

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



Photo courtesy of Madison Jennings

‘Paws in the Pew’

Two goldendoodles were among those on hand for the March 19 service at First Baptist Church West Blocton.

FBC West Blocton’s outreach event sparks joy in unique, engaging way

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

First Baptist Church West Blocton held a unique service March 19. Not only did church members and many from the community attend, but there were also a number of four-legged friends.

Pastor Kyle Hodges has challenged the congregation to find out-of-the-box ways to relate to its

community since he began serving there more than a year ago.

Recognizing the importance of pets in our culture, this year they added an unusual activity that had tremendous success: “Paws in the Pew — the paw-fect setup for a community play date.”

Hodges and his wife had been brainstorming new ideas for community outreach.

“We tried to think of things that are important to people, and their pets came to mind so we figured why not bring your pet to church one day?”

Broad support

“When we presented the idea to the church, they were actually very excited about it and immediately jumped on board to support it,” Hodges said.

FBC West Blocton held the pet-friendly worship service and other pet-centered activities between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m., all held outside. The church hosted several community partners who participated by selling or donating items. There was also a food truck.

In spite of the unseasonably cold weather, Hodges said the event
(See ‘Joy,’ page 8)

DADEVILLE STRONG

See pages 10–11 for coverage and updates following the April 15 mass shooting in Dadeville.

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.

When breaking news breaks our hearts

By Rick Lance

Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

Breaking news is a commonly used headline for some current event that demands our attention. Many times breaking news breaks our hearts.

This was the case for so many, including myself, early Sunday morning, April 15. I looked at my phone and saw a news alert featuring the story of a horrific event in Dadeville, Alabama — the sad account of a shooting at a birthday party.

I immediately contacted Ben Hayes, senior pastor of First Baptist Church Dadeville. I further reached out to our disaster relief strategist and state missionary Mark Wakefield. Both confirmed the somber news of four deaths and numerous injuries at the party held the night before.

This relatively small town of 3,000 was in a state of severe shock. This is a quiet and close-knit community where people know each other well enough to be on a first-name basis. They go to church together. They go to sports events at the high school together. They do life together.

On this day, their lives were changed. A shockwave went through the community and the surrounding areas. Individuals all over the state joined in grieving with these precious people.

Prayer vigil

Later in the day, there was a prayer vigil in the parking lot of the First Baptist Church where hundreds of people gathered to pray for all those affected by this indescribably sad event.

Ministers led in prayer for the families of the victims, the students, the educators and first re-

sponders. This was one of the saddest but most meaningful experiences I have ever had as a Christian leader.

A crisis calls for strong leaders to emerge. That is what is happening in Dadeville. The city police are doing their jobs. Other first responders stepped up to do what they do best. Pastors and other people of faith have pointed people to the only hope we have, which is Jesus Christ the Lord.

Shock to the system

At the prayer vigil, I was called upon to close out the time. I choked out a few words knowing that this is not a time for platitudes. Our trite sayings often fall on deaf ears.

This was not a time to discuss politics, although some news outlets defaulted into that kind of discussion. This was a 9/11 moment for so many. This was a shock to the system.

I did claim the promise of John 16:33 where Jesus underscored the reality of tribulation or trouble in our lives. He offered a call to courage in this promise verse. He further spoke of

being overcomers or conquerors when life doesn't make any sense.

Continue to remember in prayer the people of Dadeville. 4/15/2023 will be a date marked in history as a moment that these dear people faced adversity with a fortified faith but fragile feelings.

Time does not heal. The Lord does the healing. May His healing touch be upon the people affected by a day they will not soon forget. A day when breaking news broke our hearts.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story originally appeared on RickLance.com.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist
During the April 16 prayer vigil at FBC Dadeville, Rick Lance shares a word of encouragement for the community and leads a prayer for ministers serving the area.

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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RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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



jrash@thealabamabaptist.org



@RashionalThts

Tragedy reminds us that sin-darkened world needs light of Christ

Standing in the vacant parking lot at FBC Dadeville, I felt the heaviness of the tragedy even more than when hundreds gathered to pray in the same spot two hours prior (see story, page 10).

So much had transpired in the past 24 hours, and images suddenly scrolled through my mind in warp speed — even some I had no first-hand knowledge of, just ideas of what it might have been like.

In my mind, I saw an excited 16-year-old girl laughing and dancing around, getting dressed up for her big birthday bash, then a steady flow of smiling friends pouring into the downtown building decorated with balloons and streamers.

Oh, and definitely a specially designed Sweet 16 cake.

Were the cars parked up and down the streets? I'm not sure. I couldn't focus there. My mind stayed inside the building.

I imagined lots of hugs, selfies and more laughter as the mu-

sic played and a mom running around making sure everything was in place so her baby girl's big day was extra special.

Then everything went dark, and my mind scrolled through terrified screams, a stampede to exit the building and sirens, lots and lots of sirens.

My heart quickly shifted to a deep, deep hurt for the parents, siblings, fellow students and all who are connected to the community.

Back to my own reality, the activities of Sunday, April 16, seemed surreal as I watched pastor Ben Hayes and FBC Dadeville

via livestream that morning and then showed up in person to cover the prayer vigil hosted by the church that evening.

Pastor Hayes shares on page 11 how he navigated the horrific event and describes the look I also saw on so many faces in the community — “that thousand-yard stare.”

You know the one. You aren't quite sure what's playing out in front of you is real and, in some

ways, you feel as if you are outside your own body watching instead of actively participating.

Many times, the shock includes an inability to communicate. You are basically staring right through those in front of you while your mind attempts to process and make sense of it all.

We realize we are attempting to shoulder more than we can truly handle. The pain is sharp.

Still, no matter the depth of our predicament, we are not alone if we have accepted the blood-bought gift of grace provided by our Savior Jesus Christ.

Pastor Hayes shared at the prayer vigil that “our hearts have been set on fire by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit that indwells us and gives us the strength to do this.”

‘Afflicted ... not crushed’

“Jesus said we (believers) are the light of the world,” he noted. “This sin-darkened world desperately needs the light of believers to shine brightly.”

Second Corinthians 4:7–11 also reminds us “we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing ... struck down, but not destroyed.”



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

The beginnings of a growing memorial appear April 18 at the front door of the dance studio in downtown Dadeville.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

Hundreds from the Dadeville community and surrounding areas gather April 16 for a prayer vigil. Those who attended comforted each other following the tragic shooting the night before that left four young lives gone too soon.

Your Voice



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

3 steps toward discerning God's will, path of obedience

By Franklin L. Kirksey
Robertsdale, Ala.

Simply put, discernment is the ability to distinguish between good and evil, truth and error, right and wrong.

What appears to be appealing is appalling without God's approval. First Thessalonians 5:21-22 reads, "Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil."

This passage presents a three-fold word to the wise.

1. Faithfully examine all things.

Here are just a few of the things that need to be tested.

There should be sermon testing.

The Bereans "were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

There should be spirit testing. First John 4:1 reads, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world."

There should be soul testing. Second Corinthians 13:5 reads, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? Unless indeed you are disqualified."

2. Firmly embrace good things.

Psalm 97:10 reads, "You who love the Lord, hate evil! He preserves the souls of His saints; He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked."

If you are to hate evil, conversely you are to love good. Firmly embrace the God of the Word.

Joshua 23:8 reads, "But you shall hold fast to the Lord your God, as you have done to this day." This means to love Him, to walk in obedience to Him and to serve Him with all your heart and soul (Josh. 22:5).

Firmly embrace the Word of God. Revelation 2:25 reads, "But hold fast what you have till I come." Proverbs 4:4 reads, "He

also taught me, and said to me: 'Let your heart retain my words; Keep my commands, and live.'"

"Test all things;

hold fast what is good. Abstain from

every form of evil."

1 Thessalonians 5:21-22

3. Fully eliminate evil things.

Job 1:1 reads, "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil."

We must avoid evil places. Proverbs 4:14-15 reads, "Do not enter the path of the wicked, And do not walk in the way of evil. Avoid it, do not travel on it; Turn away from it and pass on."

We must avoid evil people. Proverbs 24:1-2 reads, "Do not be envious of evil men, Nor desire to be with them; For their heart devises violence, And their lips talk of troublemaking."

We must avoid evil practices. There were eight good kings and 31 evil kings in Israel and Judah.

The good kings pleased the Lord by obeying Him; the evil kings displeased the Lord by disobeying Him.

Remember in the Christian life there is some discernment required!

Inviting pastors into crucial moments of life

Strongly believe every person needs a pastor and church family to walk with them during life's critical moments: weddings, births, hospitalizations, surgeries, deaths, family crises, celebrations and losses.

Being God's instrument of pastoral care is a great responsibility that ministers take very seriously.

There are times, however, when pastors can't minister because members fail to inform them of their need.

Only God is all-knowing. The rest of us need to be informed when a ministry opportunity

arises. Blessed is the helpful member who gives the pastor a ministry prompt by sharing when a person may need a call or visit.

So call your minister before planning your wedding. Call your minister when a baby is born.

Call your minister when a difficult decision confronts you. Call your minister before making funeral arrangements.

Call your minister before your marriage reaches the breaking point. Call your minister when you or someone you know needs help. Call your minister when you are slipping into depression.

Call your minister when you have questions about your faith, or about your church. Ministers will gladly help.

When you need information about some process or matter in church life, go "straight to the top" and seek first-hand information. If the minister doesn't know, he'll be glad to find the answer or information.

Ministers are here to help.

They love God and God's people and are called and privileged to serve.

**Pastor David L. Chancey
Fayetteville, Ga.**

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“God is using us to expand the Kingdom. How awesome is that?”

BEN COWELL

Pastor of Brownsville (Tennessee) Baptist Church

At times God would show me the next step to take without revealing the complete plan. Yet to be honest, periods occurred where I wanted to see the entire picture before I took the now-step I knew God was calling me to take.

However, I have learned a very important truth: Obedience to God's now-step will always lead to God's next-step. A pastor once stated the following: “One of the greatest things God will ever ask you to do is the last thing He asked you to do.”

Remember, whatever step God is prodding you to take, make sure you take it. For again, obedience to God's now-step will always lead to God's next-step.

Shea Lowery
entrustedhopeministries.org

My experience with missions was that when you're called, it's for life.

Jeri Whitfield
IMB missionary in Thailand

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.

Asa Greear
Palatka, Fla.

Groups and relationships that are centered on the Word of God unify a congregation and motivate people to work together on the mission of the church. Churches with few people

participating in groups are not in a healthy position to be making more disciples.

Scott McConnell
Lifeway Research

You don't have to go overseas or go to another country. ... Every day that you wake up as a Christ-follower, you are a missionary.

Caleb McElvain
First Baptist Church
Branson, Mo.

Launch a fresh vision for hospitality in your church. The guests from your community deserve no less than your best as you point them to God's best for their lives.

Danny Franks
MinistryGrid.com

Coping with challenging, difficult days

Roy Blount Jr. nailed the way you feel some days with a book entitled “One Fell Soup: Or I'm Just a Bug on the Windshield of Life.” Do those days arrive too often?

Paul knew that kind of day. He laid bare his personal feelings in 2 Corinthians.

He sacrificed for the Corinthian church. But opponents accused Paul of selfish motives, heavy-handedness and troublemaking.

He felt like a bug on a Corinthian windshield. It hurt.

Paul declared His reliance on God's compassionate nature (comfort) to help meet the challenge of bug life.

Paul received God's undeserved mercy. It compelled him to pass comfort on to other strugglers.

The missionary acknowledged that as Jesus suffered in life, so do His followers.

Paul admitted that at times he felt utterly weighted down. He considered giving up on life.

Ever been that far down in the dumps?

Paul knew where to turn when smacked by life's windshield. He sought God's hope for deliverance from the death grip of despair.

Paul pled for prayer support from other believers to assist in stabilizing his mind.

When the bug life of anxiety, fear, guilt, loneliness or thoughts of self-harm descend, receive God's peace to guard your unsettled mind (John 14:27; Phil. 4:6-7).

Jesus made it possible.

Who can you call to pray for you when you're on your last leg?

Remember. You're no bug in God's eyes.

Darryl Wood

A midweek devotional written for Liberty Baptist Church in Chelsea and first published in “Liberty Living”

From the *Twitterverse*

@revandyfrazier

Parents, never underestimate what God's grace can do through your imperfect influence and persistent prayers.

@RobertHefner

We've got some important areas to work through on cooperation at the #SBC level, but every week as a pastor over and over again, I'm convinced the local church is where it's at.

@claysmith79

Leadership begins with competence. Both are essential and the order matters. People have to first see (and trust) that you are competent to do the job you've been asked to do.

@deaninserra

“She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus because He will save his people from their sins.” Matthew 1:21 (CSB)

@DerwinLGray

Practicing the Sabbath reminds me that:

- ▶ I am not Jesus. I can't save people.
- ▶ I need a day of delight.
- ▶ I can have boundaries.
- ▶ I am not that important.
- ▶ I need Jesus more than ever.

@PastorCroft

There is an incredible irony in the lives of many pastors. Pastors give their lives for the sake of caring for the souls of the people in the congregation ... at the expense of their own soul.

Pastors, make sure you are caring for your own soul so that you can care for others.

@richardblackaby

Every revival in history has had its critics, usually within the Church, because they disagreed with how God was doing it.

@LysaTerKeurst

When hurtful words come our way, we must be humble enough to receive any truth from what's been said but stable enough to let the rest go.

Their unkindness is usually an indication of unresolved pain in their life that probably has very little to do with you.

@lecrac

God is faithful. He always does what He says He will do. Even when we can't see how it's humanly possible.

@shane_pruitt78

The Holy Spirit will never lead you to do something that contradicts the Holy Bible.

@albertmohler

If our leaders are not passionately driven by right beliefs, we are headed for disaster.

Peggy Darby named WMU Foundation president-elect, will take the helm July 1

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Longtime Alabama Baptist Peggy Darby, who has spent nearly 25 years in fundraising and development, was unanimously elected as president-elect of the national WMU Foundation on April 17 during the board of trustees spring meeting in Birmingham.

Darby officially becomes president July 1 following the upcoming retirement of current president David George on June 30.

Board chair Bob Cardinal of South Carolina said, "It has been a wonderful run for David, and it's so exciting to see a smooth transition with both of them, as one is parting and one is coming on board.

"We are asking all our Baptist friends to pray for them daily during this transition."

In greeting the board following the announcement of her selection to the role, Darby thanked the search team, which was led by board member John Bergquist of Birmingham, for their confidence in her.

"It is my honor to use my profes-



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist
WMU Foundation's president-elect Peggy Darby expresses her gratitude to the board of trustees during the April 17 meeting in Birmingham.

sional skillset ... to continue the work that David George began and has fostered during his tenure as WMU Foundation president," she said. "David's personal and professional investment of his God-given

talents has created a legacy here at the WMU Foundation that I hope and pray I will be able to continue and enhance for future generations."

She also shared a word of appreciation for "the WMU women who have invested in me throughout my whole life. ... From my days as a GA to my time in Acteens working my way through StudiAct to eventually earn Service Aide, to my Judson College sisters who were WMU leaders in their own states.

"From my Alabama WMU camp days to the women I know as an adult, I am grateful to each of you for sharing your love of WMU work and missions with me. You may never know the impact you made on my life, but I do, and I want you to know that I stand here today because of you.

"Today, as I begin my service to the WMU Foundation I would like to ask each of you to keep the WMU Foundation team in your prayers," she shared. "I also would like you to specifically pray

that God will guide me as I seek to lead our team to further the work of the WMU Foundation in support of WMU."

'Future is bright'

George also expressed his excitement about Darby's election and the opportunity to mentor her in the position.

"I have nothing but great respect for Peggy," he said. "I think the future is bright with Peggy at the helm of the WMU Foundation. I look forward to supporting her in that work."

Darby has served several educational institutions, Children's of Alabama and, most recently, the missions group Designs for Hope.

A member of Hunter Street Baptist Church in Hoover, Darby holds a bachelor of arts from Judson College, master of arts from University of Phoenix Online, and has done expanded graduate and doctoral level and other continuing educational studies.

To see a video interview with Peggy Darby, visit tabonline.org/peggy-darby.

Persecuted church

Pastors, staff member from Chinese church arrested for 'fraud'

XI'AN, China — Two pastors and a church staff member at China's Xi'an Church of Abundance have been arrested for "fraud."

Xi'an Shilipu police initially arrested the three — pastors Lian Changnian and Lian Xu-liang, along with church staff member Fu Juan — on Aug. 17, 2022, according to the human rights group ChinaAid.

The three Christians were placed in residential surveillance at an undisclosed location. Their arrests were made official March 22, 2023.

Another Christian named Jia was interrogated and subjected to abuse because of his connection to Xi'an Church of Abundance, ChinaAid reported.

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

New believer in Sudan subjected to abuse, false claims of mental illness

KHARTOUM, Sudan — A Sudanese woman who recently became a Christian has subsequently been chained, subjected to electrical shocks and has lost access to her children.

Awatif Abdalla Kaki, 27, who lives in Omdurman, Sudan, put her faith in Jesus Christ on Jan. 27, Morning Star News reported. After she told her family about her

new faith, her husband chained her legs and tightened the chains in an attempt to force her to renounce Christianity and return to Islam. Her legs were injured by the chains.

Her husband then claimed she was insane and forced her into a psychiatric hospital, where she was given an injection and electrical shocks against her will.

Her husband took the couple's four young children and went to live with his parents. In addition, an unnamed source told Morning Star News the woman is receiving no assistance from any Christians and that her parents and siblings contend she suffers from mental illness because she has chosen to be a follower of Jesus Christ.

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



Wikimedia.org

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

▶ **Earl Eugene “Gene” Tagert Jr.**, 80, of Citronelle died March 31.

A Mobile native, Tagert graduated from William Carey College, Hattiesburg, Mississippi, with a music education degree. He was a band director for nine years. Ordained in 1974 at Roseland Park Baptist Church, Picayune, Mississippi, Tagert completed a master of divinity degree in church music from New Orleans.

He served in active church ministry for more than 60 years, beginning his service as minister of music at Bethel Baptist Church, Citronelle, while still in high school. He last served as the minister of music at Citronelle Memorial Baptist Church. He was a member of the Alabama Singing Men and also served the Mobile Baptist Association as VBS director and chairman of the senior adult leadership and activity committee. He served as a chaplain at Mobile Infirmary.

In 2010, Tagert retired from full-time ministry but continued working as a part-time music minister and visiting nursing homes each week. He also drove a charter bus for Colonial Trailways.

He is survived by his wife, Connie; two children and three grandchildren.



TAGERT

ALABAMA-CRENSHAW ASSOCIATION



KIDD

▶ **Travis Kidd** is the new pastor of **Bethel Baptist Church, Goshen**. He was ordained April 2. He served as a U.S. Army infantryman in Germany and Europe before working as a mail carrier in Dozier. He and his wife, Shelia, have two children and four grandchildren.

BALDWIN ASSOCIATION

▶ **Tim Mims** is the new pastor of **East Pointe Baptist Church, Spanish Fort**. He has been professor of biblical studies at Blue Mountain Christian University for six years and has served churches in Mississippi and Florida. At BMCU, he was director of ministerial internships and associate director of church minister relations.

Mims and his wife, Mandy, have one child.



MIMS

CALHOUN ASSOCIATION

▶ **Joe Morris** is the new groups minister of **Iron City Baptist Church, Anniston**. He holds a bachelor's degree in religion from Liberty University. He previously served as associate pastor at Seddon Baptist Church, Pell City, where he was ordained in 2013. While at Seddon, he served as an executive board member of Calhoun County Discipleship Now. He also has served as lead pastor of Mignon Baptist Church, Sylacauga; creative arts minister of Hill Crest Baptist Church, Anniston; bivocational minister of students of Westwood Baptist Church, Alexandria. He and his wife, Kelli, have three children.



MORRIS

MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION

▶ **Kathy Cooper** has retired from her role as director of the Caring Center at **First Baptist Church Montgomery**. She previously served as the single adult minister at FBC Montgomery for 20 years.

Cooper holds a bachelor's degree in psychology, sociology and social work from Huntingdon College and a master of arts degree in religious education from New Orleans Seminary. She is married to Beau.



COOPER



BRYANT

▶ **Clint Bryant**, who previously served as student pastor of **Taylor Road Baptist Church, Montgomery**, is the new pastor of **First Baptist Church Tecumseh, Oklahoma**. Bryant served in the U.S. Air Force in the Thunderbirds air demonstration squadron and the 349th and 331st recruiting squadrons. He and his wife, Jenna, have two children.

SHELBY ASSOCIATION

▶ **Southcrest Baptist Church, Bessemer**, will host Living Faith Quartet from Cullman on May 5, 7 p.m. Supper will be served at 6. Scott Bush is pastor.



TUCKER

SOUTHEAST ALABAMA ASSOCIATION

▶ **Leah Tucker** is the new administrative assistant at **First Baptist Church Dothan**. She and her husband, Joel, have two children. He is pastor of education and media of FBC Headland.

SULPHUR SPRINGS ASSOCIATION

▶ **Good Hope Baptist Church, Dora**, will celebrate its bicentennial homecoming May 7. Worship begins at 10:30 a.m. with special music, presentations and message by Kerry Turner, pastor. Lunch and reception to follow. Afternoon singing begins at 1:30 p.m., featuring the gospel quartet Awakened.

TUSCALOOSA COUNTY ASSOCIATION

▶ **Forest Lake Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa**, will host a retirement reception April 30, 2–4 p.m., for pastor Donnie Payne. He and Patrick Cochran serve as co-pastors of the church.



PAYNE

TUSKEGEE LEE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Patrick Taylor** is the new pastor of **Notasulga Baptist Church**. This is his first church. He was a deacon and was licensed at First Baptist Church Apalachicola, Florida. He and his wife, Mandy, have four children.



TAYLOR

George serving as 2023 ETS president

Timothy George, founding dean of Samford University's Beeson Divinity School, is this year's Evangelical Theological Society president. The society is made up of more than 4,000 scholars, teachers, pastors, students and others dedicated to the oral exchange and written expression of theological thought and research. ETS will mark its 75th annual meeting in San Antonio, Texas, on Nov. 14–16.

Prior to George, there has only been one

Beeson faculty member to serve as ETS president — Paul House, professor of Old Testament, who served in 2012.

George said he is honored to serve.

“I think ETS fits with who Beeson is as a theological school, committed to the gospel but also welcoming diverse Christian traditions.”

George has been serving as Beeson's distinguished professor of divinity since retiring as dean in 2019. (Kristen Padilla)



FBC West Blocton holds a pet-friendly worship service and other pet-centered activities.

Photo courtesy of Madison Jennings

Joy marks everyone's faces during 'paw-fect setup'

(continued from page 1)
was a "roaring success." There were between 35 and 40 animals with owners plus others without pets. The focus wasn't on how many attended, however; it was what happened while they were there.

Many dedicated their lives to Christ, which was the ultimate goal. Uniting church members, as well as connecting church members to the community, were wonderful by-products.

"The casual nature of the outdoor church service and having your favorite pet with you seemed to break down a lot of church barriers," Hodges said. "The excitement of having your dog and seeing other people's animals made it easy for everyone to engage in conversation as it gave them a topic to start off with."

'More comfortable'

"People were noticeably more comfortable, expressive and willing to hang around," he said. "Joy was the main expression that marked everyone's faces that day."

Hodges made the sermon interactive, involving both pet owners and pets, and spoke on love in relation to animals.

Not only were the attendees more engaged with each other than during a typical Sunday morning, but they were also more engaged with the sermon, even with the distraction of the animals.

"This event provided a unique opportunity to come together and fellowship with the community and with our beloved, furry friends — to help testify to God's unconditional love for us," said Madison Jennings from FBC West Blocton. "I believe that the message this past Sunday was a wonderful example of the unconditional love that God has for us."

"I wasn't sure how some people would respond or think about it," said FBC West Blocton member Heath Smith. "But God created the earth and every creature on it, so if the church can use a pet as a way to

possibly reach a lost person, then why not?"

"With that said, God absolutely showed up and showed out Sunday with an awesome outdoor service with clear blue skies overhead. I think everyone got a blessing from it," Smith said.

The church spent about four months planning for the event.

The major hurdle to overcome was deciding how to best handle the animals, and some members were a little concerned about possible chaos. Another concern was the weather. Organizers also

wanted to promote the event and needed to consider the involvement of community partners.

Promotion started with a paid social media ad.

Church members also handed out fliers at schools, businesses and

their food pantry. They encouraged church attendees to spread the word and generate excitement within the community.

The fliers and other promotional information included the guidelines for pets and "rules" for the event, like "Pick up animal waste. Animals must be on a leash at all times. Animals must get along with other people and animals. If they show signs of aggression, please remove the animal," Hodges said.

'Share in its blessings'

Hodges is hoping to not only do this again, but also to have it become a twice-a-year event.

"I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings," Hodges said, quoting 1 Corinthians 9:22-23. "We must not be afraid to push the envelope of our comfort zones. I am not the most pet-loving person, yet I am beyond willing to embrace an event like this to demonstrate that I value what others find important. I want everyone to know that God loves them and will go to great lengths to ensure they know that."



Photo courtesy of Jaclyn Fitch
Congregants wait to worship in song at FBC West Blocton's unique event held March 19.

Protecting CHILDREN

A closer look at gun violence and ways to keep kids safer in today's culture

By Denise George
The Alabama Baptist

One child is shot every hour in the United States. Annually, more than 3,500 U.S. children and teens are shot and killed, and 15,000 are shot and wounded, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Recent mass shootings highlight the dangers.

In Dadeville, Alabama, four teenagers were killed and 32 were wounded on April 15 while attending a birthday party (see stories, pages 10–11). Several teenaged suspects from multiple cities in the region have been arrested in connection to those shootings.

In Nashville, three children and three adults were killed March 27 at Covenant Christian school. A former student at the school was the shooter, according to officials. It was the deadliest school shooting since 21 people, including 19 children, were killed at a school in Uvalde, Texas, on May 24, 2022.

Police officials said the shooter was under care for an emotional disorder and had legally purchased several weapons.

Leading cause of death

In 2020, firearms became the leading cause of death for U.S. children and teenagers, replacing car accidents — a statistic that held for 60 years. Firearm-related deaths (for people aged 1 to 19) increased by 30%, more than doubling the increase observed in the general population, according to CDC data.

Compared with other wealthy nations, the U.S. gun homicide rate for children under the age of 14 is around 20 times higher.

For youth between 15 to 24 years



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of age, the U.S. rate for gun homicide is 49 times higher.

Gun violence happens in schools, neighborhoods, stores, theaters, churches and homes.

Yet gun ownership is a constitutionally protected right in the U.S.

The nation remains deeply divided on which measures to take to curb gun violence. Questions also remain about how to handle rising mental health concerns, especially as they relate to gun violence.

The results from the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence show that an estimated 3 million children witness a shooting each year.

Commonsense steps

Second amendment debates aside, what are ways to keep children safe at school and church?

Parents, grandparents, pastors and teachers can take some commonsense steps to help protect children

and youth from active shooters. Suggestions to contemplate include:

- ▶ Consider how to store guns in the home. Both guns and ammunition should be stored safely away from a child's reach.

- ▶ Be aware of guns in other people's homes. Inquire about guns in the homes of family members and friends before allowing your children or youth to visit.

- ▶ Be aware of the threat of domestic violence. If a home is one where domestic violence happens, know that these issues are much more likely to become homicides when a gun is present, according to the American Journal of Public Health.

- ▶ Teach children and youth to be alert to potential violence and to report anyone suspicious to the proper authorities.

Teach children and youth how to run away, take shelter and hide, barricade entrance doors and call for

help when faced with a potential shooter.

- ▶ Secure all entrances to schools and churches. Upgrade door locks and add deadbolts to the inside of doors and, if possible, install access control systems at building entrances.

- ▶ Reinforce glass in doors making it bulletproof or retrofit door glass with ballistic-grade glazing shields.

- ▶ Consider developing a neighborhood watch-style system at school with parents as volunteers. The daily presence of concerned parents could keep potential shooters away.

- ▶ Place heavy furniture or barriers inside classrooms. These can be used to barricade the door to shield students from an active shooter.

- ▶ Advocate for improved social media monitoring and closely monitor your children's involvement and posts. If you read posts that threaten violence, alert authorities immediately.

- ▶ Check the security measures put into place by your children's schools, playgrounds, community parks and churches.

Adult supervision

- ▶ Make sure to have adequate adult supervision where children and youth gather. Know where your children and youth are at all times and get to know their friends, classmates and peers.

- ▶ Decrease or eliminate the amount of time your child or teen spends watching or playing violent video games and films. Keep communication lines open with your children.

- ▶ Provide professional counseling for children and youth who have been injured by gun violence or who have witnessed it.

For resources, visit tabonline.org/gun-violence.

DADEVILLE STRONG

Hunter Baker, youth pastor for FBC Dadeville, prays during the April 16 vigil in the church parking lot.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

FBC Dadeville hosts prayer vigil following mass shooting

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

Hundreds of people from the tight-knit, east Alabama town of Dadeville and surrounding areas filled a large portion of the FBC Dadeville parking lot Sunday evening, April 16, for a time of prayer. The gathering also served as an opportunity to comfort one another.

It had only been about 18 hours since at least six suspected shooters (see story, page 11) left four people

dead and 32 wounded at an April 15 Sweet 16 birthday party.

Many in the community, including those organizing and leading the prayer vigil, were functioning on adrenaline — and somewhat in a state of shock — after a spending a heartbreaking night with families at the hospital.

An earlier afternoon prayer vigil also took place April 16, which included a message from Mayor Jimmy “Frank” Goodman.

“We are a close-knit city,” he said. “We don’t cater to saying white or black because we are all one.

“I’m proud for the way this city has come together and helps one another as one. We all have been affected by this.”

Fred Hutcherson, pastor of Zion Hill Baptist Church in Dadeville who also serves as an agent with the State Bureau of Investigation, spoke at both prayer vigils.

“We are going through something we never thought we would see. The

city is hurting,” he said. “We are a village that will come together to take care of our children. ... We are a village that will show love in the midst of these trying times.”

Banding together

“Young people, you are not going through this by yourselves. We are here for you. Each and everyone of us that is surrounding you is loving you,” Hutcherson shared during the evening vigil. “We are going to get through this together.”

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, described the “unspeakable hurt” as “our 9/11 moment.”

“This wound will take a good while, if ever, to heal. We will never forget this,” he said. “We find ourselves without words.

“Lord, in this moment, may we be at peace knowing You have overcome the world.”

Several leaders have referenced the need to let law enforcement do their jobs and the importance of sharing information with law enforcement. They also spoke out against any potential retaliation acts, which was also addressed in a Facebook post from the Dadeville High School “Student Section”:

“Please find it in your hearts to desire to do the right thing, retaliation isn’t the answer; prayer and trusting in our law enforcement is.”

Counselors were on hand April 17 for students as they returned to school. Along with Dadeville High School, Reeltown and Horseshoe Bend high schools reportedly followed a similar plan.

Area ministers, as well as Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief chaplains, remained available to the schools and community throughout the week and for the days ahead.

They also were at the evening prayer vigil to serve as a listening ear, pray for individuals and give a hug when needed.

Widespread response

FBC Dadeville pastor Ben Hayes (see story, page 11), who serves as chaplain for the Dadeville police department and high school football team, helped organize the Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief chaplains and state missionaries who quickly gathered to serve the community.

Pastors and congregations from across the state and Southeast also continue to show their support through social media posts, personal messages and visits.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief chaplains remained in the FBC Dadeville parking lot for more than an hour following the prayer vigil to talk with and pray for students and community members.

Serving to the glory of God

In aftermath of mass shooting, Dadeville pastor spends days ministering to community

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Say that again.” Ben Hayes’ phone had rung moments before, waking him up, and he was trying to understand what he had just heard. He didn’t feel like it could be real, so he asked the caller to repeat herself.

“There’s been a shooting in Dadeville, and Phil is dead.”

Philstavious Dowdell — a star athlete Hayes described as an “all-around great guy” — had been shot and killed at his younger sister’s sweet 16 birthday party that night, April 15.

And Hayes, pastor of Dadeville’s First Baptist Church and chaplain for the local football team and police department, would soon find out that Dowdell wasn’t the only one.

Three more young people — Shaunkivia Nicole “Keke” Smith, 17; Marsiah Emmanuel “Siah” Collins, 19; and Corbin Dahmontrey Holston, 23 — were also killed, and 32 others were injured.

Wading into heartbreak

Hayes found a sea of hundreds of their family and friends when he got to the hospital 15 minutes after that phone call.

“I had called the police chief to ask if I could help, and he asked me if I would suit up and go there,” Hayes said. “There were so many people all waiting to hear something about their child — they didn’t know if their child was there or if they had been injured.”

He talked with the families, hugged them and prayed with them.

“I found several of my football players there who were in such shock that they couldn’t speak, with that thousand-yard stare,” Hayes said. “I put my arm around them and told them God loved them and that we would be there for them.”



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist
Ben Hayes, pastor of FBC Dadeville, talks with the media at a prayer vigil at his church April 16. The church held the vigil for the community the day after a mass shooting killed four and injured 32.

And he watched as others arrived to help take care of people in the midst of the chaos.

“The EMS folks were so amazing, and they worked tirelessly for hours trying to save these kids,” Hayes said. “Dadeville High School nurses, coaches, teachers and mental health professionals came and just wrapped these kids up, hugging, crying and praying with them.”

And police officers started an intense investigation that as of April 20 has led to six arrests — brothers Ty Reik McCullough, 17, and Travis McCullough, 16, of Tuskegee; Johnny Letron Brown, 20, and a

15-year-old male (name not released due to his age) also of Tuskegee; and Wilson LaMar Hill Jr., 20, and Willie George Brown Jr., 19, of Auburn.

The mass shooting set a lot of things in motion ministry-wise for Hayes, starting with the families and friends of the victims at the hospital and progressing to the police department.

“It’s been a rough time for our police officers,” Hayes said. “Many of these guys on the force were in the military. They’ve seen horrible things, but the scene with these children was horrific.”

Ministry has expanded from there into the community, both in the im-

mediate and in planning for the long term.

After about an hour of sleep the night of the shooting, Hayes kept moving from person to person until the prayer vigil the church held for the community in the church parking lot (see story, page 10).

“I prayed, ‘God, let me do this in a way that will glorify you.’”

Coming together to minister

Hayes wasn’t alone in that moment — seven Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers had shown up to help out at the vigil, in addition to him and his wife, Sonya, and James Smith, Tallapoosa Baptist Association director of missions, and his wife, Jerilyn, who are all also trained ABDR chaplains.

Hayes said the “Alabama Baptist family stepped up and has been such a blessing to us.”

Mark Wakefield, state disaster relief strategist, said Hayes has been trained in crisis intervention, and that plus the relationships he’s built in Dadeville put him in just the right spot to help when tragedy struck.

“In addition to his providing and setting up things, he has been with a lot of people to meet needs and to be that listening supportive ear and provide a pastoral presence,” Wakefield said. “Pastoral care comes naturally to him — he has that kind of heart.”

Hayes said he would love prayer for him and other believers to know how to step into the gap to serve as friends and mentors for young people so that violence like this might one day end.

“Pray that hearts would change, because only through heart change will these kinds of situations stop happening,” he said. “Pray this will no longer be the norm. We as believers are going to have to step up. That will go a long way into changing the culture we’re living in.”



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist
Ben Hayes and his wife, Sonya, (left) talk with fellow Alabama Baptist DR chaplain Tameka Moment at the prayer vigil April 16.

'Next pro-life step' for Alabama pending in House committee

By Michael Smith
The Alabama Baptist

Pro-life legislation that would spur financial support for dozens of pregnancy resource centers across Alabama was introduced March 23 by Rep. Jamie Kiel, R-Russellville.

The Pregnancy Resource Act (House Bill 208) would provide a state income tax credit to individuals and businesses that contribute to eligible charitable organizations that operate as pregnancy centers or residential maternity facilities. This bill would provide tax credits of up to \$10 million each year for the next five years.

In 2019, the Alabama Legislature passed the Human Life Protection Act, which prohibits almost all abortions in Alabama.

"I am very thankful for [the Human Life Protection Act] that now protects babies in the womb from being murdered," Kiel said. "An awesome result of this law is that we will have more babies and mothers in the state. And with that comes great responsibility to care for the babies and mothers before and after birth.

"The church obviously plays a role in caring for the least of these, but we also have pregnancy crisis centers throughout the state that are professionals in the field," said Kiel, a member of Tharptown Baptist Church in Russellville,

where he served as music director for 20 years.

Kiel said his bill would allow taxpayers to voluntarily give up to 50% of their state tax liability to these centers via tax credits. It would help the centers provide free and low-cost medical, educational and support services to more women.

"It will be an incredible way for

us to participate in the great work these centers are doing in 54 locations throughout the state," he said. "Through this, I am hopeful that churches and their members realize the need for increased giving to the pregnancy resource centers. I am hopeful that we will all increase our giving."

Sen. Gerald Allen, R-Tuscaloosa, a deacon at Gilgal Baptist Church in Duncanville, strongly supports Kiel's bill.



KIEL

"Anything we can do to promote the life of a child has my full support," Allen said. "Rep. Kiel's bill is important for pregnancy resource centers across Alabama to provide needed equipment and supplies."

Kiel is asking Alabama pastors and church members to contact their legislators to show their support for the Pregnancy Resource Act, which has been referred to the House Ways and Means Education Committee.

Greg Davis, president and CEO of Alabama Citizens Action Program, which works with Alabama churches to serve as the state's "moral advocates," said this bill "is the next pro-life step for Alabama, along with updating our adoption codes."



ALLEN

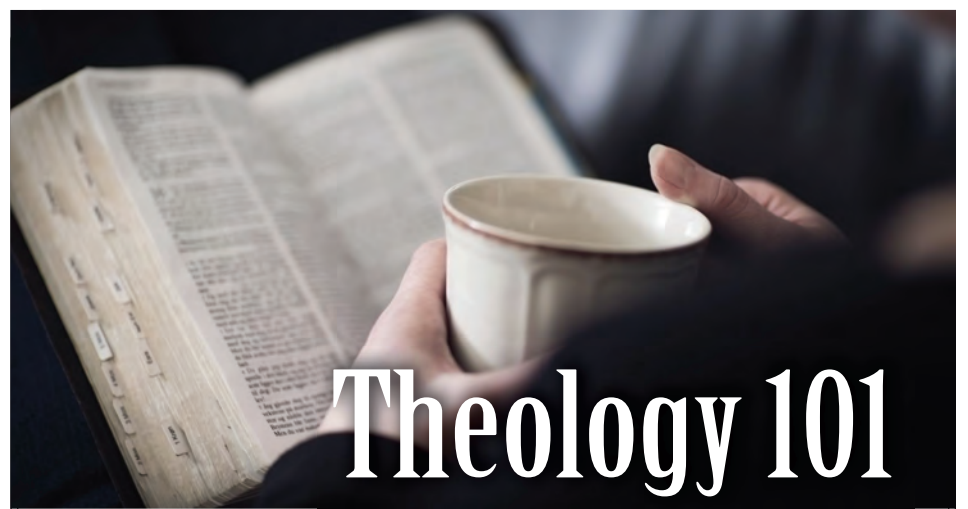
In related news, after a four-year effort to revamp the state's adoption code, the Alabama House of

Representatives and Senate have approved a bill to overhaul the process.

House Bill 101, sponsored by Rep. Ginny Shaver, R-Leesburg, a member of Tates Chapel Baptist Church in Centre, is designed to make the adoption process quicker, more streamlined and more affordable for adoptive parents in the state.

"I am very thankful for [the Human Life Protection Act] that now protects babies in the womb from being murdered."

Rep. Jamie Kiel
R-Russellville



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Let's Just Praise the Lord

The 'how' of praising the Lord

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
The Alabama Baptist

The focus this month has been on Psalm 150 in which the word hallelujah occurs 13 times, translated as either "praise God," "praise the Lord" or "praise Him."

We have seen that the opening verse of the psalm deals with the "where" of praising God, namely, in the sanctuary and in the firmament. The second verse points to the "what" of this praise, namely, we praise God for His mighty acts and His excellent greatness.

This week our attention is directed in verses 3-5 to the "how" of praising the Lord.

Apart from this psalm, we would likely think of praising Him with our voices through singing and praying. However, in the setting of the psalm, the focus is on praising God through the use of musical instruments.

Instruments

Mention is made first of the use of wind instruments like the trumpet and flute, then of stringed instruments like the lute and harp. Then there is mention of percussion instruments like the timbrel and cymbals.

Furthermore, expressions of praise might include the use of the body through dance. The focus of this list is to alert us to the fact that praising the Lord may occur in a variety of ways. This list brings to mind the admonition of Psalm 100:1 which calls for God's people to make a joyful noise unto the Lord.

When we analyze the list of

ways to praise God, we might summarize it as an invitation to praise Him with the whole body.

To this we might add that we should praise the Lord without reservation and with a spirit of joy and enthusiasm. Our God deserves praise that is more than routine or mindless. Meaningful praise demands our focus and concentration on what we are expressing, as well as on Him to whom we are expressing it.

Everything

One way to summarize the "how" of praising the Lord is that it is to be done with our words, our worship and our walk. Psalm 150 summarizes it by declaring, "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord" (v. 6).

In a sense, the heavenly bodies offer silent praise by showing forth God's handiwork. They do so with their regularity and faithfulness. In a secondary sense, they do so by causing us mortals to stand by in awe of their majesty. If inanimate creation exists to the praise of God's glory, how much more should those who bear His image as living creatures.

After all, God inhabits the praises of His people (Ps. 22:3).

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.



71 year old recalls experiencing God's love at Shocco

By Laurie Mullinax
Shocco Springs

Shocco Springs will always hold a place in my heart because it was there I was introduced to Jesus Christ through love," said Larry Ferguson, who has no memory of his biological mom or dad being a part of his life.

He does, however, have special memories of being raised by his grandparents. His grandfather, already 60 years old when Larry was born, was devastated when Larry's grandmother died, leaving him alone to care for their 5-year-old grandson.

Practical knowledge

Dirt poor, Larry and his grandfather lived in a small sharecropper shack at the back edge of a farm in the Talladega area.

Although he had little to no formal education, Grandfather Ferguson had a great deal of practical knowledge.

Larry recalls his grandfather using what he calls "old-timer tricks" to observe the habits of bees in order to estimate the location of their hives. "He was right every time and we were always able to find the hives and collect honey."

Grandfather Ferguson and

Larry often walked down to the creek bank where they cut small white oak trees, removed the limbs and dragged them home.

The elderly man split the wood into ¼" thick x 1-1/2" wide strips which he used to cane chairs and make baskets to sell in order to help support the two of them.

Larry followed his grandfather's example of praying every day, but there was no other mention of God.

A little Baptist church was down the road around 500 yards from where they lived, and the 9-year-old boy felt drawn to it.

Refusing to attend church himself, Grandfather Ferguson didn't stand in the way of his grandson attending. Since the older man never had a driver's license nor did he learn to drive, Larry walked the distance every Sunday for years.

Larry recalls that neither he nor his grandfather had anything other than one or two pairs of overalls or worn jeans to wear. Embarrassed about his lack of what was then considered proper church attire, young Larry found a place in the back of the church.

Week after week, the little boy sat on that back row,



Photo courtesy of Laurie Mullinax

Larry Ferguson (center) and his friend Billy Klinner (left) helped with a volunteer construction project at Shocco earlier this year. They are shown here with Shocco executive director Russell Klinner.

gripping the seat in terror as the pastor preached that "we were all sinners and going to be destroyed in hell if we didn't respond to the altar call," as Larry remembers. "I was scared to death and thought all week about dying and going to hell."

But the young boy continued to go back to church and eventually joined the Royal Ambassador group.

When he was in the 6th grade, Larry learned the RA boys were planning to attend RA camp at Shocco Springs in the summer. Knowing his grandfather had no money to pay the fee, Larry didn't allow himself to even hope to join the group.

But God intervened.

An adult within the church had noticed Larry and felt compassion toward him. After obtaining his grandfather's permission, this person arranged for the fee to be paid, and for the first time ever, Larry was going to camp.

Christ's love

As soon as he arrived on campus, Larry was met by the RA camp counselor, Steve. This soft-spoken, college-age man smiled at the 12-year-old boy and told Larry how happy he was to have him there. Steve presented the gospel to the boys in a different way than anything Larry had ever heard — through love.

"Steve shared the love of Christ with me," Larry said, "and he told me that God loved me so much that He gave His Son so that I could go to heaven."

Over and over throughout the week of camp, Steve carefully explained that God is a loving God.

For years, Larry had felt God was mean.

"But that summer at Shocco, I was shown the love of God," Larry fondly remembers, "and I was encouraged to give my life to the Lord."

Larry rejected the tactic of being scared out of hell but easily responded to being loved into heaven.

Counselor Steve lovingly taught the boys about a holy fear of God, not wanting to disappoint their Father God, much in the same way a child from a loving family wouldn't want to disappoint his or her earthly father.

Now 71 years old, Larry Ferguson has been trusting the Lord for many years.

Currently a member of First Baptist Church Childersburg, he serves as a deacon and Sunday School teacher.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was originally published by Shocco Springs.



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Southwestern Seminary elects new leadership

David S. Dockery has been elected as the 10th president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

The announcement was made April 19 during the seminary's board of trustees spring meeting.

Trustees also elected O.S. Hawkins to the new role of chancellor.

The unanimous elections of Dockery and Hawkins to their new

roles come nearly seven months after their elections as interim president and senior adviser and ambassador-at-large, respectively, in a special-called trustee meeting, Sept. 27, 2022, following the resignation of Adam W. Greenway.

Hawkins will report to Dockery while assisting with fundraising and providing counsel on various subjects. (Southwestern Seminary)

UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Unwind gives youth leaders a chance to connect

If you're a youth leader, there's a Zoom call you should be a part of on Thursday mornings at 9. This weekly chat, called Unwind, is a "great opportunity to connect with student leaders from all over the state," said Josh Meadows, student ministry strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Mis-

sions. "The beauty of this is it's all different ministry sizes with a common goal of sharing what God is doing at their church and resourcing each other. It's my favorite thing I get to do." Jump on the call Thursday mornings and be a part of talking about what God is doing in youth ministries

all around the state. We want to hear from you — be ready to answer a couple of questions about the ministry God has entrusted you to lead. To register, visit ymlink.org/unwind.

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



Unsplash.com

Revive conference for senior adults May 8 at FBC Birmingham

Ready to spend a morning in fellowship with other senior adults and be encouraged through God's

Word and a time of music celebration? If so, plan to come to Revive on May 8 from 9:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. at FBC Birmingham. J.J. Washington, national director for personal evangelism with NAMB, and Kevin Hamm, pastor

of Gardendale FBC, will speak. Karen Peck and New River will provide music for the morning. You'll be revived in spirit and motivated to continue serving in God's purpose for your life. Admission is free. Visit evangelizeal.org/revive.

For information, visit evangelizeal.org/revive or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



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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
Lafayette Heights Baptist Church, Lafayette, Alabama, is seeking a full-time pastor. Please email resumé to: LHBCpastorsearch@gmail.com.

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

PASTOR
Slackland Baptist Church, Leesburg, is seeking a full-time/bivocational pastor. Submit resumé to: SlacklandSearch@yahoo.com or mail to: Rick Little, P.O. Box 278, Leesburg, AL 35983 by May 20.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR
Paden Baptist Church, 900 Padenreich Ave., Gadsden, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking resumé for bivocational pastor. Please send resumé to church address, ATTN: Pastor Search Committee or to: padenbaptistchurch@yahoo.com.

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.

OTHER POSITIONS

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
First Baptist Church Community Ministries, Inc., Montgomery, Alabama, is a faith-based nonprofit providing services to the needy in the River Region. Reporting to the FBC Com-

munity Ministries with guidance from FBC's senior pastor, the executive director provides leadership to the ministries' directors. The current ministries are the Caring Center, Children's Learning Center, Nehemiah Project, Master's Garden, International Ministries and Prison Ministry. For more information or to submit a resumé, contact Ben Kelley at bfkelleyjr@gmail.com.

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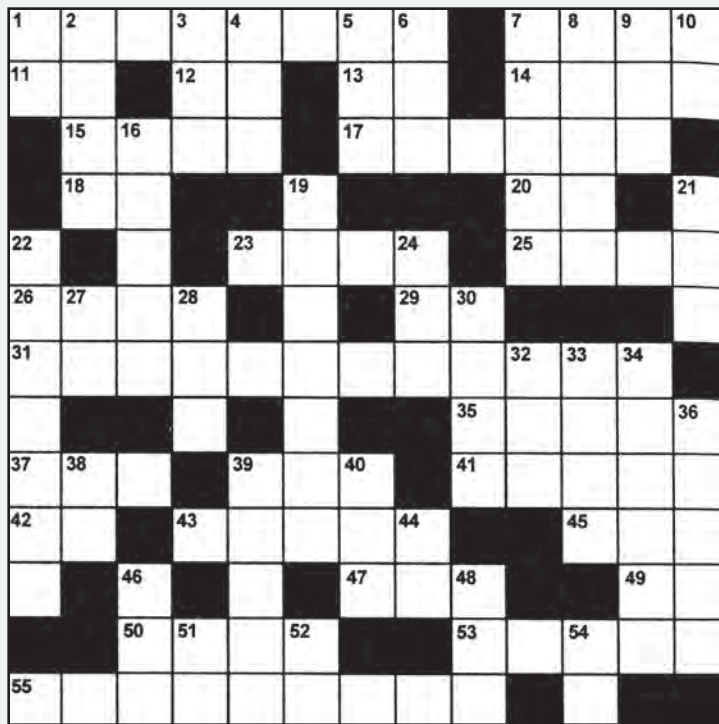
MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT RETREAT
Montevallo First Baptist Church will be hosting a marriage retreat with the theme Making Good Marriages Better. The dates will be from May 19-21. The cost will be \$30 per couple. The leaders for this event are Dr. Ric and Lisa Camp. Dr. Camp is the current associational mission strategist for Shelby Baptist Association. Session 1 will be on Friday, May 19 at 6:30 p.m., with a meal served first. Session 2 will be on Saturday, May 20 at 9:30 a.m., with snacks served. It will conclude on Sunday, May 21 at 10:30 a.m., with the normal worship service. For reservations or questions, please call 205-665-2566. This event is open to the public to join in as well.

CHRISTIAN Crossword



ACROSS

- 1. God be ____ to me a sinner. (Luke 18:13)
- 7. A female horse of breeding age.
- 11. For example.
- 12. Alternating Current. (abbr.)
- 13. ____ be ye holy. (1 Pet. 1:15)
- 14. According to my ____est expectation and hope. (Phil. 1:20)
- 15. Wide is the _____. (Matt. 7:13)
- 17. Belonging to the son of Ner. (2 Sam. 3:25)
- 18. Social Security. (abbr.)
- 20. We desire ____ hear ... what thou thinkest. (Acts 28:22)



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- 23. The month of _____. (Ex. 13:4)
- 25. ____ with hr suburbs. (1 Chron. 6:70)
- 26. A red root vegetable.
- 29. For we have heard ... what ye did unto ... _____. (Josh. 2:10)
- 31. The Lord ____ Eglon ... against Israel. (Judg. 3:12)
- 35. Tell me, art thou a ____? (Acts 22:27)
- 37. Haran begat _____. (Gen. 11:27)
- 39. I will take away all thy _____. (Isa. 1:25)
- 41. Type of acid.
- 42. ____ King of Bashan. (1 Kings 4:19)
- 43. Joshua ... gave ____ ... Hebron. (Josh. 14:13)
- 45. ____ the kine to the cart. (1 Sam. 6:7)
- 47. Another word for *bill*.
- 49. A train that runs above street level.
- 50. Volumes. (abbr.)
- 53. Many ____ and troubles shall befall them. (Deut. 31:17)

- 55. ____ shall a man leave his father and mother. (Gen. 2:24)

DOWN

- 1. He dwelleth in _____. (John 6:56)
- 2. As the partridge sitteth on _____. (Jer. 17:11)
- 3. A feline.
- 4. Blackish by reason of the _____. (Job 6:16)
- 5. United States of America. (abbr.)
- 6. A high return in tennis.
- 7. There shall ____ you ____ man. (Mark 14:13; 2 words)
- 8. Moses' brother. (Ex. 4:14)
- 9. Railroads. (abbr.)
- 10. Printer's measure.
- 16. Leah ... called his name _____. (Gen 30:13)
- 19. Nabal's wife was _____. (1 Sam. 15:3)
- 21. Tempted like as we _____, yet without sin. (Heb. 4:15)
- 22. I saw ____ hanged in an oak. (2 Sam. 18:10)
- 24. Bohemia. (abbr.)

- 27. Hero of a popular child's science-fiction movie.
- 28. One of the Kennedy family sons.
- 30. Ehud's father. (Judg. 3:15)
- 32. Nominative. (abbr.)
- 33. To give off.
- 34. Spoken of by ____ the prophet. (Matt. 24:15)
- 36. Christmases.
- 38. ____ King of Bashan. (1 Kings 4:19)
- 39. Crumbs which fell from the rich man's _____. (Luke 16:21)
- 40. When he draweth him into his _____. (Ps. 10:9)
- 44. Bachelor of Arts. (abbr.)
- 46. Adam and ____.
- 48. A swarm of ____s in the carcass of the lion. (Judg. 14:8)
- 51. Either/_____.
- 52. San Francisco. (abbr.)
- 54. ____ is finished. (John 19:30)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Ministers' Wives Connection May 9

Does your husband serve in ministry in some capacity? There's a community of ministry wives from across the state who gather virtually once a month for a time of encouragement and friendship, and they'd love for you to join them. The next Ministers' Wives Connection will be May 9 at 7 p.m. All of the group's gatherings are held via Zoom, and all ministry wives are welcome.

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



"Ministers' Wives Connection provides a place for ministry wives to connect in a safe community for encouragement and challenge

and to pray together," said Trish Jackson, missions lifestyle strategist with Alabama Woman's Missionary Union, which hosts this special time. To register, visit Alabamawmu.org/events.

Disciple Making Leader

Looking for a way to challenge your church to reach your community? At The Disciple Making Leader, discover Jesus' strategy for raising up leaders, growing the church and multiplying a movement. Learn how to make the disciple's pathway and leadership pipeline work together to develop disciple-making leaders that multi-

ply. This conference will be held May 4, 9 a.m.-3 p.m., at Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church in Hueytown. Craig Etheredge — pastor of CrossCreek Church in Colleyville, Texas, and author of "The Disciple Making Leader" — will be the guest speaker. To register, visit makingdisciplesal.org/events.

Church Weekday Education Conference

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

The conference is good for credits to meet the requirements for training by the Alabama Department of Human Resources. To register, visit at alsbom.org/cwe.

Pastor, repeat these 7 messages to your church

By Mark MacDonald

BeKnownforSomething.com

Why don't our people know?" is often asked in churches that don't disciple well with controlled messages.

Every church member needs to hear controlled messages that are repeated so they understand and remember them.

Often when messages are left uncontrolled, church members don't know critical things every pastor wishes they did.

Need to hear

Here are seven controlled messages your congregation needs to hear every week:

1. The church thread.

What do you want your church to be known for? Is it a benefit worthy of attendance or bringing in guests from your community? Make it simple, easy-to-

remember, easy-to-use and beneficial. Then repeat it enough that your members can say it out loud. If your message is left uncontrolled, you'll be known for many things — therefore, nothing will stand out.

2. The welcome message.

Are you glad people attended church? Then have a genuine greeting that makes them understand it wouldn't be the same without them. And use your welcome to get them to anticipate the rest of the service (more than "This is going to be great."). The welcome is a good time to foreshadow an invitation (call to action) later in the service too.

3. Benefits of in-person worship. Throughout the pandemic, we emphasized how easy it is to view a service online. So people did. It's now time to give them reasons why the in-person worship service is ben-



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eficial — not to shame the ones watching online, but to control the reasons you think in-person worship is different/better than online attendance. It also reminds those attending in-person that it was good for them to be there. Make sure your in-person worship delivers what you promise though.

4. The role of church leadership. Sure, you understand the pastor's role, but

members may not. Regularly let them know what you do. If this message is left uncontrolled, they may think you only work on Sundays with a bit of preparation time for the sermon sometime throughout the week.

Expectations

5. The role of each member. If you have expectations for people who attend your church, tell them regularly.

If you don't, they'll show up for a service occasionally and tell everyone they're regular members.

6. Why you receive an offering. Why are tithes and offerings important to you? Does your congregation know? For most churches, you'd never know it was an act of worship because it's not emphasized like other worship elements. Tell them regularly.

7. A call to action. We live in a world overwhelmed with communication noise. Because of that, most people quickly browse over messages. The ones they remember are the ones leading to a very obvious call to action they need.

Don't let your church service become part of the ignorable noise in their life. Instead, use controlled messages to lead them to a decision. Don't assume they'll figure it out.

If you can dream it, we can finance it

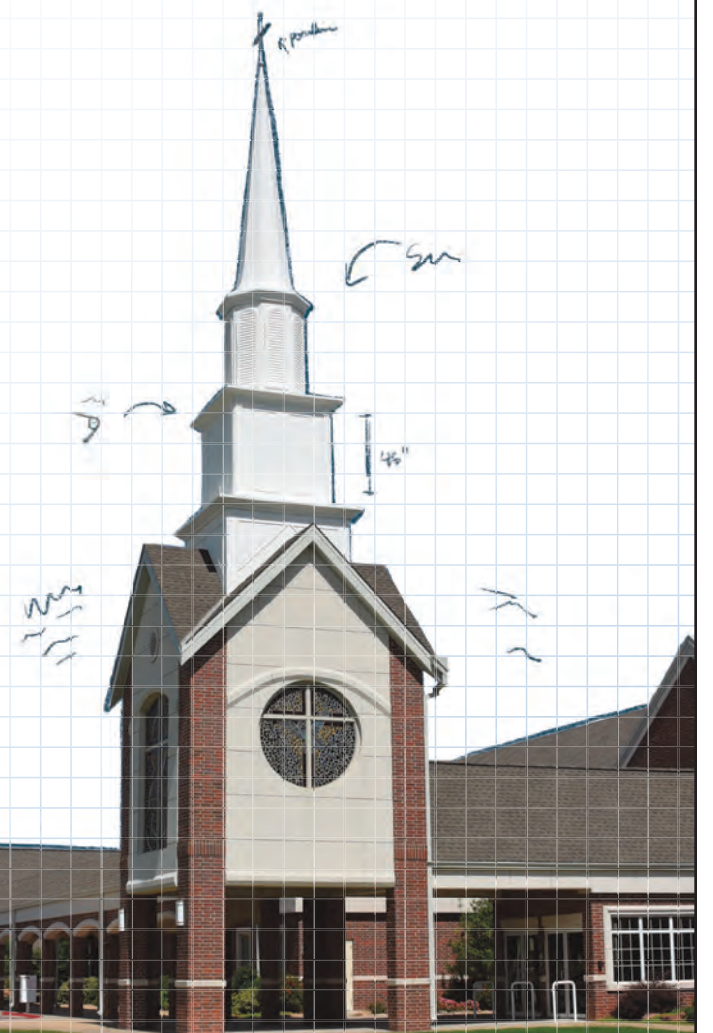
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GOD HEALS US AND GOD FORGIVES US

Refugee's journey from hurting to working at children's home shows God 'not letting go'

By Tessa Sanchez
International Mission Board

Lun's journey from hiding in the jungle in a Southeast Asian country to working at the Oklahoma Baptist Homes for Children is a journey of the Holy Spirit's protection and guidance.

Lun lost her father and brother to the civil war in her country. Her country's recent history is a blood-spattered one. People groups have struggled and fought the ruling party for self-governance and independence for decades.

Soldiers burned her village, and Lun and her remaining family lived in the jungle for several years. At age 10, Lun and her family were smuggled in an ice cream truck across the border to Thailand.

As it is for many refugees, the years after leaving a turbulent country were anything but easy. She had to fight to attend school and had to work both at school and after school.

Initially Buddhist

Her Buddhist roots ran deep and only strengthened in school, where she learned more about Buddhism and became a Buddhist leader. She grew up hearing negative words spoken against Christians, and she came to hate Christians.

When she was age 12, Lun remembers, two women came to their house and spoke about God. They told her God is everywhere. Later in one of her darkest hours, she would recall their visit.

Lun finished elementary school at age 15 but was not permitted to attend secondary school because she was not a Thai citizen.

Her mother and stepfather gave her an ultimatum to wed the head construction worker where they worked, but she believed there was



Lun (center) poses for a photo with short-term volunteers from Louisiana. The volunteers came to partner with Kim Ratliff (second from the right), who serves with the IMB in Thailand. Ratliff was one of the women who disciplined Lun.

something bigger in store for her.

She moved into an apartment in the city, worked as a gas station attendant and worked her way toward getting a GED.

"As you can imagine, as a 15-year-old girl, I didn't really know the world. I didn't know people," she said. "I just tried to survive, but I got into many wrong paths and a lot of bad things happened to me."

Police hunted her and extorted money from her to be able to stay in the country. She discovered she was unwittingly in a gang after motorcyclists started chasing her and a friend down alleys. Choices were forced on her and her life was threatened by rival gangs.

Lun secured a job as a pharmacy assistant selling medication to tourists. She pretended to be a college graduate with a pharmacy or medical-related degree. In reality, she was not yet 18 and still working on her GED.

She remembers the whiplash of going from crying in anger and frustration about the circumstances of her life to putting on a customer-service face when customers came in.

"I couldn't control my anger," she said. "When I got so angry, I just drove very fast on my motorcycle and would fall and get hurt. That's how I knew I was still alive, from the physical pain."

She considered suicide but couldn't go through with it, and then she remembered the two women who came to her family's house and told her about God.

'Come change me'

She knelt in the pharmacy and said, "God, if you are real, come change me."

Not long after, several Americans came into the pharmacy and gave her a book called "This is My Story." The author called Jesus a friend.

"In gang life, friends are very im-

portant for us, probably more than family," Lun said. "When I read that Jesus was their friend and Jesus can change their life, I said to myself, 'I want this Jesus.'"

She learned how Jesus calls His followers to turn the other cheek when struck. She said that stood out because in gangs, if someone hurts you, you pay them back with 10 times the force.

Path to the U.S.

The Americans who gave her the book returned. She'd later learn they were a Southern Baptist volunteer team from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina.

Before they returned to the U.S., they connected her with IMB missionaries Kim Ratliff and Brooke Ross. When Ratliff and Ross asked if she was ready to accept Jesus, she said she didn't know yet. She had been a Buddhist for so long.

Not long after, Lun dreamed of someone coming to save her, and she instinctively knew it was Jesus. She committed her life to Christ and was baptized.

IMB missionaries Rob and Jordan Lindley disciplined her.

The Lord grew in Lun a desire to share the gospel with anyone and everyone who would listen.

Her first years in the U.S. were marked by pain, hurt and suffering, but she reunited with the Lindleys in Oklahoma and now attends a Baptist church, is pursuing a degree in social work at the University of Oklahoma and works as an administrative assistant for the Oklahoma Baptist Homes for Children.

Her long-term dreams for her life journey are to start a school for children in her home country and open a nonprofit to help train people in trauma healing. (IMB)

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For April 30

Explore the Bible

By Mark Rathel

Professor, Baptist College of Florida in Graceville, Florida



JOHN 18:1-11 I Am He

The enemies of Jesus did not take His life. John emphasizes in his passion narrative that Jesus gave His life. Indeed, Jesus giving His life for others is a key motif throughout the Gospel of John.

God gave His only Son (John 3:16). The Father gave Jesus the authority to give eternal life to everyone God has given to Him (John 17:2). Jesus' life was not taken from Him in the act of crucifixion.

Jesus voluntarily gave up His spirit (John 19:30). As the self-giving one, Jesus oversees the final events of His life.

Show of Force (1-3)

After Jesus' teaching in the upper room and His prayer recorded in John 17, Jesus and His disciples crossed the Kidron Valley to the Mount of Olives. Jesus and the disciples frequented this location. Judas the betrayer knew of Jesus' frequent visits to this location and brought a cohort of Jewish soldiers equipped with weapons. The soldiers were prepared for battle.

The Greek term translated "company of soldiers" in numerous English Bibles describes a detachment of around 600 soldiers. The numbers seem excessive. The Romans also sent 470 troops to escort Paul (Acts 23:23). In both cases, governmental authorities seemed to fear these two Jewish preachers. No doubt, the enemy Satan was behind the excessive show of force involved in the arrest of Jesus.

Positive Identification (4-9)

Jesus asked the question, "Who is it that you are seeking?" In one sense, this question applies to everyone. Who (or what) are you seeking in life? Your answer will determine whether you experience eternal life and the abundant life

promised in the Gospel of John.

To their answer, "Jesus of Nazareth," Jesus responded, "I told you that I am He." A literal translation of Jesus' response to the soldiers and officials is "I Am!" Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus claimed to be the "I am" — a divine name of God derived from Exodus 3:14 — as the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the One from above, the Gate of the sheep, the Resurrection and Life, as well as the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Jesus appropriated the name of God (Yahweh) to Himself. The arresting soldiers fell to the ground at Jesus' claim — an appropriate response to an encounter with God.

For the second time, Jesus asked the question, "Who is that you are seeking?" While Jesus voluntarily endured the cross, He commanded that the leaders release the disciples.

Jesus' command to those who would arrest Him indicates that He is the one in charge. This fulfills Jesus' prayer request in John 17:12. "I guarded them and not one of them is lost, except the son of destruction, so that the Scripture may be fulfilled."

Rebellion Snuffed (10-1)

In the Gospels, Peter is a man of action and words. While the Gospels describe Peter as someone who spoke before he thought, Peter exhibited great commitment to Jesus. He drew out his sword and cut off the right ear of the servant of the high priest.

Paradoxically, the servant's name Malchus means "king." Luke records that Jesus the King healed the ear of Malchus (Luke 22:51).

Jesus did not come to lead a rebellion. Jesus willingly obeyed the will of the Father no matter the cost. Do we?

"So Jesus said to Peter, 'Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?'"

John 18:11

Bible Studies for Life

By James R. Strange

Professor of biblical and religious studies, Samford University



THE TEMPTATION TO TEST GOD Deuteronomy 6:16-25; Matthew 4:5-7

In our third lesson on enduring temptations, we move to the second temptation of Jesus in Matthew. (For Luke's telling, see Luke 4:1-13).

As we noted last week, all of Jesus' responses are from Deuteronomy. Hence, in each of our lessons we will look at the passages to which Jesus refers.

By beginning the first two temptations with, "If you are the Son of God ...," the devil (called "the tempter" in 4:3 and "Satan" in 4:1) betrays his purpose: to demonstrate that Jesus isn't worthy of the title that God has given Him in 3:17.

Read all of Matthew 4 and Deuteronomy 6.

We can be tempted to test God for our own purposes. (Matt. 4:5-7)

In the first temptation, the devil alluded to Scripture. Now he quotes it, mimicking Jesus by beginning with, "It is written ..." (see 4:4). The citation is from Psalm 91:11-12, in which God protects a person who loves God and calls God's name (Ps. 91:14).

The image of striking a foot against a stone evokes encountering one of life's difficulties. In the devil's interpretation, it refers to God's Son leaping from the pinnacle of the temple.

Jesus uses Deuteronomy 6:16 to reject the idea of testing God. In particular, Jesus discards the temptation to make God protect Him from harm and thus prove that He is indeed God's beloved Son.

Because God has declared this status for all to hear, the Son would show lack of faith if He attempted to force God to demonstrate it in the sight of all.

By not throwing himself from the temple's pinnacle, Jesus accepts the yoke of His mission: His Galilean ministry, His suffering and His death. Jesus will demonstrate his Sonship through the cross rather than by escaping harm.

Likewise, Jesus is a model of

faithful obedience to those of us who want proof of God's love and protection before obeying God's call.

We have no reason to test God when we trust and obey His Word. (Deut. 6:16-19)

"Massah" is the place where Moses struck the rock. The name comes from a Hebrew verb that means "test" or "try." It was there that, by grumbling about their thirst, the Israelites questioned whether the Lord was among them (Ex. 17:1-7).

Now, as they are about to enter the Promised Land, Moses tells the people that not to keep the Lord's Commandments, not to do what is good and right in the Lord's eyes, is another way to doubt the Lord.

We experience God's goodness and faithfulness as we obey His Word. (Deut. 6:20-25)

Jewish families read this passage at the Passover seder.

It is not ironic or a mistake that none of the Israelites to whom Moses was speaking had been in Egypt, for that generation had died. This is because each of Israel's generations is to say, "We were Pharaoh's slaves ..." and "The Lord displayed before our eyes ..." as if it were they and not their ancestors who escaped Egypt.

All are to live as if they were the ones whom the Lord their God redeemed, as if it were they who saw the Lord's "great and awesome signs and wonders" in the wilderness.

As with Israel, so with the Church. We also know what is good and right, and by our acts of rebellion we, individually and collectively, put the Lord our God to the test. We erase the distinction of time and space between ourselves and the foot of the cross.

But we also live as if we were the ones who received Christ's body and blood at the Last Supper, as if we were the ones to whom the risen Lord spoke the Great Commission.

MEDIA REVIEWS

By **Diana Chandler**

Baptist Press

Film project shares resurrection story in Muscogee language

Mary Emarthle, an Oklahoma Seminole Creek grandmother, became enamored in her childhood with the similarity between English and Muscogee when her mother read Scripture to her in their native tongue.

Her father had always told her never to stop speaking Muscogee, rendered Mvskoke, and she had spoken it exclusively until she entered first grade in Seminole County public schools, where she was required to speak English.

“I began to look at the (Mvskoke) Bible and compared that with the English, and I was noticing that the vowels and the consonants were the same,” she said. “I would listen to her, and I would look at the Bible, the words, and it began to make sense.

“Like Jesus. In our Mvskoke Bible it’s spelled Cesvs, and that’s Jesus. The C has a G sound. And of course the e has the e sound, but the v has the uh sound ... Jesus. And I thought, hey I’m gonna try that. And so every time I had a chance, I would look at that Mvskoke Bible and write it out and sound out my vowels.”

Emarthle is using her love and expertise of her native tongue in a



Baptist Press photo

Mary Emarthle (left) coaches a voice actor on the set of “The Savior: A Mvskoke Easter.” Emarthle grew up speaking and reading Scripture in Muscogee, the heart language of her people. Now she provides translation help to the project team.

collaborative project to translate “The Savior” film into Mvskoke. For her part, she coaches voice actors in speaking the lines added to the original film.

The project fulfills the dream of the late pastor Bill Barnett, who wanted to see the film translated into Mvskoke as a way of sharing the gospel with fellow Native Americans. Hearing the film in Mvskoke will help native speakers, including the Mvskoke Creek and Seminole nations, embrace the gospel, project collaborators believe.

“He really wanted the people to understand being saved,” she said of Barnett, who died in 2021. “He said, ‘I just don’t feel like they’re understanding. When you’re saved,’ he said, ‘you continue to believe in the Lord.’ ... He said, ‘I think they really need to understand commitment. I want them to understand that Jesus is coming back someday.’ And then

he said, ‘and when He calls them, I want them to be ready.’ ... I agreed with him.”

Emarthle is working with a team including Barnett’s daughter Jennifer Barnett, the project’s culture and language coordinator, and director Aaron Hanzel.

Jennifer Barnett, the minister of education at Indian Nations Baptist Church planted by her father in 1975, is of Mvskoke and Cherokee heritage.

‘Tool to share the gospel’

“I didn’t grow up fluent (in Mvskoke) by any means,” Barnett said. “And so this has just been an opportunity too to help carry that on, that desire of theirs to preserve that language, but ultimately really to have this as a tool to also share the gospel to their own people.

“I wanted to see the vision of my father and these other people, and to

learn more Mvskoke,” she said. “I grew up hearing my father speaking Mvskoke with his siblings and other people.”

Preserving the language

Native languages have been declining for decades, according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Native Americans. Already, 65 languages are extinct and 75 are nearing extinction, with 245 indigenous languages remaining in the U.S., HHS said, based on an analysis of data from Ethnologue.

As Barnett’s mother is Cherokee, a language quite different from Mvskoke, the Barnetts spoke English in the home.

But Barnett was born into the Southern Baptist family, is a baptized believer and has attended Native congregations her entire life.

“I know that God has called me to serve among Native people, not just Mvskoke and Cherokee people,” Barnett said.

She hopes to encourage and build up other Native believers “to grow in their faith and their service to the Lord,” she said. She relates it to the Apostle Paul’s “God-given” desire to see the Israelites saved, even as he fulfilled his mission to the Gentiles.

The scenes from “The Savior” relating to the resurrection are available for free download as “The Savior: A Mvskoke Easter” in a variety of formats with or without subtitles.

The resurrection release is the second in the project aimed at translating the entire Savior film into Mvskoke. “The Savior: A Mvskoke Nativity” was released at Christmas.

Project collaborators have assembled a team of about 70 people and hope to translate the entire film.

Learn more about their work at thesaviormvskoke.com/easter.

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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