

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



Photo courtesy of Action Sports Photography

IndyCar Series driver, Sting Ray Robb (41) of Payette, Idaho, comes down pit road during a practice for the Firestone Grand Prix of St. Petersburg.

Spreading hope

Pray.com: A team effort working to ‘impact the world in a big way’

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

With more than 16 million downloads, 2 billion minutes of content consumption, 140 million shares of the app on social media platforms and 60 pastors from across the nation providing content, pray.com is the “No. 1 app for daily prayer and bedtime Bible stories.”

Even considering those incredibly high numbers, pray.com’s success is revealed more through a much smaller audience — two — because of its ability to share a daily prayer.

“We might be nervous to invite people to church, but telling them we are thinking of them and sending them a daily prayer, it’s a little easier to start the conversation,” said Matthew Potter, co-founder of pray.com.

“Even recently, a police officer in Ohio was going to commit suicide,” he continued. “A friend of his sent him the daily prayer in the moment that he was going to commit suicide. [The officer] emailed us and said, ‘Thank you for saving my life.’”

‘God saved his life’

“But we didn’t save his life. God saved his life. God put it on the heart of the person who read that daily

prayer to send it to him,” Potter said.

Describing it as another “God thing,” Potter recently found someone who was spreading the message of Christ to a new audience — fans of IndyCar.

He had no doubt of what pray.com needed to do.

“It sounds like we’re mission-aligned. Let’s bring God to motorsports,” Potter said.

(See ‘Combining,’ page 10)

Happy *Father's* Day

Award-winning

TAB Media Group honored by national religious press organizations for work done in 2023, including several 'Best in Class' designations

Alabama Press Association

▶ **Best Use of Graphics, Division E** — 1st place, The Alabama Baptist for "Taking Care" by Lauren Grim

▶ **Best Use of Graphics, Division E** — 3rd place, "5 ways pastors can help families navigate social media" by Lauren Grim

▶ **Best Editorial, Division E** — 2nd

place, "Tragedy reminds us that sin-darkened world needs light of Christ" by Jennifer Davis Rash

▶ **Best Special Section, Division E** — 3rd place, "Aging Well" by TAB staff



▶ **Publication website** — Honorable Mention, thealabamabaptist.org by James Hammack and TAB staff

▶ **Video/Documentary (short)** — Award of Merit, "Man Cave Ministry: Hope, help & healing" by Pam Henderson, The Baptist Paper

Baptist Communicators Association

▶ **Overall Publication, Mixed Media Coverage** — 1st place,

"Sports with a Twist" by Trennis and Pam Henderson

▶ **Overall Newspaper Publication** —

2nd place, The Baptist Paper, and 3rd place, The Alabama Baptist

▶ **Website, 25 Pages or More** — 2nd place, thebaptistpaper.org by James Hammack and TBP Staff

▶ **Newspaper Design, Single Issue** — 2nd place, The Baptist Paper: SBC Annual Meeting report, and 3rd place, The Alabama Baptist: state convention annual meeting report, both by Lauren Grim and TAB Media Group staff

▶ **Design, Newspaper Front Page** — 1st place, The Baptist Paper: SBC annual meeting report by Lauren Grim and Sam Evans, and 2nd place, The Alabama Baptist, "60th anniversary of Birmingham church bombing" by Lauren Grim

▶ **Design, Newspaper Spread** — 1st place, The Baptist Paper: Endan-

gered Youth, and 2nd place, "Taking Care," both by Lauren Grim

▶ **Feature Article, Package** — 3rd place, "Man Cave Ministry" by Trennis Henderson

▶ **First-Person Column, Single Entry** — 3rd place, "Lessons learned in the trenches of parenting a teen" by Shawn Hendricks

▶ **Portrait Photo, Field** — 2nd place, "Man Cave 'changed my life'" by Pam Henderson

Evangelical Press Association

▶ **Newspaper, Print** — Award of Merit, both The Alabama Baptist and The Baptist Paper

▶ **Newspaper, Online** — Award of Merit, The Alabama Baptist

▶ **Article Series** — 1st place, "Endangered Youth" by Denise George

▶ **Cause of the Year, Fostering and Adoption** — 2nd place, "A mother's 'yes'" by Grace Thornton

Religion Communicators Council

▶ **Newspaper, Single Work** — Category Winner, The Baptist Paper

▶ **Newspaper, Article Single Work** — Award of Merit, "Lawsuits pertaining to Patterson, Pressler making headlines" and "Abuser database plan announced; choice of administrator receives pushback" both by Jennifer Davis Rash

▶ **Editorial** — Award of Merit, "Tragedy reminds us that sin-darkened world needs light of Christ" by Jennifer Davis Rash

EDITOR'S NOTE — A list of awards earned by SBOM, UM, Samford and others will be shared in an upcoming edition.

Associated Church Press

▶ **Best in Class: News Service** — Award of Merit, thebaptistpaper.org

▶ **Best in Class: Newspaper** — Award of Excellence, The Baptist Paper, and Award of Merit, The Alabama Baptist

▶ **In-Depth Coverage** — Award of Merit, "Dadeville Strong: Ministry in wake of mass shooting" by Jennifer Rash and Grace Thornton

▶ **Newspaper Front Page** — Award of Merit, "60th anniversary of Birmingham church bombing" by Lauren Grim

▶ **Newspaper Front Page** — Award of Excellence, SBC Annual Meeting by Lauren Grim, The Baptist Paper

▶ **Newspaper spread design** — Honorable Mention, "Taking Care" by Lauren Grim

▶ **Newspaper spread design** — Award of Merit, "Endangered Youth: How the church can respond to human trafficking" by Lauren Grim

▶ **Newspaper design entire issue** — Award of Merit, "Celebrating 200 years of Alabama Baptist missions and ministry" by Lauren Grim and TAB staff, The Alabama Baptist

▶ **Newspaper design entire issue** — Award of Excellence, SBC Annual Meeting coverage by Lauren Grim and TBP staff, The Baptist Paper

SUMMER INTERN

Welcome to Tucker Massey, a senior journalism major at Auburn University and a member of Locust Fork Baptist Church in Blount County.

Massey will be interning with us this summer. We look forward to showing him all we do through TAB Media Group and showcasing his contributions to the effort.

He is set to graduate in December.



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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Religion News Service (RNS)
Morning Star News (MS)

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'Nation's Top Regional Christian Newspaper'

1999, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2022 as judged by Associated Church Press, Baptist Communicators Association, Evangelical Press Association or Religion Communicators Council



The crossword puzzle can be found on page 19.

Rashional Thoughts

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

✉ jrash@thealabamabaptist.org

🐦 [@RashionalThts](https://twitter.com/RashionalThts)

How God moved in a potential ‘finders, keepers’ moment

The woman pretended not to hear the older gentleman argue with the cashier that he had indeed given him a \$20 bill and a \$5 bill as a prepay for gas.

The pump only allowed him \$5 worth of gas, however, so the gentleman assumed the cashier had made a mistake. The cashier stood his ground. “Sir, you only gave me \$5.”

While the two went back and forth, the woman inched in a little closer as she realized a different battle was warring within her spirit.

She really needed the \$20 — an about-to-have-her-power-cut-off type of needed it.

But it was wrong to take someone else’s money, and even more inappropriate to allow an innocent person to be blamed, she reasoned.

Still, the temptation to stand quietly in line and attempt to become invisible almost won out — until it didn’t.

Interjecting into the heated conversation, the woman pulled the \$20 bill from her pocket and

explained how it had fallen before making it to the counter.

She had snatched it up, thinking how lucky she had been to be standing in that spot at that exact time.

“I really need this \$20, but it’s not right for me to take it,” she told the gentleman as she handed it to him.

Astonished at her humbleness and honesty, he thanked her and said he wished he could give her the \$20 but he needed the gas for where he was headed.

She appreciated his kindness. After all, he could have responded harshly.

Now running a bit late for his appointment, he scurried out the door to pump the \$20 worth of gas and be on his way.

He didn’t forget what happened, however, and during the next few days, her expressed

need continued to haunt him. He finally determined he would drive back to the area and see if he could find her — but not before stopping by the bank to get a \$50 bill.

Once he arrived at the gas station where the episode took place, hunger pangs quickly drew his attention to a nearby restaurant.

“I’ll run in and grab a bite to eat before I start driving around the area,” he thought to himself as he swung open the door.

People were flowing all around — some getting in line to order, some cleaning up their table

to leave and others grabbing napkins and other essentials.

As the gentleman made his way to the counter, he stopped suddenly as a woman to his left turned toward him. He almost didn’t believe what he was see-

ing. It was the woman from the gas station.

He reintroduced himself and shared how he had returned to the area in hopes of finding her because he wanted to give her \$50 as a thank you for her honesty. He wanted her to know that her action that day inspired him.

She started crying and hugged the gentleman. “Fifty dollars will keep my power on another month,” she said. “I’m going to take it there right now. Thank you, thank you, thank you.”

Awareness radar

The next day I happened to be chatting with this same gentleman. As I shared about a different situation where the Lord was working and the needs that were surfacing, he told me his story.

His experience is an example of the types of stories we frequently hear related to how God is moving and the difference it makes for all involved.

The more I hear, the more I want to see — so much so that I’m continually sharpening my awareness radar and broadening my expectations.



Photo by Freepik

Your Voice



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

Faith is our calling card to God and to be lived out consistently

By Karen Moore

karenmooreauthor.com

Hebrews 11:1 may be one of the verses we know best but still struggle to understand.

The New International Version says, “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for, and assurance about what we do not see.”

The Message Bible says, “By faith, we see the world called into existence by God’s Word, what we see created by what we don’t see.”

Pastor and author Tony Evans says, “Faith is acting like God is telling the truth!”

Most believers want to live by faith. We want to act like God is telling the truth. We want to have confidence that what we hope for can happen. We want what we can’t

see, can’t understand or can’t fully contemplate to be in the hands of the One who actually can see, understand and contemplate for us.

We want faith to be our lifestyle and not simply an idea we visit now and then.

So, to quote Evans again, he says “faith is acting like it is so, even when it’s not so, in order that it might be so, simply because God said so!”

Perhaps those of you with a mama that told you what she wanted in no uncertain terms, “because I said so” can grasp this saying easily.

So, let’s go back and consider that faith is acting like God is telling the truth. We believe God exists. We believe God loves us. We believe God created the universe we live in,

so why do we struggle with whether God is telling the truth?

The fact is, God can only tell the truth, so we don’t really have to figure out that part.

Giving faith back to God

Hebrews 11, the faith chapter, reminds us that faith is not a matter of cherry picking. Faith is something we live in every hour of our lives.

Faith is the thing we give back to God so He can act on our behalf. It’s our faith that tells God, “I believe in the prayer I’m saying right now.”

It’s our faith that says, “I’ll do this thing God wants me to do, even though I don’t fully understand the direction.” It’s faith that says, “I’m here, God. Send me.”

You may face an issue, an idea or

a challenge you don’t understand, but when you believe God is with you, you can go on faith and act like it is so, so that it might be so because God said so.

Faith requires you to act and let God know you are willing to trust Him for those things you do not yet see. Faith is saying to God, “I believe you all the time. I believe you are always telling me the truth. I believe in you.”

Since God created the entire world out of nothing, don’t you think He can take those things you do not yet see and create the best option just for you? God gave you the gift of faith so you could use it, live in it, enjoy it and return the gift to Him every day.

Faith is your calling card to God.

Letters to the Editor

On behalf of our entire volunteer group, I want to express our deepest gratitude for featuring our Homeless Sleeping Mat Ministry in May 2 edition of The Alabama Baptist.

Your support means the world to us and has made an immense difference in our mission to aid the homeless in Montgomery.

The impact of the article has been truly remarkable. Since its publication, we’ve welcomed several news volunteers eager to join our cause.

We have received dona-

tions which have enabled us to provide not only sleeping mats made from recycled plastic bags but also additional essential items such as blankets, socks, toiletries and books about Jesus.

Your coverage has amplified our efforts and allowed us to extend our reach and allowed others (even beyond Alabama) to get to know us.

We firmly believe that every small act of kindness has the power to transform lives, and your decision to feature our work in your publication has magnified that belief.

Together, we are making

a tangible difference in the lives of those less fortunate, offering them a small degree of physical comfort with a sense of dignity and hope.

We invite everyone who can to join us (find out details at ehbconline.com or email karlasmilie626@gmail.com). We need many hands to prep the plastic grocery bags before they can be woven into mats.

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for spotlighting our cause and inspiring others to join us.

Karla Smilie Groves
Montgomery

I love TAB Media Group and everyone that has anything to do with your company.

Martha Alldredge
Cullman

While I no longer live in Alabama, I still love to keep up with all that’s happening there, and I enjoy the paper.

I usually read it front to back the day I get it.

Bessie Hawley
Poplar Bluff, Missouri

Gary Fisher wrote an article titled “Which version of the Bible do you

prefer?” in the May 16 edition.

My Bible is the New American Standard Open Bible by Thomas Nelson Publishers and all Deity pronouns are capitalized.

For instance, Genesis 1:26 says, “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image’”

I’m concerned about the versions that do not capitalize the Deity pronouns.

These next generations will not comprehend the meaning of Scripture as they read the Bible.

Russell Lackey
Montgomery

“Though the mountains move and the hills shake,
My love will not be removed from you.”

ISAIAH 54:10

If we are going to be disciples and keep this as the core reason for our existence, we have got to first and foremost have a loyal love. ...

Second, you've got to have a selfless sacrifice. ... Every day we need to die to self ... it's not about me, it's about King Jesus. ...

Third, you've got to have complete surrender. ... You've got to count the cost. ...

Luke 14:33 (quotes Jesus as saying), “Anyone who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.”

Discipleship is complete surrender, giving up everything to follow Him. ... We need to be committed to Christ, but the problem is that with commitment, then I'm the one in charge. ... But the word surrender means I relinquish my rights. I'm no longer in charge.

We don't need more commitment; we need more surrender. ... We exist to be disciples. We exist to make disciples in the hopes that more disciples make more disciples who make more disciples. ... A disciple is someone who looks just like Jesus. ... May we never forget the core reason we exist is to make disciples for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Daven Watkins
FBC Pelham

No true follower of Jesus should ever have a life that is boring or drab. If you choose to accept it, God has a mission for your life that is both meaningful and adventurous.

Our mission is challenging, but not impossible. It is made possible by the power of the Holy Spirit that God has given us. After giving us our Great Commission, Jesus reminded us that He would “be with us even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19–20).

Bill Wilks
NorthPark Baptist Church
Trussville

Have a great morning and remember, whatever is over your head is under God's feet! Trust Him, He's got you!

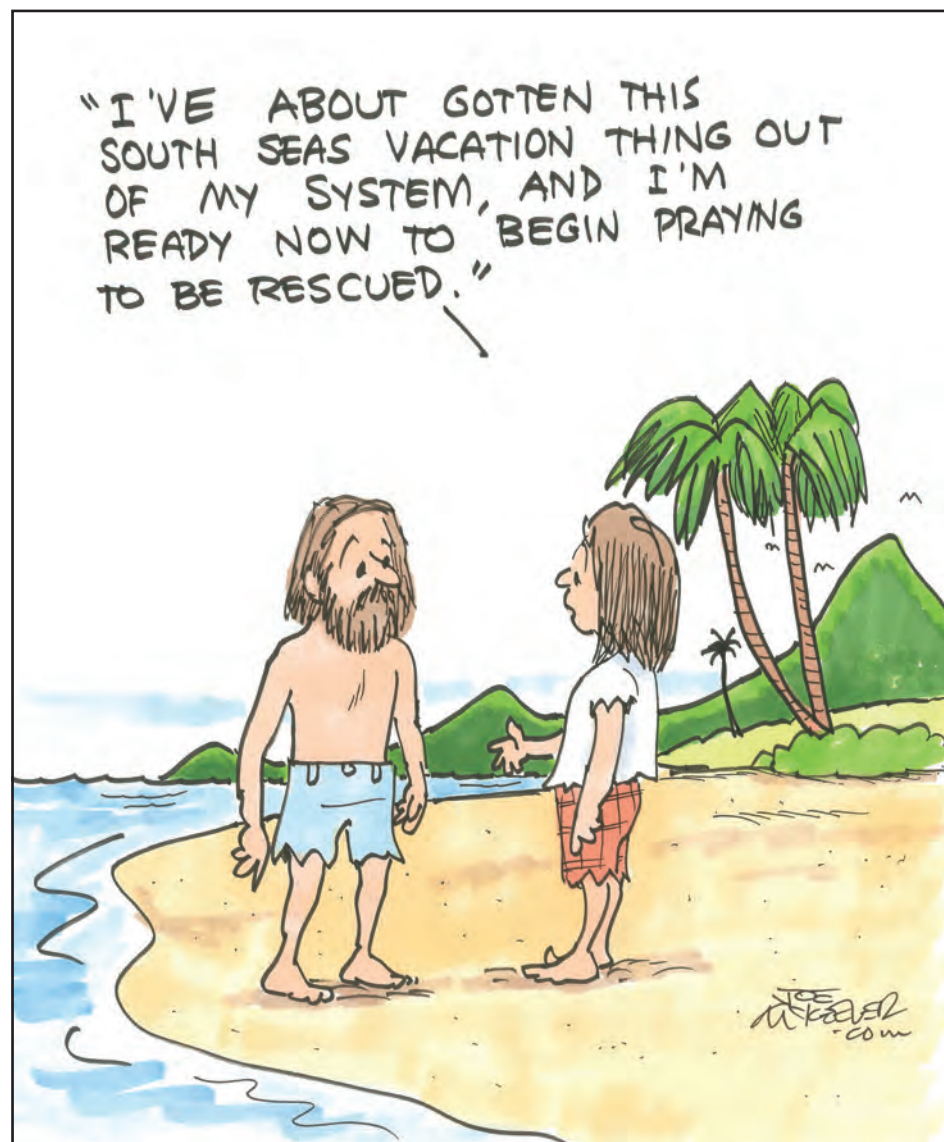
O'Shea Lowery
@EntrustedHope on X

Worthy are You to take the scroll and to break its seals; for You were slaughtered, and You purchased people for God with Your blood from every tribe, language, people and nation. You have made them into a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will reign upon the earth.

—Rev. 5:9
Todd Lafferty
@JToddL on X

Morgan Bailey (pastor emeritus of Macedona Baptist Church in Ranburne, see page 9) is available to share at your church or with a specific group any of these five training sessions:

1. Grace Talks — evangelism training.
 2. God Talks — outline of sermons, devotionals, etc.
 3. Group Talks — Sunday School and small group organization.
 4. Gift Talks — spiritual gifts of individual believers.
 5. Member Talks — new member orientation and assimilation.
- Email pastor@macedoniasbc.net or call 205-369-8112.



In case you missed these nuggets

Excerpts from the June 6 edition of The Baptist Paper:

As the war in Ukraine rages on, Yaroslav Pyzh of the Ukrainian Baptist Theological Seminary reported recently his seminary is holding up well — in fact, it is a beacon of light in dark times for many.

They are working tirelessly to plant new churches to inspire hope and community among Ukrainian believers, he said.

Pyzh believes it is crucial for the Church to hold fast to Christ in these times, advising all to offer themselves to Jesus so they may be transformed and made more like Him so God may be glorified, and others might turn to Him as well.

While he expressed desire that the war would end, Pyzh said he prayed — and encouraged others to pray — for the salvation of the people of Ukraine because all other pursuits were in vain without Christ at the center.

Christi Gibson, former minister of discipleship and missions at FBC New Orleans, is sharing her story of healing following the Ashley Madison scandal in 2015. Ashley Madison is a website dedicated to providing a space for spouses to commit adultery.

When names were leaked, Gibson's husband, John, was on the list, and he took his life.

Gibson testifies to God's goodness and grace in what once seemed to be the end of life as she knew it.

“In the midst of deep sorrow and pain, God's love goes to the very depths,” she said.

To read these articles and find out more about The Baptist Paper, visit tbponline.org. Call 800-803-5201 to add the paper to your TAB subscription.

3 stories you should know



Photo courtesy of Kris Henderson

Kris Henderson (right) was announced June 2 as the new lead pastor of Macedonia Baptist Church, Ranburne. Henderson previously served as the church's discipleship pastor since late 2020 and prior to that as pastor of International Christian Fellowship Church in San Pedro Sula, Honduras. He also served alongside his wife, Alania (left), as an associate missionary with the Honduras Baptist Dental Mission in Honduras. He holds a master of divinity from Liberty University and follows Morgan Bailey at Macedonia (see story, page 9).

Lifeway to continue lifewayworship.com

Lifeway Christian Resources has decided to continue operating lifewayworship.com and even begin providing new arrangements of music soon on the website.

"We've held listening sessions with over 200 church leaders from across the country since last fall," said Lifeway President and CEO Ben Mandrell. "Worship leaders told us this is their curriculum for discipling the people they lead in their ministries, and they rely on Lifeway Worship for music that has been vetted theologically and that encourages congregational singing."

Last summer, Lifeway planned to shut down the website that provides arrangements, charts, sheet music and other resources, but "we underestimated the value this tool brings to a meaningful portion of our churches," Mandrell said. (Lifeway)

Chaplaincy director honored by Beeson

Cecelia Ann Walker, executive director of chaplaincy and clinical pastoral education for Brookwood Baptist Health, has been named



WALKER

the 2024 alum of the year for Samford University's Beeson Divinity School.

Walker, who also serves on Samford's board of trustees, transitioned from a librarian to ministry

in the early 1990s. Walker credits her time at Beeson for preparing her well, praising the professors' dedication. Colleagues laud her as an exemplary leader and an inspiration.

"I'm so grateful because I am an ambassador for Samford and for Beeson in every way that I can be," Walker said. (Beeson)

Persecuted church

Vietnamese Christian brutally slain; churches demand police transparency

HANOI, Vietnam — Churches in Vietnam are demanding transparency from police in the investigation of the brutal and mysterious death of a Christian.

The body of Y Bum Bya was found beaten and hanged from a tree March 8 after he had been summoned to a certain location to meet with police, Morning Star News stated.

Y Bum Bya was a member of Evangelical Church of Christ of the Western Highlands in Dak Lak province. Vietnam promises religious freedom but does not recognize ECCWH.

More than 30 ECCWH congregations signed a petition calling for transparency in the police investigation of the man's death.

Y Bum Bya was first arrested in August 2023

under Article 116 of the criminal code relating to the attempt to "destroy the great national unity." Morning Star explains that "merely expressing a controversial idea in Vietnam can trigger this charge."

At that time, Y Bum Bya was battered severely and then humiliated in a public assembly of fellow villagers.



MS photo

Three Sudanese Christians jailed, tortured for possessing Bible

KHARTOUM, Sudan — Soldiers detained and tortured three Sudanese Christians earlier this year after a Bible was found during a checkpoint search, one believer said.

Hamza Haroon Ahmed said a soldier of the Sudan Armed Forces inquired Jan. 16 as to the ownership of a Bible in Ahmed's belongings, Morning Star News reported. Ahmed admitted the Bible was his. The search occurred at a military checkpoint in El Daein in Sudan's East Darfur state near Sudan's border with South Sudan.

Ahmed explained to Morning Star that the two Christians with him were recent converts from Islam. Because they would not leave Ahmed, they were jailed as well. The three were released in March.

Ahmed said that while in jail the three were tortured, during which he suffered a broken hand.

Morning Star reported the Sudan Armed Forces and the paramilitary group Rapid Support Forces have battled each other since April 2023. The fighting, which has displaced 8 million or more, has killed in excess of 14,600 people.

'WE ARE TOGETHER ONE RACE WITH ONE BLOOD'

Scottsboro pastor says Juneteenth an opportunity to show gospel without 'gaping hole'

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Like many people, Ryan Johnson said Juneteenth wasn't on his radar several years ago.

But now that he knows more about it, he sees it as an opportunity to show the gospel by loving others and working toward Christian unity.

"If churches can lead the way, they can set the tone," said Johnson, pastor of Agape Baptist Church in Scottsboro.

Juneteenth, which is celebrated annually on June 19, became a federal holiday in 2021. It marks the day in 1865 when 250,000 slaves in Texas were given their freedom by the U.S. Army — more than two years after President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation.

For Johnson, the holiday is a chance to show love, build bridges and model the gospel in his community. It's an opportunity to work toward the unified picture of all tribes and peoples and languages in Revelation 7:9, and it's also a chance to lament over injustice.

He said it's been a journey for him.

A heavy story

When Johnson was serving as a pastor in Abbeville, he heard a story that was new to him, a story of something that happened in the city.

In 1944, a young Black woman named Recy Taylor was kidnapped while leaving church and sexually assaulted by six men. The men confessed to the crime and were tried twice, but both times the courts didn't convict them.

Johnson said that story sat heavy



Photo courtesy of Ryan Johnson

Ryan Johnson, pastor of Agape Baptist Church in Scottsboro, speaks at a Juneteenth event in his community on June 19, 2023.

with him, and when he moved to Scottsboro a few years later, he heard another story of injustice — the Scottsboro Boys trials. In 1931, nine Black teenagers were falsely accused of sexually assaulting two white women aboard a train near the city, and all but the youngest — who was 13 — were sentenced to death.

The case got international attention, and people began protesting the boys' verdicts. For years, the trials and retrials went on, including landing in the U.S. Supreme Court twice — all while the boys were behind bars.

"A lot of people say that spurred on the national civil rights movement in the U.S.," Johnson said.

Then in 2020, when racial tension started to escalate after a

white police officer's excessive and seemingly unnecessary actions in Minneapolis resulted in the death of George Floyd, a Black man, Johnson said he and several other faith leaders in Scottsboro gathered together to read civil rights leader John Perkins' book, "One Blood: Parting Words to the Church on Race and Love."

"That was very helpful; there were a lot of diverse opinions," Johnson said.

Then after a threat of violence emerged in 2021, Johnson and other faith leaders decided to hold a unity march.

"We marched from the Scottsboro Boys museum to downtown and held a rally at the courthouse for racial reconciliation and unity," he said.

For Juneteenth in 2023, they repeated that event.

"I think it's going to become an annual thing for remembering the Scottsboro Boys incident and working toward justice," Johnson said.

At the rally that day, he shared a message and said he had two reasons for being there. One was to celebrate the freedom that was granted to slaves in Texas on June 19, 1865, because remembering that history shapes the culture in the Scottsboro community now and in the future.

The other reason, Johnson said, was to preach a gospel that doesn't leave a "gaping hole."

"Division is a gospel issue," he said, noting that many people who have claimed Christ have believed they could "be reconciled to God but not reconciled to our Christian brothers and sisters who don't look like us."

'All image bearers of God'

He told those present that "we stand united in that we are all image bearers of God. We all have one God-sized need: to be transformed by the salvation that is found in Christ alone. And we are together one race with one blood."

Johnson said churches can participate in Juneteenth by celebrating the American principle of freedom being applied consistently to all people, coupled with the biblical principle that every person is made in the image of God and worthy of respect and dignity.

"It is really an evangelistic opportunity when you think about it," he said. "I want more churches to see this as an opportunity."

To read more about Alabama Baptists' journey toward racial unity, visit tabonline.org/racial-unity.

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

DONALD DENNIS “DON” BATSON

Donald Dennis “Don” Batson, who served as a pastor for more than 50 years, died March 28. He was 78.

Batson was born in Birmingham and grew up in Bessemer. He served as a pastor for more than 50 years of congregations, including seven Alabama Baptist churches — Cahaba Valley Baptist in Brierfield; Rocky Ridge Baptist in Hoover; Forestdale Baptist in Birmingham; West Jefferson Baptist in Quinton; South Highland Baptist in Gadsden; Bethel Baptist Church in Dora; and James Memorial Baptist in Gadsden.

He also served as pastor of Rio Vista Baptist Church in New Orleans and Indian Head Baptist Church in Maryland.

At the time of his death, Batson was a member of the Baptist Church at McAdory in McCalla.

Batson is survived by his wife of 58 years, Treba; sons, Marc and Paul; and eight grandchildren. He is also survived by his brother, Jerry, who writes the Theology 101 column for The Alabama Baptist and The Baptist Paper.



BATSON

BIBB ASSOCIATION

▶ **Marvel Baptist Church, Brierfield**, leaders have officially closed its doors. Established in 1934, Marvel was led by pastors Bennie Hubbard, W.H. Hull, J.C. Hill, J.C. Hall, George Colburn, W.K. Lindsey, Cecil Walker, Reese Woods, Albert Roberts, William Goggins, J.W. Staggs, George W. Hicks, James Goggins, William K. Davis, Virgil Jarvis, Houston Boyd, Douglas Sanders, Travis Parks and Earl Sims. In the early 2000s, the church was mainly used for special events until Bibb Baptist Association reopened it. Stan Dawson stepped in as pastor in 2011. Bibb Association leaders are praying about how the building will be used in the future for Kingdom work.



BLISS

COFFEE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Daniel Bliss** is the new pastor of **Cool Springs Baptist Church, Enterprise**. He previously served as a pastor in La Pryor, Texas, and now works for Southeast Health, Dothan. He and his wife, Anne, have four children and eight grandchildren.

COOSA RIVER ASSOCIATION

▶ **Steven McDonald** is the new pastor of **Village Street Baptist Church (formerly Harmony Baptist), Sylacauga**, where he was ordained as the associate pastor years ago. He also previously served as pastor of Liberty Hill Independent Baptist Church, Sylacauga. McDonald is the parts manager at Childersburg Truck Service. He and his wife, Wanda Rena, have two daughters and two granddaughters.



Photo courtesy of Steven McDonald

EAST LIBERTY ASSOCIATION

▶ **Lanier Baptist Church, Lanett**, will host Providence Youth Choir, directed by Tom Smith, from Providence Baptist Church, Opelika, June 23, 7 p.m. EST. Bill King is pastor.

ESCAMBIA ASSOCIATION

▶ **Geoffrey Garrett** is the new student minister at **First Baptist Church Atmore**. He previously served as youth pastor at Freedom Church, Gadsden, and Brookside Baptist Church, Oxford. He is married to Sydney. Kevin Garrett is pastor.



Photo courtesy of FBC Atmore

ETOWAH ASSOCIATION

▶ **Ken Alford** is the new interim pastor of **Bellevue Baptist Church, Gadsden**. He has served as interim pastor at three Alabama Baptist churches — Pleasant Ridge, Hueytown; FBC Ashville; and Crossroads Community, Elmore — since 2020 when he retired from full-time ministry after 40 years. He holds master of divinity and doctor of ministry degrees from Southwestern Seminary. He and his wife, Cynthia, have two children and four grandchildren.



ALFORD

▶ **Gary Cardwell** is the new pastor of **Black Creek Church, Collinsville**, where he had been serving as interim. Cardwell has served several churches in Alabama through the years and was director of missions for Etowah Baptist Association for 12 years prior to his retirement in 2017. He has served churches as a transitional pastor since retiring. He and his wife, Carol, have two daughters and two grandchildren.



CARDWELL

LIMESTONE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Joshua Darracott** is the new college minister at **Clements Baptist Church, Athens**.

Darracott, who had been a ministry intern at the church since May 2023, grew up at Clements and has served in a variety of volunteer roles through the years. He was called to ministry while in school at Wallace State College, Hanceville, where he played on the golf team and earned an associate's degree in business. Along with his role in college ministry, Darracott also coordinates the church's social media. Caleb Gooch is pastor.



DARRACOTT

TALLAPOOSA ASSOCIATION

▶ **Chuck Stewart** is the new pastor of **Jacksons Gap Baptist Church**. He previously served as pastor in Arkansas, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, upstate New York, Ohio, Tennessee and Texas. The majority of his ministry has been building up and growing small churches. Stewart holds a bachelor of ministry degree, master of arts degree in biblical studies and is currently pursuing a doctor of ministry degree. Stewart and his wife, Anita, have six children and 14 grandchildren.

TUSKEGEE-LEE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Crawford Morris** is the new junior youth student minister at **Providence Baptist Church, Opelika**, and will work alongside student minister Chuck Adams. Morris is currently pursuing a bachelor of arts degree in Christian ministry with a minor in biblical studies from Leavell College at New Orleans Seminary. Rusty Sowell is pastor of Providence, Opelika.



MORRIS

DALE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Providence Baptist Church, Clayhatchee**, celebrated its 175th anniversary April 28. Speakers were Chad Hixson, former pastor; Tommy Green, former pastor; Jim Hill, director of missions for Dale Baptist Association until his recent retirement; Jim Peters, pastor, Daleville Baptist Church; and Lance Hobbs (left), deacon chair. A plaque was presented by Jane Hughes (right) of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Music was provided by Carvil Chalk, former music minister, and the children's choir.



Photo courtesy of Jane Hughes

College students participating in summer missions a result of churches' investment, BCM encouragement

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Chris Mills said he feels like he says this every year, but he's more excited about the group of students who are scattered across the nation and world as summer missionaries.

"We just seem to get a better and better group of students serving, so I'm excited about the stories we'll hear from what they'll get to see and do," said Mills, student missions mobilizer for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Mis-

sions. During REACH weekend in April at WorldSong Missions Place, 106 Alabama college students were commissioned at First Baptist

Church Pell City to go to South America, the Middle East "and everything in between," Mills said.

"A number of them will be in Paris for outreach events leading up to the Olympics," he said. "Some are headed to Indianapolis to be involved with Cross-over before the Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting, and some are going to Alaska to be involved with churches and ministries Alabama Baptists are partnering with up there."

The theme for REACH weekend was *Compelled*, drawn from 2 Corinthians 5.

"We challenged students to see that it's not just a calling that we have but that it's God's love for us that



Photo courtesy of SBOM/Collegiate & Student Ministries

More than 100 college students were commissioned for summer missions during the recent annual REACH conference at FBC Pell City.

compels us to be part of what He's doing across the globe," Mills said.

'A culmination'

Ben Edfeldt, director of the SBOM office of collegiate and student ministries, said sending out students "is a culmination of years of discipleship between families, churches and Bap-

tist Campus Ministries."

"It results in developing a biblical worldview in the students that will benefit the global church," Edfeldt said. "It's what Alabama Baptist churches prioritize, and our office is honored to lead in. REACH weekend is a picture of one of the most important callings God has placed on Alabama Baptist

churches and their BCMs."

Mills said the hurdles that students are facing today are great, ranging from purity to financial obstacles to parents who struggle with the idea of their children serving overseas.

No matter the cost

But he's encouraged to see students willing to go no matter the cost.

Mills said another one of the "greatest encouragements" for him in recent years is to see students who have served as summer missionaries taking the next step of commitment to missions service.

"When the International Mission Board holds its next round of training, there will be four students I know of from the University of Alabama who are going out as Journeyman," he said. "I'm hearing more and more of those kinds of things."

For anyone interested in praying specifically for students as they're serving this summer, there will be a daily prayer prompt at facebook.com/onemissionstudents.

Bailey honored as he transitions to new season of ministry

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

Family, friends and partners from 40 years of ministry gathered May 19 at Macedonia Baptist Church in Ranburne to honor longtime pastor Morgan Bailey as he transitions from full-time pastoral ministry to a new season of ministry to the Church.

'Difference maker'

"When I think of Morgan, I think of a difference maker," said Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, who praised Bailey's commitment to missions, evangelism and discipleship.

"Difference makers are not always ones who have the spotlight, but they are the ones who shine the light on Jesus."

Lance called Bailey's walk with Christ "exemplary" and pointed out his ongoing commitment to

serving the church and community.

"We have valued the contribution Morgan has made to our Alabama Baptist family," Lance said. "He has served us in immeasurable and innumerable ways. ... Thank you, Morgan, for being a difference maker."

Bailey has served in pastoral ministry for 40 years, most of those in three Alabama Baptist churches: Santuck Baptist Church in Wetumpka (14 years), Canaan Baptist Church in Bessemer (13 years) and Macedonia, where he has served the past five years. He has been part of many national and international missions projects, including leading medical

and evangelistic teams to Guatemala for the past several years.

Bailey is a past chair of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. He completed two years of service as first vice president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention in 2023 and previously served three years as ABSC second vice president (2018-2021). He chose not to run for president of the convention in 2023 due to health concerns. Bailey is a 16-year cancer survivor.

In 2022, Bailey was one of the inaugural recipients of the Dr. Rick Lance Sunday School Leader Award. Bailey said he is "grateful and

humbled" by the number of people who have reached out to him and his wife, Ritta, in this season of transition and said "thank you seems inadequate" for the love and support they've received.

But "today is not about Morgan and Ritta," Bailey said before preaching his final sermon as pastor of Macedonia. "It's about Jesus and about His bride, the Church, that I've had the privilege of pastoring for 40 years. I want to give Him all the glory and the praise."

Future plans

Bailey said his future plans include writing a book; leading workshops on evangelism, discipleship, prayer and other topics; and perhaps serving churches in an interim capacity.

The Baileys recently celebrated their 50th anniversary. They have two adult sons.



Photo by Lee Jackson

Pastor Morgan Bailey and his wife, Ritta, try out a utility vehicle gifted to them by Macedonia Baptist Church, where Bailey retired from full-time pastoral ministry.

Combining God's call to action with racing

(continued from page 1)

So in 2024, pray.com joined with IndyCar series driver Sting Ray Robb to spread the hope of prayer.

"In my career, we have tried to be uncompromising in our faith while reaching for success on the race-track," Robb said. "The partnership with pray.com allows us a unique opportunity to do just that by connecting our purpose in life — God's call to action — with our passion for racing."

His manager, Kimmie Serrano, who is also his mother, agreed.

"From the earliest days of karting, Sting Ray has been on a mission to share with others about the hope we have in Jesus," she said. "He has utilized his God-given talent on the various motorsports platforms to continue planting seeds everywhere he goes."

"As his momager, I've been in a unique position to see how God has been at the wheel of this ride every step of the way, guiding and providing," Serrano said.

"It is no surprise that the journey led us to this partnership with pray.com. The alignment with pray.com is truly a realization of all the prayers throughout the years and brings faith into the fast lane — literally!"

God moments

The God moments that led to pray.com's influence on the lives of an officer and an IndyCar driver originated

with a 15-year-old girl walking to an abortion clinic but stopping at a church first to ask for advice. Because he was new to ministry, the pastor of the church decided to call a friend.

This more experienced pastor, who had just met with a couple who had been trying to have children for 10 years, suggested asking the girl about placing her baby for adoption.

"The girl said yes. I got adopted because these two pastors in ministry were friends," Potter said.

Potter went from being adopted through a God moment to seeing many more throughout his life. One of those key moments happened after he dropped out of school when he learned about Apple's new app store.

This led to starting a company with his roommate that built 8,000-plus real estate apps. But 10 years later, he realized he had lost his purpose.

After praying and asking his pastor for advice, he ran into an old friend, Steve Gatena, who had just lost a business partner in a plane crash. During this tragedy, Gatena was given an audio sermon which led him to Christ.

Over coffee, Gatena told Potter he was frustrated. He could have learned about Jesus earlier if there were a digital format for Christians like sports fans have for ESPN.

So he bought the domain pray.com.



Photo courtesy of Action Sports Photography

Prayer along with putting God first and a world-class team of people who left high-level positions to contribute to the mission and vision of pray.com are the secrets to its success, pray.com leaders contend.

Believing this was a God moment, Potter stepped down from his company the next day. Shortly after that, while waiting in a restaurant, Gatena ran into former middle school classmate Ryan Beck.

Gatena had played college football before owning a couple of successful companies. Beck had been a drug dealer but was led to Christ in jail. Unable to find work, a pastor offered Beck a position as facilities man-

ager. The church gifted Beck scholarships that led to Beck working in international missions' nonprofits and as a computer programmer.

'Strange meeting'

"It was a strange meeting because the last time Steve saw Ryan, Ryan was working on being America's most wanted. The last time Ryan saw Steve, Steve was working on being an All-American," Potter said.

Meanwhile, Michael Lynn

was working his way up the ladder at Merrill Lynch, managing \$750 million for high net worth individuals.

All four men had unique God-given gifts and were looking to "take technology back for the Kingdom."

Impacting the world

"We knew if God was behind it and God blessed it, it would work," Potter said, adding that it still took years and multiple updates before pray.com got off the ground.

Potter attributes pray.com's success to prayer, putting God first and a world-class team of people who left high-level positions to contribute to the mission and vision. These include Victor Harris, chief data officer; Max Bard, vice president of content; Brian Davi, chief business officer; and Jason Rosoff, vice president of marketing.

"We're all just following God's plans for our lives," Potter said. "When we follow God's plans for our lives, we can impact the world in a big way together."



POTTER



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Breaking down barriers

Alabama Baptist Conference of the Deaf gather around theme of forgiveness

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Shocco Springs Conference Center in Talladega was once again the setting for Deaf Baptists from across the state to gather recently for worship, fellowship and business sessions during the annual Alabama Baptist Conference of the Deaf.

This year the sessions for adults were led by Larry White, pastor of Kirby Woods Baptist Deaf Church in Memphis, Tennessee, and co-founder of the Deaf Men's Conference. The worship leader was Martise Colston, American Sign Language instructor and interpreter from Sorrento, Florida.

The theme for the weekend in March was "Love and Forgive," based on Colossians 3:12-14.

White first laid the groundwork, discussing how Christians can tell if they haven't truly forgiven others. He mentioned how 1 Corinthians 13 shows true love isn't based on feelings, and he continued by teaching how the Pharisees religiously followed the law while also looking down on others.

Love and forgiveness

Although he shared principles that apply to every Christian, White also made it personal.

"If someone hurts a Deaf person and you say, 'You're finished,' and can't forgive, is that Christian or Pharisee behavior?" White asked.

White further shared an example of forgiveness using Joseph's life, and he invited attendees to sign parts of Joseph's story. Then White explained about how Joseph had to love and forgive repeatedly.

"Through everything Joseph went through over 22 years, he could have been bitter. God allowed those



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist
Larry White, pastor of Kirby Woods Baptist Deaf Church in Memphis, Tennessee, leads a session at the annual Alabama Baptist Conference of the Deaf.

things to happen. Joseph could have easily let these events take over his life. He learned to love and he learned forgiveness," White said.

While the adults were learning from White and worshipping with Colston, the teenagers in JrABCD — the teen track of the conference — had their own sessions about love and forgiveness led by Tony Tiano, a member of the Deaf ministry at Eden Westside Baptist Church in Pell City.

New Deaf church plant

Some exciting news shared at this year's conference was the new Deaf church plant in north Alabama.

Teresa Sheppard, one of the members of the new church, said it's "awesome, great!" She loves the Bible study and worship times and is excited about how it's growing.

It started when Steve Dye, Deaf ministry catalyst consultant for the Alabama Baptist State Board

of Missions, and his wife, Mandi, felt led to move to north Alabama because there was no thriving Deaf ministry in the area.

After moving in May 2023 and meeting with Deaf Christians in the area each month, they began the new Deaf ministry at The Grove Church in Madison.

Voting to call themselves "Deaf Koinonia," their first service was Jan. 14 and had about 20-25 people, with their highest attendance so far doubling that.

"From June 2023 to December 2023, we had many fellowships at our home, coffee shops, mall socials and other places. The Deaf here have shown one thing that was different from all of the other places we have served in Alabama: They showed a hunger for God's Word and for fellowship.

"[They] know the importance of accountability and support throughout the week, not just Sundays. We

have truly become a family among our Deaf group, and we are proud of our church family!" Dye said.

This plant was a group effort. Morgan, Madison and Limestone Baptist associations, along with Fairview Baptist Church in Athens, all provided support. The pastor and staff at Eden Westside Baptist Church in Pell City, where Dye and his wife had been leaders, "were a blessing to us and still are to this day," Dye said.

Volunteer interpreters

"We visited six different churches. The biggest hurdle was finding willing volunteers to help interpret those visits. ... But we have been blessed to have a wonderful group of people who have helped us. ... Without those interpreters, we wouldn't have been able to feel the Lord leading us to our current church, The Grove Church," Dye said.

Dye sometimes wonders why God didn't move him and his wife to north Alabama years ago.

However, he recognizes that the experiences he and Mandi had while ministering in Birmingham, Talladega, Oxford and Pell City have molded and shaped who they are.

Access to God's Word

"Many churches are still uneducated about the need and why it's important to break down those barriers to allow the Deaf to have access to God's Word," Dye said.

"There are an estimated 4,000 deaf people in the north Alabama area among the six major counties, but only about 10 [of them] had access to worship. [Since starting] at The Grove Church, we have added much more to the number of Deaf (people) having access to God's Word.

"And we are just getting started."

Baptist Campus MINISTRIES

University of West Alabama BCM bounces back from COVID stall

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Baptist Campus Ministries at the University of West Alabama is experiencing new life since the COVID-19 impact.

Logan McCoy, who became campus minister in 2022, technically started from scratch after the pandemic, but about 30 students are now meeting for Bible study each week. Some are even part of missions efforts during holiday breaks.

They also have students currently serving as summer missionaries.

McCoy said when he and his wife, Jordan, first moved to Livingston, it was a challenge at first to figure out

how to best serve the campus, the students and the community.

“The first year was a lot of learning,” he said.

Wide range of ministry

“But as we learned and observed what was happening already, we realized there was a lot of room for ministry here.”

They connected first with the athletic teams, and eventually McCoy became the football team’s chaplain.

“What began as a lot of sports ministry and a lot of outreach to them and the general population of students quickly became our normal Bible study time where we would gather together in our student union

building and have Bible study,” he said.

The first year they averaged 10 people. This year they’re up to 30.

“We’ve been focusing on pushing students out of their comfort zone in where they are spiritually and how they are trying to reach their campus,” McCoy said.

“Through really focused efforts in evangelism and discipleship, we have seen a tremendous growth in ministry as far as outreach on campus.”

They’ve done cookouts and made

pancakes for students, and they’ve used a process called gospel appointments to help students who are already believers to engage others.

“With gospel appointments, one student sets up a meeting with another student and lets them know, ‘Hey, when we meet I want to talk about spiritual things or your church background.’”

Gospel conversations

“It gets all of the awkwardness out of the way on the front end — you don’t have to figure out how to transition the conversation,” McCoy said.

Then when they meet for coffee or lunch, they talk about spiritual



McCOY



UNIVERSITY OF WEST ALABAMA BCM

Photo courtesy of Logan McCoy

things, and ultimately the student shares the gospel.

“We follow up with them and give them books to go through together,” he explained.

“The student can be the one to help them start growing as a Christian. It’s a really cool thing.”

McCoy said he’s grateful for the support of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions as he’s led the effort to boost BCM at UWA. “I couldn’t begin to explain how much they’ve helped us and supported us,” he said.



EDFELDT

Ben Edfeldt, director of the SBOM office of collegiate and student ministries, said over the past two years, they’re seeing God open doors to pockets of students at UWA.

‘Substantial growth’

“From athletes to international students, students are beginning to understand what it means to engage their classmates and teammates with the gospel, disciple others to follow Jesus more closely and be sent to the nations with the gospel,” he said.

“We’ve seen substantial growth from the UWA BCM,” Edfeldt noted. “I’m grateful for the impact Logan McCoy is making across the whole campus.”

Auburn University gains second campus minister — Kennedi Kruger

The Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions called a new state missionary in mid-May — Kennedi Kruger, who will serve as a Baptist campus minister for Auburn University. Her new role began June 1.

She will be serving along with lead campus minister Clint Culpepper, who also recently joined the staff.

Since 2022, Kruger has served as a ministry associate with the Baptist Campus Ministries of East Tennessee State University. For two years before that, she served as a campus missionary for the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, and before that, she served in a variety of other missions and ministry roles.

She also recently earned her master of arts in Christian education from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

Ben Edfeldt, director of the SBOM

office of collegiate and student ministries, said he is excited about Kruger’s future ministry.

“Alabama Baptists ask BCM campus ministers to reach, equip and send students. Kennedi is passionate about investing in this current generation of students and sees them as catalytic to fulfilling the Great Commission,” he said. “Thanks to our friends in Tennessee, Kennedi has experienced rich training and equipping as a campus minister and will now invest in Auburn students.”

Edfeldt said he is “thrilled” to have Kruger on the SBOM team.

“I believe there are great days ahead for the AU BCM,” he said. (Grace Thornton)



KRUGER

Helping students ‘build upon what God has done’

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

About five years ago, Zane Miles began to really see the significance of Baptist Campus Ministries and what they do on college campuses around the state.

He had been discipling three guys in his youth group at First Baptist Church Guin, and when they graduated, two of them went to the University of North Alabama, and the other went to

“Hey, this is Kingdom work,” Miles said.

Matt Daniels, campus minister at UNA, said he values that partnership and earning the trust of student ministers.

“To connect with their student pastor and build that relationship of trust with the student pastor, it communicates to those students that, ‘Hey, this is something that I believe in,’” Daniels said.

He said for local church ministers like Miles to encourage their

students to connect with BCMs is like passing the baton between relay runners. They’re in this together, he said.

“I’m continuing what their church has done for these students. It’s taking them in the next step in their walk with Christ and their sanctification process,” Daniels said. “It’s



UNIVERSITY OF NORTH ALABAMA BCM

Photo courtesy of Matt Daniels

the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

“What I had been doing in those guys’ lives, once they got connected with the BCM, it really started to produce that fruit in their lives,” said Miles, who now serves as senior pastor of FBCG.

One of those guys — Nathan Kemble — became the BCM president at UNA, and now he’s FBCG’s student pastor.

“I was blessed to baptize him about six months before he left and went to UNA,” Miles said. “He was growing spiritually, but his spiritual maturity that took place while he was there was incredible.”

That’s why Miles said he would encourage every student minister to get connected with the BCMs at the colleges where their graduating seniors go.

“These campus ministers are incredible, solid, God-fearing, Jesus Christ-centered people who genuinely love the Lord and love seeing that next generation seek the Kingdom of God,” Miles said.

By connecting with them and encouraging students to continue growing in their faith through BCM, “you’re partnering with campus ministers and saying,

saying, ‘Let’s build upon what God has done in your life and continue to shore up what you believe and why you believe it, and let’s disciple you and put you into the missional work of the Kingdom.’” He said he would encourage student ministers to go visit

the BCM in their area or at the colleges their students are planning to attend. “Build that relationship.”

He said he would love to get to know student ministers as well as their soon-to-be college students.

Miles said for him it’s been an important relationship, and he sends his students toward the campus ministers he knows.

Campus ministry, Daniels noted, is alive and well in Alabama. “Students’ lives have been changed through the campus ministries across our state, and they’re being put to work for the Kingdom.”

For more information about BCMs in the state or helping your students connect with campus ministers, visit bcmilink.org.

Jacksonville State University campus minister sees God’s redemptive work

More than a decade ago, Shannon Hughes thought she was failing at campus ministry — but that helped her become more prepared.

“A lot of circumstances made it a challenging situation for me personally,” said Hughes, who at the time was serving with Auburn University’s Baptist Campus Ministries. “Also, I was probably making it tougher, because I needed to seek out some help, and also I was not relying on the Lord like I needed to.”

She was doing ministry in her own power. She struggled with anxiety and fear. And after a while, she



SHANNON HUGHES

Photo courtesy of Shannon Hughes

burned out, she said.

“I lost sight of my calling, and the only thing I really knew to do at that point was walk away,” Hughes said.

But now, as she starts in

a new role as lead campus minister for Jacksonville State University, she said she believes her struggle with anxiety during that season has put her in an even better

position to relate to a generation weighed down by mental health battles.

“What I didn’t know at the time but I’m seeing now is that I’m a better minister because I can sit with a student and say, ‘I’ve been where you are, and I’m here to help,’” Hughes said.

When she first walked away from campus ministry, she spent five years working in university administration at Auburn.

“During that time, I got re-focused, and the Lord really redeemed that season and reminded me who I was and whose I was,” Hughes said.

“He renewed my calling and reminded me that He

wasn’t finished with me and He still had a purpose for me in ministry.”

God’s timing

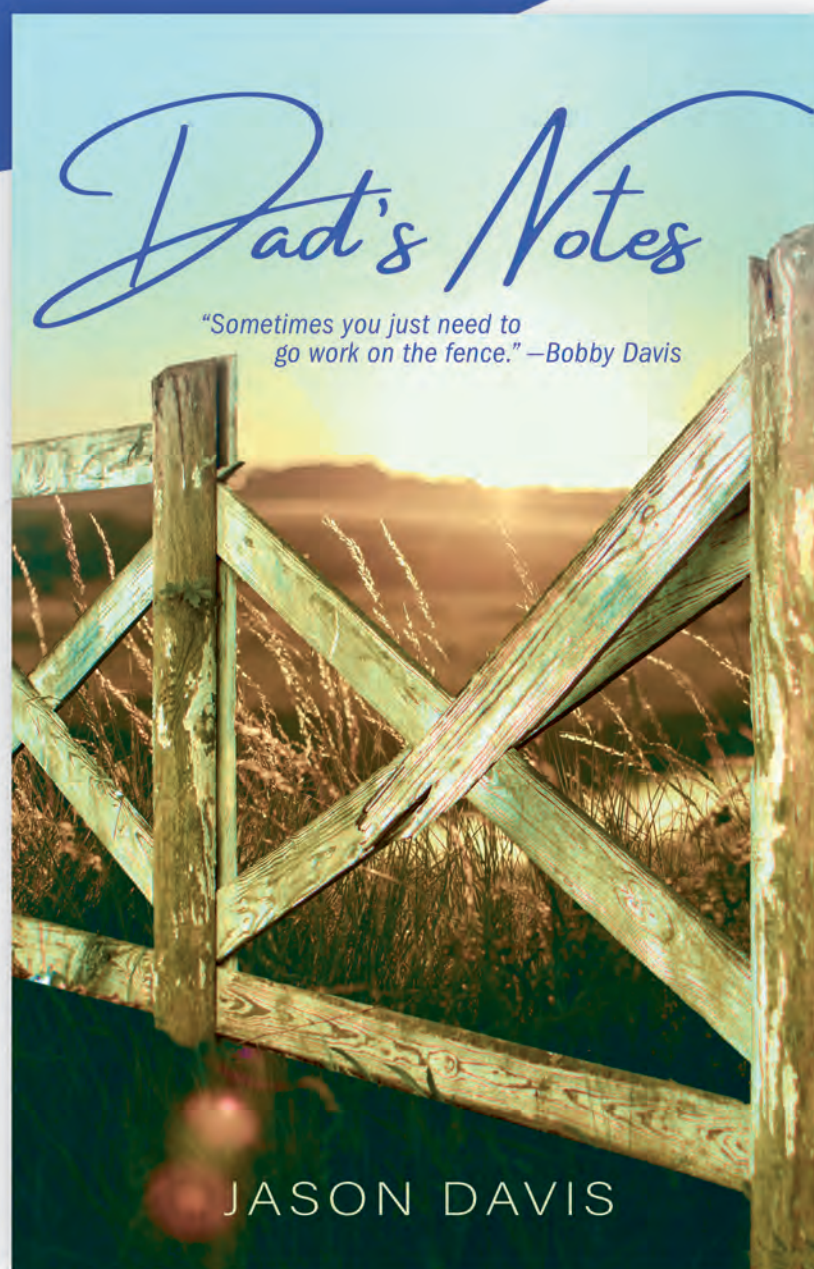
In the fall of 2023, Hughes sensed God calling her toward the lead role at JSU. A second stint at Auburn put her in the interim lead campus minister role, and she’d previously served on the BCM team at the University of South Alabama and Southeastern Louisiana University.

She said she’s thankful for the opportunity to build on the legacy left behind by Gary Brittain, who recently retired after more than 33 years in the role at JSU. (Grace Thornton)

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Lawmakers unveil statue of Billy Graham in US Capitol

Dozens of lawmakers and faith leaders gathered in the United States Capitol on May 16 to celebrate the installation of a statue honoring evangelist Billy Graham, whose likeness now represents his native North Carolina in the building's Statuary Hall.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, himself an evangelical Christian, spoke during the unveiling of the 7-foot tall bronze statue, which features Graham gesturing with one hand toward an open Bible in his other.

Johnson noted Graham, who died at age 99 in 2018, is one of only four people who have received all three of the highest honors Congress can offer: the Congressional Gold Medal, lying in honor at the Capitol and having a statue of their likeness erected in the building.

Wayne Atcheson, senior ambassador and historian for

the Billy Graham Library and Archive Center, said the statue's prominence continues the evangelistic legacy of Graham.

'Powerful witness'

"The 13 Colony states have the choicest position in Statuary Hall, and Mr. Graham will be one of the 13 persons so honored here. We believe it will be a powerful witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ," Atcheson said in an email.

Graham, a preacher who once drew crowds of hundreds of thousands at his revivals, or "crusades," now joins the ranks of Presidents Gerald Ford and Ronald Reagan, as well as Rosa Parks.

Johnson said the Bible in the statue is open to Galatians 6:14: "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has



Photo by Jack Jenkins/RNS
Franklin Graham, son of the late Billy Graham, speaks after unveiling a bronze sculpture of his father in Statuary Hall at the U.S. Capitol in Washington on May 16.

been crucified to me, and I to the world."

Johnson then grew visibly emotional as he lifted aloft Graham's personal study Bible, its pages marked with handwritten notes, open to the same verse.

"This is the verse that Reverend Graham put on the banner of his life and in his

final years," Johnson said.

Graham's son, Franklin, also addressed the assembly and praised the inclusion of Scripture along the base of the statue — John 3:16 and John 14:6 — but said the sculpture would likely have made his father "a little uncomfortable."

"He would want the fo-

cus to be on the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

Another speaker, North Carolina Sen. Ted Budd, also referenced the Scripture passages along the bottom of the statue, and appeared to embrace the elder Graham's evangelistic fervor.

"Friends, God's grace is undeserved," Budd said as he concluded his remarks.

"But through righteousness, it is freely given and it is by trusting in Christ's sacrifice that we are saved. If you've not made that decision for yourself, I hope, I pray that you will."

Sculpting process

Multiple speakers pointed out the process of establishing the statue took years, but Johnson noted the artist who made it — Charlotte-based sculptor Chas Fagan — also fashioned a nearby likeness of Reagan. (RNS, TAB Media Group)

Faith Moments

God is moving in Alabama

I thank God for Alabama Baptists. Each autonomous local church cooperates to further Christ in Alabama, the U.S.A. and around the globe.

In a day when we often hear and read about divisions and strife, I rejoice that such is not the case with Alabama Baptists.

As your state missionary, I wish I had room to share all the victories I witness. I will share one story as an example of what God is doing throughout our state in church revitalization.

Dee McGuire, pastor of Greensboro Baptist Church, contacted your Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions two years ago, wanting help in church revitalization.

In a town with a decreasing population, God is moving in a special way. Listen to just a few of

the encouraging signs from Greensboro Baptist Church:

- ▶ Sunday School average attendance has grown from 75 to 106.
- ▶ Worship attendance has grown from 85 to 140 in average attendance.

▶ After much prayer and hard work, the church re-launched missions for children. The empty halls now hear the beautiful sound of children once again.

Today, there are 18 enrolled in GAs with an average attendance of 14. They have 16 enrolled in RAs with an average attendance of 10. Mission Friends has nine enrolled with an average attendance of eight. The youth group is averaging 14 youth weekly.

One of the areas identified needing "revitalization" was in the area of evangelism.

Pastor Dee, his staff and the faithful church council led with an emphasis on evangelistic praying and sharing the Good News of Jesus.

In 2021, Greensboro Baptist recorded one baptism. Thus far, in 2024, GBC has rejoiced over 11 baptisms, with four awaiting baptism. Another five people have joined by transfer/statement in the past eight months.

The Episcopal priest in Greensboro recently said, "God is moving in our area."

Pastor Dee remarked, "The Holy Spirit is creating a spirit of obedience and encouraging greater unity in our church. Furthermore, we are experiencing a renewed joy in serving and seeking God in worship with excited anticipation as to how God will continue to lead.

"God has been faithful in nur-

turing His church from the challenges that

COVID-19 brought to the joy of seeing people respond to the gospel to the glory of God and the uplifting of His church."

I wish I had time to share all of your victories around Alabama. I say "your victories" because of your faithfulness in giving through the Cooperative Program and the Myers-Mallory State Missions offering; every victory IS YOUR victory. As long as Alabama Baptists remain focused on the Great Commission and the Great Commandments, we will continue to thrive and serve our Great God. To Christ alone receive the glory!

By Rob Jackson
Director of evangelism and church revitalization, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions



Someone You Should Know

MARGARET SMITH

By Leigh Pritchett
The Alabama Baptist

Margaret Smith of Centre has a rare ministry in this age of all things digital: She sends a personal, handwritten note to each first-time visitor at her church. The 96-year-old continues to attend Sunday School, worship services and Woman's Missionary Union meetings in person. A home economics graduate from Auburn University, she saw her mission in life as rearing her two children in a Christian home and telling people about Jesus. In church, she taught Sunday School for more than 50 years (a class is named for her) and worked with children and youth. Through the years, she has also given the legacy of her handmade wedding dresses to about 10 brides.

Q: Describe where you focus your greatest ministry efforts.

A: Making contact with first-time visitors.

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

A: My mother (Lillian Swilling). She was a widow and a school teacher. She took me to Sunday School and read Bible stories to me. She was a great influence on my life.

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

A: When my husband died 10

MINISTRY:
Hospitality

CHURCH NAME: First Baptist Church Centre in Cherokee Baptist Association



LIFE VERSES: "What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee." Ps. 56:3

"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end." Jer. 29:11

years ago ... I asked the Lord for strength to adjust.

Q: What has God been teaching you lately?

A: To trust in Him. I've known that all along, but the older I have gotten, the more I depend on Him.

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

A: That God is faithful. He may not always answer the way you want Him to, but if you pray and ask Him for direction, He can be trusted. Through my life, I have learned I can depend on God to meet my needs.

Q: Have you ever read a book or heard a song that changed the way you think about God and faith? What was it and what did you learn from it?

A: The song "An Evening Prayer": "If I have wounded any soul today/ If I have caused one foot to go astray/ If I have walked in my own willful way/ Dear Lord, forgive. ... Forgive the sins I have confessed to Thee/ Forgive the secret sins I do not see/ O guide me, love me and my Keeper be/ Dear Lord, Amen." He will forgive me.

DO YOU KNOW A PERSON WHO SHOULD BE FEATURED AS Someone You Should Know?

Send his or her name, a contact number and the reason you think he or she should be featured to Someone You Should Know, c/o The Alabama Baptist, 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209, or to news@thealabamabaptist.org.

LASS WORDS

BY KEN LASS
The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Location, location, location

Real estate agents like to say the three most important factors when buying or selling a home are location, location and location. The same can be true for many faithful church attenders.

These faithful souls have found their favorite spot in the pews (or chairs) and will return to that specific place each and every Sunday. They will be surrounded by like-minded folks who, together, will form a sort of miniature church community and fellowship. It's comfortable there. Familiar. Consistent.

There's nothing wrong with that. For years it was no different for my wife, Sharon, and me. We had found our happy place up in the balcony, weekly surveying the proceedings from on high with the usual gang of fellow worshippers around us. It was our spot, our place, our routine — maybe a little too routine.

'Winds of change'

The winds of change began to blow — quite literally — from the AC system. As I have gotten older, I've become more sensitive to cold, and it just felt to me like that balcony was approaching arctic temperatures. I could feel the breeze from the air vents. My nose would start to run and my throat would thicken. Sharon, who never seems to age, seemed oblivious to this, so when I approached her about moving downstairs where it's a tad warmer, she resisted the idea.

As all loving couples do (well, sometimes anyway), we reached a compromise. Now we take turns deciding where to sit. I always choose the main floor; she sticks with the balcony. Truth be told, the temperature is probably about the same everywhere in the building, but I have convinced myself it's warmer on the main floor. For me, warmer is happier. Whatever works, right?

'New angles'

Turns out, moving around to different areas of the sanctuary has opened up our perspective. We've met new friends, reconnected with old ones we hadn't seen in forever and, most importantly, reengaged in worship from refreshing new angles.

I have frequently been a back row Baptist, but sitting closer to the front makes it seem as though the preacher and singers are communicating with you personally with fewer distractions.

Your point of view really can make a difference. If your worship experience is becoming a bit routine, change it up. Move around.

Jesus doesn't care where you sit. He just wants your attention.

MEET THE AUTHOR

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

'Hanging on to love'

GriefShare helps local churches minister to people in the community amid loss

By Erin Roach
The Alabama Baptist

It's rare that Gene Mitchell drives anywhere in his truck listening to Christian music without getting teary-eyed some 18 months after his wife died of cancer.

"Songs now have a different meaning, things I've never heard in a song before," Mitchell told The Alabama Baptist.

The change is not just because of Donna's death but because of the renewed relationship with Christ he found through GriefShare at First Baptist Church Foley.

"I am now the man of God that my wife had prayed for me to be for 47 years," Mitchell said.

A retired schoolteacher, Mitchell was part of the first GriefShare group at FBC Foley last fall. The skeptic in him was reluctant to attend, unsure of opening up about what he was feeling.

"I had been encouraged by the pastor to at least give it a try," Mitchell recalled. "As soon as I get there, I'm the only man there. I'm thinking, 'What are you doing here?'"

Despite his unease, he acknowledged the session leader's encouragement that everyone try at least three sessions before dropping out.

"It didn't take me three," Mitchell said. "When we left that day I told another lady from church, 'I know now I'm exactly where God wants me to be today.'"

"I now know that He doesn't abandon us when we feel the loneliness and the sadness of losing someone."

Gene Mitchell
widower



Photo courtesy of Gene Mitchell
Gene and Donna Mitchell on their wedding day. GriefShare, a national ministry hosted by local churches, set Gene Mitchell on a better path as he copes with the loss of his wife.

GriefShare, a national ministry hosted by local churches, set Mitchell on a better path as he copes with the loss of his wife.

God created emotions

"It has helped me tremendously. I still suffer from grief, but I also know that everything I've felt God has felt," Mitchell said. "God created these emotions, and God has felt these same emotions for the same Son that I place my trust and hope in."

The Bible-based, 13-week curricu-

lum guided Mitchell toward a stronger relationship with Christ, drawing him closer than he has ever been.

"I now know that He doesn't abandon us when we feel the loneliness and the sadness of losing someone," Mitchell said. "He's very real to me every day now."

The way Mitchell sees it, he's now living out his wife's legacy.

"This is the way she lived. She was such a woman of God, and for me to be any less than what I am

right now would let her down," Mitchell said, adding he looks up at the ceiling and cries during worship services "because I know my wife is rejoicing."

Leah Wilson, senior adult ministry director at FBC Foley, said the GriefShare classes range from an hour to two hours depending on how talkative people are, and they help participants use what they've gone through to help others.

At Christmas, the church hosted a supplemental "Surviving the Holidays" gathering.

"You do it as if you're having a holiday party," Wilson explained. "You decorate if you so choose, and you serve the typical Christmas cookies; you watch a 30-minute video. It was dynamic."

Mitchell made a new friend at the gathering, a young man who lost his wife in a car accident only 15 months after their wedding. Now the two have coffee together at least once a month.

While people experience loss and grief for various reasons, Mitchell

noted, all are invited to join a GriefShare group.

"We have people that are at a loss not necessarily because of death of a loved one but loss from separation, loss of a job, anything like that that they're dealing with."

Various topics

Topics covered in the GriefShare workbooks include fear, feeling overwhelmed, anger, regrets and being stuck in grief, Mitchell said.

"There is Scripture related to every one of these."

Christian leaders such as Tony Evans, Joni Eareckson Tada, Paul David Tripp and Joyce Rogers share their stories in GriefShare videos.

Throughout the study, participants are invited to trust Jesus as Savior, the reason for their hope. GriefShare's web-

site provides supplemental videos and daily devotions to help people walk through the process. Anyone interested can locate nearby groups simply by entering a zip code on the website.

Wilson relayed a relevant thought from a GriefShare Facebook post: "People rush to get rid of grief because they see it as hanging on to a loss, but grief is really hanging on to love, which is why you always feel it."

"That's just a perfect way of putting it," she asserted. "If you didn't love someone, you're not going to grieve. That's what grief is. It's love."

"We grieve much because we loved much," Mitchell concurred.

"If you didn't love someone, you're not going to grieve. That's what grief is. It's love."

Leah Wilson
senior adult ministry
director, FBC Foley

For more
information visit
griefshare.org.

UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Discerning a call to ministry

For a teenager or young adult, the call to ministry can seem like the most complex decision to wade through. That's why the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions created the Called conference.

The conference, which will be held Aug. 3 at Samford University, is a one-day event designed to help young men and women, high school through college, who are considering the life-changing call to ministry.

The speaker will be Scott Pace, vice president of undergraduate studies, dean of The College at Southeastern and associate professor of pastoral ministry and preaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North

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



Carolina. There will be breakout sessions led by ministry leaders from fields including children's ministry, missions, church planting, discipleship and more.

The cost for the conference is \$30. Lunch will be provided. For more information or to register, visit bcmlink.org/called.

2024 SBC Church Compensation Survey

GuideStone and the State Board of Missions need your help to create an extensive, reliable database that will be used by thousands of churches to establish competitive compensation packages for their church staff.

Upon completion, you'll

be entered for a chance to win one of five \$100 Amazon gift cards (rules apply).

Please note that all responses must be submitted no later than June 30.

For more information or to participate, visit guidestone.org/compensationsurvey.

Equipping children's leaders

Reaching and Teaching the Next Generation is a great opportunity to equip your preschool and children's ministry leaders.

Jana Magruder from Life-way Kids will be the featured speaker at the event,

which is set for Aug. 18, 2:30–5:30 p.m., at Westwood Baptist Church in Alabaster. There will also be breakout conferences. There is no charge for this event.

To register, visit kidzlink-al.org/event/nextgenaug18.

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

Place a classified ad below for \$1 per word.

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

CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Nolensville First Baptist Church, located just outside Nashville in fast growing Williamson County, is seeking a pastor. We are a traditional Baptist church. We are looking for a strong leader to shepherd our church family and lead us in an effective outreach effort in our community. For more information and responses, send letters and resumés with recent sermon links to: NFBC Search Committee, P.O. Box 635, Nolensville, TN 37135 or email to: psc.fbcnolensville@gmail.com.

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.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

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

ASSOCIATE PASTOR

Community Baptist Ardmore, Alabama, seeking associate pastor. Link to upload resume: <http://cbcarmore.org/staffsearch>.

PART-TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC

First Baptist Church, Rogersville, Alabama, is seeking a part-time minister of music for blended services, directing choir, congregation and coordinating volunteer musicians. Request all interested candidates submit resumés to: tiedeinal@aol.com.

BIVOCATIONAL WORSHIP LEADER/DIRECTOR OF MUSIC

New Market Baptist Church, NE, Madison County, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational worship leader/director of music. Request all interested candidates submit resumés to:

newmarketbaptistchurch@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC MINISTER

Riddles Bend Baptist Church is located in Rainbow City, Etowah County, Alabama. We are praying for God's choice for a bivocational music minister. Please forward resumé to: Anita Bedwell, Bedwell3@aol.com, 256-312-3470.

TWO PART-TIME POSITIONS — MUSIC DIRECTOR & PIANIST

Mt. Nebo Baptist Church, Falkville, Alabama, (Massey Community) is seeking to fill two part-time positions: a music director and a pianist. We are a small but growing, traditional congregation. Services Sunday morning, Sunday evening and Wednesday evening. Send resumés/inquiries to: gregoryk.compton@att.net.

MINISTER OF MEDIA AND TECHNOLOGY

West End Baptist Church in Clanton, Alabama, is seeking a leader with a desire to share the gospel through media. The minister of media and technology will manage all aspects of the church's media, including all services in house and livestream, website and social media. This person needs to be creative, organized and have a heart that beats for people. He/she will help plan for services and events, create content for services and social media, promote WEBC in our community and unite our church across all ministries with current and future technology and social media platforms. If you feel God is calling you to this position, please email a resumé and a cover letter including your testimony to: media@webconline.org.

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.

PASTOR OF STUDENTS AND EDUCATION

Pine Grove Baptist Church is seeking applicants for the position of pastor of students and education. This is a full-time position. Experience in this

position is preferred but not required. Applicants should be enrolled in or have completed a program of higher theological education. Please send resumés to: dgreen@pinegrovebc.org. Applicants may contact the church office during normal business hours at 256-927-3214 for more information. Timeframe: June 1–July 31.

PART-TIME MINISTER OF STUDENTS

Bethlehem Baptist Church, Lacey's Spring. This position would have oversight and responsibility from K–12th grade students. Send resumés or request more information by email to: BethlehemLacey@gmail.com.

SIGNS

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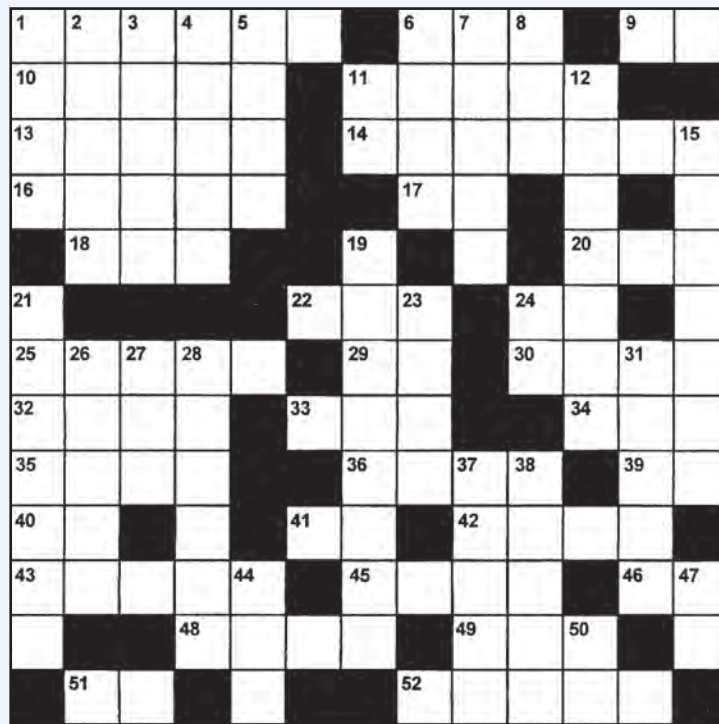
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CHRISTIAN Crossword



ACROSS

- 1. When thou makest a feast, call the poor, the _____. (Luke 14:13)
- 6. He came unto his _____. (John 1:11)
- 9. Exist.
- 10. Set thine house in _____. (2 Kings 20:1)
- 11. Beam cross section.
- 13. Come upon.
- 14. Harbor.
- 16. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a _____ for me. (Ps. 142:3)
- 17. Year. (abbr.)
- 18. Fermented beverage.
- 20. Loafer.
- 22. Encountered.
- 24. The men of Beth-el and _____. (Ezra 2:28)
- 25. Turn yourselves from your _____. (Ezek. 14:6)
- 29. See!
- 30. There shall come a _____ out of Jacob. (Num. 24:17)
- 32. Record.
- 33. Short for James.
- 34. First female.
- 35. Louse eggs.
- 36. Recedes.
- 39. Short for Albert.
- 40. Overhead transportation.
- 41. Roman numeral four.
- 42. A Hindu queen.
- 43. Governing assembly.
- 45. Greatest of them _____ to the least. (Jon. 3:5)



By Joan F. Watt Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- 46. Note in musical scale. (Ps. 150:4)
 - 48. The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no _____ of thee. (1 Cor. 12:21)
 - 49. Fuss.
 - 51. Direction.
 - 52. Wherewith one may _____ another. (Rom.14:19)
- DOWN**
- 1. Mothers.
 - 2. Space for sports event.
 - 3. Perfect.
 - 4. Meter in London.
 - 5. Pertaining to Celts of Scotland.
 - 6. We ought to _____ God. (Acts 5:29)
 - 7. Come to me, all you who are _____ and burdened. (Matt. 11:28)
 - 8. Short rest.
 - 11. Part of verb "to be."
 - 12. Person of Moab.
 - 15. Praise him with the _____ and dance.
 - 19. For I know whom I have _____. (2 Tim. 1:12)
 - 21. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear _____. (John 1:8)
 - 23. Laid it in his own new _____. (Matt. 27:60)
 - 24. Equally.
 - 26. Give us day by day our _____ bread. (Luke 11:3)
 - 27. Choose.
 - 28. Course of study.
 - 31. Assist.
 - 37. Man shall not live by _____ alone. (Matt. 4:4)
 - 38. Girl's name.
 - 44. But ye have made it a _____ of thieves. (Matt. 21:13)
 - 47. His mother marvelled _____ those things which were spoken of him. (Luke 2:33)
 - 50. Coming from.

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Connect offers fellowship, training

Refreshing. Tremendous fellowship. Powerful worship. These are a few of the words that those who have attended Connect in the past used to describe their time together at Alabama Woman's Missionary Union's enrichment and leader training weekend. "It's much more than a training conference — there's something for everyone," said Candace McIntosh, Alabama WMU executive director. "It's a really sweet time of connecting, fellowshiping, learning and preparing ourselves for God to work."



LENNON

And this year, you're invited to get involved. Connect, set for Aug. 2-3 at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega, is open to everyone.

The Friday and Saturday gathering features:
 ▶ Bible study with Andrea Lennon, women's ministry specialist for

Arkansas Baptists.
 ▶ Engaging breakout sessions on a variety of current topics, including three on women's ministry led by Lennon.
 ▶ Missionary testimonies from North American and international missionaries.
 ▶ Outstanding leadership training opportunities for new or seasoned leaders of WMU, women's ministry or adult, youth or children's missions groups.
 ▶ Fun times of fellowship with other missions-minded believers. "I think the beauty of Connect is the fellowship as we gather with

other missions-minded and ministry-minded adults," McIntosh said. "We enjoy learning from each other, having conversations and making friends in this unique setting."

To register or to learn more about how to make reservations at Shocco for the event, visit alabamawmu.org/connect.

Children's Music Summit

It's back — a hands-on training event for pre-school and children's music leadership to get you excited about teaching these precious children about God through music!

The Children's Music Summit offers exciting training for children's choir workers and day-care workers. Discover new ways to make music time a favorite

for kids, and watch the love for worship come alive in your preschoolers and children! You'll also learn to use games and toys to add more fun to your music time.

The Children's Music Summit will be Aug. 10, 8:30 a.m.-3 p.m. at Hunter Street Baptist Church in Hoover. For more information or to register, visit alabamaworship.org/events.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Sunday School Lessons

By Jay T. Robertson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, University of Mobile



For June 16

UNITED Acts 2:41–47

We live in a time when much is at stake and much is changing. The gospel does not change, but we live in a time when the stakes will not allow “status quo” Christianity to continue unchallenged.

A new program, a new curriculum or a new strategy is not the answer. Peter Drucker stated, “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.” In Acts 2 we see God creating a gospel-shaped culture that penetrated the pagan culture of its day with the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ.

Discipled (41–42)

Many Jews in the crowd heard the gospel in their own language, and they were pierced to the heart. They responded to the gospel by repenting of their sin and believing in Jesus Christ. Have you been convicted of your sin before the living God? Have you repented of your sin and trusted in Jesus as Lord and Christ?

Three thousand people accepted the message and were baptized on Pentecost. They were not baptized in order to be saved but because they were saved. Christian baptism symbolizes being buried with Christ and being raised with Christ to walk in newness of life. New life leads to new community and disciplined engagement with that new community.

These new believers were united in a gospel-shaped culture. First, they participated in the life of the Church by devoting themselves to “the apostles’ teaching.” They gathered together and were nourished by the teaching of Scripture. Second, they devoted themselves to “the fellowship.” They shared life together and actively participated in the experiences of their brothers and sisters. Third, they devoted themselves to “the breaking of bread.”

In this verse, the phrase refers to taking the Lord’s Supper together as an act of worship. Fourth, they devoted themselves

“to prayer.” These believers asked God to supply their needs and enable them to proclaim the gospel with boldness. We need to cultivate the discipline of devoting ourselves to these four activities as we mature in Christ.

Unified (43–45)

As the believers continued worshipping and proclaiming the gospel, the people in the city witnessed “many wonders and signs” being performed by the Holy Spirit through the apostles. Before the completion of the canon of Scripture, the Holy Spirit performed miracles to authenticate the authority of the apostles and the gospel message. The power of God at work among the people resulted in “awe” — a holy fear of and reverence for God.

Becoming a Christian in the first century could mean losing your job or being disowned by your family. Many believers faced poverty, hunger and cold. Instead of turning to the government, they turned to God. Instead of turning to Congress, they turned to the Church.

The caring and sharing Church is more concerned with giving than getting. The early Church was a church where the rich gave a lot, the poor gave a little, everyone gave something and no one had a need not supplied. This giving was not mandated by law; it was motivated by love.

In Community (46–47)

These new believers were steadfastly committed to God, to one another and to the gospel mission. These new Christians didn’t have to be coaxed into gathering together. They loved one another sincerely, and the general population noticed a difference in them.

The life of the gospel-shaped community made Christianity attractive, and the Lord saved a multitude of lost people and added them to the Church. The way we treat each other impacts our witness for Christ.

For June 23

PLACED Acts 3:12–26

You may wonder why you have to sit so long in the waiting room at the doctor’s office or why your granddaughter’s practice is taking forever. We need to remind ourselves that God puts us in the right place at the right time. God places us in positions to share the gospel with the lost around us. In our passage this week, God placed Peter and John in a position to proclaim the good news of Christ.

Recognize (12–16)

As Peter and John were going up to the temple for afternoon prayer, they saw a lame man sitting at the Beautiful Gate begging for money. They didn’t have any money to give the man, but Peter healed the lame man in the name of Jesus Christ. The healing attracted a crowd, and Peter discerned this was a providential opportunity to share about Jesus.

Peter wasn’t promoting himself or even the church in Jerusalem. Peter wanted the people to recognize that it was Jesus who had healed the lame man. And this miracle shouldn’t have come as a surprise to them. Scripture foretold of God sending His Servant to heal, restore and save His people.

Not only should they recognize that Jesus healed the man; they also should recognize they had denied Jesus before Pilate. The apostle who had denied knowing Jesus accused these people of the same thing.

Having been forgiven of his sin of denial, Peter knew there was hope that they too could be forgiven. This hope should compel every Christian to share the gospel with the lost. The covenant-breaking Jews had denied the “Holy and Righteous One,” the very Author of life. But God raised Him from

the dead. Jesus was alive and had healed this man. Jesus can forgive them of their sin.

Repent (17–21)

Peter’s sermon pointed to Jesus, highlighted the people’s sin and made an appeal to the people. He was not interested in merely condemning his hearers. He wanted them to repent of their sin and believe in Jesus.

He addressed them as brothers, not as enemies. He acknowledged they had acted in ignorance. Their ignorance did not make them guiltless. Rather, it meant that they were not fully aware of what they were doing, and Peter had been in exactly that category himself when he had denied Christ.

Peter made it clear that they should have known how God had foretold Jesus’ death through all the prophets. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus explained how Moses and the Prophets foretold how the Messiah would suffer (Luke 24:25–27).

Peter called on the people to “repent and turn back” to God. Repentance is a change of thinking that leads to a change of living. They were to turn back to God by trusting His saving promises in Scripture. Then their sin would be totally obliterated, and they would experience seasons of refreshing as they fellowshipped with the Lord.

Remember (22–26)

Peter kept pointing the people back to Scripture. Moses and the prophets had written about the Messiah who would come. Too many people today are saturated with ignorance when it comes to the Word of God.

We need to be nourished by the sound doctrine of Scripture so we can utilize Scripture as we share the gospel of hope with the lost.

**“Repent therefore, and turn back,
that your sins may be blotted out.”**

Acts 3:19

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sunday School Lessons

By Bryan D. Gill, D.Min.

Director of the Office of Faith, Learning and Vocation, Samford University



For June 16

GOD'S PROMISE OF BLESSING Genesis 12:1-3; 15:5-7; 17:7-11

“Father Abraham had many sons, and many sons had Father Abraham. I am one of them and so are you, so let’s just praise the Lord!” Dutch songwriter Pierre Kartner wrote that catchy children’s tune in 1971.

I cannot read Genesis 12 without it getting stuck in my head. I must admit that as a child I was confused as to how I was one of his sons; I already had a daddy. But as I grew in understanding of Scripture, I have learned the significance of this fun song.

God’s covenant with Abram brings blessing to all of us. (12:1-3)

When I read Genesis 12, these two things stick out to me: God blesses Abram, and He tells him he will be a blessing.

God did not intend for Abram to simply receive the blessing He bestowed upon him. God intended and knew that by being blessed, Abram would bless others.

I fear that we often confuse the purpose of blessings. Blessings are not able to be earned, nor are they to be hoarded. God blesses those He wants to bless. While we refer to Abraham’s descendants as God’s chosen people, they did nothing to deserve this honor.

In fact, time and time again, they disgraced this title by taking the Lord’s name in vain, acting out of selfish desires and withholding good from others. They were judged accordingly.

Blessings are not to be hoarded and used for our own selfish desires but should be used to bless others.

God’s promises call for us to trust Him and take Him at His Word. (15:5-7)

When I think of the gospel, some lyrics from “Sometimes by Step,” a song by Rich Mullins, come to mind.

“Sometimes I think of Abra-

ham/ How one star he saw had been lit for me.”

When my family and I go camping, we like to look up at the stars. On a clear night away from city lights, the sheer number of visible stars is overwhelming.

I imagine our sense of being overwhelmed pales in comparison to Abram’s when God told him his offspring would be more numerous than the stars.

Reflecting on the song “Father Abraham,” the only way this song and the passage in Genesis make sense is through Jesus. While I am not Jewish, Jesus allows us access to this blessing through His death, burial and resurrection.

Paul writes in Romans 1:16 that salvation is first for the Jew and then the Gentile. Because of Jesus I am an offspring of Abraham, and you can be one too.

God calls His people to be distinct. (17:7-11)

God has always set His people apart from their culture. He gave them a land of their own before they were a nation, delivered them from Egypt in the cover of night, explained how their God is the only true God in a world of polytheism, established dietary restrictions in a world of gluttony and instituted circumcision.

But why does God desire for His people to be different?

When God told Abraham he would be circumcised, God was testing Abraham’s obedience once again. Every time God sets His people apart, He is demanding their obedience.

We may not understand all the details and all of God’s reasons, but when we obey God, we express our love to God.

As Jesus reminds us in the Book of John, “If you love Me, you will keep My commands” (John 14:15).

God calls us to obedience in the same way He called Abraham, so we will submit to Him and depend on Him for all our needs as a people set apart for His purposes.

For June 23

GOD'S PROMISE TO MAKE A HOLY NATION Exodus 19:1-8

In families with multiple children, there seems to be one child who is a rule follower and one who views rules as mere suggestions. This is true for my children. I love them both dearly, equally and unconditionally, but the quality of our time together and the benefits of our fellowship together depends on how well they obey their mother and me.

Nothing they can do will change my relationship with them; they will always be my children. But our fellowship is affected by their obedience or disobedience. I desire their obedience because I desire unbroken fellowship with them.

Remembering what God has graciously done. (1-4)

Reflection has become more important in my life with every passing year. It helps me to accurately recognize God’s faithfulness in my life — especially in uncertain days.

Reflection on the major events in my life helps me to see my place in God’s story. I’m reminded of the Hebrew word “zakar,” meaning “to remember” (Gen. 9:15-16; Ex. 2:24, 6:5; Lev. 26:42, 45; Pss. 105:8, 105:42, 106:45; Ezek. 16:60). Every time you see this word in the Old Testament, it is a remembering accompanied by an action. Often, God is the one remembering and then acting, but there are times when God calls his people to remember.

This concept of “zakar” is what God is calling the Israelites to do here when He reminds them of what He did for them in Egypt. Because of what God did, their response should be action and obedience.

God called the Israelites to be set apart for His purposes and glory. (5-6)

When I tell my children to do something or to refrain from doing something, it is because I want

the best for them.

However, my children often see my instruction as oppression and control. If they could only understand that I am on their side and want them to prosper, they might obey what I ask of them.

I think about this often when I think about the commands of God. God did not give the Israelites a list of rules to oppress them, but to help them to prosper — to become a priestly nation.

“If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession.”

Exodus 19:5

When God made a covenant, He always upheld His part of the agreement. Israel was God’s chosen people because He chose them, not because of anything

they did or would do.

If the validity of the covenant was dependent on the actions of the Israelites, they would have never stood a chance to become a nation. While their disobedience didn’t affect God’s part of the covenant, it did negatively affect the benefits of the covenant and their fellowship with God.

God’s covenant with the people was conditioned on their obedience. (7-8)

Living in the 21st century, we have a unique perspective on Exodus 19:8.

We see the whole picture and know what happens after the Israelites said, “We will do all that the Lord has spoken.”

Time and time again, the Israelites disobeyed the Lord. They continued to break each and every commandment, proving their unworthiness of being called God’s chosen people.

However, God was unwavering in keeping His promises to them, for it was this very disobedience that confirmed their need for Jesus, as Paul writes in Romans 10:3-4.

The Israelites were not able to keep the law and so God, never breaking His covenant, sent Jesus to save the world so that we may live under mercy and grace and not the law.

WORD search

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| ASSEMBLY | ISRAELITES | QUAKE |
| BASE | JOURNEY | SMOKE |
| BORDERS | KINGDOM | SPEAK |
| BOUNDARIES | LIGHTNING | STAND |
| CLOUD | MOSES | STONE |
| COMMANDMENTS | MOUNT SINAI | SUMMIT |
| COVENANT | MOUNTAIN | THUNDER |
| DESERT | OBEDIENCE | TREMBLING |
| FEAR | PEOPLE | TRUMPET |
| FEET | PRIESTS | VOICE |
| HOLY NATION | PROMISE | |

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Now if you will carefully listen to Me and keep My covenant, you will be My own possession out of all the peoples, although the whole earth is Mine, and you will be My kingdom of priests and My holy nation.

EXODUS 19:5-6A

You Gotta' Hear This!



Finding humor in the everyday moments

Decoration Day, a dying tradition

We arrived at the little country church for my husband to begin his first pastorate. Not only was the parking lot filled, but cars also lined the road for a distance. His nervousness increased, but it also bolstered his ego.

He faced great disappointment when very few people were inside the church. The church's one deacon explained to him it was the second Sunday in May, the date set aside for the church's Decoration Day. The cemetery was filled with people placing flowers on loved ones' graves and making a time for reunion with people they only saw once a year.

I was well aware of what Decoration Day was, for the first Sunday in May was the date set aside for the little church where I grew up. My family proudly looked forward to it each year. Mother made two new spring dresses for me and my two sisters — one for Easter and one for Decoration Day — and she made bouquets for the graves. Not only were the dead memorialized by placing flowers on the graves, but we also enjoyed a big covered dish meal outside.

To Mother's dismay, I went into labor with our first child on the first Sunday in May. She still went on to Decoration and showed up at the hospital in her decoration finery with time to spare.

As years went by, the "dinner on the ground" was discontinued; the crowds diminished. Many pastors chided people for missing service at their church to go to Decora-

tion Day. One pastor accused his congregation of "worshipping the dead," but to some, this was a holy holiday, so his admonishment was not well received.

Changing times

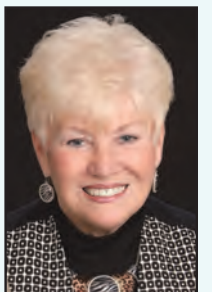
Because this was a special day of respect for my parents, I still make my trek to take flowers where they are buried. I would also see people I hadn't seen in a long time — that is until this year. No one was in the cemetery when I was.

Some traditions die with time, and I believe Decoration Day is on a respirator. This may be because many realize the person is with Jesus in heaven, or maybe people are so caught up in their own lives that they rarely think of the ones who have passed. Although we are not to "worship the dead," it is important that we remember those who have gone on before us and contributed to our heritage.

Even Joshua realized memorials were important: "When your children ask ... What mean ye by these stones? ... these stones shall be for a memorial forever" (Josh. 4:6-7).

MEET THE AUTHOR

Barbara Eubanks of Albertville is an author, conference speaker, Christian humorist and retired English teacher. She is the widow of Baptist pastor Steve Eubanks.



MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs Frontz

The Alabama Baptist

‘Laced through everything’: Author turns life lessons of God’s grace into book

Ruth Chou Simons grew up in a Southern Baptist church and attended a Southern Baptist seminary, but it wasn’t until the life she had planned was broken and changed that God’s purpose for her life became clear.

Those experiences led the author, artist and founder of GraceLaced to write her latest book, “Now and Not Yet: Pressing In When You’re Waiting, Wanting and Restless for More.”

“Everything you see that seems to be flourishing in my life right now was born out of a time that seemed like a total dead end, where it was a loss of our ministry dream. It was a loss of our vocational dream. It was a time where I would say that my ‘right now’ at that time seemed like a wasted season of my life,” she said.

God at work

“[I want others] to understand that even if they don’t like the ‘right now’ they’re facing that God is purposeful. God is at work, and He doesn’t waste any seasons. Some of the very best ways that God redeems His story comes out of times where you’re very hidden and possibly looking like the oppo-



Photo courtesy of Meshali Mitchell

RUTH CHOU SIMONS

site of success,” Simons said.

Simons is a self-proclaimed over-achiever who spent a lot of time and energy trying to find worth and purpose through collecting accolades.

This focus on herself led to her becoming utterly exhausted. Simons got married, started having children, was in full-time ministry with her husband and was ministering to the women in their church.

“That meant a lot of things that I thought God had given me passion for were going to be wasted or set aside or forgotten. It felt like the opposite of succeeding or achieving or living my best life. That was the season that I started the GraceLaced blog with the tagline ‘Finding Grace in the Everyday,’” she said.

‘Now and not yet’ lesson

When starting this blog 16 years ago, Simons had no desire for recognition; she simply prayed she could show the small ways that the gospel mattered in everyday life.

“It wasn’t overnight. It wasn’t that everything just suddenly opened up and opportunities came left and right. I wrote for years without anything stirring, without it being some huge impact in the Christian inspirational world,” Simons said.

Combining art

By the time she had her sixth son, her oldest children could help more. She was able to write more and began painting again. She started combining her art with the insights she was learning. In 2013, she opened an online shop for her artwork.

“When I look back at those 10 years, I can still testify to a ‘now and not yet’ lesson. Even when your dreams do come true, you can see where you have not yet arrived.

“The lesson is that it doesn’t matter where you are. Even when you get to whatever ‘there’ is, you still have to reckon with the fact that on this side of heaven, we’re meant to walk with God, not ahead of Him,” she said.

Before getting to this point of peace, she went through a lot of twists and turns. She and her husband were part of founding a school they really loved. Her husband was a passionate headmaster and imagined that he would be in that position the rest of his life.

After seven years, due to some “misalignment in decision-making” by other leaders at the school, they chose to step away, to relinquish what they wanted to do and allow the Lord to work out what wasn’t right.

They not only lost a lifelong dream but the career that provided for their needs. They wanted to run away due to potential backlash from being misrepresented.

It was a long, drawn-out season of pain.

“I have this expression that I say — ‘You don’t have to be blooming to be growing’ — born out of a time when I looked at my neighbor’s garden and said, ‘Why does it seem like their flowers always grow well?’ It’s really easy to think that we can measure what God’s doing by the blooms in our lives.

“That was the season that taught me that God was growing us; God was anchoring us; God was humbling us. That was actually how it works — Him working all things for good.”

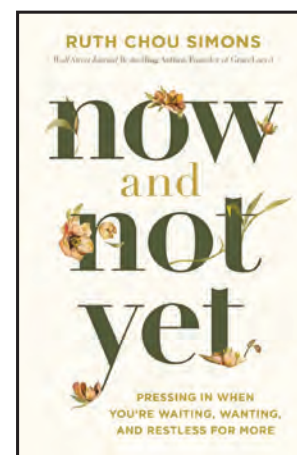
Trusting God

“Maybe we thought on the other side of this, we could just be in a better place, but the ‘now’ was that God wanted us to press in and trust Him and believe Him even when everything looked like it was falling apart for us. However, we can press in and be faithful right now because of the ‘not yet’ already promised and fulfilled in Christ.

“For us in our everyday life, even when it doesn’t look like it’s ever going to work out ... God is actually using it for our good.

“We just can’t always see it,” she noted. “God’s grace is laced through everything.”

Go to GraceLaced.com to find out more about Simons’ artwork and her books.



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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