

The Alabama Baptist

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July 13, 2023

Vol. 188, No. 27
Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

Mark Johnson (right) talks to an employee working at the grocery store next door to New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.



NOBTS photo

Evangelism on aisle 5

New Orleans Seminary professor becomes 'pastor' of grocery store next door

By Marilyn Stewart
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

Mark Johnson, assistant professor of evangelism and pastoral ministry at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, goes to the busy, franchised grocery store next door to the seminary every day. On purpose.

"Anybody need toothpaste?" Johnson asks his wife and four chil-

dren. "Somebody's got a headache? OK! I'm going."

Johnson has been making the trip almost from the day he joined the NOBTS and Leavell College faculty in 2019.

Consistent investment

His ventures in "shopping evangelism," as he calls it, have paid off.

Store managers and employees call him "pastor" as he ministers

and shares the gospel along the way.

"I'm broke," Johnson quipped. "But I know everybody there. I know the store."

The six-foot-five former international pro basketball player knows the layout so well that one day when an employee couldn't locate an item for a shopper, Johnson chimed in. "Aisle 5," he offered.

Each trip begins with prayer that God will use him in whatever way

He wants, knowing some days no opportunity may come.

"He may call you just to go get bananas," Johnson said. "It's that simple."

One day he decided his visit was merely to buy a new pair of socks for his son. God had other plans.

Johnson ended up having a conversation with someone who was contemplating suicide.

(See 'Willing,' page 17)

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IMB photo

Open Doors' 2023 World Watch List reports that last year, 5,621 Christians were murdered and 2,110 churches were attacked. More than 360 million Christians worldwide suffer high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith.

3 ways to pray for the persecuted church

Open Doors' 2023 World Watch List reports that last year, 5,621 Christians were murdered; 2,110 churches were attacked; and 4,542 Christians were detained. More than 360 million Christians suffer high levels of persecution and discrimination for their faith.

Nik and Ruth Ripken are familiar with the ultimate costs of persecution. As missions veterans with more than 30 years' experience with the International Mission Board, they've extensively researched believers living in persecution around the world.

Their 2016 film, "The Insanity of God," is based on Nik's best-selling book by the same name and recounts the couple's lifelong journey to understand the role of persecution and martyrdom in the life of a believer.

Leading children to pray

In a 2016 article originally published by IMB, Ruth offers three ways you can lead your children to pray for Christians around the world who are being persecuted for their faith.

1. Pray for believers around the world in front of your children.

Open Doors USA offers a downloadable map of the top 50 countries in the world that persecute Christians. Select a country to learn more

and pray for each one by name.

2. *Pray that believers in persecution will be obedient each day to share Jesus with their friends.* Pray that they will be obedient through their suffering. Help your child to pray that for themselves as well as for those who are persecuted.

Use Bible stories

3. *Help the stories of the Bible come to life.* Persecution was a reality for many of God's children whose stories are told in the Bible — David, Daniel, the three men in the fiery furnace, Esther, etc.

Use these stories to talk about obedience and the importance of being faithful.

God hears and responds to the prayers of children who know Him.

Rather than shielding your children from the realities of suffering for Jesus' name, lead them to pray boldly on behalf of the persecuted.

This year's International Day of Prayer for Persecuted Christians is Nov. 5. A variety of resources for your church and family are available at persecution.com/idop.

Learn more about the Ripkens' work on behalf of persecuted believers at nikripken.com.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was originally published by the International Mission Board and has been adapted for print.



The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.

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

(ISSN 0738-7741; USPS 011-080)
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is published weekly except for one week in July and December by The Alabama Baptist, Inc., at 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209. Phone: 205-870-4720. Statewide phone: 800-803-5201. Website: www.thealabamabaptist.org Email: news@thealabamabaptist.org or subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org Periodicals postage paid at Hattiesburg, Miss.

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Group Rate per subscriber per year — \$16.25

Individual — \$34.95 per year (50 issues)

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RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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



jrash@thealabamabaptist.org



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'The safest place you can be is in the center of God's will'

September 5 will mark 30 years since former missionary to Nigeria Bill Cowley delivered the commissioning sermon at my home church, Mountain View Baptist in Phil Campbell.

The congregation under the leadership of Pastor Sammy Taylor commissioned me for a two-year missions stint serving the Caribbean through the International Mission Board.

Several churches in Franklin County Baptist Association came alongside Mountain View to support and encourage me in a variety of ways, including a commitment to pray for me.

Brother Sammy hung a banner over the baptistry — “Holding the ropes for Jennifer and the Caribbean” — to remind our church family to pray.

They remained connected and engaged throughout my two years on the missions field and built a bond that exists to this day — a connection that continues to give me confidence in following God's call.

Cowley connection

Dr. Cowley's message during the commissioning service also resonated with me in a way that affirmed the step of faith I was about to take.

While I'm not sure I truly grasped the depth of his own missions experience, one particular phrase Dr. Cowley stated that September Sunday in 1993 has remained with me: “The safest place you can be is in the center of God's will.”

Formative moment

I've restated it out loud to myself several times through the years, especially when I've found myself in uncomfortable or confusing situations.

It's helped me regain my focus and recenter my heart when I've felt unsure and realized I needed to wait on the Lord.

Dr. Cowley's words also have resurfaced in my mind when I've not understood exactly what God was doing even though I knew I was to be involved.

It was through my work at The Alabama Baptist where I learned how Dr. Cowley could state this truth about God's protection with such confidence.

Bill and Audrey Cowley served as IMB missionaries for 23 years. They were assigned to Nigeria in 1955 to help start schools in anticipation of the nation's independence in 1960.

They later risked their lives to help the Nigerians they served during a horrific genocide in

September 1966 that ended with as many as 50,000 Igbo tribe members murdered. Their story is included in a documentary called “The Disturbances,” which was released by the Baptist Center for Ethics in 2016.

After returning to Alabama in 1977, Dr. Cowley began a 16-year tenure on the Samford religion and speech faculty.

Audrey served as campus minister at Jefferson State Community College and treasurer

of national Woman's Missionary Union. The Bill and Audrey Cowley MK Scholarship was named in their honor in 2014.

The two were married 66 years and beloved by countless people around the world. I'm honored to have crossed paths with them and their family.

Audrey died in December 2020 and Bill died in April 2023. A combined celebration of life service will be held July 22 (see details below).

Cowley celebration of life service — July 22



File photo

The Cowley family invites you to a July 22, 10 a.m., celebration of life service for their parents, former missionaries Audrey and Bill Cowley, at Shades Crest Baptist Church in Bluff Park (Birmingham area). “Be sure to come early to hear the Nigerian talking drum drummer heralding their home going. Our celebration will continue in a light fare reception afterwards to enable us to visit with you.” The service also will be available via livestream at shadescrest.org.

Your Voice



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

Opportunities exceed number of volunteers

By James D. Fisk
Birmingham, Ala.

Recently I spent many hours in a room with 26 active 2-year-olds. It was a time of great joy and great fun, and I would do it again in a heartbeat. Even as I write this, I can see those beautiful faces looking up at me. We were at camp.

Volunteers at the annual Alabama Baptist Children's Homes Camp of Champions receive back far more than they give. Old friends reacquaint and new friends are made from all over the state, everyone uniting to create a time of unconditional love for children.

The families' connections are bi-

ological, foster and/or adoptive, but you can't tell which is which. Like vegetable soup, they are all mixed up together.

Some of these children come from hard places. Your heart will break when a child asks if he can eat all he wants, then hoards an apple for later.

Joys and heartaches

You will shed tears when children who have never had much fun in their lives run completely amok, squealing with delight at balloon popping and funnel cakes and bounce houses and water slides.

You will be changed when a little girl shares that she is burdened by

not living with her biological parents, thinking she is the only one, and then is stunned to find the room is full of children carrying the same burden.

When you volunteer, you might deliver snacks and drinks, stuff bags with supplies, pray with an 8-year-old, sanitize toys, cry with a foster child, drive a golf cart delivering families to their next event, encourage a worn-out foster parent, rescue a lost little one separated from his mama or haul suitcases for folks with more stuff than hands.

And the hugs. Oh, the hugs! This is the 21st century equivalent of washing feet; you become the hands and heart of Jesus for some of the least of these.

Don't wait for next year's camp. ABCH is statewide, and year-round opportunities exceed the number of volunteers. The demand is great, the benefit is immediate, and the results are eternal.

How to help

Make the call and get plugged in locally. Get your pastor signed up and get your church involved.

Send your youth group to camp to volunteer. Babysit for an evening so foster parents can have a night out.

Help remodel and furnish a group home. Help equip a starting-over mom with the household stuff she needs to care for her children. Fund college tuition for a foster child.

The need is enormous. Your money, time, presence, talents and prayers are valuable.

Quotes from the-scroll.com

All too often, the current mood of our spirit is not to feast upon the riches and depths of God. We are so quick to reach for spiritual junk food that doesn't satisfy instead of feasting on the six-course meal at God's table. ... Joy in the pleasures of this life will not be as complete unless we enjoy them in God. ... He is the source of all good things.

James Hammack
"Joy in the Lord (Part 2)"

If we're going to put so much emphasis on keeping women out of pastoral roles, let's also put emphasis on making our churches safe places for them to serve in other ways.

Jessica Ingram
"Opinion: SBC 2023: 'Not well taken'"

Forgiveness doesn't always mean allowing the person who broke your heart to come back into your life as if nothing ever happened. ... Forgiveness is, however, deciding that you will not allow that hurt to control your life. It's also about letting someone, or something, leave your life to allow healing to begin.

Amy Hacker
"Forgiveness is freedom"

Thoughts on leadership

To be a leader means that we provide direction for those we are called to lead. We don't lead just anywhere, or nowhere for that matter. We are called to advance the mission of the church or ministry organization.

Followers of Jesus have one mission — the Great Commission — and every Christian leader must give himself or herself to the advancement of that mission.

There are certainly lots of ways to advance the Great Commission, but each of us has a little piece of leadership responsibility in God's grand economy and we

are responsible for advancing the Great Commission in that specific area. Leaders must advance the mission. ...

It is not enough that we solve problems and advance the mission. We must also love people and care well for them. We must strive to create and cultivate a culture of care, fairness and justice in the place where we lead.

Leaders care for people by providing both challenge and support.

Todd Gray
Executive director
Kentucky Baptist Convention

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“My prayer ... is that we will lead with a heart warmed by the power and presence of Christ.”

RICK LANCE

Executive director, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

“Leadership in our churches must be biblical and missional. We want to help our churches discover their God-given purpose,” said **Ken Allen**, director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions office of LeaderCare, noting leadership development is an ongoing process.

“We realized, ‘OK, God you are way bigger than we realize, and you’re seeking to reach this whole society,’” said International Mission Board worker **Wes Blakely**, addressing the impact he sees sports ministry having on lives in Central Asia.

“I’ve learned to say, ‘OK, God, why are You waking me up? What are You trying to say?’ The middle of the night is the only time most of

us are quiet and still,” says Alabama author **Stacy Averette**, regarding sleepless nights.

“I believed then and believe now that the reason I was allowed to go through this is that I would be able to encourage somebody else who might be going through the same thing,” said **Keith Vaughan**, pastor of Valley Grove Baptist Church in Knoxville, Tennessee, on the challenges of struggling with burnout in ministry.

“The next generation is growing up with a foundationally secular worldview that tells them the meaning of life is found in discovering themselves,” said **Chuck Peters**, director of kids for Lifeway Christian

Resources. “The pressure to do this has resulted in unprecedented levels of anxiety, loneliness and a desperate need to belong.”

“Have you prayed about the obstacles, intentionally and persistently? God sometimes moves mountains right out of the way simply by devoted, intentional prayer,” said **Rick Harrington**, author and pastor in Massachusetts.

“We have resources today that help us learn to do anything, so we mustn’t believe we can’t grow in people and leadership skills,” said **Mark Clifton**, senior director of replanting for North American Mission Board. “Every pastor can learn to be a better pastor.”



Chitchat

What people are sharing on social media

I have been repeating this mantra: ‘Hard days do not equal bad days. God is pruning me and bearing fruit in me even here, even now.’

@worthyofgrace
Instagram

I have had multiple pastors reach out to me ... who went to the hospital because of panic attacks. And each of them had never experienced them before until now.

The cost is real. The strain of ministry is uniquely hard. Pray for pastors.

@PastorCroft
Twitter

When culture is screaming about topics like sexuality and gender, but

the church is silent ... then, a whole generation only hears one worldview. Silence can’t be an option for the church.

We must love genuinely, but also teach biblically. There’s a generation desperate for this!

@shane_pruitt78
Twitter

Don’t let your circumstances become a weapon that undermines your faith and hope.

@godsgirlredefined
Instagram

Being able to pray to a Holy God is a super blessing. Being able to pray for yourself, your family, your church, your community, your city,

your county, your state, your nation and the world is also a super blessing. We should do that more.

Prayer helps our hearts and minds which lead our actions and responses.

Pastor Dewayne Rembert
Facebook

Abide and He will provide above and beyond what we can imagine. He will meet our needs according to His glorious riches, including godly vision and wisdom. — “If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.” James 1:5

@mydaughterarise
Instagram

4 lessons learned from Habbakuk

One of the most beneficial disciplines God has taught me over the years is to take time to journal regularly.

Journaling has helped me process many of my thoughts as I focus on God’s Word daily.

Sometimes I will look back and read prior entries to get a clear picture of how God is working through the circumstances of life to mold me into the image of His dear Son.

I want to share an excerpt of an entry that I wrote on May 27, 2020. It spoke fresh into my heart in a special way. I pray He speaks to you as well.

Habbakuk 1:5

“Look among the nations and watch — Be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days which you will not believe, though it were told to you.”

Habakkuk was chosen to speak to the people on behalf of God. He was struggling to understand how and why God was working. He learned that it is not man’s responsibility to explain God, but to simply trust Him. Whenever we do not understand the activity of God it is an opportunity to be drawn closer to Him.

How should Habakkuk respond? How does God’s work teach us to respond?

1. Habakkuk had to look. He had to open the eyes of his heart to get a bigger picture of what God was doing.

2. He had to watch for God to do things beyond his belief in order to accomplish God’s purpose.

3. Habakkuk had to listen. Listening involves the spiritual discipline of waiting. Waiting involves being still and not being preoccupied with other things.

4. Habakkuk had to learn. Learning is a process that never ends.

Pastor Brent Thompson
Heflin Baptist Church
June 1, 2023, newsletter

3 stories you should know



Photo courtesy of Baptist Standard

Baptist World Alliance General Secretary Elijah Brown prays for Baptist leaders during the BWA annual gathering July 2–9 in Stavanger, Norway. According to the BWA's Baptist Vulnerability Index, 15.7 million Baptists — 3 in 10 worldwide — face high levels of vulnerability to hunger, poverty, violent conflict and religious persecution. Syria topped this year's list, Brown reported. Read more on the 2023 index at tbponline.org/vulnerability. (Baptist Standard)

Court sides with postal worker in religious freedom case

In a unanimous ruling, the U.S. Supreme Court on June 29 sided with Gerald Groff, an evangelical Christian mail carrier who quit the U.S. Postal Service after he was forced to deliver packages on Sundays, a day he observed as Sabbath.

Mail is not usually delivered on Sundays, but in 2013, the USPS signed a contract with Amazon for daily package delivery. Groff transferred to another post office but later encountered the same Sunday work expectation there.

Justices said employers must do more than the minimum to accommodate workers' requests related to religious observances, and if denying a request, "must show that the burden of granting an accommodation would result in substantial increased costs in relation to the conduct of its particular business." (TAB)

Southwestern Seminary leaders working to protect accreditation

The accreditation status of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary has been moved to "warning" level by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges.

The June 15 decision applies to all programs, on and off campus, and is a result of the determination by SACSCOC board of trustees that SWBTS "had failed to demonstrate compliance with ... governing board characteristics ... and ... financial responsibility of the Principles of Accreditation."

SWBTS President David S. Dockery said in a statement that the seminary is "fully committed to take all necessary steps" to address the concerns. Among other consequences, loss of accreditation can prevent college students from receiving federal financial aid. (The Baptist Paper)

Persecuted church

Nearly 50 killed during attacks on villages in two Nigerian states

ABUJA, Nigeria — Christians in Nigeria are among those killed in attacks on two villages in two different states.

According to Morning Star News, 46 Christians were killed in raids June 3–4 upon the villages of Imande Mbakange, Michihe, Achamegh and Mbagene Kpav — all in Benue State.

Muslim Fulani herdsmen are suspected in the deadly attacks.

In Edo state, Charles Onomhoale Igechi, a Roman Catholic priest, was killed June 7 while driving in Benin, reported Morning Star, quoting Augustine Akubeze, the archbishop of the Archdiocese of Benin. Igechi, vice principal of St. Michael College in Ikhueniro, was shot numerous times, Akubeze said.

The identities of the gunmen were not known as of Morning Star's report on the shooting.

Nigeria is No. 6 on Open Doors' 2023 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian. Nigeria has led the world in the number of Christians killed for their faith, kidnapped, sexually assaulted, forcibly married or physically or mentally abused.



Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons

Mobs halt Christian worship services on Indonesia's Sumatra Island

SURABAYA, Indonesia — Mobs halted Christian worship services May 19 at two locations on Indonesia's Sumatra Island.

Morning Star News reported the disruptions at Mawar Sharon Church, which was meeting at a café in a village in Binjai in North Sumatra province, and at Bethel Indonesia Church in Riau in Pekanbaru province.

About 40 Muslims prevented Mawar Sharon Church from meeting, with the mob's leader claiming the church's permits were issued falsely, according to media reports.

At Bethel Indonesia Church, "outsiders" prohibited the service, Morning Star stated.

In January, President Joko Widodo of Indonesia said local decisions do not trump guarantees of religious freedom stipulated in the constitution.

Indonesia is No. 33 on Open Doors' 2023 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian. According to Open Doors, Islamic extremist groups often target churches that conduct evangelistic outreach.

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

► **Judy Bledsoe** — wife of Barry Bledsoe, retired president of The Baptist Foundation of Alabama — died June 26 after a battle with cancer.



BLEDSOE

She supported her husband through 20 years at the helm of TBFA until he retired in 2021. Their son, Rodney, now serves as TBFA's director of ministry engagement.

Bledsoe and her husband were members of First Baptist Church Montgomery where she was involved in choir and missions.

She is survived by her husband of nearly 51 years; sons Dennis, Chris and Rodney; and eight grandchildren.

► **Amparito Moscoso** died June 14 after a battle with cancer. She was 62.

She served with her husband, Pablo, at Iglesia Bautista Agape, where he is pastor. She was a missionary in two different cities in Ecuador and served in Chile, New Jersey and Alabama. She served as an ethnic consultant for the BMBA Woman's Missionary Union.

She is survived by her husband, Pablo, two daughters and three grandchildren.

► **Thomas Hill Perkins Sr.**, who was in ministry 72 years, died May 17. He was 90.

He led numerous churches in Mississippi and Alabama and served most recently at Faith Baptist Church, Bessemer.

He also spent 15 years as a police chaplain and was evangelism director for North Jefferson Baptist Association for 11 years. He was often featured on the TV program "The Southern Gospel Show," which airs on Charter Cable and features southern gospel music, talk sessions and guests.

He was preceded in death by three grandchildren.

He is survived by his wife of 73 years, Elizabeth Perkins; four children; four grandchildren; and 10 great-grandchildren.



PERKINS

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► **John Maddox** is the new student pastor of Clearview Baptist Church, Pinson.

He holds a bachelor's degree in pastoral ministries from Toccoa Falls College (Georgia) and a master of arts degree in pastoral leadership from New Orleans Seminary.

He previously served as bivocational pastor of Argo Baptist Church, Trussville, and Mineral Springs Baptist Church, Pell City. He also was student pastor of Cropwell Baptist Church, Pell City.

He and his wife, Suzette, have three children.



MADDOX

BLOUNT ASSOCIATION

► **Pleasant View Missionary Baptist Church, Holly Pond**, will kick off its summer revival with a singing July 16, 5 p.m. The Kellys from Tennessee will perform. Revival services will run July 17–21 at 10:30 a.m. and 7 p.m. Dustin Smith is the evangelist. Lunch will be served each day after the morning service. Prayer band begins each night at 6:45 p.m. Earl Harper is pastor.

COFFEE ASSOCIATION

► **Mount Zion Baptist Church, New Brockton**, is hosting Vacation Bible School July 13–16. The theme is Follywood and is based on Matthew 5:16. Children ages 6 to 12 are invited for games, snacks, songs, crafts and more.

Thursday, July 13, is 6 p.m. until 8:30 p.m.; Friday, July 14, and Saturday, July 15, is 9 a.m. until 3:30 p.m.; and Sunday, July 16, is 10 a.m. until 1 p.m. with commencement, worship service and a covered dish lunch.

Email mountzionbaptistchurch.mixons@gmail.com for registration information.

ESCAMBIA ASSOCIATION

► **Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, Atmore**, will celebrate its 117th anniversary July 16, 11 a.m. Hill Spring Drive will provide the music and Henry Cox, pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church Bay Minette and former president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention, will speak. Larry E. Beauchamp is pastor.

RUSSELL ASSOCIATION

► **Ethan Graves** is the new pastor of **Crawford Road Baptist Church, Phenix City**. He previously served as associate pastor at Colts Neck Community Church in Colts Neck, New Jersey. He holds bachelor of arts and master of divinity degrees from Southern Seminary and is currently pursuing his doctor of philosophy degree from Midwestern Seminary. He and his wife, Nicole, have one child.



GRAVES

ST. CLAIR ASSOCIATION

► **Steve Parr** has retired as executive pastor of **CrossPoint Church, Trussville**, where he served since 1990.

He holds a bachelor's degree from Samford University and a master's degree in religious education from Southwestern Seminary.

Parr joined the staff of First Baptist Church Center Point in 1990 after serving churches in Texas and Tennessee.

In 1998, FBC Center Point began to move toward planting CrossPoint as a satellite campus, and in 2005, it became a mission church with Parr as executive pastor.

In honor of Parr's ministry, a scholarship for members of the A Capella Choir was announced in the Parrs' name at Samford University.

The choir is where Steve met his wife, Anita. The church also named Parr executive pastor emeritus.

He and Anita have four children and three grandchildren.

TUSKEGEE LEE ASSOCIATION

► **Salem Macon Baptist Church, Notasulga**, will host its annual homecoming July 16. The Gospel Strings of Montgomery will sing at 10 a.m.

Phillip Garrett, former pastor, will bring the message at 11 a.m. There will be a covered dish meal in the fellowship hall after the service. Greg Pate is pastor.

WALKER ASSOCIATION

► **David Byrd** recently celebrated 25 years at **Northside Baptist Church, Jasper**.

Byrd became a Christian at age 13 and felt called to ministry three years later. He ignored the call until he was in college at the University of Georgia. He has now been in ministry 44 years.

He holds a bachelor's degree from Augusta College and a master of divinity degree from New Orleans Seminary.

He previously served as minister of youth at First Baptist Church Lucedale, Mississippi; pastor of Rehoboth Baptist Church, Shelman, Georgia; and pastor of Cuba Baptist Church in Alabama.

He also served on the board of trustees for Judson College and volunteers with Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief.

He and his wife, Marilyn, have two children and one grandchild.



Photo courtesy of Larry Mitchell



Photo courtesy of Jeff Johnsey

Mississippi Nailbenders helps build churches

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Some congregations have the resources to build their churches — but when the resources aren't there, Mississippi Nailbenders can help.

Founded by twin brothers Mack and Jack Honea, Mississippi Nailbenders has been building churches worldwide since 1994 using a total of five teams — one each week for five weeks.

This summer, they've been building at Quinton Baptist Church in Walker County.

The idea to work in five weeks began at a family reunion with Mack and Jack talking to their first cousin, Don Griffin, who was going on a missions trip to build a church in Louisiana. During the preceding 11 years when the men had done the typical one-week trips, they were always asked by the churches if they could find other groups to finish the job.

"We started talking about getting five teams to follow each other starting Memorial Day weekend and through the month of June," Mack said. "At first, we only had about 15 to 20 men in each group. Crews today run from 45 to 110 per week."

'Organic' growth

Nailbenders' crews grow organically. Every church they've built sends a few members to help the next year. There is a place for anyone who wants to serve — men, women and teens. They are trained as needed to fill the various jobs. A small cost is involved.

"Each person pays their own expenses, which runs about \$120 per person for food for the week, and contributes toward fuel cost," Jack said.

Through the local church-



Mississippi Nailbenders work at Quinton Baptist Church in Walker County. Founded by twin brothers Mack and Jack Honea, the group has been building churches worldwide since 1994.

Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

es, God often provides framers, electricians, drywall installers, painters or other skilled volunteers to help.

Teens make up a big portion of the later crews, and expectations are laid out before they leave.

"We tell the youth that they are there to serve and not be waited on. They have devotions every night before they go to bed and share testimonies and tell about their days' experiences," Mack said.

It's not all work though. Jack said that it "becomes a type of youth rally" and that they love to help. On their recent build in Walker County, leaders took the youth swimming and to Buc-ee's.

Churches who partner with Nailbenders provide places to sleep, cook and shower. Crew members can bring air mattresses, come in RVs or stay in local hotels or homes.

The first week the ministry brings supplies such as fish fryers, grills, pots, pans and serving utensils for cooking;

ladders, scaffolding and extension cords for the build; and power boxes and water hoses to run to the campers.

These supplies stay on-site until the final crew finishes.

Churches are chosen based on the need to expand due to growth and not being able to afford financing while

also paying for the materials needed.

Gospel takes priority

Though building a church is a great way to serve, sharing the gospel with the teams and the community takes priority. Each team member gets a matching

Mississippi Nailbenders shirt so they can be quickly identified.

"Every time someone goes to town, we make sure they have their Nailbenders shirts on. After five weeks, these yellow Mississippi Nailbenders shirts are well known in town," Mack said.

Both men have learned over the years that God will provide everything needed — from accommodations to skilled workers to the physical materials. They also are learning how to slow down and find out where God is working so they can join in.

"We have more fun working, joking and enjoying this beautiful world He has provided for us," Mack said.

Along with a new building, Mississippi Nailbenders always leaves something special behind.

"Under the stage where the pastor stands is a box with a Bible in it so that the pastor is always standing on the Word of God when he is preaching," Mack said. "We don't feel like we are putting up a building but that we are building a temple to God."

For more information, contact Mack at mhonea4@comcast.net or Jack at jackhonea48@gmail.com.



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UNIQUE, PURPOSEFUL AND INVALUABLE ROLE

How your church congregation can serve pregnancy resource centers

By **Mary Holloman**
Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission

The thought of sitting across the room from a woman facing an unplanned pregnancy strikes fear in the hearts of many. Visions of a quiet room, hushed tones, heartbreaking stories, positive tests and difficult decisions may cause anxiety or discomfort.

To be honest, this fear isn't unwarranted. As a woman who has worked in the pregnancy resource center world in a variety of capacities for the past 10 years, I've seen firsthand how serious and intense the front-lines of a PRC can be.

Staff and volunteers willingly walk into a difficult but essential ministry every day, committed to speaking truth in love to women who are either desperate to hear it or determined to reject it.

These workers stand in the gap to advocate for life within the womb and for the mothers who carry those lives. Make no mistake: what's happening behind those closed doors is life and death.

Getting past the barriers

But in an attempt to paint an accurate picture of the life-changing work happening at PRCs, churches unwillingly — perhaps unknowingly — may be discouraging their members from connecting with pregnancy centers at all.

Your congregation is filled with women who would go weak in the knees at the thought of closing themselves in a room with a mother who is considering abortion.

Their hearts may be burdened to stand for life, but the knee-knocking, white-knuckled anxiety of what



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“could” or “might” happen keeps them glued to the sidelines.

Meanwhile, the other half of your congregation may believe this is a ministry in which they have no place. After all, what could men possibly have to offer in this woman-focused missions field?

The beauty of the Church is that there are many parts, but one body (1 Cor. 12:12). Every member of the body has a unique, purposeful and invaluable role to fill.

Because abortion is a gospel issue, the Church must rise up to address it at all costs. There is room for everyone in the pro-life movement.

Practical ways to serve

What does this look like on a practical level?

Allison Herrington, director of partnerships at The Pregnancy Network in North Carolina, said volunteers — male, female, young, old, confident, fearful — can do a variety of things, including:

- ▶ Sort and organize baby items and donations.
- ▶ Write notes of encouragement for mothers.
- ▶ Prepare food, greet clients and/or distribute class incentives.
- ▶ Clean offices.
- ▶ Use their time in school carlines to make phone calls to potential event sponsors.
- ▶ Teach sessions on infant CPR or other professional certifications during parenting classes.
- ▶ Donate funds to cover costs of billboards and other marketing tools to reach more clients.
- ▶ Serve as mentors, make baby blankets, assist with mailings.
- ▶ Help set up and break down at events, and mobilize their small groups to assist with special projects.

“Our message to our community is simple,” said Hope Earwood, director of development and communications for The Pregnancy Network. “No matter where you serve,

every person makes an impact on the life of another. You have a vital role to play in this mission. And there is a place for you here.”

Steps your church can take

If your church wants to get more involved in the pro-life movement but isn't sure where to start, what is the first step?

If your community has a local PRC (and it probably does), I guarantee they would welcome your involvement with open arms. Take the initiative to invite a representative from that PRC to speak with you and your church leaders about their needs.

Consider the unique strengths of the individuals in your church. Is your church filled with stay-at-home mothers? Empty nesters? IT gurus? Graphic designers? Writers? Businessmen and women? Event planners? The answer is almost certainly “yes” to all of these, and every last person in your congregation can serve in some capacity.

Something beautiful happens when a wave of individuals from different backgrounds, skill sets and comfort zones unites around a common mission and purpose.

When the body of Christ refuses to remain passive and complacent about putting the Word into action, and instead rallies around women in unplanned pregnancies by mobilizing every possible resource they possess, well — that's when mothers will believe us when we say we value all life.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This article was originally published by the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission and has been adapted for print.

25 years & counting

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, speaks at the 2018 Alabama Baptist State Convention at First Baptist Church Trussville.



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Rick Lance celebrates quarter century of leading Alabama Baptists, plans to continue focus on the Great Commission

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Twenty-five years ago, Ron Madison stood before a board of peers and recommended Rick Lance to be Alabama Baptists' new executive director.

At that time, Lance — then pastor of First Baptist Church Tuscaloosa — had been the name circulating as the candidate for the role.

"Because of his length of service, both in pastorates and the state convention, [Lance] brings a perspective that reaches back three decades in Alabama Baptist life," said Madison, who chaired the search committee, as he presented Lance in June 1998.

Today Madison, whose own length of service is now four decades long, stands by that — and more. He said putting Lance up for the executive director role was one of the most meaningful moments of his own ministry career.

"I've been privileged to serve Alabama Baptists in a number of ways over the past 40 years since I came to Alabama, but I have never felt as

grateful for and proud of any service that rises to the level of the opportunity to chair the committee to recommend Rick Lance to be executive director," Madison said.

Moving toward unity

His gratitude boils down to one reason, he noted — the way Lance has led Alabama Baptists toward unity around the Great Commission for 25 years and counting.

"I think that over the last two-and-a-half decades, Alabama Baptists have walked through some challenging times, but those challenging times have never threatened the unity of our focus on our 'one mission' that Dr. Lance has articulated so clearly and effectively through the years," Madison said.

Other states have faced challenges and sometimes not been as effective at staying on task, he said, but "we've been able to work through all of those challenges and emerge as a unified state convention."

"Though there have been many people who have helped and have played a role in keeping us together, I think Rick Lance is singularly re-



Photo by Grace Thornton/The Alabama Baptist
Rick Lance (right) goes over paperwork with longtime special assistant Mary Sue Bennett in 2005. Bennett served alongside him for 15 years at FBC Tuscaloosa before coming to the SBOM for another 15 years and retiring in 2014.

sponsible for keeping us focused and on task," Madison said.

When Lance moved into the role in July 1998, he told Alabama Baptists that singleness of mind was his goal.

"I believe that we as a family of Alabama Baptists need to maintain

a clear focus on our mission — the Great Commission," he wrote in a column in *The Alabama Baptist*.

Over the years, that story has played out in state Baptist life in a variety of ways.

For starters, the Alabama Baptist

"He is a resource who has quietly and calmly influenced our nation. We are blessed to have his continued leadership in Alabama Baptist life."

Buddy Champion
Alabama Baptist State Convention president and pastor of FBC Trussville

State Board of Missions has been intentional about helping to launch new church plants with every culture and background in mind. In recent years, they've also reached globally by establishing Acts 1:8 Connections to help churches partner with Alabama Baptist missionaries serving in other parts of the world.

Making financial strides

Financially, state Baptists have made strides too.

Nearly eight years ago, the SBOM established the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering, named after Alabama Baptist missions heroes Martha Myers and Kathleen Mallory. Up until then, there had only been an Alabama Woman's Missionary Union offering in Mallory's name and a disaster relief offering.

"Combining the two and renaming the offering was a huge cooperative step for Alabama Baptists," Lance said.

Then a few years later, the SBOM made a move from Montgomery to a new facility in Prattville and remained debt free through the process. The state also became a "true 50-50 state convention," Lance said, meaning that 50 cents of every dollar received through the Cooperative Program is forwarded to the Southern Baptist Convention for missions and ministry efforts, and the other half focuses on Great Commission ministries in Alabama.

"This means that the Alabama Baptist State Convention is the leading contributor to the SBC," he said.

"We are not the wealthiest state convention. We don't have many larger churches or megachurches, nor do we have the largest number of churches, but we are a generous people. We praise God for that, and we pray we can do more in the future."

As he celebrates 25 years in this role, he said he's thankful for the opportunity to have served and to continue serving, and he's "excited

about the potential of the future we have as a Baptist family."

Source of wisdom

Buddy Champion, Alabama Baptist State Convention president and pastor of First Baptist Church Trussville, said Lance "personifies leadership reflecting a passion for Christ and the oneness that Christ prayed for in John 17."

"His wisdom, intuition and vision

has been a key factor in keeping Alabama Baptists focused on the Great Commission," he said.

Over the years, Lance has become a source of wisdom for leaders in other state conventions, Champion said. "He is a resource who has quietly and calmly influenced our nation. We are blessed to have his continued leadership in Alabama Baptist life."



Photo by Doug Rogers/SBOM

Rick Lance (right) and SBOM disaster relief strategist Mark Wakefield pray with Shannon Allen, pastor of Ashby Baptist Church, after the church was damaged by a tornado in 2022.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

During a vigil at FBC Dadeville after a mass shooting in April 2023, Rick Lance shares a word of encouragement for the Dadeville community and leads a prayer for ministers serving the area.

Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

English hymn writer Frances Havergal used gifts for God's glory

Frances Havergal (1836–1879) was an English hymn writer who wrote songs such as “Take My Life and Let it Be,” “Like a River Glorious” and “I Gave My Life for Thee.”

She was born Dec. 14, 1836, to William Henry and Jane Havergal in Worcestershire. Her father was an Anglican clergyman, composer and hymn writer.

At 14, Frances Havergal attended the school of Mrs. Teed, whose Christian influence resulted in her conversion. She later said, “I committed my soul to the Savior, and earth and heaven seemed brighter from that moment.”

Havergal loved to study the Bible. She read it morning and night and memorized large portions of it. As a young adult, she could recite the Gospels, the Epistles, Revelation, the Psalms and Isaiah, which was her favorite book. Later she memorized the Minor Prophets.

Language study

An exceptionally intelligent woman, Havergal studied Hebrew and Greek and was also fluent in French and German. She was a

brilliant singer and pianist and used all her gifts for God's glory.

Havergal prayed as she wrote her hymns. “Writing is praying with me,” she said. “I ask that at every line He would give me not merely thoughts and power, but also every word, even the very rhymes.”

Witnessing opportunity

She recorded the story of how she came to write “Take My Life and Let it Be.” She had made a five-day visit to a family's home. The 10



HAVERGAL

people in the home were either unconverted or were converted but were not rejoicing Christians. She saw the visit as an opportunity to witness about Christ.

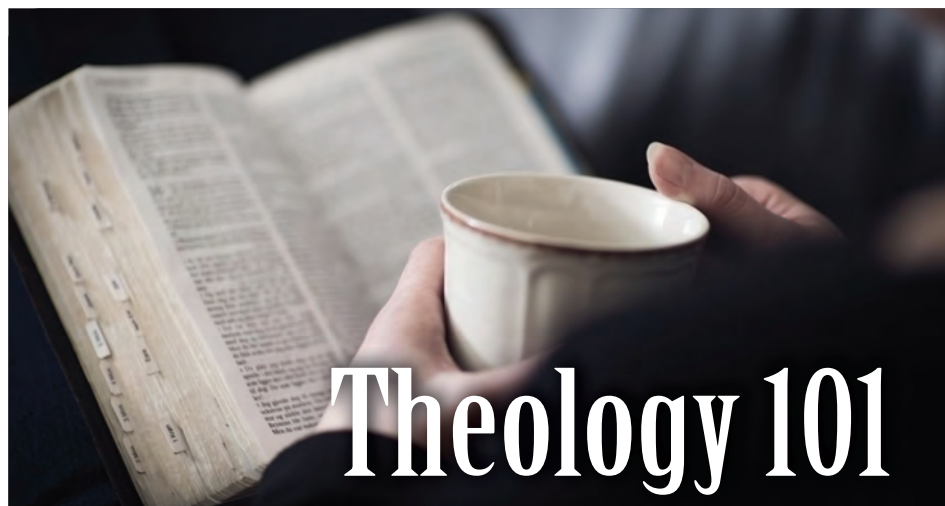
“He gave me the prayer, ‘Lord, give me all in this house.’ And He just did! Before I left the house everyone had gotten a blessing.”

She was too happy to sleep the last night of her visit. She praised God and renewed her own consecration. Then she wrote her most famous hymn. In addition to hymns, she wrote poems, devotional books and religious tracts.

Havergal never had a home of her own. She lived with her parents and then with her married sisters, helping them with their households and teaching their children. She was active in the YWCA and was a generous giver to the Anglican Church Missionary Society.

Havergal enjoyed traveling in Britain and Europe. She died of an infection at the age of 42 while vacationing in Wales.

She asked that 1 John 1:7 be inscribed on her tombstone: “The blood of Jesus Christ ... cleanseth us from all sin.”



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Christ's Ascension

Enabling Abundant Life

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
The Alabama Baptist

Ephesians 2:4–7 is instructive for us about the relation between Christ's ascension to the Father and His provision for us to experience victorious Christian living.

In previous weeks we have noted that Christ's exaltation was in three stages. This passage uses verbs that would describe those stages: “made alive” (resurrection), “raised up” (ascension) and “seated” (enthronement).

However, the striking force of these references is that this passage uses these verbs in reference to us as believing and forgiven sinners, who with Christ have been made alive, raised up and seated in the heavenly places.

To say that believers are made alive together with Christ is to say that we are in possession of His resurrection life. Our new life in Christ is the life of heaven and eternity. Although at one time all of us were dead in trespasses and sins (2:1), we can experience victorious living.

Heavenly citizenship

Not only do Christians possess “resurrection life,” we also possess “ascension life.” Joined to Christ by faith, we even now enjoy heavenly citizenship (Phil. 3:20) with our names enrolled in the Book of Life, due altogether to our union with Christ.

Furthermore, we share with Christ a position of spiritual authority and security, since He has carried us with Him all the way to the Father's right hand. He has

won for us the final victory — victory over sin, death and Satan. No safer place in the universe can be found than being at the right hand of the throne of God.

What are we to do with such exalted statements? They take us back to where this week's study began — an abundant, overflowing, victorious life made possible here and now through our spiritual association with Christ.

Inseparably joined

From God's point of view, we are co-raised, co-ascended and co-enthroned with Christ. Not only can we know our citizenship is in heaven since we are inseparably joined with Christ, but we can also live in this present world with the certainty that our lives are “hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3).

Our challenge is to live out daily on earth the eternal life already possessed by virtue of our spiritual union with Christ — made alive with Him, raised up with Him and seated with Him, so that we are living not just toward heaven but also from heaven — living out of the realities of a life already anchored above, where Christ is ascended and enthroned.

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.



By Joanne Sloan

Joanne Sloan, a member of First Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa, has been a published writer of articles and books for 30 years. She has a bachelor's degree double majoring in history and English from East Texas State University (now Texas A&M–Commerce) and a master's degree specializing in English from the University of Arkansas (1978).

Shocco pool renovation one of many changes this summer

By **Laurie Mullinax**
Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center

With staff hired and supplies stocked, Shocco is on high alert, and the jam-packed buses are rolling in.

What a blessing it always is to have the privilege of serving thousands of students each summer.

We have some exciting new developments this year.

Last summer, Shocco leaders became aware of extensive and irreparable damages to our pool.

So we went back to the drawing board and made the decision to redesign, extend and modernize.

Contractors dug out our old pool and started from scratch, replacing our old pipes and filters with a more efficient, state-of-the-art infrastructure.

We added an entirely new beach front section with zero-entry access, transforming our “L” shaped pool into a larger capacity “U” shape.

Guests will enjoy the addition of two thrilling water



The new pool at Shocco Springs features more efficient, state-of-the-art infrastructure.

Photo courtesy of Laurie Mullinax

slides, along with dump buckets and a spray bar.

There are now bubbler and jet features in the walls of the pool, and nighttime swimmers will be entranced by the colored LED pool lights.

And that’s not all. We now have a brand new, larger pool deck with in-

creased seating capacity and modernized lighting. Our old chain link fence has been replaced by a more secure, solid wall pool enclosure.

Variety of updates

Our staff and volunteers also built a new storage building between the lake

and the pool to house extra tables for group picnics.

We will soon add a swing on the porch for our guests to enjoy.

Following in the footsteps of Bagley Center’s 1st and 2nd floors, our 3rd floor has received a facelift.

We have replaced the carpet in all the meeting rooms and added new lighting and paint.

The hallway floors have been refinished in concrete, and we’ve added updated signage.

Outside the BC 300 meeting space, you will find a stylish wood plank wall, complete with Edison lights and a bench for our guests.

The final touch will be a

new wrap for the inside and outside of the elevator.

Also in Bagley Center, we have completed the improvements to the old bookstore space located to the right of the porch. This large area has been divided into two definitive rooms.

A few renovations

The left side is a Shocco staff boardroom and the right side will be used as an overflow dining area for guests, accessible from the stairs in the back of the main dining hall.

The older lights on our recreation fields have been replaced with new, brighter and more efficient LED lights.

The renovation of Shocco Inn, originally built in 1966, is finally completed. All three floors of guest rooms have been beautifully remodeled with bunk beds and modernized bathrooms including new showers and fixtures.

The common area bathrooms on the second floor have also been updated and we added a kitchenette with a coffee maker, microwave, cabinets and a refrigerator for guests to use.

The Shocco Springs board of trustees toured all the renovations and additions during its May meeting, and they approved wholeheartedly. We look forward to your visit so that you can experience the excitement and energy of Shocco.

To learn more about Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center, visit shocco.org.

Check out the Through-the-Bible Adult Study Guide

Visit us at bogardpress.org to learn more!

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UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Senior Adult Leadership Training offered in two locations in August

Want to involve senior adults in your church more effectively and reach those in your community too?

The Senior Adult Leadership Training can provide basic ways to expand the scope of your church's senior adult ministry. Senior adult ministers and lay leaders are invited.

SALT offers two dates and locations — Aug. 22 at Lindsay Lane Baptist Church in Athens and Aug. 24 at Southside Baptist Church in Greenville, both from 9:15 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

The event will have three sessions:

▶ Engaging Senior Adults, led by Bob Smith,

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



minister to seasoned adults at FBC Trussville.

▶ Reaching Boomers, led by Edwin Jenkins, LifeLift Ministries pastor/teacher.

▶ Discipling Senior Adults, led by Robert Mul-

lins, pastor of Crossroads Community Church in Elmore.

Frank Jones, senior adult event coordinator for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, will emcee the day and provide music, and Guy Anderson, minister of music emeritus at Elkdale Baptist Church in Selma, also will provide comedy and music.

Both events are free, but registration is required for the included boxed lunch.

For more information, contact Frank Jones at fjm1117@gmail.com or call 205-393-7020.

To register, visit alsbom.org/salt.

Financial Issues Conference

All year long, churches call Lee Wright with questions related to their finances.

So each year Wright, SBOM church compensation specialist, takes those questions and builds a Financial Issues Conference to help church leaders stay up-to-date on topics like doing benevolence right, having good internal controls for

electronic transactions and knowing what forms are needed to hire a new employee.

It will be offered six more times in different locations:

▶ SBOM office facility in Prattville — July 20.

▶ First Baptist Church Silverhill — July 25.

▶ Southeast Alabama Baptist Association in Dothan — July 26.

▶ Northport Baptist Church — Aug. 8.

▶ Calhoun Baptist Association in Anniston — Aug. 15.

▶ Woodmont Baptist Church in Florence — Aug. 22.

The event is 10 a.m.–3 p.m. The cost is \$15 and includes lunch and materials.

To register, visit alsbom.org/financial.

Next Intentional Leader Series set for July 27 at the SBOM office

The next Intentional Leader Series, set for July 27, will focus on the Preacher aspect of the four Ps of leadership: Person, Pastor, Preacher and Pathfinder.

The event will be 9 a.m.–2 p.m. at the State Board of Missions office facility in Prattville, and will feature Hershael York, pastor of Buck Run Baptist Church

in Frankfort, Kentucky, and dean of Southern Seminary's School of Theology.

The \$8 cost includes lunch. Register at leadercareal.org/ils.

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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

CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Mt. Hebron East Baptist Church, Eclectic, Alabama, located in a growing rural setting near Lake Martin, is in search of a full-time pastor. Please email inquiries/resumés to: mhebc1896@protonmail.com.

PASTOR

Newbridge Missionary Baptist Church in Asheville, North Carolina, a member of the Southern Baptist Convention, prayerfully seeks a man who will preach the inerrant Word of God and has a heart for missions. Email resumé to: NewbridgePST@gmail.com by Aug. 31.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

New Beginnings Baptist Church, a small congregation in Hayden, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor. Send inquiries/resumés to: sonyahumber@gmail.com.

OTHER POSITIONS

PREGNANCY CENTER

DIRECTOR — FULTONDALE, ALABAMA
Sav-A-Life, Inc. is looking for a full-time center director for its Fultondale location (just north of Birmingham). This team member will manage all routine operations of the pregnancy center in an efficient, effective and professional manner. The center director trains and manages all staff and volunteers in the implementation of necessary programs, scheduling and meets with clients. Applicants need a bachelor's or master's degree, preferably in a helping field, or need related equivalent experience if no degree. To learn more or to apply, please send a cover letter and resumé to info@savalife.org. No phone calls please.

TEACHERS

Marion Academy Early Learning Center is urgently seeking full-time teachers to fill positions for their toddler and pre-k classrooms. If you are interested and would like more information regarding these positions, please contact the main office by phone at 334-683-8204 or email at maoffice@marion-academy.com.

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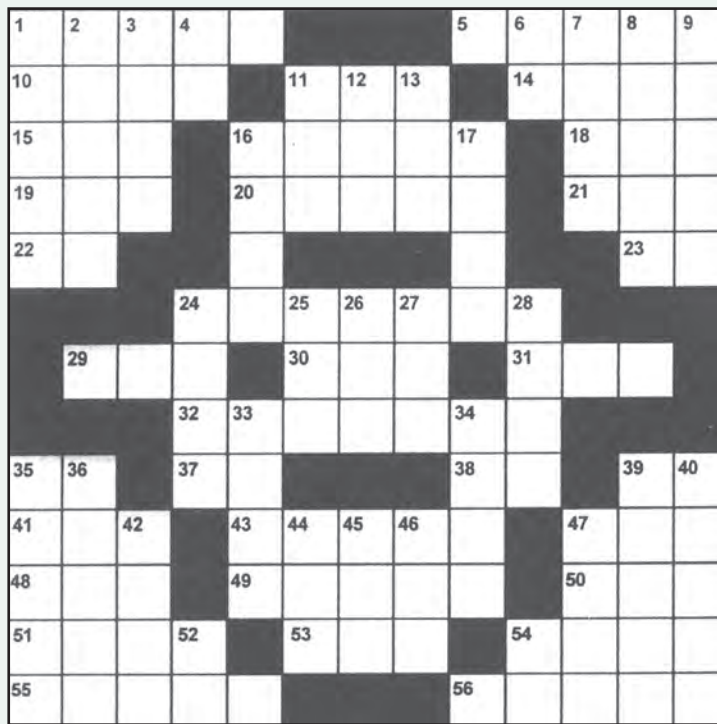
Unforsaken Ministries walks alongside those in active addiction and their loved ones. Our mission is to offer hope. This is accomplished by guiding those in addiction and their loved ones through the recovery process. For more information, call 205-246-2030 or email glenn@unforsakenministry.org.

CHRISTIAN Crossword



ACROSS

- 1. Am I in God's ____? (Gen. 30:2)
- 5. They say, 'He has a ____.' (Matt. 11:18, NIV)
- 10. Consumes.
- 11. By a mighty hand, and by a stretched out _____. (Deut. 4:34)
- 14. Lion's headdress.
- 15. By way of.
- 16. Alaskan native.
- 18. Drug Enforcement Administration. (abbr.)
- 19. Building addition.
- 20. I will ____ him up at the last day. (John 6:40)
- 21. People that do ____ in their heart. (Ps. 95:10)
- 22. They follow "M"s.
- 23. Naval vessel designation.
- 24. Goes up.
- 29. Alternate spelling of Baal.
- 30. Sanballat invited Nehemiah to the plain of _____. (Neh. 6:2)
- 31. Thickness or layer.
- 32. ____ my statutes, and do them. (Ezek. 37:24)
- 35. And ____ shall judge the world. (Ps. 9:8)
- 37. Add ____ your faith virtue. (2 Pet. 1:5)
- 38. Commercial message.
- 39. News agency.
- 41. Spanish cheer.
- 43. I will make of thee a ____ nation. (Gen. 12:2)
- 47. Much ____ About Nothing.
- 48. Cleaning tool.
- 49. Classifieds.



By Janet Adkins Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- 50. First name of Pioneer Woman.
- 51. Long, exciting adventure tale.
- 53. They compassed me about like _____. (Ps. 118:12)
- 54. An atlas is a book of ____.
- 55. There remaineth ... a ____ (plural). (Heb. 4:9)
- 56. ____p____ Dumpty sat on a wall.

DOWN

- 1. John to the ____ churches ... in Asia. (Rev. 1:4)
- 2. His ____ (s) drew the third part of the stars. (Rev. 12:4)
- 3. And others. (Latin)
- 4. Like.
- 6. Printer's measure.
- 7. Thou hast ____ him a little lower than the angels. (Ps. 8:5)
- 8. Single continuous action. (plural)
- 9. Approaches.
- 11. In this manner.

- 12. Real estate investment. (abbr.)
- 13. He heard ____ic and dancing. (Luke 15:25)
- 16. ____ (s) of the Covenant.
- 17. Began the golf game.
- 24. Great amount. (2 words)
- 25. Type of lettuce.
- 26. Compass direction.
- 27. Neither/____.
- 28. Went rapidly.
- 33. Mires.
- 34. Large tubs.
- 35. Ancient author.
- 36. Run away to wed.
- 39. Able, skillful.
- 40. The art of poetry.
- 42. American Anglican church: ____ copal.
- 44. Will a man ____ God? (Mal. 3:8)
- 45. Before (poetic).
- 46. Did eat.
- 47. Kemuel the father of _____. (Gen. 22:21)
- 52. Court. (abbr.)
- 54. Invent to themselves instruments of ____ sick. (Amos 6:5)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Week of Prayer focus for Myers-Mallory

The legacy of two spiritual giants. Two periods of time. Two lives well lived for one mission — the Great Commission.

These two women — Kathleen Mallory and Dr. Martha Myers — are the namesakes for the offering that funds our Great Commission

from 1909 to 1912 and then head of national WMU for 36 years before she died in 1954 — lived a humble lifestyle so she could give as much money as possible to missions, said Candace McIntosh, executive director of Alabama WMU.



Ministries of Alabama WMU, Disaster Relief, partnership missions and church revitalization.

The goal for this year's Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering is \$1.2 million, and the Week of Prayer focus for the offering is set for Sept. 10-17.

Mallory — who served as leader of Alabama WMU

Myers, who grew up in an Alabama Baptist church, served 25 years as a medical missionary in Yemen before being killed by an extremist there in 2002.

The offering honors their legacy by continuing to fund missions and ministry in the state and around the world.

Watch for your resource packet arriving in the mail to your church.

Visit myers-mallory.org for the latest resources.

Request your 2023-24 Resource Directories

This FREE 16-month calendar (Sept. 2023–Dec. 2024) has State Board of Missions events and emphases already printed with plenty of room for you to add your church's events. It also includes an alphabetical listing of ministries and services along with directories of associational, state and SBC contacts.

Please limit 20 copies per church. To order, please call or email your request to Melissa Tolar at 800-264-1225, ext. 2249; direct at 334-613-2249; mtolar@alsbom.org; or order online

at alsbom.org/rd. Be sure to include your name, church name, mailing address and number of guides needed up to 20.

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



Church messaging: 4 steps to break through the noise

By Mark MacDonald
 Beknownforsomething.com

Everywhere you look in our busy world, there's a lot of information. If you want the information, that's a good thing. If you don't think you need it, it's an annoyance.

We all get too many emails, see too many social media posts and get too many advertising messages, and it seems like that overwhelming wave of information is growing. It's impossible to keep up.

Information overload

In the midst of information overload, the church is attempting to break through people's full inboxes and neverending social media scrolling.

If churchgoers miss the church's posts, then the

community certainly misses them. The event promotion and the religious messaging gets lost.

Why does this happen? Communication noise is drowning the church's message out. How do we fix it? Here are four steps:

1. Identify your limited "who." If you try to reach everyone, you'll reach no one. Instead, concentrate on one or two limited and stereotypically defined groups that you have access to.

Make sure the group you're focusing on is large enough to help your church grow. It's always wise to choose a growing group in your area that is not declining. Once you identify the group, fall in love with the people in it. Research demographics, talk to them, ask them questions and listen.

2. Listen for needs, concerns and goals. Part of loving someone is the desire to help them with solutions to needs and concerns or guiding them along a path to accomplish their goals.

You know they need Jesus — they just may not realize it yet. Communicate about what keeps them up at night or weighs heavily on their shoulders. It's probably not going to be defined by them as a spiritual issue, so don't always talk about spiritual solutions.

Get their attention and engage with them, and then tell them about the gospel and Jesus.

3. Concentrate on one solution. If you talk about too many solutions, it'll only add to the noise. Calm your messaging by focusing on one engaging solution.



Unsplash.com

It needs to become a thread that unites your ministry focus and one that connects easily to the scarlet thread of the gospel.

Memorable thread

Think about three to five words that will get your target group to look up. Craft a message that's unique, memorable and usable.

When you say less, they'll listen more. The thread also needs to be broad enough that it can be unpacked and talked about for years. Be known for it.

4. Sing in unison. If a choir is singing in a loud outdoor venue, it sounds good when you're close. The farther you move away, the music is drowned out by the noise, especially if they're singing complex harmonies. Want the choir to rise above the noise? Get them to sing in unison.

Your ministries are like a choir. Want to be heard far and wide into your community? Get one thread that's a solution to your target group. And sing, sing, sing in unison. You'll be heard.

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‘Willing vessel’

Johnson helps seminary students see God at work despite challenges around them

(continued from page 1)

At first Johnson went alone on his shopping evangelism excursions, drawing from a previous ministry he led while senior pastor at Liberty Hill Baptist Church in Cleveland, Ohio. There, a rapid transit line outside the church door went directly to the mall and church members’ shopping evangelism sprees were easy and yielded fruit.

In New Orleans, students frequently join Johnson to pray, minister and share the gospel.

Praying with people

Johnson feels free to pray inside with individuals, but students usually defer to the store’s wishes and pray outside.

As the team prayer walks the four corners of the parking lot, they stop at each one to pray for one of four groups: neighborhood children, mothers, fathers and store employ-

ees. Often as the teams walk from one corner to the next, they find opportunities to listen, comfort and share the gospel.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, as many experienced isolation and anxiety, the prayer walkers continued to share.

“We found ourselves hugging, holding and saying, ‘It’s going to be alright,’” Johnson remembered.

Relationship is key to the open doors he has found.

His wife, Heather, was shopping at the store one day when an employee recognized her. Knowing it was Johnson’s birthday, the employee took her to the card aisle, picked out a card and insisted Heather buy it.

The next day Johnson found the employee.

“God has given us an easy missions field.”

**Mark Johnson
assistant professor,
New Orleans Seminary**

“You couldn’t even buy a card for me? You made my wife buy it?” Johnson teased.

“That’s the kind of relationship we have.”

While some employees have a church home, many do not.

Tragedy struck two years ago when a targeted shooting left one person dead inside the store.

Johnson arrived to find it cordoned off.

“He’s Pastor,” store employees said, and Johnson was welcomed in.

As he ministered to hurting family members and employees processing grief, God opened many doors to share the gospel.

Shopping evangelism is easy, Johnson noted.

“The biggest change for students is their fear of evangelism is dropping,” he said.

“When they do this, they say, ‘Oh, that was easy. We prayed and waited on God.’”

While spiritual warfare is real and the people he meets have pressing needs, Johnson continually sees God at work despite the challenges around them.

God will open doors as believers allow Him to work, he noted.

“God has given us an easy missions field that doesn’t take a plane ticket. You don’t have to catch a bus to get there,” Johnson said.

With the engaging smile he is known for, he added, “He’s not asking you to do anything but shop. Just go get socks. Be a willing vessel for Him.”

EDITOR’S NOTE — This story was originally published in Vision magazine, a publication of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.



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Explore the Bible

By Jay T. Robertson, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, University of Mobile



PRESENT Jeremiah 29:4–14

For decades Jeremiah had prophesied judgment upon Judah. Over and over he had said God would punish them with sword, famine and captivity. In 597 B.C. the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem, killing many and carrying most of the rest into captivity.

Thrive (4–7)

This chapter contains a rare example of correspondence preserved in the Old Testament. Jeremiah probably wrote this letter to the exiles shortly after 597 B.C.

He began his letter by reminding the exiles of the sovereignty of God. The God of Israel had multitudes of forces under His control. The Lord declared that He had sent them into Babylon and had used the Babylonians as His instrument of judgment on Judah. The sovereign God of Israel was in complete control.

Jeremiah must have heard that some of the exiles did not believe they would remain for long in Babylon and refused to unpack their bags, so to speak.

In the letter he urged them to build houses, provide for themselves and have families. They should not waste their time moping about what they had lost in Judah but should actually thrive in the new land.

They should also seek the well-being of Babylon and pray for the Lord to bless the new land.

This is the only place in the Old Testament where a prophet gave a direct exhortation to pray for a pagan city. If Babylon thrived, they would also thrive.

Ignore (8–9)

Jeremiah warned that they should not listen to the false prophets and diviners, who were apparently telling them they would soon return home. These deceivers were not only in Jerusalem but also in Baby-

lon. They were prophesying lies in the Lord's name although He had not sent them or given them His message for the people. If the people were incited by the false prophets' lies to rebel against the Babylonians, swift punishment would be inflicted on them. This would have been disastrous, and it would have been a rebellion not only against the Babylonians but against God.

Hope (10–14)

The return home would not be soon, but they would return after 70 years had been completed for Babylon. The 70 years here refers to the duration of the Babylonian Empire, which fell to the Persians in 539 B.C. After 70 years, Judah's restoration would begin because God said it would happen.

We must be careful as we interpret verse 11. It does not mean that believers will never go through hard times. Consider the context of these verses. It was addressed to the exiles living in Babylon, many of whom would never return home. This promise was made to the people of Judah corporately. They had suffered terrible loss and defeat because of their disobedience to God.

But this verse sparked hope that even in the most difficult times, they could look to God for mercy and goodness. The Lord assured them that what had happened was not a series of unplanned, accidental events. Everything that had happened was intended by God to give them a hopeful future.

God encouraged them to pray to Him, for He would listen to them. The Lord promised that if they would seek Him wholeheartedly, He would be found.

He would gather them from all the nations where He had scattered them and bring them back from captivity after they repented.

***“You will seek Me and find Me,
when you seek Me with all your heart.”***

Jeremiah 29:13

Bible Studies for Life

Roy Ciampa, Ph.D.
Armstrong Chair of Religion, Samford University



SET APART: THE HOLINESS OF GOD Psalm 99:1–9

The language of kingship is key to understanding God and His holiness, and this psalm invites us to understand God from that framework, albeit a kingship that understands Him as set apart from and as ruler over all creation.

God is set apart in His greatness. (1–3)

Our God is so awesome in His holiness that proper recognition of His kingship — of His reign — should lead all peoples to tremble before His powerful and holy presence.

Human kings have their human attendants, but our Lord is “enthroned between the cherubim” whose exact nature and description are not provided, but whose angelic status as guardians of God's presence reminds us that our King is not of this earth and reigns even over all spiritual and earthly beings.

All the earth should quake in the presence of such an awe-inspiring God because He is holy.

God is set apart in His justice. (4–5)

We Americans are used to a form of government in which the executive, legislative and judicial branches are kept separate. But in ancient Israel under the monarchy, kings were expected to establish and defend justice and to promote righteousness in the society. (See 1 Kings 10:9 and 2 Chron. 9:8, as well as 2 Sam. 8:15 and 15:4–6; 1 Kings 3:28 and 7:7; and 1 Chron. 18:14.)

Psalm 99 makes it clear that God, Israel's King (and that of all creation), is set apart in His justice as He loves, establishes and administers justice, fairness and righteousness in Israel, and eventually in all creation.

He is set apart from all the imperfect models of justice we see all around us.

We are called to exalt and bow before Him in light of this. As those who worship a God who loves and administers true justice, fairness and righteousness, we should also always find ourselves to be growing in our love for and commitment to these things.

God is set apart in His actions toward us. (6–9)

In this last refrain, God is praised for speaking and revealing Himself to priests like Moses, Aaron and Samuel.

These were called to lead Israel, and when they called on the Lord “he answered them” and “spoke to them in a pillar of cloud.”

Samuel did not experience the pillar of cloud, but he had his own experiences of calling to the Lord and having Him answer

(see 1 Sam. 7:9). God spoke to them, and they obeyed.

These were not perfect leaders, and God's commitment to justice was reflected in that He was both “a forgiving God to them” and “an avenger of their sinful actions.”

Our King's holiness and justice are reflected both in mercy and discipline.

He is not a silent God. Rather, He reveals Himself to us and is neither unforgiving nor complacent in dealing with our sins.

God is above and beyond all creation and greater than we can imagine, and we are called to exalt Him in all that we say and do, and to bow down before our holy God.

In the psalmist's day that worship was to be given on “his holy mountain” in the temple in Jerusalem. Now we join with all God's people “who in every place” (1 Cor. 1:2) call on His holy name across the globe, knowing there is no god like our Holy God.

***“The Lord reigns;
let the peoples
tremble! He sits
enthroned upon
the cherubim; let
the earth quake!”***

Psalm 99:1

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs Frontz

The Alabama Baptist

Christian singer shares journey of finding self-worth in God

To many, a good image on social media is extremely important. Worth is judged by what one does, by how one looks and by the number of likes one receives.

In her recently released EP “Running on Low,” singer-songwriter Estella Kirk seeks to counter this pervasive attitude by being vulnerable and sharing where worth really originates.

Kirk’s songwriting takes inspiration from her experiences — what she goes through as a Christian as well as the struggles she shares in common with other teens.

“I want to be that relatable person they can go to and listen to music and feel like they can relate to someone who is their age and just know that they can be confident in who they are and that their value comes from God, not the world,” said Kirk, who is 17.

Need to surrender

“Someone I’m Not,” one of her new singles, directly talks about how social media can make someone feel that they can’t measure up. It is a very personal song, written at a time when Kirk was struggling a lot with that issue.

“I’m tired of trying and tired of



ESTELLA KIRK

Photo courtesy of Estella Kirk

fighting to please someone, to be someone I’m not,” Kirk sang before concluding with an emphasis of the need to surrender to Him and His love.

“He’s where we can put our worth,” she said.

Before turning 10 years old, Kirk had already worked as a model and actress. During this time, she also experimented with other activities like dance and soccer to find out what she liked best.

“I was trying to juggle all of the hobbies, I guess you would

say, at a young age, and I just really fell in love with singing. I told my mom that I wanted to do just singing and nothing else,” Kirk said.

It turned out she was serious about the idea. She started singing pop music but changed course.

“When I was about 13, I felt that God was telling me to go a different direction and to sing His songs instead of doing it for myself,” she

said. “That’s when I feel like I really connected with why I’m supposed to be here and my purpose and my self-worth.

“It was through music that I found my love and passion.”

Soon after that time, Kirk recorded her first EP, “Bright Side,” which was released in the early part of 2020.

Her debut single, “Shelter in the Storm,” was especially relevant due to its release coinciding with the early days of the fears and stresses of the pandemic. It received a lot of attention and praise from the Christian music industry and listeners.

Critical praise

“At just 14 years old, Kirk has delivered a product that can stand up next to any of her contemporaries on the Billboard charts,” writes J-P Mauro for Aleteia.org.

It would be easy to think that Kirk’s early success would have

been encouraging enough to keep going in the music industry.

Instead, the pressure of comparing through social media drove her inward.

Connecting with peers

She didn’t stop singing, but she stopped sharing her music.

“[I was] feeling low self-esteem and not really knowing where my worth came from,” she explained.

“[It was] just feelings that a lot of teens feel with social media and comparing.”

Difficulty connecting with peers due to online school combined with coming down from the excitement of recording music led Kirk into a period of depression.

One track from the latest EP, “Running on Low,” shares how Kirk felt during that time of self-reflection.

“I was walking down this road alone with no direction, no place to call my home. I was lost, afraid, broken, ashamed, until I heard His name. He’s the reason that my heart is full again,” she sings in “Running on Low.”

In the days when merchandise is an integral part of any musician’s wheelhouse, Kirk has a unique story behind the design of some of hers.

She was gifted a necklace with a charm shaped like a key that includes her initials.

“The story behind that is Isaiah 22:22, which talks about how, if it’s His will, He’ll open the door — and if it’s not, He’ll close the door,” Kirk said.

Kirk is excited about the doors God already has opened for her and is looking forward to what’s next.

“There’s so many things that I would love to do, to be honest. But really it’s just wherever God wants to take me,” she said.

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.

To find out more about Kirk’s music, go to estellakirkmusic.com. She is most active on Instagram and can be found @estellakirkmusic.

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MAN CAVE MINISTRY

By Trennis Henderson

The Baptist Paper

NC men's ministry nurtures growth through hope, help and healing

Steve Ward loves to nurture growth. A professional landscaper by trade, he also leads Man Cave Ministry in Asheville, North Carolina.

Man Cave, established in 2013, will mark its 10th anniversary of ministry later this year. Dedicated to coming alongside men who are coping with “hurts, habits or hang-ups,” the hands-on men’s ministry offers hope, help and healing through weekly fellowship, Bible study and personal relationships.

Man Cave’s rustic, inviting setting is framed with large garage doors. Every wall is filled with crosses, flags and antique tools mixed with mounted fish, deer heads and other wildlife trophies. A bustling kitchen and outdoor grills help complete the downhome feel.

Describing Man Cave as “a place where we build relationships — no judgment,” Ward said, “We let Christ’s love do the work on them.”

Informal gathering

The informal ministry, which started with a handful of men, gradually has grown to an average of 80 or more men who gather every Tuesday evening for a meal, prayer time, Bible study and group discussion. The personal testimonies and prayer requests are especially meaningful as men share deeply and openly about their life struggles, needs and goals as well as prayer concerns for family, neighbors and coworkers.

The men’s candid comments are closely guarded by fellow participants, reflecting the hand-painted sign casually propped on a window sill: “What happens in the Man Cave — stays in the Man Cave.”

“One of our themes here is whether you’re going through something good or going through something bad, you don’t have to do it alone,” Ward noted.



Photo by Trennis Henderson/The Baptist Paper

More than 80 men typically gather for Man Cave Ministry’s weekly Tuesday evening meal and Bible study in Asheville, North Carolina.

Nearly a decade ago, “the Lord opened up my eyes to a niche of a need of men that’s out there that I honestly, truly did not know existed,” he reflected. “The heart of Man Cave really is just reaching those guys that are either church hurt, mad at God or just going through struggles.”

Man Cave’s primary ministry strategy involves providing a setting “where guys can actually come in and be real,” Ward explained. “They don’t have to pretend. They don’t have to put on.” (To read one man’s personal story, see page 11.)

Steps Class

In addition to the Tuesday night meal and Bible study, Man Cave has expanded to include a Celebrate Recovery-type Steps Class for those dealing with addictions. Throughout each month, the ministry also in-

volves a women’s Bible study group, a youth night and a fellowship lunch for military veterans.

Affirming the life transformation experienced by participants at the Man Cave, Ward said, “Our numbers have slowly grown, but now it’s like it’s almost exploding. Probably 40% or so of our guys are church guys and the rest of them are not. We have new faces that come in week after week.”

Chris Ramsey, who leads the Steps Class, also volunteers as a cook each Tuesday afternoon.

“Everybody that comes here says they can feel God on this property,” Ramsey noted. “What makes this place so unique is you can have people that have been in a ditch all day digging, sitting next to someone that is an executive in a business. ... It’s unreal how everybody meshes together.

“Another thing is people feel safe here,” he shared. “It’s a safe spot for you to admit that you’ve got struggles or troubles.”

Reflecting on his own life challenges and the positive impact Man Cave has made, Ramsey said, “I am so thankful that in the Bible, God didn’t use perfect people. I love to say God can take my mess and turn it into a message. He can use anybody when we ask Him for help.”

Living in brotherhood

Bob Apple, who facilitates group discussion following each week’s Bible study video, affirmed that “what we have here is men living life in a brotherhood. They can share very openly, very frankly.”

As one of Man Cave’s leaders for the past six or seven years, Apple greets man after man by name while sharing a big hug and a contagious smile. “I get energized by being here,” he said. “I know that I’m supposed to be here. It’s part of my purpose.

“I love it when a man comes in here carrying burdens and then he leaves his burdens here. He can do that by claiming who he is in Christ,” Apple declared. “When guys are communicating, they learn that they’re not alone. They’ve got other men that are dealing with the same kinds of issues.”

Towns and cities across the nation have “thousands of men living in isolation, hopelessness and desperation,” he pointed out. “There are answers in God’s Word and living in community with other men that can help them.

“Every town in America needs Man Caves,” Apple insisted. Citing the vital need for Christ-honoring brotherhood and community, he added, “God intended for us to live that way.”

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ONGOING IMPACT

By **Trennis Henderson**
The Baptist Paper

Man Cave Ministry ‘absolutely changed’ his life

When it comes to Man Cave Ministry’s impact on his life, Caleb Noland doesn’t mince words.

“I hate to say it, but I would probably not be sitting here today if it wasn’t for the Man Cave,” he reflected. “The way my life was going, I was probably going to die. The Man Cave brought me to Christ — and Christ saved my life.”

As powerful as Noland’s candid testimony is, it’s not that unusual at Man Cave. He is among dozens of men who have experienced spiritual, emotional and personal transformation through the Asheville, North Carolina, men’s ministry.

“I’m a local boy. I was born and raised in this area,” the 32-year-old farmers market worker shared. While he “grew up pretty good,” Noland said he “ended up struggling with alcohol.”

“It started out as a fun thing, kind of something to do on the weekends, and turned into all-consuming over time,” he acknowledged.

Hopeless feeling

While he was “always able to keep a job” and support his wife and three kids, “it was progressing to the point where I was getting ready to lose all those things,” he said. “I was miserable. I was living completely in sin and I was pretty hopeless.”

“I had gotten to the point where I was just broken,” he said. Then an acquaintance told him about Man Cave which ministers to men dealing with “hurts, habits or hang-ups.”

“I think the hardest part is

mustering up the courage to do it,” he admitted. “The first two times that I came to the Man Cave, I didn’t make it past the parking lot. I wimped out and then took off.”

Third attempt

On his third attempt, Noland finally made it inside. “I came and heard a testimony that really changed my life,” he said.

He stuck around and ended up visiting with that evening’s speaker as well as Man Cave founder Steve Ward.

“I kind of told them where I was at and told them that I was struggling, and they just started loving on me,” Noland said. “Man Cave was accepting of me, even at my lowest point.”

Ward, who founded Man Cave

Ministry in 2013, describes it as “a place of rescue.” Working with Noland and others in recent years, Ward said, “For me, the win for this is seeing the difference in the lives of these men, watching the transformation.”

“There was no judgment when I came in the Man Cave,” Noland agreed. After a couple of months of “being able to be comfortable with them, I was able to open up and then ultimately accept Christ as my Savior. That was really the big turning point for me.”

Recounting his spiritual conversion, Noland said he was transformed from “sin and darkness and sadness” to “new life.”

“I just got so excited. I started

digging into my Bible and I started sharing that with my family,” Noland said.

Noting that his wife already was a Christian, he said, “Our home turned into a place for Christ and it’s changed my life.”

Before discovering Man Cave, “I was a hair’s breadth of losing my wife and kids,” he confessed. “I was so busy running away from my problems and trying to medicate myself that I wasn’t there as a father.”

‘We’re strong’

All of that began to change after he came to faith in Christ. “My relationship with my wife has absolutely changed,” he emphasized. “We’re strong.”

But he also is candid about the real-life challenges, explaining that “we actually still go to some marriage counseling because you don’t fix 12 years of damage overnight.”

As for his kids, “all they wanted was their dad, and they’ve got him now,” he said. “They’re the most important thing on earth to me and I was so close to losing them.”

“Now I get the kids up every morning, and we do a little Bible study,” he shared. “Whenever my 4-year-old runs up to me with her little kids’ Bible and says, ‘I want to hear a Jesus story,’ I’m the leader of that now and that’s so amazing.”

‘Jesus lives in our house’

Voicing gratitude for Man Cave’s ongoing impact on his life and family, Noland concluded, “Because of the Man Cave and having the brotherhood that I have, it’s absolutely changed my life. ... Jesus lives in our house.”

TO SEE A VIDEO ABOUT HOW MAN CAVE MINISTRY NURTURES GROWTH AND CHANGES LIVES, VISIT TBPONLINE.ORG/MAN-CAVE.



Photo by Pam Henderson/The Baptist Paper
Caleb Noland struggled with alcohol for more than a decade before he connected with Man Cave Ministry and professed his faith in Christ a few months later. He said his home has “turned into a place for Christ and it’s changed my life.”

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