

The Alabama Baptist

Toll free 800-803-5201
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December 22, 2022

Vol. 187, No. 50
Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

The greatest GIFT

“FOR THE WAGES OF SIN IS DEATH; BUT THE GIFT OF GOD IS ETERNAL LIFE THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD.” ROMANS 6:23



Favorite THINGS ...

WE ASKED OUR TAB MEDIA GROUP STAFF FOR THEIR CHRISTMAS FAVORITES.



Photo by Sam Evans/The Alabama Baptist

Jennifer Davis Rash — The Christmas season has always been special to me. My favorite things include celebrating with my TAB family (above) as well as with my Davis, Rash and Searcy families throughout December. A Christmas Eve country breakfast at the farm followed by a full day of games, outdoor activities, telling stories around the fire and exchanging gifts has been a longtime tradition.

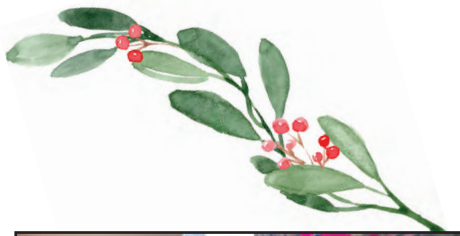


Photo by Shawn Hendricks/The Alabama Baptist

Shawn Hendricks — Our collection of missions ornaments on the family tree serves as a reminder of spiritual lostness around the globe.



Photo by Lauren C. Grim/The Alabama Baptist

Lauren C. Grim — My 6-year-old daughter, Alana, loves the Operation Christmas Child shoebox ministry. From shopping and packing to delivering to the church, it's always a special part of Christmas for our family. Not only do the boxes provide joy and hope to children around the world, it's a reminder to my little girl that it's more important to give than receive.



Photo courtesy of Carrie B. McWhorter/The Alabama Baptist

Carrie Brown McWhorter — I love going with my family to see Christmas lights. The trip is always entertaining, with lots of stories and laughter, and walking through a landscape of twinkling lights makes my heart happy.

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

(ISSN 0738-7741; USPS 011-080)
© The Alabama Baptist, Inc.

is published weekly except for one week in July and December by The Alabama Baptist, Inc., at 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209. Phone: 205-870-4720. Statewide phone: 800-803-5201.

Website: www.thealabamabaptist.org

Email: news@thealabamabaptist.org

or subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org

Periodicals postage paid at Hattiesburg, Miss.

ANNUAL TAB SUBSCRIPTION RATES
Includes print, digital, app and full web access

Group Rate per subscriber per year — \$16.25
(Check with your church or group to find out if it has a TAB group account)

Individual — \$34.95 per year (50 issues)

JENNIFER DAVIS RASH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Carrie Brown McWhorter
Content Editor

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 13.

The Alabama Baptist
will not publish a Dec. 29 issue.
The next issue will be Jan. 5.



GUEST EDITORIAL

for this week's issue of **The Alabama Baptist**

By Grace Thornton, special assignments editor

This Christmas, remember those who don't yet celebrate

Every time I see my friend Akemi, she pulls out at least four new things she's sewn since the last time I saw her. Most of the time, it's more like 14.

So many bags. Small zipper bags made of tiny quilts she hand sewed together. Purses she crocheted. Shoulder bags made from pieces of old jeans. All kinds of coasters. Placemats. All sewn with a lot of detail, many of them with tiny hearts and other designs stitched in that you have to look closely to see.

It's her life's work. And I tell her she's a machine — she never stops. She's always watching for fabric remnants and salvaging pieces of ribbon from gifts. Nothing is wasted for her.

That's the way I want my life to be too.

No believers

Akemi is from a country where she didn't know a single follower of Jesus before she moved to this part of the world. So are several more of her classmates in my ESL class every Thursday morning.

They're so kind. So gifted. So generous. My house is filled up with Akemi's coasters and a lot of things my ESL friends have brought me. But even more than

that, my heart is filled up with the joy and privilege of getting to be their friend. We've laughed so much in the past year and a half. That on its own is a gift.

I don't want to waste any moment of that when it comes to the thing that matters most — I want each of them to have the chance to consider Jesus.

Recently in class I held up a crocheted baby Jesus and told Akemi I needed her to teach me how to make the shepherds that my nativity set is missing. I felt the weight of how much it matters for Akemi and others to know why He came.

Because the world is broken — we feel that in our souls.

But God loved us enough to not leave us broken with no hope of rescue. He sent us a Rescuer, a baby who would grow up to save us from death, darkness and brokenness.

It's a beautiful story we're a part of. And not only do they not know it — most of the people they know back home don't know it either.

It's something those of us who are familiar with Scripture should never take for granted, though that's easy for us to do.

Every Christmas Eve, my mom sits in a wingback chair in



Photo by Grace Thornton/The Alabama Baptist

the living room and pulls out a weathered black leather Bible. And every year, whether there are two or 22 of us present, she reads the story of Jesus' birth from Luke 2.

It's part of the fabric of our family. Sewn in. So beautiful — but so easy to forget that other people haven't had that opportunity.

So this Christmas, I'm challenged not just to be thankful that I grew up where the gospel was readily available — because I am thankful — but also to re-

member not to waste anything when it comes to telling those who haven't heard.

Intentional friendships

I want to be intentional to make new friends from other cultures.

I want to give sacrificially to missions offerings and pray with more discipline for people who haven't heard. I hope those things happen in greater supply next year.

Let's be honest about something that probably won't happen next year — I'm not going to be able to make those shepherds. They're going to look bad — really bad.

But Akemi and I will get to talk about them again while she tries to teach me. I pray that every little shred of truth will go toward the fabric of what He's weaving in her life and that one day she'll see that the tapestry of His rescue is meant for her.



RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

By Jennifer Davis Rash, President and Editor-in-Chief, will return in January.

Your Voice



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

Beloved movie conveys valuable lessons

By **Stephanie Smith**
Birmingham, Ala.

One of the many Thanksgiving traditions we have in our family is watching the movie “It’s a Wonderful Life.”

Filmed and released in 1946, “It’s a Wonderful Life” is considered one of the greatest films of all time. It was nominated for five Academy Awards, including best picture.

The film was No. 1 on the American Film Institute’s list of the most inspirational American films of all time and No. 20 on AFI’s 100 greatest American films of all time.

For the uninitiated, the film tells the story of a character named George Bailey who is at his wit’s end on Christmas Eve of 1945.

Impact of community

Frustrated by his circumstances, he contemplates taking his own life. The intercessory prayers of his friends and family members are heard.

God sends a guardian angel, Clarence, to save George’s life by showing him what his town and friends and family would have become without his lifelong acts of sacrificial love and unrelenting dedication.

It’s a powerful tale of what one man’s devotion to his family and the truth can have on his community.

Watching the movie with my family this year, it struck me anew that George Bailey’s personal integrity, along with a steadfast dedication to his extended family and friends, exemplifies what it means for a man to be honorable, virtuous and courageous.

It is hard work to find individuals willing to seek sacrificial commonality.

It is harder work to consistently be someone willing to sacrifice personal comfort and material wealth to tell the truth so others may also see and benefit from it.

We should all search our souls and ask God to give us the daily strength to be that person.

▶ When we have the opportunity to speak the truth, we should.

▶ When we have the opportunity to fulfill our duty, we should.

▶ When we have the opportunity to serve others before ourselves, we should.

▶ When we have the opportunity to resist tyranny, we should.

In order to truly live abundantly, we must live boldly.

In order to live boldly, we must first embrace truth. It’s not enough to understand truth or to keep it to ourselves in an act of self-preservation.

We must proclaim the truth to have a truly wonderful life.

Astronauts bring tidings

On Christmas Eve 1968, NASA’s Apollo 8 lunar mission was orbiting the moon with astronauts Frank Borman, Jim Lovell and Jim Anders onboard.

On the third lunar orbit, Col. Frank Borman transmitted this Christmas message back to earth:

“Give us, Oh God, the vision which to see Thy love in the world in spite of human failure.

“Give us the faith to trust Thy goodness in spite of our ignorance and weakness.

“Give us the knowledge that we may continue to pray with understanding hearts, and show us what each one of us can do to set forward the coming of the day of universal peace. Amen.”

On the ninth orbit, as their black-and-white video cameras beamed grainy images back to earth, the crew read from Genesis 1:1–10.

In this modern day of wars and daily violence, let’s remember and try earnestly to apply the colonel’s inspiring words from Apollo 8, being ever mindful of the true reason for the season: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14).

James W. Anderson
Talladega, Ala.

Priorities

God has said for us to share the gospel so that the world will hear. We must see the truth and reality of our part in taking the gospel to the world.

Pickens Baptist Association members have seen over 7,000 people born into the Kingdom in 14 missions trips to Brazil in the last 17 years, and those 7,000 continue to share the gospel.

God is working in many places in the world, so look for where that place is and go. It will be a great blessing to you also.

Evangelism and missions

should be the very top priorities of the church.

Buddy and Emily Kirk
Carrollton, Ala.

It’s not easy to follow Jesus, but I’m certain of one thing: I don’t want to quit now. Persecution is biblical.

A follower of Christ in Brazil

A pastor, of all people, should realize the gift of influence and use it wisely.

Pastor Michael J. Brooks
Siluria Baptist Church
Alabaster, Ala.

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“Don't leave Jesus in the manger.
Take Him with you when you go.”

CHARLIE BUTTON

Huntsville, Alabama

If you want a disciple-making church, you must teach your people how to fish. Before Jesus said, “Go make disciples of all nations,” He said to His followers, “Let me teach you how to fish.” His invitation was clear. “Follow me,” He said, “and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19). Just as my father taught me how to fish, Jesus taught His followers how to be fishers of men. In churches today, every disciple needs someone who will teach them how to fish.

Pastor Bill Wilks
NorthPark Baptist Church
Trussville, Ala.
livedthelife.com

God's plan brings healing. God's plan meets us in our mess and of-

fers life. When we trust God, we are trusting His character in the midst of our broken circumstances. And the moment we do, we have a solid foundation on which to build our lives. Trusting God invites us to know God and to experience His work as we surrender to His good plan.

Andrea Lennon
Arkansas Baptist Witness

One Friday when I was a boy, Mr. Floyd Morris asked if I would help him haul hay. I agreed, needing the spending money.

Mr. Floyd, who had a bad back, would drive the tractor along the rows of square bales, and I would toss a few into the trailer, then jump in and stack.

For three days we worked. It was the hardest work I ever did, but my hard work made such an impression on Mr. Floyd that the rest of his life he talked about those three days.

Hard work should define our relationship with God too. It will leave a lasting testimony to those who observe.

Give God your best. Your work won't save you eternally, but it will define you temporally.

Wayne McMillian
Uriah, Ala.
via Facebook

Nobody ever outgrows Scripture; the book widens and deepens with our years.

Charles H. Spurgeon

From the *Twitterverse*

@mike_reeves

Christ's people can let you down. Christ never will.

@daveprince

One of my favorite times in corporate worship is when we sing a song in a style I don't prefer.

1. It reminds me the gospel is bigger than me and my preferences.

2. It allows me to count others as more significant than myself.

3. It reminds me that the gospel is not trapped in any area.

@PastorJFC

Bearing shame and scoffing rude, In my place condemned He stood, Sealed my pardon with His blood: Hallelujah, what a Savior!

@revandyfrazier

Christian, you are not defined by what has happened to you, or even what people say about you. Your

worth and identity are found in what Christ has done for you and who He says you are.

@KentuckyBaptist

“The holidays can be incredibly stressful for some individuals or families, and a time of profound sadness for others. However, the holiday season can be a welcome time of gospel intentional hospitality.”

@scottsauls

Dear Christian,
There is no shame in being ordinary. Who you are is enough.
Your worth is limitless to God ...

@shane_pruitt78

An ever-changing world desperately needs a never-changing God.

@costiwhinn

Pastors, never downplay the importance of physical exercise (if you're able bodied).

1. Workouts release God-ordained endorphins meant to propel you forward.

2. Physical fitness prolongs the quality of days God has sovereignly ordained.

3. Physical laziness is a symptom of heart issues. Our God and His faithful workers are not couch potatoes.

@mhenslee

“One good deed is more worth than a thousand brilliant theories. Let us not wait for large opportunities, or for a different kind of work, but do just the things we ‘find to do’ day by day.”
—C.H. Spurgeon

@jasonkeithallen

“God sends people into our lives just when we need them, to say the right word, His word, just when we need it.”
—W.A. Criswell

Shining the light of Christmas

I love twinkling lights, clear lights, uplights, lights shining on trees, lights in landscaping and just about any light on a house at Christmastime.

There's something gentle and beautiful when you drive down the streets and towns looking at the beautiful array of Christmas lights. It gives a sense of peace and hope.

As we start to feel a chill and crispness in the air, trees and lights begin to go up, and the Christmas season begins.

Every year I have joy and hope during this beautiful time ... but I can't help but think about those who aren't so excited about the season. Those who are alone, and those who have lost loved ones. Those who are sick, homeless, parentless or childless.

This all came into my heart as I listened to the first Christmas carol this season when I was in my car on the way home one day.

I thought, “There are people out there [for whom] this time of year is a time of sorrow and loneliness.” How can I help? How can we be a light at Christmas and all through the year?

When I look back over the years, I see how Christmas has become so commercialized that the true meaning of Christmas seems to be almost forgotten.

It is vital we as Christians celebrate and honor the birth of Jesus during this special time of year and throughout the year.

Take time out of your busy schedule to just sit and look at the lights and reflect on the birth of our Savior, who came into this world for us!

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).

Beth Nahkala
“Lights at Christmas”
leanintojesus.com/blog

3 stories

you should know



Photo courtesy of Ben Posey

A Dec. 11 fire at First Baptist Church Leroy destroyed the church's education building. Local volunteer firefighters stopped the blaze from reaching the church's sanctuary, which sustained water damage. Pastor Ben Posey said the church will meet at a local school through December and is working on a plan for Sunday School classes and office space in the new year. The fire might have destroyed a building, he said, but "our spirit's not quenched." (TAB)

Survey: Most churches plan Christmas service

Most U.S. Protestant pastors say their churches plan to have services on Christmas Day and New Year's Day, both of which fall on Sunday this year.

Just 2% of pastors told Lifeway Research they do not plan to have services on those days or on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve.

Around 1 in 10 pastors plan to have only a Christmas Eve service; 21% plan to gather New Year's Eve.

While some churches opt for Christmas Eve over Christmas Day services, churches not holding services on Christmas Day are still the exception, said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research.

This year's plans are similar to those reported six years ago, the last time Christmas fell on a Sunday, Lifeway reported. (TAB)

FCA emphasizes Bible distribution, reading

The Fellowship of Christian Athletes distributed 196,024 Bibles in 2022 and shared Bible reading plans with thousands more.

FCA annually prints about 200,000 Bibles and has distributed nearly 3 million Bibles globally in the past 15 years, CBN News reported. FCA prints Bible editions including testimonies from athletes and coaches.

Shane Williamson, FCA president and CEO, told CBN the organization focuses on getting God's word "into the hands of coaches and athletes around the world."

In addition to printed Bibles, FCA has more than 50 Bible reading plans in several languages on the YouVersion app. More than 2 million users have subscribed to their digital Bible reading plans, FCA reports. (TAB)

Samford's Ministry Training Institute celebrates 75th anniversary

Samford University's Ministry Training Institute held its 75th anniversary celebration Dec. 8.

Formed when Samford was known as Howard College, the program was originally called the Howard College Extension Division of Christian Training.

It officially launched Jan. 1, 1947, when Gilbert L. Guffin, then pastor of First Baptist Church Jasper, helped develop the program. Guffin also served as the first director.

While adapting to changes in technology, the mission of the program has remained the same: to equip ministers and lay leaders to live out their calling to serve Jesus Christ and His church.

Kevin Blackwell, MTI director for the past 10 years, said the program

is just as needed today as it was when it started.

"In 2022, the church in America is facing a crushing leadership crisis as we look toward the next decade," Blackwell said. "Pastors are retiring at an alarming rate, while seminaries are graduating fewer students.

"There has never been a more urgent need to call out the called and offer them affordable and accessible education opportunities. The extension division was born out of the needs of the people, and its purpose remains intact," he noted.

"The Samford Extension is worthy of being remembered, continued and perpetually celebrated as a divinely inspired education program."

For more information, call 205-726-4055. (TAB Media)



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

Program personalities (l to r): Samford's Scott Guffin, grandson of MTI founder Gilbert Guffin; Michael Barron of the Bessemer extension; Selma University president Stanford Angion; Samford president Beck Taylor; Samford provost Mike Hardin; Lonette Berg of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission; and MTI director Kevin Blackwell.

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

► **Randy Craig**, professor of biology, chair of the Department of Natural Sciences and director of the University of Mobile's nationally accredited cadaver lab, died Dec. 10.

Educated at Texas Tech University and Mississippi State University, he spent more than 25 years as owner/clinician of the Animal Medical Center Inc. He maintained two full-time veterinary hospitals in Mississippi and Alabama as a mixed-animal veterinarian. He joined UM's faculty in 2014.

► **Gil Barrow** of Montgomery died Nov. 19. He was 90.

After high school, Barrow played professional baseball with the



BARROW

Brooklyn Dodgers for three years, until he was called into the ministry in 1954.

He earned degrees from Mississippi College and New Orleans Seminary.

Barrow began his ministry as associate pastor at First Baptist Church Panama City, Florida, then served as pastor at Westview Baptist Church, Panama City. From there he served as FBC Prichard's pastor. Following that, he was pastor of FBC Leesburg, Florida. He then led Capitol Heights Baptist Church, Montgomery.

He retired from full-time ministry in 2003 after nearly 50 years of service but remained active in ministry. He served as interim pastor of several Alabama churches.

He previously served as chairman of the Florida Baptist Convention State Board and as trustee for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. Barrow was an active member of First Baptist Church Montgomery.



CRAIG

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

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► **Ryan Kirkland** is the new associate pastor of administration and missions at **Shades Crest Baptist Church, Hoover**,

where he and his wife, Lydia, have served as lay people for more than a year. He holds a bachelor's degree in communication studies from the University of Montevallo and a master of divinity degree from Beeson Divinity School. He previously served as a youth pastor of Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, Jemison, and pastoral intern of Raleigh Avenue Baptist Church, Homewood.



KIRKLAND

COOSA RIVER ASSOCIATION

► **Andrew Goodwin** is the new pastor of **Chandler Springs Baptist Church, Talladega**. He is pursuing a bachelor's degree from Boyce College. He previously served as associate pastor of Orr Street Baptist Church, Alexander City. He and his wife, Haley, have two children.



GOODWIN

OTHER

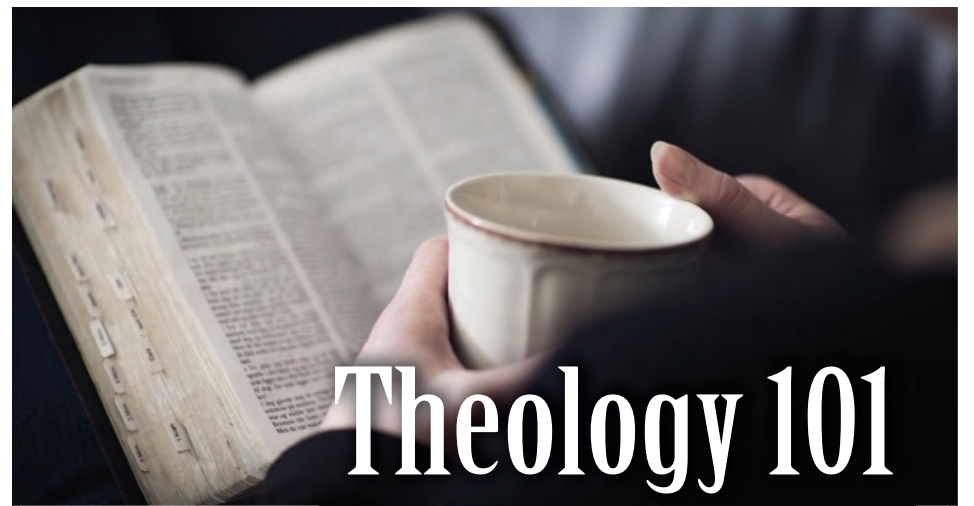
► **Nash Wills** is the new pastor of **Friendship Baptist Church, Malone, Florida**. He is a graduate of Beeson Divinity School, where he earned a master of divinity and doctor of ministry.

He previously served Hodgesville Baptist, Dothan; Ebenezer Baptist, Columbia; and Ad-amsville Baptist.

He and his wife, Melissa, have one child.



WILLS



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Living in gratitude

Christmas Praise

By **Jerry Batson, Th.D.**
The Alabama Baptist

Many of us are inspired during this season by the songs and carols of Christmas.

We may hear choirs and orchestras present special Christmas music, go caroling in our neighborhoods, give voice to favorite carols ourselves or enjoy the singing of children.

Thinking about the songs of Christmas brings to mind a rather unexpected turn of phrase found in Psalm 40, a testimony about the impact of praise expressed through songs.

Subtitled a song of David, this psalm is a testimony to the Lord's redeeming work in a life that had become bogged down as if sinking in a miry pit.

The psalm tells of the Lord's response to a sinner's cry — a response that exchanged the miry pit for a solid rock.

The testimony about such an exchange includes how the Lord "put a new song in my mouth — praise to our God; many will see it and fear and will trust in the Lord" (vv. 1-3).

It is understandable if we initially do a double take at this testimony. Normally, we would expect to read about many hearing our song. Instead, we read of many seeing that song. We expect songs to be heard, not seen.

As we move from the Christmas season into a new year, we might ask ourselves, "Do I have a song of praise to raise to the Lord?" But then we might ponder, "What

kind of song might we raise that others would be able to see and, as a result of seeing our song, turn to the Lord?"

Obviously, such a song must be more than sounds that come across our lips. People hear words, but they see conduct.

Powerful influence

Beautiful vocal music can move emotions and lift spirits. Beautiful lives can cast powerful influence as inspiration for others to draw closer to the Lord.

Some of us may move into another new year with resolutions for being better and doing better. What if we traded resolutions for a song — a song that others can see? We can aspire to a quality of behavior that others will be able to see by choosing acts of compassion, generosity, fairness and faithfulness as notes that compose such a testimony.

What we do will be like composing our song using shaped notes — those shaped by Christ-likeness in action and attitude.

Songs that people can see have staying power if they influence them to receive eternal life.

How clearly will others be able to see our song?

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.



‘FUNNEL OF LOVE’

Samford’s Legacy League strives to ‘be involved, be inspired, make an impact’

By Karen O. Allen
The Alabama Baptist

Passion for Samford University’s Legacy League shows when Julie Taylor, first lady and executive director, and Sharon Smith, managing director of Legacy League, talk about the group.

“You name ‘hard,’ and our students have faced it,” Smith said.

These students are defying the negative statistics, and Legacy League improves their chances by offering 38 “transformational scholarships,” Smith said.

She shared that one student was abandoned on the front porch of an orphanage; another was surrendered to social services by her mother.

Words like homelessness, abandonment, foster care and major medical crises surfaced.

“Everybody that I know from growing up is either in jail or dead,” said one student from Haiti. He received extensive financial and emotional support from the Legacy League. He now has a full-time job and is in the Reserve.

Several Legacy League students are first-generation college students.

‘Ripple effect’

“We want them to graduate and turn the tide in their family. It’s amazing to watch the ripple effect of that,” Smith said.

“The redemption is not only an education,” chimes in Taylor. “The redemption is a new identity in whom God has them to be.”

An auxiliary of the uni-



Photo courtesy of Samford Legacy League
Julie Taylor, first lady and executive director of Samford University’s Legacy League, welcomes guests to her home Dec. 8 during the organization’s 2022 Christmas Home Tour. The annual event raises funds for scholarships.

versity, the Legacy League works collaboratively with its members and the community to raise scholarships for students with significant financial need. The focus has not always been on scholarships, however.

The initial intent of the organization was to help raise funds for the endowment and better equipment.

Later, the focus shifted to landscaping and furnishings. Now the primary goal is to offer life-changing scholarships. Approximately \$1.3 million in scholarships has been awarded to 200 students.

Fundraising for scholarships isn’t the only activity of Legacy League however. Monthly fellowship suppers are a highlight for both students and members. The suppers, often hosted in the president’s home, allow students and members to interact and build relationships.

Students go home encouraged with one hand full of extra food and a goody bag

in the other filled with gift cards and practical items.

“This group goes beyond the scholarship — this group represents family,” noted a former Legacy League scholarship recipient.

By being in a relationship with the students, Legacy League tunes into the practical, emotional and spiritual needs enabling them to connect students with resources

to help them be successful.

Legacy League not only cares about the students it serves, it cares about its members.

Commitment

The organization’s tagline, “Be involved, be inspired, make an impact,” models the ministry they provide. Legacy League members are “vibrant, committed and engaged.” Just ask the 100-year-old member who participated in two events last year.

All events are open to the community. “We’ve given a challenge to our board to invite, invite, invite,” quips Taylor.

Taylor completed her first year as executive director this summer, helping Legacy League achieve its most significant fundraising year.

“I joined an organization that’s a rocket right now in terms of mission, in terms of a lamppost and a light for the Lord,” Taylor said.

“We are strong and have lots of opportunity. By His grace, Legacy League was

provided for through the pandemic. By His grace, we have grown. So why wouldn’t we step forward in faith?”

Much of Legacy League’s success, according to Taylor, is from Smith’s management, the willingness of its 760 members to embrace change and the many volunteers who gave unselfishly of their time. Last year, more than 300 people volunteered, logging more than 5,500 hours of service.

Seeking growth

Taylor balances her time between being a mother to a 15-year-old and Samford’s 6,000 students. She also has responsibilities to the alums, trustees and the president’s office. She calls league members a “funnel of love.”

“This organization is not tired,” Taylor said. “Can we have more students? Yes. Can we have more endowments? Yes.”

Legacy League and its mission, she said, is “a beautiful thing to be a part of.”

For more information about Legacy League, visit samford.edu/legacyleague.

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CHRISTMAS

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OUTREACH



Photo by Toni Wall/BMBA

Above: Volunteer Tiffany Cosby helps organize stockings filled with age-appropriate Christmas treats and gifts at Birmingham Metro Baptist Association's Season of Our Savior outreach event. More than 2,000 stockings for infants through teens were collected. For more than 20 years, the 170+ churches of BMBA have been partnering with local nonprofit agencies and shelters to provide underserved children with Christmas stockings during the Advent season.

Right: Churches across the state hosted live or drive-thru nativity programs, including (first row, l to r) Russellville First Baptist Church, Gardendale FBC, (second row, l to r) FBC Andalusia and Greenbrier Road Baptist Church in Anniston.



Facebook photo



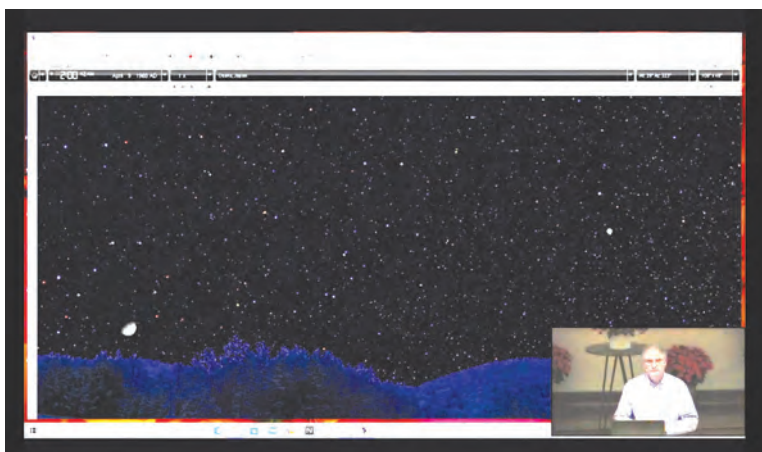
Photo courtesy of Gardendale FBC



Facebook photo



Photo courtesy of Greenbrier Road Baptist Church



Screenshot

Left: Dennis Strickland, an aerospace engineer and member of CrossPointe Church in Madison, speaks about the Star of Bethlehem on Dec. 11 at East McFarland Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa. To watch the service, visit goembc.com/media.

Right: Singers and musicians from First Baptist Church Florence join the choir and orchestra at Woodward Avenue Baptist Church in Florence to present Andrew Peterson's "Behold the Lamb of God" on Dec. 12.

Left: Musicians and singers prepare for the Living Christmas Tree presentation at First Baptist Church Montgomery. Performances were held Dec. 8-11. This was the program's 41st year.



Facebook photo



Photo by Drew Barton



Photo courtesy of Renee Gilmore

Above: Members of First Baptist Gulf Shores serve at the Operation Christmas Child Atlanta shoebox processing center on Dec. 8. More than 1 million shoeboxes were prepared for shipment in Atlanta, one of eight major processing centers in the U.S.

Alabama linebacker Henry To'oTo'o stays grounded in faith, family

By Carrie B. McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

Henry To'oTo'o credits his family with two things that have defined his life in recent years — his love of football and his love of Jesus.

A linebacker for the University of Alabama Crimson Tide during the 2021 and 2022 seasons, To'oTo'o graduated from the University of Alabama Dec. 10.

He also was one of three recipients of the team's Pat Trammel Award, given to senior players who best display integrity, character, academic accomplishments and inspirational leadership during their time at Alabama.

But To'oTo'o said football wasn't really his thing when he was young.

His dad saw his potential and pushed because he viewed football as a path toward higher education.

To'oTo'o soon fell in love with the sport and excelled at it.

"I like hitting people without getting in trouble," he joked while speaking at a preseason Fellowship of Christian Athletes event at Northcrest Baptist Church in Meridian, Mississippi.

To'oTo'o also credits his parents and grandparents with instilling spiritual values in him and his siblings from a young age.

Learning the gospel

"My parents did such a great job of teaching me and my siblings the gospel and the Bible," he said.

To'oTo'o, who is Samoan and Tongan, grew up in a large family in Sacramento, California. He has seven siblings but grew up with cousins who were like siblings — part of his family's Polynesian heritage.

The fourth oldest, To'oTo'o said he felt a responsibility for those



Photo by Kent Gidley/Alabama Athletics

Alabama Crimson Tide linebacker Henry To'oTo'o is one of three 2022 recipients of the Pat Trammel Award, given to UA players who demonstrate exemplary character.

younger than him, which wasn't always easy because of difficult circumstances in the community.

"There's a lot of gang violence," he said. "It was a rough neighborhood where I grew up."

Stretching his faith

The desire to stretch his faith was a big part of why he left California after high school to play in the South.

"I've always been surrounded by family," he said. "I always had my mom to call, my dad to call, my aunt, my siblings. I wanted to go so far away that I couldn't call anybody because being able to separate yourself from the people you love the most is when you grow the most."

"Being able to find who you are in times of need is when you find yourself in Christ," he said.

To'oTo'o credits his Bible study leader and teammates with helping him stay grounded in faith during difficult times and said an important part of his faith life is morning prayer.

"It all starts when you wake up," he said. "If you wake up with a mindset with God ... on your mind, then

you're going to go through your day and carry yourself as if He's watching. You're going to remember the sacrifice He made for you and realize His love for you is infinite."

To'oTo'o said he learned that the hard way. As a college freshman on his own for the first time, he sometimes found himself doing things he knew he shouldn't be doing.

"It was when I was furthest from Jesus ... I found myself down and out ... disappointed in myself," he said.

Going back to the basics of faith helped. Now he tries to let people know he's a follower of Christ and seeking to follow His example.

And no matter what the scoreboard says week in and week out, To'oTo'o says he remembers Jesus' love is the only lasting thing.

"A football team ... a baseball or tennis team, the job you work — everything's going to come to an end," To'oTo'o said.

"But Christ's love is infinite. He's never going to leave your team. He's always going to be by your side through any decision you make."



TO'OTO'O

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Parkway Baptist Church, Creve Coeur, Missouri, seeks a full-time senior pastor to lead our church into the future. Parkway Baptist is located in an increasingly diverse area of West St. Louis County, MO. Please visit our website at <https://www.parkwaybaptist.net> for more information about the church. Send resumé and cover letter to: pastorsearch@parkwaybaptist.net or Senior Pastor Search Committee, 12465 Olive Blvd., St. Louis, MO 63141.

PASTOR

First Baptist Church Rogersville is in search of a senior pastor. Interested candidates may email their resumé to: seniorpastorsearch@fbcrogersville.com or mail a resumé to: First Baptist Church Rogersville, 222 College St., Rogersville, AL 35652, ATTN: Senior Pastor Search Committee.

PASTOR

Newbridge Missionary Baptist Church in Asheville, North Carolina, a member of the Southern Baptist Convention, prayerfully seeks a man who will preach the inerrant word of God and has a heart for missions. Email resumé to: NewbridgePST@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Stowers Hill Baptist Church of Attalla, Alabama, is in search of a bivocational pastor. Please send resumé to email address stowershillbaptist@gmail.com or mail to 407 9th Ave. SW, Attalla, AL 35954.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Liberty Baptist Church in Morris, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor who will preach God's word, pray for God's leadership and have a heart for missions. Send resumé to: garrettm2@bellsouth.net.

WORSHIP PASTOR

Seeking someone to lead all aspects of musical programs of Linden Baptist Church. This is a full-time position and will also have other responsibilities as an associate pastor. For full job description and to apply for the position, visit <http://www.lindenbaptist.org> and click on "associate pastor application." You may contact the church directly at 334-295-4278 or by mail at P.O. Box 480776, Linden, AL 36748.

WORSHIP LEADER

Calvary Baptist in Tuscumbia, seeks bivocational worship leader. Mail resumé to: 601 North Main Street, Tuscumbia, AL 35674, or email to: lynndaleh@gmail.com.

DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND/OR PRESCHOOL

Parkview Baptist Church in Decatur, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a full-time and/or part-

time director of children and/or preschool. Send resumé and questions to: search.committee@parkviewdecatur.org.

OTHER POSITIONS

RETREAT CENTER DIRECTOR

Marshall Baptist Retreat Center (on Lake Guntersville in North Alabama) is looking for a visionary who can help take this ministry forward, who has the ability to lead, delegate and manage association resources for God's glory with a keen attention to detail and organization. Above all, we want a person who has a heart for Christ and for the church. Our association offers a salary along with a freshly renovated home. For a complete job description, visit marshallba.com and click on "About Us" and then documents. Please send resumé to: apply@marshallba.com by January 31, 2023.

DIRECTOR OF MISSIONS

Coffee Baptist Association is seeking a director of missions. Resumé must be received by January 31, 2023. Please send resumé to: P.O. Box 127, New Brockton, AL 36351. For further information, please call 334-894-6411.

NURSERY COORDINATOR

First Baptist Church Spanish Fort is seeking a part-time nursery coordinator. For more information, contact the personnel committee at contact@fbcspanishfort.com.

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A Mousetrap for Christmas?

BY JAY STEWART

State Missionary and Director,
Cooperative Program &
Church Financial Resources

I'm sure many of you have already completed your shopping and you're just enjoying the holiday season watching Christmas movies and/or football games and sipping on hot chocolate. For those of us who are last-minute gift buyers, there's still a few days left to procrastinate.

Not only is this the time of year to celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus, but it is also when Southern Baptists receive their annual Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and focus on praying for international missions.

Like you, I sense a burden to pray for our missionaries who serve around the world. I feel especially compelled to pray for those who serve in the most extreme circumstances — places that are dangerous to live as a Christian and where it is nearly impossible to speak the name of Jesus without fear of retribution.

For some, the topic of missions in far away places brings up a discussion about doing missions in our own proverbial "backyard" instead of sending money and resources around the world to far away places. Like you, I've heard something like this spoken in

conversations about the Gospel and missions: "Why do we send so much money halfway around the world when we have lost people dying without Jesus right here in _____ County."

I encourage us all to avoid the "battle" between missions and ministry in our local areas versus missions and ministry across the globe. The Bible gives a comprehensive answer with the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20) coupled with Acts 1:8. Biblically, there's not even a hint of a competitive attitude. The biblical approach to missions and ministry is everywhere, all the time, all at once.

Instead of an "either/or" dilemma, let us be encouraged to think of missions and ministry as a "both/and" proposition. That's where the idea of a mousetrap comes into play. When I say, "mousetrap," I'm talking about the old fashioned one with a base, spring, hold-down bar, a catch, a hammer, and of course, a piece of cheese or peanut butter. You see, all the parts

of a mousetrap are necessary and they are necessary all at the same time. If you're unsure about this, try to make any of that mousetrap work without it all. It simply won't work separately.

Called to make disciples

I believe this is the right way to view missions and ministry. God has not given us the option to choose between "here or there." He has called us to make disciples everywhere. I applaud churches who do missions and ministry in their own community. They should. I also applaud churches who invest in missions and ministry in places they cannot go, nor will they ever go.

The beauty and power of the Cooperative Program is that it allows churches to minister everywhere, all the time. When disasters occur, your CP dollars are funding work to rebuild. When children are left without a family to care for them, our cooperative efforts help fund the

Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries. When students enroll in colleges across our state, Baptist Campus Ministries are there to greet them. When men and women sense God's call to missions in remote places in the world, CP-giving churches have provided them a way to get there. On and on we could go.

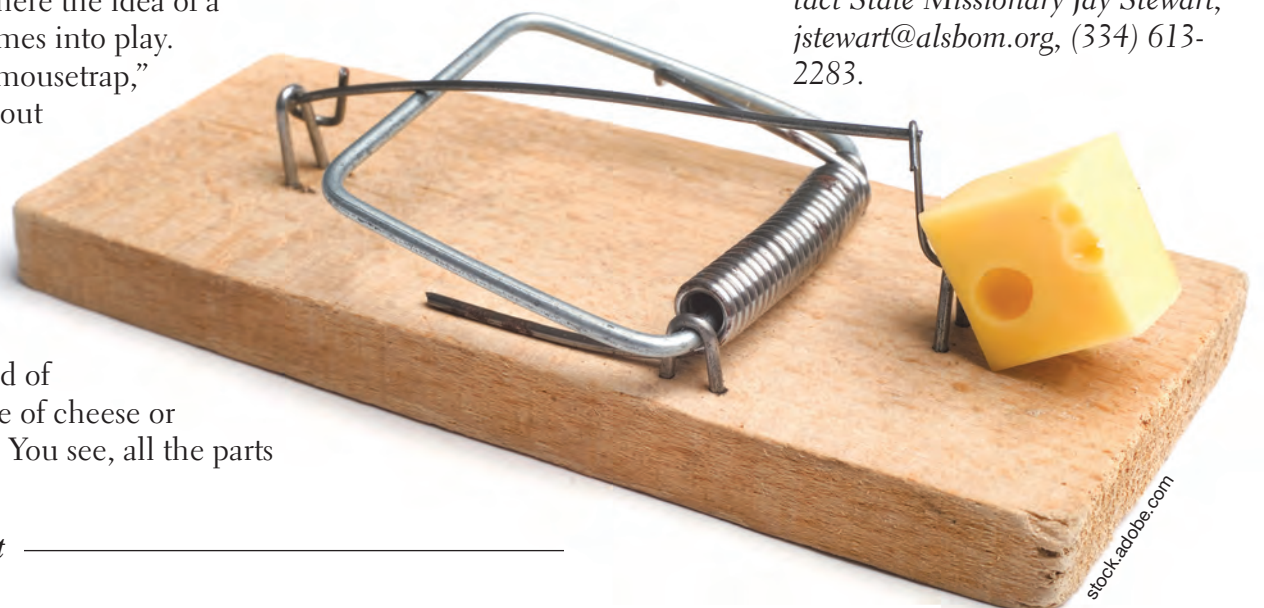
For years I have heard a proverbial dilemma related to building a better mousetrap. When it comes to doing missions and ministry, there isn't a better model than the Cooperative Program. When it comes to the Good News of the Gospel, there is certainly not a better message of hope.

We are better together than we are separately. Let us continue to support missions and ministry through our one program — the Cooperative Program!

To learn more about how the Cooperative Program supports missions in Alabama and around the world, visit alabamacp.org or contact State Missionary Jay Stewart, jstewart@alsbom.org, (334) 613-2283.



IMB photo
A deaf woman is baptized in Batangas province in the Philippines.





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

Merry Christmas

FROM THE
STATE BOARD OF
MISSIONS

*"... when the Fullness of the time was come,
God sent forth his Son ..." (Galatians 4:4)*

May the joy and peace surrounding the celebration of Christ's birth fill your heart and your home throughout this season. Thank you for your generous support of missions and ministry in Alabama and around the world!

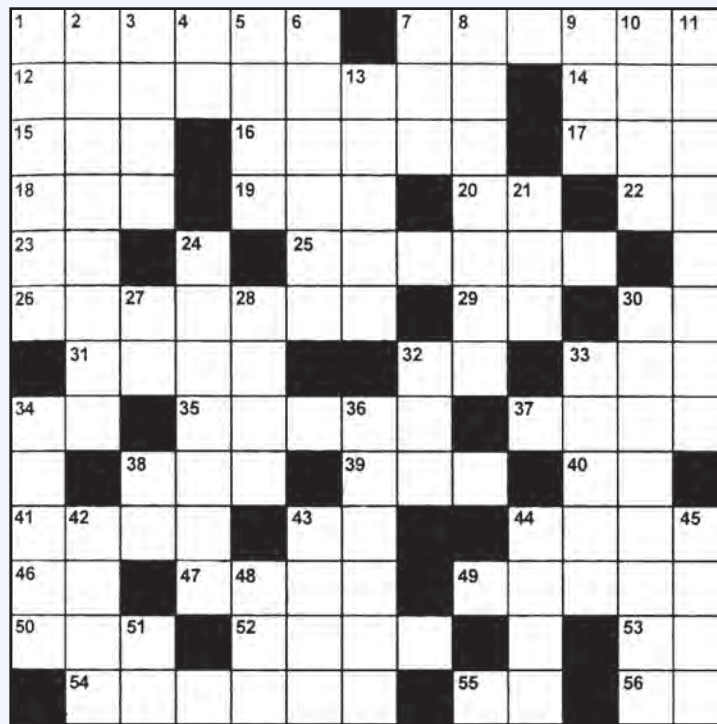


INFORMATION ABOUT YEAR-END GIVING: Please be sure that your Cooperative Program and Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering gifts are sent in time to be received at the State Board of Missions by Friday, December 30, if you would like for them to be counted in 2022.

CHRISTIAN CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 1. Urges on.
- 7. The sword of _____.
(Judg. 7:14)
- 12. A horn of ____ for us.
(Luke 1:69)
- 14. But ____ mightier than I cometh.
(Luke 3:16)
- 15. Consumed.
- 16. Nor hear your _____.
(Matt. 10:14)
- 17. He is cast into a _____.
(Job 18:8)
- 18. International Cooperative Alliance.
(abbr.)
- 19. Standing Room Only.
(abbr.)
- 20. A disease of the lungs. (abbr.)
- 22. Wind direction.
- 23. Exclamation of satisfaction.
- 25. To impose a necessary accompaniment or result.
- 26. Batters.
- 29. Negative.
- 30. Either/_____.
- 31. Lamech ... begat _____.
(Gen. 5:30)
- 32. Saint. (abbr.)
- 33. A large, long-haired Asian animal.
- 34. The kingdom of _____ in Bashan.
(Josh. 13:31)
- 35. To take _____.
- 37. Oriental cooking pans.
- 38. Very wet dirt.
- 39. I _____ no pleasant bread.
(Dan. 10:3)
- 40. Left Tackle. (abbr.)
- 41. Shalt thou find no _____.
(Deut. 28:65)
- 43. _____, I come ... to do Thy will.
(Heb. 10:7)
- 44. Hairy Southern vegetable.
- 46. Roman numeral for 550.
- 47. Lest any of them



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- should _____ out.
(Acts 27:42)
 - 49. For I trust _____ you.
(Rom. 15:24; 2 words)
 - 50. Lay not this _____ to their charge.
(Acts 7:60)
 - 52. In the middle of.
 - 53. Emergency Room. (abbr.)
 - 54. Throws.
 - 55. Made ... the sea, and all that in them _____.
(Acts 4:24)
 - 56. _____ Abram departed.
(Gen. 12:4)
- DOWN**
- 1. A prophet.
 - 2. Identical.
 - 3. Request.
 - 4. Electric vehicle. (abbr.)
 - 5. Abraham ... kept ... My statutes, and My _____.
(Gen. 26:5)
 - 6. A person who saves things.
 - 7. They were both righteous before _____.
(Luke 1:6)
 - 8. Continuing _____ in prayer.
(Rom. 12:12)
 - 9. Long period of time.
 - 10. I have commanded My sanctified _____.
(Isa. 13:3)
 - 11. NBC, CBS, ABC.
 - 13. Fill his skin with barbed _____.
(Job 41:7)
 - 21. Having to do with a natural science. (prefix)
 - 24. Idols.
 - 27. Christ went up _____ Jerusalem.
 - 28. The son of Gera.
(Judg. 3:15)
 - 30. A strong wood comes from these. (2 words)
 - 32. Supersonic Transport. (abbr.)
 - 33. Part of an egg. (plural)
 - 34. Belonging to the son of Ephlail.
(1 Chron. 2:37)
 - 36. Belonging to Ruth's mother-in-law.
(Ruth 1:2)
 - 38. Used instead of "Miss" today.
 - 42. _____ lamp.
(2 words)
 - 43. Citrus fruit.
 - 44. Expression of regret after a mistake.
 - 45. Having to do with airplanes or space.
 - 48. God _____ with the lad.
(Gen. 21:20)
 - 51. Yes or _____.

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

National Christmas Tree lit for 100th time

It was Christmas Eve in 1923. A church choir sang, Marine band members played and the president of the United States pressed a button to light the first National Christmas Tree under the gaze of thousands of on-lookers.

This year marked the 100th lighting of the National Christmas Tree, a symbol of civil religion as Americans mark the Christmas season.

Though the tree was not lit from 1942 to 1944 due to the Second World War, it is the second-oldest White House tradition after the Easter Egg Roll, which began in 1878.

Significance

"A hundred years is a fairly significant milestone to reach for consistently practicing a tradition," said Matthew Costello, senior historian of the nonprofit White House Historical Association. "This is really part of the customs and the traditions of the White House."

In 1940, before the U.S. entered the conflict in Europe, Franklin D. Roosevelt used the tree lighting to condemn the war, referring to the Beatitudes of Christ, and urging "belligerent na-

tions to read the Sermon on the Mount," a National Park Service timeline notes.

Roosevelt lit the tree weeks after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill standing behind him.

Perseverance

The lighting of the National Christmas Tree has continued amid other difficult times.

After the Nov. 22, 1963, assassination of President John F. Kennedy, his successor waited until a 30-day mourning period was over before lighting the tree.

A few months after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, President George W. Bush rode in a motorcade to the nearby Ellipse park for the ceremony. Costello contrasted these people-oriented instances to the more policy-oriented rhetoric of State of the Union speeches.

"We see after these moments of national catastrophe, disaster, tragedy, where this can be a really uplifting time for presidents to deliver a message directly to the American people, to remind them about what the season is all about." (RNS)

Christmas Greetings!

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us! His death, burial, resurrection and soon return is the message we proclaim.

Enjoy and share Jesus this season.



Merry Christmas,
Jimmy Dixon
Reverse Mortgage Specialist
205-567-4800

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For December 25

Explore the Bible

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.

Dean of the Center for Christian Calling, University of Mobile



YOU WILL FIND Luke 2:1-15

Luke's gospel was written for discipleship and dedicated to the reader who is loved by God (Theophilus). The account records significant aspects of Jesus' life and ministry.

Each of the first three chapters mentions specific civil leaders with political and religious authority.

Details about the annunciation, visit by the shepherds, dedication of Jesus at the temple, encounters with Anna and Simeon and Jesus' bar mitzvah indicate Luke may have interviewed Mary personally.

In this special Christmas lesson, we review the familiar story from Luke 2.

The Birth (1-7)

Caesar Augustus reigned in Rome from 23 B.C. to A.D. 14. His "world" stretched as far west as Hispania (Spain), an expanding empire that enjoyed relative peace through military strength known as Pax Romana.

Taxing was the means of fundraising for military and infrastructure projects. It was often accompanied by a census or registration.

Looking at verse 7, readers might wonder "What about the inn? What are these modern translators doing with our Bible?"

The answer is that the word previously translated as inn is not the word for the kind of place where caravans might rest at night.

The word here is "katalyma" and is the same word used when the disciples were procuring a place for the Last Supper (Luke 22:11).

This room was located within a personal home.

The verse carries with it the idea of "there was no space in the guest room," rather than "there was no vacancy at the local motel," as we often interpret it through our own context.

The Announcement (8-12)

The announcer: Previously in

Luke, Gabriel announced the coming of the Messiah.

He informed Zechariah about the ensuing birth of John (1:19).

Months later, he told Mary that God had chosen her to bear the Messiah (1:28).

The recipients: A handful of shepherds were tending flocks in an open field outside Bethlehem. In the first century these hired hands did not have the same respect they held during the time David served as Israel's shepherd king.

Instead, they were sometimes hirelings who would leave the flocks and run from danger. On this night though, they would leave the flocks to heed the message of the angel and see the newborn baby.

The message: I can hear Linus reciting this announcement in "A Charlie Brown Christmas." When Charlie asks if anyone knows what Christmas is all about, Linus quotes the angelic message.

It has been a reminder to kids since 1965 and to Bible readers today that Jesus' birth is what Christmas is all about.

The wrapping of the Christmas gift: Imagine a baby wrapped in gauze strips.

His covering resembled the wrappings on a corpse, rather than the blanket we often see in hospital labor and delivery units.

Mary had a little lamb. This lamb was born to die as the sacrifice for all who believe in Him. Seek and you will find Him.

The Song (13-15)

Gloria in excelsis Deo! The attendance for the nativity concert looked like a Wednesday night prayer meeting!

God chose a handful of shepherds as the first human witnesses to the birth of the Lamb, revealing His glory through common means. He still uses common witnesses.

Glory to God in the highest!
Merry Christmas!

Bible Studies for Life

By Tyshawn Gardner, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies, Samford University



SUBMISSION TO GOD IN PLACE OF FEAR Luke 1:26-38

Don't fear the unknown. (26-29)

Children can possess an unappeasable fear of the dark, so sleeping with the lights on is a universal request. Although most of us grow out of sleeping with the lights on and overcome our fear of the dark, we never quite transcend our fear of the unknown.

However, in adulthood we can draw from the lessons that helped us sleep in the dark in our childhood.

As adults we can live in the light of God's presence and God's word to help us find rest in the unknown dark places of life.

Upon hearing she would bear the Son of the Most High, Mary's first reaction was fear of the unknown. She asked, "How will this be?"

Mary found courage and peace in the light of God's word from the angel.

When we face unknown situations, whether sickness, a new job, a change in our relationships or a new ministry opportunity, we can find comfort in the light of God's word.

Since He is all knowing, our faith in Him puts fear of the unknown to rest.

Fear of the unknown may produce disobedience to God's instruction or create the temptation to rely on our own methods and strength.

Submission to God in place of fear produces obedience and reliance on God.

Don't fear God's plan for you. (30-33)

Just as God had plans for Mary, He has plans for us. We don't need to fear His plans. He desires us to be part of His redemptive plans, so He provides all we need to fulfill His plans.

Mary was young and inexpe-

rienced. Many of us fear God's plans because of our inadequacies and shortcomings.

Throughout the Bible, God teaches us He can use young and inexperienced people who have inadequacies. In addition to the young virgin Mary, God used other people in their youth, including Joseph, Jeremiah, Joshua, Esther and Jesus. All these people realized they were a part of God's plan, and they obeyed without fear. The phrase "Do not be afraid" appears several times in the birth narrative: to Zechariah (Luke 1:13), to Mary (v. 30), to Joseph (Matt. 1:20) and to the shepherds (Luke 2:10). Don't fear God's plan for you.

Don't fear the seemingly impossible. (34-38)

Along with the unknown, we may fear the seemingly impossible. Sometimes when we reflect on our limitations and shortcomings, we fear it is impossible to do what God calls us to do. However, this is precisely when He desires to use us so His glory can be seen. God can do what is impossible for us to do. There are no impossibilities with God and when He lives in us, we can also do what seems impossible.

Paul wrote, "Now unto Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us" (Eph. 3:20).

Mary's youth and inexperience were not too difficult for God. The angel assured her, "For nothing will be impossible with God." Examples abound both in the Bible and in our own world of God doing the impossible through men and women who commit to doing His will.

May the Lord fill us with His light and give us courage as we put away fear to focus on His plan.

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Michael Foust

The Alabama Baptist

MercyMe hopes new album helps heal divisions

Bart Millard and his MercyMe bandmates began writing some of the songs for their latest album during the COVID-19 pandemic, long before the nation was divided over issues that now dominate the headlines.

Millard believes the album's release in 2022 was God's plan all along. Titled "Always Only Jesus," it is the 11th studio album by MercyMe and urges Christians to keep Jesus — and only Him — at the center of their lives.

Of the album's 10 tracks, about half were written during the pandemic.

'Perfect timing'

"It feels like we just stumbled on to a very important record," Millard told The Alabama Baptist.

"It's perfect timing with an album titled 'Always Only Jesus' when we've got a divided body of Christ that needs to be reminded of the one common denominator we should all have. And so it was definitely a God thing. It was kind of weird."

The album's title track references a Christ-centric theme — "... every breath I'm breathing will be filled with praise" — as does the first



MercyMe

Photo courtesy of Fair Trade

radio single, "Then Christ Came," which testifies of Jesus' power — "You are the one I was made for."

The latter single saw success on Billboard's hot Christian songs and Christian airplay charts.

"We have friends that have kind of drawn some pretty harsh lines in the sand and become very passionate about certain things," Millard said, referring to current hot-button issues.

"Some of them were like, 'Man, how do we recover from this?'"

'Pursuing Jesus'

Millard said he has seen friendships severed in recent years.

"[It's] heartbreaking," he said.

"And now that we're kind of going back to normal, you either have some [people] pretending it never happened, some walking it back or some trying to explain, 'Well,

this is why I said this.' ... But the one thing we do know is that we all have to be able to agree that we are still pursuing Jesus."

Millard compares pandemic-driven divisions to those between denominations splitting over tertiary issues.

"I can disagree with you, and it happens a lot. It's why there are so many denominations. We all feel like we're doing our best to honor the heart of God," he noted.

"So we all thought, 'Doing our part is making an album to remind people that it is about the heart of God, it is about Jesus.'

"If you're gonna address the elephant in the room, you can argue and fight ... as much as you want. But we have to be able to come together and agree that, yes, we are still pursuing Christ."

For more information, visit [MercyMe.org](https://www.mercyme.org).



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.

MEET THE REVIEWER

Michael Foust covers the intersection of faith and entertainment as a media reviewer for The Alabama Baptist. He also is the husband of an amazing wife and the father of four young children.

TAB MEDIA GROUP: HOME OF SEVEN BAPTIST COMMUNICATORS ASSOCIATION

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- ▶ TAB editorial staff, 2021
- ▶ Dianna Cagle, 2011

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in Feature Writing*

- ▶ Trennis Henderson, 2020
- ▶ Grace Thornton, 2019

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*for Exceptional Achievement
in Public Relations and Development*

- ▶ TAB editorial staff, 2012

TAB
MEDIA GROUP



Valuable work

By Grace Thornton
The Baptist Paper

Ukrainian seminary opens centers for humanitarian aid, trauma counseling

When Slavik Pyzh first held a roundtable talk for people who were weathering the war in Ukraine, he was hit with a big challenge.

“They were asking questions I had never heard in my life,” recalled Pyzh, president of the Ukrainian Baptist Theological Seminary, during a recent conference call. “Like one lady was asking, ‘What should I say to someone who was raped by a Russian soldier?’ And I know that this is not a theoretical question for her.”

‘Share that burden’

“But that was the first time I started hearing these questions that you cannot just answer. You have to walk through the question with the person and share that burden, that pain.”

Which is a big reason UBTS started WeCare centers, places where people in Ukraine can receive both humanitarian aid and trauma counseling.

The seminary didn’t start the centers from scratch. It identified places where students and graduates already were meeting needs and came alongside to offer financial resources and training.

The help of churches, organizations and individuals who give financially through the Ukraine Partnership Foundation is critical in the effort, Pyzh said.

He also noted another big help in the effort: Clay Barnes, a trauma specialist who traveled to Ukraine in late September to train a group of 30 volunteers serving at the six WeCare centers.



Photo courtesy of Ukrainian Baptist Theological Seminary
Teams assess the needs of their community in Ukraine. The Ukrainian Baptist Theological Seminary formed WeCare centers to offer basic human triage to those in need in their surrounding areas.

Barnes said the idea going forward is that these men and women will be on-site at the centers and offer basic trauma triage to those who come through the doors.

“They know they’re not trauma counselors,” he noted. “They know some people they work with will be well beyond their capability to help, and that’s where we’re going to be a resource for them, both via telehealth and in person.”

Barnes, spiritual director and Christian life coach at Carmel Counseling Center at Carmel Baptist Church in Matthews, North Carolina, said he plans to take teams of professional counselors to Ukraine monthly beginning in January. He welcomes counselors interested in serving at WeCare

centers and providing more training for the trauma helpers.

Pyzh added the centers will need teams to come alongside and help them rebuild homes and businesses and train Ukrainians in life skills, such as opening their own businesses in the middle of the conflict.

‘Leadership vacuum’

He also asked for prayer for the seminary itself as it continues to train students to be church leaders and care for people in the war-torn country.

“I think that one of the greatest consequences of this war is the leadership vacuum,” Pyzh said.

“In one form or another we lost 400 to 450 churches. Before the war we had 2,100

churches, and now we have 400 churches less.”

Pyzh noted his concern that even more leaders will be lost when travel restrictions are lifted.

Mission and vision

“You can rebuild structures, you can rebuild buildings, but if you don’t have pastors and leaders, you don’t have anyone,” he said.

“This is going to be the main challenge for us as a church, but at the same time I believe God placed us in the right place and gave us partners and tools to respond to that need because our mission and vision is to train these leaders.”

At the seminary’s most recent graduation in September, Pyzh encouraged students that “if you are here, then Ukraine has a future, and the church has a future here.”

He said he is excited that as the fall semester starts, there are 1,200 to 1,300 new students and around 600 returning students.

“Our work right now is much more valuable than a year ago because the number of leaders has tremendously decreased,” Pyzh said, “and the number of opportunities has tremendously increased.”

But in the face of crisis and challenge, churches are being planted.

“Even through these WeCare centers, we already planted two churches,” Pyzh added.

Still more students are being trained and more centers are opening.

“In spite of everything we have in Ukraine,” he noted, “we do have people who believe in God’s calling.”



PYZH

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT UPFMISSIONS.ORG. TO CONTACT BARNES, CALL 704-849-0686.

STRUGGLING TOWARD HOPE:

LIFE AFTER THE DEATH OF A SPOUSE

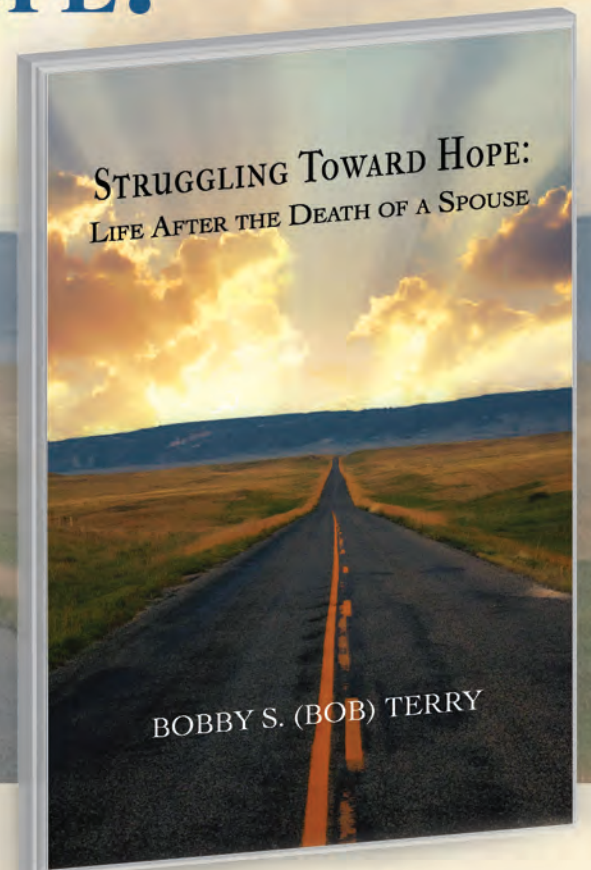
A powerful, beautiful and very helpful account of working through the loss of a spouse. Dr. Terry describes the deep sense of loss he felt and then the process of building hope. This is not a "how to" book on grief, but one that allows the reader to follow the journey and then engage on several levels. As I read the book, I wish that it had been available when as a pastor I struggled to minister to church members who were going through this process. I firmly believe that this book needs to be in every pastor's library to read with extra copies for folks to read as they go through their own grief journey. Dr. Terry's background as a journalist allows him to unpack his own story with unique insights along the way. It is a must read for pastors and counselors.

DR. GARY FENTON
RETIRED SENIOR PASTOR OF DAWSON MEMORIAL BAPTIST CHURCH
BIRMINGHAM, ALA.



BOBBY S. (BOB) TERRY

As a Christian minister Bob thought he understood grief. He had done special studies about death and dying and walked with numerous families through the loss of loved ones. But when his wife died from injuries suffered in an automobile accident while the couple was on a mission trip, Bob learned the difference between studying grief academically and knowing grief personally. In this book, Bob relates his own struggles about putting life back together after the death of a spouse. He examines issues related to the changes that death brings and questions about religious faith, about the grief journey and about finding a new hope-filled sense of life.



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Let the duck 'do the talking'

By Lonnie Wilkey
Baptist and Reflector

Church uses floating toys as evangelism tool for Jeep owners

When it comes to finding unique ways to share the gospel, David Evans is always on the lookout.

Evans, pastor of Springfield Baptist Church in Springfield, Tennessee, recently learned that the city of Springfield and Robertson County, Tennessee, have a large population of people who own Jeeps. He also discovered that Jeep owners like rubber ducks.

"The Jeep community has a thing with rubber ducks," Evans explained.

When those who have a Jeep see another Jeep in a parking lot, they'll just walk up and put a rubber duck on the hood or in the driver's door handle and then leave, he said.

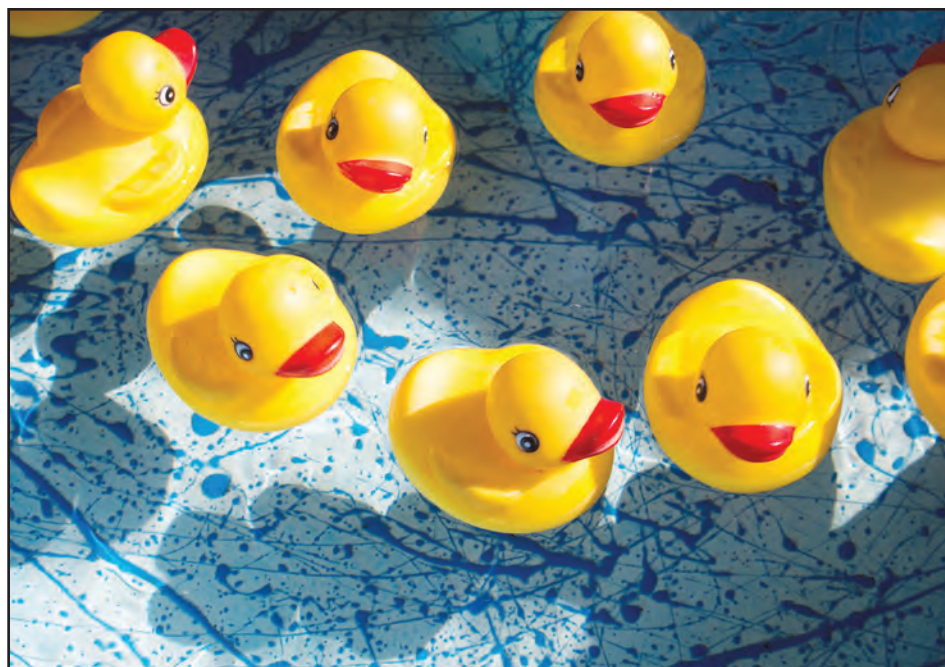
The rubber duck has become a symbol of encouragement to Jeep owners, Evans added. "When I hear of something unique like this, I naturally think, 'How can we use this to share the gospel?'"

Missed opportunities

Prior to becoming pastor at Springfield Baptist, Evans served as evangelism team leader for the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board.

"Throughout the years, Southern Baptists have done ourselves a disservice because when you look at our evangelism training techniques, most of them involve memorizing an outline or knocking on a stranger's door," he observed.

While those efforts have "produced a lot of great fruit," he noted many Southern Baptists are not comfortable with speaking to strangers.



Springfield Baptist Church in Tennessee uses rubber ducks to share the gospel with Jeep owners. The ducks have a QR code to a page on the church's website that expresses Christ's love for them.

So when ministers say the words evangelism or outreach, people get scared, Evans said.

"They're like, 'I'm not going to do that.' And to some degree, I don't blame them. Big personalities like mine never meet a stranger, can walk up to a stranger's door, recite an outline and really talk and have a conversation," he said, adding that he realizes most people are not comfortable with that approach.

"As a pastor, I have to think, 'How can I help everybody share the gospel?' I have discovered two basic principles. They have to want to share the gospel, and they need

to be excited to tell others about Jesus."

On a recent Sunday morning, Evans launched a unique way to reach people in the community, or at least those who drive Jeeps, with the gospel.

The church bought 500 rubber ducks and put a QR code on each duck. When used, the code links to a page on the church's website that tells people "not only does the Jeep community love you, but Jesus also loves [you]," Evans said.

With the ducks surrounding him on the platform as he preached, Evans explained what he wanted the congregation to do.

When it came time for the congregation to come to the front and get some ducks to pass out, there was a brief hesitation. Evans realized it was a "sink or swim" idea.

"All of a sudden, however, people started swarming to the front, and every duck was taken that morning. I didn't have any extras. I had people calling me asking, 'Are you going to order some more?'"

New attitude

Evans instructed the congregation to place a duck on the hood or in the door handle.

"I told them to walk away, don't talk to anybody, don't look at anybody and don't stand there waiting for someone to come up. Just leave the duck and let it do the talking," Evans said.

It sounds odd, but it worked, Evans said, adding that the rubber duck served the purpose of a gospel tract because it led the recipients to the website.

Evans also asked church members to send him videos or photos of them leaving the ducks. He noted the effort has gotten his members excited about doing evangelism.

The Springfield pastor has been pleased with the results.

Those who have received ducks have gone to the website and left responses.

One person wrote he was having a terrible day, but his spirits were lifted when he saw the message from the church.

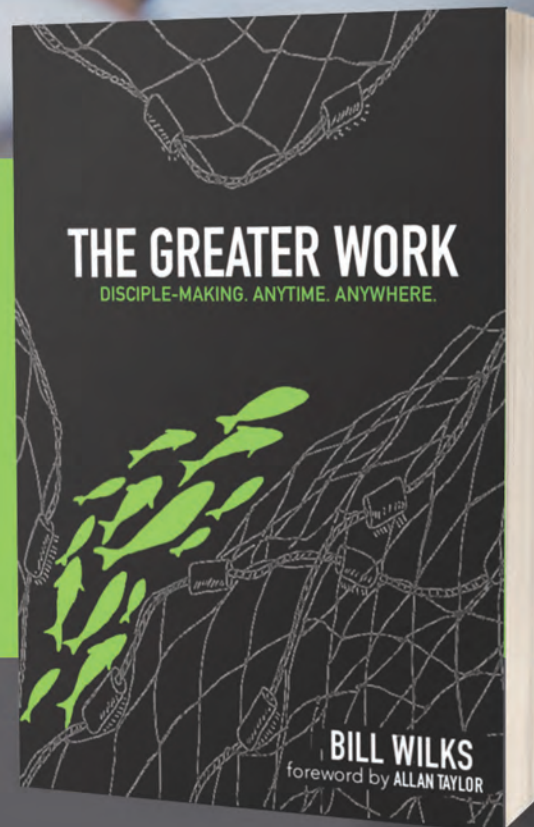
Just as importantly, however, Evans' congregation is excited about evangelism, he observed.

"That is the attitude I am trying to create here," he said.

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Planting seeds

By Grace Thornton
The Baptist Paper

Off-road event, ATV giveaway provide outreach opportunity in WV

Keith Smith was amazed at what he saw when he went to the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally in South Dakota a few years ago.

“A good friend of mine had been going there for a few years and working with the Dakota Baptist Convention,” he recalled. “They would give away a brand-new Harley, and thousands of people came through their doors.”

To get their name in a drawing, visitors agreed to listen to a volunteer’s three-minute testimony about their faith in Jesus Christ, and Smith saw the fruit the experience produced.

“The numbers of salvations were in the thousands,” he recounted.

After the event, as he rode his motorcycle back home to West Virginia, he said God put an idea in his head.

“It was, ‘You can do this in Gilbert,’” Smith recalled, referring to National TrailFest, an off-road event held each October in Gilbert, West Virginia. “I thought, ‘Lord, are You sure You’re talking to the right guy?’”

Sharing Christ

For years Smith had been part of the Christian Motorcyclists Association.

“We had been going to different

rallies and events to try to minister to the bikers and the riders in whatever way we could,” he related. “We had been going to Gilbert for probably 10 years.”

Personal testimony

The town of about 500 swells to some 5,000 the weekend of the festival. Smith knew from experience there were a lot of people who needed to hear the type of gospel presentation he’d seen at Sturgis.

“It’s wrapped around your testimony,” he said of the outreach model. “It’s patterned after the Apostle Paul — how he was before he met Christ, how he met Christ and how his life was after he met Christ.

“They share the gospel with that. It’s nothing new, but it’s powerful and effective.”

Pair it with a big giveaway, and it gets people sitting in seats ready to listen, Smith said.

So that’s what he needed to nail down first, something to give away.

Because of his CMA contacts, Smith had a relationship with Eddie Keefer, owner of Keefer’s Powersports.

“He made a recommendation, and we bought [an all-terrain vehicle] from him,” Smith said about their first event in 2019.

Keefer also put together a youth package at his own expense for people under the age of 18, Smith noted.



Photo courtesy of Keith Smith

For visitors to get their name in the drawing for a new Polaris Sportsman ATV, they agreed to listen to a volunteer’s three-minute testimony about their faith in Jesus.

“For the past three years the Keepers have sold us the ATV and have given us the youth package.”

Smith’s church, Abundant Hope Baptist in Barboursville, West Virginia, has been a supporter of the ministry, with a bank account set up for donations for the ATV.

This year the ministry gave away a Polaris Sportsman.

Making connections

God has continued to provide connections to help make the event possible, Smith said. Since there aren’t a lot of places to stay, he and fellow CMA members have forged a relationship over the years with Horsepen Baptist Church in Gilbert, sleeping and showering in the church’s facilities.

As Smith transitioned into the ATV giveaway outreach, the church became an even stronger partner, asking him to train its members in

the evangelism technique so they could participate.

This year, 21 volunteers from eight churches gathered to help at TrailFest. They saw 441 people come through the tent, with 31 first-time professions of faith in Christ. As people make decisions, volunteers give away Bibles and Bible reading plans and work to connect them with churches in their local areas for follow-up.

“It’s really great to be a part of this,” Smith said.

He has a new nickname now that he wouldn’t have foreseen several years ago — the ATV guy.

“I’m only doing what I truly believe He called me to do,” Smith said. “Not only did He call me to do this in Gilbert, He has also equipped me. He has just smoothed the way and opened doors. I’ve never seen anything like it.”



Photo courtesy of Keith Smith

This year, 21 volunteers from eight churches gathered to help at TrailFest. They saw 441 people come through the tent, with 31 first-time professions of faith in Christ.