

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

SEE YOU AT THE POLE

See story on page 8

HELENA
MIDDLE
SCHOOL



Photo courtesy of Debi DeBoer



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GLYNNWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH



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Photo by Randy Byrd
The bulletin board in the education building at FBC Silas is filled with articles from The Alabama Baptist. Church members who regularly use the paper in their Sunday School classes cut out articles and place them for others to see.

TAB articles, commentary provide helpful resource

Randy Byrd said when he was in the 10th grade, God called him to preach, and the pastor decided to let him teach Sunday School for the 10th through 12th grade boys.

“Most of the time I would use The Alabama Baptist [Sunday School commentary] to prepare,” he said.

Over the decades since, he’s tried to promote TAB in every church he’s been in.

“I use it in my personal messages when I’m preparing for sermons,”

said Byrd, now pastor of First Baptist Church Silas. “And just about every week, people in the church are asking each other, ‘Did you read that in The Alabama Baptist?’ and we dissect it.”

‘We love it’

Church members also regularly use it in their own Sunday School classes and cut out articles and put them on the bulletin board in the education building.

“We love it,” Byrd said. (Grace Thornton)

Nearly (or newly) retired?

Coming soon — a periodic special section printed in The Alabama Baptist to help those nearly or newly retired make the transition to this next season of life.

We want to partner with you to help set you up for success.

To provide helpful guidance, practical tips and suggested resources, we need to hear from those of you who have already been around the block related to retirement. Help us know what has worked well for you and what parts were difficult.

- ▶ What do you realize now that you wish you had known prior to retiring?
- ▶ What are some practical do’s and don’ts?
- ▶ How far in advance should we think about and prepare for retirement?
- ▶ Along with thinking through and setting goals related to finances, what else should be considered when preparing for retirement?
- ▶ What surprised you the most the first few days into your retirement?
- ▶ What does a successful retirement mean to you?

Please send your comments to:
Jennifer Rash
The Alabama Baptist
 3310 Independence Drive
 Birmingham, AL 35209
 or email
jrash@thealabamabaptist.org

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.

The Alabama Baptist

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

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RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

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



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Mentors spark growth needed in journey toward Spirit-filled life

The simplicity of the nine characteristics outlined in Galatians 5 might lead the casual reader to overlook the depth and richness contained in the description of a life truly and completely filled with the Holy Spirit.

A full 30 years now since surrendering my life to Christ, I still struggle to consistently display the full set intact in the purity for which it is intended — at least all at the same time.

Still, the security and confidence I have in being a child of the King provide the environment needed to grow in each of the areas.

Making my way to showcase all nine characteristics at the same time all the time seems to be a lifelong journey — a journey dependent on the investment of others in me.

Seasonal guides

Reflecting on my half century, I can see how God has been faithful to place people in my life to help guide me during specific seasons, which assures me He will continue to do the same going forward.

The thread of mentors may not have known who came before or who would follow but each grabbed the baton on cue

and stewarded its delivery to the next runner in the relay — all while balancing his or her own life issues.

From parents and extended family who modeled a fierce love, kindness and goodness to Sunday School teachers, pastors and other church leaders who faithfully pointed me to the true Author of joy and peace, I have been surrounded and influenced by ripe fruit since birth.

The love and gentleness of a dear friend guided me to the foot of the Cross, and the forbearance (patience) of an older mentor instilled the concepts of discipleship and making disciples. Many mentors have taken turns discipling me along the way.

Whether it be a fellow church member, ministry peer or dear friend, countless believers ahead of me on the journey have reached back time after time to grab my hand and pull me along.

Sometimes the investment comes in the form of support and encouragement, while other times it sends me to my knees for repentance and re-centering.

Many bolster me through praying and reminding me to keep my eyes on Jesus. Others show love and support through their actions and how well they care for me. Still, others offer a listening ear and comforting shoulder during those times the load seems a bit too heavy.

The gentle guidance from mentors noting hazards up ahead, pointing out weaknesses I need to address and challenging me to find a better way keeps me humbly seeking true self discipline.

Finding the proper rhythms for my day and in my overall faith walk isn't easy with all the pressures and

demands that seem to grow extra tentacles each morning, but the effort is possible with those willing to share their secrets and show the way.

As I work to cull the withered parts of my heart to make more room for the Holy Spirit to nurture the fruit planted in me, I am reminded to look around for others who might need to borrow my clippers for a time.

Following the model of those who noticed me and sacrificed

to help me grow, I am inspired to do the same for others.

The ripple effect makes sense as person after person flourishes from the investment and then looks to share the gift rather than hoard it for him- or herself.

Prepped and ready

The Holy Spirit will surface the who, what, when, where, why and how at exactly the right time. All we have to do is dive in, knowing we are covered by the grace of our Lord.

As each follower of Jesus Christ showcases genuine love, joy, peace, forbearance (patience), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, the environment around him or her will no doubt shine brightly with beams from the one true Light.

The hope we have in Christ gives us the courage and strength to not only face each new day, no matter what it brings, but also to seek wisdom and nourishment from the Word in order to nurture our reflection of Him — to genuinely broadcast the fruit of the Spirit.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This is an excerpt of a piece I contributed to WMU's "Because of Hope: Reflections of Faith" book that can be purchased at wmustore.com.

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

Galatians 5:22-23

Your Voice



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

Ongoing concerns about legalizing marijuana

By J. Daniel Raulerson, M.D.
Brewton, Ala.

Several months ago, The Alabama Baptist printed a letter to the editor from a retired counselor whose work included the areas of “crisis intervention, suicide prevention, domestic violence and at-risk youth.”

He told of the very painful death of his brother with widespread metastatic cancer. He stated his belief that this horrible ordeal could have been better managed if “medical marijuana” had been available.

First of all, “medical” marijuana (cannabis) is a misnomer. The proposed medical benefits of marijuana have never been rigorously tested, as is required of all prescription medications.

There have never been “prospective” controlled studies of marijuana

na. Instead, the proposed benefits have come from “retrospective” questionnaires from users.

Until marijuana is tested like all other legitimate drugs, it should not be prescribed as a medicine.

Misleading data

Secondly, Alabama doctors were sent a questionnaire about our attitude about the legalization of marijuana. Unfortunately, it was worded in such a way that the author got the results she was looking for. It appeared the doctors surveyed supported legalization.

Legislators have been led to believe the public wants it, doctors support it, and the state treasury will benefit from its taxation. This is shortsighted.

In the last two years, Alabama has seen as many DUI arrests due to marijuana as alcohol. Who is

going to pay for the medical care of those injured in automobile accidents? It will fall primarily to the taxpayer.

I am a semi-retired internal medicine physician and the medical examiner/coroner of Escambia County. In case after case of suicide and accidental death in my county, I find the presence of marijuana (along with several other drugs) in the blood specimens I draw. Although the level is never high enough to have caused the death, I believe that like alcohol, marijuana serves as an “enabler” for the user to take chances an otherwise sober person would not take.

Adversely affected

There is also research which suggests that the adolescent (and therefore still developing) brain is likely to be the most adversely affected and possibly permanently affected by marijuana.

Are we going to be complicit in the development of a generation of mentally crippled people, and possibly their children, by what we are allowing?

The child who finds grandma’s “marijuana nerve pills” in her medicine cabinet is at risk. They are bound to conclude that if it’s OK for grandma it can’t possibly be that bad for them.

I urge my fellow concerned Christians to fight to keep marijuana dispensaries out of our counties and cities and to get Alabama’s medical marijuana law repealed.

October is Pastor Appreciation Month

October is Pastor Appreciation Month. In the coming weeks, TAB will share ideas from various sources of ways you can bless your pastor and his family this month.

The suggestions below are from ChuckLawless.com.

1. Ask him, “What can I do to most help you?” You might be surprised by his answer. He might have immediate needs. If not, tackle some immediate tasks for him. Cut the grass. Paint a room. Power wash the deck. Just do something.

2. Provide gifts for his wife and children. The church that loves a pastor’s family will have a pastor who loves them.

3. Give him an Amazon tree. The “tree” might be an artificial plant, but the leaves are Amazon gift cards. Every pastor I know wants more books.

4. Make a personal commitment not to speak ill of him — or listen to those who do. Support him in front of others.

5. Give him an extra week of vacation. Even if it’s only for this year, he’ll be appreciative.

6. Commit to praying for him daily — and then be sure to do it. Let him know you’re doing it, too. He’ll be grateful.

Keeping children drug-free

According to the National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics, drug use among eighth graders increased by 61% between 2016 and 2020.

Keeping kids off drugs is extremely important, but it can be difficult for many parents and caregivers. A frank and open discussion with your child is one of the best ways to keep them drug-free. Talk to them about the dangers of drugs and how drugs can

harm their physical and mental health.

It would be best if you also discussed the legal implications of drug use with your children. Emphasize the importance of staying away from drugs because of the horrible repercussions they could face.

Find more tips on preventing drug abuse at alcap.com/4-ways-to-keep-your-kids-drug-free.

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“Confession is not easy, but it is essential if we desire to walk closely with Christ.”

PASTOR BOBBY MCKAY

Explore the Bible commentary for Oct. 1 lesson, *The Baptist Paper*

The Lord’s Prayer serves as a prescriptive model for cooperation, as it presents Christianity as a community. Jesus’ instruction in prayer emphasizes “Our Father” over “My Father” and “our daily bread” over “my daily bread.” God forgives not only “my trespasses” but “our trespasses.”

The New Testament is replete with descriptive examples. In Acts 4:32–35, we see people cooperating to produce a great act of generosity. Those early believers shared their possessions so that no one was without. In Acts 6:1–7, we witness the power of ecclesiastical cooperation as the church appointed leaders to ensure the needs of all members were met. Later, we see the strength of cooperative evangelism when Paul partnered with Timothy, Titus and others to spread the gospel.

This illustrates that cooperation transcends mere utilitarian concepts of becoming “better” or “stronger.” Instead, cooperation emanates from the intrinsic bond among followers of Jesus, fostering a resilient community anchored in the unity of a common faith.

Jared Wellman

Pastor of Tate Springs Baptist Church in Arlington, Texas, and chair, SBC Cooperation Group

Hey preacher! You have a limited number of sermons to preach before you die. Make them count.

@hbcharlesjr

X (formerly Twitter)

The cure for whatever ails a Baptist church is more baptisms. ... Baptism is a powerful declaration of public witness, not just for the baptismal candidate but for the church gathered as people remember their own baptismal moment.

Baptisms by immersion are also a novelty for many unbelievers who have never seen one in person. When new believers invite their friends to their baptism, they will often come.

The event then becomes more than a religious ritual. It becomes a gospel-declaring event. ... Nothing shouts “new life” — both for individuals and for a church family — like baptism.

Jeff Iorg

President, Gateway Seminary

I love where God has me, and I don’t want to go to the next chapter until He’s ready for me to move on. That’s my prayer all the time. You’ve got me here for a reason.

Please show me what it is. Help me understand it.

David Pollack

Former ESPN GameDay analyst

Denying self means submitting every goal, plan or aspiration to Jesus because you are a servant of Christ. Following Jesus requires a radical reorientation of life. (See Mark 8:31–9:1.)

Mark Rathel

Oct. 8 Bible Studies for Life commentary, *The Baptist Paper*



Wednesday night meal ministry

By Chip Warren

Albertville, Alabama

The primary goal of the Wednesday night meal ministry is to make it easier for people to attend the Wednesday night activities.

And while the church needs to be a good steward of money, it needs to look at the Wednesday night meal as a ministry, not a business operation. Seeing it as a ministry (rather than trying to cover the cost) is the key to its success.

Other benefits include:

1. Fellowship.
2. Assimilation.
3. Place for lots of volunteers to serve.
4. Place for community for retirees and seniors.
5. Outreach opportunity.

Whether you are resuming your meal or starting for the first time, here are a few things I have learned over the years.

First, provide an adequate window of time for serving the meal. Some can come early, but working folks cannot. The biggest mistake I have observed over the years is starting too early and closing down too early. Select volunteers who are not in a hurry to finish up and “get out of the kitchen.”

Second, do not ask people to bring food. That defeats the goal of making it easier for families to be there on Wednesday night. The ideal situation is to hire someone to cook the meals, assisted by volunteers.

Third, charge a fair but not prohibitive price for the meal. Make arrangements for those who cannot afford to pay.

Fourth, provide a kids’ meal option.

Fifth, a reservation system will increase attendance and reduce the amount of leftovers.

Reminder:

The meal itself will not bring people out on Wednesday night. You must provide quality programming for all ages.

3 stories you should know



Photo courtesy of Baptist and Reflector

Union University President Samuel S. “Dub” Oliver recently held discussions with a contingent from Nigeria (from left, Joshua Ogunwole, Joan Ayo and Israel Akanji) to discuss a possible partnership with the largest Baptist university in Nigeria, Bowen University, named for Thomas Jefferson Bowen, the first Southern Baptist missionary to Nigeria. The Nigerian Baptist Convention is made up of 14,000 churches and numbers 10 million members. (Union University)

Ethnic leaders express concerns after layoffs

Asian American and Hispanic church leaders are expressing concerns over the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee’s recent decision to eliminate two associate vice president roles tasked with ethnic church leadership.

Peter Yanes, former executive director of Asian American relations and mobilization, and Luis Lopez, former executive director of Hispanic relations and mobilization, were laid off along with three other full-time EC staff members in an effort to help with ongoing financial challenges at the EC.

In two separate letters, the National Hispanic Baptist Network, which represents more than 3,300 churches, and 18 Asian American church leaders expressed “disappointment” and included a call for action from the EC. (The Baptist Paper)

Fewer Christian refugees find safe haven in US

A new report from Open Doors and World Relief found the number of Christians finding refuge in the U.S. after fleeing persecution in their native countries dropped from 32,248 in 2016 to 9,528 in 2022 — a decline of 70%.

The report, titled “Closed Doors,” found the number of Christian refugees from Myanmar dropped from 7,634 in 2016 to 587 in 2022, while the number of Christian refugees from Iran dropped from 2,086 in 2016 to 112 in 2022.

Christian refugees from Eritrea dropped from 1,639 in 2016 to 252 in 2022, while refugees from Iraq dropped from 1,524 to 93 during the same timeframe.

All four countries are among the 50 nations on the annual World Watch List published by Open Doors. (RNS)

Persecuted church

After pastor shot in Pakistan, official blames India for continued unrest

LAHORE, Pakistan — Unrest in Pakistan that erupted in August after two Christian brothers were accused of blaspheming Islam has continued, with a pastor being shot and other Christians arrested. An official in Pakistan blames India for the conflict.

After the Christian brothers were accused of blasphemy Aug. 16, Muslim mobs — incited by the Islamist party Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan — set churches afire and ransacked homes and businesses of Christians in Jaranwala Tehsil in Faisalabad District. Reports from Morning Star News indicate police watched but did not intervene.

Morning Star also reported that two Muslims accosted Presbyterian pastor Eleazar Sidhu on

Sept. 3 and shot him in the chest. Sidhu is recovering. Preceding the attack, Islamist slogans were painted Aug. 28 on his church in Kukranwala village of Jaranwala Tehsil.

In a September press conference, Usman Anwar, police inspector general for Punjab, said the riots and desecration of the Quran (for which the brothers were accused) were an attempt by officials in India to divert attention from India’s mistreatment of Christians.

Pakistan is No. 7 on Open Doors’ 2023 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.



Unsplash.com

Evangelist in Uganda killed while returning home from worship event

KAMPALA, Uganda — Evangelist Philip Bere, 33, was beaten to death Sept. 6 near Katiryio in Uganda’s Kibuku District following an event in which many Muslims put their faith in Jesus, Morning Star News reported.

At the time of the attack by Muslim extremists, Bere was returning to Katiryio by bicycle from an evangelistic event in Kituuti town.

Also ambushed was Mudanya Sirasi, who accompanied Bere on the journey and had helped with the evangelistic event. Sirasi was able to escape the attack and hide in a tunnel.

The pastor of Bere’s church said police are searching for the assailants. Morning Star reported that Bere was known for his ministry to Muslims in parts of eastern Uganda.

Alabama news

ALABAMA CRENSHAW ASSOCIATION

▶ **Eugene Meadows** is the interim pastor of **Dozier Baptist Church**. He served 18 years as pastor of Oakey Ridge Baptist Church, Andalusia, and six years at Red Oak Baptist Church, Florala. He also was pastor of Dozier for two and a half years before retiring. A graduate of Livingston University (now University of West Alabama), he taught history for 38 years in public schools. He and his wife, Sarah, have one son and two grandsons.

AUTAUGA ASSOCIATION

▶ **Mike Durham** is the new congregational care minister and **Josiah Pruett** is worship associate at **First Baptist Church Prattville**. Peyton Hill is lead pastor.

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

▶ **NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville**, is hosting a combined disciple-making and evangelism workshop Nov. 18 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Bill Wilks, founder of D-Life and pastor of NorthPark, and Alvin Reid, author and presenter of "Sharing Jesus and Showing Kindness," will lead the workshop, which includes a light breakfast starting at 8:30 a.m.

To register and find out more information, visit livedthelife.com.

BLOUNT ASSOCIATION

▶ **Pleasant View Baptist Church, Holly Pond**, has their annual homecoming service Oct. 15 at 10:30 a.m. Singing featuring 2nd Mile from DeKalb, Mississippi, begins at 1:30 p.m. A special invitation is extended to former pastors, members and their families. For more information, call 256-796-5986 or 256-338-9202. Earl Harper is pastor.

CALHOUN ASSOCIATION

▶ **Bob and Eloise Crossley** (right and center respectively) retired from directing the senior adult ministry at **First Baptist Church Jacksonville** after 20 years. They were honored for their service with a reception and will stay involved with the ministry going forward. Gena Christopher (left) is the interim senior adult director.



Photo courtesy of Gena Christopher

CHEROKEE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Cedar Bluff First Baptist Church** dedicated a new sanctuary Sept. 10. Ten people were baptized, and two babies were dedicated. Mark Cosby is pastor.

GENEVA ASSOCIATION

▶ **El Bethel Church, Chancellor**, will hold revival services Oct. 29–Nov. 1. Sunday worship begins at 10 a.m. and evening services will begin at 6:30. Ted Traylor, pastor of Olive Church, Pensacola, Florida, will be preaching in the night services. Jay Kimbro is pastor.

MARSHALL ASSOCIATION

▶ **Bill Rucker** recently resigned as pastor of **Mount Hebron Missionary Baptist Church, Boaz**, after four and a half "faithful years of service," according to the church.

MOBILE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Emily Sisson** is the new next gen worship leader, and **Jim Brown** is the new connections pastor at **Cottage Hill Baptist Church, Mobile**. Alan Floyd is pastor.

MUSCLE SHOALS ASSOCIATION

▶ **Sulphur Springs Missionary Baptist Church, Hillsboro**, held its final meeting as a congregation July 30. All active members were present during a July 23 special-called business meeting and voted unanimously to dissolve the legal entity of Sulphur Springs "with full understanding that God's church does not end." Tim Graham served as church moderator, and Rayburn Harris was church clerk. Harris, along with Don Glenn, are the trustees finalizing the details.

NORTH JEFFERSON ASSOCIATION

▶ **North Highland Baptist Church, Warrior**, has two new staff members. **Andrew Johnson** is the new young adult pastor. Andrew and his wife, Crystal, served for eight years in

the children's ministry before moving to young adults. Candice Suddeth is the new financial secretary. Candice grew up in the church and began working as the secretary and clerk in October 2014. Steve Abney is pastor.

SAND MOUNTAIN ASSOCIATION

▶ **New Home Baptist Church, Pisgah**, will host Fall Campmeeting 2023 Oct. 1–4. Evangelist Heath Williams from Stokesdale, North Carolina, is the speaker. Following the initial service at New Home, 10:30 a.m., the evening events will take place at Grace Tabernacle New Home Bible Camp, Henagar. David Smith is pastor.

TUSCALOOSA ASSOCIATION

▶ **Clay Mosley** is the new senior pastor of **Taylorville Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa**. He previously served as the associate pastor of youth and education since November 2022. Mosley holds a bachelor's degree in theological and biblical studies and a master of divinity from Liberty University and a master of theological studies from Southwestern Seminary. He is currently pursuing a doctorate of ministry in applied theology at Southern Seminary.



MOSLEY

Mosley and his wife, Morgan, met while ministering to underprivileged children in the heart of Oklahoma City. Before moving to Tuscaloosa, they worked as house parents to eight boys through Oklahoma Baptist Homes for Children.

Clay and Morgan have three children.

David Puckett joins GuideStone team

David S. Puckett, a former senior vice president at Regions Bank Private Wealth Management in Birmingham, was appointed chief denominational relationship officer at GuideStone Financial Resources. Puckett succeeds Timothy E. Head, who will retire at the end of 2023.

Before joining GuideStone in June, Puckett was a GuideStone trustee from 2014 to 2022.

His father, the late Tommy Puckett, was the longtime Disaster Relief leader for Alabama Baptists, and his grandfather, the late Garnett E. Puckett, served as pastor of churches in Attalla, Birmingham, Montgomery and Mobile.

David Puckett has a bachelor's degree in accounting from the University of Alabama.

Additionally, he has studied at the Southern Trust School at Spring Hill College and the National Graduate Trust School through the American Bankers Association.

He is a certified public accountant, a certified investment management analyst and a certified wealth strategist.

Puckett and his wife, Stacey, have two children. They were members of Valleydale Church in Birmingham prior to moving to Dallas.

In his new role, Puckett will lead efforts to coordinate all GuideStone relationships within all levels of Southern Baptist life. He will lead the Denominational Relations, Pastoral Wellness and Mission:Dignity teams. (The Alabama Baptist)



PUCKETT

Students gather Sept. 27 for prayer events

By **Carrie B. McWhorter**
The Alabama Baptist

Students began to gather at Satsuma High School before daylight on Sept. 27, preparing their hearts for See You at the Pole, an annual student-led prayer event.

Students sang together, and then individuals prayed and shared their favorite Bible verses as they worshipped alongside their classmates and friends.

Student Claire Boyett said it was her second year to participate in SYATP. She told Mobile's Fox 10 News she hoped fellow students saw the event as "a safe place to pray and worship."

Every year since 1990 on the fourth Wednesday in September, students from around the globe have come together to pray, to lift up their friends, families, school, city, state and nation to the Lord.

This year's See You at the Pole theme was "Wholehearted," taken from Jeremiah 29:13.

Debi DeBoer, ministry director for First Priority



Facebook photo

Hundreds of students gather in front of Satsuma High School in Mobile County on Sept. 27 for a See You at the Pole prayer rally and student-led worship time.

Greater Birmingham, said the theme is "very convicting and serves as a reminder that God wants our full commitment."

Providing support

First Priority Greater Birmingham and First Priority organizations around the state provided resources and support for many schools as they planned and carried out their SYATP events.

Among the reports DeBoer received was more than

20 decisions for Christ at one area middle school.

At Andalusia Elementary School, older students from the school's Priority Kids chapter led worship, and students then divided into small groups to pray for their school and its staff, fellow students and the community.

Parent Hillary Dent said "it was a beautiful thing to see students worshipping with parents, grandparents, friends, teachers and administrators."

As student ministries report an uptick in attendance at Bible study and worship events this fall following reports of revival on many campuses earlier this year, SYATP is a "moment," said Doug Clark, national field director of the National Network of Youth Ministries, which coordinates SYATP promotion.

Organizers hope adults and students will consider turning SYATP into a movement that results in regular student-led prayer gatherings, he noted.

"The heart of SYATP is extraordinary prayer," Clark said, adding that SYATP partners with Claim Your

Campus (claimyourcampus.com) to encourage students to pray daily at their schools.

Ways to pray

Clark suggested several ways students and others can pray regularly:

- ▶ Pray every time you drive through a school zone.

- ▶ Prayer walk a school in your community in the evening or on a weekend.

- ▶ Engage with students and teachers in your church.

- ▶ Start a weekly prayer gathering at your school.

For more information on the history of SYATP and additional resources, go to syatp.com.



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Lessons Learned from experience

Leeds missionaries reflect on God's provision, blessings after 30 years in the Middle East

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Are you a Christian?" Paul Lawrence was sitting in the cooling-down room at a Turkish bathhouse in Gaza — a Palestinian territory on the western border of Israel — when a man asked him that question. The two had been talking for a while.

"Yes, I am," Paul replied.

The man then said something that has stuck with Paul for decades: "I could tell by your face."

Paul said he knew there were a dozen things that could've told the man he was a foreigner — his lighter complexion, his accent, the type of shorts he was wearing. But the man mentioned his face as the thing that told him Paul was a Christian.

That experience was an encouragement to stay grounded in Christ over the years as he and his wife, Harriet, served as Southern Baptist representatives among the Palestinian people, first in Gaza and later in Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

'Great impact'

He writes about the episode in a book the two of them authored called, "Going to School in Gaza: Lessons Learned in Thirty Years of Service in the Middle East."

"My new friend's simple comment had a great impact on me," Paul wrote, noting he hoped the man's words were true.

"How could my face not be changed forever if I am reflecting the love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control so freely given by the Holy Spirit?"

"I would hope that everyone could tell I am a Christian because 'with ever-increasing glory' my face, my

life, is being transformed into the image of His Son."

The book's title comes from the idea that wherever you are is a "school" of learning how to walk more closely in Christ's footsteps.

God "wants to teach us and grow us and mold us, and He'll do it in America just like He did for us overseas," Harriet said. "It doesn't matter where your 'school' is, you're still in school — ours just happened to be in Gaza."

It's a place she never thought they would end up.

When the Lawrences first started dating in the mid-1970s Paul told her God had called him to missions. Not too far down the road, that call became personal for Harriet too. But she didn't want to go to Gaza, which was frequently in conflict with Israel.

"The team from Gaza had been recruiting Paul, and I had been saying, 'Thank you, but no,'" Harriet recalled.

They were preparing to go to the west African country of Ghana as Paul was finishing his graduate degree in nursing at the University of Alabama at Birmingham and Har-

riet was teaching kindergarten at First Baptist Church Leeds.

"We weren't poor — we were dirt poor," she remembered.

But when their pastor announced he was taking a tour to Israel, she felt God was prompting her to go too.

Paul said he didn't know how it was going to happen, but they got an income tax refund, and Harriet pulled the rest of the money together.

"I told a friend at work one Friday that Harriet was going to the Holy Land," Paul recalled. "I'd told her about my call to missions, and she said, 'Paul, you ought to go on this trip.'"

He explained their financial constraints and that God had miraculously provided the way for Harriet to go.

"And then on Monday she said, 'Paul, I've got money in my account for an emergency, and I want you to take that and go on that trip, and I'm going to trust God I'm not going to have an emergency until I build it back up.'"

Profoundly touched by the gesture and God's provision, they both went, and Harriet "fell in love with the Palestinian women."

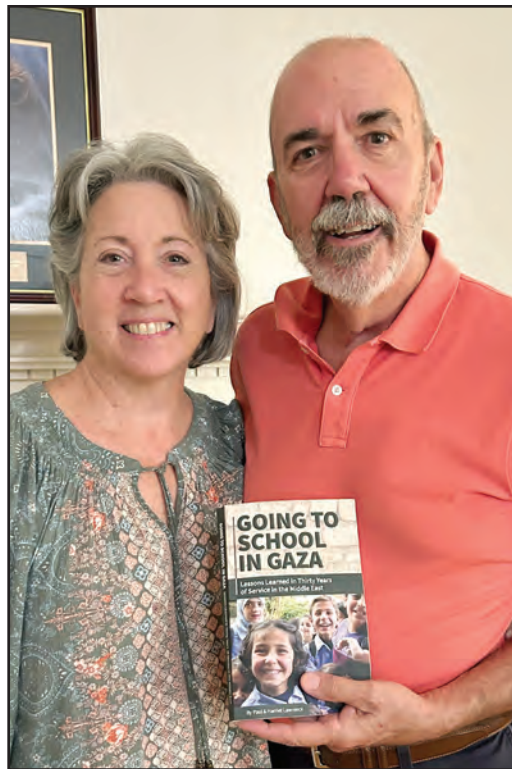


Photo courtesy of Paul and Harriet Lawrence
Paul and Harriet Lawrence celebrate the release of their book, "Going to School in Gaza: Lessons Learned in Thirty Years of Service in the Middle East."

"The Lord used that trip to convince us that the Palestinians were our people group," she recalled.

They moved to Gaza in 1985 and started working at the school of nursing and raising their two children. They served God through bombings and evacuations and the emotional exhaustion that comes with having hungry women sitting on the porch begging for food every day. They walked through some difficult goodbyes.

Learning to follow Him

And through it God taught them more and more about His faithfulness, Paul related. Those are the stories they write about.

"We wanted to share how God used those experiences in our lives to teach us how to follow Him," he said.

Harriet agreed.

"He's willing to use everything, if we allow Him to, to conform us to His image," she asserted.

In 2003, the Lawrences moved to Jerusalem, then four years later to Bethlehem, retiring in 2015 and moving back to Alabama where they are active members of FBC Leeds.

"You don't think about the lessons that the Lord is teaching through those experiences, both the good ones and the traumatic experiences — you're just getting through that," Harriet said. "But now, being able to look back and see where we came from and the progress we made personally, is a blessing."

"Going to School in Gaza: Lessons Learned in Thirty Years of Service in the Middle East" is available only on Amazon.

Joseph R. Crider, dean of the School of Church Music and Worship at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, speaks during the Revive Summit held Sept. 12–13 at Hope Community Church in Birmingham

‘Bringing new life’



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Birmingham conference offers encouragement, aid to replanting, revitalizing churches

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Through its church replant division, the North American Mission Board is providing resources and encouragement for those planting new churches or revitalizing old ones. The Revive Summit, held Sept. 12–13 at Hope Community Church in Birmingham, is part of the effort.

“Because the conference is targeted toward revitalization and revival, the teams at North American Mission Board and Birmingham Metro Baptist Association wanted to host the conference at a church that is working toward revitalization,” said Jacob Simmons, pastor of Hope Community.

“Hope Community Church is all in on the work of revitalization,” Simmons said. “We are a product of God’s work, bringing new life to God’s people. We’ve asked several of our senior adults to volunteer for this event so that they can tell the story of Hope to our conference goers and so that we as a church can continue to learn and listen to others on how to do this work better.”

The first speaker for the event was Richard Blackaby, president of Blackaby Ministries International. He described the experiences of

his father, Henry Blackaby, pastor, author of “Experiencing God” and church revitalizer.

One church where Richard’s father was pastor wanted to keep its community — prostitutes, drug dealers and gang members — out. He helped them realize that only through bringing the community into the church would it flourish.

Just as that church became healthy, he was called to a church that had a three-way split.

As that church began to thrive, Richard’s father heard about another church with only 10 people. Many thought that he shouldn’t waste his time. The church needed to die, they said.

Not believing that any church “needed to die,” he and his family moved and started over again.

Richard Blackaby learned from a young age that “you

become a great man or woman of God in the hard places.”

He encouraged conference participants to focus on possibilities, not on problems.

“If you’ve got God ... you have everything you need,” he said. “Don’t apologize for what you don’t have. Look at who you serve ... the awesome living Lord.”

Joseph R. Crider, dean of the School of Church Music and Worship and professor of church music and worship at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, led worship and spoke at the event.

“Christian worship is about the relationship,” Crider said, pointing out that God didn’t call Christians to gather around the music, which is something that continually changes through time and is different for various cultures.

Services need to be focused on the Word of God, not the music or a personality. There’s a danger of equating being moved by a song instead of being moved by the Spirit.

Crider also encouraged pastors to be the “lead worshipper” and not spend the worship time looking at notes or getting ready for the sermon.

“Worship is not vicarious,” he said. “No one can worship for you.”

In their sessions, Frank Lewis, revitalization pastor of Tusculum Hills Baptist Church in Nashville, shared three practical points about jars of clay — that God brings glory to Himself through the treasure inside, that our response

is gratitude and that even Paul had critics and enemies and was subject to physical and emotional issues. Remembering that jars of clay are breakable, clergy self-care is a spiritual discipline that can’t be ignored.

Mark Clifton, senior director of replanting for NAMB, spoke on the diagnosis of a dying church. He said many leaders of dying churches will ask, “What is a good program to add?” or “How do I find a great personality to hire?” or “Should I add a youth ministry?”

What is needed is for the remaining members to show they care about the youth, not simply to

add youth activities, he said. They shouldn’t resent the community for not coming to church; they need to love the community because of Christ.

Struggles and blessings

JimBo Stewart, replant specialist for NAMB, said dying churches are primarily a spiritual problem. Bob Bickford, associate director of replanting for NAMB, agreed, noting that church replanters are likely to face “significant spiritual attack and deep, dark depression” when leading small, dying churches. But even in suffering, God is present and powerful, he said. Suffering is for a season and “in the middle of great struggle comes great comfort.”



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Bob Bickford, associate director of replanting for NAMB, shares that even in suffering, God is present and powerful.

For more information about NAMB and its replanting focus or to ask for an evangelism kit, visit namb.net/church-replanting.

‘Let’s do the work’

Crestline Baptist in Tuscaloosa ‘an inspiration to all churches’ undergoing change

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

As churches go, Crestline Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa isn’t old — it will celebrate its 30th birthday at the end of October.

The church had already lived through a whole life cycle by the time it called Clay Womble as pastor in October 2022.

Their founding pastor, Ed King, had been there for most of the church’s history, then developed health problems and passed away. The church struggled to find its feet with new leadership. Then COVID-19 happened.

“They were down to about 15 to 20 in worship and some were trying to decide if they were going to shut the doors or not,” Womble said. “But that remnant felt like God wasn’t through.”

In the past year, they’ve had 37 people make decisions to follow Christ and are now averaging close to 100 people in worship each Sunday. Where the parking lot was empty, people are now parking in the grass, Womble said.

‘Knocking walls out’

“We’re now knocking walls out, making classes bigger and we’ve got classes meeting in the auditorium,” he said. “We just put a digital sign out front, and we’re painting the buildings and fixing things up. These folks are excited; they’re going and doing.”

They also just hired their second staff person — Ron Burns, minister of music and worship.

Womble, who serves bivocationally, said when he first arrived as pastor, there was an adult Sunday School class, and if someone came with a child, someone would just go and keep him or

For more information about Crestline Baptist, visit facebook.com/cbctuscaloosa.



Facebook photo

Clay Womble, pastor of Crestline Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa, baptizes Daylin James on Sept. 10. A year ago, the church had 15–20 people attending, but in the last year it has seen about 37 people make decisions to follow Christ.



Facebook photo

her in the nursery. He encouraged them to go ahead and plan for children’s classes instead, anticipating that guests were going to show up.

And they have. As church members have invited guests, they’ve continued to grow across all age groups.

Womble has continued to tell them that everyone in the church should have as their goal to help one person know Christ and get

involved in the church each year. The church’s Facebook page is a running testimony of what God is doing at the church.

‘Let’s be faithful’

“It’s God,” Womble said. “I tell our folks, let’s be faithful, let’s pray earnestly and let’s do the work.”

Jeff Knight, lead mission strategist for Tuscaloosa County Baptist Association, said the Lord is doing wonderful things at Crestline.

“I think Pastor Clay would echo these sentiments — Crestline does not have some magic bullet, just simply the favor of the Lord and a pastor and people who are very intentional about the Great Commission,” Knight said.

“The story that God is writing there is truly an inspiration to all our churches.”

The congregation of Crestline Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa gathers Sept. 10 to dedicate its new digital sign, another marker of the church’s growth and desire to reach its community. “We’re painting the buildings and fixing things up. These folks are excited; they’re going and doing,” pastor Clay Womble said.

Famous Christians from previous centuries

Heroes of the Faith

Baptist pastor Robert Lowry wrote well-known hymns

Robert Lowry (1826–1899) was a Baptist pastor and hymn writer whose gospel songs “Shall We Gather at the River,” “Christ Arose” and “Nothing but the Blood of Jesus” are among his best known.

Born in Philadelphia on March 12, 1826, he was the son of Crozier Lowry, who had emigrated from Northern Ireland.

At the age of 17, Robert Lowry had a conversion experience. He joined First Baptist Church Philadelphia and became a Sunday School teacher and a member of the choir.

Lowry studied at the University of Lewisburg (now Bucknell University) in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, to prepare himself for the ministry. He graduated in 1854 with the highest honors in his class and was ordained into the ministry.

Pastorates

He held pastorates in Pennsylvania, New York and New Jersey, having much success in all his churches. Although he considered his major vocation to be preaching, countless people know him better as a hymn writer. He composed the

music, and sometimes the music and text, of more than 500 hymns.

He wrote the words and music to “Shall We Gather at the River” in July 1864 while pastor at Hanson Place Baptist Church in Brooklyn, New York. During a heatwave in the city, he was in a state of physical exhaustion when he suddenly imag-



LOWRY

ined the passage in Revelation 22:1 — “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb.” With the verse in mind, he wrote: “Shall we gather at the river/ Where bright angel feet have trod/ With its crystal tide forever/ Flowing by the throne of God?”

In 1874, he penned the Easter song, “Christ Arose.” After reflecting on the resurrection as written in Luke 24:6–8, Lowry “found himself seated at the little pump organ in the parlor of his home, and, in a very spontaneous fashion, there came forth the music and the words.”

Two years later, he wrote the words and music to “Nothing but the Blood of Jesus.” He based it upon Hebrews 9:22 — “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”

In addition to his pastoral work and his hymn writing, he oversaw the production of more than 20 hymnals.

Lowry died on Nov. 25, 1899, in Plainfield, New Jersey. The eulogist at his funeral summarized his life and work with this quote: “His melodies and songs were but the expression of the man’s heart and his character, and they attracted all to him.”

Lass WORDS

BY KEN LASS
The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

A Song for a Soul

My father was a good man but not an outwardly spiritual man. I was raised in the country, and we were members of a tiny church in a farm community. Every Sunday morning, Mom would take my two older brothers and me to worship at the little stone building.

There was no choir, no worship team. The preacher would lead us in songs out of the hymnbook. An elderly parishioner would play the piano — often badly — and we would do our best to “make a joyful noise” for the Lord.

Dad seldom went to church with us. He didn’t say why, and we didn’t have the nerve to ask him. Every once in a while, however, Mom would catch him in just the right mood, and he would agree to come along.

One condition

He had one condition: Instead of going to our little country church, Dad insisted we go into the city to the big church. When asked why, Dad would say he wanted to listen to the choir. The city church had a large, talented choir that sang in lilting harmonies with dramatic key changes and passionate solos.

Dad would smile and rock back and forth to the melodies, occasionally closing his eyes to savor a particularly beautiful interlude. Music is what brought him to church. It’s what connected him to God.

Were it not for the wonderful choir, he might never have set

foot in God’s house and been exposed to biblical preaching. Dad died in 1990, and I feel confident his soul was in the right place, thanks in large part to those faithful singers and musicians.

Impact of music

If you sing in a church choir or play an instrument during worship, it might bless you to know there are likely many people in attendance who are just like my dad. They are there only because of you. The music and the singing are the only things that pull their attention away from their problems and focus them on God. They may well be the only things that got them in the building. Your ministry through song is invaluable and irreplaceable.

Not everyone can appreciate the effort and exertion it takes to perform, especially when you’re tired or just not in the mood. But you smile and put your heart into each song.

It makes a difference to those listening — a life-changing difference. The preacher may bring the meal, but you set the table. I thank you and appreciate you. And somewhere in heaven, my dad does too.

MEET THE AUTHOR

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

By Joanne Sloan

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

DR efforts continue as residents return to Lahaina

By Stephen R. Clark
The Baptist Paper

As displaced residents began returning to their homes in Lahaina on Sept. 25, Southern Baptist Disaster Relief efforts continue — and will for a long time, said John Williams, co-director of Hawaii Pacific Baptist Disaster Relief.

Craig Webb, executive director-treasurer of the HPBC, recently posted a video interview with Williams providing a brief look at the current relief efforts following the deadly wildfires. Located behind the men in the video was a special Send Relief trailer equipped with washers, dryers and showers.

Help from churches

The trailer, Williams said, was shipped with help from Olivet Baptist Church in Honolulu.



Screenshot/video courtesy of Hawaii Pacific Baptist Convention
John Williams (left), co-director of Disaster Relief for Hawaii Pacific Baptist Convention, and Craig Webb, HPBC executive director-treasurer, provide an update on efforts in Lahaina.

Williams noted the trailer would be located outside of Kahului Union Church, where volunteers will be staying as they serve the people of Lahaina.

The church is among those actively helping in the area and was the initial

staging site for the FEMA disaster assistance center.

Special training

Williams led a special Disaster Relief training session hosted by Valley Isle Fellowship located in Wailuku, Hawaii.

The training was requested by Maui pastors

and included at least 80 adult participants.

Williams explained that these newly trained volunteers will be integrated with experienced Disaster Relief volunteers coming from other state conventions, by invitation.

‘Cautiously’

A limited number of displaced residents were allowed to reenter their homes beginning Sept. 25. These residents will be escorted by representatives from FEMA.

“They are doing it very slowly and cautiously due to the dangers that still exist,” Williams said. “The [Environmental Protection Agency] is still working to clear other zones.”

Williams urged those still wanting to visit the island to help to “Please stay tuned.”

He explained that “this

is going to be a very long process” that will extend over time.

He asked that everyone “please be patient. We know you’re there and we want you to come serve,” but efforts need to be timed and scheduled to be effective. Webb urged everyone to “continue to pray for Maui because we are still grieving.”



Commons.wikimedia.org
Burned out cars and the remains of buildings are seen on Front Street in Lahaina.

IRELAND-GODFREY ALCAP SUNDAY NOVEMBER 12



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1978-2008



JOE GODFREY
2008-2022

Honoring nearly 45 years of leadership (1978-2022)

Receive an offering or make a personal donation in support of Alabama's Moral Advocates. For more information or resources, visit alcap.com.



UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Give sacrificially to help share gospel here, beyond

Thank you to all those who participated in the recent Week of Prayer for State Missions. Your prayers, along with your gifts to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering, are making an eternal difference in our state and world.

Remember that the offering is received through the end of the year, so there's still time for you to make your gift. The offering is designed to complement vital giving through the Cooperative Program and

For more information, visit myers-mallory.org, or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



helps support the Great Commission Ministries of Alabama WMU, Disaster Relief, Church Planting,

Partnership Missions and Church Revitalization.

Please continue to pray for these five strategic ministries and to prayerfully consider giving sacrificially to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering if you haven't already.

As we build off our 200-year-long past and step into our future, know that your gifts provide resources to help Alabama Baptists carry the life-changing power of the gospel to our local communities and beyond.

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.

For a complete schedule, hotel information and more, visit alsbom.org/convention.



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.

WORD search

APOSTLES	DISCIPLES	KINGDOM	SCRIBES
AUTHORITY	EATING	LEVI	SIN
BAPTISM	FASTING	MULTITUDE	SPIRITS
CALL	FORGIVENESS	NEW WINE	SYNAGOGUE
CAPERNAUM	GALILEE	PARALYTIC	TAX
CLEAN	GRAIN	PHARISEES	TOUCH
COLLECTOR	HEALING	PREACH	UNCLEAN
CROWDS	JESUS	REPENT	WILDERNESS
DEMON	JOHN	SABBATH	WITHDRAW

L V N N R O T C E L L O C C C L M L
 S Y N A G O G U E D R E A T I N G M
 W K O E N R D E R E H T I W T S T F
 A B M L H M T G P J H T Y T Y E W O
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 H W F R K I L L H E B R W A W X U D
 K W C A L E N T A B A M C G L O M T
 P I K H E L U G L E C C M S K L R Z
 V N Y P X A L R R T H R H F N K H C
 T E H T A B B A S K I N G D O M F N

They were all amazed, and so they began to ask each other, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."

MARK 1:27

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.

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CHURCH SIGN

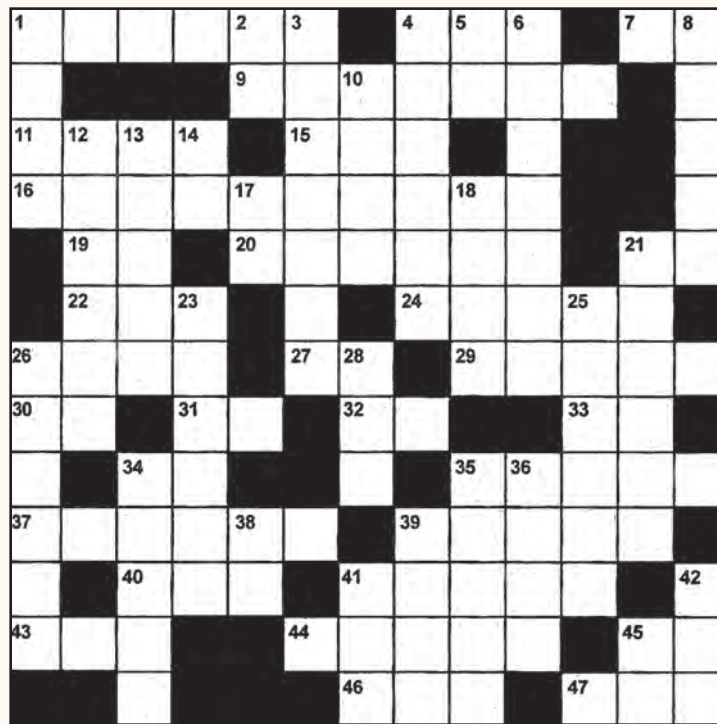
Signs are your first impression. What kind of impression is your church sign making? Call us

CHRISTIAN Crossword



ACROSS

1. Filthy conversation of the _____. (2 Pet. 2:7)
4. Pekod, and Shoa, and _____. (Ezek. 23:23)
7. New Testament. (abbr.)
9. His _____ is in the law. (Ps. 1:2)
11. _____ have we confidence toward God. (1 John 3:21)
15. Feline.
16. Be not, as the _____. (Matt. 6:16)
19. Hush.
20. When the wicked _____. (Prov. 11:10)
21. Let _____ many servants. (1 Tim. 6:1)
22. _____ not among thorns. (Jer. 4:3)
24. The son of _____, which was the son of Mattathias. (Luke 3:26)
26. Gaddiel the son of _____. (Num. 13:10)
27. Compass direction.
29. Bathsheba's first husband. (2 Sam. 11:3)
30. Not down.
31. Negative.
32. Joshua sent men from Jericho to _____. (Josh. 7:2)
33. Mister. (abbr.)
34. Newspaper want _____. (1 Cor. 6:19)
35. Rachel and Leah's father. (Gen. 29:10)
37. Lord, by thy _____. (Ps. 30:7)
39. By the hill of _____. (Judg. 7:1)
40. And ye are not your _____. (1 Cor. 6:19)
41. In _____ with God and men. (Luke 2:52 NAS)



By Faith Wade Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

43. Nathan ... and Shimei, and _____. (1 Kings 1:8)
44. _____, and ye clothed me. (Matt. 25:36)
45. You and I.
46. Esau's color at birth. (Gen. 25:25)
47. Noah's boat.
17. Computer Printer. (abbr.)
18. Jacob's brother. (Gen. 25:2-26)
21. Benjamin's third child. (1 Chron. 8:1)
23. And there sat in a _____. (Acts 20:9)
25. Buy _____ and hewed stone. (2 Kings 12:12)
26. _____ the little children to come unto me. (Mark 10:14)
28. I am the _____. (John 15:6)
34. _____ it, pass not by it. (Prov. 4:15)
35. For God so _____. (John 3:16)
36. Of _____, the family of the Arodites. (Num. 26:17)
38. United Nations. (abbr.)
39. Thou shall not _____ unto thee. (Ex. 20:4)
41. Not near.
42. _____, and it shall be given. (Matt. 7:7)
45. Abraham's hometown. (Gen. 11:31)

DOWN

1. Every man _____ his weapons. (2 Chron. 23:7)
2. Short for Edwin.
3. They delivered them the _____. (Acts 16:4)
4. Javan, Elishah, and Tarshish, _____. (Gen. 10:4)
5. The kingdom of _____ in Bashan. (Deut. 3:4)
6. _____ was over the household. (1 Kings 4:6)
8. His dwelling among the _____. (Mark 5:3)
10. A lion's den.
12. Take a bunch of _____. (Ex. 12:22)
13. He made the _____ of gold. (Ex. 39:2)
14. Opposite of yes.

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Conference for church leadership

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.

A sponsoring partner of this event, the SBOM “is dedicated to the equipping of those called to Christian/church leadership,” said Rick

For information, visit nobts.edu/prepare/here.html or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



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.”

Alabama Baptists can receive a 20% discount off registration by using the code ALABAMA_20.

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

Check out Disciple Link to raise up church leaders

Pastors, staff and church leaders are invited to join us for a unique connecting event called Disciple Link!

Leaders learn better shoulder-to-shoulder rather than in rows, so we've designed this event to provide encouragement to you and to equip you to develop a pipeline of leaders in your church.

Disciple Link will be Oct. 23, 9 a.m.–2 p.m., at Crossroads Community Church in Elmore. There will be panel discussions, small group breakouts, cornhole, lunch and door prizes.

The cost is \$8. For more information or to register, visit makingdisciplesal.org/event/disciple-link-central-alabama.

IMB Hispanic missions team emphasizes disciple-making

Standing in front of believers in a village off the beaten path, 19-year-old Jaelin opened her Bible. Speaking through a translator, she answered questions called from the crowd. Often bombarded with false teachings, the church thirsted for the truth.

The second generation Hispanic American trekked through mountains and sought out remote villages with the heart to make sure these isolated churches not only know the gospel but also grow into healthy, multiplying churches.

“When you serve, you end up being blessed. We’re giving a lot, but we also receive a lot of blessing,” she said.

International Mission

Board missionaries Jeff and Joy Connelly hosted Jaelin and her teammates.

The Connellys serve in an area with around 25 million people, geographically about the size of Massachusetts, so it’s an “all hands on deck” situation.

As the volunteer missions team spent time discipling believers who live in a largely tribal context, the gospel truths they taught helped move some of the churches off milk and to the meat of the Christian life,

Connelly said, referencing 1 Corinthians 3:2.

Jaelin, a graphic design student, is a member of Iglesia Bautista Vida Nueva in Elgin, Illinois.

Her older sister was the first missions volunteer sent

out from their church.

Her sister spent the summer serving overseas and is currently in the IMB’s missionary candidate pipeline.

Both sisters are thankful their church supports them by paying the full cost of their missions trips, something Jaelin knows not every church can do. Her plane ticket was purchased by members of Iglesia Bautista Emmanuel, Illinois.

Encouragement

Jaelin has been encouraged by communication from her church members.

“The people in the church have been incredible, from the young students to the older members of my church. Sending a Bible verse that maybe I needed in the moment, that’s very important,” she said.

She’s been mentored by



IMB photo

Jaelin’s team worked with IMB missionaries Jeff and Joy Connelly. Together, they focused on training existing churches in the true gospel to combat the false teachings they’re bombarded with.

Ivan Ballines, a member of Iglesia Bautista Emmanuel and encouraged by people like Annel Robayna, IMB’s Hispanic church mobilization strategist, who most recently served Alabama Baptists.

“Jaelin’s story is a great example of what God is doing among second generation Hispanic young adults,” Robayna said.

During Hispanic Heritage

Month, the IMB is highlighting the contribution of Hispanics to global missions and celebrating the growing number of Hispanic churches committed to reaching the nations.

Resources are available at imb.org/hispanic-church-missions. (IMB)

EDITOR’S NOTE — Some names have been changed for security purposes.



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BWA volunteers serve, train women in Latin America

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 fourth 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.

Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Born in Argentina, Liliana Fernandez de Farina, president of

the Latin American Baptist Women's Union, was only 9 years old when she felt God's call.

"I knew perfectly that the spirit of Deborah was on me. I was going to be there outside of the church, helping people, leading and advising people," Farina said.

Part of the Baptist World Alliance Women, Farina is leading the women of the 24 conventions and the Associations of Hispanic Baptist Women, located in the states of Texas, New York and New Jersey, to be an "army of volunteers working outside the churches."

Part of her role is going to the city halls and govern-

ments of each area to ask them about the community's needs. Educating the children is mentioned most.

"At the same time while they are in the kindergarten with us, the group of mothers is going to be taught by the other sisters and brothers in churches in that city, in any country of Latin America," she said.

Farina is also leading UFBAL women in helping those considering abortion.

"We started in Argentina — [offering] a free phone call — because when a woman receives the news that she's pregnant and she's thinking of an abortion, she can call that number [from] any country she is [in], and she'll receive immediate help on the phone. Depending on the country where she was, she's connected with our vice president within 24 hours," she explained.

"Now we have more than



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

"I knew perfectly that the spirit of Deborah was on me. I was going to be there outside of the church, helping people, leading and advising people," Liliana Fernandez de Farina says.

350 babies born in just one year and a half, growing up," Farina said.

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


UFBAL's women facilitate 37 projects, including Christian social ministry, evangelization, helping victims of natural disasters, rescuing street children and others in at-risk situations, leadership training, missions and supporting

abandoned women who have been abused.

Future goals include supporting Latin American female missionaries in India and getting more young women in Woman's Missionary Union.

Prayer needs for UFBAL include:

- ▶ Strong health.
- ▶ Wisdom to see and do His will.
- ▶ Resources for travel costs, which are very expensive in Argentina.



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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For October 8

Explore the Bible

By Robert Olsen, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



FOLLOWED Mark 8:31–9:1

Get Behind (8:31–33)

People were trying to figure out who exactly Jesus was at this point in His ministry and what He was going to do. Peter understood who Jesus was. He was the promised Messiah!

After Peter's confession, Jesus begins to explain how He came to suffer and die. But how could the Messiah — the future ruler of Israel — die before His Kingdom is set up?

Jesus rebukes Peter because Peter does not understand that Jesus must suffer and die so that He can defeat death and fulfill Scripture in His resurrection. Just as Satan tempted Jesus earlier, Peter's statement was a temptation as well.

Peter was looking at the situation with human sensibilities, not divine understanding. How often are we guilty of the same?

Many times we look to God with worldly eyes instead of the eyes of faith. Christians suffer at the hands of evil men throughout the world, and bad things happen even to the most godly of disciples.

Even Jesus Himself suffered even though He had done no wrong. If Jesus suffered, we should expect no less. The Bible is full of verses that tell us that we should expect hardship and persecution. When we face these trials, it does not mean God is punishing us. These are opportunities for us to glorify God and grow in faith.

Follow Me (8:34–38)

Following this episode, Jesus gives a speech about the cost of being a disciple. Being a disciple means taking up your cross and following Jesus in spite of the persecution and hardships that are to come. The idea of carrying one's

cross would be a weird one to Jesus' hearers. It would be akin to someone today telling us to take up our electric chairs. It implies death.

But Jesus qualifies His statement. Dying to our own desires actually brings eternal life.

When we do the will of God and follow Jesus — no matter the cost — that is what it means to be a follower of Christ. The opposite of this — trying to save our own lives by affirming what the world has to offer — leads to eternal death.

This is why historically, Christians have been willing to die for their faith. They know that obedience to Christ is better than trying to please the world. We will receive an eternal reward if we cling to Christ and His promises.

See His Power (9:1)

At the end of Jesus' speech, He tells those listening that some will not taste death until they see the Kingdom of God coming in power. Some believe this is referring to Pentecost or Jesus' Second Coming, but it is referring to His transfiguration that immediately follows this account in each Gospel.

This is truly Christ revealing His glory and power to three of His disciples. This is an affirmation to them that He is the divine Messiah; therefore, they can trust Him.

The ultimate proof of God's power came through the resurrection, and now that Pentecost has occurred, the power of God dwells within believers.

The Holy Spirit is who convicts us of sin and enables us to live a life pleasing to God. This is why Christians have the ability to withstand persecution and stand against the culture. The power of God enables us to do so.

“For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for Me and for the gospel will save it.”

Mark 8:35

Bible Studies for Life

By Jeffery M. Leonard, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Biblical & Religious Studies, Samford University



PREPARE FOR BATTLE Daniel 10:1–3, 10–13, 16–19

The pages of Scripture offer God's revelation to us in a variety of genres. There are narratives, songs, various kinds of wisdom literature and a great many prophetic books as well.

The New Testament adds the biographies of Jesus that we call Gospels and a large collection of letters often referred to as epistles. To this roster of genres, we can also add a less common one, namely apocalyptic literature.

Apocalyptic literature is known to us mainly from the Book of Revelation, a book that actually begins in Greek with the word “apokalypsis.” In addition, apocalyptic literature can be found in the first eight chapters of the book of Zechariah and the final six chapters of the book of Daniel.

As any reader of the Book of Revelation can attest, the style of apocalyptic literature ranges from mildly confusing to downright perplexing.

It does have certain key features, though. Usually, it involves the common elements of being highly symbolic revelation transmitted from an angel to a human that discloses the supernatural world behind God's saving work. We see all of these elements in Daniel 10.

News and events that trouble us should lead us to pray. (1–3)

Daniel 10 opens with a notice that Daniel had been given a vision concerning a great war that was to take place. The text then shifts to Daniel's first-person narration of the vision. The vision was so powerful that Daniel says it spurred him to begin an extended time of mourning. For three weeks he fasted, avoiding choice food, meat and wine. He apparently also neglected his external appearance during this time.

When these three weeks of mourning had passed, Daniel received a

second vision that expanded and clarified his earlier experience. This time, we learn that a “man” stood before Daniel. He was dressed in linen with a belt of gold, a body like topaz and arms and legs like bronze.

His face, Daniel recalls, was like lightning, with eyes like flaming torches and a voice like the sound of a multitude. It is little wonder that Daniel says his face turned deathly pale and he was rendered helpless.

Our prayers are part of a larger picture of spiritual warfare. (10–13)

The words the angel spoke to Daniel are, truthfully, among the more confusing in all of Scripture.

The angel relates that during the three weeks of Daniel's mourning, he sought to come to Daniel, but he was delayed because he was locked in battle with “the prince of the Persian kingdom.” It was only with the help of Michael, “one of the chief princes,” that the angel was able to break free.

This is a description of events on a spiritual plane that is quite different from what we find elsewhere in Scripture.

Standing strong in spiritual battle does not depend on us but on God. (16–19)

It might be tempting to use Daniel 10 as the starting point for all manner of speculation about the nature and organization of the powers that inhabit the spiritual realm.

Here, the words of the psalmist may chart a better course for us: “Lord, my heart is not proud; my eyes are not haughty. I do not get involved in things too great or too wondrous for me” (Ps. 131:1).

We do better to follow Daniel's example of letting prayer, fasting and humble reliance on God be our part in spiritual warfare.

***“Do not be afraid,
you who are
highly esteemed,”
he said. “Peace!
Be strong now;
be strong.”***

Daniel 10:19

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs Frontz

The Alabama Baptist

Former American Idol star sets priorities of faith, family, career

Colton Dixon has a list of accolades — finishing in the top seven on Season 11 of “American Idol,” joining Harry Connick Jr. and Billy Joel as a Steinway artist, winning Dove Awards, performing at the 2019 National Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony and having several top hits on the contemporary Christian music charts.

However, even with all the success in his music career, Dixon knows that he can’t rely on himself to make it through life.

“I feel like whether in music or not, you’ll reach a point in your life where you’ll have to figure this out as well. My job isn’t my source. My title as a dad or husband isn’t my source. It’s who I am in God — the identity that He’s given me,” Dixon said.

In 2020, Dixon not only wasn’t able to tour due to the pandemic, but he had also been dropped by his music label.

Learning to trust

“God is our primary source in the Dixon house, whether I’ve got work or not,” he said. “He’s going to take care of us, and He’s going to provide for us as long as we continue to put our faith and hope in Him. That was something we had to learn.”

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.



COLTON DIXON

Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

That year was full of ups and downs but also included a miracle. In August 2020, one of Dixon’s twin daughters was born without a pulse and wasn’t breathing. The medical team resuscitated her, and she spent a few days in the neonatal intensive care unit before going home.

Dixon has been learning how precious life is and how important it is to put a priority on time with his family. After the twins arrived, he and his wife, Annie, became much more intentional when choosing what to do next concerning Dixon’s career.

“God is teaching me the road-life balance. Every time that I say ‘yes’ to something on the road, that means that I ultimately say ‘no’ to being home with my family. I can say what my priorities need to be, and it’s sometimes hard to get that right, but it’s God first, family second, ministry third,” he said.

When Dixon first started singing and playing in front of others, he

would get caught up in the technical aspects of a performance — worrying about playing the right notes, not forgetting the lyrics and even making sure the lighting was executed as planned.

He admits there can be hesitancy or fear involved when stepping out on stage, but he soon found that even in those times when he “bombed,” the connection with God and people was more important than the technical aspects.

“Whereas those things are super important and I still care about those things and want to do them with excellence, it’s about connection,” he said.

Through the years, Dixon has had one main focus with his music — having his songs give hope to believers and nonbelievers, knowing that both the church and unchurched need it.

“I would love for my music to be a safe place for people to listen, to get filled up,” Dixon said. “Those

who have ears to hear will know what I’m talking about, which is faith.

“But those who don’t — maybe they’re not as versed in church culture or whatever — will just think of it as a hopeful song, a song that brings them out of a dark place.”

In April 2023, Dixon released his seven-song project, “Canvas.” The title song is all about what God can do in us.

The first release from the EP, “My Light,” is based on Psalm 119 and is a reminder that no matter how dark the world gets, God’s Word is a tool to illuminate where we need to go.

“Every day is a blank canvas to live life to the fullest and to view the world and the people around us in a new light,” he said.

Dixon will be joining Jordan Feliz for the “Love and Light Tour,” kicking off in Searcy, Arizona, on Sept. 28. Dixon and Feliz will stop in Montgomery on Oct. 27.

“My music career has done well in the last couple of years, and I’m so thankful for that. I never take that for granted because it’s not guaranteed — I’ve learned that as well. I’ve had some ups and downs in my career.”

Making connections

“I’m always thankful when a song connects — that’s the goal every time,” he continued. “With a song like ‘Build a Boat,’ it’s my favorite part every night at a show, singing that song with so many people who have adopted that song as their own.”

But through all the highs and lows, Dixon keeps coming back to one of the most important parts of his life.

“It’s been an amazing couple of years, but the biggest highlight for sure is the twins.”

To find out more about Colton Dixon’s music and the 2023 tour, visit coltondixon.com.

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