The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

Carlos Lemus (right), a Hispanic strategist in central Alabama, baptizes Aquiles Rodriguez in the Gulf at Navarre Beach, Florida, in 2017 assisted by (from left) Carlos Contreras, a deacon at Pueblo de Dios in Prattville, and Giovanni Cano, a deacon at First Hispanic Baptist Church of Autauga. Lemus serves as pastor of both churches.

Photo courtesy of Carlos Lemus

Fruits of ministry

Calling still confirmed after 20 years for Hispanic strategist in central Alabama

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

It was 20 years ago when Carlos Lemus asked: "Where in the world is Alabama?"

At the time, he was serving in ministry in Guatemala, and he wasn't sure it was in God's plan for him to move to the United States. Another opportunity a couple of years before had looked fairly certain, but in the wake of 9/11, it had dissolved — and then another opportunity came and went — and then another.

Waiting on God's will

"At least five times in five situations ... I thought, 'This is God's will for my ministry,'" Lemus said. "The door opened, but a few days later just closed. I said, 'OK, let's just wait for God's will.'"

And then he got an email from someone in Autauga County, Alabama. He had never heard of it, but the person who wrote the email told him that he was just the person they needed — someone who could speak Spanish and English and help them build up Hispanic ministry in their area.

Lemus was also a graduate of Guatemala Baptist Theological Seminary and could bring a robust doctrinal undergirding to the church planting effort in Alabama. On both sides, everyone knew it was a good fit.

'A new adventure'

"I knew we were starting a new adventure in our lives," Lemus said.

"It was pretty hard to leave family and friends behind and all the experiences that you had in your home country, but we were trying

(*See 'Every,' page 12*)

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Unforsaken Ministry — Building and creating relationships while walking with those in addiction and their families through the journey of recovery.

SCAN ME

‘Good deeds’

Registration opens for 2023 Southern Christian Writers Conference

The 2023 Southern Christian Writers Conference will be held June 9–10 at Valley View Baptist Church in Leeds, with a virtual option offered again this year.

The goal of the annual conference is to bring together writers of faith to educate and encourage them in the writing journey.

Keynote speakers for this year’s conference are publisher and literary agent Bruce Barbour and Christy Award-winning novelist Valerie Fraser Luesse.

Barbour, who is a fifth-generation Christian book publisher, will present a keynote address Friday night titled “Called to Tell God’s Story.”

Luesse, who is an author of inspirational Southern fiction and a former senior travel editor for Southern Living, will present Saturday’s keynote address on “Southern Fiction: Where Storytelling and Faith Meet.”

Both presenters also will lead workshops on writing topics.

Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Attendees participate in the 2022 Southern Christian Writers Conference at Valley View Baptist Church in Leeds. This year’s conference will be held at the same location June 9–10. Registration is now open and also is available as a virtual event.

‘Real treat’

According to SCWC coordinator Cheryl Wray, the keynote presentations set the stage for the entire conference.

“Bruce and Valerie are wonderful Christians and representatives of the writing community,” she said. “We know that our attendees are in for a real treat from both of them.”

Barbour said he can’t wait to share “stories and strategies that will inspire and motivate every attendee to stay the course.”

In addition to the keynote presentations, the SCWC will feature 20 workshops on a variety of writing topics including writing devotional books, writing poetry, writing screenplays, social media for writers and much more.

A full listing of workshops is on the SCWC blog at southernchristianwriters.blogspot.com.

Workshop presenters are Christian professionals who are experts in different writing genres, and this year’s lineup includes Jennifer Davis Rash, TAB Media Group president and editor-in-chief.

SCWC participants also will get the chance to have one-on-one consultations with agents and editors, both in person and virtually.

Featured agents and editors include Linda Glaz (Linda Glaz Literary Agency), Bruce Barbour (Literary Management Group), Karen Moore (Literary Management Group), Martine Fairbanks (Soncoast Publishing) and John Herring (Iron Stream Media).

For more information or to register, visit tabonline.org/SCWC-2023.

Other features include the opportunity to participate in an on-site book room where authors can sell their books; a share and critique session the Thursday night before the conference; worship and prayer opportunities; and the opportunity to submit entries to the 2023 SCWC writing awards.

Registration for the in-person events includes three meals (Friday dinner, Saturday breakfast and Saturday lunch).

The virtual SCWC will be available through video recordings of keynote presentations, select workshops and more on a private playlist on the SCWC YouTube channel.

“This is a great way to participate in the conference if you can’t make it to Birmingham,” Wray said.

The SCWC was founded in 1991 by Wray’s parents, David and Joanne Sloan, members of First Baptist Church Tuscaloosa.

Wray now coordinates the annual conference and related events.

The conference welcomes aspiring, published and professional writers of all experience levels.

“We’ve claimed Hebrews 10:23–24 as our conference Bible verse this year. ...

“It talks about the importance of ‘spurring one another to good deeds,’ and that’s what we try to do through the conference,” she said. “We want to encourage writers to good deeds with their words.”

Registration information

Registration is now open for the conference. Contact Cheryl Wray at scwritersconference@gmail.com to sign up or to receive more information.

The Southern Christian Writers Conference works in partnership with TAB Media Group. (TAB)

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.

OPINION

RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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

jrash@thealabamabaptist.org @RashionalThts

Trickle-down effect of better listening skills might surprise us

I've been evaluating my verbal communication style lately. What I think I'm saying seems to get lost between my mouth and the other person's ears.

In most cases, I'm confident the person can hear me, but the breakdown comes at the retention or comprehension level.

Am I saying too many words and thus causing an overwhelming flow of information?

Am I not clear with what I'm attempting to explain?

Am I choosing an inconvenient time for the other person, which likely means he or she is distracted and not able to listen?

I've been on the other side before and know how timing truly can make a difference.

Too fatigued to process

Sometimes our mind space is stuffed beyond capacity. Other times we are basically too fatigued to process information.

If we are juggling several projects, deadline items or complex life situations, then it's difficult to add anything else to the mental gymnastics taking place beneath the surface.

The more I'm observing, the more I'm learning about the signs that someone is not fully listening. For instance, a glazed look in someone's eyes; an overeager or repetitive response such as "yes, yes, uh huh, yes, uh huh, right, gotcha, OK"; or a faraway look underneath a crinkled brow all likely mean the person's mind is elsewhere.

However, instead of being frustrated, I'm seeking ways to help, both when I'm the one sharing and the one listening.

10 tips for better listening

1. Be honest with the other person. If you can't comprehend what is being shared at the moment, suggest a better time to talk so you can provide your full attention and absorb the details.

2. Be selective in choosing the timing to share. Rather than walking up or calling and jumping straight into what you want to share, consider working out a time to talk that's convenient for all parties involved.

Pexels.com

Of course, this doesn't count when the information to share is a form of breaking news where you are excited to share or need comfort and/or help because of learning something tragic. In those cases, we should always just go for it.

3. Give your full attention to the discussion. Even if you are able to do something else while listening, the split focus sends a message that you aren't fully engaged.

4. An exception to No. 3 is if you are only able to truly focus on what is being said when you are doing something else at the same time — driving while the passenger shares, walking together for exercise while having a conversation, sketching as a presentation is made, etc.

5. Ensure everyone is understanding the same thought patterns. Words and phrases mean different things to different people.

6. Listen to the full story. Before mentally checking out of the conversation to process how this impacts your world or get started on your response, hear all of what the person is saying. Otherwise, you might miss vital details or implications of the information.

7. Explain the overall point of the conversation before diving into a chronological detailing of where you are headed. That will help the listener anticipate why he or she needs to follow along and will help the listener stick with you longer.

8. Ask clarifying questions at the right time. Determining when to ask questions depends on whether you can write them down and go through them once the information has been shared or if it's better to ask immediately because you know you won't be able to concentrate without having that question answered.

9. Summarize next steps to make sure everyone understands the expectations.

10. Send friendly reminders along the way. You might resurface an email for your colleague after a few days, text an update that includes the list of other items pending or touch base on the phone or in person about a specific item related to the upcoming activity or event.

Why should we care?

First, listening is a sign of respect for the other person.

Second, the time and energy saved has countless benefits.

Third, the reduction in misunderstandings truly could influence all of our lives in such a positive way that the trickle-down effect provides peaceful homes, a calmer culture and extensive opportunities to share the gospel.

OPINION

Your Voice

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

5 reasons camp matters for your children

By Kyle Cravens
Lifeway Christian Resources

Camp is a mountaintop experience, a spiritual marker in the lives of many who attend.

Here's what group leaders and campers have to say about the impact of camp:

- "During my week of camp, my leader taught me how to trust in the Lord and stay faithful."
- "At camp, I got to paint houses with my friends and got closer to God."
- "God has shown me the importance of service and putting feet to my faith."
- "God showed me it's OK to be who I am."

CRAVENS

I worked five summers of FUGE Camps and went on to devote my career for 23 years to this ministry. I am passionate about camp ministry and what the Lord does in the lives of campers when they get out of their comfort zones and turn their attention to Him.

Benefits

Here are five reasons parents should send their children to camp and why kids and teenagers should want to be part of this experience.

1. Encounter God in a personal way

Summer camp can often be a spiritually life-changing event for kids and teenagers. They experience God either for the first time or in new and different ways through Bible study, worship and many other activities. This encounter becomes a spiritual marker in their lives. A change of routine, being away from home and distractions, and having unfamiliar, godly people speak into their lives creates a unique opportunity for campers to learn and grow in their faith.

2. Build relationships

While students are at camp, away from their norm, they have the opportunity to get to know each other and their leaders better as well as to make new friends from other church groups. They may even make friends for life. They also interact with staffers who are positive role models, speaking truth into their lives and ministering to them through intentional conversations. These God-centered relationships can have a lasting impact on a child's faith. Perhaps most importantly, kids and students build on their relationship with God at camp.

3. Be physically active and have fun

Camp schedules are usually packed with fun activities. Campers have activities to do and places to go from breakfast to bedtime. There is no chance for boredom. Camp gives them alternatives to technology and pushes them to be physically active doing activities they enjoy.

4. Develop lifelong skills

The camp setting provides a safe opportunity for children and teens to test the waters of new experiences with a lessened fear of failure or rejection. They participate in new and diverse learning experiences that help them discover new talents. Camp is irreplaceable when it comes to learning and developing social skills, as well.

5. Grow more independent

Many students are away from mom and dad for the very first time when they go to camp. While under the close care and supervision of trusted adults, they begin to learn responsibility. They become more resourceful and must navigate situations independently. This aids in their growing up and maturation.

Next steps

Summer camps foster spiritual growth, personal growth and relationships in ways that are unlike any other traditional setting tailored for students. Now that you see the incredible benefits of camp, here are some next steps:

- Work with your children and student pastors or leaders to approve the trip to camp.
- As a church, provide financial support by making it part of the budget and having sponsor fundraisers.
- Encourage parents to support the decision to go to camp by sending their children.
- Clear any barriers that may try to prevent your groups from going to camp.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was originally published by Lifeway Christian Resources.

If we are more excited about reformed theology than the gospel, more excited about church discipline, more passionate about gender roles, more angered by perceived insubordination to abusive leaders than the abuse they do, more moved by the things God gives than who God is, or speaking in tongues, healings, large numbers ... than we are the gospel, we may not actually love the Jesus of the gospel.

Amber Bowman
Missionary to Mexico
via Facebook

There is no problem in the Southern Baptist Convention that fidelity to the Scriptures, integrity and humility cannot solve. The challenge is in our culture those three traits are in short supply. May they become abundant again in the SBC!

Chuck Register
Clayton, N.C.
via Facebook

"Waiting on God requires the willingness to bear uncertainty, to carry within oneself the unanswered question, lifting the heart to God about it whenever it intrudes upon one's thoughts."

Elizabeth Elliot

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

OPINION

> "One of the most tenacious temptations of the church is assuming it can do God's work, the world's way."
>
> RICHARD BLACKABY
> *Author and speaker*

"God is the God of second chances," comedian **Mickey Bell** declared. "When He talks about redemption, He means it. I am the picture boy of that. I don't shy away from that. I talk about it every night."

"One of the ways I like to encourage people is to tell them to do what you do for the glory of God, and do it strategically for the mission of God," said **Todd Unzicker**, executive director of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.

"My French is OK. ... But amazingly enough, when I began to share that three minutes of the gospel, my French just went into overdrive and everybody understood as if the Spirit of God was just giving me the proper pronunciation of those words to say," said **Asa Greear**, executive director of St. Johns River Baptist Association in Palatka, Florida.

"If churches only sing songs written by perfect Christians with flawless theology and impeccable ethics, we'd have no songs left to sing," noted **Scott Shepherd**, who serves as worship & music specialist for the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board.

"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," said **Igor Bandura**, senior vice president of All-Ukrainian Union of Churches of Evangelical Christians-Baptists.

"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. We can't talk her out of an abortion, but we can show her the ultrasound and let the Holy Spirit do the work," said **Robyn Blessing**, executive director of Life On Wheels, a mobile ultrasound clinic aimed at giving pregnant women the resources they need to carry their pregnancies to term and give birth to their babies.

"My experience with missions was that when you're called, it's for life," said **Jeri Whitfield**, an IMB missionary in Thailand.

From the *Twitterverse*

@haines_matt

The Holy Spirit doesn't produce mean and grumpy Christians. Pride and self-sufficiency do. Where the Spirit resides, the fruit of the Spirit will blossom.

@DanielRitchie

A baby in the womb with a disability or deformity is not a prime candidate for an abortion.

A baby in the womb with a disability or deformity is a prime candidate to show what God can do with a life that the world sees as weak and less than.

@johnmarkclifton

A former youth pastor, KSTATE Coach Tang said recently, "My faith is extremely important to me. That's what I live my life by. I believe that God put me on this earth to be a servant leader, and I just want to be of service in any way I can."

@DianeLangberg

There is great hope in knowing God is not calling us to bigger, better or extraordinary. He wants to take the small, hidden, little and seemingly unimportant things in our lives and inject them with eternal glory. We can rest in our commonness, our ordinariness and our smallness.

@claysmith79

The longevity of a leader has a lot to do with the physical health of a leader. It's not everything, of course, but it means a lot. And it is often neglected by many.

@JCRyle

Doctrine is useless if it is not accompanied by a holy life. It is worse than useless; it does positive harm. Something of the 'image of Christ' must be seen and observed in our private life and habits and character and doings.

@davideprince

The NT Gospels make clear our Lord's attitude toward the OT Scripture: He revered them, read them, knew them, obeyed them, fulfilled them, and — in a word — He loved them.

@MichaelCatt

Prayers to pray for older saints:

Don't let my body outlive my mind.

Don't let me be a worthless worker in a world of work.

Don't let me stumble on the last turn.

Don't let me drown in shallow water.

@shane_pruitt78

A lot of people today want to be like the Jesus who flipped over tables in the temple, but they don't want to be like the Jesus who sacrificially loves and serves the church.

Thoughts from the-Scroll.com

Are you constantly worrying about the next task? Does work consume all you think of and do? Shift your thoughts to Christ and you will find rest.

During your rest, use the time to study God's work, to pray and to worship Him. There is peace only found in the presence of Christ because He is the only true resting place.

Selah Vetter
"Rhythms of rest"

While we're in this broken world, we can hold on to the truth of God's word and the hope of perfect peace and love we will one day experience in heaven.

Amy Hacker
"Visions of heaven"

God made us all unique in our gifts, talents and joys. But we all serve a common goal — to know God and make Him known. How can you fit into that calling in a way that both glorifies God and fills your soul?

Jessica Ingram
"What makes your soul sing?"

When we spend the majority of our day around lost people but never speak the name of Jesus to them, we are making an excuse. So often we focus on the daily busyness of life by neglecting His Word and prayer and fellowship, but Jesus is inviting us to feast rather than starve.

James Hammack
"God gives His invitation to the undeserving"

I don't know why I feel a need to hold on to everything myself, but it's something I have to remind myself of hourly, it seems like. I don't have to. He tells us to give everything to Him.

Hannah Muñoz
"Lay it all at His feet"

NEWS

3 stories you should know

Unsplash.com

A 2021 Barna survey of more than 24,000 teens found a majority of those surveyed view the BIble as the Word of God. Teens were asked to choose one of four responses to the question, "Which of the following statements comes closest to describing what you believe about the Christian Bible?" Fifty percent chose "the Word of God" and 11% chose "the inspired Word of God and has no errors." Only 11% considered the Bible "another book of teachings." (TAB)

EC search team set to vote on candidate May 1

Following a yearlong search, the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee has announced plans for a special-called meeting on May 1 to consider a candidate for president.

Search committee chairman Adron Robinson, a pastor in Illinois, announced the meeting April 3 in a statement to Baptist Press.

Robinson said the search team has "diligently prayed, discussed and worked to identify the person to best lead the SBC Executive Committee. ... We are confident the candidate we are presenting represents the humility, wisdom, administrative skill and Christlikeness necessary to fulfill the responsibilities."

Willie McLaurin currently serves as interim president and CEO of the Executive Committee. (The Baptist Paper)

Retired chaplain named next Liberty president

Retired Maj. Gen. Dondi E. Costin was named the sixth president of Liberty University on March 31. Pastor Jonathan Falwell, son of Liberty's founder, Jerry Falwell Sr., was named Liberty's third chancellor. Both leaders will assume their duties ahead of the 2023–24 school year.

COSTIN

Costin most recently served as president of Charleston Southern University in South Carolina. He holds a Ph.D. in organizational leadership along with several other degrees. He served 32 years as a chaplain in the U.S. Air Force.

Read the full story at tabonline.org/costin. (TAB)

Persecuted church

Chinese pastor freed after 15-year sentence for his Christian work

XINJIANG, China — A Uyghur man convicted during secret trials for his Christian work in China has been released after serving a 15-year sentence.

Alimujiang Yimiti, pastor of a Uyghur house church in Kashgar in China's Xinjiang province, was freed in March, according to the human rights organization ChinaAid.

YIMITI

Chinese authorities initially accused him in 2007 of using his business to disseminate Christian ideology in Kashgar. In 2008, he was detained for "inciting separatism" and other charges.

Two secret trials ensued, one in 2009 and another in 2010. After the first one, the separatism charge was dropped, reports China Aid.

In the years following his conviction, China's crimes against some people groups in Xinjiang have become widely known.

"An estimated 1 to 2 million Uyghurs, Kazakhs and other ethnic minorities are kept in concentration camps," states ChinaAid.

China is ranked No. 16 on Open Doors' 2023 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

Pastor released from Iranian prison after original death sentence

TEHRAN, Iran — A pastor originally sentenced to death for "apostasy from Islam" was released from prison in a move to mark the anniversary of Iran's 1979 revolution.

Pastor Yousef Nadarkhani was released Feb. 26, Morning Star News reported. He was freed as part of the government's amnesty marking the revolution of Feb. 11, 1979.

NADARKHANI

In 2010, he was given the death penalty for leaving Islam to become a Christian. He was acquitted of that charge in 2012. However, he was deemed guilty of evangelizing, for which he received a three-year sentence.

He was arrested again on similar charges in May 2016 and given a 10-year sentence. Nadarkhani's penalty also was to include two years of exile.

Iran is ranked No. 8 on Open Doors' 2023 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

NEWS ITEMS COMPILED BY CARRIE McWHORTER AND LEIGH PRITCHETT

Alabama news

BLOUNT ASSOCIATION

▸ **Pleasant View Missionary Baptist Church, Holly Pond,** will host New Ground of Scottsboro for its third Sunday night singing April 16, 5 p.m. Earl Harper is pastor.

BUTLER ASSOCIATION

▸ **Mount Pleasant Baptist Church, Georgiana,** celebrated its pastor's 50th anniversary of surrendering to ministry April 2. **Danny Dean**'s actual anniversary date was March 31. He preached his first sermon April 15, 1973. After graduating high school, he taught Sunday School and Royal Ambassadors.

He holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master of divinity with an emphasis on counseling from New Orleans Seminary.

DEAN

He served as youth pastor of Oakland Baptist Church, Mary Ester, Florida; 10th grade department leader of First Baptist Chickasaw; youth pastor of Central Baptist Church, Pensacola, Florida; interim youth pastor of Sage Avenue Baptist Church, Mobile; ministry internship at Calvary Baptist Church, New Orleans; pastor of Indian Creek Baptist Church, DeFuniak Springs, Florida; interim pastor of Oakdale Baptist Church, Crestview, Florida; director of single adult ministries of FBC Crestview, Florida; pastor of Unity Baptist Church, Fayette; pastor of Beaverton Baptist Church; pastor of Academy Baptist Church, Vernon; pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Belzoni, Mississippi; pastor of Spring Creek Baptist Church, Greenville; director of missions of Butler Baptist Association; and interim pastor and pastor of Mount Pleasant Baptist.

He worked as a therapist in public mental health from 1986 to 2006 as well.

He and his wife, Brenda, have three children and three grandchildren.

PICKENS ASSOCIATION

▸ **Pickens Baptist Association** is hosting its fifth annual classic car, truck and motorcycle show April 22, 9 a.m.–1 p.m., at the courthouse square in Carrollton. For more information, call Terry Billings at 205-399-0199.

TUSKEGEE LEE ASSOCIATION

▸ **Tuskegee Lee Baptist Association** will have a Senior Adult Celebration on May 16 at Providence Baptist Church, Opelika, 10 a.m. The guest speaker is Lonette Berg, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Special music will be provided by the Providence Golden Notes senior adult choir. Lunch will follow. A donation to help cover the cost of lunch is appreciated but not required. For meal reservations or for more information, call 334-745-0588 or email jeaniveytlba@gmail.com.

Facebook photo

An Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteer helps remove a fallen tree in the Florence area after a tornado hit March 24. At press time, the team was nearing 150 jobs completed.

Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief teams continue work in the South

It's been a very active few weeks of weather across the South, and Mark Wakefield, state disaster relief strategist, said teams are still working in some places.

A team of 17 Alabama Baptists deployed April 1 to Rolling Fork, Mississippi, with a mass feeding unit. Wakefield said Arkansas Baptists had been filling that need since a March 24 tornado killed at least 23 people there, but when their own state was hit by deadly tornadoes on March 31, they pulled out to help there.

Quick response

"The folks really came through," Wakefield said of the Alabama Baptist volunteers who responded to the call to deploy in less than a day. "It means a lot to the town for them to be there."

For more information or to donate, visit sbdr.org.

Teams are also still hard at work in the Florence area cleaning up from a tornado that hit the same night as the Rolling Fork tornado.

John Hayes, the white cap leader there, said at press time they were nearing 150 jobs completed.

"Everything's going good up here; we're turning out a lot of work and still getting a lot of work," he said. "We have 50 to 60 people working every day plus drive-in support too."

Wakefield and Hayes said at press time it was possible both locations might wrap up their work by Easter weekend depending on what is still needed.

Facebook photo

Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers work with a mass feeding unit in Rolling Fork, Mississippi, following the March 24 tornado that hit the area.

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

‘Blessed to work together’

Flatline Movement’s new hip-hop tour another step to saturate music world with godly influence

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

DeAndre’ Burns said a song is the only thing a person will listen to hundreds and hundreds of times.

“I have a favorite sermon, but I have not listened to it 100 times. Same with movies,” he said. “But with music, you listen to it so much that you recite what is being said even if you don’t like what is being said.”

That’s the problem, he noted — hip-hop music is filling the minds of young people with messages that are tearing them down. And Burns and others are trying to find the solution.

“Our goal is to saturate the music world with what we have to offer,” said Burns, general manager of Flatline Movement, a ministry started years ago to reach urban youth through Christian hip-hop.

Right now, they’re working hard on that goal from the studio and planning tour dates for the coming months. They’re getting close to finishing their first solo project, which covers rap, rhythm, praise and even jazz, Burns said.

Burns is one of the artists, along with his son, Dillon; daughter, Christa; and seven others.

For more information, visit flatlinemovement.org or email DeAndre Burns at dburns@flatlinechurch.org.

“I’m blessed by what comes from all of us together. Altogether it’s 10 of us in the group, and our goal is to release two projects a year in addition to our solo projects. People are going to be tired of seeing us,” he joked.

But Burns knows in order to get the message out there, that’s what’s needed.

Hip-hop is the No. 1-selling genre in the world right now, he said. “Over the years, it’s continued in its momentum, and it’s become a regular in most households, especially those with young people.”

Photo by Jim Gormley

Dillon Burns (center) — who raps under the name Makaio (see story, page 9) — and other artists with Flatline Movement are releasing an album and going on tour this year to saturate Alabama with the gospel message through hip-hop.

And the influences are becoming darker, he said.

That’s why Flatline Movement wants to produce music that’s full of light, Burns said. “We have to use everything at our disposal to make sure people get to hear the gospel in a way they understand.”

That’s why the tour is important to them too — they want to get the word out and saturate Alabama with the message of the gospel through rap, he said. “We want people who host us to rest assured we’re coming with the gospel and only that, and we pray everyone would be able to hear it and receive the Lord where they are.”

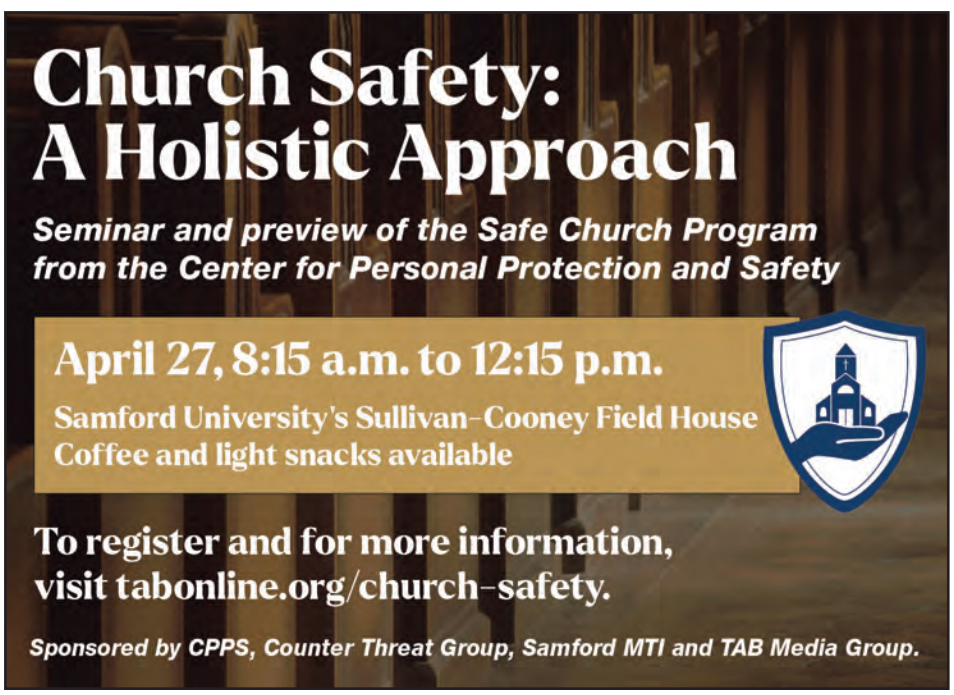
> ***“Our goal is to saturate the music world with what we have to offer.”***
>
> **DeAndre’ Burns**
> **general manager**
> **Flatline Movement**

Dewayne Rembert, pastor of Flatline Church at Chisholm and founder of Flatline Movement, said even Christian youth are listening to secular hip-hop music, so it’s a concern not only for unchurched youth, but also those growing up in the church.

“We need to do a better job as a church of giving them an alternative with a different message,” he said.

Burns said anyone interested in bringing Flatline Movement to their church, school or other local venue this year can reach out through the contact information on its website.

“We’re excited about what the Lord is going to do. We’re ready for it, whatever it is He would have for us.”



‘A witness’

Dillon Burns uses gifts in Christian rap to share testimony, bless others

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

In many ways, Dillon Burns’ life so far is an “apple doesn’t fall far from the tree” kind of story.

His father, DeAndre’ Burns, started rapping at a young age.

“I was 14 when I first started rapping my brother’s lyrics,” DeAndre’ said.

That was the beginning of three decades so far of ministry heavily entwined with writing, performing and producing Christian rap. He’s now general manager for Flatline Movement, a ministry started years ago to reach urban youth through Christian hip-hop.

Special place

DeAndre’ moved his family from Mobile to Montgomery to take on that role, and as it turns out, it’s been a special place — Montgomery is where Dillon’s own passion for music began to take off.

He was 12 when Dewayne Rembert, founder of Flatline Movement and pastor of Flatline Church at Chisholm, overheard him and his friends in the youth group rapping a song by Christian rapper Lecrae.

“He asked if me and one of my friends would like to rap, and we said yes,” Dillon said. “So my dad wrote both of our first songs.”

That got him started. Now 16, Dillon writes his own music. His first song, “Take Off,” took a year to write, but after that it was second nature, he said. He raps under the name Makaio, his middle name, which means “gift of God” in Hawaiian.

“I think it was pretty fitting to use that name for the gifts that God has given me,” Dillon said.

He’s hoping to drop a solo extended play sometime this year.

“I want to share my testimony — I feel like it will help people my age,” Dillon said. “I’m seeing that’s my main demographic because there’s not many young Christian artists.”

He said as a new artist he’s been blessed to have Flatline Movement.

“They were already established, and the studio is amazing,” Dillon said. “I hear a lot of artists talking about getting studio time, but God has been so huge in allowing the church to have a studio.”

He has also had a chance to get a lot of performing experience as Flatline’s artists have led rallies at schools, churches and occasionally in stadiums.

“Ministry wise, I feel like I’ve done a lot of shows because of the connections that Flatline movement has with schools and different churches, so it’s really been a blessing,” Dillon said.

And as he’s performed, young audiences have responded.

“The Lord has just been speaking to me and showing me I’m not the only one looking for that kind of music,” Dillon said.

DeAndre’ said he’s noticed that too.

“We see the engagement he has with his peers, how a song comes on and everyone responds,” he said, adding that often from the moment Dillon starts rapping, “they are into it.”

Rembert said Dillon is “just a strong witness to the Lord.”

“He’s an example of being a witness, being a servant, being very committed to his craft with the Lord and giving his all to the Lord,” he said. “He’s not lukewarm; it’s Jesus or nothing. He’s really been such an encouragement to me.”

Dillon said he’s grateful for “amazing parents” who have helped him stay on the right track and “check up on me a lot.”

“A lot of teenagers don’t have that,” he said.

He’s also had their support as he’s worked hard toward other personal goals. During the COVID-19 pandemic as life slowed down to a crawl, Dillon used that time to get ahead on his studies.

For God’s glory

He graduated high school at 15. He’s currently enrolled in community college studying culinary arts while he works at Chick-Fil-A.

“I love to cook — that’s another passion of mine,” he said. “School, music and work are my life.”

DeAndre’ said he’s proud of all his son’s accomplishments and can’t wait to see how God uses him.

He’s enjoyed watching him get to use his musical talents, among other things, for the glory of God in this season.

“It’s so interesting to see how God is continuing the tradition of ministry,” DeAndre’ said. “I don’t know what God has for him in the future, but I know for me it started with music.”

To listen to Dillon Burn’s music, search for Flatline Movement on your favorite music platform. To contact him about a booking, email makaiomakesmusic@gmail.com.

Photo by DeAndre’ Burns

Dillon Burns, 16, writes his own rap music and performs under the name Makaio, his middle name, which means “gift of God” in Hawaiian. Through his music, he’s able to reach a young audience with gospel-centered lyrics.

Photo by Robin Spielmann on Unsplash/graphic courtesy of TBFA

'Helping churches reach their God-given vision'

Church loan options through Baptist Foundation of Alabama expand Kingdom-impacting relationship

By Erin Roach
The Alabama Baptist

When a church needs a loan, say, for remodeling, borrowing from The Baptist Foundation of Alabama means the interest paid will be reinvested in Kingdom causes.

For more than 30 years, The Baptist Foundation of Alabama has offered limited loans to Alabama Baptist churches, most often to church plants, but TBFA recently expanded its loan offerings to include new construction, remodeling, property purchases and refinancing to all Alabama Baptist churches and ministries, regardless of age or size.

"A ministry-based lender differs from a typical bank because we only offer loans to churches and other nonprofits that share the same biblical beliefs," John Ashworth, TBFA's president, told The Alabama Baptist.

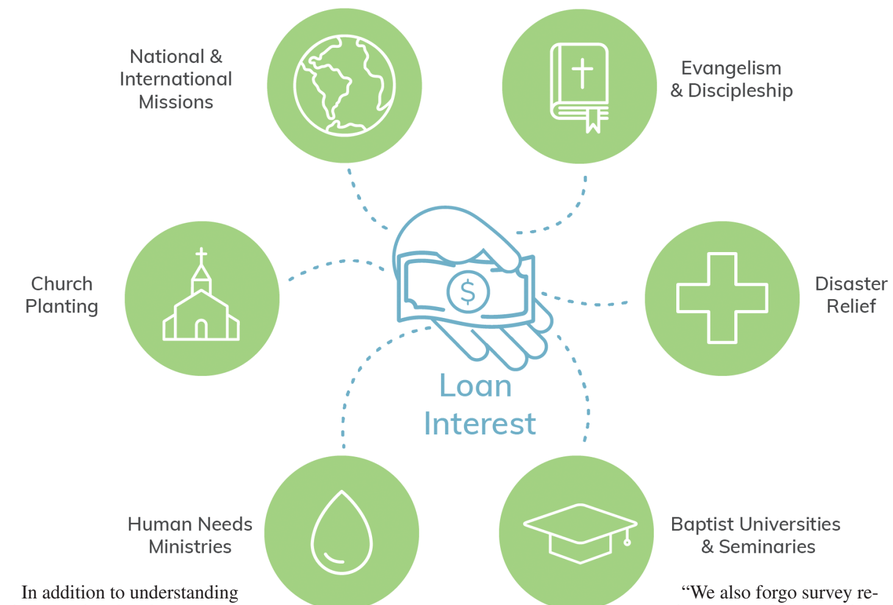
With a long history of serving Alabama Baptist churches and ministries, TBFA understands the unique needs of churches and "is very familiar with church leadership and committee structure," Ashworth said.

Scriptural understanding

Another component of biblically grounded lending is a scriptural understanding of debt, he said.

"The Bible doesn't forbid debt but instead cautions its use," Ashworth said. "When discussing a potential loan with a church, we employ conservative guidelines that seek to ensure a congregation doesn't borrow more than it can afford."

Loans are available to all Alabama Baptist churches and faith-aligned ministries, "which would include Alabama Baptist ministries and evangelical organizations that are like-minded with the Baptist Faith and Message," Ashworth said.



In addition to understanding the operational and governance structure of a church, TBFA knows how to work with church finance committees, building committees, trustees and pastors, he said.

"We serve ministries, and we are genuinely interested in helping churches reach their God-given vision for reaching their communities," Ashworth said.

As an example, The Foundation limits the ratio of the debt payment to tithes and offerings a church receives to ensure the church can comfortably handle the payments.

"This helps churches have capacity to do the ministry God has called them to do," Ashworth said. "When you consider staff and utility costs, debt payments and mission commitments, we understand a church needs to have money left to do the ministry God has called them to do."

The Foundation considers the interest rates it offers to be highly competitive, and it tries to keep rates in line with or lower than what banks are offering on similar terms.

'Compared to banks'

"In addition to competitive interest rates, our closing costs are very low compared to banks, plus there are no prepayment penalties or appraisal requirements," Ashworth said.

Instead of appraisals, The Foundation looks at the insured value of the property or the cost of construction to draw a collateral value.

"We also forgo survey requirements and construction draw inspections," Ashworth said. "The local church committee and staff are typically aware of construction progress and provide documented evidence of that progress on draw requests without the added expense of a third party that is typically required by a bank."

A highlight of loans through TBFA is how interest is reinvested in Kingdom causes. The opportunity stems from The Foundation's offering of CD-like investments to churches and ministries that are then used to provide loans to congregations.

"The interest these borrowing churches pay on their loans provides the return that we pay to the churches and ministries that may have invested with us," Ashworth said.

Churches should consider seeking loans through TBFA, he said, because its mission is to help Alabama Baptist churches and ministries unlock more financial resources to do more ministry across the state and around the world.

'Returned to ministry'

"By offering loans that may save churches money and where the interest paid is returned to ministry, we can do exactly that," he said.

More information is available at tbfa.org/church-loans, and interested churches can begin the application process there.

In addition to offering loans to churches, The Baptist Foundation of Alabama has worked since 1940 to help Alabama Baptists "generate more resources for more Kingdom work." TBFA manages more than $300 million of ministry-fueling investments, the website says, and facilitates estate planning ministries in churches.

The Foundation also manages more than 100 scholarship funds for Alabama Baptist students pursuing educational degrees and helps churches with vision campaigns and online giving.

For more information, visit tbfa.org/church-loans or scan the code above with your smartphone's camera.

‘Every day God confirms His calling to this country’

(*continued from page 1*)

to focus on the reality that this was God’s calling.”

After two decades of serving central Alabama Hispanic population, he still feels just as certain that this is what God had for him, his wife, Zuly, and their two children.

“Every day God confirms His calling to this country as I see the fruits of the ministry,” said Lemus, who currently serves as Hispanic mission strategist for Autauga Baptist Association and director of Hispanic ministries for Elmore Baptist Association.

From the moment he arrived in Alabama, the fruit has been there, brought by the Holy Spirit, he said. Starting in Prattville, God brought one family across his path, which led to six families in total.

He decided to have a Vacation Bible School for their children, and on the first night, he realized the mothers were also going to stay every night until it was time to take their kids home.

“I said to the pastor, ‘I think tomorrow we will have a Bible study for the ladies,’” he said. “At the end I gave an invitation, and the six ladies received Christ as their personal Savior.”

Photo courtesy of Autauga Baptist Association

Carlos Lemus is Hispanic mission strategist for Autauga Baptist Association and director of Hispanic ministries for Elmore Baptist Association.

Thriving church

That was the start of Pueblo de Dios (People of God), a church that has been “thriving there for all these years,” Lemus said.

Over the years, the work across the area has expanded. In Elmore County, three Hispanic missions are growing, two of which Lemus planted, and in Autauga Baptist Association, two more missions are also thriving.

Lemus said what he’s envisioning in the future is for his role to be less direct church planting and more involved in directing ministries for all the Hispanic missions in the area.

“I’m preparing and training for that,” he said.

Strong ties

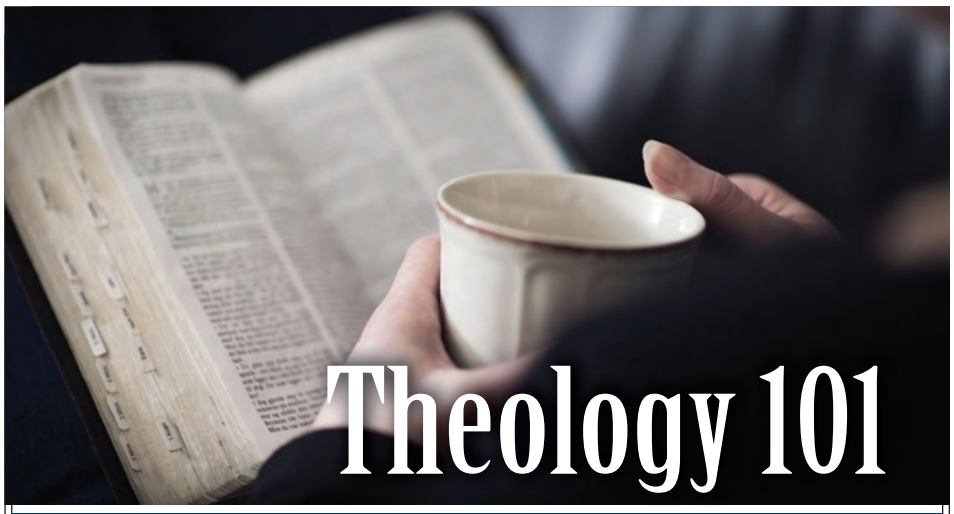
He also keeps strong ties with Guatemala, leading an ongoing partnership between the Baptists in his area of Alabama and ministries back in his home country — in 20 years, he’s made more than 70 trips.

In 2003, he and six other pastors founded the Alabama Baptist Hispanic Fellowship, a network of Hispanic Baptist pastors, lay leaders and missionaries in the state.

Ray McKenzie, director of missions for Elmore Association, said Lemus has been “a blessing” to the association, noting he teaches a large class of pastors and church leaders on Monday nights at the associational office. The class has “served to deepen the biblical understanding of these leaders and create stability in the missions of our association,” McKenzie said.

Mel Johnson, associational mission strategist for Autauga Association, said working with Lemus has been a blessing and an asset in ministry.

“The language and cultural differences were a difficulty for us in doing effective ministry,” Johnson said. “Twenty years ago, the decision was made to actively pursue a Hispanic leader who could serve as a Hispanic strategist in this association, and we were able to connect with Carlos. He has played an active role in terms of outreach, and we’ve been able to do a number of things in the community because of his leadership.”



BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Let’s Just Praise the Lord

The ‘where’ of praising the Lord

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
The Alabama Baptist

This week we continue to look at Psalm 150, the “hallelujah psalm.” Its opening verse identifies two places where praise is appropriate and expected.

The first one is part of an appeal, namely, to praise God in His sanctuary. The designation sanctuary describes a holy place, one sanctified by the presence of a Holy God. Such a place is where God meets with His people and gives His people access to Himself.

The Garden of Eden was the original earthly sanctuary, a perfect place where the first pair of people met with God and He with them. Then a stone altar between Bethel and Ai was a sanctuary for Abraham where he met with God and God spoke to him (Gen. 12:7–8; 13:1–4).

Later, a burning bush was such a place for Moses. Still later, a portable tent called the tabernacle became Israel’s sanctuary for centuries. Finally, Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem became the permanent sanctuary for Israel.

Sanctuaries

After Christ came, house churches served as sanctuaries for the early church. By the third century, church buildings emerged as sanctuaries for the expanding church. All of these served as places where God chose to meet with His people of faith. Now it is somewhat commonplace to refer to our worship centers as sanctuaries where bodies of believers approach God and experience His presence and receive His instructions.

In addition, since God’s outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon Christian believers, He has sought to make our hearts individual sanctuaries where He indwells us, inspires us and informs us.

Prayer

As believers, we have the privilege of coming before God in prayer to say, “Here is my heart — make it Your sanctuary.” Thus we may conclude that we are to praise the Lord both as the gathered people of God when we come together in a building and privately in our hearts when we are scattered to our individual places.

Back to the opening verse of Psalm 150, we also read that God is to be praised in His mighty firmament. God has His heavenly abode. Its visible part is where the heavens declare His glory and display His handiwork — the sun, moon and stars that He formed and flung into space. Then there is the invisible part of God’s heavenly abode, where angels and the spirits of just men made perfect join in His praise.

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.

‘PROTECT THE SHEEP GOD HAS GIVEN US’

Attorney exhorts churches to be proactive in sexual abuse prevention

By Michael Brooks
The Alabama Baptist

Attorney Greg Love said the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior, and “what is predictable is preventable.”

“When we consider protecting our boys and girls from sexual predators, we’ll never get this accidentally right,” he said.

“Churches must be intentional and build the right fences to protect the sheep God has given us.”

Love directed a child safety workshop at Valleydale Church in Birmingham on March 23.

The event was jointly sponsored by the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions and the Birmingham Metro Baptist and Shelby Baptist associations.

Love and his law partner/spouse, Kimberlee Norris, have more than 30 years of experience as civil trial lawyers specializing in child sexual abuse. He said they receive five to six crisis calls every day from church leaders.

“We must do a better job of putting in guardrails and being proactive rather than reactive,” Love said.

Photo courtesy of Toni Wall

Attorney Greg Love directs the child safety workshop at Valleydale Church in Birmingham on March 23. The event was jointly sponsored by SBOM and the Birmingham Metro Baptist and Shelby Baptist associations.

Staggering statistics

Love said the statistics about child sexual abuse are staggering.

“We know that 1 in 4 females are abused by age 18, and 1 in 6 males,” he said.

Love said too many churches rely only on background checks.

“These are good, but not the only thing we must do,” he said. “The typical abuser has 150 male victims or 52 female victims before his arrest at age 35, so the background check alone doesn’t identify the perpetrators.”

Love said churches generally have good policies in place to deal with the “abduction predator,” often identified in the past as “stranger danger.” However, he noted that the major problem in churches is the preferential offender who uses a grooming process — more than 90% of children are victimized by someone they know and trust.

“Though we can’t identify the predator visually, we know the ‘on ramps’ he uses,” Love said.

“These groomers, most often male, groom the gatekeepers first,” he said. “They convince us they’re helpful, trustworthy and responsible. Thus they gain access to our children. They most often select children who are ‘disconnected’ in some way — those from single-parent households, those who are physically or mentally challenged or those who are economically disadvantaged. They offer friendship and build trust.”

More information is available from state missionary Lee Wright at 800-264-1225, ext. 2241, or lwright@alsbom.org.

Love said predators frequently “set the hook” with boys by offering alcohol, drugs or pornography, whereas they groom girls emotionally, telling them they’re more mature or smart or beautiful than others in the group.

“The average age of a first encounter with pornography is now age 8,” he said. “This usually equates with the time children get a smartphone. And the emotional relationship the predator builds with girls is through electronic communication.”

The predator experiments with “barrier testing” according to Love.

“He will begin ‘playful touch’ (like tickling) with children or turn the conversation to sexual themes with the older boys and girls,” he said. “If a barrier is broken, he will continue to build relationships. If a young person resists, the predator will find other victims.”

Love said another issue is peer-to-peer abuse, which some reports indicate has increased 300% in recent years.

“The average male abuser begins victimizing at age 13,” he said.

‘We’re all shepherds’

Love said church members need to have “eyes to see, ears to hear and voices to speak” as they monitor church activities.

“We are all shepherds, and we want the sheepfold to be a safe place,” he said. “It’s never too late to do the right thing, so we encourage churches to do awareness training, skillful screening, background checks, tailored policies and careful monitoring.”

Love’s organization, MinistrySafe of Fort Worth, Texas, offers membership with training videos, documents and sample policies at ministrysafe.com.

While MinistrySafe membership is $250 per year, the Alabama State Board of Missions is currently making a discount available. Alabama churches can use the coupon code ALSBOM when they sign up, and the first year’s membership fee will be $50. The discount is available through SBOM’s partnership with MinistrySafe and gifts through the Cooperative Program.

Go to ministrysafe.com/alsbom for more information.

UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Moms and daughters in K–6 invited to Spring Fling event

If you're a mom with a daughter who's in kindergarten through sixth grade, you need to be at Mom & Me Spring Fling!

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

Spring Fling — set for April 21–22 at WorldSong Missions Place — is an exciting weekend for mothers and daughters to make memories together and learn more about what it means to live a missional lifestyle.

You'll enjoy traditional camp activities, Bible study and crafts, along with a special time of worship and community around a campfire. You'll also hear from our missionary speakers and learn ways you can live on mission daily.

"We'll focus on the gospel and the Great Commission — what it means to follow Jesus and why we need to tell others," said Trish Jackson, missions lifestyle strategist for preschool, children and students for Alabama WMU.

Photo courtesy of Alabama WMU

For more information, visit alabamawmu.org/springfling.

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.

FINCHUM

SPEAK Tour will have fun outdoor games, worship and a chance to hear and respond to the hope of Jesus Christ. The speaker will be Brent Finchum, a youth ministries missionary/coach from Birmingham. He endeavors to challenge youth to become wholly devoted followers of Christ.

SPEAK Tour will be 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.

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.

ESL offers a chance to meet the needs of your international neighbors and introduce them to the gospel.

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

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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

CHURCH POSITIONS

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 resumés to: jcrosslin89@gmail.com.

PASTOR
Elam Baptist Church, Thomasville, Alabama, is seeking a full-time pastor. Interested applicants can email resumés to: reid2546@hotmail.com or call Johnny at 334-357-1652 for more information.

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

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR
New Providence Baptist Church, 53080 Rabun Road, Bay Minette, AL is seeking a bivocational pastor. Please send resumé to: Search Committee, P.O. Box 503, Bay Minette, AL 36507, or email to: arlene@pfefferflooring.com

MINISTER OF MUSIC
First Baptist Silverhill, a growing church in central Baldwin County, is seeking a part-time minister of music. Send resumé or questions to: fbc36576@gmail.com.

PART-TIME YOUTH MINISTER
Webb Baptist Church is seeking an individual who can work part-time in leading the youth ministry. Resumés can be sent to: lshayles@outlook.com.

PRESCHOOL & CHILDREN'S MINISTER
First Baptist Killen is actively seeking a candidate to lead a vibrant preschool and children's ministry. The position would include direct oversight of planning, implementing and supervision of programming for children from birth through sixth grade, and their families, in coordination with the pastoral staff. Consideration will be given to qualified personnel who prefer to serve in a bivocational/part-time capacity, or full-time with additional ministry responsibilities based on the applicant's gifts and experience. Send resumé to: mail@firstbaptistkillen.org.

OTHER POSITIONS

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

SIGNS

CHURCH SIGN
Signs are your first impression. What kind of impression is your church sign making? Call us to replace/update yours with either digital or traditional. Statewide since 1994. 1-800-729-6844 or 205-664-0955. www.reliablesigns.com.

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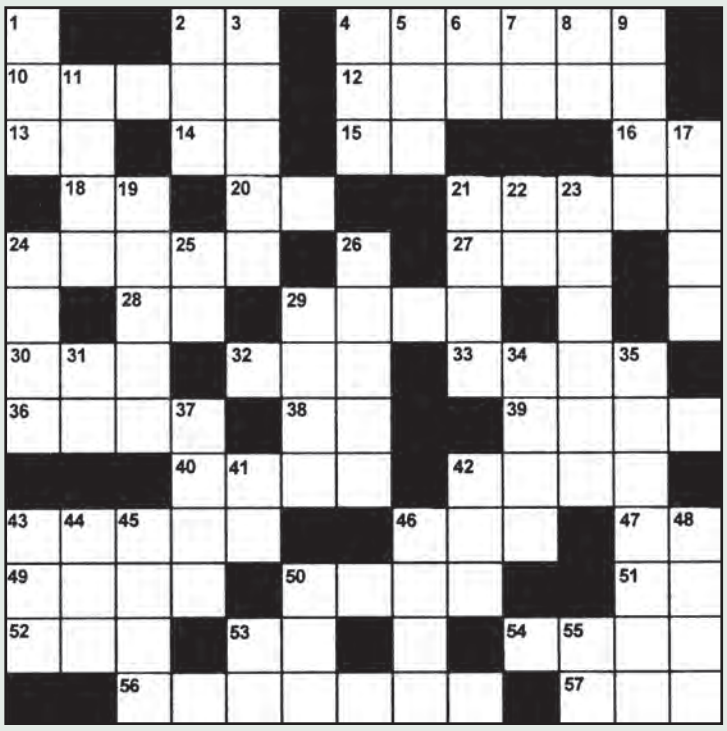
LOG CABIN RENTAL
Lake Guntersville area, beautiful view and fully furnished. Discounts to ministers. Log on to www.paradisevista.net to see pictures. Call for reservations at 205-540-3600.

CHRISTIAN crossword



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ACROSS

2. Kilogram. (abbr.)
4. Not very often.
10. Computer communication.
12. Joshua ... left nothing ____. (Josh. 11:15)
13. ____ each his own.
14. Their cry came up un____ God. (Ex. 2:23)
15. New Testament. (abbr.)
16. Egyptian sun god.
18. Royal Canadian. (abbr.)
20. Not A.D.
21. All the people that came out of Egypt ... were ____. (Josh. 5:4)
24. Live in ____. (2 Cor. 13:11)
27. ____, our eye hath seen it. (Ps. 35:21)
28. Deutsche mark. (abbr.)
29. The cup was found in Benjamin's ____. (Gen. 44:12)
30. Our ____ is near. (Lam. 4:18)
32. Shem, ____ and Japheth. (Gen. 5:32)
33. Saul ... fought against ... Moab and ... ____. (1 Sam. 14:47)
36. Takes care of a bill.
38. ____ la la la la.
39. The ____ of that house was great. (Luke 6:49)
40. So be it.
42. Led us through the ... ____. (Jer. 2:6)
43. "Kukla, Fran and ____."
46. Energy, vim, vigor.
47. Lung disease.
49. They ____ hands on the apostles. (Acts 4:3)
50. Behold ... the ____, and it shineth not. (Job 25:5)
51. As he thinketh in his heart, ____ is he. (Prov. 23:7)
52. A long period of time.
53. He saith among the trumpets, ____. (Job 39:25)
54. Heareth ... and ____ with joy receiveth it. (Matt. 13:20)
56. I am a ... ____ of the Gentiles. (1 Tim. 2:7)
57. As ____ that mourneth for his mother. (Ps. 35:14)

DOWN

1. Cornelius ____ him, and fell down. (Acts 10:25)
2. Baby fox.
3. The earth is a ____.
4. I saw an angel standing in the ____. (Rev. 19:17)
5. Inner, within. (prefix)
6. Learning disabilities. (two words)
7. Who rejoice to ____ evil. (Prov. 2:14)
8. Cherubims ... stretch forth their wings ____ high. (Ex. 25:20)
9. Being nothing more than.
11. (Jacob) loved also Rachel ____ than Leah. (Gen. 29:30)
17. The cruel venom of ____. (Deut. 32:33)
19. A person who carries another's clubs.
21. ____ straight the way of the Lord. (John 1:23)
22. ____, thou that destroyest the temple. (Mark 15:29)
23. The arrangement of items.
24. Wizards that ____, and that mutter. (Isa. 8:19)
25. 900 in Roman numerals.
26. ____ sought to destroy all the Jews. (Esther 3:6)
29. Is the young man Absalom ____? (2 Sam. 18:29)
31. North America. (abbr.)
34. One drop of water.
35. Sprinkles lightly on something. (two words)
37. He hath ____ in his heart. (Ps. 10:6)
41. He ... dwelleth in ____. (John 6:56)
42. I will not with ink and ___ write unto thee. (3 John 13)
43. Bravo. (Span.)
44. Citizen of an Asian country.
45. Pieces of material shed during washing or drying.
46. Corn ____.
48. ____ of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. (Gen. 2:23)
50. Brand of computer. (abbr.)
53. Sound made when laughing.
55. Negative.

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Pastoral Evangelism Workshop May 16

As a pastor, how do you lead your church to make a greater impact in evangelism? And how do you prepare biblical sermons that have an evangelistic appeal?

The Pastoral Evangelism Workshop — set for May 16 at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions — is designed to address these questions.

"The benefit of attending the Pastoral Evangelism Workshop is that we'll learn from effective practitioners who are actually doing in their own churches what they will be sharing with us," said Daniel Wilson, director of the SBOM office of evangelism. "So this is not going to be a bunch of theoretical ideas. Instead we'll be getting proven and practical help for becoming better evangelistic leaders and preachers."

For more information about the Pastoral Evangelism Workshop or to register, visit evangelizeal.org/pew.

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

National Day of Prayer for VBS: May 21

For many churches, Vacation Bible School is their biggest outreach event of the year.

And Patty Burns, VBS strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said prayer is vital to its success.

"Prayer is the foundation of it all," she said.

That's why churches are urged to unite in prayer on the National Day of Prayer for VBS on May 21.

Burns encouraged each congregation to have a special emphasis that day to pray for the gospel to change hearts at their church and churches across their community during VBS season.

Photo courtesy of Fultondale FBC

She also mentioned that resources are available to point people to specific ways to pray. Lifeway materials, for instance, offer prayer calendars and prayer points that can be used on social media.

Around 3 in 10 U.S. Protestant pastors (31%) are not sure how many weeks of cash reserves their church has. Among those who know, the percentage of churches with less than 16 weeks of reserves has fallen from 50% in 2016 to 44%.

Cash reserves

Photo by Freepik

Churches more financially equipped to weather hardships, study shows

By Aaron Earls
Lifeway Research

After enduring difficult economic seasons recently, churches are better prepared for financial rainy days than they were in prior years.

A Lifeway Research study on the financial health of U.S. Protestant churches found fewer congregations have less than two months of cash reserves compared to a previous study in 2016.

Additionally, most churches have undergone a financial audit in the past two years, and fewer than 1 in 10 have had someone embezzle funds from the congregation.

"When hardships impact an organization, financial leaders carefully watch how much cash is on hand and how quickly they are spending it," said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research.

Being prepared

"Very rarely does cash stop coming in completely, though some churches experienced that for a few weeks in 2020," he said. "But hardships such as a financial recession can impact church receipts and force the use of cash reserves to get by.

"While improved, there are still too many churches with too little money in the bank given the uncertainties of 2023."

Prior to 2022, 2016 was the last year a majority of pastors said the economy was having a negative impact on their congregation, according to an annual Lifeway Research study.

This time, however, churches seem more equipped to handle the storm.

Around 3 in 10 U.S. Protestant pastors (31%) are not sure how many weeks of cash reserves their church has.

Among those who know, the percentage of churches with less than 16 weeks of reserves has fallen from 50% in 2016 to 44%. Specifically, 20% of pastors say their cash reserves are seven weeks or less, down from 26% in 2016.

Savings in reserve

Slightly more churches today have reserves ranging from 16 to 51 weeks. In 2016, 27% said that was the case. Today, 32% have that amount on hand. The percentage of pastors today who say their congregation has more than a year's worth is similar to 2016 (23% in 2016 vs. 24% now).

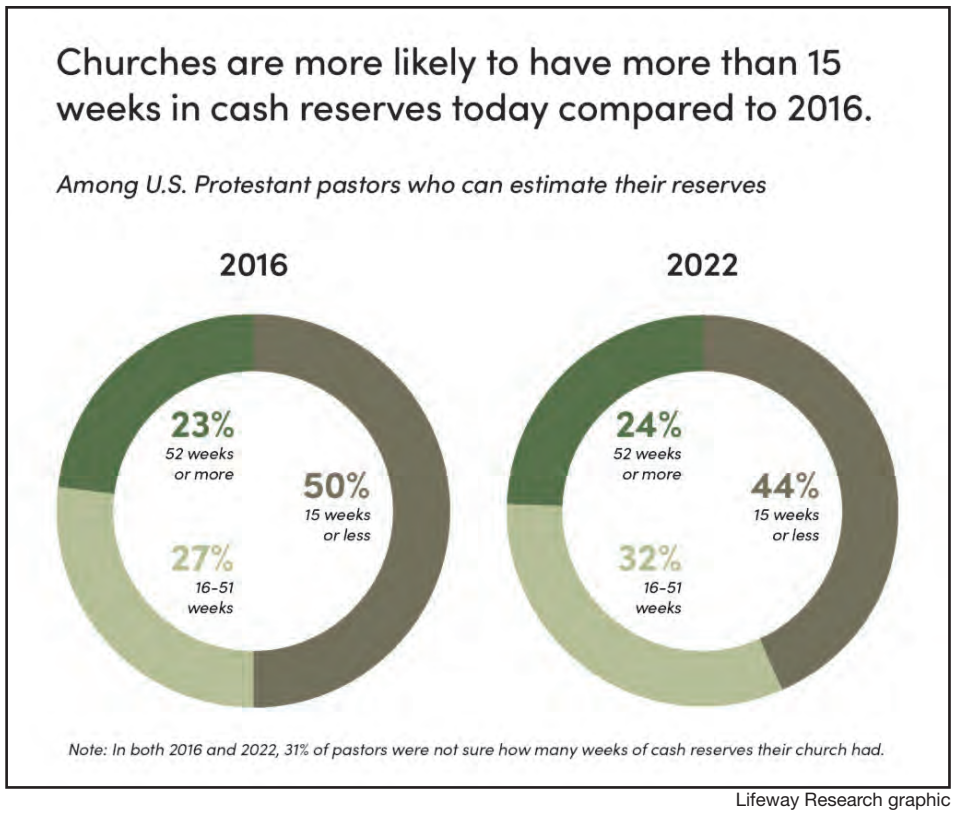
Pastors at small and normative sized congregations and those who serve Black or Hispanic congregations are among the most likely to have little to no reserves.

One in 5 pastors at the largest churches, those with 250 or more in attendance, say they have less than two months of cash reserves.

Most pastors (58%) say they have had a complete audit of their church's finances within the past two years, including 47% who say the audit occurred within the past year.

Fewer say the audit took place three to four years ago (7%) or five or more years ago (12%).

One in 10 pastors say their church has never undergone a financial audit, while 12% are not sure. These are similar to the percentages in 2016.



Lifeway Research graphic

Auditing processes

"Some state laws require that nonprofit organizations of a certain size file audited financial statements, but most churches have an option," McConnell said.

"Many congregations prefer to have this review to ensure that financial processes are being followed and that trust is maintained."

Pastors 65 and older (54%) are more likely than their youngest counterparts, pastors 18 to 44, (42%) to say their church had an audit within the last year.

Relatively few pastors say their congregations have had someone embezzle money from them, but still around 1 in 13 churches (8%) have experienced this.

More than 9 in 10 pastors (92%) say they are not aware of any past instances. The rate is statistically unchanged from 2016 when 9% reported previous embezzlement and 91% were unaware of any.

"The misappropriation of funds is more likely when an organization lacks necessary processes so that multiple people are aware of every expenditure before it is made," McConnell said.

"Skipping some of those safeguards and streamlining financial accountability for the sake of ministry may sound easy to justify, but it can be a costly choice for a church."

Compassionate investing

Conference focuses on long-term stewardship of church funds for Kingdom work

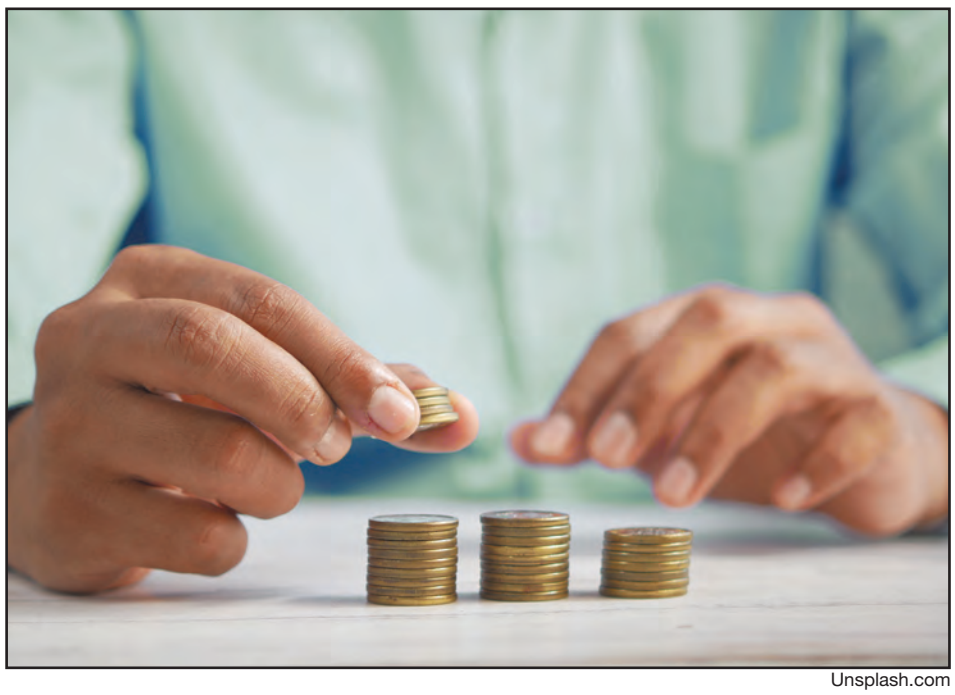
By George Bullard
The Alabama Baptist

I never heard the following terms in a seminary classroom — performance transparency, donor-advised fund, fiduciary, asset allocation, values-based investing, evergreen model, duration bonds and freedom weighting.

To many people in Christian ministry, these terms may be like a foreign language.

But at the Redemptive Institutional Investing Retreat these words are assumed. The retreat is sponsored annually by Oak City Consulting of Wake Forest, North Carolina, and held at the Billy Graham Training Center at The Cove in Asheville, North Carolina.

Nathan McCarthy, president of BFSC, told us in an orientation session that we were going to hear the heart of who Baptist foundations are and how their strategy for investing is not the same as the rest of the world.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Investing with excellence

Oak City Consulting has a faith-based focus. Leaders declare on the company's website "that when invested with excellence, concentrated capital is one of the tools that God uses to bless the world He has created and repair the broken relationships that exist within it."

Also present at the retreat were numerous for-profit organizations who invest money in Christian and other values-based organizations in the U.S. and throughout the world. They spoke with deep conviction about their ministry of impactful, compassionate investing.

Worship was an important part of each session, led by a worship team from The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham and Dave Owen, senior associate pastor of Providence Church in Raleigh, North Carolina.

On the second evening we were treated to a surprise appearance by celebrities Shane and Shane to talk about compassionate investing through The Worship Initiative. They then led us in a mini-concert.

We also learned about music royalty funds, which is a pathway to generating new resources for Christian ministry.

BULLARD

The theme for this retreat was "Order from Chaos." Last year was a tough investment year. Yet in the middle of it were values-based investments that empowered Christian ministries to make Kingdom progress.

Many speakers were positive about long-term investing even with the possible chaos in the short term. Strider Elass, an economist in the banking and investment world, advised staying the course.

We also learned how order replaces chaos when efficiencies are addressed, impact is measured, governance practices are elevated, future planning takes place and human capital is developed.

The future will always be chaordic, which means chaos and order happening simultaneously. We must continue to move forward with boldness to provide the resources needed for Kingdom ministry.

The comparison of compassionate or impact investing with philanthropy was clearly explained. Patrick Fisher, founder and managing partner of Creation Investments in Chicago, proclaimed that "investment capital doing God's work can do more than philanthropy ever thought about doing."

He said this when talking about the hundreds of millions of dollars his firm invests in mortgages for people in India who do not have access to traditional banking services, while at the same time making money for investors who provide the capital and are then able to increase their investment in God's work.

Anthony Hoye, partner and head of private credit at the Copia Group in Chicago, shared that the Copia Group provides access to funds for the people and organizations for whom access to capital is broken. His perspective is that philanthropy meets a specific need at a specific time. Impact investing creates sustainable businesses that can focus on compassion for people.

Michael Tremain, managing partner for Sovereign's Capital of Raleigh, North Carolina, talked about looking for companies who are putting their faith values into what they do. He prefers to invest with the Christian founders of companies who also screen for values compatible with Christian lifestyle convictions.

'God owns it all'

As McCarthy said, "because God owns it all, we need to think carefully about how we invest His money."

EDITOR'S NOTE — George Bullard spent 45 years in denominational ministry. He served on the staff of three associations, was a key staff person working with associations in two state conventions and served on the association missions division staff of the former Home Mission Board of the SBC. He retired in June 2022 as director of Columbia Metro Baptist Association in South Carolina. He has led strategic planning processes in more than 100 associations and has written extensively in this area. Bullard now serves as a strategic thinking mentor for Christian leaders through his ForthTelling Innovation ministry.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For April 16

Explore the Bible

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

JOHN 15:26–27; 16:7–15
When the Spirit Comes

Jesus' comments regarding the Counselor arrive on the heels of His explanation of a coming persecution (John 15:18–25). He tells His disciples that even in His absence, the world "will hate you as it has hated Me." A very natural question for each disciple would have been, "How will we remain faithful through the days of trial?"

Testify (15:26–27)

Jesus' answer is, "The Counselor will help you testify." The Spirit of truth will bear witness to Christ in the world. Christ's soon physical, personal absence will not leave the world bereft of testimony to Him. The Spirit remains and will, while abiding in the disciples, lead His people to testify of Him, no matter how difficult, dangerous or overwhelming the world's hostility to Christ.

I've never been persecuted by a government for being a Christian. But I've run the thought experiment many times: "How would I handle the pressures of persecution?" These verses give me confidence that the same Holy Spirit residing within me will ensure a faithful witness in a time of trial.

Convicts (16:7–11)

I'll bet lots of us have thought, "It would have been so much better to be around to see Jesus do His ministry." Well, Jesus didn't think so! He says it's to our advantage that He goes away, because we now live under the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Before the Holy Spirit, as one commentator says, "millions ignored the claims of the true God." Now because of the Holy Spirit, millions have been brought into a happy relationship with Christ.

The Spirit's ministry convicts. The language of verse 8 is difficult to render into English. My best guess is it means something like "convince the world of its own shame" with regard to sin, righteousness and judgment.

In other words, part of the role of the Spirit through the witness of the church is to reveal to the world the truth about sin and real righteousness and to persuade the world about the true and coming judgment.

Guides (12–15)

Some interpreters take these verses to indicate an "end times" kind of revelation. They understand Jesus to be telling His disciples that the Holy Spirit will reveal prophetic events still to come. It seems more likely Jesus is speaking about how to understand the events yet to come in His earthly ministry and how they relate to the full revelation and self-disclosure of the Godhead. Jesus is truth sending the Spirit of Truth to take what is from the Father regarding truth and reveal it to His people.

I don't think He has in mind apocalyptic knowledge, but rather more revelation about events soon to take place at Golgotha and the garden. The disciples still have to properly process the implications of those events, an exercise aided by the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:13–49).

We still need the Holy Spirit to help us perceive the truth about the Lord (1 Cor. 2:14–15). We are not incapable of comprehending divine truth, but our judgments can be clouded by faithless disobedience. Jesus never accuses the disciples of misunderstanding because of a low IQ. But He does reprove them for their lack of faith in understanding (Luke 24:25).

Like them, we are sometimes prone to wander. I am thankful for the active work of the Holy Spirit, who guides me into truth to the glory and honor of Christ.

"And when He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment."

John 16:8

Bible Studies for Life

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

THE SOURCE OF TEMPTATION
James 1:13–18

It is no surprise many biblical authors have something to say about dealing with temptation. Over the next six weeks, our lessons take us to James, Deuteronomy, Matthew, Psalms and Ephesians.

Read all of chapter 1. The passage begins with a beatitude, a device Jesus made famous in Matthew 5:3–12, but also found in places like Psalm 1:1, 1 Kings 10:8 and the Dead Sea Scrolls.

James uses a word translators render as "tempt" or "try"/"trial." He first combines this idea with testing in 1:2, and in 1:3–4, he uses the metaphor of growth from endurance to wisdom, that is, the progression of life. Temptation leads to death.

God does not tempt anyone to sin. (13)

James makes it clear God has no part in temptation. God cannot be tempted, and He does not tempt. Christians might respond that, in contrast to God, the devil tempts. But even in Genesis, temptation comes from within, and in the wilderness, what was tested was Jesus's willingness to obey the Father.

Temptation begins with our own sin nature. (14–15)

In Genesis, the snake told Eve the truth about the consequences of eating the fruit: She would become like God, knowing good from evil. Her temptation, however, was internal. She saw the fruit "was a delight to the eyes" and "was to be desired to make one wise" (Gen. 3:6). The appeal of what the fruit offered was greater than her desire for the life God offered in the garden.

James' language evokes sexual enticements that draw one away from one's spouse: luring and enticing. But desire or even lust can apply to any longing. If I desire happiness, peace or security more than anything else, I do not desire God more than anything.

This kind of desire is the opposite of endurance. James turns the metaphor of birth on its head — as in the garden, so now. Desire, once it has conceived, bears sin; sin, when it has come to term, gives birth to death.

Everything good comes from God, including the Word of truth. (16–18)

The verb translated "be deceived" is the root of the English word planet. It means to cause to wander and so belongs to the semantic range of the words lure and entice.

James again uses the imagery of creation. God is "the Father of lights" (a phrase also found in the Dead Sea Scrolls and Gen. 1:3–4, 14–19) from whom comes, not temptation, but every good gift and each perfect favor.

James speaks of God's unchanging faithfulness. God gives life, and He never stops giving it. The mixed parental images are deliberate: God is Father — He "gave us birth."

James likens the first life at creation to the new life God gives those who are faithful (John 3:5–6), who are both hearers and doers of the Word (James 1:22).

He plants the "Word of truth" within, where it can grow to bring salvation (see Matt. 3, Mark 4 and Luke 8 as examples).

Pay attention to the phrase "by His own choice." God's will is life. This is why God has not given us temptation but what we need to endure temptation — the Word of truth that, if we allow it to grow within us, can lead us to salvation.

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change."

James 1:17

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Brandon Porter
Baptist Press

Singing Scripture leads believers to the presence of God, Shane & Shane say

Shane & Shane believe they have found a pathway to experience God's love in deeper, richer way. And it's through Scripture and song.

The Dove-award winning artists have just released a live album featuring songs from their "Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs" recording. The title is a phrase used by Paul in Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19.

"I can't think about that phrase without thinking that Scripture is this pathway that God's given us to allow the Spirit's work of letting the Word of Christ dwell richly in you," said Shane Barnard.

Shane & Shane's new album is available on all major streaming platforms.

Shane & Shane were guests recently on Baptist Press This Week to talk about the new album and worshipping God through music.

"I think culturally we kind of have a wrong language around those moments. I think, you know, people would say, you ushered us into the presence (of God), and this is happening in the room, and the atmosphere is changing," Barnard said.

SHANE & SHANE

Facebook photo

He doesn't believe most worship leaders are trying to concoct an emotional experience, he just believes God has given us the answer for how to experience the love of God.

He calls it a "promise of God" that when Christians sing Scripture there is a "pathway" to the fullness of God's love.

"Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs (LIVE)" features five songs from the previous studio recording with the same title and five new songs. It was recorded on the campus of Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia.

Shane & Shane also manage a ministry resource for worship leaders called the Worship Initiative. The site features devotionals and tutorials on specific songs, instruments and worship leading.

Ministry resource

"We want to feed the sheep, and this is our little corner of His Kingdom where we get to, hopefully, create things that encourage the hearts of believers to remember who they are in Christ, remember what He's done, remember what He's coming to do and to implant the Word of God in people's hearts so they would sing it," Shane Everett said.

"We want to feed the sheep, and this is our little corner of His Kingdom where we get to, hopefully, create things that encourage the hearts of believers."

Shane Everett
Shane & Shane

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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