The Alabama Baptist

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SCAN ME

I See Jesus

Where God is Working, Christ is Shining and the Holy Spirit is Moving

From a personal testimony and life experience

Testimony from TAB Media Group staff member Annette Brown:

I see Jesus in me. All I have to do is look at my past — who I was and where I was — and look at me now. I went from being the darkest sinner in the room to the King's daughter.

I see how He waited on me for years to turn to Him and accept His eternal gift of life and love. I see how He loved me enough to use His big, strong, loving hand to get my attention.

I remember the day my life changed direction — He took me from east to west. He parted every one of my Red Seas and led me to safety and green pastures. I can see how much He loves me by peppering my life with the most loving, caring, God-appointed people, at the very moment I needed them.

I see the only One who could love me this much — love me. And I will be forever grateful.

From page 15 of this edition of The Alabama Baptist

Chris Mills, student missions mobilizer for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, describes how he has seen the equipping weekend known as Pursue work in students' lives. This part of the story can be found in the online version:

Mills said he heard stories of students who felt led to go on missions after Pursue, or who felt led to go for longer than they'd originally planned. He heard of others who had a renewed passion to go back and share the gospel with students on their campus.

"While Pursue is always a highlight, this year especially was one where I was just really encouraged specifically with conversations I had with students afterward and how the Lord spoke to them about considering those next steps of obedience," he said.

Mills said he often sees God use the breakouts, main sessions and testimonies from other students to continue the work He's already been doing in students' lives on their campuses.

From page 15 of this edition of The Alabama Baptist

Madilyn Segrest of Eastern Hills Baptist Church in Montgomery shares about her experience with WMU's Complete weekend event. This part of the story can be found in the online version:

Segrest attended her second Complete this year and said she loved the overall missions aspect.

"I love missions and it is definitely something I want to do with my life. I loved feeling the Holy Spirit in the worship, teaching and people and getting to share that with other girls from around our state."

EDITOR'S NOTE — Share your experiences with us by sending to news@thealabamabaptist.org.

Tribute to a life dedicated to the Lord's service

Pastor Daniel Waid said as his church — Central Baptist in Albertville — has been studying the doctrine of Hell on Wednesday nights recently, the words of his good friend Mike Benefield have stuck with him.

BENEFIELD

"Mike exclaimed that understanding the truth of the Bible and about Hell should motivate us all to not want anyone to go there," Waid said. "If we don't want people to go there, he said, we must go where they are now."

That's the way Benefield spent his life, and that's the way Waid said he wants to remember his friend, who died March 2 at 77 years old after he fell off a ladder at church.

"He served with Disaster Relief, deployed 12 times with them, served in VBS, drove for our bus ministry, served the elderly, was a friend to all and ministered to many in our community," Waid said. "I was hearing stories of how Mike brought kids to church who still come to our church but are now 35 or 36 years old. His children have served Jesus in their communities, and his daughter has gone on the missions field."

The day after Benefield died, a young girl from Haiti was baptized at Central Baptist — Benefield had been picking her up for church on the bus.

"I believe that the Lord uses people to reach people, and this is one of the countless grains of sand of testimonies of this servant's heart to love the Lord and to love people," Waid said.

Benefield's wife of 47 years, Connie, has also served alongside him at Central Baptist since 1987.

Waid noted, "Mike was truly a servant for the Lord. His aim was to make Jesus known in all things."

Correction

The Explore the Bible Sunday School lesson for March 10 under the subhead "The answer (15–20)" should have read: "It must have been exhilarating and affirming to hear her tell him she was the *granddaughter* of Abraham's brother." The March 7 print edition incorrectly stated "son" instead of "granddaughter." We apologize for the mistake.

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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JENNIFER DAVIS RASH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 19.

OPINION

Rashional Thoughts

By Jennifer Davis Rash
President and Editor-in-Chief
jrash@thealabamabaptist.org @RashionalThts

Could remaining calm be one way to love others, share Christ?

Have you ever allowed someone else's anxiety to influence your own sense of a situation? Did it cause you to shift into uncertainty, fear or chaos even if normally you would have remained calm?

Maybe it triggered you in such a way that you experienced a full-blown anxiety or panic attack yourself.

It always hurts to watch someone go through a true panic attack. I feel so helpless when it happens.

However, one thing I've learned through the years is that remaining calm is the best gift and assistance we can give those susceptible to anxiety and panic attacks. They need reassurance that everything is OK and will be OK.

Stabilizing force

We can be the stabilizing figure for them in the midst of the battle they face within themselves, especially if they are new to learning and developing coping methods in preparation for when those moments occur.

The same is true in general life moments when someone expresses an unreasonable level of nervousness, fear or frustration.

We don't have to dive in with the person, group or talking heads screaming the sky is falling and the heaviest piece is sure to land on us.

If the situation is related to someone we know, then they may not understand why we aren't reacting hysterically like they are. They may even judge or belittle us because of it.

Still, maintaining the discipline to choose calmness, gracefulness and thoughtfulness will always serve us better.

Not only does it allow us to respond cautiously after thinking through and around the situation rather than reacting emotionally without careful thought, but it also provides the opportunity for clarity and accuracy to surface.

It may take deep breath exercises such as the 4-7-8 method to steady our heart rate. Inhale through the nose for four seconds, hold for seven seconds, then breathe out through the nose for eight seconds.

If that's not enough, then try placing an ice pack on your chest to calm the central nervous system.

Also, reducing stimulation helps tremendously. Turn off the TV and other devices. Lie back with a cover over your eyes and maybe even noise-canceling headphones.

Pull a blanket, preferably a weighted blanket, over you and take slow, deep breaths.

And for those who are believers in and followers of Jesus Christ, we can always hold tightly to His promise that no matter how difficult the situation, He is with us.

Page 1 reminds us of the extent to which He proved that promise to us.

What are other methods that work for you?

What are some experiences where you wish you had stayed calm rather than being led astray by another person's high anxiety? How would you handle that same situation today?

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

PHILIPPIANS 4:6–7

OPINION

Your Voice

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

Casinos create 'fantasy world,' irresponsibility

Tom Coates, executive director of the Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Des Moines, Iowa, in 2002 said he saw a correlation between the expansion of gambling and the "explosion of personal debt."

Casinos, in particular, create a "fantasy world" that encourages personal irresponsibility, Coates said.

Unlike "destination gambling" sites in Las Vegas, most local casinos in the United States "prey on the native population, " he said.

"Casinos thrive in an atmosphere of 'no more delayed gratification,'" Coates said. "They encourage people to mortgage their future."

With its promises of revenues, gambling is a tempting lure to politicians seeking a way around making hard decisions about spending and taxation, a member of the Texas Legislature shared during a 2002 meeting of gambling opponents.

"Gambling allows legislators to abdicate their duty and their fiscal responsibility," said then-Rep. Talmadge Heflin, R-Houston.

In some cases, it can even lead to political corruption. The day before the group met in late September 2002, Linda Cloud resigned as executive director of the Texas lottery after admitting she had lied about information regarding a lottery commissioner. She was the third director to resign amid controversy.

Weston Ware, past president of the National Coalition Against Legalized Gambling and longtime associate with the Texas Baptist Christian Life Commission, said that is an example of the problems that can occur when government gets in the business of promoting gambling.

"When you have an agency that is built on smoke and mirrors, you have to expect that something like this can occur," he said.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This is an excerpt from the article "Economy can win without gambling" written by then-Associated Baptist Press and published in the Oct. 24, 2002, edition of The Alabama Baptist.

Focus on solid companies, communities — not gambling

EDITOR'S NOTE — Gov. Kay Ivey previously served as treasurer for the state of Alabama and in 2010 wrote an article opposing gambling expansion efforts. The following is an excerpt from the article, which was published in the early 2010 edition of Christian Life Report.

It seems like a simple idea: legalize gambling in Alabama, place a heavy tax on it, and then sit back and watch as ... endless waves of "free" money fill the state coffers.

But that premise is flawed. Gambling itself is based on the idea of getting something for nothing. You put down a little money and hope to win a big cash prize in return.

Ah, if it were only that easy! Simple math tells you there must be more losers than winners to make gambling profitable for the owners of the gambling operation.

And there's the problem. Using tax revenue from gambling as a funding mechanism is unpredictable at best, and unreliable at worst. A basic principle of public policy is, never fund an essential public service with an unstable source of funding. ...

Then there is the cost of the social problems that go hand-in glove with legalized gambling. Gambling proponents don't like to talk about them, but I assure you they are there.

If legalizing gambling raised the percent of gamblers in our state to the national average, 15,000 additional gambling addicts would be created, at a cost of more than $200 million per year in crime, lost productivity and costs for health and human services.

I agree with people who want to attract new jobs to their communities and who want to find new revenue sources for our state government. But you won't find the answer in legalized gambling. It is Fool's Gold, a lure of easy money that doesn't deliver, unless you are the owner of a casino.

Want a sure bet? We should focus our energies and invest our limited resources in recruiting stable, good paying jobs with established businesses, and encouraging existing companies to expand. Solid jobs with solid companies build solid communities.

Previous lottery promises found false

Prior to 2016, then-Gov. Robert Bentley opposed gambling as an answer to Alabama's fiscal problems, but in 2016 he determined a state lottery was "the only real choice."

While the legislation he supported failed, his advocacy for it included a promise of $225 million in annual revenue.

Checking the numbers

Maggie Walsh Evans of The Alabama Baptist dug into the claim and discovered the $225 million figure was calculated from an estimate based on the average of one year's numbers in similar size states with lotteries — Arkansas, Louisiana, Kentucky and South Carolina.

Of the four states, Louisiana most closely matched up with Alabama at the time. According to the 2010 census, Alabama's population was 4,779,736 and Louisiana's was 4,533,372. The states' per capita income also was comparable, with Alabama's at $35,625 and Louisiana's at $39,413, according to infoplease.com.

In 2015, the Louisiana lottery generated $184.8 million, according to "The Blinken Report: State Revenues From Gambling." It was its peak lottery income in eight years and still more than $40 million shy of what Bentley promised.

"[Gambling] results are short-run yields and longer-run deterioration," the report said.

OPINION

> "Now therefore fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and in faithfulness."
>
> JOSHUA 24:14

"Fasting is a spiritual journey; there is no one-size-fits-all approach. It's essential to approach fasting with a humble and sincere heart, seeking God's guidance," said **Rob Jackson,** director of evangelism and church revitalization, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

"You can build a strong church by focusing on seniors," said author **Karl Vaters.** "Senior ministry must be as intentional as every other ministry."

"To share the love of Christ and see the smiles on the faces of all our honored guests throughout the night was priceless," said **Daley Grace Alford,** who helped organize a Night to Shine event for First Baptist Church Oxford at the Bynum Community Center. "It's been a really great adventure."

"When you take time to remember and recognize who God is, then it's easy to ask yourself, 'Who are we not to worship Him?' That's what we want to do ... and through these songs," said **Bart Millard,** lead singer of MercyMe.

"In an election year, we often hope that our next leader will restore unity," noted veteran researcher **George Barna.** Based on the results of a recent study revealing a deeply fragmented country, he sees this as unrealistic. Instead, he said, "What we need as a nation is a spiritual awakening, not a political majority, to restore national unity."

"I am always amazed that the Lord would choose me to be His vessel for communicating with His people," said Christian artist **Sally Greer**. "One of the most meaningful things is when someone tells me that they love art too, and they are excited to use it for God's glory."

"There is nothing in this world that God can't overcome. God is bigger than pornography. ... When it comes to pornography, we use words like 'issue' or 'problem' rather than calling pornography a sin, a highly addictive sin," said **Leslie Umstattd**, an assistant professor of Christian Education at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

"So — at what point should a church leader consider outsourcing payroll to a third party? If your church isn't 100% confident in its tax withholding and tax reporting practices, then outsourcing might make sense," said **Sarah Baraham**, vice president of ministry accounting services for WatersEdge Ministry Services.

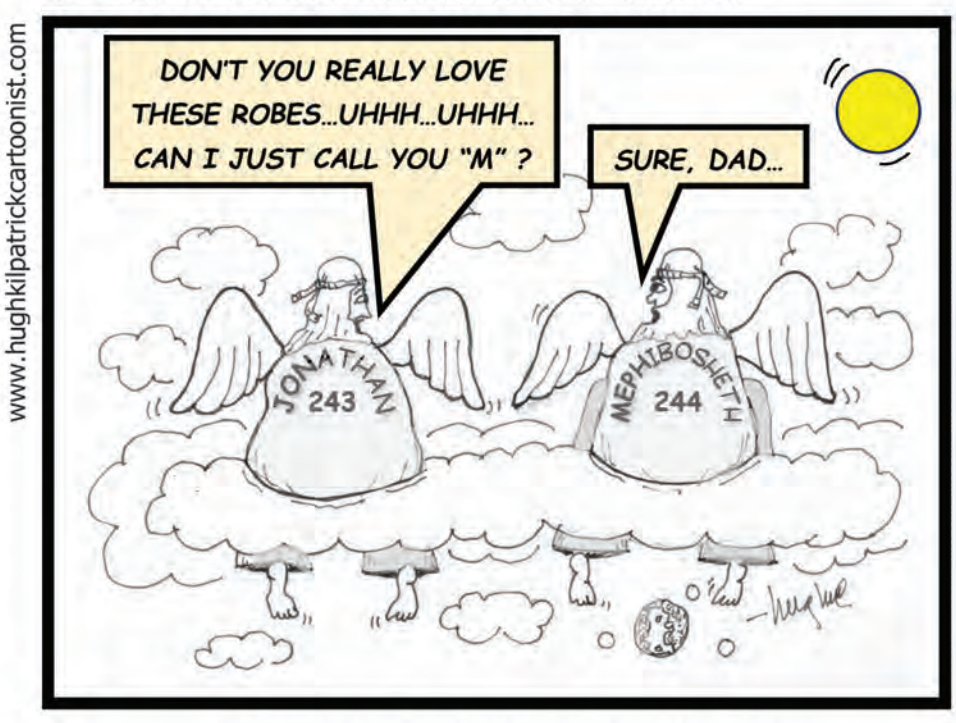
Five things to remember when conducting a funeral:

1. Remember that God is the God of comfort and gives peace that passes understanding.
2. Remember to connect with the family before the funeral to get family information and memories to help make the service more personal.
3. Remember to meet with the family for prayer before the service.
4. Remember to focus on God's promises during the sermon.
5. Remember to share the gospel and invite those who haven't to come to Christ.

BONUS: One that I say at every funeral for a Christian — both with the family during our preservice prayer and at the beginning of the service to the congregation — is that "we haven't lost _____. You only lose those things that you don't know where they are. We know where _____ is because they trusted Jesus and are with Him in Heaven right now, and those of us who know Christ will see them again one day."

@DrBradWhitt on X

HUGH'S VIEWS – *HUGH KILPATRICK III*



"ONE 'N DONE" BIBLE NAME

2 SAMUEL 4:4

In case you missed these nuggets

Excerpt from the March 14 edition of The Baptist Paper:

Regarding the recent Department of Justice investigation into the SBC Executive Committee, the EC is reporting that the segment of the investigation dealing with the EC has concluded and "no further action" is anticipated.

However, the investigation itself doesn't seem to be wrapped. While it is unclear who or what remains under the scope, The Baptist Paper has confirmed who it isn't.

Broader look

Jennifer Rash reached out to all SBC entity and auxiliary heads and had heard back from all but three at press time.

Those not part of the investigation nor contacted by the DOJ (Office of the U.S. Attorneys) are: International Mission Board, North American Mission Board, Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, Lifeway Christian Resources, GuideStone Financial Resources and national Woman's Missionary Union.

As far as the six seminaries:

1. A spokesperson for Southeastern Seminary said they had no official information.
2. A spokesperson for New Orleans Seminary said, "To our knowledge, [NOBTS] has not been the target of any investigation. We responded to a request for documents more than a year ago and have had no contact with the DOJ since."
3. Jeff Iorg, president of Gateway Seminary, shared with Rash: "Gateway, in response to a request from the SBC legal team, provided information to assist with their response to the DOJ investigation. Other than that, Gateway has had no other involvement in the investigation and no direct contact with the DOJ."

4–6. Still waiting to hear from Southern, Southwestern and Midwestern seminaries.

NEWS

Nominees set

SBC Exec Comm expected to confirm Iorg; UM to name new leader

By Shawn Hendricks
The Alabama Baptist

At press time a couple of key actions expected by the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee and the University of Mobile were looming on the horizon.

According to sources close to the search for the EC's next president/CEO, Jeff Iorg was expected to be approved unanimously by the EC as its next leader.

The EC's search team planned to present Iorg for a vote at a March 21 special-called meeting of the full EC board of trustees to be held at the Dallas Fort Worth International Airport.

IORG

Iorg is soon retiring as president of Gateway Seminary, where he has served since 2004.

"Jeff Iorg is who we have been praying for," EC search team chair Neal Hughes said in his announcement of Iorg as the candidate.

Hughes serves as director of missions for Montgomery Baptist Association and is one of five Alabama Baptists serving on the EC board.

If all goes as the search team plans and Iorg is elected, he will succeed Ronnie Floyd, who resigned as EC president and CEO in October 2021.

Jonathan Howe, EC's vice president for communications since 2019, has served as interim president following Willie McLaurin's sudden departure in August 2023 after admitting to falsifying his resumé.

Iorg's nomination has garnered widespread support, including from Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, and Sandy Wisdom-Martin, executive director of national Woman's Missionary Union.

Many cite his integrity, leadership abilities and longstanding commitment to Southern Baptist service.

Prior to his years at Gateway Seminary, Iorg served in various leadership roles within the SBC, including executive director of the Northwest Baptist Convention.

Iorg's professional journey also includes stints as a children's minister, pastor and church planter, where he demonstrated a track record of growth and financial stewardship. He holds degrees from Hardin-Simmons University, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Seeking 'visionary leader'

The University of Mobile also planned to name its new president this week during the board of trustees' spring board meeting.

Lonnie Burnett, the university's fifth president, will retire May 30.

After Burnett announced his plan in August 2023, the trustees launched a national search, which was expected to culminate with a candidate being presented to the full board of trustees for a vote the afternoon of March 21.

"The University of Mobile seeks a visionary leader who understands UM's opportunities and challenges and, with dependency on the Holy Spirit, is eager to lead the school into the future," said Fred Wilson, chair of the UM presidential search committee, which was made up of trustees, alumni, denominational leaders, staff and faculty.

"We believe that the foundation laid by Dr. Burnett's administration creates a tremendous opportunity for an insightful leader with the right set of skills to expand the university's influence exponentially," he noted.

The Alabama Baptist will report the name online March 21 and in the next edition of the paper.

Persecuted church

Militants in Sudan kill Christian, beat another unconscious

OMDURMAN, Sudan — Members of a paramilitary group killed one Christian in Sudan and beat another one until he was unconscious.

Sources told Morning Star News that militants of Rapid Support Forces shot Hidar Al Amin at his home Jan. 20 in Omdurman. The property of Al Amin, a member of the Sudanese Presbyterian Evangelical Church, was looted and the assailants left him bleeding to death, one of his relatives said. Then on Jan. 22, the home and shop of Al Thahir Kafi were looted and he was beaten unconscious. Muslim extremists within the RSF attacked Kafi, whose Christian faith is well known in his area.

The fighting between the Sudan Armed Forces and the RSF began following a coup in 2021.

The conflict, states Morning Star, has claimed the lives of 12,000 people and displaced approximately 7.6 million others. The RSF took control of Sudan's Al Jazirah state in December 2023.

Sudan is No. 8 on Open Doors' 2024 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian. Christians comprise about 4.5% of Sudan's population.

Charge dropped against Christian after accuser admits lying

LAHORE, Pakistan — A Christian charged under Pakistan's blasphemy laws was released two days later after the accuser admitted to fabricating the complaint.

The quick release of 72-year-old Younis Bhatti from a blasphemy charge that carries a mandatory life sentence is an unusual move in Pakistan, states the news services Christian Daily International and Morning Star News.

Bhatti had been accused Feb. 10 of desecrating the Quran in 211-RB village in Punjab province of Pakistan. Sosan Fatima, to whom Bhatti was providing free housing on his own land, accused Bhatti of storming her dwelling, attacking her and tearing up the Quran she was reading.

BHATTI

Bhatti told the news services that Fatima later admitted to police that she, her husband and two Christians plotted against Bhatti because of a property dispute. Police detained Fatima and the co-conspirators.

Pakistan is No. 7 on Open Doors' 2024 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

NEWS ITEMS COMPILED BY THE ALABAMA BAPTIST STAFF

NEWS

Enforce or regulate?

Alabama legislators debate how to address illegal gambling, lure of potential revenue

Alabama Baptist and other faith-based leaders continue to speak out against the current gambling expansion efforts anticipated to solidify soon in the Legislature.

The two versions of bills passed by the state House of Representatives and Senate will be reviewed to determine how to bring them together, possibly even happening right after press time.

The House version of the bill, sponsored by Rep. Chris Blackshear and Rep. Andy Whitt, would legalize sports wagering, online betting, a lottery and casino-style gambling in Alabama. It passed Feb. 15.

The Senate version, sponsored by Sen. Greg Albritton, passed March 7. It eliminates the authorization of sports betting and full-blown casinos from the plan but still allows for a state lottery.

It also maintains the call for Gov. Kay Ivey to negotiate an agreement with the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, which could lead to the tribe having casinos with table games in three Alabama locations.

The tribal casino locations currently operate slot machine-style gambling devices like those debated and deemed illegal in other parts of the state for the past 15 years.

Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist

Illegal slot machine-style gambling continues in Alabama despite laws against it.

Keeping the tracks in play

While the Senate version of the bill would reportedly not allow for electronic bingo gambling, it would authorize seven locations, including the state's four dog tracks, to have "historical racing computerized machines," according to Alabama Daily News.

The newest of these devices that allows players to bet on replays of horse races can resemble slot machines, ADN reported.

The sites would include the state's four existing dog tracks located in Greene, Jefferson, Macon and Mobile counties as well as current illegally operated locations in Houston, Lowndes and an additional site in Greene County.

Regarding the House version of the bill, Whitt says his reasoning behind the major expansion of legalized gambling is an attempt to temper the ongoing illegal operations.

Illegal gambling activity in Alabama is like "the wild west," Whitt told Alabama Media Group.

"I think when we have 67 counties, 67 sheriffs and DAs interpreting the law differently, there's no clarity [nor] one uniformed piece of legislation or law that they follow," he said. "Enforcements are different ... across the state."

However, Greg Davis, president and CEO of Alabama Citizens Action Program, and other gambling opponents disagree with the strategy and are sending an urgent message to all who are concerned.

"This one is really, really hot and very, very serious," he said of the House version of the bill.

"It will change the face of our state; there's no doubt about it."

Davis opposes the concept of regulating legalized gambling. Instead, he is advocating to merely enforce the current law.

"To curb illegal gambling operations, enacting and enforcing stricter criminal penalties is a more effective measure than legalization and regulation," Davis explained, noting the word "regulate" is being highlighted but to regulate requires legalization.

Alabama has a long history of confusion and division regarding illegal gambling in the state and attempts at expanding gambling surface every legislative session.

For more on this topic, visit ALCAP.com.

While dog races and pari-mutuel horse races are legal at the state's four tracks, casino-style games are not legal. Known as class III gambling, casino-style games include slot machines, blackjack and other games of chance.

Traditional paper bingo for charity is legal but not slot-machine style games labeled as "electronic bingo" or "electronic gambling."

Still, a continuous string of slot machine operators has attempted to skirt the law with machines that have a small, animated bingo card in the bottom corner of the large screen showcasing the slots.

Additionally, because of the 1988 Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, gambling activities are allowed on tribal lands at the same level as what is legal in the state in which the land sits. With non-reservation facilities attempting to run electronic slot machine-style devices (even though they are illegal), the Poarch Band thus uses IGRA as the reasoning to operate similar machines at the tribe's three operations in the state — located on tribal lands in Atmore, Montgomery and Wetumpka.

Davis explained that Alabama's 1901 constitution officially bans lotteries and games of chance, but 18 different constitutional amendments permit those specific forms of traditional bingo in certain counties throughout the state. These constitutional amendments are the laws being ignored or interpreted beyond the original intention.

'A gospel issue'

"This is a gospel issue to me," Davis said. "It affects people's lives in a negative way, and it must be a matter of prayer."

Alabama Baptist State Convention and State Board of Missions leaders released a joint statement Feb. 9 voicing their opposition to any expansion of gambling.

"The sad and tragic results of gambling frequently adversely affect the poor and wreck the lives of families and individuals who participate, notably those who live below the poverty level. Gambling can intensify addiction, leading to financial ruin, relationship strain and psychological distress."

(Compiled reporting by Jennifer Rash, Tim Cockes and Lizzy Haseltine of The Alabama Baptist)

NEWS

OBITUARIES

▸ **William E. "Bill" Bailey,** former pastor of Round Island Baptist Church, Athens, died Feb. 6. He was 73.

Bailey served in the U.S. Air Force for 13 years. He earned a bachelor's degree from Wayland Baptist University in Plainview, Texas, a master's degree from Southern Seminary and a doctorate from Luther Rice College & Seminary in Lithonia, Georgia.

BAILEY

Bailey also held pastoral positions in Mississippi and Indiana, and served in several roles with the State Convention of Baptists in Indiana, including convention president.

He is survived by his wife, Mary Ann; son, Richard; daughter, Rachel; and four grandchildren.

▸ **Charles Merry Christmas Sr.,** a former pastor and director of missions, died March 10 at 97. Christmas surrendered to God's call to preach when he was 18 years old and in the U.S. Navy. He studied at Howard College (now Samford University) and earned his doctorate from New Orleans Seminary.

He served as director of missions for Chilton Baptist Association from 1990 to 1997. He also served as pastor of Rock Springs Baptist Church in Lafayette, Mignon Baptist Church in Sylacauga, Philadelphia Baptist Church, Hillview Baptist Church and the former Gate City Baptist Church in Birmingham as well as churches in Louisiana. He also was associate pastor of FBC Center Point.

CHRISTMAS

For years, Christmas was an active member of West End Baptist Church in Clanton. He is preceded in death by his wife of 65 years, Louise. He is survived by his daughter, Joy Carol; his son, Charles Jr.; and a number of grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

▸ **Larry Brent Earnest,** who spent 32 years focused on community ministries in the Birmingham area, died Dec. 19, 2023, at 77.

A native of Greenwood, Mississippi, he held a bachelor's degree from Mississippi College and a master's degree from Southwestern Seminary. He started in youth ministry in 1971, serving in Mississippi, Texas, Louisiana and Alabama.

EARNEST

A member of Ridgecrest Baptist Church in Trussville, Earnest served with what is now Birmingham Metro Baptist Association. He is survived by his wife, Charlotte; his son, Brent; his daughter, Kayla; and five grandchildren.

Alabama news

AUTAUGA ASSOCIATION

▸ **Calvary Baptist Church, Prattville,** will host an Easter egg hunt at the church, March 30, 10 a.m.–noon. Get a picture with the Easter bunny and discover the true meaning of Easter. Dave Burns is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

▸ **Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Birmingham,** will hold a special needs community egg hunt March 30 from 9:30 a.m. to noon. Individuals of all ages are invited. There will be an egg hunt to accommodate varying abilities, games, crafts, door prize raffles and treat bag options with different types of candy or trinkets. There also will be dessert trucks for treat purchases. Bring your basket. Visit shades.org/egghunt or contact Amy Kirby at akirby@shades.org for more information. George Wright is pastor.

Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/ The Alabama Baptist

▸ **Bob Driggers** was awarded a Great Commission Leader Award for his years of service at Raleigh Avenue Baptist Church, Homewood. Driggers, a retired attorney, has served his church as deacon, discipler and Sunday School teacher. "Mr. Driggers' impact has enabled Raleigh to be a Great Commission church for decades," said Michael Ent, pastor. Ent surprised Driggers with the award, recognition and thanks during the morning service, Jan. 14, as he gave a state of the church address, refocusing the congregation on the mission of the church in Matthew 28:18–20.

COFFEE ASSOCIATION

▸ **Alberton Baptist Church, Kinston,** will present the Easter cantata "I Know My Redeemer Lives" March 29 at 6:30 p.m. Will Jordan is pastor.

COVINGTON ASSOCIATION

▸ **Cam Ballard** is the new associate pastor of youth ministries of **Babbie Baptist Church, Andalusia.** A native of Opp, Ballard holds a bachelor of science degree in biblical/theological studies from the University of Mobile and is currently pursuing his master's degree at Midwestern Seminary. He previously served as youth director at Beulah Baptist Church, Opp, and FBC Loxley. Dwayne Seay is pastor.

BALLARD

DALE ASSOCIATION

▸ **Jonathan Bost** is the new pastor of **Newton Baptist Church.** He holds a bachelor of science degree from the University of Louisiana, Lafayette; a master of divinity degree from New Orleans Seminary; and is pursuing a doctor of ministry degree from Gateway Seminary. He previously served as pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, Pennington, and churches in Louisiana and Mississippi. He and his wife, Drew, have two children.

BOST

▸ **Merrell Henry** is the new pastor of **Camp Ground Baptist Church, Ozark.** He served as associate pastor to students, education and outreach, as well as in other roles, at Camp Ground for more than a decade. He has been in ministry for about 25 years. Henry and his wife, Jennifer, have two daughters.

Facebook photo

DEKALB ASSOCIATION

▸ **Isaiah Craig** is the new associate and missions pastor of **First Baptist Church Rainsville.** Licensed in 2006 and ordained in 2009, Craig holds a bachelor of science degree from Athens State University in Georgia and has studied at Luther Rice College & Seminary in Georgia. He previously served as a church planter and multiplication leader for central and western Massachusetts and as a pastor, associate pastor and youth pastor in Tennessee and Georgia. Since 2008, he has overseen and equipped church planting movements in two nations and took missions trips to India, Nepal, Peru, Uganda, El Salvador and Honduras. Craig and his wife, ShaRhonda, have nine children. David Cofield is pastor.

CRAIG

▸ **Will Standridge** is the new pastor of **First Baptist Church Geraldine.** He holds a bachelor of arts in biblical and theological studies from Boyce College, Louisville, Kentucky; a master of divinity from Southern Seminary, and is currently pursuing a doctor of ministry in applied theology from Southern Seminary as well. Standridge served as a youth minister at County Line Baptist Church, Trafford, and as a pastoral intern, administrator and student minister in Kentucky and Texas. He and his wife, Kendyl, have one daughter.

Photo courtesy of Will Standridge

ESCAMBIA ASSOCIATION

▸ **Dennis Daniel** is the new pastor of **Nokomis Baptist Church, Atmore.** Daniel became a Christian in 1985 and began teaching youth and preaching. Daniel has been a member of

NEWS

Nokomis for 10 years, and became the interim pastor February 2023. His career of the past 46 years has been in carpet manufacturing, from which he will retire this year. He and his wife of 43 years, Cheryl, have two sons and four grandchildren.

DANIEL

FAYETTE ASSOCIATION

▸ **Ashcraft Corner Baptist Church, Kennedy,** closed after nearly 135 years of ministry. Organized in 1889 under the name Pleasant Ridge as part of the Sipsey Baptist Association, the name changed in 1944. Fayette Association has a list of items the church has available to facilitate other ministries in the area.

MARSHALL ASSOCIATION

▸ **Skylar Baugh** is the new pastor of **Mount Hebron Missionary Baptist Church, Boaz.** He and his wife, Leslie, have two daughters.

MOBILE ASSOCIATION

▸ **Lee Merck** is the new pastor of **Dauphin Way Baptist Church, Mobile.** Merck holds a bachelor of arts in religion from William Carey College (now William Carey University), Hattiesburg, Mississippi; a master of divinity with languages from Southeastern Seminary; and a doctor of ministry in evangelism and church planting from Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia. For the past 12 years, Merck was the director of church planting for Send Network Montana with the North American Mission Board. Merck also has served as pastor of various churches through the years. He and his wife, Christie, have four children and two granddaughters.

Facebook photo

SOUTHEAST ALABAMA ASSOCIATION

▸ **Ray Cobb** is the new pastor of **Antioch Baptist Church, Ashford.** Cobb grew up in Webb and spent the majority of his career as foreman over Dothan's right of way crew. When called to ministry later in life, he earned bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees in pastoral ministry from Bethany Divinity College and Seminary, Dothan. Cobb previously served as pastor of Haleburg Baptist Church, Columbia. He and his wife, Kay, have four children and three grandchildren.

COBB

▸ **Jarrod Skinner** is the new minister of music and students of **Kinsey Baptist Church.** Skinner previously served as associate youth minister of Memphis Baptist Church, Dothan, and minister of music and interim youth minister at Church at the Crossing, Dothan. He is working toward a bachelor of arts degree in pastoral ministry at Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia, and plans to pursue a master of divinity. Skinner and his wife, Katie, have one son. Brad Hardy is pastor.

Photo courtesy of Jarrod Skinner

ST. CLAIR ASSOCIATION

▸ **Tim Childers** is the new pastor of **Cook Springs Baptist Church, Pell City,** where he had been serving as interim. A native of Piedmont, Childers retired from full-time ministry in July 2023 after serving almost 40 years in Alabama, Louisiana, Tennessee and Georgia. He holds a bachelor of general studies degree from Samford University and a master's of religious education from New Orleans Seminary. He and his wife, Debbie, have been married 48 years and have two children and seven grandchildren.

CHILDERS

TALLAPOOSA ASSOCIATION

▸ **Turk Holt** is the new interim minister of youth of **First Baptist Church Alexander City.** Steve King is pastor.

WEST CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

▸ **Donald Harris** retired as pastor of **Friendship Baptist Church, Lawley,** where he served for 21 years. Harris grew up in Selma at Northside Baptist Church, where he became a Christian.

He moved to Ocmulgee Baptist Church, Selma, in high school when he started dating his wife, Faye. The two were married there 62 years ago, and Harris served as a lay leader and deacon for many years. He was ordained by Ocmulgee as a deacon in 1978 and as a pastor in 2003. Harris served as interim pastor twice at Safford Baptist Church, and at Faith Chapel Baptist Church, Marion.

Harris retired from a 35-year career as manager of the appliance and electronics department at Sears, Selma. He and Faye, have three children, seven grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren.

HARRIS

▸ **Lloyd Stockman** retired from **Faith Chapel, Marion,** after 30 years as pastor. Stockman grew up at Plantersville Baptist Church, where he was saved and was in the first group baptized in the new church baptistry. He met his wife, Carolyn, at Northside Baptist Church, Selma, where he was ordained as a deacon. He helped start Summerfield Baptist Church, Valley Grande, and he was licensed to ministry there in 1987 and served as youth minister.

STOCKMAN

Stockman was ordained as a pastor in 1994 at Summerfield, by request of Faith Chapel, where he had become the pastor. Stockman worked for 33 years as the director of distribution and traffic for American Candy Company, Selma. He and Carolyn have been married almost 57 years. They have three children, six grandchildren and one great grandchild.

OTHER

▸ **Tommy Quinn** has been called as associate pastor of worship of **First Baptist Church Zachary, Louisiana.** He previously served as associate pastor of worship of First Baptist Church Tillman's Corner for 11 1/2 years. He and his wife, Carren, have two children.

QUINN

Samford wins first SoCon tournament, advances to NCAA Big Dance

Samford University punched its ticket to the Big Dance on March 11 — winning the school's first-ever Southern Conference Tournament title and a trip to the NCAA tournament for the first time since 2000. The Bulldogs move on after defeating East Tennessee State University 76–69 in Asheville, North Carolina.

"I'm so happy for this team; I'm so happy for Samford University," Samford head coach Bucky McMillan said. "I remember sitting in here our first year and playing as a 10 seed, we won six games and at the end of the year we lost by 35 or 40 points. I remember we had to recruit players for my first recruiting class, and we had to convince them that we could win this league. I said in the press conference that we would win this league and win this tournament, and we did."

The Bulldogs now have a record of 29–5, the most wins in program history.

Samford's forward Achor Achor, who had 25 points and nine rebounds, was named the tournament's Most Outstanding Player. Jermaine Marshall, a first-team All-Tournament honoree, had 23 points and eight rebounds.

The NCAA tournament schedule had not been announced at press time. (Samford)

ALABAMA NEWS ITEMS COMPILED BY KRISTI ENT AND DEBBIE CAMPBELL

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Alabama-Alaska connections have been 'perfect picture' of partnership vision

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Volunteers from Montgomery Baptist Association work on an awning at Birchwood Behavioral Health in August 2023.

Photo courtesy of Debbie Perry

Scotty Goldman said every time he goes somewhere, he hears about someone who's headed to Alaska or someone who's just been.

Goldman, who directs the office of global missions at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said it's "just amazing to me how these folks are responding and how many Alabama Baptists are going to Alaska."

The Alabama Baptist State Convention started its partnership with Alaska Baptists in 2021, and since then, the partnerships between individual churches and associations in both states have taken on a life of their own, he said. "They're making those connections. It's a perfect picture of what we had hoped would happen."

The partnership was introduced to the state convention in 2021 as a five-year commitment, but Goldman said he doesn't see it ending anytime soon.

"It takes that long for folks to get their minds and hands around it. By the time we get folks on board and they explore and build relationships, it takes three to four years for it to blossom," he said.

'Full steam ahead'

Alabamians are really excited about going right now, and the momentum is still building, Goldman said.

"If our partnership were to come to a close, the needs in Alaska are still going to be there and be strong," he said. "We have not talked about a formal extension, but as long as folks are responding well, let's move full steam ahead."

Jae McKee, director of missions and church planting for the Alaska Baptist Resource Network, said the partnership's momentum going into 2024 has been "pretty amazing."

"I couldn't be happier from the partnership perspective," he said.

"We have close to 40 teams that showed up last year, some large, some small.

"Those ranged anywhere from vision trip teams to 20-plus-member teams showing up to do bigger projects."

Associational mission strategists like Danny Courson of St. Clair Baptist Association and Ric Camp of Shelby Baptist Association have come alongside pastors and other church leaders to encourage them.

Shelby Association and Montgomery Baptist Association also sent volunteers to serve at Birchwood Behavioral Health, which serves a similar role in Alaska to Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries. A team from First Baptist Church Pelham also led a sports camp there.

McKee said he was "in awe of all they were able to accomplish in terms of physical labor but also the investment of the sports camp."

Their service also had a great impact on the staff, he said. "Their morale from when the teams were there has been a 180-degree turn in attitude and excitement."

'Eternal impact'

A number of Alabama churches have also gone deeply into partnerships with Alaska churches. For one, Liberty Hill Baptist Church in Clanton has partnered with Liberty Baptist Church in Craig, Alaska, to do a lot of projects, the most recent of which is to help them build a Baptist camp (see story, page 11).

All of these partnerships are "building relationships that are going to be long lasting and have eternal impact," McKee said.

For more information about how to partner with Baptists in Alaska, visit tabonline.org/Alaska or email Scotty Goldman at sgoldman@alsbom.org or Jae McKee at jae@alaskabrn.com.

SEEING GOD WORK

Alabama Baptists work to build camp like Shocco Springs in Alaska

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

There's a piece of land nestled next to a lake in Alaska, and Tommy Bishop said when he's there, he thinks of somewhere else.

He thinks about Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center back home in Alabama, which has hosted camps and retreats for 75 years, and he reflects on the camp's legacy.

"In just about every church that I know, I know somebody who went to Shocco Springs, and they either got saved there or were discipled or maybe even were called to the ministry," he said.

Bishop believes the land in Alaska could have a similar legacy.

"I think about how many people's lives could be impacted until the day the Lord comes back — children, youth, adults, married couples," said Bishop, president of Chilton Baptist Builders and a member of Liberty Hill Baptist Church in Clanton. "It's amazing."

Photo courtesy of Tommy Bishop

Tommy Bishop, president of Chilton Baptist Builders and a member of Liberty Hill Baptist Church in Clanton, walks through the site where the new camp would be built.

The vision started simply because Cody Schwegel, pastor of Liberty Baptist Church in Craig, Alaska, wanted a place to pitch a few tents.

His church is far away from the nearest Baptist camp, so for years it has cost more than $1,000 per student to send a group there.

"If you could imagine loading your kids on an airplane in Birmingham and flying them to North Dakota to go to camp, that's what it's like going from the southeast part of Alaska to the camp in Anchorage," Schwegel said.

His congregation of 25 used to raise around $30,000 to send 30 students. But that wasn't sustainable, he said.

'More impactful'

"For a church that small, that is very difficult to do," he said. "Raising that much money took a lot of our time, so we decided we had to become more efficient at our ministry. Our adults, instead of raising funds, were able to use that time to minister to our students in a way that was more impactful."

But Schwegel said he still knew the camp experience was important. In the past two years, he's seen God work in a big way at Liberty Baptist, much of which was "in direct response to the partnership" that Alabama Baptists have had with Alaska Baptists since 2021.

"We see Alaska as the forgotten frontier because there's not a lot of resources for churches to be successful in some of the things that we do," Schwegel said. "The partnership with Alabama has been so amazing, because we've seen Alabamians come in and support and hundreds of people traveling to help with VBS and kids camp and retreats — you name it — and it's made a huge impact."

After seven years without a baptism, the church baptized nine people in 2023.

And as Liberty Baptist has grown, so has the youth group, which is "phenomenal to see" — and they all want to go to camp, Schwegel said. "So I called the state mental health trust, a large landowner in the state of Alaska, and said, 'Hey, do you guys have some land that I can pitch a couple of tents on to start a camp that I can take kids to once a year?' "

Photo courtesy of Robert Rhodes

The land in Alaska where the camp would be built rests beside a lake.

God's provision

One thing led to another, and through what Schwegel said is totally God's provision, they ended up offering him a 33-acre plot of land for a fraction of what it's worth.

"It's in one of the most picturesque places you could imagine," he said. "It's on the edge of a lake, and you've got these snow-covered mountains in the background. On a nice sunny day you can sit on the edge of the land and see untouched God's country for miles."

A donor covered the cost of the property, and now Bishop's church is heading up the effort to build the camp.

Bishop said it's so exciting because he can see the potential for impacting lives as they build Alaska a "Shocco Springs." The vision is to reach the 6,000 students who live within $100 worth of travel expenses from the camp.

They also want to use it for a variety of retreats and conferences for men, women and couples.

"We hope by early summer we will start," said Bishop, who plans to essentially relocate to Alaska for the next two years to oversee the volunteer teams who are doing the construction work.

Schwegel said they need people who will pray for God's providence — they've "seen miracles on a day-to-day basis" as God has guided them step by step, and he asked for prayer for that to continue.

"God has provided exactly what we've needed," he said. "It's been pretty phenomenal."

For information about how to get involved with the camp project, contact Tommy Bishop at chiltonbaptistbuilders@gmail.com.

Filling hearts with joy

Every Wednesday, about 10 women gather to make fidget animals, chemotherapy port pillows and lap blankets to meet needs in the community.

Sewing and Serving Ministry at Shoal Creek in Priceville provides outreach, fellowship

By Blair Moore
The Alabama Baptist

Every Wednesday, a group of ladies gathers at Shoal Creek Baptist Church in Priceville for a day of sewing, serving and fellowship.

To show the love of Christ to their community, the women from the Sewing and Serving Ministry create handmade items and lead serving initiatives, such as collecting backpacks filled with items for homeless people. These ladies enjoy the projects and each other's company.

'Stay all day'

On any given week, about 10 women from the church and community come and go from about 10 a.m. until suppertime. "I'm making cornbread to bring today," said LeeAnn McDaniel. "We like to bring food so we can stay all day."

Together, they make things like fidget animals, chemotherapy port pillows and lap blankets to meet needs in the community. McDaniel makes most of the fidget animals, which they give to local memory care patients. She stitches items with texture onto the animals, including felt flowers, buttons, yarn, foam curlers and even bath scrubbers — "anything with a different texture or a different kind of feel."

And she makes sure they look cute too. The ladies deliver the fidget animals to residents at the Terrace at Priceville, a memory care residence in Decatur, when they go to play bingo with residents.

Caring for others

"They love these little things," McDaniel said. "Some say they want them for their grandchildren."

McDaniel has been a caregiver for years, and one of her motivations for being a part of this ministry is to serve the elderly. "I see that the elderly are often overlooked and mistreated, and I think they need us a lot more than we admit."

Lisa Drew is also part of the ministry. Since she retired, Drew has found this ministry a meaningful way to spend her extra time.

"It's a good social time for us," she said. "We're always making unique little projects that people in the group come up with, and we just enjoy learning to make things that can meet different needs in our community."

Photo courtesy of Shoal Creek Baptist Church

Participants in the Sewing and Serving Ministry do not have to know how to sew.

"A lot of us may have sewn earlier in our lives but stopped it because we didn't have to, and it's just too easy to buy things," Drew said.

"It's been an opportunity for a lot of us to go back and pick up this skill again and just to spend time together because it's a great creative outlet too."

Pat Dunkin, who now leads the group, was not always a seamstress. "We laugh because I failed sewing in home [economics class]," she said. "I never wanted to sew. My mother-in-law, who was a seamstress, begged me to learn to sew for my two daughters, but I wouldn't do it."

Two years ago, some friends talked Dunkin into joining the sewing ministry and she absolutely loves it. "I look forward to it every Wednesday," she said.

The first project she worked on was sewing patriotic quilts. Dunkin's husband is a member of Disabled American Veterans, and they wanted to do something special for this group for Veterans Day.

Different projects

"And we don't just sew, I'll tell you that," Dunkin said. "We do all types of projects so that we can reach the most people possible."

Right now, they're working on decorated mint tins filled with handmade animals.

The American Legion requested these recently, and the group decided to make extra for the pediatric ward of their local hospital.

Another regular hospital project for this ministry is making port pillows for chemotherapy patients.

These small pillows attach to seat belts with fabric fasteners to make the drive to and from treatment more comfortable. They delivered three bags of port pillows the last week of February.

Dunkin said serving the Lord through the Sewing and Serving Ministry fills her heart with joy.

"Oftentimes when people see that you made something for them personally, they can't believe it," she said.

"The appreciation on their faces just makes your heart happy."

Social engagement and healthier longevity

A key to healthy aging lies in staying socially connected to others.

"Remaining socially engaged is important for both mental health and life satisfaction. Sitting alone at home is a health-compromising habit, but a habit that we can all break with a little effort," says UAB biology professor Steven N. Austad, who studies healthy aging.

While time and aging cannot be stopped, overwhelming evidence shows healthy lifestyle habits can improve a person's well-being, ultimately making a difference in their quality of life throughout their lifespan. Austad refers to this as "healthier longevity."

'Things you like'

"By that, I mean living life with the physical and mental abilities to do the things you like to do, not necessarily a longer life," he said.

Austad's comments are echoed by James Hill, chair of UAB's department of nutrition sciences, and Thomas Buford, director of the UAB center for exercise medicine.

"Older adults we've talked with over the years say that better quality of life or the 'life in your years' is more important to them than the number of years of their life," Buford said. "Finding a group of people to support one another is frequently cited as one of the best ways to maintain healthy lifestyle habits."

Start small

In making any plans to modify lifestyle habits, the key is to start small and steadily make incremental changes that can be sustained over time, Hill said.

"It's never too late to adopt a healthy lifestyle," Hill said. "Often people who have not had healthy habits can start by making a few small changes in how much they move and what they eat. This will often lead to more changes. No matter how old you are or how bad your lifestyle habits are, you can benefit from making better lifestyle choices." (UAB News)

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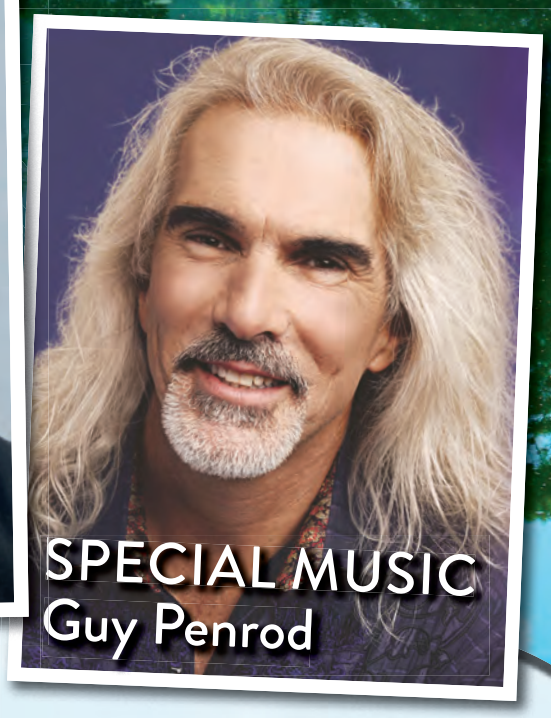
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Equipping students

Older teens challenged at Pursue to put Jesus at center of their lives

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Peyton Hill said when he was in college, an event like Pursue altered his life plans in a big way.

"It was at a weekend like this one that God totally changed the direction of my life," Hill, pastor of First Baptist Church Prattville, told the students.

The event encourages high school seniors and college students to grow as disciples and disciple makers, noted Ben Edfeldt, director of the office of collegiate and student ministries at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. "Pursue essentially exists to be an equipping weekend for students."

During breakout sessions, students dug deeper into topics from having a quiet time to finding God's will for their life. They also heard insights on finding freedom from porn, discipling others, preparing for life after graduation and talking with LGBTQ friends and family.

In the main sessions, Hill walked through the entire storyline of the Bible and how all the stories of Scripture point to Jesus.

Photo by Mitchell Bruce/Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

High school seniors and college students were encouraged to grow as disciples and disciple makers at Pursue, a two-day event, held this year at Taylor Road Baptist Church in Montgomery on Feb. 9–10.

"The Bible isn't a book with a bunch of random stories put together," he said. "I want to show you from the Bible that the Bible is actually one book sharing one story that centers on Jesus Christ, God's Son."

Hill framed it up with the story of Jesus talking with Cleopas in Luke 24. While they walked on the road to Emmaus, Jesus took Cleopas and his companion on a journey through the Old Testament and taught them how every part of it points to Him.

Not an 'add-on'

"Are you ever reading the Bible and you walk away totally unaffected?" Hill asked. "Sometimes the Bible doesn't affect us, but I think sometimes the reason is because when we read the Bible and forget Jesus, we're not going to be changed.

"The Bible exalts and lifts up the One who can transform and change us from one degree of glory to the next," he said. "Not only does Jesus show you that the whole Bible centers on Him, but also Jesus does not give us the option to have Him as an add-on to our ... comfortable lives.

"Instead Jesus calls us to follow Him as the center focus of our life, as the only real priority in our life."

Hill said Jesus doesn't want to be the top of lots of priorities — He wants to be the one and only priority in life.

WMU's Complete event focuses teen girls on God's truth, their value

By Tiffany Roy
Alabama WMU

Intentional. Steeped in God's Truth. Customizable. God-Centered. Missions-Minded. Relevant. Authentic. Impactful.

These are just some of the words used to describe Complete — an annual gathering for teen girls sponsored by Alabama WMU.

"This event focused on Jesus being the Truth for our lives when secular culture pressures teens to discover their own truth," said Trish Jackson, NextGen consultant for Alabama WMU.

'Connections matter'

"There is truly something special ... about sending teen girls to an all girls event," she explained. "The topics are specific to them. They get to meet other girls like them from a different part of Alabama and those connections matter.

"When you see breakout rooms busting at the seams, you know God is using topics on self-worth, identity, how to have a healthy mind and how to study the Bible to speak to the hearts of the girls."

Jamie McGlaughn of Meadowbrook Church in Gadsden has been bringing teens to this event for 25 years.

She has witnessed the importance of an event geared toward teen girls — especially with the need to learn to navigate life in an ever-changing culture. She noted that Complete helps young women understand their worth and value.

"I have watched the change and shift over the past 25 years of all the things vying for our teens' attention," McGlaughn said.

"In the beginning, there were not so many things pulling at their time and attention."

She has "even seen so many girls grow up coming to Complete and then ask to be chaperones because even as adults and young women, they wanted to continue to come because they gleaned so much from what they learned."

Photo by Tiffany Roy/Alabama WMU

Complete was held March 8–9 at Eastmont Baptist Church in Montgomery.

One of those is Taylor Noah, a member of Eastern Hills Baptist Church in Montgomery. "We live in a world that tells you, 'you're not good enough, you're not pretty enough, you're not smart enough,'" she said. "Then at Complete ... it is a breath of fresh air and you hear how you are loved, you are beautifully created, you have the God of the Universe pursuing you and ... wants a relationship with you."

Someone You Should Know

THOMAS GEBHART

By Leigh Pritchett
The Alabama Baptist

Thomas Lee Gebhart, 82, of Foley was recently recognized by his church for 56 years as a deacon. For three years longer than that, he has been a church usher and greeter. He and wife, Della, also volunteer for the church's crisis center, which helps people of the community with food and other needs. Gebhart retired from Moyer Ford Sales in Foley after 35 years and then ran a lawn care business for 20 years. He and Della, who have been married 59 years, have three children, 10 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren. His church was founded in the home of his great-grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. W.H. Monteith.

MINISTRY: Deacon, usher and greeter, crisis center volunteer

CHURCH NAME: First Baptist Church Foley in Baldwin Baptist Association

LIFE VERSES: Psalm 23

Q: Describe where you focus your greatest ministry efforts.

A: Serving people. I love people. I love to be around people. I love to share God.

Q: Who was or is one of the most influential people in your faith life?

A: My mother, Alice (Gebhart) Killion. She was always such an influence. She always saw that we were in church, and she was there with us. My mother's mother (Laura Monteith Wolbrink) and my father (Cecil Gebhart) were really great Christians. They were such an influence in my life. When the doors (of the church) were open, they were there. For 50 years, my mother taught Sunday School once a month at a Black church (Little Rock Missionary Baptist Church). I went with her. Another is my brother, James (a pastor and missionary). He traveled 1,000 miles to help ordain me.

Q: Tell about a turning point in your life and how God was involved.

A: It was a real turning point in my life when I was ordained a deacon. I was the youngest person on the deacon board. At 26, I appreciated the guidance from the other deacons. It was a turning point because it put me involved with people. We went to visit people on my "deacon family ministry" list. Della has been with me in the deacon ministry.

Q: What has God been teaching you lately?

A: God has taught me to trust Him in everything, pray and be faithful. He is always there for us and will never let you down. I feel sorry for people who don't have God.

Q: If there were one thing you could tell your younger self about faith, what would it be?

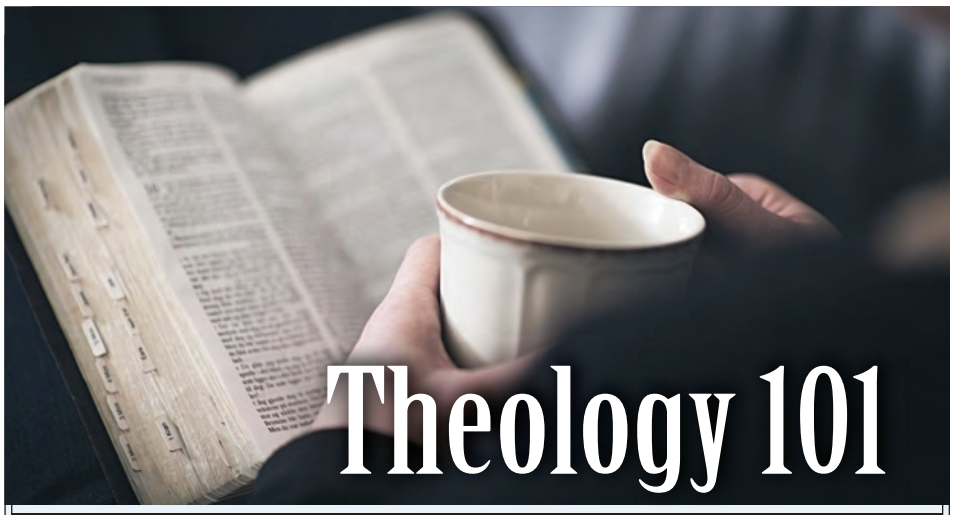
A: Focus on God all the time. Pray. Listen to His guidance. Go in the path He leads. Don't take for granted Christian faith. Count your blessings one by one.

Q: Have you ever read a book or heard a song that changed the way you think about God and faith?

A: "How Great Thou Art" has always touched my heart. God is the greatest. I want that song sung at my funeral because that tells it all.

Q: Does your church have any special traditions that mean a lot to you? What are they?

A: The Lord's Supper. I have been blessed to be able to serve that for 56 years. The Christmas programs — I have helped with those since I was little. Easter sunrise service has meant a lot. As long as I can remember, we have had Easter sunrise service. We always took the kids and enjoyed that. Good memories.



BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Our Great Salvation

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
The Alabama Baptist

The New Testament contains a warning passage about how one responds to God's provision of salvation. That passage in Hebrews 2:1–4 calls it a "great salvation" (v. 3). One way of grasping its greatness is to ponder three important biblical terms used to refer to salvation.

Regeneration is a single term that points us to the outset of our salvation. Titus 3:5 reminds us that this salvation is "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit."

We often speak of regeneration as being "born again." This experience of being made alive spiritually requires the double-pronged action of repentance and faith.

Peace with God

Another way of expressing it is reconciliation with God. This newness of life with its new relationship of peace with God brings immediate and eternal salvation.

Regeneration also makes a repentant sinner a child of God. The New Testament terms this as being born again. This was Christ's way of putting it to Nicodemus as recorded in the opening verses of John 3 when He declared, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (v. 3).

Sanctification is a term that speaks of the process of the Christian life which begins with regeneration. This term points to a forgiven sinner being set apart to God and His purposes. It also points to a progression in holiness of life or godliness.

Such spiritual growth is made possible internally by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit as He enables forgiven sinners to order their lives according to the Word of truth. We often speak of this as growth in Christlikeness.

Grand climax

The ultimate result of being born again and growing in holiness of life can be spoken of as glorification. This is the grand climax of salvation. It is not achieved in this life, but happens when a Christian passes through death into the eternal presence of God in heaven.

We might think of glorification as both becoming fully like a Person and being finally in a Place. The Person, of course, is none other than Christ.

Christlikeness is finally and fully realized when a believer passes from earthly life into heavenly life. The Person whose likeness believers are destined to realize is none other than Christ Jesus.

These three aspects of salvation allows a genuine Christian to testify, "I have been saved, I am being saved, and I will be saved."

Jerry Batson is a retired Alabama Baptist pastor who also has served as associate dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University and professor of several schools of religion during his career.

Erwin brothers' film about helping others heal

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Scripture assures us that God is near the brokenhearted and that He answers prayer. That biblical message is also a theme in "Ordinary Angels," a new film from producers Jon and Andy Erwin.

Based on a true story, "Ordinary Angels" is the account of an alcoholic hairdresser who stumbles on to a grieving family. Needing a sense of purpose in her life, she decides to do what she can to help this father and daughter after finding out that the daughter has the same liver condition that killed her mother and needs a transplant to live more than a few years.

It's a faith-inspired redemption story that shows the impact one person can make on another's life, Andy Erwin said. Sometimes that impact comes from something as simple as the voice of a child, as illustrated in a scene in the film in which a young daughter, Ashley, visits her mother's grave with her father, Ed Schmitt, and asks him, "Why don't you talk to God anymore?"

Her question about the power of prayer hits even closer to home when the daughter continues the conversation with her dad.

"He kind of makes excuses for it," Erwin said. "Then she says, 'It's okay if you're angry. I get angry at people sometimes. ... Why don't you try talking to Him?'

"He's really moved by it, trying not to cry, and says, 'You first.' She starts this simple prayer of a child," Erwin continued.

Photo courtesy of Allen Fraser/Lionsgate

Southeastern roots

The Erwins, who are Birmingham natives, said the film brings a touch of their Alabama roots to the story. "It's a Kentucky story, a Southeastern story. There's something about our blue-collar roots. It's just the way we are — we help our neighbors," Erwin said.

Jon Erwin added, "I think this is the perfect film to follow 'Jesus Revolution' (which Jon Erwin helped write and direct). 'Jesus Revolution' is a film about spiritual awakening and revival. 'Ordinary Angels' is a film about how we can become known as Christians by how we love people in our communities."

The main character, Schmitt, is "a man of few words, carries the weight of the world on his shoulders, doesn't feel like anyone is coming to help him and has a hard time asking for help," Andy Erwin said.

'Super-relatable'

"This story is one that's super-relatable to the Church and the idea of getting past yourself and looking out past the church walls where there are those hurting and desperately needing help. This puts hands and feet back to the message Jesus called us to," Andy Erwin said.

"Ordinary Angels" is a narrative on how "sometimes the most healing thing in a person's life is to be able to help heal other people."

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UPCOMING EVENTS
sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Disciple-Making Conference

The Alabama Disciple-Making Conference is an experience designed to provide practical tools and principles to equip you to create a culture of disciple-making in your church.

This conference — set for April 21–22 — is unique because each of the speakers and leaders will also lead round table discussion as part of the conference.

While there, you'll hear from Craig Etheredge, Cody Hale and Eric Taylor. Andrew Nunnelley will be leading worship.

The event will be held April 21–22 at Fultondale FBC starting at 6 p.m. Sunday and running all day Monday.

To register, visit aldmconference.com.

To register, visit aldmconference.com or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.

Renew brings hope, refreshment to women

Women of all ages are invited to take part in Renew, a one-day event that brings hope and refreshment. Gather a group of friends or come and make new friends as you experience outstanding Bible teaching, moving worship, a missions focus, an environment for spiritual renewal — and the WorldCrafts store!

Renew will be held April 13, 9 a.m.–3 p.m. at First Baptist Church Trussville. Rondie Wilks will lead Bible study, and Nathan and Brooke Dodd will lead worship. The cost is $35 and includes lunch.

To register, visit alabamawmu.org/renew.

Help with legal issues

Legal Issues, a conference set for April 30, can provide your church staff with helpful information about legal challenges that come up in churches today.

Topics include the lawsuit revolution, sexual misconduct, copyright, employment practices, church organization and operation, incorporation, labor law, risk management, insurance, tax law and more. The conference led by Jim Swedenburg will be held at the SBOM on April 30, 10 a.m.–3 p.m. The cost is $15 and includes lunch.

To register, visit alsbom.org/legalissues.

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

SENIOR PASTOR
Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Alexandria, Alabama, is seeking a full-time senior pastor. Interested candidates should send resumés and correspondence to: Pastorsearch@mzbclife.net

PASTOR
FBC Shawmut, Valley, Alabama, seeking traditional pastor. Sunday and Wednesday services. Centrally located between Auburn, Alabama, LaGrange and Columbus, Georgia. Submit resumé to: sfbc.psc@yahoo.com.

PASTOR
Silver Run Baptist Church in Seale, Alabama, located in rural Russell County, is seeking a pastor that the Lord would have to serve here. Resumés may be sent to: P.O. Box 8, Seale, AL 36875, ATTN: Kenny Harris.

PASTOR
Mt Zion Baptist Church in northwest Chambers County, Alabama is seeking a bivocational or full-time pastor to guide a rural community with an eager variety of age groups. Email resumés to: mtzionpsc24@gmail.com or contact Reid House with questions at reid36862@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR
New Market Southern Baptist Church located in northeast Madison County, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor. A man called by God, who will be a caring biblical shepherd for our church family. A man who holds to the full inspiration and authority of the Holy Scripture. Submit resumé to: scnmbc@yahoo.com or New Market Baptist Church, P.O. Box 128, New Market, AL 35761.

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

BIVOCATIONAL WORSHIP LEADER/ CHOIR DIRECTOR
East Gadsden Baptist Church is seeking a bivocational worship leader/choir director. If interested, please email at eastgadsdenbaptist@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC MINISTRY DIRECTOR
Southern Baptist church in Bullock County seeking a bivocational music ministry director. Blended traditional and contemporary music. Responsibilities to include planning worship services, teaching and leading choir and congregational singing, planning and growing the music ministry at all age levels. Sunday morning worship, Wednesday evening prayer meeting and choir rehearsal. Call 334-738-2840 or email firstbc@ustconline.net for more information.

BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC MINISTER
New Center Baptist Church, Hartselle, Alabama, seeking music minister for blended services, directing choir and coordinating volunteer musicians. Email resumé to: raykballew@gmail.com or contact 256-221-6880 and newcenterbaptist.org for more information.

PART-TIME MUSIC MINISTER
Cedar Grove Baptist Church in Leeds, Alabama, seeks a part-time music minister to lead a thoroughly blended worship service and grow our music ministry at Cedar Grove. This person is directly accountable to the senior pastor and should possess an adaptable skill set, leadership capabilities and the ability to actively serve in our local community. Please visit cedargroveleeds.org/jobs to read our full job description and submit your resumé.

STUDENT PASTOR
Maplesville Baptist Church seeks student pastor. Email Pastorb@maplesvillebc.org for job description, salary and application details.

CHILDREN & FAMILY MINISTER/DIRECTOR
First Baptist Dadeville, located in the heart of Dadeville, Alabama, is seeking God's person to fill the position of children and family minister/director. Full-time job with a competitive salary. Interested individuals should contact John Wilcox at employment@fbcdadeville.com. Resumés may be sent to the same address.

OTHER POSITIONS

PRESIDENT-TREASURER
The Tennessee Baptist Foundation administers in excess of $180 million of God's assets for God's people. The Foundation is seeking a qualified individual to provide leadership for the future. You may view the job description at http://www.tbfoundation.org/president-search. Please submit cover letter and resumé to the Foundation Executive Committee at tbfoundation1938@gmail.com. Deadline for resumés is March 31.

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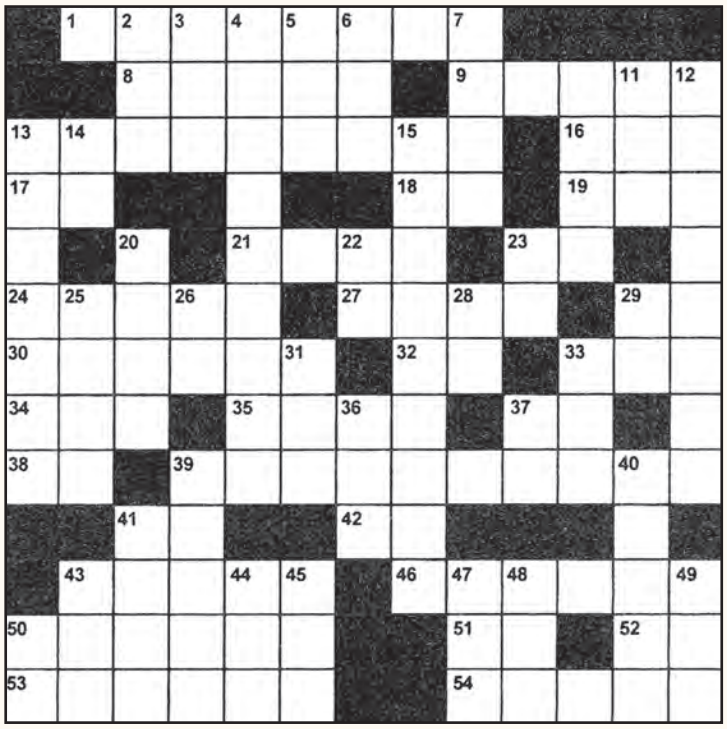
CHRISTIAN crossword



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ACROSS

1. Brotherly ___. (2 Pet. 1:7)
8. Cuts of meat.
9. Grace and ___ be multiplied. (2 Pet. 1:2)
13. Through the ___ of him that hath called us. (2 Pet. 1:3)
16. Charged particle.
17. Jupiter's moon.
18. Overdose. (abbr.)
19. Explosive.
21. Eschew evil, and do ___. (1 Pet. 3:11)
23. Exclamation.
24. ___ and peace be multiplied. (2 Pet. 1:2)
27. Evil plan.
29. South America. (abbr.)
30. That ye might be partakers of the ___ nature. (2 Pet. 1:4)
32. If these things be ___ you. (2 Pet. 1:8)
33. This is my beloved ___. (2 Pet. 1:17)
34. Poem.
35. Family group.
37. Greek letter.
38. Manuscript. (abbr.)
39. And to knowledge ___. (2 Pet. 1:6)
41. Puerto Rico. (abbr.)
42. Old style. (abbr.)
43. Thou shalt make the ___ of the tabernacle. (Ex. 27:9)
46. Our ___ Jesus Christ.
50. Add to your faith ___. (2 Pet. 1:5)
51. ___, I am with you always. (Matt. 28:20)
52. Tin. (symbol)
53. ___ ___ God gave unto them. (Acts 11:17 ASV; 2 words)
54. His divine ___ hath given unto us. (2 Pet. 1:3)

DOWN

2. Labor organization. (abbr.)
3. Beloved, ___ are we the sons of God. (1 John 3:2)
4. Besides this, giving all ___, add to your faith virtue. (2 Pet. 1:5)
5. Direction.
6. Apocryphal book Esdras. (abbr.)
7. Went quickly.
11. Convict. (abbr.)
12. For so an ___ shall be. (2 Pet. 1:11)
13. Into the everlasting ___. (2 Pet. 1:11)
14. That ___ prophecy of the Scripture. (2 Pet. 1:20)
15. All things that pertain unto life and ___. (2 Pet. 1:3)
20. Doth also now ___ us. (1 Pet. 3:21)
22. Out of print. (abbr.)
23. I fell ___ his feet as dead. (Rev. 1:17)
25. Eliminates.
26. The number 101 in Roman numerals.
28. With him ___ the sacred mountain. (2 Pet. 1:18 NIV)
29. For ___ an entrance shall be. (2 Pet. 1:11)
31. Tree.
33. He was purged from his old ___s. (2 Pet. 1:9)
36. Military address.
37. Ma's mate.
39. Be established in the present ___. (2 Pet. 1:12)
40. I ___ you ... to go and bear fruit. (John 15:16 NIV)
41. Sea ___.
43. Cost, insurance and freight. (abbr.)
44. Regret.
45. Likened unto ___ virgins. (Matt. 25:1)
47. European mountain.
48. ___ doo, African sorcery.
49. Royal Naval Reserve. (abbr.)
50. The number 6 in Roman numerals.

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Transitional Pastor Training is important

Almost every church is in need of revitalization. And when a church is in between pastors, that's when a trained transitional pastor can be an asset in preparing a church for its next season.

WEBB

GARLAND

Transitional Pastor Training, a two-day event planned for April 22–23 at the State Board of Missions, will equip pastors for transition ministry by training them to work with a group in the church, taking them through a stage-by-stage process of renewed mission.

A transitional pastor can assist the church in dealing with major issues as well as realigning the church around biblical mission.

"Churches in periods without pastors need experienced, sanctified and wise leadership," said Ken Allen, director of the SBOM office of LeaderCare.

Transitional Pastor Training will feature two special guests — Henry Webb, who retired in 2005 after 28 years of service at Lifeway in the areas of pastoral ministries, discipleship and deacon ministry; and Dan Garland, who was director of pastoral ministries for Lifeway from 2007 to 2015.

The event will run Monday from 1 p.m.–7:30 p.m. and Tuesday from 8:30 a.m.–5:15 p.m. The cost is $25 and includes dinner Monday and lunch Tuesday.

To register, visit alsbom.org/tpt.

Get Acquainted Day

Are you new to Alabama or new to your church staff? Or would you just like to learn more about ways to partner together for ministry and missions?

Get Acquainted Day is the perfect chance to find out how the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions can partner with you to fulfill the Great Commission. Hear about all the ministries, meet your state missionaries and tour the SBOM facility in Prattville. You'll also receive a report with information about the people who live within a five-mile radius of your church.

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

Get Acquainted Day will be May 7, 9:30 a.m.–3 p.m., with lunch provided.

To register, visit alsbom.org/gad.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Sunday School Lessons

By Ben Stubblefield, Ph.D.
Visiting assistant professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile

For March 24

A STAIRWAY
Genesis 28:10–22

"Ooh, it makes me wonder." When I was at any high school get-together, if there was a guy with a guitar around, he was going to play the Led Zeppelin classic "Stairway to Heaven," and we were all going to sing that little refrain.

To be honest (and sadly), I used to be way more familiar with that song than our passage because it either wasn't taught much, or I just wasn't paying attention (probably the latter). It's a perplexing scene in many ways, but I think this moment in Genesis is critical not only to the story of Israel, but also to the life of Christ (John 1:51).

> ***"The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring."***
>
> **Genesis 28:13**

Dreaming (10–12)

In pursuit of a wife from Paddan-aram and in retreat from Esau's murderous rage, Jacob beds down for the night and has a dream about a ladder on which angels are ascending and descending — a visual link between heaven and earth.

The ladder affirms God's presence with Jacob and upon the land where he rests. The dream assures Jacob that God will deploy heaven's emissaries to accomplish His plan of blessing for him. And it is the kind of assurance that Jacob will need because his journey of faith will require no small resolve.

It's the same kind of confidence the Lord promises us before His final ascension. The disciples observe Jesus, although rising, declaring the upcoming descent of the Helper, and promising, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

Promised (13–15)

The Lord reveals Himself above the ladder and extends to Jacob the covenant of Abraham. This appears to be the moment God designates Jacob as a father (patriarch) of Israel.

Notice that this is not a transaction. God's not offering to do something for Jacob if he will do something for God. No, God promises to provide for Jacob land, descendants, blessing and His presence.

Jacob is a deceiver, like the serpent, and appears to deserve exile more than mercy. And yet God offers His covenant love irrespective of Jacob's merit. God continues to love the Jacobs of the world and offers heaven's mercies still.

Gate of heaven (16–17)

When Jacob realizes God's presence, he has two reactions. He reacts with fear because he did not realize where he slept was holy ground, and joy because there was no better place to be than in the presence of the Lord. His eyes are opened and his attitude completely changes. He goes from being tired and listless to an awe-struck worshiper.

Like Jacob, we've experienced that reorientation, and it was a moment that shaped the rest of our lives.

The vow (18–22)

Jacob happily receives God's blessing and responds to God's mercies by making a personal vow of commitment, obedience and sacrifice to the Lord. The grace of God motivated the surrender of Jacob's life back to the Lord.

Like Jacob, we've received God's grace, but also like Jacob, we want to return to the Lord our devotion, obedience, and, indeed, our very lives.

It's a free gift, but it will cost you everything. We give our talents not in exchange for God's love but because of it. We sing it powerfully: "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."

For March 31

BELIEVE!
John 20:1–17

A removed stone (1–2)

Verse 1 begins by describing "the first day of the week." The time between Jesus' death and resurrection was the Sabbath. Mary visits at the first opportunity, Sunday, which becomes the day of celebratory worship for the Church.

It is now known as the Lord's Day because it was the day He undid death and became the firstborn of the new creation, the firstfruit of many more to come.

Mary runs to Simon Peter and John confused, scared and unbelieving. She questioned, like any good skeptic would, and then the Lord revealed Himself to an honest inquirer. The claims of our faith are not based in mythology or mystery but are grounded in history and hinge upon investigatable, concrete facts.

They are, therefore, open to discovery and inquiry and are verifiable. And though incredible, they are true. Jesus did not hide from Mary. We don't have to be afraid of doubts, fears or questions. The Lord will meet us, as He did Mary, in the search for truth.

An empty tomb (3–10)

While John, the younger of the two, outran Peter, Peter was the first to peer inside the tomb, and there he found folded burial linens. That little detail indicates two things. First, it means the tomb wasn't robbed. Thieves wouldn't need a body, and they would have most certainly taken expensive garments. Second, it's clear that the One wearing the grave clothes didn't think He'd be needing them anymore.

For those reasons, John "saw and believed." Though the disciples were still perplexed about the death of their Messiah, the seeds of belief had started to sprout. Their lingering misconceptions and doubts would dissolve by evening.

What so many Jesus-seeking folks appreciate about the Gospel writers is their honesty and plain presentation. These verses don't read like myth or fable. These are ordinary, flawed, speculative people (just like us) describing an extraordinary miracle as sincerely as they can.

Perhaps this Easter we could learn from John and invite others to consider his simple testimony and to examine, as though with him in his doubt and uncertainty, the empty tomb.

The living Teacher (11–17)

Mary does not recognize Jesus immediately but when Jesus calls her name, she recognizes and clings to Him.

Jesus' instructions to her in verse 17 are perplexing. I think it's best to envision a Mary who is so enraptured with Jesus that she does not want to let Him go. And so He tells her in effect, "I'm not going anywhere yet!"

She leaves Jesus per His instruction and bears witness to the disciples. We don't know how they reacted to her news, but we do know that she was faithful. The disciples may have been frightened or confused, as described in Luke 24. But Mary's assignment wasn't to convince the disciples; it was to report what she had seen to the disciples. And isn't that our calling as well?

We're called to be faithful to go and tell and bear witness to a resurrected Christ, regardless of how people respond.

I've heard people say that the culture is changing and folks don't believe, but perhaps fewer believe because fewer bear witness. Let's be faithful, like Mary, to tell others about the hope of our Lord during this resurrection season.

> ***Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father."***
>
> **John 20:17**

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sunday School Lessons

By Tyshawn Gardner, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies, Samford University

For March 24

THE DEATH OF JESUS
Luke 23:32–49

God demonstrates His great love for humanity through the death of His Son on the cross. Jesus' death captures the gravity of sin as well as God's power to break the destructive forces of sin and death.

Jesus' death brings life, not shame. We can be comforted in knowing God had us in mind when Jesus died on the cross.

Jesus forgave us even as He suffered on the cross. (32–34)

For many, the cross makes no sense. In our postmodern culture, the idea of Jesus dying on the cross for the sins of humanity is irrational.

These thoughts may be directly linked to the fact that many people, who live in a world influenced by individualism, feel that forgiveness is also ridiculous.

However, the gospels attest to the fact that Jesus died for the sins of the world in accordance with God's plan.

Luke shows us that Jesus models forgiveness in a manner most would deem foolish.

The Apostle Paul contends, "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Cor. 1:18).

Jesus forgave not only the two criminals on the cross while He suffered there, but He was also forgiving us; an act that can only be done through the power of God. Many who have suffered gross injustices have followed the example of Jesus by choosing to forgive, even as they suffer.

> ***And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments.***
>
> **Luke 23:34**

Jesus saves those who trust in Him. (35–43)

Salvation is the gift of God through Jesus Christ. Salvation is available to those who trust Jesus and believe salvation lies in Him.

Just as one of the criminals placed his faith in the substitutionary death of Christ, so should we.

Salvation is free. Salvation is also by grace. Countless people have a difficult time trusting the fact that something so profound could come with no strings attached.

Salvation cannot be earned and it cannot be bought. God offers salvation to everyone who believes in His Son Jesus Christ.

The proof of salvation is a transformed mind, way of thinking and behavior.

In Galatians Paul lists the fruits of the Spirit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal. 5:22–23).

Through His sacrifice on the cross, all who trust in Jesus can be saved from a life of eternal death.

Jesus completed His earthly ministry with His death on the cross. (44–49)

Out of all the miracles, defending the oppressed, speaking up for the poor and rebuking systemic evil, Jesus' death on the cross was the climax and most important aspect of His earthly ministry.

When Jesus cried out, "Father, into your hands I commit My spirit," His earthly ministry was complete and God was pleased. Jesus' death on the cross defeated the powers of injustice, death and hell. His death frees us and brings us new life.

For March 31

THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS
Luke 24:1–8, 38–43

There is life after death! Jesus rose from the dead. The cross, which was thought to have the final word, was defeated in the resurrection of Christ.

The resurrection is the single most important event in the life of the Christian. The resurrection is tied to the crucifixion. However, the Apostle Paul contends, " ... if Christ is not raised from the dead, our preaching is useless and so is our faith" (1 Cor. 15:14). Thanks be to God, we have victory over death through the resurrection of Jesus.

The empty tomb points to the resurrection of Jesus. (1–6a)

Throughout human history, the bodies that have been deposited in graves remain there. However, when Jesus was buried, His followers found an empty tomb the very next day.

Though many theories abound concerning the empty tomb, only one fact remains: Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.

The empty tomb also points out that those who trust in Christ will also rise from their graves by the same Spirit that raised Jesus. Thank God the tomb was empty, and so shall ours be one day!

Jesus foretold His resurrection. (6b–8)

Jesus knew His true identity. He also knew what the Old Testament testified about Him. He foretold of His resurrection through His trust in God's plan. The Word of God is true and steadfast. In His life, Jesus proved over and over again that His words could be trusted.

Those who followed Him should have known that what He testified of about His resurrection could also be trusted. When the disciples saw the empty tomb they remembered how Jesus foretold His resurrection.

What has Jesus said about Himself concerning our lives that we have yet to believe? He also testified that He is "the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

In like manner He said, "I have come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). We can rest in everything Jesus testifies about Himself. He foretold His resurrection and He also foretold ours.

The disciples saw Jesus after His resurrection. (38–43)

Though no one saw Jesus rise from the dead, the disciples saw the resurrected Christ after He had been brutally murdered on the cross.

This is our proof. Even in persecution and various threats to their lives, the disciples could not contain the message of His resurrection, simply because they saw the risen Lord for themselves. The disciples went about preaching and writing about the resurrected Christ as trustworthy witnesses.

Though we have not seen Christ in the flesh, we can be His witnesses, because He promised us the Spirit that raised Him from the dead.

Let us also testify about His power and love, and the great victory we have through His resurrection.

> ***And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel.***
>
> **Luke 24:2–4**

WORD **search**

ASCENSION
BELIEF
BREAD
BURIAL
CENTURION
CLOUD
CROSS
CRUCIFY
DARKNESS
EMPTY
HEAVEN
JERUSALEM
JESUS
MARY
MOCKED
PEACE
PILATE
PRAISE
REPENTED
RISEN
SABBATH
SCRIPTURES
SOLDIERS
SPICES
STONE
SUFFERING
TEMPLE
THIEVES
TOMB
WITNESSES
WOMEN
WORSHIP
WOUNDS

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

Then He said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

LUKE 24:46–47

Finding humor in the everyday moments

Prayer chain efficiency

In one of our former churches, there was a charter member I will call Mrs. Rachel. She was well loved by everyone. As she grew older, her health began to fail and she could no longer attend the church she loved.

She was finally hospitalized and was drawing close to the end of her life. The church family who loved her grieved. And as churches always do, they began to plan for meals to feed the family.

One day I received a phone call from a church friend to tell me that Mrs. Rachel had passed. I cried just like everybody else that knew her. The prayer chain was started of course, and the church women started cooking the family's meals.

Surprise update

About two hours later my phone rang again. It was the same woman that had told me about Mrs. Rachel's passing. She breathlessly asked, "Have you started your prayer chain yet?"

I said, "Well of course I have. I've completed it." She said, "Well call them all back. She's not dead."

It seems that the family had declared her dead when she stopped breathing. But when the doctor came in to check her, she still had a pulse and was in fact still breathing.

When she actually died a couple of days later, the question asked by everyone on the prayer chain was, "Are you sure this time?"

I think some of them wanted to see a death certificate before they went to the trouble of frying chicken again.

Sharing the love

Church stories are always the best stories, and the love of a church family is sweet. Let me challenge you to find a unique way to show love to someone in your church family.

We are blessed to know the unconditional love of Jesus and share it with those around us.

MEET THE AUTHOR

Debbie Childers is a speaker, humorist and author based in Moody. She finds great humor in the fact that all through her school years, she got in trouble for talking and now she gets invited to do it!

MEDIA REVIEWS

By Steve Potts and Lori White
The Alabama Baptist

Devotionals and journaling to further your Christian walk

Wisdom for Life Devotional: 100 One-Minute Reflections from Psalms and Proverbs

By Gail Burton Purath
B&H Publishing, 2023

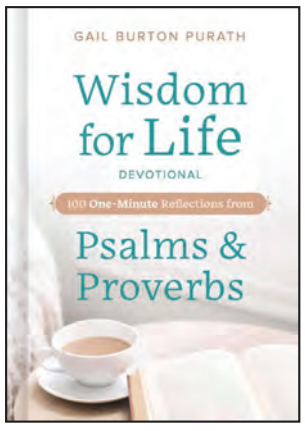
The Bible is filled with wisdom for our daily lives, and Gail Burton Purath has produced a devotional book that helpfully guides the reader through many of the Psalms and Proverbs.

"Wisdom for Life Devotional: 100 One-Minute Reflections from Psalms and Proverbs" is a highly readable and uplifting work that strengthens faith, challenges spiritual drift and steadies biblical conviction for the engaged reader.

Purath is the founder of Bible Love Notes ministry, and she has been a women's Bible study teacher for many years. She holds a master of arts in leadership for evangelism and discipleship from Columbia Biblical Seminary. This devotional is especially targeted for women, and she writes with sensitivity and conviction.

Along the way, Purath helps the reader interpret the Psalms and Proverbs carefully and accurately. She explains the role of figurative and poetic expression. She notes that the Book of Psalms, as well as Proverbs, uses expressions of symbolism, hyperbole, metaphor, etc. She draws a helpful distinction between the role of proverbs and promises, observing that "God doesn't guarantee that we'll always experience the desired results" of following His instructions as we would like, but that those principles are valuable nevertheless (p. 16).

The devotionals are based on either a Psalm or Proverb from the Bible. Purath does not travel systematically through every chapter of these books of the Bible but addresses each devotional in a creative and personal manner. In this way, the reader becomes familiar with both books of Scripture like someone savoring individual meals from a favorite restaurant rather than trying to eat through the entire menu at one time. (Steve Potts)



Seek First: 31 Day Prayer Journal

By Marisa Taylor and Mary Teel
Independently published by Birmingham Metro Baptist Association, 2023

The Birmingham Metro Baptist Association invites us to celebrate missionaries and to seek God first every day in prayer.

Marisa Taylor, BMBA church resource specialist, and Mary Teel, ministry intern, have collected quotes from missionaries and paired them with verses of Scripture to direct each day's prayerful writing.

Elisabeth Elliot, missionary to Ecuador from 1952 to 1963, is quoted on Day 20. "God has promised to supply all our needs. What we don't have now, we don't need now." The authors pair this quote from Elliot with Philippians 4:19–20: "And my God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever." The journal then has two pages to write, draw or outline thoughts or prayers.

At the end of the 31 days, the authors provide brief biography sketches for each missionary, including Jim Elliot, Annie Armstrong and Billy Graham. The journal is attractive and easy to use. (Lori White)

Climbing Higher: 40 Devotions for Hikers

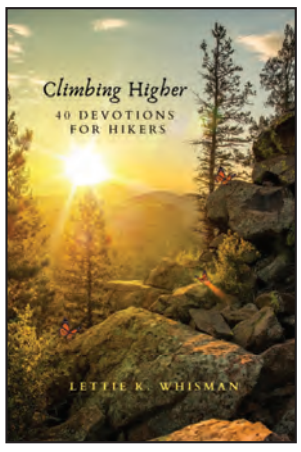
By Lettie K. Whisman
Derek Press, 2022

Even if you're not much of a hiker, this short volume of devotions is encouraging and fascinating. "Climbing Higher: 40 Devotions for Hikers" by Lettie K. Whisman received the Devotional Book Award for 2022 from the Southern Christian Writers Conference, a ministry partner with TAB Media Group.

Whisman, who has written other devotional books and articles, lives in Cleveland, Tennessee, and she wrote this devotional based on her own passion for hiking. She quotes Eric Liddell, the famed Christian Olympic runner, who said that when he ran he felt God's pleasure, and applies this to her love for hiking mountain paths and forest trails. The book is graced with numerous photographs and notable quotes.

Whisman tells the story of hikers like Gracie McNicol, who climbed the 6,593-foot Mount LeConte in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park at age 92. She relates a stirring account of a young boy who was lost for nine days in the forests of Maine in 1939 and survived. Throughout these concise devotional chapters, she shows how the beauty of God's creation, the value of perseverance and the enduring joy of friendship can make hiking exhilarating and beneficial for many people.

Whisman recounts personal experiences as well as the testimonies of other hikers, and she weaves through each chapter a spiritual lesson based on the Bible. For example, she considers the value of a walking stick in relation to what Psalm 23 tells us of the shepherd's staff and rod. Each chapter radiates with her love for the Lord and for hiking. Though I haven't been on a long hike for some time, this devotional made me want to lace up my hiking boots and hit the trail. It might do the same for you. (Steve Potts)



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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