

The Alabama Baptist

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Photo by gpointstudio on Freepik

Future **impact**

When parents fail their children, churches have opportunity to offer help, hope

By Denise George
The Alabama Baptist

Rearing children is a monumental task and every parent can make mistakes and feel like a less-than-perfect mother or father, but researchers now consider poor parenting one of the most important public health issues facing our society.

Sometimes parents must deal with health crises, personal illness,

financial problems, unemployment or other setbacks out of their control that can unintentionally affect the quality of their parenting. Poor parenting, however, is different.

Poor parenting often involves parents who provide inadequate discipline, but sometimes it involves parents who are too strict.

Poor parents may withdraw affection and attention from their children or show conditional love based

on a child's actions. Or they may be absent or uninvolved in a child's life.

Self-centered focus

Some parents are too wrapped up in their own problems, stresses and anxieties to selflessly parent their children.

Regardless of the causes, parents who are uninvolved, abusive, irresponsible, absent or immature are

endangering the health and future well-being of our nation's youth and negatively affecting society as a whole.

Child abuse in this nation is common. More than 4 million cases of child abuse and neglect involving almost 7 million children are reported each year, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics.

The highest rate of child abuse (See 'Intervention,' page 9)

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Beeson scholarship supports future missions

We recently shared about three scholarships aimed at helping students pursue their calling — the Dr. Bobby S. “Bob” Terry Scholarship at Samford University, the Jennifer Davis Rash Scholarship at Beeson Divinity School and the Gary and Alta Faye Fenton Student Scholarship at Beeson.

We’d like to share one more — the Milton and Anne Chamberlain Annual and Endowed Scholarship, which will be awarded to Beeson students preparing to serve as international missionaries or in a faith-based international business with a missions purpose.

The Chamberlains joined Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham in 1981.

Eighteen months later, they began teaching a Sunday School class, which Drew and Diane Ferguson joined. More than 40 years later, the class is still going, and the Fergusons decided to honor their teachers for their “dedicated service and commitment” with a student scholarship in their name.

Not only have the Chamberlains been instrumental in leading a Sunday School class for four decades, they also helped to start a Chinese ministry at Shades Mountain in 2001.

Their first experience with Chinese Christians occurred on the weekend of July 4, 1978, when

the Chamberlains went to Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center to help teach Vacation Bible School to the children of Chinese families attending the Southeast Chinese Christian Gospel Camp. Anne served as the coordinator of VBS at the camp until 2017.

The Chinese ministry at Shades Mountain grew out of their long association with Chinese Christians they met at these camps and was led by Shu Huang, a retired medical doctor, and his wife, Lily.



Photo courtesy of Beeson Divinity School

MILTON AND ANNE CHAMBERLAIN

The Chamberlains assisted with this ministry in numerous ways including driving vans to bring Chinese visitors to the church and teaching Bible and conversational English classes.

David Parks, director of the Global Center at

Beeson, worked with the Chamberlains for about five years on a Bible study for internationals, observing that “they loved on internationals every Sunday.”

‘A connection’

“It gives me a lot of joy to know that there will be future students who will be assisted in their current and future ministries in the name of these two people I know and love,” Parks said.

“I feel more of a connection to this scholarship because of whom it’s named after. I look forward to telling those students who receive the scholarship about Milt and Anne Chamberlain.” (Beeson, TAB)

“It gives me a lot of joy to know that there will be future students who will be assisted in their current and future ministries in the name of these two people I know and love.”

David Parks

director of Beeson Divinity School’s Global Center

The Alabama Baptist

“If ye continue in My word, then ... ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” John 8:31-32

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.



RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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

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🐦 @RashionalThts

Influencing next generation requires specific work in our own lives

Any elementary school or children's Sunday School teacher can tell you they know much more about your personal family life than you might realize.

Kids are keen observers of everything going on around them, even if they don't seem to be paying attention.

It can be shocking to think you are having a private conversation while the children play, only to later have one or more of the kids announce part of the discussion (typically out of context) in a public setting.

They see and hear — and then either internalize or act out in some way.

They sense the emotions of those around them — and again, internalize or act out.

Processing their environment also means sharing it with others when they feel safe, which many times happens in the classroom in the form of basically blurting out what's on their minds.

The classroom structure and time limitations prevent teachers from having the opportunity to help each child with thorough and situation-appropriate processing. Sometimes the child attempts to make sense of it all within his or her own mind

without talking it out with a trusted adult.

Ideally, children can process with their parents and grandparents and have the security in their home life for this step. This isn't always the case, however.

Life pressures, health issues, packed schedules, school and work responsibilities, and basic exhaustion can edge out the time and mental space needed to be fully present for our family members. Families who are barely surviving day to day have another layer of difficulty piled on top.

Still, even with the roughest of situations, a few minor tweaks such as minimizing harsh com-

ments, complaining and pessimistic reactions can truly make a difference.

As we head into Easter week, we have the perfect opportunity to intentionally pull away from the negative influences in our lives to not only focus more on Christ but also to evaluate how we can continuously point our families and friends to Christ.

Building in spare time with nothing specific on the agenda allows for spontaneous conversations to occur.

If carried out with calmness and respect, those discussions can help all of us — especially the children in our lives — develop critical thinking skills as

well as processing and communication skills.

Those simple moments might also take those involved to the next level of their faith journey. We will never know what is possible unless we give it a try.

Spending the next 10 days or so more focused on calming and edifying content, scheduling extra time for family and friends, and purposefully looking for God's hand in each situation will do more for your heart, health and overall influence than you realize.

Investing in your own life's margin also allows you a special opportunity to positively influence the next generation.

Special opportunity for churches the Sunday following Easter — Baptism Sunday is April 16

After churches wrap up the daddy/daughter dances and Night to Shine events around Valentine's Day in February, it's not always easy for church staff to think beyond Easter until after Easter.

The State Board of Missions staff acknowledged they understand. Much of their daily priorities and routine efforts are calendar-driven as well.

Rick Lance, SBOM executive director, and Daniel Wilson,

director of SBOM's office of evangelism, hope you will make one exception though — for Baptism Sunday, April 16.

Celebrate results

"This is an effort for us to emphasize baptisms, which will hopefully lead to a greater renewed effort in evangelism and discipleship," Lance shared with The Alabama Baptist.

Wilson added, "Observing Baptism Sunday in your church is a

great way to celebrate the results that come from faithfully sharing the gospel.

"Plus, this would be a great Sunday to preach on the symbolic meaning of baptism that as Christ died and rose again, so also have we died to our old selves and have been made new by Jesus Christ."

Whatever you choose to do, we would love to share how God works in your congregation. Keep us posted. —JDR

Your Voice



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

Churches have opportunity to help children and be a village

By Neal Hughes

Director of missions, Montgomery Baptist Association

We're living in a time when many families truly need a village to help them escape the generational burdens of fatherlessness, poverty and lack of educational opportunities. In both urban and rural communities, the church has the opportunity to be that village.

Doing the chasing

Pastor Michael Catt once observed that the group who chases the heart of young people will catch them. What if, instead of the gangs, drug dealers and other evil forces doing all the chasing, God's

people are contenders in this race?

If you went to prison and interviewed inmates, I daresay almost none would say, "I was in church and then I went to prison."

When the church views mentoring as another aspect of making disciples and invests time and resources into building strong spiritual relationships with young people, only good will come from that effort.

Here are some ways God's people can do God's work to help people come to faith and walk with the Lord:

▶ A strong Christian man can

be a powerful influence when he chooses to be a spiritual father to a fatherless young man.

Attend ballgames, cheer him on, take him and his friends to dinner and then to church. It's relationship-driven but it works.

▶ The church can provide educational opportunities, such as helping high school students prepare for the ACT or SAT, taking a student on a tour of one of our Baptist colleges or providing financial assistance

for the student to attend college. What if the church committed to stand in the gap in cases where

parents might be absent or simply unfamiliar with what is possible?

The church can be the second family that sees these young people through high school, college, military and beyond. We can love them as Christ loves them and help them see a lifestyle of health, happiness and joy.

Future families

They will want that for themselves and for their future families.

Who in your community needs someone to invest in them? More importantly, who are you going to invest your life in? Who's your one?



HUGHES

Alabama families and the 'pipeline to prison'

By Pastor Robert O. White II

City of Refuge Church in Montgomery

I have done prison ministry for as long as I have been in pastoral ministry.

There is one thing I find in common with the incarcerated more times than not; that is many of them have had a horrible home life that includes broken promises, broken marriages, drug abuse, abandonment and dysfunction on many levels.

While this is no excuse for criminal behavior it is an explanation that points to a solution.

Over time, the compounding issues of our families form pathologies that we in the church call generational curses where the kids seem to get sucked into a vortex from which there seems to be no escape. Our state's incarcerated also seem to be severely limited in academic ability and communication skills.

Can the state do better?

So can the state do any better than the family in raising children? No, all it can do is expand its reach over the people through stiffer and more intrusive laws.

Right now the state is seeking to make stricter laws for fentanyl use and seeks to ban divisive language in college classrooms which, in my opinion, actually adds to the problem.

If the family cannot get its children off drugs or teach them to intellectually defend themselves, why does the state think it can do a better job by bolstering state power to trample on the rights of educators or taking advantage of those already addicted?

The family has collapsed. ...

We have forfeited our responsibilities and can prepare for the rise of an authoritarian regime that will do the thinking and acting for us!



WHITE

EDITOR'S NOTE — Robert O. White II is pastor of City of Refuge Church in Montgomery and a faculty member at Alabama State University. City of Refuge is a member of Montgomery Baptist Association.

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“Train up a child in the way he should go.
Even when he grows older he will not abandon it.”

PROVERBS 22:6

The redemptive purpose and ministry of God through the church is carried out by enabling others to know His forgiveness.

Morris Murray Jr.
Jasper, Ala.

You've got to be responsible for who you're with, who you're around and what you do — who you associate yourself with and the situations that you put yourself in. ... It is what it is, but there is cause and effect when you make choices and decisions that put you in bad situations.

Coach Nick Saban
University of Alabama

“This job has been given to me to do. Therefore, it is a gift. There-

fore, it is a privilege. Therefore, it is an offering I may make to God. Therefore, it is to be done gladly if it is done for Him. Here, not somewhere else, I may learn God's way. In this job, not in some other, God looks for faithfulness.”

Elisabeth Elliot
Missionary, author, speaker

“No matter how many ways we tell it, there's still somebody out there who hasn't heard it quite like that, who needs to hear it, who's waiting to hear it, who actually is praying that somebody would tell them the story.

“God is so gracious that He just shows up. He has a way of letting us know we're on a track that He's encouraging us to keep go-

ing,” said **Karen Moore**, author of “Prayers to Strengthen Your Soul,” in an interview with Janet Harllee on “Faith In An Ever-Changing World.”

Plans change. They always will. Life changes. I can't control everything. I can hardly control anything. That's something I need to work on accepting.

But there's one thing that truly never changes — God never changes. His love for us never changes. Jesus' sacrifice for our sins will never change — it will never not be enough.

Hannah Muñoz
The-scroll.com
“Our steadiness in life's changes”

From the *Twitterverse*

@keahbone

It is astounding what people will say to protect their fallen heroes. Respect or influence should never morph into blind idolatry.

@philpnation

Friends, authors, and especially pastors: BEWARE THE SPOT-LIGHT. Shun the applause of man. Reject the accolades that you are the next {great person from history}. Follow the Matt. 6:3 principle and serve without need of recognition.

@haines_matt

If you are following Jesus for the wrong reasons, then it's probably not the Jesus of the Bible you are really following.

@greglaurie

If you want to see a revival, then you need to do revival-like things. Emotions will catch up. Don't wait for a big emotional encounter with

God. That may happen, or it may not. To have a personal revival, you need to go back to the basics in your walk with Christ.

@tim_lafleur

Accountability is something we all desperately need but seldom want. God help us find a few trusted friends who love us enough to tell us the truth.

@MBTS

“I have not to preach to you a salvation losable and dependent upon your good behavior; but lo, I preach a pardon never to be reversed, acceptance in the Beloved never to be canceled, adoption which makes you sons forever.”

—Charles Spurgeon

@jasonthacker

A robust Christian public theology and social ethic is rarely if ever being promoted or articulated by key-

board warriors. Christians are to be rooted and marked by unchanging truth and deep humility, not by the hot take dujour or alarmist grandiosity.

@williemclaurin

The great temptation of leadership is to think it is about you. It's ALL about Jesus!

@edstetzer

Never get over the fact that Jesus rescued you. He SAVED you. That truth changes everything.

@blondeorthodoxy

Who but God can take our biggest failures and use them to pull us closer to Himself? He really is the Redeemer.

@mhenslee

We know Sunday morning worship is a Saturday night decision. Let's make evangelism an everyday decision too ...

The thief on the cross and me

How does your faith compare to the thief on the cross?

As we enter the Easter season, it is especially appropriate that we as Christians reflect and examine our faith and Christian beliefs.

As we consider what we believe compared to the thief on the cross at Calvary, it is an opportunity for unimpeded honesty with the Lord and how our personal beliefs fit with the thief.

For this thief, there was no baptism, no communion, no confirmation, no speaking in tongues, no missions trips, no volunteerism nor church clothes.

He didn't recite a sinner's prayer. He couldn't even bend his knees to pray.

Among other things, he was just a thief.

Jesus didn't take away his pain, heal his body or rebuke his scoffers.

Yet it was this thief on the cross that walked into heaven the same hour as Jesus, simply by believing.

This thief had nothing more to offer than his belief that Jesus was who He said He was.

There was no spin from brilliant theologians or flashy TV evangelists. There was no ego displays or arrogance or shiny lights or crafty words. No donuts and coffee at the entrance on Sunday mornings.

Just a naked man dying on a cross, unable to fold his hands to pray.

Are you at peace with your Christian beliefs?

James W. Anderson
Talladega, Ala.

Then [the thief on the cross] said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.” And He said to him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 2:42–43).

3 stories you should know



IMB photo

The International Mission Board encourages Christians to pray for the 1.7 billion global followers of Islam during the Ramadan holiday, March 22 through April 21. During Ramadan, Muslims seek a greater spiritual awareness. Many Muslim-background believers have come to Christ through dreams and visions in which Jesus draws them to Himself. For more information on how to engage Muslims with the gospel, go to tabonline.org/Ramadan. (IMB)

Baptist leaders offer prayers for Ukraine

Pastor Yuri Sipko, former president of the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in Russia, voiced an apology Feb. 23 for his countrymen who are engaged in his country's war against Ukraine.

Sipko offered his comments in an online prayer forum hosted by Mission Eurasia.

"We continue to pray ... for God to protect Ukraine and the Ukrainian people," said Sipko.

Igor Bandura, senior vice president of Ukraine's Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, also spoke.

"This year was a year of pain, loss, uncertainty, fears, but at the same time it was a year of God's presence (and) his blessings in a very unique and special way during the turmoil of the war," Bandura said.

Read more at tabonline.org/Russian-prayer. (The Baptist Paper)

Leatherwood installed as ERLC president

Brent Leatherwood was installed as president of the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission in a March 20 service hosted by Brentwood (Tennessee) Baptist Church.

Leatherwood pledged that the ERLC stands ready to represent Southern Baptist beliefs in an America beleaguered by darkness and division.

Leatherwood served the ERLC as acting president for one year following the resignation of former president Russell Moore.

He had previously served as the ERLC's director of strategic partnerships and as chief of staff. (The Christian Index)



LEATHERWOOD

Hunt lawsuit latest step in his return to public ministry

From pastor to plaintiff, veteran Southern Baptist platform personality Johnny Hunt continues to deny allegations of sexual abuse made against him almost a year ago by an investigation into the SBC Executive Committee's handling of sexual abuse cases between the years 2000 and mid-2021.

Results of the investigation by Guidepost Solutions were released publicly by the SBC Sexual Abuse Task Force on May 22, 2022.

Hunt disappeared from public life until late November 2022, when his accountability team announced his return to ministry.

Speaking for the four pastors that made up the accountability team, Steven Kyle, pastor of Hiland Park Baptist Church in Panama City, Florida, said he and the other pastors had observed Hunt's "genuine brokenness and humility before God" and deemed him fit for ministry in the future.

Hunt has been preaching in churches since



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

December and hosted a men's conference March 17-18, the same time period his attorneys filed suit against the SBC, EC and Guidepost.

While he admits to a brief, inappropriate encounter with the wife of a fellow pastor in 2010 (a month after his two one-year terms as SBC president ended), Hunt contends the situation

was consensual and outside the bounds of the Guidepost investigation.

The woman involved has not been identified publicly and, according to the Guidepost report, her alleged description of the encounter says force was involved.

The debate about Hunt goes beyond whether he should have been included in the report's findings, however.

Some are asking whether he took appropriate action initially in 2010 for restoration to ministry. Others are concerned about the churches who are currently supporting his recent return to ministry.

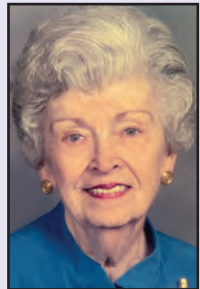
In response to The Alabama Baptist about the lawsuit, Jared Wellman, EC chair and pastor of Tate Springs Baptist Church in Arlington, Texas, said the EC's policy is not to comment on active litigation.

Read more at tabonline.org/Hunt-lawsuit. (Jennifer Davis Rash)

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

▶ **Dorothy Marion Pryor**, Alabama native and retired executive director of Georgia Woman's Missionary Union, died March 12. She was 98.



PRYOR

Pryor served Georgia WMU for 36 years, 28 of those as executive director. She joined the staff in 1955 and retired in 1991.

A native of Decatur, Alabama, Pryor graduated from Judson College in Marion and Carver School of Missions and Social Work (which later merged with Southern Seminary). She is the recipient of three honorary doctorates, from Judson, Tift College and Mercer University.

Pryor served as a trustee, officer and member of several organizations, universities and entities.

She was raised in Central Baptist Church, Decatur, Alabama.

October 2022. He has been a youth pastor for 12 years and is currently enrolled at the University of Alabama at Birmingham majoring in business information systems. He also works in UAB's financial affairs department. He has been leading worship for more than 10 years in a variety of settings including playing in a worship band for the last six years.

Ingle was raised at Blount Springs, where his father served as pastor for more than 20 years retiring in 2022.

He and his wife, Casie, have three children.

GENEVA ASSOCIATION

▶ Pastors from **Geneva Baptist Association**



Photo courtesy of Geneva Baptist Association

recently met with Clayton Cloer, the new president of Baptist College of Florida. Cloer shared his vision for the school's future and reported on plans to expand campus locations and degree offerings. The pastors offered prayer for Cloer as he begins this new work.

NORTH JEFFERSON ASSOCIATION

▶ **Timothy Anderson** is the new student pastor of **Enon Baptist Church, Morris**, where he has been serving in an interim role. He is pursu-

ing a degree through Liberty University.

He previously served as student and college pastor of Fultondale First Baptist Church and as a student ministry intern at Enon.



ANDERSON

TENNESSEE RIVER ASSOCIATION

▶ **Agape Baptist Church, Scottsboro**, awarded its associate pastor and his wife with the inaugural Spirit of Agape Award.

Max Croft became the church's volunteer associate pastor 15 years ago. He and his wife, **Mary Ella**, have a love for the community that has helped "make Agape into what God has called it to be," said Pastor Ryan Johnson.

The Crofts are involved in creating Community Care Village, which will use the 17 acres adjacent to the church to minister to its community. Croft, who previously served in the evangelism office of the Alabama



Photo courtesy of Max and Mary Ella Croft

Baptist State Board of Missions, was inspired by a similar model at First Baptist Church Leesburg, Florida.

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

▶ **Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills**, is hosting a community egg hunt for individuals of all ages with disabilities. The indoor event is April 8, 9:30 a.m.–noon. Activities include games, crafts and raffles. At 10 a.m., the hunt will include pre-kindergarten to 5th grade. The hunt at 11 a.m. is aimed at students age 6th grade all the way to adults.

Wheelchair and sensory friendly egg hunts will be held at the same times. A sensory space will be available. Egg hunt participants will be asked to trade eggs for treat bags. Dessert trucks will be available for treat purchases. Participants are encouraged to bring a basket. Contact Amy Kirby at akirby@shades.org.

COFFEE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Mount Zion Baptist Church, New Brockton**, is hosting a childrens' activity day April 1, 1–5 p.m. There will be food, a skit, games, songs, an egg hunt.

To register, email mountzion-baptistchurch.mixons@gmail.com.

FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION

▶ **Jeffery Ingle** is the new worship leader of **Blount Springs Baptist Church, Hayden**, where he has been serving in an interim role since



INGLE

Sims retires after 70 years in ministry

Robert Elwood Sims recently retired from **New Bethel Baptist Church, Braggs**, after 40 years of service and more than 70 years in pastoral ministry.

Sims was ordained in 1952 by his home church **First Baptist Church Prichard**. He holds a bachelor's degree from **Howard College** (now **Samford University**) and a master's degree from **Southern Seminary**.

His first major preaching opportunity came when he assisted with revival meetings at **Forrest Avenue Baptist Church, Gadsden**.

While a college student, he served as interim pastor at **South Park Baptist, Birmingham**, and **Macedonia Baptist, Bessemer**. In 1954, he began serving as pastor of three part-time churches in the **Selma Baptist Association**: **Benton Baptist**; **Sister Springs Baptist, Tyler**; and **Bethany Baptist, Collirene**.

In 1957, he moved to Kentucky to attend

Southern and served as a student pastor and led a mission church. He also was pastor at two churches in Indiana. In 1963, Sims was called as pastor of **FBC Semmes**.

After four years at Semmes he moved back to Selma to be bivocational minister at **Orrville Baptist** while working as a teacher and principal in **Dallas County**.

In 1977, he was called by **Ephesus Baptist, Sprott**, and served there until 1983 when he began serving **Bethany Baptist** and **New Bethel Baptist**. In 1994, Sims retired from teaching.

The church celebrated Sims on March 12 with a special service and fellowship meal.

Lee Tate, associational mission strategist of **West Central Baptist Association**, was guest speaker.

Sims and his wife, **Sarah**, have five children and six grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.



Photo courtesy of Steve Stephens

Children and the Church: Why attendance matters

By Carolyn Tomlin
The Alabama Baptist

One Sunday morning, when moving from our Sunday School class to the worship service in the auditorium, I overheard this conversation between a mother and her three children. “Do you want to stay for church — or go home and play and have ice cream?” The children replied while jumping up and down, “We want to go home! Yes, let’s go home and have ice cream!”

Before asking, the mother knew the answer.

Reaching children

According to a recent report from relevantchildrens-ministry.com, 85% of the people who come to know Jesus as their personal Savior do so before the age of 18.

Well-known evangelist and publisher Dwight L. Moody once said, “If I could relive

my life, I would devote my entire ministry to reaching children for God.”

Proverbs 22:6 says, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” But one of the concerns in both large and small churches is how to encourage parents to bring their children to church and participate as a family in the various programs the church offers.

“The church can reinforce Christian values which the child learns at home and ... the parents are trying to teach,” said Greg Gilbreath, pastor of Madison Baptist Church in Jackson, Tennessee.

Gilbreath is the author of a series of books, “Daddy Is My Favorite Word,” which help children learn to read while also reinforcing family values.

The church offers a bal-



Unsplash.com

ance from worldly pursuits. Contact with church leaders shows how mature Christians live their lives. Sunday School provides lessons that help us make choices that reflect God in our lives.

Here are three additional ways church attendance helps nurture spiritual growth in children:

1. Participation in church reinforces the value of prayer. We teach our chil-

dren to have a relationship with Jesus — to make Him our personal friend and the One we can talk to about anything.

Support system

2. Children who are in church have a support system when negative concerns arise in their life. Children have big problems, just like adults, but often they do not voice these feelings. Church

leaders help provide encouragement that Jesus is concerned about both big and small problems.

3. A church focused on Scripture helps children develop a biblical worldview. Studies show memorization is an important aspect for mental growth. Memorizing Scripture adds a spiritual component to this development. Throughout the year, the Word is taught in age-appropriate ways during Vacation Bible School, Sunday School, Bible Drill, GAs, RAs, Acteens and other activities.

Victor Love, a deacon of Greater St. Luke Baptist Church in Jackson, Tennessee, believes there is no substitute for children attending church.

“Children and youth need God,” Love said. “The future of our children depends on making sure our family attends church.”

Church Safety: A Holistic Approach

*Seminar and preview of the Safe Church Program
from the Center for Personal Protection and Safety*

April 27, 8:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.

Samford University's Sullivan-Cooney Field House
Coffee and light snacks available



To register and for more information, visit tabonline.org/church-safety.

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Samford MTI and TAB Media Group.



Intervention

US leads Western world in rates of divorce, teenage pregnancy, child poverty

(continued from page 1)

occurs with babies under the age of 1. Twenty-five percent of victims are below the age of 3.

Child abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional, educational and medical. Parental neglect — failing to provide food, clothing, shelter and other necessities children need to survive and thrive — is considered child abuse.

Many children live in homes with parents who have mental health issues or substance abuse addictions, who are embroiled in domestic violence or who are immature teenagers. Many live in poverty. Children and youth living with abusive and inadequate parenting usually suffer devastating, long-term consequences.

Fatherless homes

Fatherless homes are also a significant problem. It is estimated that 24.7 million children under 18 live without their fathers, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Research shows a father's absence affects children in numerous adverse ways, while a father's presence makes a positive difference in the lives of both children and mothers, according to the National Fatherhood Initiative.

Divorce is one of the leading causes of fatherless homes. The second leading cause is out-of-wedlock births. The United States has the highest divorce rate, the highest teenage pregnancy rate and the highest child poverty rate in the Western world.

According to research, children and youth raised without a father in the home are more likely to experience:

- ▶ Behavioral problems.
- ▶ Delinquency.
- ▶ Obesity.
- ▶ Lower grades.
- ▶ Poverty.
- ▶ Involvement in crime.
- ▶ Maltreatment.



- ▶ Homelessness.
- ▶ Psychological problems.

In addition, adolescent females from fatherless homes have a higher chance of becoming pregnant. Statistics also show that 63% of youth suicides are from father-

less homes, more than five times the national average, according to the U.S. Department of Health.

In situations where parents are drug addicted, incarcerated, abusive, neglectful, immature or inexperienced, grandparents and other relatives must often step in and take full responsibility for raising their children.

Grandparents step up

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 1 in 10 grandparents have grandchildren living with them. For older adults, the sudden stress of becoming a primary caregiver

The nation's foster care system is currently at a crisis level with too few foster parents to care for the nation's children in need.

There are now approximately 400,000 children and youth in foster care, according to the Child Welfare Information Gateway at childwelfare.gov.

Reaching out to help

Here are a few ways the church can reach out to help parents and children:

▶ In sermons, Bible study classes and seminars, strive to teach parents the qualities of good parenting, helping equip them with the skills necessary to raise their children.

▶ Intervene and alert proper authorities when abuse or neglect is suspected involving a child in your church or community.

▶ Create a list of resources, addresses, phone numbers and websites where church and community members can report child abuse or neglect and where overwhelmed parents can receive help.

▶ Seek ways your church can become a protector and promoter of children and families, empowering them and making them a high priority in the church's ministry.

again can be overwhelming, financially draining and detrimental to their health.

In cases where grandparents can't manage it, children often end up in the foster system.



For a list of resources, visit tabonline.org/parenting.

fatherhood.org

Unsplash.com

Taking ministry to the wounded

Life On Wheels mobile clinic seeks to be a resource, place of healing for women

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

There's a part of Robyn Blessing's story that she shares all the time now, but for a large part of her life — 28 years — she never spoke of it to anyone.

"I had an abortion in 1988," she said. "I was married and had a 5-year-old and had just moved to Montgomery from Texas."

Blessing was taking over a sales business and traveling all over the state, and when she found out she was expecting a baby, she told her husband that she just couldn't be pregnant.

"There were three abortion clinics here then," she said. "My husband and my 5-year-old went with me and sat in the TV room, and I had an abortion. It was horrible, but I left feeling relieved."

Blessing doesn't recall abortion being discussed much at church while she was growing up, and she didn't think of what she'd done as murder. She even served on a church staff for several years and never mentioned it to anyone.

Then one day in the fall of 2016, when she was working as a secretary in the labor and delivery unit of Baptist Medical Center South, something happened that began to change her view of abortion.

Ministry vision

Dr. Matt Phillips, an OB-GYN who worked on Blessing's floor, asked her if she would consider volunteering with a new ministry he was starting — Life On Wheels, a mobile ultrasound clinic aimed at giving pregnant women the resources they needed to carry their pregnancies to term and give birth to their babies.



Photo by Robyn Blessing

Life On Wheels medical director Dr. Matt Phillips (right) and Birmingham volunteer driver Carlton Rushin stand beside the ministry's mobile ultrasound clinic. The mobile clinic aims to provide resources that encourage women to carry their pregnancies to term.

Blessing told Phillips she had something to tell him.

"We walked out in the hall, and I said, 'I've had an abortion,' and I started crying. I didn't know why I was crying," she said. "And he put his arm around me and said, 'God will take that sin.' I thought, 'What sin?'"

On the way home, Blessing began to think and pray about whether what she had done had been sinful. The next day, she and her husband went to visit Phillips' Life On Wheels bus.

"They had a loop of ultrasound pictures on a screen," she said, "and when I stepped up onto that bus, the first thing I saw was a 9-week-old baby, and I said, 'Father, what did I do?'"

Before that day, she'd just seen her pregnancy as a problem. Now she saw it as a baby.

Two months after that moment, Phillips hired her as executive director of Life On Wheels.

"It's crazy that they would've hired me — two months before,

I was pro-choice," Blessing said. "But I understand how women feel and what would bring them to that point. It's our job just to tell them the truth, give them a moment to breathe and think for themselves, and show them their options."

She said Phillips' vision for Life On Wheels started when he would see women come to the emergency room for treatment after botched abortions.

A while later, the mobile clinic became a reality when a patient began helping him raise funds.

"We're part of a fleet called Image Clear Ultrasound," Blessing said.

For more information, visit lifenewheelsalabama.com.

“The goal is to be where the women are.”

Image Clear Ultrasound is at work in more than 40 cities in the U.S., including four in Alabama. Two of those are covered by Life On Wheels — they have one mobile clinic in Montgomery and two in Birmingham. They are also working toward having a Life On Wheels unit in Tuscaloosa in the coming months.

The Montgomery clinic has seen 315 women choose not to abort after seeing their baby on ultrasound. Birmingham — which got its first unit in February 2020 and added a second in February 2022 — has seen 57 women choose not to abort.

“We’re not coercive, but the statistics say 89% of women who see their own baby on ultrasound will choose to parent,” Blessing said. “What we’re doing is personifying that baby — showing them their head, arms, heartbeat — and letting the women see for themselves.”

After that, Life On Wheels connects mothers with pregnancy resource centers that can provide parenting classes, prenatal care and items they may need. They also help them get Medicaid and connect them with other resources in the community.

“We catch the mother at the moment when she’s freaking out and give her a safe place to sit down and think a little bit,” Blessing said. “We can’t talk her out of an abortion, but we can show her the ultrasound and let the Holy Spirit do the work.”

They’ve also seen 290 women profess new faith in Jesus after hearing the gospel at Life On Wheels. Blessing is able to connect those women with local churches that have volunteered to follow up with them for discipleship.

She said churches from 14 denominations serve on Life On Wheels’ staff and board.

“It’s 100% God,” Blessing said. “No way I would’ve thought I

could do something like this. He’s brought us people and resources.”

Neal Hughes, director of missions for Montgomery Baptist Association, said Blessing and Phillips “lead the Life On Wheels ministry from their knees.”

“They know that prayer is not part of the work, it is the work,” he said. “Robyn and Matt are constantly inviting Kingdom-minded people to join them in prayer for the unborn and for the moms they regularly see in this incredible ministry.”

Blessing said for her, it’s personal — her own story colors her approach to the ministry, both to the women and to the volunteers.

“I interview people all the time to volunteer, and at the end of the interview, they’ll tell me that they’ve had an abortion,” she said. “For some of them, it’s the first time they’ve told anyone. We need to be aware that there are so

many wounded people.”

Blessing said statistics say 1 in 3 women have an abortion before the age of 45, though she feels like it may be more like 1 in 4. Either way, it’s a large number.

Sharing her story

She said after she started telling her own story, she learned two close family members also had an abortion.

“Nobody talks about it until somebody talks about it,” Blessing said.

That’s why she wants to give women the information before they make a choice and wants to point women who have already chosen abortion toward healing.

Many pregnancy resource centers offer post-abortion counseling as part of their range of services. (Download a list of PRCs in Alabama at tabonline.org/prc-list.)

“[Abortion] is a tender subject,” Blessing said, “but if nobody’s talking about it, how are we going to educate people and stop it from happening?”



Facebook photo

Robyn Blessing holds the baby of a Life On Wheels client who chose to carry her baby to term after viewing an ultrasound in the mobile clinic.

PREGNANCY RESOURCE CENTERS

AROUND THE STATE

NORTH ALABAMA

▶ **Alpha Women’s Resource Center**
6479 Highway 43 N
Jackson, AL 36545
251-246-7750
pregnancytesthelp.com

▶ **First Choice — South**
2019 Normandie Dr.
Montgomery, AL 36111
334-593-0780
firstchoicemontgomery.com

▶ **COPE Pregnancy Center**
2158 Madison Ave.
Montgomery, AL 36107
334-264-9143
pregnancymontgomery.org

SOUTH ALABAMA

▶ **Pregnancy Resource Center**
604 S Eufaula Ave.
Eufaula, AL 36027
334-687-0715
prceufaula.com

▶ **Blount County Sav-A-Life**
311 1st Ave. East
Oneonta, AL 35121
205-625-5416
bcsavalife.com

▶ **Women’s Care Medical Center**
18555 Carolina St.
Robertsdale, AL 36567
251-220-0174
womenscaremedicalcenter.org

▶ **Sav-A-Life Shelby**
3156 Pelham Parkway
Suite 1
Pelham, AL 35124
205-664-1667
pregnancycenterpelham.org

▶ **Women’s Resource Center**
718 Downtowner Loop West
Mobile, AL 36609
251-344-4357
wrcmobile.org

▶ **River Region Pregnancy Center**
150 First St.
Prattville, AL 36067
334-365-8266
rrpregnancycenter.org

CENTRAL ALABAMA

▶ **Pregnancy Test and Resource Center**
1707 2nd Ave.
Jasper, AL 35501
205-221-5860

▶ **Etowah Pregnancy Testing Center**
119 Church St.
Rainbow City, AL 35906
256-442-6101
lovethemboth.org

▶ **Sav-A-Life of Lanett Valley, Inc.**
711 North 4th Ave.
Lanett, AL 36863
334-642-8832
lanettpregnancy.org

▶ **Pregnancy Care Center**
5389 U.S. Highway 11
Springville, AL 35146
205-467-7322
yourpregnancyhelp.com

▶ **Ann’s New Life Center for Women, Inc. — Leeds**
7404 Roosevelt Drive
Leeds, AL 35094
205-702-6500
annsnewlifecenter.com

▶ **First Choice — East**
380 Mendel Pkwy E
Montgomery, AL 36117
334-260-8010
firstchoicemontgomery.com

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

Journeyman experiences God at work among Thailand's Deaf

When Sarah Mitchell moved to Bangkok, Thailand, to serve as a Journeyman to the Deaf with the International Mission Board, life in the bustling Southeast Asian megacity was quite different than anything she'd ever known before.

Mitchell was quickly immersed in not only Thailand's culture but also Deaf culture. She began learning Thai Sign Language and growing in her understanding of how to minister effectively to the Deaf.

At times, the task seemed overwhelming, but Mitchell can testify God has been faithful to lead and guide her. And she's certain she's called to this work.

"It's been amazing to see, despite challenges, how faithful God is every single day," she said. "Meeting Deaf people in a city of 15 million is not easy. But the Lord has taken me, an ordinary person, and put me in the right places at the right times."

Spirit-led encounters

Once, she felt prompted by the Holy Spirit to leave early for a meeting with some friends. On the way, she noticed a fruit vendor with a sign on her shop indicating she was Deaf. Mitchell began signing to her, and the woman, named Kamala, was so excited to meet someone she could communicate with.

As they became friends, Mitchell learned that Kamala was a believer, and she had been praying specifically for God to send her a Christian friend who could teach her the Bible. They've been able to meet several times since then, and each time Kamala comes ready to study the Word.

Another time, Mitchell felt impressed by the Spirit to take a motorbike taxi home. By God's providence, her driver was Deaf, and he opened a door for her team to connect with a whole community of low-income Deaf.

These stories are just some of many Mitchell points to as clear examples of the Lord directing her path to find those in Bangkok who need the gospel.

Mitchell said the needs are great among the Deaf, who globally number approximately 70 million people. Less than 2% of them are believers or have access to the gospel in sign language.

"Deaf people are one of the most unreached peoples in the world, and we need more workers to reach them," Mitchell said. "If you're willing, just say 'Yes, here I am Lord, send me.' God will use you. All you need is a willing heart." (IMB)

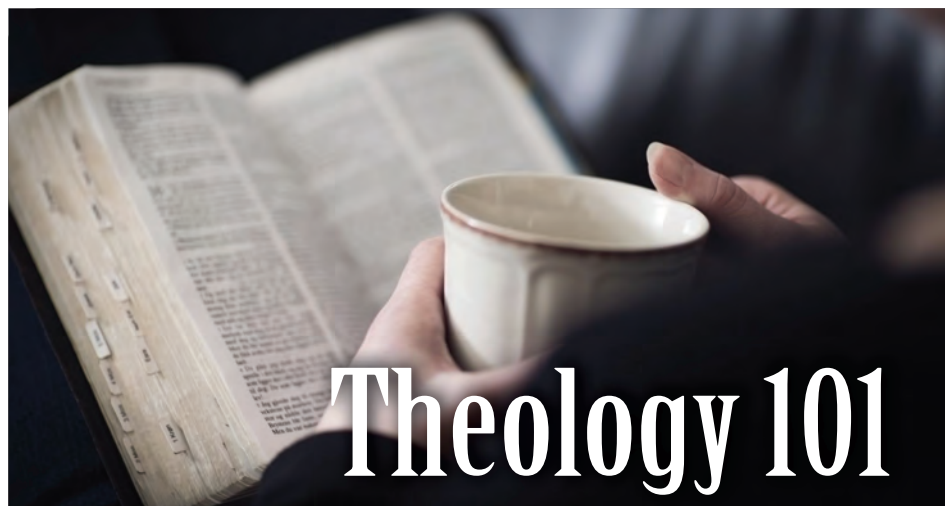
EDITOR'S NOTE — Some names have been changed for security reasons.

To read about Alabama ministries to Deaf, see page 17.



IMB photo

IMB Journeyman Sarah Mitchell builds relationships with the Deaf in Bangkok, Thailand, through sports ministry and other outreach efforts in her community.



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

The Holy Spirit

The World's Need for His Convicting

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
The Alabama Baptist

This month, in thinking about the role of the Holy Spirit as pointed out by Christ when He termed the Spirit as the Paraclete, we have considered three ideas.

First, we need to live in the daily awareness of His presence and enjoy the fellowship of the Spirit. Second, we need the Spirit's illumination to understand revealed truth and share it with others. Third, we need to know that as Christian witnesses we live in a divine-human partnership in which the Spirit is also bearing witness through our witness.

This last of the Paraclete passages, found in John 16:5-11, puts the focus on the necessity for people to experience the Spirit's conviction concerning their need and God's provision.

Clear warning

Jesus clearly warned His disciples that their loyalty to Him would put them at risk of experiencing hostility from the world of unbelievers as they bore witness to Him and His truth.

Even so, the coming of the Spirit would give them the advantage in the midst of that hostility.

Jesus pointed to the fact that the Spirit could be everywhere simultaneously. He also pointed out the added benefit of the Spirit being in them. Unlike Jesus' own incarnate mission of redemption that was accomplished during His earthly presence, the Spirit would abide with them forever.

Furthermore, the Spirit would

internalize their religious experience, making it a matter of the heart, not of external law-keeping.

To top it all, He explained that as God-designed temples of the Spirit, they would become conduits through whom God would touch the world.

Christ's righteousness

The convicting work of the Spirit (v. 9) would cause people to recognize that Christ has the only righteousness that puts sinners in right standing before God and that He alone possesses a righteousness that God would accept into His heaven (v. 10).

Finally, Jesus explained that the Spirit would convict the world of judgment as demonstrated by the judgment that was passed upon Satan, the ruler of this unbelieving world (v. 11).

Being sinners, every person needs to ask three questions:

▶ Have I dealt with my unbelief?

▶ Have I acted on the conviction that only the righteousness of Christ gains admittance into heaven?

▶ Have I abandoned the devil and his ways, knowing his cause is already doomed?

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.



Discipleship vital to preparing future leaders

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Shane Pruitt, Next Gen director for the North American Mission Board, said his office gets 3–5 calls per week from churches needing various leaders.

“In 2017, Barna research found that less than 15% of all Protestant ministry leaders are under the age of 40,” he said.

The question of whether a void in ministry leadership exists also keeps coming up, Pruitt added.

His book “Calling Out the Called” is a response to the question.

Pruitt moderated a recent “Calling Out the Called” webinar featuring Scott Pace, associate professor of pastoral ministry and preaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Semi-

nary; Paul Worcester, director of NAMB’s collegiate evangelism; and Catherine Renfro, NAMB’s director of evangelism. The panel discussed “what it means to call out the called and disciple those God has called to ministry.”

The first step to recognizing God’s calling to vocational ministry is prayer, Pruitt said.

“Jesus said, ‘Pray to the Lord of the harvest,’” Pruitt said. Asking God to reveal callings in others should be a priority of current leaders’ ministries, he said.

Prayer is needed for parents of young people who are called, along with “seasoned saints” God might call after retirement, Pruitt said.

Prayer should include discernment to see God’s call in others, Renfro added.

Once it’s noticed ask, “Have you ever considered a call to vocational ministry?” then hold strategic conversations to help clarify what God is saying.

‘Wrestling’ is OK

A time of questioning should be encouraged, Pace added.

“Let them wrestle with the call. Don’t immediately bypass that season,” he suggested. “It can be invaluable, not only in shaping their heart, but you also want the cement to dry, you want the stake to be nailed down so that it won’t be pulled up by a gust of wind.”

“We all know what it’s like to have those seasons of ministry to where we would tap out if we could. But the one anchor that holds that ministry to

the ground is that calling that we know that Jesus placed on us,” he asserted.

All four leaders agreed that learning to serve should be emphasized along with providing opportunities to learn about ministry and start leading others.

“Let them explore their gifts. Let them see what they’re good at. Give them opportunities to serve and to plug in,” Pace advised. “Give them those chances to fail and mess up ... Help them understand that doesn’t disqualify them from ministry. It actually helps them grow.”

Pruitt recalled that when he was younger his pastor made time by inviting him along on ministry tasks — going to the hospital, sharing the gospel or working on the church building.

“Don’t add something else to your calendar. Invite people into your calendar,” Pruitt urged. “So the things you’re already doing, just invite people to come along.”

Renfro said she heard wise words early on about ministry being more than becoming famous.

‘Open doors’

“Just serve where you are ... right here, right now ... be faithful in that and God will open the doors along the way as He wants to open them, where He wants to open them and when,” she was told.

“At the end of the day there’s one person who deserves to be famous, and that’s Jesus. It has nothing to do with us,” Renfro said. “If we just remind those that we get to invest in that it’s a privilege to serve Jesus, that could be a game changer.”



PRUITT

Free resources can be found at gensend.org as well as in Pruitt’s book, “Calling Out the Called.”

Ask the Podiatrist: NEUROPATHY

What Is Peripheral Neuropathy?

Peripheral neuropathy is a defect or change to small nerve fibers which may cause pain, tingling, numbness, and possible muscle weakness. It usually starts in the hands and feet.

What Treatments Are Available?

Treatment for neuropathy ranges from medication, which can have adverse effects, to vitamins, topical pain medication, and injections.

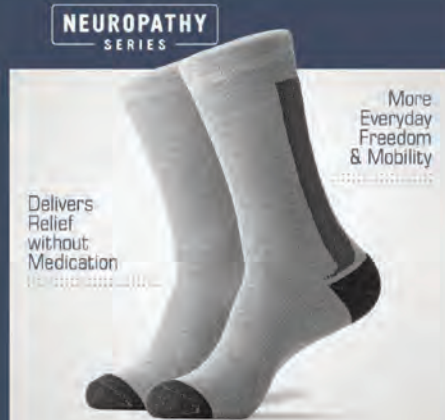
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Dr. Hames is the first to design a wearable garment that can help circulation, balance, and neuropathy pain at the same time.



DR. MICHAEL HAMES
FOUNDER

Dr. Hames is a Fellow of the American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons. He currently practices in Alabama where he is on the state board of Podiatry. He has developed and brought to market multiple items to improve the lives of his patients and others including Patent No.: US 9.421,117 B1.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Super Summer signup is open

The April 10 early bird deadline for Super Summer registration is coming up quickly — if you haven't already, it's time to get your students signed up!

Super Summer — which will be held July 10–14 at the University of Mobile — is a leadership and discipleship camp for Alabama students who have completed any grade 8th–12th grade.

At Super Summer, students begin to dig deeper in the Word of God and own their faith. It is a place where they are not only disciplined but challenged to go

To register, visit supersummer.ymlink.org or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



out and make disciples.

The cost for early bird registration (by April 10) is \$250. After April 10, \$280.

For more information, visit supersummer.ymlink.org.

Start your church's own ESL ministry

An English as a Second Language ministry can be a great way to make connections with internationals in your area. If your church doesn't have one, a first step toward getting involved is to attend an ESL workshop.

The next workshop will be held at Westwood Baptist Church in Alabaster

April 21–22 from 1 p.m. 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.

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

Get Acquainted Day

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 ministries, meet your missionaries and tour the SBOM facility in Prattville.

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

To register, visit alsbom.org/gad.

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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

CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR

Westside Baptist Church in Jasper, Alabama, is in search of a senior pastor. Deadline to apply is May 24. Mail resumé to: Westside Baptist Church, 1101 22nd St W, Jasper, AL 35501. Email to: wbcjasper@gmail.com.

SENIOR PASTOR

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

PASTOR

Northside Baptist Church, Selma, Alabama, is seeking a full-time pastor. Please submit resumé to: Northsidebaptist2021@gmail.com.

PASTOR

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

PASTOR

Dalraida Baptist Church, Montgomery, Alabama, is accepting resumé 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 resumé to: dalraidapastorsearch@gmail.com.

PASTOR

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

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Westview Baptist Church, 809 Damascus Hwy., Enterprise, AL 36330, is prayerfully seeking resumé for a bivocational pastor. Please send resumé to: church address, marked ATTN: Search Committee, or via email at wbcchurch.enterprise@gmail.com.

com. For additional inquiries, call 334-797-0798.

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 resumé to: garrettm2@bellsouth.net.

YOUTH PASTOR

Bethlehem West Baptist Church, a vibrant and growing church in Vinemont, Alabama, is seeking a full-time youth pastor. Please send resumé to: shanewheeler1210@icloud.com.

PART-TIME YOUTH MINISTER

Webb Baptist Church is seeking an individual who can work part-time in leading the youth ministry. Resumé can be sent to: lshayles@outlook.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

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Sav-A-Life Calhoun County is seeking a confident and passionately pro-life individual to serve as our executive director, overseeing two locations. This person must be a competent leader with management experience and willing to oversee donor relations. For information: savalifetoday@gmail.com.

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. Resumé will be received through April 30.

SIGNS

SIGN INSTALLER NEEDED

For Reliable Signs in McCalla, Alabama, 40+ hours/week at times, electrical, welding, lift/ariel equipment operation is a plus. Clean driving record needed. For more information, call 205-664-0955 or email signs@reliablesigns.com.

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Take a trip this year to help Alaska Baptists

Dozens of Alabama churches and associations are partnering with churches in Alaska. There are still many opportunities this spring and summer.

To learn more, visit alaskabrnr.org and click on "Get Involved," then choose "Mission Opportunities."

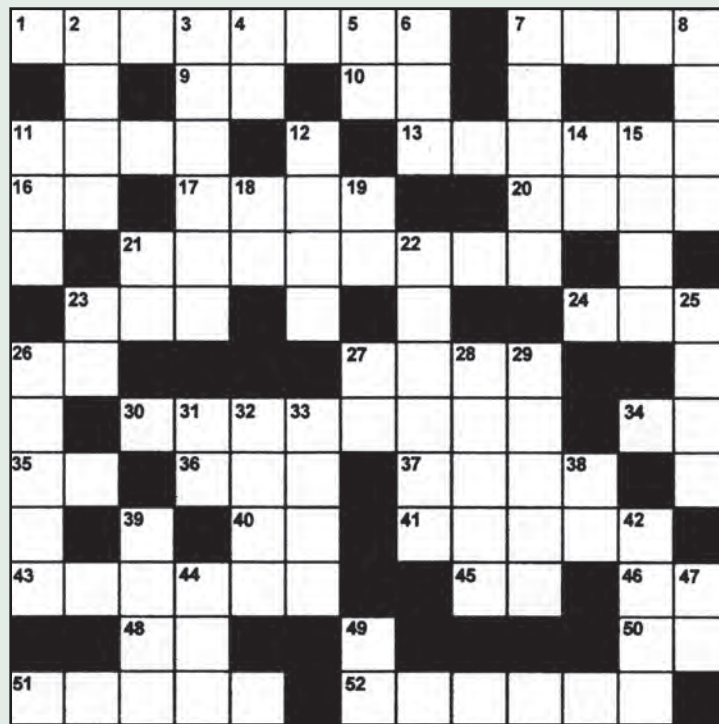
CHRISTIAN crossword



UPCOMING EVENTS
sponsored by the State Board of Missions

ACROSS

1. Belonging to a minor prophet.
7. Belonging to the son of Issachar. (Gen. 46:13)
9. I'm ____ the end of my rope.
10. Each. (abbr.)
11. The beloved disciple.
13. Spoken of by ____ the prophet. (Matt. 24:15)
16. Abbreviation meaning "all right."
17. Though they have ____ chariots. (Josh. 17:18)
20. Woodworking tool.
21. Cupbearer to the king. (Neh. 1:1,11)
23. Styling ____ for the hair.
24. ____ is the father of Canaan. (Gen. 9:18)
26. Negative.
27. They set the ark ... upon a new _____. (2 Sam. 6:3)
30. ____ lamented for Josiah. (2 Chron. 35:25)
34. ____ of the Chaldees. (Gen. 15:7)
35. And ____ shall rule over thee. (Gen. 3:16)
36. Type of armament.
37. "I ____ that test!"
40. ____ have and to hold.
41. 28th book of the Bible.
43. Belonging to a man of mount Ephraim. (Judg. 17:1)
45. Compass direction.
46. He ... dwelleth in _____. (John 6:56)
48. Tyrone. (abbr.)
50. "____ top of old Smokey."



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51. Pharaoh's daughter ... called his name _____. (Ex. 2:10)
52. Before the Israelites had kings, they had _____.
21. Compass direction.
22. As my servant ____ hath walked naked. (Isa. 20:3)
23. ____ in peace. (Luke 7:50)
25. Barnabas took _____, and sailed unto Cyprus. (Acts 15:39)
26. 34th book of the Bible.
27. 900 in Roman numerals.
28. Radar beacon.
29. Solomon ... was not arrayed like one of _____. (Matt. 6:29)
31. For example.
32. Boaz begat Obed of _____. (Matt. 1:5)
33. Seth ... called his (son's) name _____. (Gen. 4:26)
38. Defensive End. (abbr.)
39. ____ of the Apostles.
42. Prophet who was a herdsman of Tekoa.
44. Yes. (nautical)
47. Printer's measure.
49. Middle Atlantic state. (abbr.)

DOWN

2. Written in the ____ of the prophets. (Acts 7:42)
3. He had the gift of interpreting dreams.
4. A word ... in due season, how good is ____! (Prov. 15:23)
5. Where is ____ that is born King of the Jews? (Matt. 2:2)
6. Why is thy countenance ____ ... ? (Neh. 2:2)
7. Prophet to Nineveh.
8. Part of a shoe.
11. The patience of ____.
12. The name of Samuel's firstborn was _____. (1 Sam. 8:2)
14. ____, ego, superego.
15. Seraiah, Jeremiah, _____. (Neh. 12:1)
18. Blood factor.
19. Southwestern state. (abbr.)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

SPEAK Tour set for May 3

Want to build up the students in your church and reach their friends with the gospel?

Plan to bring them all to SPEAK Tour on May 3 in Centreville.

"It's a night of worship, but it's more geared toward students bringing their friends so that they can hear the gospel and have an opportunity to respond to the gospel," said Josh Meadows, student ministry strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. "We also will challenge our followers of Jesus to take the next step and identify the person that they want to begin praying for and ultimately reach with the gospel message."

SPEAK Tour is basically an old-fashioned tent revival that's been modern-

For more information, visit ymlink.org/speaktour or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



ized. The event will have fun outdoor games, worship and a chance to hear and respond to the hope of Jesus Christ.

SPEAK Tour will be held May 3, 5:30 p.m., at BMC Wellness Center, 285 Hospital Dr. in Centreville.

Admission is free, and no preregistration is required.

For more information, visit ymlink.org/speaktour.

The Disciple Making Leader conference

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.

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'DO NOT LET LANGUAGE BARRIERS STOP YOU'

Alabama Baptist Conference of the Deaf stresses encouragement, involvement in others' lives

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Part family reunion, part continuing education, the Alabama Baptist Conference of the Deaf held its annual meeting March 3–5 at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega.

Steve Dye, Deaf ministry catalyst consultant for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, explained that language issues are the main reason a separate conference is important.

"[In a] Deaf group study led by a skilled Deaf leader ... [the Deaf] will get 100% of the message, compared to a hearing interpreted group or service where the Deaf would only catch about 60% of the message. I read ... that a hearing person would average learning about 700,000 words before they graduate high school. A deaf person would average about 80,000 — [a] pretty big difference," Dye said.

American Sign Language is often mistaken for a visual form of English. It's actually a distinct language, with a different word order. Because English is a second language for many in the Deaf community, the speaker often includes explanations of words or terms used.

Offering encouragement

At ABCD, for example, when featured speaker LeRance Hall, pastor of the Deaf ministry of Roebuck Baptist Church in Spartanburg, South Carolina, shared ways to encourage someone who is terminally ill, he first made sure everyone understood what terminally ill means.

The Deaf ask questions and offer opinions throughout a message,



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Attendees show their appreciation as Tarell Trask (right) leads worship March 4 during the Alabama Baptist Conference of the Deaf. The group's annual meeting was held March 3–5 at Shocco Springs.

making it very interactive. However, the audience can't always see what's being signed. For everyone to "hear" everything, someone faces the group and mirrors the question or comments in ASL.

ABCD also is an annual opportunity to educate the broader Alabama Baptist family about the Deaf community and ministering to and with its members. For example, people who are deaf love worship music just as much as hearing believers do. Deaf people simply participate in worship music differently.

One person faces the group and interprets a prerecorded song. Lyrics are often displayed so the audience can sign along. The music is loud with the bass cranked up so

that the Deaf can feel the vibrations of the beat.

The worship leader for ABCD was Tarell Trask. Trask, who lives in Montgomery, is hearing. She graduated from Troy University, obtaining a bachelor's degree in interpreting.

"My passion to interpret using sign language is a divine calling from God. I don't have any deaf family members, and this was definitely a step of faith and total obedience to God's perfect, not permissive, plan for my life for His glory. It is so worth it!" Trask explained.

Out of the songs chosen for the weekend, she has two favorites: "Believe" by Blessing Offor and "I Speak Jesus" by Charity Gayle.

"Sometimes, His word to me was just to 'Believe' His love for me instead of looking for love in all the wrong places. Other times, He wanted to lead me back to His presence and just call on Jesus — "I Speak Jesus" — who is the only One that can save," she said.

Like an interpreter for the Deaf in a hearing service, in a Deaf meeting someone will "reverse interpret" or "voice" what is being signed for those not fluent in ASL.

ABCD features an adult track and a track for teens, JrABCD. About 75 people attended this year's conference. The topic of the teaching sessions for both adults and youth was encouragement.

Micah Willis spoke at the JrABCD meetings. His passions are training and discipling the next generation of deaf teens to be leaders, as well as leading worship at Deaf conferences and retreats.

"It is very important for [the Deaf] to know how to encourage themselves when facing problems in their daily lives. And to encourage others as well. Youth is my passion, and I love to do what I get to do for the Kingdom of God," Willis shared.

Vastly unreached group

Even though there are differences, Dye is adamant that language barriers between the hearing and the Deaf are not an excuse for not reaching out to this mostly unchurched population.

"We have 28,000 [deaf people] in the state of Alabama. We average around 200 in attendance in our churches. That has got to change. Listen to your deaf people and pray with them. Do not let the language barriers stop you from reaching out," he urged.

To find out more about Deaf ministries in Alabama and throughout the Southern Baptist Convention, go to albcdeaf.org and click on "Alabama Ministries" under the menu tab.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For April 2

Explore the Bible

By Ben Stubblefield

Visiting assistant professor of Christian studies, University of Mobile



REMAIN IN ME John 15:1–17

B.B. King once sang, “Nobody loves me but my mother, and she might be jivin’ too.” I’m pretty sure my mama loves me, but I get what B.B. is saying. Sometimes it’s hard to believe anybody out there cares.

The disciples are about to experience an extraordinary sense of loss and absence — once at the crucifixion of Christ and again at His ascension. So the Lord leaves them this remarkable instruction in order to have and remember His permanent care, love, joy and abiding presence.

Pruned (1–8)

John 15 opens with Jesus’ vine/branch metaphor. Agrarian imagery is common in His teaching ministry, but the meaning behind this particular usage deserves further consideration because of how often vineyard language is associated with Israel in the Old Testament.

Most significantly, Psalm 80 describes Israel as God’s choice vine. In Old Testament language, you had to get connected to the Israel vine to get into the Lord’s family.

But Jesus says, “I am the true vine.” What He is saying here is epic — people no longer need a bloodline traceable to Abraham in order to get to God. Similar to John 14:6, Jesus says that in order to get to God, all you need to do is get connected to the Jesus vine. He is the true path to everlasting life.

There are plenty of particulars to dig into in verses 2–8. You could write a book about each verse, but the essence of Jesus’ teaching is about fruitful obedience.

The Father’s pruning, our abiding and the Lord abiding in us will catalyze much fruitfulness, or faithful obedience.

Joy (9–11)

Jesus promises to grant His love

and His joy to His disciples. Interestingly, it seems our joy is proportionate to our obedience — the more faithfully we obey, the more full our joy becomes.

As a young pastor, I often felt part of my job was to convince people not to do things they already knew they shouldn’t do, almost like the John Lithgow character in the film “Footloose.” There’s a bunch of Kevin Bacons out there just trying to have a simple good time, and here I am, a man of the cloth, trying to shut it down.

That feeling would come over me from time to time until I got a firm hold on what Jesus is saying here. It made me realize that what Christians advocate for aren’t the rules of a cosmic killjoy. According to Jesus, we are summoning people to experience infinite, divine joy made full. We are not fighting to keep people from having a good time. We are contending for humanity’s greatest imaginable joy.

Love (12–17)

Jesus reiterates His commandment to love “as I have loved,” but goes on to explain that the essence of love is self-sacrifice. It is a defining quality of friends and what Jesus anticipates His chosen and appointed disciples will imitate.

Jesus no longer considers them servants, but celebrates them as friends. He relates to them all things He has heard from the Father. Only two characters in the Old Testament, Abraham and Moses, received the moniker “friend of God.” They enjoyed unique and privileged insight into the mind and heart of the Almighty. It is quite shocking, therefore, that Jesus extends the same intimate self-revelation of the Godhead to any that follow, abide and obey.

**“Greater love has no one than this,
that someone lay down his life for his friends.”**

John 15:13

Bible Studies for Life

By James R. Strange

Professor of biblical and religious studies, Samford University



JESUS DIED FOR ME John 19:16–19, 28–30, 38–42

In John 18:28–19:16, we learn Jesus’ crucifixion is the result of His encounter with Pontius Pilate, a Roman prefect who governed Judea from A.D. 26 to 36.

In John’s Gospel, Pilate and the chief priests stand out against the backdrop of many people who believe in Jesus after they encounter Him. All these encounters coalesce in the events of chapters 19 and 20.

In verse 8, we learn Pilate is afraid. Presumably, he is worried about the implied threat in verse 12.

From all sources that mention Pilate, we know it’s unlikely he wants to avoid angering the Jewish people. Instead, he probably wants to maintain a good relationship with the priesthood.

What we do know is this — he executes someone he thinks is innocent, probably because Jesus is Jewish and has no status. The flogging and crucifixion reveal Pilate’s character.

Jesus is crucified on the day of preparation for Passover, when lambs are being slaughtered nearby in the temple. We recall the confession of John the Baptist in John 1:29 and 36.

Jesus was free of sin, yet He was crucified. (16–19)

“Calvary” comes from Latin translations of “Golgotha.” Jesus probably carried the cross beam to the place where vertical posts were set beside the road outside a western gate of the city.

The Gospels don’t mention a hill, but early Christians identified the place with a raised outcrop of limestone bedrock.

Jesus poses no threat to Roman control of the region. But because of the accusations, Pilate can make a grisly and public example of Him, which is what crucifixion is

designed to do. The Romans use the inscription to say, “This is what we do to your kings.”

Christ’s work on the cross was completed when He died. (28–30)

Verses 28 and 29 fulfill Psalm 69:21. Hyssop, an herb similar to oregano, grows wild in Israel. Hyssop and wine recall the use of hyssop and lambs’ blood at the first Passover (Ex. 12:22).

The death and burial of Jesus was attested to by others. (38–42)

Although the town of Arimathea is unknown, Joseph is mentioned in all four Gospels.

His traditional tomb is inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. According to Mark 15:43, Joseph is rich, which accords with having a rock-cut family tomb in Jerusalem (Matt. 27:60).

In the other Gospels, women come to the empty tomb to anoint Jesus’ body with spices.

In John, Nicodemus provides a lavish amount of myrrh and aloes. Only John mentions this garden and the one on the Mount of Olives where Jesus was arrested (“Gethsemane” in Matthew and Mark).

In John, all encounters with Jesus lead to the question of His identity.

His crucifixion and resurrection are His glorification — the most complete revelation that He is the Son who reveals the Father. The priesthood and Gentile governor reject this revelation while many others believe.

John wants his audience to believe Jesus is the Son of God and to “have life in His name” (20:31). The same encouragement, therefore, applies to us. Let us live life in Jesus’ name.

**“When he had
received the drink,
Jesus said,
‘It is finished.’
With that, he
bowed his head and
gave up his spirit.”**

John 19:30

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Easter devotional explores the resurrection through the Gospel of John

After completing the devotional “Christmas Matters: How the Birth of Jesus Makes a Difference Every Day,” coauthors and lifelong friends Anna Nash and Katy Shelton knew they weren’t finished writing. They quickly got to work on “Easter Matters: How the Resurrection of Jesus Changes You.”

Like their first book, the devotional was born out of the women’s personal journeys.

“As Katy and I really began to more deeply wrap our minds and hearts [around] the concept of the Resurrection, we saw the impact that it has on lives — to change us individually, to better understand and improve our awareness of our identity in Christ,” Nash noted.

“Christmas Matters” ended with a reading from John 1 on Christmas Day. “Easter Matters” naturally flowed from the earlier book.

Journaling-style prompts

“That was kind of an automatic lead-in to the next holiday coming up — Easter. We moved ahead to write about the book of John and the Easter season,” Shelton said.

Nash explained that she and Shelton have a passion for people to be “inspired and encouraged” to



Katy Shelton (left) and Anna Nash

Submitted photo

engage with prayer and Scripture. The book includes journaling-style writing prompts and questions for further thought and discussion so readers can “personally apply each chapter” to their lives.

The devotional’s goal is to explore who a person is in relation to God. As they wrote, the coauthors learned a lot about this topic themselves. Shelton’s favorite chapters are based on John 15. She was in part inspired by her grandmother, who was interested in genealogy and desperately wanted to discover she was part of a royal family. When Shelton thought about her grandmother’s quest, she realized Christians are already in a royal family.

“Going back to [John 15:5], Jesus talked about a literal family tree where He said ‘I am the vine, you are the branches.’ ... If we accept Jesus as our Savior and Lord, then we are a child of God, connected to

that literal family tree, and we have a rich, royal inheritance. Forgiveness, hope and love are the riches we’ll receive.”

Nash’s favorite chapter is based on John 1. The chapter starts with “In the beginning was the Word,” and by its end, Jesus is choosing His disciples. This chapter highlights how Jesus related to Nathaniel, calling him by name. After Nathaniel asked how He knew him, Jesus replied He saw him under the tree. “We can relate to Nathaniel and feel touched by Jesus in very similar, personal ways. His call to us is warm and inviting, not just a shallow, ‘I saw you over there,’” Nash explained.

Personal reflections

Though the entire book is meaningful to each author in distinct ways, the coauthors have found that through the various seasons of life, different chapters stand out.

Currently, Shelton’s most meaningful passage is John 17, when Jesus prayed the night before His crucifixion.

She recognizes the importance of this moment on many levels.

‘Jesus prayed for us’

“In verse 20, He says, ‘I am praying, not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in Me through this message.’ That took me aback — Jesus prayed for us,” she recalled. “[He] prayed for us, not only His disciples. That whole chapter is Him just pouring His heart out to God for His disciples ... [and] for us.”

John 10 is especially important to Nash at this time in her life, as it includes verses about knowing Jesus’ voice and how He came to provide His followers an abundant life.

“That abundant life is wrapped into the relationship of us knowing His voice and following Him. But His voice is kind; His voice is loving and tender and forgiving. Because of the kind of God He is, it causes me to want to hear His voice,” Nash said. “A lot of us as believers live under this banner of ‘I should read and listen and try to discern and follow — do all the things and check the boxes,’ but instead it’s a warm, loving relationship as if He is saying, ‘Here I am,’ very gently.”

Nash and Shelton are continuing the series with upcoming devotionals “Reflection Matters,” “Giving Thanks Matters” and “Forever Matters.”

To find out more about the authors, go to AnnaNash.net and KatyShelton.com.

“Easter Matters” and “Christmas Matters” are available at Amazon.com and other book retailers.



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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Add prayer

By Tina Louderback
International Mission Board

6 ways to make your next missions trip more impactful

Let's face it, churches spend a whole lot of money and time doing short-term missions trips around the globe. If we are going to invest so much, let's do it right by being intentional from the beginning.

My husband, Tim, and I have hosted teams taking entry-level missions trips in Panama. Our goal is always to help churches not only see but experience their role in carrying out the missionary task. We've seen the good, the bad and the ugly.

Through the years, we've found when you add prayer to the following six things, your missions trip will be intentional and impactful.

1. Flexible doesn't mean "wing it." Send teams that are prepared.

Try to paint a picture for your team about what they signed up to do.

Help them know what to pack, wear and what not to take. Make sure your team leaders spend time talking to missionaries on the field. They will have tips and hints on the best way to prep your team.

Cultural exposure

Practice cultural greetings. Try food that might seem weird. Take a bucket bath. Talk about the concept of "time" as it relates to the people you will serve. This helps to get the "Ooh, that's weird" comments out of the way while still in the U.S. When you get to your country of service, it's easier to slide right into the culture.

Short-term trips are jam packed with activities. This means it is important to have your Bible lessons already prepared and be comfortable sharing the gospel. Not only



A student volunteer and a local believer lead a class in Nicaragua together.

will you have an immediate impact, but you'll have time to invest in relationships, not to mention sleep more. No long nights preparing for the next day!

2. Partner with local believers.

Yes, work with your International Mission Board missionary but let local believers connect you to other Christians, churches and ministries. While this may not be possible in every country, work toward partnering with nationals already doing the work. This is important for discipleship.

After you go back home, what's the plan for discipling the new followers of Christ?

By partnering with local churches, not only will they take over the task of discipleship, but you become

sister churches supporting each other.

3. If nationals can do it, you shouldn't.

The last thing we want to do is create dependency.

Being tied to ministries with national believers keeps dependency down. Spend your time empowering, not enabling.

This means if your trip involves teaching a Vacation Bible School, it's your job to mentor and encourage the local believer as they teach beside you. This is an important principle with almost any type of ministry, whether it's door-to-door evangelism or putting on a new roof.

4. The only solution you need is for lostness.

It's in our nature to fix things and make it better. The Lord reminded me years ago that I didn't have enough power or resources to fix all the problems.

What you can try to fix, however, is your new friend's eternity. Each day 157,690 people die without Christ. You have the solution for a lost world — the gospel.

5. The entire church should be involved, not just the five traveling.

A short-term trip can transform the entire church.

Have a plan to get everyone involved from the beginning and afterward.

Ask classes to pray. Create notes of encouragement for your team to read — this can be done by kids, teens and adults. Study the country and people as a congregation. Stay connected with the team while they are ministering.

When the team returns, the trip isn't over. Your church will be forever changed by this experience.

6. Short-term trips should lead to a long-term commitment.

Be forward thinking from the very beginning.

There are more than 7,000 people groups among the least reached with the gospel in the world. It's going to take all of us working together to reach the nations.

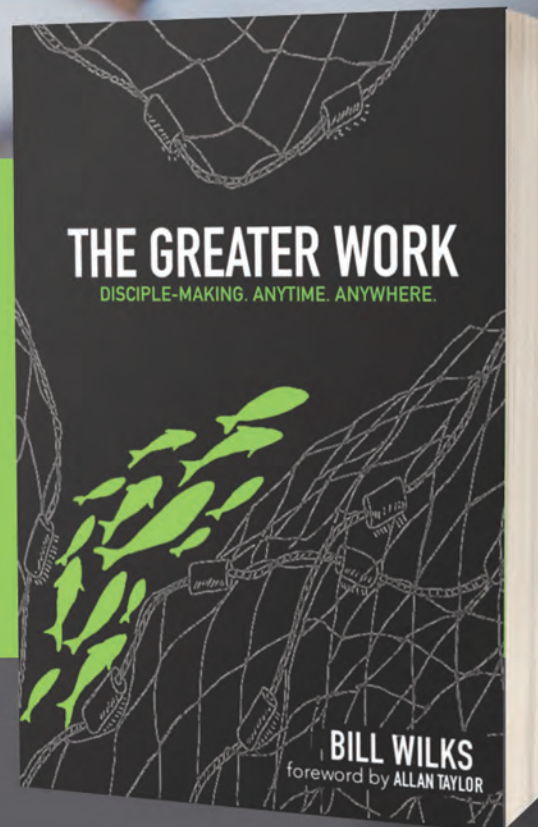
This long-term commitment may lead to ministries not only with a people group in another country but also with them in your own community.

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

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Seven lessons from 70 years

By Mary Alford
Arkansas Baptist News

Arkansas couple celebrates decades of marriage, ministry

James and Mattie Walker have been married 70 years and have been in the ministry together even longer.

In 1949, while he was a student at Ouachita Baptist University, James was called to be a part-time pastor at Union Baptist Church, near Harrison, Arkansas. At the same time, the 19-year-old also accepted a call to pastor at Bellefonte Baptist Church in Boone County, where he preached two Sundays a month. He eventually resigned from Union Baptist Church and took on preaching full-time at Bellefonte.

James said George Blackmon, a Bible professor at OBU, told the “preacher boys,” as he referred to them, two things they did not want to do when leading a church.

The first was not to construct a building, and the second was not to date any of the girls. While at Bellefonte, James did both.

It was at this church that James met Mattie.

The two dated about two years before getting engaged and eventually wed on July 27, 1952.

When it comes to the longevity of their marriage, James credits it to seven things.

1. Family

James’ grandfather was a Baptist preacher as well as a schoolteacher and farmer. He also served in the U.S. House of Representatives.

James said he was watching his grandfather split wood one day when his grandfather said, “Don’t just stand there, do something.”

And James has been doing something ever since, Mattie said.

James and Mattie grew up during the Depression. He said their parents were hard workers and



JAMES AND MATTIE WALKER

Photo courtesy of Arkansas Baptist News

taught James and Mattie to be self-sufficient.

Additionally, their children have been incredibly supportive of them.

2. Opened doors

James’ grandfather led the two churches — Union and Bellefonte — where James first began ministry too.

James went on to Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and led two

churches in southern Oklahoma. After graduation from seminary, James and Mattie served as church planters in Washington and then traveled south to pastor churches in Wimberly and Houston, Texas, before returning to Arkansas to

pastor at First Baptist Church Warren, where he served eight years.

During that time, Mattie worked

as a substitute teacher, supplementing their income with her earnings.

James went on to work for the Arkansas Baptist State Convention, where he was director of stewardship and aided with Cooperative Program promotion before working with GuideStone Financial Resources for 15 years.

3. Christian education

James graduated from Bergman High School and Mattie graduated from Bellefonte High School.

“I mention these schools because we had teachers who really helped shape and mold our lives. ... They taught us the basic principles of life. ... And we’re grateful for those experiences in

those two high schools,” he said.

At seminary, James received a bachelor of divinity, and Mattie

earned her associate degree in religious education.

4. Christian stewardship

“The principle that we live by was that we always tried to keep our expenses less than our income. ... And any extra money we received we put it in a savings account and that gave us a little bit of a sense of security,” James said.

5. Conflicts of life

James said he and Mattie have had very few conflicts within the church over the years. The biggest one, however, happened while he was leading in Oklahoma.

There was a disturbance in the church over a local liquor election. The members in favor of the sale of alcohol tried to vote James out of the church but did not garner enough support.

James continued sharing the gospel there and beyond.

6. Forgiveness

Couples are going to have disputes.

“One of the factors in our longevity together is the fact that we can forgive each other,” James said.

7. Faith and God’s grace

James and Mattie have carried their faith and God’s grace with them through all the years.

James referenced Psalm 90:10, “Our lives last 70 years or, if we are strong, 80 years. Even the best of them are struggle and sorrow; indeed, they pass quickly and we fly away.”

James and Mattie are members at First Baptist Church Benton.

EDITOR’S NOTE — This story was originally published by Arkansas Baptist News.

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MAKE DISCIPLES



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5 keys to your church being more welcoming

By Mark MacDonald
BeKnownforSomething.com

The church welcome time is important in your church for three reasons: to be friendly to regular attenders, to demonstrate the way members are friendly to each other and to make guests feel appreciated for attending, so they'll hopefully return.

While the scheduling is up to you, placing this time near the beginning of your worship service is wise because it's good to introduce a sense of welcome early in your fellowship.

Things to include

There are five essential things you should include in your church welcome time:

1. The welcomer's information. Whoever leads the greeting needs to give their name, their role and a way to contact them or someone else later. If you use screens, you can create a slide with contact information.

This allows your congregation and guests to start building a rela-

tionship of helpfulness, leadership and friendship with someone.

Even better, explain how people can talk personally with the person after the service. Research has shown that when guests and members know each other by name, they are more likely to stay in that church. So share your name and invite discussion.

2. A genuine reason you're glad they're present. Getting ready, driving to church and spending time together shouldn't be taken for granted, especially if you want it to happen regularly.

Your attendees could have chosen to stay home and do other things. Fortunately, they came. Or maybe they tuned into an online service.

Use the welcome time to make the gathering special for an authentic reason.

3. A church thread. Your church should have a controlled takeaway message you want to be known for. That thread needs to authentically

weave itself through your website, services, ministries and your welcome time so your church becomes remembered for it.

Use the words you want the audience to use in response to questions like "What's this church all about?" "Why do you attend our church?"

4. A next step. When the member or guest arrives for the service, they're anticipating something beneficial out of their time.

A welcome time near the beginning of the service is an excellent time to establish potential decisions that may be made after the sermon. It's also the perfect time to explain how your church puts faith into action through missions or ministries that would be their obvious next step.

Think like a visitor

Resist feeling like everyone understands what the church offers. Tell them the benefit of taking the next step (for example, registering for a small group, going to a

Sunday School class or volunteering for a missions project) and be very clear how to do whatever they decide (without overloading them with details).

5. Establish trust in your website. No one, especially a guest, will remember all the details they heard during a service. Therefore, mention your website address as the trusted source for all their questions and answers. Then ensure your website lives up to the honor of their trust.

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