

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



Graffiti Church's pastor Kareem Goubran was Britney McEwen's inaugural patient for her first night of blood pressure screenings.

Photo courtesy of Britney McEwen

'Extra hands & feet'

25-year-old Huntsville nurse turns desire to serve into summer of missions in NYC

By **Lizzy Haseltine**
The Alabama Baptist

When Britney McEwen felt called to serve through medical missions this summer, she thought she'd be going overseas. But God called the 25-year-old Alabamian to move to New York City instead.

"When I do my New Year's resolutions, I usually pick a word

instead of things I want to accomplish," McEwen said. "This year, my word was 'service.'

"I realized that something in my life was missing," McEwen continued, adding that service was "a hole" she needed to fill.

Her desire to serve sparked a conversation with her pastor, Travis Collins of First Baptist Church Huntsville. In January, he connected her with Kareem Goubran, pastor

of their new partner church, Graffiti Church in New York City. Their discussion sparked an idea.

Traveling nurse

"What if I came to New York for the summer, and I was just extra hands and feet where your team needed? I could take a nursing travel contract, and nobody would have to pay for me; I could pay for myself," McEwen proposed.

After praying about the opportunity for months, McEwen recruited a friend to serve alongside her and secured New York City housing at a Catholic convent.

But upon arriving, the 2020 graduate wrestled with her new role.

"What does a domestic medical missions intern do for a country ... where a lot of people have health care, resources and clinics more so

(See 'I've seen,' page 13)

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Photo courtesy of Ginger George Clifton

Tripp Dickson (left), family pastor at FBC Sylacauga, experienced God's mercy in breaking the chains of addiction. With that healing came the great responsibility of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with all ages.

Family pastor serves out of personal experience

EDITOR'S NOTE — A few weeks ago, we shared the “comeback” story of First Baptist Church Gadsden and asked if you had a comeback story to share. That sparked an idea for TAB reader Ginger George Clifton, 81, who submitted this story about Tripp Dickson, family pastor at FBC Sylacauga.

By Ginger George Clifton
Special to The Alabama Baptist

First Baptist Church Sylacauga recently completed a new children's department and playground. The church also recognized a need for a family pastor to best use these wonderful facilities and enhance this important ministry.

Tripp Dickson was recommended for this position, an idea I had to process because I remember Tripp as quite a “trip” himself.

About 15 years ago, Tripp hit “rock bottom” after struggling with an opioid addiction after a back surgery. It almost cost him his family.

Great responsibility

But God broke the chains of addiction and has given him a great responsibility of sharing the good news of Jesus.

“Some godly men took me under their wing and disciplined me, and my new found faith in God revealed He had a great plan for me — family ministry,” he said.

I am a senior adult who watched

Tripp grow up, and quite honestly, I wondered if he were up for this task. But God knew he was, and now I know it too.

Tripp has a way with children. His natural knack for fun has combined with his desire to be a stabilizing, energizing force in the spiritual development of children. It is fun to watch his expectations met.

He speaks “child,” and they bombard him with questions, a “Mr. Tripp” here and a “Mr. Tripp” there. The answers and fist bumps confirm his strategy is working.

Purposeful interactions

His activities are purposeful, making the Bible real and Jesus the Savior personal. He has a way of bringing young people out of their comfort zones.

Tripp is truly a family minister. He always has time for senior adults. He plans fishing and recreational opportunities and visits those in the hospital. He can be counted on.

Recently at a community meeting, I introduced myself to a young man whose family has started attending our church. He said, “We love what this church is doing for children, and we want our children to be a part of this great program!”

Tripp has a great comeback story, and he is a good example of what James 1:22 describes as a “doer of the Word.”

The Alabama Baptist

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

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.



RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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



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@RashionalThts

Maintaining a sensitive spirit toward others changes everything

Have you ever been insensitive to others? I certainly have, and I'm so disappointed in myself each time I realize what I've done.

It's never intentional but it does happen from time to time, and I've been thinking about why lately. Why am I capable of something like insensitivity to others?

For me, it always comes back to time and space. When I fail to slow down and truly listen to the other person, I'm more likely to miss the nuances of what's being said.

When I'm busy trying to give my opinion on how to handle the situation or solve the problem instead of working to truly understand what he or she is shouldering, then I'm not allowing the person to work through the issue and process it all.

Instead, I'm likely shutting down the conversation because it's only me talking at the person rather than the two of us having a conversation.

Silently asking for help

How about those times a friend or family member needs help but is so overwhelmed that he or she doesn't even know how to ask for help?

Are we observant enough to notice? Are we bold enough to ask how we can help? Or better yet, are we able to show up with the help needed and gently move the person forward?

The past two weeks have allowed us opportunities to remember difficult moments in our history — the 22nd anniversary of 9/11 (Sept. 11, 2001) and the 60th anniversary of the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing (Sept. 15, 1963).

Both are somber, difficult memories and provide opportunities to be sensitive as our nation remembers.

September also marks Childhood Cancer Awareness Month.

Our family knows all too well the path of childhood cancer and what it steals from you.

Special opportunity

Our team at The Alabama Baptist has had a special opportunity to care for a sweet, young family new to the childhood cancer journey.

We've been able to be sensitive to their needs and attempt to help where we can, pray for them often and share with others who are willing to assist.

None of us can do it all, nor can we help everyone around us who needs support, encouragement or guidance.

Each of us can do something, however.

While we all will have days where we miss moments to be fully present for others, we can continually work to keep enough margin in our lives to be more observant.

And we certainly can remember two important items:

1. Our opinions and preferences are not necessarily the only right options available.
2. We may not truly understand the full story of others and should err on the side of being sensitive rather than immediately telling them what they should do or how they should feel.

Are you or is someone close to you considered homebound? What are ways your church family could minister to you more?

Ever get the sense that those in the homebound community might be suffering from the "out of sight, out of mind" philosophy?

It's definitely not true in many cases across the state, but it does happen in some situations.

We are confident no church leader or church member would intend for the homebound members of their congregation to feel left out or isolated.

However, it can happen over

time as the pull of church activities and general life responsibilities crowd out schedules and energy.

Staying connected

I compare it to our extended families. We may love and care dearly for our aunts, uncles, cousins, second cousins and so forth, but over time we sometimes drift apart.

Family reunions, holiday gatherings, weddings and funerals provide opportunities to catch up, but communication outside of those

special events may be minimal.

For our homebound church members, those days of minimal contact can get pretty long.

What are ways your church stays connected? What are ways we could do better?

Please send your comments to:

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Your Voice



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

Fighting for babies with Down syndrome, special needs

By **Herbie Newell**

President, Lifeline Children's Services

Sam behaves like a typical teenager. He loves music, junk food, baseball and hanging out with friends. He stays up late on the weekends, watches videos on his iPad and loves to attend his high school sporting events, clubs and functions. The only difference between Sam and his typical peers is that Sam has Down syndrome.

Tragically, between 60% and 90% of women in the U.S. who learn they are pregnant with a baby with Down syndrome choose abortion. But Sam's parents consider him an abundant blessing.

Eighteen years ago when doctors

advocated for abortion as the "best answer" to his genetic condition, Sam's parents heroically chose life for him.

Sam's family is not at all rare in their thinking. Many families are raising their children or young adults with Down syndrome. They love and cherish their sons and daughters deeply and see them as the true gifts they are.

Lives extinguished

Tragically, the lives of too many people with Down syndrome have been extinguished through the grievous act of abortion. This occurs even while we have families lined up domestically and internationally

hoping to adopt children living with Down syndrome.

All life is precious, no matter the label or syndrome attached. We must speak up and defend life because all life bears the image of God. People living with Down syndrome — or people with any special need, for that matter — are created with unique talents, gifts, and abilities, just like everyone else.

Sam's unique ability is that he can remember most people's names, making his fellow peers feel special and seen — it's a gift that's needed in the oftentimes lonely world of Gen Z.

As image bearers, those living with Down syndrome or other special needs are uniquely created by God for exceptional works as they glorify our Father in heaven, just as Matthew 5 implores.

Author of life

We are not the author of life — God is. Therefore, we don't get to determine another human's value or whether or not a person is worthy of life. As a society, we have lost our way when we fail to see the dignity and value of every single human being, no matter what condition, syndrome or disorder they bear.

When we classify others and deem their inherent worth according to their IQ or productivity rather than their God-given intrinsic value, we diminish the humanity of every individual placed on this planet.

It's fair to say that spiritually each of us has special needs. We are all spiritually disabled and in desperate need of a Savior to redeem us.

Physically caring for someone with special needs is a tangible reminder of how Jesus cares for us spiritually.

This is why we can't just be pro-birth; we must also be life-affirming — and that translates into wrapping ongoing care around people with special needs and their families.

As the Church, we are called to serve the broken, the poor and yes, those with special needs. Jesus makes

it clear in Matthew 25 that we are serving Him when we do so.

When the Church steps in and embraces people living with special needs — through adoption, providing respite to families caring for a special needs child, or teaching people with unique needs about Jesus, we are fulfilling Christ's vision and mission. In return, we are drawn close to the heart of the Father, and we are blessed.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Herbie Newell is president of Lifeline Children's Services, based in Birmingham. The organization serves vulnerable children and families through private domestic and international adoption, family restoration and pregnancy counseling. Newell is the author of "Image Bearers: Shifting from Pro-Birth to Pro-Life."

Learn more about special needs adoption at lifelinechild.org/special-needs-adoption.



NEWELL

Learning to love Psalms

For most of my life, I underappreciated the psalms. They weren't narrative. They weren't letters. They were often-confusing poems with too much figurative language for my liking.

But the more time I spend reading, praying and singing the psalms (thanks to Shane & Shane), the more I see their beauty.

The psalms are glimpses at the raw emotions of God's people — the fear, sadness, anger, confusion and joy that we are invited to lay at God's feet.

God gave us our emotions. Jesus experienced all kinds of emotions. We don't have to hide our feelings from God. The psalms demonstrate for us how we can express those emotions.

We all have days when we are carrying big feelings — frustration, anger, sadness, insecurity. Not only does God give us the psalms to show us how to bring those emotions to God, the psalms also give us God's response.

Jessica Ingram
"A God Who Sees"
the-scroll.com

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“Hymns built on Scripture speak to the heart and lives of the worshipper.”

IRIS ANDERSON

Retired organist

According to a recent Lifeway Research study, churchgoers are more likely today than in 2017 to believe God wants them to prosper financially (76% v. 69%) and that they have to do something for God in order to receive material blessings from Him (45% v. 26%).

Today, 3 in 4 churchgoers (76%) believe God wants them to prosper financially, including 43% who strongly agree.

“In the last five years, far more churchgoers are reflecting prosperity gospel teachings, including the heretical belief that material blessings are earned from God,” said **Scott McConnell**, executive director of Lifeway Research.

In Christ’s Kingdom, we recognize that apart from Jesus Christ, we can do nothing.

We come to understand that EVERYTHING we need is found in Him and only in Him. Jesus is sovereign. He has all of the power and all of the control. We don’t have to climb the ladder of success to feel valued or loved.

We don’t have to be in control to feel safe. We don’t have to use people to get what we selfishly want. Our ego isn’t big because our identity is not in what we do, but our identity is found in what Christ has done for us.

Pastor Andy Frazier
via Facebook

If our expectations of ourselves and others are excessively high, we may experience disappointment and/or varying kinds of frustrations.

Efforts to achieve or demonstrate consistently a near-perfect stance in everyday life almost always lead to major disillusionment, defeat and disorientation.

We have to monitor our expectations in order that our ambition does not outweigh our ability.

Morris Murray Jr.
Jasper, Ala.

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

My very first job in a church was as a janitor (no kidding, the full-time guy quit and they needed me for 6 months). Little did I know how much God would use that experience to shape my leadership.

At our heart, we are called to be servants. The building doesn’t clean itself.

@claysmith79
X (formerly Twitter)

“Coming to classes taught me what a man, what a father, should be,” said **Richard**, who attended parenting classes at Sav-A-Life in Vestavia, Alabama. The greatest gift I received from coming to class is my knowledge of being more of a father for my kids and more of a husband for my wife.”

“It was truly an inspiring experience to see how the Ukrainian believers, especially the youth and young adults, were engaged in gospel-centered relief work,” said **William Maxwell**, chief administrative officer for the Tennessee Baptist Mission Board, who recently traveled to war torn Ukraine. “There will be many more [opportunities to serve] when the war is over.”

Giving people a reason to come back

We’re currently living in the largest and fastest religious shift in U.S. history. Some 40 million adult Americans who used to go to church at least once per month now attend less than once per year.

This shift is larger than the number of conversions during the First Great Awakening, Second Great Awakening and the totality of the Billy Graham Crusades combined.

But people aren’t leaving the church for the reasons we thought. And one of the misconceptions is they aren’t willing to come back.

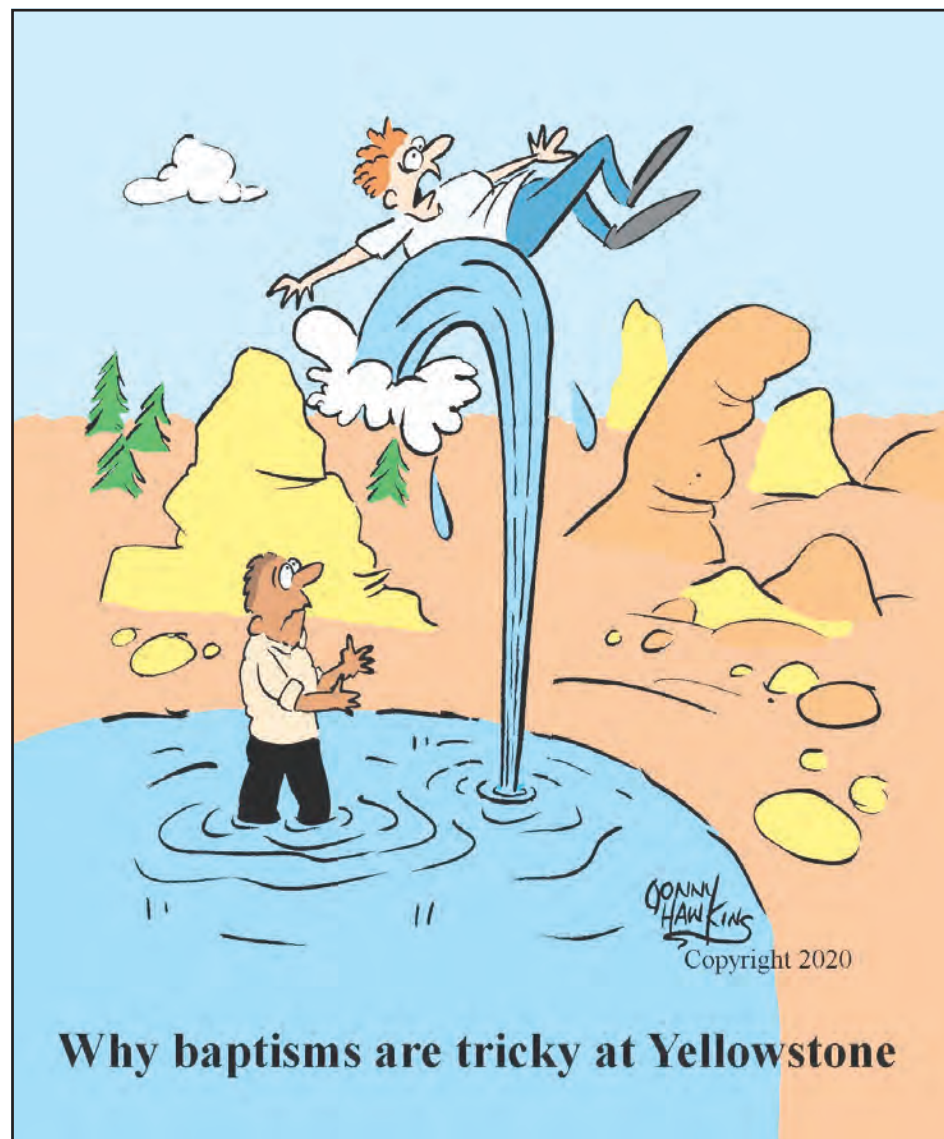
We’ve conducted the most comprehensive study of de-churching ever commissioned. In total, we heard from more than 7,000 respondents over three phases.

The single best piece of good news is that more than half of those who have left evangelical churches are willing to come back right now. That’s nearly 8 million dechurched evangelicals who are willing to come back to church.

The reasons they’re willing to come back vary from group to group, but on the whole, people are looking for two things: healthy relationships and a local church that actively demonstrates how the gospel is true, good and beautiful.

Those two factors are almost entirely within our control. Church leaders can grow in their ability to exercise relational wisdom and build healthy communities. Our local churches can grow institutionally to be bolder and clearer with our doctrine, religious affection and cultural engagement.

EDITOR’S NOTE — Excerpt from “5 misconceptions about dechurching in ‘the largest and fastest religious shift in U.S. history’” by Jim Davis and Michael Graham, authors of “The Great Dechurching.”



Why baptisms are tricky at Yellowstone

3 stories you should know



Facebook photo

Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief teams serving in the aftermath of Hurricane Idalia wrapped up their work in Florida on Sept. 15. Mark Wakefield, state disaster relief strategist, said more than 80 volunteers deployed to help victims of Idalia, which made landfall Aug. 30 as a Category 3 storm. ABDR volunteers cleaned out flooded homes, cleared fallen trees and served meals to community members. At least one salvation was reported, Wakefield said. (TAB)

Send Relief provides aid after Morocco quake

Relief efforts continue in Morocco after a deadly 6.8-magnitude earthquake struck the High Atlas Mountains on Sept. 8.

The death toll stood at more than 3,000 at press time, with thousands more injured. Most of the damage is reportedly in remote, mountainous villages that are difficult for rescue workers to reach.

Send Relief, the compassion ministry arm of the International Mission Board and North American Mission Board, is responding through local partners who mobilized within hours of the earthquake to provide help and supplies to families in the affected region.

“Please pray for the people of Morocco as they process the physical and emotional devastation of the earthquake,” Send Relief urges. (The Baptist Paper)

McRaney plans appeal in NAMB lawsuit

Former Baptist state executive Will McRaney announced Sept. 11 he is appealing the ruling that dismissed his lawsuit against the North American Mission Board.

A U.S. District Court in Mississippi dismissed the suit Aug. 15 on religious and jurisdictional grounds.

But McRaney, who originally filed suit in 2017, said he wants to move forward with an appeal to the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals.

In a statement following the dismissal, NAMB said the First Amendment protects churches and ministries from “intrusive examination from the courts.”

McRaney maintains the judge’s ruling is “built around the erroneous concept of ‘THE’ Baptist Church” and threatens “Baptist autonomy, cooperation, financial health and missionaries.” (The Baptist Paper)

Persecuted church

Police in China raid church youth camp, detain four adults

TAIYUAN, China — Police in China raided a church’s summer youth camp and detained four Christian adults for “carrying out activities in the name of an illegal social organization.”

Members of the Police and Religious Affairs Bureau raided Zion Reformed Church’s camp in China’s Shanxi province July 25, demanding an inspection for safety hazards, according to the human rights group ChinaAid. The four adults were apprehended and ultimately given a 15-day administrative detention.

On July 26, police confiscated the campers’ Bibles and the teachers’ mobile phones, among other items. Officials instructed parents to come get their children.

“During this time,” stated ChinaAid, “joint law

enforcement wanted to take away all of the male Christians. None of them agreed to leave their families.”

The pastor and one of those detained had previously had received a one-year sentence for going to a Christian conference in Malaysia.

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

Ugandan pastor pelted with stones for evangelizing at a funeral

KAMPALA, Uganda — A pastor officiating a funeral in Uganda was pelted with stones for us-

ing both the Bible and the Quran in evangelizing about Jesus Christ.

The attack on Davidson Okirori occurred July 21 in Kyoga village of Mayuge District. Okirori, pastor of Covenant Church of God in Buwenge, was officiating the funeral of an individual who had left Islam to become a Christian, reported Morning Star News.

Okirori said he used the Bible to show “mourners the fact of the unique and powerful resurrection of Jesus as the Son of God, while at the same time mentioning that Muhammad, being just a prophet of Allah, did not resurrect.”

“It was a good platform for me to witness the love of Christ to Muslims,” he said.

Angry Muslim mourners took the microphone from him, tore pages out of the Bible and hurled stones at him. Okirori is recovering from his injuries, Morning Star reported.



Photo courtesy of ChinaAid

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

▶ **Billy Hunt**, who served as director of missions for St. Clair Baptist Association for more than 20 years, died Sept. 3. He was 84.

At age 10, Hunt gave his life to Jesus. He felt a call to preach when he was a senior in high school. He studied at Howard College (now Samford University) and did graduate work at Jacksonville State University.

In the early years of his ministry, Hunt served as pastor of a mission of First Baptist Church Fairfield; Mulberry Springs Baptist in Sulligent; Artesia Baptist in Artesia, Mississippi; First Baptist Church Gurley; and Tates Chapel Baptist in Centre. He left a six-and-a-half-year pastorate at Pepperell Baptist Church in Opelika to become St. Clair Association's DOM.

Hunt served in that role from 1983 until he retired in 2003. When he first became DOM, there were about 12,000 members in the churches of St. Clair Association. That number had grown to 23,000 by the time he retired. In that time frame, a few churches and one mission began. In addition, Camp Sonshine near Pell City was acquired.

While serving as DOM, Hunt was also pastor of a mission in Leeds for several years and for more than a decade had a weekly radio program broadcast on WURL (760 AM) in Broompton.

After retiring, Hunt served the association again as interim associational mission strategist in 2019. He also served as interim pastor of churches in Etowah, Cherokee and St. Clair counties.

Hunt is preceded in death by his wife of 63 years, Shirley, and his son, John. He is survived by his daughter, Lynn; son, Scott; and several grandchildren and great-grandchildren.



HUNT

CHOCTAW ASSOCIATION

▶ **Brian Walley** is the new pastor of **Spring Bank Baptist Church, Silas**. He previously served as minister of youth at Brewer Baptist Church, Richton, Mississippi, and has served in ministry for 21 years. He is a 2018 graduate of Liberty University with a bachelor's in biblical and theological studies. He and his wife, Deidre, have three children.



WALLEY

DALE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Chris Beam** is the new pastor of **Mount Enon Baptist Church, Midland City**. He previously served at Corinth Baptist Church, Clayton. He and his wife, Lindsey, have two children.



BEAM

MARSHALL ASSOCIATION

▶ **Clear Spring Baptist Church, Guntersville**, will celebrate its sesquicentennial Oct. 8, with a special service beginning at 2 p.m. Former pastors will be recognized and special music will be provided by people who grew up in the church. Melton Smith, one of the former pastors, is the guest speaker. A reception will follow. Don Paris is interim pastor.

MOBILE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Zion Baptist Church, Mobile**, will celebrate its 175th and final anniversary Nov. 4 with a reception at Tillman's Corner Senior Center from 2 to 4 p.m. Bruce Moseley is pastor.

MORGAN ASSOCIATION

▶ **Gavin Lee** is the new youth minister of **Mount Zion Baptist Church, Hartselle**. He was raised in Lebanon Baptist Church, Falkville. A graduate of Falkville High School, Lee is studying electrical technology at Calhoun Community College. In recent years, he attended No Fences Cowboy Church, where he served as a counselor at Christian camps across the Southeast.



LEE

SHELBY ASSOCIATION

▶ **Indian Springs First Baptist Church's** Illuminate student ministries will host "Saw You at the Pole" youth rally Sept. 27 at 6 p.m. Guest speaker is Zachary Bigley, president of Zachary Bigley Ministries, with The Station Church Worship leading music. Students from churches, schools and communities are invited. For more information call 205-988-3662. Will Little is youth pastor and Mitch Thrower is pastor.

EAST LIBERTY ASSOCIATION

▶ **Dave Bearden** is the new pastor of **LaFayette Heights Baptist Church, LaFayette**, following the retirement of Pastor Emeritus Paul Howard, who served more than 36 years.



BEARDEN

Bearden previously served Pinehurst Baptist Church, Everett, Washington. He received a master of divinity degree from Southern Seminary.

Bearden and his wife, Debi, have three children.

AUTAUGA ASSOCIATION

▶ **Eugene Meadows** is the interim pastor of **Dozier Baptist Church**. Eugene and his wife, Sara, live in Andalusia.

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

▶ **Ryan Adams** has settled in as the new pastor of **Philadelphia Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills**. He previously served as an associate pastor at Christ Fellowship Church, Homewood. He received a master of theological studies degree from Beeson Divinity School and a master of divinity degree from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.



ADAMS

Shoutout to DR volunteer Wanda White

From South Carolina Disaster Relief volunteer Roger Troutman, who recently served in Florida helping with cleanup efforts following Hurricane Idalia:

Wanda White, an Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteer, joined our SCDR team on our last assignment in Florida, and I was impressed by her.

She is 79 years old and served as a chaplain in Inverness, Florida, for this assignment but has previously served on food prep/serve

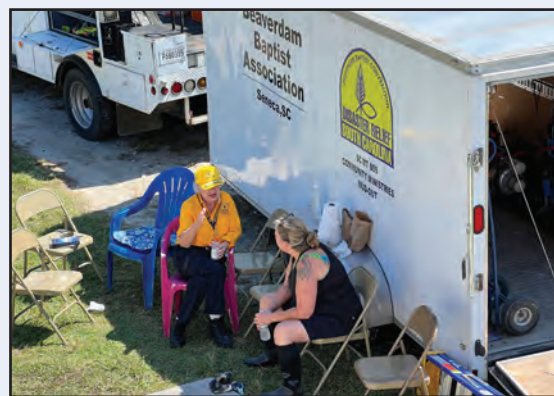


Photo by Roger Troutman/The Baptist Paper

teams at DR incident management sites.

As we worked out our last assignment in mid-September, Wanda spent most of her time with the homeowner, Lena, while the work crew was cleaning up from the water damage on her home.

Wanda listened to Lena's story, certainly

a cathartic experience for Lena, as Wanda also shared Jesus' love and salvation for everyone. What a blessing and inspiration Wanda was for all of us.

Youth from various churches gather for SPEAK Tour in Athens on Aug. 20. Josh Meadows, SBOM student ministry strategist, said taking SPEAK around the state has allowed more youth to be a part.

‘All the glory is to God’



Photo courtesy of Josh Meadows

Small church sees youth reached at SPEAK Tour; next event set for Sept. 27

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Dedra Henry’s church is small. Her husband, James, accepted the call to serve as pastor there in 2019, and when the COVID-19 pandemic happened, they lost nearly all of what little youth group they had.

“Our youth group consisted of our son and daughter and maybe one or two others,” Henry said.

Gaining momentum

She was passionate about teaching them on Wednesday nights, but she also wanted them to experience the things a larger youth group would.

So she and her husband loaded them up in 2022 and took them first

to Super Summer, then to SPEAK Tour in August.

“We wanted to keep the momentum going,” Henry said.

And at SPEAK Tour — a night of worship designed for youth to bring their friends to hear the gospel — two of Henry’s daughter’s friends made decisions to follow Christ.

“From there, it just started feeding off of my daughter inviting her friends and then they invited friends, and we ended up going to another SPEAK

Tour that was closer to us in September,” she said.

At that event, three of her son’s friends from band made decisions to follow Christ too.

It’s been a galvanizing experience for the youth group at Henry’s church, Enon Baptist in Atmore, not to mention the church as a whole.

On Aug. 27, two teens who

went to SPEAK Tour last year followed through with baptism. Their parents joined the church the same day.

“All the glory is to God,” Henry said.

She said she’s thankful for SPEAK Tour.

“Because we have nothing in this area, our kids are just hungry for something, and they really enjoyed it,” she said.

Josh Meadows, student ministry strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said that was the idea behind SPEAK Tour — to take the SPEAK conference, in past years held annually at a single location, to a variety of dates and locations where it would be more accessible for churches around the state.

He said attendance “has been phe-



Photo courtesy of Dedra Henry

Dedra Henry (left) and her husband James (right) roadtrip with students to SPEAK Tour in August 2022. Several youth decided to follow Christ.



Photo courtesy of Dedra Henry

James Henry, pastor of Enon Baptist Church in Atmore, baptizes Macy Riley on Aug. 27. Macy gave her life to Christ at SPEAK Tour in 2022, and her brother Bradden was baptized with her. Their parents joined the church the same day.

nominal” at this year’s four SPEAK Tour events, held in Centreville, Haleyville, Cropwell and Athens. The events have drawn between 750–800 total so far.

“It’s just been an incredible time of worship. I think comfortably I can say we’ve had 45 decisions for Christ out of SPEAK Tour this year so far,” Meadows said. “It’s been great for relationship building and networking among the churches, and it’s been an incredible investment for the Kingdom.”

The next SPEAK Tour event will be held Sept. 27 at Ridgecrest Baptist

Church in Ozark. The speaker will be Brent Finchum, a youth ministry coach, and the band will be One Step Closer.



Photo courtesy of Josh Meadows

Mount Pisgah Baptist Church in Pell City hosts the Cropwell-area SPEAK Tour on Aug. 9. So far, this year’s four SPEAK Tour events have drawn about 750–800 students total.

For more information, visit ymlink.org/calendar/speak-tour-ozark.

To schedule a SPEAK Tour stop in your area, email jmeadows@alsbom.org.

'THE SAME SPIRIT BINDS US TOGETHER'

'Mosaic' of women across Europe, Middle East serve through European Baptist Women United

EDITOR'S NOTE — Baptist World Alliance is a global community of 51 million Baptists from 176,000 churches. Under that umbrella, BWA Women provides support for missions and ministries in seven continental unions representing more than 150 countries.

This is the third in a series of eight stories about leaders in each region, the challenges they face and the way they see God working through women across the globe.

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Fabienne Seguin says a large part of her job as president of European Baptist Women United is encouragement.

"My main goal within our union is to encourage the national presidents and more generally the Baptist women in their Christian life and to develop deeper relationships with them," said Seguin, who hails from France and serves with volunteers from Slovakia, the United Kingdom, Latvia, Lebanon and Moldova.

European Baptist Women United, or EBWU, is the European region of Baptist World Alliance Women.

Seguin calls the 52 countries that make up the EBWU, including the Middle East and the former Soviet republics, a "beautiful mosaic."

Members fall into three primary language groups — English, Russian and Arabic, she said.

Seguin, former treasurer and now president of EBWU, has been involved for nine years. She also represents the Baptist women from her region at the European Baptist Federation executive committee meetings and is one of the vice presidents of BWA.



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

"My main goal within our union is to encourage the national presidents and more generally the Baptist women in their Christian life and to develop deeper relationships with them," Fabienne Seguin says.

However, attending various meetings is not her major focus.

EBWU has organized women's conferences, camps for single mothers, conferences for widows and children's camps.

Work with refugees

They have supported women in the refugee camps in Syria and refugees in Ukraine and neighboring countries and work with the BWA fighting against domestic violence.

Seguin started in ministry feeling very unqualified.

"I'm single. I'm a civil servant working as a tax inspector, and I have never studied theology," she said. She thought that only pastors' wives could serve this way.

Attending her first EBWU

conference in 2010 in Budapest, Hungary, Seguin was extremely nervous due to her lack of fluency in English.

"But it changed my life," she said. "I couldn't say any word in English during those three days, but the ladies I met there were so inspiring and encouraging. I was so enthusiastic when I came back home. I wanted to know them better."

Traveling to the next conference, her flight was delayed, and she spent the night in the airport. Unable to sleep, she pondered what God wanted her to do next.

"Right before I left to go to the boarding gate, I answered in my heart, 'I will go wherever You send me.' At the end of this conference, the EBWU secretary came to me and asked if France would ac-

cept to host the next EBWU conference in 2012," she said.

There she was asked to be treasurer, which led to her becoming president.

Seguin has been able to go to South Africa, the Bahamas and Alabama — all for BWA conferences.

'At home with my sisters'

"I'm always surprised to go to places that I would have never visited on my own. And I always feel at home with my sisters. The same Spirit binds us together and, to me, it is so amazing. Working and serving with my sisters is so pleasant and easy," she said.

"I meet faithful and inspiring women. We are in many ways so different and in many ways so similar. I see the high level of the creativity of God. I'm always encouraged when I meet them. With them, I can grow."

Seguin asks others to pray for her, that she will trust the Lord and not try to find solutions on her own.

She recognizes her tendency to worry, which is why looking back, she wishes she had been less worried and more confident in the Lord.

"This world is not an easy place for women, even in Western countries," she said. "In my ministry, I noticed how hard it is for most women to see their value and to be in the light. They prefer mostly living in the shadows and hiding their talent."

"When I started to serve as the president of EBWU in 2018, my vision was to encourage women to be where God wants them to be."

"I want to encourage them to enter their promised land and to face their giants because Christ has defeated them already."

To find out more about EBWU, go to bwawomen.org and find this region in "Continental Unions" under the "About Us" tab.

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Missions discipleship helps us hear about God's work and join Him

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Candace McIntosh didn't grow up in church, but for a short stint in her teen years, she attended a small church in her area.

While there, she was involved in Acteens, a missions discipleship group for girls in grades 7-12. And it changed her.

"It introduced me to a bigger world than my world on the farm in rural north Florida," said McIntosh, now executive director of Alabama Woman's Missionary Union. "That's when I began to learn that God used a group of people called missionaries to do His work. Then as a young adult when I reentered the church, that's when that passion grew deeper and wider."

People came alongside her and helped her understand God's heart for the lost, she said, and that changed the way she viewed both the world and her purpose in it.

It's a legacy that's been passed down for generations — people telling others about what God is doing and how He's using missionaries to accomplish the task

of sharing the gospel with those who haven't heard it.

Missions discipleship is "not a program, it's not an organization — it's the vital part of the discipleship of children, students and adults to get the bigger picture of where God is at work and how He would want them to join Him in that work," McIntosh said.

A legacy

Since the state's beginnings, Alabama Baptists — especially women — have championed missions discipleship.

As 15 men gathered to start the Alabama Baptist State Convention in 1823, all of them were there as representatives of missions societies, many of which were women's societies.

The group reported that they knew of 17 existing women's missions organizations total, according to "Declaring His Glory: Celebrating 125 Years of Alabama Woman's

Missionary Union," which McIntosh coauthored with Sammie Jo Barstow and Lucretia Mobbs.

Between 1823 and when Alabama WMU officially formed in 1889, that number grew to 75.



Martha Foster Crawford (1830-1909), the first Alabama native to serve as an international missionary, discipled others in how to live life on mission.



Candace McIntosh, Alabama WMU executive director, greets a new friend while on a missions trip to South Asia in January 2020. McIntosh says the missions discipleship she received as a teen and young adult opened her eyes to the world.

"[I]t's obvious that these pioneer women had a love for Christ and a passion for spreading the message of salvation which would only grow stronger in years to come," the book says.

That legacy grew for sure. In 1850, Martha Foster Crawford of Grant's Creek Baptist Church in Fosters became the first Alabama-native female missionary.

On the field in China, she served as a mentor to many, including beloved missionary Lottie Moon, whose letters back to the U.S. helped to disciple a generation toward missions.

This kind of personal mentorship picked up steam in Alabama's

churches through Alabama WMU. Over the decades that followed, volunteers led groups of preschoolers, children, teens and adults to know more about God's work around the world, and national WMU produced curriculum and provided missionary stories toward that end.

Investing in young people

That ranged from Sunbeams for preschool, which eventually changed its name to Mission Friends, to Royal Ambassadors and Girls in Action for elementary-age boys and girls.

And Alabama WMU also invested heavily in camps where all ages



Marti Richardson (top, right), who has taught Mission Friends for 25-plus years, leads a class of preschoolers at Eastmont Baptist Church in Montgomery. "That's the age when they're forming ideas about everything. ... We're missing a really big opportunity if we don't start instilling missions in them when they're little," she said.

could learn about missions. In 1990, it purchased the land that became what is now WorldSong Missions Place. At the dedication service in 1991, those present prayed "for those who would be changed by the gospel message received around the world from someone who had attended camp at WorldSong," according to "Declaring His Glory."

Hannah Thomas is one of many answers to that prayer. Thomas said God's call on her life was very real when she was a camper at WorldSong Missions Place.

"I really felt confirmation that I was to be a full-time missionary in Africa," she said.

That experience propelled her into a career of missions service in West Africa that is now going on 20 years.

"I have so many amazing memories of WorldSong," she said. "It is a place where I feel at home and where I have always felt the presence of God. I feel like the heart and soul of WorldSong is the desire to help children understand missions and the role they can play in taking the gospel to the ends of the earth."

McIntosh said WorldSong's Missions Adventure Camp is a vital way to plant those seeds early.

"We plant that understanding of God's desire of all peoples of the world to know who He is and have that personal relationship with Him," she said. "We help each child at an early age know they can be a part of that, whether it's serving their community, state or the world."

Laying the groundwork

Sophie Doyle is another whose journey was impacted by missions discipleship starting from when she was a preschooler. She felt a call to missions in college, but she said the groundwork for that call happened way before then.

"I was involved in weekly activities like Mission Friends and later GAs," said Doyle, who grew up at Eastmont Baptist Church in Montgomery and now serves alongside her husband with the International Mission Board in South Asia.

"Although I didn't feel the call on my life to serve overseas until I was in college, I think it was important that I was involved in these missions-minded programs at a young age as it laid a foundation for how I viewed cross-cultural work."

Marti Richardson — Doyle's Missions Friends teacher at Eastmont — said that's exactly what she's hoped



Acteens at Eastern Hills Baptist Church in Montgomery pack backpacks for children in the Mississippi River region.

and prayed for in the 25-plus years she's worked with preschoolers.

"That's the age when they're forming ideas about everything," Richardson said. "They're learning motor skills and relationships. We're missing a really big opportunity if we don't start instilling missions in them when they're little."

She loves it when lightbulbs go off and preschoolers see that they can pray and give to real missionaries serving Jesus in other places. And she's loved seeing those seeds grow.

"I say to them a lot, 'One day you'll be the missionaries,'" Richardson said.

For Doyle, that has definitely rung true. McIntosh said it is deeply concerning to consider the possibilities if no one is championing missions discipleship in churches, starting with the youngest among them.

She cited a recent Barna study that shows that children began developing a worldview as early as 15 months old and that a lifelong groundwork for their worldview is laid before the age of 12.

"When we do not pass on to our next generation or to the adults in our congregation the work God is doing around the world and here in the States, we fail to help them see the bigger picture of how to be a part of God's work," McIntosh said.

She pointed to "Missions Journey: Kids!" as a great resource for churches wanting to add more children's missions discipleship into their church's fabric. The flexible curriculum, produced by national Woman's

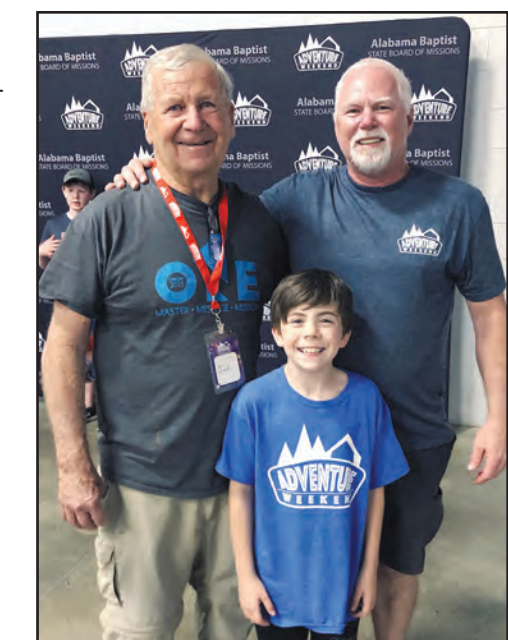
Missionary Union, includes both missions discipleship and Bible study and can be used by itself or in addition to existing curriculum at your church.

"Missions discipleship is not just a 'program' — it needs to be a vital part of your church's DNA," McIntosh said. "It's not about us, it's not about an organization but simply being a conduit for the message to

help people understand where God is working and how to join Him."

For more information, visit AlabamaWMU.org.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Names may have been changed for security reasons.



Joe Brothers (left), a member of First Baptist Church Glencoe who just started his 50th year of missions discipleship, stands with Maury Riley and his grandson Daylon, both of whom he has taught in Royal Ambassadors.



Since its dedication in 1991, WorldSong Missions Place has hosted camps intended to help children and students catch the vision to live their lives on mission to get the gospel to a lost world.

For more information, visit alabamawmu.org.

Photo courtesy of Marti Richardson

Photo courtesy of Candace McIntosh

Photo courtesy of Alabama WMU

Photo courtesy of Alabama WMU

Music-focused missions team shares gospel in Paraguay

For Becky Rogers and Karen Allen, a missions trip to the heart of South America will not soon be forgotten.

Rogers, a member of Lakeside Baptist Church in Birmingham, and Allen, a member of Meadow Brook Baptist Church in Birmingham, each participate in their respective church orchestras. But the orchestra in Paraguay was of a different sort.

Known as the Global Missions Project Celebration Orchestra, it was composed of more than 30 musicians of all ages from at least nine states and three countries.

All came together in Paraguay's capital city, Asunción, for their first rehearsal. Twenty additional young musicians from Paraguay joined the orchestra as they traveled throughout the country spreading the gospel through music.

The orchestra shared eight concerts in various locations, including the Gutenberg School in Campo Nueve, a Mennonite university, a military police station, an outside park and a concert hall.

Rogers has been on 10 previous Global Missions Project trips but noted that "this is one of the best projects I've been on." She and Allen, who has been on two trips with GMP, agreed that a church youth concert ranked as their most

meaningful moment. Youth enjoyed singing and swaying to the music with phone flashlights dotting the dimly lit sanctuary. Following the concert, a picnic on the grounds was provided, with the youth demonstrating a traditional dance and inviting orchestra members to join in.

The military police concert was another highlight, packing the concert venue with 400 rowdy cadets.

Musical favorites such as "Majesty" and "You Are Good" captured the attention of listeners. Testimonies, stories and an invitation to sing allowed for audience engagement.

Hymn classics including "Amazing Grace," "Be Thou My Vision" and "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee" were played along with an Irish jig and a jazz version of "Jericho."

Camp Kirkland, director of the orchestra and founder of GMP, also orchestrated a favorite national song of Paraguay, distributing it to project participants. "Mi Paraguay" was played at each concert, delighting concert attendees.

God's message of love was shared with more than 4,100 people from the eastern to the western side of a landlocked country that measures the size of California.

"Music is truly the international language," Rogers said. (The Alabama Baptist)

For more information, visit globalmissionsproject.com.



Photo courtesy of Global Missions Project

"Music is truly the international language," says Becky Rogers, a member of Lakeside Baptist Church in Birmingham, who participated with other musicians in a recent Global Missions Project Celebration Orchestra in Paraguay.

LASS WORDS

BY KEN LASS
The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

No Style Points in Heaven

The man is visiting his 28-year-old daughter. It is Sunday morning, and she has invited him to attend her church. He's nervous about it.

His daughter goes to one of those contemporary mega churches. He's been a member of his modest traditional Baptist church for most of his adult life.

Her church doesn't have Sunday School, so 30 minutes before the service, hundreds of cars are pouring into the vast parking lot from every direction. An army of volunteers wearing bright yellow shirts is directing parking.

Finally out of the car, they approach the worship center and are greeted at the door by a smiling young lady who is wearing blue jeans. Pretty casual for church, he thinks. As he enters the cavernous auditorium, his jaw falls open.

Uncertainty

Must be several thousand people here. No pews. Just padded folding chairs lined up in massive semi-circles facing what looks like a stage. No choir loft.

Along the back walls are elevated rows of chairs. It feels more like a concert hall than a church. Giant screens everywhere, all flashing a digital clock counting down. "What have I gotten myself into?" he wonders.

When the countdown on the screens reaches zero, a large band converges on the stage and launches into a loud spiritual rock song. The lyrics explode on to the screens in artistic fonts.

A battery of spotlights along the front of the stage fire beams of light across the room in changing colors.

This is not like any worship he's ever heard.

But after several songs, the preacher takes the podium. He is an excellent orator who delivers a compelling, Bible-based message.

The band retakes the stage with a stirring rendition of "Mighty to Save." The man looks around. Everyone on their feet. Arms in the air. Palms facing upward.

Engagement

Most importantly, he notices his daughter.

Her eyes are closed. She is singing sweetly with outstretched fingers pointed to the heavens, totally engaged, praising the Lord.

It occurs to him she is connecting with God in a way she never seemed to do in his home church.

The service is over, and he is no longer apprehensive. He leaves the building feeling glad he came.

It's not his cup of tea, but that's okay. Different churches use different ways to reach people for Christ. So be it.

There are no style points in heaven.

MEET THE AUTHOR

Ken Lass is a retired Birmingham television news and sports anchor, and an award-winning columnist for numerous publications and websites.

'I've seen the immensity of God's love here'

(continued from page 1)
 than you would find in a [developing] country?" McEwen questioned.

After finding the church's medical drawer completely empty, she began researching different organizations that would donate medical supplies domestically for the church.

A company called MedWish International answered McEwen's request with a donation of several hygiene kits, a blood pressure cuff and a couple of wound care kits.

Since she still had a few weeks before starting her nursing job in the city, she began helping Graffiti dur-

ing the workweek — and using her new supplies.

On Sundays and Mondays, she joined the church's English as a second language class and connected with asylum-seekers at a nearby establishment.

People's stories

"Being from Alabama, I knew immigrants were coming to the United States all the time, but I think we are kind of removed from that," McEwen said.

While volunteering, she enjoyed hearing people's stories and used her limited Spanish skills to make simple connections, including one with a 19-year-old

woman who wants to be a nurse.

McEwen spent her Wednesdays helping with a clothing distribution and community dinner. She started holding blood pressure screenings using the donated blood pressure cuff.

"That was my first toe dip into what it meant to be a medical missions intern," McEwen explained. "I built this community of people who always joke, 'When you get older, you're excited for someone to check your blood pressure.'"

During the screenings, McEwen found she loved making one-on-one connections and combining her love for nursing with service.

On Wednesdays and Saturdays, she made sandwiches with other church members and passed out free lunches in the park.

Lasting impact

"There've been people coming there for 20-plus years every Saturday ready for lunch," McEwen recalled. "We got to meet a lady named Miss Irene. She told us stories about 9/11. ... That really touched me in a way I didn't expect."

While McEwen has enjoyed her temporary experience serving in New York City, she wants to make a lasting impact at Graffiti.

"The point of missions is not for you to help them and leave. The point of missions



Photo courtesy of Britney McEwen

Britney McEwen (right) poses with her friend, Anne Cheri Gygax, the other intern from First Baptist Church Huntsville who spent the summer working at Graffiti Church.

is to help them so they can sustain or be better after you leave them," McEwen said.

After receiving the idea from Collins' wife, who is also a nurse, she decided to build an accessible first-aid kit that anyone — even those not medically trained — can use.

"What I'm working on is how can I teach them to use this first-aid kit, not so that when they open it, they're scared, but that they can see the splints that we made or the gauze and be like, 'I know how to use this,'" McEwen said.

In September, she plans to speak in a church service on how to use this first-aid kit and how to react in emergency situations, like fire safety.

After finishing her nursing contract in November,



Photo by Corrie Aune Photography

"[This experience] is something that I'm going to remember for the rest of my life," Britney McEwen says.

McEwen will return home to Huntsville with a lot of memories.

"I feel like I've seen the immensity of God's love here," McEwen said while standing on the city streets. "The time that I've spent here — it's so diverse; there are so many cultures to get to know.

"You don't see the world in Alabama, but you see the world in New York City. You see how much God loves these people and that does not change by what we do or who we are.

"I think I just needed to be reminded that God does love me, and He loves everyone on this planet. [This experience] is something that I'm going to remember for the rest of my life."

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Photo courtesy of Britney McEwen

Britney McEwen (center) shows Graffiti Church members the medical supplies that now fill up an entire cabinet that was once empty.

UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Leadership conference for all staff and lay leaders

PrepHere is a church leadership conference for every staff member and lay leader in your church. Everyone will have opportunities to attend breakout sessions pertinent to their area of service, be emboldened and leave better prepared to serve in ministry.

The focus of the conference — set for Oct. 12–13 at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary — is Servant Leadership in Uncertain Times.

It will feature:

▶ Jamie Dew, NOBTS president.

▶ Robby Gallaty, senior pastor of Long Hollow Baptist Church in Hendersonville, Tennessee.

▶ Steve Gaines, senior pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Cordova, Tennessee.

As the SBOM is a sponsoring partner of this event, Alabama Baptists can receive a 20% discount off registration by using the code ALABAMA_20.

The SBOM “is dedicated

to the equipping of those called to Christian/church leadership,” said Rick Lance, SBOM executive director. “The Prepare Here Leadership Conference is an event that does just that for leaders who are serving and who will serve in ministry for the Lord. We highly recommend this quality training event.”

For more information and downloadable promotional resources, visit nobts.edu/prepare/here.html.

Annual meeting Nov. 14–15 will highlight bicentennial

Mark your calendars now for a grand celebration coming in November!

The annual meeting of the Alabama Baptist State Convention — really a family reunion for all Alabama Baptists — will be held Tuesday and

Wednesday, Nov. 14 and 15, at First Baptist Church, Montgomery. Woven

throughout our time together will be a commemoration of our convention’s 200th anniversary, with a focus on the theme

“Unfinished” based on Philippians 3:13–14.

You won’t want to miss this glorious time of celebrating God’s wonderful faithfulness while also stepping into a bright future of missions and ministry for the Lord.

There will be much more information to come, so check alsbom.org/ convention regularly for the latest details.



LIFT! event for church worship ministers

The LIFT! Defining Worship Conference has a simple purpose — to worship God with all of our heart, mind and soul, and give you tools to take that worship back to your church with fresh tools to meet your church’s needs.

This event is created

for worship leaders, lay leaders, worship teams, pastors and more to join together and rediscover the love and importance of leading worship. It’s also a great time for networking and fellowship with people doing ministry similar to yours in their own churches.

LIFT! features corporate worship plus breakout sessions to choose from. The conference will be held Sept. 28, 9:30–2 p.m., at First Baptist Church Trussville.

The cost is \$35 and includes lunch.

To register, visit alabamaworship.org/lift.

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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

CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Sardis Springs Baptist Church in Athens, Alabama, is seeking full-time, God-called pastor with a heart for evangelism. SSBC is a member of the SBC, following SB doctrine, follows the Baptist Faith & Message. Candidate should demonstrate a strong Christian faith and commitment to Jesus Christ. For detailed job posting: <https://thealabamabaptist.org/classifieds/browse-ads/22223/job-openings/>. Please send resumé with references to SSBC PSC electronically (preferred) or through mail to: ssbcsearchteam@gmail.com or ATTN: SSBC Pastor Search Committee, 19072 Holt Road, Athens, AL 35613. Links to recorded sermons also preferred. Deadline to apply: Sept. 24.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR & MINISTER OF YOUTH/ EDUCATION

Taylorville Baptist Church is seeking a full-time associate pastor and minister of youth/education. An ordained minister with a college degree preferred and at least three years of ministry experience preferred. Please email your cover letter, resumé and three references to: kcollins@taylorvillebaptist.org. Resumés will be accepted until Sept. 30.

STUDENT & YOUNG ADULT PASTOR

Lakewood Baptist Church, Phenix City, Alabama, is seeking a full-time student and young adult pastor. Resumés sent to: lbpsearch@outlook.com.

OTHER POSITIONS

LIVE-IN HOUSE MOTHER

Live-in house mother needed for battered women’s shelter. Strong faith and good communication skills, office skills a plus. Job can be shared, salary and benefits. Send resumé to: hopecottageofrandolphcounty@gmail.com or P.O. Box 366, Wedowee, AL 36274.

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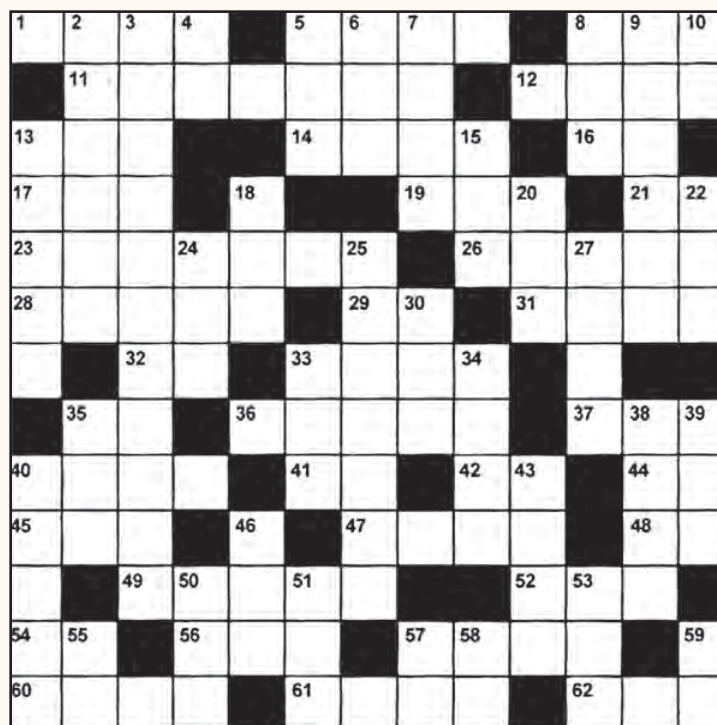
Unforsaken Ministries walks alongside those in active addiction and their loved ones. Our mission is to offer hope. This is accomplished by guiding those in addiction and their loved ones through the recovery process. For more information, call 205-246-2030 or email glenn@unforsakenministry.org.

CHRISTIAN Crossword



ACROSS

- 1. Garden of ____.
- 5. Wander.
- 8. He is of ____; ask him. (John 9:21)
- 11. And the ____ and the morning were the first day. (Gen. 1:5)
- 12. The first man.
- 13. The first woman.
- 14. Pare.
- 16. Doctor. (abbr.)
- 17. Director. (abbr.)
- 19. Grass.
- 21. This ____ in remembrance of me. (Luke 22:19)
- 23. Lands surrounded by water.
- 26. Make broader.
- 28. Day and night shall not _____. (Gen 8:22)
- 29. Chicago transportation.
- 31. What hast thou ____? (Gen. 4:10)
- 32. Spelling. (abbr.)
- 33. Ye shall not eat of every ____ of the garden? (Gen. 3:1)
- 35. Old Testament. (abbr.)
- 36. Naomi's daughter-in-law. (Ruth 1:4)
- 37. Relatives.
- 40. Son of Adam and Eve.
- 41. ____ shall not eat of it. (Gen. 3:3)
- 42. Let ____ make man. (Gen. 1:26)
- 44. Hear the word of God and ____ it. (Luke 8:21)
- 45. Vase.
- 47. Naked.
- 48. Either/_____.
- 49. I will make of thee a ____ nation. (Gen. 12:2)
- 52. To be in poor health.
- 54. And it was _____. (Gen. 1:7)
- 56. Deed.
- 57. North Atlantic Treaty



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- Organization. (abbr.)
 - the hole of the _____. (Isa. 11:8)
 - 25. The ____ beguiled me. (Gen. 3:13)
 - 27. Pier.
 - 30. Meadow.
 - 33. ____ me, and know my thoughts. (Ps. 139:23)
 - 34. Lefthanded judge. (Judg. 3:15)
 - 35. Paddle.
 - 38. An ____ is nothing. (1 Cor. 8:4)
 - 39. They have no rest day ____ night. (Rev. 14:11)
 - 40. ____d is the ground for thy sake. (Gen. 3:17)
 - 43. The ____ of the scornful. (Ps. 1:1)
 - 46. Recreation. (abbr.)
 - 50. Beam.
 - 51. I took the little book ... and ____ it up. (Rev. 10:10)
 - 53. Electrically charged atom.
 - 55. Upon.
 - 57. North Carolina. (abbr.)
 - 58. Exclamation.
 - 59. ____ was very good. (Gen. 1:31)
- DOWN**
- 2. Plan.
 - 3. Be ye lift up, ye ____ doors. (Ps. 24:7)
 - 4. Compass direction.
 - 5. Rend.
 - 6. And they shall be ____ flesh. (Gen. 2:24)
 - 7. That in the ____ to come. (Eph. 2:7)
 - 8. Total.
 - 9. And the Lord God planted a _____. (Gen 2:8)
 - 10. Printer's measure.
 - 13. Decree.
 - 15. Both ____ and high. (Ps. 49:2)
 - 18. Love ____ another. (John 15:17)
 - 20. And I ____ eat. (Gen. 3:12)
 - 22. There is none good but _____. (Matt. 19:17)
 - 24. Child shall play on

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

YM Link on the Road in October

YM Link is providing two opportunities in October for practical, intensive training that can greatly impact your youth ministry.

This year's speakers for YM Link on the Road are Ricky Smith, lead pastor at Calvary Baptist Church in Columbus, Georgia, and Josh Meadows, youth ministry strategist at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. Smith will be speaking about professionalism in youth ministry, and Meadows will talk about personal development.

This event will also be a great time of networking with other youth ministry workers.

It will be held:

- ▶ The Church at Eastern

To register, visit studentmin.forms.app/on-the-road-reg24 or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



Oaks in Montgomery, Oct. 23, 6 p.m.–8 p.m.

▶ CrossPoint Church Trussville, Oct. 24, 10 a.m.–12 p.m.

▶ First Baptist Church Hartselle, Oct. 24, 6 p.m.–8 p.m.

To register, visit studentmin.forms.app/on-the-road-reg24.

It's time to pack Christmas backpacks

In 2022, Alabama Baptists gave 14,336 backpacks to the Christmas backpacks ministry.

It's time to do it again!

You and your church can make Christmas brighter for children living along the Mississippi River who are among some of the poorest in the nation. Generation after generation in the region live without basic human necessities.

For instructions on how to pack backpacks, collection points and times and other information about how you and your church can be involved in this effort, visit alabamawmu.org/christmasbackpacks.

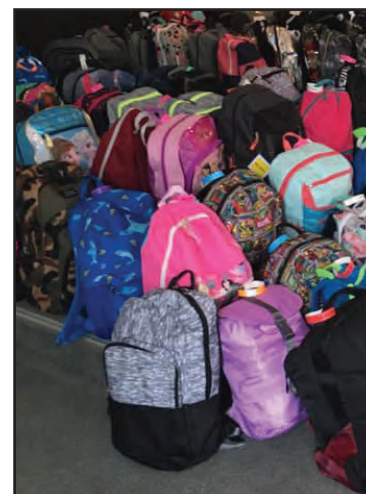


Photo courtesy of Paulette Wilcutt

Feeling 'God's tug'

Adoption of 3 daughters with Down syndrome helps empty nesters fulfill God's purpose

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

In 2012, Brenda Rinehart was busy — really, really busy. She was starting her doctoral degree, working as a health care administrator and serving in a variety of professional roles. She and her husband, Joseph, were also leading networking groups and involved in a variety of other things in their community and church.

"That's where we were in life,"

Rinehart said. "And around that time, I had a dream of a little girl walking down the hallway of our house. She had black hair and a little soup-bowl haircut, and she had Down syndrome. And she opened the door to our bedroom and called us Mama and Daddy."

'Dream kept happening'

Rinehart was taken off guard by the dream, and she figured it must be God preparing her to have a grandchild with special needs —

she and her husband already had six adult children.

"But the dream kept happening over and over, and this child was calling us Mama and Daddy, not Nana and Papa or anything like that," she said.

Rinehart said she found ways to brush it off. First, after two of her grandchildren developed special needs, she circled back around to the belief they might be why she'd had the dream.

Then as she and her husband

both felt "God's tug" on their heart for foster care, they decided they were too busy to take children into their home; instead, they decided to start giving financially to foster care ministry.

Sensing direction

In the years that followed, things only got more chaotic. Their life went through a series of job changes and house changes, and while they continued to soften more and more on adoption and

EVERY CHILD DESERVES TO THRIVE.

Is the Lord calling your family to explore adoption of a child, or children, with special needs?

To learn more about Domestic or International options, visit:

lifelinechild.org/specialneedsadoption

 **lifeline**
children's services





Photo courtesy of Brenda Rinehart

Brenda Rinehart says God led her and her husband, Joseph, as empty nesters to adopt three daughters with Down syndrome — (from left) Brooklyn (9), Bella (9) and Brynlee (11).

even looked into it, everything felt too busy for that to work.

But the Rineharts couldn't shake the feeling that God was calling them to it.

"I told my husband, 'I can't let go of that dream,' and he said, 'I can't let go of that dream either,'" she said. "So I said, 'Let's go tell that dream to our agency.'"

So that's exactly what they did, and their social worker's reaction surprised them.

"She said, 'From the moment I heard you say that, I knew exactly what I wanted to show you,'" Rinehart said. "She pulled up a photo of some little girls in China who had Down syndrome. For my husband and I, it was like an instant knowing — that's what we were supposed to do."

She and her husband started the adoption process, which moved quickly at first, then slowed for a variety of reasons.

'God's timing'

"In that waiting time, because God's timing is perfect, the daughter we adopted first became available, and we were matched with her," Rinehart said.

Then, in the place in China where they met their daughter, Brooklyn,

who's now 9, Rinehart said God impressed something new on her heart as they prayed with other adoptive parents.

She looked at her husband and said, "We're going to be back here really soon."

More big change

Sure enough, nine months later, they went back to China and brought home Brynlee, who's now 11. With that season came more big change.

"She'd been home three months, and my husband's job offered him the chance to get into management," Rinehart said.

That meant they'd have to move from Washington State to Texas.

"We weren't in Texas very long, maybe a year, before I said to

my husband that I think we're supposed to adopt one final time," she said.

God confirmed the same thing to Joseph one night while he was on a flight. The couple started the process again, but it wasn't as easy this time.

They struggled first with getting some critical paperwork through, then found out that Bethany — the little girl they had been matched

with for two and a half years — had gone into a coma from encephalitis brought on by a respiratory infection. They were told she would never recover.

"We grieved really hard," Rinehart said. "It took a while, but I will give kudos to my husband because in all this he said, 'I told you God told me on the plane that this was our purpose, and we were going to move forward. There's no reason not to keep going forward with what He's called us to do even if it hurts.'"

They were matched again with another little girl, and then more news came.

"The foster family who had her decided that they could not let her go, and they adopted her in country. It's absolutely unheard of," Rinehart said. "I was so happy for her — ecstatic for her to not have to leave her culture and her country and the people who have raised her."

It was still tough to process, and at that point, their door for an adoption from China seemed to close.

"They weren't going to let us find another child," Rinehart said. "We didn't have a choice; we were just going to have to hang in there and see what God had planned."

Working with Lifeline

Along the way, they had started working with Lifeline Children's Services, a holistic orphan-care ministry based in Birmingham, and one day Lifeline called with a question.

"They said, 'Would you consider a domestic adoption?' And we said, 'Tell us more,'" Rinehart said. "They told us about a little girl who had been adopted from China three years prior, and her parents couldn't continue with her adoption."

The little girl also had Down syndrome, and age-wise she was between Brooklyn and Brynlee. After meeting her on a video call, Rinehart realized she recognized the girl — she'd helped advocate for her adoption several years before. Soon Bella, now 9, joined their family too.

Rinehart said she's so thankful that God took them from being an empty-nester career couple to being the adoptive parents of three precious girls. Even though she'd originally planned to go back to work when her oldest daughter was in kindergarten, she never did.

'God knows better'

"I was thinking I was destined to be CEO of a hospital someday, that was my goal," said Rinehart, who has moved with her family to Tulsa, Oklahoma, since the last adoption. "I'm so glad God knows better than I do. I'm so glad I'm here with these kiddos, not there."

She said for anyone who feels God tugging on their heart toward adoption or another calling, "don't be afraid for God to turn your life upside down; sometimes that's the only way to see correctly."

"When God puts a call on your life, you're always going to be unsettled until you fulfill that call," Rinehart said.

"That restlessness, that 'I can't get comfortable' feeling — I think that, until you do it, you will be restless."

Heather Cole, senior domestic specialist at Lifeline, said it had been "a joy" to walk alongside the Rineharts.

"I had the privilege of seeing their love for their children and grandchildren throughout their journey," Cole said. "They love who God created their children to be, and [they] help them to flourish into who they are."

All children deserve to thrive, she said, and the Rineharts are a picture of that.

"At Lifeline Children's Services, we believe that every child, no matter their abilities or needs, is worthy of love, family and belonging," Cole said.

Rinehart said she's grateful for the guidance and support Lifeline has provided.

"There are days I'm certain I would not have made it through without them," she said. "They're compassionate, they listen and they go out of their way to make sure that you're OK. I always knew they cared."



Photo courtesy of Brenda Rinehart

Brooklyn Rinehart (9) with her father, Joseph. Brooklyn was the Rineharts' first daughter adopted from China.

For more information on special needs adoption, visit lifelinechild.org/special-needs-adoption.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For September 24

Explore the Bible

By Robert Olsen, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



SATISFIES Mark 6:30–43

Rest (30–32)

A common reference to the Christian life is that it is like the military — we are always on duty.

Just as a soldier is always on duty, even at night when sleeping, a Christian is always at the beck and call of our Master, Jesus. However, this does not mean we are always “on the go.” There are times in the Christian life when rest is needed, just as in the military.

The disciples had just come back from preaching the gospel, telling people to repent and casting out demons and healing sickness. (See Mark 6:7–13.) They told Jesus all that had happened, and Jesus took them to a solitary place to rest.

When we are involved in ministry, it is good for us to get together and discuss the results. This is always a source of encouragement and instruction for God’s people and motivates all of us to be on mission for God in whatever our calling is.

Unfortunately, a common problem in the church is that some people tend to do too much and get burned out as a result. When a task is left open, others have opportunities to pick up the slack and get involved.

Response (33–34)

The crowd followed Jesus around the lake so they could continue to hear Him and see His miracles. When Jesus saw them, He had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. He recognized their spiritual needs and so began to minister to them.

God has put many people in our lives who have deep spiritual needs, from fellow Christians who are hurting to nonbelievers who are completely lost.

“And taking the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves ... and He divided the two fish among them all.”

Mark 6:41

We need to be aware of our surroundings and minister when we can, where we can.

Resources (35–38)

Instead of sending the crowds away, Jesus told the disciples to round up what food they could find, and then Jesus did the miracle of multiplying it so everyone could eat, perhaps as many as 20,000 people if you include women and children.

Jesus’ concern for the physical needs of others has historically given rise to ministries that bring aid to those in need — hospitals, food kitchens, missions, etc.

However, Jesus was not only concerned with healing others; He always preached the gospel. If we only provide physical comfort for others, they still face a godless eternity in hell. While we can help bring physical healing, the gospel brings spiritual healing, which is what people need more than anything.

The miracle of feeding the 5,000 is the only miracle apart from the resurrection of Jesus that appears in every gospel, indicating how important this event is. Not only does it show Jesus being concerned for those around Him, but His ability to do such miracles also affirms His deity.

Relief (39–44)

The disciples obeyed Jesus and did what He told them to do — go round up the resources. Jesus then did the miracle.

In our own lives and ministries, it is our duty to obey what God commands us to do, no matter how daunting the task may be. God is the one who gets the glory, and God is the one who does the miracle of salvation in the lives of those around us while also changing our hearts, sanctifying us as we serve.

Bible Studies for Life

By Jeffery M. Leonard, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Biblical & Religious Studies, Samford University



LIVE COURAGEOUSLY Daniel 6:6–13, 16–17, 21–23

The stories collected in the Book of Daniel take place across the backdrop of two major empires — Babylonia and Persia.

Like other empires in the region, Babylonia’s power had ebbed and flowed across the centuries.

The latest (and last) iteration of the empire was the so-called Neo-Babylon Empire, a powerful dynasty whose most famous ruler was the mighty King Nebuchadnezzar.

But less than a century after its founding, the Neo-Babylonian Empire would be eclipsed by an even more powerful empire from the east.

The Persian king known as Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon by claiming that the ancient god Marduk had commissioned him to take Babylon from King Nabonidus, who had replaced Marduk with the moon god Sin.

The priests and the people welcomed him with open arms. The Bible writers gave Cyrus high praise as well because he was the king who reversed Babylon’s policy of exile.

Cyrus ordered that the Jews in exile be allowed to return to their homeland, and he even helped fund their journey.

While many of the Jewish exiles returned to Judah, a significant minority did not. Esther and her uncle Mordecai were among those who chose to stay in exile; so was Daniel.

Now an old man and a trusted servant in Persia, just as he had been in Babylon, it is not surprising that Daniel opted not to return to the promised land.

Nor is it surprising that, despite the high regard in which he was held by most, Daniel continued to face challenges to freely living out his faith.

Changing circumstances should not change our resolve to obey and honor God. (6–10)

The Book of Daniel characterizes its namesake as a model servant

to the Persian king. When other politicians in the empire grew jealous of Daniel, they found themselves continually stymied in their efforts to undermine him “for he was trustworthy and no negligence or corruption was found in him” (v. 4).

Unable to nail Daniel on ethical charges, his opponents decided to entrap him on religious grounds instead.

They convinced the king to sign an order forbidding Persia’s subjects from praying to “any god or human being” except the king himself. The punishment for violating this edict was to be death in the lions’ den.

Honoring God often incurs opposition. (11–13)

It is worth taking a moment to “look under the hood” of the actions of Daniel’s rivals.

Their failure to find malfeasance or maladministration on Daniel’s part tells us something important about the book’s hero: Daniel was a man of extraordinary ethical integrity.

The rivals’ decision to target Daniel’s prayer life tells us something as well: The rivals knew Daniel would remain faithful to his convictions no matter what the cost.

God uses our commitment to Him to point others to Him. (16–17, 21–23)

Just as Daniel’s opponents had suspected, Daniel refused to stray from his faith.

Even with the knowledge that praying to his God would mean certain death, Daniel knelt before God three times a day just as he had before the king’s edict was issued. What followed is one of the best-known stories in the Bible.

Despite his desire to let Daniel go, the king was obliged to follow through with his order, and so he had Daniel thrown into the lions’ den. To the king’s great delight, however, Daniel emerged the next morning without a scratch.

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Leann Callaway

The Alabama Baptist

Musician Jordan Feliz rejoices in Christ's redemptive power

With songs such as “The King is Alive” and “Jesus is Coming Back,” singer-songwriter Jordan Feliz wants to encourage listeners to rejoice in Christ's redemptive power as they anticipate His return.

Looking back through the years, Feliz says he remains greatly moved by the testimonies of God at work throughout his musical journey and is reminded of the winding path that led him to where he is today.

“My prayer before I go on stage is, ‘Lord, let these people be focused on only You through these words,’” Feliz told The Alabama Baptist. “Ultimately, the ability for that to happen through a song that's written is incredible and so powerful, knowing that these songs can prove to people that Jesus can heal the brokenhearted and that He is the answer for those who are struggling and searching.

“I grew up in the church, but I didn't really understand my walk with Christ until I was in high school,” Feliz said. “I started writing songs my freshman year when I picked up the guitar and taught myself how to play. Through songwriting, I had this amazing moment



JORDAN FELIZ

Photo courtesy of Jordan Feliz

of feeling like God was calling me to sing and write music for the Church.”

‘Different direction’

Although Feliz initially began his music career in a mainstream rock band, he remained faithful to his calling to reach people for Christ.

“My senior year of high school, my friends and I started a heavy metal band with the purpose of being a light in the darkness,” Feliz said. “We really wanted to go out and introduce people to Jesus. In that band I kept the same desire that is still in my heart today — to go out and love people.”

While this genre provided Feliz with a unique platform and opportunities to share his faith, he soon realized the Lord was directing him another way.

“When the band broke up, God pushed me into a different direction when a worship pastor in my hometown reached out to me and

invited me to lead worship,” Feliz said. “It was during this time that I really fell in love with leading worship. During that prayerful time of seeking God's will, I really felt like God was opening this door to pursue music in Nashville.”

In 2015, Feliz released his debut album, “Beloved,” with Centricity Music, which captured the attention of audiences across the country with heart-stirring lyrics.

“The title track on that album was written specifically for my daughter,” Feliz said. “When my wife was pregnant, I was sitting in a room with two other fathers, and we were discussing what this world would tell our daughters. It was a compiled list of negative things that kept growing.”

‘New perspective’

“As I was thinking about all these things, it inspired me to write a song letting my daughter know that she is not only loved by her parents

but by the Savior of the world more than anything. Now being a father myself, I've gained a whole new perspective on God's love for His children, His beloved. The song has taken new shape knowing the depths of the Father's love.”

Sharing the Savior's love

Since then, Feliz has turned the song into a heartwarming children's book of the same name designed to help young children to find their value and identity in Christ.

While making an impressive entrance into the Christian music industry back in 2015, his first single, “The River,” quickly raced up the charts and reached No. 1 on Billboard's Christian radio chart.

In 2016, Feliz received the prestigious honors of New Artist of the Year at the Gospel Music Association's Dove Awards, and “The River” was named the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers Christian Music Song of the Year.

Today, wherever Feliz performs, he desires to use his musical talents for God's glory and focuses on leading audiences to find fulfillment in Christ. This fall he will be appearing on the “Love and Light Tour” with Colton Dixon.

“More than anything, I want people to know that they are loved by the Savior of the world. I want people to know that everything in life and the void in our hearts can only be satisfied by Jesus,” Feliz said.

“It's an incredible thing to encourage each other along life's journey, being broken together and worshipping God together. I've heard from people going through a lot of pain and loss, and I'm reminded that these songs are a lot bigger than me.”

EDITOR'S NOTE

Reviews of films, books, music or other media that appear in TAB are intended to help readers evaluate current media for themselves, their children and grandchildren in order to decide whether to watch, read or listen. Reviews are not an endorsement by the writer or TAB Media.

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The Alabama Baptist

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December 8, 2022

INSIDE



Missionary couple recognized for decades of service
→ Page 9



Pastors working as Santas bring joy, extend ministry to others during holidays
→ Page 11



'Something

Ice cream truck dreams turn into ministry

By Grace Thornton
Michelle Norwood says on a much smaller scale, she might know what South felt like. For her it wasn't an ark — it was an ice cream truck. "I had seen one for maybe three minutes in my life," she recalled. "I was visiting my sister in Memphis one summer. We walked out, and I bought the kids an ice cream." But in 2017, Norwood said she woke up night after night at 2 a.m., and God started to speak to her about how to build one. "I'd wake up, and little by little there would be another idea of what I needed to research or figure out," she related. "I made notes and started making connections." It was a new thought, but its purpose behind it had been in Norwood's mind and heart.

The Alabama Baptist

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February 16, 2023

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Volunteers unload boxes of frozen chicken at the ministry house of FBC Alabaster. The church has run a food ministry for 20 years.

Food insecurity

Alabama Baptist churches help put food on the table for people in their communities

By Grace Thornton
Michelle Weaver said people used to associate hunger with homelessness, but from where she sits, she feels that just isn't the case anymore. As community ministry director at First Baptist Church Alabaster, Weaver sees people from all walks of life wait in line every second and

fourth Monday to get food from their drive-thru food pantry. "In this day and in this economy, there are families we have met who are nurses, bankers, teachers and college students," she said. "It's a diverse population right now needing food assistance because groceries have gone sky high, medical bills aren't being covered, or they can't afford medical insurance or their hours are being cut at work."

And not only are the lines full of a broad spectrum of people, they're also getting longer, Weaver said. Their ministry has tripled in the last three years and takes between 30 and 40 volunteers to run. **Growing ministry** "We used to start out with 15 to 20 cars in our drive-thru and can get 100 cars now, some with multiple families in the car," she said. "We

feed between 500 and 600 people every Monday we do our food ministry." FBC Alabaster's food pantry started 20 years ago with boxes of food stored in a closet and has grown over the years and adapted to meet people where they are. In years past, people could come to the ministry, talk to the volunteers about their financial need and then receive food. (See 'Hunger,' page 13)

SPOTLIGHT SPONSOR ...

Unforsaken Ministry — Walking with those in addiction and their families through the journey of recovery.

The Alabama Baptist

February 23, 2023

Vol. 188, No. 8
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College students focus of Feb. 23 prayer emphasis

By Carrie B. McWhorter
An annual day of prayer for college students is coming at a pivotal time in the spiritual lives of students throughout the nation and across Alabama. The Collegiate Day of Prayer, which falls this year on Feb. 23, has garnered renewed attention as news reports chronicle the revival happening at Ashbury University in Wilmore, Kentucky.

Livestream This year's 200th anniversary prayer service will be livestreamed from Ashbury on Feb. 23 from 7 to 9 p.m. Central time.

On Feb. 24-25, hundreds of college students from across Alabama will gather at First Baptist Church Montgomery and student ministries for Pursue, an annual missions and discipleship conference. Ben Edfield, director of collegiate and student ministries for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said he is excited to see how God will use the convergence of the day of prayer, Pursue and the Ashbury revival. "I hope that our Alabama Baptist churches will join the office of collegiate and student ministries on Feb. 23 in asking God to move in an unmistakable way — calling students to repentance, inviting students

us'

to Annie Armstrong gifts In Alabama there are churches everywhere. That started the couple on a journey toward realizing God was calling them to plant a church there. They started a church planting residency in early 2020, were affirmed in the summer and started growing their launch teams in 2021. "We launched The Local Church officially in February 2022," McKay said. "We started in one location, meeting on Sunday afternoons at 4 p.m." (See 'Ministry,' page 10)

LIGHT SPONSOR ...

Training Institute at Samford University — Equipping students to be leaders in their churches and communities through education and practical ministry training.

‘A God thing’

By Meredith Flynn
The Baptist Paper

Wilton reflects on friendship with Billy Graham

For years, Don Wilton had a front row seat to the quiet leadership and humble spirit of Billy Graham.

As pastor of First Baptist Church Spartanburg, South Carolina, Wilton was Graham’s pastor, meeting with him regularly to discuss the Bible and pray together.

“I will forever be grateful to the Lord that He allowed me to sit at this man’s feet for nearly 25 years,” Wilton, now retired, said on a recent episode of the Think Eternity podcast hosted by Matt Brown.

The conversation included Wilton’s thoughts on Graham’s humility and servant’s heart, despite the fact that he was counselor to some of the most famous and powerful people in the world. Wilton also shared the evangelist’s answer to the question Christian leaders asked near the end of his life and after his 2018 death: Who will be the next Billy Graham?

Wilton shared stories about Graham in the book “Saturdays with Billy: My Friendship with Billy Graham” (Thomas Nelson, 2021). But for the first decade they knew each other, he rarely mentioned their friendship to anyone. He hesitated to write the book even years later and insisted it’s not a biography. Rather, it’s the story of a friendship or, as Wilton said, “a picture of a nobody who really thought he was a somebody, talking to a somebody who really thought he was a nobody.”

In 1993, Wilton had begun his tenure in Spartanburg when Graham called to discuss his sermon, which he’d watched on television.

He invited the pastor to visit his home in Montreat, North Carolina. Wilton went the next day.

Graham greeted him in blue jeans, a sweater and running shoes, Wilton recalled. They sat on the front lawn



Photo courtesy of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association

Don Wilton, pastor to the late evangelist Billy Graham, says he “will forever be grateful to the Lord” for time spent with Graham. As the pastor of FBC Spartanburg, South Carolina, Wilton, now retired, regularly met with Graham to discuss the Bible and pray.

drinking tea. “I really believe that that moment God ordained something that I can’t explain to you,” Wilton told Brown about the beginning of their friendship. “It just was a God thing.”

‘Standing ovations’

Wilton met with Graham for years until the evangelist summoned him to Montreat to ask an important question: Can I join your church? The vote was a unanimous yes. “You can imagine, when I took it to our

church, in all our worship services, just standing ovations,” Wilton said.

Graham was a world-renowned evangelist, a counselor to leaders around the globe. But he had a deep humility that came from within, Wilton noted.

As they read the Bible together, the evangelist would often ask his pastor to help him understand a particular passage of Scripture.

“He was the most genuinely Christ-like, humble servant of the Lord Jesus I’ve ever had the privi-

lege of being around,” Wilton said.

“We were with presidents of the United States, prime ministers, kings, queens, the most famous athletes in the world, the most famous people in the world, and he was the same in his spiritual demeanor toward them. And yet in that, there was a supersonic greatness. Mr. Graham would be very unhappy to hear me say this: I always felt like I was in the presence of greatness, of someone who was highly esteemed. I never lost that, the sense, I knew it.”

Uniqueness of the gospel

Wilton said Graham impressed upon him the uniqueness of the gospel. It is a message unique in its content and its application to all people, he said, and in the instrument God chose to share it: followers of Jesus.

“I am not Billy Graham, and Billy Graham is not Don Wilton,” he said. “We are made militantly, fiercely, uniquely in the image of God. And you and you and you and you are precious in God’s sight. And we all have our unique gifts, all of us. Because God has no giftless children, and God uses all of us.”

Wilton once asked the evangelist who would take up the mantle as the next Billy Graham.

“Don, you are,” Graham replied and for one second, Wilton recounted, he told himself he had just been anointed by Graham himself. He wished his wife and sons had been there to hear it. But Graham quickly added, “Everyone, all of us, Don. That’s the single greatest need we have in our world today.”

“Mr. Graham so embedded in my heart the joyful necessity of sharing Christ, inviting people to trust him,” Wilton said. “And that’s the work of God by His Holy Spirit.”

“I WILL FOREVER BE GRATEFUL TO THE LORD THAT HE ALLOWED ME TO SIT AT THIS MAN’S FEET FOR NEARLY 25 YEARS.”

DON WILTON

UPCOMING SPECIAL EDITION



NOVEMBER 30 ISSUE

Aging Well

Resources that encompass aspects of growing older, including fitness and wellness tips, estate planning, housing and health care, and ways to mentor the next generation.

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Active in missions

By Hamilton Richardson

The Baptist Paper

Indiana Baptists striving to fuel missionary pipeline

Because of a deep desire for every church in the Hoosier State to be active in missions, the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana is striving to fuel the International Mission Board pipeline with more missionary candidates to actively reach the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Ryan Strother, executive director of SCBI, visited IMB's office in Richmond, Virginia, in January and was challenged by the IMB's goal of sending 500 more missionaries over the next five years, said Scooter Kellum, team leader for church and leader mobilization for SCBI.

"Statistics reveal that 300 missionaries come off the field every year for various reasons," Kellum said. "So, when realizing that the Southern Baptist Convention needs to send 400 new missionaries every year if we're going to see 500 additional missionaries over the next five years, Dr. Strother started thinking of how SCBI can fuel the pipeline with more Hoosier candidates."

First step

Kellum went on to explain that as Strother was reflecting on what the first step would be, he was reminded of a time when he was a pastor. A young couple from his church was reportedly inquiring about how to follow God's calling in their lives to be on the missions field. They went to Strother, and he was able to help track down the answers the couple needed. They are now serving on the missions field.

Paul Chitwood, president of IMB, recently shared with Southern Baptists his vision for missionary involvement. Kellum noted that

Chitwood said, "This work can only be accomplished through the cooperative work of Southern Baptists. Our convention exists for the purpose of praying, giving, going and sending together. Together, we get to share the good news of Jesus with people and in places where that news has never been heard. Together, we send, sustain and support missionaries to be steadfastly present around the globe."

In May, Kellum, six pastors and Strother went to Richmond for two

days to learn more about the work of the IMB.

"If SCBI is going to fill the missionary pipeline [with] Hoosier candidates, we need our pastors involved in the solution," Strother said.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE MISSIONARY EFFORTS BEING PUT FORWARD BY THE STATE CONVENTION OF BAPTISTS IN INDIANA, VISITSCBI.ORG.

Kellum outlined the strategy SCBI is working toward, which includes "connecting and coupling."

Connecting involves making one connection, such as a phone call, with an SCBI pastor each week and being available to speak in

churches and associations when missionaries are desired.

Coupling means that every Hoosier candidate in the IMB pipeline will be paired with one of the IMB advocates for prayer and emotional support throughout the process.

'We want to connect'

"We want to connect with our SCBI churches," Kellum said, "to create a missionary pipeline so that many will be added to the 'great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb'" (Rev. 7:9).



Photo courtesy of the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana

Todd Lafferty (far left), IMB executive vice president, and Paul Chitwood (far right), IMB president, recently met with Indiana Baptist leaders (l to r) Scott Smith, pastor, South Side Baptist Church, South Bend; Ryan Strother, executive director, State Convention of Baptists in Indiana; Larry Lewis, pastor, Vann Avenue Baptist Church, Evansville; Toby Jenkins, pastor, First Baptist Church, Henryville; Dan Conrades, pastor, Crosspoint Church, Richmond, Indiana; Jordan Hobbles, pastor, Emmanuel Baptist Church, North Salem; and Larry Snyder, retired pastor, Victory Baptist Church, Terre Haute.

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‘No one is beyond redemption’

By Roger Alford
The Christian Index

New book tells story of mafia leader with same name as famous evangelist Billy Sunday

Billy Sunday Birt didn't live up to his namesake, the famed evangelist who impacted countless lives in the early 1900s through his powerful preaching.

Birt, the reputed leader of the Dixie Mafia operating out of northeast Georgia in the 1960s and '70s, had been convicted in three murders, although authorities suspect he may have killed more than 50 people.

Journalist Phil Hudgins and Birt's wife, Ruby Nell Birt, teamed up to tell Birt's story in the true crime account "Grace and Disgrace," which chronicles the life of a man who fell far short of the respected gospel preacher his parents had named him after.

"The name didn't take," Hudgins said.

The original Billy Sunday was a professional baseball player-turned-evangelist who was the Billy Graham of the early 1900s, traveling the country telling people about Jesus.

Finding Christ

In his research, Hudgins discovered that Birt apparently found redemption thanks to the ministry of Charles Bryant Skelton, a member of Gideons International who had been a family practitioner in Winder, about 50 miles northeast of Atlanta. Skelton explained the gospel to Birt through letters he sent to him in prison.

Ruby Nell Birt described her

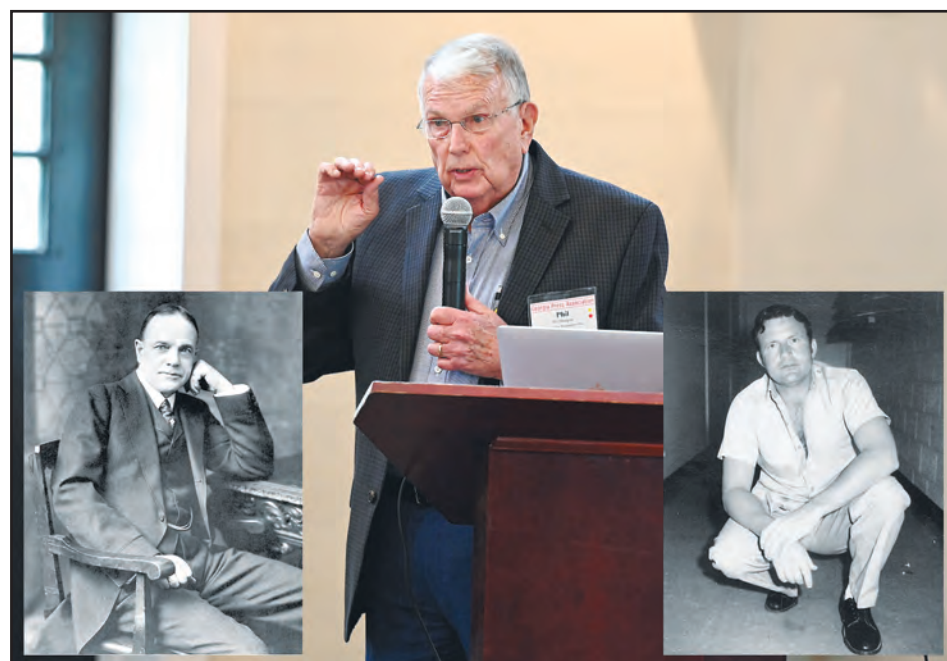


Photo courtesy of The Christian Index
Longtime Georgia newspaper editor Phil Hudgins (center) speaks to members of the Georgia Press Association about the late Billy Sunday Birt at Jekyll Island on June 8. The inset photos are famed evangelist Billy Sunday (left) and convicted murderer Billy Sunday Birt.

husband as a conflicted man — a hardened killer who was known to buy groceries for the elderly and give money to needy children.

"All I can say is what I've always said: 'He was two people in one,'" she says in the novel.

Hudgins noted Birt was born into poverty in the southern Appalachians where he turned to crime to support himself and his family.

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"Billy Birt was, without a doubt, one of the most prolific killers in the history of our country," said retired Georgia Bureau of Investigation agent Bob Ingram in an interview with the Atlanta Journal-Constitution last year.

In the book, Hudgins writes about Skelton's letter in which he assured Birt that God was willing to forgive his sins, just as He had done for

others throughout Bible history. "Thanks for taking the time to write me," Birt wrote in response. "That was the most beautiful letter, and you made so much sense. You wrote it so such a fool like myself can understand what you mean."

God forgives

After receiving the letter, Hudgins noted Birt started reading the Bible, at first in an attempt to prove Skelton wrong.

"He couldn't believe that God could forgive a man like him," Hudgins writes. "Surely Doc was wrong. God cannot — does not — forgive mass murderers. In the end, however, the Bible proved Doc right. God can forgive even the vilest offender, even a murderer. No one is beyond redemption through Christ, not even Billy Sunday Birt."

Some years later, Hudgins writes, Birt was baptized, courtesy of a sheriff who played a part in leading him to Christ.

Hudgins described Birt, who died in prison, as a highly intelligent man.

"He used his intelligence for all the wrong reasons," Hudgins writes. "He was guilty of many horrible criminal acts, but, at the end, he was a believer in Jesus Christ and was not condemned."

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story was originally published by The Christian Index.