The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

INSIDE

Deadly storms rip through Alabama, leave trail of devastation

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National WMU board gathers in Birmingham for annual meeting

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Pastor encourages involvement in foster care, adoption ministries

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Photo courtesy of Sav-A-Life

Representatives of several Baptist entities join Lisa Hogan (second from right), executive director of Sav-A-Life Inc., at Birmingham's new Crestwood location for the dedication of an ultrasound machine provided by the State Board of Missions through ERLC's Psalm 139 Project.

Life-affirming

Pregnancy resource centers provide compassionate care amid uncertainty

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Lisa Hogan said every time a woman walks through the doors of Sav-A-Life, staff members have the opportunity to offer hope to both the mother and the baby.

On many days, mothers make a life-affirming choice, and staff members celebrate.

That's their goal — to empower women with information, counseling and resources so they can make the decision to carry their babies to term.

Sav-A-Life has been working toward that end since 1980, caring for one woman at a time.

It's one of about 50 other pregnancy resource ministries across Alabama and more than 2,500 nationwide.

Many times, Sav-A-Life sees women choose to keep their babies and gets the privilege of walking alongside those new mothers, and sometimes the fathers too, with practical help and parenting classes, said Hogan, who serves as executive director of three Sav-A-Life centers in the Birmingham metro area.

'Honored to serve'

"We are honored to serve the precious women and men God sends our way," she said. "We fully recognize that not everyone gets to do what we get to do. What a privilege to share the truth of God's Word and watch transformation occur."

But Sav-A-Life staff and volunteers sometimes see women walk out the door with plans to get an abortion. Since Roe v. Wade was overturned in June 2022, that means driving to another state to get it.

When that happens, Hogan said she hopes they've demonstrated love in such a way that no matter what the woman decides, she's welcome to come back.

"Do we want them to make a life-affirming decision? Of course we do — we know the long-term consequences of not choosing that," Hogan said.

"But if they know we genuinely care about them and come back, it's another opportunity to love them well and share the gospel. We also may be able to prevent an additional abortion."

(*See 'From,' page 8*)

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Photo by Joy Lee/National WMU

TAB Editor-in-Chief Jennifer Davis Rash leads the Jan. 8 breakout session "Retool through Brainstorming" during national WMU's January board meeting in Birmingham.

Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

TAB content editor Carrie McWhorter leads a Jan. 7 workshop on how and why to "Recount Your Story."

TAB editors speak to WMU

TAB Editor-in-Chief Jennifer Davis Rash and content editor Carrie Brown McWhorter were two of the many missions, ministry and media professionals who led workshops during national Woman's Missionary Union's January board meeting held Jan. 7–9 in Birmingham (see full story, pages 10–11).

The meeting's theme was "Regather," since it was the first time leaders had been together in person since January 2020. The breakout sessions all built off the theme, focusing on ideas to reset, reimagine and reinvigorate in the coming year. (TAB)

Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

National WMU Executive Director Sandy Wisdom-Martin (center) pauses for a selfie with TAB's Jennifer Davis Rash (left) and Carrie Brown McWhorter on Jan. 7, the first day of national WMU's January board meeting in Birmingham.

The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.

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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‘SIGNIFICANT’ DAMAGE

Deadly storm system rips through Alabama Jan. 12, leaves trail of devastation

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

At least seven people in Autauga County are dead after a storm system surprised Alabamians on Jan. 12 with tornadoes that devastated homes, businesses and churches across the state.

At press time, three churches in the state were known to have sustained damage, two of those from one large tornado that ripped through the heart of Selma.

Selma has significant damage on a long track from west Highway 22 through the city going northeast and beyond, according to Mark Wakefield, state disaster relief strategist for Alabama Baptists.

For more information about Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief, visit sbdr.org.

Crosspoint Christian Church in Selma, which suffered extensive damage, had its day care and preschool in session when the tornado hit, with about 70 children from six weeks to 5 years old present in the building.

There were no serious injuries; only one baby had a small cut on her cheek and forehead, according to ABC 33/40 meteorologist James Spann’s Facebook page.

Fairview Baptist Church in Selma also lost its steeple and suffered roof damage. Two Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief teams were out the day of the storms to help clear the roads in Selma, Wakefield said.

By Jan. 13, volunteers were already at work in hard-hit areas and organizing in others, he added.

Volunteers in Autauga County were helping with search and rescue efforts. At least 20 homes were damaged or destroyed in the area, and all seven confirmed fatalities in the state happened there. Wadsworth Baptist Church north of Marbury lost its worship center, and its other building was heavily damaged, Wakefield said.

In Tallapoosa Baptist Association, disaster relief volunteers were setting up an incident command center at the associational office that would be the hub for work at the homes in that area.

“We are working to establish a location in Dallas County to work the Selma area also,” Wakefield said. “It’s a pretty significant operation at this point.”

Ten to 15 injuries in Morgan County were attributed to a tornado that cut a 30-mile path through portions of Lawrence, Morgan and Limestone counties. None of the injuries are believed to be life-threatening, Morgan County sheriff’s spokesperson Mike Swafford told local news outlets, but numerous buildings were damaged.

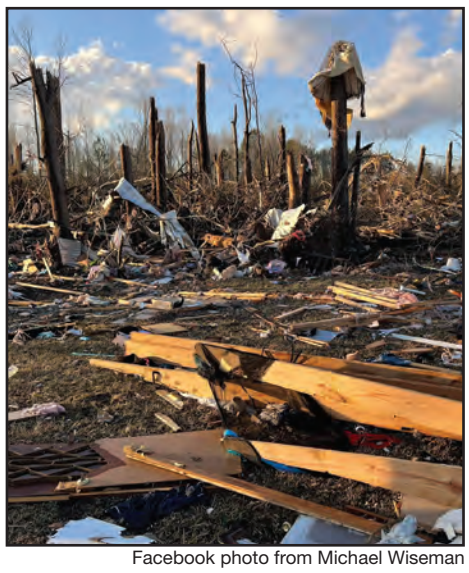
At press time, Wakefield expected teams to be working Jan. 13 in all areas around the state with damage.

Facebook photo from Amanda McCloud

Crosspoint Christian Church in Selma had about 70 babies and children in its preschool when a tornado hit the building. Only one baby had a small cut on her face; there were no serious injuries.

Photo by Mel Johnson

Wadsworth Baptist Church north of Marbury lost its worship center, and its other building was heavily damaged.



Facebook photo from Michael Wiseman

After the storms, volunteers helped with search and rescue in Autauga County, where at least seven people were killed.

Facebook photo from Ryan Denton

FBC Posey Crossroads in Prattville opened its doors as a storm shelter for the community Jan. 12. It wasn’t hit, but homes in the area were destroyed.

Photo courtesy of Lee Tate

Fairview Baptist Church in Selma lost its steeple and suffered major roof damage when a tornado ripped through the heart of the city Jan. 12.

OPINION

Your Voice

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

‘No heartbeat’: Loss of preborn life affirms comfort of Christ

By Neal Hughes
Director of missions, Montgomery Baptist Association

On Nov. 29, 2022, I returned my son-in-law’s call to hear Grant say, “Dad, the baby doesn’t have a heartbeat.” What a gut punch.

Ninety-six hours earlier, we were sitting as a family enjoying Thanksgiving together when my daughter announced that I would be a Poppy again.

Laurie was eight weeks pregnant. My wife, Mary, and I were whispering, “It is about time!” Their only child, our 5-year-old granddaughter, had joined us with the plea to give her a baby brother or sister. So the whole family was thrilled to know another baby was on the way. What a Thanksgiving celebration!

And then Tuesday came. Nobody saw it coming. We all thought the second child would enter the world as the first one did: no problems, normal delivery, happy family and sweet memories.

No words for pain

As a father of three, my privilege and duty has always been to protect, love and support my children. Even though they are all grown up with careers, live far away from Montgomery and have their own families, I am still the patriarch of the Hughes clan. I have the “dad card” and can fix anything.

But not today.

The baby did not have a heartbeat. I was not going to be able to say to my precious daughter, “It is going to be fine,” because it was not fine. The baby had died.

In the Christian world, we seldom say someone died. As a pastor, I have been by the bedside and the graveside of many. It is a rare day that someone says their loved one died. Instead, we will hear that they passed away, stepped into heaven or their heart stopped. Almost never will we hear that someone just died.

It is even stranger with miscarriages. They call it the silent death because no one talks about it. The fact that someone lost their baby is often hush-hush.

There is no memorial, graveside, casserole dish or tradition. Families often are expected to bear the burden alone. Honestly, Mary and I have spoken only to a few (and then in whispered tones) that our 8-week-old grandchild died.

HUGHES

When a baby dies, prenatal or postnatal, miscarriage or stillborn, you do not know what to do. After all, this is not in the playbook. Old people die, not young people.

We will say there was a miscarriage. We will explain the science. We will speak of heaven and hope. But it is unacceptable in our minds to accept that the baby died.

My son-in-law was correct; death means there is no more heartbeat. All the words, the possibility that the doctor is wrong and the bargaining, will not bring the baby back. Death is death. It is sad; it stinks. It is unkind; it is cruel. Dads cannot fix it, nor can they heal the broken hearts of loved ones.

The Apostle Paul said it correctly in 1 Corinthians 15:55: “Death, where is your sting?”

I believe strongly in the sanctity of human life and in the biblical conviction that life begins at conception. I am a “womb to the tomb” pro-lifer. Therefore, my grandbaby who died is as real to me as my 5-year-old granddaughter. We, as a family, are in sorrow. No words, except the words of God, can soothe a broken heart. So we hold on to one another and move forward.

There are things I have learned already regarding this journey that has gravely affected our family. Perhaps others affected in a similar way will benefit from hearing these thoughts.

1. When answers aren’t enough, there is Jesus.

I do not pretend to have all the answers (or any of the answers) for my family. But our family has found great comfort in the arms of God. Isaiah 49:16 has been a highlight: “See, I have engraved you on the palms of My hands.”

We may not have a permanent marker on earth for this little one, but there is an eternal marker engraved on the One who knew my grandbaby before he or she was in the womb. You can be assured the names of each member of my family are there too.

When there are no answers, there is always Jesus, the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father and the Prince of Peace. He is indeed Immanuel, God with us.

2. Draw near to God and each other.

The devil will play with your mind when you are hurting and tired. He will fool a person into thinking that such a death must be the judgment of God. But beloved, that is absolutely false! The Lord is whispering to my daughter and son-in-law right now, “I love you, let’s spend more time together; I will help you through the fire, the struggle and the pain.”

Hold each other

One doesn’t need to carry this burden alone. Hold on to each other, call a friend and embrace quiet moments with the Prince of Peace. Often, those who have gone through a miscarriage are the best counselors and agents of healing for the Lord. Seek someone out who has walked in your shoes.

3. Grief is real, God sent and therapeutic.

Every member of our family is experiencing all the stages of grief — denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. It is normal and helpful to the orchestra of one’s soul, mind and body to allow time to grieve any loss.

Mary and I found it beneficial to attend a worship service for those who lost a loved one this past year. We were given an opportunity to memorialize our grandbaby in a tangible way by placing a named ornament on a tree.

To those who have had a miscarriage, don’t brush it aside. Take time to experience the loss. Don’t be embarrassed to talk to someone about your deep sorrow.

Thank you for praying for the Hughes/Letizia family. Because Jesus lives, we will one day have all the time in glory to spend with the child we celebrated this Thanksgiving. But for now, we press on in the Wonderful Counselor’s strength and Immanuel’s presence.

OPINION

> "Sacrifice and significance, who can understand the real cost and the real victory but God?"

LEO ENDEL

Executive director, Minnesota-Wisconsin Baptist Convention

"I shared the gospel with her, and she just cried and said, 'I want to do this more than anything in the world,'" said **Sammy Gilbreath, retired director of the office of evangelism for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions**, on sharing the gospel with a flight attendant years ago.

"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," said **Tyshawn Gardner, assistant professor of biblical and religious studies at Samford University.**

Is it possible having true compassion for someone will change their life? It did for the ones Jesus encountered during His ministry. While we may not be able to heal a blind man or raise someone from the dead, we can walk alongside a person in need and possibly change the outcome of their situation.

Amy Hacker
the-scroll.com
"Compassion makes the difference"

"My prayer has always been that God would allow me to see each of my children come to Christ," said **Paul Chitwood, president of the International Mission Board,** on baptizing his daughter Lilly. "I felt that leading them to Him was my most important job as a father, and once that job was complete, I would be content with whatever happened to me."

"We'll pray for people even when they don't pull in. We'll do it if they ask us to pray while stopped at a red light, or even if they just honk as they drive past," said **Jamie Hobbs, pastor of New Hope Baptist Church in Dallas, Georgia,** on the church's drive-thru prayer ministry.

"As far as evangelistic efforts go, I think the more hooks you have in the water, the more fish you're likely to catch," said **Daniel Wilson**, **director of the office of evangelism for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions**. "Different techniques work in different places and for different churches."

From the *Twitterverse*

@smcconn

"When people realize God is against their sin — not them as a person — they may begin to trust Him with their choices."
—@LizzyHaseltine

@_MichaelKelley

Tried to write a simple post about why the Bible is important. Three reasons:

1. Because of what it is.
2. Because of who we are.
3. Because of what it does.

@tim_lafleur

Let me encourage all believers to memorize Scripture.

When you internalize the Word of God, you give the Holy Spirit something to work with.

@ronniep

God is the Great Repeater.
He repeats His love to me.
He repeats His grace to me.
He repeats His mercy to me.
He repeats His kindness to me.

Repent and repeat the gospel to yourself daily. "If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?" (Ps. 130:3).

@PaulTripp

As the saints of old waited in hope for the advent of Jesus' first coming, we wait in hope for the advent of His second coming.

@claysmith79

If you surround yourself with critics who always look for the worst in others, don't be surprised if you end up becoming just like them. Honest criticism is needed at times, but if unchecked it can act like a cancer that spreads and is toxic to your soul.

@DianeLangberg

Trauma has a profound spiritual impact. Trauma raises questions about who God is. Victims are uncertain of His character; His faithfulness; His love and His capacity to keep us, to be our refuge. Trauma mutilates hope. It shatters faith. It turns the world upside-down.

@DanReiland

God certainly does have expectations of us, but He gives so much more than He expects of us. As leaders, that fills us up and helps us keep going!

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

Life: A sacred gift of God

Our culture devalues life. Often the unborn, disabled and elderly are treated in ways that devalue the image of God. Therefore, they devalue God Himself.

During my seminary days, I came to a new understanding of the value of all human life as I served as a chaplain both to individuals who lived with mental disabilities and to their families. These people, each an individual of worth created in the image of God, taught me much about God and ministry.

God's providential care

In the first six verses of Psalm 139, the psalmist expresses one wondrous thought: God's providential care of His people is beyond our knowledge or comprehension.

This passage celebrates our all-knowing God. He knows our inner thoughts as well as our lifestyle.

Psalm 139:7–10 reminds readers that God is with us. No one can flee or hide from the presence of God.

God created the entirety of our human nature, both our nonphysical and physical aspects. God observed us from the moment of our conception — when we were formless.

Psalm 139:14 is one of the strongest affirmations of the sanctity of human life within the Bible. The psalmist testified he personally knew through experience that God's works are wondrous.

In summary, Psalm 139 reassures every person that no one is to be treated like junk.

God knows you. God surrounds you. God made you. God leads you. And God holds on to you. God's thoughts should be precious to each believer. You are special.

Professor Mark Rathel
Baptist College of Florida
Commentary on Lifeway's Jan. 15 Bible Studies for Life lesson
The Baptist Paper

NEWS

3 stories you should know

Photo courtesy of the Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force

Helena Mayor Brian Puckett (right) is one of many Alabama leaders who declared January 2023 as Human Trafficking Awareness Month. More than 50 Alabama municipalities have joined the effort to prioritize human trafficking awareness and prevention in their communities, said Jamie Willett (above left) of the Alabama Human Trafficking Task Force. The task force will hold its annual summit Jan. 26–27 in Montgomery. Visit enditalabama.org for information. (TAB)

ARITF clarifies sexual abuse hotline protocol

The SBC's Abuse Reform Implementation Task Force affirmed Jan. 9 that information provided to the Southern Baptist Convention's sexual abuse hotline is confidential.

The ARITF statement came after retired attorney and sexual abuse survivor Christa Brown questioned Rachael Denhollander's role as both a victim's advocate and an adviser to SBC on its handling of sexual abuse. Brown's concerns were published in a Jan. 6 opinion article at Baptist News Global.

The hotline was established in May 2022 and is operated by Guidepost Solutions. Only Guidepost staff members receive phone calls, and if for legal reasons information must be conveyed to others, survivors are fully informed, the statement said.

The full statement is at tabonline.org/task-force-responds. (TAB)

Alabama abortion law prohibits pills, AG says

Alabama Attorney General Steve Marshall says all elective abortions are illegal in Alabama, and women in the state who use medication to induce an abortion could be prosecuted.

Alabama's Human Life Protection Act targets abortion providers for prosecution but does not criminalize women who seek an abortion. However, an older chemical endangerment law, originally designed to protect children from meth lab fumes and often used to jail pregnant women who abuse drugs, could be used, Marshall said in a Jan. 10 statement to AL.com.

An FDA rule change finalized Jan. 3 allows pharmacies to sell two drugs commonly used in what many call medication abortions. The new rule does not change Alabama law, Marshall emphasized. (TAB)

Persecuted church

Islamic State demands Christians, Jews submit, convert or face death

MAPUTO, Mozambique — Christians and Jews in the Cabo Delgado Province of Mozambique have been threatened with death if they do not convert to Islam or pay a jizya tax, levied on non-Muslim subjects of a state governed by Islamic law.

The Islamic State in Mozambique also threatened moderate Muslims with death if they do not join the ISM cause, reported the relief group Barnabas Fund. Paying the jizya tax, Barnabas Fund stated, would show submission to the Islamic caliphate.

In October, Islamic extremists staged numerous attacks in northern Mozambique, killing more than 20 Christians. In addition, they raped females and abducted boys to make them child soldiers.

ISM assailants often decapitate individuals during raids, Barnabas Fund reported.

Because of the level of violence in Cabo Delgado, the area has become known as the Land of Fear.

Mozambique is No. 41 on Open Doors' 2022 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

en.wikipedia.org

Two arrested in German minister's possible abduction in Mali

BAMAKO, Mali — Two people in Mali have been arrested in the possible November abduction of Hans-Joachim Lohre, a German minister who has lived in the country for three decades.

A police representative in Bamako, Mali, announced the arrests Nov. 24.

Lohre did not arrive for a service he was to lead Nov. 20, reported Barnabas Fund. Shortly before he disappeared, a vehicle with no license plates was seen at the institute where Lohre is a teacher, according to a neighbor.

Footprints on the ground near Lohre's car seemed to indicate a struggle occurred, said one of Lohre's coworkers.

Barnabus Fund said Lohre's disappearance may be the work of Islamic extremists. Such groups have targeted foreign missionaries for kidnappings for years. Jihadists seek to take over the north and central portions of Mali in order to establish Islamic law in the entire country.

Mali is No. 24 on Open Doors' 2022 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

NEWS ITEMS COMPILED BY CARRIE MCWHORTER AND LEIGH PRITCHETT

NEWS

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

Harold Hancock, retired missionary to South Korea and missions minister at First Baptist Church Montgomery, died Jan. 8. He was 85.

Hancock and his wife, Helen, served as missionaries in South Korea with the Foreign Mission Board (now the International Mission Board) from 1971 until 1980. His background was in music ministry, so he worked as a church music promoter among Korean Baptist churches. He taught George Beverly Shea how to sing "How Great Thou Art" in Korean for a Billy Graham crusade there.

HANCOCK

After returning to the U.S., he began serving as missions minister at FBC Montgomery in 1989. Under his leadership, the church moved from sending one missions team per year to sending 40 per year.

Hancock was preceded in death by his daughter, Lynda Taylor. He is survived by his wife, Helen; one son; six grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.

CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

Central Baptist Association made meals Christmas Eve for Coosa County inmates.

"I appreciate these men and women who volunteer their time to minister and provide a meal to our inmates," said Sheriff Michael Howell. "Thank you to our jail ministry team and all the local churches who made this possible."

Photo courtesy of Coosa County Sheriff's Office

Several churches are involved in the jail ministry, leading devotions in each cell block once a week, according to David Crowe, director of missions.

MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION

Rick Evans retired as pastor of Dalraida Baptist Church, Montgomery, on Dec. 31 after 23½ years. Previously, he served as pastor of Selma Baptist Church, Dothan, for five years before becoming the church's staff evangelist while going into full-time evangelism with his entire family. He was pastor of Enon Baptist Church, Montevallo, for 8½ years and was associate pastor of Prattmont Baptist Church, Prattville, for six years.

EVANS

He is a graduate of Troy State University and attended Beeson Divinity School at Samford University. He was a trustee of Lifeway Christian Resources for 10 years and served stints as vice chair and chair of the board.

He also has served as a trustee of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions and has served on several committees for Montgomery Baptist Association through the years. In 2011, Evans was honored to preach the Alabama Baptist State Convention sermon. He and his wife, Melanie, have three children and three grandchildren, one who is deceased.

MORGAN ASSOCIATION

Central Park Baptist Church, Decatur, honored two long-serving deacons with the title Deacon Emeritus on Jan. 8. David Whitten (left) served as a deacon from 1966 until 2020. Earl Marshall (right) served as a deacon from 1980 to 2020. Matt Haines is the pastor.

Photo courtesy of Central Park Baptist Church

NORTH JEFFERSON ASSOCIATION

Zac Goforth is the new associate pastor of **Enon Baptist Church, Morris**. In addition to assisting with pastoral duties, Goforth will bring leadership to the church's next gen, discipleship and international missions ministries.

He holds a bachelor's degree in education from the University of North Alabama and a master of divinity degree from New Orleans Seminary. He has served as minister of education at Sardis Baptist Church, Boaz; minister of students and recreation at Sardis Baptist; and minister to college students at East Memorial Baptist, Prattville.

GOFORTH

He and his wife, Natalie, have four children.

SHELBY ASSOCIATION

Mayberry Baptist Church, Montevallo, officially closed Jan. 1. At a special service Jan. 8, Pastor **Robert Lovelady** (left) and his wife, **Joanne** (right), received a plaque from Shelby Baptist Association's mission strategist Ric Camp, commemorating the church's 80 years of ministry. The property and building were given to the association.

Photo courtesy of Shelby Baptist Association

TUSCALOOSA CO. ASSOCIATION

Circlewood Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, is hosting evangelist Bob Pitman for "Spiritual Awakening in Uncertain Times."

Pitman will preach Jan. 22 at 10:30 a.m. and 6 p.m., and Jan. 23–25 at 6 p.m. Tuesday, Jan. 24, there will be a luncheon service at 11 a.m. Music will be provided by Circlewood's praise singers. Herb Thomas is pastor.

Retirement Centers names new president

Ken Schroeder is the new president of the Alabama Baptist Retirement Centers effective Jan. 10.

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, announced Schroeder's election to lead the entity in a Jan. 11 Facebook post, noting Schroeder "has distinguished himself as a leader."

Schroeder has served the Retirement Centers as administrative/accounting assistant since May 2022. He previously served as ABRC's financial director from 1995 to 2011.

SCHROEDER

Schroeder told The Alabama Baptist he sees his role as preparing ABRC for the future. The organization has "some challenging staffing concerns for the future as many of our valued staff members at our retirement centers will themselves be retiring within the next 5–7 years," he said. "I believe my tenure as president will be a bridge to the future."

Schroeder holds a bachelor's degree and a Master of Business Administration from Samford University.

He has served as minister of music at Raleigh Avenue Baptist Church, Birmingham; Shiloh Baptist, Sardis; and First Baptist Selma. He also was intake coordinator and pastoral counselor for Adult & Teen Challenge of Alabama, a Christ-centered drug and alcohol recovery program, for several years. (The Alabama Baptist)

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

From heartbeats to health services

Ultrasounds, post-abortion care part of PRCs' efforts to provide hope, help

(*continued from page 1*)

One recent client's story fits that narrative, Hogan said. Pregnant from an affair, the woman was determined to drive to Georgia for a quiet abortion after she left Sav-A-Life.

"She was served well here, and after she went to Georgia, she called back and told the nurse about her experience," Hogan said.

A place to go

She said the woman described sitting in a room full of around 60 women who had all paid cash to end their pregnancies.

Until it was struck down in November, a Georgia bill prevented a mother from having an abortion if a heartbeat was detected. Six weeks is about as early as a heartbeat can be detected.

The woman told Hogan the staff at the abortion clinic performed a perfunctory ultrasound but didn't really try to find a heartbeat.

"She went through with the abortion," Hogan said, "and she said the experience was horrendous and prays God will use her in the future to prevent someone else from going through it."

Hogan said Sav-A-Life wants to establish that kind of relationship with women so that even if they don't choose life, the ministry can be part of their post-abortion recovery.

"We give them a place to go if they have complications and can help them with bleeding or screenings if they need them," she said. "We want them to know we care."

Facebook photo

Green Valley Church in Hoover hosts a baby shower in November 2022 for expectant moms who completed Sav-A-Life's Gift of Birth class. The women were showered with love, gifts and prayer by church members.

It's all part of their overall ministry to offer hope and help. Hogan said their three Sav-A-Life locations in the Birmingham area are busy offering pregnancy tests, ultrasounds, STD/STI testing, treatment for men and women, educational programs and practical resources to support women so that they can choose to deliver and parent their babies.

"With the economy going where it was at one point, we really beefed up our program, even though we already had a robust one," she said.

The Fultondale location, North Jefferson Women's Center, gave out more than 7,000 diapers in one month recently, Hogan said.

'Miracle story'

In October 2022, Sav-A-Life opened a new location on the third floor of the Birmingham Metro Baptist Association building. Hogan said the road to a third Sav-A-Life clinic in the Birmingham area was "such a miracle story."

Even though the ministry was nearing capacity at its other two Birmingham-area locations — Vestavia and Fultondale — starting a third wasn't on Hogan's radar. But in 2021, she got a call from Chris Crain, BMBA executive director, wanting her to come and take a look at their empty third floor.

"It had a completely separate entrance, which is perfect for confidentiality, and it was a blank slate that still needed to be designed," Hogan said. "It was like God said to me, 'I'm in control of this.'"

More affirmation

The affirmations just kept coming, she said.

BMBA provided $200,000 for the build-out as well as the architect to do the design, and Shades Mountain Baptist Church and two individual donors also provided some funding. The Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions also provided an ultrasound machine through the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission's Psalm 139 Project, which aims to save lives by providing ultrasounds for expectant mothers across the nation.

"We are now fully open, and it's growing like crazy," Hogan said. "We're open three days a week right now, but hopefully in the next couple of months we will open five days a week."

To access a three-minute video from ERLC that can be shared with your church, visit vimeo.com/785098504.

PREGNANCY RESOURCE CENTERS

AROUND THE STATE

NORTH ALABAMA

- ***Real Life Crisis Pregnancy Center***
  104 W. Alabama Ave. Suite F
  Albertville, AL 35950
  256-878-1300
  reallifecpc.org

- ***Women's Resource Center Athens***
  727-D West Market St.
  Athens, AL 35611
  256-233-5775
  wrcathens.org

SOUTH ALABAMA

- ***Sav-A-Life Family Hope Center***
  116 Crescent St.
  Andalusia, AL 36420
  334-222-0644
  pregnancyctr.com

- ***Women's Resource Center of Escambia — Atmore***
  204 S. Pensacola Ave.
  Atmore, AL 36502
  251-368-4949

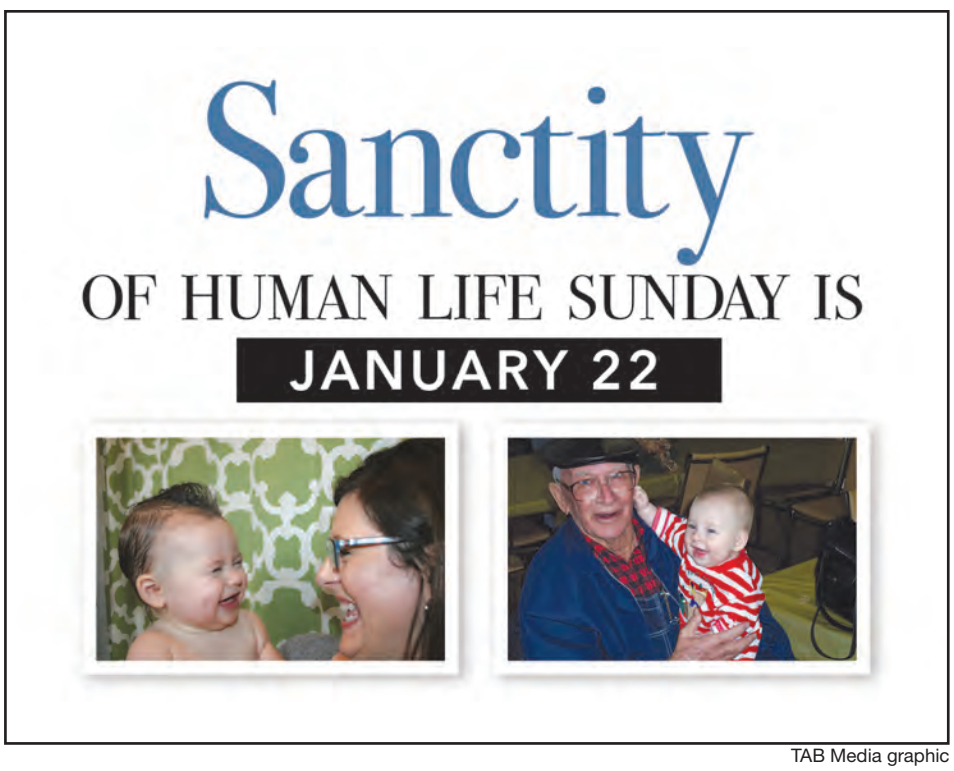
CENTRAL ALABAMA

- ***Sav-A-Life Alexander City***
  5 Lee Street
  Alexander City, AL 35010
  256-329-2273

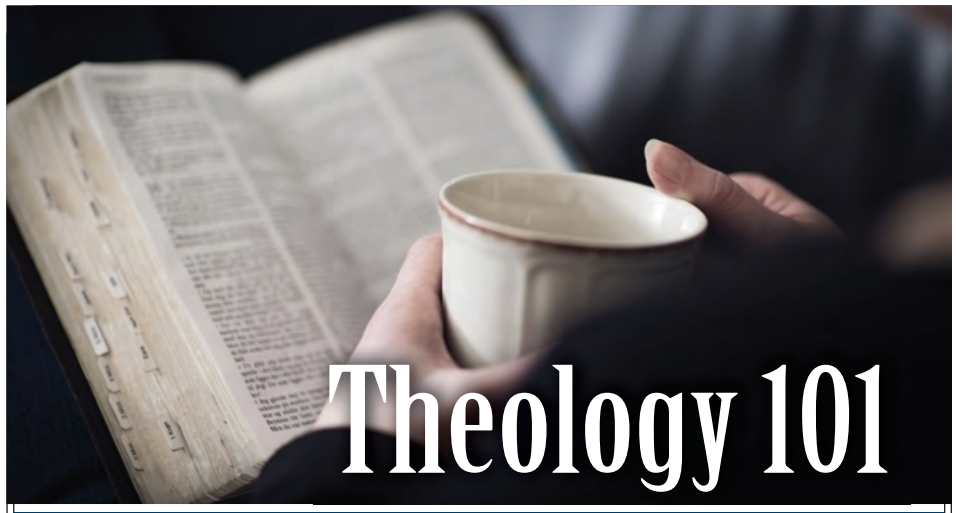
- ***HOPE Women's Services — Jacksonville***
  301 Henry Road SW
  Jacksonville, AL 36265
  256-237-9999

- ***HOPE Women's Services — Anniston***
  1506 Leighton Ave.
  Anniston, AL 36207
  256-237-9999
  hopewomensservices.com

EDITOR'S NOTE — Throughout 2023, TAB will cover the work of pregnancy resource centers around the state. We will print the names of a few PRCs with each article. To download a complete listing of PRCs, visit tabonline.org/prc.



TAB Media graphic



BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Discipleship

Being with Jesus

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
The Alabama Baptist

In the past two weeks, we pondered discipleship as a matter of coming to Jesus in order to follow after Him. This week we add another dimension to our theme of discipleship. It is also a matter of being spiritually with Jesus in a life of rich and meaningful fellowship.

The New Testament informs us that after a night of prayer, Jesus chose 12 men from among those who were following after Him in order that they might become His disciples: "Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him" (Mark 3:14). Our focus this week is on the importance of the little phrase "with Him."

Those original followers of Christ began a life of keeping company with Him. They lived in His presence. Their hearts sought unity with His heart. They enjoyed divine fellowship with the Son of God. To become a Christian is to be called into a life of fellowship with Christ.

That is exactly what John discovered and then sought to offer to others as He testified in writing, "That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). Again, we find the significance of fellowship with Christ in the phrase "with His Son."

While those original disciples were with Jesus bodily as well as spiritually, we have the privilege of being with Him spiritually as we learn how to walk in the Spirit consistently and obediently.

One important result of being with Jesus through the presence of the Holy Spirit indwelling our lives is the power to overcome our natural or sinful inclinations.

Galatians 5:16 puts it like this, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."

Keeping daily divine company with Christ through the agency of the Holy Spirit is the divine provision for victorious living in a fallen and depraved world.

Daily company with Christ

God's provision for us to live in company with Christ is an integral part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in this present age.

While in our sinful natures we may grieve the Spirit and at times resist Him, He will never leave or forsake us.

The entire course of a Christian's life has the marvelous possibility of us keeping daily company with Christ.

At the conclusion of our earthly life, we will enter into a glorious eternity with Him. The Bible puts it simply as "Christ in you the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).

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.

‘Reset, reimagine, reinvigorate’

National WMU board approves missions offering goals, hears from SBC leaders at January meeting

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Nearly 200 people from across the nation — and a few from around the globe — made their way to Birmingham Jan. 7–9 for national Woman’s Missionary Union’s annual January board meeting.

Among other business items, board members set this year’s goals for the two national Southern Baptist Convention missions offerings.

The 2023 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions goal was approved for $200 million, up from $196 million in 2022. The 2024 Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions goal will be $75 million, up from the current $70 million for 2023.

Board members also heard a challenge and a word of encouragement from national WMU Executive Director Sandy Wisdom-Martin.

Many moving parts

Wisdom-Martin compared a life lived in service to the Lord to the workings of a piano. A piano has many moving parts, she said, but they all play in concert for an audience of one “just like us.”

Piano strings also require tension, she added, and a piano’s sound relies on a mechanism that moves the internal hammers back into position as soon as they hit a string.

Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

Carolyn (left) and Leroy (right) Fountain from Louisiana, Lauren Sullen (center) from Georgia and Angela Jones (forefront) from Alaska enjoy a few minutes between workshop sessions at WMU’s January board meeting.

“Tension can change us,” Wisdom-Martin said, noting James 1:2–4. “But God can take the broken pieces and make something more beautiful. That gives me hope.”

Willie McLaurin, interim president and CEO of the SBC Executive Committee, preached during the Jan. 8 worship service and led a Jan. 7 breakout session on “Reignite Your Passion.”

McLaurin encouraged leaders to focus on a deeper intimacy with God, developing a passion for reaching the lost, improving their relational skills and persevering through difficulties.

Pointing to the meeting’s theme Scripture, Romans 12:12, McLaurin said, “Believers stay on task even in difficult situations ... but difficult situations have a way of taking our passions away.

“Our vision must be based in reality, which includes difficult times, and difficult times require perseverance.”

But even in difficult times, believers are to rejoice in Christ, McLaurin said, noting Philippians 4:4.

‘Finish strong’

“Create a climate of contentment,” he said. “Learn something new every day. Get some rest and relaxation. Finish strong.

“Follow the model of

Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

During the Jan. 8 evening session, Alabama WMU executive director Candace McIntosh (right) and IMB’s Todd Lafferty discuss global trends and the future of missions efforts.

Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

Nearly 200 Woman's Missionary Union leaders from across the nation gather for January board meeting at the national office in Birmingham. The Jan. 7–9 event included a variety of missions emphases.

Jesus, who was engaged, then disengaged and then reengaged."

In her Jan. 9 address, WMU president Connie Dixon spoke to the past of WMU but focused primarily on the organization's future.

"We need to reinvest in the future of WMU," Dixon said. "We can't just coast. We need to have the same attitude that our foremothers had — whatever it takes to assure every man, woman and child is taught missions discipleship; that all our churches are committed to compassion ministries; that we are constantly training up leaders for tomorrow in missions; and the importance of praying and giving to support our missionaries."

Members of the 2023 National Acteens Panel were announced Jan. 9. Destiny MacCarthy, a member of Eastern Hills Baptist Church in Montgomery, will serve alongside Leslie Almonte of New Jersey; Alyssa McMillon of North Carolina; and Hannah Rickman and Isavela Montanez Ojeda, both of Texas.

Throughout the weekend, the group also heard from North American and international missionaries, WMU staff members showcasing various areas of work and David George, president of the WMU Foundation, who made a special surprise presentation to retired missionary and author Rosalie Hunt (see story, this page).

Kevin Ezell, president of the North American Mission Board, spoke during a lunch presentation, and Todd Lafferty, executive vice president of the International Mission Board, closed out Jan. 8 with a dinner presentation.

Photo courtesy of Sandy Wisdom-Martin

WMU's Sandy Wisdom-Martin (left) and Connie Dixon (right) welcome SBC's Willie McLaurin.

Author Julie Busler, who serves as Oklahoma WMU president, also shared about her book "Joyful Sorrow."

Other breakout sessions offered throughout the weekend built off the ideas of reset, reimagine and reinvigorate. (See page 2 for more on how TAB Media staff members participated.)

WMU Foundation honors Rosalie Hunt with devoted patron award

Retired missionary and author Rosalie Hall Hunt received a surprise during the Jan. 8 general session of the national Woman's Missionary Union January board meeting in Birmingham.

David George, president of WMU Foundation, announced the new Rosalie Hunt Devoted Patron Award and presented the inaugural award to Hunt. Along with the award, a brick in the WMU Foundation's Walk of Faith will be placed in her honor.

To learn more about Rosalie Hunt's life, legacy and books, go to tabonline.org/rosalie.

Faithful service

The new award recognizes those WMU Foundation patrons who are faithful to their missions passion, consistently giving and demonstrating steadfast loyalty to making an impact through gifts.

Hunt, a former WMU Foundation board member, donates consistently to various missions funds and allows the proceeds of her many books to go toward supporting missions endeavors, including the Touch Tomorrow Today endowment managed by WMU Foundation.

The daughter of missionaries to China, she and her husband, Bob, served for 30 years as missionaries in eight Asian countries before retiring to Guntersville.

Hunt is a past president of Alabama WMU, served five years as national WMU recording secretary and currently serves on the board of directors for The Alabama Baptist.

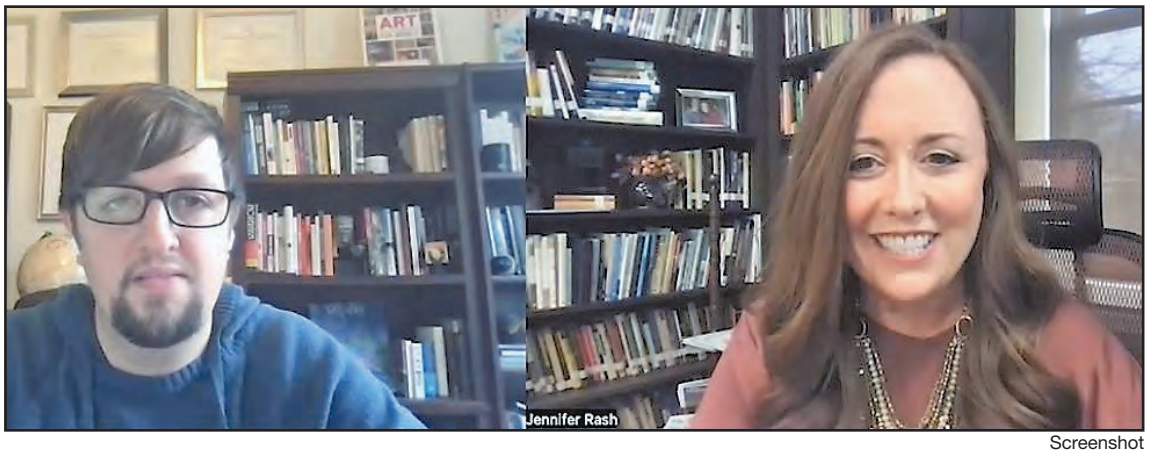
The Hunts' children, Jody and Alice, also recently announced plans to honor their parents by creating the Bob and Rosalie Hunt Mission Endowment through WMU Foundation. More details will be released in the coming weeks, George said.

WMU Foundation manages more than 100 funds and endowments that support missions causes.

Sign up at tabonline.org/wmuf-newsletter to receive regular updates from WMU Foundation. (Jennifer Davis Rash)

Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

Rosalie Hunt (left) receives WMU Foundation's inaugural Rosalie Hunt Devoted Patron Award. David George (on stage) and Amy Cook (right) present the surprise award named in Hunt's honor during the national WMU January board meeting.



Screenshot

In a TAB Media Special Report, Daniel Blackaby, the son and grandson of the authors of "Experiencing God," joins host Jennifer Davis Rash to share about the Collision.

How churches can engage the next generation

By Michael Smith
The Alabama Baptist

Attempting to engage young adults has churches, ministry groups and even parents busy researching, swapping ideas and trying to keep up with cultural trends.

About the time they think they've found what might resonate with the next generation, something — or everything — changes.

Daniel Blackaby, the son and grandson of the authors of "Experiencing God," launched the Collision in 2019, with a ministry goal of equipping and challenging Christians to collide with their culture for Christ.

In a TAB Media Special Report, Blackaby joined host Jennifer Davis Rash to discuss his work in this area.

Cultural themes

By using articles, video, social media, podcasts, livestreams, public speaking and published resources, the Collision strives to help Christians see where God is working in the culture and join Him — themes from "Experiencing God."

"[We focus] on the difficult issues in culture, observe what's going on and ... [consider how to] guide and equip people," Blackaby explained, "not necessarily just to give them a bunch of answers, but equip them to be able to ... see where God is at work even in the craziness that's going on in our culture."

Blackaby said the foundational biblical passage for the Collision is Acts 17:16–34.

Posture of listening

"Paul entered Athens — essentially the Hollywood of the day — the cultural arts and culture center and where the theater was and the poetry was and the philosophers were," Blackaby noted. "You might expect [Paul] to sort of go in guns blazing — he has all the answers."

But "he demonstrates a posture of just listening. He doesn't go in [thinking], 'I have the answers, they need the truth, I'm going to give it to them.' But you get a sense that he actually takes his time to observe, to see what's going on."

Blackaby said some of the questions he and the Collision are asking include:

- What are the popular movies right now?
- What are the issues with which young adults wrestle, such as identity, stigma, hurt from authority and dealing with broken families?

The ministry is learning from the stories being told and by asking young adults about their struggles.

One of the Collision's goals is sparking cultural conversations.

"Part of a conversation is talking, but a big part is listening and asking good questions and being attentive," Blackaby asserted.

He thinks one misconception about younger generations is that they're antisocial or technology has isolated them.

"I think because of technology, we assume that they're not relational, but they're very relational," Blackaby declared. "They want, especially with older generations, people to listen to their story and get to know them."

For more information, visit thecollision.org.

He noted younger generations like Gen Z are "more involved in activism and helping in the communities than any generation before."

"There is this passion to serve, relate and make a difference," Blackaby explained. "Millennials and Gen Z are just not driven by finances and monetary success as much as, 'I just want my life to matter. I want to change people and change the world.'"

Young adults are valuable assets, Blackaby said, but the church tends to keep giving them baby food when they want more and want to serve.

"The younger generations can handle a lot more than we give them credit for," he asserted.

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Place a classified ad below for $1 per word. For more information call 205-870-4720, ext. 200, or email ads@thealabamabaptist.org. To place an online classified ad for $9.99/month, visit thealabamabaptist.org/classifieds.

CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR
Spring Bank Baptist Church in Silas, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a full-time pastor. Please email your resumé to: Mike Thorn at michaelcthorn@gmail.com. Phone: 251-744-4081

PASTOR
Crossroads Baptist, Elgin, Alabama, is searching for a full-time/bivocational spiritually led pastor. To apply or ask questions, email us at crossroadsbcelginal@gmail.com or visit crossroadsbcelginal.com.

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, Missouri. 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.

MINISTER OF MUSIC
First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Alabama, is seeking a candidate to lead our worship ministry. Please submit resumés to: office@fbcwoodstock.org.

OTHER POSITIONS

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

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TAB Highlights is an email newsletter delivered every Monday–Wednesday–Friday with the day's top stories from the world of faith-based news. To sign up, email news@thealabamabaptist.org.

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Sunday Evening

Ben Stubblefield
Pastor, Spring Hill Baptist Church, Mobile

Willie McLaurin
Interim President and CEO, Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention

2023 State Evangelism Conference

January 29-30

Sunday·5:30-7:45 pm, Monday·8:30-11:45 am

Lakeside Baptist Church, Birmingham

FREE ADMISSION, no registration.

evangelizeAL.org/SEC

Monday Morning

Fred Luter
Pastor, Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, New Orleans

Mac Brunson
Pastor, Valleydale Church, Birmingham

Chuck Lawless
Senior Professor of Evangelism & Missions, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

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Everybody.

Alabama WMU will have a gift for all ministers' wives.

FREE
Full Moon BBQ Lunch
Noon Monday

FEATURING SPEAKER
Mark Clifton
Senior Director of Replanting, North American Mission Board

TOPIC: *Biblical Church Revitalization: It's Not About Numbers*

No afternoon or evening session on Monday.

‘Everyone can do something’

Pastor encourages community, association to get involved in foster and adoptive ministry

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

When Chris Woodall and his wife, Stacy, got married, adopting children was part of their plan.

“We wanted our family to be a picture of the gospel,” he said.

But before they adopted their first son, Robert, they also got a good look at the importance of a healthy foster home. Robert had been abused before entering foster care and had a lot of behavioral issues when the Woodalls first met him at a school where they worked.

They found out later that the abuse had continued in his foster home, which broke their hearts. So they brought him into their family.

‘Knit our family’

They later adopted another son, Adrian, and Woodall said God “has knit our family through the adoption of two sons and the birth of an additional son and daughter.”

The needs of children have been front and center for them since the Woodalls first opened their home.

“As an adoptive parent myself, I want to see more Christians involved in that,” said Woodall, pastor of Pinckard Baptist Church.

Grassroots effort

So he’s been working on a strategy to help his church and others in the Dale Baptist Association connect more with the needs of children in their area. The strategy — We Care: Foster and Adoptive Ministry — started with a grassroots effort among the association’s pastors to educate their congregations about the need through lunch and learn events and special emphasis Sundays.

Woodall led the way with an Orphan Care Sunday event Nov. 6 featuring the testimony of Amy Atkins, an adoptive mother in the Dothan area, and a message from Rick West, partnership specialist for Alabama Baptist Children’s Homes & Family Ministries.

During his message, West said the trauma foster children face will never be forgotten.

“Trauma leaves scars and memories that are there forever,” he explained. “Orphan ministry is both a horrible and a wonderful thing. To be taken from their biological parents is the worst day, and yet it is the best day to see God give them a new family.”

Photo courtesy of Chris Woodall

Chris and Stacy Woodall are strong advocates for children in need of permanent, loving families. Their oldest son, Robert (center front), 27, was adopted when he was 10. His younger siblings are Adrian, 24, adopted at 13 (back right), Judy Beth and Carter.

Photo courtesy of Chris Woodall

Chris Woodall (left), pastor of Pinckard Baptist Church, presents Rick West, partnership specialist for Alabama Baptist Children’s Homes & Family Ministries, with a love offering his church collected for ABCH on Orphan Care Sunday, Nov. 6.

West recounted stories of several children who had their futures altered for the good by families willing to step in and care for them. He challenged the audience to get involved in foster care ministry in some way, whether opening their home as a foster family or supporting other foster families or childcare ministries.

“Everyone can do something,” Woodall declared.

For more information about Alabama Baptist Children’s Homes & Family Ministries and how to get involved in foster care or adoption, visit alabamachild.org.

‘Umbrella of support’

He said that’s the message he hopes will catch on in his area: Everyone can foster, adopt or support. That’s what Woodall sees as the heart of James 1:27, which says the religion God accepts is to visit widows and orphans in their distress.

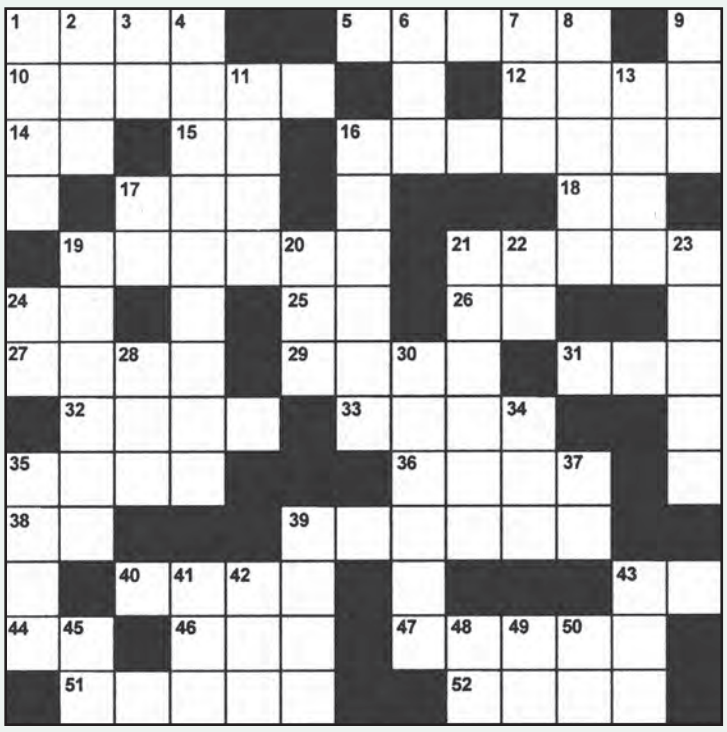
While some church members may need to step up and open their homes, others can organize an “umbrella of support” and come around families, providing meals or other resources, Woodall suggested. He said he also would love to see things like quarterly fellowships for families and continuing education.

“Big picture, I would love to see within our association a huge response, to not only see God work in our church but also see that spread in our association and beyond,” Woodall said.

He is developing the strategy as part of his doctoral project.

“If every church has one foster family, we could take care of the crisis in Alabama, and those children would be in a Christian home.”

CHRISTIAN crossword



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ACROSS

1. Hid from ____ and from generations. (Col. 1:26)
5. ____ is your reward in heaven. (Matt. 5:12)
10. The ____ shall come and take ... our place. (John 11:48)
12. I will not ____ to speak. (Rom. 15:18)
14. For example.
15. Missouri.
16. ____ thy son, he shall build My house. (1 Chron. 28:6)
17. David ... feigned himself ____. (1 Sam. 21:12, 13)
18. ____ I my brother's keeper? (Gen. 4:9)
19. The power of ____. (Esther 1:3)
21. As ____ obeyed Abraham. (1 Pet. 3:6; alt. spelling)
24. How can these things ____? (John 3:9)
25. Truth ____ Consequences.
26. Ambush between Bethel and ____. (Josh. 8:12)
27. All sailors can tie a ____.
29. An authoritative standard.
31. Into captivity unto ____. (Amos 1:5)
32. Where are the gods of ... Hena, and ____? (2 Kings 18:34)
33. Amos, ... the son of ____. (Luke 3:25)
35. A middle point between extremes.
36. A unit of dry measure.
38. Above-ground subway.
39. ____ and Bartholomew. (Matt. 10:3)
40. ____, Tekel, Upharsin. (Dan. 5:25)
43. Let us ____ over unto the other side. (Luke 8:22)
44. These ____ght Milcah did bear to Nahor. (Gen. 22:23)
46. Prefix having to do with the earth.
47. I write not these things to ____ you. (1 Cor. 4:14)
51. Simeon that was called ____. (Acts 13:1)
52. In the top of the rock ____. (Judg. 15:8)

DOWN

1. Height times width.
2. ____, and Magog. (Rev. 20:8)
4. But a certain ____. (Luke 10:33)
6. City in Brazil.
7. Why make ye this ____, and weep? (Mark 5:39)
8. Absalom's sister. (2 Sam. 13:1)
9. As a ____ gathereth her chickens. (Matt. 23:37)
11. Drifts off to sleep.
13. Rome. (Ital.)
16. The excellency of Carmel and ____. (Isa. 35:2)
17. Pray ye to the Lord for ____. (Acts 8:24)
19. Jacob called the name of the place ____. (Gen. 32:30)
20. A free electron.
21. Hannah ... bare a son, ... called ... ____. (1 Sam. 1:20)
22. They fled before the men of ____. (Josh. 7:4)
23. Speed it up!
24. Book. (abbr.)
28. Eggs.
30. Whitewater.
34. 1,101 in Roman numerals.
35. What the hand wrote on the wall. (Dan. 5:25)
37. Kitchen Police. (abbr.)
39. Balak brought Balaam unto the top of ____. (Num. 23:28)
41. In the white of an ____. (Job 6:6)
42. Formerly.
43. Jewel.
45. I am glorified ____ them. (John 17:10)
48. Cursed is ____ that curseth thee. (Num. 24:9)
49. But also to die _____ Jerusalem. (Acts 21:13)
50. Mom.

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Report shows rise in charitable donations

An annual report on giving to evangelical Christian nonprofits, including churches and other ministries, found giving to the United States' largest churches fell by more than 6.6% in 2021, despite a rise of 4% in charitable giving nationwide.

New donors and large donations were especially hard to come by, according to the report.

The findings appeared in the 2022 State of Giving report, released in December by the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, an accreditation organization that sets standards for ministries' financial management and reporting.

123rf.com

The report's authors examined cash-giving patterns to more than 1,800 ECFA members, drawn from financial statements from those nonprofits. All told, ECFA members received more than $19 billion in cash donations in 2021. They also received $11.3 billion in revenue from fees and investments and $4.7 billion worth of in-kind donations.

Different avenues

Many Christian groups other than churches saw increases in keeping with the overall rise in philanthropic giving, and some did far better. Donations to Christian foundations (65.8%), anti-human trafficking groups (28.9%), K–12 schools (18.3%), church planting (12.2%) and pregnancy resource centers (14.5%) saw some of the largest increases.

Giving to Christian charities overall was up 3%, adjusted for inflation, according to the report. That tops overall charitable giving in the U.S., which dropped by just under 1%, according to Giving USA data cited by ECFA.

The report also finds that giving went up by 1.8% from 2016 to 2021.

Giving to churches

Those numbers made the decline in giving to churches (-6.6%) and youth ministry (-2.9%) all the more stark. Churches with budgets under $2 million saw giving go down by 8%, while those with budgets of more than $20 million saw giving go down by 2.5%.

Many charities and churches alike struggled to find staff and volunteers.

The churches in the ECFA are larger than the average church in the United States. According to the 2020 Faith Communities Today study, which looks at congregations from a wide range of faith groups, the median congregation has a budget of $120,000, down 20% from 2010. Most congregations in the U.S. have budgets of less than $100,000, but because larger churches draw so many people, about half of Americans (51%) attend a church where the budget is $1 million or more.

The ECFA study found that 45% of nonprofits had trouble finding enough volunteers, 53% had problems finding enough staff, 29% struggled to keep existing donors and 63% had issues finding major donors who gave $10,000 a year or more.

More than a third (37%) tapped their reserves in 2021, while 43% left reserves untouched. Just under 1 in 5 (17%) were able to grow their reserves. (RNS)

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Colossians 3:23

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What does branding mean for your church?

By Mark MacDonald
The Alabama Baptist

Many pastors wonder, "is church branding scriptural?" It's a great question that stems from a misunderstanding of what branding is.

Church branding is simply differentiating your church so you're known for something that defines your ministry focus. It's more than a name, denomination or mission and vision statement. Instead, it allows someone to know why they need you.

Branding started with cattle as a way to differentiate cows owned by various farmers that grazed together. Their owners created a unique, simple stamp that was used to identify which cows belonged to each farm. Each farm ultimately became known for their consistently used symbol. A brand quickly identifies ownership.

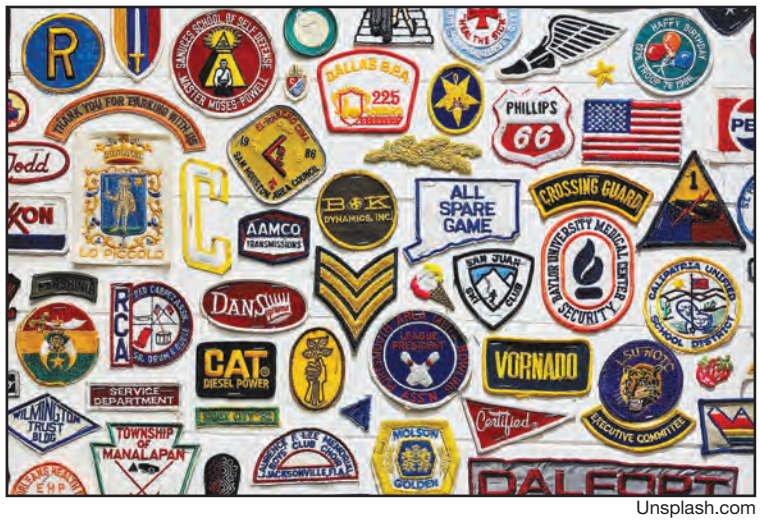
What does that mean for churches? Since there are many churches in a community, outsiders often perceive sameness. To them, one church is like all churches. We know that's not accurate. To make a choice easier, a local church needs to position itself differently.

A brand thread emphasizes the church's focus based on the people in the community who need Jesus. And that thread — a simple tagline — is what the local church becomes known for. It becomes the church brand.

Unique thread

A church brand thread puts into words why someone needs you and controls the unique language of what you're offering, in order to connect people with the gospel message.

Then, because of the visual world we live in, a local church needs a unique, simple symbol that quickly brands everything they produce.



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The church logo starts to represent the church by controlling the look of its website, signage, print, social media and other communications so the ownership of the ministry's communication is quickly identified. It shouldn't look like other logos. It should be unique.

So is church branding scriptural? The short answer is yes.

Jesus told His followers they'd be known for love (John 13:35). That's Jesus using a controlled brand message for the Church. The scriptural brand for all churches is love.

However, to differentiate, a local church needs to be known for something uniquely received as love, a unique solution to the needs of the people in the community around the local church. This will get their attention so we can connect them to Christ's love.

Setting priority

A church brand should never water down biblical messaging. However, to get the community's attention, we should concentrate on temporal needs first, much like Jesus did when the woman approached Him at the well (John 4). He engaged with her about water (her immediate need) and then connected to the eternal ("water springing up ... for eternal life"). This lets the church be known for something relevant, needed and engaging.

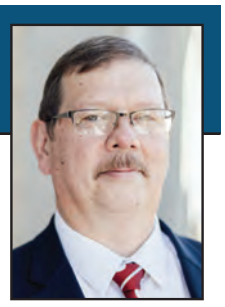
A strong brand will help the church evangelize biblically and get the community's attention so we can introduce others to Jesus.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For January 22

Explore the Bible

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.
Executive Director of the Center for Christian Calling, University of Mobile



I AM THE BREAD
John 6:26–40

John introduces readers to Jesus' self-revelations. His intent is for readers to believe Jesus is the Son of God, the incarnate Anointed One. God introduced Himself to Moses as "I am" (Ex. 3:6), so it is reasonable for the evangelist to include statements from Jesus which equate Him with God. Review the earlier lessons from this quarter to see the list of "I am" passages.

Jesus multiplied enough bread and fish to feed thousands with leftovers to spare. Afterward, the disciples launched across the Sea of Galilee without Him. He walked on water that night to catch up with them.

Wants? (26–29)

Word spread quickly around the Sea of Galilee. A crew from Tiberias looked for Jesus where the feeding took place. Not finding Him, they went to Capernaum, where He had arrived and was with His disciples.

Jesus discerned their simple question — "How did you get here?" — revealed their intent. They did not want to see God's miraculous work. They wanted a free lunch.

We experience this same reality today in our churches, as some members are more drawn to temporal satisfaction than hungering for the things of God.

Jesus told them to change their focus. Stop working hard solely to eat. Instead, do the work that leads to eternal life. What work of God is this? It is to believe in the One whom the Father sent.

Manna (30–34)

Jesus' words were not enough to satisfy them. Again, they mentioned food, "Remember how Moses gave manna to our fathers in the wilderness? What kind of sign are You going to show so we will see and believe You?"

Was this lack of faith on their part? Yes and no. On one hand, their request for another sign was a lack of faith because they were looking for something temporal. They already believed the testimony of others about the feeding of thousands. On the other hand, Moses said prophets must be tested to authenticate God-given prophecy (Deut. 18:20–22). True prophecy is normally accompanied by an immediate fulfillment. Unfulfilled false prophecy leads to a death sentence.

Jesus said to them, "I am the Bread of Life; whoever comes to Me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in Me shall never thirst."

John 6:35

It comes as no surprise that this group was seeking a sign from Jesus. John intentionally highlighted seven signs through his Gospel. Matthew's account also records Jesus rebuking those who asked for supernatural signs (Matt. 12:39; 16:3). In addition, Paul wrote that "Jews ask for signs" (1 Cor. 1:22). As a former Pharisee, he confirmed what the gospels stated. The Pharisees and their followers sought after signs.

Satisfied (35–40)

God provided the manna, not Moses. But the manna did not satisfy the freed slaves' temporal appetites. God gave them manna, and they complained. Plentiful quail was His next provision, and still they complained: "We would rather go back to Egypt. We had a better menu there!"

Jesus is greater than manna, which only lasted a day at a time. And God provided it only until they entered the promised land. Moses wrote that manna was insufficient for a satisfied life (Deut. 8:3). Jesus quoted this verse when tempted in the wilderness during the inaugural period of His ministry, "... man must not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). You will only find spiritual satisfaction when you place your faith in Jesus.

Bible Studies for Life

By Tyshawn Gardner, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies, Samford University

DOES IT AGREE WITH THE BIBLE?
Genesis 3:1–6

In Genesis 3, we catch a glimpse of the origins of sin and how every creature since Adam and Eve has been corrupted by sin, therefore inheriting a sinful nature. The cause of sin was the distortion of and disobedience to God's Word. His Word is eternal and transcends philosophies, intellect and cultural ideologies.

Don't question God's Word. (1)

God's Word is inspired by Him and is authoritative. Satan deceived our first parents, Adam and Eve, by casting doubt on the precision of God's Word. Sinful thoughts led to sinful actions.

When believers are unsure of God's will or are uncertain what to do, we can consult His Word. When we are in doubt, we should never oppose what is clear and plain in Scripture.

Scripture is the starting point for all knowledge and for all human behaviors. Casting doubt on one part of God's Word soon casts doubt on more of it. His Word is trustworthy.

Paul reminds us "all Scripture is God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16). God's Word is the highest authority in the world.

Don't alter God's Word. (2–3)

Adam and Eve altered God's Word. God revealed His Word to Adam. Although Satan altered God's Word, Adam's knowledge of it should have led to obedience to God, rather than to the altered words Satan gave Eve. Humanism and pluralism are on the rise in our world. Society rejects authoritative and objective truth, leading people to believe truth is relative and subjective to the individual and the circumstance.

There is no circumstance where God's Word should be altered to fit our political persuasion, cultural proclivities or individual preferences.

Like Adam and Eve, we sometimes alter the Word to fit our personal pleasure, taste and desire. The consequences of our disobedient actions are beyond our ability to repair.

When sin drives our cravings, creating cultural pride, greed and fear, we may take Scripture out of context in an attempt to justify our actions. This requires us to suppress the Spirit within us. James sums up this process by stating, "each person is tempted when he is drawn away and enticed by his own evil desire. Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death" (James 1:14–15). We should never allow lust and pride to cause us to compromise God's Word.

Don't contradict God's Word. (4–6)

We should never read the Bible out of context. Nor should we use a cherry-picking method of Bible reading, only choosing and learning Scripture that supports our point of view. When our actions don't line up with the Word, we are out of line in our fellowship with God. He desires us to live in harmony with Him, worship Him, fellowship with Him and serve Him in peace and joy. When our actions contradict His Word, we forfeit peace and incur needless pain.

Sometimes our families, our political parties and our favorite social groups do not live up to the Word of God. In these times we must ask God for grace and courage to do what is right according to His Word. When we study the Word of God through the presence of the Holy Spirit and listen to the Spirit of God within us, we will obey God's Word.

Now the serpent ... said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You can't eat from any tree in the garden'?"

Genesis 3:3

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Timothy Cockes
Baptist Press

‘Jesus Revolution’ filmmaker hopes movie can bring revival

The producers of “Jesus Revolution,” a movie depicting the famous Jesus Movement of the late ’60s and early ’70s, would love to see the film spark a similar spiritual revival in America today.

Opening in February, the film tells the story of the spiritual awakening in the country that took place more than 50 years ago. Many historians classify the movement as the greatest spiritual awakening in American history.

“I think God just showed up in our country in a unique way at a unique time,” said Jon Erwin (“I Can Only Imagine,” “American Underdog”), the film’s co-director and producer. “It was a rediscovering of the essence of Christianity. It was just such a simple movement.”

The movement successfully united disparate Christians, including some older and more traditional and some younger, more charismatic hippie believers.

Photo by Dan Anderson

“Jesus Revolution” tells the story of America’s Jesus Movement of the 1960s and ’70s, which was sparked in large part through the unlikely friendship of Pastor Chuck Smith and a young hippie preacher named Lonnie Frisbee. The two are portrayed in the movie by Kelsey Grammer (left) and Jonathan Roumie.

Beginnings

It largely began in California, when a pastor named Chuck Smith started opening the doors of his church (Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa in Santa Ana, California) to the younger generation of Jesus Freak Christians who had freshly abandoned the partying ways of their peers.

Much of the bridge between Smith and the younger generation was built through his friendship with a hippie preacher named Lonnie Frisbee. Despite their differences, the two grew a close bond and worked together as the movement spread from California across the whole country.

In the film, Smith is portrayed by iconic actor Kelsey Grammer (“Cheers,” “Frasier”), while Frisbee is played by Jonathan Roumie, who plays Jesus in the wildly popular streaming series “The Chosen.”

The film’s trailer, released in November 2022, has already amassed almost 9 million views on YouTube.

Erwin said the idea for the movie came while he and his brother were making “Woodlawn,” a football movie also set in the early ’70s.

While researching that movie, Erwin came across the famous 1971 issue of Time magazine with a colorful front-page image of Jesus. The magazine dubbed the spiritual revival happening in the country “The Jesus Revolution.”

Since discovering the article, Erwin said he has been obsessed with the movement during the last seven years of his filmmaking career.

“That magazine article was just this ray of hope in a dark time,” Erwin said. “It’s this incredible article about this revival that was sweeping America and the spiritual awakening happening among young people with a spontaneous outburst of love, hope and joy in a time that was very similar to right now.”

One of the aspects of the movement Erwin was most enamored with was the diversity of people involved, particularly the connection between the older generation of Christians with younger people going through their own spiritual journey.

Connection

“There is some sort of magic in hanging out with people that are nothing like you and these people just focused on celebrating what they agreed on, which was Jesus,” Erwin said.

The Southern Baptist Convention and many individual Southern Baptists were also affected by the Jesus Movement. One of those individuals is Greg Laurie, pastor of Harvest Christian Fellowship in Riverside, California.

The film shows Laurie, portrayed by actor Joel Courtney, as a teenager experiencing the movement firsthand. Laurie would make a decision for Christ as part of the movement and be baptized at Pirate’s Cove, a resort in Southern California where Harvest still holds some baptisms today.

In addition to discovering the love of Christ as part of the movement, Laurie also met his wife, Cathe, during that time. Their love story is a main part of the movie’s storyline.

Erwin said he hopes the movie will both encourage non-Christians to come to Christ and Christians to a next step in serving Jesus.

“I hope when people see this movie, [those] who may be sitting on the sidelines, that they realize God can use them too, and they can be a part of this story,” Erwin said.

“God can change people. ... I hope people have the same thought that I have that maybe this could happen again in our time.”

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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Power of prayer

By Henry Durand
The Christian Index

Church's drive-thru prayer ministry a spiritual 'signal' to motorists

Turn around."

That's what driver Jack Shultz said he felt God tell him after he drove past New Hope First Baptist Church's drive-thru prayer ministry one Saturday in Dallas, Georgia.

Shultz explained he was in a hurry, but asked God to put it on his heart if he should stop for prayer. He believes God responded.

New Hope Pastor Jamie Hobbs said he heard similar stories from a lot of people that stopped and asked for prayer after seeing the signs in front of the church.

This is the third time the church has held a drive-thru prayer event since the first one just before Easter of this year, Hobbs said. The events have been so successful the church plans to hold them quarterly going forward.

Church member Amanda Brooks calls the ministry effort the best idea the church has had in years.

The church's strategic location at a busy Dallas intersection means many drivers see the eager volunteers waving and holding signs.

Community outreach

"We'll pray for people even when they don't pull in. We'll do it if they ask us to pray while stopped at a red light, or even if they just honk as they drive past," Brooks explained.

Friendly faces and warm smiles greeted drivers that pulled into the church parking lot on a chilly autumn morning before being asked for their prayer requests.

In addition to prayer, everyone that stops and doesn't have a church home also receives an invitation card.

Photo courtesy of The Christian Index

New Hope First Baptist Church volunteers (L to r) Robert Endicott, Robby Hall and Debbie Lloyd pray for Erica Mitchell, who described the experience as a "great thing." The church held its third drive-up event on Nov. 19.

Melinda Bowen holds up a sign encouraging people to pull into New Hope First Baptist Church in Dallas, Georgia, for drive-thru prayer Nov. 19.

Photo courtesy of The Christian Index

On Sunday after the event, Hobbs said the church had two visitors as a direct result of the drive-thru prayer ministry.

"We've also seen an increase in our members getting involved in missions, since they can see firsthand the impact we're making on the community," he added.

The drivers that pulled in were just as enthusiastic about the event as the volunteers.

Photo courtesy of The Christian Index

Pastor Jamie Hobbs prays for Stephanie Semasky and Lane Weddington, on phone, after Semasky pulled into the parking lot.

Feeling compelled

Terrone Prescod drove up in his delivery vehicle because he felt compelled.

"I'm going through something right now, and God put this in my way like a signal," he said.

When Prescod said he didn't have a Bible, prayer warrior Robby Hall gave him one to take with him.

Jarrell and Precious Brown also took advantage of the offer of prayer. Brown said the couple could have gone in any direction that morning, but "God led us this way."

That's exactly the response that encourages Hobbs to continue this ministry, which benefits the community and also inspires the church.

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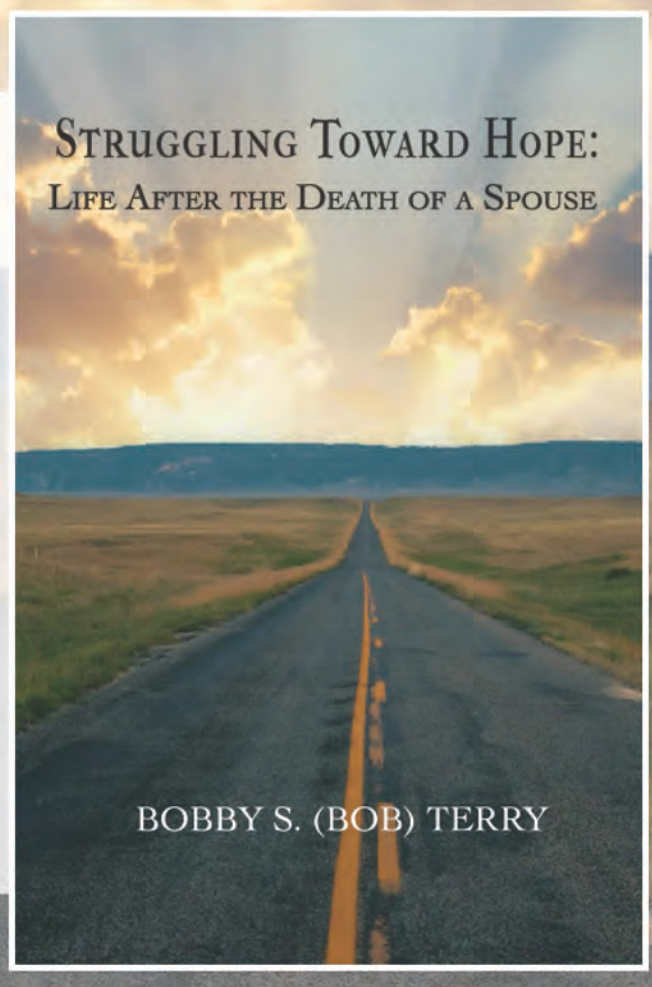
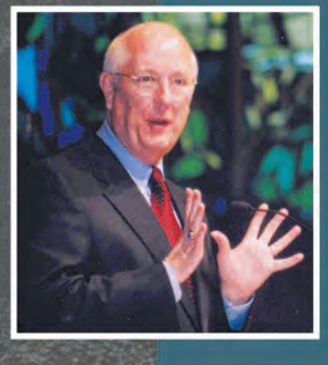
STRUGGLING TOWARD HOPE:

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 IN 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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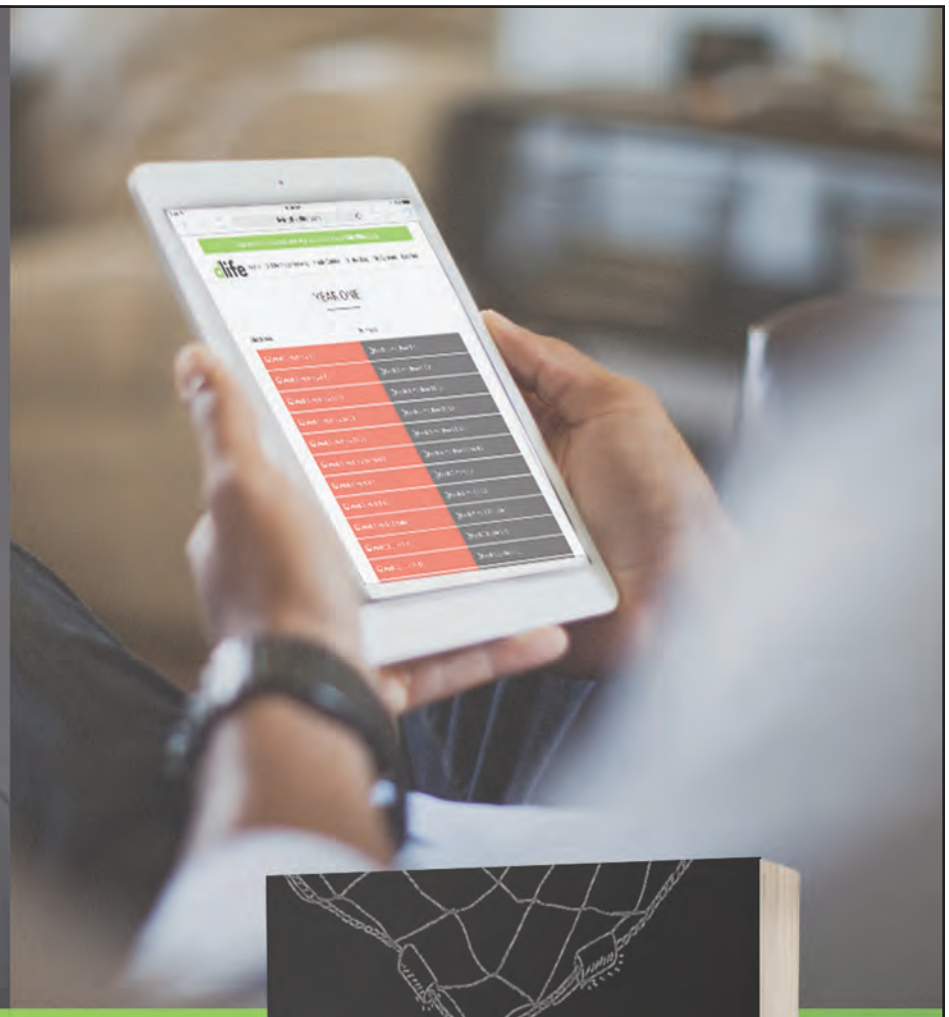

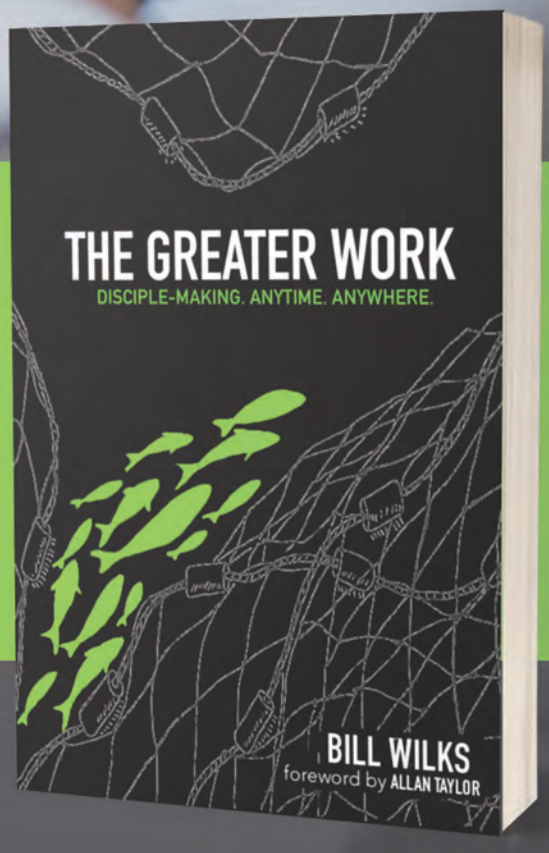

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