

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

— “ —
Each window
is a testament
to the
**community,
faith and
family** that
have shaped
Alabama’s
history.

DAVID GRAVES

— ” —



First Baptist Church Fairhope is one of 75 Alabama churches featured in photographer David Graves’ new coffee table book, “Alabama Faith.”

Photo by David Graves

Photographer releases coffee table book of state’s stained glass windows

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

One night when David Graves was growing up, his dad took him and his family to their church — Pineview Baptist in Thomasville — and left the lights off.

Graves said it was a “core memory” for him, seeing the light shining through the stained glass windows and hitting the pews.

That memory inspired his recent project — a coffee table book

called “Alabama Faith,” which features about 150 photos of stained glass windows from 75 churches across Alabama. Pineview is one, as are First Baptist Fairhope, First Baptist Montgomery and First Baptist Sylacauga. Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopal and Catholic churches are also featured.

Telling a story

The windows range from the early 19th century to the mid-20th century, and Graves said the colors, pews and the light shining

through the glass all tell a story.

“Week after week, generation after generation, a message of hope resonates,” said Graves, a photographer, University of Mobile graduate and member of The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham. “People have walked through these doors weary, hopeless and tired, only to be met with grace, hope and love.”

He said he hopes people will “find their own memory” as they look through the book.

“With ‘Alabama Faith,’ I hope to

invite viewers to slow down and appreciate the intricate beauty and craftsmanship of these stained glass windows,” Graves said.

Connecting us all

“Each window is a testament to the community, faith and family that have shaped Alabama’s history,” he noted. “This book is more than just a collection of photographs — it’s a celebration of the bigger picture that connects us all.”

“Alabama Faith” is available on Amazon.

Coverage from the

2024 Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting

will be in the Nov. 28 issue.



GUEST EDITORIAL

for this week's issue of **The Alabama Baptist**

By *Carrie Brown McWhorter, special assignments editor*

'Come, follow Me': Walking daily in the 'footprints of Jesus'

After a recent morning walk, I looked at the app that tracks my progress and saw something unusual: George Washington.

Yes, this is kind of like those optical illusions that go around the internet every now and then — maybe you see it, maybe you don't — but my family got a laugh out of the GPS trail reminiscent of the founding father's head.

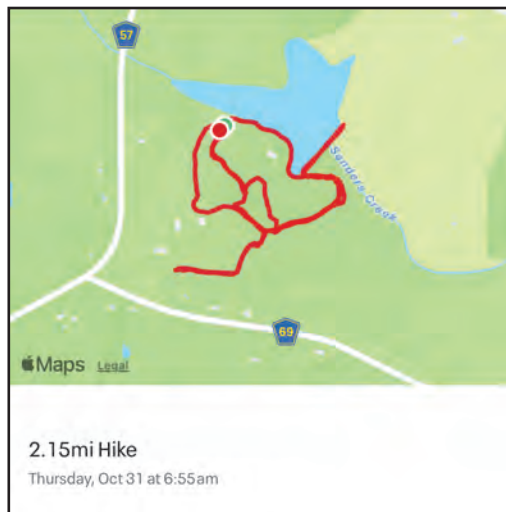
My unintended path made me think about my daily

“walk” with the Lord and a song we used to sing at church about following the footprints of Jesus.

A few years ago during a season when our TAB Media Group staff focused on prayer, I read the book “God Walk,” in which pastor and author Mark Buchanan explores walking and all its many benefits — physical, emotional and spiritual.

Buchanan says walking nurtures attentiveness of physical things and also of our thoughts, which leads to prayers.

“One step, two, and soon longing and gratitude and wonder and petition are working their way up through me, almost bodily, mingling with my thoughts, fusing with my emotions, pressing toward speech. Before long, all of it — the walking, the noticing, the feeling, the thinking, the speaking — is praying,” he writes.



Screenshot

The Bible calls believers to walk in the light (Eph. 5:8, 1 John 1:7), to walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7) and to walk in truth (2 John 1:4).

We also read in Scripture what those who literally walked with Jesus saw and experienced, though as John writes, “there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” (John 21:25).

As Jesus walked with His followers, I imagine He noticed the people He passed, sensing their pain, suffering and hurts, yes, but also their contentment, mischievousness and joy. I imagine laughter and tears, hearty em-

braces and long conversations — Jesus the teacher sharing love and wisdom as He moved on foot from place to place.

As I begin each day with a walk, I seek that same love and wisdom. With each step, I listen to Scripture and ask the Holy Spirit to mold my heart, soul and mind to be more like Jesus, to help me “take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5b).

For me, the benefits of a daily walk with Jesus are renewed physical energy and strength,

less anxiety and a greater sense of His presence as I start my day.

Desire of our hearts

For some of you, physical limitations mean your Christian “walk” is more figurative than literal, but I am certain our hearts echo a similar prayer:

Father, Wherever our journey takes us today, fill us with compassion, truth, humility and love and guide us in Your footprints. Amen.

*Sweetly, Lord, have we heard Thee calling,
“Come, follow Me!”
And we see where Thy footprints falling,
lead us to Thee.*

*Footprints of Jesus that make the pathway glow;
we will follow the steps of Jesus where'er they go.*

*Though they lead o'er the cold dark mountains,
seeking His sheep,
or along by Siloam's fountains,
helping the weak.*

*Then at last, when on high He sees us,
our journey done,
we will rest where the steps of Jesus
end at His throne.*

Music and lyrics by Mary Bridges Canady Slade (1826–1882)

Your Voice



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

First person: Doing the hard work of the Christian faith

By **Andy Blanks**
andyblanks.com

If my ministry has a particular leaning, it's a default to encouraging people to take seriously the stewardship of the life Jesus purchased for them.

In the past few years, I have experienced something that has become so common I feel compelled to examine it. If I preach a sermon, write an article or post on social media any challenge to strive, work or exert great effort to pursue Jesus, someone inevitably pops up and scolds me.

"Striving is legalism."

"We don't gain anything by effort, only by faith."

"Works-based faith much?"

Every. Single. Time. I know that there will be people who respond the same way to this article.

The Word of God could be no clearer: Salvation cannot be achieved by our efforts or exerting our will. No one could ever knuckle down and work so hard as to save themselves from their sin.

Amazing grace

Ephesians 2:8–9 might be the most succinct expression of this truth: "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." It's amazing grace that offers salvation to sinners by faith in the person and works of Jesus.

It's also important to acknowledge that our hard work and striving can never make God love or want us

more. God sees us as worthy and valuable because He sees us through the lens of Jesus' atoning death on the cross, which eternally ensures our worthiness (Col. 1:21–22).

Once we acknowledge these two truths, we are free to stare in the face how the Bible talks about how we are to approach our faith.

The Bible paints a picture of Christ-followers exerting great effort to follow after God. We must strive. We must work and work hard. The pursuit of God the biblical authors would recognize is all-encompassing, exhaustive and single-minded. It is a faith-fueled by work and effort.

We cannot strive to earn our salvation. But we must strive in our pursuit of sanctification. Want receipts? There is a near endless amount.

Let's start with Jesus' definition of discipleship in Matthew 16:24: "Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.'"

The Greek word Jesus uses for "take up" ("aparnesastho") signifies "obedience to the will of God declared by Jesus and a readiness for self-denial and martyrdom in following Jesus." That sounds like hard work to me.

God didn't tell us through the prophet Jeremiah that we would find Him when we looked for Him half-heartedly. No, God said, "You will

seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13). Solomon echoes this same sentiment when he says that we find the wisdom of God only by searching diligently (Prov. 8:13).

Peter urges the Christian not to try just a little but to make "every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and

knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love" so that believers would be effective and fruitful for God (2 Pet. 1:5–8).

First Timothy 6:11–12 is a powerful example of this

line of reasoning. Paul is writing to his protegee Timothy and says, "But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses."

This appeal is loaded with words and phrases that speak to the hard work of our faith.

Pursue righteousness

Paul tells Timothy to "pursue" righteousness. The Greek word for pursue is transcribed as "dioke," and in this case, and everywhere else in the New Testament where it's simi-

larly used, "it always denotes the striving of Christians."

Paul says, "Fight the good fight of faith," a phrase he repeats in 1 Timothy 1:18. The definition of this Greek word, "agonizomai," is "to struggle; to fight; to strain."

Jesus uses the same word in Luke 13:24, saying, "Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able." It's also the same word Paul uses in Colossians 1:29, where he says, "For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me."

Strain forward

Philippians 3:13–16 might be Paul's most powerful example of the tremendous effort it takes to pursue Christ's demands of us.

Paul says in verse 13 that he "strains forward" to what lies ahead — a growing knowledge of Christ. The Greek phrase for "straining forward" is a phrase that imagines the exact moment a runner is breaking the tape. This is the culmination of the runner's effort.

Paul says, straining forward, he "presses on." The phrase "press on" in Greek was often used to describe a hunter stalking his prey. Paul is giving us insight into how seriously he pursued Jesus. Paul's pursuit of Christ was like an athlete straining to win the race with the single-minded focus of a hunter. This is how Paul describes the intensity, commitment and complete effort he puts into pursuing Jesus.

We must strive. We must exert effort. We must pursue. In a word, we must work for it.

Work for what? What is the goal?



BLANKS

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KEVIN BLACKWELL

Teaching pastor, The Station Church in Bessemer

Paul gives us the answer in Philippians 3:14. ... Paul gave everything he had to pursuing the call of God on His life. That was his prize. Simply put, God and everything that comes with Him was Paul's goal.

What Paul has described for us in Philippians and elsewhere, what Jesus lays out for us, and what Peter and even the Old Testament writers urge us to is a single-minded, deeply rooted, all-consuming commitment to surrendering everything in our lives to becoming like Jesus in order to be used by Him to advance His Kingdom. Rather than being an unattainable ideal, something exceptional for super-Christians, it is the model. It is the expectation.

I don't know what to make of the pushback I receive when I preach or write on this aspect of our faith.

My hunch is that some people are so adamant in confronting a works-based view of salvation that they, with good intentions, throw the baby out with the bath water. For them, any discussion of hard work raises red flags.

Others may resist the urging of Scripture's call to strive greatly out of what Bonhoeffer referred to as a cheapening of God's grace, the misguided notion that God's grace is so sufficient that it relieves us of any obligation to strive for holiness through obedience to God's commands.

Difficult pursuit

I suspect, however, that most of the pushback I receive is the outer expression of an inner recoiling, born of our sin nature, against the difficulty of pursuing Christ as fallen people in a fallen world.

Following Jesus is difficult.

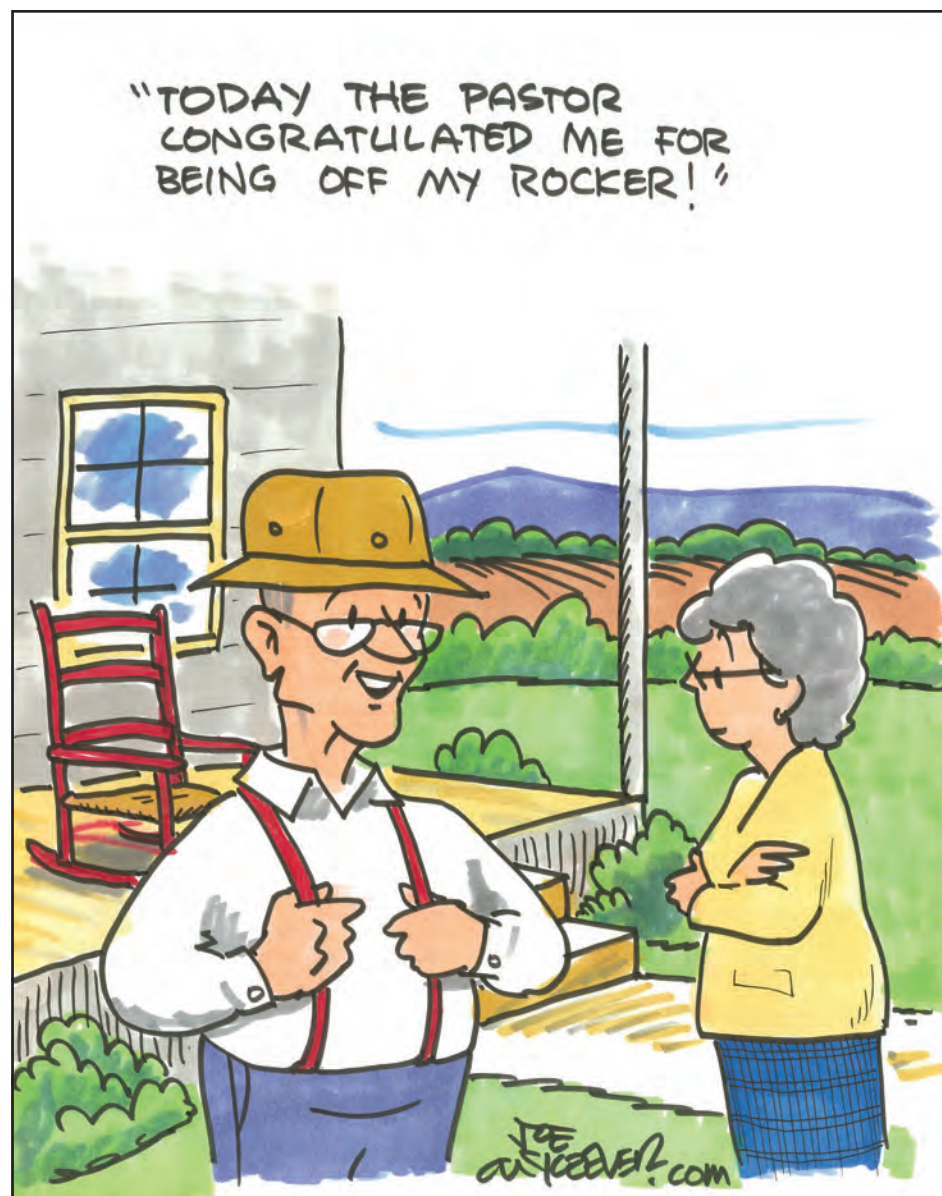
That should come as no surprise to any of us. And yet, the greatest irony of it all is that God gives us His Spirit for this very reason. We are called to the hard work of faithfully bending our wills to seek God. And precisely because God Himself knows that this

will be difficult for us, He gives us, in the words of Paul from Romans 8:11, the same power that raised Christ from the dead. We have the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit to strengthen us as we follow God. And still, so many Christians are defined by a faith that is weak, untried and unserious.

I grieve over what is missed by those who will not surrender themselves to a strenuous pursuit of Christ, to a costly faith. Because what they cannot know is that there is a beautiful paradox at work regarding the hard work that Christ commands.

Toiling for Christ is not tiresome, burdensome or joyless. It is freeing. It is life-giving. The more you pour yourself out in the service of the Lord, the more you have to give. How tragic that those who will not invest the effort of following Jesus out of fear of the cost will never know the bliss of the reward.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Andy Blanks is co-founder and CEO of Iron Hill Press and serves as men's ministry coordinator at Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Birmingham. He and his wife, Brendt, have four children.



Find your people and family

If you watch television, you already know that several channels have already started Christmas movies. Some channels are 24 hours of Christmas movies. Each movie is the same — there is a conflict, someone's life is not what they wanted, some happy person invades their grumpiness, somebody falls in love, they kiss under the mistletoe and they wish us a Merry Christmas, or something like that.

Somedays, I wish life was like that — somebody to come along and remind me of all of the life and love I am missing. But as I stop to revisit my life, I realize those people are here.

The question is, do we SEE them? Are we thankful for them?

I may have said this before, but it is truly important right now. Find your people and your family. Burrow down into the love, friendship and family that they offer. Be grateful for their presence and what they bring.

It's not going to be perfect every time. Life rarely is. But when you focus on the highlights, you will KNOW that there are more highs than lows.

Embracing gratitude

And if you focus on the moment, you too will allow the grumpy to fade away, fall in love with friendship and life again, and embrace the peace and joy of the Thanksgiving season.

If we are honest, the tradition of food, family and thanksgiving was built on a painful past. The past cannot be changed. Our personal past cannot be changed. However, even with a flawed past, we must continue to celebrate and seek out family, fellowship and love for each other, so that this year and EVERY year is a blessed event of thankfulness and giving. The same applies to our lives.

Vernet Nettles

Inspirational Journeys
vernetcnettlles.com

Transition time

Trump, Harris both vow to continue 'fight ... for the future'

Following a contentious 2024 presidential campaign, Donald Trump was elected on Nov. 5 to serve a second four-year term as president of the United States. He is the country's 45th and soon-to-be 47th president.

In what was expected by many to be a razor-thin outcome in the race between Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris, Trump had received 295 of the electoral votes at press time while Harris had 226.

Trump, who also continued to lead in the popular vote count at press time, told supporters, "We overcame obstacles that nobody thought possible, and it is now clear that we've achieved the most incredible political thing. Look what happened. ...

"We're going to help our country heal," Trump said during his Nov. 6 victory speech. "We have a country that needs help, and it needs help very badly. ... [To] every citizen, I will fight for you and your family and your future."



TRUMP

Harris confirmed during her Nov. 6 late afternoon concession speech that she and President Joe Biden would ensure a "peaceful transfer of power" and that she had called to congratulate Trump on the win.

"While I concede this election, I do not concede the fight that fueled this campaign," Harris said. "[The fight] for the ideals at the heart of this nation, the ideals that reflect America at our best. That is a fight I will never give up.

"Everyone of us ... has certain fundamental rights and freedoms that must be respected and upheld,"

she said. "We will continue to wage this fight ... in the public square ... also in quieter ways — how we live our lives, by treating one another with kindness and respect ... by always using our strength to lift people up to fight for the dignity that all people deserve.

"It's OK to be sad and disappointed, but please know it is going to be OK," she added. "Don't ever stop trying to make the world a better place. ...

"This is not a time to throw up our hands. This is a time to roll up our sleeves," Harris said. "This is a time to stay engaged for the sake of freedom and justice ... and the future we can build together."

Abortion ballot initiatives

Regarding abortion ballot initiatives, pro-life advocates witnessed wins in Florida, South Dakota and Nebraska, but pro-abortion measures won in seven states.

Brent Leatherwood, president of the SBC's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, said, "As we process the abortion ballot initiatives from across the country, it is obvious that there is a critical need, not only in policy but at a more basic level, in individual hearts and consciences, for a better understanding of the humanity of preborn children.

"The reality is, the majority of states with (pro-abortion) initiatives chose a deadlier path," he said. "Preborn children are in danger, and we will work with our churches and partners to oppose and combat this urgent cultural crisis." (TAB)

Disaster Relief efforts continue

Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers have joined the cleanup effort in western North Carolina after wrapping up their work in Clearwater, South Carolina, on Nov. 1.

Also, an ABDR shower unit that initially deployed to Forest City, North Carolina, following Hurricane Helene's destruction is still in place there.

Student efforts ahead

Mark Wakefield, state disaster relief strategist, added that he thinks students from Alabama's Baptist Campus Ministries may be able to help with rebuilding in North Carolina in the coming months or during spring break.

"We're looking for ways to partner with our campus ministries — they're eager to serve," he said.

ABDR teams serving in South Carolina completed more than 400 job requests and saw 10 people come to Christ during their time in the state. (TAB Media Group)

Persecuted church

Young girls at risk of abduction, forced marriage in Pakistan

LAHORE, Pakistan — Abduction, forced conversion, forced marriage or rape are real risks for young minority girls in Pakistan.

Sometimes authorities work to recover the girls and return them to their families. Other times authorities appear to aid the perpetrators.

Recent reports include:

▶ Two Muslims allegedly drugged, raped and tortured a 15-year-old Catholic girl July 1 in Lahore. The girl's mother sought to file a police report, but police delayed registering the complaint, the mother said.

▶ A Muslim abducted a 12-year-old Catholic

girl Aug. 9 from Pattoki Tehsil in Punjab province and forced her to convert to Islam and marry him. The girl's mother said police delayed filing a report and searching for her. As of Sept. 13, the girl was still missing. An attorney is petitioning Lahore High Court to rescue the girl.

▶ A Lahore High Court justice ordered police Sept. 11 to recover two Catholic sisters — ages 13 and 18 — who were kidnapped and forced to convert to Islam and marry the Muslim brothers who abducted them. The girls were kidnapped July 23 in Pattoki

Tehsil.

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



commons.wikimedia.org

Christian woman arrested in Iran held in jail without formal charges

TEHRAN, Iran — Authorities in Iran arrested and jailed a Christian woman without any formal charges, and relatives believe they may be trying to get her to tell about other Christians.

Morning Star News reports that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps took Mojdeh Falahi — a convert from Islam — into custody Sept. 9.

She was still detained as of Oct. 2. No charges have been filed against her. After going daily to a judge about her daughter's plight, Mojdeh's mother was granted a five-minute visit Sept. 30. Prior to that visit, family members had only a few minutes of contact with her.

Iran is No. 9 on Open Doors' 2024 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

RON BUTLER

Ron Butler, retired Alabama Baptist pastor, died Oct. 29. He was 79.

Butler retired in May after 44 years of serving churches in Alabama, Florida and Mississippi. He served as pastor of Pine Level Baptist in Chatom and Spice Pond Baptist in Eight Mile.

He also served in the U.S. Army for 11 years, completing a tour of duty in Korea and two in Germany, and retired from State of

Alabama Rehabilitation Services.

Butler served as a volunteer at Alpha Women's Resource Center in Jackson and Waterfront Rescue Mission in Mobile.

He was preceded in death by his first wife, Sally, and son, Jacob. He is survived by his wife of 35 years, Mildred, and son, Adam.



BUTLER

BARBOUR ASSOCIATION

► **Bethlehem Baptist Church, Clayton**, celebrated its 200th anniversary Sept. 8. Special music was provided by Ann Jeltsch, a former member, and two presentations were made to the church during the service. Don Hatcher (right), director of missions for Barbour Association, presented a flower arrangement given by churches in the association to mark the occasion. Dean Brown (center), deacon chair, accepted a commemorative plaque for the church from Jane Hughes (left), a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission.



Photo courtesy of Ellen Dewberry

BLOUNT ASSOCIATION

► **Pleasant View Missionary Baptist Church, Holly Pond**, will host its last singing of the year Nov. 17, 5 p.m, featuring gospel group Unity 4. Earl Harper is pastor.

BULLOCK ASSOCIATION

► **Union Springs First Baptist Church** celebrated its 175th anniversary Sept. 8. Among those sharing during the service were deacon chair Clifford Dawson, former member John Emfinger and former minister of music Michael Jones. Pastor Bill Cannon (left) received the commemorative plaque presented to the church by Calvin Milford,

a commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Former pastor Tom Randall shared a benediction and blessing before the closing song and ringing of the church bell. The service was followed by dinner on the grounds and a time of sharing favorite memories.



Photo courtesy of Midge Putman

CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

► **Grimes Chapel Baptist Church, Sylacauga**, celebrated its centennial anniversary and homecoming Sept. 15. The church began as a brush arbor with seven members joining during a revival. J.E. Grimes, the first member, donated two acres of land to build a church. Special music was provided by Chosen Anointed trio. The two



Photo courtesy of Lee Peters

oldest members, Rosie Bryant and Kitty Adams, were recognized. Joyce Peters (left), a commissioner with the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented a commemorative certificate for the church to its pastor, Jeff Chick. A fellowship meal was served following the service.

CHEROKEE ASSOCIATION

► **Pleasant Arbor Baptist Church, Piedmont**, celebrated its 100th anniversary Sept. 8. Wendell Dutton, director of missions for Cherokee Association and a commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, was the guest speaker. During the service, he presented two commemorative plaques to the church from the association and the commission. Harold Wood (left), deacon, and Thomas Ward (right), pastor, are pictured in the photo with Dutton. Former pastor Billy Hicks was in attendance, and special music was provided by Joyful Sounds gospel group. A video of historical highlights was shown, and a church quilt with members' names and photos was on display.



Photo courtesy of Denise Hilburn

COFFEE ASSOCIATION

► **Alberton Baptist Church, Kinston**, will host its annual community Thanksgiving barbecue Nov. 23, 5 p.m. All are invited. Will Jordan is pastor.

EAST CULLMAN ASSOCIATION

► **Antioch Missionary Baptist Church, Cullman**, celebrated its 100th anniversary Sept. 15. Special music was provided by the children's choir and Brad and Sandra Pepper. A brief history of the church was shared by David Hadley. The church was honored with two commemorative plaques presented by Randy Makemson (left), East Cullman's associational missionary, and Ken Blackwood (not shown), a commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission and



Photo courtesy of Alison Blackwood

director of missions and ministries for Morgan Association. Deacon chair Mark Howse (right) accepted the plaques on behalf of the church. Also present was the oldest living member of the church, Doug Maynard, 96. Books, letters, photos and a list of former pastors were on display. Jim Butts is pastor.

GENEVA ASSOCIATION

► **Maple Avenue Baptist Church, Geneva**, will host Bill King as Bro Billy Bob, humorist and musician, Nov. 17. Dinner will be served at 6 p.m. Ricky Hall is pastor.

SARDIS ASSOCIATION

► **James Preachers** retired July 1 after more than 20 years as associational missionary of **Sardis Baptist Association**. Previously, he served as associate pastor of New Brockton FBC. Preachers and his wife, Jo (now deceased), also helped as volunteers with the church plant, Church on Boll Weevil Circle, Enterprise.

During his ministry, he served seven Alabama Baptist associations: Sardis, Salem-Troy, Coffee, Dale, Geneva, Covington and Bethlehem. A native of Coffee County, he earned his bachelor's degree in social science from Troy University; a master's degree in Christian education from New Orleans Seminary; and a doctor of ministry from Covington Seminary, Ringgold, Georgia.

In 1976, Preachers began attending area classes at what is now known as the Ministry Training Institute for Samford University. The following year, he became director of Coffee Association's MTI site, serving 48 years. His wife served as the association's MTI registrar for almost 40 years.

He has two adult children, five grandchildren and five great-grandchildren, plus one on the way. He continues to serve as pastor of Trinity Baptist Church, Elba.



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► **County Line Baptist Church, Enterprise**
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► **Lake Martin Baptist Church, Dadeville**
Keyboards at Christmas, featuring Christmas music on two grand pianos, three keyboards and 10 pianists. Dec. 8 at 6 p.m.

► **Rainsville First Baptist Church**
Puppet show featuring "How the Grinch Was Saved at Christmas." Show dates are Dec. 1-7. Go to www.rainsvillefirst.com for times and free tickets.

► **Taylorville Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa**
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Finding peace in a busy Christmas season

By Denise George

The Alabama Baptist

During the Christmas season life becomes even busier, noisier and more chaotic than usual.

The hustle and bustle of the holidays brings a flurry of expectations — planning and cooking meals, preparing for guests, buying and wrapping gifts, addressing and sending cards, hosting and attending get-togethers, decorating the home.

Each task seems to come with its own pressing deadline, and the to-do list can grow longer every year.

‘Stop, breathe and rest’

Physical, mental and emotional exhaustion can quickly replace Christmas joy when we become overwhelmed with all the activities. The increased workload can turn the anticipation of celebrating Christ’s birth into dread.

It doesn’t have to be that way. Amid the busyness, God invites us to stop, breathe and rest in His peaceful presence. “Be still, and know that I am God,” He whispers

to our tired spirits (Ps. 46:10). He encourages us to slow down, cease striving, quiet our mind, ease our anxieties and simply trust Him.

We can practice peace by resting in the Prince of Peace (Is. 9:6).

Is a peaceful, Christ-centered Christmas possible?

Yes. Here are some suggestions to help you enjoy Christ’s peace and presence during the holidays:

▶ Discuss with family and friends celebrating a more peaceful season.

Make plans to:

- Eliminate chaos-producing expectations the season most often brings.
- Forgo expensive gift-buying and giving.
- Limit social events and choose selectively those to host and attend.
- Organize potluck dinners, encouraging everyone to contribute.
- Decorate homes and yards more simply.
- Use social media to wish family

and friends a “Merry Christmas,” saving time and expense to buy, address and send cards.

▶ Plan special quiet family times together reading Scripture, listening to music, sharing thoughts and praying. Spend time reflecting on

the Christmas story (Luke 2:1–20; Matt. 2:1–12).

▶ Focus on relationships, being fully present with loved ones and making memories, rather than getting caught up in the demands of the season.

Church leaders can help families focus

on the peace of Christ. Here are some ideas:

▶ Encourage family worship with a daily devotion booklet, guiding the congregation to spend quiet time together as they prepare for a peaceful Christmas.

▶ Plan a family-focused sermon and Bible study series that will teach and highlight the peace Christ

brings to individual human hearts and to Christian families.

▶ Encourage church families to simplify their holiday traditions to focus more on Christ. Seek church programs that will renew the true message of Christ and Christmas for the congregation.

▶ Open the sanctuary during the week for quiet individual prayer and reflection by church and community members during the busy season.

▶ As a congregation, volunteer time and resources to help someone in need, reflecting the love of Christ.

Meaningful moments

In the midst of a busy Christmas season, slowing down and focusing on Christ allows us to experience His peace in a profound way.

As we pause to reflect on hope, peace, joy and love, we can enjoy meaningful moments with family and friends as we draw nearer to the true meaning of Christmas.

This season, may we prepare our hearts to welcome the Prince of Peace into our lives.

“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!”

Psalm 46:10

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LOTTIE MOON CHRISTMAS OFFERING PREVIEW

'Deeply committed to the Great Commission'

Lottie Moon offering helps missionaries go, live among the unreached and share the hope of Jesus

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Nicole Gallwey said the people group she serves is Muslim, and they love being Muslim. And she loves them and wants them to know the love of Jesus instead.

That's why she left Alabama nine years ago to live among them in the Middle East.

"They love being Muslim, but many of them don't really know what their religion teaches besides the basics of how to pray and fast," Gallwey said of her people group, the Pearl people.

But she said God

has provided several ways for her International Mission Board team to reach the women, who rarely leave their homes, she said.

"We have a health education team that visits people with diabetes and other chronic illnesses to teach and encourage healthy habits," Gallwey said. "A few doctors and a physical therapist from a local hospital partner go with us to treat women in their homes."

Healthy habits

She and her teammates have also started exercising with the women and cooking healthy food together.

"While we are in the home, we tell the women and children a series of Bible stories that help them understand the nature of God and man's relationship with him and how Jesus puts everything right again," Gallwey said.

The men on her team have also been meeting with a small group of Pearl men to read the Bible, and God is working in their hearts, she said.

Beginnings of God's work

"It's a long road to faith for them. There is one man who our team prayed for for years who was an alcoholic and abusive to his wife and children who has recently professed faith in Christ," Gallwey said. "He will need lots of patient and loving discipleship, but we rejoice over the beginnings of God's work in his life."

Gallwey is among 3,515 IMB missionaries around the world who are supported by the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering each year. All the LMCO goes straight to missionaries who are making disciples and multiplying churches among unreached people groups. A number of those missionaries — like Gallwey — are from Alabama.

This year's Week of Prayer for International Missions, set for Dec. 1-8, kicks off the season of the LMCO, which this year has a national goal of \$205



Photo courtesy of Nicole Gallwey
Alabama missionary Nicole Gallwey works among the 60 million Pearl people who live in Central Asia and the Middle East.

million and a goal of \$12 million for Alabama.

"I'm very thankful for the LMCO because the funds allow [our] team to both live in and travel to places where unreached people live," Gallwey said. "Because we

are so well supported, we can focus all our energy on the missions task, knowing that our financial, physical and medical needs are taken care of."

She said she is also thankful for the offering because it reminds her "how many other Christians are deeply committed to the Great Commission and that there are many people faithfully praying for me and God's work here."

Prayer needs

She asked for prayer for God to give her team creativity and endurance as they share the gospel over and over with the Pearl people they know and for God to open inroads into new communities yet to hear the gospel.

For more information or to download resources like videos, social media graphics, posters and bulletin inserts, visit imb.org/lottiemoon.

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

The Week of Prayer for International Missions is Dec. 1-8.

LOTTIE MOON CHRISTMAS OFFERING



National goal: \$205 million
Alabama goal: \$12 million



IMB missionaries among Central Asian peoples, much like the woman pictured, know they will need to reach those in cities, in rural mountain villages and in hard-to-reach places in order to make the gospel accessible to the lost.

Week of Prayer

for International Missions is Dec. 1-8

Day 1 — The Great Pursuit in Senegal

Even though Moses is afraid of water, he and his wife Beth continue to travel by canoe to reach the unreached living on the islands of the west African country of Senegal.



IMB photo
IMB missionary Moses leads a Bible study at a church plant in southern Senegal.

Day 2 — The Great Pursuit in Central Asia

During their two decades in Central Asia, Gary and Ann Warrior have seen people turn to Christ, and that isn't stopping now — people are still desiring to be baptized.

Day 3 — The Great Pursuit among the Deaf

Two years ago, there was no church-planting movement among the Deaf of Slovenia. But now with a Slovenian Sign Language translation of the Bible, IMB missionaries are seeing the Deaf respond to the gospel.

Day 4 — The Great Pursuit in Brazil

When Danilo Miranda was growing up in Brazil, he was disciplined by an IMB missionary. Now he is one himself and spends time training churches in Brazil to be healthy and send missionaries around the world.



IMB photo
Cultures vary widely among the more than 17,000 islands in Southeast Asia.

Day 5 — The Great Pursuit on Southeast Asian Islands

On the Southeast Asian islands where David and Regan York serve, there are a lot of obstacles, including a variety of religions and treacherous travel through jungles. But the Yorks are committed to seeing healthy churches planted and multiplied.

Day 6 — The Great Pursuit in Northern Africa

Jay and Ella Janill serve in an area where they need security guards and a trekking guide to travel safely into the mountains. But they have seen God at work as they've shared the gospel — including the salvation of one of their guides.

Day 7 — The Great Pursuit in South Asia

As a missionary explorer, John Pratt prays for God to show him how to find the people groups he's looking for. On one occasion, God led him to a man fishing by the water, and so far he and six others from his people group have prayed to trust in Christ.



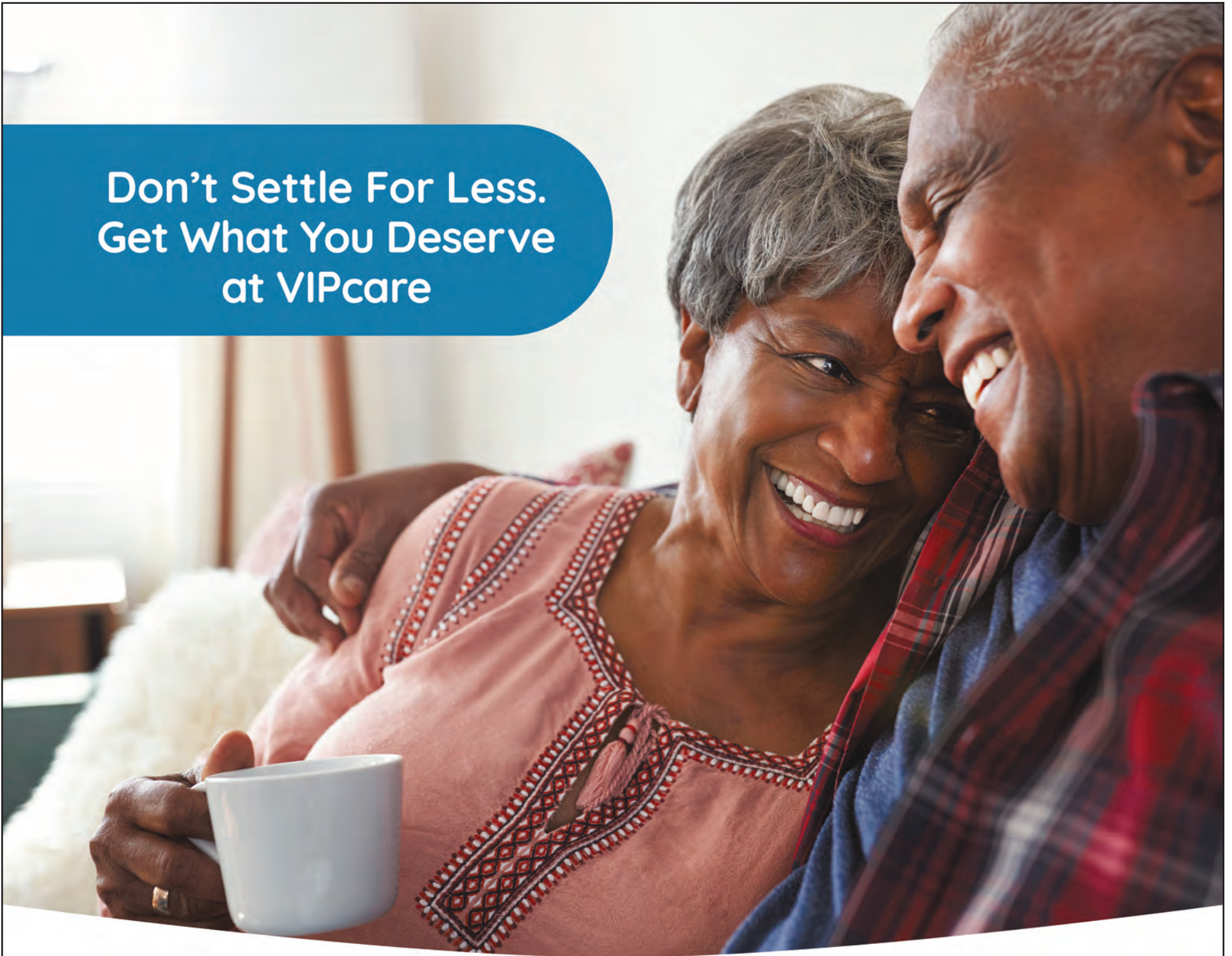
IMB photo
IMB missionary Ginny Wheeler and John Holston, a medical volunteer, pray for an Armenian. Wheeler facilitates health care providers in creatively partnering with IMB missionaries and their national partners.

Day 8 — The Great Pursuit in Europe

Ginny Wheeler has seen God use her nursing skills in Greece in ways she never would've expected. Most recently, she's been able to mentor a young Greek nurse and help her catch a vision for reaching refugees with the gospel through meeting medical needs.

For more information or for resources, visit lottiemoon.org.

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3 ways to develop an 'attitude of gratitude' this fall

By Carolyn Tomlin
The Alabama Baptist

When the fourth Thursday in November arrives, how will your family observe Thanksgiving? Will your celebration resemble a Norman Rockwell painting where families sit down together for a meal and offer a blessing? Or will you tell everyone to grab a sandwich and watch football all day?

According to Lifeway Research, 56% of those surveyed said being thankful to God for their blessings was most important on Thanksgiving Day, while 38% reported spending time with family and friends as top on their list.

Beneficial reasons

Research shows that being thankful is good for us, and author David Jeremiah, pastor of Shadow Mountain Community Church in El Cajon, California, writes, "No matter the circumstance, we can find a reason to be thankful."

Research-based benefits of gratitude include optimism,

happiness, a stronger immune system, sound sleep, better rest and a more generous attitude toward others. Research even suggests grateful people recover more quickly after surgery.

And I believe the person who pursues God will be the happiest.

Learned trait

My late paternal grandmother was an example of a grateful woman. Before she died at almost 100 years, I asked her what her secret to longevity was. She quickly replied, "To be grateful for the life the Lord has given me, to love God, to love people and to be happy."

Gratitude is a trait not learned in a book, but it can be taught through example and daily practice. Would some of these suggestions work for your family or your church family?

1. Start an attitude journal. Write down your blessings. Reflect on ways God has blessed you. Has He given you restful sleep? Nutritious food? True friends? A loving family? You'll find



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your blessings are too numerous to write.

2. Recognize your blessings. This is similar to a journal, but throughout the day, be aware of how God is blessing you. Perhaps it's kind friends, a meaningful song or hymn, a beautiful sunset, faith and trust in God. The list is endless.

3. Teach children to be thankful. Be positive

about life instead of negative. Look for the good in people. As you interact with children and youth, point out things for which you are thankful.

One of the most recurring themes of the Bible is how we should thank God for His goodness.

First Thessalonians 5:18 says, "Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's

will for you in Christ Jesus."

"In everything" means both the good and the not so good, the joys and the sorrows. Sometimes in the valleys of life, we learn lessons that would not be seen from the mountaintop. Thank Him for the difficulties as well as the blessings.

Being grateful is not only for this season. It should be celebrated all year long.

Remedy for excessive busyness found in intentional time with God

When author Alyssa Joy Bethke polled her Instagram audience to learn their biggest challenges, a common theme emerged — so much pressure to do it all and be it all right now, and that it was too much.

Knowing this wasn't the life God wanted her and others to live, Bethke started on a journey of healing, of

moving from the pressure of being everything to everyone to living a life with a "deep contemplation on the goodness of God."

Her book "When Doing it All is Undoing You" describes how moments of solitude, a time of reflection and other practices can bring the joy and peace God promises. (Tracy Riggs Frontz)

Amazing happens **here.**

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UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Register now for State Evangelism Conference

Register now for the E3 Conference, the new name for the State Evangelism Conference, set for Jan. 26–27 at Lakeside Baptist Church in Birmingham. E3 stands for Evangelize, Establish, Equip.

The goal is to encourage and equip believers to make a difference through sharing their faith.

The conference will feature practical breakout sessions Monday morning followed by a luncheon with a keynote message by Scott Dawson, founder and CEO of Scott Dawson Evangelistic Association.

Other conference leaders include Phil Waldrep, founder and CEO of Phil Waldrep Ministries, and Tim Dowdy, vice president of evangelism for the North

To register, visit evangelizeal.org/E3 or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



American Mission Board.

Charles Billingsley will lead music.

To register for the conference, visit evangelizeal.org/E3.

Can't make it in person? Sunday evening and Monday morning sessions will be livestreamed at live.alsbom.org.

Early Bird Tax Conference: Dec. 3

What IRS forms are required to be filed by the church? What should the pastor's W-2 look like? How are ministers and churches treated differently than businesses? How should we acknowledge charitable contributions to the church?

These and other topics will be covered at this year's Early Bird Tax Conference.

The conference will be held Dec. 3 at the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions in Prattville from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The cost of this event is \$15, which includes lunch and materials.

To register, visit alsbom.org/event/early-bird-tax-conference. For questions, call Lee Wright at 334-613-2263 or email lwright@alsbom.org.

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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

First Baptist Church of Uria, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a full-time or bivocational pastor. Please email resumé to Larry Boles at Wb4cva@yahoo.com or mail via USPS to: FBC Uria, P.O. Box 337, Uria, AL 36480.

PASTOR

FBC Shawmut, located in Valley, Alabama, is a traditional church seeking a pastor who is a servant leader with vision, and passion for people, God's work and Word. The pastor should have a heart for evangelism and seek to grow and guide a small congregation needing revitalization. Send resumé to: sfbc.psc@yahoo.com.

PASTOR

Pineview Baptist Church, Brent, Alabama, is seeking a full-time pastor. Send resumé to: Pineview Baptist Church, 10291 Highway 5, Brent, AL 35034 or email: pineviewbaptist@yahoo.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Wilton Baptist Church, located in Shelby County, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a senior bivocational pastor to shepherd the flock and lead us forward. The membership consists of all ages — from children to senior adults. We voluntarily band ourselves together as a body of baptized believers in Jesus Christ and are personally committed to sharing the good news of salvation to lost mankind. If you believe God may be calling you to serve at a church like ours, please submit a resumé and short cover letter to: wiltonbaptistal@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

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

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Paden Baptist Church, Gadsden, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a bivocational pastor. Mail resumé to: Paden Baptist Church, 900 Padenreich Ave., Gadsden, AL 35903, or Bruce Ragland, Chairman, Search Committee at Padenbaptistchurch@yahoo.com.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR

Buhl Baptist is seeking an associate pastor with experience in all areas of pastoral responsibilities and some availability during the work week. Send resumé to: dmhicks630@gmail.com or BuhlBaptistChurch@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL WORSHIP LEADER/DIRECTOR OF MUSIC

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

MINISTER OF MUSIC

Taylorville Baptist Church (Tuscaloosa, Alabama), full-time or part-time position based on candidate, competitive salary. Interested applicants should email Krista Collins (kcollins@taylorvillebaptist.org) for a copy of the position description. To be considered, please email a cover letter, resumé and three references by Nov. 30. Also, if available, please provide links from YouTube or other sites of your music.

MUSIC MINISTER

Bell Lane Baptist Church, Clanton, Alabama, seeking music minister for blended services. For more information or to submit a resumé, email: sheila.bolton@att.net.

PART-TIME MINISTER OF MUSIC

First Baptist Church Rogersville, Alabama, is seeking a part-time minister of music responsible for overseeing the music ministries of the church, including planning and conducting blended worship services, directing the choir/praise and worship team and coordinating volunteer musicians. Request interested candidates submit resumé to Corwyn Tiede at tiedein@aol.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PART-TIME CHILDREN'S MINISTER

Pineview Baptist Church, Brent, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational part-time children's minister. Send resumé to: Pineview Baptist Church, 10291 Highway 5, Brent, AL 35034, or email: pineviewbaptist@yahoo.com.

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.

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RESOURCES

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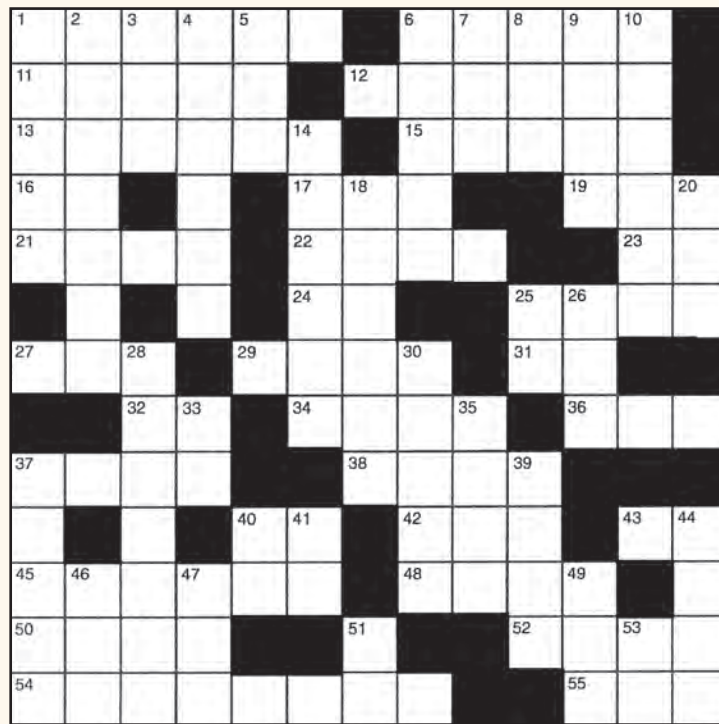
This new book by veteran Baptist pastor and cartoonist Joe McKeever is a resource pastors will want to keep on their shelf. And for those new to the pastorate, McKeever's insights will be a true gift. Order your copy straight from the author today for \$24.95. Email joe@joemckeever.com, Venmo @Joe-McKeever-7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

CHRISTIAN Crossword



ACROSS

1. Led the Israelites over the Jordan River. (Josh. 4:1)
6. Queen of the _____. (Matt. 12:42)
11. A crown of gold round _____. (Ex. 25:11)
12. Disciple and successor of Elijah. (1 Kings 19:16)
13. Marked with bands.
15. Part of the small intestine.
16. Overdraft. (abbr.)
17. Born in his _____ house. (Gen. 14:14)
19. The _____ es saw a man coming forth out of the city. (Judg. 1:24)
21. _____ thou return unto the ground. (Gen. 3:19)
22. Loose outer garment worn by ancient Romans.
23. He built there an altar, and called the place _____-bethel. (Gen. 35:7)
24. The Lord your God, _____ it is that fighteth for you. (Josh. 23:10)
25. Spiral or twisted form.
27. Which heard _____ words of God. (Num. 24:4)
29. Whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be _____. (Prov. 29:25)
31. _____ an earring of gold. (Prov. 25:12)
32. Los Angeles. (abbr.)
34. Thus you _____ify the word of God. (Mark 7:13)
36. One who excels.
37. If a man have long _____. (1 Cor. 11:14)
38. Past participle of lie.
40. The men of Bethel and _____. (Neh. 7:32)
42. Where golf ball is placed.



By Udena McKee Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

43. Give _____ this day. (Matt. 6:11)
44. City where the Philistines took the ark. (1 Sam. 5:1)
48. First home of Adam and Eve. (Gen. 2:8)
50. A native of Thailand.
52. What hast thou _____? (Gen. 4:10)
54. A good king of Judah. (2 Chron. 29:1-2)
55. A male cat.

DOWN

1. A dress or shirt ruffle.
2. Shortest book of the Old Testament.
3. Hannah prayed for a _____. (1 Sam. 1:11)
4. To crowd together.
5. Indian tribe from western U.S.
6. His _____ was in his hand. (1 Sam. 17:40)
7. Her mouth is smoother than _____. (Prov. 5:3)
8. That _____ their tongues. (Jer. 23:31)
9. _____ shall ye say to David. (1 Sam. 18:25)
10. Your steps will not be _____ed. (Prov. 4:12, NIV)
14. Where Joseph found his brothers.
18. Full of sorrow.
20. Jonadab told Amnon to pretend to be _____. (2 Sam. 13:5)
25. Symbol for calcium.
26. United States of America (abbr.)
28. Job's friend. (Job 2:11)
30. To fill with joy.
33. Symbol for argon.
35. Thou hast not _____ unto men, but unto God. (Acts 5:4)
37. A tract of open land.
39. Your Father knoweth what things ye have _____ of. (Matt. 6:8)
40. Account of. (abbr.)
41. Part of the psyche.
44. All a man's ways _____ right to him. (Prov. 16:2, CSB)
46. Female pronoun.
47. Give me children, or else I _____. (Gen. 30:1)
49. That which was torn of beasts I brought _____ unto thee. (Gen. 31:39)
51. Mother.
53. Before them there were _____ such locusts. (Ex. 10:14)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Give sacrificially to help share gospel here, beyond

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

Remember that the offering is received through the end of the year, so there's still time for you to make your gift. The offering is designed to complement vital giving through the Cooperative Program and helps support the Great Commission Ministries of Alabama WMU, Disaster Relief, Church Planting, Partnership Missions and Church Revitalization.

Please continue to pray for these five strategic ministries and to prayerfully consider giving sacrificially

to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering if you haven't already.

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

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



Week of Prayer for International Missions and Lottie Moon Christmas Offering

It's almost time for the Week of Prayer for International Missions and the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering!

Be sure to check out alsbom.org/lottiemoon and sign up to receive prayer updates by email.

During the Week of Prayer, you'll receive daily

missionary moments in your inbox with stories of how God is at work around the world and ways you can pray for your International Mission Board missionaries.

You'll also find resources your church can use to promote the Week of Prayer and the offering.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Sunday School Lessons

By Robert Olsen, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



For November 17

RESPOND Acts 26:19–29

A Changed Life (19–23)

In this passage Luke recounts Paul's legal situation. Paul was accused of being a trouble-maker, of being a part of the Nazarene sect and trying to desecrate the temple.

By chapter 26, the Roman governor Festus is the one hearing the trial. Being a Roman, Festus didn't understand why Paul was being detained because the issue was one of Jewish religion pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus and not one of Roman civil law. So Festus presented the case to King Agrippa, who was Jewish.

In response, Paul recounted his testimony to show how he had previously lived his life as a devout Pharisee, only to be confronted by Jesus on the road to Damascus. The experience had a profound impact on how Paul began to live his life, showing the marked change the gospel brings.

In his trial, Paul had such confidence in God's plan for him that his circumstances were not important to him. For Christians today, when we are faced with trials and tribulations, do we have enough faith in God's plan for our lives that we can be content with our circumstances?

It is so easy for us to look at our circumstances, the issues in our communities, the problems in our country and the concerns about the world in general that it is easy to lose hope.

This is why both Jesus and Paul tell us not to focus on these things. (See John 16:33 and 2 Cor. 4:16–18.) Our confidence in God's plan for us should help us to live with contentment in spite of the chaos of the world around us.

Opposition (24–26)

After Paul presented his salvation experience and his actions in sharing the gospel,

Festus interjected that Paul was out of his mind.

We should expect opposition when we present the gospel to the world, but it should not cause us to lose heart or become frustrated. How we respond to opposition is a form of evangelism.

Christians should be kind in the midst of persecution to the point of actually forgiving those who persecute us. This type of behavior is so counter to what the culture expects that these actions can move people to an acceptance of the gospel.

The Ask (27–29)

Paul then turns the questioning back on Agrippa about believing the prophets. Paul knew that Agrippa was Jewish and thus would believe the Old Testament, so Paul is trying to convince Agrippa of the fulfillment of prophecy in Christ.

This is a good model for us to follow. It is important for Christians to know the worldview and beliefs of our audience so that we can try to find common ideas to help in sharing the gospel.

When Agrippa refused the gospel, Paul said he would pray that one day all who were there with them would accept the gospel. Instead of Paul trying harder to convince them or giving up or even getting angry, Paul keeps his poise and acts positively toward his hearers.

It is a good lesson for us today. Instead of becoming flustered or upset over opposition we face, we should remain kind toward the individuals.

One of the marks of a Christian is how we treat others and how we live, and when people can see how different Christians are from the world around them, it makes a compelling case for the gospel.

EDITOR'S NOTE — The Sunday School lesson outlines are provided by Lifeway.

For November 24

TRUST Acts 27:31–44

Call to Trust (31–34)

By his own choice Paul was going to be taken to Rome to stand trial. Under Roman law he had a right to go to Rome for his trial, and so he had appealed to Caesar. While traveling, a storm hit that ultimately lasted 14 days, threatening the well-being of the ship and its cargo.

Paul had received a visit from an angel telling him that he would indeed make it to Rome to stand trial before Caesar. Paul communicated the message to the centurion in charge that if all the men on board stayed together on the boat, they would all survive. As they neared land Paul encouraged the men to eat something. He prayed to God, giving thanks for the food.

Paul had confidence because of his faith in God and was able to take command of the situation, giving instructions and details. With no better information and fearing for their lives, the men listened to Paul. With no objective grounding to anchor reality, people today have decided to make up their own reality, and this leads to chaos and pain.

Christians have answers for all of these problems and as such, we need to be vocal about the problems in the culture and how the gospel answers these problems. Even if this leads to persecution, being persecuted for righteousness' sake is worthwhile and can often lead to belief in the gospel. (See Matt. 5:11–12.)

Act in Faith (35–38)

In an attempt to keep from shipwreck, the men threw over the supplies and even their grain. Paul was not worried because he had confidence that God would do what He had promised.

While most of us today have not seen an angel of the Lord nor had a message as clear as the one the angel gave Paul, we do have God's Word and in it, God encourages us with promises and tells us how to live and act in the midst of our circumstances.

We are promised eternal life through belief and trust in the atoning sacrifice of Christ through His death, burial and resurrection. With this assurance we should be able to face whatever trials come our way, and we should have an attitude that glorifies God in the process. God uses our circumstances — both good and bad — for His glory and for our good (Rom. 8:28).

Persistent Trust (39–44)

When the ship finally wrecked, the men swam to shore or floated in on pieces of the boat and everyone survived, just as Paul had told them.

God was true to His word, as He is today. Knowing that God uses our circumstances for our good and His glory, we should not complain about our situations but understand that God is fulfilling His plan through them.

Nothing befalls us outside of God's knowledge and if we trust His promises, we know that our present sufferings are preparing for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all (2 Cor. 4:17).

We need to prepare ourselves in calm times so that we can weather the difficult times. The best way to do this is to read the Bible, know what it says, be in prayer to help us focus on God and be involved with our churches so we can be built up and build others up in Christ.

Doing these things will help us to see God's hand in both our good times and trials.

*“Paul urged them to take some food saying ...
‘Not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you.’”*

Acts 27:33–34

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sunday School Lessons

By Teman Knight, Ph.D.

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For November 17

JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS: FAMILY RECONCILIATION Genesis 42:3–5, 21–24a; 45:1–5

Forgiveness is a key component of any relationship. Because of our sinfulness and selfishness, every relationship is going to experience times of failure and hurt, especially in our family relationships. Forgiveness is the way to find healing and restoration for broken relationships. As believers, our relationship with God is based on His forgiveness of our sin. We are commanded to forgive others as He has forgiven us.

In our last lesson, we saw the broken relationships of Jacob's family. We ended with Joseph being sold into slavery and Jacob grieving. Now, we move forward 20 years.

Joseph's life in Egypt was an up-and-down experience, rising from slavery to being head of household only to be falsely accused and imprisoned. Later, Joseph becomes Pharaoh's chief adviser and second in command, overseeing the storing and distribution of resources during the famine. His brothers come back into his life after they travel to Egypt to purchase food because of the famine.

God can use a crisis to bring two groups together. (42:3–5)

To provide for his family during the famine, Jacob sends his 10 oldest sons to Egypt to buy grain. He does not send Benjamin, Joseph's younger brother. Jacob's fear that something may happen to Benjamin is an indication that he is still affected by the loss of Joseph. While hurt and loss may diminish over time, they still can affect our actions and responses.

This crisis brought Joseph and his brothers back together. Sometimes the crises of life such as family crises, health issues and funerals can bring us back into situations where we must deal with people from our past and

have an opportunity to restore broken relationships.

Repentance begins with acknowledging our sins. (21–24a)

Joseph recognizes his brothers, but after 20 years they fail to recognize him. Testing them to see if they have changed, Joseph accuses his brothers of being spies, which they deny. Joseph demands that his brothers return home and bring back Benjamin, the youngest brother. Simeon is kept as a guarantee that they will return.

The guilt-ridden brothers conclude that God is punishing them for selling Joseph into slavery. Upon hearing this, Joseph leaves the room so that he does not reveal his identity when he weeps.

Forgiveness lets go of the past and leads to restoration. (45:1–5)

At this point in the story, an emotional Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers. The brothers are overwhelmed and terrified by this revelation. Perhaps they think that Joseph will now seek to retaliate because of their past actions.

Joseph tells his brothers that God has allowed everything to happen as it did so people might be saved from starvation during the famine. He tells his brothers to go home and tell their father to pack up and move to Egypt.

Forgiveness is vital for healthy relationships at home and in church. Jesus instructed us that even when we are in worship, if we have offended someone, then we should leave and go immediately to reconcile with our brother (Matt. 5:23–24). This would include confession and restitution.

If we have been offended, we must immediately seek reconciliation and forgive the offender (Matt. 18:21–22): "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. ... For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (Matt. 6:12, 14).

For November 24

THE GOD WHO RESCUES Psalm 30:1–12

Psalm 30 is an individual psalm of thanksgiving that came to be associated with the rededication of the temple when it was rebuilt. The original intent of the psalm was for an individual (David) to thank God for His deliverance.

Gratitude is not something we express enough in our society.

Many have a feeling of entitlement and think we deserve it, should have received more or should have received it sooner.

As believers, we should be thankful for every blessing we receive.

We know that every good gift is a gift from God that we do not deserve. Often — like when Jesus healed the 10 lepers — only a small percentage of us pause to thank God.

Paul reminds us, "Give thanks in everything for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thess. 5:18). When our grandchildren receive something we often prompt them with, "What do you say?"

Saying "thank you" reminds us that we owe someone else for what they have provided or done for us. We're not independent; we are reliant on someone else. The psalmist reminds us that we owe everything to God and prompts us with, "What do you say?"

Be thankful God rescues us from destruction. (1–5)

The Psalmist begins by exalting the Lord. We should praise God because of who He is. We also praise Him because of what He has done.

The psalmist identifies four reasons to thank God. First, He lifted us up from where we had fallen. Second, He has protected us from our enemies.

In addition, when we cried out to God He healed us from our sickness. Also, He saved us from death and the grave. We can thank Him

for these things and for all the times He has delivered us.

Because of God's deliverance, the psalmist invites us to "sing to the Lord" and "praise His holy name." We are motivated to praise God because He is holy. "Praise His holy name" in Hebrew literally reads "and give thanks for the memory of His holiness."

"Holy" means "different." God is not like us. God is not like the false gods that other people worshipped. He is holy and deserves to be praised and worshipped.

The psalmist reminds us that God's anger only lasts a moment, but life is found in His favor or grace.

We may be weeping tonight but joy is coming. Be thankful God rescues us from the destruction we deserve.

Be thankful God rescues us from pride. (6–10)

Thankfulness comes from realizing we are not self-reliant but totally dependent upon God. David pridefully thought he could stand on his own strength.

He came to realize that the only time he could stand at all was when God showed him His favor.

When he attempted to stand without God he was terrified, but when he placed his trust in God and sought His favor, he was able to stand.

Be thankful God rescues us from sorrow. (11–12)

God can turn every aspect of our lives around. When we cry out for His grace and His favor and place our trust in God, He changes everything.

He transforms our grief into dancing. God transforms our mourning into joy. He puts a song into our hearts. We cannot remain silent. His faithful ones must cry out with thankfulness and praise to our God forever.

*"Sing praises
to the LORD,
O you his saints,
and give thanks
to his holy name."*

Psalm 30:4

National WMU builds houseboat from craft sticks to show what cooperative effort can do

By Grace Thornton

The Alabama Baptist

A lot of little popsicle sticks can go a long way when they're put together.

That's what national Woman's Missionary Union has been trying to show as they've been preparing for a craft stick houseboat for the past six months.

Back in May, WMU put out a request for churches, entities, missions groups, Vacation Bible Schools and others to put together small square panels with craft sticks, decorate them and send them to the WMU headquarters.

Working together

The idea was to use them to build a big houseboat and float it on Lay Lake in Alabama to demonstrate

the way the Cooperative Program works — how when the more than 40,000 Southern Baptist churches work together, they can accomplish a lot toward the fulfillment of the Great Commission.



WMU photo

National WMU staff and a crew of volunteers began the first morning of the build with a time of prayer for women around the world.

Some of the money given through the Cooperative Program in the past helped provide a houseboat for International Mission Board missionaries Don and Maria Friesen who live in South America among a people group that often moves when the water levels rise.

Missions curriculum

The couple's story is featured in WMU's children's missions curriculum for November, so to coincide with that, national WMU staff and a team of volunteers from Texas and Illinois worked in early November to construct the boat on a pontoon platform.

Thousands of panels were turned in, including some from Southern Baptist seminaries, IMB, the North



WMU photo

National WMU staff and volunteers from Illinois and Texas worked in early November to build the houseboat from the thousands of panels sent in from churches and others around the country.

American Mission Board, GuideStone and the SBC Executive Committee.

(To see a video, visit tabonline.org/houseboat.)

To learn more about the project, visit wmu.com/

craft-stick-houseboat-and-the-cooperative-program.

To see updates on the craft stick houseboat, visit WMU's Facebook page at facebook.com/National-WMU.

Faith Moments

Seven lessons for Christians living with a wartime mentality

A few weeks ago, Ken Allen and I returned from teaching, preaching and encouraging Baptist pastors and leaders in Ukraine. Crossing the border from Ukraine into Romania was a relief (even though we were at the border awaiting entry for four hours).

Reflecting on our trip, we believe all Christians should live with a wartime mentality. After all, we are in a spiritual war. Below are seven lessons for Christians living with a wartime mentality:

1. Urgency of the gospel: In times of war, the brevity of life becomes more apparent. Christians are reminded of the urgency to share the gospel with others while there is still time. We are not guaranteed tomorrow.

2. Faith over fear: War creates an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, but believers can rely on God's promises. Because we serve the Lord, there is NOTHING for Christians to fear. Scriptures like Psalm 91 offer comfort in God's protection and sovereignty.

3. Community and unity: War highlights the need for strong Christian fellowship. The Baptist churches in Ukraine are "all in" in helping in the war effort. In adversity, the body of Christ can provide comfort, resources and emotional support.

4. Sacrificial love: Christians are called to serve others selflessly, even in dangerous circumstances. War provides an opportunity to live out Christ's love sacrificially by meeting the needs of those suffering. Grisa, a Baptist pastor friend in Ukraine, leads a convoy every other week

with food and supplies to a dangerous and bombed-out town. His efforts have led to a new church plant with as many as 250 people gathering for food and the Word of God.

5. Resilience in prayer: War tests your faith and strengthens your prayer life. Persistent, fervent prayer becomes essential. It has been said, "There are no atheists in foxholes." I don't know if this is accurate, but wartime drives people to their knees. Let us renew our commitment to devote our lives and our churches to prayer.

6. Hope in eternity: Many of the towns in parts of Ukraine have been bombed to rubble. In the face of devastation, believers have the assurance of eternity with Christ. This eternal hope gives them strength and perspective that the world cannot offer.

7. Witness through suffering: Christians enduring war can bear witness to Christ through their suffering. How they respond to trials can reflect Christ's grace and hope for those around them. Jesus said, "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Your suffering is momentary. Life with Christ is eternal.

These principles help in surviving and thriving spiritually. Paul reminds us "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers ... authorities ... cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12).

By Rob Jackson

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



LASS WORDS

BY **KEN LASS**
The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Seeing is believing

I have been severely nearsighted for as long as I can remember. As a child my depth perception was lacking. I can remember walking through doorways and cracking my shoulder into the door frame or reaching for a doorknob and missing. You drop a lot of stuff when you're nearsighted. Mom never trusted me to carry drinks to the dinner table.

It also doesn't help in athletic activities. I remember being in the outfield during backyard baseball games when the batter would hit a fly ball I was certain was going to drop in front of me. I would charge in to catch it, only to watch it sail well over my head to the collective groan of my teammates.

Facing reality

I hated the idea of wearing glasses. Kids made fun of those who wore glasses. Every year in elementary school they would haul out the same old eye chart to test your vision.

I had that thing memorized right down to the 20/20 vision line. Then in fifth grade, the school double-crossed me and used a new eye chart. I was busted. The school informed my parents that I was basically blind as a bat, and soon after that I was wearing thick glasses with black frames.

I looked like that guy in the movie "Revenge of the Nerds." I've worn glasses or contact lenses ever since.

Of course, it wasn't long before I was kiddingly labeled "Four Eyes" by my friends. Funny thing though, I quickly learned that seeing the world around me more clearly was well worth the abuse.

Value others

I thought about this recently when I happened to be reading through the book of Philippians. There's a verse that says, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves" (2:3).

It's easy to fall into the trap of being spiritually nearsighted. You just see your own needs and desires.

I guess the Bible can be a kind of sharp pair of glasses that brings the real meaning of life into focus as you worship Him as Lord and serve others. That's 20/20 vision for living.

We exist in a world where values and priorities are becoming a little more blurry every day.

It's important that we can see God's will for our lives clearly. The Bible is our new eye chart.

MEET THE AUTHOR

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

Discipleship leaders should 'start small,' share 'as you go'

By **Michael J. Brooks**
The Alabama Baptist

Discipleship is the example Jesus set for His followers, and it begins with engaging and investing in future disciplemakers, according to Daniel Edmonds.

Edmonds, director of the office of Sunday School and discipleship for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, spoke to church leaders at Disciple Link, held Oct. 10 at Bethsalem Baptist Church in Billingsley.

Mark Gainey, lead strategist for disciple-making for SBOM, served as host, along with Jeremy Jones, pastor of Bethsalem Baptist.

"We have the 'macro' programs in our churches and these are fine, but discipleship is the 'micro' program by which we invest in a small group and then ask them to go and do the same," said Edmonds, author of a new book on discipleship, "Start Small, Do It Right, Build It Strong: Observing Jesus: What He Did That You Can Do."

Engage and equip

"Church leaders 'start small' with a group we invest in, but we actually start smaller since discipleship begins with us and the Lord," Gainey said during a panel discussion featuring several pastors.

"We must engage and equip disciples and tell them in biblical language, 'as you go' into the world, you make disciples too," he said.

Cody Hale, pastor of Iron City Baptist Church in Anniston, said he believes the church — including the pastor — must "build bridges" to the unsaved world by going outside the church building.

"When I finished my seminary studies, I decided to take up golf again," he said. "This gives me the opportunity to meet people outside the church, and I've worked at this. I've had people come to me on the golf course and ask me to pray with them about something."

'Art of neighboring'

Eric Taylor, pastor of Bethel Baptist Church in Pleasant Grove, said meeting needs is the new outreach. He teaches "the art of neighboring," in which members are encouraged to meet and know those who live on all sides of their houses.

Andy Frazier, pastor of First Baptist Church Jasper, agreed that outreach requires Christians to build relationships and live on mission.

"Churches used to do door hangers, but the new door hanger is our digital presence," he said.

"Those who come to our church have already checked us out on Facebook and on our website. They've followed several services online, and then they come to worship with us. Digital time is a necessary part of church outreach today."

Learn more about discipleship at makingdisciplesal.org.



Photo by Michael J. Brooks/The Alabama Baptist
Cody Hale (left), pastor of Iron City Baptist Church in Anniston; Eric Taylor (center), pastor of Bethel Baptist Church in Pleasant Grove; and Andy Frazier, pastor of First Baptist Church Jasper, share about engaging the unchurched community.

WORD search

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| ACCEPT | ESAU | JACOB |
| ANGER | FAMILY | JOURNEY |
| BIRTHRIGHT | FATHER | KISSED |
| BLESSING | FAVOR | PEACE |
| BOWED | FLEE | REBEKAH |
| BROTHER | FLOCK | RECONCILED |
| CAMPS | FORGIVE | REUNION |
| CATTLE | GIFTS | SERVANTS |
| CURSE | GRACE | VENGEANCE |
| DECEIVE | HUNTING | WEALTH |
| EMBRACE | ISAAC | WEPT |

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"But Esau ran to meet him, hugged him, threw his arms around him and kissed him. Then they wept."

GENESIS 33:4

You Gotta' Hear This!



Glimpses of God in the everyday moments

Thankful for tough times

I believe God often uses tough times to teach us to be grateful. Here are some examples from my life.

This morning, I got to sleep as late as I wanted. I said, "Thank you, Lord, for the wonderful night's sleep." I spent many sleep-deprived years as a student, a teacher and a mother to three active children. I remember how it felt to operate on little sleep, but had it not been for those hard days, I wouldn't appreciate a good eight hours of sleep.

As I made my way to the kitchen, I determined to cook myself a good breakfast. When I opened the fridge, I thanked God for the bounty found there. We had lean years where there were not the choices I found today. There was bacon aplenty, four dozen eggs, real orange juice, fruit all cut up and cherry preserves.

A sweet treat

When I was growing up, Daddy mainly carried grape jelly, or maybe apple, in our country store where we also got our groceries. After I married and got to go to a "real" grocery store, I discovered cherry preserves for just a few more pennies than grape jelly. I indulged then and still do.

I could have put my bacon in the microwave, but I wanted to enjoy the sensory delight of smelling the bacon frying. There is no better smell. In that good bacon fat, I fried two eggs.

As I sat down today to eat my feast, my eyes were overflowing

with tears as my heart felt such gratitude for the way I'm blessed by my Heavenly Father.

Now let me say, my family never went hungry in our leanest times, for which I'm grateful. God provided work, even though the low-paying jobs didn't always stretch far enough to buy everything we thought we needed.

Give thanks

I am thankful for those hard times because they taught me to be thankful for good days and good things.

I'm sure you could add to the thought train, but here are some of mine:

▶ If it weren't for the rain, how much would we appreciate the dry?

▶ If it weren't for the cold, how would we know to enjoy the heat?

▶ If we never experienced pain, how would we know comfort?

▶ If I were never lonely, how much would I appreciate visits from family and friends?

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.

