

The Alabama Baptist

Toll free 800-803-5201
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March 20, 2025

Vol. 190, No. 6
Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



TAB graphic with wayhomestudio on Freepik

Be aware

Facebook scams on the rise: Tips for spotting fraudulent posts online

By Carrie Brown McWhorter
The Alabama Baptist

If you've recently seen a Facebook post offering unbelievable deals on cars, tools, appliances and other items, beware — the post is likely a scammer trying to lure people into sending money they'll never get back.

The posts may read something like this actual post from a scammer:

“Hello guys, we are clearing out items from my Cousin house (he got moved to aged care) and he is no longer in need of these items and he is glad to have the extra money for other expenses on coming holidays. We have a truck and can deliver at a small extra fee. Send a Dm if interested in any item. **FIRST COME FIRST SERVE BASIS!**”

“If you pay a deposit now, I won't open talk with anyone else about it

and mark it sold on your name. So when I'm home, you can come and check it. If you like it, you will pay the balance and take it, if you don't, I will refund the deposit you paid.”

Items for sale

These posts will then list several items for sale, usually cars, tractors, ATVs, refrigerators, furniture and sometimes pets. The post will likely sound like an estate sale listing and

play on emotion, as in the example above. In reality, it is all a scam.

In some cases, fraudsters have created a clone of a real person's account and are pretending to be that person. In other cases, criminals have hacked the account, gaining access to emails, passwords, friends lists and other personal information, and are using this information to get people to send money.

(See 'If it sounds,' page 6)

SPOTLIGHT SPONSOR ...

Reliable Signs — A full-service, Alabama-based sign company, including design, manufacturing, installation and service



Bibles needed

Partners in developing countries grateful for donations

Jason Jenkins, director of the Alabama-based warehouse for Love Packages and shown in the photo on the right, has countless stories to share about how lives are being changed. If you walk with him through the warehouse in Decatur, then he can't help but tell you about the latest ones he's heard.

Love Packages, which is headquartered in Illinois, collects donations of Bibles, Christian books, Sunday School materials and more and ships them to distributors in port cities all over the world.

The effort puts roughly 2,000 tons of recycled gospel literature on the missions field each year, and Alabama Baptists are among the most consistent donors.

Jenkins sends his gratitude to all who are donating and mentioned the need for more Bibles and volunteers.

For more information, visit lovepackages.org or call 256-355-3004. (TAB)



Photos by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist



Ministering to those caught in addiction, discipling those recovering from addiction

TAB Media Group is partnering with Unforsaken Ministry, which walks with those seeking recovery from addiction, to develop a resource for all churches to use in helping those struggling with addiction as well as know how to integrate those in recovery into church life.

Compiling list

The resource will include listings of and recommendations for faith-based treatment centers that

have a proven success rate as well as steps for how to proceed related to assistance.

For instance, since discipling can really only occur in the recovery phase, ministering to someone caught in addiction begins with encouraging them to seek treatment and even building a relationship with them while they are in treatment.

Unforsaken can help with these steps. Learn more at unforsakenministry.org.

Reach out to Glenn Sandifer at

glenn@unforsakenministry.org or 205-246-2030.

We also need your help in developing the resource that will be made available to all churches.

Share with us your current ministry efforts in this area and what you've learned.

Also, share what questions you have as well as any recommendations for rehabilitation centers.

Send your information to support@thealabamabaptist.org. (The Alabama Baptist)

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
Includes print, digital, app and full web access

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

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TAB Media Group
among top in nation

The newspapers, online content and other media offerings produced by TAB Media Group continue to be honored among the top in the nation in the Christian market and in the state's general market. Best in Class, Awards of Excellence and other top awards have been earned by team members every year for nearly 30 years.



The crossword puzzle can be found on page 17.



Rashional Thoughts

By Jennifer Davis Rash
President and Editor-in-Chief

✉ jrash@thealabamabaptist.org

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

Help us help you stay connected to each other, ways to serve

Making connections between a need and a solution always fills our hearts. We love the opportunity to partner with so many fellow believers ministering and serving in various capacities.

You've likely noticed that "connecting" is actually a third of our purpose — Informing. Inspiring. Connecting. — and appears on the front page of each edition of The Alabama Baptist.

In this one edition of the paper, you'll find references to our church partners, associational partners and State Board of Missions partners. You'll also see the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries, the University of Mobile, Samford University, Disaster Relief, WMU and Lifeway Christian Resources.

Next to me on pages 2 and 3 are opportunities to connect with more of our partners — Love Packages for sharing Bibles and Christian literature, Unforsaken Ministry for helping those struggling with addiction and Counter Threat Group to work on keeping our churches safe.

These are only a few of our ministry partners, but by engag-

ing with The Alabama Baptist consistently you'll get to know the others as well.

Staying connected to us keeps you connected to countless opportunities you might not hear about otherwise, such as learning about Unbound216 prison ministry found on page 13.

Readers share with each other on the Your Voice spread on pages 4 and 5, and we seek out interesting quotes, statements and sermon snippets from Christian leaders across the state and nation for that section as well.

We partner with several groups who produce disciple-making resources and love to tell the missions story in print and through our online platforms.

Variety of opportunities

Our team also serves as problem solvers when you need assistance with determining who to contact and how to reach them.

If you haven't checked out our sister publication, The Baptist Paper, then I'd encourage you to give it a try. It publishes every other week and rotates with The Alabama Baptist. We now have

an Alabama-edition of The Baptist Paper, so you'll find Alabama Baptist coverage in the center four pages of each edition.

Give us a call at 800-803-5201 or email us at subscribe@thebaptistpaper.org to add The Baptist Paper to your subscription for only \$10 per year. Ask for a trial

subscription if you would like to test it out first and then decide.

Not only will you receive broader coverage of what God is doing through His people, but you'll also be helping our team sustain our efforts to connect believers with each other and the opportunities to share God's love.

CHURCH SAFETY AND SECURITY WORKSHOP

Thursday, May 8 | 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

Registration opens at 8 a.m.

\$20 per person (group rates apply for teams of 5 or more)

FBC Birmingham fellowship hall

(southwest side of the building, door closest to Lakeshore Parkway)

Coffee, water and light snacks will be provided.

Registration is required — email Robin McCall at rmcall@tabmedia.group to share your name, cell number, safety/security responsibility and the organization or church you will be representing. Please bring cash or check made to **Counter Threat Group** to the workshop and turn in at the registration table.

For more information, call Robin at 800-803-5201, ext. 103.

Sponsored by Counter Threat Group and TAB Media Group

Your Voice



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

Letters to the Editor

Thank you for putting an emphasis on the problems our Christian friends in other countries are experiencing. (These stories appear in both The Alabama Baptist and The Baptist Paper publications.)

I am overwhelmed with what is happening in our world, and I am extremely disappointed in the participation of Alabama Baptist congregations and their seeming lack of concern for others as well as themselves. Or is it because they do not know?

I have had the opportunity to be a member of several Alabama congregations. Many churches used to freely send each family a copy of The Alabama Baptist.

I was in one church in which I suddenly did not receive my subscription. When questioning why, I was told that it was an expense that had to be cut.

Another church, which I understand could not afford to send freely, was too small in congregational membership to afford and they solicited their membership to each make their personal subscription.

Another church I attended also encouraged the congregation to order their own subscription to the paper.

My prayer is that leaders would understand that The Alabama Baptist newspaper (and other efforts by TAB Media Group) are the only

way in which many of our church members know anything of the rest of the state, especially the rural churches.

Much is happening to our churches and members of which we need to know and have the opportunity to reach out and help in various ways.

Our state Baptist leaders also should understand they have a responsibility to our membership churches to emphasize that the war on Christianity is also moving to our local areas.

Alabama Baptists need to know they are not alone and that other Christians are praying for them. We also need to continue praying for our Christian brothers and sisters around the world. One way to stay informed and connected is through reading The Alabama Baptist.

Keep printing our state news and news of the world. We are praying for you and your work.

Iris L. Anderson
Mobile, Alabama

EDITOR'S NOTE — Thank you, Iris, for your many years of encouragement. Readers like you have allowed us to continue providing important information and resources these 182 years of existence. We appreciate all who renew subscriptions, share content with friends and neighbors and support

our efforts in various ways. To the churches that provide subscriptions for their members, thank you. You truly are investing in the health of your congregation as individuals and as a whole.

Jennifer Rash is one of the most rational, resilient, relevant and redeeming leaders in Alabama. Her editorials always address pertinent issues in today's culture of chaos and conflicts.

The openness she shares from her personal life experiences speaks of her own courageous candor and concern to highlight the challenges within the Christian life. Her writings indicate the needed flexibility and adaptability to face those challenges with persistent faith and without flinching and fears.

Indeed, her kindness is revealed in compassionate ministries toward the bereaved and bewildered. As Junior Hill once noted, "she is the Queen of Nice."

May her worthiness and value as one of the key leaders in this state always lead to many intercessory prayers of gratitude in her behalf.

May all her efforts in the various TAB Media Group avenues be undergirded with prayerful partnerships for her and those she leads.

Morris Murray Jr.
Jasper, Alabama

When a leader adopts an ownership mentality rather than a stewardship approach, the organization or ministry typically dies with him. I have seen it many times!

Chris Crain
Birmingham Metro
Baptist Association

"Gen Z is riddled with anxiety, and their belief system doesn't help," said **Dustin Bruce**, dean of Boyce College of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, who noted churches have a great evangelistic opportunity as they emphasize the "beauty and goodness" of the Christian faith. "They're lonely, and we make the case for faith in the context of community."

"When the Word is open, God's mouth is open, and the light of Christ begins to shine on us!"

Neeko Williams
Planting pastor
Greenhouse Church

"Sometimes church members say their 'sweet fellowship' is what they love most, and this is good," said **Tim Dowdy**, vice president of evangelism for the North American Mission Board. "But having a sweet fellowship is not our primary purpose." Everyone is meant to be bringing more people into the family, he noted.

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“If we walk with God, following however He leads, we’ll always be headed in the right direction.”

TONY DUNGY

Retired NFL coach

“The Devil has been attacking God’s good design for sexuality since the fall,” said **John-Michael Bout**, co-founder of The Light Ministries, an effort dedicated to equipping the church to fight the pervasive issue of pornography through gospel-centered resources. “But today, he weaponizes technology like we have never seen before. In 2025, an 8-year-old can pull out their phone and instantly access millions of videos of graphic sex. Every parent must become a counselor, addiction expert and technologist to protect their families.”

The pastoral qualifications extend to online behavior and speech.

Few know this.

Kirk E. Miller

@KirkMiller on X

“If it were not for Montgomery Baptist Association churches, we wouldn’t make it,” said **Dewayne Rembert**, pastor of Flatline Church at Chisholm. “There’s no way we could be in an impoverished community like we are, serving our neighbors and feeding the basketball team at the high school every week. The (area) pastors have got to buy in to what you’re doing.”

“When writing about a hero or heroine, I first had to decide on a person,” said **Joanne Sloan**, long-time writer of the “Heroes of the Faith” column for The Alabama Baptist. “Then I would research what I found online and also found in books about the person. Every male and female I wrote about was a remarkable person, although many of my readers had never heard of them. I found people I had never heard about, and after researching them, I discovered they had literally ‘changed the world.’”

“Back in the day, we had three services a week, choir practices, choir programs, weddings and funerals,” said **Carole Egerton**, who

recently celebrated being behind the keyboard at Capitol Heights Baptist Church in Montgomery for more than 60 years and 20,000 services. “It adds up quickly.”

“Our culture has only made it harder to wait on simple things,” said **Mark Bethea**, pastor of First Baptist Church Montgomery. “If we can’t wait on a hamburger from McDonald’s very well, then how are we going to wait on the Lord to fulfill His promises in our lives?”

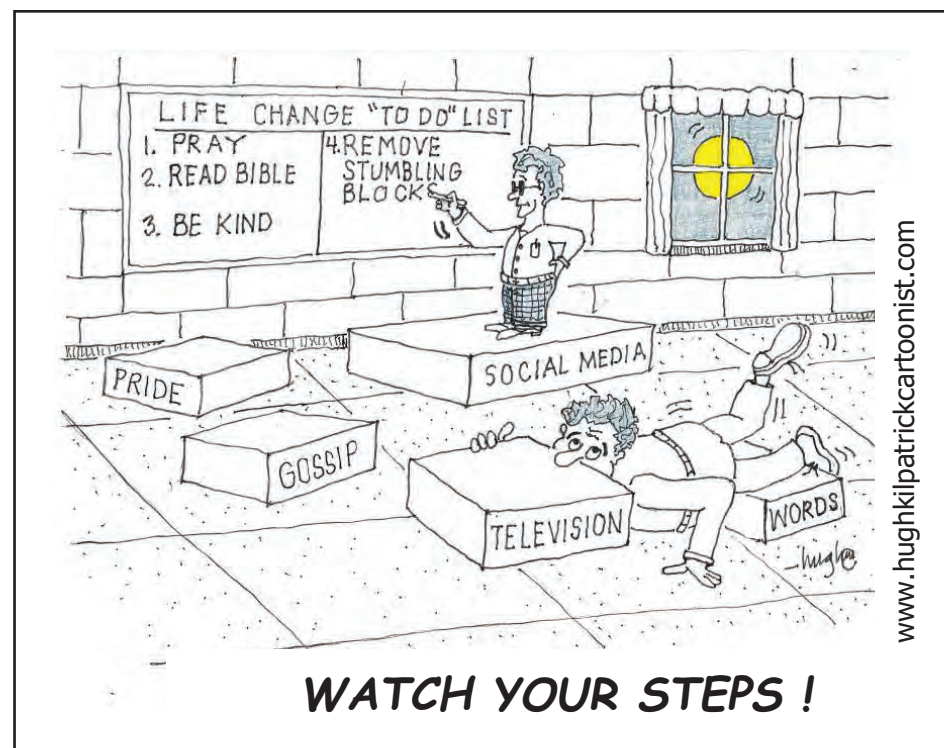
“The older I get, the more joy I find in giving to the Lord,” said **Rob Jackson**, director of evangelism and church revitalization, Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. “I am profoundly grateful God allows us to make a meaningful financial difference through our local church. The privilege and discipline of giving are essential aspects of the Christian life and vital to a healthy church.”

“It’s not buildings that make churches. It’s people,” said **Rick Earnest**, teaching pastor of Eden Westside in Pell City. “You know

when those folks who had been baptized stood up, there’s something that struck me. Even more so than the thankfulness I feel seeing the lives that have been changed by the love of Christ — those same people who stood up are serving in this church. They are not just people who God saved and are sitting. They’re serving. They are being the Church.”

Speaking to new students, **Charles Smith**, president of University of Mobile, urged students to take hold of the opportunities provided. “Your first missions field may be your own heart,” he said. “How might God be calling you to trust and follow Him? How might this season serve to strengthen your faith?”

“The heart of Christian education is a Christ-centered message presented by convicted presenters ... that is filled with the Spirit and preached to the glory of God, so that those who hear it and believe it, live it out in their daily lives, day by day,” said longtime preaching professor **Robert Smith Jr.**



WATCH YOUR STEPS !

‘Stories that still speak’: Parables in Luke

By David Eldridge, pastor
Dawson Memorial Baptist Church, Homewood

Our Heavenly Father welcomes us upon our return home. I want you to see that His arms are opened wide for any of us that are here who need to turn from sin and need to come home to Him. We have a Heavenly Father that celebrates our return home.

This is not what we expect. It is the 21st century. We need a little bit of tough love; we need a little bit of a speech here. We need the father in this moment to say, “I am glad you are here, but if you are going to live under my roof, some things will have to change. I am glad you came home, but I have a tally right here. You will start working for me, and this is going to be the interest to payback.”

Celebrating the son

We don’t get any of that here. You know what we get? We get a party. This one who had lived in this foreign land, this one who squandered his inheritance, this one who comes when there was nothing left for him to turn to except for the familiarity of his home. He comes home and he gets the best robe, the robe that was reserved for honored guests. He gets the ring of his father that bestows authority upon the son. He gets the sandals reserved for the family.

The celebration is a reminder that our Heavenly Father gives complete forgiveness, no questions asked. No, “Where have you been these past few months?” No, “Mother and I have been worried sick about you.” No punishment — but instead a party.

For every person who has ever run from God’s will, when we return home to His grace, when we return home to His mercy, He has a simple message for each and every one of us: “I will treat you as if you never left.”

If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is

(continued from page 1)

While fraudulent posts with items for sale do occur on Facebook Marketplace, scams like this are more often going to show up in your regular Facebook feed because they are targeting friends and family members of the alleged seller.

Ripe for fraud

If you try to comment on the post, you probably won't be able to. Instead, the post will ask you to send a message to the seller, who will then explain how they will "hold" the item if you send a deposit through a Peer-to-Peer (P2P) payment app, such as Cash App, Venmo or Zelle.

These transactions are also known as "authorized push payments," in which an account holder uses an app (banking or P2P) to send money directly from their bank account to another

Understanding cloning and hacking on Facebook

You or someone you know has likely received a Facebook "friend" request from someone you're certain you are already friends with. Frequently, social media accounts are hacked or cloned, and it's important to understand the difference.

Hacking means someone has gained unauthorized access to your account and is controlling it. You'll likely be locked out and see odd or concerning messages from the account. This access can lead to significant privacy and security breaches.

Cloning is a new, fake account that impersonates you. Cloning isn't as problematic as hacking, but it could lead to someone scamming those who signed on

as friends to the cloned account.

In both cases, you should alert Facebook support right away and let those who interact with you online know through your Facebook feed (if you still have access) as well as in other ways.

For best practices, search your current friends list for the name of the new friend request and delete the new one if you are already friends with that person.

Also, consider never accepting a friend request from someone in which you have no common friends.

It's also good to change your password regularly, especially if you accidentally click on a link you shouldn't have. (TAB)

If you decide to purchase an item you see online, it is better to meet in a safe location and pay on delivery of the item. If the seller tries to pressure you to send a deposit before you can meet, perhaps because there is "so much interest" in the item or "another person may beat you" to the deal, consider that a red flag.

Credit card payments or transactions made through platforms like PayPal that have some buyer protections offer better fraud protection, which is why criminals will not offer or accept them.

Assessing carefully

Another clue for sniffing out fraud is if the account with the item for sale tags a long list of other people whose names will show up as being "with" that account.

Basically, in all cases, if something seems off, then trust your impression.

bank account. These payments are hard if not impossible to reverse, making them ripe for fraud — once you've sent the money, you will not be able to get it back, regardless of what the post says.

Awareness is one of the

most important ways to protect yourself from being tricked. Remember the old adage: If it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

Even if you "know" or think you know the person selling the item, never send money, either as a deposit or

in response to an "urgent" need or emergency, unless you can verify the recipient's legitimacy (e.g., by verifying the account or confirming that the seller is a local business with a phone number and a physical location you can go to).

Faith Moments

Growing through the dark nights of the soul

From time to time, we all experience periods of deep spiritual anguish. John of the Cross (a 16th-century reformer of the Carmelite way of life) called these times the "Dark Night of the Soul." He describes **Seven Deadly Spiritual Imperfections** that God illuminates during these times of suffering.

Instead of focusing on the extreme trial, look to Christ and His freedom. Here's a breakdown of these seven deadly imperfections:

1. Spiritual pride. God uses the **Dark Night** to strip away your sense of self-sufficiency and impatience with others while opening your eyes to your total dependence on God.

2. Spiritual avarice (greed). The **Dark Night** reveals a pride in learning and intellectualism instead of growing in poverty of spirit. God teaches you to love Him for who He is over and above your own spiritual knowledge and accomplishments.

3. Spiritual lust. John of the Cross saw a danger of Christians receiving more satisfaction in spiritual blessings of God than God Himself. The **Dark Night** is traumatic. God uses this time to turn you from seeking blessings to seeking Him.

4. Spiritual anger. Christians can become impatient waiting on God, which leads to frustration and anger. The **Dark Night** teaches patience and surrender, helping the

soul trust God's hidden work even in silence.

5. Spiritual gluttony. Like children, we sometimes long for a life of pleasure. We can become content with religious activities instead of a deep communion with God. The **Dark Night** weans the soul of spiritual excess, leading to a deeper, quieter and more mature faith.

6. Spiritual envy. Christians often compare. Jealousy arises when you perceive others as doing better "spiritually" than you. God uses the **Dark Night** to refocus you on God and God alone.

7. Spiritual sloth (acedia). You sometimes avoid what is hard, preferring ease over Christ's cross. The **Dark Night** removes distract-

tions and forces your soul to rely on faith over feelings and surrender over sloth.

Again, many of us have experienced or are experiencing the "Dark Night of the Soul." Instead of throwing in the towel and giving up, look to Christ.

Ask God to use this period to refine you, stripping away self-centered spirituality and leading you to more profound love with Him.

Instead of relying on emotional highs or personal achievements, God will teach your soul to dive deeper into His love for His sake, embracing faith, humility and deep trust.

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



3 stories you should know



Facebook/Marion Fire and Rescue

Fire crews successfully put out a fire in the basement of the former Judson College library in Marion on Feb. 23. Marion Fire and Rescue were assisted by crews from Suttle, Vaiden, Uniontown and Hamburg volunteer fire departments as well as cadets from the Marion Military Institute first responder fire program. The fire was contained and extinguished on the basement level, and the rest of the building only received smoke damage. Police arrested 40-year-old Micah Hester at the scene. He is charged with arson, burglary and making a terrorist threat. (TAB)

Full-tuition scholarships available at Beeson

Samford University's Beeson Divinity School has received a major gift from an anonymous donor to fund full-tuition "Life Together" scholarships for students starting in the 2025-26 academic year.

The new scholarships will be available to full-time master's-level students, with priority given to master of divinity students who complete the scholarship essay along with their application. These merit-based scholarships will be awarded to top applicants beginning their studies in the fall.

The money will cover the full cost of tuition and fees for the recipients over three years of study at Beeson, the average amount of time needed to complete a master of divinity degree. Learn more at samford.edu/beeson-divinity or call 800-888-8266. (Beeson)

UM presents Hudson with medal of excellence

The University of Mobile has announced Veronica Smith Hudson as the recipient of the 2025 Samuel Boykin Medal of Excellence, a prestigious award established in 2019 to honor the legacy of



HUDSON

Samuel M. Boykin, the university's first African American graduate. This medal recognizes outstanding African American alumni who exemplify the ideals of virtuosity, faith and charity

that Boykin demonstrated throughout his life.

Hudson, a two-time graduate of UM, earned her bachelor of science in nursing in 1984 and returned to complete her master of science in nursing education in 2003. (UM)

Persecuted church

Young girls in Pakistan kidnapped for marriage; bill to stop it languishes

LAHORE, Pakistan — As a measure targeting child marriages in Pakistan languishes in political limbo, girls as young as 10 in minority religious groups continue to be abducted, forced to convert to Islam and marry or sold into sex slavery.

The following are recent cases that media outlets Christian Daily International and Morning Star News reported:

▶ A 40-year-old male Muslim neighbor and two accomplices abducted a 12-year-old girl at gunpoint Jan. 20 from her home in Chak 55/2L village in Pakistan's Punjab province. The girl's mother, Sumera Gulzar,

said she contacted the neighbor's family to try to get her daughter back, after which the neighbor "threatened to rape Ariha and to sell her to sex traffickers if we pursued the matter."

▶ A 35-year-old married Muslim neighbor abducted a 12-year-old girl Jan. 5 from her home in Walton Model Colony No. 2 in Punjab province. The girl's father, Shafique Masih, said the man took her to Sindh province and forced her to convert to Islam and marry him. Masih says police are not working to find Saba.

▶ After being abducted in June 2024 from Lahore and forced to convert to Islam and marry her captor, a now 18-year-old woman was able to escape Jan. 16 and return to her family, reported her parents.



The bill to criminalize child marriages has languished in Punjab province's assembly since April 2024. It would raise the legal age for marriage to 18, up from the current minimum of 16, the news outlets report.

Relentless onslaught of Christians continues in Nigeria with more deaths

ABUJA, Nigeria — Fifteen more Nigerian Christians have been killed as factions opposed to believers continue their massacres and wreak havoc upon churches and communities.

Also, the Evangelical Church Winning All building and six homes were burned earlier this year, sources told area news outlets.

Nigeria has led the world in the number of Christians killed for their faith or kidnapped. The country is No. 7 on Open Doors' World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

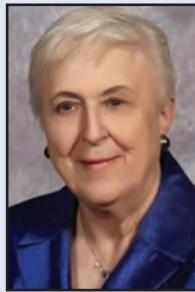
MARY SWEDENBURG

Mary Swedenburg, a former International Mission Board missionary from Alabama, died March 2.

At an early age, Swedenburg committed her life to the call of the Lord for international missions. She went on to study at Oklahoma Baptist University and Southwestern Seminary in preparation for this calling.

She was appointed by the IMB in 1969 to serve in Japan. She loved the Japanese people and served them faithfully for 34 years.

After retiring, Swedenburg served as Woman's Missionary Union director at Shades Crest Baptist Church in Hoover as well as serving as a Sunday School teacher, Missions Friends leader and WMU director at Abernant Baptist Church.



SWEDENBURG

AUTAUGA ASSOCIATION

► **Calvary Baptist Church, Prattville**, will celebrate its 75th anniversary and homecoming April 6. Worship begins at 11 a.m. Mel Johnson, associational missionary, will be the guest speaker. Dave Burns is pastor.

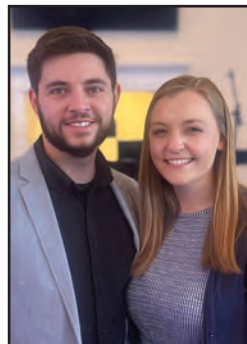


Photo courtesy of Hope Smith

BIGBEE ASSOCIATION

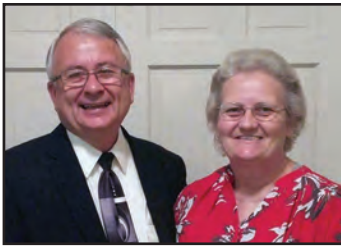
► **Brady Gaither**, associate pastor of students for **Christian Valley Baptist Church, Livingston**, was ordained into the ministry March 2. He is married to Stephanie. Wayne Smith is pastor.

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► **Luke Long** is the new student ministry intern for **Birmingham Metro Baptist Association**. He is currently a student at Samford University pursuing a degree in Christian ministry.

BLOUNT ASSOCIATION

► **Pleasant View Missionary Baptist Church, Holly Pond**, will have revival services April 6-9. Sunday services begin at 11 a.m. and 5 p.m. Weekday services begin at 7 p.m. The evangelist will be Jared Dixon with "The Dixons" singing Sunday. For more information, call 256-590-1501. Earl Harper is pastor.



Submitted photo

COOSA RIVER ASSOCIATION

► **David Gaither** is serving as interim pastor of **Stockdale Baptist Church, Munford**. Previously, he served as pastor of Cartersville Baptist Church, Alpine.

DEKALB ASSOCIATION

► **Fyffe First Baptist Church** will celebrate its centennial anniversary April 6. Special worship service begins at 10 a.m. For more information, call 256-623-3836. Keith Atchley is pastor.

ELMORE ASSOCIATION

► **Ray McKenzie**, who had been serving as director of missions for **Elmore Baptist Association**, recently accepted a new position in the Mobile area. He served with Elmore Association for eight years and is now an engagement specialist for the **Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries**.



McKENZIE

MARSHALL ASSOCIATION

► **Trevor Holsonback** is the new student minister of **Sardis Baptist Church, Boaz**. He earned his bachelor's degree from Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia, and is working on a master of divinity degree in pastoral ministry at New Orleans Seminary. He and

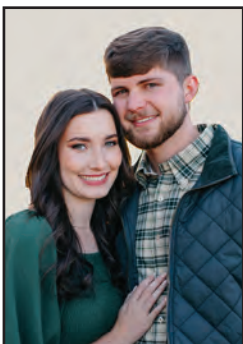


Photo courtesy of Sardis Baptist Church

Gracie married in April 2024. Mike Goforth is senior pastor.

MOBILE ASSOCIATION

► Samford University administrator **Kevin Blackwell** has been elected to lead **Mobile Baptist Association**. He also will join the **University of Mobile** faculty, launching what UM President Charles Smith called an "innovative partnership" between a Baptist association and the university. Blackwell was elected at a March 6 special-called evening meeting of the MBA executive committee. Alabama Baptists have known Blackwell as both assistant to the president for church relations at Samford and a leader of the Alabama Baptist State Convention's Calling Out the Called initiative to raise up a new generation of ministers. At UM, Blackwell will serve as special assistant to the president for institutional



BLACKWELL

relations and assistant professor of disciple-making. Blackwell has served in church ministry for 31 years and was senior pastor of Valley Creek Baptist Church in Hueytown prior to arriving at Samford in 2014, where he served as director of the Ministry Training Institute in addition to his duties as assistant to the president. A former president of the Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference, he is an author and a member of the Evangelical Missiological Society. Blackwell holds doctor of philosophy and master of theology degrees from Midwestern Seminary, doctor of ministry and master of divinity degrees from New Orleans Seminary and a bachelor's degree from Samford University. He and his wife, Lorrie, have four children.

ST. CLAIR ASSOCIATION

► **Danny Freeman** is serving as interim pastor of **Steele Baptist Church**. He has served as interim pastor of Stowers Hill Baptist Church, Attalla, and Slackland Baptist Church, Leesburg, since his retirement three years ago after 46 years of full-time pastoral ministry.

TUSCALOOSA COUNTY ASSOCIATION

► **Circlewood Baptist Church, Tuscaloosa**, celebrated its 75th anniversary Feb. 23. David Williams, Circlewood's minister of music, produced and narrated a special video about the history of the church. Circlewood began as a mission of First Baptist Church Tuscaloosa. David Nelson, a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission and a member of FBC Tuscaloosa, presented a commemorative



Photo courtesy of David Nelson

plaque to the church with Pastor Herb Thomas accepting it. Gil McKee, recently retired pastor of FBC Tuscaloosa, was the guest preacher. Special music was provided by Debbie Duncan, a member of the church. Circlewood's oldest active member Lorene Sims also shared during the service. Additional special guests included Winton Patterson, former music minister who served in that position for 50 years. He led the congregation in singing the hymn "The Solid Rock." Pictured with the plaque are (l to r) McKee, his wife Sharon, and Virginia and Herb Thomas.



SMITH

WEST CENTRAL ASSOCIATION

► **Lonzo Smith** is the new pastor of **West End Baptist Church, Selma**. He was ordained by the church and has served as a deacon. He and his wife, Mary, have one son and one grandson.

'TIED TOGETHER'

State disaster relief organizations work cooperatively to make big impact

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Alabamians are glued to weather updates this time of year, and rightly so — since Christmas, they've already seen more than 40 tornadoes, two snowstorms, two windstorms, wildfires and a 2.6-magnitude earthquake.

It's familiar territory for the state, but what may not be as familiar to everyone is the band of helpers that comes in behind these disasters whenever they're needed, a group Rick Lance calls the "yellow shirt army."

Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said these Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief volunteers are "crucial to helping people deal with basic needs during some of their most vulnerable times following major weather events."

They cut trees for homeowners, clear yards, rip damaged drywall out of flooded homes, prepare hot meals, do laundry, provide a place to take a shower and offer a listening ear for those who have lost so much.

"For decades now the yellow shirt army are people who seek to

be faithful witnesses for Christ in giving a 'cup of cold water' in the name of Jesus," he said. "I have seen firsthand their ministry among those who have faced catastrophic disaster."

How it works

Mark Wakefield, Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief strategist, said the yellow shirt army is made up of 42 Baptist state conventions that each own and operate their own disaster relief organization.

In Alabama, that means some equipment is owned by the Alabama Baptist State Convention, including skid steers for moving trees and kitchen equipment for preparing meals for thousands of people.

Some Baptist associations in the state also own their own equipment and work together with ABDR.

"We rely extremely heavily on our associational partners to provide resources particularly when it refers to clean out and recovery," Wakefield said, explaining that clean out and recovery involves chainsaw work, tarping roofs and cleaning out flooded homes.

Across the state, ABDR has 3,500 trained volunteers with current credentials. When a disaster strikes in another state, Wakefield makes Alabama's volunteer resources available and deploys them to set up a headquarters in a hard-hit area if needed.

"And if we need something here in Alabama, I call Mississippi or Florida or anybody else," he said. "It's a partnership. We (all the state disaster

relief organizations) are tied together very much even though we are independent. It's a great picture of what cooperation looks like."

Hubert Yates, director of disaster relief for Mississippi Baptists, said he's grateful for that "strength" of teamwork. Because of the disaster relief network, teams from different states were able to open 52 command centers from Florida to Virginia when hurricanes Helene and Milton hit in fall 2024.

"The cooperative spirit within disaster relief is a wonderful illustration of what it means to work together," he said.

How it's funded

Wakefield said the fact that ABDR is its own organization

means that "Alabama Baptists are the supporters of Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief."

The work receives no government money — it gets its funding through the gifts of Alabama Baptist churches through the Cooperative Program as well as to the Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering and from state Baptists who donate directly to ABDR.

In 2024, the Myers-Mallory offering brought in just over \$1.7 million, 20% — or \$340,000 — of which went to ABDR.

"Alabama Baptists are incredibly generous and committed to missions and ministry," Wakefield said. "If Alabama Baptists are supportive of disaster relief, we can do some amazing things. God has always provided so we can do what needs to be done and so that people get taken care of."

Lance said state Baptists "can be proud of their commitment to go beyond the call of duty when the worst of events come to pass."

"I am grateful for Mark Wakefield and the thousands of volunteers who serve so selflessly for the cause of Christ," he said.

For more information, visit sbdr.org.

Mount Zion Church community-wide event draws 250 men

Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church in Ashland prayed and planned for 200 men to attend their community-wide men's night Feb. 23. But when the night came, God brought them more — they had 250, with more than 20 churches and five denominations represented.

After a welcome from Joseph Stanford, Mount Zion's youth pastor and associate pastor, pastor Jason Watkins told the crowd that the persistence of his son, Nathan, had led to this event —

Nathan had asked twice about having a joint service for local men and Royal Ambassadors, a missions program for school-age boys.

Listening to God

After the second time, Watkins said he realized "Jesus was trying to tell him something."

His son also recommended he get Paul Reynolds with Teen Challenge Alabama as the speaker after hearing him speak at his school. Nathan helped with publicity and enlisted Richie Farrow, director of

missions for Carey Baptist Association, to help him.

After Reynolds finished his message, Watkins led an invitation. Three men gave their lives to Christ, and many others rededicated their life to Him.

To close, T.C. Brown, youth pastor of County Line Baptist Church in Cragford, shared a message and invited everyone in attendance to take with them a challenge coin representing the whole armor of God.

Scott Brand led music during the evening. (The Alabama Baptist)



Photo courtesy of Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church

God 'takes care of us'

Adoption leads to 'miracle' at Ukraine border when war starts

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Lilia was having a hard time seeing a scenario where her family stayed together. The morning before, she'd been woken up at her house by the sound of explosions.

"It was supposed to be just a regular day," she said.

She'd had plans to bake a cake and have her mom and grandmother over. Now she found herself sitting in her car in a miles-long line at the border of her country, Ukraine, crying and praying for a miracle.

"A policeman we talked to along the way told us that when we got to the border, I would be able to go with the kids but my husband would have to stay and defend our country," Lilia said. "The president had made a law that only women and kids could leave."

Her husband started to prepare her that she and the kids might have to leave him behind. To her, that sounded like a nightmare.

"I asked him, 'How would I survive? Where would I go?' I didn't know how I would make it just me and the kids," she said.

A big move

As they discussed what to do, their three children sat in the back seat, the youngest just a toddler in diapers. Her family could afford a normal life in Ukraine, but they hadn't saved up money for a move like this.

"When we left home, all I was thinking about was our documents, and I grabbed a few other things," Lilia said.

One of those things was an album full of photos of their young-



Screenshot/AFP News Agency

Lilia, who now is a member of an Alabama Baptist church, sat in line with her family all day at the Ukrainian border on Feb. 25, 2022, trying to escape the war. They were able to because of a "miracle," she said.

est daughter, whose very presence in the car was a miracle.

And because of her, they would also see another miracle very soon.

A few years back, Lilia had been struck with a "very big desire" for a third child, and she wasn't sure why, or why the desire wouldn't go away.

She had married at 19, and quickly after she had delivered her first child and then her second.

"With our son, it was a difficult

pregnancy, and my body couldn't recover. I couldn't have kids anymore," she said. "But for me, it was fine — we had two kids, a boy and a girl. We had our house and a car, and my husband had his own business. We had a good life."

Talking about adoption

But then one day that desire for another baby showed up.

And Lilia started talking with her husband about adoption. It was out of left field, because in Ukraine, people usually only

adopt if they can't have kids or if they are very rich, she said.

"For a couple of years, I just prayed, and my husband and I talked about it," she said. "And one day he said, 'OK, let's do it. It's good; we're Christians, and we can tell this child about God.'"

So they did. For two years, they waited to be matched with the right child, and while they waited they prepared. They even built another room onto their home.

Finally they got word that a baby was waiting for them.

"We did all the paperwork, and it took more than two months to complete it all," she said.

They brought their new daughter home in March 2020, and the next day, everything shut down because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"It really was a miracle that we

"When we adopted our daughter, we thought we were doing something good for her, but really because of her, we were all able to stay together. God took care of us."

Lilia

were able to get her before everything closed,” Lilia said.

Their family of five was finally together, and now as they approached Ukraine’s border, all Lilia wanted was for them to stay together.

That day, “we just stayed in line the whole day, and we cried and prayed,” she said. “It was very difficult.”

But then something hopeful happened.

As they crept toward the front of the line, a woman approached them and said she and her husband and three children had just tried to cross the border but had turned back because her husband wasn’t allowed to leave.

“But then she showed us on her phone that right now our president had adopted an addition to the law that said a man who has three kids or more, they can cross the border,” Lilia said.

The woman asked if she could stay in front of Lilia’s family in the line and try again with this new piece of information.

“We said, ‘Yes, of course, try,’” Lilia said.

The woman’s family showed their documents to the border patrol and then showed them their phone. At first the officers said no — the addition to the law was so new that they didn’t even know about it yet. But they asked some higher authorities, and in the end, they said yes.

“After that it was our turn, and we showed our documents,” Lilia said.

The other family got held up because they didn’t have their car’s documents with them, but Lilia’s family moved on through.

“When we got into Slovenia, an officer who saw my husband said, ‘How is it possible? You are the first man who has done this,’” Lilia said. “For us, it was a really, really big miracle. When we adopted our daughter, we thought we were doing something good for her, but really because of her, we were all able to stay together. God took care of us.”

And she said He continued to take care of them as they traveled across Europe to Spain, where



Photo by Grace Thornton/The Alabama Baptist

Lilia flips through a photo album that was one of the few items she put in the car when she and her family fled the war in Ukraine in February 2022. The years since then have been a testimony to God’s care for her family, she said.

they were able to stay with a kind-hearted woman for free for several weeks.

They were grateful. But the emotional toll of the war was tough.

“Spain is a beautiful country, but really for a month and a half I just

cried,” Lilia said.

“All my thoughts were about Ukraine, my home, my mom, my sisters and their kids. It was very, very difficult.”

Finding a job was difficult too — they didn’t know any Spanish at all.

So eventually relatives in the United States sent them some money to fly to Mexico, where

a California church group helped them get to the border to talk to a U.S. official.

“We talked with American representatives and explained that we’re from Ukraine and we have relatives in Texas and we need help, and they provided humanitarian parole for one year.”

Rebuilding life

Lilia and her family moved in with their relatives in Texas, and her husband got a job where he worked hard but didn’t make much money. That first year, Lilia still had her mind set on returning to Ukraine.

But the war dragged on.

“We understood after a while that it’s not stopping so quickly,

and we need to build our life here,” she said.

They worked hard on learning English. Lilia had lessons three days a week online with an English teacher she knew from Ukraine.

They also got involved in a church, and the members there helped them pay the deposit for a small house and get some furniture.

In God’s hand

“It was impossible for us to buy those things — we had just enough money for food,” Lilia said. “I really see a lot of miracles and care; God held all this in His hand.”

Then after visiting Ukrainian friends in Alabama for Christmas,

they felt God prompting them to move to the state. Now they’re members of an Alabama Baptist church.

“We feel like the church is our home; we have friends here,” Lilia said. “I believe God put us in this church in this place, and it’s not a coincidence — it’s God’s will and it’s how He takes care of us.”

Government changes

Now, as the U.S. government makes changes related to immigration and the war in Ukraine, Lilia and her family wait to see what will happen with their legal status in the future.

“We can’t go back to our city or our house, so if we have to move somewhere, we will be starting from scratch again,” she said.

“I’m not ready to do that — right now, we have a house, a job, a church and friends.”

She also prays her children won’t have to move into a new school situation with a different language again. She has so many questions in her mind, but in the midst of that, she has an anchor in God — and she said she doesn’t know how anyone survives something like this without it.

“Sometimes I think about it and I ask God why. But I know God brought us here and took care of us, so I know in the future it will be the same,” she said. “No matter what, He will take care of us.”

EDITOR’S NOTE — Name has been changed for security reasons.

“I believe God put us in this church in this place, and it’s not a coincidence — it’s God’s will and it’s how He takes care of us.”

Lilia



Photo by Grace Thornton/The Alabama Baptist

Lilia, an Alabama Baptist church member who moved to the U.S. when the war in Ukraine broke out, said God worked a miracle for her family through the adoption of her youngest daughter.

'WORTHY OF CELEBRATION'

Columbiana Baptist Kindergarten commemorates 50 years of loving, equipping children

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

For the past 50 years, Columbiana Baptist Kindergarten has been a place where teachers' "hope and prayer is that each day children know that they are loved by us but more importantly by their Heavenly Father."

Amy Rush said that's the mission that drives her every day as she serves as CBK's director, and it was the mission that First Baptist Church Columbiana celebrated Feb. 23 as it honored a half century of CBK.

"When children leave here, they will hopefully be somewhat equipped to know about Jesus and His love as they go out into the world," Rush said.

In 1974, church members came up with the idea to start a kindergarten, and under the leadership of then pastor Charles Stroud, they appointed committees to research whether it would be beneficial or not.

They decided it would be, and CBK was born.

"The actual start date was the fall of 1975," Rush said. "They started with two teachers running a 4K and 5K program."

Today, CBK has about 90 children enrolled from birth to 4K.



Photo courtesy of Columbiana Baptist Kindergarten
Students at Columbiana Baptist Kindergarten run through football-style signs at the kickoff of the school's 50th year in September 2024.

"It's been a great ministry," Rush said.

When her daughter was 4, Rush taught for a year at CBK.

"It was an amazing experience to be a part of a program that seeks to share the love of Christ and the gospel of Christ with little ones," she said.

'A blessing'

Now her daughter is out of high school, and Rush is back serving at the school, this time as director.

"It's a joy to be a part of, and I don't know why I get the privilege to sit in this position at the 50th year, but

it's a blessing beyond measure," Rush said.

At the celebration service Feb. 23, CBK students sang

songs, and Rush honored all of the preschool's former directors.

A proclamation from

Mayor David Mitchell declared that it was "Columbiana Baptist Kindergarten 50th Anniversary Day" in the City of Columbiana, and State Rep. Corley Ellis presented proclamations from the Alabama House of Representatives and Gov. Kay Ivey.

Feeling God's love

"All this is obviously worthy of celebration," Ellis said. "But those kids who may not have had the opportunity to feel God's love and get God's Word from somewhere else, and those kids that got to experience that here ... that will carry them through life."

For more information, visit fbccol.net/ministry/children/kindergarten or facebook.com/cbk.preschool.



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Inmates growing as disciples behind prison walls

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

At Bibb Correctional Facility in Alabama, there lives a man who was convicted of murder when he was 18 years old. Due to how violent he was in his previous incarceration as well as his participation in the Aryan Brotherhood, he ended up in isolation — and was there for years.

When officers there first gave him a Bible, he threw it out in anger. But there came a time when he asked for it back. After reading it over and over, he started writing to Christian publishers, begging them to send him books. He had hit rock bottom.

When this man ended up at Bibb Correctional, he was one of the first to graduate from a two-year ministry program called the Birmingham Theological Seminary Prison Initiative.

Transformed by the gospel, he is now one of the gentlest men there.

It was still a hard moment when Christopher Taunton, director for outside programs and external relations for UnBound216, told him he was denied parole. But after getting over the disappointment, the changed man said that maybe God had a plan for him to prepare those who will be released — and even if he spends the rest of

his life in prison, he will just try to help those men.

Before that conversation was over, he asked Taunton about help for an inmate he had been mentoring, turning from distress to compassion.

“That’s just one of the amazing stories I could tell you about the men in UnBound216,” Taunton said.

UnBound216 is a “faith-based transitional care ministry designed to pre-

pare inmates for release by helping them discover their God-given purpose,” according to its website. It’s unique because it’s led by inmates; graduates of UnBound216 become teachers, leaders and mentors.

During and after

The entire program includes 46 weeks of discipleship classes during incarceration, along with ongoing mentoring and structure that isn’t found in the rest of Bibb Correctional. For qualifying candidates, there is also a one-year program that continues after release, which includes housing, structure, job assistance, a church and ongoing Christian support.

Not only is UnBound216 making an impact on the Kingdom, it’s also making an impact on the communities where the men go after release.

The Department of Justice reports that more than 80% of those released from prison return. The recidivism rate for UnBound216 graduates is only 5%.

When UnBound216 (called Jumpstart at the time) first went into Bibb Correctional, it was one of the most violent prisons in



Photo courtesy of UnBound216

UnBound216 is a program that includes 46 weeks of discipleship classes during incarceration, along with ongoing mentoring and structure that isn’t found in the rest of Bibb Correctional.

the state. The 1,800 men there live in “bays” of 106 men in an open warehouse-type room with bunk beds to sleep on, one bathroom, two attached classrooms and absolutely no personal space.

Three bays are now filled with UnBound216 participants.

Forging bonds

“There are some pretty tragic and tough stories there, but here the men really have found another family among the men in the program. It’s really incredible to see the bonds that these men are forging with one another,” Taunton said.

Not only are UnBound216 classes being held regularly, but BTS, Ligonier Inside and Samford University’s Ministry Training Institute also have programs within UnBound216’s bays.

Samford’s MTI program began there in 2022 by partnering with Bibb Baptist Association. Bibb County Baptist churches provide textbooks and Taylor Gurley, pastor of Four Points Baptist Church in Centreville, is the lead instructor.

“I consistently hear about God’s work among the students as they study subjects such as systematic theology, spiritual disciplines, minor prophets and hermeneutics,” said Kevin Blackwell, outgoing executive director of

MTI. “This work would not be possible without the efforts of the chaplain, pastor Gurley and Bill Russell (the associational mission strategist for Bibb Baptist Association).”

After going through an interview process and being willing to commit fully to the program, the men who are chosen take classes that include topics like how to be a godly man, husband and father.

If they qualify, they can also go on to take classes on addiction and crisis counseling and master’s-level theological classes.

Though the classroom knowledge is life changing, what is most remarkable is what these former murderers, rapists and criminals do with what they learn. They turn around and serve the men surrounding them.

‘A missions field’

“This is a missions field, so just like any missions field, when the gospel really takes root is when people there take it for themselves and run with it — where leaders are raised up and there’s a church there,” Taunton said.

“So really, we’re seeing a church behind the walls that’s growing and it’s really incredible.”

To learn more, visit UnBound216.org.



Photo courtesy of UnBound216

Mitch Haubert, chaplain at Bibb County Correctional Facility, baptizes a former satanist.





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‘The wind of God is moving’

Traylor encourages UM students with ‘lessons from the middle of the Book’

By Leann Callaway
The Alabama Baptist

During the Feb. 5 chapel service at the University of Mobile, students were encouraged by Ted Traylor with a message titled “Lessons from the middle of the Book” as he spoke out of Psalm 117 about God’s lovingkindness and truth.

Traylor is senior pastor of Olive Baptist Church in Pensacola, Florida, and is passionate about mentoring and training young ministers. He is a leader in Southern Baptist life, having served as president of the Florida Baptist Convention, president of the Southern Baptist Convention Pastors Conference and as first vice president of the SBC.

“I want to draw some lessons from the middle of the Book so when you walk out of here today, I want you to remember that Psalm 117 is the heart of the Bible,” Traylor said. “Hear what David wrote when he said, ‘Praise the Lord, all nations; Laud Him, all peoples! For His lovingkindness is great toward us, and the truth of the Lord is everlasting. Praise the Lord.’”

As Traylor addressed the students he exclaimed, “We’re going to give God praise today for His lovingkindness.”

Lovingkindness and truth

“I want you to remember two pillars today of lovingkindness and truth,” Traylor said.

“As a matter of fact, Psalm 25:10 says, ‘All the paths of the Lord are lovingkindness and truth.’”

“Psalm 85:10 says, ‘Lovingkindness and truth meet together; they are one.’”

“Psalm 89:14 tells us that ‘lovingkindness and truth go before you.’”

“Psalm 115:1 tells us that we ‘give



Photo by Baleigh Essary/University of Mobile
Ted Traylor, senior pastor of Olive Baptist Church in Pensacola, Florida, delivers the Feb. 5 chapel address to students at the University of Mobile.

glory to God’s name because of His lovingkindness and truth.’ We are going to build on what I share with you today based on those two words: lovingkindness and truth.”

Traylor explained that the Hebrew word for lovingkindness is ‘hesed,’ and the Hebrew word for truth is ‘emet.’

“If lovingkindness is all you have but you have no truth, it’s powerless,” Traylor noted. “If you have truth without lovingkindness, it’s just punishment. When you take lovingkindness to the New Testament, it’s a different word. It’s the word ‘grace’ or ‘kairos.’ We sing an old hymn, ‘Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound.’ It’s saving grace. For by grace you are saved by faith. Not that of yourself or by works that you can boast about, it’s all of God.

“It’s not just the saving grace, it’s the sustaining grace too. It will see you through.

A full video of the chapel address can be found at tabonline.org/Traylor.

“In 2 Corinthians 12:9, Paul said, ‘My grace will see you through because my power is perfected in weakness.’ When you are weak, He is strong. After you’ve been saved, God gives you sustaining grace. I don’t know what you’re walking through right now, but God’s grace is sufficient for you. In your weakness, He will show strength. The lovingkindness, the grace of God — praise Him for it.”

Traylor then told students to “flip the coin on the other side” as he transitioned the message to look at the other key word: truth.

Understanding truth

“I want you to see my other word for just a moment,” he said. “Not just lovingkindness or grace, but the word ‘truth.’ You’ve got to put truth with lovingkindness. Jesus said in John 8:32, ‘You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’”

“Three things about truth,” Traylor said. “There’s the person of truth. ... Jesus said, ‘I am the way. I am the truth, and I am the life.’ There is nothing truer than Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is the person of truth.

“Not only is there the person of truth, but there’s also the book of truth: the Bible. Isaiah 40:8 says, ‘The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the Word of God lasts forever.’ God’s Word is the only absolute truth. All of it is true. Jesus is the person of truth. The Bible is the Book of truth, and there’s also the Spirit of truth. John 16:13 says, ‘The Spirit of truth will guide you into all truth.’”

Traylor then encouraged the students to enthusiastically proclaim that “Jesus wins” before closing in prayer and praising God for His lovingkindness and truth.

Praying for revival

“Students listen to me and forgive me if I cry,” he said. “I’ve been praying for over 40 years to see a revival come among a young generation. I’m a product of the Jesus movement of 1970–71 that started on the west coast that made its way to Kentucky and Alabama.

“I was in the middle of that, and God shook my world. God swept a whole generation into Him. ... I’m seeing it in your generation. The wind of God is moving.

“Ephesians 3:20 tells us that God is able. I don’t know what you are facing, but God is able. We need to touch this nation with the gospel. We can do it if we ever learn to love with grace and truth. Wed them together, and you’ll find the power of almighty God working in you.

“In the end, every knee is going to bow and every tongue is going to confess that Jesus is Lord. Jesus wins.”



ABCH photo

Rod Marshall (right) serves at ABCH's Camp of Champions in 2024 alongside his wife, Leslie; son-in-law and daughter Kevon and Anna Leigh Moncrief; and two of his grandchildren.

SERVANT OF THE LORD

Marshall hits 30-year milestone — half his life — at Alabama Baptist Children's Homes

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Rod Marshall said it doesn't feel like he could've possibly been at Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries for 30 years, but one particular memory puts a time stamp on it for him.

It all started with a fax.

"It was 1994, so that's how word got around," Marshall joked. "It was a Monday morning, and I got a call from Buddy Nelson, the pastor at Riverchase Baptist where my wife and I attended."

'Integral part'

Nelson told him about a fax from ABCH that said they were looking to start a counseling ministry. He knew Marshall had just finished his studies and credentialing to become a licensed professional counselor.

"I interviewed and was hired to help start the counseling ministry and had no idea what an integral part of my life this ministry would become," Marshall said. "At the time, I didn't know a lot about the Children's Homes; now I cannot imagine my life without it."

On Jan. 1, 1995, he started working part time, which grew to full time a couple of years later. A little further down the road, he was asked

to lead the counseling ministry. And then in 2011, as ABCH president and CEO Paul Miller prepared to retire, the search committee asked Marshall if he would submit a resumé.

"One of the first questions asked in that process was, 'Why do you want to be the CEO?'"

"I told them I don't know that I do," he said.

"I never set out for that to be who I wanted to be when I grew up. But being chosen to serve in that role 13 years ago was a privilege."

And now he's celebrating the fact that ABCH has been a part of his life as long as anything else has. He marked 30 years there in January, then turned 60 on Feb. 25.

Not only that — he's the longest-tenured ABCH employee currently serving.

"The more I've learned about the Children's Homes over the years, the more impressed I've been," Marshall said. "I encourage people all the time, 'If you're looking for a way to make Kingdom impact with children and families, this is the right place to look.'"

Over the years, a lot has changed. For one, the ministry has shifted its focus from utilizing group homes to expanding its foster care presence. Though ABCH still retains

some homes, these are now more community-based foster-care settings where the parent-to-child ratio is smaller.

And Marshall said even those are slowly being phased out when it feels like the time is right.

"In places where former group homes are now campus foster homes, if we can't find

people who want to serve there, we can sell those homes and do more good for more foster families with those resources," he said. "If one of those homes stops working well, we have the ability to pivot."

Marshall said ABCH's goal is to be caring for 1,000 children in the state's foster care system by the ministry's 140th anniversary in 2031. In 2024, they served 460 children, a 13% increase over 2023.

"There are 5,000 to 6,000 children in Alabama's foster system, and we feel like if we can care for 20% of the kids, that's a worthwhile goal," he said.

Staying consistent

Even as ABCH has become more sophisticated in how they've approached caring for children over the years, Marshall said he's most excited not about how much has changed but how much has stayed consistent.

"As the culture changes, the support we've received from Alabama Baptists has remained the same," he said. "The willingness of people to be foster parents, the willingness of people to volunteer with us — that hasn't changed. God is doing a great work, and the credit has to be broad."

Marshall said in 1891, ABCH's founder John Stewart said if you show Alabama Baptists what the need is, they will do the rest — and that's still true today.

"The story is so compelling, and they are such a people of strong compassion," he said. "It dovetails very nicely for Alabama Baptists to get involved in what the ABCH has done."

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, said Marshall is "a faithful ministry partner with Alabama Baptists."

"His calm demeanor and engaging personality have been well received

by our faith family. Personally, I consider Rod to be one of the wisest and most effective servants of the Lord I know," Lance said. "I always enjoy hearing him speak and also conversing with him. I am grateful to the Lord for his leadership among us, and I wish him the best on this important birthday occasion."

For more information about ABCH, visit alabamachild.org.



ABCH photo
Rod Marshall is pictured with his wife, Leslie.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist
Rick Lance (right), SBOM executive director, talks with Rod Marshall during the ABCH report at the 2024 Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting.

UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

'AI in Ministry: The What, Why, and How of Artificial Intelligence' conference

Do you have questions about Artificial Intelligence? Do you wonder how it might impact ministry?

You can learn more about that at the "AI in Ministry: The What, Why, and How of Artificial Intelligence" conference set for May 8, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., at Taylor Road Baptist Church in Montgomery.

Don Barger, director of innovation and artificial intelligence at the International Mission Board, will help you understand what it is and its impact and potential

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



for ministry. The sessions throughout the day will focus on subjects like an overview of what AI is, how it

can be used in ministry contexts, and the local church and best practices using AI.

We expect attendees of this conference to leave empowered with a better understanding of AI and how they might use it responsibly and effectively.

This conference is designed to assist all church staff members at every level of ministry or ministry support.

Registration is required, and the \$10 cost includes lunch.

To register, visit alsbom.org/AI.

Newish Leadership Network

Youth leaders who have been in ministry for three years or fewer are invited to join the Newish Leadership Network.

Ministry in the early years can be challenging, but you don't have to navigate it alone.

The Newish Leadership Network provides resources, mentorship and community to equip and encourage you as you grow in your leadership.

The \$100 cost includes

essential ministry resources and books, access to regular Zoom meetings, attendance at the Youth Pastor Retreat on Sept. 8-9 at WorldSong Missions Place and a special in-person gathering May 19.

Zoom meetings will be held the second and fourth Mondays starting in April from 1:30 to 3 p.m.

Join us as we learn, grow and support each other in the journey of youth ministry. For more information, visit ymlink.org/newish.

For more information, visit ymlink.org/newish or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



Church Weekday Education Conference: May 2-3 at Shocco Springs in Talladega

If you're a church pre-school teacher or director, the Church Weekday Education Conference, set for May 2-3 at Shocco Springs

Baptist Conference Center in Talladega, is for you.

The conference is good for credits to meet the requirements for training by

the Alabama Department of Human Resources.

For a list of topics or to register, visit alsbom.org/cwe.

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

Place a classified ad below for \$1 per word. For more information call 205-870-4720, ext. 200, or email ads@thealabamabaptist.org. To place an online classified ad for \$9.99/month, visit thealabamabaptist.org/classifieds.

CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

First Baptist Church Center Star, located in Killen, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a senior pastor to lead our established, family-focused and vibrant congregation of 400 active members. Please submit resumés to: pscfbccs@gmail.com.

PASTOR

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

PASTOR

Cave Spring Baptist Church, Priceville, Alabama, seeks a full-time pastor. We are prayerfully seeking a man whose life aligns with 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and has a heart for seeking the lost and discipling the saved. Deadline to apply: April 5. Email: CSBCpastorsearchcommittee@gmail.com for more information and job description.

PASTOR

Durant Chapel Baptist Church, Crossroads Community of Bay Minette, is seeking a pastor. Send resumés to: office@durantchapel.com, ATTN: Pastor Search Committee.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Southside Baptist Church (a small church) in Cullman, Alabama, is seeking a bivocational pastor. Send resumés to: SSBC, P.O. Box 2637, Cullman, AL 35056.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Enon Baptist Church, located in Wilcox County, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a bivocational pastor. Send inquires/resumés to: enonbccamden@gmail.com or mail to: Enon Baptist Church, ATTN: Search Committee P.O. Box 4, Camden, AL 36726.

FULL/PART-TIME MINISTER OF WORSHIP

Parkview Baptist Church of Decatur is seeking a servant of God to direct our choir/praise and worship team and structure a God-honoring worship set for Sunday morning worship. Email searchcommittee@parkviewdecatur.org for more information or to submit resumés.

OTHER POSITIONS

EDUCATION ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

West End Baptist Church,

Clanton, Alabama. If you are interested in applying for this position, please send your resumé to: office@webconline.org. Upon the receipt of a resumé, a job description will be sent to the applicant. The education administrative assistant's primary function is to oversee all activities of the main church office and perform secretarial duties related to church operations. The applicant must have strong computer skills to include Microsoft Publisher or equivalent, Microsoft Office and have strong organizational and communication skills. Applicant must be a professing Christian and exhibit a high level of trust and confidentiality. Applicant must exhibit professionalism in a fast-paced, Christ-centered environment.

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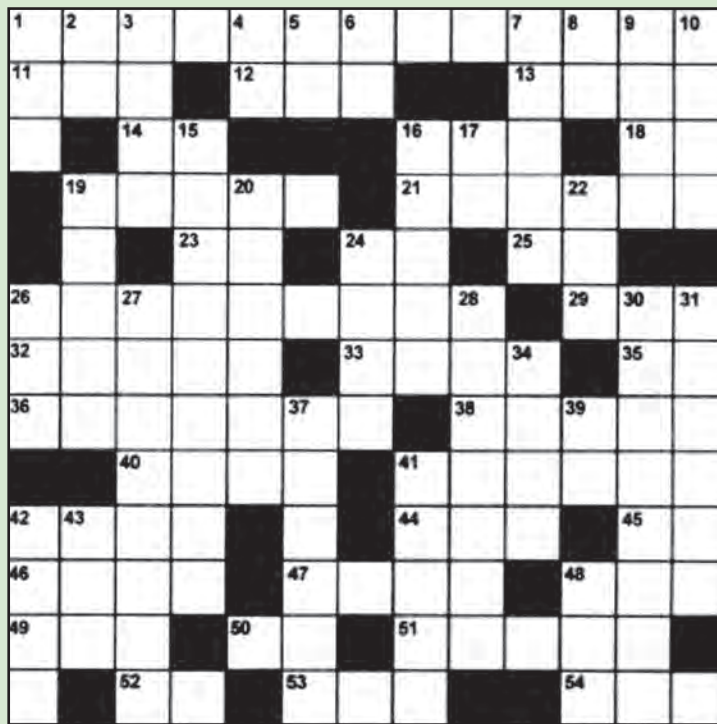
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CHRISTIAN Crossword



ACROSS

1. They ... delivered him to ___ the governor. (Matt. 27:2)
11. Despise not ___ of these little ones. (Matt. 18:10)
12. Standing room only. (abbr.)
13. Unknown writer. (abbr.)
14. Ye shall be ___ gods. (Gen. 3:5)
16. ___ Francisco.
18. Come from God, and went ___ God. (John 13:3)
19. To hold onto something with your hands.



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21. Fathers. (Spanish)
23. Lower case. (abbr.)
24. Missouri. (abbr.)
25. Thus.
26. For mine eyes have seen thy _____. (Luke 2:30)
29. I will let down the _____. (Luke 5:5)
32. A high standard.
33. His raiment white as _____. (Matt. 28:3)
35. There was ___ strength in him. (1 Sam. 28:20)
36. Cleanest, best arranged, coolest.
38. With many other ___ did he testify. (Acts 2:40)
40. Thou didst ___ upon thine horses. (Hab. 3:8)
41. A group of singers or part of a song.
42. ___ Domini.
44. The multitude ... ___ him unto Pilate. (Luke 23:1)
45. In regard to. (abbr.)
46. He cleaveth my ___(s) asunder. (Job 16:13)
47. The angel ... rolled back the stone from the _____. (Matt. 28:2)

48. In between, in the midst of.
49. 2,000 pounds.
50. Let there ___ light. (Gen. 1:3)
51. ___ order. (2 Chron. 29:35)
52. I ___ to prepare a place for you. (John 14:2)
53. Fish eggs.
54. The asses that were lost three days _____. (1 Sam. 9:20)

DOWN

1. Dad.
2. Pilate wrote a title, and put it ___ the cross. (John 19:19)
3. Ye know that summer is _____. (Mark 13:28)
4. Jesus ___ the Savior.
5. ___ of the Chaldees. (Gen. 15:7)
6. ___ Abram departed. (Gen. 12:4)
7. The fame of David went out into all _____. (1 Chron. 14:17)
8. Sent ___ angel. (Num. 20:16)
9. To carry something.
10. Seth ... called his (son's) name _____. (Gen. 4:26)

15. Neither is there ___ in any other. (Acts 4:12)
16. Knife, fork, ____.
17. Support group for alcoholics.
19. A level in school.
20. Climbed.
22. Ronald (nickname).
24. Went up a ___ from the earth. (Gen. 2:6)
26. Lay not this ___ to their charge. (Acts 7:60)
27. A wise man will hear, and will increase _____. (Prov. 1:5)
28. In no specific place.
30. The fear of the Lord is clean ___ for ever. (Ps. 19:9)
31. The ship was now ____, ___ with waves. (Matt. 14:24)
34. Abraham took the ___ ... and laid it upon Isaac. (Gen. 22:6)
37. One who sends.
39. Railroad. (abbr.)
41. Near.
42. ___ and crafts.
43. New. (prefix)
48. Missing in Action. (abbr.)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Next SPEAK Tour coming up April 6

Want to build up the students in your church and reach their friends with the gospel?

Plan to bring them all to SPEAK Tour.

“It’s a night of worship, but it’s more geared toward students bringing their friends so that they can hear the gospel and have an opportunity to respond to the gospel,” said Josh Meadows, student ministry strategist for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. “We also will challenge our followers of Jesus to take the next step and identify the person that they want to begin praying for and ultimately reach with the gospel message.”

SPEAK Tour will also have fun outdoor games for students to play.

To register, visit ymlink.org/speaktour or scan the code below with your smartphone’s camera.



The upcoming date and location is April 6 at 5:30 p.m. at Mount Zion Baptist Church in Huntsville.

Can’t make it? Check out the website for future dates! Admission is free, and no preregistration is required.

For more information, visit ymlink.org/speaktour.

Intentional Leader Series event to focus on Pathfinder

The next Intentional Leader Series, set for April 8, will focus on the Pathfinder aspect of the four Ps of leadership: Person, Pastor, Preacher and Pathfinder.

This event will focus on strategically leading with intentionality to rally your church leadership and membership to enthusiastically work toward the goal. Learn how to paint a picture for your church of the fin-

ished task and help them hear the plan and pray for it so that they eagerly strive to get involved and serve on the front lines.



CHAMPION

This conference will be led by Buddy Champion, pastor of First Baptist Church Trussville.

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.

Lakewood WMU up and running to bless others

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Debbie Hill has only been a member of Lakewood Baptist Church in Birmingham for about four years, but in that time she brought back what had been a long-standing ministry in the church — Woman's Missionary Union.

Lakewood Baptist is located in South East Lake, an area just outside Birmingham. From the 1950s until the 1970s, it was a booming community. However, as the suburbs of Birmingham flourished, East Lake families moved and the population became older, with many struggling financially.

The church had begun mirroring its community, but even with limited resources, Lakewood prioritizes giving to those outside the church due to the missions-minded focus of their pastor, Larry Wimberly. Even so, the for-

merly thriving WMU hadn't met in decades by the time Hill began attending.

Active participants

After Hill started going to Lakewood, she noticed that some members went to Raleigh Avenue Baptist Church in west Homewood for WMU meetings. She asked Wimberly why they didn't have a WMU there, especially since they were already doing projects.

Wimberly appointed a few women to talk about forming a committee, but the women were ready for action. At their first meeting to discuss it, they just went ahead and organized a group.

On July 8, 2021, Lakewood's WMU was again an official church ministry. They already had several projects going, but with the addition of once-a-month meetings, their efforts went into overdrive.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Debbie Hill leads a recent meeting of Lakewood Baptist WMU. Even though she's only been a member for about four years, in that time she has brought back what had been a long-standing ministry in the church — the Woman's Missionary Union.

Now there is always a project in the works: backpacks for children in the Mississippi Delta, shoeboxes for Samaritan's Purse and Christmas stockings for area kids, just to name a few.

The women also provide lunch for Fire Station 19's firefighters in September each year. It doesn't take

much for them to organize it since they already have a potluck after each meeting.

Helping women

However, the group's main focus is the Lovelady Center, a local ministry that helps women who are transitioning from prison, referred by the Department

of Human Resources or are on parole.

"I always call [Lakewood] with any needs that the center might have," said Donna Smith, Lovelady's in-kind resource director. "I know it's a small church, but they always, always like to help in any way they can. I overwhelm them because with 500 women and 120 children, our needs are great.

"And in a couple of weeks, I get a call. 'Come get it. We have it for you.'"

One of their projects meets a unique need. Although the women at Lovelady get food from various food pantries, birthday cake supplies are rarely there. Although not as necessary as food, celebrating birthdays is essential to making loving memories for both the children and their moms.

The birthday cake kits that Lakewood's WMU make consist of a 9-by-13 alumi-

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num pan, a box of cake mix, a can of frosting, sprinkles, birthday candles and a can of Sprite, which substitutes for eggs and oil.

Not only does the WMU provide kits for Lovelady's clients, but occasionally Lovelady adds them to their own food distribution site, Lovelady Manna, which serves the East Lake area.

Circle of generosity

This means Lakewood gives to Lovelady, and then Lovelady gives back to Lakewood's community, creating a full circle of generosity.

The 15 to 20 women who attend each month love their WMU.

"It means getting together and learning about different missionaries from around the world and praying for them and giving them our support," said Jacquelyn Franklin.

Sonya Cordor appreciates the chance WMU gives her to help others. "It gives me the opportunity to share and

to serve the people. I have been in a situation myself where if it weren't for some good Christian people, my kids wouldn't have had birthdays or clothes and all when I became a single mother. So this gives me the opportunity to give back."

"I go to a Methodist church, and I work with missions at my church also," said Debbie Oden. "I love the ladies ... so I come here every Thursday. ... It's [also] a love for the children.

They're prayed over. They're thought about while we're working on the projects. We talk about them — the people who are going to receive them — and we know where they're going and it's just fun."

"[This WMU] is what my heart and my soul needed," said Sophie Arthur.

Pastor Wimberly said the ministry is vital.

"It's not like I've got [missions] over here isolated. It's part of everything I do. This is the life of our church."

About 500 women gather for Alabama WMU's 'day away with friends'

About 500 women gathered at Heritage Baptist Church in Montgomery on Feb. 22 for Renew, an annual event organized by Alabama Woman's Missionary Union that's described as "a day away with friends."

The Bible study leader for the missions-focused day was Heather Johnson, women's life coordinator at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and assistant director of Thrive, the seminary's certificate program for ministry wives. Nathan and Brooke Dodd were the worship leaders.

Renew also hosted a WorldCrafts store and an area called "The Backyard," which offered several display areas where



Facebook/Alabama WMU

A group of women pose for a photo at Renew on Feb. 22 at Heritage Baptist Church in Montgomery. The annual event is organized by Alabama Woman's Missionary Union.

participants could sign up for Pause and Pray, part of Alabama WMU's partnership with collegiate and student ministries.

All who attended Renew could also have their photo

made in a giant "cake" as a reminder that Southern Baptists will celebrate the 100th birthday of the Cooperative Program in May. (The Alabama Baptist)



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9-9:30 • Check-in and refreshments

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alsbom.org/gad

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Sunday School Lessons

By Nathan Harris, Ph.D.

Vice President for Strategic Initiatives, University of Mobile



For March 23

OUR WITNESS

1 Peter 2:11–17, 21–25

Our Good Works (11–12)

We know that salvation comes only through faith in Christ, not by works. (See Rom. 3:21–28, Gal. 2:16, Eph. 2:8–9, Phil. 3:8–11.) However, it is not inconsistent for Christians to claim that faith without works is dead (James 2:26). Good works are a fruit of the new life we have in Christ.

Because of faith, we do good works for the glory of God. In our passage today, Peter is reminding Christians of the call to do good works, not as a means of earning anything but as a means to glorify God.

He urges Christians, as strangers and exiles, to abstain from the sinful desires of their hearts that wage war against their souls. We are not at home in this temporary world but look forward to the unshakable and eternal Kingdom to come (Heb. 12:28). While we wait we are to fight off the sinful desires of our flesh. Why is this important? We conduct ourselves honorably before the Gentiles so that our good work glorifies the Lord before the watching world.

Our Freedom (13–17)

Peter continues his letter with another command for Christians of all ages. He not only urges us to abstain from sin and to do good works that glorify God, but he also calls us to submit to all who hold authority — including the government. I know this can be such a touchy subject to talk about these days.

Whether you like your elected officials or not often dictates how well you receive a command like this, but there is an important reminder that Peter gives us that should bring us

peace and joy in situations such as this. We are called to submit to all authorities not because of their inherent goodness or ability to serve justly but because of God (v. 13).

It is because of God's will that we do good works and submit to authorities, living lives of holiness unto the Lord as a means to bring Him glory.

It is our very freedom in Christ that allows us to joyfully submit

to human authority, not as slaves to the government but as free people under the lordship of Christ.

Our Example (21–25)

As we submit to all authorities, we also recognize that suffering will come. Unjust treat-

ment, persecution and suffering are not uncommon in the Christian life.

It is not a matter of "if" it will happen but truly only "when." As Peter recognizes this, he gives the greatest encouragement we can have as believers. Christ, our perfect example, suffered well so that we can follow in His footsteps.

Christ did not commit sin, was not deceitful and did not hurl insults in return, but as He suffered He trusted entirely in the just Judge, God the Father. And it is through Christ's suffering on the tree that we experience true freedom.

We have freedom to live fully to God and submit joyfully to all authorities — even in the face of suffering. As Peter says, it's by Christ's wounds — His suffering — that we have been healed. Though we were once lost sheep, we have returned to the Shepherd of our souls, Jesus Christ.

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

"Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God."

1 Peter 2:16

For March 30

OUR RELATIONSHIPS

1 PETER 3:1–12

1 Peter 3 begins with what many scholars consider the "household code."

Speaking directly to wives, husbands and then all believers, Peter is addressing primarily how we are to live in relationship to those around us, whether it be our spouse or even more broadly, the world around us.

Other passages on the household code include Ephesians 5:22–6:9 and Colossians 3:18–4:1.

As Peter draws from the context of 1 Peter 2:18–20, he speaks to both wives and husbands on how they are to live together and how they are to honor the Lord through their marriage (1 Pet. 3:1–7) before addressing how Christians should relate to one another (1 Pet. 3:8–12).

Wives (1–6)

First, Peter speaks directly to wives in verses 1–6, calling them to live in submission to their husbands.

Just as slaves submit to their masters and citizens submit to their authorities (2:13), "in the same way," Peter calls wives to submit to their husbands.

This is not to say that the relationship between wives and husbands is identical to that of slaves and masters but is more so telling us about the relational dynamic present in marriage.

Wives submit to the headship and authority of their husbands. Why?

As Peter says, so the unbelieving husband is won over by the way she lives her life according to God's Word.

Even without saying a word, a wife's submission to her husband can lead an unbelieving spouse to the faith.

And instead of focusing on her outward appearance, wives should be attentive to their hearts — adorning themselves with a gentle and quiet spirit, joyfully submitting to their husbands, which all ultimately honors the Lord.

Husbands (7)

After addressing the wives in verses 1–6, Peter turns his attention on the other half of marriages — the husbands.

At first glance, one may notice that Peter addresses the wives with six verses while only dedicating one verse to the husbands.

This is not to say one part of the marriage needs less directive from God's word, but that Peter was primarily focusing on those who were more liable to experience oppression from authorities rather than those who exercise authority (Schreiner p.180).

In speaking to husbands, Peter tells them to live in an understanding way with their wives that shows honor and treats them as coheirs of grace.

Peter is giving directive on how husbands are to lead — with understanding and honor.

The headship of the husband isn't intended to be domineering or harsh.

Instead it is to model the same sacrificial love that Christ gave for the church (Eph. 5:25).

Husbands are to exercise their role with understanding, honor and love.

All Believers (8–12)

Lastly, Peter addresses Christian relationships between one another.

Broadening the scope from husbands and wives, Peter encourages believers to be of one mind, having compassion for each other, and with humility exhibiting compassion for each other.

Instead of seeking to retaliate when experiencing something unjust (paying back evil for evil), Christians are called to bless others.

In supporting these statements, Peter says the one who wants to love life and experience good days does not pursue evil and deceitfulness but keeps himself clean of wrong doing and speaks truth.

Christians should seek peace for their lives and pursue it.

For the Lord is for those who pursue righteousness, and His face is against those who do evil.

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sunday School Lessons

By James R. Strange, Ph.D.

Professor of Biblical and Religious Studies, Samford University



For March 23

THE SIGN OF HIS PROVISION John 6:1–15

In the Gospel of John, Jesus' fourth sign happens back in Galilee, a region that was once the northern part of ancient Israel but at the time of the event is controlled by Herod Antipas.

This sign is one of the few stories shared by all four Gospels. In John, all signs — works of divine power — point to Jesus' identity and thus are critical for John's message that Jesus is the Son sent by the Father to reveal the Father.

The correct response to the signs is to have faith in Jesus.

Jesus sees our needs. (1–5)

Rather than going to Jerusalem for this Passover, Jesus goes to a mountain in Galilee where crowds flock to Him. John is calling attention to a remarkable irony. Rather than feasting on Passover lamb, God's Passover Lamb (1:29, 35; 19:14) is feeding the crowd. The event also partially fulfills Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman (4:21).

In the accounts in Matthew, Mark and Luke, the disciples ask Jesus near the end of the day to send the crowd into villages so that they can eat. But in John, Jesus initiates the sign when He asks Philip where the disciples can purchase bread to feed the crowd. It is a test with repercussions that Jesus addresses the next day (vv. 25–40).

Jesus can work mightily with whatever we trust to His care. (6–11)

Philip thinks Jesus is inquiring about something that is impossible. He is right, for 200 denarii was around seven months' wages for a typical laborer. Philip says that such a fortune would not be

enough to provide everyone a full meal.

But of course, he's also wrong. Andrew finds a boy who had the foresight to pack a lunch of barley loaves and dried fish, and this one meal turns out to be more than 200 denarii could provide. All get as much as they want to eat.

Jesus provides what we need, not necessarily what we want. (12–15)

Jesus provides even more, however, for 12 baskets full of pieces of barley loaves remain.

The implication is that Philip has failed the test, for he was in Cana when Jesus provided far more than the guests at a village wedding celebration could consume. Moreover, the miraculous abundance in these events recalls miracles from Israel's

**“Andrew said to him,
‘There is a boy here
who has five barley
loaves and two
fish, but what are
they for so many?’”**

John 6:9

past — God's gift of manna in the wilderness in Exodus 16:14–26, the multiplication of oil and flour in 1 Kings 17:7–16 and 2 Kings 4:1–7, and the celebration of God's provision in Psalm 23:5.

The people understand something important, however, and want to make “the Prophet who is to come into the world” their king. This will happen in chapter 19, but it is premature now for the Son's “hour” will not come for another year (13:1).

In verse 26, Jesus begins to give the key for understanding the sign of the loaves and fishes. Even better than the manna God provided in the wilderness, Jesus is the Bread that never perishes but “lasts for eternal life” (v. 27).

He is the Bread of Life (v. 35), the true Bread that came “down from heaven and gives life to the world” (v. 33; see 3:16).

Jesus Himself is God's abundant, eternal provision for the world that He loves.

For March 30

THE SIGN OF HIS PRESENCE John 6:16–21

In our fifth session on signs (miracles) in the Gospel of John, we read John's account of Jesus walking on water, a story that also appears in Matthew 14:22–33 and Mark 6:45–56. As with the other signs, it ends with Jesus' statement about who He is.

Jesus has just fed 5,000 men and an unknown number of women and children with a boy's meager lunch, and the disciples collect 12 baskets of leftover fragments. Like the manna in the wilderness, Jesus demonstrates God's abundant provision.

Thus, the fourth sign echoes the astonishing amount of wine in the first — the wedding in Cana — and in turn anticipates the miraculous catch of fish in chapter 21. These signs also set up two of Jesus' famous “I am” statements in John: Jesus is the Bread of Life (v. 35) and the true Vine (15:1, 5).

Life without Jesus is dangerous. (16–18)

Near the place where He fed the crowd on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus has withdrawn to a mountain to avoid being declared king by the people (v. 15). If they had done so, Antipas would have responded ruthlessly and violently as an agent of the Roman government.

This mountain of Jesus' isolation is probably the plateau of the Golan Heights, and it would have taken much time and effort to climb the steep slope and descend it again to the lake's shore.

As a result, Jesus' disciples get into a boat that evening without Him to begin their return journey to Capernaum. They are hindered, however, by a strong wind and rough water, and they proceed only three to four miles. This puts them

close to their destination but still not on firm, dry land.

Jesus' presence brings peace. (19–20)

That must explain their terror at seeing Jesus walking near their boat. There is no shallow water here to provide an optical illusion of a miracle. Untroubled by wind or sea, Jesus treads the surface of the lake, suspended 65 to 80 feet above its floor. The disciples who were fishermen must have known of people who drowned much closer to land.

Jesus knows they are afraid and soothes them. He says to them, “I AM. Fear not.”

Many translations render Jesus' statement, “It is I,” but in John's telling, Jesus speaks the words that God said to Moses in the Greek translation of Exodus 3:14. When Moses asks the Voice from the burning bush the name of the One who is sending him, the reply is, “I AM the One Who Is.” There is a simpler way in Greek to say “I am,” but to identify Himself, Jesus has chosen the familiar, biblical words of divine revelation, and they must have rung in the disciples' ears. Once again, He has made Himself equal to God (5:18).

Jesus' presence will see us through. (21)

Surely the disciples understood the miraculous arrival at their destination as proof of Jesus' claim.

Although John doesn't say so, the wind and waves must have calmed, which is another thing that only God accomplishes (Ps. 65:7, 89:9, 107:29; Jon. 1:15; Is. 51:10; compare Matt. 8:26; Mark 4:39; Luke 8:24).

Jesus speaks as the “I AM” who redeemed Israel from bondage, and it is He who speaks assurance to their fear and calm to the winds that buffet them.

**“But He said to them, ‘It is I; do not be afraid.’
Then they were glad to take Him into the boat.”**

John 6:20–21

WORD search

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|-----------|----------|-----------|
| ANDREW | FIVE | SEA |
| BARLEY | JESUS | SIMON |
| BASKET | JUDAS | SPIRIT |
| BELIEVE | KINGDOM | STORM |
| BETRAY | LOAVES | TEACHINGS |
| BOAT | MANNA | THOUSAND |
| CAPERNAUM | MIRACLE | WALK |
| CROWD | MOUNTAIN | WATER |
| DISCIPLES | PASSOVER | WORDS |
| FEAR | PETER | WORK |
| FISH | PHILIP | WORSHIP |

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

*"He said to Philip, 'Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?'
 But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do."*

JOHN 6:5B-6



UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

2025 ENCOURAGE: A senior adult worship service

Spend a morning in fellowship with other senior adults being encouraged through God's Word and a time of music celebration!

2025 ENCOURAGE is a worship service designed to encourage senior adults in evangelism and Christian living.

You'll be revived in spirit and motivated to continue serving in God's purpose for your life.

ENCOURAGE will be held

May 5 from 9:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. at First Baptist Church Pelham.

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, will be speaking, and worship will be led by Guy Penrod, former lead singer of the Gaither Vocal Band, and gospel pianist Frank Jones.

The event is free, but registration is encouraged at alsbom.org/encourage.



LANCE



PENROD



JONES

Two-day training equips pastors for transitional ministry

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

Transitional Pastor Training, a two-day event planned for April 21-22 at the State Board of Missions, will equip pastors for transition ministry by training them to work with a group in the church, taking them through a stage-by-stage process of renewed mission.

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

"Churches in periods without

pastors need experienced, sanctified and wise leadership," said Ken Allen, director of the SBOM office of LeaderCare.

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

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

To register, visit alsbom.org/tpt.

The Wellness Kitchen

"Nature is God's Wellness Kitchen where Food is Medicine."

By Pat Terry
The Wellness Kitchen

CARAMELIZED CHICKEN WITH FRESH MANGO

Makes 4 servings

INGREDIENTS:

3/4 cup dark brown sugar	2 red chilles, thinly sliced (optional)
1/2 cup cold water	4 cups boneless breast or thigh chicken cut into 2 inch slices
1/3 cup soy sauce	2 ripe mangoes, peeled and chopped
1/3 cup rice wine vinegar	1/2 cup roasted peanuts
4 cloves garlic, crushed	1 bunch green onions, chopped
2 inch piece of fresh ginger, peeled and grated	Toasted sesame oil (optional)
4 tablespoons high temperature oil (safflower, rice bran, peanut, canola, coconut or grapeseed)	

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Whisk brown sugar, water, soy sauce, rice wine, garlic and ginger together in a bowl until brown sugar is completely dissolved, about one minute; set aside.
- Heat oil in a skillet over high heat: add chicken.
- Pour 1/3 cup of the brown sugar mixture over the chicken. Cook and stir until the mixture has a syrup-like consistency, 6 to 7 minutes.
- Pour in the remaining brown sugar mixture. Cook until the chicken is tender and is no longer pink inside, about 5 minutes.
- Stir in mangoes, peanuts and green onions. Cook until warmed through, 2 to 3 minutes.
- Serve with jasmine or sticky rice.
- Sprinkle with toasted sesame oil if desired.

Adapted from allrecipes.com

What's in season right now? Mango

Once thought of as an exotic tropical fruit, mangoes are now available year-round. Although native to Southeast Asia, thousands of mango varieties are spread throughout Central and South America as well as Africa.

When we lived in Costa Rica and Venezuela, mangoes were so plentiful in season that you were expected to leave the extra outside your gate for anyone to take! Of course, now in the United States we can get them year-round, but many are still imported.

The growing season for U.S. grown mangoes is January through September, with peak production in June and July.

The south is fortunate to have Florida mangoes close at hand. What a great way to bring sunshine to your meals in midwinter!

► **Peak time:** Available from U.S.

farms March to September, peak season is summer.

► **Average price:** \$1.10 each

► **Tips for selection and storage:** Choose large, plump fruit with smooth skin that has at least begun to color. A ripe mango will yield to gentle pressure.

Fresh smelling, well colored but firm fruit will ripen well in a brown paper bag at room temperature. Avoid mushy or withered fruit, bruises or large black spots. Use ripened fruit immediately or refrigerate for 1–2 days.

► **Nutritional highlights:** Mangoes are excellent sources of vitamins A and C as well as

dietary fiber. They also provide thiamin, riboflavin, niacin, vitamin B6, vitamin E, potassium, magnesium and copper. Mangoes have many phytonutrients including beta carotene, lutein, anthocyanins, polyphenols, gallic and egallic acids.



Photo by Pat Terry

Pat Terry started The Wellness Kitchen as a way to share the knowledge she's acquired over the 30 years she served as a professor of nutrition and dietetics at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama. Prior to her work at Samford, Terry was the first nonclinical dietitian appointed by the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention to serve overseas. Visit her website at thewellnesskitchenrd.com.



MEDIA REVIEWS

By Steve Potts

The Alabama Baptist

Selections focus on theme of resurrection ahead of Easter

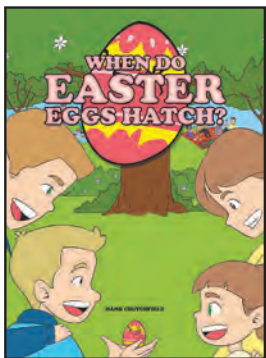
When Do Easter Eggs Hatch?

By Hank Crutchfield

WestBow Press, 2023

Hank Crutchfield's young son once asked him an intriguing question: "When do Easter eggs hatch?"

That sparked the idea for a simple and beautiful children's book to help explain the true meaning of Easter. Crutchfield is a Marine veteran and citrus grower in Florida who, as a devout Christian, wanted to write a story that would help young children think about the real message of Easter. The result is a colorful story based around a child named Jack and his family.



The boy is curious and confused about a bunny bringing eggs, and his parents and little sister don't have a good answer for his question about when the eggs hatch. The story is told in rhyme and written in easy-to-understand terms most young readers can grasp.

It follows the family to church on Easter Sunday, where the Sunday School class gives information about the resurrection of Jesus. But Jack is still wondering about the eggs. The family visits a beautiful meadow on their way home and gets involved in an Easter egg hunt. Jack finds an egg in which his father has put a note that answers the question in a gentle and uplifting way. The resurrection of Jesus is clearly taught and celebrated.

While the story is short, it would be excellent for parents or grandparents to share with young children. Sunday School teachers may also find the book a unique way to open a discussion about the Easter holiday and its true meaning.

The Young Samaritan

By J. Schuyler Sprowles

BookBaby, 2024

Schuyler Sprowles has written a creative and moving novel that tells the story of a young man from Samaria at the time of Jesus. Through the eyes of this youth named Joshua, we encountered the story of Jesus in a unique and memorable way.

Sprowles, who grew up in Chicago, has had a long career in television journalism and is currently a magazine publisher in California. "The Young Samaritan" is his first novel. The book moves along at a good pace, beginning in a small village in ancient Samaria where Joshua faces serious family problems and is forced to leave home. The reader gets a good sense of life in the ancient world through the experiences of this young man.

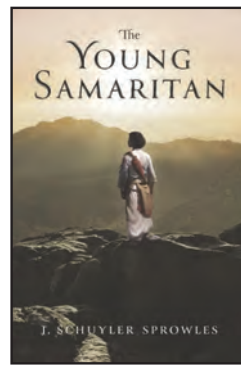
Joshua spends time with a reclusive uncle and meets a woman who helps him and seems to have prophetic insight, predicting that Joshua would soon encounter the

promised Messiah. Indeed, he meets Jesus and the apostles on their journey into Samaria.

The author is careful in handling the fictional encounters between the boy and Jesus. Much of what Jesus says is adapted directly from the gospel accounts. We get a sort of sideways glance at familiar biblical stories like the woman at the well in Samaria and the feeding of the 5,000.

Eventually, the young man travels to Jerusalem and is a witness to the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. In fact, the reference to "an unidentified boy who flees the Garden of Gethsemane after Jesus' arrest" — recorded in Mark 14:51–52 — provides the inspiration for the novel.

Though many New Testament scholars suggest the account refers to Mark himself, Sprowles considered



the text in a different way and built the story around a fictional Samaritan youth. The book is filled with many biblical insights, and the author's speculations are closely tied to scriptural situations. Readers of historical fiction and Christian novels will especially find this book enjoyable and uplifting.

The Three Resurrections

By John G. "Jack" Green

Soncoast Publishing, 2022

At the heart of Christianity is the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Drawing on his extensive ministry experience, John G. "Jack" Green writes a thoughtful exploration of the centrality of Christ's victory

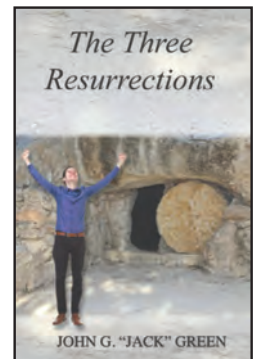
over death and how it brings two other resurrections into the salvation of every believer. The second resurrection is the new birth, or the conversion of each true believer from spiritual death into eternal life. The third resurrection is the glorious hope of the future bodily resurrection of every believer at the return of Christ.

Green, a former military chaplain, missionary to Korea and pastor of six churches, graduated from Howard College (now Samford University) and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. "The Three Resurrections" takes the reader through a devotional meditation of the Bible and how the resurrection of Jesus fulfills the heart of God's plan of redemption. Along the way, he shares personal insights and ministry experiences that illustrate and encourage.

Green writes with a pastor's heart and uses his material to nourish faith and to correct common misunderstandings.

For example, he notes his longtime friend coach Bobby Bowden's testimony and shares a list of spiritual practices that Bowden received from his parents: "Obey God above all, weekly church attendance with my parents, regular tithing at church, regular Bible study, family prayer before each meal, prayer before retiring at night."

I found this slim book to be full of wisdom and truth. Jack Green has given the reader an uplifting, Bible-based study of the power of Christ's resurrection that can transform lives here and forever.



EDITOR'S NOTE

Reviews of films, books, music or other media that appear in TAB are intended to help readers evaluate current media for themselves, their children and grandchildren in order to decide whether to watch, read or listen. Reviews are not an endorsement by the writer or TAB Media.