

The Alabama Baptist

Toll free 800-803-5201
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September 5, 2024

Vol. 189, No. 18
Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



Photo by Mark Reis

Zion Redington (right) drives during a wheelchair rugby game at the 2023 Parapan American Games in Santiago, Chile, in November.

‘Go, Zion, go!’

Alabama teen to play wheelchair rugby for Team USA in Paralympic Games

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Heather Redington-Whitlock said her son Zion’s adoption was the fastest adoption she’s ever heard of.

Six months from the moment she saw his picture on a list of waiting children in China, she had him in her arms. That was just after the 2008 Paralympic Games in Beijing.

“He was in a welfare institution, and the doctor there said to me, ‘There is a light upon your child,’” Redington-Whitlock said of her then-2-year-old son. “It’s pretty cool, because I feel like that has always continued to be — the Holy Spirit just ministering through Zion and to Zion.”

Zion was born with a genetic deficiency called ectrodactyly — he had one finger on each hand, one

small toe on each foot and was missing some of the palms of his hands. At age six, they decided to amputate his feet so he could have more mobility.

‘Another language’

“He kept breaking each toe; we would take off one cast and put on another one,” Redington-Whitlock said.

She was no stranger to medical

needs — over the years, she’s fostered more than 40 children facing physical challenges. But Zion was her first amputee.

“It was almost like learning another language,” she said. “I had to become fluent in prosthetics and adaptive sports.”

But she did, and Zion became proficient in living out that language too — this week, he will play

(See ‘Zion,’ page 12)

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SCAN ME

Alabama WMU launches new collegiate partnership during Connect weekend

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

“Candace McIntosh said she’s always had a heart for teens and young adults. That’s only grown as she’s listened to Baptist campus ministers talk about what God has been doing recently at colleges and universities around the state.

“I’ve loved to listen to them share the stories of people who have come to know the Lord out of hard situations and others who have found their footing in service to the Lord while in college,” said McIntosh, executive director of Alabama Woman’s Missionary Union.

As she listened, she felt a burden that Alabama WMU should support Baptist campus ministers with encouragement and prayer.

So at Connect, a leadership training conference held Aug. 2–3 at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center, Alabama WMU launched that new partnership.

“We continue to have our partnership with Pakistan; we continue to pray for them,” McIntosh said. “I just also felt compelled that we come alongside our campus ministers and our office of collegiate and student ministries (at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions).”

The effort is called Cultivate, and it will involve a once-a-week prayer



Photo by Tiffany Roy/Mae Joy Creative

Campus ministers (l to r) Kennedi Kruger of Auburn University, Jacob Freeman of the University of Montevallo and Beth Gardner of the University of South Alabama help Alabama WMU launch Cultivate, a partnership with the SBOM office of collegiate and student ministries.

focus along with encouraging people to “adopt” one of the state’s Baptist campus ministers.

Undergirded in prayer

“Something that hit me as we were preparing for this — we would never dream of sending our international missionaries or North American missionaries to the field without undergirding them in prayer, so we need to do it for our state missionaries as well who are on the front lines,” McIntosh said.

Andrea Lennon, women’s ministry specialist for Arkansas Baptists, led Bible study for Connect, and Gordon Fort of the International Mission Board shared updates from the missions field. A variety of breakout sessions offering leadership training and spiritual enrichment were held, and 15 girls in grades 9–12 participated in Emerging Leaders.

For more information about Connect, visit alabamawmu.org/connect. For more information about Cultivate, visit alabamawmu.org/bcm.

James Preachers honored for dedicated service

Leaders of the Coffee County Baptist Association and Samford University’s Ministry Training Institute honored James Preachers for his 48 years of service to MTI through the association during a special presentation Aug. 19.

Kevin Blackwell, executive director of MTI and assistant to the president for church relations at Samford, was on hand to present Preachers with Samford’s special Bell Tower Award signed by Beck A. Taylor, Samford president.

Also presenting Preachers a certificate of appreciation was Jud Waldrop, Coffee Association’s director of missions, who now oversees the association’s MTI site.

“Coffee Association’s involvement



Photo courtesy of Jud Waldrop

Jud Waldrop (left) and John Granger (right), current and previous director of missions for Coffee County Baptist Association, respectively, help celebrate and honor James Preachers on Aug. 19.

with Samford’s MTI flourished under the leadership of James Preachers,” Waldrop said, noting Preachers not only led the effort there but also

taught classes throughout the years.

“Many bivocational pastors have studied under him over the years,” Waldrop noted. “James remains passionate about seeing men and women dive deeper into the Word of God and prepare for ministry, whether as a pastor, Sunday School teacher, church staff member or just someone wanting to know more.”

The Aug. 19 celebration also marked the official relaunch of Coffee Association’s partnership with MTI, in which Preachers plans to now participate as a student.

For more information about MTI (locations, class offerings, class fees, etc.), visit samford.edu/programs/ministry-training-institute or call 205-726-4055. (TAB)

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

(ISSN 0738-7741; USPS 011-080)
© The Alabama Baptist, Inc.

is published every other week by The Alabama Baptist, Inc., at 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209. Phone: 205-870-4720. Statewide phone: 800-803-5201.

Website: www.thealabamabaptist.org

Email: news@thealabamabaptist.org or subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org

Periodicals postage paid at Baton Rouge, La.

ANNUAL TAB SUBSCRIPTION RATES
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Group Rate per subscriber per year — \$16.25

Individual — \$34.95 per year (26 issues)

JENNIFER DAVIS RASH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.



Rashional Thoughts

By Jennifer Davis Rash
President and Editor-in-Chief

 jrash@thealabamabaptist.org

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

I choose faith; I choose hope; I choose love

What do you choose? I choose faith, hope and love. I also choose joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and faithfulness.

I want to choose self-discipline too, but I'm still working on attaining proper rhythms and routines in order to truly be able to claim it.

Some of the other choices have their moments as well. I can promise it's not always rainbows and roses.

However, the Lord always provides and leads me back when I veer off course.

God provides

It might be through the awareness of a friend who notices my heart is heavy and my eyes aren't as bright.

It could be a simple call, text or email merely noting appreciation or affirmation — or to alert me to some rough edges I need to polish.

Sometimes it's by way of a random conversation or maybe an article, book or blog post.

Many times, it's through the moments of meditation on His Word or after a tug-of-war season of ongoing prayer and conversation with the Lord.

Almost always, it requires pulling back for a moment, listening rather than talking and recentering with proper perspective.

Life on this side of heaven is filled with difficulties, heartaches, frustrations — and sometimes excruciatingly painful dashed dreams.

Determining to choose faith, hope, love, joy, etc., doesn't immunize us against pain, but it does keep the Savior close to our hearts and provides a strength that can only come from Him.

"Day by day, that's how we do it," a dear friend shared with me recently. Her words surface for me every time I'm tempted to worry about a future situation or circle back to a disappointment from the past.

Her confidence in the strategy is evidence of her reliance on the Lord and reminds me how the Bible provides solid affirmation that God will provide.

It's not always the path we prefer or in the way we want (read about the Israelites and their daily manna in Exodus 16), but the provision is available to us if we keep our eyes on Him.

Making the choice

The reality is that all of us who truly know Jesus as Lord and Savior most likely understand these concepts. The question is, are we living them out?

Do we choose to spend our time grumbling in general and pointing out all that's wrong on every level? Are we contributing to the fear, frustration and

hopelessness invading more and more people every day?

Or are we able to be real with ourselves and those around us, acknowledging the painful moments while also looking desperately for where the Lord is working and giving Him the glory He deserves?

Are we allowing the Lord to shine through our difficulties and pain? Are we pointing others to Jesus through faith, hope and love?

We all are making a difference in one way or another. Which way do you choose?

Seeking words of wisdom out of Isaiah

My recent Scripture reading has me in Isaiah, and the Lord has been surfacing new insights as well as previous ways He used this book in my life.

For instance, the Scripture I claimed for my stint on the missions field back in the 90s was Isaiah 58:11: "The Lord will guide you always; He will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-

watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail."

Currently, I'm drawn to chapters 8 through 12 and am wondering if any of you have, or know of, writings on this section of Isaiah?

We would love to consider publishing sermon outlines, research articles or other blog posts from the passage.

Email us at news@thealabamabaptist.org or call 800-803-5201 for more details.

—JDR

Your Voice



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

First person: Will we know one another in heaven?

By Adam B. Dooley
Baptist and Reflector

Do you have someone you hope to meet again in heaven?

Several friends and loved ones come to mind as I think about the place Jesus referred to as Paradise. Great-grandparents, grandparents, church members and a childhood hero that I admired are just a few of the friendly faces I cannot wait to see in eternity. The Puritan Richard Baxter, when speaking of heaven, remarked, “it much sweetens the thoughts of that place to me that there are such a multitude of my most dear and precious friends in Christ (who are there).” Indeed.

But will we remember our closest friends in heaven?

Will we still know one another?

A quick survey of biblical literature answers these questions with a resounding YES!

Consider, for example, that after

Jesus’ resurrection from the dead all the disciples recognized Him (John 21:1–14). The man some have called Doubting Thomas was able to touch the wounds of the Lord after He was raised from the dead (John 20:24–29). On the Mount of Transfiguration, those closest to Jesus identified that Moses and Elijah were with the Lord (Luke 9:29–33). Furthermore, our forecasted gathering with God celebrates our reunion with fellow Christ followers as well. After telling us that the dead will rise first at the coming of the Lord (1 Thess. 4:16), the Apostle Paul explains that “we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them” (1 Thess. 4:17).

An expression

Clearly, it is scriptural and appropriate for us to look forward to seeing the people we love again. We are even told to “comfort one another with these words”

(1 Thess. 4:18). The blessing of our friendships doesn’t compete with the joy we will have in God, but it is an expression of it.

From here, more specific questions arise. For instance, will husbands and wives remain married in heaven? This question is as old as the Bible itself. On one occasion (Matt. 22:23–30), the Sadducees come to Jesus with a hypothetical question about a woman who had seven husbands who died. “In the resurrection,” they asked, “whose wife of the seven will she be” (Matt. 22:28)? Jesus answered, “You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels in heaven” (Matt. 22:29–30).

People won’t be married to one another in heaven because God created marriage as a symbol of the relationship between Christ and the church. On this earth, husbands should depict a Christ-figure in the home through their sacrificial, servant leadership. In a similar way, wives should function as a picture of the church through their godly submission and support (Eph. 5:22–33). When our union with Christ is complete, the need for the symbol of marriage will disappear. This does not mean, however, that husbands and wives will have no recollection of their earthly marriages, nor that they will not remain close in heaven. In fact, without the hindrance of sin our current relationships will only im-

prove when we meet the Lord.

Similar principles apply to our familial relationships. We will remember our kinfolk in heaven, as well as our past friendships, but the number of our meaningful interactions will increase astronomically. Why? Because individual families will be replaced with one big family, and limited friendships will give way to universal friendships.

But how can we be sure?

On one occasion Jesus identified those who hear the word of God and do it as His mother and brothers (Luke 8:19–21). Another time Jesus promised brothers, sisters, mothers and children to anyone who sacrificed to follow Him (Mark 10:29–30). In other words, if you lack a family on this earth, God will give you one in eternity. If you enjoy your family now, He will make it even bigger one day!

Eternal bodies

Ever wondered how old our bodies will be when we get to heaven? Years ago, while pastoring in Chattanooga, I had a member of our church who was 107 years old. She said to me once, “Pastor, if God will just give me a 90-year-old body, I’ll be happy with that!”

Unfortunately, the Bible doesn’t answer this particular question. Because physical death is caused by sin, though, I tend to believe that our eternal bodies will mirror our peak physical existence. Theologian Jonathan Edwards once opined, “The heavenly inhabitants ... remain in eternal youth.”



DOOLEY

Letters to the Editor

Well, you nailed it again! What pragmatic perspectives you set forth about and within the educational arena with your Rashional Thoughts editorial in the Aug. 22 edition of The Alabama Baptist — “Our school teachers need us, and even the smallest effort helps.”

The dynamic angles from which you evaluate and instill helpful ideologies toward enhancing positive outcomes are

arresting, to say the least. If only a handful of readers would adopt these guidelines, your Rashional Thoughts pitch would yield outcomes which could positively startle both teachers and students. Thanks for another compassionate contribution to the socio-academic chaos which could thereby be somewhat mitigated.

Morris Murray Jr.
Jasper, Alabama

“Part of what it means to be a grandparent is making memories with grandkids when you can.”

RICHARD BLACKABY

Author and Bible teacher

“I believe if we have leaders who are experts and who are people of integrity, that’s the way we can be salt and light in society,” said **Rostyslav Semikov**, a Ukraine-born Houston Baptist layman, who is seeking to help his homeland rebuild its health care system by offering young Ukrainian medical professionals continuing education opportunities in the United States.

“It’s not that I’m trying to fix them,” said Big Train pitching coach **Craig Lopez**, who noted his purpose as a coach reaches far beyond the baseball field. “I have been gifted to look at them and try to get their body to work the best that it can and ... in the last seven years, teaching them the inside-outs of what it means to be a man in today’s society, and baseball is just my means of being able to do it.

“I’m going to be intentional to let people know that they are loved by Christ,” he also noted. “That’s my purpose: to know His love and share it from the inside out.”

“Satan left and Jesus entered into my body,” said **Cedric Davis**, an inmate at Bossier Parish Maximum Facility in Plain Dealing, Louisiana. The 45 year old — convicted for simple burglary — shared how he gained a permanent reprieve from a spiritual death sentence through choosing to follow Jesus Christ.

“I believe that every person on this earth is called by God and has a job to fill,” said **Jack Tennison**, who has built more than 6,000 pieces of furniture for ministries from Texas to Canada to Cuba, but at age 92 he’s now lost count. Still, he and others working with him keep building. He wants to help people “get on the tracks” to do whatever God calls them to do, whether or not it’s woodworking.

“What was wild in our upbringing is, if the Lord told [our father] to plant another church, they didn’t have the whole salary thing figured out,” said **Caleb Ward**, lead vocals for Consumed by Fire. “They just had faith. They were constantly, in our lives growing up, the ‘what if?’ We would think that XYZ is going to work out financially but we didn’t know. We would leap, and time after time, we would watch God come through.”

Pastors, an important part of caring for grieving people in your church is your ability and willingness to connect to your own sadness

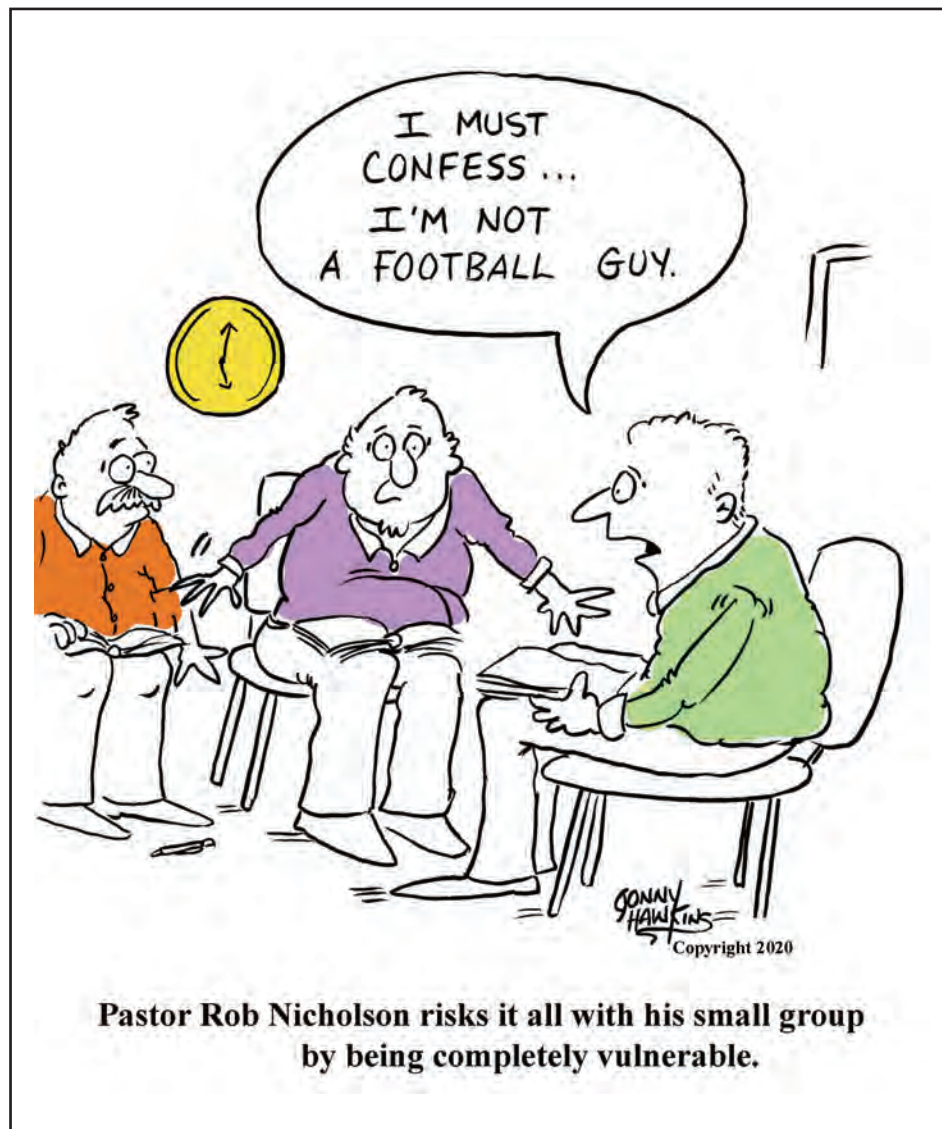
and grief. Only then can we “weep with those who weep.” We don’t fix people’s grief, but enter into it with them. That is true empathy.

Brian Croft
@PastorCroft on X

Sorrow and celebration can co-exist. In one single day together. One month together. One season together.

So let yourself laugh today. Let yourself cry today. Let yourself enjoy trying something new. And let yourself sit with a memory of something you miss.

Lysa TerKeurst
@LysaTerKeurst on X



Pastor Rob Nicholson risks it all with his small group by being completely vulnerable.

Producer prays hearts are ignited

By **Tracy Riggs Frontz**
The Alabama Baptist

We have 400,000 churches in America. There are 100,000 children waiting to be adopted.

“The courts have already determined these children are not safe (in their homes of origin), and they’re just sitting in the system waiting for someone to step forward,” said **Rebekah Weigel**, writer and producer for the film “Sound of Hope: The Story of Possum Trot.”

“We could so easily clear out the foster system. It’s so doable,” Weigel said.

“Our prayer is that this film ignites the hearts of believers to step out in faith and obedience as (members of) Bennett Chapel did and bring these children into loving families.”

“Sound of Hope: The Story of Possum Trot” isn’t simply a film that Weigel and her husband, Joshua, wanted to make because it was inspirational or an interesting true story.

They are living it.

Even though they had personal experience with foster care and adoption, they moved their family from Los Angeles to deep east Texas and started going to church at Bennett Chapel and fellowshiping with them and the community.

As a bonus, because the funding was primarily through donations, they are able to give back most of the profits to help kids and families in crisis.

“What drew me to this story was how they did it together,” Weigel said.

“I have a deep desire to see the Church ... bearing each other’s burdens. I think we’ve lost some of that.

“My hope is that not only does this movie eliminate the foster care crisis, but it also inspires people and churches to have deeper and stronger community.”

3 stories you should know



Photo courtesy of Daily Mountain Eagle

Jasper recently held a dedication for Alabama's seventh Safe Haven Baby Box. Pastor Andy Frazier (second from right) of First Baptist Church Jasper offered the blessing over the new box, which is downtown at Jasper Fire Department's Station 1 on 18th Street East. Parents can anonymously and safely leave an infant they are unable or unwilling to care for. Across the country there are more than 250 Safe Haven Baby Box locations, including seven in Alabama.

Gulf State Park pier reopens after repairs

The pier at Gulf State Park is now open after a \$13.6 million restoration project that started in November.

A 200-foot section of the pier was destroyed by Hurricane Sally in 2020, right after an extensive renovation, according to the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

Bids to repair the damage were higher than expected and there was an extensive process to get federal permits for the renovations, the department said.

"We are thrilled to have the pier open to the public again. It's been a long journey to get to this point, and we appreciate the support and patience given to us as the renovation work took place," said Chris Blankenship, Alabama DCNR commissioner. (Alabama Daily News)

New nonprofit connects refugees with resources

Refugee families in Alabama are finding homes and connecting with local churches through a new nonprofit resettlement organization.

Birmingham Cross Cultural Connections was born out of English as a Second Language classes at The Church at Brook Hills. The organization walks alongside refugees as they start a new life in the U.S.

In August, BCCC received four refugee families and helped get them set up in new homes. As an affiliate of World Relief, a global Christian humanitarian organization, BCCC will resettle 120 individuals between now and December 2025.

Katherine Woods, BCCC executive director, said the organization's mission is to see all nationalities flourish here "while finding and living out God's good design for their lives." (Grace Thornton)

Persecuted church

Nearly 70 Nigerian Christians killed, others missing following attacks

ABUJA, Nigeria — Nearly 70 individuals are dead following attacks on two predominantly Christian villages in Nigeria's Benue State.

Eighteen Christians were murdered in a July 19 raid upon Mbacher village. In an Aug. 8 attack on Ayati village, at least 50 Christians were killed. Christian Daily International and Morning Star News reported that 30 bodies were recovered, but officials think others may have been taken elsewhere to be slain. Sources told the news services that a criminal gang joined the Fulani in the Ayati attack.

The deaths are part of ongoing violence in Nigeria that often targets Christian communities. Nigeria is the world leader for the number of believers kidnapped or killed for their faith.

Barnabas Aid attributes the violence to a number of possible factors, including ongoing resentment over Western colonialism in Africa and a desire by some in the country to preserve African traditional religions. The global aid agency says Nigerian Christians may be treated with distrust and suspicion for their supposed links to the West.

Father burns daughter for putting faith in Jesus Christ

KAMPALA, Uganda — Relatives of a Ugandan woman bound and beat her, and her father inflicted burns upon her a week after she put

faith in Jesus Christ, Morning Star News reported.

Naasike Maliyati, 19, of Nampologoma in Butaleja District, put faith in Jesus Christ at an evangelistic crusade July 15 in Lwangoli in Mbale District. According to Morning Star News, she told her sister about the conversion, and her sister informed their father.

On July 21, Maliyati came home from a church service to find her father and uncles angry with her.

After the group bound and beat her, her father burned her with a flat iron and hot water for leaving Islam, Maliyati told Morning Star. She was left near the Namatala River.

A Christian passerby heard Maliyati crying out to Jesus. The passerby found her, transported her to a clinic and paid \$8 (30,000 shillings) for her to be admitted for treatment.



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Alabama news

AUTAUGA ASSOCIATION

▶ **White Pond Baptist Church, Marbury**, will celebrate homecoming Sept. 22. The event begins at 10 a.m. with a concert by gospel quartet Trusting Grace. The 11 a.m. service will feature guest speaker Mel Johnson, who is lead mission strategist for Autauga Association. Dinner on the grounds to follow. Donnie Burns is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

▶ **Jody Baker** is retiring as minister of education and administration of **Hope Community Church (formerly McElwain Baptist Church), Birmingham**, after more than 43 years of ministry. A celebration dinner will be held in her honor Nov. 9, 6 p.m., at Marriott Birmingham. Tickets are available online: hopebhm.org/legacy; register by Oct. 15. Proceeds will be used to provide a retirement gift and fund the track restoration at McElwain Park in Baker's honor. More on Baker's ministry service through the years will follow the event.

▶ **Lakeside Baptist Church, Birmingham**, will present Gospel Family Reunion, Sept. 15 at 5 p.m. The event will feature southern gospel Gaither-style music sung by Lakeside members. Greg Corbin is pastor.

▶ **NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville**, is hosting humorist and columnist for The Alabama Baptist Debbie Childers in a community event Sept. 22 at 6 p.m. For more information on "Life, Laugh, Love: Remember Who You Belong To" or to register, visit nponline.org, email rondiewilks@me.com or call 205-937-2908. Bill Wilks is pastor.

BLOUNT ASSOCIATION

▶ **Pleasant View Missionary Baptist Church, Holly Pond**, recently hosted the singing group Children of the Promise. Earl Harper is pastor.

CAREY ASSOCIATION

▶ **Clairmont Springs Baptist Church, Talladega**, celebrated its 150th anniversary Aug. 11, beginning with a concert by Promised Land southern gospel trio from Fosters (near Tuscaloosa). Randy Harrelson, a former pastor, was the guest preacher. Special presentations were given by Richie Farrow (right), associational missionary, and Wendy Westerhouse (left), executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Nick Jordan (center), deacon chair, received the presentations on behalf of the church.



Photo courtesy of Donna Farrow

▶ **Mellow Valley Baptist Church, Cragford**, celebrated its 125th anniversary Aug. 4. The guest preacher was Randy Harrelson and a special concert was provided by ReSound quartet from Red Bay. Richie Farrow, associational missionary for Carey Baptist Association, and Wendy Westerhouse, executive director of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, both made special presentations. Bud Jordan (left), the oldest deacon is pictured accepting the plaque from Westerhouse. The celebration included lunch and ended with singing.



Photo courtesy of Judith Jordan

COLBERT-LAUDERDALE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Barry Fleming** is the new pastor of **York Bluff Baptist Church, Sheffield**. He has served churches in Virginia, West Virginia and Alabama. Most recently Fleming served as transitional pastor of Parkview Baptist Church, Eufaula. He attended Liberty University and New Orleans Seminary. He and his wife, Sun, have two daughters and eight grandchildren.



Photo courtesy of Andy Bumpus

▶ **Jeremy Sanderson** is the new pastor of **Westside Baptist Church, Tuscumbia**, where he began his ministry in 2010 as student minister and then minister of education. He previously served as pastor of Hampton Heights Baptist Church, Tuscumbia, and First Baptist Church Littleville, near Russellville. Sanderson is the district manager of the Foodland stores in the Shoals area, where he has been employed for more than 25 years. He and his wife, Courtney, have one son.



Photo courtesy of Jeremy Sanderson

COVINGTON ASSOCIATION

▶ **Babbie Baptist Church, Andalusia**, will celebrate homecoming and its 75th anniversary Sept. 8, 10:40 a.m. with guest speaker Gary Miller. Dwayne Seay is pastor.

ELMORE ASSOCIATION

▶ **Thelma Baptist Church, Wetumpka**, will host "Seasons: Growing Deeper with God" on Sept. 27, 6-9 p.m., and Sept. 28, 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m. The conference is for adults in their 20s and 30s, and food is provided. To find out more information about costs and to register, visit tlfeonline.com/seasons. Doug Chappelle is pastor.

MADISON ASSOCIATION

▶ **Sherwood Baptist Church, Huntsville**, will celebrate its 60th anniversary Sept. 22, 10 a.m., with a special service followed by a fellowship lunch. Craig Carlisle, president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention and director of missions for Etowah Baptist Association, is the guest speaker. RSVP for lunch: info@sherwoodbaptist.org or 256-837-0731. Robby Boyd is pastor.

MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION

▶ **Jeremy Smalley** is the new pastor of **Eastern Hills Baptist Church, Montgomery**. He previously served as pastor of First Baptist Church Bayou La Batre, minister to students at FBC Arab and interim youth minister for FBC Hartselle.

Smalley served in a variety of committee roles for Mobile Baptist Association and Marshall Baptist Association; chapel preacher for Mobile Rescue Mission; board member for Northeast Alabama Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Marshall County; and team chaplain for the Arab High School football team. He also served a stint on the state convention's credentials committee. He holds a master of divinity degree from New Orleans Seminary and a bachelor's degree in religion from Samford University. Smalley and his wife, Amber, have two boys.



Photo courtesy of Jeremy Smalley

MORGAN ASSOCIATION

▶ **Mount Zion Baptist Church, Hartselle**, will host its annual Depot Days Homecoming Singing on Sept. 15, 6 p.m. The event is designed to be a special start to the Hartselle Depot Days festival and features hymns, southern gospel and contemporary worship with musicians from many area churches leading. A community choir will meet at 4:30 p.m. for rehearsal prior to the service; all are welcome to join. Spencer Bell is pastor.

PICKENS ASSOCIATION

▶ **Bethlehem Baptist Church, Reform**, will hold revival services Sept. 8-11. The first night's service begins at 6 p.m. The remaining services start at 7 p.m. Preachers are Mike Hall, Jeremy Smith, Marvin Fuller and Jordan Lollar (each taking one night, listed in order of when they will preach). Matt Winters will lead music and pianists will be Ricky Morris (first three nights) and Lana Lollar (last night).

▶ **Ethelsville Baptist Church** will celebrate its 200th anniversary Sept. 8, 10:30 a.m. with Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, as the guest speaker. Special music will be provided by Faithful Friends quartet. Richard Trotter is pastor.

University of Alabama baseball's Jonathan Stevens wins top pitching honor on summer league team

With an arsenal of pitches — including a slider called “dangerous” and a “wicked fast ball” — Jonathan Stevens was named Pitcher of the Year this summer by his team, Bethesda Big Train.

Big Train rode a powerful win streak all the way to the championship game of the Cal Ripken Sr. Collegiate Baseball League and won that game 12–3 in July.

Summer stats

In the regular season, Stevens had a 1.42 ERA for the Maryland team. He threw 34 strikeouts and had three wins and a save. In the postseason, he had four more strikeouts.

During the school year, Stevens pitches for the University of Alabama. He attends Calvary Baptist

Church in Tuscaloosa and grew up at Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham.

‘Hard working’

“Jonathan Stevens, wow, just a nice Southern guy who came in and wanted to work, wanted to get better, had a purpose,” said Manager Sal Colangelo, according to the Big Train website. “His purpose was to get a bunch of innings, really pound the strike zone, work on his slider so he can help Alabama win. He came in and he threw 94 to 97 mph every game. He’s extremely hard working and dedicated.”

During an extra-inning win over the Alexandria Aces on July 7, Stevens struck out three straight batters with bases loaded.



Photo courtesy of Bethesda Big Train

Jonathan Stevens pitches for the Bethesda Big Train on July 7 in what was called a “dramatic” extra-innings win. He was named Pitcher of the Year by his summer league team throwing 38 total strikeouts this summer.

He said he was honored to receive the team’s top pitching honor.

‘Great honor’

“Winning pitcher of the year is a great honor and I’m thankful I was se-

lected,” Stevens said. “Just having a lot of in-game reps helped refine my pitching overall. I had great coaches as well who adjusted small things that made a big impact. It was a great experience to be here and have the

opportunity to compete.” After his season with Big Train, he went on to end his summer pitching for the the Bourne Braves as part of the Cape Cod Baseball League in Massachusetts. (The Alabama Baptist)

Faith Moments

8 ways you can impact Generation Alpha

Generation Alpha, born between 2010 and 2024, is poised to become the largest generation in history, with more than 2.8 million children entering the world each week.

As the Church looks to the future, reaching this young generation with the gospel is not just an opportunity — it’s an urgent necessity. In a culture where secular influences are shaping values and beliefs from an increasingly young age, the Church has a unique and critical responsibility to lay a solid spiritual foundation for Generation Alpha.

Investing in their spiritual growth equips them with a moral compass and fosters a deep, lifelong relationship with God. By engaging with them early, the Church can plant seeds of faith

that will guide them throughout their lives, influencing their futures and the future of the Church and society as a whole.

Practical ideas

Here are eight practical ways you can impact Generation Alpha:

1. Pray specifically for God to send children to your church.

Camden Baptist Church had prayer warriors dedicated to asking God to fill their empty nursery. Today, that nursery is overflowing, and they’re praying for more workers.

2. **Value them.** Mike Dawson, former pastor of Central Baptist Church in Decatur, made it a point to stop whatever he was doing to kneel down and engage with children. They matter and showing them they do makes a lasting impression.

3. **Learn their names.** When you interact with children, call them by name. It shows them that they are seen, known and cared for.

4. **Invest in them.** My wife encouraged me to participate in the children’s programs and chaperone trips. Once, I rode my motorcycle to Shocco Springs and gave rides to all the kids whose parents permitted it. Experiences like these build lasting connections.

5. **Pray for them.** Make a list of the children and parents in your church and pray for them regularly. Consider dedicating one day each week specifically to focus on Generation Alpha.

6. **Give the parents a night out.** When our daughter Abigail was young, Rick Lance (executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions) and his wife,

Pam, would babysit Abigail and give us a night

out. Try it. Parents will love it, and you can invest in these young people’s lives. Abigail still cherishes those moments.

7. **Involve children in the service.** Talk to the church’s leadership and encourage the children to be involved in the service. It may be handing out bulletins, reading Bible verses, taking up the offering, etc. From an early age, we want the children to be involved in worship instead of spectators.

8. **Equip parents to disciple their children.** Invest in training the parents to disciple their children. Making disciples must first begin in the home.

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





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6



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DAY

8



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Visit Myers-Mallory.org for downloadable print and video resources, including the full prayer guide and accompanying Week of Prayer videos, the 2024 Missions Study, social media graphics and announcement slides.

Zion Redington loves, serves, sees other people

(continued from page 1) wheelchair rugby for Team USA in the Paralympic Games in Paris. He and the team won gold at the 2023 Parapan American Games in Santiago, Chile, in November.

Zion's father, Mark Whitlock, said when Zion was young, his mother had a "vision to just kind of set Zion on fire and see what happened and let him know that everything he put his mind to was possible."

Zion tried a lot of things — adaptive running, cycling, climbing, field events, swimming, surfing, sled hockey and air rifle, to name a few — and really loved wheelchair basketball.

But one day when he was 9, someone saw him playing basketball and asked if he wanted to try wheelchair rugby. He did, and while he continued playing basketball, he also started playing



Facebook photo

Pastor Matt Mason and members of The Church at Brook Hills pray over Zion Redington on Aug. 18 as he prepared to travel to Paris to compete in the Paralympic Games.

for the Cumberland Quad-Crushers in the Nashville area, where he was coached by Paralympic gold medalist and Wheelchair Rugby Hall of Fame member Eddie Crouch.

Later, when the Quad-Crushers dissolved, Redington-Whitlock started driving him to Lakeshore

Foundation in Birmingham several times a week so he could play on their team, the Lakeshore Demolition.

Gaining skills

By then he'd grown taller and gained skills, and in 2022 at age 15, Zion made the Team USA development team.

Zion said that propelled him to "really want to train and work hard for this and really make it my goal to be on the Paralympic team."

He continued to excel at the game that he described as "high-speed chess," and coaches were beginning to refer to him as "the future of the sport."

At that point, after much prayer, the family decided it was time to move to Birmingham.

And on Aug. 18, the congregation they now call home — The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham — gathered around Zion's family to pray for him as he prepared to travel to Paris.

Pastor Matt Mason thanked God for His calling on Zion's life.

"I know that there have

been many hard days in his life from the early years on, and yet through all the trials, You have made him into such a man of faith, a man of character, a man who loves other people and serves other people and sees them," Mason prayed. "Lord, we pray that that light would shine as he travels to Paris to serve and to compete. ... May he represent You well; may he shine as a light."

Redington-Whitlock said she's seen that happen since the beginning.

"I keep going back to that baby picture," she said. "Zion has been through some hard things, but he has been in the arms of the Lord, and what better place to be. It's been an exciting time as parents to experience that."

For more information about Zion's story, visit goziongo.com.

We are here.

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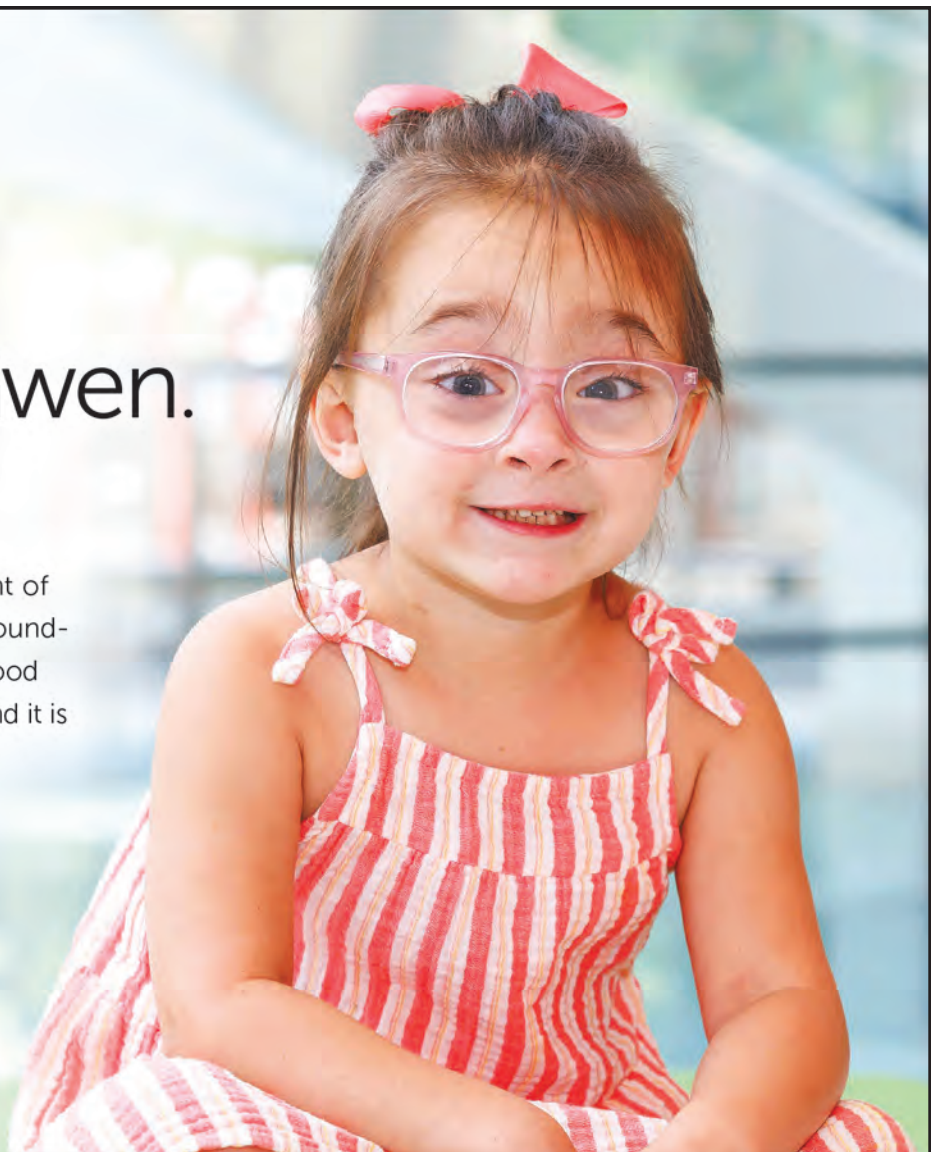
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'NO REGRETS'

College students serve in 17 countries, across U.S. for summer missions

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Lorrie McCarver knew she was interested in missions when she attended a Go Night event in Tuscaloosa last year, but she wasn't sure how to incorporate missions in her life. Then something gave her a push.

"Someone got up and challenged us to not focus on our fears or anxieties but just focus on what the Lord is doing in our life and how much that is needed in someone else's life," said McCarver, a student at the University of Alabama. "I felt very convicted and ... decided I was going to go."

Ample opportunities

She didn't have to look far for a way. One Mission Students, the Alabama Baptist State Board of

Missions' path for sending college students as summer missionaries, had "ample" opportunities, she said.

McCarver ended up serving in North Africa this summer. The experience gave her a new "appreciation for the goodness of the gospel." While there, she and her teammates were able to lead a young girl to faith in Christ.

"If someone is on the fence about going and serving somewhere, I would highly recommend doing it," she said. "I have no regrets. I wish I could still be there."

McCarver was one of 106 college students from Alabama who scattered to serve in 17 countries, 11 states and the District of Columbia this summer, according to Chris Mills, student missions mobilizer for the SBOM.



Photo courtesy of Abbey Colley

UA student Abbey Colley (second from left) and her teammates share the gospel on the streets of Paris this summer. She spent nine weeks doing street evangelism surrounding the Olympics.

They saw 157 people make professions of new faith in Christ.

"We've seen lives that were saved, and we've seen students come back and say 'I was really wrestling with a call to missions, but I'm

going to take some steps to pursue that seriously,'" Mills said. "I'm really encouraged not only by the lives of those they served but the lives of the students that were changed by those experiences, and I'm looking forward to seeing how God uses them to make His name known on their campuses and around the world."

Jordan Katz, a student at the University of North Alabama, spent his summer in Southeast Asia and said through his experience there "the Lord has definitely confirmed a call to full-time missions for me."

While in Southeast Asia, he and his teammates spent time talking with other college students on campuses and in coffee shops and were able to share the gospel more than 70 times.

"Before we left, we were able to start a group of people who were seeking the Lord," Katz said, noting that with the religious climate in that country, "the fact that they were willing to meet and study the Bible was amazing."

Abbey Colley, a UA student, spent nine weeks in Paris serving in a church and doing street evangelism surrounding the Olympics. She met a woman from Congo who was a Christian but had not found a faith commu-

nity in France. Colley shared Scripture with her and connected her with another woman in the local church who spoke her heart language.

"It was a summer I was so glad to experience," she said. "It was out of my comfort zone, but God's strength was made perfect in my weakness."

EDITOR'S NOTE — Some names have been changed for security reasons.

For more information about One Mission Students, visit onemissionstudents.org.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Annual meeting to focus on *DifferenceMakers*

Make plans now to attend The Gathering, our annual family reunion of Alabama Baptists! The State Convention Annual Meeting will be held on Tuesday and Wednesday, November 12-13, at Eastern Shore Baptist Church in Daphne. This year's theme will be DifferenceMakers, based on Acts 4:13.

Highlighting the gathering will be a message Tuesday evening from Jason Allen, president of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri, where he has served since 2012. A native of Mobile, Allen has led the institution to become one of the largest and fastest growing seminaries in North America.

Special music

Preceding Allen's message will be the music of Ram:Corps, a Christ-centered high impact visual brass and percussion ensemble from the University of Mobile. Ram:Corps presents over 100 concerts and ministry events a year both locally and internationally to elevate the university, encourage musicians, evangelize the lost and edify the body of Christ. The Tuesday evening session will also include a time of recognizing missionaries and church planters who serve in Alabama.

Other messages throughout the two-day celebration include the President's Address by Craig Carlisle, director of missions at Etowah Association, Tuesday morning; the Convention Sermon by Ben Bowden, senior pastor of First Baptist Church Enterprise, Wednesday morning; and two DifferenceMakers theme messages from Rob Jackson, director of evangelism and church revitalization at the State Board of Missions, and Albert Williams, pastor of St. James Baptist Church, Dothan.

Messengers will also learn about a Calling Out the Called initiative

in addition to hearing celebratory reports from State Board of Missions and Alabama Baptist entity leaders.

Plan also to stop by the exhibit hall to visit with state missionaries, along with state and SBC entity leaders, and see firsthand how your Cooperative Program giving is making a difference around the world. In addition, cartoonist Joe McKeever will be on hand in the exhibit hall to sketch caricatures of those who stop by.

Messenger information will be mailed to each church by Oct. 1. For more information, including hotel options and a complete schedule as it becomes available, visit alsbom.org/convention.



ALLEN

CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR

Hueytown Baptist Church has an opening for senior pastor. Contact us for additional information at office@hueytownbaptist.com.

PASTOR

Stowers Hill Baptist Church, Attalla, Alabama, is seeking a pastor. Please send resumé to: stowershillbaptist@gmail.com.

PASTOR

Tates Chapel Baptist Church is seeking a full-time pastor. Send resumé to: Tates Chapel Baptist Church, P.O. Box 38, Centre, AL 35960. Email: tateschapeloffice@gmail.com.

PASTOR

Pinckard Baptist Church, Pinckard, Alabama, seeking full-time or bivocational pastor. Send resumé to: mark.b.ivey@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Fairview Baptist in Samson, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor. Please email resumé to: fairviewbaptist.samson.al@outlook.com or via USPS to: 3159 N State Highway 87, Samson, AL 36477.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

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

PART-TIME ASSOCIATE PASTOR

Buhl Baptist is prayerfully seeking a part-time associate pastor. Please contact us for more information by emailing dmhicks630@gmail.com or BuhlBaptistChurch@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC MINISTER

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

MINISTER OF MUSIC

First Baptist Church in Selma, Alabama, is seeking a minister of music to be responsible to the church body and for working alongside the pastor, assisting the church in the preparation, conveyance and evaluation of a comprehensive music ministry. Contact Dr. Tim Mathis: tmathis@fbcselma.org.

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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

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istry. Contact Dr. Tim Mathis: tmathis@fbcselma.org.

PART-TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC

South Luverne Baptist Church, Luverne, AL 36049. southluvernebc.com. Provides overall direction and vision of the worship and music program and provides spiritual leadership to the music staff and volunteers. Submit resume to: jnorsworthy1141@gmail.com. Call 334-335-6885 for detailed job description.

NEXT GENERATION PASTOR

Calvary Baptist Church, Tusculumbia is seeking a full-time next generation pastor to lead our youth and children. Please send a resumé to: youth@calvarybaptisttuscumbia.com.

OTHER POSITIONS

ASSOCIATION MISSIONS STRATEGIST

Tallapoosa Baptist Association is prayerfully beginning the search for our next association missions strategist. We invite those who sense God calling them to serve in this capacity to send your resumé to our search team at pstrchad79@gmail.com. The expected start date for the position is January 2025 or thereafter. Resumés will be accepted until Oct. 1.

SIGNS

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ADOPTION LEGAL SERVICES

Long-time lawyer and former deputy probate judge Eddie Vines offers legal services to families walking through the adoption process. He is an ordained Baptist minister and does ongoing missions work in India. Contact Eddie Vines: 205-

586-0222 or evinesattorney@yahoo.com. No representation is made that the quality of the legal services to be performed is greater than the quality of legal services performed by other lawyers.

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RESOURCES

"HELP I'M A PASTOR!"

This new book by veteran Baptist pastor and cartoonist Joe McKeever is a resource pastors will want to keep on their shelf. And for those with a friend or family member new to the pastorate, McKeever's insights will be a true gift. Order your copy straight from the author today for \$24.95. Email him at joe@joemckeeper.com, Venmo him at @Joe-McKeever-7 or send a check and your mailing address to: 3310 Independence Drive, Birmingham, AL 35209.

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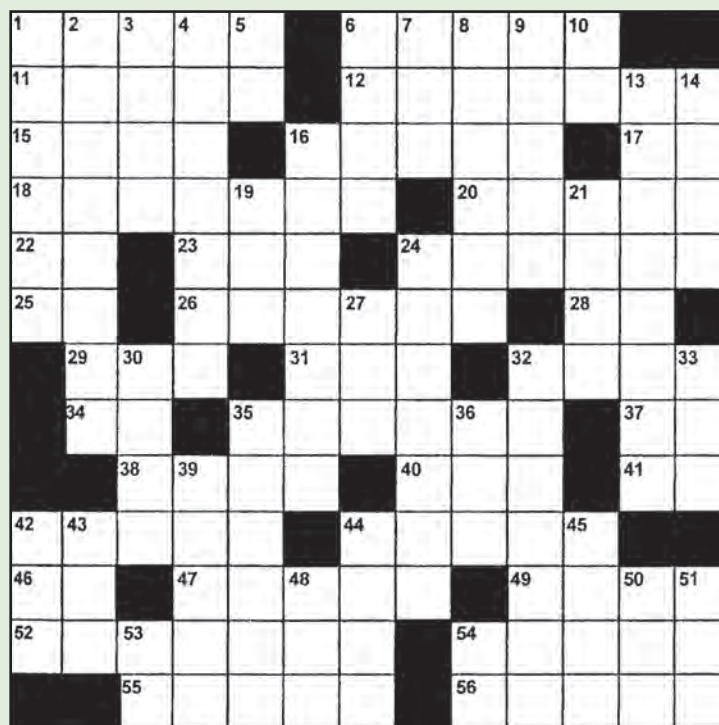
The Ministry Training Institute at Samford University exists to equip Christians to be leaders in their churches and communities through theological education and practical ministry training. Education opportunities exist through the institute's vast extension network and robust online certificate curriculum. Find more information at samford.edu/programs/ministry-training-institute.

CHRISTIAN Crossword



ACROSS

1. Now the Lord said unto _____. (Gen. 12:1)
6. Are not ____ and Pharpar rivers of Damascus? (2 Kings 5:12)
11. Abraham ... ____ the wood. (Gen. 22:3)
12. Athenian woman who believed. (Acts 17:34)
15. In charge of King Ahasuerus' women. (Esther 2:3)
16. The Lord sent him to meet Moses in the wilderness. (Ex. 4:27)
17. Infant's first word for daddy.
18. Joseph's wife. (Gen. 41:45)
20. The works that are done ____ the sun. (Eccles. 1:14)
22. I am, you are, he ____.
23. Dialect for get.
24. Eli heard the noise of the _____. (1 Sam. 4:14)
25. Joshua sent men from Jericho to _____. (Josh. 7:2)
26. Descendants of Eri. (Num. 26:16)
28. Sarah shall bear unto thee ____ this set time. (Gen. 17:21)
29. Not bow down thyself to them, ____ serve them. (Ex. 20:5)
31. I ____ the marathon.
32. Place of 12 wells of water. (Ex. 15:27)
34. ____ ye therefore. (Matt. 28:19)
35. The sons of Aaron, took either of them his _____. (Lev. 10:1)
37. They went forth ____ go. (Gen. 12:5)
38. King of Greek gods.
40. Cut off his right _____. (Luke 22:50)
41. God said, ____ shall not eat of every tree. (Gen. 3:1)
42. Bright ____.
44. Strong people set in battle _____. (Joel 2:5)
46. And, ____, the angel



By Diana Rowland Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

19. The fowl of the _____. (Gen. 1:26)
21. The sun ____ of Ahaz. (Isa. 38:8)
24. And the ____ of pure gold. (1 Kings 7:50)
27. You get this at a beach.
30. Leak out slowly.
32. Flighty, capricious.
33. ____, Larry and Curly.
35. The tents of ____ in affliction. (Hab. 3:7)
36. Give ____ to His commandments. (Ex. 15:26)
39. Hast thou ____ of the tree? (Gen. 3:11)
42. So that it went ____ with Moses. (Ps. 106:32)
43. The noise of them that sing ____ hear. (Ex. 32:18; two words)
44. Pointed tools for piercing holes.
45. Broken the bands of your _____. (Lev. 26:13)
48. Order ____ carte. (two words)
50. Benjamin's son. (Gen. 46:21)
51. Cleanseth us from all _____. (1 John 1:7)
53. Do, re, mi, ____.
54. Syllable to sing when you don't know the words.

DOWN

1. Gallio was the deputy of _____. (Acts 18:12)
2. Thou shalt be a _____. (Gen. 12:2)
3. Why do the heathen ____? (Ps. 2:1)
4. The Lord is the ____ of all such. (1 Thess. 4:6)
5. ____, myself and I.
6. And ____ bare Jabal. (Gen. 4:20)
7. Candy or ice cream ____.
8. Loves.
9. Mary Poppins was one.
10. Pass over through _____. (Deut. 2:18)
13. Joseph's brothers didn't know his ____.
14. "Hey, ____." (Beetle Bailey's call.)
16. Dresses. (verb)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Longing for revival in your area?

The Regional Prayer Summits are designed to draw pastors, church leaders and prayer warriors together for a time of worship and strategic prayer, focusing on the need for revival and spiritual awakening across the state of Alabama and the nation. These four events, held 10 a.m.–2 p.m., will be led by Bill Elliff of Little Rock, Arkansas:

- ▶ **Sept. 16** — Southeast Alabama Baptist Association
- ▶ **Sept. 17** — Dauphin Way Baptist Church in Mobile
- ▶ **Sept. 23** — Lakewood Baptist Church in Huntsville

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



- ▶ **Sept. 24** — Bethlehem West Baptist Church in Vinemont
- This is a free event and lunch is provided. Register at alsbom.org/prayersummits.

Next Intentional Leader Series set for Sept. 17

The next Intentional Leader Series, set for Sept. 17, will focus on the Pastor aspect of the four Ps of leadership: Person, Pastor, Preacher and Pathfinder.

This invaluable session will be led by Eric Hankins, pastor of FBC Fairhope, and David Eldridge, pastor of Dawson Memorial Baptist

Church in Birmingham. During this training, they will be sharing practical tips on pastoring and shepherding that you won't want to miss.

The event will be 9 a.m.–2 p.m. at the State Board of Missions in Prattville. The \$10 cost includes lunch.

To register, visit alsbom.org/ils.

Worship conference

The LIFT! Defining Worship Conference aims to give you fresh tools to meet your church's needs.

This event is created for worship leaders (including pastors) and worship teams to join together and redis-

cover the love and importance of leading worship. The conference will be held Sept. 26, 9:30–2 p.m., at Thorington Road Baptist Church in Montgomery. The cost is \$35.

To register, visit alabamaworship.org/lift.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Sunday School Lessons

By Robert Olsen, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



For September 8

THE TASK Acts 13:42–52

Mixed Responses (42–45)

Paul and Barnabas traveled to the city of Pisidian Antioch, going to the synagogue on the Sabbath.

Paul was given the floor to speak, and beginning with Moses and the Exodus, he followed the Old Testament story to its fulfillment in Jesus. He emphasized the crucifixion of Jesus, His burial and His resurrection and the fact that this was witnessed by many people.

Many people wanted to hear more about this, so Paul returned the next Sabbath to continue. However, many Jews rejected Paul's message because they were jealous of the attention Paul and his company were receiving. They argued against them, causing Paul and Barnabas to leave and go to the Gentiles.

The story is no different for Christians today. The gospel is an offense. It tells people that there is a God they are answerable to, and it tells them that they don't have the ability to satisfy God's demands.

This is offensive to people who are naturally prideful because it shows them that they have to rely on the goodness and love of God to save them, and this comes through the sacrifice — death, burial and resurrection — of Jesus Christ.

This is not earned. Again, this goes against our human belief that one must do something to receive something. Salvation comes through faith, accepting that I am a sinner in need of saving and that this only comes through Christ.

Gentile Believers (46–48)

Paul and Barnabas took the gospel to the Jews first because the gospel message was first for the Jews and then for the Gentiles (Rom. 1:16).

This was for several reasons. The Jews were called to be

priests to the nations (Ex. 19:6), which means that God had chosen the Israelites to be the people through whom the nations would know Him. It was natural that the gospel would first be heard by the Jews so that they could see God's hand in salvation history, using them as His messengers.

Another reason Paul went to the Jews first is that they had the background to understand the gospel. All of the Old Testament is pointing to Christ, and so the Jews were best prepared to receive the gospel message.

Lastly, Paul himself had been a Pharisee and had misunderstood the Old Testament. Having been given the proper understanding of the Old Testament, it seems only natural that he would want to extend the same grace to his fellow Jews.

However, since the Jews rejected it, Paul turned his attention to the Gentiles, many of whom embraced the gospel.

Spread of the Gospel (49–52)

The gospel spread throughout the Gentile community with joy. Living in darkness and fearing death and the spirits, the gospel gives hope and allays fears. There is joy in knowing that your sins have been atoned for and that you have been made right with God through Christ. The Gentiles reacted in a way that created quite a stir. The Jews stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and kicked them out of the city.

The persecution that came should not surprise us. Satan cannot stand the gospel, and so he creates problems for the Church.

In spite of this persecution, Paul and Barnabas continued on their way, sharing the gospel as they went. Persecution should not stop us from sharing the gospel, but we should be encouraged that God's Word is effective even in the midst of opposition.

For September 15

THE TRUTH Acts 14:11–23

Misdirected Worship (11–13)

After Paul and Barnabas healed a lame man in Lystra, the crowd became excited and claimed that the gods Zeus and Hermes had visited them! Upon hearing this, the priest of Zeus came with two bulls to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas.

Seeing this blasphemous act, Paul made sure to let the people know that he and Barnabas were just mortal men.

One temptation in ministry is to think that you have a role in the success of the ministry. God is choosing to use you and your gifts to minister to others, and so success comes from God using you, not from your own effort.

There are many Christian leaders who began to think of themselves as someone special and above the advice of Christians around them. They think that because their ministry has been successful in the past their ideas will work in the future, so they do not consider God's plans. Many ministers have fallen because of this.

Proclaiming the Living God (14–18)

Being declared gods was the last thing Paul and Barnabas wanted. To turn their attention away from themselves, Paul told them about the one true God. Notice how in this discussion with the Gentiles, Paul focuses on common grace by pointing out how God sends rain for crops and provides for their needs and pointing out that there is only one God instead of many.

For a Jewish audience, Paul focuses on Christ as fulfillment of Scripture. This is a great model for sharing the gospel. We need to know our audience because then we know what areas to begin with when sharing the gospel. Do they already believe there is only one God? Are they atheists?

Are they of a different religion? We need to know our neighbors so that God can use us to minister to them.

Opposition Faced (19–20)

As before, Jews from other cities followed Paul and Barnabas and turned the crowd against them. Paul got stoned and was left for dead, but when he was revived he went right back into the city.

This shows Paul's willingness to suffer for the gospel and it gives us a model. Paul was so concerned for the gospel that he was willing to die for it.

Christians have historically faced persecution for their faith, and we should expect it as well. In the history of missions, countless Christians have given up their lives to spread the gospel. We can know that this suffering is not unexpected, and God can use our persecution to actually spread the gospel as has happened many times in the past.

Encouragement Given (21–23)

Paul and Barnabas returned to the cities they had previously visited to help encourage the believers.

Many times ministries focus on communicating the gospel but not on discipleship.

But the Great Commission in Matthew 28:20 says you should be "teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you." This shows that Jesus was concerned not just with sharing the gospel but with building Christians up so that they could be steadfast in their commitment to Jesus.

Discipleship needs to be a major focus for our churches. The culture is no longer a Christian culture, and some in society seek to turn people away from Christianity. If our people do not understand what the Bible says, they become easy prey to be led astray. We must train people up in the truths of the Bible.

"We are also men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these things ..."

Acts 14:15

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sunday School Lessons

By Teman Knight, Ph.D.

Adjunct Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary



For September 8

PURPOSE ABANDONED Psalm 8:1–6, 14:1–7

God created us to glorify and worship Him. This is the chief purpose of people and is far greater than any purpose we might devise for ourselves. However, our sin keeps us from living out that great purpose.

Ever since Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, we have set ourselves up to play God and determine for ourselves what is good and what is evil. We follow our own selfish desires and go our own way instead of submitting to God's will and plan for our lives.

We were created to bring God praise and glory. (8:1–6)

The psalmist is amazed that in the splendor of God's creation, He chose humanity to be the crowning point. People were created in God's image with God forming man out of the dust of the ground and breathing life into him. However, we know that man failed to live up to this and fell into sin.

The Hebrew words reflect this idea in their description of man. "Enosh" means "weak man," and "atham" indicates "man of the ground." Yet even with all of man's frailties and shortcomings, God amazingly remembers us and looks after us.

Human beings have two responsibilities identified in this passage. The first responsibility is to praise and glorify God. We are to join all creation in making His name great in all the earth. The second task identified here is to rule over creation and use it to glorify Him.

This task was also given to man in the creation account found in Genesis. Humanity's place in creation and the tasks we have been given are special, but

our own weaknesses will lead us to fall short of God's purpose.

We have turned away from God and His purpose for us. (14:1–3)

The arrogance of a foolish man is demonstrated by his beliefs and actions. He denies the existence of God, failing to recognize the Creator and all that He deserves. Many may not even vocalize their denial of the existence of God but will demonstrate this belief by living as though God is not real.

"You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet."

Psalm 8:6

The Hebrew word for fool is "nabal," which means "to wilt or fail." To deny God is the shameful act of someone who has failed to meet God's intended purpose.

A fool is a person without any sense of moral values or social obligation. "They are corrupt; they do vile deeds" (v. 1). The psalmist is clear that we have all come up short. We have turned away from God's plan to instead follow our own desires. If we fail to seek God and fulfill His purpose, the consequences are dire.

When we turn to God as our refuge, He restores us. (4–7)

Those who fail to seek God or call on the Lord will be filled with dread.

They will face the overwhelming consequences of their foolishness, which the Bible clearly teaches us is death and hell. However, hope still exists. God offers restoration and refuge for those who turn back to Him.

When we turn to God through His Son, Jesus Christ, we will find refuge from our sins in His forgiveness.

Our broken relationship with God will be restored. Then we can join God's people and celebrate our deliverance. So let us rejoice in God's salvation and live our lives with purpose.

For September 15

PURPOSE RESTORED Acts 3:14–26

We have studied the truth that God created us for a purpose. Instead of submitting to God, we sin and follow our own selfish desires. Abandoning God's purpose, we find ourselves adrift and looking for purpose, but fulfillment continues to elude us. On our own, we are not able to overcome the barrier of sin.

We are thankful God sent His Son to overcome this obstacle for us. Through Jesus' death, burial and resurrection sin is defeated. When we respond to Him with repentance and faith, we are saved from sin and regain our focus on God's purpose for our lives.

Peter and John enter the temple and encounter a man crippled since birth. He is begging for coins but instead of giving him money, they command him to rise and walk in the name of Jesus.

God miraculously heals the man, and he begins to jump around praising God. The lame man did not get what he asked for; God instead gave him what he needed.

Many try to find their purpose in helping people with physical needs. Society is filled with people with economic, emotional, family or physical problems.

Peter understood that meeting physical needs is important, but God's purpose must include addressing their spiritual condition. Peter uses this opportunity to share the gospel, demonstrating that God's purpose for every believer includes sharing the gospel of Jesus.

Jesus restores when we place our faith in Him. (14–18)

Peter begins his presentation of the gospel to those who gathered to see the miracle by reminding them of their guilt for rejecting Jesus and demanding that Barabbas be set free. Peter tells them that this was

God's plan and points them back to the prophets.

He may have been referring to Isaiah's "Songs of the Suffering Servant" (Isa. 42, 49, 50 and 52–53) as he calls Jesus "servant" and uses the term "suffering" to describe His death. He tells them that the answer to their guilt and sin is faith in Jesus.

Jesus forgives and refreshes us when we repent of our sin. (19–21)

Peter calls them to repentance with two expressions: "repent" and "turn back." He calls them to turn away from their rejection of Jesus and God's purpose and turn to God's Messiah and His will.

If they will repent and turn to God, three things will happen: Their sins will be wiped out, they will be refreshed by the presence of God and He will send Jesus who is the Messiah. God will do the same for us if we will turn from our sins and turn to Him.

Only Jesus can bring us back to God. (22–26)

Peter then traces God's salvation plan throughout history. From Abraham, Moses, Samuel and all the prophets God's plan always pointed toward Jesus.

He is the only way we can return to God. Notice the word "offspring" is singular. The world will be blessed not by all of Abraham's descendants but by one specific "Servant."

Paul would emphasize this same point. "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say 'and to seeds,' as though referring to many, but referring to one, and to your seed, who is Christ" (Gal. 3:16).

God raised Jesus so we could turn from our sin and come back to God and fulfill His purpose of sharing the gospel with others.

"But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he fulfilled."

Acts 3:18

WORD search

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| ACHIEVEMENTS | HEAVEN | SEEK |
| CHASING | KNOWLEDGE | SOLOMON |
| CYCLE | LABOR | STREAMS |
| DISCOVER | MEANINGLESS | STRIVING |
| EARTH | PLEASURE | SUN |
| ECCLESIASTES | PROFIT | TEACHER |
| ETERNAL | PURSUIT | TOIL |
| FOLLY | REFLECT | VANITY |
| FORGETTING | REMEMBER | WEARINESS |
| FUTILITY | REPETITION | WIND |
| GENERATION | SATISFIED | WISDOM |

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S R L C Y C L E P T D N I W F

*"Can one say about anything, 'Look, this is new'?
It has already existed in the ages before us."*

ECCLESIASTES 1:10

You Gotta' Hear This!



Glimpses of God in the everyday moments

Why God Made Trees

I love trees and always have. Their beauty, their functionality and their impressive stature impress me, but most of all, I love them for their strength — their ability to weather many storms by growing deeper roots.

My earliest obsession with trees goes back to my childhood. I remember collecting big leaves from an old oak tree and constructing jewelry from them with my sister Sylvia. We made necklaces and bracelets and wore them like queens with precious jewels. I inquisitively tried eating an acorn from that old oak once — not so tasty. I made feeble attempts trying to climb a tree like my cousin Willard. I could only stand on a low-slung limb, and even then, I was afraid of falling.

Deep roots

Later, I philosophized wanting my faith in God to be like that of a strong tree. I wanted to imagine my roots just digging deeper with each storm. Maybe it did. I learned to appreciate the changes and the fresh beauty each season brought — the life lessons about the stages of life, death and resurrection trees taught.

On my trips to the Holy Land, we always made a stop at the Jerusalem Prayer Center, a peaceful, serene respite from our busy sightseeing. In a downstairs sanctuary, there is a striking mural that fills one wall.

It is a colorful painting of a huge tree. On it is pictured a

different fruit for each month depicting what is mentioned in Revelation 22:2: "In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."

Perspective

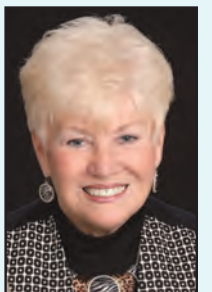
One blustery winter day, while traveling down Sand Mountain from Albertville to Gadsden with my mother, she surprised me with her comment: "Barbara, just look at the beautiful colors of the trees today." I glanced over at her wondering if she had completely lost it. In the dead of winter, the trees were stark black and white.

Only then did I notice she was wearing a pair of rose-tinted sunglasses. I told her to take off her glasses and hand them to me.

She then saw the winter's bleakness, and when I donned the glasses, I saw the beauty. Perhaps our perspective makes a lot of difference.

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.



Maintaining healthy eyes

Vision care at every age: You're never too young to take care of your eyes

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

I started wearing glasses at age 5 when I failed my kindergarten vision test, so eye care has always been part of my life. But even if you are young or have never had vision problems, it is important to care for the health of your eyes.

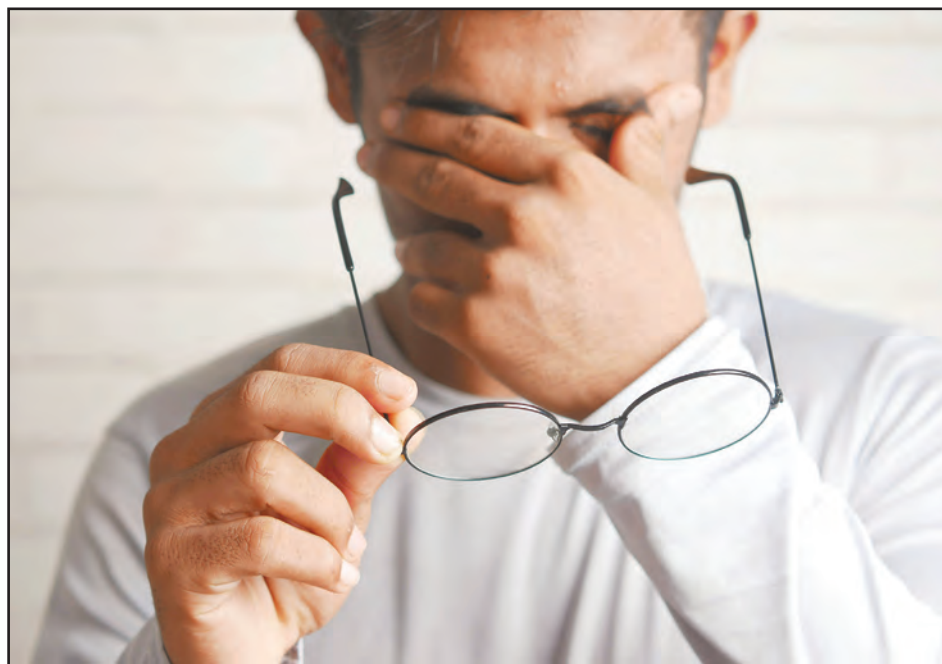
In addition to routine eye exams, here are some general recommendations for making sure your eyes stay healthy for the long-term.

In your 20s and 30s, focus on prevention. Wear sunglasses that block 100% of ultraviolet radiation (UVA and UVB rays) when you are outdoors. Maintain a healthy lifestyle, which includes eating a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, antioxidants and omega-3 fatty acids, staying hydrated, getting regular exercise, managing stress and avoiding smoking.

Eye strain is a growing problem for people of all ages due to the significant amount of time we spend on computers, smartphones and other digital devices. To help prevent eye strain, take regular breaks from screens and use the 20-20-20 rule: Look at something 20 feet away for 20 seconds every 20 minutes.

Comprehensive eye exam

Even if you don't currently wear glasses or contacts, schedule a comprehensive eye exam with an optometrist or ophthalmologist at least once every two years. This exam can detect refractive errors (like nearsightedness, farsightedness or astigmatism), as well as eye diseases or conditions that may not present symptoms in the early stages, such as glaucoma or macular degeneration.



Unsplash.com

If you wear glasses, regular vision testing will help you maintain visual acuity. If you notice any changes in your vision between appointments, such as blurred vision, difficulty focusing or eye strain, schedule an appointment with an eye care professional promptly.

As you enter your 40s, your eyes begin to change. Many adults develop presbyopia, or age-related farsightedness, which makes it hard to focus clearly on close objects (like books and phone screens). Cataracts may begin to form as the proteins in the lens of your eye naturally start to break down.

Continue to take proactive steps to keep your eyes as healthy as possible and schedule a comprehensive eye exam to assess and monitor these and other eye health conditions and to get the appropriate

corrective lenses for your vision and lifestyle.

Be aware of the symptoms of retinal detachment, a painless but urgent medical emergency in which the retina, a thin layer of tissue at the back of the eye, pulls away from its normal position causing loss of oxygen-rich blood to the cells in the eye. Symptoms of retinal detachment include reduced vision, the sudden appearance of "floaters" (dark spots or specks that seem to "float" in your vision),

flashes of light or a curtain-like shadow that clouds your field of vision. If you experience any of these symptoms, go to the ER or contact an ophthalmologist right away.

For adults over 50, routine eye care becomes critical to maintain good vision and detect age-related changes or eye diseases early. Schedule a comprehensive eye exam

each year or as recommended by your eye care provider.

During the exam, review your medications with your doctor, as certain medications may have side effects that can affect your vision or eye health. If you experience discomfort in your eyes, such as a scratchy feeling, stinging, burning, sensitivity to light or red eyes, your doctor may prescribe treatment for dry eyes, a condition that is more common after age 50.

Healthy practices

By prioritizing regular eye care and incorporating healthy practices into your routine, you can do your part to help preserve your vision and maintain healthy eyes as you age. If you have any concerns or notice changes in your vision, consult with your eye care professional promptly for evaluation and appropriate management.

No vision benefits or insurance? Here are five options that might help with eye care expenses for you and your family:

- ▶ If your employer offers it, take advantage of a Flexible Spending Account (FSA) or Health Savings Account (HSA), either of which can be used to pay for eye care and other medical expenses.

- ▶ Ask your provider or local health department about vision discount plans, community health centers, nonprofit organizations or others programs you may be eligible for.

- ▶ Ask about payment plans.

- ▶ Membership clubs like Costco and Sam's Club often offer discounted eye care services and products to their members.

- ▶ Consider using mail order companies that sell glasses and contacts at a discount.

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Something missing

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Bilingual book speaks to God's 'purpose for every child's life'

Many people have heard about a baby being discarded, sometimes even found in the trash.

Jackie Darby, missionary in Guatemala and an author, was a newborn when she was abandoned in a garbage dump in Seoul, South Korea. In her bilingual Spanish and English children's book, "Whose Am I? The Truth About Your Worth and Identity in Christ," she writes about her journey of being found by a missionary and being adopted.

"I was adopted when I was 8 months old. My parents were very loving and provided everything that I needed. But deep down in my heart, there was always something missing.

"I always had a lot of questions and doubts regarding my adoption — mostly 'Why? Why was I abandoned? Why did I start life under those circumstances?'"

Because of being "treated like a piece of garbage," Darby felt like her life didn't matter. When her parents added to the family an adopted son who was left on a doorstep in a basket, it was difficult not to compare their stories.

"Oh, he was Moses. His mom loved him. She wanted him to be found. I was left to die in a garbage dump.

"That was the most haunting question that I had. I just wanted to understand why. Who left me? Why was I left?"

Identity questions

Though raised in church and not treated differently, she really struggled with her worth and identity. Not only was she the only Asian in her peer group, but she also wore physical scars from being bitten by

rats in the trash heap — a daily reminder of her origin.

"I didn't feel like I blended in with the other kids. I was very ashamed of my story. I never talked about my story," she said.

When Darby was 22 years old, she moved to Florida. At one of the lowest points in her life, she realized that the only way to change was to do her part.

She told God, "If You're the God I've heard of my whole life, that I've been taught about my whole life, please forgive me for my poor decisions. You have to come into my life and help me. I feel like I made a mess of my life."

"He was faithful and He did it. Little by little I began healing. I began that journey and my walk with the Lord. But it wasn't a quick fix. There are many chapters, many layers," she said.

During her continued healing, Darby and her husband, Randall, became missionaries in Guatemala.

The plan hadn't been to work with orphaned and abandoned teens while there, but there was a need. Then God opened up opportunities for her to begin sharing her story — little by little.

Dream book

It was never on her radar to write a book, especially one about her beginnings. However, one night she had a dream that she wrote a children's book. She saw the colors of the book and realized it was about her story.

But she was still healing, so she put it in the back of her mind.

Occasionally, her husband would bring it up and in 2019 he asked her, "How are you ever going to know if it's a God dream if you don't put your faith into action?"

"With that, I sat down at the computer and began writing my testimony out," she said.

This is where co-author and illustrator Aixa de López came into the picture. She was a fellow church

member and the only published author Darby knew. They already had a relationship.

López also has experience with adoption, but from the point of view of the parent. She and her husband adopted two of their four children.

One of López's adopted children, Darby, is a main character in the book. She "became attached" to Darby and over years of baking cookies and painting their nails, they built a safe relationship.

With both having many of the same questions about their pre-adoption lives, over time, Darby began to slowly share her story with her young friend.

"Whose Am I?" is based on a real conversation that they had while baking cookies in Darby's kitchen and was used with Darby's permission.

Though at times difficult to write, especially after first seeing the illustration of her being found in a garbage dump, Darby is no longer ashamed of her story. Plus, with López including a Spanish translation on every page, both English and Spanish readers can benefit from its lessons.

Furthermore, both authors believe the messages from "Whose Am I?" are for any age, whether adopted or not.

"My original heart was that I found the peace of God and healing through my relationship with Christ," Darby said. "I wanted anyone adopted or any child who experiences abandonment or rejection to know that they have a Heavenly Father who knew them before they were ever formed in their mother's womb. He has a plan and purpose for every child's life, no matter how their lives began."



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist
Aixa de López (from left) and Jackie Darby celebrate the release of their bilingual children's book.

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Praying for the persecuted church

Christian hopes 'double jeopardy' nullifies his death penalty

A judge's ruling citing double jeopardy gives hope to a Pakistani Christian charged with blasphemy twice for the same alleged incident.

Double jeopardy prohibits a person from being prosecuted twice for the same offense, noted the news services Christian Daily International and Morning Star News, quoting attorney Lazar Allah Rakha.

A judge cited double jeopardy in the acquittal of Noman Masih. Masih and his cousin Sunny Waqas were charged under Section 295-C of Pakistan's blasphemy laws for alleged derogatory statements about Muhammad. The sentence for such a conviction is death.

Waqas blamed Masih and was later granted bail and fled Pakistan, the news services stated.

Rakha said police used "secret information" and illegally charged Masih in two cities — Bahawalnagar and Bahawalpur — for the same incident. Masih was sentenced to death in May 2023 in the Bahawalpur case.



Photo courtesy of Morning Star News

In light of the acquittal in Bahawalnagar, Rakha hopes the Lahore High Court will hear Masih's appeal of the death

sentence and set aside that conviction.

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

Man gains custody of Christian girl he allegedly abducted in Pakistan

A Pakistani court awarded custody of a kidnapped Christian girl to the man who had abducted her.

Roshni Shakeel, 13, was taken from her home in Basti Khaliq Pura in Punjab province, reported the news services Christian Daily International and Morning Star News.

Her captor — 28-year-old Muazzam Mazhar — has since forced the girl to convert to Islam, marry him and tell a court she did so willingly, sources say. (TAB)

Pastor, wife get prison term on false charges of trying to force conversions

A pastor and his wife have been fined and sentenced to two years in prison in India for false accusations of trying to force or coerce some Hindus to convert to Christianity.

The Christian couple — Ramesh Ahirwar and wife Sakshi Ahirwar — were convicted under the anticonversion law of Madhya Pradesh state. Morning Star News says each spouse must pay a fine of \$300 (25,000 rupees) in addition to serving the two-year sentence.



Photo courtesy of Morning Star News

"If the conviction stands, it would be the first under Madhya Pradesh's anticonversion law," states Morning Star. (TAB)

Martyr's widow, 5 Christian families flee village, possible persecution

The widow of a Christian man killed for his faith in India has fled the village to save her life.

Five other Christian families followed suit, fearing the same fate, reported Morning Star News.

Jime Kawasi left Kapanar village in India's Chhattisgarh state in May after seeing her husband, Kosa Kawasi, 22, be killed by a mob.

Roughly 20 villagers — some of whom were Kosa Kawasi's relatives — beat and stabbed him to death for refusing to renounce his faith and return to Hinduism, a source said. Jime Kawasi also was attacked.

Relatives had grown angry with Kosa Kawasi because villagers were prohibiting anyone with Christian family members from offering the season's first mango harvest to gods.

The day after the slaying, two of Kosa Kawasi's relatives were arrested. (TAB)

Woman slain for family land after converting to Christianity

A woman was fatally stoned and beaten with an ax by relatives, who claimed she and her family no longer were entitled to their land because they became Christians.

Sources told Morning Star News that an uncle and cousin of Bindu Sodi killed the woman on ancestral farmland belonging to her younger brother.

The uncle and son — Chetu and Kumma Sodi — had claimed and planted on two-thirds of that land, which is in Toylanka village in India's Chhattisgarh state.

Bindu's brother, the landowner, filed a complaint with Katekalyan police.

After Chetu rebuffed authorities trying to resolve the dispute, Bindu, her brother and two other family members planted the only portion

left. As they did, Chetu and Kumma stoned, struck, beat and kicked Bindu until she died.

Police have registered a case of murder and criminal acts against Chetu and Kumma. (TAB)

Christian man slain possibly for revenge dating back two years

A Christian man was tortured, strangled and hanged, possibly the result of a spat dating back two years, Morning Star News reported.

Parents of Nilesh Kumar, 22, reportedly found his body hanging in an animal shed near their home in Satpura village in India's Bihar state.

His father, Sushil Kumar, is a pastor.

Nilesh's parents were so distraught after finding his body and learning of the torture he endured that they had to be hospitalized, another pastor said.

Police arrested and charged the suspect and accomplices. Kumar's father said the slaying arose from an incident two years ago. (TAB)

Church receives threat; blaze follows; authorities question arson claim

Arson is suspected in a church fire in Pakistan that occurred after an individual threatened to prevent the observance of Christ's resurrection.

The predawn blaze burned the contents of the United Presbyterian Junior Church in Gujar Khan in Pakistan's Rawalpindi District, report the news services Christian Daily International and Morning Star News.

Prior to the blaze, a Muslim businessman tried to disrupt the church's Good Friday service, Alphonse stated.

Because of damage to the church building, the worship service was relocated. (TAB)

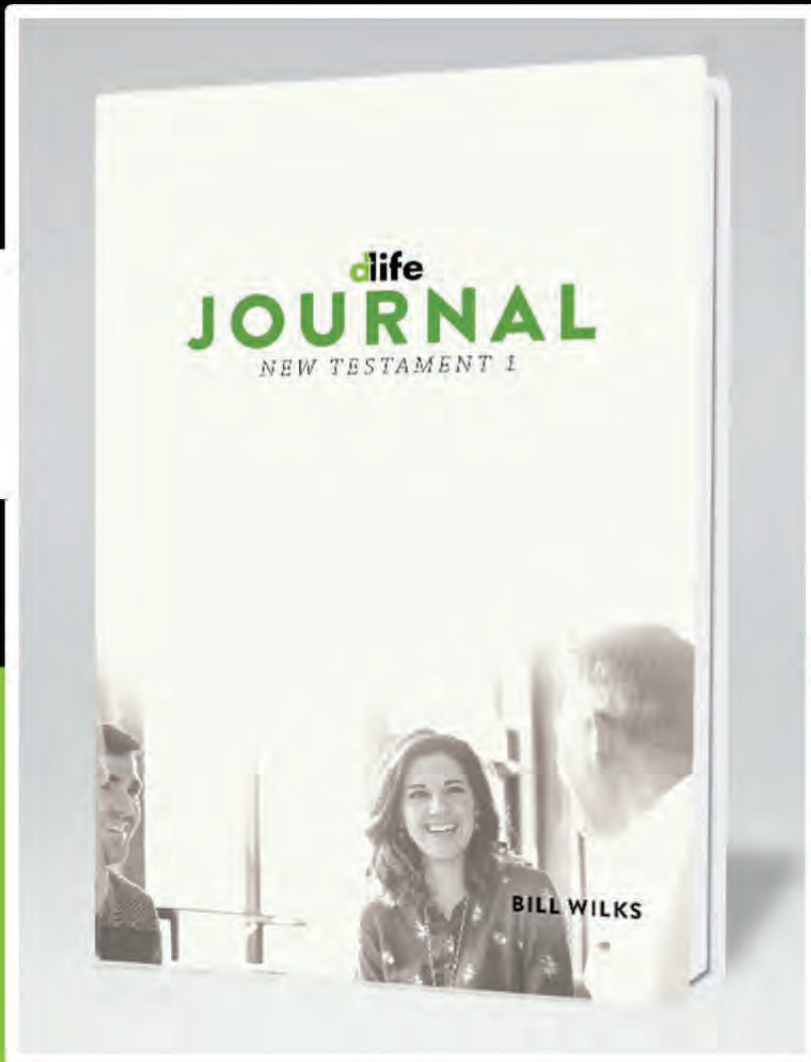


A note on India

India is No. 11 on Open Doors' 2024 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian. There are a large number of Christians in India — more than 71 million — but it's still only 5% of the country's Hindu-majority population.

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MEDIA REVIEWS

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Former band manager gets back to work after near-fatal wreck

It's easy to get caught up in a lifestyle of working in a Christian industry and forget Who is most important — and His call.

Kelly K, currently a pastor, evangelist and author, grew up under the influence of Baptist grandparents and going to whichever “local church had the best food.” At 13 years old, he felt God impress upon him that he would travel and preach all over the world, even in arenas. But it wasn't a straightforward path.

Kelly was the tour manager for Red, a Christian rock band, when, during an arena tour, disaster struck when the group was only about 15–20 minutes away from home in Nashville. They had been waiting for their newly purchased tour bus and were riding in a 15-passenger van when they hit a guard rail that a construction company had left on the highway.

Extensive damage

“I was asleep in the very back seat. We had been driving all night long. In the 6 a.m. traffic, it was just bumper-to-bumper, and our driver couldn't swerve around it so he hit it going 70 mph. It just tore the van completely apart, like a can opener — just shredded it.

“While I was asleep, I came out



KELLY K

Photo courtesy of Kelly K

of the side of that van at 70 mph. I woke up sliding down the highway on my back. I thought I was on fire. I woke up in a full scream. All I thought was that I was burning to death,” Kelly remembered.

When Kelly finally stopped sliding, he realized he wasn't on fire — but the damage was still extensive. The accident had torn nearly 90% of his back off. He had to spend the next three months in and out of burn centers.

When finally able to work again, he found that the emotional effects lasted much longer than the physical. His touring days were over.

“I had [post-traumatic stress disorder] even being in a vehicle. I would have panic attacks when hitting bumps or getting too close to cars. There was no way I could sleep on a tour bus anymore,” Kelly said.

Seeing God's protection

Even with all this pain and loss, Kelly found out that God had actually protected him.

For some reason, about 5 minutes before the crash, Kelly did three things he never did. He had woken up, taken off his hoodie and rolled over on his back to go back to sleep.

“So when the paramedics came and saw everything that happened, they told me, ‘If you had been awake and tried to brace, all this metal would have killed you as you came out of the vehicle as you tried to protect yourself. Had you been lying on your stomach, the cut that was on your head would have been on your throat — and that could have killed you. If you had your hoodie on, your jacket would have gotten caught in the metal and thrown you underneath the van and you would've been run over,’” Kelly recalled.

After having to leave the music industry, he didn't know what to do next. He tried various types of work — stand-up comedy, playing in bands, promotion — but remained completely unfulfilled. Then one day he heard a voice.

“I was driving down the road, trying to plan out my next big thing to be famous or whatever I was going to do, and I just heard God speak to me and say, ‘Kelly, I'm still waiting on you. I have a plan for you,’” Kelly remembered.

But instead of being excited to hear what felt like an audible voice from God, Kelly was furious. He yelled back at “that voice” that he had tried to serve God so many times and had failed every time.

Releasing control

Though he doesn't recommend this, he made a deal with God and told Him, “If You really want me and You really have a plan for me, I'll open my heart to You, but I'm not doing anything else. I'm not making one change, because every time I stop doing stuff to serve You, I go right back to it. If You want to change me, I'll let You.”

He was completely surprised when, the very next morning, he awoke to find his every desire changed. He knew he needed to get back to his calling.

After getting rejected over and over because he “didn't look like a preacher,” he felt God tell him to make videos and post them online.

His first video had only 92 views, but Kelly finally found the fulfillment he had been looking for. Then in 2016, after posting a video titled “Is It a Sin to Get a Tattoo?,” he had 3 million views in one week.

“God showed me, ‘You know, when you sent out those resumés to speak in churches and people saw you and all your tattoos, they disqualified you. But look — the same thing that I used to put you in churches was the same thing they used to keep you out.’”

To find out more about Kelly, go to kellykministries.com.

EDITOR'S NOTE

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