

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

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Anniston family enjoys time as extras in 'The Chosen'

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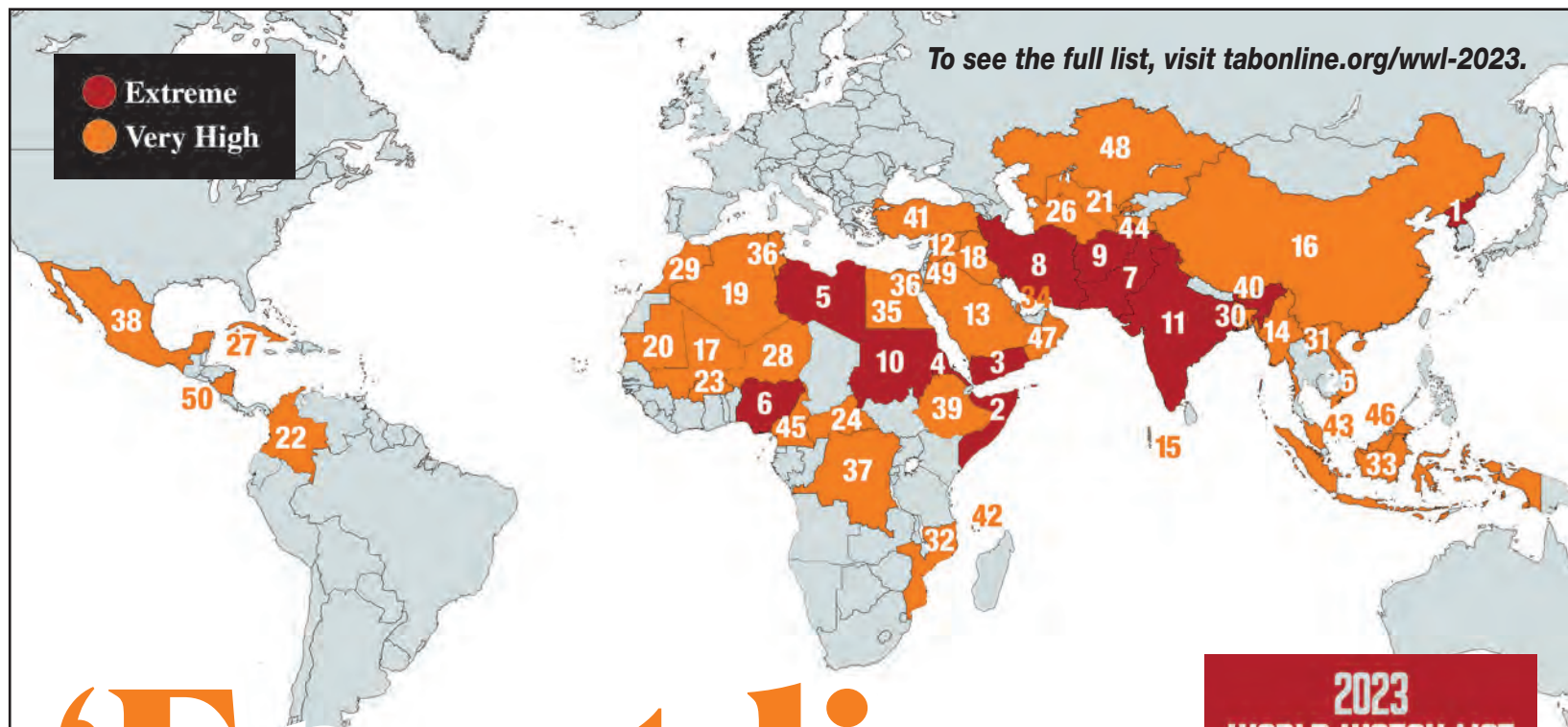
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'Front line of attack'

North Korea retakes No. 1 spot on World Watch List of most dangerous countries for Christians

By Carrie B. McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

North Korea is again atop the list of countries where persecution of Christians is highest, Open Doors said Jan. 17 in the release of its 2023 World Watch List.

North Korea had been in the top position since 2002 until last year, when Afghanistan moved into that position. Af-

ghanistan holds the No. 9 spot on the 2023 list.

"Afghanistan looks like a significant drop, and it is," Lisa Pearce, interim CEO of Open Doors US, told The Alabama Baptist. "But the reality for the indigenous Christians that remain in Afghanistan is that life is just as dangerous and just as brutal as last year."

Pearce said that in the aftermath of the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan, many Christians fled the country. Many others were killed, and the Christians who remained were driven further underground.

"It was dangerous before to

meet, but now fewer are getting caught because of the fear they live under," Pearce said. "The reality is that their situation has not improved, but that's why the numbers are different."

Increased arrests

North Korea earned its highest-ever persecution score. The score reflects increased arrests of Christians and the number of underground house churches discovered and closed. In North Korea, Open Doors reported, arrest usually means execution or life in one of the nation's "horribly inhumane" camps for political

prisoners, where prisoners face near-starvation, torture and sexual violence.

Timothy Cho, who escaped imprisonment in North Korea, said, "Christians have always been in the front line of attack for the regime."

"Their aim is to wipe out every Christian in the country. There can only be one god in North Korea, and that is the Kim family."

The country's new "Anti-Reactionary Thought Law" criminalized any published materials of foreign origin in North Korea. Though used for other purposes, it is being used (See 'Extremely,' page 11)

2023 WORLD WATCH LIST

- 1 North Korea
- 2 Somalia
- 3 Pakistan
- 4 Eritrea
- 5 Yemen
- 6 Nigeria
- 7 Pakistan
- 8 Iran
- 9 Afghanistan
- 10 Sudan



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TAB Media graphic/photo courtesy of Unsplash.com

Bethel Baptist Church in Bessemer uses TAB Media's Hosted Church service, which offers a turnkey solution for churches, associations and nonprofits interested in getting a website set up.

Hosted Church provides positive experience for Bethel Baptist

By Grace Thornton

The Alabama Baptist

When Calvin Bell, pastor of Bethel Baptist Church in Bessemer, mentioned to a friend that his church didn't have a website, the friend recommended contacting The Alabama Baptist.

That might not seem like the natural choice — to reach out to a publication when you need a website. But TAB Media Group's Hosted Church service offers a turnkey solution for churches, associations and nonprofits interested in getting a website set up.

Hosted Church offers templates from which to choose, then the team personalizes the site's colors, images and information based on your preferences. They offer regular security scans and backups to keep the information safe, as well as providing quick help if something breaks.

They can make changes throughout the year as needed, or they can train you how to make changes yourself.

Amazing service

"The customer service has just been amazing," Bell said. "Our experiences with the website have been all positive, especially the

courtesy of the TAB staff reaching out to us each month."

He said the church's site has a professional look and helps the community get to know who Bethel Baptist is.

'Front door'

James Hammack, digital services manager for TAB Media Group, said that is the most important reason for a church to have a website.

"In almost all contexts, the church website is the front door to the church in today's digital age," he explained. "In many ways, to have no web presence can communicate a message to potential visitors that you don't want them. The church website is the first step to inviting people into your church."

Bell said Hosted Church was a great solution for his congregation to get that "front door" open.

"We didn't have the money in our budget to spend a lot on building a website, and what Hosted Church built for us has been quality," he noted. "It has certainly been a valuable tool for us."

With TAB Media Group's Hosted Church, a low annual cost covers everything needed.

To see Bethel's website, visit bethelbcbessemer.org. For more information about Hosted Church, visit hostedchurch.com or call 205-870-4720, ext. 108.

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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JENNIFER DAVIS RASH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Carrie Brown McWhorter
Content Editor

Content, design and production
Lauren C. Grim
Dianna Cagle, Daniel Gilliland
Robin McCall, Holly Smith
Grace Thornton

Digital products
Shawn Hendricks
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Digital services
James Hammack
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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.



RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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



jrash@thealabamabaptist.org



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When God's call is clear, why do we sometimes have to wait?

In the end, we all desire for our lives to have mattered — that we had value and made a positive difference along the way.

Some seasons provide ample opportunity for us to thrive and sense success; other moments drag us down with discouragement and disappointment.

Still, God is working through it all, and we are growing into the person needed for the next phase of our assignment.

If we don't give up or become impatient and take a different route, we will get to see what God has been up to and be privileged to be part of it.

Author and Bible study leader Richard Blackaby explains it clearly in "The Inspired Leader: 101 Biblical Reflections for Becoming a Person of Influence."

He says, "God is positioning His servants in crucial roles throughout the marketplace so they can impact peoples' lives globally, change their world and uplift His name.

"God placed you where you are for a purpose," Blackaby writes.

"Do you know what it is? You may have plans for your career and for your company, but God has one too. Whose plans are you following?"

So often we let our preferences and our desire to quickly achieve our goals overrule the more methodical and purposeful path God intends.

We push for a packed schedule, sold-out event and all-in support.

We may indeed have a clear vision of God's call on our lives, but the temptation always exists to take charge and determine within our own minds how to live out the call.

Praying through every step while calmly and confidently waiting on the Lord can be an exercise in discipline and fortitude.

In our task-oriented, achievement-driven society, it is difficult to move at a slower, strategic pace, especially when we are evaluated at every level by how influential, how engaged and how popular our efforts are.

At the same time, it can be agonizing trying to understand why others can't see the value of what we know God has clearly called us to share with them.

How can they not see it? How can they not get involved? How can they not carve out time in

their schedule to participate in the service project, discipleship opportunity or outreach activity? Why won't they get trained?

Why would they miss out on ordering the newly published book or Bible study curriculum?

What keeps them from fully supporting the cause that is so important to the group? Can't they see how vital it is?

Why would they not want to participate when it makes sense to us?

Believe me, I've sat with that last question a lot through the years, but when I think through it objectively, I remember how complex life is for all of us.

Every situation is different and each person walks through various seasons of life that require a triage mentality.

Limited capacity

We can't truly know the weight another person shoulders, nor can we know all he or she is attempting to juggle.

It's like the saying goes, we can't really understand unless we've walked in their shoes.

Our mental, emotional and physical capacities all fall within different limits — but limits exist for all of us.

We also need to learn and grow through specific experiences to be ready for the full extent of God's call on our lives, and that takes time.

So, instead of fretting about what isn't happening yet or who isn't present, what if we took the opposite approach?

What if we focused our energy on staying in tune with the Lord and looking for His guidance every day and with each step?

What if we poured our energy into developing and polishing our skills for the areas we've been called?

What if we trusted the Lord with what thriving, succeeding and influencing means in our lives? What if we fully invested in those in front of us?

Instead of looking around at all the ones not participating, let's keep our attention on those God has given us to love and help equip for their next steps.

Everyone matters — and each one of us can make a positive dent in the harshness of this world while glorifying the Lord and sharing about His grace. The key? Letting Him show us the way.

"Those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength. ... They will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary."

Isaiah 40:31

Your Voice



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

Yellow Shirt Army responds in times of crisis

By Rick Lance

Executive director, State Board of Missions

When terrible events happen, who are you going to call? The answer is often the Yellow Shirt Army — namely Southern Baptist Disaster Relief workers.

Across the SBC, many state conventions have trained people who make up this Yellow Shirt Army.

They come from churches of all sizes: small, medium and much larger congregations. They come from urban areas, smaller cities and rural communities.

These trained members of the Yellow Shirt Army are called on to do some very important work in

times of disasters. They move trees off houses and out of driveways so those affected can begin to rebuild their lives.

The Yellow Shirt Army has mudout crews who know how to do some of the so-called “dirty jobs.”

Others devote themselves to providing food to those in need. I cannot imagine how many meals have been prepared and served throughout the years by members of the Yellow Shirt Army.

During my tenure as a state missionary serving Alabama Baptists, I have been an eyewitness to the sacrificial service of Southern Baptist

Disaster Relief in my own state as well as in others.

Members of the Yellow Shirt Army are among my biggest heroes. They give that cup of cold water in Jesus’ name when it is needed most.

Furthermore, of eternal significance, each has been trained in sharing the gospel. Even as tragic circumstances persist, it’s always a blessing to hear the reports of people trusting Jesus as

Lord and Savior through the witness of a member of the Yellow Shirt Army.

When Hurricane Katrina hit Mississippi and Alabama, and later caused the levees to flood New Orleans, members of the Yellow Shirt Army moved into action in the affected areas. Their work was remarkable.

For decades now, the Yellow Shirt Army has been hard at work serving the Lord in basic and essential ways during hurricanes, tornadoes, floods and fires. You won’t know each of their names, but they will do their best to be there when tragic events such as these happen.

From one who admires the work of this Yellow Shirt Army, I must express my gratitude for service beyond the call of duty.

Join me in offering a big “thank you!” to all those who are members of our Yellow Shirt Army. May they continue to be used by our Lord in times when breaking news breaks our hearts.

EDITOR’S NOTE — This article was originally published at ricklance.com.



LANCE

Letters to the Editor

I am a second-year doctoral student at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and I want to share how your Cooperative Program giving is making a difference in equipping ministers to take the gospel to the ends of the earth.

My doctoral concentration is biblical counseling. I recently attended my third weeklong intensive seminar at SBTS. There were about 15 students in the classroom. What a joy to be in a class that is diverse and representative of the nations.

Your CP giving is helping students from many states and countries receive sound biblical training. I had the privilege of sitting with and training alongside minis-

ters who will go back to Canada, Myanmar, Africa, California, Kentucky, Indiana, Louisiana and Alabama.

As a small church pastor in southeast Alabama, I am encouraged that our annual CP allocations, together with the CP contributions of over 40,000 plus SBC churches, help send qualified ministers to take the gospel to the nations.

Thank you, Alabama Baptists, for your generosity and investment in CP as we take God’s truth and hope in Christ to the nations. Tell your people of the impact their giving is making!

Pastor Chris Woodall
Pinckard Baptist Church
Pinckard, Ala.

Oftentimes you don’t know where things are going long term. You don’t know exactly where the support is going to come from. But as you take steps, and God confirms [His] call, God shows up. It just builds that faith more and more as you go along.

Kevin Kilgore, founder
Through the Eyes of Our Tribe ministry

Christian leadership is social in nature, for the one who exercises such leadership actually participates with others in the syndrome of human struggles and seeks ways to maximize our functioning within those struggles.

Morris Murray Jr.
Jasper, Ala.

To God, the reckless are courageous; the unclean are forgiven; the foolish are loyal; the victimized are redeemed; the ruined are worthy. Through God’s eyes, we all are transformed.

Addie Lee Frierson
the-scroll.com

We may be unaware of the extent of God’s work in our lives or surroundings, but He is at work.

Professor Douglas Wilson
University of Mobile

“Remember, the next great WMU heroine may be sitting ... in your GA group!”

CONNIE DIXON

President, national Woman's Missionary Union

Spiritual drifting happens to all of us. Due to our sinful nature, we are all prone to drift from our relationship with Jesus. ... Maybe you have transferred your affection elsewhere: career, finances, yourself, worldly substitutes. ... These days appear bleak to us. Fear and doubt grip us. Sorrow falls on us like a heavy cloud. But where we stand today is primed for revival.

Bill Brewster, author
“Revival: It's Time to Live Again”

Exodus 20 reminds us that God Himself rested on the seventh day of creating the world, so shouldn't we rest every seventh day from cleaning it up? To switch metaphors, if marathon runners skip the

hydration stations during the race, they will not finish it. We need to breathe and hydrate emotionally and spiritually during this [race], or we will not make it through.

Mark Gonzales
Executive director
Royal Palm Association
of Churches
Fort Myers, Florida

What I try to impress on my students is that you cannot draw water from an empty well, and you must minister to your own soul. ... You are going to make some bad decisions if you start ministering on empty.

Jeff Struecker
Assistant professor
Southeastern Seminary

Ever pull an Adam and Eve? Some things just look too good to pass up? Maybe for you it's savoring a social media ruckus, thinking unkind thoughts about a neighbor or harboring anger. People around you may have no suspicions of what's on your mind. But you can't hide it from God. Why not 'fess up now and clear it up with Him?

Darryl Wood
“A Personal Word from a Retread Pastor”

I firmly believe that anything we can do to prevent sexual abuse in our churches, anything we can do to aid survivors and help them, is money well spent and reduces our expenses in the long run.

SBC President Bart Barber

From the *Twitterverse*

@chrhcurnudgeon

He took my sins and my sorrows,
He made them His very own;
He bore the burden to Cal'ry,
And suffered and died alone.
How marvelous! How wonderful!
And my song shall ever be;
How marvelous! How wonderful!
Is my Savior's love for me!
#thirdverse

@jeffwiesner

With some exceptions, a pastor should lead change in his church more slowly than his instincts demand. He does well to think in terms of years, not months.

@JToddL

Large crowds came to Him, including the lame, the blind, the crippled, those unable to speak and

many others. They put them at His feet, and He healed them. So the crowd was amazed when they saw those unable to speak talking, the crippled restored, the lame walking.
—Matthew 15:30–31

@DrKBlackwell

It is not about me, it is all about Him, for the sake of them.

@desiringGod

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”
—Ephesians 4:32

@jeffschreve

“I pity ... any individual who is so unfortunate as to get into the habit of holding race prejudice. In the sight of God, there is no color line,

and we want to cultivate a spirit that will make us forget that there is such a line anyway.”

—Booker T. Washington

@trillianewbell

“If God is for us, who can be against us?”

Nothing and no one can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

I've cried a lot lately. I feel weak. The Truth ministers grace to my heart and mind. Maybe you need this too.

@williemclaurin

The Lord will fulfill His purpose for me; Your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of Your hands.

—Psalm 138:8

Pro-life movement not over

The future of the pro-life movement is growing much more complex. We are not merely fighting to protect women and children from a badly reasoned 1973 Supreme Court precedent.

We also are fighting to defend them against international activists, other states, domestic activists and even the current administration.

Addressing the use or expansion of abortion pills and abortion trafficking in all their forms will become essential as we seek to protect human life in the womb in America.

But there is another side to this picture.

Legally protecting children in the womb alone fails to address the very real and pressing needs of vulnerable mothers ... who are in desperate need of material, emotional and social support.

We must rally around women as well. We need to find a way to restore motherhood to its rightful status as a role to be celebrated, cherished and protected.

It will take charity, humility and tireless work from all parts of the pro-life movement in order to do so: part legislative, part community based, part spiritual ministry and part prayer.

It is possible, and it is imperative we work to realize it.

Millions of children in the womb and their mothers depend upon us.

Pray in gratitude for each life rescued by existing abortion restrictions, many enacted by the Dobbs decision.

And work fervently to rescue children in the many states where their lives are not yet protected or valued. The very fabric of our society depends upon it.

Chelsea Youman
National director of public policy for Human Coalition

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3 stories you should know



Screenshot from WSFA 12 News coverage

First Baptist Church Wetumpka hosts an open house for its replacement building four years after a EF2 tornado irreparably damaged its chapel. The Jan. 19 open house involved a ribbon cutting and showcased items salvaged — stained glass windows and front doors — from the previous building. The 201-year-old church's new facility features a room for public meetings, welcome desk, library and a children's play area. Clint Landry is pastor. (TAB)

Stand for Life organizes to unify pro-life efforts

A new organization that grew out of an alliance of more than 100 pro-life groups has launched.

Stand for Life was established this year with the purpose of uniting the pro-life movement to establish a culture that affirms every human being, including the preborn child, is made in the image of God. It also seeks to strengthen support for women who experience unexpected pregnancies.

The new organization met with partner organizations Jan. 18–19 in Washington in conjunction with the 50th annual March for Life on Jan. 20.

Elizabeth Graham, previously the vice president of operations and life initiatives for the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, is Stand for Life's chief executive officer. (BP)

Researchers correlate religiosity, well-being

An analysis of U.S. social data from the early 1970s to 2000 suggests the repeal of “blue laws,” which often closed businesses on Sundays, prefaced a decline in religiosity and a subsequent rise in “deaths of despair” among middle-aged white men.

The repeal of blue laws beginning in the 1960s created “discrete changes in incentives to attend religious services,” according to the study. Data from the General Social Survey showed an increase in deaths by drugs, alcohol and suicide beginning in the early 1990s.

Researchers noted the mortality changes were not correlated with a decline in religious beliefs but rather a decline in religious participation.

The results underscore the relationship between well-being and religiosity, they concluded. (TAB)

Persecuted church

Islamic extremists claim deadly attack on church in DRC

BENI, Democratic Republic of Congo — More than a dozen worshippers were killed, and more than 60 others were wounded, in a bombing at a church Jan. 15 in the Democratic Republic of Congo. A group believed to have ties to Islamic State claimed responsibility for the attack.

The Congolese military is reportedly blaming the extremist group Allied Democratic Forces for the bombing, according to the BBC.

The group said in a statement, “Let the Congolese forces know that their continued attacks on the Mujahideen (those who engage in jihad) will only bring them more failure and losses.”

More than 10 Christians were killed June 21 when Islamist extremists ambushed three vehicles just days after a similar deadly attack.

Allied Democratic Forces reportedly carried out the attack. Militant forces blocked the road and shot all occupants of the vehicles before setting them ablaze, the rights group International Christian Concern reported.

DRC is No. 37 on Open Doors' 2023 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

Military fires on Bible school in Myanmar, injures four

KUTKAI, Myanmar — Shelling directed at a Bible school in Myanmar injured four male students in a campus dormitory.

On Nov. 3, Myanmar's military, called the Tat-



IMB photo

madaw, fired on the school, which is a ministry of Kachin Baptist Convention in Shan State, reported the relief group Barnabas Fund.

The four men suffered shrapnel injuries when a shell hit a tree. They were treated at a hospital.

The Tatmadaw staged a coup in February 2021, seizing power in the mostly Buddhist country. For a number of years, the Tatmadaw has targeted certain populations for persecution. Among those are the predominately Christian Chin, Kachin and Karen ethnic groups, Christian communities in Kayah and Shan states, and mostly Muslim Rohingya, said Barnabas Fund.

The Tatmadaw occupied Moebye in Shan State for several days in September and placed mines around a church.

Myanmar (also called Burma) is No. 14 on Open Doors' 2023 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

Alabama news

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

▶ **Johnny Robertson** is the new pastor of **Walkers Chapel Baptist Church, Fultondale**. He attended Southeastern Bible College. He previously served as pastor of New Lebanon Baptist, Springville, and The Church at Morris. He also served as a deacon and small group teacher at Gardendale First Baptist. Robertson surrendered to the call to ministry in September 2011 and was ordained in 2014. He also works at Globe Life Liberty National.



ROBERTSON

He and his wife, Brenda, have two children and five grandchildren.



JETT

▶ **Brad Jett** is the new worship arts minister of **Hunter Street Baptist Church, Hoover**.

He holds a bachelor's degree in music education from Murray State University and a master's degree in church music from Southwestern Seminary. He previously served as worship pastor of First West, West Monroe, Louisiana. He and his wife, Bethany, have four children.

CLEBURNE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Lonette Berg** will be the featured speaker at Cleburne Baptist Association's Senior Friends luncheon Feb. 9 at 11 a.m. CST. Berg is the executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Lunch will be provided.

COVINGTON ASSOCIATION

▶ **Lance Maddox** is the new worship pastor of **First Baptist Church Andalusia**. He previously served as minister of worship of Eastmont Baptist Church, Montgomery, for seven years; and Tannehill Baptist Church, McCalla, for eight years.

Maddox also served at several other churches in the Bessemer Baptist Association (now part of the Birmingham Metro Baptist Association): Crossroads Baptist Church, Hueytown; Eastern Valley Baptist Church, Bessemer; and Faith Baptist Church (now River Road Baptist Church), Hueytown.



MADDOX

He was baptized, ordained and married at South Highland Baptist Church, Bessemer, where his dad, Ken Maddox, served as pastor before it became a part of The Baptist Church at McAdory. A graduate of Samford University,

Maddox and his wife, Sonya, have two daughters and two sons.

MARSHALL ASSOCIATION

▶ **Charles Teague** is the new minister of education, outreach and media of **Sardis Baptist Church, Boaz**. He holds a bachelor's degree in religion/religious studies from Charleston Southern University and a master of arts degree in religious education from Southwestern Seminary. He previously served as journey pastor of Canaan Baptist Church, Bessemer, for more than 18 years. He also served as pastor of Randolph Baptist and West Side Baptist, Eva. He also was a teacher at Bethel Baptist Christian School, Hartselle.



TEAGUE

He and his wife, Angie, have two children and one grandchild on the way.

SAND MOUNTAIN ASSOCIATION

▶ **David Crawford** is the new pastor of **Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church, Section**.

He also works at Buttram's Hosiery and previously served as pastor of Fuller Baptist, Ider; Trenton Missionary Baptist; Oak Grove Missionary Baptist, Stevenson; Macedonia Missionary Baptist, Shellmound, Tennessee; and Mount Zion Missionary Baptist, Section.

He and his wife, Teresa, have two daughters and four grandchildren.



CRAWFORD

To submit items for publication, please email news@thealabamabaptist.org. Send event announcements at least three weeks in advance and include a high resolution photo with your submission along with contact information in case there are questions.

Montgomery teen named to national panel

Destiny MacCarthy of Montgomery has been selected to serve on the 2023 National Acteens Panel.

MacCarthy, a member of the Acteens group at Eastern Hills Baptist Church in Montgomery, is one of five young women from four states who will serve on the panel in the coming year. The panelists were announced Jan. 9 during the final day of national Woman's Missionary Union's January board meeting, held Jan. 7-9 in Birmingham.

In addition to being an Acteen since 7th grade, MacCarthy has participated in several local missions efforts, including volunteer service at WorldSong Missions Place in Cook Springs.

She regularly attends Complete, Alabama WMU's annual gathering for teen girls and their leaders, and in 2022 was a member of Alabama WMU's Emerging Leaders program, a forum designed to enhance and develop the leadership skills and abilities of girls completing grades 9-12.

'Standout' leader

Trish Jackson, missions lifestyle strategist for Alabama WMU, said MacCarthy is a "standout" leader among her peers.

"Destiny was willing to come early to our weekend at Shocco Springs as a helper,"

Jackson wrote in recommending MacCarthy to be an Acteens panelist. "She joyfully did everything I asked her to do and more by adding her own creative touches to the rooms we prepared for the emerging leaders.

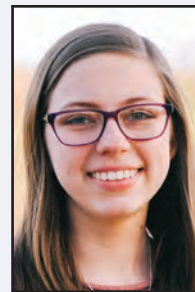
"Her gentle spirit listened well and served hard at this event. ... I was so thankful for her natural leadership and excellence." Sonja Peaspanen, Acteens leader at Eastern Hills, praised MacCarthy's encouragement and guidance of younger Acteens and her desire to grow as a disciple of Christ.

"Her love of God and her pursuit of a relationship with Jesus have ignited her desire to share the message of Jesus Christ with others," Peaspanen said.

MacCarthy will serve alongside four other panelists hailing from New Jersey, North Carolina and Texas.

Panelists serve as ambassadors for Acteens, WMU and missions during their year of service. Each panelist will be awarded \$1,500 through the WMU Foundation from the Jessica Powell Loftis Endowment for Acteens to assist with travel or academic expenses during the year.

The panel will be featured during the WMU Missions Adventures and the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting in New Orleans June 11-12. (The Alabama Baptist)



MACCARTHY

Anniston family enjoys time as extras in 'The Chosen'

By Carolyn Tomlin
The Alabama Baptist

People from around the world continue to provide financial support for "The Chosen," and thousands have served as volunteer extras on set.

One mother from Anniston decided to make it a family adventure during last summer's school break.

Rachel Nichols, along with her husband Byron and their two daughters, Isabelle (12) and Lillian (10), went to Dallas in June to be extras for an episode of the series.

"We had recently moved to Anniston from Gainesville, Florida," Rachel recalled.

"[And we] heard about this crowd-funded TV show where people contribute — a pay-it-forward adventure. And I thought, 'Let's do something different this summer!'"

Learning that 10,000 volunteer extras would be

needed, they contacted the production company and were accepted.

The family, members of Parker Memorial Baptist Church in Anniston, was given six months to make costumes, choosing to be either Greek, Roman or Jewish. Rachel searched in thrift shops for garments made from linen, which could be cut up and made into costumes, since the cotton plant was not native to the series setting and accuracy was important to producers.

Filming took place near Midlothian, Texas, which has terrain similar to the region of Jordan.

An international cast

"Seated on a sloping hillside, we were able to sit near the front of the crowd so we were able to interact with the actors," Rachel recalled. "We were near enough to be given fish and bread when it was



Photo courtesy of Rachel Nichols
The Nichols family of Anniston stands in front of a fishing boat used in the television series "The Chosen."

passed out. ... The producers gave us candy fish as a keepsake of the experience."

It was hot, which is not unusual for a Texas summer. The area was barren with no shade, and a hot, dry wind seemed to never stop blowing, she remembered. Some of the extras who were not used to the heat fainted, so an ambulance was on call.

Rachel said she and Byron were overwhelmed not only by the large number of extras, but by the thousands of Christians in one place.

"People represented many countries who had heard about pay-it-forward and wanted to come to America to be part of the cast," she noted. "At least 20 different languages were heard."

Rachel recalled people talking about how being part of "The Chosen" had affected their lives.

Multitudes

"Just being there surrounded by 5,000 people helped to visualize that large number," she related. "It was exciting to see Jonathan Roumie, the man who played Jesus, especially when he was preaching. As we boarded the buses, Dallas Jenkins, the producer [and director], went to every bus and shook everyone's hand."

"It was an adventure the girls will never forget," Rachel said.

"The Chosen' shows how the Bible story is relatable to the gospel, and how the disciples interacted with Jesus," she noted. "You look at the story and see yourself."

The series is available for no cost on "The Chosen" app or at Angel.com.

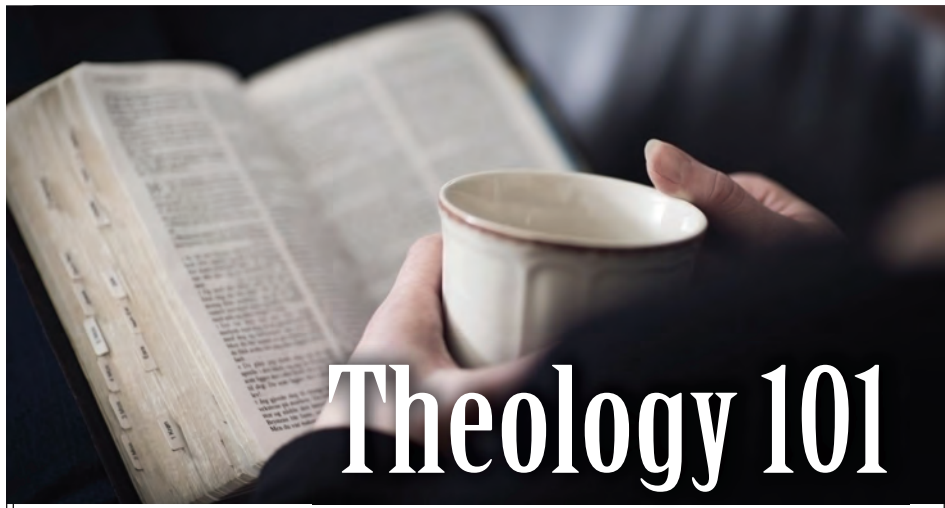
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Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Discipleship

Learning from Jesus

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
The Alabama Baptist

We continue in this opening month of the New Year to ponder the theme of discipleship. Using the biblical account of Jesus and the Twelve Disciples as our example, we have noted discipleship for them began, as for us, as a matter of coming to Christ in personal faith. This initial coming to Christ is to be followed by the enriching blessing of following Christ throughout the rest of our earthly time. This following after Christ means living our lives in fellowship with Him through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Living a life of spiritual fellowship with Christ through the Spirit involves for us the wonderful blessing of learning from Him. Such was the experience of the original Twelve who had the privilege of hearing Jesus teach and preach in the days of His flesh. In fact, the word disciple means a learner or student. Ancient teachers and philosophers gathered a group of learners around them to teach them by precept and by example.

The original Twelve were not highly schooled. In fact, people marveled that they were basically uneducated and untrained men, realizing only that “they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13). Their distinctiveness was their openness toward Jesus and their willingness to follow Him, observing Him and listening to Him.

As disciples, the Twelve learned from the Master Teacher, who

used parables and commandments, analogies and explanations, as well as Old Testament symbols and types as entryways for them into divine truth. The Twelve were like apprentices, learning on the job as they observed how Jesus conducted Himself and how He related to people — both to friends and to enemies.

Study His words

We who become Christ’s followers are also to be His learners. We study His words and meditate on His teachings, as well as ponder His actions and attitudes. We pray for guidance to know how those teachings and His example are to inform to our manner of living. To this end, we go to church, engage in Bible studies, chat with fellow believers and in multiple other ways seek to learn all we can about all that Jesus would teach us.

Learning from Jesus involves more than gaining information and insights. It includes becoming increasingly more Christlike in ways the Bible describes as “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22–23).

It is also a matter of attitude and behavior.

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.



Someone You Should Know

LILLIAN OVERTON

By Leigh Pritchett
The Alabama Baptist

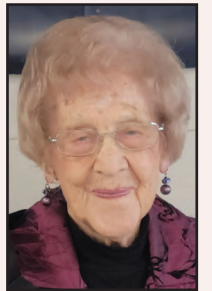
Many of Lillian Overton’s 100 years have focused on missions in her church and community. As a member at First Baptist Tuskegee, then First Baptist Opelika, she was active in Woman’s Missionary Union and also taught Sunday School, Bible Drill and what was then called “Training Union.” In addition, she rocked a lot of babies in the nursery through the years. Until recently she made hospital, hospice and shut-in visits. To support missionaries, Lillian recycled aluminum cans and saved dollar bills with “J” (for Jesus) in the serial number (family and friends continue that tradition). At East Alabama Medical Center, Lillian served 38 years in the Pink Ladies Auxiliary.

Q: Who was one of the most influential people in your faith life? Why?

A: My Dad. We had a good home life. We prayed and read the Bible daily and went to church when we could. Dad did whatever was best for his family.

MINISTRY:
Missions

CHURCH NAME:
First Baptist Church Opelika in Tuskegee Lee Baptist Association



LIFE VERSE: Psalm 23 and John 14

Q: What was a turning point in your life and how was God involved?

A: Recently I moved into an assisted living facility. I felt lost. I did not pray or read my Bible as I should. I just asked God, “Why me?” I stayed in my room alone. But Jesus told me, “No way, just trust Me.” Jesus put me back in my place. Now all is well.

Q: What has God been teaching you lately?

A: Patience and also trust. We must let go and let God handle our situations.

Q: If there was one thing you could tell your younger self about faith, what would it be?

A: God is faithful. He knows our needs — we just need to trust and obey.

Q: Have you read a book or heard a song that changed the way you think about God and faith?

A: I love all the old hymns — their messages are clear and meaningful. They always put me in a worshipful spirit.

Q: Does your church have any special traditions that mean a lot to you?

A: The Lord’s Supper and baptisms.

DO YOU KNOW A PERSON WHO SHOULD BE FEATURED AS

Someone You Should Know?

Send his or her name, a contact number and the reason you think he or she should be featured to:

Someone You Should Know
c/o The Alabama Baptist
3310 Independence Drive
Birmingham, AL 35209

or email it to:
news@thealabamabaptist.org.

Widespread

African nations dominate 2023 watch list as violence intensifies

By **Carrie Brown McWhorter**
The Alabama Baptist

Jihadist violence against Christians is becoming commonplace in countries across the continent of Africa, with more than half the countries in the region scoring very significant levels of persecution.

Five of the countries in the Top 10 on Open Doors' 2023 World Watch List of countries where it is most difficult to be a Christian are in Africa: Somalia (No. 2), Eritrea (No. 4), Libya (No. 5), Nigeria (No. 6) and Sudan (No. 10).

In its Jan. 17 announcement of the 2023 World Watch List, Open Doors said violent Islamist militants are attempting to destabilize Sub-Saharan Africa using extreme violence.

The Islamist campaign of terror is fueled by a lethal mix of trafficking, changes to the climate and an influx of mercenary soldiers from the shadowy Kremlin-backed Wagner Group, Open Doors reported.

'Heading into catastrophe'

Wybo Nicolai, founder of the World Watch List and former Open Doors global field director, told The Alabama Baptist the picture of persecution in Africa has "changed a lot in the last five years."

Though there is persecution all over the continent, violence has grown more widespread in countries to the east. There had been hope things would change for the better, he said, but Christians are increasingly being attacked in countries like Kenya and Tanzania where Christians are a majority.

"The whole region is heading into catastrophe," said Frans Veerman, managing director of World Watch Research. "The aim of Islamic State and affiliated groups is to destabilize the entire region, establish an Islamic caliphate — ultimately across the entire continent — and, long-term, they are confident this is within their reach."

The violence is most extreme in



IMB photo
Eritrean refugees hold a church service on the snowcapped peak of Israel's Mount Hermon. Eritrea is No. 4 on Open Doors' 2023 World Watch List.

Nigeria, where militants from the Fulani, Boko Haram, Islamic State West Africa Province and others conduct raids on Christian communities, killing, maiming, raping and kidnapping for ransom or sexual slavery, Open Doors reported.

Lisa Pearce, interim CEO of Open Doors US, described Nigeria as "in the heart of the fire."

"Christians are being driven from their homes, women are being raped and the pattern is expanding across Africa," Pearce told The Alabama Baptist.

She described preparing for a recent visit to Christians in Africa, who asked her to bring a black outfit and running shoes.

"The logic was that if we were attacked, I had a better chance of getting into the bush to hide if I was wearing black and running shoes," Pearce explained. "That's me for a week, but that's believers in Nigeria and many other African countries every day of the week."

Rise in motivated killings

Religiously motivated killings in Nigeria have risen from 4,650 documented for the 2022 World Watch List report to 5,014 documented for the 2023 report. That number repre-

sents 89% of the number of Christians killed for their faith globally.

Open Doors reports that Nigeria's government continues to deny the violence is religiously motivated.

"It isn't just governments in Africa that aren't facing up to the true nature of this religiously motivated purge, it's governments across the world. The price of this denial is incalculable, not just to Africa, but to the whole world," Veerman said.

Recent news

Between Dec. 18 and Dec. 21, 46 individuals were killed in mainly Christian areas of Kaduna State, reported Morning Star News.

Luka Biniyat of Southern Kaduna People's Union told Morning Star that thousands of individuals have been killed in hundreds of attacks in Kaduna in the past eight years. Christian leaders believe the herdsmen seek to take over the lands of Christians and impose Islam.

In Borno State on Dec. 19, Islamic State West Africa Province terrorists burned homes, killed livestock and destroyed harvests. In the same area nine days before, ISWAP invaded a home, killing a Christian woman and her preborn baby and shooting her husband.

Threats to believers in Latin America

Increased threats to Christians in Latin America are among the concerns noted in the Jan. 17 release of Open Doors' 2023 World Watch List.

Released annually since 1993, the list ranks the Top 50 countries where it is most difficult to live as a follower of Christ. This year, Nicaragua entered the list at No. 50, becoming the fourth country in the Western Hemisphere where believers experience "very high" levels of persecution.

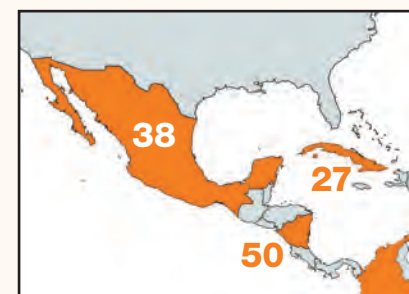
Colombia (No. 22), Cuba (No. 27) and Mexico (No. 38) also rank in the Top 50. Open Doors ranks three additional countries in the region as areas of "high persecution" — Venezuela, Honduras and El Salvador.

Wybo Nicolai, founder of the World Watch List and former Open Doors global field director, said there is a direct link between authoritarian governments with a communist/socialist ideology and the persecution of Christians.

"The power base does not like to be challenged," Nicolai told The Alabama Baptist. "If Christians are speaking up for their rights, they are seen as voices of opposition."

Gang activity and organized crime in Latin American countries pose other threats, he said.

"If you are a Christian and refuse to participate, the gangs that are in control of parts of the city or countryside turn against you," Nicolai said. "That puts more pressure on active Christians." (Carrie B. McWhorter)



TAB Media graphic, source: Open Doors

Extremely high levels of persecution

Annual assessment notes rise in surveillance by authoritarian regimes

(continued from page 1)
to track down Bibles and other Christian materials, both printed or electronic, Open Doors explained.

The rise of authoritarianism in many countries, especially in China, is one of the major trends Open Doors tracked in the past year.

In China, Pearce said, there are 100 million members of the Communist party and an estimated 100 million Christians.

“Christians are contributors to society, but they are seen as a threat because they don’t conform to the party’s authority,” she explained.

Digital platforms have been a blessing to help get Bibles and Christian material into the hands of believers in tightly controlled countries.

However, better surveillance tools used by the government now place Christians at greater risk.

“Their online activity is being tracked, one, two, even three years after they searched for those materials,” Pearce said.

Open Doors noted that both Russia and China have utilized data from tracking apps used to collect COVID-19 data for other purposes.

Internet lockdowns

The rise of surveillance is happening in other authoritarian countries too, Wybo Nicolai, founder of the World Watch List and former Open Doors global field director, told The Alabama Baptist.

In Iran, for example, officials have been trying to crack down on protesters, locking down access to



IMB photo

A 2020 survey of 50,000 Iranians found 1.5% of those polled identified as Christian. The secular researchers behind the survey estimate the number of Christians in Iran is likely “growing beyond a million.”

the internet in their efforts. This action has an impact on Christian ministry, Nicolai said.

“There has been a revival going on in Iran for decades,” he said. “Many Iranians in the past 10 years have gone online and to social media to get access to teaching materials like Bible studies. So by cutting off the internet, the believers are more isolated than they were even six months ago, and ministries are struggling to engage with believers in the country.”

Though the Middle East is an

area where persecution remains at high levels, there is positive news, Nicolai said. Christian minorities in some countries, particularly

Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, are experiencing a bit more freedom, he said.

“Some countries are trying to move away from very extreme forms of Islam,” he explained.

He noted Egypt as another example of a country that has dropped in the rankings, noting there has been a drop in acts of violence against the

country’s historic Christian minority while clarifying that the situation for Egyptian converts is “still complicated.”

Another trend noted by this year’s World Watch List is the rise in violence against Christians in Sub-Saharan Africa as Islamist militants use force in attempts to destabilize the region.

Once again, Nigeria saw the most deaths by a “staggering” 89% majority, Open Doors reported. (Read more about the situation in Africa on page 10.)

30th anniversary of WWL

This year marks the 30th year of the World Watch List. The first list was produced in January 1993.

Researchers look at pressure levels on believers’ family life, private life, community life, national life and church life, along with violence levels in each country. The 2023 list covers the period Oct. 1, 2021, to Sept. 30, 2022.

To see a video that shows the changes in the World Watch List map over the past three decades, visit tabonline.org/wwl-2023. (Press “Play” to see the changes over time).

The World Watch List is released each year by Open Doors International, a global NGO network that has supported and strengthened persecuted Christians for 68 years and works in more than 70 countries. Open Doors provides practical support to persecuted Christians, including food, medicines, trauma care, training and resources.

To see the full 2023 World Watch List, visit tabonline.org/wwl-2023.

For more information, visit opendoorsus.org.



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist
Kris Henderson, discipleship pastor of Macedonia Baptist Church in Ranburne, emphasizes the importance of room setup for class engagement.

7 strategies to 'shrinkproof' Sunday School classes, Bible study groups

By Michael J. Brooks
The Alabama Baptist

A new year often brings a fresh commitment to Bible study, so January is a great time for leaders to think about how to retain members for the long haul.

Ken Braddy, Lifeway's director of Sunday School and network partnerships, says leaders help set the tone for successful groups. He offers these tips for "shrinkproofing" small groups.

1. Arrive on time.

"Arriving late ... doesn't show proper respect for the time of others," Braddy said.

"[This] may be the only time some of our members open their Bibles during the week, so we must use our time productively."

2. Prepare ahead.

Read the Scripture text for the next week on Sunday afternoon, he suggested. Then give 30 minutes every day to study and preparation.

3. Allow others to talk.

"Your group should talk as much as you do," Braddy said. "That means if you have 40 minutes, you teach 20 minutes and the group in-

teracts for 20 minutes.

"Learn to 'bite your tongue' and not answer your own questions."

"We get nervous waiting one or two or three seconds for a response," Braddy acknowledged, "but sometimes waiting 20 seconds brings a good result."

4. Plant another group.

"We're cooperating with the Holy Spirit when we keep a loose grip on our members and form new groups to reach more people," he added. "People belong to the Lord, not to us, so we should bless 'missionary efforts' in our churches."

5. Don't ignore absentees.

"What we've seen for the past century is that Bible study classes, at least on the church campus, will have about 50% of their enrollment on a given Sunday," Braddy noted.

"So we have to show concern for absentees. We can create care groups, and we can call, email, text and visit. Another good practice is

to have a 'front porch' visit and deliver new study materials when they arrive."

6. Have fun.

"If we're 'Grumpy Gus,' we won't attract others," Braddy asserted. "Most of our groups need more fellowship opportunities and more fun events."

He suggested a group member could be designated the "CEO of fun" and be responsible for planning events and having fellowship events once a quarter.

7. Make connections.

"Programs don't connect people — people connect people," Braddy said.

"Ask for contact information when new people come."

Small group leaders will find helpful advice in books like Braddy's "Breakthrough: Creating a New Scorecard for Group Ministry Success" and "Building A Disciple-Making Ministry" by Lifeway Adults.

Braddy's webinar series for leaders is available at lifeway.com/training22.

To view Ken Braddy's webinar series, visit lifeway.com/training22.

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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 resúmes to: office@fbcwoodstock.org.

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DISCIPLE-MAKING

STATEWIDE D-LIFE BOOT CAMP, JAN. 28

"Equipping common people to be Christ-like disciple makers" by Dr. Bill Wilks, pastor of NorthPark Baptist Church in Trussville. Bill and his wife Rondie are passionate disciple makers. Through D-Life, they have trained thousands of common people to be Christ-like disciple makers in churches, associations and state conventions across the country. In a D-Life Boot Camp, we don't just talk about discipleship. Instead, you will learn how to make disciples as a way of life. We will role play, share exciting stories and equip you with a simple disciple-making process modeled after Jesus. The goal of D-Life is to see a global grassroots disciple-making movement. To join the movement, plan to attend the D-Life Boot Camp on Jan. 28 (9 a.m. to 1 p.m.) and bring as many people as you can. The event begins with a light breakfast at 8:30 a.m. All ages able from students to senior adults are encouraged to attend. A special breakout session will be held for students and student ministers. Register at livedthelife.com/bama.

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

2023 State Evangelism Conference



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

Monday Morning

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

Sunday Evening

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

Fred Luter
 Pastor, Franklin Avenue Baptist Church, New Orleans

Ben Stubblefield
 Pastor, Spring Hill Baptist Church, Mobile

Mac Brunson
 Pastor, Valleydale Church, Birmingham



FREE ADMISSION, no registration.

January 29-30

evangelizeAL.org/SEC

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

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

Lakeside Baptist Church, Birmingham

No afternoon or evening session on Monday.

OFFICE OF CHURCH HEALTH

EXPERIENCING GOD WEEKEND

Join *Experiencing God* co-author Claude King in an interactive workshop and begin your own encounter with God. Come experience the workshop and then take the workshop home to your church or group. The event, provided by the Office of Church Health, begins **Friday, February 17, 7-9 p.m.**, and will conclude with a session on **Saturday, February 18, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.** at the State Board of Missions, 1404 Fairview Avenue in Prattville.
To learn more or register, visit alsbom.org/egw.



Claude King, co-author, *Experiencing God*

STREAM OF SERVANTS

Retired minister who owns hard-hit house in Selma said volunteers have made all the difference

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Guy Anderson's home in downtown Selma has a big front porch, and he's stood on it many times in the more than 25 years since he and his wife, Debbie, bought the historic 1880s property.

But he said the view from the porch has never looked like it did the afternoon of Jan. 12.

"I heard the siren, and I just kind of walked out onto the front steps and looked out at the sky," Anderson said. "I didn't ever see the tornado itself, but I knew the clouds were just boiling. I had never seen them look like that."

His wife was at work, and he and their small dog hunkered down inside the house for the worst.

"The whole thing was over in less than half a minute," Anderson said. "The air pressure was changing, and I could hear glass breaking and doors opening and closing, awful kinds of explosive sounds."

23-mile track

And when he came out to see the damage, the whole top of his house was gone — the tornado had ripped it off and dropped it in the backyard completely intact.

The Andersons' house was one of many damaged by what the National Weather Service deemed a high-end EF2 tornado that carved a nearly



Photo courtesy of Guy and Debbie Anderson
Guy and Debbie Anderson stand in front of their historic 1880s house in downtown Selma a few days after a Jan. 12 tornado ripped off the top of the house and dropped it in the backyard completely intact.

23-mile track through Dallas County and plowed right through the middle of Selma. It was one of nine confirmed tornadoes that tore through the central part of the state that day.

And within hours, the yellow shirt army of Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers arrived, he said. "Since the moment they pulled up, when we've been at home, there has never ceased to be a stream of people coming through."

Those shirts are no stranger to Anderson. After he retired several years ago from Elkdale Baptist Church

in Selma and was named minister of music emeritus there, he and his wife volunteered as DR chaplains, walking through devastated neighborhoods in other places to share help and hope.

"It has a dramatically different feel to be the recipient," he said. "We've spent all of our life and ministry being helpers and ministers. The

adjustment is not losing the house, it's trying to absorb the love being poured out on us."

That love is being spread around all over the community by Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers working out of a temporary command center at Elkdale Baptist.

Hundreds of requests

John Hayes, the white hat leader in charge of efforts in Selma, said as of late Jan. 17, they had received 308 job requests, but the numbers often expand when they send out a team.

"Most of the time when we go to a location, every house in the area has damage, so we're sending the teams out with blank sheets and just tell-

ing them to sign those homeowners up and work their jobs while they're there," Hayes said.

In his estimation, he thinks teams will be working there for at least two more weeks. At the moment, teams from Colbert-Lauderdale, Pickens, St. Clair, Birmingham Metro, Limestone, North Jefferson and Madison Baptist associations are on the ground working, with more teams on the way. A team from Tennessee has also been assisting.

Grateful for help

Mark Wakefield, state disaster relief strategist, said teams "are so, so grateful to get to help out, and people are so, so grateful for the help."

Anderson said the volunteer efforts are opening up a lot of conversations. One of his neighbors told him he'd been watching crews come and go from Anderson's house, and he was amazed at how so many would give of their time to help. It gave Anderson the opportunity to talk with him about why Disaster Relief volunteers do what they do.

"I want to tell Mark Wakefield, 'You already know this, but boy, the world is watching what we do,'" Anderson said. "I don't know that we'll change everything on earth, but it certainly makes a difference in a lot of individuals' lives."

Hayes said they're already seeing that in Selma. In their first few days of working, teams have seen seven people make decisions to follow Jesus as they've talked with Disaster Relief volunteers.

Lee Tate, director of missions for West Central Baptist Association, has already visited all of them, and local churches will also follow up with them in the days to come.

Hayes said disaster relief work is "not about the number of trees we cut, it's about the number of people [in whose lives] we make a difference."

"That's the reason we're here," he said.

Disaster Relief volunteers from Shelby Baptist Association clear trees in the yard of a Selma resident after tornadoes plowed through the state during the afternoon of Jan. 12.



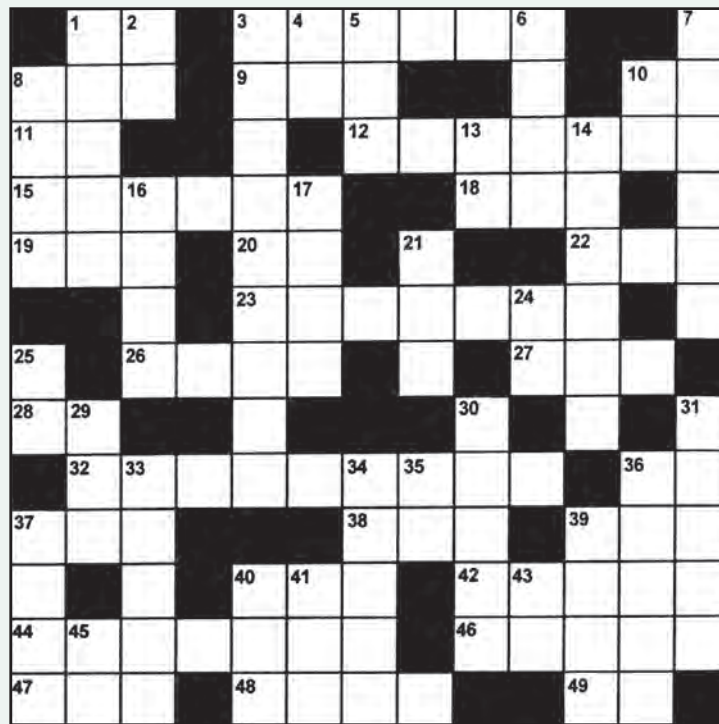
Photo by Curry Evans

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

CHRISTIAN CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1. Expression of laughter.
3. Stayed.
8. God heard the voice of the _____.
(Gen. 21:17)
9. A prohibition.
10. Mom.
11. One ____ the other.
12. Joseph ... entered into his _____.
(Gen. 43:30)
15. The child Jesus tarried _____.
(Luke 2:43)
18. Drink originally from China.
19. Compass direction.
20. ____ not this folly.
(Judg. 19:23)
22. The people sin against ____ Lord.
(1 Sam. 14:33)
23. As they that must give _____.
(Heb. 13:17)
26. ____ and good.
(Gen. 41:5)
27. And they did eat of the ____ corn.
(Josh. 5:11)
28. I am. (contraction)
32. Set your ____ on things above.
(Col. 3:2)
36. Let not the sun ____ down upon your wrath.
(Eph. 4:26)
37. Deliver thyself as a ____ from the ... hunter.
(Prov. 6:5)
38. Ribonucleic acid.
39. 2,000 pounds.
40. Larry, Curley and ____.
42. Their ____ hath been to feed cattle.
(Gen. 46:32)
44. That all men through



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- | | |
|--|--|
| Him might _____.
(John 1:7) | 21. He that is of ____
heareth. (John 8:47) |
| 46. What a boat needs if
it has no motor. | 24. There had been ____
rain. (1 Kings 17:7) |
| 47. Estimated Time of
Arrival. (abbr.) | 25. Hello! |
| 48. Of your daily _____.
(Ex. 5:19) | 29. Former Chinese
leader. |
| 49. Added to a word to
make it an adverb. | 30. Take ye a kid of the
____ for a sin
offering. (Lev. 9:3) |
| | 31. Full of dead men's
____. (Matt. 23:27) |

DOWN

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Rabbits. | 33. Guy, pal, a good
_____. |
| 2. Not B.C. | 34. All the ____ of the
field, are withered.
(Joel 1:12) |
| 3. The ____ of their joy.
(2 Cor. 8:2) | 35. Not out. |
| 4. What a sheep says. | 36. Reverence and ____
fear. (Heb. 12:28) |
| 5. Incorporated. (abbr.) | 37. They put on [Jesus] a
scarlet ____.
(Matt. 27:28) |
| 6. English noblewoman. | 39. Take it by the ____.
(Ex. 4:4) |
| 7. Three measures of ____
for a penny. (Rev. 6:6) | 40. Martha ... went and
____ Him. (John 11:20) |
| 8. Part of the ear or
brain. | 41. Eggs. |
| 10. He walked with _____.
(Mal. 2:6) | 43. Egyptian god. |
| 13. In a certain place. | 45. "Entertainment
Tonight." (abbr.) |
| 14. When kings go forth to
____. (2 Sam. 11:1) | |
| 16. Ye therefore ____ them
not. (John 8:47) | |
| 17. A place to tie a boat. | |

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Boones Chapel undertakes massive tornado ministry

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Matt Hall said he doesn't know how long his church is going to keep going with tornado relief ministry, but best he can tell, it will be part of their lives for a long time in one form or another. "We want to be the church that, yes, meets immediate needs, but I also want to be the church who months down the road is still ministering to these people as much as when the storm happened," said Hall, pastor of Boones Chapel Baptist Church in Prattville.

After a Jan. 12 tornado ripped through their area, killing seven people and destroying and damaging hundreds of homes, members of Boones Chapel stepped to the front lines to help meet the immediate needs of area residents, just like churches and volunteers in other hard-hit parts of Alabama.

'So humbled'

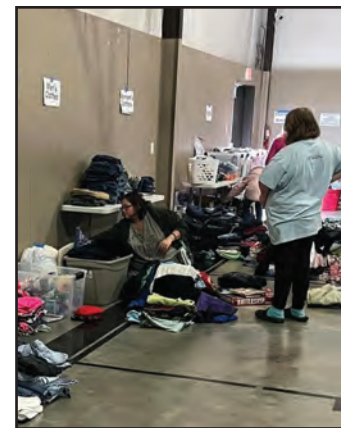
"I've gotten to meet or speak to a family member of everyone who lost their lives and pray with them," Hall said. "I'm so humbled to get to be the hands and feet of Jesus on the ground and meet these guys where they are."

Volunteers from his church and from Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief teams have gone out in the community removing trees from homes, helping with cleanup and talking and praying with those who have been impacted by the storms.

And Boones Chapel members have been preparing hundreds of meals a day in the church kitchen since the tornado hit, starting with 300 meals Jan. 13 and growing to around 900 meals Jan. 15, Hall said.

"We've taken addresses where people are who don't have power and houses are gone or damaged, and teams have delivered all of these meals," he said.

The church has also become a collection site for water, clothing, tarps, totes and other dry goods. The effort was moved there after



Facebook photo Boones Chapel Baptist Church is serving as a collection site for items their tornado-devastated community might need.

it was started by the Marbury Youth League, and people from the community have been able to come in and "shop" in the church gym.

"It's been neat to see it all come together, as we've been figuring it out as we go," he said. "The community

has come and been a part of what we're doing here, donating things and organizing and folding stuff."

Facing a storm isn't new for the community or for the church. In April 2011, a tornado tore through the area, damaging the church and killing three church members. Boones Chapel Baptist knows the pain their neighbors are feeling — they've walked this road before.

And Hall wants the church to continue to walk alongside the people of their area for the long haul.

"We want to create a community that loves our community, that loves God and loves people, that's it," Hall said.



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Event and location are followed by SBOM contact person and extension. For more information on these events, call 1-800-264-1225 or (334) 613 plus the listed extension, or visit alsbom.org/events.

FEBRUARY

- 1-4 Deaf Pastors Gathering**, Shocco Springs, Kristy Kennedy, ext. 2311
- 4 Bible Skills and Drill Retreat**, First, Montgomery, Belinda Stroud, ext. 2255
- 7 Ministers Tax Conference**, SBOM, Prattville, Lee Wright, ext. 2304
- 11 VBS Live 2023**, FBC of Level Plains, Enterprise, Patty Burns, ext. 2312
- 12 Racial Reconciliation Sunday**, Keith Hinson, ext. 2289
- 14 Ministers Tax Conference**, First, Decatur, Lee Wright, ext. 2304
- 14 Ministers' Wives Connection**, ONLINE, AlabamaWMU.org, Cindy Wilson, ext. 2225
- 15 Ministers Tax Conference**, First, Silverhill, Lee Wright, ext. 2304
- 17-18 Experiencing God Weekend**, SBOM, Prattville, Rob Jackson, ext. 2343
- 18 VBS Live 2023**, Northbrook, Cullman, Ramona Noah, ext. 2312
- 19 Hunger Sunday**, Lori Lockett, ext. 2304
- 19 Focus On WMU Day**, Kathryn Helms, ext. 2325
- 21 VBS Live 2023**, First, Fort Payne, Ramona Noah, ext. 2312
- 21 Great Commission Conversations**, ONLINE, AlabamaWMU.org, Cindy Wilson, ext. 2225
- 22 Ministers Tax Conference**, Southeast Alabama Baptist Association Office, Dothan, Lee Wright, ext. 2304
- 23 MinistrySafe Awareness Training**, Calvary, Dothan, Lee Wright, ext. 2304
- 23 VBS Live 2023**, First, Robertsedale, Ramona Noah, ext. 2312
- 23-26 Deaf Women's Gathering**, Children's Harbor, Alexander City, Kristy Kennedy, ext. 2311
- 24-25 Bivocational Minister/Spouse Retreat**, Shocco Springs, Ken Allen, ext. 2208
- 24-25 Pursue**, First, Montgomery, Ben Edfeldt, ext. 2276
- 25 VBS Live 2023**, Glynwood, Prattville, Ramona Noah, ext. 2312
- 28 VBS Live 2023**, Westmeade, Decatur, Ramona Noah, ext. 2312

MARCH

- 2-3 Ministry Evangelism Retreat**, Shocco Springs, Kristy Kennedy, ext. 2311
- 3-4 Complete**, Northpark, Trussville, Kathryn Helms, ext. 2325
- 3-4 Alabama Conference of the Deaf**, Shocco Springs, Kristy Kennedy, ext. 2311
- 3-5 Children's Honor Choir**, First, Prattville, and Crossroads Community, Prattville, Cindy Tillery, ext. 2230
- 5-8 Alabama Association of Baptist Secretaries Conference**, Shocco Springs, Traci Jackson, 205-758-0868
- 5-12 Week of Prayer for North American Missions/Annie Armstrong Easter Offering**, Kathryn Helms, ext. 2325
- 6 Student Ministry Essentials**, Christ Fellowship, Homewood, Jessica Palmer, ext. 2262
- 7 Student Ministry Essentials**, Taylor Road, Montgomery, Jessica Palmer, ext. 2262
- 10-11 Serve Tour Montgomery**, various River Region locations, Rick Barnhart, ext. 2220
- 14 Senior Adult Singin'**, First, Leeds, Frank Jones, fjm1117@gmail.com
- 14 Ministers' Wives Connection**, ONLINE, AlabamaWMU.org, Cindy Wilson, ext. 2225
- 14 The Basics of Church Security**, SBOM, Prattville, Lee Wright, ext. 2304
- 16 Connect:316 Day**, Steve Layton, ext. 2221
- 17-19 OneVoice Tour**, Eastern Shore, Daphne, April Brewer, ext. 2279
- 18 Disaster Relief Admin Training**, Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief Center, Prattville, Ana Raymundo, ext. 2356
- 19 Substance Abuse Prevention Sunday**, Keith Hinson, ext. 2289
- 21 Great Commission Conversations**, ONLINE, AlabamaWMU.org, Cindy Wilson, ext. 2225
- 21 Senior Adult Singin'**, Chapel Hill, Northport, Frank Jones, fjm1117@gmail.com
- 23 MinistrySafe Awareness Training**, Valleydale, Birmingham, Lee Wright, ext. 2304
- 24-25 Adventure Weekend**, Shocco Springs, Talladega, Larry Hyche, ext. 2227
- 25 Disaster Relief Communications Training**, Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief Center, Prattville, Ana Raymundo, ext. 2356
- 25 Disaster Relief Shower and Laundry Training**, Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief Center, Prattville, Ana Raymundo, ext. 2356
- 31 Disaster Relief Cleanup and Recovery Training**, Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief Center, Prattville, Ana Raymundo, ext. 2356
- 31 Disaster Relief Chainsaw Training**, Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief Center, Prattville, Ana Raymundo, ext. 2356

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SWBTS students join professors in sharing gospel

More than 130 people have professed faith in Christ as 84 seminary students at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary who were taking a practicum course on evangelism shared the gospel nearly 1,100 times during this past fall semester.

“Professors offer students weekly scheduled times through ‘Everyday Evangelism’ so they can join the professors to evangelize the greater Fort Worth community in its neighborhoods, parks and local college campuses,” said interim provost Matt Queen of Southwestern’s introduction to missiology and contemporary evangelism practicums.

Queen noted practicum students also “utilize the seminary’s relationship with NeedHim Global, in order to share the gospel over digital platforms. However, the vast majority of students’ evan-

gelistic encounters occur by their own initiatives.”

On average each student enrolled in the practicums shared the gospel nearly 13 times during the semester. This is more than twice the number of gospel presentations per student enrolled in the practicums during the spring 2022 academic semester, he noted.

‘Inspire and equip’

John D. Massey, a professor and dean of the seminary’s Roy J. Fish School of Evangelism and Missions, said the required practicums for the introduction to missiology and contemporary evangelism courses are designed to “inspire and equip students to become active witnesses for the gospel of Christ.”

Professors play a crucial role in equipping students for evangelism in the classroom, but also while they are

NOBTS’ Caskey Center reports 6,000 salvations in 8 years

The Caskey Center for Church Excellence at New Orleans Seminary also focuses on training students to share the gospel, said Teman Knight, who represents the center in Alabama.

Recipients of scholarships are required to share the gospel weekly, which

has resulted in more than 6,000 salvations and more than 50,000 gospel conversations since the Center’s founding in 2014.

The scholarships are for ministers who serve smaller Southern Baptist churches in Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Indiana. (TAB)

engaged in sharing the gospel, Massey said.

“Our professors of evangelism and missions have given their lives to share the gospel of Christ with a lost world and to equip others to do the same,” he explained.

“They not only teach students the how and why of evangelism, but each one is

actively sharing Christ on a weekly basis.

“We not only require practicums, but we go out with the students and demonstrate ... how to have a gospel conversation with the lost.”

Samuel Kampa, a master of divinity student from Hyderabad, India, where he has

been involved in evangelism and missions for more than 20 years, was enrolled at SWBTS in the practicum for the contemporary evangelism class.

Student perspective

Kampa, who shared the gospel with 43 people and saw three salvations during the semester, said witnessing in the U.S. was a “new experience.”

“God helped me to adapt and use different contexts in sharing the good news of Christ,” he noted. “I had to prayerfully look for opportunities and timing to initiate conversation quickly and introduce Christ using different situations and contexts.”

EDITOR’S NOTE — This story was written by Ashley Allen and originally was published by Southwestern Seminary. It has been adapted for print.



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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For January 29

Explore the Bible

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.

Executive Director of the Center for Christian Calling, University of Mobile



HE SENT ME John 7:14–29

John's Gospel records 30 references to Jesus speaking of the One who "sent Me."

His high priestly prayer in chapter 17 contains five instances of Him affirming to the Father, "You sent Me."

Perhaps the most appropriate verse to preview this lesson comes from His earlier statement, "I can do nothing on My own. I judge only as I hear, and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (5:30).

Jesus' brothers did not believe in Him, but others did. He went to Jerusalem, not by His brothers' goading, but because the Father sent Him.

People whispered about Him, wondering if He would come to celebrate Sukkot, the autumn harvest festival.

They gathered courage to speak openly about Jesus only after He began teaching in the temple.

From the Father (14–19)

Where did Jesus receive training? Pedigree matters among scholars. How was it that Jesus, who grew up in a carpenter's shop in Nazareth, was rising in popularity as a rabbi? Who trained and authorized Him?

One could argue Jesus was trained by theological giants when He was an adolescent. Luke records He received an accelerated course in theology at the age of 12 (Luke 2:46–49).

Jesus received training from the Father.

His intent was to glorify the Father, not self-glory or notoriety. He had no ambition to attain the scholastic status of Hillel, a highly significant scholar of the oral law in His day.

He was fully aware of an undercurrent among Jerusalem's religious power brokers who deemed Him a threat.

Some felt His teachings were blasphemous and worthy of death — He was calling God Father.

With Righteousness (20–24)

Jesus voiced concern about their plans to kill Him, so they accused Him of having a demon.

This accusation was a recurring theme (7:20, 8:48, 8:52, 10:20). Ultimately, the Sanhedrin's death warrant indicted Him of sorcery and leading Israel to apostasy (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 43a).

The religious leaders' judgments were biased and inconsistent. Jesus confronted them openly.

How can healing a man break the Sabbath commandment, while circumcising a baby boy on the Sabbath does not? He said their judgment was based on appearances, not righteousness.

Jesus judges with righteousness. He judges rightly, based on God's revealed word.

By contrast, ritualistic Jewish leaders based their decisions and commentary on oral and cultural traditions.

Many cultural Christians today follow tradition more than Scripture. Jesus instructs all of us to discern rightly.

They Know Each Other (25–29)

Jesus knew the people, and some of them recognized Him. They asked questions, wondering if the religious leaders thought He was the Messiah. Then they demonstrated unfamiliarity with messianic prophecy, suggesting no one would know where the Christ came from.

Scribes and Pharisees knew He was to be born in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:5–6; Mic. 5:2). Isaiah prophesied the great light would come out of Galilee, where Jesus' ministry began (Isa. 9:1–7).

Knowing His identity is not enough. The chapter begins with His brothers chiding Him to go to Judea to be seen by more people. Even His brothers, who knew Him, did not believe Him (v. 5). It is not enough to simply acknowledge Jesus as a historical figure. We must believe in Him as the Anointed One, the Son of God.

Bible Studies for Life

By Tyshawn Gardner, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies, Samford University



DOES IT BRING CONVICTION? Acts 2:32–41

On the Day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit fell on 120 believers, uniting them across ethnic and tribal lines. People abandoned their own cultural loyalties upon being convicted to embrace the way of Christ.

The Holy Spirit empowered believers, birthed a multiethnic church and brought conviction through Peter's sermon.

The Lord often convicts us of sin through His preached Word. We rejoice in the Spirit bringing unity and reconciliation, but we must also submit to His conviction. Our response to conviction determines how we go forward in God's plan for the Church. Even as believers, we must ask, "How is the Lord convicting me, and what is He convicting me of?" The way of peace and joy goes through the path of conviction.

Christ was crucified and resurrected for our salvation. (32–36)

The Holy Spirit reveals the truth of who God is in Christ. Jesus is the Messiah. His crucifixion made atonement for our sins. His resurrection defeated death, hell and the grave, bringing us salvation. The Word of God convicts us of this truth. There is no other way to salvation and no other means by which we can be reconciled to God.

The promise that the Messiah would come through the Davidic line was made known in the prophets and the psalms. God's promise of the Messiah is manifest in our Savior, Jesus Christ.

When He is preached, every person, regardless of nationality, who opens their heart and accepts this convicting truth in faith is saved and brought into the family of God. All truth rises and falls on Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.

The work of Christ calls for a response from us. (37–38)

The finished work of Christ on the cross beckons us to respond in obedience. When Peter preached the Lordship of Jesus Christ, doubters were cut to the heart. John 16:8–10 is a reminder of the work of the Holy Spirit in the process of salvation. He will convict those who oppose the truth of the reconciling work of Christ. There-

fore, when we hear the gospel, we should repent, be baptized and believe on the Lord Jesus.

The decision for Christ does not stop at mere belief in His crucifixion and resurrection. The proof lies in our thinking and behaviors.

Conviction requires us to yield to the truth of Scripture concerning who Christ is and

how we must live in light of that truth. When we repent, we turn away from any ideology, philosophy or theology that contradicts unity, holiness and righteousness.

The right response to God's conviction leads to salvation and obedience. (39–41)

When Peter finished preaching, those who received his word believed and became members of the new family God was creating. The right response takes courage.

When we believe who Christ is and receive the truth of His way, we must change our thinking and behaviors and leave our old ways and people who reject the way of Christ.

This can be seen in how we respond to Christ and to people. Conviction may be uncomfortable, but it leads to a new way of thinking and freedom, peace and joy.

God also provides the Holy Spirit, so we are not without help in making a right response. The same Spirit who convicts us of our sins helps us in our salvation.

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know with certainty that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."

Acts 2:36

MEDIA REVIEWS

Authors share missiological fiction, family devotion, empathy

Go-and-Tell Storybook: 30 Bible Stories Showing Why We Share About Jesus

By Laura Richie
David C Cook

The Go-and-Tell Storybook: 30 Bible Stories Showing Why We Share About Jesus” is the third book in a series of books for children and their families by author Laura Richie.

The stories highlight the adventures of Peter, Paul and other believers, beginning at Pentecost and going through the Acts of the Apostles.

Each story begins with a key Bible verse and ends with a conversation starting question.

The illustrations by Ian Dale, who has created art for clients such as World Vision, American Bible Society, Compassion International and the Bible App for Kids, are beautiful and include maps for little fingers to trace.

Most importantly, the book provides opportunities for the youngest hearts to learn more about who Jesus is, why He came and how His work of rescue and hope was shared by believers in the first century and continues to be shared



around the world today.

The book would work well as a 30-day family devotional or a book to be enjoyed throughout the year.

This third book is a nice follow-up to Richie’s other books, “The Advent Storybook” and “The Easter Storybook.”

All are published by David C. Cook and available at davidccook.org and Amazon. (Martha Brown, The Alabama Baptist)

Arman’s Freedom

By David Parks
Soncoast Publishing

In his new book, “Arman’s Freedom,” author and former missionary David Parks takes readers on an exciting journey with Arman — a man haunted by dreams and his past — who is running for his life.

Arman is a young man with secrets. He left his home in Iran in search of a new life and a graduate degree in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

With his cousin and roommate, Farzin, Arman explores this new city and meets new friends.

But his dreams haunt him, and he can’t shake off his past, no matter how many new experiences he pursues.

One night Arman meets Yusef at a home where Christians Tom and Barbara welcome friends for Bible study. Yusef asks Arman the fateful question, “What are you longing for?”

Arman has no idea how to answer. He has never considered the question. But that will change.

While exploring the city and a local shopping center, the Petronas Towers, with Yusef and Farzin, Arman finds himself in the middle of a disaster.

Explosions rock the towers, and

Arman is the lone survivor among his friends.

Arman is despondent as he realizes his friends are gone. He believes he could never experience a deeper grief. He could be wrong.



“Arman’s Freedom” falls into the category of missiological fiction, and the book keeps the reader’s attention as Arman searches for the kind of freedom he

didn’t know he needed.

A glimpse into Persian culture and social norms is a welcome bonus in this story of faith.

Parks is a Birmingham native and former missionary to Southeast Asia. He currently serves as director of the Global Center and Contextual Learning for Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in Birmingham.

He loves to teach about missions and hopes Arman’s story will encourage a love of missions in his readers.

“Arman’s Freedom” is available at Amazon. (Lori White, The Alabama Baptist)

The Gift of Empathy: Helping Others Feel Valued, Cared for, and Understood

By Joel P. Bretscher and Kenneth C. Haug
Stephen Ministries

Authors Joel Bretscher and Kenneth Haug believe everyone needs empathy, and they are convinced it is a gift everyone can give.

While some people are more naturally empathetic than others,

Bretscher and Haug’s experience and research have taught them everyone can learn the necessary skills to practice empathy.

In “The Gift of Empathy,” Bretscher and Haug offer practical guidelines to help readers learn how to become more empathetic. They explain empathy as a two-step process.

First, seek to look at circumstances from the perspective of another person and understand what they are feeling.

Next, express your understanding of those feelings to that other person.

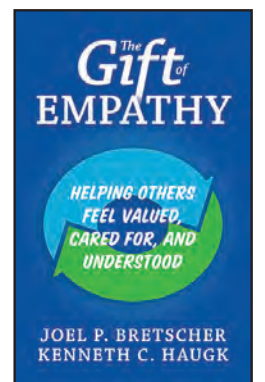
As the authors explain it, empathy is liberating and life giving, both to the recipient and the giver.

It lets the person receiving empathy know they are heard and that someone cares enough to want to understand them, which frees them from isolation.

It also frees the giver from the pressure of trying to “fix” another person’s problem or attempt to offer “wise” words of advice.

“The Gift of Empathy” includes simple, understandable principles to apply, and it offers true-to-life examples of various situations people encounter in which empathy can be life changing.

This book is easy to read and would be a helpful aid to ministers, deacons, small-group leaders, caregivers, parents, children of aging parents — anyone who wants to make meaningful connections with other people. (Ken Camp, Texas Baptist Standard)



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.

Resources for the **VISUALLY IMPAIRED**

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The Alabama Baptist

Choosing life

By Grace Thornton
The Baptist Paper

Tennessee clinic, others ‘save generations’ of babies over years

Chris Veteto said she hears the stories all the time when she’s in the check-out line at Sam’s Club or Walmart, and she’s overwhelmed by God’s mercy every time.

“If I use my Birth Choice card to pay for something for the clinic, someone will notice it and tell me their own story or the story of someone they know,” said Veteto, who serves as clinic director for Birth Choice, a pregnancy resource center in Jackson, Tennessee.

“I hear things like, ‘My daughter gave birth to my granddaughter after coming there,’ or ‘Here’s a pic of my 10-year-old son, the light of my life,’ or ‘I don’t know what I would’ve done without all the material assistance you gave me.’”

The clinic, which turns 34 in March, has now been open long enough that the staff and volunteers aren’t just seeing babies born because of the ministry — they’re seeing those babies grow up and have babies themselves.

“When a woman changes her mind about abortion and chooses life, every generation to follow that baby is saved as well,” Veteto said. “We have gotten to see it play out now because we’ve been here so long.”

Practical support

Birth Choice is one of more than 2,500 pro-life pregnancy resource centers across the U.S. focused on helping mothers have the information and practical support they need to deliver and parent their children.

Initially Birth Choice began by offering free pregnancy testing in a time when pregnancy tests weren’t as affordable or readily available, Veteto said. That resource, along with practical helps and counseling, was enough to encourage and support many women to deliver their



Birth Choice, a Christian pregnancy clinic in Jackson, Tennessee, has two mobile clinics that offer free pregnancy testing and ultrasounds in five counties. Facebook photo

babies. But in the 1990s, the numbers of women choosing life began a downward slide both at Birth Choice and at other centers.

So as Birth Choice crossed into the 2000s, its staff — along with around 100 other clinics across the country — began offering ultrasounds to allow the mother to see her baby and hear his or her heartbeat.

“We found out if a woman can see her own baby in her womb and hear that baby’s heartbeat, it can make all the difference,” Veteto said. “The impact was unbelievable.”

That impact spread to other clinics over the years, and it has continued. In 2022, Birth Choice saw 134 mothers choose life over abortion — 137 babies total, as three mothers had twins, Veteto said.

That was during a year when a “stunning” move happened — the federal protections for abortion offered through Roe v. Wade were overturned in June by the Supreme Court after nearly 50 years and

more than 63 million abortions.

“It’s an awesome thing, and we want to try to be what God would have us to be in light of it,” Veteto said.

Birth Choice’s numbers in 2022 are on pace with years prior, so Veteto said they haven’t seen a big change thus far. But she said she has noticed a difference in the mindset of women who are calling the clinic.

In the past, Birth Choice has typically had two kinds of clients — those who are life-minded and those who are abortion-minded. Both feel hopeless and are looking for help when they call or come by, Veteto said.

Landmark decision

But in the aftermath of the landmark Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization decision that overturned Roe v. Wade, Veteto said they’re seeing a third type of client — women who may routinely go to abortion clinics and are angry or

panicked now that the option isn’t available in Tennessee.

The Monday after the Supreme Court decision, one woman who called told Veteto she was absolutely getting an abortion, even if that meant she had to drive to another state.

Peaceful place

But another woman who called that day looking for an abortion ended up coming in and, in the end, decided to deliver her baby. She told Veteto she was surprised to find the clinic was a peaceful place where she felt safe.

“The biggest thing we’re trying to do is share hope. When we love them and give them truth, it’s remarkable how they’ll change their minds and choose life,” Veteto said.

That’s who the staff and volunteers of Birth Choice want to be — people who offer love, help and hope, she said, adding that sometimes people who haven’t met them have preconceived notions that aren’t true.

Veteto said she remembers being part of a panel discussion in the ’90s where a woman pointed her finger at Veteto and said, “You’re out there telling women they shouldn’t have an abortion, but then what do you do for them?”

Veteto calmly began to describe what that looks like.

“We walk through the pregnancy with them. We have parenting classes, childbirth and breastfeeding classes and offer anything they need materially,” she told the woman, who responded, “Well — that’s you.”

Veteto told her it wasn’t just Birth Choice.

“There’s a lot of me out there. The pregnancy clinics are doing that. They’re on the front lines, and we’re doing everything we can to meet those needs,” she said.

The Wellness Kitchen

"Nature is God's Wellness Kitchen where Food is Medicine."

By Pat Terry
The Wellness Kitchen

SLOW COOKER SPINACH ARTICHOKE DIP

Makes 16 servings

INGREDIENTS:

1 (16 ounce) bag frozen chopped spinach, thawed and squeezed dry	½ cup grated Parmesan
1 (14 ounce) can artichoke hearts, drained and chopped	½ teaspoon garlic powder
8 ounces cream cheese, cut into cubes*	¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper
8 ounces sour cream	¼ teaspoon salt
½ cup shredded whole-milk mozzarella cheese	¼ teaspoon ground pepper
	4 cups sliced vegetables, such as carrots and bell peppers
	Baguette, sliced

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Combine spinach, artichoke hearts, cream cheese, sour cream, mozzarella, Parmesan, garlic powder, crushed red pepper, salt and pepper in a 4-quart slow cooker. Cook on high for 2 hours. Stir and serve with sliced vegetables and/or baguette slices.

*Homemade Greek Yogurt Cream Cheese:

Set a strainer inside of a dish or bowl that will hold 3 inches of liquid. Layer two pieces of cheesecloth in the strainer, one on top of the other. Make sure that it covers the holes in the strainer. Pour the Greek yogurt in and fold the cheesecloth completely over the yogurt. Place a heavy can or jar over the folded cheesecloth. Refrigerate for 2–3 days, draining the liquid out as needed. Store in an airtight container for up to a week. Use as regular cream cheese — but a lot healthier.

Adapted from eatingwell.com

What's in season right now? Spinach!

Wild spinach originated from central and southwestern Asia (ancient Persia) and is still gathered wild there. It spread to Nepal and China and ultimately to the Mediterranean with the Arab conquest of Spain in the 700s. When spinach reached France and Italy, it became popular and is found in many recipes today. Sephardic Jews from the Mediterranean still use spinach in a popular dish served on Shabbat.

There are several types or varieties of spinach available in the marketplace today. Savoy and semi-Savoy that have crinkled leaves and the flat-leaved varieties are a few of the more common types. Also available is baby spinach that has smaller leaves and possibly a more tender texture. Whether cooked or raw, spinach is a powerhouse of nutrient density. Spinach belongs to the same plant family as beets, Swiss chard, amaranth and quinoa.



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Peak Time: Year round

Average Price: \$1.39 per bunch

Nutritional Highlights: Spinach is a superfood with excellent sources of vitamins A, K and E, B vitamins, and the minerals magnesium, iron, calcium, potassium, manganese and copper. It is a good source of phosphorus, zinc, selenium, omega 3 fatty acids and dietary fiber.

In addition to the anti-inflammatory functions of vitamins A, E, K and B vitamins, the minerals iron, copper, zinc, selenium and omega 3 fatty acids, spinach has an amazing array of phytonutrients that are anti-inflammatory. Flavonoids and carotenoids have anti-inflammatory benefits especially within the digestive tract by protecting the nitric oxide-produced nitrates in spinach. Nitric oxide benefits cardiovascular health.

Pat Terry started The Wellness Kitchen as a way to share the knowledge she's acquired over the 30 years she served as a professor of nutrition and dietetics at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama. Prior to her work at Samford, Terry was the first nonclinical dietitian appointed by the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention to serve overseas. Visit her website at thewellnesskitchenrd.com.





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'Jonah, go to Nineveh' experience

By David Dawson
Baptist and Reflector

Former Titans quarterback heeds missions call, moving to Kenya

Rusty Smith has spent most of his life on the football field. Now he's headed to a different field — the missions field.

Smith, a former NFL quarterback who played with the Tennessee Titans, will leave next summer with his family to begin serving a two-year commitment in Kijabe, Kenya, as part of the Africa Inland Mission team.

Smith will be teaching at Rift Valley Academy — a Christian boarding school in central Kenya operated by AIM — and will be assisting with the spread of the gospel to unreached people groups.

It will be a major change for Smith, who has spent the past eight years as a head football coach and teacher at Grace Christian Academy in Franklin, Tennessee, and for his wife, Nicole, who was the head volleyball coach at GCA and a former college volleyball star.

It will likewise be a big adjustment for Smith's four sons.

No denying

Smith said there was no denying he has been called.

"God made His plans for us abundantly clear," said Smith, who is currently working as a systems analyst for the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board.

Although Smith has had a relationship with the Lord since childhood, he never envisioned becoming a missionary. Rather, he assumed that sports — and football in particular — would be his livelihood.

And certainly everything in his life seemed to be pointing him in that direction.



Facebook photo

Rusty Smith prepares to throw the ball for the Tennessee Titans. After retiring from the NFL, he coached football for Grace Christian Academy. Now he is preparing to leave for Kenya, serving with Africa Inland Mission.

Growing up in Jacksonville, Florida, he was a standout athlete from childhood through high school, earning honors in multiple sports.

He then went on to have a celebrated career as a quarterback at Florida Atlantic University, where he compiled school records in passing yards (10,112) and touchdowns (76) while playing for legendary coach Howard Schnellenberger.

Smith led FAU to its first and second bowl appearances. He was named the 2007 Sun Belt Conference player of the year.

Smith was drafted by the Titans as a sixth-round pick in 2010. He spent four years in the NFL, seeing limited action while serving as a backup quarterback.

After leaving professional football, Smith began his coaching career, and he figured that would be the end of the story.

"When I was at Grace Christian, I honestly thought that was where I would retire," Smith said.

God had something else in mind.

This past January, Smith attended Passion 2022, the annual conference developed by Louie

Giglio, as a chaperone for a group of students from GCA.

Smith was dealing with a transportation issue so he wasn't able to go to the full event.

"I was only able to hear about two or three of the featured speakers, but one of them was David Platt,"

Smith said. Platt's message that day touched a chord with Smith.

"His whole message was explaining from Old Testament to New Testament why God wants us to take the gospel to the ends of the world and to all the people groups across the nations," Smith said.

'Wherever You want'

Smith remembered how excited he was at that moment. "I was thinking to myself, 'God, I'll go wherever You want.'"

As the memories of the conference began to fade, Smith went on with life. But little did he know, he was about to have a "Jonah, go to Nineveh" experience.

"About two weeks after the conference, God closed ... the door from coaching football," Smith said.

Inquiries about other football jobs did not even get a response. That's when he shared with his wife about the call to the missions field.

The Smiths, who will raise their own support, will begin "doing life" in Kenya in July.

"There are some sacrifices involved with going to Kenya, knowing that there's not going to be American football, there's not going to be baseball, there's not going to be an emphasis on athletics like there is here," he said.

"The boys seem to be understanding why we're doing it. Nicole and I are trying to do our very best to be open with them in terms of explaining the purpose of this. It's a biblical commandment for us to do these things."

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was originally published by Tennessee's Baptist and Reflector.

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YOUR ‘YES’

By Dan Darling

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Exposing 3 myths about finding your calling

What is my calling?
Where does God want me to serve Him?
What are my gifts?

These are all questions that Christian young people are asking. And these are good questions. The desire to follow in obedience is the natural response of someone who has had a saving encounter with Jesus. Romans 12:1 says that this is “true worship.” The old King James rendered this phrase “our reasonable service.”

In other words, putting your “yes” on the table and asking God to send you is the right response to His gift of salvation.

But what does this look like? How do we know where, when, why and how God might use us for His kingdom purposes? I think we can begin to discover this by shattering three myths about calling.

Myth 1 — It’s all about me.

I think it can be helpful for Christians to utilize personality profiles (Enneagram anyone?) to help us narrow down and think through the matrix of our backgrounds, unique talents, spiritual gifts and other factors. At various points along the way, these kinds of tools have helped shape my life.

However, too much emphasis on these tools can become myopic and self-centered.

Scripture tells us that while salvation is personal when we are regenerated, we are baptized into a body (1 Cor. 12:13). Our story is part of the larger story of God’s mission in the world. Our spiritual gifts were not given to us for mere self-actualization, but to serve the people of God (Eph. 4:12–16).

I believe the best way to discover

our callings is not in a navel-gazing session on an idyllic mountaintop, though getting away for contemplation and prayer is important (Luke 5:16). The best place to know where God wants you in His mission is in community. Often it’s the observation of others that help us discover our giftedness.

I remember the words of some mentors and friends in high school who urged me to go into pastoral ministry. They saw in me what I couldn’t quite see in myself.

Here are a few good diagnostic questions to ask yourself as you are praying and seeking wisdom:

- ▶ Where are the deep needs in my church, community and world?
- ▶ What do others see in me? What do they believe I’m good at?
- ▶ What areas of service bring me joy?

Take the personality profiles and spiritual gift inventories, but then plunge into Christian community and see how these relationships help provide shape to the calling of God.

Myth 2 — It’s all about money.

When thinking about the future, it’s good and right to consider how your educational choices and early career decisions will impact your ability to provide for yourself and your family.

The Bible tells us that “the laborer is worthy of his hire” (Luke 10:7) and that one who is lazy and does not provide for his family is “worse than an infidel” (1 Tim. 5:8).

Your calling is more than your paycheck; your calling encompasses all your life.

Some of your talents and gifts may be the very skills that an employer is looking for and will help you provide for your family. Some of your talents and skills may not help you earn a paycheck, but will help you be a good parent, a good church member and a good member of your community.

This is why I think it’s important, especially when considering educa-

tion, to think of all of your calling. In college, it’s very likely you will take courses that you will not use in your workplaces, such as philosophy, history and literature.

In a Christian college setting, you’ll likely take courses in theology that may or may not directly relate to the work you do for a living. It’s good and right for you to study these areas because they are shaping the whole person.

It’s good for Christians to be curious, to understand history and other topics and to know Scripture and theology because these ideas help you better love God with your whole person: heart, soul, mind and strength. Your worldview matters regardless of your career.

Myth 3 — It’s all about now.

When I talk to high school seniors or college students, I often detect anxiety about the future.

I remember fretting in my 20s about what I want to do with my life. But while it’s important to plan, and it’s good to dream, God often unfolds His calling to us in seasons.

I look back on my life and am amazed at the way God has led me to opportunities and places that I couldn’t have sketched out and envisioned when I was in my 20s.

Proverbs 3:5–6 really is true. If you commit your way to the Lord, He will direct your path. Often that is through a conversation, an opportunity or an internship.

Make wise decisions through prayer and counsel, but don’t let uncertainty about the future keep you from making decisions.

Discovering your calling today might just mean stepping forward gingerly in faith while trusting the God of your tomorrows.



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Living the **D-Life**

How to train Christ-like disciple makers

Every child needs a father who will teach him how to fish. I was blessed to have such a father. When I was 7 years old, my dad said, “Son, I want to teach you how to fish.” I was so excited. My dad loved to fish, and I wanted to do everything he did. One day we loaded our fishing gear and headed out to my Uncle Bill’s lake. It was a beautiful private lake just outside of town on my uncle’s farm.

When we arrived, my dad told me about all the fish in the lake and that we were going to catch some of them. But how? I didn’t know how to fish. Then my dad did something that was a game-changer. He placed in my hands a fishing rod and a reel. “This is a Zebco 33,” he said, “It’s the most simple and reliable fishing reel that you will ever use.”

With only a few tries, I could cast out the bait as I followed my dad’s instructions. That day my dad taught me how to fish. He is in heaven now, but thanks to my loving dad, I can still catch fish today.

What I’m glad my dad didn’t do was to take me fishing without teaching me how. I wouldn’t have known where to begin. I probably would have jumped in the water and begun swimming around looking for a fish to catch with my bare hands. It would have never happened. After many failed attempts, even a determined boy like me would be forced to give up. I would have left that day and concluded fishing was just not my thing.

No loving father would do this. He would never take his son fishing and not teach him how to fish.



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Yet this is exactly what we often do in our churches. We preach regularly about the Great Commission and challenge our people to make disciples. But we fail to teach them how. We leave them to learn for themselves, and after many failed attempts, they eventually give up and conclude disciple-making is just not their thing. They decide to leave it to the “professionals.”

Here is the point. 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. But how? How do we teach common people to be Christ-like disciple makers?

There are three important things we can learn from Jesus.

1. It must be intentional.

Genuine disciple makers aren’t made by accident. Jesus was very clear about His intentions for His followers. He told them He was going to make them into something new. He was going to teach them how to be fishers of men. Jesus was highly intentional about making disciples who make disciples. He didn’t make any other kind.

2. It must be personal.

We also learn genuine disciple makers aren’t made by disciple-

ship programs. Jesus was a personal disciple maker. He didn’t enroll His disciples in a discipleship class; He called them to follow Him.

With great patience, He personally trained them to be fishers of men. The same was true for my dad. He didn’t buy me a book on fishing or sign me up for a bait casting course. Instead, he put a Zebco 33 in my hands and personally taught me how to use it. He made me believe I could catch fish, and he fished with me until I was confident enough to do it myself.

3. It must be reproducible.

Finally, we see genuine disciples make other disciples. That’s the very nature of what they do. Like the art of fishing, it’s passed down from one generation to the other.

Jesus taught His followers how to make disciples, and they had the joy of teaching many others. This was the heart and foundation of the early church.

In the beginning, they had no church buildings or ministry programs, but they had one thing that we often don’t. They had disciples who knew how to make disciples.

This was the one main thing Jesus had trained them to do, and they did it well.

