

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

INSIDE



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'3 Things' approach leads to 'comfortable but effective' gospel conversations

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BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Alabama churches open doors of ministry to young athletes and their families

Though sports options abound year round, fall feels like the unofficial kickoff for a new year of athletics — an avenue many churches use to open doors of ministry to young athletes and their families.

Some churches hold sports-themed Sunday morning services during the year. That's the case at West Blocton First Baptist Church,

which hosts an annual "Sports Sunday" and invites members of local sports teams, parents, coaches and officials to join with them for worship. The event usually brings in more visitors than a typical Easter or Christmas service, said pastor Kyle Hodges.

"They come wearing their team jerseys, and the service is geared toward celebrating them, praying for them and delivering a salvation message with a sports-related theme," Hodges said. "This offers a chance for the community to see that a local church cares and is highly interested

in what the community is involved in."

He noted that a luncheon following the service allows church members to have conversations and build relationships.

Other churches hold special events. That's what Freedom Baptist Church in Ranburne

did recently. Pastor Jerome Whaley said the "Heart of a Champion" event was conceived last year as a way to reengage and reenergize the community

(See 'Churches,' page 13)

West Blocton First Baptist Church



Photo courtesy of Kyle Hodges

Freedom Baptist Church in Ranburne



Photo courtesy of Jerome Whaley



‘Working together to do something good’

Beloved advertising manager retiring from The Alabama Baptist

If you know Melanie McKinney, you know this — she doesn’t forget anyone. If you were to bump into her at the grocery store, she would ask you about your family by name, and she would remember everything you had told her about them the last time she saw you, no matter how long ago it was.

You can imagine what a gift that’s been for the advertising department of The Alabama Baptist for more than 21 years. She’s been a dear friend to her co-workers but also to every advertiser she’s emailed and talked with on the phone over the years.

“I love talking to people,” said McKinney, TAB’s advertising manager. “It has meant a lot to me that I’ve had the opportunity to get to know people and have those relationships for so long.”

That’s one of the things she said she will miss the most as she retires Aug. 31.

“You feel like you’re part of their family because you are in a way, and I loved that part and just helping them,” she said. “Sometimes someone would call back later and say, ‘You helped me so much,’ and that would make my heart smile. It made me think I was doing what I was supposed to be doing.”

McKinney came to TAB in 2001 after spending nine years as the administrative assistant for youth/college at Dawson Memorial Baptist Church in Homewood. Her sons Sammy, Blake and Russell were 19, 15 and 4 at the time — now they’re 40, 36 and 25.

Over her years at the publication, McKinney handled the company’s communication with advertisers, including billing, classifieds and occasionally selling ads. She also



Melanie McKinney (center) shares a laugh with husband Terry (left) and fellow TAB Media staff member Deb Lowery during TAB’s 175th anniversary celebration at Judson College in Marion on Feb. 6, 2018.

attended events on behalf of TAB Media.

In all of that work, she became a familiar face and voice for friends of TAB.

‘She will be missed’

Jennifer Davis Rash, TAB Media president and editor-in-chief, said, “Melanie is loved so dearly by everyone on staff, as well as by countless friends and ministry partners of TAB Media. She will certainly be



Melanie McKinney restocks a snack table and shows off the cookie selection at the 2019 Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference.

missed around the office, and we are holding her to her promise to stay connected.”

Rash said McKinney has been part of her life for more than two decades and “is no doubt one of the sweetest people you could ever meet.”

“She truly loves and cares for all of us,” Rash said, “and with that heart of gold comes a fun spirit. She makes sure we are smiling and laughing a lot.”

McKinney said the TAB staff has been like a family to her over the years, walking with her through high and low times.

“I’ve always known that I could count on everyone for anything I needed,” she said.

McKinney said people often say you don’t know what you have until it’s gone, but she feels like she’s known all along.

“I just hope and pray I have contributed something meaningful to this ministry over the years that has helped in some way,” she said. “I’m going to miss the work. I’m going to miss the ministry and knowing that we were working together to do something good.” (Grace Thornton)

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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@RashionalThts

Debt forgiveness debate provides opportunity to share Christ

We all may know a young person who took advantage of the student loan option more for the cash infusion than to truly aid in obtaining an education.

Still, I'm confident the majority of people with student loans used them for the right reason, even if they didn't understand what the future obligation would look like.

As the debate over a potential option for forgiveness of a portion of some student loan debt dominates headlines, I'm intrigued by the multiple layers that must be peeled back to grasp the full picture of cause and effect.

Also intriguing is the proposed IRS plan to forgive \$1.2 billion in fees connected to those filing their taxes late during the pandemic factor into debt forgiveness. Media reports indicate nearly 1.6 million taxpayers will receive those refunds or credits in the coming weeks.

Social media posts and coffee shop conversations nationwide prove Americans have strong opinions on the debt forgiveness debate, and Alabama Baptists fall on both sides of the argument.

As I've been reading, listening and researching the topic, I've wondered how the Bible would inform us as to how to approach the complexity of all that is in

front of us. And once one thread is pulled, what does that mean going forward?

In an Aug. 25 Religion News Service article, Hebrew Bible professor and former financial analyst Roger S. Nam reminds his readers college student loans didn't exist in ancient Israel.

"The economic worlds of the Bible are foreign to our modern sensibilities," he stated. "For most of biblical history, money had not yet been invented. Economic decisions on issues like vocation, housing and marriage were largely predetermined according to kinship needs. A household's greatest asset was a modest plot of land. Agriculture dominated economic production.

"Bible verses in regard to loan forgiveness must be interpreted in this context," he continued. "Biblical texts should not be proof-texted to support contrary opinions on this student debt relief proposal.

"We should not treat the Bible like an enormously thick reference textbook, looking for the singular verse to weaponize against ideological opponents," Nam noted. "Taking one single verse to support or protest any modern legislation violates the very character of the Bible."

So, no specific passage is available to tell us exactly how to respond, but it is a good reminder to look for biblical values to inform our perspectives overall.

I don't have an answer for the current debate, but I'm always drawn to the parable of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18:21-35 when the topic of debt forgiveness surfaces.

For those of us who have had a debt of any kind forgiven in our past, I pray we are able to pay it forward to others when the appropriate opportunity arises.

And for those who have accepted the free gift of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone know, we know none of us actually deserves forgiveness of any kind, but praise God for His unconditional and unending love.

The Cross provides our ultimate debt forgiveness.

It really is a lot to absorb at one time ...

The Aug. 17 headline in the Houston Chronicle caught my attention — "Just too much at one time" — not so much for the topic of the article but because the sentiment seems to ring true for so many.

We all know someone truly overwhelmed with life right now, and in some moments we may be the ones on the list.

As we all work to sort through so many difficult news reports compounding on top of each other as well as other issues weighing heavily on us, let's also try to

avoid adding negative stress to others along the way.

Fear, frustration, anger and disappointment easily can cause us to exacerbate an already difficult situation, but adding emotional, physical and spiritual exhaustion to the mix could turn it volatile.

We need each other to be our best, and the world needs us at our best. We have the only answer for the darkness — the good news of Jesus Christ — and if we are imploding then we are missing opportunities to shine His light.

Will we ever truly get to relax

and coast through this life again?

Not likely, but we can find our way through it and share Jesus with the world as we do.

To get started:

- ▶ Remove unnecessary pressures you've placed on yourself and/or others. Those can wait.
- ▶ Seek fully the face of Christ.
- ▶ Evaluate your sleep, exercise and eating patterns.
- ▶ Monitor your intake of national and political news.
- ▶ Make a list of everything bothering you and tackle one item at a time. —JDR

Your Voice



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

Forgiveness makes second chances possible

By **Pastor Michael J. Brooks**
Siluria Baptist Church, Alabaster

It was a fearful time in 2006 when a number of rural churches were burned in Alabama.

I remember a deacons meeting in which we discussed whether we ought to take night shifts at our church to protect our property. One of our deacons dismissed the idea: “We’d probably end up shooting each other,” he growled.

A short time later three college students were arrested. The FBI tracked them down, quite literally, by their tire tracks. But in the middle of this crisis, the pastor of one of the destroyed churches became an advocate for the arsonists.

Jim Parker taught at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary’s Birmingham extension and served Ashby Baptist Church in Bibb County as bivocational pastor. He met the arsonists and their families and became their pastor and friend.

Parker lobbied for state charges to run concurrent with federal charges, thus reducing their jail time, and for the boys, in turn, to make some restitution for their crimes. He cited Exodus 22:6 about the burning of a neighbor’s field without loss of life.

“In property crimes, the overarching scriptural approach is restitution,” he said.

Parker, now a professor at New

Orleans Seminary, was an advocate who pressed for a second chance.

A similar story is found in the New Testament. John Mark accompanied Barnabas and Paul on what is popularly known as Paul’s first missionary journey. Midstream, Mark abandoned the mission (Acts 13:13). We don’t know if he was sick, homesick or angry, but he became an AWOL missionary.

The two leaders later determined to go back and visit the churches they’d planted. Barnabas wanted to take Mark again, but Paul refused. The men parted in conflict and, as far as we know, never met again.

Lo, many years later Paul was on death row in a Roman prison. He wrote to Timothy urging him to make haste to visit him. “And bring Mark too,” he said, “for he is now profitable for my ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11).

Another gospel warhorse, Simon Peter, likewise acknowledged the contribution of Mark in 1 Peter 5:13.

Early church leaders insisted Mark was Peter’s interpreter and recorded Peter’s first-hand accounts of Jesus’ life in the Gospel of Mark. This gospel has blessed the world. We have it in Scripture in large measure because three missionaries gave a young man a second chance.

We’re never more godly than when we forgiven sinners pass forgiveness along to others.

With the issue of abortion back in the hands of voters and representatives, we should face the reality that many children and families may struggle.

Christ-followers must prove they are more than politically motivated and genuinely pro-life. This will require us to grapple with how we may best serve single mothers, support foster care and partner with those seeking to place a newborn for adoption.

We prayed for children to be protected from abortion. Now we must act prayerfully and creatively to do what we can to provide for these children.

Mark Bordeaux
Taylors, South Carolina

No matter how small or plain or simple your church may be, never forget you have two great assets. You have content and community.

Make the most of those and watch God energize your work for His glory!

President Jeff Iorg
Gateway Seminary

Let us worship the God who deserves to be praised for His goodness during both the blessings and hardships of our lives.

Selah Vetter
the-scroll.com

Letters to the editor

Thank you for your insightful Rashional Thoughts editorial in the July 21 edition.

Not sure just when it happened, but somewhere along the line it would seem Southern Baptists moved from a called ministry to professionalism, from the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit to marketing. Rather than being culture changers, Southern Baptists, and I might add other groups that claim the Christian name, have become culture adapters. Does Scripture not say, “Friendship with the world is enmity with God“?

Satan is most effective in his deceit when he causes belief in a system over faith in a person, the person of Christ. For some reason the thought prevails that the work of the Holy Spirit can be programmed.

I am convinced that less worry about production and greater focus on preaching repentance, as did Christ, and on the power of the gospel would bring an enlivening in our churches reminiscent of Great Awakenings of the past.

Bob Sandifer
Former pastor and retired hospice chaplain

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“No matter what life pitches at you, [God] will catch it in His mighty and strong hands.”

LEANN SANDERS SHELTON

Head softball coach, Columbus Christian Academy in Columbus, Mississippi

For the gospel to go out, there are two core truths we have to remember:

First, we have to be in the community and be known in the community to see the gospel make a great impact. Would your community miss you if you as a church were no longer there?

Second, we have to share the gospel, and we share the gospel most effectively with people we have a relationship with in our community. That relationship can simply be one that is built through an acquaintance — meaning they know me, I know them and we share some type of common interest. (That common interest could be that we both love our community.)

As we serve in our local area, our

purpose is to love them, know them and tell them about Jesus. Go serve and connect with your community to share the love of Christ with them.

Adam McCampbell
Russellville, Arkansas

Several months ago, I said my last earthly goodbye — verbal shorthand for “God be with you” — to the love of my life.

Visiting her grave recently, a gloomy gray curtain draped the sky. A sad, slight mist was falling. Not even Hollywood could have built a more perfect scenario for a pity party.

I thought myself alone in that vast, silent garden of weather-worn, upright granite headstones, flat

bronze markers and plastic flowers that ranged from full color to fading. But I was mistaken. Badly mistaken.

In that time of renewed tears and heartbreak, I was overcome with a profound sense of love, gratitude, cherished memories, strength and hope. An unseen, powerful Presence was there and at work.

Retired pastor Jim Auchmuty
Birmingham

As we live each day, we touch countless lives. We have the privilege of helping folks or hurting folks, of pointing people to Jesus or giving them an excuse for not following Jesus. Which do you do?

David Chancey
Fayetteville, Georgia

From the *Twitterverse*

@macbrunson

The place to start with a problem is with God. He sees the problem in its totality; He sees it in all dimensions at once; He sees it with perfect clarity. If you want the right perspective on your problem, see God’s perspective on it.

@micahfries

One of the best leadership lessons I learned a long time ago was to quit pursuing balance in life. Balance is generally a myth and chasing it will further frustrate. Instead, recognize that life is a series of rhythms. Lean into the rhythms. Appreciate the rhythm of the moment.

@nathanafinn

The Webb telescope is a reminder that “outer space” is actually God’s vast canvas. He created it all for His own glory, and it reflects His infinite beauty. God delighted in His cosmic artistry long before we could

even begin to fathom these images. Praise the Lord.

@MattSmethurst

- The Christian Life
- ▶ Bible (God to man)
 - ▶ Prayer (man to God)
 - ▶ Fellowship (believer to believer)
 - ▶ Witness (believer to unbeliever)

All in the context of a local church.

@markmac1023

Satan is known for limiting prayer time because your prayers are known for limiting him.

@jobymartin

The things that come out of your mouth, first started in your heart.

@AdamGreenway

“The democratic polity in our Baptist denomination rests upon the conviction that the composite mind

of the entire constituency is likely to be right more often than the mind of any single organization or individual.” —Duke K. McCall, seventh president of @SBTS, 1951 #Point-ToPonder

@JCRyle

By affliction He teaches us many precious lessons, which without it we should never learn. By affliction He shows us our emptiness and weakness, draws us to the throne of grace, purifies our affections, weans us from the world, makes us long for heaven.

@keahbone

Most SBC churches are pillars of love, ministry and peace in their communities. They are not arguing on Twitter ... debating denominational drift ... or organizing factions. What you see on Twitter is not an accurate picture of who we are as Southern Baptists.

Desperate need for discipleship

By Pastor Dave Walsh
Ariton Baptist Church

Many Christians have quit growing because they are not being discipled.

According to Barna, just over 1 in 4 U.S. Christians (28%) are fully engaged in discipleship. Praise God for them!

Another 28% are being discipled but are not helping others grow closer to Christ. A very small percentage (5%) is discipling others but not being discipled themselves. That means 39% of Christians are not engaged in discipleship in any direction. Why is that?

A huge percentage of Christians simply lack the confidence to disciple or the knowledge of the need for discipleship. While I find this to be alarming, I also see some hope.

These non-disciplers are not fundamentally opposed to discipleship; they just need to be better informed and equipped. All they need is some encouragement and opportunities to be discipled.

As pastors, we need to instill in our congregations the urgency and the necessity for growth in Christ. We have the opportunity to seek out varied methods and out-of-the-box approaches to allow people to grow in Christ.

As we lead others into that growth process, I firmly believe the “ill-equipped” can become fully equipped and ready to take on the journey toward Christlikeness.

The responsibility of equipping and engaging our congregation is on our shoulders. Let’s all get back to discipleship, to deepening the faith of those in our flock.

EDITOR’S NOTE — This article originally appeared in Pastor Connections, a semi-monthly newsletter by pastors for pastors. Subscribe at thealabamabaptist.org/email-newsletter.

3 stories you should know



IMB photo

IMB missionary kid Trey Haun competes in cyclocross at the Uni-cycling Convention and World Championships in France. At the event, Haun represented Ghana, a country where he has lived most of his life with his mom, Heidi, a surgeon at Baptist Medical Centre in Nalerigu; his father, William, a multimedia specialist; and his sister. Haun won silver and bronze medals. This was the first time a team from Ghana entered the World Championships. (IMB)

Walmart to add benefits for abortion, adoption

Walmart, the nation's largest employer, is expanding coverage for abortion and adoption following the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*.

In a memo sent to employees Aug. 19, the company said its employee health care plans will now cover abortion "when there is a health risk to the mother, rape or incest, ectopic pregnancy, miscarriage or lack of fetal viability," the Associated Press reported after viewing a copy of the memo.

"Travel support" also will be offered when abortion access is not available within a 100-mile radius of the worker's location, according to the memo.

The company also said it will launch a center that provides fertility services to employees and increase its financial aid for adoptions from \$5,000 to \$20,000. (TAB)

UN report says China guilty of forced labor

The United Nations has determined it is "reasonable to conclude" China has been practicing forced labor among ethnic Muslim minorities in the country's western Xinjiang region.

A U.N. report was shared Aug. 16 by Tomoya Obokata on contemporary forms of slavery. Forced labor in sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing has been occurring among Uyghur, Kazakh and other people groups, Obokata said.

Some of the coercion "may amount to enslavement as a crime against humanity," the report says.

The Trump administration declared China guilty of genocide against the Uyghurs and other minorities in Xinjiang in January 2021. The Biden administration affirmed that determination weeks later. China rejects the accusations. (TAB)

Mobile Baptists share concerns after mayor appoints LGBTQ liaisons

Mobile Mayor Sandy Stimpson has assured Southern Baptists their religious freedom is not in jeopardy following his appointment of two city liaisons to the LGBTQ community.

Six representatives from the Mobile Baptist Association executive committee met with Stimpson Aug. 15 to express their concerns. They also presented him a resolution "on the LGBTQ+ agenda and religious liberty" adopted by the MBA executive committee Aug. 1.

The resolution notes the appointment of the liaisons and expresses concern about the level of authority of such positions in other cities.

"Liaisons who were appointed to advise officials in other cities later were given the authority to enforce ordinances and levy fines on any groups who refused to celebrate pro-LGBTQ+ ordinances and activity," the resolution stated.

The resolution implores public officials "to protect religious liberty by rejecting any attempts to compromise the longstanding Judeo-

Christian and biblical convictions of the majority of our citizens."

MBA moderator Scott Griffith, pastor of Cypress Shores Baptist Church, was among the leaders who met with Stimpson.

"Our ethnically diverse group of pastors had a cordial meeting with the mayor," Griffith said. "We assured him of our support for any efforts to protect Mobile residents' liberty to hold and live out biblical convictions regarding human sexuality."

Other MBA representatives who met with Stimpson were vice moderator Kevin Cobb, pastor of West Mobile Baptist Church; Mack Morris, retired pastor of Woodridge Baptist Church; former moderator Charlie York, pastor of Highpoint Baptist Church in Eight Mile; David Roach, pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church in Saraland; and MBA executive director Thomas Wright.

Wright said "it is important for biblical Chris-

tian citizens to communicate with leaders the individual liberty of the LGBTQ+ agenda does not have to include imposing universal endorsement of that lifestyle on the rest of the population."

Following other cities' lead

Stimpson appointed the uncompensated liaisons in February to "represent the city's LGBTQ+ community in all matters related to city government" and to provide the "LGBTQ+ perspective on public policies and services," according to the city's website.

Similar positions have been created in Birmingham and Montgomery, and religious liberty advocates have closely watched a 2017 Birmingham ordinance prohibiting discrimination based on factors that include sexual orientation and gender identity.

Read the full text of the resolution at mobilebaptists.org. (TAB Media)

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

► Pastor, church planter and author **Clifford Matthews** died June 17. He was 87.

Matthews served numerous churches during more than 65 years of ministry, including Hales Chapel, Shiloh, St. John, Dorcas and Pocosin, all in Jack.

His memoir, "Worth Dying For," recounts his life in ministry, beginning with his childhood in South Alabama during the pre-World War II era.

He became a Christian as a teenager, and as a youth heeded an early call to become licensed to preach, to serve churches and even to lead a citywide revival. By the early 1960s, he and his wife Peggy were living in the Panama Canal Zone and assisting with missions work when he unexpectedly found himself in the middle of a riot. His conviction that ministry is worth the risk didn't wane during that tumult in the Republic of Panama, and this conviction also guided him during his church planting efforts in Alabama, New York and Florida.

Matthews is survived by his wife, daughter, son, seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

AUTAUGA ASSOCIATION

► **William "Pete" Chadwick** is the new pastor of **Prattmont Baptist Church, Prattville**.

He was licensed to ministry in 2011 and ordained in 2013. He holds a biblical teaching certificate from New Orleans Seminary. He previously served as pastor of Crossville First Baptist Church and student pastor of Geraldine FBC.

He and his wife, Marsha, have two children.

► **White Pond Baptist Church, Marbury**, will celebrate its 110th anniversary Sept. 25 featuring guest singers Spoken For at 9:45 a.m.

and former pastor, Warren Culver, preaching at 11 a.m. Lunch will follow in the fellowship hall. Donnie Burns is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► **Westwood Baptist Church, Forestdale**, will celebrate its 75th anniversary Sept. 18 with Chris Crain, executive director of Birmingham Metro Baptist Association, serving as guest preacher and Shawn Stinson leading the music. The service is at 10:30 a.m. followed by a fellowship lunch.

FRANKLIN ASSOCIATION

► **Garrett Booth** is the new minister of music/education of **Russellville First Baptist Church**. He previously served as the minister of music at Union Valley Baptist Church, Beebe, Arkansas. Garrett holds a bachelor's degree from Liberty University. He is married to Madison.

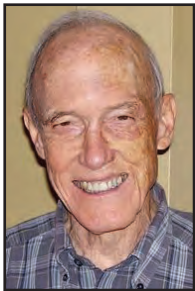
OTHER

► **Mike Clark** is the new director of missions for the **William Carey Baptist Association, Fayetteville, Tennessee**.

For more than 24 years, Clark was pastor of Mable Hill Baptist Church, Ardmore. Clark has a bachelor's degree in pastoral studies, a master's degree in theology and a doctoral degree in crisis counseling. He had a 25-year career with the Huntsville Police Department (uniformed patrol, special undercover narcotic/organized crime agent and the last 18 of those years as a special criminal and administrative investigator).

For the past 16 years, he has also served with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

His wife, Mona, served as Madison Baptist Association clerk for 13 years. They have two children and six grandchildren.



MATTHEWS



BOOTH



CLARK



CHADWICK

FBC Jacksonville sells building to JSU

By **Grace Thornton**
The Alabama Baptist

First Baptist Church Jacksonville has started the process of selling its north campus to nearby Jacksonville State University to be used as additional space for its performing arts program.

The offer came at the perfect time, Pastor Derek Staples said. The church had recently voted to approve a vision plan that included selling that campus — which includes its sanctuary built in the 1950s — and its south campus, known as Eagle-Point Church, to buy land and build a facility large enough to hold the combined congregation.

The two congregations will meet for worship services at Eagle-Point starting Sept. 4 until that property sells and the new building is completed.

Staples said church leadership originally considered remodeling both campuses, but then questioned the wisdom of pouring money into two sets of aging buildings.

"One day I was in my office staring at the pictures of my grandkids, and I started thinking about if they moved to Jacksonville, what kind of church would we like to see ministering to them? I think that's when the Lord put in my heart [to get] the church in the best possible place they could be for the next 50 or 60 years," Staples said. "I felt like the best option on the table would be for us to unite our two campuses, sell our two campuses and buy enough land that our church could dream anything they wanted to dream in the future,

whether it was a Christian school or some kind of a ministry center — whatever they wanted to do, they would have the ability."

JSU leadership reached out about purchasing the building early in the church's planning process and met with church leadership two days after the vision plan, called Forward As One, was approved by church members.

According to university officials, the JSU board of trustees authorized the university's president to enter into an agreement to buy the church building. The purchase is part of a greater project — JSU plans to build a new 1,000-seat Randy Owen Center for the Performing Arts.

Part of the plan now is to move some of the programs planned for the ROC to the renovated church building, such as practice for the Marching Southerners band. This will help reduce

costs in their building project. They are working with architects to modify the design to connect to the FBC property.

'Trusting the Lord'

Staples said everything came together for the sale, and he is praying the same thing will happen with the EaglePoint campus.

"I'm trusting the Lord is going to send the right person or group to purchase this building. We've had some interest already," Staples said.

"There are two words we've asked everybody to keep in mind — temporary and flexibility," he said. The church's goal is to move into its new facilities debt free.



Photo by Grace Thornton/The Alabama Baptist

FBC Jacksonville is in the process of selling its building to Jacksonville State University. The building will be used for programs planned for JSU's Randy Owen Center for the Performing Arts.

'God allowed me to live again'

Jasper man keeps positive outlook, strong faith after 114-day hospital stay, two amputations

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Over the past two years, Rick Brown has lost both his legs below the knee. But he sees it as a miracle.

In fact he sees it as a reminder of two miracles, both of which kept him alive.

"God is good," Brown declared. "I am a true believer in God's miracle-working power."

In the summer of 2020, a doctor told Brown's family that he was the sickest man in Princeton Baptist Medical Center.

First miracle

He had been diagnosed with COVID-19, and his lungs were failing. Over the months that followed, Brown racked up a lot of numbers — 66 days on a ventilator, 19 days with an ECMO machine filtering his blood, 24 days in a medically induced coma, 36 days intubated, 43 days with a tracheostomy.

"I was just a sick man, and I was struggling for my life, with my family and church family praying for me," said Brown, a member of Northside Baptist Church in Jasper.

His pastor, David Byrd, called at 9 p.m. every night to pray with Brown's family, regardless of where he was. The church also was praying, but on the outside, it looked like things were only getting worse.

While sedated, Brown remembers asking God to take him, to end his suffering. His heart stopped three times while he was in the coma. Three times he remembers dreaming he was dead and going to see Jesus, but a barrier of some kind would push him back.

"The third time I said, 'Well, Lord, whatever you've got for me to do, let's get it done. Just bring me out of this,'" he remembered.

Around that time the doctor told Brown's family that the medical team had done everything they could for him and asked if they



Photo courtesy of Rick Brown
Rick Brown (front row, center), a member of Northside Baptist Church in Jasper, says he's thankful two 'miracles' from God gave him more time with his family after a near-deadly bout with COVID-19 and two leg amputations.

wanted to stop life-saving measures. Each time his heart stopped, his condition worsened. But the family called the church's prayer chain to plead on his behalf. Byrd remembers driving to the hospital, parking, laying his hand on the outside wall and crying out to God to save Brown's life.

The news spread fast around the county, and churches all over the area began to pray. And his condition began to turn around.

"With the prayers, God's hand just reached into my body and touched my organs, and the very next day my numbers started going up," Brown said.

After 114 days in the hospital, he finally went home — which was the first miracle.

"I had lost all my muscle tone and 58 pounds of body weight and had to go from scratch to learn

to sit up and stand again," Brown remembered. "I finally learned to walk again."

Second miracle

But then other things began to happen. Sores formed on his toes, causing them to turn black and

blue. He learned he had peripheral artery disease, a condition made worse by his long stay on the ECMO machine, which focuses on using the blood supply to keep organs alive.

In October 2021, Brown's right leg was amputated below the knee, and in March they amputated his left. After the second amputation, an episode with his medication landed him in the emergency room at Princeton, Brown said.

But even that was in God's hand — it's where the second miracle happened.

"When I went back to the hospital after this second amputation, they found a heart problem," Brown recalled. "The main artery around my heart was 99% blocked, and there were three other arteries almost completely blocked."

This condition wouldn't have been detected without his issues with the amputation, Brown noted.

"God's timing is perfect. He was making things happen to me that could not be anything but God's hand."

As a result he now has four stents, a new heart valve and two prosthetic feet.

And most importantly he's alive to spend time with his wife, two children and five grandchildren.

"If I was ever doubtful that God still worked miracles, I was definitely proven wrong and believe completely that God is a miracle-working God," Brown declared. "I'm here because God allowed me to live again."

He says the Lord has given him the gift of more time.

"He's helped the doctors find my heart issue. He's got some more plans for me," Brown asserted. "I've tried to be a positive influence in my church with all of this, to show how great God is and have a good attitude even though I've lost both legs."

Inspirational testimony

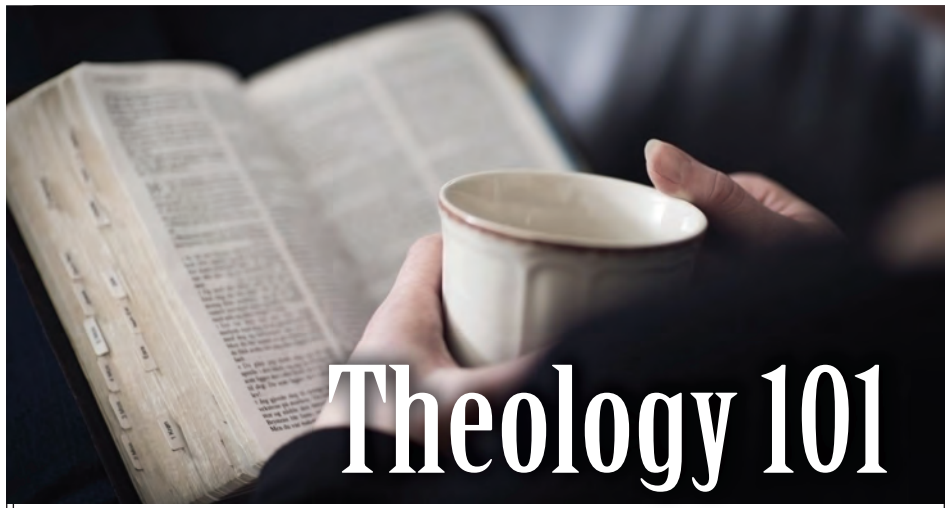
"What's happened to me could make a person get down on themselves and get down on God. But God is good, and He works miracles," Brown declared.

His pastor said he has been a testimony of God's goodness to his church and everyone around him.

"It has been amazing to see God work in all that," Byrd said. "The people there at the hospital were surely confounded by God showing up and healing him. Rick continues to amaze them. He's a very inspirational person."

"The people there at the hospital were surely confounded by God showing up and healing [Rick]."

**Pastor David Byrd
Northside Baptist Church
in Jasper**



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Spiritual Blessings

The Christian Walk

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
The Alabama Baptist

In past issues, Theology 101 has used biblical imagery as windows into biblical truths. This week we begin looking at imagery that offers insights into the Christian life. We might think of these as common images of an uncommon life.

The Bible often speaks of the life of believers in terms of walking; hence we often speak of the life of Christians as the Christian walk.

Romans 6:4 tells us we “should walk in newness of life.” Galatians 5:16 admonishes us to “walk in the Spirit.” Ephesians speaks repeatedly about walking as Christians in such terms as walking worthily (Eph. 4:1), walking differently from unconverted outsiders (Eph. 4:17), walking in love as Christ has loved us (Eph. 5:1) and walking circumspectly or carefully. First Thessalonians 4:1 speaks summarily about walking so as “to please God.”

The thought of walking suggests progress or advancement — unless the walk is on a treadmill, but even that can help our physical health. In any case, a person who is walking is not stationary.

In living the Christian life, one is not stationary but is either advancing or regressing. The life of a Christian ought to be anything but stagnant.

The image of a walk suggests forward movement that has the character of taking one step at a

time. Walking is not descriptive of standing still or of regression. At its core, walking is composed of incremental steps taken one at a time. Likewise, Christian growth is usually incremental, happening over time as the disciplines of the Christian life are practiced with continuity rather than in fits and spurts.

The nature of walking often suggests a goal, perhaps getting to a predetermined or desired destination. The goal may be exercise for the sake of physical health, which is worthy in itself.

Purposefulness

In short, walking usually involves purposefulness. It is movement toward a goal.

A major aspect of this goal in the Christian life is to be more like Christ, which includes seeking to know and do God’s will. Christ expressed it by using a quotation from the Old Testament: “Behold, I have come ... to do your will, O God” (Heb. 10:7).

Our goal is not only to be like a Person, but also to be in a place — the Father’s house. Our ultimate goal is heaven. Toward that destiny, we are walking each day.

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.



Senior adults shine in Golden Nineties Club at FBC Sylacauga

For senior adults at First Baptist Church Sylacauga, becoming a member of the Golden Nineties Club is a very special milestone.

The special recognition goes to church members 90 years of age and older and has become a beloved event — so much so that one member who recently remarried and moved to a different part of the state refuses to join another church until she can be inducted into the Golden Nineties Club next year.

The idea for the special recognition came from longtime church member Harriette Sawyer, who noticed a quiet 90-year-old who had worked in the children’s department for many years. She realized there were others who had “faithfully supported the church with their money and attendance.”

“They needed to be honored ... to have lived 90 years and have given 50 years or more to the church,” Sawyer said. “So many have worked behind the scenes.”

She took it upon herself to establish the Golden Nineties Club as a “thank you” from the church family.

Sawyer laughed when she spoke of one of the early inductees saying it made her feel like a “queen for a day.”

Beginning stages

Sawyer started the club when the church was between pastors in 2006. She continued planning it by herself for a number of years until the senior adult committee began helping her.

Barbara Jones, committee chairman, said, “This is the first church I’ve ever seen anything like this done.”

At their induction each new Golden Nineties Club member

is given a yellow rose corsage or boutonniere with golden ribbons.

As part of the service, pastor Rick Patrick reads a short biography of each Golden Nineties inductee, including their roles within the church, years of service and missions work.

Service music included some traditional favorites: “Heavenly Sunlight,” “Victory in Jesus,” “Amazing Grace” and a trumpet solo of “This Is My Story.”

Among the 2022 inductees was Margaret O’Kelley, who was recognized for 60 continuous years of teaching Sunday School (1962–

present) and participation in three international missions trips after the age of 70.

Another new inductee, Wilda Jones, said being a member of the Golden Nineties Club encourages her to keep serving in the Kingdom.

“What a privilege to be 91 years old and know that God can still use me and other 90-year-olds to show God’s love,

wisdom, guidance, peace and joy wherever He places us,” Jones said.

Planning help

Any church can put action to Psalm 71:9 to “not set aside” those in their old age, said Sawyer.

An ideal time to plan a recognition of senior adults in your congregation is in September, perhaps in conjunction with Grandparents

Day, observed the first Sunday after Labor Day.

May is another good option, since it is recognized as Older Americans Month.

For more information and a planning guide, email bjonesbsn@sbcglobal.net or call FBC Sylacauga at 256-245-6301. (Karen O. Allen)



Photo courtesy of Karen Allen

Barbara Jones (left), chairman of the senior adult committee at FBC Sylacauga, poses with Golden Nineties Club inductee Margaret O’Kelley.

Grandparents Day is Sept. 11.

‘Offered as Worship’

Long-time campus minister releases new 90-day discipleship curriculum

By Cole Shiflet
The Alabama Baptist

Bill Morrison has dedicated much of his life to discipling students and equipping them to live on mission. His latest project seeks to extend that effort beyond the students he encounters daily.

Companion study

“Offered As Worship: Attributes of a Disciple” is a 90-day curriculum Morrison recently published as a companion study to his 2016 book, “Offered.” Both draw from his more than 30 years of experience with Baptist Campus Ministries.

Morrison is the campus minister at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, where he has served since 1999.

Years ago he was asked to preach in Montgomery on Romans 12:1–2, he recalled. As he studied the text, he considered what it looked like for Christians to “present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice” to God. He recognized the connection between that sacrifice and seeking to fulfill the Great Commission.

The realization led to “Offered,” which aims

to encourage and equip Christians to obey the Romans passage.

In many ways the book is the fruit of years of work with college students.

“Truthfully the impact of this book came long before

the actual book was written,” Morrison said. “We are called to live out the Great Commission as a living sacrifice. Whatever God calls you to do, His will is for you to make disciples.

You can’t be an effective evangelist without discipling or vice versa.”

“Offered” helps young

adults find the connection between discipleship and evangelism.

Morrison identifies the imperatives Jesus gave His disciples and categorizes them to help families serve one another.

Call to action

The companion curriculum, “Offered As Worship: Attributes of a Disciple,” goes along with the book and seeks to help equip college students and campus ministers, as well as, Christians of all ages and walks of life in discipleship through a clear call to action to invite

others to join them. “After the reader completes ‘attribute 10,’ they will be prompted to start a group with others,” Morrison noted.



MORRISON


“We can’t just sit around and talk about making disciples. We must begin the discipleship process while we are being discipled. My focus is on ‘becoming’ rather than ‘doing.’”

Morrison hopes the curriculum will help believers become people who follow Jesus by reading the Bible, sharing the gospel and serving others.


It is available on Amazon.




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Photo by Tracy Riggs/The Alabama Baptist

21-year-old Evita Griskenas competes for the U.S. in rhythmic gymnastics during the 2022 World Games in Birmingham. She finished fifth in individual ribbon competition and seventh in individual hoop.

‘NOTHING WITHOUT HIM’

Olympian, World Games rhythmic gymnast describes impact of faith

By Tracy Riggs
The Alabama Baptist

Evita Griskenas — U.S. Olympian, World Games competitor and multiple gold medal winner — might not be what some would consider a typical world-class athlete.

Deeply contemplative and highly spiritual, 21-year-old Griskenas is as concerned with learning and practicing lessons about life as learning and practicing new rhythmic gymnastic routines.

“Each competition is unique and an experience in which I can learn and take something away from it as well as enjoy it,” Griskenas said. “Some competitions you might not do as well, but you’re happy that this one really hard thing worked.”

Her dedication to training is paying off. She competed at the Tokyo Olympic Games and hopes to be in Paris for the 2024 Olympics. In July she helped Team USA claim gold while taking the individual all-around title at the Pan American Championships in Rio de Janeiro.

‘Special experience’

“That was really exciting,” she said. “Standing on the pedestal, hearing [our] national anthem play ... was a very special experience.”

She finished out of medal contention at the 2022 World Games in Birmingham: fifth in individual ribbon competition and seventh in individual hoop. But medals and wins are not what defines her, she said.

“There are lots of moments that I love, and not all of them are related to standing on a podium.”

Griskenas’ family has been very supportive, both in her gymnastics

career and in helping her grow in her faith.

Though her mother, Olga, laughed at first when 4-year-old Griskenas saw a rhythmic gymnastics competition on TV and said, “I want to do this,” she listened to her preschooler’s desire.

Olga first took her daughter to a gym with a balance beam, bars and vault. Young Evita showed the fighting spirit that would later help get her to world-class status by refusing to participate, saying it was the “wrong kind of gym.”

The family soon located a rhythmic gymnastics gym, and Griskenas started learning skills similar to those artistic gymnasts use during floor routines, but using a ball, ribbon, hoop or clubs.

When she was about 6 years old, Griskenas would wake up in the night and ask, “Mom, can you play the music?”

She would dance for about an hour, then go back to bed.

While her mother supported Griskenas’ dream of becoming an Olympic rhythmic gymnast by letting her dance in the middle of the night and driving the 2 1/2-to-3 hour round trip to the gym, her father, Sigitas, was teaching her about God and about life.

“It started when I was young,” she recalled. “My dad was an absolutely wonderful role model. He’s very, very knowledgeable. He taught me so much about the world and how to appreciate what God has created and how to structure my life around God.

“I grew up listening to all of the scriptural stories, and we would do walks in the park where he would tell me how God created the stars and the moon and all these wonderful things.”

Growing in faith

“He also taught me how to appreciate the moment,” Griskenas added. “When we were taking a walk, he would say, ‘Stop! Smell that. Do you see it? It smells like fall, right?’ Now I notice that wherever I go.”

Though she struggled, as Griskenas matured so did her faith.

“Of course, I rely on Him a lot when I compete. I have found that through sport, as weird as that sounds, my faith has been strengthened because I get to see the way that the Lord influences my life and helps me out.

“I am nothing without Him,” she acknowledged. “My accomplishments are not what defines me. Yes, I competed at the Olympic Games, but that was the Lord answering my prayers.”

One life lesson Griskenas has learned through her sport is patience, a key in waiting for the right moment to perform a toss or reach for a catch. Perfect timing is essential, and that can’t be done without patience.

Another life lesson is resilience. “But also on the Christian side ... sometimes you have a few competitions or routines in a row where it doesn’t work,” Griskenas admitted. “This year I was in despair over something that happened with the

ball. I sat there and cried and [said], ‘This is not OK.’

“I [thought to myself], ‘God, why did this happen to me?’ But I had more routines. I was like, ‘Get up and keep going.’

“You pray. Move on. The world doesn’t stop. You just have to continue to move. You can’t stay static.”

Though on the surface Griskenas’ life as an elite athlete may seem enviable, she struggled with making decisions about her future. After the Olympics she wasn’t sure about continuing in gymnastics and was dealing with difficult personal issues. College was looming, and she didn’t know if she could handle college while competing.

Asking God for help

She remembers praying, “God, I don’t know what to do. I know this is gonna work, but help me.”

She is now in her second year of studies at Columbia University in New York. She also trains with her longtime gymnastics club and coach in suburban Chicago, which requires many flights between the two cities. It’s a balancing act of a different kind, but Griskenas said it’s been worth it.

“A lot of good things have come out of being able to do both,” she said, “and I’ve been able to do both because of His blessings and His guidance. Even when I’ve felt very unstable and unsure, what I could be sure of was that it will work out, even if I don’t know how.

“That’s the only reason I can have assurance — through God. I see Him everywhere and in everything, and it’s beautiful.”

For a peek into Griskenas’ life follow her at [evita.griskenas](https://www.instagram.com/evita.griskenas) on Instagram.



Photo courtesy of Grace Bible Church

Perry Nix baptizes a new believer in a portable baptistry outside the dry goods store in Altoona where Grace Bible Church meets.

Shift in priorities leads Altoona native into pastorate

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Perry Nix says he's knocked on just about every door in his hometown over the past few years. What he's found is a lot of people who feel just like he used to.

"We're in an area that is kind of newly post-Christian," he said. "I'm 39, and most people in their 30s grew up in church and it felt like it was very surface-level-type stuff, so now they don't see the need for it."

Nix said if he asked the people behind those doors if they are Christians, 95% would say yes. But if he asked if they go to church they would say no.

"Most of them seem like they're Christian in name only. They're not really practicing a walk with Jesus," Nix said. "We want people's hearts to change in that way, to see it as a relationship, not a religion."

Reaching the broken

And Nix wants Grace Bible Church in Altoona to be a home for the people who don't feel like church is for them.

"Our goal is to reach the broken people in the community," he said.

After all, Nix knows a bit of how they feel. Though he grew up in church in the same community, in his 20s

he was "not walking with the Lord at all." Nix said he sees now that his career as an airline pilot was a "toxic environment" but he felt he had found success, living in a nice neighborhood in Atlanta with his wife and children.

Health crisis

But when his fourth child was three months old, his wife — who had been healthy up to that point — had three heart attacks. She's healthy now, but that health crisis shook him and ultimately led him to figure out his relationship with Jesus and move back to Altoona to focus more on family.

They began attending Redeemer Community Church in Oneonta in 2018, then joined the staff. On Easter Sunday 2019, Nix planted Redeemer Altoona.

Two years later, Easter 2021, Redeemer Altoona became Grace Bible Church, an autonomous congregation that meets in an old dry goods store.

"It's such a loving congregation, and we are committed to keeping everything biblically sound," Nix said.

"We want to love our community well and see the fruit of His work in people's lives. People are growing, and we want them to take that out and share it with other people."

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CHURCH POSITIONS

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

PASTOR

Sweet Home Baptist Church in Guntersville, Alabama, is in search of a pastor. Interested candidates may send a resumé to: sweethomesearchcommittee@gmail.com.

PASTOR

Lakewood Baptist Church, Phenix City, Alabama, is now accepting resumés for the position of full-time pastor. Please send resumé to: pastorsearch@lbcpc.org or 4011 Lakewood Drive, Phenix City, AL 36867.

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.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Concord Highland Baptist Church is seeking a bivocational pastor. Please send resumé to: CHBC2672@bellsouth.net.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Pleasant Hill Baptist Church, Prattville, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor. Please submit resumés to: PHBCPrattville@gmail.com.

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.

YOUTH AND RECREATION DIRECTOR

Sardis Baptist Church, Boaz, Alabama, is now accepting resumés for a full-time youth and recreation minister. Please send resumés to: Sardis Baptist Church, 1501 Church Street, Boaz, AL 35956 or to Mike Goforth at megoforth@yahoo.com. We are a growing, missions-minded church who is very active in sharing the gospel at

home and abroad. Contact Mike Goforth at 256-506-2875 with any questions.

STUDENT MINISTER

Southside Baptist Church, Andalusia, Alabama, seeks to fill the full-time position of student minister. Resumés may be mailed to: Student Minister Search Committee, 1213 West Bypass, Andalusia, AL 36420. ATTN: Mr. Jim Syler, Chairman.

YOUTH MINISTER

Immanuel Baptist Church of Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, is seeking applications for a full-time youth minister. Must have a love for Christ and a passion for ministering to young people. Send resumé to: ibc.youthsearch@myimmanuel.net.

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.

MINISTRY ASSISTANT

The ministry assistant at East Pointe Baptist Church, Spanish Fort, Alabama, is responsible for performing general secretarial and office work, under the supervision of the pastor and in cooperation with the other staff. The hours for this position are 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday–Thursday. Compensation will be based upon experience and training. For more information and to apply for this position, please visit eastpointebaptistchurch.com/apply.

PRESCHOOL TEACHERS

FBC Tallassee's PreSchool Academy has job openings for teachers for 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds. Send a letter of interest or resumé to: julie@fbctallassee.com. For more in-

formation, contact Denise Voss, dvoss@fbctallassee.com.

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TAB DIGITAL

In addition to the print edition, The Alabama Baptist also releases a weekly digital edition of the newspaper to every subscribers' email. The digital edition comes in PDF form as well as part of an app and is included with all subscriptions. It has exclusive content for the digital edition only, and can be accessed anytime as long as you have internet. To update your email address, contact subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org.

STRONG REACH

Montgomery church hosts weightlifting competition, connects with community

By Lanell Downs Smith
The Alabama Baptist

Athletic events can provide an unusual but effective way to attract visitors to church — just ask the members of Thorington Road Baptist Church in Montgomery.

Back in May, Thorington Road hosted the first Southeast Strongman Classic. Sanctioned by Strongman Corporation, the event featured 33 male and female athletes from seven states who competed in events like Farmer's Carry, Max Log Lift, Yoke Walk, Axle Deadlift for Reps and Loading Medley.

Prior to the competition, there had been no real strongman presence in central Alabama, according to Brandon Spivey, a Thorington Road member, strongman competitor and the promoter who helped organize the event. The competition drew a crowd, and the church welcomed and served them.

Athletes and spectators were in-



Photo by Michael Trull/The Alabama Baptist

A weightlifter competes in the Southeast Strongman Classic at Thorington Road Baptist Church.

vited to worship with the congregation or talk with a volunteer about their faith.

"We offered to pray with any [visitor] throughout the competition about anything," said Thorington Road pastor Michael Trull, who shared the gospel with several in attendance. "I just have to believe that God planted a gospel seed in some

of those athletes' hearts and [am] praying one day that some of them will come to Christ," Trull said.

"I am reminded of Paul's word in 1 Corinthians 9:19-23: 'I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.'"

Opening doors

Since the competition, athletes have reached out to Spivey to talk about faith, he said.

"Having previously only known [me] through Strongman, they didn't know [I] was a Christian, so that has opened doors for conversation," he explained.

Several church members came out to support the athletes and help provide a welcoming environment for them, Trull noted.

Neal Hughes, director of missions for Montgomery Baptist Association, praised the effort of Thorington Road and its members.

"The event brought a lot of people to the area," Hughes noted.

"Many of them were lost. [Thorington Road] loved them, laughed with them, and there were many gospel conversations that day.

"It takes many to do mass events," Hughes added.

"[This] congregation always steps up to the plate with volunteer missionaries who come eagerly, with a smile and a 'whatever it takes' spirit.

"Heaven will tell the impact story, but here is a church that is faithful in telling others the best news this side of heaven."

Further opportunities

Spivey hopes to host the Southeast Strongman event annually in Montgomery.

Trull added church leaders have floated ideas for inviting strongman or weightlifting athletes who are strong believers to present a seminar on how they train for such events, then to share what is most important to them — their faith.

Churches see God moving in their communities

(continued from page 1) as the COVID-19 pandemic subsided.

"We started to pray about reaching out to preteens and high schoolers in particular," Whaley said. "They had just experienced a series of traumatic events by seeing people in their community pass away and their school years cut short."

Whaley said he and other church leaders, many of whom teach in local schools, could still see the aftereffects of pandemic-related restrictions.

"We started to notice a decline in most youth groups in our area, and ours was not an excep-

tion," Whaley said. "There was this constant spirit of fear."

Whaley knew something had to be done in order to encourage youth to become involved again and make a commitment to Christ.

'A bold move'

"We decided to make a bold move and do what we do best — what Matthew 28 commands us to do — and evangelize. Our mindset was to go back to basics," Whaley said.

Ronnie Coleman, pastor of SoulQuest Church in Jackson, Tennessee, spoke at the event. A frequent speaker at youth-oriented events, Coleman said he always prioritizes sharing the gospel.

"We do whatever it takes



Photo courtesy of Heflin Baptist Church

Heflin Baptist Church hosts an annual Gridiron Night that not only challenges young athletes in the community to accept Christ as their Savior but to be a bold voice for Him too.

to get them (young people) there, and the Holy Spirit will do His part. [He] always does," Coleman said.

Whaley said following Coleman's sermon, the al-

tar was full and 24 students made first-time commitments to Christ.

"God moved in a miraculous way," Whaley said.

"Kids were coming down

broken and ready to do business with God."

Brent Thompson, pastor of Heflin Baptist Church, said he hopes his church's annual Gridiron Night challenges young athletes to accept Christ and to be a bold voice for Him too.

"There's so much God wants to do in our communities," he said.

"God's placed us here for such a time as this, and I'm really praying for some young men and women to rise up among [these student athletes] and carry the banner and cross of Jesus Christ without compromise. We're going to continue to encourage them in that." (Lizzie Bowen, Carrie Brown McWhorter)

‘Means and a mechanism to share’

‘3 Things’ approach leads to ‘comfortable but effective’ gospel conversations

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Ronnie Burlison says it’s the easiest way he’s found to have a conversation about the gospel. It starts with a simple question: What are three things God can’t do?

Sometimes people aren’t interested in hearing the answer, but often they’re intrigued enough to listen. When they do, “it’s a comfortable conversation,” said Burlison, a member of East Highland Baptist Church in Hartselle.

He said the answer is this — God cannot lie, God cannot change and God cannot let anyone into heaven unless they’re born again.

“This lends itself to a conversation about people’s relationship with God really quickly,” Burlison noted. “It’s simple and people respond to it.”

The method is called “3 Things,” and Burlison learned about it when Sammy Gilbreath, event evangelism strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, encouraged him to check out a ministry called Serving Our Savior

Events. Burlison was his church’s outreach director at the time and looking for ways to get more people at East Highland Baptist involved in sharing their faith.

Soon after, he and three other people were trained in 3 Things, and at an event at East Highland that fall, 20 people made decisions to follow Jesus.

Not long after that, on a medical missions trip, 73 committed their lives to Christ.

Great success

“I said, ‘This thing actually works,’” Burlison recalled. “We’ve been at it pretty much ever since.”

He now serves as a missionary for SOS Events, setting up a tent at community gatherings, fairs and festivals to share the gospel.

The ministry has seen great success. As a whole, SOS Events, started in 2001 by Tom and Carolyn Curtis, has seen more than 70,000 people pray to receive Christ.

And for East Highland, it’s an outreach ministry for the entire congregation.



Photo courtesy of East Highland Baptist Church

Volunteers with Serving Our Savior Events share the gospel with passersby at a festival using the 3 Things evangelistic presentation. SOS Events has seen 70,000 people pray to accept Christ since it started in 2001.

More than 50 members are trained to share the 3 Things presentation. They saw around 300 make decisions at events in 2018 and more than 450 in 2019.

And since the COVID-19 pandemic has died down, they’ve been seeing dozens more come to faith.

Walter Blackman Jr., senior pastor of East Highland, said it’s “been very good, very helpful for our church.”

“We’ve got a few folks ... who had never done anything like that, and it brought them right out of their shell. Now they look forward to doing it,” he said.

Blackman has many treasured memories from events the church has participated in.

He remembers at one festival visiting with some teenagers who had made decisions at the SOS tent the year before and brought their friends back to hear the presentation.

He also remembers one event where a woman visited the tent

with a snake wrapped around her neck. He offered to hold it for her while she listened to the 3 Things presentation.

Learning more

Blackman noted the 3 Things presentation isn’t just something that brings people to a point where they can mouth a prayer and move on. If they are interested in learning more about the gospel after hearing the presentation, volunteers sit down with them at a table and counsel them through the decision and what it means.

“The Lord has blessed it; we’ve had a lot of people make decisions,” he said.

Many of the events they’ve been part of haven’t been in their local area, and Blackman noted SOS Events would love more churches to be involved around the state.

“It’s been a great tool for us to have a means and a mechanism to share with a lot of people,” he said.



Photo courtesy of East Highland Baptist Church

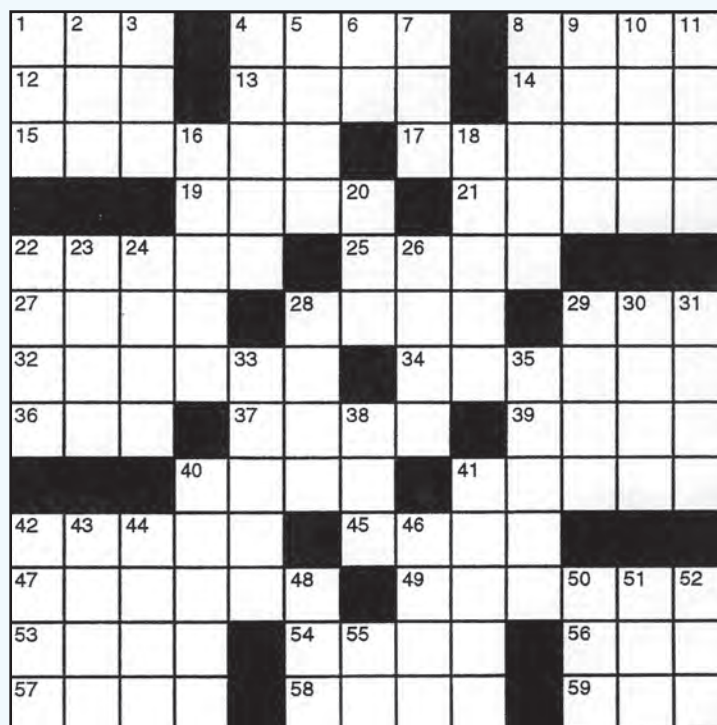
When someone is interested in hearing more about the third item of the 3 Things evangelistic presentation — that God can’t let anyone into heaven unless he or she is born again — volunteers sit and share the gospel with them.

For more information about training in 3 Things visit sosevents.org.

CHRISTIAN CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1. Chop down.
(as a tree)
4. Prong.
8. "Without Him was not any thing ____."
(John 1:3)
12. Gershwin.
13. Golf club.
14. "We ought to ____
God rather than men."
(Acts 5:29)
15. Captain of the Canaanites.
(Judg. 4:2)
17. Member of an ancient Jewish sect.
19. "The wicked ____ their bow."
(Ps. 11:2)
21. Wales from a whip.
22. Traveled with Paul to Syria and Cilicia.
25. Cain was his uncle.
27. Blue. (Sp.)
28. Large pitcher.
29. In this manner.
32. "I am like a broken ____."
(Ps. 31:12)
34. Begat by Mizraim.
(Gen. 10:13)
36. Time zone. (abbr.)
37. To tilt to one side,
as a ship.
39. Machete.
40. Splendor.
41. He led 10,000 men down Mount Tabor.
42. "There went up ____
from the earth."
(Gen. 2:6)
45. Chinese monetary unit.
47. Word repeated in the Psalms. (pl.)
49. "Sing ____ to the Lord God."
(Judg. 5:3)
53. Navigate.
54. Shortly.
56. Street ____.
57. Ancient kingdom at the head of the Persian Gulf.
58. Writes.



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59. "But the poor man had nothing, save one little ____."
(2 Sam. 12:3)

DOWN

1. Pronoun.
2. Of the family of the Erites.
(Num. 26:16)
3. Linking verb.
4. Turbans.
5. Middle Eastern country.
6. What you should just say.
7. Compass dir.
8. When he died at 120,
his vision was most likely 20/20.
9. He offered a "more excellent sacrifice."
(Heb. 11:4)
10. Impression.
11. Notices.
16. Belonging to a child of Shobal.
(Gen. 36:23)
18. Promised.
20. ____ point.
22. "He will ... hear their cry and will ____ them."
(Ps. 145:19)
23. Causes to become.
(suffix)

24. "Not fulfill the ____ of the flesh."
(Gal. 5:16)
26. Tidy.
28. "They came to ____,
where were twelve wells."
(Ex. 15:27)
29. Love. (Lat.)
30. Feminine name.
31. In a rage.
33. City on the Red Sea,
in the land of Edom.
(2 Chron. 8:17)
35. River of Damascus.
(2 Kings 5:12)
38. Caleb was one.
40. Song of praise.
41. "So shall thy ____ be filled."
(Prov. 3:10)
42. South African fox.
43. "The barrel of ____ shall not waste."
(1 Kings 17:14)
44. Hip bones.
46. Preposition.
48. Weaken.
50. "He casteth forth his ____ like morsels."
(Ps. 147:17)
51. Proverb.
52. Before. (poet.)
55. Direction from Beersheba to Jericho.

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

WMU Foundation, churches help Hueytown-area students

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

A team effort between WMU Foundation and several others recently helped provide backpacks filled with school supplies to more than 150 Birmingham-area students.

The effort started when Lamar Benefield, a co-founder of the charity organization Brothers and Sisters Inquiring Change, mentioned to David George, president of WMU Foundation, that he needed backpacks and school supplies for the third annual 205 Magic City Back-to-School Bash, an Aug. 7 event his organization co-sponsored with Clippers Barbershop in Hueytown.

George said he wondered if Send Relief, a compassion ministry of the International Mission Board and the North American Mission Board, might have any backpacks left over from their backpack projects. When he reached out, they said yes. He soon had 168 backpacks headed his way. Several Birmingham-area churches — NorthPark Baptist in Trussville, Pleasant Ridge Baptist in Hueytown and Shades Crest Baptist in

Hoover — donated items for the bags. "The churches were able to be an instrument and show the community that they care," George said.

Bill Wilks, NorthPark's pastor, said that's exactly why a couple of his church's discipleship groups collected supplies for the event.

Demonstrating love

"These groups are always looking for opportunities to show love to the community," he said.

The University of Mobile donated copies of its "Be Known" devotional book for older students, The Alabama

Baptist staff packed canvas bags with the supplies, and WMU Foundation volunteers packed all of those into the backpacks.

Benefield said he was thankful for George and the team of volunteers who helped gather the bags.

"David is a great resource; he was going 110% for this," Benefield said.

In addition to the backpack giveaway, the event included free food, a bounce house, guest speakers and other resources. Clippers Barbershop gave free haircuts to 125 students.

For information about next year's 205 Magic City Back-to-School Bash, contact basicmovement72@gmail.com.



Photo by David George

Lamar Benefield (left) oversees the third annual 205 Magic City Back-to-School Bash. WMU Foundation organized volunteers to fill backpacks to give away at the event.

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



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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, Reka Baker, ext. 2208
- 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 **Ministers' 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, Reka Baker, ext. 2208
- 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
- 27 **Empower Conference**, SBOM, Prattville, Rob Jackson, ext. 2343
- 27 **Central Region Disciple-Making Roundtable**, Crossroads, Elmore, Mark Gainey, ext. 2240
- 28 **SPEAK Tour**, East Pointe, Spanish Fort, Jessica Palmer, ext. 2262
- 30/9-1 **International Friends Retreat**, WorldSong, Cook Springs, Chris Mills, ext. 2379

OCTOBER 2022

- COOPERATIVE PROGRAM MONTH**, Jay Stewart, ext. 2283
- Minister Appreciation Month**, Reka Baker, ext. 2263
- 3 **Ymlink Youth Ministers' Golf Tournament**, RTJ Golf Course Capitol Hill, Prattville, Jessica Palmer, ext. 2262
- 4 **Ministers' Wives Connection**, ONLINE, Trish Jackson, ext. 2224
- 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
- 17 **Being Human-An Apologetic for Human Life**, University of North Alabama BCM, Florence, Lori McGough, ext. 2245
- 18 **Being Human-An Apologetic for Human Life**, University of Montevallo BCM, Montevallo, Lori McGough, ext. 2245
- 20 **Fall Missions Festival for Adults**, WorldSong, Cook Springs, Kathryn Helms, ext. 2325
- 22-28 **Christmas Backpacks Collection Week**, Pat Ingram, ext. 2292
- 28-29 **Conexión: Conferencia de Adoración**, Shocco Springs, Kimberly Sandoval, ext. 2244



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SEO solutions to make sermons more engaging

By **Mark MacDonald**
BeKnownforSomething.com

Creating engaging content is an art requiring a deep dive into psychology. Motivating an audience to participate in communication is often not about the actual content. It's more about the framing of the content.

If you want sermons that engage, Search Engine Optimization can help provide solutions. SEO is the process of improving the quality of web content to increase the number of visitors to a website. Use these SEO techniques to craft sermons that engage and reach a potential audience:

1. Define the type of person who needs to hear the entire sermon.

All communication should be directed to an

audience. It's rare you'll be able to speak to everyone. Define a group that needs the message God's given you to deliver. Why do they need it?

2. Decide what they would search for to find an answer.

Everyone seems to turn to Google for answers. Consider what they'd search for to find your sermon content. What words would they include? Keyword research is important in building engaging sermons because it's easier to get someone's attention with content they're actually seeking.

3. Use desired keywords in your title.

Use the key phrase from No. 2 in your sermon title. If it's near the beginning,



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more will remember it. They ask, "I need that, I wonder what the answer is?"

4. Ensure your title feels like a simple solution.

People rarely have a lot of time to sit through a long sermon. Use numbers to make it feel achievable and limited. It may sound

simple, but you are not saying it's easy. Tell practical stories demonstrating how God wants to help.

5. Craft an outline that is easy to remember, keyword-rich and practical.

Have a small number of sermon points that rely on the title. Each point directly

corresponds to the solution. Use your key phrase in the points and write them in active voice, things your listeners can do and believe. Repetition will help people recall your sermon after they have left the building.

6. Have a call to action. Repeat it three times.

SEO shows we need to be reminded how information must lead to action. Link to other ministries, give them next steps and call them to do something. It may be obvious to you, but it's probably not to them. Provide clear modes of application.

Remember, the right sermon title could motivate someone to click on an online sermon link or decide they need to attend an in-person service because the sermon is just what they need.



Sydney
Cancer Survivor

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Sydney was diagnosed with osteosarcoma at 13 years old. Through her treatment and recovery, she bonded with the doctors and nurses saying, "they became like family to me." She was so inspired by her care team, she decided to become a doctor and help other children going through a scary and similar situation. She also wanted to show that people with physical challenges can and should pursue medicine, too. She believes her journey to becoming a doctor was inspired as a patient here at Children's of Alabama.



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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For September 4

Explore the Bible

By Robert Olsen, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



LISTEN TO GOD Amos 2:4–16

The book of Amos fits squarely in the list of the minor prophets — minor not because of importance but because of the size. Amos was born in the southern kingdom of Judah in an obscure village called Tekoa, where he was a shepherd and farmer of figs. Despite his stature as a farmer, God called him to be a prophet and to deliver a message to the northern kingdom of Israel.

Wrongs Reviewed (4–8)

The first part of Amos concerns God's judgment against the nations throughout the region that typically warred against the Hebrews — Moab, Ammon, Edom and others. In verse 4, Amos turns his attention to Judah and God's coming judgment upon Judah for not keeping God's statutes. At this point, the Israelite hearers were probably pleased at Amos' message — God was going to punish all of their historical enemies, including Judah, their neighbor to the south who Israel split from after the death of Solomon. However, Amos then turns his attention to Israel itself, revealing God's anger at His audience for idolatry and taking advantage of the poor.

We have to be careful not to fall into the trap of looking at others and judging them yet paying no attention to the sins in our lives. When we look around at so much sin in our world, we can lose sight of our own guilt. While we are able to judge the world through the lens of Scripture, we can take no pride in this because we also are guilty before God. We can stand against sin only by the grace God has given us through Christ's atonement and the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. We can never be prideful in our behavior because it is Christ who saves us (Eph. 2:8–9). Instead of looking on with haughtiness at the world around us, we need to pray God would grant others the same freedom in Christ He has given us.

History Relived (9–11)

Through Amos, God takes the Israelites on a tour of all He has done

in their history. The Israelites had forgotten about the God of Israel, and they had begun to follow and worship foreign gods.

We often look back at the figures in the Old Testament and scoff at their foolishness and poor decisions. We know there are no such things as false gods who we can pray to via idols. We know there is only one God who deserves worship. And yet often our behavior says otherwise. While I don't know any Christians who worship little idols made by hands, all of us are guilty of idolatry on a regular basis.

In fact, it was John Calvin who, in his book "Institutes of the Christian Religion," said the human mind is "a perpetual forge of idols." Because of sin, humans are always turning away from God and toward something else. Anything that takes the place of God is an idol. While it is easy to look back at the Israelites and see their folly by participating in foreign religions, we need to be sure to check ourselves and see in what areas of our lives we are failing to put God first.

Judgment Reckoned (12–16)

God is holy and He cannot allow sin to go unpunished. This was true then and it is still true today. However, the solution is found in Christ, who took God's punishment for us. For those who have embraced Christ as Savior, the punishment is satisfied through Christ's death. Second Corinthians 5:21 sums it up this way: "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."

Christ's righteousness is transferred to us so the Father sees Christ's righteousness instead of our sinfulness. Because we are now "in Christ," we do not face God's wrath. But for those who do not know Christ, God's wrath rests on them. This motivates us to tell others about Christ so they can have eternal life and not face God's punishment by spending eternity separated from Him in hell.

Bible Studies for Life

By Rony Kozman, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies, Samford University



FAITH ON DISPLAY IN HARD TIMES James 1:1–12

Trials can strengthen our faith. (1–4)

Through the course of our lives, we meet different kinds of suffering with varied levels of intensity. The kinds of suffering and their severity can also vary from person to person. Sorrow is our natural response to suffering. We grieve because we have lost something. That is what it means to suffer: to lose something that brings life and joy. The loss of health. The loss of a job or possessions. The loss of a friend or family member.

To suffer is to lack. When we lose these things, we grieve for what we have lost. Yet James wants to raise us from despair to joy. How can we find joy in the midst of loss? We are to turn our loss into an opportunity for gain. If we match our trial, which is the occasion of our loss, with endurance, our endurance will make us "mature and complete, lacking in nothing." We find joy in our suffering when we turn our loss into an occasion that adds to us and matures us so we are in fact "lacking in nothing."

Trials require the wisdom of God. (5–8)

Our endurance through suffering fills up what is lacking in our maturity. James also describes this process of maturation as asking and receiving wisdom from God. While we might understand the one who receives wisdom from God as one who asks for wisdom to en-

sure trials, there is another way to read this. Our deficient maturity that suffering can remedy (vv. 2–4) parallels the lack of wisdom we need to ask God to supply in us. The one God fills with wisdom is the "mature and complete" person (v. 4). One who does not lack wisdom but receives it from God is the one who endures trials without wavering. If we endure our trials and ask God for wisdom, we can be sure God will use our trials to mature our character.

Trials can help us keep the right perspective. (9–12)

James aligns his audience with the poor and the lowly. Just as Jesus proclaims a blessing on those who are poor since they possess the kingdom of God (Luke 6:20), James likewise reverses our expectations and identifies his audience with the poor and the lowly. The poor in Christ can find joy in their future exaltation. We can persevere through the trials that impoverish our lives because of our future hope of a "crown of life" God will give to those who endure and love Him.

But James also warns the rich: They and their wealth will wither and fade. This warning to the rich also orients us who are poor to endure our trials. The trials that bring loss and lack of prosperity take away the riches that will be scorched even for the rich. And so we endure the loss of riches and health to seek the crown of life that awaits us who endure our trials and love Christ.

"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness."

JAMES 1:2–3

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Erin Roach

The Alabama Baptist

‘Because of Hope’ shows God’s work and goodness in hardships

For people who are strengthened in their Christian walk by reading stories of God at work in difficult situations, National Woman’s Missionary Union has published, “Because of Hope: Reflections of Faith,” a collection of 50 stories from Southern Baptist contributors.

The book supports WMU’s emphasis for 2022–24: “Hope in Christ.”

“Many contributing authors have been through horrific life events,” noted Sandy Wisdom-Martin, WMU executive director.

“Hope in Christ sustained them or enabled them to persevere,” she said. “Because of that hope, they can proclaim the goodness of God and testify to His work in their lives.”

“WMU leaders are rallying around our hope in Christ, seeking Him to make a difference in our lives and in the lives of others,” Wisdom-Martin said.

‘Incredibly inspired’

“I am incredibly inspired by the stories of individuals, and I knew readers would be as well,” she added. “I thought it would be encouraging to hear the faith reflections of multiple authors speaking into the same topic.”

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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Contributors include Ben Mandrell, president of Lifeway Christian Resources; Jeff Iorg, president of Gateway Seminary; Todd Unzicker, executive director of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina; and TAB Media Group’s Jennifer Davis Rash, president and editor in chief, and Trennis Henderson, regional correspondent.

“We sought authors from a broad spectrum of Southern Baptist life representing missions volunteers as well as local church, associational, state convention and national SBC entity leadership,” Wisdom-Martin said. “I simply emailed friends and asked them to consider being an author for this work of inspirational stories.”

Her contribution to the book is about a couple who adopted a daughter with severe medical needs and then adopted a son with similar needs. They followed God in a move from Alabama to Idaho and saw Him work in undeniable ways to use

difficult things for good.

The story “follows the journey of a precious family intent to follow God’s will no matter what,” Wisdom-Martin said. “I see God

at work at every turn in their lives. It is one of my favorite stories that is still being written by the hand of God.”

Marty, the adoptive mother, says, “We’re glad to share our story. It’s God’s story.”

Wisdom-Martin added: “Yes, it is, with Jesus as the centerpiece. There is

indeed hope in Christ. God always involves us in His plans. Are you living out His purposes for your life?”

Impact of mentors

Using the fruit of the Spirit, Rash wrote about the impact mentors have had on her life and how she tries to help others.

“As I work to cull the withered parts of my heart to make more room for the Holy Spirit to nurture

the fruit planted in me, I am reminded to look around for others who might need to borrow my clipper for a time,” Rash wrote.

Mandrell recounted some of his ministry transitions and shared what God taught him about changing seasons in life.

Willing heart

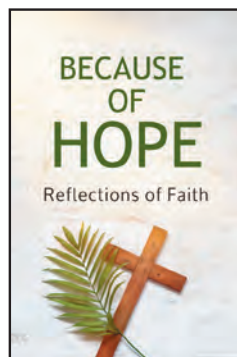
“Here’s the reward of having a willing heart to step out of your comfort zone and into a new season: As you walk into a new season, you experience the power of the Holy Spirit,” Mandrell wrote. “The reason many of us don’t experience this power is because we don’t leave what’s easy. We’ve gotten too comfortable in our current season.”

With the theme “Hope in Christ” through the next couple of years, WMU’s resources will highlight that because of hope in Him, people can be genuine in love, patient in tribulation, constant in prayer and compassionate to all.

“Because of Hope” can be read individually or used in small groups, according to WMU. A free leader guide is available for download at wmustore.com. The book study is structured as a weekend retreat, but can be adapted for a book club.

“The world is desperate for a word of hope,” Wisdom-Martin said. “As Christians, we know there is nothing equivalent to hope found in Christ. When hope in Christ is all you have, hope in Christ is all you need.”

“Though each of us are in the midst of our own story, we full well know the ending — so what comes today or in the future matters not. The redemptive work of our Savior is complete, and we declare with confidence and boldness that our hope is in Christ alone.”



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5 communication strategies for churches as summer ends

By Mark MacDonald

The Baptist Paper

Looking for some fresh church communication strategy ideas? We're in the waning summer months on the church calendar, so Vacation Bible School is probably over, and regular church ministry groups are somewhat paused for a much-needed break. It's relatively quiet.

However, fall anticipation is upon us. So let's use this time to get your church communication strategy ready.

Here are five late-summer church communication ideas to do now to prepare you well for fall.

1. Get to know the congregation better.

You can't go wrong learning about members. Talk with them to truly understand their needs, concerns and goals. Create (or correct) research about large church groups that represent growing demographic groups in your community. What do they need from your church? Are you delivering that information in

your communication? Is there anything that can be eliminated?

2. Focus on their social media.

Discover your church's social media influencers by searching for their feeds. What are they posting about? Do they follow church channels? Why? Why not? Then ask them how the church can improve engagement and content. Do they think you have enough engaging content? Is there too much promotional content? What's a successful rhythm for your content?

3. Identify potential volunteers.

Talking with members about communication improvements will help you discover talented people you need for a highly effective communication team. Organize a meeting with them to dream about what can be done. Share goals and request help. Be on the lookout for photographers, videographers, writers, editors and designers who'd love to join your ministry. Be mind-

ful, though, of those earning a living doing what you're requesting. They may not want to give the church free work, so ask them if they'll offer a discount for ongoing assistance.

4. Talk with ministry leaders.

Talk to the leaders who run the ministries. Share what you're discovering about members. Encourage the leaders, and show interest in what they're doing. Ask questions to hear how they're meeting the needs of their groups. Share how you're trying to help them and enable their ministry. Find out what they're prioritizing and how you can assist.

5. Simplify your website.

Effective church communication is about simplification. And since your website is critical to the church's digital communication, calm it down. Ensure it's clear and organized well (only 6–7 main menu items). Each page should have short scannable content, not a lot

of paragraphs. Include bullet points with answers, three or four links to other pages and calls to action along the way. Are there enough pictures that extend each page's story? How about staff pictures? Do they look up-to-date? Is there an easy way to contact the people in charge of various ministries?

Make sure your website is ready this fall to lead people from catching the occasional online service into being involved with an in-person community of believers in your local church.

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

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sweetheart.

*"Love bears all things ... hopes all things ... endures all things ...
Love never ends." 1 Corinthians 13:7-8*

BY ALAN JOHNSTON

When life is suddenly and dramatically interrupted, what do you do? React in fear, despair, become overwhelmed with anxiety, just give up?

"Goodnight, Sweetheart" tells the story of how Alan Johnston dealt with the 16-year illness and eventual death from Alzheimer's of his beloved wife, Judy.

Johnston says, "... none of the negative thoughts and emotions improved our situation, nor did they solve any problems. Perhaps the best advice is that which comes from the Apostle Paul "... stand firm in your faith."

Chapters include, "When a Man Loves a Woman," "The Twilight Zone," "Bad Things Happen to Good People," "Man of Sorrow," "Paradise Found," "Those That Mourn," "Joy Comes in the Morning" ... and more.



Alan Johnston is a retired pastor living in Chattanooga, Tenn. During his 54 years of ministry, he pastored churches in Alabama and Tennessee, and during 34 of those years he was also a certified financial planner. He is founder of Path2Truth Ministry and spends much of his time teaching and writing.

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