The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

INSIDE

Star softball player turned coach spotlights God's power

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World Games operation involves dozens of human trafficking victims

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Churches like Hillcrest Baptist in Enterprise see Vacation Bible School numbers returning to pre-pandemic levels this summer.

Photo courtesy of Hillcrest Baptist Church

Army of volunteers

Outreach, discipleship the fruit of Vacation Bible School this summer

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

After Vacation Bible School is over at Hillcrest Baptist Church in Enterprise, Annette Whitton does a lot of follow-up. She doesn't do it alone; she does it with the help of an army of volunteers.

"We had about 400 to 450 kids, and 79 of those were from unchurched families," said Whitton, director of children's ministries at Hillcrest.

"We do our family visitation on Wednesday night and let our VBS leaders go and visit. We want to do that while it's still fresh and the kids know these ladies and men who come."

If a child who attends another church makes a salvation decision, Whitton lets the church know so it can help with next steps.

But if the child goes to Hillcrest, she takes the decision card to the deacons so they can follow up.

"One of the things that was so sweet — there were so many of them who were our kids, and their dads were deacons," Whitton related.

"I was able to hand that card to that dad and say, 'Hey, do you want to follow up with this one?' They were so excited."

Whitton noted this year's VBS was one of the best the church has had. They were back to pre-COVID numbers, and more unchurched families and military families from nearby Fort Rucker attended than ever before.

Increased attendance

Patty Burns, VBS strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said she's seen a return to pre-pandemic VBS on many levels across the state.

"Numbers are definitely up," she said. "I've been in Vacation Bible Schools ranging from 12 children to 1,200. No matter the size of the church, the enthusiasm is just the same, and the excitement about getting to have it in person is evident."

The first week of June tends to be the biggest VBS week in the state, Burns noted. This year more than 300 Alabama Baptist churches hosted VBS that week.

The second week of June also is big, then it trails off toward the July 4 holiday and picks back up in mid-July.

Though those traditional rhythms are back in place for many churches, others stayed with new routines they adopted during the pandemic, Burns said.

Some held Wednesday night family VBS, and others had one-day or two-day weekend events.

"I like that people are doing whatever they need to do to make a VBS happen — whatever fits their community and church family," Burns said.

(See 'Church,' page 11)

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 13.

Photo by Emily Stillman

LeAnn Sanders Shelton is head coach for the high school softball team at Columbus Christian Academy in Columbus, Mississippi.

Star softball player turned coach spotlights God's power

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Back in 2020 we shared the story of LeAnn Sanders Shelton, who lost her left arm at age 4 in a lawnmower accident.

With determination, she not only relearned how to do everything she needed to with one arm, but also how to play ball.

She started out playing baseball on a boys' team, then switched to girls' softball when the sport came to her hometown.

Later at Pickens County High School, Shelton was a star pitcher and outfielder and a leading hitter. In 2013 she was inducted into the Dixie Softball Hall of Fame.

Now she's head coach for the high school softball team at Columbus Christian Academy in Columbus, Mississippi.

"In March athletic director Billy Thomas sent me a Facebook friend request," recalled Shelton, a member of Arbor Springs Baptist Church in Reform. "Then in April he sent me a message to contact him."

Opportunities to speak

In 2019 she published a book, "Red Stitches," about her life and softball career, which gave her many opportunities to share her testimony. She figured the message was about that. Instead Thomas offered her the head coach position.

"He told me to take my time, pray about it and talk it over with my husband," Shelton recalled. "I heard from Coach Billy every other week!"

Her husband was behind her 100%, as was the rest of the family. The night she and her son had their final meeting with Thomas, they went to Walmart and drove past a softball sitting in the middle of the parking lot. They turned around and she picked it up.

'God's signs'

"I'm all about God's signs," she said.

Shelton took the job even though she was nervous.

"I worried about them not accepting me as a coach, but after the third practice the girls and I were cracking jokes," Shelton said.

She says she knows softball "like the back of my only hand." It taught her self-discipline and confidence when she needed it most. She's looking forward to helping the girls be successful as a team and individuals. She sees it as a way to live out her passion and invest in them at the same time.

"I want to show the girls that through God anything is possible," Shelton declared. "I'm far from perfect but I know I'm forgiven. No matter what they're facing, God can turn it around just like that.

"Our purpose for disappointment is when we find God's appointment for something better," she noted. "God is a pretty good catcher, so no matter what life pitches at you, He will catch it in His mighty and strong hands."

To read LeAnn Sanders Shelton's original story, visit tabonline.org/leann-sanders-shelton.

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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OPINION

RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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

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Psalms provide guidance for our steps as we face the mountains

While I'm sure I've seen her work, I wasn't really familiar with actress Mira Sorvino until July 25 — the day she announced the death of her well-known actor father, Paul Sorvino.

Paul Sorvino, known best for his work in Goodfellas and Law & Order, died in Jacksonville, Florida, at age 83, reportedly as a result of declining health.

Mira Sorvino's style of announcing her father's passing is what caught my attention.

She released the news via Twitter and her tweet made all the morning news reports.

"... My heart is rent asunder — a life of love and joy and wisdom with him is over. He was the most wonderful father. I love him so much. I'm sending you love in the stars Dad as you ascend."

The phrase she chose for his location, "the stars," perplexed me. Could she be creatively describing heaven or is it a more generic reference for his death?

Mira Sorvino speaks openly of her faith, describing herself as "a card-carrying Christian," in a 2015 article on scarymommy.com. "I was raised Episcopalian and I still am. I think my faith has gotten stronger as I have gotten older, honestly. ... [I]t is a very important part of my life and my children's lives."

She also shares about her faith in a 2021 article in Risen Magazine and through a variety of other interviews.

Mira Sorvino is known for her humanitarian efforts such as fighting human trafficking. She also starred in two faith-based films — "Do You Believe?" and "The Girl Who Believes in Miracles" — along with her many other mainstream roles.

Researching the Sorvino family has been interesting, but it's still her tweet about her father's death that intrigued me.

Her use of "rent asunder" and "ascend" in her wording remind me of biblical references.

'Rent asunder'

I immediately sensed the depth of her grief as I thought about the pain she described through rent asunder — violently torn apart — and how we all find ourselves in those moments.

As far as her concept of ascending, I haven't figured out exactly what she meant yet, but I smiled as I landed on the Songs of Ascents in Psalms 120–134 in my devotional readings the next morning (see one of them, Psalm 121, below).

These psalms were traditionally sung by Hebrew pilgrims ascending the hill to Jerusalem to attend the annual festivals and possibly while walking up Mount Zion or the temple steps.

Today we can apply them to our faith journey toward our forever home, which means sometimes trekking through difficult terrain along the consistent climb up and over mountains.

PSALM 121

MY HELP COMES FROM THE LORD

I lift up my eyes to the mountains —
where does my help come from?

My help comes from the Lord,
the Maker of heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot slip —
He who watches over you will not slumber;

indeed, He who watches over Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord watches over you —
the Lord is your shade at your right hand;

the sun will not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all harm —
He will watch over your life;

the Lord will watch over your coming and going
both now and forevermore.

OPINION

Your Voice

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

Readers respond with letters to editor

The biblical understanding of the phrase "Seeking the Lord" means "Seeking His presence." We are to "seek His presence continually" (Ps. 105:4).

Unfortunately, there are times in our lives God's "face" — which is the brightness of His personal character — is hidden behind the curtain of our carnal desires and willful sinfulness.

We live in a time of extreme selfishness and self-gratification. Therefore, it must be a conscious choice to direct our hearts toward God. "May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ" (2 Thess. 3:5).

God shows Himself to us in the evidences of His grace. We are to constantly set our minds toward God in all our experiences, to direct our minds and hearts toward Him through the means of His abiding presence and His amazing grace.

The great obstacle in seeking the Lord is pride. Therefore, humility is essential in seeking the Lord.

The great promise to those who seek the Lord is stated in 1 Chronicles 28:9: "If you seek Him, He will be found by you."

And when He is found, there is great reward. God Himself is our greatest reward. And when we have embraced Him, we have everything.

As Southern Baptists, we stand in a dilemma of controversy created by man's selfishness and pride. We must come clean of our sins before our gracious God. We must confess our pride to Him. We must turn away from our self-centeredness. We must seek our Lord's holy presence in our personal lives, our churches and our denomination.

In Revelation 2:4–5, Jesus describes and exhorts the church in Ephesus. It is a mirror image of many of our churches today: "I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen; repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent."

Stan Albright
Director of missions
Coosa River Association
(with quotes from John Piper's 2009 article "What Does It Mean to Seek the Lord?" at desiringgod.org)

I have seen much about the problems we have had with sexual improprieties among our church and even denominational leaders. May I offer a word of caution?

First, I know James has said, "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness." But we need to be careful that we do not put ourselves in the place of God. He is the one who can judge, not we.

Is there a need for discipline? Absolutely, but be careful. Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.

Second, please be sure of your facts before you start exercising discipline. Sexual sins are disgusting, of course. I get that. But there have been times even in Scripture where men have been falsely accused.

Remember Joseph? He spent years in prison because he was falsely accused by the wife of Potiphar. And it still happens today.

One retired pastor in Mobile was put on a published list of offenders because he had the same name as another (not in Mobile) who was the actual offender. Yes, the truth came out, but that falsely accused pastor had his reputation damaged and was spiritually harmed by this mistake.

My point is: be careful. Let God be God. He is the final judge. He will have all the facts and is always righteous.

Charles Adams
Wilmer, Ala.

Thank you for the article about Jones Dairy in Walker County in the June 2 issue.

As a teenager in 1969–70, I worked at the dairy as part of a vocational project sponsored by FFA. I worked primarily in the feed mill, making feed for the cows at the dairy and the pigs at the farm.

During this time they still sold "All Jersey" milk and had local delivery trucks. The work was hard, but the Jones family was always good to the employees. I have fond memories of my time working there.

Don Smith
Retired director of missions
Winston Baptist Association

Understanding the theology of spiritual gifts helps us escape the temptation to see Christianity as a merely individualistic faith — about me and my needs and happiness. It allows us to see ourselves as members of both a local body and a worldwide communion of saints.

It allows us to resist two false ideas:

1. I am not needed in the kingdom of God.
2. The entire work of God rests solely on my shoulders.

Neither statement is true, and every church needs people with a multitude of gifts.

When a body of believers faithfully submits to Christ's calling, there's a beautiful harmony of people using their gifts side by side for the sake of the gospel.

Dan Darling
Land Center for Cultural Engagement,
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
(excerpt from Lifeway Research article)

"Every Christian is supposed to be involved in serving the Lord actively. That's the general call or universal call to ministry. [But] don't mistake the healthy Christian life for a call to ministry," said **Larry Hyche,** who served 20 years in local church ministry before his current assignment as **men's spiritual development specialist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.**

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OPINION

> “Disappointment is part of living in a world that’s not always fair.”
>
> PASTOR DAVID L. CHANCEY
> *McDonough Road Baptist Church in Fayetteville, Georgia*

“You have to know your identity in Christ,” said **Matt Daniels, Baptist campus minister at the University of North Alabama.** “We are free from sin because of the cross. Knowing that should give us the confidence to flee temptation.”

How can we seek God in silence in a noisy world?

Many Christians have a special place and time for Bible reading and prayer. A friend uses his back porch for morning devotions. Great saints of previous generations wrote about rising early before the world grew noisy to spend time with God.

I’ve also known Christians who schedule devotional time later at night after their children are asleep and the house is quiet. And churches may have prayer rooms available for quiet time with God.

Seeking God in silence is important. It helps us to focus on spiritual truth rather than popular broadcast entertainment. In the silence, God has promised to fill our hearts with His loving presence.

Pastor Michael J. Brooks
Siluria Baptist Church, Alabaster

If we are Christians, we’re no longer representing ourselves, we’re representing Christ.

It’s in the name. And how we live should reflect that. We no longer live for ourselves. We live to spread Christ’s love to the world.

Our actions, our work, the way we talk and the way we treat others all should point to God.

Our “jersey” has His name across the front. And we should be living with our dedication to that name and not our own.

Hannah Muñoz
the-scroll.com

“A neighbor isn’t just someone who lives near us or is like us. Our neighbor is anyone in need we might encounter and be in a position to help through our time, efforts and resources.” said **Roy E. Ciampa, Armstrong Chair of Religion, Samford University.**

“Anytime someone comes to faith, it’s a miracle to see the work of God in their life,” said **Molly Petry, an International Mission Board worker.**

From the *Twitterverse*

@DanielRitchie

An easy life does nothing to bring about character. Character is forged in the fire of trials.

@TaylorBurgess87

This is one of the biggest challenges today: lovingly, patiently, boldly and firmly helping people who genuinely believe they’re doing the will of God understand that they’re actually working against His will.

@christyelis

Do not let quarrelsomeness with its love of empty victory creep into our midst, for our aim is the elimination of all discord. Surely this is the meaning of the expression “Peace be to you.” —Clement of Alexandria, commenting on 3 John 15

@JCRyle

Never does a person see any beauty in Christ as a Savior, until they discover that they are a lost and ruined sinner.

@clayhallmark

Before Christ can be with you, beside you, ahead of you and over you, He must first be IN you!

@nathanafinn

Friction is healthy and creates energy. Faction is toxic and creates division. One of the challenges for organizational leaders is cultivating friction while fighting against the tendency toward factions.

@ewarren9

Student ministry is not for the faint of heart. It can be exhausting and oftentimes discouraging. But this morning I got to pray with a dad who has been drawn back to faith because of his daughter’s love for the church. Praise God for His lovingkindness. It was an amazing morning.

@shane_pruitt78

If you’re able to sin without the Holy Spirit convicting you, then you probably don’t have the Holy Spirit.

@Traffanstedtd

If we do not live out the gospel we confess to believe in, why would anyone else believe it? Your words & your life have to match to be effective in sharing your faith. Are you pursuing Christ daily?

@macbrunson

God help me if I start doing exegesis by threat and fear that I have upset someone’s cultural view or social agenda.

@GreggMatte

As Christians, Jesus Christ already lives in you. The need is not for Him to increase, but for the barriers to Him to decrease. Let Him shed away your discouragement, pride and misplaced desires.

Are you out of order?

Envision standing before the Judge of all the earth only to be told you are out of order.

Abraham asked, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25b).

Who is the Judge of all the earth? Jesus is, and He explains, “For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him” (John 5:22–23).

Jesus warns, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

“Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name and done many wonders in Your name?’

“And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness’” (Matt. 7:21–23).

Ephesians 2:8–10 reads, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

The three key words are by, through and for. We must not get them out of order.

Many try to reverse the order attempting to be saved by good works, thus bypassing God’s grace.

If your hope is heaven, make certain you don’t get these key words out of order, or you will be called out of order by the Judge of all the earth for all eternity and consigned to a place called hell.

Franklin L. Kirksey
Robertsdale, Ala.

NEWS

3 stories you should know

Photo courtesy of The Baptist Record

The building that housed the last abortion clinic in Mississippi is sold after being shuttered by a trigger law that went into effect after the U.S. Supreme Court on June 24 reversed its controversial 1973 Roe v. Wade decision that legalized abortion in the United States. On July 20 the clinic ended its lawsuit that sought to block the state from enforcing a law that bans most abortions, the Associated Press reported. Diane Derzis, owner of the now-defunct Jackson Women's Health Organization, told AP the building has been cleared out.

Georgia Baptist Mission Board reduces staff

Squeezed by high inflation and declining Cooperative Program receipts, the Georgia Baptist Mission Board has made mid-year budget adjustments, including staff reductions.

GBMB Executive Director W. Thomas Hammond Jr. said economic trends, coupled with issues such as discontent among some churches over the Southern Baptist Convention's handling of sexual abuse complaints, have led to a significant decline in financial receipts.

Fourteen positions were eliminated, some of which were already vacant due to prior budget cuts.

The GBMB employs 64 full-time and 30 part-time staff members and approximately 20 contract workers.

Georgia's CP receipts were $35.8 million in 2021. (The Christian Index)

Disney+ draws ire, adds R-rated movies

Disney+ is taking heat from media watchdog group Parents Television and Media Council after adding R-rated material to its platform, which has traditionally been known for its family-friendly content.

With the addition of "Deadpool," "Deadpool 2" and "Logan" — all three given R ratings for graphic depictions of violence, strong language and mature content — PTC is calling out Disney for going against a promise it made in 2019 not to add R-rated movies to its platform.

Parental controls are not enough, said PTC President Tim Winter in a news release. He said the decision "violates the trust and sensibilities of families," whom he describes as "woefully underserved by Hollywood." (The Alabama Baptist)

Persecuted church

Nigerian Baptist leader asks for American help to end persecution in his country

BIRMINGHAM, Alabama — Though persecution of Christians in Nigeria continues, the work of Christ is flourishing, according to a Baptist leader in the country.

"Our situation is fearful," said Samson Olasupo A. Ayokunle, president of the Christian Association of Nigeria, the umbrella body of all Christians in Nigeria with some 100 million members.

Ayokunle serves as one of several vice presidents of the Baptist World Alliance and previously served 10 years as president of the Nigerian Baptist Convention, the largest Baptist group in Africa and Europe.

"Just one month ago, the St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Ondo was attacked with explosives, and 70 people died," Ayokunle said.

"Pastors who travel to preach in their churches can be kidnapped and held for ransom.

"Our government could provide security for us, but they don't; therefore, many churches are forced to provide security for themselves."

Nigeria has a population of more than 210 million people and is roughly equally divided between Muslims and Christians, Ayokunle explained, but persecution of Christians has intensified in the last few years.

Photo courtesy of Michael J. Brooks

Nigeria will hold elections this fall, and Ayokunle is hopeful new leaders might help ease religious tensions in the land.

"The best we can hope for is that Muslim and Christian leaders can be elected and will partner together to ensure religious freedom in our land," he said.

God is working

Despite hard times, Ayokunle said Baptist work is growing in his country.

"The Southern Baptist Convention started the Nigerian Baptist Convention in 1850, and Baptist work has flourished. Many people are coming to faith," he said.

Ayokunle spoke July 10 at Siluria Baptist Church in Alabaster, joined by several Nigerian Baptist leaders, including (pictured, from left): Christson Adedoyin, professor of public health and sociology at Samford University; Ayokunle; and Adebola and Samson Fatokun, members of Christ Baptist Church in Gbagada in the Nigerian state of Lagos. (Michael J. Brooks)

NEWS ITEMS COMPILED BY CARRIE MCWHORTER AND LEIGH PRITCHETT

NEWS

Alabama news

BIGBEE ASSOCIATION

▸ **Christian Valley Baptist Church, Livingston**, hosted Vacation Bible School July 15–17. More than 40 adult volunteers helped the largest attended VBS in recent history. More than 300 food items were collected along with monetary gifts to help the Blessing Box food pantry, a class project of the local charter school, and the University of West Alabama's student food pantry.

Photo courtesy of Christian Valley Baptist Church

Pastor Wayne Smith had a tractor bucket of ice water poured over him after the collection was counted.

MOBILE ASSOCIATION

▸ **Elbert Charpie** is the new bivocational pastor of **Fulton Road Baptist Church, Mobile.** He previously served as pastor of First Baptist Church Citronelle and Shiloh Baptist Church, Deer Park. He holds master of divinity and doctor of ministry degrees from New Orleans Seminary. He and his wife, Vickie, have three adult children.

CHARPIE

MORGAN ASSOCIATION

▸ **Lebanon Baptist Church, Falkville**, is hosting a revival Aug. 7–10. Sunday service times are 10:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. with Monday through Wednesday services at 7 p.m. Michael Mason is the evangelist. Living Faith Quartet will sing Aug. 8. Randall Ashley is pastor.

ST. CLAIR ASSOCIATION

▸ **Eden Westside Baptist Church, Pell City,** recently recognized **Jacky and Denise Connell** for 35 years of service. Connell started as Eden Westside's bivocational pastor in 1987 with less than 20 "devoted followers of Christ." The church grew, and after 13 years he became the full-time pastor. He previously led Prescott Baptist Church, Pell City, for six years and also served as a student minister at Happy Home Baptist Church, Leeds, where he was called into ministry at age 20.

CONNELL

The Connells have two children and six grandchildren.

SARDIS ASSOCIATION

▸ **New Chapel Baptist Church, Kinston**, celebrated its 75th anniversary July 3. Former members Brad Wood, Robin Free and Calli Dean sang solos while the praise team and congregation were led by music director Keith Bell. Ellen Dewberry (left) from the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission presented a certificate.

Photo courtesy of Ellen Dewberry

The church recognized Donna Jones, clerk and Sunday School director, who died in January. Jones also served as the clerk for Sardis Baptist Association.

"The church was down to six people when I came as pastor 14 years ago," said Pastor Terry Godwin, who shared the church's history. "We have grown and are thankful for how God is working."

TUSKEGEE LEE ASSOCIATION

▸ **Concord Baptist Church, Notasulga,** will celebrate its homecoming Aug. 21. Special music is scheduled at 10:30 a.m. followed by a message by Kevin Johnson and then a covered dish dinner. After the meal, Bill King will provide humor and music as Bro. Billy Bob Bohannon. Kevin Johnson is interim pastor.

OTHER

▸ **Wait No More: Preparing Hearts and Homes for Kids in Foster Care** is a one-day event scheduled Aug. 20 at **Valleydale Church, Birmingham**.

Join Focus on the Family, in conjunction with Lifeline Children's Services, for this free event, 10 a.m. until 2 p.m. For more information email WaitNoMore@fotf.org or visit waitnomore.org.

— Correction —

An obituary for Tom Anderson that ran in the July 28 issue of The Alabama Baptist had the incorrect retirement year. He retired from Mount Gilead Baptist Church in Dothan in 2007. We regret the error.

FBC Montgomery worships again in sanctuary damaged by arson attack

Nearly a year after an arson attack damaged the church's main sanctuary, First Baptist Church Montgomery gathered there again July 24 for worship.

Pastor Mark Bethea (right) said he was filled with "great anticipation" as he prepared for the first service back in the sanctuary, which took the brunt of the Sept. 30 arson attack. The church's reception area also was destroyed and other areas, including historic Stakely Sanctuary, were damaged by fire and smoke. The church met in Stakely during the renovation process.

Photo courtesy of FBC Montgomery

During the July 24 service minister of music Ed Cleveland led the congregation in singing "To God Be the Glory," a hymn church members sang as they gathered in a parking deck, a parking lot and other spaces following the attack.

"Great things He has done, great things He's still doing and great things He will continue to do," Bethea said.

"We're going to keep going, we're going to keep pressing on because great things our eyes have not seen yet."

Church members took to social media to praise the leadership of Bethea and the FBC staff during the past few months and express their thanks for the worship service.

"It was glorious," wrote Diane Cook. "The songs just lifted us up in praise to our God that has walked with us every inch of the way!"

"I'll never forget it," wrote Ruby Henley.

The service included a baptism (including Charles Barley, left), a baby dedication and a brief video recap showing the immediate aftermath of the attack and the restoration process, which included extensive repair and cleaning throughout the campus. Highlighted were photos of families writing Bible verses on the concrete just before new carpet was laid in the sanctuary.

In October an Auburn resident and Chinese national was charged with setting the fires.

In a Facebook post following the service, Bethea acknowledged a gift from the Montgomery Chinese Christian Church led by Pastor Dawson Zhang. Members donated money for sanctuary flowers when FBC returned.

FBC member Jane Burdeshaw said the flowers were "beautiful and the gift behind them an amazing expression of love for our church family and God's unifying power." (Carrie B. McWhorter)

ALABAMA NEWS ITEMS COMPILED BY DIANNA L. CAGLE AND DEBBIE CAMPBELL

Evangelism efforts

Fultondale FBC takes VBS on the road, partners with YMCA of Greater Birmingham

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Photo courtesy of Fultondale FBC

Fultondale FBC takes a two-hour mini-VBS on the road to three campuses of YMCA of Greater Birmingham — Shades Valley, Trussville and Northeast YMCA in Roebuck.

Vacation Bible School has long been viewed by many as one of the Church's best evangelism tools. But for Fultondale First Baptist Church, it was extra special this year — a way to get outside its doors and into the community.

After hosting its usual VBS, Fultondale First condensed it to a two-hour mini-VBS and took the event to three campuses of YMCA of Greater Birmingham: Shades Valley, Trussville and Northeast YMCA in Roebuck.

Mark Gainey, pastor of Fultondale First, said it all started when a church member who works for YMCA of Greater Birmingham told the church missions director there might be opportunities to take VBS into their summer camps. It fit right in with the church's summer evangelism effort, "To the Streets," aimed at getting the church out into the community to share the gospel.

'Incredible'

"When we first talked to the YMCA they were interested in five or six branches," Gainey said, but the church decided to start with three, do it well and expand from there.

"It was incredible," he added. "VBS is awesome anyway because you get to share the gospel with kids, many of whom have never gone to church. But for me it was incredible because it was a taste of missions in our city."

He said around 10% of the children present might have been involved in church in some way, but the rest weren't.

"Hundreds of kids heard the gospel," Gainey said. "We had no limitations. We shared the gospel straight up."

For the mini-VBS, everything was shortened.

"We're taking the best of VBS and bringing it to you," Gainey said. "We shortened it and tried to make everything, including the games, focused on the gospel."

They also included a craft that wasn't part of their original VBS, salvation bracelets made from rubber bands.

"We had to basically simplify everything and think through what is absolutely essential to communicate and share," Gainey said. "We asked, 'How can we express the love of Jesus and clearly communicate the gospel?' "

Leadership for the three mini-events included the missions team, children's ministry leaders and some VBS volunteers.

Gainey said they're planning to go back next year and expand it to more campuses if possible.

Just ask

"This is something that honestly we can't take credit for because one of our members had the idea," he said. "It's not something we dreamed up but something that any church with any YMCA anywhere close to them could do — it just takes asking. Many churches already have VBS, and this is just taking what you already have and taking it on the road."

Gainey said he was excited it could get the church involved in local missions "in a real way again."

"As a pastor, looking back now, it was much more beneficial than I could've imagined," he reflected. "Our church rallied around our VBS, and then when we talked about VBS on the road, our whole church prayed for it and was excited about it. I'm so glad God paved the way for it.

"It's reaped benefits for our church's momentum."

Elkdale sanctity of life VBS leads to partnership

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Michele Dyson admitted it was a bit overwhelming when she began planning her first Vacation Bible School.

"I started getting all these books with samples and stuff," said Dyson, who recently completed her first year as director of children's ministry at Elkdale Baptist Church in Selma. "I read through each one and narrowed it to two."

But as she prayed about which to use, one kept resurfacing — Answers VBS Zoomerang, which had the theme "Returning to the Value of Life" for 2022.

Photo courtesy of Elkdale Baptist Church

Church members Brett Dyson (left) and Hailey Nedley are with a turtle from Bama Bucks wildlife sanctuary.

"Every time I would have my quiet time, I came across the same verses that were the theme verses for Zoomerang," Dyson said. "It was just clear that that's what we should do."

So she got to work planning. The curriculum was set in Australia, so she had fun incorporating her husband, Brett, who is Australian, into the week's activities.

She also planned to have some kangaroos visit the children.

Value of life

But most importantly Dyson felt she needed to use the week to teach the children about the value of life. The curriculum would tell them about creation and how life began, how they are fearfully and wonderfully made, how they can have eternal life and how God has a purpose for each person's life.

To go along with that, Dyson began to think about how they might help a related ministry during the week.

"It seemed like a no-brainer to me that we should partner together with our local Safe Harbor Women's Medical Clinic in town, which one of our church members facilitates," Dyson said.

"Our youth pastor and I went to Safe Harbor to visit and talk to the ladies about needs that they had that our offering could potentially help fund.

"As we talked we were told of the need for an updated ultrasound machine. Even though this seemed like a massive undertaking, we started praying and asking the Lord to show up and provide."

As they began to brainstorm, the clinic facilitator decided to contact Knights of Columbus at the state level to see what they could do.

In the end, KC donated the ultrasound machine. The children's VBS offering, more than $2,100, covered the tax. On the last day of VBS, Dyson learned Roe v. Wade had been overturned.

"It was just the best week, and I can't believe that I get to be a part of what God is doing at Elkdale and in the city of Selma," she said. "Our prayer is that the gospel was made clear and that hearts and lives were changed."

VBS on wheels meets people of Lowndes County

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Davey Lyon has a pond outside his house, and he says if he wanted fish for dinner he wouldn't sit on the porch and expect them to hop out of the pond and onto the grill.

It's the same for his church plant, Imago Dei Church at the 45 in Hayneville, into which Lyon and his family have been investing their lives since 2020. He grew up in Lowndes County and knows it well. It's rural and poor, with pockets of housing miles apart.

Lyon knows if he wants to see the people there know Jesus, he's got to go where they are.

"I think that's something the Lord has been pressing on me. There are so many things now that keep people from coming to church," he acknowledged. "We're two generations away from people not knowing Christ if we don't do something about it."

With that in mind Lyon got the vision several months ago for a mobile church: a trailer, tent, chairs, bouncy house and pull-behind grill he could take out into the community. He also had the idea of bringing on student summer missionaries as church planting interns to help lead mobile Vacation Bible School.

God confirmed Lyon's vision when a generous donor wrote a check for the cost of setting up the mobile church.

But then he got a phone call that made him question Imago Dei's summer plans.

Photo courtesy of Davey Lyon

Imago Dei Church at the 45 in Hayneville goes beyond the church walls and takes Vacation Bible School to three areas in Lowndes County — a local elementary school, city hall and a housing complex this summer.

High school students

"I had four locations picked out for VBS, and about a week and a half before it was going to start I got a call that we hadn't been able to get any student missionaries for the summer," Lyon recalled.

He decided to cut the grass and pray about what to do next. As he did, he kept thinking about three high school students who had asked if he could help them get jobs for the summer. He had been building relationships with them by meeting with the high school football and basketball teams, feeding them meals and sharing devotionals.

"I kept coming back to these guys and thinking, 'What can we do for them to provide discipleship opportunities and provide them with a job?' And I kept thinking of someone I knew who might be willing to sponsor them for the summer," Lyon related.

Confirmation

When he finished in the yard, he had a text message from that person.

"It said, 'Give me a call when you get a chance. I want to talk about what I can do to help you,'" Lyon remembered. "We met the next day, and he wrote me a check to cover it."

That was all the confirmation Lyon needed. In June the teens went along with him and others from Imago Dei to take VBS to three areas — a local elementary school, city hall and a housing complex.

At the elementary school they grilled food, played with the kids and got to know the parents and grandparents who joined them.

Lyon said he realized right away that the programmatic approach they had originally planned for the summer missionaries would never have worked in this context.

"What we found was we needed to make it personal," Lyon said.

"We had opportunities to just go sit down by a kid and get to know them and share Jesus with them one on one."

At the housing community the experience was different, Lyon said. They had around 30 kids each night but only three adults.

"These kids were cussing each other and getting into fights, but it really showed us why we were there. They need to know God loves them," Lyon declared. "We would go over there and break them up and say, 'These are the two greatest commandments — to love God and love others as yourself. They are made in the image of God just like you are.' It gave us the opportunity to make it personal."

Photo courtesy of Davey Lyon

Children in the community participate in Imago Dei Church at the 45's mobile Vacation Bible School.

It also gave Lyon a chance to explain that what they were doing was sin, how it separated them from God and how they could be forgiven through Jesus, he recalled.

One child who had instigated trouble in the group came up to Lyon at the end of the week and asked when they would be coming back.

Lyon hopes the summer intern program will continue. In addition to the mobile VBS, Lyon and the students served the community doing things like pressure-washing bleachers at a local high school.

"I don't know if there's any more important discipleship time I could've spent this summer," he said. "These guys are asking good questions, and they have a desire to grow in the Lord. I don't know if they're saved right now, but now they're starting to think through, 'Am I really saved or do I need to repent and give my life to Christ?'"

Lyon admitted he may have panicked at first when he found out no summer missionaries were coming, but "God had the plan the whole time. Even if the summer missionaries come next year, I still would like to continue the summer internship."

Neal Hughes, director of missions for Montgomery Baptist Association, said he believes this summer allowed Lyon and the weeks of VBS to mold the young men.

"He needed some help with VBS, but he wanted to give them Jesus," Hughes said, adding that Lyon and his wife, Amber, kind of "adopted" the boys and made them part of their family. "Now these guys can't get enough of the Lord because they've seen it in Davey."

'Tremendous' model

Hughes also said the mobile VBS model is "tremendous" and one other churches could use.

"Davey received some funds that enabled him to get some things going that are going to be a major strategy for him, but any church could go outside their doors and do the same thing," Hughes asserted. "Every community has a park. A tent is not a costly item. And you would be right at the pinnacle of where lostness is by taking your VBS out the door and putting it in the backyard of the community."

The food may have been the draw, but the gospel "was abundantly shared," Hughes noted.

"The community was strengthened, and the church grew and benefited from this, but the community benefited most because they had a man who said, 'Hey, we're not going to wait for you to come to us, we're going to go to you.'

"It was an incredible plan, and God has blessed that incredible plan."

Photo courtesy of Longview Heights Baptist Church

Longview Heights Baptist Church in Olive Branch, Mississippi, holds its 19th special needs Vacation Bible School. The VBS for children through adults is held in the evenings to accommodate those who might go to a day program or extended school year program.

Special needs VBS ministers to community

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Lisa Wilson said special needs families "are one of our most unreached people groups, because so many don't feel like they have a place to go to church."

That's why 20 years ago her husband, Alan, started a special needs ministry at their church, Longview Heights Baptist Church in Olive Branch, Mississippi.

And that's why the congregation recently sponsored its 19th special needs Vacation Bible School.

"It's something we provide for the community because we know it's something different that not all churches are able to provide," said Wilson, Longview Heights' special needs ministry director. "It's one of the most enjoyable things that we do as outreach and inreach throughout the year."

Accommodating

The VBS is for children through adults and is held in the evenings to accommodate anyone who might go to a day program or extended school year program. Before COVID-19 the VBS drew right at 100 students with about 125 volunteers helping out. This year there were 50 students, as some families and group homes still aren't comfortable returning to in-person gatherings because of medical vulnerability.

'They love it'

The VBS uses traditional curriculum and rotation-based programming.

"It works beautifully; they love it," Wilson said. "They come in and start out with the worship rally. They sit with their crew, and then we rotate through the stations."

VBS volunteers help those who might be overstimulated by the noise in worship. The church also provides a café where parents can hang out to be nearby and visit with other special needs parents.

All of this is part of a larger effort to let the community know there is a place at their church.

James Walker, discipleship pastor at Longview Heights, said the ministry is a haven for children and adults with special needs, as well as their caregivers who may not get a break from serving any other time.

It's been something the whole church has been able to get involved in, Walker said.

Read more about Longview Heights' special needs ministry at tabonline.org/Longview-Heights.

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

CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR
Providence Baptist Church, Town Creek, Alabama, is in search of a senior pastor. Please send resumés to: jcrosslin89@gmail.com.

PASTOR
Union Baptist Church is seeking a full-time pastor. Resumés will be received through Sept. 30 by mail at: Pastor Search Committee, Union Baptist Church, 5251 Grand Bay Wilmer Road S, Grand Bay, AL 36541 or by email at: admin@ubcgrandbay.org.

PASTOR
Thomaston Baptist Church, Thomaston, Alabama, is seeking a full-time pastor. Please email resumé to: thomastonbaptistchurch@gmail.com.

PASTOR
Westlawn Baptist Church of Huntsville is seeking a pastor. Please send resumés to: pastorsearchcommittee@westlawnbaptist.org.

PASTOR
Emmanuel Baptist Church of Gordo, Alabama, is currently seeking the will of God to direct us to the pastor that He has ordained to lead us at this time. We are currently open to either a full-time or bivocational pastor, whichever way the Lord leads. If you are interested in submitting a resumé for this position, please send it to: ebcpastorsearch2020@gmail.com.

PASTOR
First Baptist Church Irvington is seeking a full-time pastor. Please send resumés to: DARBREL59@gmail.com.

PASTOR
Prayerfully, Hillview Baptist Church is seeking a part-time pastor. Resumés may be sent to: Pastor Search Committee, 800 Heflin Avenue E., Birmingham, AL 35214.

WORSHIP PASTOR
FBC Fairhope is searching for a full-time worship pastor to lead corporate worship, including choir, praise team, orchestra and praise band. The worship ministry also includes administrating children, youth and senior adult choirs and leading several special events during the year. For more information, contact Kerry Flowers at kerrybflowers@gmail.com.

MUSIC MINISTER
Philadelphia Baptist Church in Smiths Station, Alabama, is seeking a full-time music minister. Our congregation enjoys worshipping to both traditional and contemporary music. If you enjoy Jesus and serving His church, please send your resumé to: duck.clay1@gmail.com.

MINISTER OF MUSIC
Montevallo First Baptist Church is seeking a bivocational minister of music. Please submit resumé to: mfbc@bellsouth.net. ATTN: Pastor.

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. Resumés may be submitted to: keving@fbcatmore.org.

OTHER POSITIONS

EDITOR/PRESIDENT
The Baptist Courier, the oldest ministry partner of the South Carolina Baptist Convention (153 years), is seeking a full-time editor and president. The position requires oversight of the print and electronic editions of the monthly magazine, the website, weekly podcast, social media, Courier Publishing (books), tours and fundraising. Qualifications include significant experience as a Baptist communicator/writer who adheres to the 2000 Baptist Faith & Message; active member of a Southern Baptist church; resumé with at least three references; and at least a master's degree. Deadline for receiving resumés and letters of reference is Sept. 30. Please email resumés and letters of reference to: tarafreeman@fbccola.com.

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS
The Duck River Baptist Association is seeking a director of missions. Located about 55 miles south of Nashville, Tennessee, the association is comprised of 41 churches and 1 mission ministering to Coffee, Franklin, and Grundy Counties. Send resumés to: Search Committee, Duck River Baptist Association, P.O. Box 820, Tullahoma, TN 37388.

MINISTRY ASSISTANT
The ministry assistant for student ministry and social media at Lakeside Baptist Church, Birmingham, Alabama, is responsible to the minister of discipleship and outreach for providing logistical, clerical and communications support to student ministry and for coordinating, maintaining and executing churchwide digital/virtual communication. This is a full-time position with compensation based upon experience and training. Candidates should contact Dr. W. Stacey Boutwell (sboutwell@lakesidebaptist.com, 205-313-2907) with questions and for a complete position description.

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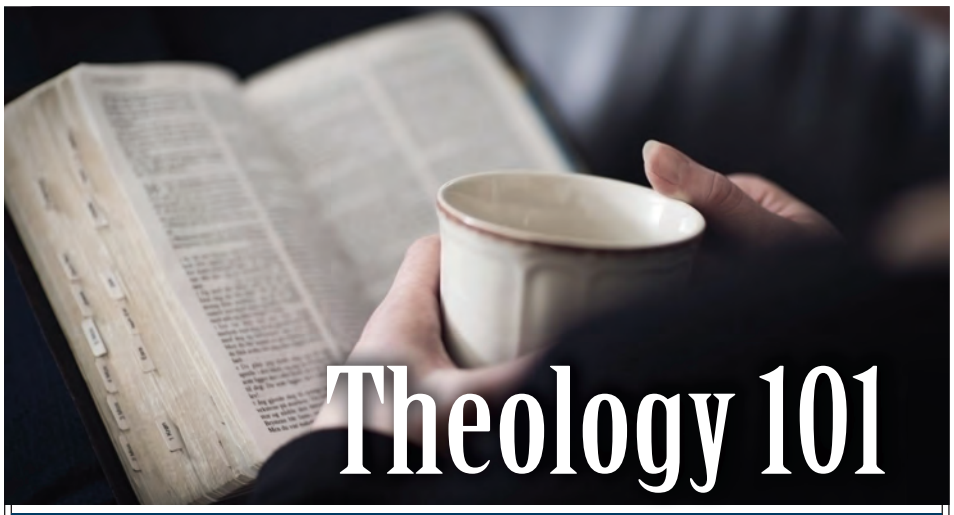

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Spiritual Blessings

God's Provision for Our Witness

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
The Alabama Baptist

Previously in Theology 101, we have considered the first two of the passages in John that refer to the Holy Spirit as the Paraclete.

In that first passage, we noted how Jesus responded to His disciples' troubled hearts over His announcement He would be leaving them. To those troubled hearts He promised His presence would continue with them through the Holy Spirit. The indwelling Spirit would equate to His indwelling presence (John 14:15–18).

In the second reference to the Paraclete, Jesus acknowledged His followers were unable to receive all He wanted to teach them. In light of this inability of the disciples, Jesus promised them the Spirit of Truth who would come upon them and lead them into all truth by continuing to teach them truths Jesus had begun to show them (John 14:25–26).

In a third reference to the Holy Spirit, Jesus spoke of the Spirit's help in enabling His followers to be effective witnesses as they testified of Him following His ascension (John 15:26–27). The promise of this provision would place them in good stead when they began to go into all the world as His witnesses.

In John 16:7–11, Jesus elaborated further on the Spirit's ministry of enabling His followers to be effective and fruitful. He spoke about the convicting or convincing work of the Spirit in three areas.

First, He is God's provision for convicting the world of sin. The focus of this conviction is human unbelief. Without conviction, sinners are doomed to eternal punishment as a result of never being forgiven through faith in Christ.

Righteousness

Second, the Spirit's convicting work focuses on righteousness, which unbelievers do not possess in a measure that fits them for heaven. Jesus declared His return to the Father would be evidence He possessed a righteousness God accepts into His heaven. Human righteousness amounts to filthy rags when compared with the perfect righteousness that dwells in heaven (Isa. 64:6). Sinners must respond to the Spirit's convicting of this fact by accepting God's gift of righteousness by receiving His Son in faith.

Third, the convicting work of the Spirit also focuses on the judgment awaiting the unforgiven. Satan is already under divine judgment, and so are all who have not turned from him and embraced the Savior.

Our witness for Christ can only be fruitful when accompanied by the Spirit's convicting ministry.

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.

North American Mission Board expands evangelism team efforts

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

The North American Mission Board plans to expand evangelism efforts with new team members and an adapted strategy, according to NAMB officials.

In June, Tim Dowdy was announced as the new leader of NAMB's evangelism team, stepping into the position left vacant with the resignation of Johnny Hunt, who served as vice president of evangelism and leadership until mid-May.

DOWDY

Dowdy's title is slightly different — executive director of evangelism and leadership — but his responsibilities are the same, overseeing NAMB's work in evangelism. His role will involve a broader team approach, however.

Along with managing the day-to-day work, Dowdy will lead strategy and vision in this area and report directly to Kevin Ezell, president of NAMB.

WASHINGTON

Ezell shared the news in his report to messengers during the SBC Annual Meeting in Anaheim.

Dowdy said during Ezell's presentation, "I appreciate the opportunity to serve in the area of evangelism. ... It's going to take all of us working together diligently day in and day out, faithfully sharing the good news of the gospel to change the world.

"Our aim is to help our family of churches share the gospel everywhere with everyone until the whole world hears."

Also coming to the team is JJ Washington as NAMB's national director of personal evangelism.

Serving alongside Dowdy, Washington will oversee evangelism resources and be the liaison to state directors of evangelism.

Both Dowdy and Washington come to NAMB from roles at the Georgia Baptist Mission Board and both have served as church pastors.

Nonstaff, advocate-type positions across the nation also are anticipated to be added to the team in the coming days.

"Our mission to serve and equip pastors and churches with evangelism resources will continue as our urgent focus," Ezell shared with The Alabama Baptist in mid-July. "Tim Dowdy is a great leader who is passionate about sharing Christ. In the 30 years he pastored his last church, they averaged 132 baptisms a year.

"With Tim leading strategy, vision and day-to-day ministry, we also will be utilizing several leading pastors who will assist us in promoting evangelism to our churches and training Southern Baptists in evangelism," Ezell added. "We look forward to sharing more about this direction in the months ahead."

Church, community kids respond

(continued from page 1)

Something she also noticed this year was more pastors helping in an upfront leadership role, such as being the emcee for worship rallies.

"It's neat to see their involvement; the kids always love to see their pastor being more hands-on," Burns said.

Though she hasn't received official word from Lifeway Christian Resources yet, "I'm seeing lots of salvations," Burns noted.

"For several churches those numbers were in the double digits."

Burns said VBS is an excellent tool for churches, both for outreach to the community and discipleship of children already in the church.

"It's a great opportunity for the church to show how much Jesus loves us and model for them how to share the gospel in a fun and exciting way," she explained.

"Whether it's church kids or community kids, there's a place for those children in VBS."

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AUGUST 2022

5 **SPEAK Tour**, Thorington Road, Montgomery, Jessica Palmer, ext. 2262
5-6 **Pinnacle Alabama @ Shocco**, Shocco Springs, Steve Layton, ext. 2221
6 **Called Conference**, Samford University, Birmingham, Mary Kelley, ext. 2227
7 **Social Issues Sunday**, Keith Hinson, ext. 2289
9 **Ministers Wives' Connection**, ONLINE, Trish Jackson, ext. 2224
11 **UPlink on the Road**, Bethany, Andalusia, Jessica Palmer, ext. 2262
12-13 **English as a Second Language Workshop**, Colbert-Lauderdale Association, Sheffield, Kristy Kennedy, ext. 2311
15 **North Region Disciple-Making Roundtable**, Mark Gainey, ext. 2240
16 **Great Commission Conversations**, ONLINE, Cindy Wilson, ext. 2225
19 **SALT Conference**, Canaan, Bessemer, Ramona Noah, ext. 2312
20 **SPEAK Tour**, First, Trussville, Jessica Palmer, ext. 2262
25 **UPlink on the Road**, First, Trussville, Jessica Palmer, ext. 2262
25 **2022 SPARK Conference**, ONLINE, Daniel Edmonds, ext. 2285
27 **Fortify Conference**, First Trussville, Trussville, Larry Hyche, ext. 2268

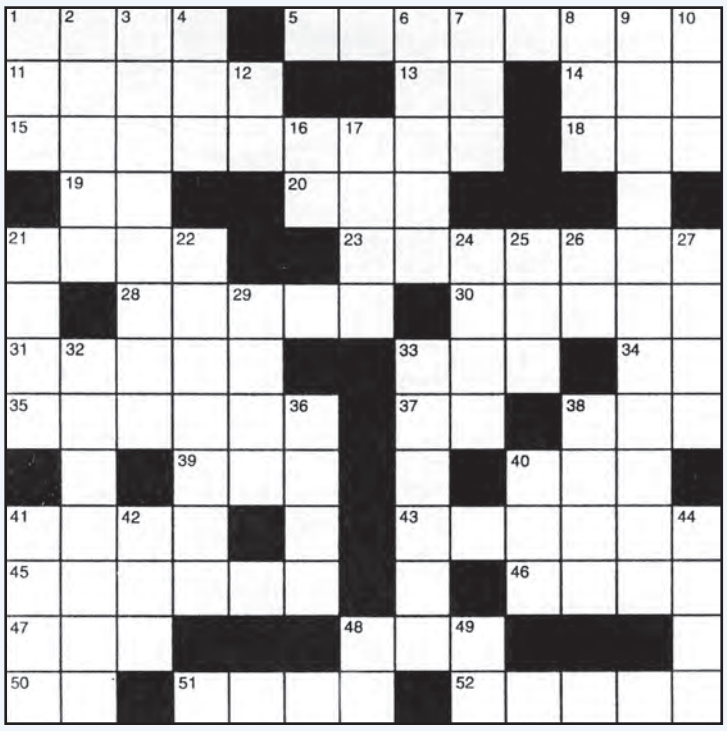
SEPTEMBER 2022

8 **Get Acquainted Day**, SBOM, Prattville, Amy Nelson, ext. 2231
8-9 **Alabama Singing Women Retreat**, Shocco Springs, Talladega, Cindy Parrish, ext. 2230
8-9 **Alabama Singing Men Retreat**, Shocco Springs, Talladega, Karen Gosselin, ext. 2318
9-10 **Financial Issues Tax Conference,** Shocco Springs, Talladega, Linda Hicks, ext. 2263
9-11 **YMlink Youth Ministers' Wives Retreat**, Pursell Farms, Sylacauga, Jessica Palmer, ext. 2262
11 **Single Adult Sunday**, Daniel Edmonds, ext. 2285
11-18 **Week of Prayer for State Missions and Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering**, Kathryn Helms, ext. 2325
12-13 **Critical Incident Stress Management Training**, SBOM, Prattville, Ana Raymundo, ext. 2356
13 **Senior Adult Singin'**, Hillcrest, Enterprise, Frank Jones, fjm1117@gmail.com
13 **Minsters' Wives Connection**, ONLINE, Trish Jackson, ext. 2224
17 **Children's Missions Day**, Trish Jackson, ext. 2224
18 **Anti-Gambling Sunday**, Keith Hinson, ext. 2289
20 **Personnel Management Conference**, SBOM, Prattville, Linda Hicks, ext. 2263
20 **Senior Adult Singin'**, Mount Zion, Huntsville, Frank Jones, fjm1117@gmail.com
20 **Great Commission Conversations**, ONLINE, Cindy Wilson, ext. 2225
23 **SPEAK Tour**, Valleydale Baptist, Valleydale, Jessica Palmer, ext. 2262
23-24 **Pastor/Deacon/Spouse Retreat**, Shocco Springs, Talladega, Ken Allen, ext. 2210
25 **Night of Encouragement and Evangelism**, Bethel, Snead, Lori McGough, ext. 2245
25 **Student Choir Kick-Off**, First, Montgomery, Karen Gosselin, ext. 2318
27 **Empower Conference**, SBOM, Prattville, Rob Jackson, ext. 2343
27 **Central Region Disciple-Making Roundtable**, Crossroads, Elmore, Mark Gainey, ext. 2240
30/9-1 **International Friends Retreat**, WorldSong, Cook Springs, Chris Mills, ext. 2379

OCTOBER 2022

1-31 **Minister Appreciation Month**, Reka Baker, ext. 2263
4 **Ministers' Wives Connection**, ONLINE, Trish Jackson, ext. 2224
6-8 **Interlink Marriage Retreat**, Camp Baldwin, Elberta, Jessica Palmer, ext. 2262
7-8 **Fall Missions Festival for Children**, WorldSong, Cook Springs, Kathryn Helms, ext. 2325
11 **Abundant Living**, Hunter Street, Hoover, Ramona Noah, ext. 2312
11 **Great Commission Conversations**, ONLINE, Cindy Wilson, ext. 2225
14-15 **Fall Missions Festival for Children**, WorldSong, Cook Springs, Kathryn Helms, ext. 2325
16 **Being Human–An Apologetic for Human Life**, UAB BCM, Birmingham, Lori McGough, ext. 2245

CHRISTIAN crossword



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ACROSS

1. Thou shalt call His ___ Jesus. (Matt. 1:21)
5. They shall call His name ___. (Matt. 1:23)
11. Revises.
13. A cry of pain.
14. Avenue. (abbr.)
15. His name shall be called ___. (Isa. 9:6)
18. Married.
19. Rhode Island. (abbr.)
20. The meek shall ___ and be satisfied. (Ps. 22:26)
21. Good, better, ___.
23. Soon.
28. Characteristic.
30. King of Tyre. (1 Kings 5:1)
31. Be of good ___. (Acts 23:11)
33. Purpose.
34. South Carolina. (abbr.)
35. Damaged.
37. And, ___, the angel of the Lord came upon them. (Luke 2:9)
38. Estimated time of arrival. (abbr.)
39. Aramaic "son of."
40. Greek letter.
41. Egg-shaped.
43. On all sides.
45. Cure.
46. Rim.
47. Serpent.
48. Extrasensory perception. (abbr.)
50. Light. (abbr.)
51. I will ___ up mine eyes. (Ps. 121:1)
52. The ___ of a trumpet. (Ps. 47:5)

DOWN

1. Sing unto Him a ___ song. (Ps. 33:3)
2. "Come, let us ___ Him."
3. Pastor.
4. Estimated time of departure. (abbr.)
6. My ___ shall speak of wisdom. (Ps. 49:3)
7. A tool.
8. United Auto Workers. (abbr.)
9. ___ Father, the Prince of Peace. (Isa. 9:6)
10. But if ye be ___ of the Spirit. (Gal. 5:18)
12. Southeast. (abbr.)
16. Musical note.
17. When they ___, I will not hear. (Jer. 14:12)
21. Composer of organ music.
22. Ye that ___ at His word. (Isa. 66:5)
24. Buckeye state.
25. Edge.
26. Transpose. (abbr.)
27. Young Men's Christian Association. (abbr.)
29. Region.
32. The ___ is the end of the world. (Matt. 13:39)
33. Continually.
36. Cart.
38. Left-handed man. (Judg. 3:15)
40. Edgar Allen ___.
41. Spoken.
42. Unit of electrical current.
44. Whatsoever ye do in word or ___. (Col. 3:17)
48. ___cetera.
49. Postscript. (abbr.)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Games' trafficking effort nets rescues, arrests

Seven missing and endangered minors and 13 minors who are victims of sex trafficking or exploitation are among those identified in a multi-agency human trafficking prevention effort conducted during the World Games in Birmingham.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security Investigations says 34 arrests were made for commercial sex buyers and six arrests for human trafficking during the World Games, which ended July 17.

Doug Gilmer, resident agent in charge for DHS Investigations, told WBHM news the number of victims and arrests was more than he expected.

"We felt like we were going to be busy. I just don't think we anticipated just how busy we would be. It's been taxing," he said.

'Successful' effort

Among those identified in the operation were 15 adults and two minors that are sex trafficking victims; 11 minors that are victims of online sexual exploitation and sextortion; seven missing and endangered minors; and seven adults and four minors that are labor trafficking victims.

Some victims traveled from out of state specifically for the World Games, Gilmer said.

Several were referred to local ministries that help trafficking victims.

Focused effort

The 4-week focused effort, dubbed "Operation Games STOP" (Strategic Trafficking Operation), began June 23 and targeted human exploitation-related offenses, drug trafficking and other public safety threats in the lead up to the World Games.

To see photos from the Games, visit tabonline.org/twg-2022.

But DHS, Immigration and Customs Enforcement and other groups have been preparing for the World Games for over three years, Gilmer said.

Thousands of law enforcement officers, workers in the health care and hospitality industries, and community volunteers had been trained in the lead up to the World Games, he added. Volunteers for the World Games also received training ahead of their service.

Gilmer lamented the number of victims, but said the effort to identify and help them was "incredibly successful." (TAB)

Photo by Carrie Brown McWhorter/The Alabama Baptist

A quick-reference card and bracelet share a hotline number with volunteers to report human trafficking during the World Games.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For August 7

Explore the Bible

By Jay T. Robertson, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Theology, University of Mobile

GOD HONORS
2 Kings 12:4–16

Joash ruled as king in Jerusalem from 835 to 796 B.C., one of the longest reigns in the southern kingdom. He received an evaluation of restrained approval from the writers of Scripture. Joash failed to remove the local high places that dotted the landscape. While he was instructed by Jehoiada the priest, he did what was right in the Lord's sight. Although he started well, his final days were described as a failure (2 Chron. 24:17–22).

Joash's major accomplishment was the repair of the temple and the reorganization of the temple finances that made it possible. By this time, the temple was about 150 years old. The temple not only suffered from aging but also from the abuse of the Ahab-influenced rulers who had preceded Joash.

Problem (4–8)

The king ordered the priests to take the money given to the temple from the census, personal vows and the funds brought voluntarily and devote it to repairing whatever damage was found in the temple. These funds had been used by the priests for food and other personal needs, but at Joash's command, the funds would now be redirected to repair the temple.

We are not told when Joash gave the order, but by the 23rd year of King Joash, when he would have been 30 years old, no progress had been made on repairs. Joash summoned Jehoiada the priest and other priestly leaders and rebuked them for not initiating the repairs. It is shocking to find Jehoiada guilty of such neglect.

He would have been a very old man by this time, perhaps unable to exercise the leadership needed to fulfill the king's order.

Perhaps at the command of the king, the priests agreed not to receive money from the people. They would no longer be responsible for repairing the temple. The temptation for them to use the funds for their needs was too great.

They needed a system to divide responsibility, provide accountability and eliminate the temptation to divert funds for their personal use.

Solution (9–12)

Joash, working with Jehoiada, developed a solution. Money given to the priests would be collected in a chest near the entrance to the temple. The king's secretary and Jehoiada the high priest together would collect and weigh the money. Then they delivered the money directly to the workmen.

The project overseers then paid the men doing the manual labor and purchased the materials for the temple's repairs. This new strategy ensured the work was getting done and everybody involved was being paid for their work. Financial accountability led to financial integrity in this important project.

The people responded to the reforms. People responded by giving both joyfully and generously for the repair of the temple. The chest had to be emptied daily (2 Chron. 24:11). God desires His people today to give both joyfully and generously to fulfill the Great Commission.

Action (13–16)

The money contributed in the chest was used for the repair and restoration of the temple. None was designated for making the instruments the priests used in fulfilling their priestly duties or for their personal needs. The description in these verses highlights the integrity of the men working on the temple repairs.

After all the repairs were completed and all the workers had been paid, the funds left over were used to provide the instruments the priests needed to fulfill their duties. And what about the priests themselves? Did they suffer financially? No. They continued to have sufficient income from the sacrificial offerings the people brought. The money from the guilt offerings and sin offerings belonged to the priests. God in His providence cared for His priests and restored the temple so His people could worship Him.

Bible Studies for Life

By Roy E. Ciampa, Ph.D.
Armstrong Chair of Religion, Samford University

PRAY FOR YOUR NEIGHBOR
1 TIMOTHY 2:1–8

Paul reminds Timothy (and us) of the importance of intercessory prayer, or praying for others, for the sake of advancing the gospel.

We are to pray for our neighbors. (1–4)

Paul teaches us to pray for everyone and for kings and all who are in authority, emphasizing the wide range of different types of prayer we might pray for all of these people.

He mentions "petitions, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings."

The different terms he uses serve to encourage a wide range of prayer to promote the best possible conditions for advancing the gospel.

One of Paul's key goals for our prayers is that believers might live tranquil and quiet lives marked by godliness and dignity. Sometimes that is challenged by leaders or neighbors who would persecute or harass us.

Other times our ability to live such lives can be challenged by our need to stand up in righteousness against injustice or unrighteousness around us.

When government and society are functioning as they should (which is the focus of the prayers Paul urges us to pray in this passage), we are all left in peace to live lives that please God.

The focus on living tranquil and quiet lives reminds us God cares about how we and our neighbors experience earthly life, not just about getting us and them to heaven. God wants all of us to live out this present life with the hope, peace, purpose and joy that come from walking with Christ amid life's challenges.

God is our Savior, and He wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Knowing this motivates our prayers to promote the conditions that will best serve to advance His purposes, both for ourselves and our neighbors.

We are to pray that our neighbors recognize Jesus is the only way to salvation. (5–6)

We pray our neighbors will come to know salvation in Christ since He is the only mediator who can secure our salvation, having sacrificed Himself on the cross as the ransom and sacrificial price that needed to be paid for our redemption. There are not different gods, mediators or saviors for others of different peoples and nations. There is only one God and one mediator for all people. There is only one Savior, who has come to offer salvation to all and give Himself as a ransom for all. Christ's death for us is the testimony and proof of God's love, justice and righteousness, which are all expressed in Christ at what Paul elsewhere calls "the fullness of time" (Gal. 4:4).

We are to pray with the right attitude. (7–8)

Paul points out his emphasis on prayer in this passage is consistent with the fact that he was appointed a herald and apostle to bring faith and truth to the Gentiles. The testimony about Christ as our mediator mentioned in verses 5 and 6 would be spread through Paul to Gentiles everywhere. For that to happen, prayer is essential. Urgent prayer for the advance of the gospel and for conditions conducive to the advance of the gospel must be constantly offered "in every place," that is, from around the globe.

But prayer with a wrong attitude, such as prayer grounded in anger or arguments, would undermine the spread and credibility of the gospel. Lifting up one's hands was a standard posture for prayer in Paul's context. When Paul says we need to lift up "holy" hands, he means we must not be people who act like holy people when we pray but who live impure lives in private. Rather, our prayers must reflect a love for Christ and others that marks our private lives just as much as it does our public presentations.

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Timothy Cockes
Baptist Press

Southern gospel singer appears on America's Got Talent after 10-year wait

Ben Waites' performance on the July 12 episode of America's Got Talent has garnered millions of views, which he says can only be described as "a God thing."

Waites, a Nashville-based southern gospel singer and vocal coach, said glorifying God remains the primary motivation for his audition on the popular NBC show.

"Everything that I've done my entire career has been so heavily oriented in serving Christ and showing the love of God to as many people as I can," he said. "I looked at this as an opportunity for reaching a lot of people that I probably couldn't have on my own."

Based on the response of the AGT audience and judges, Waites made quite an impression. He received a standing ovation led by AGT judge Sofía Vergara.

Judges respond

Judge Heidi Klum said Vergara was "bawling her eyes out" during Waites' performance of Cyndi Lauper's "True Colors."

"I loved it because it's a beautiful song, but you made it yours. It was special and different," Vergara said.

Judge Simon Cowell added, "There's no such thing as a perfect audition. This is just a great audition. This is a moment." Waites received a "yes" from all three judges to move on to the next round of competition.

'Strange journey'

The 33-year-old Waites said his journey to the show was a strange one. He first auditioned for America's Got Talent years ago while a student at Louisiana Christian University (then Louisiana College), but was not selected.

Years later Waites did not intend to try out for the show, but a viral video proved to be his golden ticket moment.

Originally from Louisiana, Waites was back for a concert in the state when someone filmed his performance and uploaded it to TikTok, where it received around 600,000 views in 24 hours.

BEN WAITES Trae Patton/NBC

Producers for AGT reached out to Waites about auditioning for the show.

"It had not even crossed my mind since my college days to do something like this, but God's going to use this, and I didn't need to pass up this opportunity," Waites said.

The challenges he overcame to appear on the show mirror those he has faced in his personal life.

Waites was born with arthrogryposis multiplex congenita, a condition that causes fixed or hooked joints throughout the body, such as in the elbows, wrists, knees and ankles. His family has always encouraged him not to let his disability limit him, he said.

"It wasn't really a thing growing up because it was just my life," Waites said. "I don't ever think about it because each day is just another day for me where I'm using this wheelchair to get around or a stylus in my mouth to type.

"Growing up my parents and grandparents kept that same mentality in how they raised me. They would encourage me that if I wanted to do something then do it, and do it to the best of my ability. There were no excuses, and you would just figure out how to do what you wanted to do."

Waites said during his years on the road performing, he has encountered many people with disabilities, including some with AMC, and he always tries to encourage them. He sees his appearance on AGT as a new avenue for that.

"I've met others with varying disabilities, and some are just full of joy, while others have some anger or bitterness within them as well," Waites said.

Matter of perspective

"If anything, I would hope that my life demonstrates how important perspective is. My mind always goes to Romans 8:28 and knowing that everything has a purpose. What I would hope my life demonstrates for others going through hard struggles is if your perspective is in the right place then you can persevere, endure and see it through to the end."

For the past few years Waites has also been teaching and inspiring singers as a vocal coach. But his students aren't the only ones getting inspiration from the lessons.

"You have no idea when someone walks in the door or gets on a Zoom who is going be on the other side," Waites said. "The people that I teach are all ages, all genres, all backgrounds, all walks of life and all religions.

"These people bring their life and their experiences to the table, and they are giving me just as much back as I'm giving to them. It's a very enlightening thing for me."

In teaching, Waites is carrying a torch passed down from his grandfather who was his musical mentor. And in performing on AGT, Waites has already made an impact on viewers.

"It is surreal," he said of his appearance on the show. "I even had quite the delay in originally responding back to them because I just was not sure if this was a direction that I wanted to go. My wife, grandmother and mom really poured into me that this is a really massive opportunity to reach a lot of people with the message that I'm trying to spread. I couldn't pass that up.

"I'm carrying a lot of weight on my shoulders over it, not in the sense of being overly nervous or caring about winning. That stuff doesn't matter to me. What I'm more concerned about is appropriately and effectively showing the gospel of Christ through this opportunity." (TAB Media contributed)

EDITOR'S NOTE

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