The Alabama Baptist

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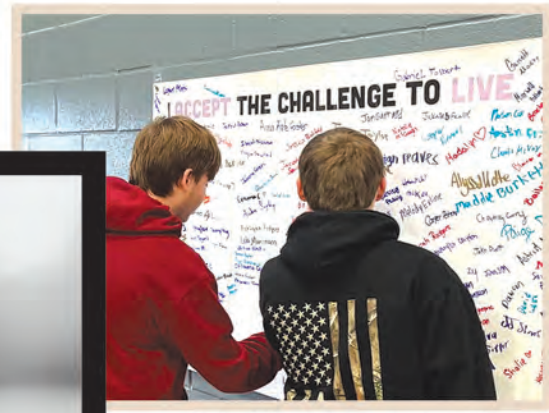
Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

Andalusia High School



Highland Home School

Lexi Webb

Brantley High School

Luverne High School

Following the death of her daughter, Lexi Webb (above), Andrea Mills began the Love Like Lexi Project, which hosts Choose Life assemblies aimed at preventing youth suicide.

Center photo courtesy of Andrea Mills, smaller photos courtesy of Love Like Lexi Project on Facebook

Love Like Lexi

Project invites students to choose life, recognize source of their worth, identity

By Lanell Downs Smith
The Alabama Baptist

Lexi Webb, a well-rounded Smiths Station High School senior, was involved in sports and her local church youth group before taking her own life Feb. 6, 2019.

Andrea Mills, Lexi's mom and a registered nurse, wanted to understand why loving and seemingly happy Lexi felt suicide was her best, and perhaps only, option. She developed the Love Like Lexi Project to help other young men and women learn to love, live and lead.

Suicide stigma

"Our family believed the stigma that's around suicide, that this happens to families or people that are ... struggling with mental health or whose families are falling apart," Mills recalled. "So we never really talked about these things within our home. I didn't think that I needed to. When this actually happened to our family, we were blindsided.

"[After Lexi died] I wanted to know why it happened, and I wanted to know what she needed in that moment that she did not have. What could have saved her or helped her make a different decision?"

According to the Centers for Disease Control, suicide is the second-leading cause of death among persons ages 10 to 14 and 25 to 34.

Mills talked with her daughter's friends, teachers, counselors and other youth. She soon realized communities were continuing to lose youth to suicide.

She learned that many of those teens were believers who embraced a lie, thinking death by suicide was the answer to their struggles, freeing

(*See 'Choose,' page 9*)

Follow us on Twitter @AlabamaBaptist

CONTENT ALERT ...

This issue includes several articles that discuss suicide and sexual abuse. If you or someone you know needs help, call 911 for emergency services or the new 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

Guest editorial: Alabama newspapers are not disappearing

Alabama newspapers are alive and printing.

Like most every industry in the world, our industry is experiencing changes that some have characterized as the end of newspapers. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Alabama has 109 paid circulation newspapers that have a print edition at least every week.

Newspapers have evolved in how they deliver news to their readers, but not in their mission to provide quality journalism in their communities.

Their print products are now complemented with various platforms, including websites, electronic editions, social media and video.

Online-only newspapers still continue to provide a valuable service in their communities for local news.

Reliable news

This multimedia combination delivers the greatest exposure of news, entertainment and public notices available in any community in our state.

Our newspapers remain a reliable and important news source.

A recent market study, conducted by the independent research firm Coda Ventures, reports that 3.2 million, or 81%, of Alabama adults rely on newspapers every month for local news and advertising. That is strong.

Unrivaled reach

The study also found that among consumers who plan to shop for specific products and services, the targeted reach of newspapers is unrivaled.

> ***"3.2 million, or 81%, of Alabama adults rely on newspapers every month for local news and advertising."***
>
> **Coda Ventures**

Our newspapers are an unmatched source of information because they help people know what's going on in their community, and this promotes a sense of social engagement.

The news you receive in your community newspaper is news you cannot get from any other news source.

Local newspapers keep residents up to date on births and deaths; updates from local schools and stories about students who are making a difference; information on civic clubs, fundraisers, and community events; in-depth coverage on local sports teams; openings of new businesses and industries; and updates on arts and entertainment events.

A local newspaper's focus is to make your community stronger and safer, and to encourage its readership to be more involved.

These days, we hear a lot about transparency. Your local newspapers play an important role in making sure relevant information citizens need to make informed decisions is disclosed.

Public voice

Lastly, a good newspaper is the record of a public voice. Articles on key issues affecting communities, letters to editors, and guest columns offer citizens and elected officials alike the opportunity to share their views, their demands and grievances, their criticisms, and their appreciation of governmental activities.

By offering a place to air complaints and discuss problems, newspapers help strengthen the bonds of their communities, and facilitate the exchange of ideas.

So, don't believe everything you hear about newspapers going away. There are 109 print publications in Alabama that disagree.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Written by Felicia Mason, executive director of the Alabama Press Association, and Darrell Sandlin, APA president.

TAB graphic

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

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1999, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020 as judged by Associated Church Press, Baptist Communicators Association, Evangelical Press Association or Religion Communicators Council

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.

OPINION

RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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

jrash@thealabamabaptist.org @RashionalThts

Would you miss us if we were gone? Let's not find out

More than a decade ago, our team at The Alabama Baptist realized how close our paid subscription numbers were to The Birmingham News, the Mobile Press-Register and the Huntsville Times.

We were consistently sharing the top spots with the most prominent newspapers in our state, and I shared that information with a large group of Alabama Baptist pastors and other leaders.

I remember doing some quick math right before my time to speak and shared with the group that if each one of the church families present that day would help us add a mere 10 new subscriptions each then we would jump to the top spot.

It took longer than I anticipated to get there, and it happened in a way I had hoped wouldn't be the case — the three major papers ceasing to print — but with the recent change, The Alabama Baptist is officially now the largest-circulated newspaper in the state.

While continuing to offer news online, The Birmingham News, Mobile Press-Register and Huntsville Times all ended an era on Feb. 26 with their final print editions rolling off the presses.

Similar moves have happened with many of the state Baptist newspapers across the nation, which is a major reason why our team launched The Baptist Paper in 2021. We are committed to ensuring every person in Alabama and across the nation has access to fact-based news, information and resources of the day — no matter how they prefer to receive the content.

For those who enjoy digital offerings, we are set. We've been gradually building a wide variety of digital platforms for nearly 25 years now.

For those who prefer receiving a newspaper, we deliver The Alabama Baptist right to your mailbox every week (except the weeks of July 4 and New Year's Eve). The Baptist Paper is mailed to subscribers every other week and complements each state's existing communication method.

Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

Your city and community newspapers also are working to provide content across all platforms to maintain a central hub of communication that keeps your community connected and informed.

As all of us attempt to help hold together our communities, the reality is we need your continued support and advocacy.

For The Alabama Baptist team, it's not about selecting one form of content delivery over another nor following trends. It's about ensuring every Baptist and beyond who desires to be informed, stay connected and remain inspired toward the things of God has access to a trustworthy source for those things.

Additionally, it's about truth with compassion.

Our team members are followers of Jesus Christ, professionally trained, have a deep understanding of Baptists and are committed to providing calm, fact-based coverage as well as consistent reminders of love, hope and grace.

With the streamlined structure of what is offered through The Alabama Baptist and now The Baptist Paper, every individual can stay engaged and informed in whatever form is most comfortable to him or her.

Also, every ministry leader can contribute to the longevity of The Alabama Baptist and The Baptist Paper by advocating, subscribing, sharing, commenting, advertising and following.

The list of ways to ensure the 180-year-old ministry continues to be available in all forms is endless — and really simple.

3 ways to spread the word

1. If you are reading the print edition or digital PDF right now, keep reading and subscribing. From time to time, urge a friend to read and subscribe as well.

2. For those reading online without a subscription, consider subscribing for yourself or a family member/friend. Make a donation to help underwrite the ministry or purchase advertising for your business or ministry service.

3. If you prefer engaging solely through social media, that works great as well. Follow us, share articles and make comments to keep us moving forward.

Each person will engage differently, and readers will disagree about what information is vital. But we hope every Alabama Baptist realizes the 33-cents-per-week subscription rate is a simple way to make a big difference.

Thank you for praying for our team and the ministry we are called to do. You are keeping us strong for future generations.

OPINION

Your Voice

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

6 lessons learned in church revitalization

Pastor Robert A. Klotz
First Baptist Church Talladega

Six years ago, I was called to First Baptist Church Talladega.

During the interview process, the committee was clear with me that FBC was a church in need of revitalization, and I was clear with them that the burden of my heart was to serve as a revitalization pastor.

KLOTZ

We talked during those interviews about what had gone wrong at FBC, what changes were needed and what it would take to implement those changes.

In the six years that I have served FBC so far, we have seen God do an amazing work of revitalization.

The work is still ongoing, but FBC is already a different church than it was because of what God has done.

I want to share with you six lessons I have learned in these years of revitalization work.

I pray they may be an encouragement to you whether you are a member of a church in need of revitalization or whether you are a pastor seeking to be used of God in revitalization work.

1. Prayer as a priority

Prayer is too often a neglected afterthought.

We pray when we either don't know what else to do, or we say we are praying "as we're doing everything else," but in truth we never truly focus on it.

At FBC, we spent time in dedicated prayer, especially during the first year of revitalization.

2. Primacy of preaching

It is through preaching that the church hears God's directives for His church from His Word.

From the beginning, this will mean the church has a clear understanding that the various changes that come in healthy revitalization are called for, not by the pastor's "wild ideas" but by the authority of God's Word.

3. Commitment to longevity

If anything is going to change, and if those changes are going to last, a pastor must commit himself to stay.

He must stay for a long time to earn the people's trust. He must stay through difficult seasons to maintain a steady hand of leadership.

4. Needed repentance

Churches that need revitalization need to repent of sin. Churches decline for a reason, and in every case, in one way or another sin is involved.

This may be bitterness, broken relationships, spiritual complacency, resistance to godly leadership, disregard for the lost or some other issue. Whatever the sin issue is, the church needs to repent.

5. Biblical membership

Membership classes will help incoming members have a much more clear understanding of who we are as a local church, how they can be a valuable part of the local body at FBC and what we as a church expect of one another as members.

6. New Testament polity

At FBC, we kept this question ever before us: "Why do we do what we do?"

We also asked ourselves the important follow-up question: "If the answer to the first question is anything other than, 'because the Bible says so,' is there something that needs to change?"

Church revitalization is not about changing paint colors, implementing new worship styles or trading the pulpit for a coffee table. We haven't done any of this.

All of the significant changes have been spiritual ones that have absolutely transformed FBC Talladega.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This article has been adapted for space. Read the full article at tabonline.org/6-lessons-learned.

Thoughts from The-Scroll.com

Committing God's Word to memory will help us stand strong when facing temptation, discouragement and fear. You may not know right now how God will use the verses you memorize to strengthen you, but the day will come when you are thankful for the Scripture you have stored up in your heart.

Jessica Ingram
"Fighting with the sword of the Spirit"

Encourage each other without coddling each other. You're going to mess up — by forgetting or by purposefully rejecting — but a gentle push from your partner is a good step to getting back on track quickly.

Hannah Muñoz
"Accountability matters"

We are serving the Lord Jesus Christ! So in whatever you do this coming week, do it in the service of Christ.

When we live our daily lives for the sake of Christ's Kingdom and we are motivated by the joys of being invited to join in on God's timeless work of redemption and displayed glory, what can damper that?

James Hammack
"Laboring well"

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

OPINION

> "Keep doing what you're doing — and do it better. God uses us by His grace to proclaim His truth."
>
> ROBERT SMITH JR.
>
> *Preaching professor, Beeson Divinity School at Samford University in Birmingham*

"One of the factors in our longevity together is the fact that we can forgive each other," said **James Walker** on he and his wife, Mattie, being married for 70 years. The couple are members of First Baptist Church Benton, Arkansas.

"Whether in our homes, workplaces, neighborhoods or among the nations, God wants to use His children as missionaries so that all may know Him." said **Tara Dew**, wife of Jamie Dew, president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, speaking during the Abide women's conference, held on the seminary's campus.

"I only know that I experienced Christ and left uplifted and encouraged. I drove back to Alabama with a renewed desire to see true revival spread worldwide," said **Rob Jackson**, who shared his experience of attending a worship service on the campus of Asbury University, where reports of revival have continued to spread.

"No matter what circumstance or situation we find ourselves in, Jesus Christ is truly the only person that can turn somebody's life around. I get to watch God show up and show out. It's amazing to watch. He still works miracles," said **Kay Bennett**, a missionary with the North American Mission Board who serves in New Orleans.

"Walking in and genuinely seeing people I am walking everyday life with, step up and let the Spirit speak through them was life changing ... to see people with beautiful God-given gifts singing out, speaking up and allowing the Holy Spirit to orchestrate that night. I've never seen the campus more unified," said **Madeleine Crow**, a student at Samford University, reflecting on worship services on campus.

"Disciple-making is not a program — it's a lifestyle," said **Bill Wilks**, founder of D-Life and pastor of NorthPark Baptist Church in Trussville. "We don't need any more new programs. Amen? We've got more programs than we could ever possibly know how to use."

From the *Twitterverse*

@PastorGregC

Some of the greatest, godliest, most faithful pastors I know preached to small crowds in small places with no response and no visitors [on Sunday]. Yet, they are mighty in the Word, prayer and every biblical measure of pastoral faithfulness. The Lord knows, men. Stay the course!

@RScottMcCullar

I am overwhelmed with what God did in our church. ... People confessing sin, crying out to God, weeping, loving on each other and sharing their hearts. My soul. Everybody saw God move in a powerful way. Pray we continue to see this. God is so good. May He get the glory.

@brocraigc

Serving on the @SBCExecComm is humbling and weighty. ... We work with the knowledge that whatever decisions we make, somebody is not going to agree. We can handle the criticism, but would more appreciate your prayers.

@jaroland74

"Nothing we despise in the other man is entirely absent from ourselves." —Dietrich Bonhoeffer

@PastorCroft

Pastors, your wife is the barometer of your family. Barometers measure pressure. She has a God-given gift to measure and know the pressure in your home that ministry creates in a way you cannot. Listen to her. Took a lot of painful years before I learned this.

@trillianewbell

Something that has surprised me as I've read through the Bible this year is how invested my heart is in their stories and lives. I weep and mourn with them! Is this part of getting older? Also, God is more merciful than I could ever have imagined!

@GarrettMWalden

The loss of the Lord's Day evening worship gathering is one of the great tragedies of the contemporary church.

@jdanielatkins

The further along in years I get in pastoring, it's the littlest things that are the biggest blessings ... like having a personnel committee chairman who ends every phone conversation we have with, "I love you."

@shane_pruitt78

Tears, Holy Spirit goosebumps and crowds aren't the evidence of true revival. Revival is evident when God's people get serious about the calling on their life to know Him and to make Him known. When the church repents, obeys and walks in holiness ... cities and nations are changed!

Thoughts on successful marriages

By Morris Murray Jr.
Counselor and minister

The most effective witness today is a godly family. The quality of one's family life is a prerequisite for leadership in the church.

One of the changes taking place today in marriage is a decline in understanding between marriage partners. There is also a loss of determination to stay married. After all, divorce has become too easy.

Happy marriages don't just happen; they involve hard work. Effort can compensate for the corrosion of time and the inevitable decline of happiness in marriage.

Lack of effort results from special problems for incompatible or unskilled couples.

Marriage is better when a husband and wife put forth effort, both in the long run as well as the short.

With effort, spouses can hold the line of deterioration and develop their relationship from year to year. Marriage cannot grow if you don't work on it.

Too often couples are part of a marriage that is empty. In such a marriage, couples will be hostile to each other, compete and even try to destroy each other.

They tolerate each other some of the time, and at other times it is an open warfare. There is an emotional divorce, which can lead to infidelity.

Why would one prefer admiration from another woman or man more than from his/her own spouse?

Some people are so maladaptive and hungry for admiration that they desperately crave attention to keep their ego built up. Men may doubt their masculinity, and women may doubt their femininity. The bait is not "sex" but "ego satisfaction."

Infidelity or circumstantial adultery begins when another person meets his/her ego and emotional needs.

NEWS

3 stories you should know

Photo courtesy of Texas Baptist Standard

Ten thousand blankets are on the way to people in Syria displaced by recent earthquakes, thanks to efforts by Texas Baptist Men in cooperation with key partners. Donated funds were used to purchase the blankets, and volunteers helped fold and pack them. Donations of blankets are not being accepted, but Baptists are encouraged to contribute to ongoing relief efforts. Alabama Baptists can give through Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief at sbdr.org. (TAB)

Ark Encounter voted No. 1 religious museum

The Ark Encounter and the Creation Museum were recently named by readers of USA Today as the top religious attractions in the United States.

In the category Best Religious Museum for 2023, the Kentucky-based attractions, both operated by Answers in Genesis, as No. 1 and No. 2, respectively.

"I'm thrilled that more and more families have been discovering and enjoying our wholesome, God-honoring attractions," said Ken Ham, CEO and founder of the Ark Encounter and the Creation Museum.

Rounding out the survey's Top 5 are Museum of the Bible in Washington (No. 3), Biblical History Center in LaGrange, Georgia (No. 4) and the Billy Graham Library in Charlotte, North Carolina (No. 5). (The Alabama Baptist)

'Jesus Revolution' film sees box office success

Jesus Revolution," the film based on the Jesus movement of the 1970s, grossed $15.5 million through its Feb. 24–26 opening weekend, making it the No. 3 movie in the country.

The movie scored big with audiences, notching an A+ CinemaScore calculated from polling on opening night. It also received a 99% audience score from the Rotten Tomatoes movie review site.

"This one is special," said producer Andy Erwin, whose company Kingdom Story has made several popular faith-centered movies.

"Jesus Revolution" is based on evangelist Greg Laurie's book about how revival among hippies in 1970s California started a wave of spiritual awakening, eventually landing the movement on the cover of Time magazine. (The Alabama Baptist)

Persecuted church

Pakistani Christian released from jail after excessive bail paid

LAHORE, Pakistan — A Christian whose bail was set exponentially higher than Pakistan's blasphemy laws stipulate has been released.

A Lahore High Court judge set bail for Sunny Waqas at 4 million rupees (US$15,200) Jan. 17, an amount far above the maximum of 500,000 rupees (US$1,900) stipulated in Pakistan's blasphemy laws. Morning Star News reported that Waqas had been falsely charged.

The accusation against Waqas claims he possessed blasphemous sketches of Muhammad (Islam's prophet) and was showing them to people. Arrested July 1, 2019, he was in jail more than three years.

Waqas' attorney, Aneeqa Maria of the Voice Society, said the excessive bail amount was raised in about two weeks, and Waqas was released Feb. 3. Waqas' cousin also was accused and remains in jail, Maria said.

Pakistan is No. 7 on Open Doors' 2023 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

Creative Commons photo via wikipedia

Four Christians killed, two arrested in Sudan after following Christ

KHARTOUM, Sudan — A pastor and three Christians all traveling together in Sudan were killed in an attack believed to be the work of Islamic extremists.

In the same attack, four of the victims' traveling companions were wounded, reported Morning Star News. The assailants fired on the men Jan. 23, while the travelers were spending the night in the South Kordofan State of Sudan.

A local church leader identified those killed as Sudanese-American pastor Ibrahim Kandr, Ismail Osman, Bashir Almaak and Ayoub Ibrahim.

On Jan. 8 in Nyala town in Sudan's South Darfur Province, masked men in a government vehicle arrested two Christians who had converted from Islam, a source said. The two Christians were released that day.

Morning Star reports indicate Muslim sheikhs had warned the two Christians to stop evangelizing Muslims.

Sudan is No. 10 on Open Doors' 2023 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

NEWS ITEMS COMPILED BY CARRIE MCWHORTER AND LEIGH PRITCHETT

NEWS

Alabama news

ALABAMA-CRENSHAW ASSOCIATION

Gary Holloway is the new pastor of **Weed Baptist Church, Brantley**. He has been employed at Southeast Gas for 26 years. He holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from Faulkner University.

HOLLOWAY

He previously served Pigeon Creek Baptist Church, Red Level, and Oak Grove Baptist Church, Dozier. He and his wife, Barbara, have four children, 10 grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

BALDWIN ASSOCIATION

Bayside Baptist Church, Lillian, is hosting the Sandspur Band, a gospel bluegrass group, on March 19, 6 p.m. Greg Brown is pastor.

BLOUNT ASSOCIATION

Pleasant View Missionary Baptist Church, Holly Pond, will host the Williamsons of Wetumpka, Oklahoma, for its third Sunday night singing March 19, 5 p.m. Earl Harper is pastor.

CLEBURNE ASSOCIATION

Tracy Mayfield is the new pastor of **Happy Hill Baptist Church, Heflin**. He is a retired U.S. Navy chief petty officer. Ordained in 2007, Mayfield served as a senior pastor for 13 years and has served in multiple church positions while moving during his Navy career.

MAYFIELD

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

MADISON ASSOCIATION

Ron Madison is the transitional consultant/association ambassador of **Madison Baptist Association**. Prior to his retirement as pastor of Mount Zion Baptist Church, Huntsville, he served as director of the office of associational missions and church planting of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. He also served as pastor of First Baptist Church Opelika and FBC Decatur. He has taught as an adjunct professor at Beeson Divinity School.

MADISON

He and his wife, Charlotte, have three children and six grandchildren.

RANDOLPH ASSOCIATION

Robert "Bob" L. Dewhurst is the new director of missions of **Randolph Baptist Association**. He holds a bachelor's degree in law enforcement and psychology from the University of Maryland in College Park, Maryland, a master of arts degree in management and supervision from Central Michigan University in Mount Pleasant, Michigan, and a doctor of education degree in organizational leadership from Nova Southeastern University in Davie, Florida.

DEWHURST

He served in the U.S. Army for 20 years in law enforcement roles and 25 years as vice president of ministry development for the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries. He also was an assistant professor/research chair in Liberty University's school of business.

He is married to Sonja.

WEST CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

New Bethel Baptist Church, Braggs, is hosting a 40th anniversary and retirement celebration for its pastor Robert Elwood Sims. There will be a special worship service Sunday, March 12, at 11 a.m. followed by a meal.

Wade Morris family starts scholarship, seeks video, audio files

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

When Wade Morris went to college at Samford University, he went with financial aid — his family couldn't help him.

"He didn't have a good family situation," said his wife, Deborah, explaining that his mother left her children after he graduated high school.

Then after Samford, when he wanted to attend seminary, "the only way he was able to go was that he was a youth minister at Green Valley Baptist, and someone at the church anonymously gave money to pay for his seminary," Deborah Morris said. "He didn't know who it was until years later."

But because of that gift, Wade Morris spent decades traveling and sharing the gospel as a full-time evangelist.

And in 2021, when he contracted COVID-19 while preaching at a camp and later died, it made sense to the family to honor him with an endowed scholarship in his name at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary — the Timothy Wade Morris Endowed Scholarship Fund for Evangelism.

Photo courtesy of Deborah Morris

"We wanted it to go to someone who feels called to be in evangelism and has a passion for it, and also someone who has demonstrated a financial need," Deborah Morris said. "Wade wouldn't have been able to go without help."

She said she — along with their daughters, Eden and Trinity, and the board of Wade Morris Ministries — are "really wanting to raise up more people who are passionate about evangelism."

"We just feel like there's a void, a big hole with Wade gone, and with the next generation as well," Deborah Morris said. "We started the scholarship to hopefully raise up some younger students who want to carry that on."

At the camp in Oklahoma where Wade Morris contracted COVID-19, more than 500 students reported giving their lives to Christ.

His older daughter, Eden, feels led to carry on his legacy through evangelistic ministry. She's studying now at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

She said the story of losing her father would be completely devastating and hopeless "but the fact that Jesus loved us and died on the cross for us and had an ultimate story for us where we can be in heaven with Him forever. That's my hope, and I want to share that with other people."

Gathering content

That's the vision the family hopes to see spread in the next generation through the scholarship, which they're working hard to endow. The board of Wade Morris Ministries is also trying to gather digital content of Morris speaking or preaching in years past.

To submit video or audio files of Morris preaching, email deb@wademorris.com. For more information about him, visit wademorris.com. To give to the scholarship, visit swbts.edu/giving and designate the Timothy Wade Morris Endowed Scholarship Fund.

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

How churches can help protect youth from suicide

By Denise George
The Alabama Baptist

According to many reports, a common theme of public testimony during revival services at Asbury University was students overcoming anxiety, depression, isolation and, for some, thoughts of suicide.

The nation has witnessed a five-fold increase in youth suicide and suicide attempts over the past decade, happening particularly in pre-teen children ages 10 to 12.

Some blame the higher rate of child and youth suicide on the recent pandemic, saying children have experienced isolation and uncertainty, faced worsening family situations or abuse and lost their routines of school, church and sports.

But Rob Hendrickson, professor of emergency medicine in the Oregon Health and Science University School of Medicine, said the problem was growing before the pandemic.

"We know the pandemic has increased anxiety and depression in young children, but this [OHSU] study shows that the increase in [children's] suicide attempts started well before that," he said.

Some blame mental health issues as the culprit.

The World Health Organization estimates that 10% to 20% of adolescents worldwide struggle with mental health issues. They report that "adolescence is a time when young people are struggling to fit in socially and emotionally, [and] ... they are especially vulnerable to bullying, social ostracization, family dysfunction, problems in school and trauma, any of which may trigger a mental health issue."

Mental illness

MentalHealthLiteracy.org reports that "suicide itself is not a mental disorder, but one of the most important causes of suicide is mental illness — most often depression, bipolar disorder (manic depression), schizophrenia and substance use disorders."

Researchers at Johns Hopkins Medicine state that suicide risk factors include mental or substance abuse problems or a family history of them, negative life events, a family history of suicide, familial abuse of any type, household guns, impulsive behaviors and exposure to others' suicidal behaviors.

Pixabay.com

Younger children

Among younger children, suicide attempts are often impulsive and may be caused by feelings of sadness, confusion, anger and other problems, according to the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychology. Among teenagers, suicide may be seen as a way to solve feelings of stress, self-doubt, pressure to succeed, disappointment or loss.

New research also shows the crisis is growing among young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning. Half of LGBTQ teens age 13 to 17 seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year, and 18% actually made a suicide attempt, according to the Trevor Project's 2022 national survey. That's a rate twice as high as the rate of all U.S. teens, which is 9%.

Whatever the reasons behind the rise in child and youth suicide, the latest numbers show the U.S. is losing 20 teens a day to suicide, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. And nearly half of all youth suicides involve a firearm.

While some suicides are impossible to prevent, most are believed to be preventable. The church can be instrumental in its efforts to help prevent child and youth suicide within their congregations and communities.

Here are some ways to do that:

- Preach and teach from the pulpit and in Bible study classes about the value of God-created life and the tragedy of teen suicide. Note: National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day will be observed on Sunday, May 7, 2023.
- Begin a proactive suicide prevention program in your church.
- Build strong children and youth programs that create safe and welcoming environments for the church's young people to meet, learn, fellowship and talk about their struggles. Pray with and for your young people.
- Invite Christian professionals from agencies in your community to speak to parents and grandparents, offering a variety of faith-themed parenting classes. Seek to build healthy family relationships in your congregation.

Be equipped

- Require your ministers of children and youth to take mental health awareness training through organizations like the National Alliance on Mental Illnesses.
- Teach your church staff, teachers, children and youth ministers and congregation to take threats of suicide seriously, to recognize the symptoms and to respond immediately and appropriately.
- Teach children and teens about 988, the new U.S. National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. Modeled after 911, the new three-digit number is designed to be a memorable and quick number that connects people who are suicidal or in any other mental health crisis to a trained mental health professional.
- If someone mentions or shows signs of suicide, remove firearms, medications and other objects that could be used in a suicide attempt and do not leave that person alone.
- Create a network and updated list of trusted mental health professionals and resources for immediate referral.

In times of tragedy

If, in spite of your efforts, teen suicide occurs within your congregation, take action immediately.

Minister to the grieving family and church members, showing them the love of Christ. Be a patient presence, praying with those affected. Refer them to licensed Christian counselors and others for help.

Bring together church and community members. Invite professionals to speak, addressing the suicide. Mourn the loss of the victim. Hold a remembrance service in their honor. Be available to help family members arrange funeral and burial arrangements.

Watch for signs of copycat or clustered suicides. Teen suicide can often trigger tendencies that cause others to imitate the tragic act.

Helpful resources

- **U.S. National Suicide and Crisis Lifeline**
  988 (call or text)
- **American Foundation for Suicide Prevention**
  afsp.org
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**
  cdc.gov/suicide/index.html

Choose Life

Curriculum, assemblies at Christian, secular schools emphasize pro-life message

(*continued from page 1*)
them from worldly concerns to unite them with God.

"That's where it basically started from," Mills said. "The project came about after my daughter lost the battle of choosing life ... . It was the answer I received, the missing pieces that [Lexi] needed.

"My daughter was an athlete, and I did not know that her identity was anchored to being an athlete and anchored in not failing.

"I realized that other parents and students needed to know that their identity, their worth, their significance and the meaning of their life is not what they do. It's who they are," Mills said.

The project begins at schools or churches with an assembly for students and another for parents.

Choose Life assemblies and workbooks for faith-based or secular groups aim to empower students to be part of the solution by giving them tools for navigating life's challenges.

Sharing Lexi's story

During assemblies, Mills shares Lexi's story of hope by showing a video Lexi created just eight days before taking her life and helping students relate by learning about another youth who battled the same situations they face.

Mills presents the program wherever she can, including in churches and schools across Alabama and Georgia.

The Crenshaw County school system launched LLL on Jan. 12, beginning a series of assemblies and a study of the LLL workbook. Students at all three Crenshaw County high schools, Highland Home School, Luverne School and Brantley School, hosted assemblies.

"We are trying to support students and show them we care for them," said Bailey Kilpatrick, who coordinates mental health services for Crenshaw County Schools. "We are putting programs in place so they know we love them."

Sherry Sport, Crenshaw County Schools special education director, said the open conversations inspired by the project are yielding fruit already among students who are committing to choose life.

"We have seen that conversations are touching children on a deep emotional level and that children are clearly displaying evidence of their commitment to choose life," Sport declared. "I think we're seeing also, through the emotional responses among all of us, a commitment to be there for each other, to support each other and hold on to each other and build each other up."

After assemblies, Mills extends an invitation for teens to sign a commitment to choose life.

For more information, visit lovelikelexi.com.

Following Christ

At Faith Academy in Mobile, Mills shared Lexi's story with around 1,200 students on Jan. 3. More than 100 of those made decisions to surrender their life to Christ.

After assemblies, students can work through a curriculum written from Lexi's perspective. The workbooks include what Mills said Lexi needed to know about having authentic community, creating community, protecting the heart, identifying values, choosing an inner circle, the influence of music on a person's emotions and the significance of life.

"The workbook helps youth truly understand and see that their life actually does matter," Mills said. The faith-based workbook includes sections focused on the power of worship and the secular version relays the importance of community.

"We have some schools that want both," Mills explained. "They want the faith-based version, but they also want the public school version because they want students to be able to stand when they get into a secular school and everything is shaken for them."

Photos courtesy of Love Like Lexi Project on Facebook

Students at Hooper Academy in Hope Hull participate in a Choose Life assembly that discusses suicide awareness but focuses on hope and self-esteem.

LEGAL MANDATE

Law requires pastors, church staff, volunteers to report suspicions of child abuse

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

Craig Carlisle's concern since the day he became chair of the Alabama Baptist Sexual Abuse Task Force in November 2021 has been that nothing would change in the churches.

"I'm sharing with my fellow [associational mission strategists] that 'if this doesn't become important to you, then it's not going to be important to your churches,'" said Carlisle, director of missions for Etowah Baptist Association.

Carlisle shared that message during a recent meeting of associational mission strategists. He also shared it with 23 Etowah Association churches at a Feb. 2 sexual abuse response symposium at 12th Street Baptist Church in Rainbow City.

Carlisle spoke on the spiritual harm of abuse, and participants also heard from the local district attorney, sheriff, Department of Human Resources (DHR) and counselors.

Later this month, Carlisle will speak on the topic as part of a deacons training workshop in Cleburne Baptist Association. Carlisle hopes other associations will pick up the mantle of training pastors and church leaders in best practices for preventing and addressing sexual abuse in the church.

Photo by Freepik

Mandatory reporters

In January, Alabama's SATF was renamed the Sexual Abuse Advisory Task Force, but the same members and the same purpose remain in place, Carlisle said — to equip Alabama Baptist churches with the knowledge and resources to prevent abuse in the church.

One of the most frequent questions task force members have received deals with Alabama's mandatory reporting laws and how they apply to pastors, said Melissa Bowen, a retired attorney and vice chair of the Alabama Sexual Abuse Advisory Task Force.

Alabama is a mandatory reporting state for all forms of child abuse and neglect — physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and child neglect.

Mandatory reporting is a legal requirement that certain professionals, whether paid or volunteer, must report any suspected abuse or neglect of children under the age of 19 to DHR or local law enforcement, depending on the circumstances. (In Alabama, legal adulthood begins on an individual's 19th birthday.)

Mandatory reporters include ministers, child care workers, teachers and any other person called upon to render aid or medical assistance to any child. In the church context, if you work with or are in contact with a child or children at your church, you are a mandatory reporter, Bowen said.

"That means if you have suspicions or knowledge of child abuse or neglect, you must report those concerns immediately to the proper authorities," she said.

Pastors are not exempt from these laws, she emphasized. Though in the past it was common for pastors to let a child's parents determine next steps when abuse was perpetrated by someone in the church, doing so today is a criminal offense.

Failure to report the matter promptly to local law enforcement or DHR can result in a Class C misdemeanor charge, punishable by up to three months in prison and/or $500 in fines.

Many pastors have heard about an exception for "privileged" information shared with a clergy member as "confidential communication," Bowen said. The common thought is that such information must be kept secret, but that isn't the right interpretation, she said.

For more information about hosting a sexual abuse response symposium, contact Carlisle at craigc@etowahbaptist.com or 256-328-5757.

Look for reasons to help

"The 'out' for clergy is the issue of privilege," Bowen said. "However, to my mind, there should be a bias in favor of reporting. Remember that reporting is just that — filing a report so that the proper authorities can investigate the suspicions." (See sidebar, page 11.)

Bowen said she believes pastors should look for ways it will be "permissible" to report rather than ways to get out of reporting.

"Maybe there's talk in the church. Maybe you as a pastor, leader or teacher have noticed something about the child's behavior or about an adult's treatment of a child (often called 'grooming,' which means that the abuser takes deliberate, manipulative action to form an emotional or relational connection with the child to prepare him or her for abuse)."

Certainty not required

"Maybe someone else has noticed something about the child's behavior. All you have to do is suspect that something's just not right. You do not have to know," she said. "Pastors have had that drilled into them, that they can't tell anyone what people have told them confidentially. But pastors need to do what they can to protect children."

Melissa Golden, a licensed professional counselor, agreed.

"One of the most important jobs of every adult, especially those of us in ministry, is to help keep kids safe," Golden said.

"Mandatory reporters are required by law to report any suspicion or disclosure of child abuse or neglect. While it is usually quite uncomfortable to make these reports, especially about families we love and work closely alongside, it is not our job, nor do we have the authority, to decide for ourselves if the child truly is safe when abuse/neglect concerns arise.

"Certainty is not required to make a report. We are called to help protect the vulnerable, and one way we can do this is to raise the red flag when we suspect abuse or neglect of a little one who is unable to protect themselves. A report is simply raising a red flag and requesting attention to a delicate and possibly catastrophic situation.

"When in doubt, the best practice is 'always make the call,'" Golden said.

Mandatory reporting FAQs

I'm a volunteer Sunday School teacher. Should I just tell my pastor if I suspect a child is being abused or neglected?

No. Previously, Alabama law permitted a person to notify his or her supervisor, and the supervisor would then be responsible for making the report. That process is no longer permitted, and the person who has direct knowledge of or suspicion of abuse or neglect must be the one to make the report.

Shouldn't I try to investigate the allegations first?

No. A mandatory reporter should not interview the child. Alabama has a network of more than 40 child advocacy centers where children can be properly interviewed by trained professionals and supported when abuse or neglect is suspected. A report to DHR or law enforcement can be made anonymously and filing a report doesn't automatically lead to a person being charged with a crime. Once a report is made, officials will investigate and issue a finding either ruling out ("not indicated") or affirming ("indicated") that abuse has happened or calling for further investigation ("reason to suspect").

Why should I get involved?

Reporting suspected abuse is a necessary part of protecting children in our churches. Only through consistent policies of reporting any suspected abuse, whether it occurs at church or in the home of a child who attends one of our churches, can we hope to help prevent the cycles of abuse and despair that plague too many of the children in our care. Schools, camps, children's organizations and others have already come to the realization that this is a necessary part of protecting children. The process can simply become part of the plan for keeping children safe. (TAB)

3 mistakes church leaders make when responding to sexual abuse allegations

By Brad Hambrick
Lifeway Research

Seemingly every day there is a new report of a church mishandling reports of abuse. If you are a church leader, that should alarm you.

But I hope the alarm you feel is not, "I don't want us to be the next church highlighted in one of those reports." As understandable as that sentiment is, it is self-protective. It is about the institution, not the individual in harm's way.

Instead, I hope your motivation for reading this article is this: "When someone entrusts us with their story, I hope we are equipped to be the refuge God has called His church to be." The difference between these two questions is more than semantics. It is the difference between being a caring shepherd versus a skittish public figure.

Preparation is vital

With that in mind, here are three common mistakes churches make when they receive allegations of sexual abuse and steps you can take to prevent these mistakes.

Mistake No. 1: Wait until disclosure occurs to prepare

If you wait for a crisis to prepare for a crisis, you will not be prepared. Abuse is too prevalent for church leaders to be surprised that a church member comes to you and says, "Things aren't safe at home," or "I was raped on a date last weekend." That disclosure is coming. We must not be willfully blind to that reality.

Here are two things you should do now to ensure you have the awareness and resources you need then.

- Build relationships with key professionals in your community. Do you know a social worker, police officer, trauma counselor, etc.? You should. Every abuse case is different. You'll need trusted people who can help you determine the best way to care for each person who entrusts their story to your church.
- Equip leaders in key areas of ministry in your church. What training do your children, student and college ministry leaders have? What about your women's discipleship leaders? A survivor may not come to you. Whoever a survivor knows best and trusts most is who they will talk to and who will represent your church to that person.

'Caring Well' curriculum

You can accomplish these two things with one resource — the free "Becoming a Church that Cares Well for the Abused" curriculum. This curriculum includes twelve 20-minute lessons. It includes tips for helping you identify which leaders in your church need to watch which lessons.

You can send a link to each lesson that's essential for leaders in that area of ministry to understand. This helps ensure each leader, staff and lay, in your church is "reading off the same sheet of music" on how to respond when a victim entrusts that leader with their story.

Unsplash.com

Mistake No. 2: Want certainty before being supportive

You won't know everything you want to know before you begin supporting a victim in taking the next steps. More than this, it is not the role of the church to investigate sexual abuse allegations before coming alongside the victim with support.

If the victim is a minor, then the standard is "reasonable suspicion" of abuse or neglect. The next step is to contact your local child protective services agency. In Alabama, this is the Department of Human Resources. (See article, page 10.)

Making a report is not "pressing charges." It is getting an expert second opinion from someone with experience vetting concerns of potential abuse against a minor.

If the victim is an adult, the church's role is to support the victim as she/he decides what steps to take. This involves connecting them with a counselor experienced in working with abuse and offering to be with them as they take any legal steps they choose to take.

Confronting an alleged abuser before allowing the victim to receive care and counsel can endanger the victim and confound the Romans 13 legal process. This leads us to a third common mistake.

Mistake No. 3: Begin to usurp the voice of the victim

If the first two mistakes are passive mistakes (i.e., mistakes when the church does too little), then this third mistake is an active mistake (i.e., a mistake where the church does too much).

With the best of intentions, compassionate Christians can begin to tell a victim what she/he ought to do in light of their situation.

You may ask, "What's wrong with that?" We must realize there isn't a "one-size-fits-all" response to abuse. Some victims may want to press charges. Other victims may feel the legal process would only add to their trauma. Deciding whether or not to press charges is just the most obvious fork in the road. There are myriad choices like this one that a survivor faces.

Now ask yourself, "Who has to live with the consequences of these choices?" Answer: the victim, not their Christian friend. That's why we need to support victims in making these choices rather than declaring what they ought to do.

This should help you see why it's so key to have relationships with the people identified under the first mistake. These professionals are experienced at being supportive without usurping the personal agency of the victim. And they can help you learn how to balance these two things as well.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story from Lifeway Research was adapted for print. For more information or to read the story in its entirety, visit tabonline.org/3-mistakes.

ARITF releases more details about database

By Meredith Flynn
The Alabama Baptist

The Southern Baptist Convention's Abuse Reform Implementation Task Force has released new information about the Ministry Check database that will assist churches as they conduct background checks on potential staff and volunteers.

In a Feb. 27 update, the ARITF said Ministry Check will fulfill the goal approved by messengers to the 2022 Southern Baptist Convention: maintaining a record of "pastors, denominational workers, ministry employees, and volunteers who have at any time been credibly accused of sexual abuse and who have been or are associated with a cooperating Southern Baptist church or entity."

Unsplash.com

Chairman Marshall Blalock previously said creating Ministry Check would be one of the group's first major challenges.

"It's a priority because it will enable churches to identify sexual predators in order to stop them from going from church to church to abuse others," he told The Alabama Baptist.

"In the end, the goal is for our churches to have the biblical and practical resources necessary to prevent sexual abuse and to have an authentic Christlike compassion to minister to survivors."

The new FAQ outlines four qualifications that will meet the "credibly accused" standard:

- conviction for a crime of sexual abuse.
- civil judgment entered against the abuser for sexual abuse.
- confession of sexual abuse in a non-privileged setting.
- determination by a qualified, independent third-party that the person is credibly accused, following a properly-conducted independent inquiry.

Names of pastors, denominational workers or ministry employees may be submitted to Ministry Check by churches, entities, associations, survivors or their proxies, and other Baptist bodies. Submissions that do not meet the necessary evidentiary standard won't be posted.

Preventing future abuse

The National Sex Offender Registry isn't sufficient to prevent future abuse because the registry only includes people who have been convicted, the task force noted.

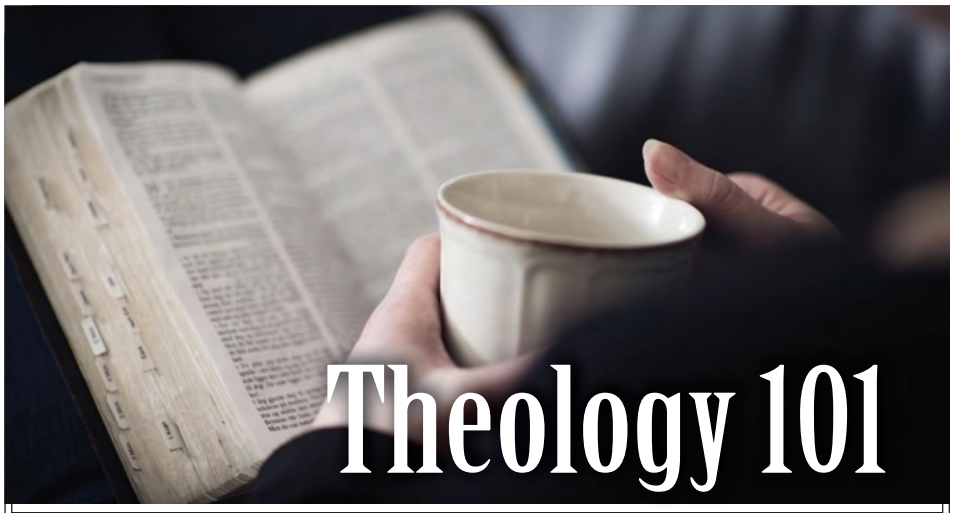
"Due to the effects of trauma, especially in a faith setting where respect for spiritual authority is strong, disclosure is often delayed until the statute of limitations has run [out], making conviction and inclusion on the National Sexual Offender Registry highly unlikely," the task force reported.

Ministry Check will be established and maintained by Guidepost Solutions' new Faith-Based Solutions division led by Samantha Kilpatrick, a graduate of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary who helped create the SBC's Caring Well curriculum.

In his report to the Southern Baptist Executive Committee Feb. 20, Blalock recommended Guidepost to maintain Ministry Check. He also addressed concerns over a Guidepost tweet during gay pride month last year. Blalock said Guidepost has altered its social media engagement "so this will not be an issue going forward."

For more information about Ministry Check, visit abusereformtaskforce.net.

In an earlier update, ARITF further explained the selection, noting that all of the organizations it considered had "publicly expressed views contrary to key Southern Baptist beliefs. Notably, Guidepost Solutions was the only firm which does not fund these causes in any form."



BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

The Holy Spirit

Our Need for His Presence

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
The Alabama Baptist

This month we are looking at the Paraclete passages in the Gospel of John. The first one is John 14:15–17.

The term "Paraclete" is a transliteration of the Greek term Jesus used when He said, "I will pray (to) the Father, and He will give you another Helper (Paraclete), that He might abide with you forever" (v. 16).

This designation Jesus used combines two ideas: "Para" means alongside of, as we have in the English word "parallel."

"Clete" conveys the idea of one called. Taken together, the resultant term yields the idea of one called alongside.

As Jesus unfolded the idea of the Spirit as the Paraclete, He took the idea a step further by saying, "He dwells with you and will be in you" (v. 17). Thus we focus this week on our need for the Spirit's indwelling presence.

Fresh breath

When Jesus spoke of the Spirit in this way in the first Paraclete reference, He had just announced to the disciples His impending departure, saying, "I go and prepare a place for you" (John 14:3).

His announcement set the mood for the occasion. It likely sucked all the air out of that upper room. Sorrow took its place. Jesus' announcement of the Spirit's coming must have come into that room like a fresh breath from heaven to dispel their sorrow.

We notice up front that Jesus assumed the personhood of the Spirit. He used the personal pronoun "He" and not the impersonal pronoun "it." In the unfathomable truth of God existing as one God in three Persons (Father, Son and Spirit), the Spirit is a person, just as the Father and Son are persons.

He can be known and experienced as God's personal presence with His people.

'Truth Spirit'

In this first Paraclete passage, Jesus enlarged on the idea of the Spirit by referring to Him as "the Spirit of truth" (v. 17). Earlier that evening, Jesus had declared of Himself, "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

God's Spirit is not only the Holy Spirit, He is also the Truth Spirit. As such, His mission includes leading Christ's followers into all truth, as well as enabling us to become more holy in our thoughts and actions.

Jesus sought to help the disciples and all believers understand that the indwelling Spirit meets our need for the divine presence in our lives this side of heaven.

Given our sinful natures within and a fallen world without, we have no greater need than God's presence abiding in us daily.

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.

A burden for revival

'When the Fire Falls' outlines what happens when 'God pours out His Spirit'

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Many who grew up in Baptist life equate revival with structured daily church services featuring a special guest preacher or emotionally charged meetings with a big evangelistic push.

Terry Long, director of missions for Choctaw County Baptist Association and author, believes that real revival is something altogether different.

Long wrote "When the Fire Falls: Ten Characteristics of Genuine Revival" to review actions that either precede, accompany or follow a true revival. "When the Fire Falls" weaves in historical accounts of great revivals with these ten attributes.

However, this isn't a how-to book. Long is clear that leaving the word "the" out of the subtitle was deliberate.

Photo by Doug Rogers

Terry Long, director of missions for Choctaw County Baptist Association, wrote the book "When the Fire Falls: Ten Characteristics of Genuine Revival" to review actions that either precede, accompany or follow a true revival.

Personal perspective

"I didn't want to imply that these are 'the' 10 characteristics of revival as if there can be no more, as if these are the only ones, as if there's an order to them. It's just characteristics I've seen as I've studied biblical, historical revival, and as I've seen in my own life," Long explained.

The 10 aspects that Long discusses are repentance, brokenness, reconciliation, joy, lordship, prayer, the Word, worship, soul winning and awakening. Major revivals often share other common traits, such as not being centered around a popular evangelist; gathering together spontaneously; corporate worship; and sharing personal testimonies, which makes the revival organically spread.

Though the above traits are common in genuine revival, one component is always present — an individual or group earnestly praying.

Quoting 19th century pastor and missionary A.T. Pierson, Long said, "There has never been a spiritual awakening in any country or locality that did not begin in united prayer."

However, that prayer doesn't have to begin with a group. It can also begin with one person crying out to God.

Quoting British evangelist Gipsy Smith, Long explained that true revival usually starts with a small group, but it's not necessary.

Smith said, "Find a piece of chalk and find an empty room. Go into that room and shut the door. Draw a circle on the floor with that chalk, kneel down in that circle and ask God to start revival right there."

Long's cry for revival didn't involve a closet or a circle. Instead, Long prayed at the foot of a cross.

As a teenager, before leaving to preach in other states for about 20 years, Long had been part of large youth rallies in his county with 400 to 500 people attending. Upon coming back, he discovered a big change.

"Those churches had dried up. The ones that had been on fire were struggling to keep the doors open. Some of them had closed the doors. The county was nothing spiritually like it was when I was there as a teenager," he recalled.

God put a burden on Long's heart to pray for revival. He felt led to put up a cross at an intersection and pray there for the next 100 days.

During those 100 days, 30 people were saved and about 2,000 visited the cross for prayer.

Though he didn't feel qualified to write a book about this experience, he told the story to many. It took those he had told 8 1/2 years to convince him to write about it. His book "100 Days at the Cross: One Man's Journey to Understanding the Power of the Cross of Christ" is the result.

Long still doesn't consider himself a writer, but he knows God loves to take ordinary people and do amazing things they couldn't have imagined.

Both books have come out of his heart and his burden to share about revival.

Long is adamant that Christians need to do their part, both individually and in groups, but God is the One who chooses the time and place to send His fire.

'A fresh work'

"Revival is in the heart of God. It always begins there. He's sovereign. And yet on earth, where we see God pouring His Spirit out in revival, is in places where men and women have taken their sin seriously, have gotten clean before God and have cried out to Him for a fresh work in their lives. That's where God chooses to drop this thing of revival."

Quoting another British evangelist G. Campbell Morgan, Long said, "We cannot organize revival, but we can set our sails to catch the wind from heaven when God chooses to blow upon His people once again."

UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Workshop to help churches start their own ESL ministry

Kristy Kennedy says many of the internationals who live in Alabama have never had their own Bible, and many have never heard of Jesus specifically.

A great way to make connections with them, build relationships and help meet their needs is to get involved in English as a Second Language ministry, she said.

"For me personally and in my experience, ESL ministries are one of the best ways to reach internationals with the gospel, not only in the U.S. and Alabama but around the world," said Kennedy, who leads in the area of community ministries at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. "There's a huge opportunity here."

To register, visit alsbom.org/eslworkshop or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.

A first step toward getting involved is to attend an ESL workshop put on by Kennedy's team. The next workshop will be held at Westwood Baptist Church in Alabaster April 21–22, running from noon until 8 p.m. on Friday and 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday.

At the workshop, you'll learn the skills to start an ESL ministry. The cost is $25 and includes materials, dinner Friday and lunch Saturday.

"Through ESL, you're able to make that connection with internationals and help meet their needs," she said. "It's an amazing ministry to get to be a part of. You get to see lives change because of the gospel."

For more information or to register, visit alsbom.org/eslworkshop.

The Disciple Making Leader

Looking for a way to challenge your church to reach your community?

At The Disciple Making Leader, discover Jesus' strategy for raising up leaders, growing the church and multiplying a movement.

Learn how to make the disciple's pathway and leadership pipeline work together to develop disciple-making leaders that multiply.

This conference will be held May 4, 9 a.m.–3 p.m., at Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church in Hueytown.

ETHEREDGE

Craig Etheredge — pastor of Cross-Creek Church in Colleyville, Texas, and author of "The Disciple Making Leader" — will be the guest speaker.

To register, visit makingdisciplesal.org/events.

Church Weekday Education Conference set for May 5–6 at Shocco Springs

If you're a church preschool teacher or director, the Church Weekday Education Conference, set for May 5–6 at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega, is for you.

The conference is good for credits to meet the requirements for training by the Alabama Department of Human Resources.

To register, visit at alsbom.org/cwe.

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

CHURCH POSITIONS

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

SENIOR PASTOR
Taylorville Baptist Church, located in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, is searching for a senior pastor who will love and care for its congregation and in return, be loved and cared for by a special church family. TBC has an active congregation of approximately 200 members. Interested applicants should contact Krista at TBC, 205-758-0868 or kcollins@taylorvillebaptist.org for a comprehensive description of qualifications and application process.

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

PASTOR
Hamilton Baptist Church in Robertsdale, Alabama, is in search of bivocational/full-time pastor. Please email resumés to: hamiltonbaptist3037@gmail.com or mail to: HBC 32815 County Road 112, Robertsdale, AL 36567. Resumés must be received by April 30.

PASTOR
Dalraida Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama, is accepting resumés for a Kingdom-minded senior pastor with a heart for the lost who is missional, evangelistic and a discipler. Visit DalraidaBaptist.com/pastorsearch for more information. Email resumés to: dalraidapastorsearch@gmail.com.

PASTOR
Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church in Gordo, Alabama, is seeking a pastor. Please send resumés to: mtpleasant@centurytel.net.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR
Central Baptist Church of Opelika, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor to lead our church family on Sundays and Wednesday nights by sharing the love and gospel of Jesus Christ with our community and the world. Please send your resumé to: 922mrw@gmail.com.

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

BIVOCATIONAL WORSHIP PASTOR
East Side Baptist Church, Cullman, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational worship pastor. This person will direct the choir, praise team and instrumentalists. Some technical/computer skills are required. The pay is $15K to $17.5K, based on experience. Send resumé to: ESBCsearchteam@gmail.com.

PART-TIME YOUTH MINISTER
South Chapel Hill Baptist, Decatur, Alabama. Flexible hours and scheduling. Please email resumé and inquiries to: knhayes2022@gmail.com for details.

OTHER POSITIONS

ASSOCIATIONAL MISSIONS STRATEGIST
The Bethel Baptist Association, located in Linden, Alabama, is seeking an associational missions strategist to serve its 33 churches. You may send a resumé to: bethelba.linden@gmail.com or you may mail one to: Bethel Baptist Association, Associational Missions Strategist Search Committee, P.O. Box 481088, Linden, AL 36748. Resumés will be received through April 30.

ASSOCIATIONAL MISSIONS STRATEGIST
The Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association seeks a full-time associational missions strategist to serve the 76 churches in beautiful northwest Alabama. For more information or to apply, please go to clbaptist.com.

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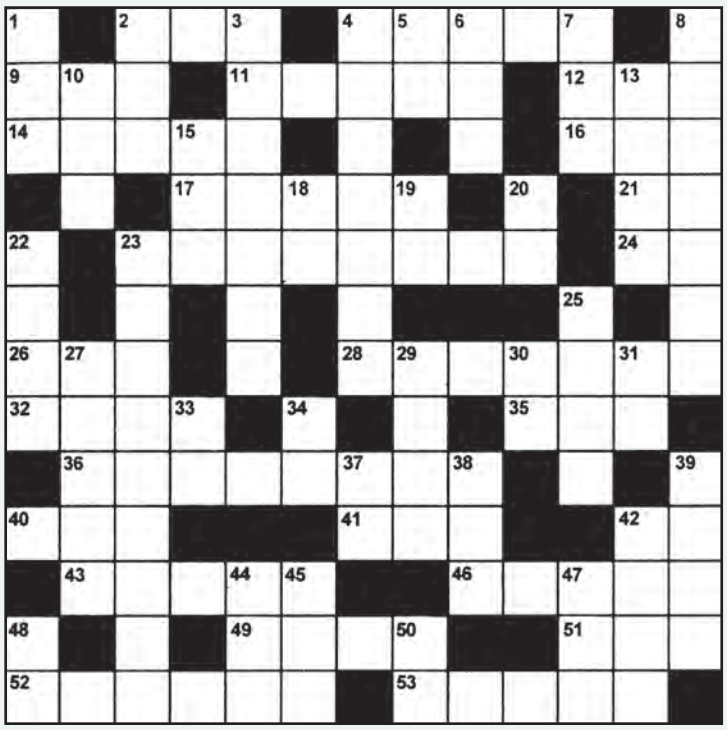
CHRISTIAN **crossword**



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ACROSS

2. Behold, it ____ very good. (Gen. 1:31)
4. Thou and all thy house shall be ____. (Acts 11:14)
9. Sound of sudden enlightenment.
11. Long-legged bird.
12. Before. (poetic)
14. West African river.
16. The beast ... shall make ____ against them. (Rev. 11:7)
17. Peels.
21. Intravenous. (abbr.)
23. My ____ ye shall keep. (Ex. 31:13)
24. Yes. (Russian)
26. Love worketh no ____ to his neighbour. (Rom. 13:10)
28. She bound the ____ line in the window. (Josh. 2:21)
32. A type of star.
35. ____ ye drink of the cup that I drink of? (Mark 10:38)
36. ____ them through thy truth. (John 17:17)
40. To ____ at liberty them that are bruised. (Luke 4:18)
41. The price set by a professional person.
42. ____ and fro.
43. I have sinned ... and in thy ____. (Luke 15:21)
46. Them also which ____ in Jesus. (1 Thess. 4:14)
49. Israel ... had made a great ____. (Judg. 21:5)
51. Elevated trains.
52. God be merciful to me a ____. (Luke 18:13)
53. They had a few ___ fishes. (Mark 8:7)

DOWN

1. A prohibition.
2. Every one that passeth ... shall ... ____ his head. (Jer. 18:16)
3. The pen of the ____ is in vain. (Jer. 8:8)
4. Gird thyself, and bind on thy ____. (Acts 12:8)
5. Sent ____ angel, and hath brought us forth out of Egypt. (Num. 20:16)
6. ____ certain of the church. (Acts 12:1)
7. God give thee of the ____ of heaven. (Gen. 27:28)
8. O thou wicked ____. (Matt. 18:32)
10. Let ____ that readeth understand. (Mark 13:14)
13. A sudden attack.
15. Equal Rights Amendment. (abbr.)
18. New Brunswick. (abbr.)
19. Saint. (abbr.)
20. There ____ none good but one. (Mark 10:18)
22. Use not ____ repetitions. (Matt. 6:7)
23. Thou art the God of my ____. (Ps. 25:5)
25. The revenger of blood ... shall ____ the murderer. (Num. 35:19)
27. Doesn't win.
29. Sidewalk ____.
30. Royal Canadian. (abbr.)
31. Printer's measure.
33. I will be ____ enemy unto thine enemies. (Ex. 23:22)
34. How is ____ that ye are come so soon? (Ex. 2:18)
37. ____ now I have found favour in thy sight. (Gen. 18:3)
38. Yea.
39. Were the ____ of the mountains seen. (Gen. 8:5)
42. ____ John what things ye have seen. (Luke 7:22)
44. Tool for weeding.
45. ____ and feather.
47. Snake-like fish.
48. This ____ the way. (Isa. 30:21)
50. High school. (abbr.)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

UPCOMING EVENTS
sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Get Acquainted Day: May 2

Are you new to Alabama or new to your church staff? Or would you just like to learn more about ways to partner together for ministry and missions?

Get Acquainted Day is the perfect chance to find out how the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions can partner with you to fulfill the Great Commission. Hear about all the ministries, meet your state missionaries and tour the SBOM facility in Prattville. You'll also receive a report with information about the people who live within a five-mile radius of your church.

To register, visit alsbom.org/gad or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.

Get Acquainted Day will be May 2, 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., with lunch provided.

To register, visit alsbom.org/gad.

Two-day boys camp

If you're a leader of boys in first through sixth grade, there's still time to register for Adventure Weekend, set for March 24–25 at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega.

The two-day camp, starting Friday at 7 p.m. (with check-in beginning at 5 p.m.) and ending Saturday at 3 p.m., offers a unique and challenging adventure for boys. It gives them a chance to learn the value of living on mission through teaching, worship and various outdoor activities.

To register, visit alabamamen.org/adventureweekend.

Conference to help churches with legal issues

Legal Issues, a conference set for April 13, can provide your church staff with helpful information about legal challenges that come up in churches today.

Topics range from lawsuits to sexual misconduct and tax law. The conference will be held at the SBOM in Prattville on April 13, 10 a.m.–3 p.m. The cost is $15 and includes lunch.

To register, visit alsbom.org/legalissues.

5 useful tips for creating, using a QR code at church

By Mark MacDonald
BeKnownforSomething.com

The QR code — that curious little bitmapped square — is everywhere, but how do organizations generate that image? Even more importantly, should churches use QR codes? The short answer is "Yes!" and here's why.

A QR (quick response) code can be used any time you want to take your congregation to digital content from an in-person experience.

If you want the congregation to take a survey or quickly register for a church event, a projected QR code can do it.

Simply ask folks to hold their phone cameras up like they're taking a picture of the code. The phone's operating system converts the code into a web link that can be clicked to take them to a web form or additional information for a sermon topic or details for an upcoming church event.

To generate a QR code, search online for "free QR code generator," and you'll have many options. Choose any search result on that first Google page.

When the generator opens in your browser, you'll type a website address (e.g., thealabamabaptist.org) to direct the code to. But before you generate your QR code, usually by clicking on a "generate" button, here are 5 tips for effectively using a QR code in a church:

1. Only use QR codes on announcement screens and/or in print. Don't take someone from a digital environment to their phone and then back to the digital environment again. It adds an unnecessary step. Web links are great for directing people who are already online to your website or social media posts.

Shorten the URL

2. Use a URL shortener with click analytics. The longer your destination domain is (e.g., thealabamabaptist.org/rashional-thoughts-why-do-we-overcomplicate-life-ministry-seeking-the-lord); the more complex the QR code will be. This complexity could cause problems with the QR code scan.

And if the QR code is small, the phone reader may have difficulty recognizing it. Instead, use a URL shortener like bit.ly to decrease the size of a long URL. This mostly free website will take a "messy" URL and create a much shorter one (e.g., bit.ly/ALBaptist3), making its QR code simpler.

Another value is that at no cost to you, URL-shortening websites can keep track of how many times the QR code is used. This is invaluable information to determine interest. Some URL shorteners, like bit.ly, will generate a QR code too.

3. Keep things simple and include a clear call to action. Resist using overly complicated QR codes or promotional designs. Your shortened URL will make a nice, simple code.

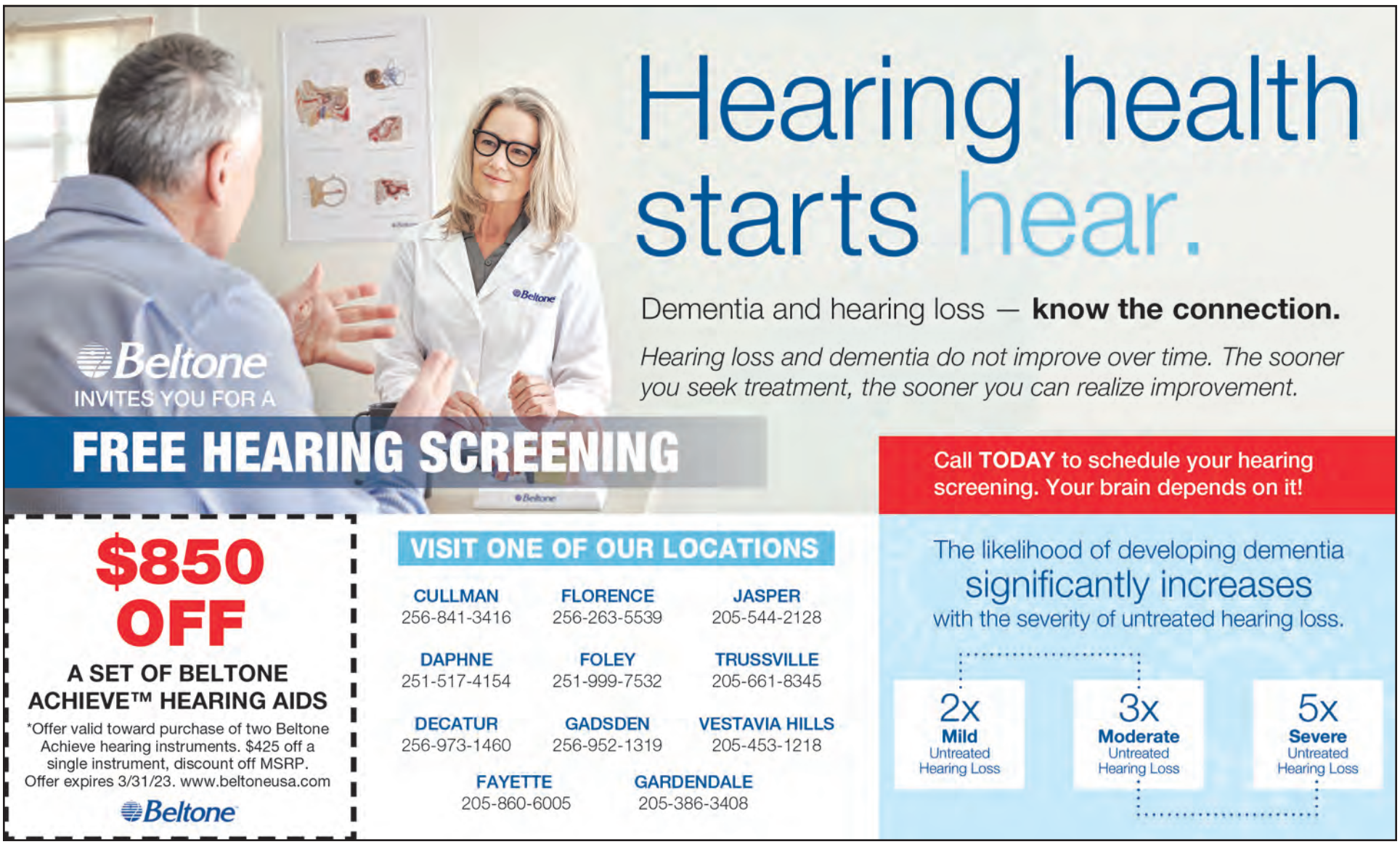
Some QR code generators allow you to add a logo. Only use the church's symbol if it's readable in a small QR code. Make the QR code large enough to work easily based on how close people will be to it and test it at that distance. State where the QR code leads and what will be requested at the destination site.

Be mobile-friendly

4. Lead people to a mobile-friendly webpage. Knowing how to generate a QR code is wasted if you don't have good content to lead people to. Look at the destination website on a small phone screen. If it's not easy to use and read, you are wasting people's time leading them to it. They won't like it.

5. Monitor analytics and adjust strategy. Are people not using your QR codes? Then you may want to stop using them or better explain them. Or perhaps you need better promotional material. Decide what the issue is. Ask people who should be using them and from that information, decide how to proceed or alter course.

QR codes are being used everywhere. Make them work for your church.



A STRUCTURE THAT IS MULTIPLYING

The Well Network continues to grow, announces next college town for church plant

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Malachi Cole said over the past year, he and his wife, Liz, have been part of "the biggest story that anyone could dream up."

They, along with teammates from other cities, moved to east Alabama to plant Banner Church near Jacksonville State University. The church held its launch service in January.

"Planting with community is a game changer," Cole said. "The biggest blessing in our church is our team, the ones who moved here."

Photo courtesy of Banner Church

Banner Church held its launch service in January. It is the fourth church plant near a university campus as part of The Well Network. The vision is 16 churches by 2026.

Larger effort

And that "big story" they're a part of is part of a larger effort — The Well Network, started by Highland Baptist Church in Florence, has been working since 2015 to plant churches near university campuses.

Banner Church is the fourth. The vision is 16 churches by 2026.

It started when Allen Tate, then college pastor at Highland Baptist, approached pastor John Brock about turning the church's weekly collegiate worship service, called The Well, into a church plant. The two had noticed that students from the nearby University of North Alabama were coming to The Well, but many weren't plugging into the church.

"What we realized was pretty gut-wrenching," Tate said. "Our college students who were very engaged with us throughout college, we had taught them to love the ministry, but we had not taught them to love the church."

After some conversations, the worship service became The Well Church Florence in 2016.

Since then, TWC Florence has multiplied, planting TWC Huntsville in 2017, Church at the Oaks in Tuscaloosa in 2021 and Banner Church in January. The church is also planning to plant Church of the Heights in Starkville, Mississippi, in early 2024.

Pastor Malachi Cole speaks at Banner Church. He and his wife, Liz, along with teammates from other cities, moved to east Alabama to plant Banner Church near the campus of Jacksonville State University.

Photo courtesy of Banner Church

Laying groundwork

On Feb. 26, TWC Huntsville pastor Ethan McCreary announced the church would plant its first church later this year in Mobile.

He said the planter, Christian Caldwell, has been serving as worship pastor of TWC Huntsville since 2017 and participating in the church planting residency program for the past six months.

He will move in January 2024 to begin laying the groundwork for Five Rivers Church in Mobile.

Planter in residence

The idea of a church planter in residence has been part of the fabric of The Well Network from the beginning, Tate said. It gives the planters a chance to learn more about planting a church near a campus before starting a new one themselves.

He said they plan to eventually have residencies at each of the church plants in the future.

"Our goal is that every church in our network, once they get their legs, would have a residency at all times," Tate said.

Brock said the vision is to set up systems that can be replicated in each church plant so a church planting movement can happen.

"The Lord put at least 16 of these on our heart around the Southeast, and we're not to the end of this journey," he said. "It's been a God thing, a testimony to the sheer grace of God that He has done this, and it's been pretty phenomenal to watch Him work."

Tate said he would encourage other churches thinking of getting involved with planting not to let a lack of experience with them keep them from trying. He said he, Brock and others have been learning as they go.

"If we waited until we knew what we were doing, we would never have started," he said.

For more information, visit wellchurchnetwork.com.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For March 12

Explore the Bible

By Ben Stubblefield
Visiting assistant professor of Christian studies, University of Mobile

IF IT DIES
John 12:20–33

So many important moments in Jesus' ministry were "interruptions." Our passage this week is a similar kind of interruption.

Jesus transforms this simple introduction to some new friends into an astonishingly larger implication for His life and ministry.

Introduced (20–22)

At this point in John's narrative, Jesus' ministry has exponential momentum, fueled in particular by the Bethany miracle. In fact, it is so dynamic the Pharisees remark, "The world has gone after Him" (v. 19). It is no surprise then to see the world (non-Jews) in pursuit of an audience with Christ in verse 20.

The passage does not tell us exactly who these people are, but they do not appear to be Greek-speaking Jews (Acts 6:1). They are Gentiles, presumably admirers of Judaism fascinated by Jesus. Most likely, they approach Philip to tell him they want to see Jesus because the name Philip is Greek in origin.

It's a simple request, but it is at the heart of all our ministry. We exist to introduce people to Christ and to do all we can, like Philip and Andrew, to let people see Jesus.

Dies (23–26)

We do not know exactly how the meeting went. It seems the request of the Greeks triggered in Jesus the knowledge that His death was imminent. One commentator points out the parallel to Paul's observations in Romans 9–11.

At the point when Israel rejects the Messiah, Gentiles begin to clamor for His attention.

Jesus adopts the metaphor of a seed's burial in the earth and its death and subsequent multiplication as illustrative of His own ministry. The pattern of self-sacrifice for future fruitfulness, blessing and honor is so central to Christ that it becomes the test of discipleship for all who follow Him. Will we, like Him, surrender our will to the Father and lay our life down for the good of those around us?

Glorified (27–28)

This moment in John's Gospel gets compared to other Gospels' Gethsemane moment, a moment of prayer and agony.

Jesus is troubled. He struggles to ask the cup to pass from Him, asking "What shall I say? ... 'Save Me from this hour?'" Yet He remains vigilant to pray "not My will" for this is His purpose. Here the prospect of death and the determination to obey the Father were enjoined.

Doesn't it minister to you to know that our Christ agonized over the high cost of obedience and yet was faithful? We have a Savior who was like us "in every way" (Heb. 2:17). He has shown us the path forward of faithfulness to the finish.

Draws (29–33)

A voice comes from heaven that affirms Christ but serves also as a harbinger for the climax of redemptive history, the crucifixion of the Son of God.

The world will presume to sit in judgment upon Jesus, deeming Him worthy of death. But His death will serve as God's judgment upon the world. He came to redeem, but the world saw fit to kill.

Of course, the death of Jesus appears to be a satanic victory, but in God's wisdom it is his undoing. What hell meant for evil, God meant for good.

The Lord, soon exalted or "lifted up," will draw through His death and resurrection both Jew and Gentile to Himself. The Lord will not be simply the God of Jacob, but the God of all nations.

Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

John 12:25

Bible Studies for Life

By James R. Strange
Professor of biblical and religious studies, Samford University

JESUS RESTORED MY LIFE
John 5:2–11; 19–21

In John, Jesus makes four trips to Jerusalem during His ministry. Today we read about the second visit to Jerusalem but the third conversation in which Jesus talks about the eternal life available to those who believe in Him (5:24, 3:15–16, 4:14).

The story of Jesus healing a sick man who lay beside a pool in Jerusalem teaches us about mutual love, especially concerning those suffering from chronic conditions. Pay attention to those who are absent.

I was desperate for help that no one could provide. (2–7)

Because they lack strong textual support, your translation probably puts verses 3b–4 in a footnote.

John says the Sheep Gate of Jesus' day (Neh. 3:1) was near the Pool of Bethesda. This gate probably allowed access into the northern temple precincts, where Jesus met the man a second time (v. 14).

Jesus' question reminds us of other encounters, including the one with Bartimaeus (Mark 10:51; Luke 18:41), but this situation is unique. Unlike Bartimaeus, this man can't ask for what he wants.

Jesus met my need in a far greater way than I ever expected. (8–11)

We don't know why Jesus only speaks to one of the people who need healing. Is it because this man has been unwell so long? Is it because whoever brings him leaves him there alone?

Chronic illness, pain, anxiety and depression invite despair. Despite longing to be well, we can become convinced we will never recover, and friends and family don't know how to express their care. But the man does recover. He does things his bones, muscles and sinews haven't done for three decades: He walks and he carries.

Thus, he stands out among the people in the crowd. It's a Sabbath day and few others carry burdens. "The law forbids" or "prohibits" doesn't mean the man can be arrested or fined. The healing leads to questions about Jesus' interpretation of the Torah and His claims about Himself (vv. 17–18, Matt. 12:8, Mark 2:28, Luke 6:5). Here is a key for unlocking a meaning.

Jesus was pleased to give me life. (19–21)

We can't say why Jesus speaks only to this man, but we see the result. The climax arrives in what Jesus says about the Son and the Father.

We first hear of the Father's love for the Son, which provides the basis for the mutual love commandment of the last supper (15:9–17). We then learn the Son does what He sees the Father do.

By extension, Jesus' actions — from singling out the man, to asking if he wants to be well, to healing him, to proclaiming the Son's mission — reveal what the Father is doing in the world. Jesus characterizes these actions as giving life.

The story, therefore, is about the man's absent friends, who don't know how to translate the Father's love for them and their love for the man, into a patient presence assuring him they haven't given up on him.

It's about the man's despair yielding to a healing he no longer expects. It's about Jesus offering eternal life to all whom He chooses, which is everyone in the world (3:16).

And it's about a life of mutual abiding love beginning now for those who believe (5:24).

Jesus said to him, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk." And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.

John 5:8–9

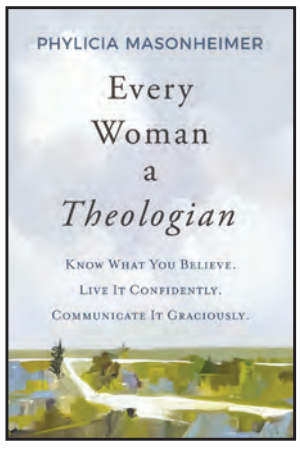
MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

New book outlines importance of every Christian knowing theology

When Phylicia Masonheimer founded the Every Woman a Theologian ministry and then wrote a book with the same name, it had nothing to do with all women becoming qualified to write commentaries or work on Bible translations. It is much more practical.

"One of the things we have to recognize is that every Christian should be a theologian. Every Christian, man or woman, should understand what it means to follow God, what the gospel is and how to communicate it," Masonheimer explained.



Sharing Jesus

This ministry and book are products of a conversation Masonheimer had with an old friend from high school who had left Christianity and was exploring other religions. As they talked, Masonheimer used theology — the study of the nature of God and religious belief — to share who Jesus is.

When her friend said she had "never heard it explained that way" and that she had some thinking to do, Masonheimer grasped how important it is for every Christian to study theology.

"I think most Christians today recognize that all people need theology because there's so much unhealthy and unbiblical theology out there. And a lot of women are discipling other people — their kids and whoever else is in their lives," she said.

The book, released Feb. 28 by Thomas Nelson, is one of the tools Masonheimer developed to fulfill the vision God has given her of disciples making disciples. It's subtitle, "Know What You Believe. Live It Confidently. Communicate It Graciously." is the way Masonheimer hopes other believers will answer such questions as: Why does the gospel matter? Did Jesus really rise from the dead? Why do we baptize?

"All of those are theological questions," noted Masonheimer. "Shouldn't a woman be able to answer those questions?"

"My goal would be, even if nobody ever knew the name 'Every Woman a Theologian' or Phylicia Masonheimer, they would have gone deeper in their theology because of someone who was exposed to our ministry and discipled other people to know God and the gospel," she revealed.

Geared toward women

Masonheimer geared the book toward women for several reasons. In addition to being a woman and having that perspective, she noted that fewer women go to seminary than men. She also added that "women have incredible influence — in their communities, in their homes — because they're very relational. They're very connected, and they're good at welcoming people in."

Photo courtesy of Natalie Puls
PHYLICIA MASONHEIMER

'Powerful'

"Not that men aren't too, but women are particularly gifted, and so for a woman who knows theology and who's just living her life and bringing the gospel into [her life] every day, that's really powerful," she continued. "You could call it raising up lay ministers — women who are living their regular lives and are ministering the gospel as they do it."

Masonheimer lives this lay ministry life. Though she and her husband run the ministry together, she has three young children, homeschools and lives in northern Michigan on a small farm, complete with goats, rabbits and chickens.

'Living the life'

"['Every Woman a Theologian'] was written living the very theology and life ... a lot of women who read it will be living. As I'm writing these truths from Scripture and researching in these commentaries and reading these scholars, I have diapers to change and dinner to cook and laundry to fold — and I'm doing those things. I'm not holed up in an ivory tower studying this stuff. I'm [living] a very real life split between studying theology and walking it out with my kids and in my city and in my church," she said.

Because being able to effectively share one's faith is the ultimate goal of the book, it touches on the major doctrines of Scripture: God, creation, humanity and sin, Christ, salvation, the Holy Spirit, the Church and last things.

Though it is not a devotional, each chapter includes personal examples and ends with a takeaway, something to focus on as a key point of the chapter. There is also an eight-week Bible study for churches or individuals.

Masonheimer graduated with a bachelor's degree in religion, and "Every Woman a Theologian" has been endorsed by several pastors. The many resources used are listed at the end of the book. Though it's written with women in mind, the truths included are all applicable for men and women.

To order this book and learn more about the many resources Phylicia Masonheimer has to offer, visit phyliciamasonheimer.com.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Reviews of films, books, music or other media that appear in TAB are intended to help readers evaluate current media for themselves, their children and grandchildren in order to decide whether to watch, read or listen. Reviews are not an endorsement by the writer or TAB Media.

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TAB
MEDIA GROUP

'God is unbelievable'

By Aiden Trimble
The Pathway

Evangelist with one arm, no legs began ministry in unlikely way

Tim Clark took a deep breath and dove underwater. He came up, took a breath and swam — faster than he ever had in his life.

The cheers of 1,500 people echoed off the brick walls of the Gladstone Community Center pool, but Tim couldn't hear them. The water rushed by his ears, and the lane markers turned into a blur.

He reached the far end of the pool, touched the wall and swam back. He reached the end and resurfaced to the cheers of the crowd.

He'd placed third in the first heat of the Kansas City Corporate Challenge, with a time of 43 seconds. It was quite an accomplishment against five other men, considering he has one arm and no legs.

In any case, this accomplishment launched Clark into an evangelistic ministry that still impacts lives. Today, Clark is a member of the Fellowship of Missouri Baptist Evangelists.

It's safe to assume Clark's childhood was different from that of most kids.

He was born with no legs and only his left arm. One leg ends above the knee and the other ends just below it. His right arm ends above the elbow. He grew up in Independence, Missouri, as the youngest of four children.

Despite the setbacks, Clark always pushed his physical limits.

As a senior in high school, he decided to try wrestling. "It was the only sport I could actually compete at," he reflects.

Unsplash.com

Clark made the varsity team at 105 pounds. He also swam, became a talented table tennis player and even ran a 10K on his knees.

After high school, Clark attended the University of Kansas to study engineering, but later switched to business. Up to this point, Clark had lived only for himself. Everything changed during his junior year.

CLARK

One spring day, two men from a campus ministry approached him and asked two simple questions: "If you died today, where would you go, and why do you believe this?"

Clark didn't have a clear answer.

He tried to think of reasons why he would go to heaven, but eventually he had to face the truth.

"None of those things would do it," he said. "It convicted me of my sin. I knew I needed a Savior." Later that week, Clark bought his first Bible and gave his life to Christ.

After graduating college, Clark moved back to Kansas City and began to work as an accountant.

Swimming challenge

In January 2010, one of Clark's coworkers, Doug Hayden, approached Clark and asked what he thought about swimming in a city-wide, Olympic-style sports event for large businesses in Kansas City.

Clark laughed.

"I have one arm and no legs, and I'd be competing against able-bodied men," he said. "I don't want to be the crippled guy coming in last place."

So for four months, Hayden and Clark trained hard.

The day came on June 23, 2010. Before the race, Clark prayed, "God, if You help me swim fast, I'll give You all the glory" — and swim fast he did.

Clark finished the 50-meter race in 43.11 seconds, taking third and more than holding his own against the competition.

Open to opportunities

Clark received many opportunities to give God the glory.

He did four television interviews after the swim and wrote an autobiography titled "With God All Things Are Possible!"

The book led to speaking engagements, and the speaking engagements led to church ministry.

Now Clark preaches revivals at churches across the country, using his story to encourage believers.

"If someone told me 15 years ago that I would be a preacher, I would have laughed," Clark said. "God is unbelievable, the way He plans it all together."

He never could have contrived a ministry from one swim.

"God gave me a gift I didn't know I had," he reflected.

From birth, Clark's life has been anything but predictable.

He keeps moving forward, trusting God with each step.

"God put me on earth to love Him, worship Him and enjoy Him forever," Clark reflected. "I just want to be faithful to what He's called me to do."

TO READ MORE STORIES LIKE THIS ABOUT MISSOURI BAPTISTS, VISIT MBCPATHWAY.COM.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was originally published by The Pathway.

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Fulfilling a need

By Grace Thornton
The Baptist Paper

Missions houses at Mississippi church become home away from home for missionaries back from the field

Columbia, Mississippi, wasn't originally home for Tom and Gloria Thurman.

But thanks to a ministry at First Baptist Church Columbia that's grown over the years, the city became the Thurmans' home away from home while they served as missionaries to Bangladesh for 33 years.

And now it's home full time.

Gloria Thurman said it started like this:

"The director of missions in the area knew about the availability of a missions house at First Baptist Church in Columbia," she explained, noting Tom had grown up in a town about 30 minutes away.

The couple got in touch with FBC, and they and their sons spent five furloughs at the church during their missionary career, living in four missions houses.

"It's like home here, and it became that for our boys," Thurman said. "It gave them contact and a home base."

Photo courtesy of the Thurmans

Tom and Gloria Thurman served as missionaries to Bangladesh for 33 years. When they came back from the missions field in 1998, one of the church's homes they had lived in while on furlough became theirs indefinitely.

'Like a lease'

Then when the Thurmans came back from the missions field in 1998, one of the church's homes they had lived in became theirs indefinitely. The congregation decided to expand its temporary housing ministry to add something more long term — permanent homes for retired missionaries who were of a certain age and had spent four or more furloughs (now called stateside assignment) with them.

"It's like a lease — as long as we're living, it's ours," Thurman explained. "The church provides a home not only for us, but [also] for a couple who lives next door who served in Venezuela for 36 years."

That couple, Richard and Martha Beal, became part of the fabric of FBC life over the years just like the Thurmans. Tom Thurman currently serves as FBC's senior adults minister.

Pastor Brett Frazier said the church's heart, and his heart, is to serve missionaries who have dedicated their lives to sharing the gospel in hard-to-reach places. He hopes the missionary housing will offer "a time of refreshing, a time to think and reflect and seek the Lord and recuperate so that when they go back, they're ready to go."

And for those who are retired, Frazier hopes it fills a need and enables them to keep serving in their next season of ministry.

Missionaries don't often have the opportunity to build equity in a home, he noted, so the housing takes care of a need and at the same time infuses a missions passion into the church.

'It's contagious'

"Can you imagine the difference when several [International Mission Board] missionary couples join your church? It changes the DNA," Frazier asserted. "I think some of our missions emphasis has to do with the fact that we've had these missionaries inside our church body for so long beating that drum. It's contagious."

Faye Hemphill, who serves on the FBC missions house committee, said the ministry began in the early 1970s when God placed it on the hearts of two couples to provide a home for missionaries while they were on stateside assignment.

Renovation and addition

With that encouragement, the church turned a small building it had used as a day care into its first missionary home. A couple serving in Niger stayed there first, then two more couples, then the Thurmans.

As time went on, FBC changed and added to its facilities. It now owns five missionary houses. One houses the Thurmans, another the Beals, two still need to be renovated and one currently hosts a family from Asia.

FBC also has a one-bedroom apartment on its campus that can be used for missionaries.

Over the years families serving in more than 20 countries have lived in the church's housing, Hemphill noted. Each is fully furnished. After a family moves out, the committee goes in and prepares the home for the next residents.

Thurman said it's a wonderful ministry and "a very giving church. We're blessed to be in their midst and enjoy being a part of their fellowship too."

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Financial challenges

By Sue Sprenkle
International Mission Board

Missionaries persevere to be 'present among the lost' amid global inflation

Otis Newman opened the door and stared at the empty refrigerator. The kids rifled through the cabinets next to him. The family ate everything except dried goods before leaving for vacation.

The International Mission Board missionary cringed just thinking about how much it might cost to restock. Inflation has been a global hot topic for months. Experts try to predict how it will affect the economy, but for most people, it doesn't hit home until they pay for groceries or utilities. For the Newman family living in Europe, restocking with the basics — milk, cereal, bread and lunch meat for a few days — cost 153 Euros, or $162.89.

"When we first moved here a baguette cost 90 cents but now it's ($1.28) ... I look at these basics and know every bit of it comes from the generosity of others," the veteran missionary said.

IMB photo

Global inflation is making a huge impact in many places where IMB missionaries live. Jonathon Sharp, missionary in Portugal, shops at a Lisbon grocery store in preparation for a volunteer team arriving from the United States.

Generous gifts

"We are able to remain present among the lost because Southern Baptists, who are also experiencing an increased cost of living, continue to be generous and give [to the Lottie Moon offering]."

IMB President Paul Chitwood admits staggering inflation rates at home and around the world have created some significant financial challenges for Southern Baptist missionaries.

Utility costs for missionaries in Europe skyrocketed, as have the cost of goods in many of the countries in North Africa and the Middle East. Lebanon's inflation rate recently slowed to 158.46% from 162.47. In comparison, the United States' inflation rate ended the year around 7.1%. Food in Lebanon has increased so much residents talk more about the "food inflation" that peaked at 280%, making it more than $20 to buy a gallon of milk.

Thankfully, Southern Baptists are rising to meet the challenges of keeping missionaries on the field, no matter how inflation impacts different countries. Churches gave more generously through the 2021 Lottie Moon Christmas Offering than any time in the IMB's 177-year history. Every penny of the $203.7 million raised goes to missionaries on the field.

And every penny will be needed. The IMB has set a goal of increasing giving by 6% every year, just to keep up with inflation in ordinary years. The increase does not take into account the seasons of unpredicted global economic challenges, as the world has recently experienced. Even as prices soar, Southern Baptists remain committed to the primary missionary task.

"Our missionaries have gone to address the world's greatest problem, the problem of spiritual lostness, with God's solution, which is the gospel," Chitwood said. "Without the presence of missionaries how will the lost hear the gospel?"

Prioritizing lostness

Sometimes this presence means putting missionaries in places that are expensive like the Middle East or France, where Kit and Stacy Klein live. They work with other IMB missionaries throughout Europe, the most lost continent on earth with less than 1% evangelical Christians.

"As an organization, the IMB prioritizes lostness and Europe is about as lost as it gets," Kit said. "We want to help our neighbors see the greatest problem they face is not financial ... it is being separated from God."

Throughout these financial challenges, the Kleins walk alongside neighbors and friends. While they don't face the same tough choices brought on by lost jobs, their family of seven has had to make cutbacks.

Unexpected rise in costs

They try to conserve gas by walking, taking public transport and riding their bikes. When utilities skyrocketed, they found ways to cut back on usage. The IMB also implemented a utilities supplement for those living in affected countries to help with the unexpected rise in costs.

The grocery bill, though, still proved to be one of the biggest increases in their family's budget. With five growing kids, food disappears fast. As Stacy tried to stretch out meals, she discussed ways to use more beans and save money on groceries with other mothers in the neighborhood.

Shared experiences like these, Kit said, opens doors for spiritual conversations.

Because the group of women shared ways to save money, it became a safe environment to talk about other things going on in their lives. One mother shared the burdens brought on by this economic crisis. Stacy offered to pray and introduced Jesus' love and compassion for the first time in their friendship.

"We are extremely grateful to Southern Baptist churches for continuing to give despite their own financially hard times," Stacy said. "Our ability to be present among least reach peoples is invaluable."

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was originally published by the International Mission Board.