

SPECIAL EDITION

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

Resources and stories to help soon-to-be college students, as well as their parents and grandparents

Back to Campus

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The Alabama Baptist

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

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The crossword puzzle
can be found on page 25.



GUEST EDITORIAL

for this week's issue of **The Alabama Baptist**

By **Carrie Brown McWhorter, Content Editor**

The evolution of a revolution: Navigating today's technology

What did you think when you saw the cover of this week's edition?

Does the photo remind you of your own daughter, granddaughter, niece or neighbor, headed confidently into the first day of a new school year? Do you see a young woman you hope your daughter becomes? Or do you see the image of what you fear will never come to pass?

In this annual Back to Campus spotlight, we strive to provide helpful information for students and their parents, grandparents and ministry leaders as they embark on another school year.

But we all know that whether the student in the photo is a model or a student in your youth group, a smile and a backpack don't tell the whole story.

Behind their bravado, many teenagers are struggling. A 2021 report by the CDC said more than 4 in 10 (42%) students felt persistently sad or hopeless and nearly one-third (29%) experienced poor mental health. There are numerous other studies and organizations reporting similar statistics.

Today's greater awareness of mental health means individuals are more likely to acknowledge their struggles and seek help. And no doubt we can point to a

lot of factors that might contribute to a growth in anxiety and depression among teens.

But health care providers, teachers and others are increasingly pointing the finger at one source of concern — phones.

Changing the world

The first smartphone, the IBM Simon, hit the market in 1994. The device came with a calendar, address book, calculator and email.

In 2000, the first camera phone was introduced in Japan; in 2001, smartphones got connected to the internet.

And in 2007, Steve Jobs introduced the iPhone. It could take photos, play music and videos, and easily access not only the internet but also millions of apps to do just about anything the human mind could imagine.

It was, as Jobs put it, "revolutionary."

But revolutions always come with a cost. Revolutions bring rapid and fundamental changes, often without considering the long-term ramifications of those changes.

The internet, smartphones and apps are not evil. They are tools that help us communicate, connect and be more productive (see

"7 ways students can harness the professional benefits of social media" on page 18).

But the evolution of the smartphone and the emergence of all those apps created what my internet repair technician recently called "the most addictive drug humans ever invented."

Among the most addicted — children and teens.

That's according to U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy, who released a public statement in May about the "profound risk" of smartphone use, specifically time spent on social media, to young people, many of whom are spending a minimum of 3.5 hours each day on social media apps.

Murthy says our children "have become unknowing participants in a decades-long experiment" — one not governed by institutional review boards but instead by a drive for profit.

Real solutions?

There aren't any great ideas on the horizon for managing the various mental, physical and emotional crises created by excessive use of social media.

Murthy's advisory calls for "urgent action by policymakers, technology companies, researchers, families and young people alike to gain a better understand-

ing of the full impact of social media use, maximize the benefits and minimize the harms of social media platforms, and create safer, healthier online environments to protect children."

What can we as parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, teachers, ministry leaders and friends do?

Perhaps the most important thing is to realize that we interact with our children in one hemisphere of their world.

In the other hemisphere — that online space of YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok — there is a cacophony of voices, urging them to hurt themselves, to change who they are and to reject the teachings of their parents, the church and every other authority who would urge them to love the young man or woman God created them to be.

They need us to engage with love and truth as they navigate our postmodern culture.

And there's no time like the start of a new school year to learn more about the apps students are using, talk about the pros and cons, and set reasonable, healthy boundaries for time spent online.

Need a place to start? See "5 ways pastors can help families navigate social media" on page 14 for advice on how ministry leaders might help families better navigate the online world.

Your Voice



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

'Experience the Difference' of Christian higher education

By **Lonnie Burnett**
President, University of Mobile

A recent Gallup poll found that the public's perception of higher education continues to drop. Only about one third of Americans say that they have a "great deal" or "quite a lot of confidence" in post-secondary education. Likewise, a Wall Street Journal survey documented that less than half of respondents thought college was worth the cost.

Elite companies, facing a profound labor shortage, are enticing high school students to skip further education and enter the workforce immediately.

Politicians and financial gurus are warning families against taking out

student loans to pursue degrees that may or may not provide a sound return on investment.

A university president can respond to this data and these trends in one of two ways.

The first is to develop a hand-wringing, woe-is-us attitude.

The second is to prove the nay-sayers wrong by showing the unique worth of a Christ-centered institution.

At the University of Mobile, we are pursuing the latter option.

We are rolling out a marketing campaign which invites students to "Experience the Difference."

I believe what we uniquely do is

not only valuable, but today is more crucial than ever. It is valuable because of our difference.

At the University of Mobile, our difference can be summarized by the three Ps.

The first difference is our product. We offer the very best in high-quality academics. With over 75 programs ranging from associate to doctoral degrees, we provide a solid educational foundation for a successful career.

A second difference is our people. In addition to teaching, our faculty and staff see themselves as mentors. A school of our size can provide a needed personal support

system for students who are facing increasing societal pressures.

Finally, and most importantly, is our purpose. We never stray from our motto, which is "Higher Education for a Higher Purpose." Everything we do is tied to our mission as a Christian institution. We want our graduates to know not just their field, but their God and their calling.

Worthwhile investment

That is the difference which makes the University of Mobile a valuable experience and a worthwhile investment for students and families.

We invite you to visit YOUR Alabama Baptist university and experience the difference for yourself.



BURNETT

Trusting 'the Lord to lead me where He wanted'

The master's level work of becoming a registered dietitian was my first experience in trusting the Lord to lead me where He wanted.

Throughout the 18-month internship/master's program at Samford University, I faced many challenges and discouragements. I fell away from the church and dwelt in self-pity instead of trusting the Lord's sovereignty. My godly grandparents and parents made sure to guide me and push me to connect with a local church.

Near the end of my internship,

I drove by a church on Raleigh Avenue in the Homewood area of Birmingham.

Finding a local church

The next Sunday I attended and Pastor Michael Ent's sermon on trusting God's guidance was exactly what I needed to hear.

I have been in that church almost every Sunday since.

Attending a local church is important for young believers. I have continued to face many "fork in the road" moments this past year as I progress in my career, but attend-

ing and becoming involved with the church has allowed me to focus on the Lord's purpose for my life.

The Bible is full of references to food from Adam and Eve sinning (Gen. 2-3) to the Lord's Supper (Matt. 26). I have a passion to be a witness for God's glory and my credential as a registered dietitian is the tool that He has given me to pursue that calling.

Because I have found a local church that is also dedicated to sharing the gospel, I am supported by other godly members.

I encourage all college students

and new graduates to find a local church.

Churches are the hands and feet of God. They are not merely resources that offer free meals. (Enjoy churches that do feed you, however; there is nothing wrong with a free meal.)

Use your skills and talents to honor God. God can use anyone with or without a specific skill.

Find a church that can strengthen and build you up in your walk with the Lord.

James Price, RDN
Birmingham

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“To see [students] surrender to God’s call on their lives is powerful!”

LARRY HYCHE

SBOM state missionary and Super Summer Alabama camp pastor

Advice for incoming college freshmen

By Beck A. Taylor

President, Samford University

Samford University has a long tradition of inviting incoming freshman students and their families to campus for orientation sessions during the summer before our new students enroll. This time provides opportunities to familiarize students and families with the many details that will enable a smooth transition to college.

At each orientation session, I take a few moments to welcome and encourage our newest Bulldogs. Understandably, anxieties about this important milestone are high as students prepare to leave the nest and embark on the next stage of their educational journeys.

I typically share these six pieces of well-tested advice:

1. Trust in God. The same faithful God that led them to college will meet them in their new home. God is doing something special in their lives, and if they seek Him,

God will make His plans known. Students should grow in their Christian faith as they gain more independence.

2. Be grateful. None of us is where we are in life without the investments of others and gifts from the Lord.

I encourage our new students to maintain a posture of gratitude in all things, and to not take for granted the amazing opportunities they have.

3. Keep the end in mind. Most of our students are pursuing a four-year degree. That’s a long time, and many things will happen during their years in college. I remind them that it’s up to all of us to ensure everyone in the room crosses the finish line and earns their degrees.

Although there will be setbacks during these years, the goal of completing a rigorous education is in sight for all of the students.

4. Invest in relationships. At no other time in their lives will students be around so many different people with varied stories and backgrounds. Relationships with

faculty, staff members and students will form the backbone of their experience, and they will make friends for life.

5. Seek challenges. Students should take full advantage of the learning opportunities available to them. Getting outside their comfort zones and stretch-

ing themselves intellectually and socially is critical to maximizing their college experience.

6. Go to class. Students who fall behind academically often report that their troubles began by skipping classes. Being proximate to professors and peers who want the best for them is the surest way to stay on top of things. Going to class is the easiest part of college.



TAYLOR



Chitchat

What people are sharing on social media

The more we remind our students to love God and their neighbor ... the less they fear and therefore become better problem-solvers.

Shirley Hoogstra

President of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities
@allthattosaypodcast
Instagram

Never fall into the belief that you were not made for the position you’re in. Your faith shouldn’t rest

in your strengths but in God’s grace. ... He has a plan, He has a purpose, and He is always making a way (Isa. 43:19).

@kent_ingle

President, Southeastern University
Instagram

Alignment. Integrity. Staying mission-centric. These are “best practices” for all organizations. But colleges and universities that carry a faith-based identity are doubly accountable to ensure that the distinc-

tive education they promise is ably delivered.

Paul Kaak

Coach, consultant at TheoMetrics
LinkedIn

#ChristianHigherEd is a catalyst that prepares the next generation of leaders to be influential, passionate and caring in their professions and towards their neighbors.

Council for Christian Colleges and Universities

Facebook

Some Baptist associations have a goal to connect at least one church with every elementary, middle and high school in the area. This provides ongoing ministry to students, teachers and administrators for the coming year.

Parents are launching new high school graduates into careers, further training or college or university experiences. The next stage of life for their children and letting go of them at the same time brings challenges churches should help parents address.

In some cases, this next stage means there are empty nest households that now need a new dimension of ministry. They now must figure out what the rest of their lives look like.

How will your association respond to these great open doors of ministry God has placed before the churches?

George Bullard

ForthTelling Innovation ministry

Of all the decisions you’ll face this year as a college student, the most important one may be whether you get up and go to church on the very first Sunday when no one is there to make sure that you go.

What you do in those first weeks on your own, especially what you do with your commitment to a local church, will set you on a trajectory where Jesus Christ will truly be Lord of your life or where He will be something that you learned as a young person and then left behind.

Pastor Kevin DeYoung

Author of “Do Not Be True to Yourself: Countercultural Advice for the Rest of Your Life”

Our ultimate call is to make disciples (Matt. 28:19). Your theology will heavily influence your doxology. A love for Jesus, His Word and living it out has sticking power.

Shane Pruitt

National next gen director
North American Mission Board

3 stories you should know



Photo courtesy of the University of Mobile

Over 275 high school students and 100 leaders from across Alabama gathered July 10–14 at the University of Mobile for Super Summer Alabama 2023, a weeklong leadership and discipleship camp of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. The annual camp is designed for students who have a desire to learn, study and grow in their faith, said Denis Tanner, associate pastor of students and spiritual formation at Shades Crest Baptist Church in Hoover. (UM)

Christian radio pioneer Epperson dies at 86

Stuart Epperson, evangelical Christian and pioneer of Christian radio, died July 17. He was 86.

Epperson co-founded Salem Communications (now Salem Media Group) in 1986 with his brother-in-law, Edward Atsinger. They built a network of religious and politically conservative radio stations across the U.S.

In 2005, Time Magazine named Epperson one of the 25 most influential evangelicals in the U.S.

Among other media and internet endeavors, Salem Media Group owns 117 radio stations in 38 markets and syndicates content to some 2,400 affiliates. (TAB)



EPPERSON

NYC's only evangelical college in financial peril

The last remaining evangelical Christian college in New York City, The King's College, announced July 17 in an email that the school, which has faced dire financial challenges, would not offer classes in the fall.

In an earlier meeting with faculty and staff it was announced many teaching contracts would not renew or were canceled.

"This decision comes after months of diligently exploring numerous avenues to enable the college to continue its mission," read the email, which was addressed to "members of the King's community" and signed by the board of trustees.

"In connection with this decision," it continued, "it is with regret we share that our faculty and staff positions will be reduced or eliminated." (Religion News Service)

Persecuted church

City officials raze church in Belarus, two years after evicting congregation

MINSK, Belarus — A Pentecostal church repeatedly targeted by the Minsk regime has now been demolished on order of the city government.

Forum 18 News Service reported that a construction management company owned by Minsk City Executive Committee destroyed the building of New Life Pentecostal Church on June 20.

Minsk officials would not say why the church was destroyed.

In 2021, city officials evicted the congregation from the church building. Later, members were prohibited from holding worship services in New Life's parking lot, and two pastors were fined for conducting outdoor meetings.

Subsequently, the congregation has not been allowed to rent a venue for worship services, reported Forum 18. The church has either had

to conduct services online or use God's Grace Church, a Protestant church in Minsk.

In 2002, the New Life congregation purchased a cowshed, renovated it and sought to have it reclassified as a place of worship. However, several times the city government denied the building's redesignation as a church.

37 students slain, 6 kidnapped from Christian school in Uganda

MPONDWE, Uganda — At least 37 students in Uganda were slain June 16 in their dormitories at a private Christian high school.



Forum 18 photo

Attackers armed with guns, machetes and axes stormed Lhubiriha Secondary School in Mpondwe, according to sources cited by Morning Star News. Several students died when their dormitory was purposely set afire. Several nonstudents also perished, and six students were kidnapped.

Three people have been arrested, according to reports. Uganda's president, Yoweri Museveni, said Allied Democratic Forces was responsible for the massacre. ADF is an Islamic State affiliate group operating in a neighboring country.

Approximately 12% of Uganda's population is Muslim. Uganda's constitution and laws allow for freedom of religion, including converting from one faith to another. However, Christian churches increasingly have received threats of violence, and some Christian converts have been attacked, killed or excommunicated by Muslim family members, the World Atlas reports.

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

▶ **Jack Collins** — who served as director of missions for West Cullman Baptist Association for 29 years — died July 14. He was 92.

A native of Arkadelphia, Arkansas, Collins earned a bachelor's degree from Howard College (now Samford University) in Birmingham and later studied at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.



COLLINS

He served as pastor of Northside Baptist Church in Cullman and Westside Baptist Church in Demopolis before accepting the DOM position in October 1985. He served there until he retired in 2014.

As DOM, Collins facilitated 29 associational missions trips throughout the Southeast and Northeast. Under his leadership seven churches were planted in West Cullman Association.

He is survived by his wife, Charlotte; two children; two stepchildren; and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

CLEBURNE ASSOCIATION

▶ **New Harmony Baptist Church, Heflin**, will host a special Operation Christmas Child Shoebox presentation for all area churches, July 29 at 2 p.m. Edouard Ndecky, who grew up in West Africa, will share the difference a shoebox he received at 14 made in his life. Learn tips on making your church collection a success. Discover how the children who receive a shoebox are disciplined. Everyone is invited. Light refreshments will be served. Chad Morgan is pastor.

COLBERT-LAUDERDALE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Tuscumbia First Baptist** will celebrate its bicentennial July 30. Worship begins at 10 a.m. Special guest preacher will be evangelist Michael Mason, who also will be the evangelist for revival services July 29–Aug. 1 at 6:30 each evening. Barrett Long is pastor.



KINCAID

▶ **Davy Kincaid** is the new pastor of **Calvary Baptist Church, Tuscumbia**. He began his ministry in 2011 serving Harris Chapel Baptist Church, Cherokee, as the youth and family minister. In 2013 he became the youth/children/college pastor for York Terrace Baptist Church and for the last six years he has served as the minister to youth and

children for Good Hope Baptist Church, Eclectic. Kincaid holds a bachelor's degree in physical education from the University of North Alabama and a master's degree in Christian ministry from Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia. He will graduate from Liberty University in December with a doctorate in ministry. He and his wife, Mallory, have two children.

▶ **Timmy Ray** is the new associational missions strategist for **Colbert-Lauderdale Baptist Association**. He previously served as worship pastor of Woodward Avenue Baptist Church, Muscle Shoals, for more than 10 years. A native of the Shoals area, Ray holds a bachelor of science in commercial music from the University of North Alabama and a master of arts in theological studies from Beeson Divinity School at Samford University. He and his wife, Maggie Bea, have four children.



RAY

DALE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Holmes Baptist Church** on Highway 51 in Barbour County, located two and a half miles north of Ariton, will host The Byrd Family from Newville in concert for Fifth Sunday Sing on July 30 at 10:30 a.m. Dinner will follow in the fellowship hall. Ron Jeffers is minister of music. Wayne Williams is pastor.

MADISON ASSOCIATION

▶ **Mount Zion Baptist Church, Huntsville**, where Kevin Moore is pastor, recently welcomed two new staff members:



COLLINS

▶ **Joey Collins** is the new contemporary worship minister. He previously served Fredericktown First Baptist, Missouri. A Mississippi native, Collins is a graduate of William Carey University and currently working on a master of arts in worship at Mid-America Seminary in

Memphis, Tennessee. He and his wife, Anna, have one child.

▶ **Braxton Blankenship** is the new junior high student minister. He previously served as the west campus student minister for Redemption Church, Saraland. Blankenship and his wife, Grace, are both recent graduates of the University of Mobile.



BLANKENSHIP

MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION

▶ **Pinedale Baptist Church, Montgomery**, will celebrate its 75th anniversary Aug. 6. Wor-

ship begins at 10:30 a.m. with former pastor Bill Tucker, now a hospice chaplain, as guest preacher. A potluck meal will follow the service. Everyone is welcome. Dale Huff is interim pastor.

MADISON ASSOCIATION

▶ **Robert Mullins** will become the new executive director of missions for **Madison Baptist Association** effective Sept. 1. Former executive director Charlie Howell returned to the pastorate earlier this year and is now pastor of Grace Baptist Church, Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Mullins has served as pastor of Crossroads Community Church (formerly Mount Hebron Baptist Church) in Elmore County for more than 10 years. He also leads PassionTree Network and was president of the 2022 Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference. Mullins and his wife, Pam, have two adult children.



MULLINS

SHELBY ASSOCIATION

▶ **Southcrest Baptist Church, Bessemer**, will host Eagle's Wings southern gospel group Aug. 4 at 7 p.m. with supper at 6. Scott Bush is pastor.

TUSKEGEE LEE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Nic Stockdale** is the new pastor of **Elam Baptist Church, Tallassee**. He previously served as associate pastor and small groups minister for First Baptist Church Reeltown, Notasulga. Stockdale holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from Faulkner University and is pursuing a master's degree through New Orleans Seminary. He also is employed at Auburn University in the plant breeding unit. He and his wife, Audrey, have three children.

▶ **Union Grove Baptist Church, Opelika**, will host its annual homecoming, Aug. 6. Bob Sellers, former lead singer of the Kingsman Quartet, will sing at 10 a.m. Robert Rhodes, former pastor, will bring the message. A covered dish meal will be served in the fellowship hall after the service. Marvin Minton is interim pastor.

WEST CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

▶ **Frank Calloway** is the new interim music director for **FBC Selma**. Jerry Henry is interim pastor.

WINSTON ASSOCIATION

▶ **Bethel #1 Baptist Church, Arley**, kicks off Awesome August Sundays with its 150th anniversary celebration Aug. 6 at 11 a.m. Special music will be provided by the choir, and Mike Goforth, pastor of Sardis Baptist Church, Boaz, will be the guest speaker, followed by a potluck luncheon. The Sunday services in August will begin at 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. with special music and guest speakers for each service. Mike Tidwell is pastor.

10

reasons

why churches must reach college students

BY CHUCK LAWLESS • CHUCKLAWLESS.COM

I first wrote about this topic in 2016, but my burden for college students has grown exponentially since then. I'm convinced we can change the world for Christ if we reach this group; in fact, I want the next season of my ministry career to include investing even more in college students. Here's why:

1. There are a lot of them. More than 19 million students are in colleges and universities in the United States. That's a "people group" unto themselves — a missions field often within a short distance of our churches.

2. They are in a critical stage of life. They are inquisitive. They're being exposed to theories and worldviews other than Christian ones.

If we can reach them now while they're open, the rest of their life will be transformed.

3. God has often begun awakenings with college students. In the Second Great Awakening, God moved at places like Hampden-Sydney College and Williams College (where the "Haystack Meeting" occurred). The 1970

revival that began at Asbury College in Kentucky spread to multiple campuses in the U.S. — and we recently saw glimpses again of that movement.

4. They are the nations among us. More than a million international students

attend colleges and universities in the U.S. Many are open to talking about religious matters, and some will have their first exposure to the gospel on their university campus. The fields are ripe.

5. When they follow the Lord, they do so with great passion. My faith is challenged when I hang out with students willing to give their lives to take the gospel to the nations. When they truly know the Lord, they dig into His Word and fight for holiness. We need them in our churches.

6. They want to do social ministry as a means toward evangelism. The world has obvious needs, and college students are ready to help meet those needs. They want to get their hands dirty in ministry even while they are telling others about Jesus.

7. They need — and genuinely want — mentors. Give them just a few minutes, and they'll flock to you. They need relationships that are cross-generational to help them navigate life. The local church wins when older Christian mentors and young mentees connect.

8. They rightly challenge us to explain our faith. They're not interested in superficial, routine Christianity. Rather, they want authenticity, depth and relevance. They're unafraid to ask questions, and we should be ready to answer.

9. They need face-to-face relationships with believers. In fact, they who have been raised on electronic communication need face-to-face relationships in general. To have genuine friendships with older believers and strong Christian families is ideal.

10. They are the leaders of today and tomorrow. We have an opportunity to influence their lives today for the sake of the gospel tomorrow. Don't miss it!

Take some time today to learn about college and university students near your church. Reach out to them. If you're not within driving distance of a campus, spend intentional time in prayer for those leaders who are.

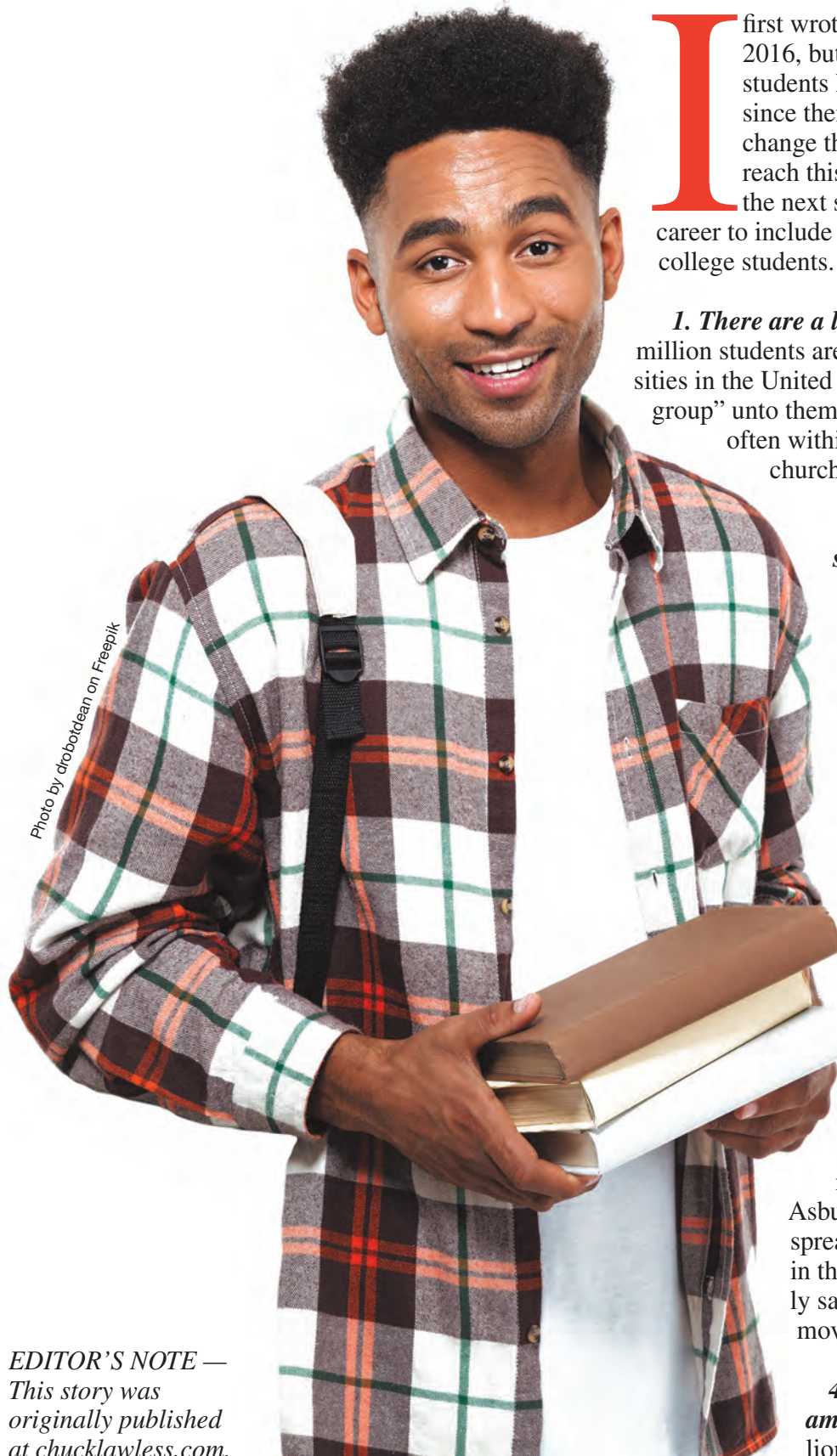


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EDITOR'S NOTE —
This story was originally published at chucklawless.com.



Photo by lookstudio on Freepik

Engagement

BY MARK MACDONALD • THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

5 tips for retaining high school, college students at your church

Engaging students at your church is critical to retaining them throughout their school years and into young adult life.

But there is a difference between communication and engagement.

A church has several demographic groups called “students”: elementary, middle school, high school and college. Each student group has its own communication challenges.

Though many of these tips can work with each group, parents tend to make most of the decisions for elementary and middle school students, so let’s focus on the older students since they make more decisions independent of their parents.

Here are 5 tips for engaging students at your church:

1. Have listening sessions with students. Consider the student groups you want to engage with and organize small listening sessions with 8–10 students of similar age.

Start by asking general questions about their needs, concerns and

goals. You’ll be surprised at what’s top of mind for them. This helps student ministry leaders create content that will get a student’s attention.

Be pain experts for them. Any parent will confirm that talking to a student is different than interacting with a student. So strive to listen as much as you talk. With that engagement, introduce biblical solutions. In your sessions, end with a discussion of where they get information.

End with asking what content they’d like from the church, what communication channels they regularly use from the church and if they’d like something different. Listen to learn and understand.

2. Establish your main communication channel. Empowered by the listening groups, concentrate on one or two channels you know students are using. Then provide the content they want and need.

Once they’re working well, let the students (and parents) know what channel they can depend on for solutions, answers, and/or events.

Remember, most churches can’t do all channels well — so focus on one or two. Regularly remind them to rely on the channel for information.

3. Create a student area on your website. Likely, social media will be the channel that most students are on regularly (constantly!) — but also focus on your student area of your church website. This will be found easier by those outside of the church; and also allows you to link to details on social posts.

Organize the area and keep it up-to-date. It needs to look simple — but, through links and tertiary pages, it can go deep for those who want more information.

4. Recruit student volunteers to help communicate. In the listening groups, be on the lookout for students with many social media followers and also have an eagerness to participate in student ministry.

They’re perfect for being an influencer to reach their church and school friends.

Together, establish content rules and structure. Encourage them as you meet regularly to hold them accountable to the church’s goals.

5. Be consistent. Say it, then say it again. Student engagement doesn’t happen overnight. Keep conducting listening groups and improving.

Teach them consistency too. Engaging students at your church will ensure the next generation remains in the church for the long haul.

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

God sees you

BY CARRIE BROWN McWHORTER • THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

New book seeks to encourage moms amid busyness of daily responsibilities

Car rider line. Those three little words inspire a range of memories and emotions, not the least of which is the constant hustle mothers face.

Author Caris Snider knows that busyness. Her new devotional book, “Car Line Mom Devotional: 100 Days of Encouragement for the Mama who Gets Everybody Everywhere,” draws from her own experiences in the car rider line and seeks to encourage other moms on the same journey.

“As a mom, I get it,” Snider told *The Alabama Baptist*. “The overwhelm we experience, the comparison we feel trapped in at times and the thoughts of failing God and our family can be paralyzing.”

Role of motherhood

“Our heavenly Father doesn’t view us the way we view ourselves, thankfully. He called us to this important role of motherhood, and I wanted to share with mamas everywhere God’s truth to combat the untruths working to steal our joy.”

Each chapter tackles a common parenting challenge, with relatable titles like “Hectic Mornings, Chaotic Afternoons,” “Crumbs in the Crevices” and “So Hard Letting Go.” Snider includes a verse of Scripture, a relevant story from her own experiences, an action step and a prayer to help put each situation in perspective.



CARIS SNIDER

Photos courtesy of Caris Snider

It’s a different direction than her previous books for children and adults, which have focused on coping with anxiety. But the inspiration is the same, Snider said.

“For the books I have written in the past, God always led me back to the struggles and how He was there in the midst of them helping me overcome. The strategies, Scripture and people He brought into my life put me on a path of writing to share with others so they wouldn’t believe the lie that I did, thinking I was alone and the only one struggling.”

“‘Car Line Mom Devotional’ came from the same desire to encourage and offer hope,” she said.

Parents play an important role in the lives of children and in the culture at large, Snider said, because “the enemy is attacking our children like never before with confusion, anxiety and doubt of purpose.”

moments of the mundane and bring His peace in the chaos of every afternoon stop, Snider said.

“The goal is to let mamas know they are not alone. God sees them under the piles of laundry, the hidden tears behind locked bathroom doors.”

“He did not call us to this role and abandon us. He will equip us with exactly what we need on every twist and turn and straightaway of this motherhood journey.”

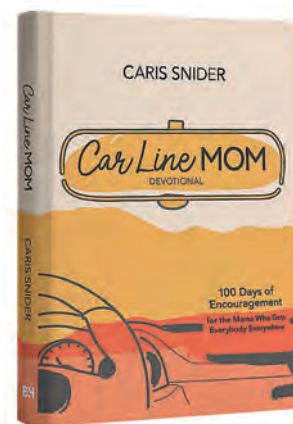
The emphasis on Scripture is important, Snider

said. Many moms have shared with her that they feel they are failing in their efforts to spend time alone with God and His Word. She hopes the book will encourage

readers that “God wants our moments.”

“When we surrender our moments to Him, He will show up in a powerful and tender way,” she said. “Change happens in His presence. The

hope is that this will spill into every family as they allow God’s grace to guide them day by day, stop by stop.”





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Volunteer Hannah Tindall organizes baby clothes at Hope Family Services' new building near the campus of Jacksonville State University.

Photo courtesy of Lauren Robinson

Saving lives

BY GRACE THORNTON • THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

Pregnancy center moves near JSU campus, aims to help students

Lauren Robinson said these days, “we live in a world where the closest abortion clinic is at the end of your driveway.” Even if a woman lives in an abortion ban state like Alabama, the abortion pill can come right to her mailbox.

So Robinson is praying that the new location of Hope Family Services — a Sav-A-Life pregnancy resource center in Jacksonville — will use proximity in a way that saves lives and families.

Its new office, owned by West Side Baptist Church, is right next to the Jacksonville State University campus.

Walking distance

“We’re really hoping that because of where it is, basically any JSU student can walk there reasonably,” said Robinson, who served as HFS’ interim director until moving into a marketing role recently.

The vision started earlier this year when West Side Baptist purchased a

building that had formerly housed a grocery store. Pastor David Haynes said they decided to name it the Hope Building, having no idea Hope Family Services would later move into it.

Around that same time, the city’s First Baptist Church had sold its north campus and combined into one congregation for the time being at their EaglePoint campus, which had also housed Hope Family Services since 2012. And Haynes said everyone began to see how God was moving everything into place.

“We had paid for the building upfront, and we unanimously voted to lease that new building to them for \$1 a year for 49 years,” Haynes said.

“It’s been one miracle after another. It’s been the Lord’s doing; we couldn’t have worked it out like this.”

Volunteers from West Side have worked hard to get the building

ready to go before the school year, Robinson said. “The church has done so much, and we’re very thankful for that.”

The space still needs interior walls, but they’ve already moved in and started using it for parenting classes and as a space for moms and dads to come and “shop” for baby items. They’re hoping to get the remodel finished before the school year starts.

“There’s definitely a need on college campuses,” Robinson said.

“You’ve got to meet that college student right where they are in those moments where they’re making critical decisions.”

Hope Family Services offers pregnancy testing and ultrasounds as well as counseling for both mothers and fathers. They also offer post-abortion care small groups, infant loss classes and parenting classes.

Their clinic is for everyone in the area — being close to the college

campus is just an added dimension they’re thankful for.

“It makes pregnancy testing and ultrasounds more available for students, but if they enroll in our classes, it’s going to make it so much easier for them to get there for those too,” she said.

“It will be a big deal for people on campus. We’re hoping to save lives; that’s our goal.”

In need of volunteers

Robinson said they’re in “desperate need of men and women volunteers of all ages and all walks of life and talents” who can help with everything from counseling to cleaning the facilities to serving in a medical capacity. They could also always use donations of baby items, water and snacks for their clients.

She said their center also has positions open right now for anyone interested — a new director as well as a male mentor and a coordinator for their parenting classes.

For more information, email Savalifetoday@gmail.com or visit supporthopefamily-services.com.

‘Wake up’

BY SHANE PRUITT • NORTH AMERICAN MISSION BOARD

Tips for addressing the 4 major gaps in student ministry

There used to be one major gap in student ministry where teens would typically cease being part of a church. It was the gap between student ministry and collegiate ministry.

According to Lifeway Research, 66% of American young adults who attended a Protestant church regularly for at least a year as a teenager say they dropped out for at least a year between the ages of 18 and 22.

This gap remains a serious concern, but I believe there are actually four major gaps now. Fewer and fewer students are making it all the way through student ministry (sixth grade through senior year) before they even have a chance to drop out after graduation.

What are those gaps?

▶ The gap between middle school and high school.

▶ The gap around getting their driver’s license.

▶ The gap between junior and senior year.

▶ The gap between youth ministry and college ministry.

If the Church is going to be an effective student ministry moving forward, we must wake up to addressing and closing these four gaps.

How do we do this? Here is a list of things that I be-

lieve will help in closing these gaps.

▶ A love for the Lord and His Word. Don’t dumb it down; disciple them up.

▶ Be a part of the church as a whole. It’s one church that is multigenerational. Find ways to constantly be together instead of always separate.

▶ Build relationships. The more relationships a student has, the less likely they are to fall through the gaps. Help cultivate relationships with their peers and at the

same time with those in the next phase.

▶ Get them serving and living on mission. Students should be serving and living on mission with the church as a whole, not only in the student ministry. Empower them to be involved in the whole life of the church.

EDITOR’S NOTE — This article was originally published by Baptist Press and has been edited for space. Read the full article at tabonline.org/4-gaps.



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Transition

BY RYAN SCANTLING • ARKANSAS BAPTIST NEWS

5 ways parents can help high school seniors

Countless students will graduate from public high schools across the country this year. Even more students will finish their coursework through homeschooling, private schools and co-ops.

The transition that awaits a student as they cross the graduation stage is one of the most important transitions in their lives.

In many ways, these students are graduating from more than just high school.

They are graduating from a life and a schedule that has been somewhat routine, predictable and charted for them into an unknown.

Below are five ways parents can help guide their high school senior into his or her next season of life.

1. Ask them how they are feeling.

I often find that students oscillate between excited and nervous about their transition from high school into whatever is next. This is natural. Talk to your student about their fears and hesitations, as well as their excitements and ambitions.

2. Talk to them about your transition from high school.

Having done ministry on

college campuses for over a decade, I have noticed one factor that significantly contributes to healthy relationships between students and their parents — honest conversations.

Those parents who have had conversations with their students about their own young adult years often have the privilege of guiding their students through their young adult decisions.

I have found that students who have never heard of the temptations, struggles and stupid decisions of their parents are often hesitant to come to their parent when they are tempted,

struggling or have made a stupid decision.

A parent's ability to guide their student through the crucial young adult years begins long before those young adult years begin.

As a parent of faith, share your testimony with your student early and often.

Your example, whether good or bad, can only guide them if they are familiar with it.

excited he was to be an engineer.

I was the first to tell him that our university did not have an engineering program; he transferred the next semester.

Help your student identify a roadmap to get where they want to go. Do they need to enroll in college, go straight to the workforce or consider serving in the

military? There are great options out there for graduating high school seniors.

"A parent's ability to guide their student through the crucial young adult years begins long before those young adult years begin."

3. Expose them to adult mentors.

Several research projects have shown that exposing students to adult Christian mentors outside their home is one of the most significant factors contributing to a student staying connected to their faith in their young-adult years.

Help your student get connected to adult mentors who can be examples of faithfulness to them.

4. Help them make informed plans.

Your student has dreams and aspirations. Help them make God-honoring plans to achieve their goals.

I can remember meeting a student during his first week of classes.

He shared with me how

5. Encourage them to make spiritual decisions.

As your student transitions from high school, help them make spiritual decisions as well as practical decisions.

Put your student in positions where they need to consider their own faith.

As your student is considering a college, ask them how they can get connected to a church and campus ministry in that college town.

Help your student consider how their faith could develop as they embark on this new journey.

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

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5 ways pastors can help families navigate social media

By Chris Martin
Lifeway Research

In May, Dr. Vivek Murthy, the Surgeon General of the United States, issued a 25-page advisory titled, “Social Media and Youth Mental Health,” detailing the dangers of social media use among children and teens and what parents, government agencies, tech companies and others can do about it.

If you’re a pastor, you’ve likely heard about or seen parents in your church struggle with how to lead their children to use social media wisely or abstain from it entirely. I do not envy those parenting pre-teens and teenage children today who have to endure endless requests for social media access from their desperate, peer-pressured children. It is not an easy position for parents, to be sure, even if the data and wisdom are clear. How can

you as a pastor help parents with the matter of social media and their children?

This is a broad topic, and a plethora of perspectives can fall within the scope of wisdom. But here are a few pieces of advice for pastors who want to help parents.

1. Encourage research and thoughtfulness.

If you’re a pastor, you would be wise to read widely about social media and its effects on the hearts, souls and minds of people.

Your own church leadership experiences may have made you all too aware of how social media can be divisive or lead people astray. But it can still be helpful to read articles and books about social media and its effects in order to see how common your experiences are.

Likewise, you should encourage parents to read and learn about social media and its effects on their children. Take the time to read the advisory produced by the surgeon general’s office. Read books about social media and psychology or social media and faith. Read articles about the same. Parents need to be willing to do some homework about this issue if they want to help their kids.

2. Take children’s requests seriously.

While serving in student ministry, I’ve spoken with scores of parents about when their children should be allowed to have a phone or access to social media. My answer is always the same, and it really isn’t a cop-out no matter how much it sounds like it.

There is no “right” answer. My general advice is that the longer parents can keep their kids off social media, the better.

However, pastors and parents need to realize that kids who beg to be on social media have a case.

And they should take it seriously because a lack of access to social media has resulted in bullying and other negative social effects. These should not be taken lightly.

Pastors should advise parents to have good, fruitful conversations about their children’s requests.

3. Establish realistic and enforceable restrictions.

Pastors and parents alike probably recognize the importance of this. If you want to take social media seriously, you need to be willing to restrict access to it. This is true for anyone who uses social media, not just children.

Pastors, if the parents in your church have already let their children onto social media, you can’t un-ring that bell. So the next best thing is to limit social media use as effectively as possible.

Realistic restrictions may vary but no one really needs to be on social media for more than an hour per day. Most new phones, tablets and computers have features that allow for restrictions. Use them.

4. Create and maintain an environment of openness.

Unfortunately, this is probably one of the most overlooked or taken-for-granted aspects of our families’ relationship with social media.

In parenting, we simply don’t talk about our social media activity enough.

Pastors, parents likely feel a bit intimidated when they think about talking with their children about what they’re doing on social media.

Some parents may be afraid to know what their kids are getting into — and with good reason.

If parents have decided to let their children on social media, that privilege must come with openness and honesty about social media use.

Parents cannot rely on surveillance software alone to monitor their children’s online activity. Such software is far too easy to get around.

Parents and children alike would be best served by an atmosphere of openness and honesty about social media use.

No one is served when parents shame kids for getting into content they shouldn’t.

Give grace. Show humility. Love children even when they sin online.

5. Exemplify wise use.

This one is pretty simple. Pastors need to advise parents that they cannot lead children where they themselves will not go.

Parents are going to have a hard time keeping their kids off their phones at the dinner table if mom and dad are scrolling their preferred social media platforms in between bites.

It’s going to be hard for parents to put limits on their son’s YouTube usage if their son has trouble getting his parents’ attention away from

their phones anytime he has a question while working on his math homework.

This doesn’t mean parents need to be perfect social media users to lead their kids well in this space, but they can’t be hypocritical either.

A child is going to have a hard time listening to parenting about wise social media use if the parents can’t do it themselves.

EDITOR’S NOTE — This story was originally published by Lifeway Research.

We would love to hear about your family or youth group’s experiences regarding social media and the conversations needed. Email us at news@thealabamabaptist.org.

“In parenting, we simply don’t talk about our social media activity enough.”

—CHRIS MARTIN



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TRACY RIGGS FRONTZ • THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

Samford music program director uses industry experience to help students flourish

The music industry is a growing career field offering a range of opportunities, and Samford University in Birmingham is one of several Alabama colleges preparing students for employment in this creative but challenging job market.

Steven Potaczek, a musician and producer with more than 20 years of experience in the industry, directs the commercial music program at Samford. He connects well with students because he shares their passion.

“For me, it started more as a love affair with songwriting and performing,”

Potaczek said. “That started me on a path toward being in the music industry, first as a creator and an artist but secondarily as a producer and someone who works on behalf of other artists.”

Classical training

A pianist at heart, he started classical training at 8 years old and started composing at 12. He earned a music degree, formed a band, wrote and produced songs and toured.

He has worked with some big names in the industry — The Band Perry, Josh Garrels, Lincoln Brewster, Switchfoot, TobyMac and MercyMe — and for a lot of lesser-known artists too.



Photo courtesy of Sarah Cook

Steven Potaczek (left), director of the commercial music program at Samford, helps a student in the school's recording studio.

Each one has been part of developing his skills and reputation.

Along the way, he shared his experience with students,

which led him to Samford, where he now teaches and mentors students.

“There have never been more job opportunities in the music industry than there are today as a result of all the technology that's flooding the marketplace and changing the game every three to five years.

“Music producer is obviously a familiar one, as well as artist or songwriter, but there's all sorts of areas of business partnerships in the music industry that people don't often think of,” he said.

Production and engineering, copyright law, marketing and management are just a few of the options.

Samford's program covers all aspects of the commercial music industry, from singing or playing an instrument to songwriting, and from performance and

production to touring. Students can also further their work in the industry through graduate programs. That's what Samford student Hannah Miller hopes to do.

Writing at LinkedIn, Miller, a trumpet student and commercial music major, said she hopes to earn a dual juris doctorate and master of business administration and eventually work as a music attorney. She sees great opportunities to make her love of music a career in the \$26 billion-a-year industry.

“Music is why I get up every morning,” Miller writes. “Playing trumpet and listening to other artists help me cope with depression, anxiety and everyday stress. ... I plan to be part of that process.”

Potaczek's experience in the music industry inspired him to begin the annual “How to Make it in the Music Industry” workshop, held each January at Samford. The event brings producers, musicians and other industry professionals to campus during

the university's annual Step Sing competition to provide evaluations and workshops.

More than anything related to music, Potaczek wants his students to know he cares about who they are, not just how well they'll do in the job market. His goal is to have “the Father's heart” toward students and the next generation of creatives.



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Learn more about the commercial music program at Samford at samford.edu/arts/music/bachelor-of-arts-commercial-music.

Powerful tool

BY CARRIE BROWN McWHORTER • THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

7 ways students can harness the professional benefits of social media

Though cautions abound when it comes to social media use by teenagers, platforms like Instagram and YouTube, when used strategically, can be powerful tools for high school students to showcase their skills, talents and experiences.

According to a Pew Research survey conducted in early 2022, 71% of teens say social media makes them feel like they have a place “where they can show their creative side.”

It’s that characteristic of social media that provides opportunities for students to get a head start on

creating a professional online image as they approach high school and college.

Here are a few positive ways students can use social media to help prepare for the future:

1. Personal branding: High school students can use social media platforms to create and showcase their personal brand. They can highlight their achievements, skills, interests and experiences through carefully curated profiles. This can help them stand out to college admissions officers, potential employers or scholarship committees.

2. Networking: Social media provides an opportunity to connect with professionals, experts and peers in their fields of interest. Students can follow and engage with individuals and organizations relevant to their career aspirations. Building a professional network can lead to mentorship opportunities, internships and future collaborations.

3. Research and learning: Social media platforms can serve as valuable sources of information and learning opportunities. Students can follow industry leaders, educational institutions and organizations to

stay updated on trends, news and developments in their areas of interest. Participating in relevant online communities and groups can provide access to resources and discussions. Students also can follow educational channels, join webinars or live sessions, and participate in online courses or workshops to develop new skills and enhance their knowledge.

4. Showcasing projects and portfolios: High school students can use social media to share their projects, artwork, writing or other creative works. Platforms like Instagram,



9 CRITICAL QUESTIONS

Every Faithful Parent Should Ask

Helping your student find the right college often begins with parents asking the right questions.

Boyce College has curated a series of short videos designed to arm faithful families with the 9 critical questions they should be prepared to ask while on college visits.

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LinkedIn or personal websites can serve as digital portfolios that highlight their skills and accomplishments.

5. Online learning communities: High school students can join online learning communities or participate in educational discussions on social media. By participating, students engage with others who have similar interests, exchange knowledge with their peers and engage in collaborative learning, a frequent method used in college classrooms.



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6. College and career research: Social media platforms can be used to research colleges, universities and potential career paths or employers. Students can follow college and university pages, career-related accounts and alumni networks to network with other prospective and current stu-

dents, as well as alumni, thus gaining insight into the institutions and industries that interest them.

7. Developing digital literacy and online etiquette: Engaging responsibly and respectfully on social media is important. Americans go online for all kinds of reasons — product research, health questions and entertainment, just to name a few.

Developing an understanding of how to discern information provided by various sources is part of being a responsible digital citizen, as is being mindful of one's own use of appropriate language and tone when communicating online.

By using social media effectively, students can leverage its potential as a tool for learning, networking and personal growth, enhancing their future personal and professional prospects.

College student's advice to high schoolers about social media

As you graduate high school, apply to graduate school or enter the job market, the content you post can affect your future in a positive or negative way. Here are some tips to help students responsibly use social media:

▶ **Think about your image.**

How you portray yourself on social media affects more than your likes and followers. Potential employers and universities will look to this content to determine if you are someone who fits what they are looking for.

▶ **Protect yourself.** Always avoid giving out your personal and sensitive information online.

▶ **Be trustworthy.** In many situations, whether with a job or during college, you will be trusted with sensitive information that is not your own. Your employers or professors will expect you to keep certain information confidential.

▶ **Be respectful.** We live in

a world where everyone wants to be heard, which is not a bad thing. However, you should always be respectful of someone else's opinions or beliefs. It is okay to comment on something — which is why they made the comment section — but you must know where to draw the line.

▶ **Be responsible.** There have been many instances of misinformation and miscommunication due to lack of responsibility. What you put on the internet can and does affect the thoughts and beliefs of others.

Our parents always told us to be careful about what content we put online. As much as we may not like to admit that our parents were right, they were. You can still post your favorite content and selfies, but it never hurts to be cautious for the future. (Sydney Snow, writing in 2021 for the University of Mobile blog)

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Samford, University of Mobile players head to MLB

Four players from Alabama Baptist colleges are headed to the major leagues following this year's draft.

Samford University's Jacob Cravey was selected by the Baltimore Orioles in the sixth round of the 2023 Major League Baseball Draft which began July 10.

Cravey was taken with the 181st pick, marking the highest selection for a Bulldog pitcher in program history.

The junior right-hander led the Bulldogs' pitching staff in 2023 with a 9-2 record and 3.10 ERA that earned him Southern Conference Pitcher of the Year honors. The Andalusia native finished his Bulldog career ranking third in program history with 225 career strikeouts and sixth among qualified pitchers in Bulldog Baseball history with a 3.47 career ERA.

"I'm so happy and proud for Jacob and his entire family," Samford head coach Tony David said.



CRAVEY

"He has worked like crazy since day one here and developed into a dominant Friday-night guy."

University of Mobile standout Tucker Musgrove was chosen by the San Diego Padres in the seventh round.

'Coach's dream'

The junior from Semmes was the 221st pick in the overall draft. During the selection, the Padres announced Musgrove will both pitch and hit for the organization.

During the 2023 season, he recorded a .397 hitting line and .485 on-base percentage. He led the Rams with 25 steals, while notching eight home runs, five triples and 32 walks.

Musgrove threw 18 innings from the mound, leading Mobile with 10 saves on the season and averaging just under 12 strikeouts per nine innings.

Mobile Head Baseball Coach Jon Seymour said Musgrove "loves the game, wants to grow in the game, and is a kid that just likes to be coached. He's relentless and competitive, but doesn't play with an ego. On top of all that, he is great in the classroom and a strong and



Photo courtesy of the University of Mobile
University of Mobile standout Tucker Musgrove was chosen by the San Diego Padres in the seventh round.

devoted Christian. He is a coach's dream."

Two other Samford players also are headed to the big leagues.

Pitcher Carson Hobbs was selected in the 11th round by the Los Angeles Dodgers.

The Alabaster native

posted a 1-1 record with two saves and a 1.59 earned run average over an injury-shortened 2023 season. He tallied 18 strikeouts in 11.1 innings and held opposing hitters to a .135 batting average.

Hobbs was chosen 340th overall.

"I'm elated for Carson to still have this opportunity after his injury this season, which speaks volumes about

his talent," David said. "He came into this year as one of the top closers in the country before he went down (with a season-ending injury) early on," David said. "There truly is no ceiling for him and Cravey.

Both guys have a real shot to make it all the way."

Samford closer Ben Petschke signed a free agent deal with the Houston Astros.

Petschke led the Southern Conference in 2023 and ranked third nationally with 14 saves, a mark that also ranked for the second-most in a single season by a Bulldog pitcher. He compiled a 6-3 record with a 4.14 earned run average while fanning 62 batters over 54.1 innings for a rate of 10.3 strikeouts per nine innings.

The Wexford, Pennsylvania, native saved his best work for May, where he logged seven saves and surrendered just three earned runs in 14.1 innings for a 1.88 ERA.

"Ben was thrust into the closer role this spring ... and obviously did an incredible job for us," David said.

"'Petschke Time' in the last inning was all about building suspense before finishing it off. We appreciate all he did for our program in this championship season."

(Compiled from releases by Samford University and the University of Mobile)



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'Be faithful'

BY KATHY DEAN • UNIVERSITY OF MOBILE

'You can achieve your dreams,' says UM alumnus, songwriter

Blake Walker knows dreams can come true — especially when you follow the advice of your college mentor.

"Dr. Roger Breland used to tell us that, 'God didn't call us to be famous, He called us to be faithful,'" Walker recalled. "Dr. Breland said, 'If you remain faithful in the small, God will be faithful in the large.'"

The University of Mobile 2015 alumnus points to that advice — and his experience as a student in the Alabama School of the Arts at the University of Mobile — as a factor in his latest success.

Walker co-wrote a southern gospel song that is being considered for nomination as the Inspirational Song of the Year in the 54th Annual GMA Dove Awards.

Dove Award consideration

"What the Soldiers Didn't See," recorded by The Kramers, reached No. 3 on the Restoration Gospel Radio chart and made the Singing News Top 20 and Power 50 charts in recent weeks. The GMA Dove Award ceremony honoring outstanding achievements and excellence in Christian and Gospel Music will be held Oct. 17.

"I remember turning on the radio in my truck one day and hearing it on the radio and thinking to myself, 'Wow, I can't believe it!' Whether it makes the full nomination or even wins, I know in my heart that it's a win because God is using it to encourage people and draw people closer to Him," Walker said.

A songwriter's journey

As a student at the University of Mobile, Walker traveled and performed with the elite ensemble Voices of Mobile.

Among his mentors was Breland, executive director of the univer-

sity's Roger Breland Center for Performing Arts and founder of TRUTH, one of the first contemporary Christian recording groups.

After graduating with a bachelor's degree in worship leadership with an emphasis in church ministries, Walker served two years as worship leader for a Southern Baptist church in Houston, Texas.

In 2018, he moved to Washington, D.C., to sing in a group that performed at the Museum of the Bible, while also helping with a church plant.

After his contract with the museum ended, Walker returned to



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Photo courtesy of the University of Mobile

University of Mobile 2015 alumnus Blake Walker co-wrote the southern gospel song “What the Soldiers Didn’t See,” which is being considered for nomination as the Inspirational Song of the Year in the 54th Annual GMA Dove Awards.

Mobile and recorded a worship choir-driven EP called “Generation to Generation.” A month after its release, he signed a publishing and songwriting deal with Lifeway Worship. Then Walker was invited to a writing retreat.

“I went not knowing any of the writers, except knowing their

names and songs. All of the writers are drawn at random, and they picked me, Belinda Smith and Tim Lovelace. We sat down, and Tim had this idea that we talked through and prayed through, and we just watched God orchestrate this beautiful song,” Walker said.

Now Walker writes for Sunset

“I can’t say enough how thankful I am for UM. My UM experience was vital to my spiritual and personal growth. I was challenged, encouraged and loved.”

Blake Walker
Songwriter and UM alumnus

Gallery Music. He said being on the ballot for consideration for a Dove Award “is something I never thought would happen in my lifetime — just something that people like me dream about. It’s been a crazy journey watching this song go from the first time we ever sang it to hearing the Kramers record it and sing it all over the country.”

As for the future, Walker is working with a variety of songwriters, many of whom already have Dove Awards to their credit.

“I’m super excited to see more of my songs get out there,” he said.

“I have two songs coming out on The Erwins’ new record after Christmas, one of which I released as a single last year called ‘None But Jesus.’”

Walker said he hopes his story will be an encouragement to University of Mobile students — both current and future.

“I wouldn’t be the singer, writer or the person I am today if it weren’t for my time at UM. I hope my story can be an encouragement to students there today — you can achieve your dreams.”

University of Mobile’s role

In a blog published on the university’s website in 2020, Walker reflected on the role the University of Mobile played in preparing him to follow God’s calling for his life.

“I can’t say enough how thankful I am for UM,” he wrote. “My UM experience was vital to my spiritual and personal growth. I was challenged, encouraged and loved.”

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UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

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Sixteen state missionaries serve as campus ministers at colleges and universities across our state:

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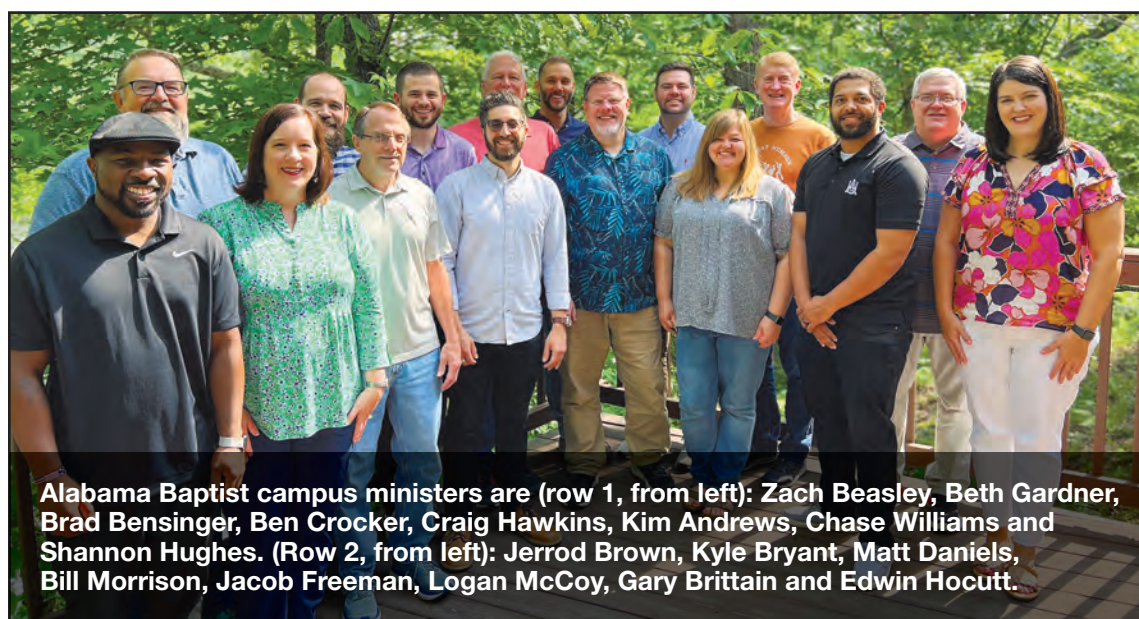
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SBOM photo

Alabama Baptist campus ministers are (row 1, from left): Zach Beasley, Beth Gardner, Brad Bensinger, Ben Crocker, Craig Hawkins, Kim Andrews, Chase Williams and Shannon Hughes. (Row 2, from left): Jerrod Brown, Kyle Bryant, Matt Daniels, Bill Morrison, Jacob Freeman, Logan McCoy, Gary Brittain and Edwin Hocutt.



For more information and to learn about campus ministry on community college campuses, visit bcmlink.org/bcm or scan this QR code.

Baptist Campus Ministries is funded and made possible by gifts from Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program and the local Baptist association of churches.

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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Mount 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

South Hamilton Baptist Church in Hamilton, Alabama, is prayerfully accepting resumés, for a God-led bivocational pastor. South Hamilton Baptist Church has a traditional Sunday morning Sunday School and worship time as well as a Bible study on Wednesday evenings. To submit a resumé please email: southhamilton@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

New Providence Baptist Church, 53080 Rabun Road, Bay Minette, Alabama, 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.

OTHER POSITIONS

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Dr. Romeo Penn is a licensed clinical pastoral counselor/therapist. Dr. Penn serves those in need of pre-marriage, marriage and relationship counseling, as well as those struggling with grief depression, anxiety, fear and anger. Visit his website at pennpointcounseling.com to learn more. Dr. Penn also recently published his first workbook, "R.P.T. Therapy: Rejoice. Prayer. Thanksgiving." It is available for purchase through Amazon.

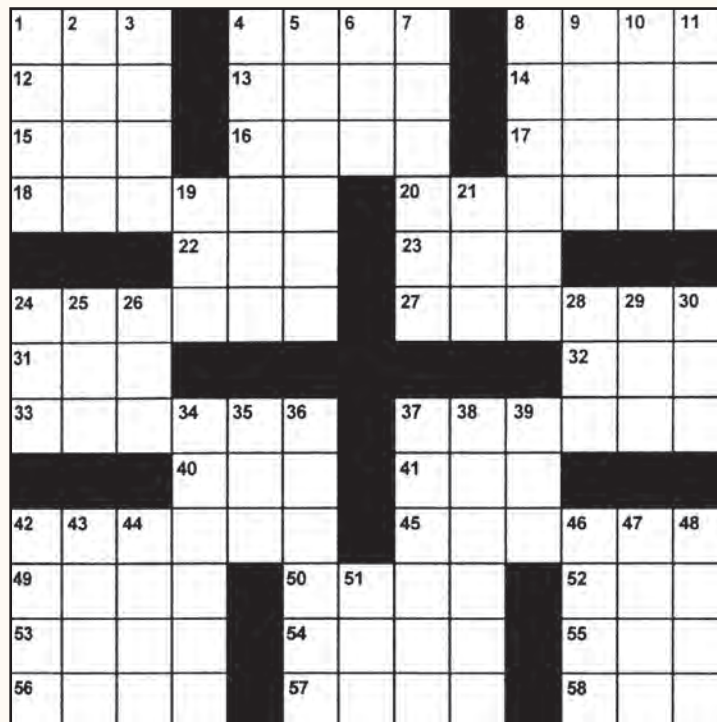
CHRISTIAN Crossword



UPCOMING EVENTS
sponsored by the State Board of Missions

ACROSS

1. Rather give ____ (s). (Luke 11:41)
4. Crustacean.
8. Like a ____ planted by the rivers. (Ps. 1:3)
12. Roman numeral 52.
13. Samuel answered, ____ am I. (1 Sam. 3:4)
14. Saul came after the _____. (1 Sam. 11:5)
15. Who will have all ____ to be saved. (1 Tim. 2:4)
16. Grain.
17. How ____ (ble) are thy tabernacles. (Ps. 84:1)
18. He shall give his ____ charge over thee. (Ps. 91:11)
20. Meekness, ____ance. (Gal. 5:23)
22. New. (prefix)
23. Mouths.
24. A cave.
27. The flesh of the child waxed _____. (2 Kings 4:34; comparative)
31. ____ not two sparrows sold. (Matt. 10:29)
32. Eggs. (Latin)
33. But seek not _____. (Amos 5:5)
37. The vision of ____ the son of Amoz. (Isa. 1:1)
40. Before. (poetic)
41. And ____ brought forth her firstborn son. (Luke 2:7)
42. Of ____ many books there is no end. (Eccles. 12:12)
45. Sons of ____; Joseph and Benjamin. (Gen. 35:24)
49. Belonging to Hezekiah's mother. (2 Kings 18:1, 2)
50. Kemuel the father of _____. (Gen. 22:21)
52. Short for Abraham.
53. Is not. (slang)



By Janet Adkins Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

54. To be prolific.
55. The 23rd letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
56. Loiters behind.
57. Good woman's name.
58. The sons of ____ were sons of Belial. (1 Sam. 2:12)
21. Historical period.
24. The fourth part of a ____ of dove's dung. (2 Kings 6:25)
25. Form of to be.
26. Former serviceman.
28. Me. (French)
29. Madame Peron.
30. Stadium cheer.
34. Robberies. (slang)
35. Sea eagle.
36. Ambassador.
37. Hear, O _____. (Deut. 6:4)
38. Bezer, and Hod, and _____. (1 Chron. 7:37)
39. Atomic Energy Commission. (abbr.)
42. Out to the south side to ____eh. (Josh. 15:3)
43. Solomon thrust out ____ thar. (1 Kings 2:27)
44. ____ of kings. (Rev. 17:14)
46. They that ____ the righteous. (Ps. 34:21)
47. I command you this day in mount _____. (Deut. 27:4)
48. Jacob's third son by Leah. (Gen. 29:34)
51. Peleg ... begat _____. (Gen. 11:18)

DOWN

1. ____ Mater.
2. Property right.
3. Chinese dynasty.
4. He was moved with ____ against him. (Dan. 8:7)
5. Let us ____ together. (Isa. 1:18)
6. Nathan said to David, thou ____ the man. (2 Sam. 12:7)
7. Though I ____ all my goods to feed the poor. (1 Cor. 13:3)
8. Absalom had a fair sister whose name was _____. (2 Sam. 13:1; alt. spelling)
9. Star of your god ____han. (Acts 7:43)
10. Great Lake.
11. Southward were Kabzeel, and _____. (Josh. 15:21; alt. spelling)
19. Compass direction.

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

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What a student does during his or her first three weeks of college matters. It sets the pattern for the student's whole college career in the relationships they establish and the patterns they develop.

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Ben Edfeldt, director of the office of collegiate and student ministries at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said collegiate

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ministers would "love to help your college student get connected with a local Christian community."

Get started by connecting with us at bcmlink.org/connect.

Called Conference

For a teenager or young adult, the call to ministry can seem like a complex decision.

The Called conference, which will be held Aug. 5 at Samford University, is a one-day event designed to help young men and women, high school through college, who are considering the life-changing call to ministry.

The speaker will be Jamie

Dew, president of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Ryan John Band will be the worship leader.

There will be breakout sessions led by ministry leaders from fields including age-graded ministry, missions, church planting, discipleship and more.

The cost is \$30. Lunch will be provided.

To register, visit alabamamen.org/called.

Fortify event to help teen guys strengthen faith

The world can be tough on teen guys. Fortify, set for Aug. 26 at Westwood Baptist Church in Alabaster, strengthens guys in 7th-12th grades with biblical teaching.

The goal is to reveal their Christ-centered identity in

response to the confusing messages of today's culture.

The speaker will be Jason Cook, senior pastor of Fellowship Bible Church near Atlanta. The cost is \$20.

For more information, visit alabamamen.org/fortify.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For July 30

Explore the Bible

By Jay T. Robertson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, University of Mobile



WORTHY Jeremiah 35:5–19

Jeremiah's encounter with the Rechabites was a symbolic act performed by the prophet. It revealed the remarkable loyalty of a nomadic family to keep a command given by one of its ancestors 250 years earlier.

Jeremiah used the encounter to contrast their faithfulness to the commands of a dead ancestor with the faithlessness of the people of Judah to the commands of God.

Tested (5–11)

While Jehoiakim was king of Judah, the Lord instructed Jeremiah to go to the Rechabites and invite them to one of the side rooms of the temple and give them wine to drink.

The Rechabites were descendants of the Kenites. One of their most famous sons was Jonadab (also called Jehonadab), who joined Jehu in the blood purge of the family of Ahab (2 Kings 10:15–27).

Jeremiah escorted them into the room of the sons of Hanan, set wine before them and told them to drink it.

They refused to drink the wine, however, because their ancestor Jonadab had forbidden them to use it. He had also commanded them to live nomadic lives in tents, never settling in one place long enough to build houses or plant seeds or vineyards.

Jonadab's motives are not known, but perhaps he saw the corruption and immorality in the cities and thought it was better for his family to live simple lives.

Whatever Jonadab's motives were, his descendants 250 years later were still faithfully obeying his commands.

They had only come to Jerusalem temporarily for protection from King Nebuchadnezzar's armies that had come to punish King Jehoiakim for his rebellion.

Jeremiah was not instructing the people of Judah to do all the things the Rechabites were doing, but he contrasted their faithfulness

to obey the commands of a mere man with Judah's faithlessness to obey God's commands.

Their faithfulness to their forefather was an indictment of the people of Judah.

Contrasted (12–17)

The descendants of the Israelites, who had made a covenant with God at Mount Sinai, refused to obey the terms of that covenant time and time again and had turned to their own wicked ways.

God's prophets had faithfully proclaimed God's warnings that the people must turn from their wicked ways and correct their actions and not worship other gods.

If they would obey Him, He promised that they would remain in the land He had given them. But their history proved that they had not paid attention to the Lord. The contrast between the Rechabites' obedience and Judah's disobedience was painfully apparent.

Because of their continued disobedience, the Lord announced that He was going to bring on them all the disaster He had already pronounced against them.

The Lord had given them numerous opportunities to repent, but they refused to obey.

Commended (18–19)

Jeremiah then spoke to the Rechabites and commended them for their obedience to their ancestor's command.

Because of their faithfulness, the Lord pronounced a blessing on them through Jeremiah. He promised they would "never fail to have a man to stand before Me always."

This expression is found more than 100 times in the Old Testament. It means that the Rechabites would not become extinct but would always have someone to serve the Lord.

The family did survive the destruction of Jerusalem, and one of its descendants is mentioned in Nehemiah 3:14. God honors people who faithfully serve Him.

Bible Studies for Life

Roy Ciampa, Ph.D.

Armstrong Chair of Religion, Samford University



SET APART BUT NOT ALONE 1 Corinthians 2:6–16

We are privileged to have received the wisdom that came to the apostles and prophets through the Holy Spirit. That same Spirit lives within us and seeks to guide us each day.

As God's children, we have something far greater than worldly wisdom. (6–9)

In Christ, God has shown us true wisdom. It is a wisdom that is at odds with any "wisdom of this age, or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing."

This is the wisdom of the cross, the wisdom revealed in a crucified Messiah who, while seeming to be powerless and humiliated in the eyes of the world, is known by us to demonstrate the power and glory of God.

The truth of Christ makes no sense to unbelievers and if "the rulers of this age"

had known it, "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." Notice the irony at the end of verse 8. Because they lacked knowledge of God's wisdom, they couldn't possibly imagine that the One being crucified could be the Lord of glory.

What they perceived in Christ

was not glory, but shame. But all those who are mature in Christ find themselves awestruck by the glory of God revealed in Christ on the cross. The completely unexpected nature of God's wisdom is stressed in Paul's quotation in verse 9, which seems to be based on Isaiah 64:4.

The Holy Spirit helps us understand the things of God. (10–13)

Our knowledge of God's world-confounding wisdom has been revealed to us by His Spirit, who knows all things. God has given

us His Spirit so that we can know what He has chosen to reveal to us in Christ,

"what has been freely given to us by God." Paul and his apostolic team were able to share the deeper wisdom of God's Spirit with Spirit-given words to all those who have God's Spirit living within them, that is, all those who have come to faith in Christ.

Of course, this does not mean we are incapable of misrepresenting God and His truth. We must be careful to make sure we are actually living in light of the true wisdom revealed in Christ by God's Spirit.

The Holy Spirit helps us see things from Christ's perspective. (14–16)

The wisdom of God as revealed to us in Christ is confounding to unbelievers since they lack God's Spirit and still cannot see the truth of God reflected in Christ and His death and seeming helplessness on the cross.

The same Spirit who helps us come to recognize Christ crucified (and resurrected) as the glory of God helps us understand the rest of God's wisdom, the wisdom of Christ's demonstration of power through weakness and self-sacrifice.

The person who is truly grasped by God's Spirit will always seem out of step with the world and will judge all things in light of the truth revealed in Christ.

Unbelievers may seek to judge those who live by God's wisdom, but they lack the capacity to do so since they don't know God's mind, which is revealed in and through Christ as He is mediated to us by the Spirit. In verse 16, Paul quotes Isaiah 40:13 to remind us that the Spirit who lives within us knows God's mind and helps us discern and live by the mind of Christ.

*"Eye has not seen,
nor ear heard, nor
have entered into
the heart of man the
things which God has
prepared for those
who love Him."*

1 Corinthians 2:9

MEDIA REVIEWS

By **Tristan Martin**

The (Oklahoma) Baptist Messenger

New book helps Christians respond in grace and truth to transgenderism

Does Christianity have anything important to say about the issues that are overwhelming Western culture? Isn't it more loving to just accept people how they are and support them in their decisions as long as they're not hurting anyone? If Jesus were here, wouldn't He just love people?

These are questions that aren't uncommon in our day. In fact, those who don't support Christian views are quick to tell how people should respond. Can Christianity actually speak gracefully, yet truthfully to significant issues? Thankfully the answer to that question is a resounding "yes."

An excellent example of this in practice is the new book, "To Be A Woman" by Katie McCoy. The title assumes that people would need to understand what it actually means to be a woman.

Gender confusion

In any other time, that might seem absurd. But as McCoy recalls, a Supreme Court nominee — just last year — was asked to define a woman. The nominee responded, "I'm not a biologist." Was the now Justice really confused about what a woman really was? Or did she recognize a now culturally divisive issue and did



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not want her answer scrutinized? The answer is clearly the latter.

The issue of transgenderism and its acceptance seem to have burst upon the scene within the last several years. Hollywood regularly uses transgender characters, and local and national media have quickly begun using "preferred pronouns" like "they/them," making some news stories practically incoherent.

Is this a moment when Christians are being "sticks in the mud" by not jumping on board? Or is there something deeper at play?

McCoy makes the case that what it means to be a woman goes beyond what can be answered through social acceptance, puberty blockers, hormone treatments or even gender transition surgeries.

According to McCoy, there are philosophical, biological and theological foundations that cannot be ignored and certainly cannot be

changed. The main point she proves in the book is "Female identity is socially guided, philosophically formed, relationally confirmed and theologically bestowed."

In short, female identity is not some contrived status that is "assigned at birth." Human biology is not a hindrance to be overcome but designed by God and good.

So why do so many believe the opposite? McCoy explains how many have imbibed the philosophy of Rousseau, "our feelings comprised the core of our true selves." Not only that,

but when a boy or girl or man or woman begins to question their gender, they receive almost instant affirmation from social media and the medical community.

Teenagers who are constantly seeking acceptance find community as they begin to make the transition. But there is more going on than just social acceptance.

A teenager begins acting and dressing like the new gender. The brain then adapts to the new behavior. Following the behavior comes hormone treatment. But as McCoy explains, the effects of these drugs are not benign.

Often when gender transition drugs are used for other purposes than what they were invented for, it results in long-term negative side-effects that are exacerbated through application during puberty. This creates a haunting effect. "The single most influential factor in outgrowing childhood gender dysphoria is experiencing puberty, but if you have childhood gender dysphoria, you're prescribed puberty blockers."

Often parents are told that questioning their teens' feelings of transition could lead to suicide.

McCoy presents evidence that those who make these transitions are actually more likely to attempt suicide. An analysis of the fine print does not show the rosy picture that dominates the media landscape.

Desperate need

So why read a book on a topic so controversial? Our culture is confused. As Christians, we have the truth. There are underpinning realities that can help to clear up some of the overwhelming confusion in our culture.

There is backlash to the transgender movement, highlighted especially in what is going on in women's sports. But backlashes don't respond in grace. We as believers respond to those we disagree with in grace and truth.

Our arrogance and self-righteousness vanish at the cross where we all stand as beggars.

McCoy's book helps to speak the truth in a culture that is desperate for it.



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.

LARGEST-CIRCULATED PAPER IN THE STATE

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MedAdvance

By Myriah Snyder

International Mission Board

Registration open for those with passion for health care, missions

For those with a passion for health care and a calling to missions, the International Mission Board has avenues of service ready to fill.

MedAdvance, an IMB-hosted conference for believers interested in using health care strategies to open doors to a hurting world and gain access to unreached peoples and places in unique ways, will be at Brentwood Baptist Church in Brentwood, Tennessee, Aug. 3–5.

Joshua and Jessica Cobb recall how the trajectory of their ministry changed because of a MedAdvance event just a few years ago.

On a vision trip to England, they felt the Lord pulling their hearts there. But as a trained psychiatrist (Joshua) and biblical counselor (Jessica), they weren't sure how what they were trained to do and passionate about doing would fit in their greater calling to reach the nations.

Overcoming hurdles

The family had already run into numerous hurdles trying to get to the missions field. By the time they attended MedAdvance, they were discouraged.

But as the week went on, they networked and asked questions.

They took advantage of opportunities to meet one-on-one with health care missionaries at meal-



IMB graphic

times, and they plugged into breakout sessions where they learned how God is using health care strategies to reach the nations.

“Is there a need for us? Is there a use for us?” they asked.

“The overwhelming answer was ‘Yes, absolutely. There’s a huge need, we see a huge opportunity and we’re so interested in you,’” Joshua reported.

Joshua continued, “Not only was it an incredible conference, but I came out more equipped, encouraged and just feeling so much closer to the Lord.”

Eventually, they reconnected with the leaders in London at a

time when the COVID-19 pandemic had brought mental health care into focus in Europe. The Cobbs joined the team in London, providing help and encouragement through a church plant and a local organization.

The Cobbs officially serve as health strategy coaches for the IMB’s European affinities.

Another couple, Brennan and Isabel Andrews, also knew they were going to the nations as medical missionaries. He’s a general surgeon, and she’s a physician assistant. They even knew where they felt called to work, a hospital in Togo. They did not know if they could serve that hospital through IMB.

That all changed when they attended MedAdvance. They met with IMB leadership and missionaries and learned of the vast opportunities available through IMB’s medical strategies.

“In the course of one MedAdvance, we kind of got everything figured out,” Brennan said. After that, they were set to fulfill their seminary requirements to go long term with IMB, and they headed off to language school.

Eager to get back

They served in Togo for a couple of years, Brennan at the hospital in Togo and Isabel as a physician assistant. They’re now in Paris, doing more language studies after Isabel delivered their baby boy earlier this year.

They’re eager to get back to Togo, focusing on extending the hospital’s reach into the unreached people groups who have little access to medical care or the gospel.

Hundreds of health care professionals, students and church leaders will gather at MedAdvance 2023 for opportunities to:

- ▶ Connect with IMB missionaries and leaders for networking and questions.
- ▶ Discover how God is at work as health care missionaries share stories from around the world.

▶ Learn how you can serve God’s mission at home and overseas using your God-given talent, skills and experience in the health care field.

Discover how your gifting can fit into health care strategies at imb.org/healthcare. Learn more about last year’s conference at tbponline.org/MedAdvance-2022.

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

“IN THE COURSE OF ONE MEDADVANCE, WE KIND OF GOT EVERYTHING FIGURED OUT.”

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A secret church growth metric that's hiding in plain sight

By Phil Cooke
philcooke.com

Whenever we talk about church growth, the first thing that comes to mind is attendance.

How many people are showing up on a typical Sunday? And along with today's digital age, how many are engaging online?

But one metric that few talk about is this:

How many has your church sent out?

I'm not talking about outreaches, campuses or missions the church supervises or funds.

I'm talking about people who feel so inspired, motivated and called that they answer that calling to

launch their own full- or part-time ministry.

During the days of the early church, those people popped up everywhere.

Early church lessons

While leaders like Peter and Paul were doing the heavy lifting of preaching, teaching and writing down the doctrinal foundations of the Church, there were also people like Stephen, Apollos, Timothy, Titus, Luke, Phoebe, Lydia, Aquila and his wife, Priscilla, and many more.

Some followed the apostle's example and became evangelists, some planted new churches, while others assisted, delivered Paul's letters, or ministered in their local community.



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The point is, in far too many churches today, our strategy is to tend rather than send.

We spend enormous resources helping maintain the people in the congregation or local community, but the question is — how

many men and women are we raising up to take the gospel to the far corners of the earth?

Today, we invest more time and effort training volunteers for parking lot ministry than challenging church members to launch

out on their own to reach the lost.

How focused is your church on planting a vision in people's hearts, providing training, and inspiring them to go and change the world?

How many people in your church have launched out into either full-time ministry or are doing serious ministry outside their normal day job?

It's time we took world evangelism off the list of jobs for paid ministry professionals and started raising up church members to complete the task.

It was a strategy that helped the early church change the world, and we could use a little of that today.

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‘Worker bees’

By Lizzy Haseltine

The Baptist Paper

Campers on Mission helps others know Jesus

When a group of Campers on Mission hear about a volunteer missions project, they typically load up their RVs and head to the job site.

Their destination is often a camp, church, children’s home or state fairgrounds, depending on the request and need.

“If you can think of a way to volunteer and spread the Word of the Lord, chances are Campers on Mission can do it,” said Walt Miller, president of Alabama COM from 2021 through April 2023.

After starting solely as an outreach campground ministry in the 1970s, COM has evolved into a group of evangelical Christians staying in campers while helping with missional activities across the United States, such as backyard Bible clubs, disaster relief and church planting.

“Our prime kind of project is construction. We do either church building or renovation or sprucing up — remodeling and so forth,” Miller said, explaining that the organizations are responsible for buying the project materials and often provide meals for COM workers. “We can build a church for about 50% of what it costs a contractor to build it.”

Gospel opportunities

Miller was the project leader for Sykes Creek Baptist Church in Clio, Alabama. Church members joined COM to help renovate the church’s sagging roof and restructure its walls.

Several years later, Miller received a call that the church wanted to build five new Sunday School classrooms to accommodate its growing membership. When Miller initially volunteered, there were



Photo courtesy of Shocco Springs

Campers on Mission volunteers work on facility updates and renovations at Shocco Springs Conference Center in Talladega, Alabama.

no kids in the church. Later, he got another follow-up call that 16 children in Bible school had made decisions for Christ.

Hundreds of projects like this have occurred through the volunteer work of 4,000 campers across 27 states, leading to countless gospel opportunities.

Among these COM members are national coordinators Jerry and Renee McGovern, who lived in Missouri when they joined the cause in 2011.

With Jerry being a former master plumber and Renee a “gypsy at heart,” Campers on Mission was a perfect fit.

“We knew there was a calling on us to do something,” Renee explained. “We knew it had to do with using our hands because we’re worker bees.”

The couple served COM full time

for 12 years, staying in their RV while hopping from one missions site to another before settling down in Grand Ridge, Florida, in August 2021. One of their favorite projects was working on the Great Passion Play in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, just six months after they joined COM.

After the outdoor theater shut down due to financial hardship, a local pastor asked the McGoverns to help bring it back to life because he’d seen how instrumental the play was in many salvation decisions. The couple agreed and created a new national project for COM, asking other states to volunteer.

Once they rounded up a group to help, the McGoverns started working on the theater, which was in poor shape since things hadn’t been shut down properly.

“Everything needed repairs,” Renee said. “[But] God gave us all the skills we needed [through] the electricians, the plumbers, the Sheetrockers, the roofers.”

While the main repairs are now complete for the theater, COM volunteers still work ahead of its show openings to help with regular maintenance. In large part to COM’s work, the play has almost paid off \$3 million in debt.

“It’s just wonderful to see how beautiful it is now,” Renee said, sharing how the theater has expanded its landscape to include petting zoos and prayer areas. “It’s just so different from what it was back in 2012.”

Although repairing or adding buildings for the work of ministry is often one of COM’s main objectives, the McGoverns explained the true purpose is all about people making decisions for Christ.

“We might not be there at that meeting or that camp or that revival of that ministry, [but] we had a hand in it when we did anything to prepare that ministry for them to have those meetings.”

Short-term missions

The couple originally thought they had to be retired to serve with COM, which is a common misconception.

Actually, there are plenty of short-term missions opportunities for those looking to participate — and you don’t have to have an RV.

“They have places you can stay in if you don’t have an RV,” Renee said, adding that children are also welcome.

She doesn’t want others to miss out on the opportunity to serve with COM.

“You don’t have to wait 25 years to do missions work,” she said.

TO APPLY FOR CAMPERS ON MISSION, VISIT CAMPERSONMISSION.NET/ENROLLMENT-FORM.