

The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



Judson College alumnae gather for a Step Sing, a longstanding Judson tradition, during J-Day at Siloam Baptist Church in Marion on Sept. 13.

Photo courtesy of the Judson College Alumnae Association

Traditions continue

Judson alumnae continue J-Day, Rose Sunday, give thanks for 'lasting sisterhood'

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Claire Kinnaird Keel said even though it's been four years since Judson College closed its doors, the Judson spirit is still very much alive.

Alumnae gathered Sept. 13–14 at nearby Siloam Baptist Church in Marion to continue the Judson traditions of J-Day and Rose Sunday.

"We've learned since we started producing our own reunions that the Judson spirit wasn't in the buildings or the grounds — it was in the hearts of those Judson students and professors who were on that campus," said Keel, president of the Judson College Alumnae Association. "Wherever those hearts and souls are, that Judson spirit is there."

As part of the J-Day activities on Sept. 13, alumnae inducted the

graduating class of 1975 into the Golden Club to honor their 50-year reunion. They also honored alumna Beatrice Robbins Morris from the class of 1951, who traveled from Louisiana to celebrate 74 years since her graduation from Judson.

A look back

The day also featured a fashion show called Hats, Hose, Heels and Gloves: Judson Fashion Under the

Dome, produced by alumna Deborah Law Vogelgesang, who graduated in 1971.

"She's a collector of antique clothing," Keel said. "We used Judson alumnae as models and traced the years of what someone might have worn to a Rose Sunday in the '60s, or a president's reception in the '70s."

Some of the alumnae in attendance (See 'Judson,' page 8)

AGING WELL

See this week's special section for **Ageing Well** — a resource that encompasses all aspects of growing older

New Home Baptist Church honors first responders for 'putting their lives on the line'

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

The week before New Home Baptist Church's First Responder Day, Lanny Lewis' hay bales caught on fire.

"He was on a piece of farm equipment and something sparked," said Phillip Dendy, associate pastor at New Home Baptist in Pisgah. "He called the volunteer fire department, and they responded and were able to minimize the damage.

"It was a miracle, because they only lost about five bales — he had 200 of them stacked side by side."

The very next week, Lewis was able to share that story during the church's Sunday service, and "the ladies and gentlemen were there, and we were able to recognize them for something that happened less than two miles from the church," Dendy said.

The event — which honors the community's past and present first responders — was the church's third annual First Responders Day.

Dendy said it's "a good way for us to recognize police officers, firefighters, all those who put their lives on the line for us every day."



Photo courtesy of Yvonne Case

Phillip Dendy (facing those being honored) shares a gift from New Home Baptist Church in Pisgah during the special presentation highlighting first responders. Dendy serves as associate pastor.

He said it's grown every year, and they've had instances where first responders have come and ended up staying, joining the church, getting plugged in and seeing their children come to faith too.

"We have story after story of how that has happened," Dendy said.



Photos courtesy of Yvonne Case

Past and present first responders are honored at New Home Baptist Church's third annual First Responders Day.

The Alabama Baptist

"If ye continue in My word, then ... ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." John 8:31-32

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JENNIFER DAVIS RASH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 11.

Rashional Thoughts

By Jennifer Davis Rash
President and Editor-in-Chief

✉ jrash@thealabamabaptist.org

🐦 @RashionalThts

Frustrated with mail delivery, excited about Kids Edition, honored to serve you

As we finalized the latest Aging Well resource (see section B of this edition of The Alabama Baptist), I thought about a few recent stressors that are preventing me from aging well.

One of those is frustrating you also — excessively slow mail delivery.

I can only offer my sincerest apology for whatever is happening with the United States Postal Service. We truly have tried to go the extra mile from our end to not become collateral damage within their consistent chaos.

While the mailing difficulties began several years ago, something different has surfaced lately to create a new level of inefficiency.

To ensure we are finding a way to properly serve you, we will soon begin publishing the Sunday School lesson commentaries three weeks ahead of the Sunday they are to be taught.

It's not fair for you to not be able to depend on receiving one

of the important resources you use in preparation for the lesson.

Thank you for your grace and patience as we make this shift. It will take a few editions to pull it all together.

Also, if you use email, send your email address to Sarah at subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org and she will add you to the list that receives the PDF of each edition via email. The PDF version is complimentary with your paid print subscription.

Each PDF arrives on the day of the edition's publication date, so you'll have that in hand right away.

New Kids Edition

While we are on the subject of subscriptions and new elements, be sure you are bundled to receive The Baptist Paper because you definitely want to receive our new Kids Edition newspaper

(section B of The Baptist Paper). And I'm confident you'll want to share it with all the kids in your life.

The Kids Edition launches with the Oct. 9 edition, so contact us today (800-803-5201 or subscribe@thebaptistpaper.org) to add The Baptist Paper for only \$10 per year for TAB subscribers. The Baptist Paper is printed and mailed to your home, alternating weeks with The Alabama Baptist.

We are excited to offer this new entertaining and informative resource for kids ages 5 to 12 and anticipate it providing a family-friendly gateway for parents and grandparents into discussions related to Christian values and principles.

With the same mission and motto of Truth with Compassion in all that we do, our team works hard to provide the information you need to navigate life

as a believer without unnecessary drama.

We seek to provide helpful resources, an overall calming effect and fact-based reporting without labels or spin.

The hope is that as more and more people focus intently on Jesus, seek His face, allow His light to shine through them and choose kindness and grace over anger and fear, the faster His message travels.

Trusted friend

What if God truly is up to something big right now? Are we prepared to grow in Him at that level, no matter what it means we must sacrifice? Are we ready to reach out our hands to help others come along with us, no matter how messy their situation?

As we all attempt to find our way each day, it's nice to know we aren't alone. The Lord provides our ultimate peace, strength and guidance.

But we hope you also will keep us close and let us be a trusted friend and resource along the journey.



Your Voice



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

Fred Luter reminds students to remember 3 key things

By Leann Callaway

The Alabama Baptist

Speaking out of Philippians 4:6–9, Fred Luter Jr. challenged University of Mobile students Sept. 3 during their chapel service to pray right, think right and live right.

“One of the realities of living in a fallen society is that we have to deal with the impact and struggles of a fallen world,” said Luter, senior pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, Louisiana. “No one is exempt or gets a pass. Struggles will come your way. Because of the struggles

of living in a fallen world, these struggles can lead to anxiety or apprehension and no peace in your life. As sons and daughters of God, how do we achieve the peace of God in our lives?”

1. Pray right.

Luter, former president of the Southern Baptist Convention, reminded students that prayer is essential.

“Philippians 4:6 reminds us to be anxious for nothing,” he noted. “God has given us the spiritual discipline of prayer to help

us. There is no trial or situation that you can’t take to the Lord in prayer. The battle is the Lord’s. No matter what you are facing, you can tell God all about it. If you want to experience the peace of God, take everything to God in prayer.”

2. Think right.

One’s thought life is also important, Luter said. “God desires for us as His sons and daughters to have His peace,” Luter said. “Isaiah 26:3 says God will keep you in perfect peace.”



LUTER

3. Live right.

Pay attention to your choices, Luter urged.

“If you commit these things to Him, practice them and accomplish them, the God of peace will be with you,” Luter said. “He promises that He will never leave you or forsake you.”

Peace comes from God

“The world can’t give or take away the peace that comes from God. That same peace of God is available to every child of God.”

Luter concluded the message by praying for the students and school leaders to have peace in God.

First person: When you disagree with the pastor

By Todd Fisher

Executive director, Oklahoma Baptist State Convention

My plea is to show your pastor some grace and treat him with kindness and respect even if you disagree with him.

Some of the emails/messages pastors have read to me which they received from church members are just mean.

We all should rightly condemn the violence done against Charlie Kirk, but how can we then turn around and treat our pastor in a violent way with injurious and inappropriate words (because he did or didn’t address the situation from the pulpit)?

If you disagree with your pastor and feel compelled to say something — about any issue — please talk to him rather than about him. Please talk to him in a way that is seasoned with grace and is fair, rather than name calling and condemning/ac-cusing him before you even hear what he has to say.

Challenges of leadership

I hope church members can appreciate how difficult it can be to lead a church today. With such diversity of opinion among church members on a wide range of topics, pastors are often placed in a no-win situation of making decisions. Leading from the first chair can be very challenging.

Your pastor is doing the best he knows to do under the Lord’s leadership to lead the church in biblical faithfulness and gospel-centeredness while at the same time trying to build unity among the members. Stinging messages sent to him not only violate Scripture, they can also be deeply hurtful to him and his wife.

If necessary, talk to him. But do so understanding what a difficult job he has and that the thing you are upset with him about may be something others in the church are praising him for. Let’s pray for them and treat them with dignity and respect (Rom. 12:10).

“Half of Americans seek their own comfort and their own way even in their death, but that doesn’t mean they don’t think twice about the morality of physician-assisted suicide,” said **Scott McConnell**, executive director of Lifeway Research. “Only 1 in 5 Americans strongly agree such a decision is morally acceptable; others are less sure.”

“The real healing only comes from Jesus. He is not just putting a bandage on something that hurts. He is healing from the inside,” said **Leo Regheta**, pastor of River of Life Church in Plano, Texas, who connects with refugees from Ukraine weekly.

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“What a good thing when someone extends the benefit of the doubt. Let’s ask a direct question instead of putting one another on blast.”

CLINT PRESSLEY
SBC President

“A lot of people think a pastor is someone that works at a church, preaches on Sunday mornings and shepherds the flock of the local church community,” said **Matt Bostic**, chaplain and business life coach. “A chaplain is more of a pastor in the marketplace. Whereas maybe 50% of Christians in America go to church on Sunday, 100% go to work on Monday.

“Chaplains have an incredible opportunity to take the pastoral gift into the business marketplace and find their flock to lead in the workforce.”

Mia Robertson shares her testimony about having a cleft palate and wondering “Why God made her this way?” on **Sadie Robert-**

son’s podcast, “WHOA That’s Good.”

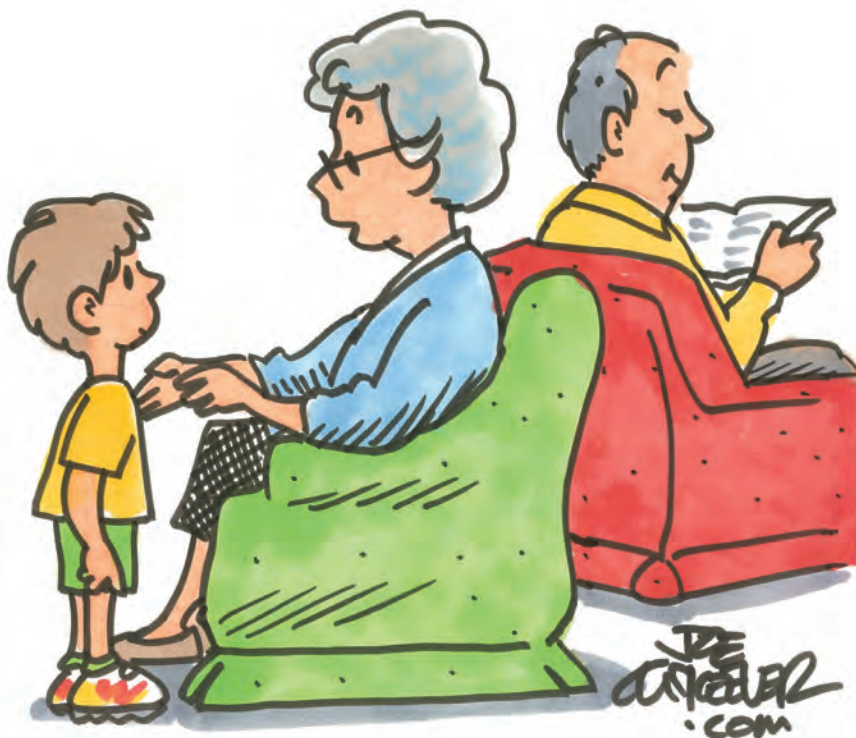
Mia discusses her struggle with bullies and insecurities with her looks. She unfolds how she is able to help young girls that struggle with their looks during this podcast. She said she overcame her struggles through the power of prayer.

“You could have a manicured lawn, but your life is full of weeds. You could have all of these things on the outside, but your inside is falling apart. ...

“Life sometimes can get easily unmanageable, and you need help. Help comes from God.”

Billy Abrams, pastor
Cedar Grove Baptist Church
Leeds, Ala.

“HONEY, GRANDPA DIDN'T ACTUALLY HANG THE MOON. HE JUST HELD THE LADDER.”



LASS WORDS



BY **KEN LASS**
The Alabama Baptist

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

God’s holy name

Recently I woke up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom. I chose not to turn on any lights because I was afraid they might bother my sleeping wife.

Turns out, that was a mistake. About halfway there I stubbed my toe on the corner of my dresser. It hurt like crazy!

I am embarrassed to confess that my first inclination upon suffering this sharp pain was to let out a shout, taking the Lord’s name in vain. Somehow, I managed to muffle my agony and change the verbiage to “Sugar!” which I heaved out intensely under my breath.

Human nature

It did get me wondering why some of us are so tempted to use God’s name profanely when we want to express anger. God didn’t make me stub my toe. That was my own silly fault.

In the moment, I guess it is human nature to want somebody else to blame. We don’t want to blame ourselves. We can’t blame other people — they’d get mad at us. So God becomes an easy target. Apparently, we figure, since He is in control of all things He must have caused this misfortune.

I know a person for whom profanity is common any time he encounters something negative. When asked why he curses

so much, he replied, “I don’t really mean anything by it. I’m just blowing off steam.”

A habit

In other words, it’s a habit. A bad one. Taking the Lord’s name in vain may be something humans regard lightly, but God clearly does not.

Scripture is loaded with warnings about disrespecting His holy name: “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Eph. 4:29).

In the third chapter of James the author writes “Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be” (verse 10).

In Matthew 12:36, Jesus warns, “But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken.”

We all get angry. We must learn to handle it with patience and grace.

MEET THE AUTHOR

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

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

HORACE DAVID SMITH

Horace David Smith, who served as pastor of New Home Baptist Church, Pisgah, for more than 25 years, died Sept. 7. He was 63.

Smith previously served as pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, Bridgeport; Bethel Baptist Church, Chattanooga, Tennessee; and Roaches Cove Baptist Church, Fackler. He began at New Home in February 2000.

In 1981, Smith was called to preach. He was licensed and ordained the same year at Calvary Baptist.

Smith received his bachelor's degree, master's degree and doctor of ministry degree from Emmanuel Baptist University, Connelly Springs, North Carolina.

He is survived by his wife, Annette; two daughters, Elisabeth and Leah; and two grandchildren.



SMITH

AUTAUGA ASSOCIATION

► **Calvary Baptist Church, Prattville**, will host its annual fall festival and trunk or treat event Oct. 25, 1–3 p.m., featuring games, prizes, candy, sno-cones and popcorn. Jamie Bostic is interim pastor.



Facebook photo

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► **Timothy Fortune** is the new senior pastor of **Bethel Baptist Church, Pleasant Grove**. He previously served as pastor of Columbus Baptist Church, North Carolina. Bethel hosted a welcome reception Sept. 28 for him and his wife, Michelle.

► **Terry Fuller**, the new pastor of **Adamsville Baptist Church**, was ordained to the gospel ministry Aug. 17. He has served churches in Jefferson County for more than 40 years. Deacon John Hayes (left), presented the certificate to Fuller (right). He is married to Janet.



Photo by Chris Crain

CHILTON ASSOCIATION

► **Chris Ferguson** is the new pastor of **Bell Lane Baptist Church, Clanton**. He previously

served as associate pastor for Clanton First Baptist Church. He and his wife, Ashley, have six children.

CLARKE ASSOCIATION

► **Mark Dunn** was recognized for his 25 years of ministry as pastor of **Rockville Baptist Church, Jackson**, on Aug. 17 during its homecoming service. Dennis Dunn, recently retired pastor of Bayou



Submitted photo

Sara Baptist Church, Saraland, and Mark's brother, was the guest preacher. Wayne Kimbrell, deacon chair, presented a plaque and gifts on behalf of the church, to Pastor

COOSA RIVER ASSOCIATION

► **Oldfield Baptist Church, Sylacauga**, celebrated its 75th anniversary Sept. 14. Special guests included Rick Patrick, pastor of First Baptist Church Sylacauga, who spoke about the establishment of Oldfield Baptist as a mission church of FBC; Wes Johnson, Coosa River Association's director of missions, who affirmed and encouraged the congregation; and Braxton Baker, a missionary to Nicaragua, who thanked the congregation for their support. Pastor Danny Cotton presented certificates of appreciation to church leaders. Special music was provided by Bill Henderson, Courtlyn Hay and Aasia Pruitt. The church received a commemorative plaque presented by Roger Willmore (left), a commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, with Cotton (center) and deacon Randy Brazier (right) accepting the honor. Everyone present received a personalized tote bag that contained a calendar and note pad. Historical photos and newspaper articles also were on display. A DVD of the celebration will soon be available. A fellowship lunch followed the service.



Photo by Linda Cotton

EAST CULLMAN ASSOCIATION

► **Kenny Mullins** is the new pastor of **West Side Baptist Church, Eva**. Pre-



Facebook photo

viously he served as pastor of Eastside Baptist Church, Arab. He and his wife, Tasha, have two children.

ETOWAH ASSOCIATION

► **David Cofield** is the new pastor of **Edgewood Baptist Church, Gadsden**. He recently retired as pastor of First Baptist Church Rainsville and has been preaching in various churches. He and his wife, Roxanne, reside in Rainsville.



COFIELD

► **Brad Mullinax** is the new pastor of **Bellevue Baptist Church, Gadsden**.



Facebook photo

He previously served as pastor of James Memorial Baptist Church, Gadsden. He and his wife, Bethany, have three children.

► **Bethany Baptist Church, Reece City**, celebrated its 190th anniversary Sept. 6–7. The celebration began with a community-wide family fun day with

the church receiving two recognition awards from Etowah Baptist Association and the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. The celebration culminated with a special worship service Sunday. Bethany was one of the founding churches of Etowah Association in 1884 and remains the oldest, active church in the association. John Dempsey is pastor.



Submitted photo

FRANKLIN ASSOCIATION

► **Mike Hand** is the new pastor of **Crooked Oak Baptist Church, Tuscumbia**. With more than 30 years in ministry, he has served as pastor of three churches. Most recently he served at East Colbert Baptist Church, Muscle Shoals. He and his wife, Debbie, have three adult children and six grandchildren.



HAND

JUDSON ASSOCIATION

► **Oakey Grove Baptist Church, Newville**, celebrated its 175th anniversary Aug. 31. Guest musician Ian Hudspeth led worship. Pastor Don Adams (right) accepted a commemorative plaque presented by Jane Hughes (left), a commissioner for



Facebook photo



Photo by Ellen Dewberry

NEWS

the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. A fellowship meal was served following the service.

LIMESTONE ASSOCIATION

► **Dusty McLemore** is serving as interim pastor of **Round Island Baptist Church, Athens**, his home church where he was raised, baptized and ordained to preach. He and his wife, Patsy, raised their two daughters there as well. He served as pastor of Lyndsey Lane Baptist Church, Athens, for 28 years before retiring in 2020.



MCLEMORE

► **Keith Smyser** is serving as interim director of missions for **Limestone Baptist Association**. Since his retirement as executive pastor for First Baptist Church Athens in 2022, Smyser has continued to serve in various ministry roles, including teaching for Samford Ministry Training Institute. He and his wife, Teresa, are members of FBC Athens.



SMYSER

MARSHALL ASSOCIATION

► **Taylor Beck** (right) is the new ministry assistant for **Marshall Baptist Association** and retreat center. Beck is shown here with **Tammy Aziz**, who previously served in the role and is now serving as a ministry assistant with Arab First Baptist Church where Mike Foreman is pastor.



Photo by Eric Taylor

Beck and his wife, Kelly, have two children and are members of Solitude Baptist Church, Albertville, where he serves on the worship team.

Eric Taylor is associational missionary strategist for Marshall Association.

MOBILE NETWORK

► **Airport Boulevard Baptist Church, Mobile**, will be celebrating its 70th anniversary Oct. 5. Worship begins at 10:30 a.m. with a lunch and fellowship time to follow. Members, former members and friends are welcome to share memories via pictures, videos and stories by sending them to info@abbclife.org. J.T. Wright is pastor.

► **Bayou Sara Baptist Church, Saraland**, is celebrating its 65th homecoming Oct. 5. Sunday School begins at 9:45 a.m. with worship at 11. Dennis Dunn, who retired in March as the church's pastor, will preach, and Welsh Revival from the University of Mobile will provide special music. Dinner on the grounds will follow with everyone encouraged to bring covered dishes and desserts.

SHELBY ASSOCIATION

► **Meredith Whiten** is the new preschool and children's director for **First Baptist Church Pel-**

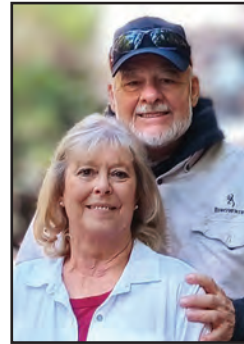


WHITEN

ham. She previously served as FBC Pelham ministry associate for students and worship ministry assistant. She and her husband, Alston, have two children. Daven Watkins is pastor.

TALLAPOOSA ASSOCIATION

► **Jeff Dye** is the new pastor of **Bethel Baptist Church, Jacksons Gap**. He has served as pastor of several churches in central and eastern Alabama and has been involved in music ministry, singing with family members, gospel groups and solo throughout the South. Bethel holds a special significance for him as his father was the church's pastor for almost 15 years. Dye and his wife, Kay, have been married six years, and together they have five adult children, 18 grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.



Facebook photo

TENNESSEE RIVER ASSOCIATION

► **Providence Missionary Baptist Church, Hollywood**, is hosting a fall festival Oct. 11 beginning at 5 p.m. The event includes games, food, smores a bonfire and more. God's Creation Petting Zoo, LLC also will be onsite. Everyone is welcome. Patrick Kritner is pastor.

TUSKEGEE LEE ASSOCIATION

► **Josh Carmichael** is the new pastor of **Central Baptist Church, Opelika**. He has served churches in Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina and Kentucky. He and his wife, Betsy, have six sons.



CARMICHAEL

► **Mark Murphy** is the new pastor of **Chewacla Baptist Church, Opelika**. He has been serving as interim pastor since November 2024. Previously he served as youth and music pastor of two churches in Georgia. He is married to Morgan.



MURPHY



WOODALL

► **Jimmy Woodall** is the new pastor of **Elam Baptist Church, Tallassee**. He and his wife, Mona, have three daughters and six grandchildren.

► **Cubahatchie Baptist Church, Shorter**, will celebrate its 187th anniversary Oct. 5. Worship begins at 10 a.m. Pastor Ben Nichols will preach with special music provided by Garrett Jimmerson. A covered dish lunch will follow.

Buddy Gray announces upcoming retirement from Hunter Street

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Buddy Gray, pastor of Hunter Street Baptist Church in Hoover, announced Sept. 14 his plans to retire in summer 2026.

"Next summer I plan to step down from full-time pastoral ministry," Gray said during the church's worship service. "I'll be retiring from Hunter Street; at that time I will have been here more than 40 years, and I will be 69 years old. But I want you to know I have loved serving the Lord, and I've loved His people here."

He said he had come to the decision by seeking the Lord's guidance "with peace and tears," and it was hard for him to find the right words to express the way he felt about the church.

"For almost 40 years, you have been my spiritual family. You are my church home. You have loved Tricia her entire life," Gray said, noting that his wife was on the church's cradle roll when she was born.

Gray first came to Hunter Street in 1978 as the church's youth pastor, then returned in 1986 when they called him as pastor.

Covenant love

"Every week at the end of the service when I say I love you, I just don't mean feelings of affection, but I certainly feel those, but I mean commitment, a covenant love, a love that says I am with you no matter what," he said. "And I have felt the very same from you."

Gray said he knew some might be asking where the church goes from here.

"I have an answer for that. You will continue in the grace of God," he said. "The strength of a church has never rested in one man. It has always rested in the unchanging faithfulness of God."

Gray said Hunter Street had already been walking with the Lord for 79 years before he arrived.

"And when I step aside, I want you to remember that the same God who has carried this church now for 119 years will still carry you," he said. "By His grace and for His glory, I believe that the greatest days of the life of our church, the greatest days of Kingdom ministry, are just ahead of us."

To watch the entirety of Buddy Gray's announcement, visit tabonline.org/Gray.

JUDSON SPIRIT

Siloam Baptist helps alumnae continue traditions

(continued from page 1)
 revived traditional outfits Sept. 14 to commemorate Rose Sunday, the traditional day when Judson students would walk across the street from campus to Siloam Baptist for worship. As part of Rose Sunday, which started in 1913, freshmen would weave live ivy into a chain that underclassmen

would hold for the Judson president and seniors to walk through.

“It was required that the girls wore hats, hose, heels and gloves to Rose Sunday for years,” Keel said. “I graduated in 1981, and by then, hats were gone but hose and heels were still required, and underclassmen had to wear gloves still

to hold the ivy chain.”

But Keel and the others decided to bring back the full attire, hats and all.

Those who were able met in the street outside Jewett Hall on the former Judson campus to walk to Siloam Baptist, then met others who were waiting there for prayer. They then processed in and joined the worship service.

She said it’s a blessing for Siloam Baptist to let them continue traditions like these.

“Siloam gives us that gift each year of Rose Sunday, which is one of our most cherished traditions,” she said. “Siloam is now the only home we have. We



Photo courtesy of the Judson College Alumnae Association

Models for the J-Day fashion show were (l to r) Deborah Law Vogelgesang (Judson class of 1971), Kristen Potts Helton (class of 1999 and daughter of the late Judson president David Potts), Savanna Anderson (daughter and granddaughter of alumnae Lisa Tucker Anderson, class of 2007, and Theresa King Anderson, class of 1977) and Rebecca Malphurs Watford (class of 2014).

thank God for giving us the gift of Judson College and thank Siloam for giving us the gift of Rose Sunday and

being a part of our Judson legacy. And we give thanks for our continuing and lasting Judson sisterhood.”

Claire Kinnaird Keel (left), Judson College Alumnae Association president, is pictured with John Nicholson, pastor of Siloam Baptist Church in Marion.



Photo courtesy of the Judson College Alumnae Association



THE PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST

November 10, 2025
 Whitesburg Baptist Church
 Huntsville, Alabama



Richard Blackaby



Fred "Chip" Luter, III



Dowand Malone



Ed Newton



Zane Pratt



Kyle Reno



Jay Wolf

Worship led by
 • Scott Underwood,
 Timmy Ray and
 Dusty Medlock
 • Whitesburg Worship

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ERLC taps Alabama Baptist Hollingsworth as interim

By **Jennifer Davis Rash**
The Alabama Baptist

First Baptist Church Trussville pastor emeritus Gary Hollingsworth will serve SBC's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission as interim president from his home in the Birmingham area, traveling to Nashville as needed.

Hollingsworth was unanimously elected Sept. 16 during ERLC's regularly scheduled September board of trustees meeting, held this year in Washington, D.C.

Alabama trustee Joe Godfrey led the board's congratulatory prayer over Hollingsworth and Miles Mullin, executive vice president and chief of staff, who has been serving as acting president

since previous ERLC president Brent Leatherwood stepped down July 31.

Leatherwood was elected as president of ERLC in 2022. He resigned following more than a year of growing controversy about his leadership and ERLC in general.

'Unique combination'

Scott Foshie, chair of ERLC's trustee board, applauded Hollingsworth's nomination, according to an ERLC press release.

"Dr. Hollingsworth brings a unique combination of executive leadership, relational depth and pastoral heart that will serve Southern Baptists well as he leads the ERLC through this season of transition and opportu-

nity. We are thankful for his obedience and availability to be used by God in this way to serve and empower churches as we take the gospel to our culture and the public square."

Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, shared his admiration and appreciation of Hollingsworth.

"I have known Gary Hollingsworth for decades," Lance said in written comments. "During that time I have admired and I have appreciated his genuine walk with God and his exemplary leadership. Gary has served the Lord on so many levels in Baptist life.

"In each of these places of service Gary always gave his best. ... I believe the Lord is going to continue to use him in crucial places of leadership in the days to come."

Buddy Champion, current senior pastor of FBC Truss-

ville, said, "Gary ... is deeply loved by those he has pastored and led throughout the years. Gary will bring a listening heart and help the Southern Baptist family stay focused on the future. ... We should all be grateful for his willingness to serve in this capacity."

Hollingsworth most recently served part-time as donor relations manager (east) for GuideStone's Mission:Dignity, traveling to various Baptist meetings throughout the year as well as spending time with individual donors.

He retired from full-time ministry in 2023, at that time serving as executive director of the South Carolina Baptist Convention since 2016.

Hollingsworth's previous ministry roles included serving as senior pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, Arkansas, from 2007 to 2016; as senior

director of cultural evangelism for the North American Mission Board from 2005 to 2007; as senior pastor of FBC Trussville from 1995 to 2005; as senior pastor of FBC Alexandria, Virginia, from 1991 to 1995; as senior pastor of Shively Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, from 1989 to 1991; and in a variety of other ministry roles.

Life of ministry

His initial experience on a church staff began at Dauphin Way Baptist Church in Mobile as minister to students from 1979 to 1981. He also has served in various denominational roles through the years.

He is a graduate of the University of Alabama and holds a master of divinity degree from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and doctor of ministry degree from Southern Seminary.

Hollingsworth and his wife, Gwen, returned to the Birmingham area in 2023 and are active members of FBC Trussville.



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UPCOMING EVENTS
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First person: Continuing to serve the Lord

Through years of working with senior adults, I have heard this so many times — “I’m retiring from serving (choir, Sunday School class, nursery, etc.).”

But can someone really retire from service to the Lord? I really don’t think so. In our ministry to Alabama Baptist senior adults, we have adopted a Scripture to lean on in 2026. Psalm 92:12–14 says:

“The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing” (NKJV).

Hear what that says? “Still bear fruit in old age.”

I don’t think you ever get too old to serve the Lord. Perhaps our physical abilities are not what they were in younger years, but there is still something every se-

For more information about senior adult events, visit alsbom.org/senior-adults or scan the code below with your smartphone’s camera.



nior adult can do in service for the sake of the Kingdom.

There will always be babies to be rocked, young adults to disciple, children to lead to Christ.

But maybe “all” one can do is to pray. Prayer is a powerful tool!

One of my former pastors, Jimmy Taylor, said, “Prayer can do anything God can

do ... and God can do anything.”

Senior adult, don’t sit on the sideline. Get in the game. As long as the Lord gives you the ability to serve, then ... serve!

Besides service to the Lord, let me encourage Alabama Baptist senior adults to be involved in our 2026 events across the state. These are wonderful fellowship opportunities to gather with hundreds of other senior adults from our churches.

For more information, visit alsbom.org/senior-adults. You’ll also find event details in the accompanying articles in this issue.

Senior adult, God will reward your faithfulness to Him as you continue to serve Him. He is worthy of any effort put forth in His name.

Frank Jones
Senior adult ministry strategist
State Board of Missions



Photo by Doug Rogers/SBOM

Frank Jones performs during Encourage on May 5 at First Baptist Church Pelham. The special worship service was designed to encourage senior adults in evangelism and Christian living.

WORD search

- | | |
|------------|-----------|
| ABEL | LORD |
| ABRAHAM | MOSES |
| ASSURANCE | NOAH |
| BARAK | OBEY |
| BELIEVE | PROMISE |
| CONVICTION | PROPHETS |
| DAVID | RAHAB |
| ENDURANCE | REWARD |
| ENOCH | RIGHTEOUS |
| FAITH | SACRIFICE |
| GIDEON | SAMSON |
| HEAVENLY | SAMUEL |
| ISAAC | SARAH |
| JACOB | TESTIMONY |
| JEPHTHAH | TRUST |
| JOSEPH | WITNESSES |

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

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for,
the evidence of things not seen.”

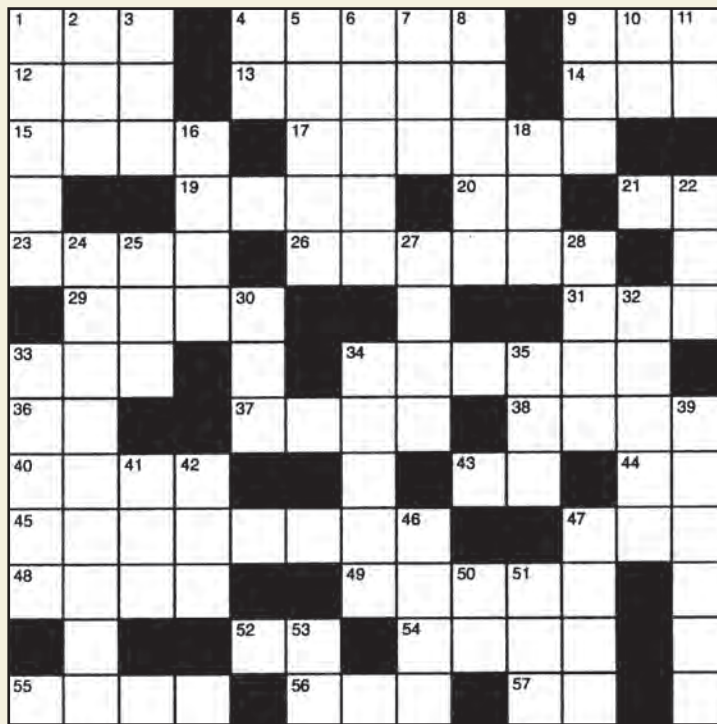
HEBREWS 11:1

CHRISTIAN Crossword



ACROSS

1. ___ shall not live by bread alone. (Matt. 4:4)
4. And the darkness He called ___. (Gen. 1:5)
9. My heart was ___ within me. (Ps. 39:3)
12. Mine ___ is as nothing before Thee. (Ps. 39:5)
13. Let us go and serve ___ gods. (Deut. 13:13)
14. There was no room for them in the ___. (Luke 2:7)
15. Lo, I have given thee ___ dung. (Ezek. 4:15)
17. The ___ also dwelt in Seir. (Deut. 2:12)
19. On this side Jordan may be ___. (Num. 32:32)
20. Grace ___ unto you. (Rev. 1:4)



By Janice Buhl Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

21. Los Angeles. (abbr.)
23. Asa destroyed her ___, and burnt it. (1 Kings 15:13)
26. ___ unto me. (Ps. 55:2)
29. And a river went out of ___ to water the garden. (Gen. 2:10)
31. When ye pray, ___ not vain repetitions. (Matt. 6:7)
33. I will ___ unto thy days 15 years. (Isa. 38:5)
34. It ___ to him that was possessed. (Mark 5:16)
36. The young men of Aven and of ___-beseth. (Ezek. 30:17)
37. Hast thou eaten of the ___? (Gen. 3:11)
38. So that my feet did not ___. (2 Sam. 22:37)
40. Praise Him for His mighty ___. (Ps. 150:2)
43. And he cast stones ___ David. (2 Sam. 16:6)
44. Thou shalt feed ___ people Israel. (2 Sam. 5:2)
45. Then led they Jesus from ___ unto the hall of judgment. (John 18:28)
47. Therefore shall he ___ in harvest. (Prov. 20:4)
48. Even Bethlehem, and ___ and Tekoa. (2 Chron. 11:6)
49. ___ went and dwelt in

- her father's house. (Gen. 38:11)
52. Let there ___ light. (Gen. 1:3)
54. ___ made him a great feast. (Luke 5:29)
55. Went up to ___, and fetched a compass to Karkaa. (Josh. 15:3)
56. The name of the wicked shall ___. (Prov. 10:7)
57. Short for Emily.
18. David sent out 10 young ___. (1 Sam. 25:5)
22. I ___ no ... bread. (Dan. 10:3)
24. King David ___ unto the Lord. (1 Chron. 18:11)
25. The ___ number of them is to be redeemed. (Num. 3:48)
27. Saul abode in Gibeah under a ___. (1 Sam. 22:6)
28. Their ears are ___ of hearing. (Acts 28:27)
30. He will ___ suffer. (Ps. 121:3)
32. And daubed it with ___ and with pitch. (Ex. 2:3)
33. And he came ___, and drew near. (2 Sam. 18:25)
34. Abraham ___ Isaac. (1 Chron. 1:34)
35. Established. (abbr.)
39. Goat and the ___. (Deut. 14:5)
41. Aunt. (Spanish)
42. Short for Samuel.
46. The ___ sea. (Josh. 15:5)
47. And they filled them up to the ___. (John 2:7)
50. To ___ a son. (Heb. 1:5)
51. Avenue. (abbr.)
53. Elmodam, ... son of ___. (Luke 3:28)

DOWN

1. Geuel the son of ___. (Num. 13:15)
2. Hast thou not heard long ___? (2 Kings 19:25)
3. Behold, all things are become ___. (2 Cor. 5:17)
4. God is ___ respecter of persons. (Acts 10:34)
5. Whose name was ___ an Israelite. (2 Sam. 17:25)
6. Then Abraham gave up the ___. (Gen. 25:8)
7. Made he a woman, and brought ___ unto the man. (Gen. 2:22)
8. There is one ___ cut off from Israel. (Judg. 21:6)
9. Abraham lifted up ___ eyes. (Gen. 22:13)
10. Moses gave you ___ this side Jordan. (Josh. 1:14)
11. Tennessee. (abbr.)
16. Neither shall the ___ of thy foot have rest. (Deut. 28:65)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

Saints Alive for senior adults: Oct. 23

Saints Alive, a free event for senior adults, will be held Oct. 23 at First Baptist Church Prattville. The event — formerly called Abundant Living — will feature great gospel music and messages from Dennis Swanberg and Bob Smith. Frank Jones will provide

pre-service music and lead congregational singing. The event will be held from 9:15 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. with a break for lunch on your own from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. The event is free. Registration is encouraged. Register at alsbom.org/saints-alive.

Senior adult events in 2026

It's already time to start planning for 2026! Here are some events the senior adults in your church won't want to miss: **SINGFEST** — March 10, 2026, at First Baptist Church Demopolis; March 17, 2026, at First Baptist Church Jasper; Sept. 8, 2026, at Parkway Baptist Church in Auburn; and Sept. 15, 2026, at Gilliam Springs Baptist Church in Arab, 10 a.m.–12 p.m. **SINGFEST** is a chance to sing the great old hymns of our faith and heritage. It's designed for senior adults, but all are welcome!

and a time of music celebration! **ENCOURAGE** is a worship service designed to encourage senior adults in evangelism and Christian living. Worship will be led by Greater Vision and gospel pianist Frank Jones.

Senior Adult Leadership Training (SALT) — Aug. 18, 2026, at First Baptist Church Fultondale and Aug. 20, 2026, at First Baptist Church Andalusia, 9:15 a.m.–3 p.m. Want to be more effective involving senior adults in your church and reaching those in your community? **SALT** is a one-day event to



Facebook/Heritage Baptist Church SALT 2025

ENCOURAGE — May 4, 2026, at First Baptist Church Prattville, 9:30 a.m.–12 p.m. Spend a morning in fellowship with other senior adults being encouraged through God's Word

equip senior adult ministers, leaders and leadership teams with basic ways to expand the scope of your church's senior adult ministry. **Saints Alive** — Oct. 29, 2026, at Meadowbrook Baptist Church in Gadsden, 9:15 a.m.–2:45 p.m.

COMPELLED

2 CORINTHIANS 5:14

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NOVEMBER 11-12, 2025

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Jeff Iorg

President, SBC Executive Committee
Tuesday Evening Celebration

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CHURCH POSITIONS

PASTOR

Pintlala Baptist Church is seeking a full-time pastor. The candidate should be a self-starter, enthusiastic about the Word of God, and excited for opportunity to bring new members to the church. Pintlala Baptist Church, which is located in the southwestern portion of Montgomery County, has a loving church family that is here to share the good news of Jesus Christ to serve our community (and beyond) in His love. We are genuine in our atmosphere and enjoy supporting one another. For more information, please go to: <https://pintlalabaptist.com/ministry-position-open>.

PASTOR

Bell Lane Baptist, Clanton, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking our next full-time pastor. The successful candidate will assume a range of responsibilities. You can view the full job description by visiting the link: www.belllanebaptist.org/about.

PASTOR OR BIVOCATIONAL

Snow Road First Baptist Church, Semmes, Alabama, seeking experienced, seminary trained man. Contact Douglas Kaul: 251-591-5525, or church office: 251-649-7722. Send resumé to: drkaul7100@gmail.com.

PASTOR OF WORSHIP AND EQUIPPING MINISTRIES

First Baptist Church of Tallassee, Alabama, is searching for a full-time pastor of worship and equipping ministries. For more information and to send a resumé, please see fbctallassee.com/jobs.

PART-TIME WORSHIP/MUSIC LEADER

Pine Grove Baptist Church, Bay Minette, Alabama, is seeking a part-time worship/music leader. Please send resumé to: pgbmbaptist@gmail.com or mail to: 42240 Pine Grove Road, Bay Minette, AL 36507.

BIVOCATIONAL YOUTH MINISTER

The Hueytown Baptist Church is a mid-sized congregation located in the Birmingham metro area. We are in search of a bivocational youth minis-

ter to join our staff and work with our youth team and volunteers to help the youth of our church and community become, grow and engage as disciples of Jesus Christ. Interested applicants may reply to: office@hueytownbaptist.com.

CHILDREN'S MINISTRY DIRECTOR

New Market Baptist Church is prayerfully seeking a children's ministry director. This is a part-time position that will consist of 10–20 hours per week. We are praying for a candidate who loves the Lord and has a heart for children and their families. Please email resumé to Brother Jeff at newmarketbaptistchurch@gmail.com.

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Persecuted church

Boy likely forced to convert to Islam

Brothers of a 14-year-old Pakistani Christian, Shamraiz Masih, allege he was abducted July 21 and forced to convert to Islam, an attorney for the family told Christian Daily International-Morning Star News.

Masih started working at a motorcycle repair shop four months ago. He reportedly was seen with his employer at an Islamic seminary. The brothers were told Masih willingly converted and did not want contact with his family, the news outlet reported.

Pakistan is No. 8 on Open Doors' 2025 World Watch List of the 50 places most difficult to be a Christian.

Pastors arrested, beaten while in jail

Members of the Hindu group Bajrang Dal disrupted a July 20 church service, resulting in the arrest of six Christian pastors, five of whom were beaten in jail. Family members and Christian leaders were able to get bail together for the six the next day.

On July 22, hundreds of Christians gathered at the police station to demand the arrest of the Hindu mob, the news outlet states. No charges have been filed against the extremists or jail officials.

India is No. 11 on Open Doors' 2025 World Watch List of the 50 places most difficult to be a Christian.

China refuses to let pastor return to US as crackdown on Christians continues

John Cao, a Chinese pastor and permanent United States resident, was released from a Chinese prison 19 months ago after serving seven years for allegedly "organizing illegal border crossings;" however, Cao's Chinese passport expired while he was imprisoned, and Chinese officials refuse to renew it.

Speaking July 14 to the Christian Broadcasting Network, pastor Bob Fu — ChinaAid's leader — reported that persecution of Christians in China has intensified but that believers are persevering and Christianity is increasing.

Due to restrictions that went into effect May 1, foreigners preaching, teaching or doing missionary work — even as businessmen or students — are being sent out of China. Worshipers also are subject to increased video surveillance, Fu said.

China is No. 15 on Open Doors' 2025

World Watch List of the 50 places most difficult to be a Christian.

Nigerian violence continues

Attacks on Christians in Nigeria have claimed at least 44 lives since mid-July, Christian Daily International-Morning Star News reported.

One community leader said Muslim Fulani herdsmen have driven Christians out of Hock, Kaban, Kadim, Nawula, Dulu, Mbor, Margif, Chirang and Mangor and are now inhabiting those villages.

Nigeria is No. 7 on Open Doors' 2025 World Watch List of places most difficult to be a Christian.

Man puts faith in Jesus, then is beaten

Wambuzi Maka Uthman, a former sheikh in Uganda, put his faith in Jesus after a dream of a man clothed in a white and flanked by angels and later was beaten and hospitalized, during which time his wife left him, taking their six children.

Uthman said the man told him to tell Muslims "to repent and turn to the living God." A Christian pastor helped him understand the man in the vision was Jesus.

Rare court order lets woman declare Christianity

Christian Daily International-Morning Star News reported that a Pakistani court ordered issuance of a new government identification card to a woman to acknowledge her 2009 conversion to Christianity — a rare decision for converts from Islam.

Christian mother, child held captive

A Christian mother in Somalia and her baby reportedly are being held captive by Muslim family members as punishment for her conversion to Christianity. A few years ago, Hassan began listening to Christian worship songs on her phone. She had a vision of a man who identified himself as Jesus, saying, "I know you are thirsty. Come and drink of my water," she said.

Somalia is No. 2 on Open Doors' 2025 World Watch List of the 50 places most difficult to be a Christian.

Evangelist, son expelled from district

State officials and local clerics closed a prayer house, halted Christian activities and expelled an evangelist and his young son from Indonesia's West Java province.

The Indonesian Christian Youth Movement said the closure leaves no house of worship for 20 Christian communities in the district.



CAO

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Sunday School Lessons

By Robert Olsen, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



For October 5

LACK OF TRUST Numbers 20:2–13

The Problem (2–5)

In chapter 16, Moses and Aaron faced a serious challenge to their authority when Korah and others rebelled against their leadership. God's response was to open up the earth and allow it to swallow Korah and his followers.

In spite of this episode, the Israelites continued to groan and complain against Moses and Aaron, God's chosen leaders. They complained about a lack of water, saying it would have been better to have stayed in Egypt.

When we obey God and things get difficult, it is often easy for us to remember past times when circumstances were less challenging.

We may be tempted to complain to God, asking why He made things harder for us when we are acting in obedience. However, we mature in the faith when we are obedient.

God uses hard times to help sanctify us. It is easy to look down on the Israelites and criticize their lack of faith, but we need to be mindful of how often we do the same things. We grumble against God because things don't go our way.

We may get angry that we struggle to make ends meet or because our ministry is not as successful as we would like. However, when we repent and ask for forgiveness for our complaining, we can be thankful that God is patient with us and forgives us of our sins.

The Plan (6–8)

Moses and Aaron went to God to present the Israelites' frustrations to Him. This is a proper response from these leaders, as God is the One we should trust with our concerns. God, being long-suffering, did not destroy the Israelites but instead told Moses how to get water for the people.

In our ministries as Sunday School teachers, Bible Study leaders, parents or whatever God has called us to do, we need to pray to God for the needs of those we lead.

God places people under our charge so we can help lead them to the Lord and help them mature. We need to listen to God's directions through prayer and reading Scripture because this is where we can be sure to get God's insight in how to lead.

The Result (9–13)

Moses and Aaron were told by God to speak to the rock and water would come forth.

However, instead of speaking to the rock, Moses struck it twice.

On top of this, instead of giving credit to God, Moses said, "Must we bring water out of this rock for you?" He took credit for the water. Because of this act of pride and disobedience, Moses and Aaron were prevented by God from entering the promised land.

Many Christians in positions of leadership can have great success in their ministry. Often, God gives Christians insight into how to lead ministries but over time, the leaders can begin to think that their ideas are good and forget that the success came from God.

How many leaders in Christian circles have we seen fall because they put their own ideas over those of God? How often do we see faithful churches face division because the leaders begin to think that they are in charge rather than God?

It is crucial that we surround ourselves with Christians who will be honest with us and tell us when we are becoming prideful. Then we can repent and God will forgive us.

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

For October 12

GOD'S PLANS Numbers 22:22–35

Obstacles Met (22–27)

As the Israelites continued to move toward the promised land, they encountered resistance from the countries through which they traveled. The Israelites offered to travel through safely, but since the nations did not trust them, they attacked them.

However, because these groups attacked God's chosen people, the Israelites were able to defeat them. This caused fear in the other nations and led some of them to try to stop the Israelites.

Balak, king of Moab, tried to hire Balaam, a diviner from near the Euphrates River, to come and put a curse on the Israelites. God told Balaam to go.

As Balaam traveled to Moab on a donkey, he was confronted by an angel of the Lord who stood in his path three times with a drawn sword. Balaam could not see the angel but the donkey could.

The donkey avoided the angel by first going off into a field, next by pushing up against a wall and lastly by just crouching down. Each time, Balaam beat the donkey.

This is an interesting passage because God Himself gave Balaam directions to go to Balak, but here He sends an angel to stand in Balaam's path. This shows that just because God calls us to do something doesn't mean that we will not encounter hardship.

The history of missions, for example, is filled with believers who went off to foreign lands to tell others the gospel, and they often encountered much resistance — even death.

It is not for the Christian to determine the outcome of what God calls us to do. All we can do is be obedient. We do not know how God will use our lives.

God used the death of the famous missionary Jim Elliot to increase interest in worldwide missions and to eventually lead to the salvation of most of the people in the tribe that killed him!

Attention Gained (28–31)

God opened the mouth of Balaam's donkey to speak to him and ask him why he was beating her. God revealed the angel standing in front of Balaam, causing him to bow down in reverence. God used the seemingly slow-witted and stubborn animal to save its rider.

This shows us that God can use unusual means to get His point across. We should not think so much of ourselves that we are not open to hearing God's truths in strange places or through strange means.

God's Plan (32–35)

The angel of the Lord told Balaam to continue on his way but to only say what God would tell him to say. When Balaam got to Balak, Balak wanted him to curse the Israelites.

Each time Balaam was going to curse the Israelites, all he could do was bless them and announce what blessings God would bestow upon the Israelites because he did exactly what God told him to do. Balaam's obedience to God meant that he did not receive his payment because he did not curse them as he was paid to do.

We know from the New Testament (2 Pet. 2:15 and Jude 11) that Balaam did not have pure motives but was greedy and led the Israelites to sin (Rev. 2:14). Yet obedience to God cost Balaam dearly. It cost him time and money. If a wicked man obeyed God in this passage in Numbers, shouldn't it encourage us all the more to be obedient to God?

"Then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, 'What have I done to you...?'"

Numbers 22:28

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sunday School Lessons

By Adam Winn, Ph.D.

Chair and Professor, Department of Biblical and Religious Studies at Samford University



For October 5

THE GREATEST COMMAND Mark 12:28–34

We are to love God with all our being. (28–30)

This story occurs in chapters 11 and 12 of Mark's Gospel in which the primary focus is Jesus' condemnation of the current temple and its leadership. Disputes between Jesus and the leadership of the temple feature prominently, with Jesus the clear winner of each one.

This story references such disputes and introduces a certain scribe who had heard them. This scribe brings his own question to Jesus, asking which commandment is the most important. Jesus responds by citing the first verse of the Shema (Deut. 6:4), something that faithful Jews recited twice a day.

It declares there is only one God, Yahweh, and then continues on to declare that Israel must love Yahweh with all their heart, soul, mind and strength — one's entire self.

This verse reflects God's desire for creation, namely for all people to come to love the God who made them, to live in harmony with the Creator and to experience the great joy and blessing that comes from doing so.

Loving others is as important as loving ourselves. (31)

Jesus follows this first command with a second: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). This command is closely related to the first, as it also reflects God's desire for His creation.

Not only does God want His creation to live in harmony with Him, but He also wants those He created to live in harmony with each other. God's creation will only be as God intended and completely fulfilled when it is properly aligned with both the God who created it and all those whom God created.

Thus, the command to love

God is inseparable from the command to love other people, and in fact one cannot truly love God if they do not love their neighbor (1 John 4:20). Jesus follows this statement by declaring, "There is no other command greater than these."

Loving God is the greatest thing we can do. (32–34)

In what seems a rather striking twist in this chapter, a scribe — one from a group of people who are consistent enemies of Jesus in the Book of Mark — agrees with Jesus and affirms His answer! Thus, this story breaks from the pattern of the "dispute" stories that come before it.

In fact, the scribe even declares that to follow these commands is "far more important than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices." One of Jesus' supposed "enemies" not only agrees with Jesus but also mitigates the significance of the Jewish sacrificial system — at least in its relationship to these two commandments.

The fact that this story takes place within the temple courtyards adjacent to where burnt offerings and sacrifices are made and within the context of stories in which Jesus is condemning the current temple institution is significant.

It demonstrates that even some of Jesus' opponents can see a truth greater than the current temple system, and it foreshadows a time when that temple system will be gone and these two commandments will guide God's people.

Jesus recognizes the man's wisdom and tells him that he is not far from the Kingdom of God. Such a story offers us a good reminder that not all leaders were the same, and that while many opposed Jesus, others did find common ground with Him, with some even becoming followers during His lifetime (John 19:38–39) and some after His death (Acts 15:5).

For October 12

THE GREATEST RETURN 1 Thessalonians 4:16–5:8

We can be assured that Jesus will bodily return. (4:16–18)

Verse 16 picks up in the middle of Paul addressing a particular concern of the Thessalonian believers, namely their fear that brothers and sisters in the faith who have died in the few months since Paul left them will miss out on the Second Coming and Jesus' glorious Kingdom. Paul assures them that the dead in Christ will surely participate in that Kingdom and that, in fact, they will rise first at His Second Coming.

Verses 16–18 describe that coming. In ancient times, the king would send word to a city that he would be visiting and would provide an estimated arrival date. The city would then prepare for the king's arrival. The king would draw visibly close to the city. After the king refreshed himself from travel a trumpet would signal to the city, and the citizens of the city would go to meet the king and usher him into the city.

Many scholars see Paul using this imagery but transforming the king's journey from horizontal to vertical, with King Jesus coming from heaven. Jesus comes close to His destination and waits in the clouds. A trumpet signal is given, and Jesus is met in the air by the citizens of His Kingdom.

Where do they go from there to "always be with the Lord"? Some conclude that they return to earth with Jesus to participate in its restoration, while others contend that they are taken to a new heaven and new earth. Regardless, the outcome of being in Jesus' glorious Kingdom is the same.

We do not know the specific time Jesus will return. (5:1–3)

Paul then turns his attention to when this glorious return of Jesus

will take place.

Paul compares the coming of Jesus to a thief in the night, with the analogy focused on the surprise and suddenness of such an event. Paul here seems to be echoing the words of Jesus that no one knows the day or the hour of the Lord's coming.

He also says that when people are saying "peace and security," sudden destruction will come upon them.

This likely echoes the Roman promise to those in the empire that if they give allegiance to Rome, Rome will provide them with "pax et securitas," or "peace and security." Paul is subtly subversive to this claim, as he is implying that those who are relying on Rome's strength and protection will not be protected from the Judgment at the return of the King.

We are to be diligent as we wait for His return. (4–8)

In these verses, Paul tells the Christians of Thessalonica that they are not in darkness and therefore won't be surprised. Is Paul then saying that Christians will be able to determine the time of Jesus' return? No, this would be to misread Paul and to contradict what Jesus has already said.

Paul is talking about preparedness through righteous living. Paul makes this clear in the following verses. They are children of the light and of the day and bear the armor of faith and love and the helmet of the hope of salvation.

Paul's command that they keep awake is about being spiritually awake, prepared for the coming of Jesus that could happen at any time.

Paul is not addressing their surprise in a literal sense but rather their surprise in a spiritual sense so that they will not be ashamed at the return of Jesus.

"For you are all children of light, children of the day.

We are not of the night or of the darkness."

1 Thessalonians 5:5

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October 2, 2025

Resources that encompass all aspects of growing older, including basic tips for staying healthy, coping with challenges and preparing for the future.

THE END IN MIND

First-person: Walking into unknown future with known God

MEMORY CHALLENGES

Supporting those with Alzheimer's disease and their caregivers

BREAKING CYCLES

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The Alabama Baptist

FROM THE EDITOR

The content in this issue is for informational purposes only and is not intended to be a substitute for professional advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always consult with your physician. Aging Well is an ongoing special section of The Alabama Baptist and is published by The Alabama Baptist, Inc. More content can be found online at tabonline.org. To subscribe, visit tabonline.org/subscribe or call 800-803-5201.

Living with the end in mind

BY DONNA AND THOMAS WRIGHT • SPECIAL TO THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

First-person: Couple shares how they are walking into unknown future with known God

Once the word “glioblastoma” (brain cancer) appeared in Thomas’ chart, both of us knew we had to prepare for his transition from earth to heaven.

We had prepared for retirement but had not prepared for a terminal disease. Death is inevitable, but we act like it is abnormal and do not discuss it well. We have confidence the Lord does not make mistakes. He sees what we do not see, and we can trust him.

The hardest part is planning to live as a widow. (That sentence is difficult to write.) Confidence in the Lord does not remove the waves of sadness as we adjust our will to the Lord’s will. The advantage with glioblastoma is we have some months to prepare. We had to be realists. We will both die at some point, as will you. It could even happen in reverse order than what looks likely today. Here is how we responded to a terminal diagnosis:

Our response

1. We researched the treatment options and discussed them with our family. There is no medical cure for glioblastoma. We know the Lord could heal it miraculously, but not in our case thus far. The deep location of the brain cancer caused us to choose quality of life over an additional number of days in hospice with mental and physical limitations. We agreed to surgery and chemotherapy. We opted against radiation treatments.

2. We updated our wills, powers of attorney and medical end-of-life directives. Our attorney said such documents should be less than



Facebook/C. Thomas Wright
Thomas and Donna Wright explore historic Seville, Spain. They have been married for 42 years and have two married children and one grandchild.

5 years old. The power of attorney would help in case Donna had to do business for a medically compromised Thomas if necessary, or vice versa. The end-of-life directive gave details from each of us on what efforts needed to be made to extend life. Donna used this with her father after his stroke, so we knew it was needed. It is tough to make these decisions without knowing the patient’s wishes. The natural instinct is to fight for one more day or hour — even if it requires machines or extraordinary effort.



Facebook/C. Thomas Wright
Thomas Wright spends precious time with his first grandchild, Sophia Jean Wright.

3. We confirmed both of us had access to utility payments, deeds, titles, insurance and bills. Online and paperless billing makes online business difficult without access to the accounts.

4. We cleaned out. Thomas was determined to leave Donna with the least work possible. We went through closets, files and our home. There is a lot of stuff that doesn’t matter anymore. There are a lot of memories that matter a lot. We gave away, donated or trashed things we no longer needed. We kept a range

of clothing sizes anticipating the loss of weight for Thomas but otherwise it was removed.

We conferred with our children and gave them items they wanted (quilts, pocket watch, etc.). We sold a car, met with legal and financial consultants and found homes for Thomas’ hobby items. We decided to give his body to science in hopes research could help others. We created the memorial service outline and contacted participants. He created a short video so he could speak at his memorial service.

5. We recognized the role of caregiver. Donna becoming caregiver was much easier since we both had recently retired. Thomas’ seizure and surgery prevented him driving and completing the chores he had always done. We had to adapt as friends temporarily took over yard work and maintenance needs and brought meals. We made plans for Donna to either do or hire out work to care for the house in the future.

Donna had led GriefShare six times at our church and had seen first-hand the difficulties resulting from the passing of a spouse. Grief in loss of a loved one results in fuzzy thinking, making it even harder than normal to handle new business details — or to even make decisions at all.

Scripture tells believers many times to not be afraid. Fear can cause us to ignore impending decisions or to make wrong ones. Walking through this together, living with the end in mind will help us walk into the unknown future with our known God.

God’s presence never leaves us (Heb. 13:5).

Memory challenges

BY MORRIS MURRAY JR. • SPECIAL TO THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

Supporting individuals with Alzheimer's disease and their caregivers

Dementias are brain diseases in which memory, judgment, attention and learning are seriously and progressively challenged. Alzheimer's disease is one form of dementia in which the challenges are never ultimately won.

In light of the multiple symptoms associated with dementia and their similarities with other health problems, Alzheimer's is not easily diagnosed. In other words, some of the symptoms also are commonplace in depression, adverse drug reactions, nutritional deficiencies, strokes, head injuries and other potentially reversible conditions.

Numerous evaluative criteria (complete health history, CT scan, EEG, blood studies, urinalysis, cerebrospinal fluid and more) should also be included for a more accurate diagnosis of Alzheimer's. In fact, the only way to secure a 100% accurate diagnosis is through an autopsy.

The causes of Alzheimer's are many and controversial. The economic impact is astronomical and increasing. The cure does not yet knowingly exist.

These noted concerns, however, actually fall outside the boundaries of this article. Rather, attention is here focused on suggestions as to how best to provide accurate and appropriate care to a loved one who is living with dementia.



Photo by Freepik

These suggestions are the result of my consultations with a former caregiver and employee of the Alzheimer's Association of Central Alabama in Birmingham. These suggestions also result from the observations and interactions with one of my own sisters who recently died from complications of Alzheimer's disease.

Choose your words

► **Don't reason (or argue) with your loved one.** For example, if they say, "What doctor's appointment? There's nothing wrong with me," don't reason by saying, "You've been seeing the doctor every three months for the past two

years. It's written on the calendar, and I told you about it yesterday and this morning." Instead, simply say, "It's just a regular check-up," or "I'm sorry if I forgot to tell you," or "Would you like to stop and get a treat before we see the doctor?"

► **Don't confront a person with dementia.** For example, if they say, "Nobody's going to tell me what to do or make decisions for me. Why don't you leave me alone and not come back," ... simply say, "I'm sorry that this is a tough time for you, but I love you and we are going to get through this together." Or change the subject: "Have I told you today how pleasant the temperature is outside?"

► **Don't remind them that they forget all the time.** For example, if they say, "Joe hasn't called for a long time, I hope he's OK," don't say, "Joe just called yesterday, and you talked with him for 15 minutes." Instead, simply say, "You really like talking with Joe, don't you," or "Let's call him when we get back from our walk."

Respond carefully

► **Don't question recent memory.** For example, if they say, "Hello, Susie, I see you have brought a friend with you," don't say, "Oh mother, this is Betty, don't you remember anything?" Instead, simply say, "Hi, Mom. You look wonderful today. This is my friend, Betty. She and I work together. She is a wonderful person — just like you."

► **Don't take it personally.** For example, if they say, "Who are you? Where is my husband?" don't say, "What do you mean? I am your husband." Instead, simply say, "He'll be here for dinner," or "How about some milk and cookies?"

The essence of these directives is that caregivers should give short explanations, repeat comments exactly, allow plenty of time for understanding and avoid being confrontational.

To either agree with the individual or distract them is very important. To either accept blame or just leave the room also may be appro-

appropriate. Graciousness and generosity should rate high on one's response list.

It is important to remember that people living with dementia are not lazy or crazy. The anxiety associated with this state of mind may reveal itself through anger and hostility or extreme passivity and uncooperativeness. They are seeking to protect themselves.

Whatever they are saying or doing is simply par for the course for the progression of Alzheimer's and other dementias. Even though some days they may seem normal, their perception of reality is very different from those who care for them.

Since caregivers cannot control the thoughts and actions of the person with dementia, controlling their own thoughts, actions and reactions must be paramount.

Additional considerations for family members, friends and caregivers include:

1. Stay familiar with the family so you won't be lost as the condition worsens.
2. Be familiar with pertinent information on what to expect as the condition worsens.
3. Rotate caregiving helpers to reduce burnout.
4. Contact Meals on Wheels, provided by the Community Action Agency, which brings food for homebound older people at low cost.



Photo by rawpixel.com on Freepik

5. Since people living with dementia may be unable to attend to their personal hygiene, offer or arrange assistance. Use protective floor and furniture coverings as needed.

6. Lock the bedroom doors.

7. Use wall monitors to listen to activities.

Situational awareness

8. Keep the family updated on what is going on in the community.

9. Be aware of potential violent tendencies by the individual and take necessary precautions.

10. Since people with dementia are typically very sensitive to noise

and bright lights, provide a calm environment.

Of special note is how churches may respond to the needs of caregivers. Here are some ideas:

1. Provide opportunities for the observance of the Lord's Supper at their residences. The symbolic meaning of this observance could serve as a real source of encouragement and participation for those caregivers whose absence from regular church service observances may be necessary.

2. Prayer should not only be made for those who are affected but also with them.

3. Be aware that some caregivers

may be reluctant to ask for help due to embarrassment or pride. So, rather than trying to help them without asking, find out somehow what kind of assistance may be needed.

4. Before providing assistance, obtain legal advice from informed people (lawyers or denominational offices) as to potential liability concerns.

Insights and experiences

While these ideas are not all-inclusive, they offer insights and experiences which may be adapted according to one's own specific situation (people, settings, time, etc.).

Each person with dementia and his or her situation is unique and presents its own challenges. The same is true for caregivers, who may have to make significant changes to their own lifestyles to help their loved one.

Offering our support through service, presence, prayers or other aid is how we can be the hands and feet of Jesus in a very difficult time.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This is an excerpt of an article written by Morris Murray Jr. of Jasper, Alabama. Murray is a health care management specialist, former college and seminary professor, and former pastor of churches in Alabama, Louisiana and Texas. He is presently an associate pastor/minister of music and outreach at Samaria Baptist Church in Jasper.

Respite for All documentary to reach national audience

A new documentary, "A Place of Belonging: How Respite for All Communities Transform the Dementia Community," by the Respite for All Foundation will air Nov. 6 at 8 p.m. on PBS.

The documentary premiered May 1 during a special showing for guests gathered at the Capri Theatre in Montgomery, not far from where the original respite ministry began in 2012.

Producer Jack York, cinematographer Zack Mejias and featured care partner Madeline White were all there to celebrate the release, as were

125 local supporters, including about a dozen volunteers who helped Daphne Johnston start the original Respite ministry.

The documentary was filmed at First United Methodist Church in Montgomery and Respite for All communities in Birmingham;

Chapel Hill, North Carolina; and McDonough, Georgia. The full 41-minute documentary is also available on Respite For All's YouTube channel.

The Respite for All Foundation, a Montgomery-based nonprofit organization, helps churches and senior service organizations create engaging, uplifting weekday programs for individuals living with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia.

Through this social model of care, droves of volunteers come together to create places of belonging filled with enriching activities — while giving care partners

support and a much-needed break from the challenges they're experiencing.

The Respite for All model doesn't provide a cure but instead introduces relationships for healing and fosters social connection for all involved — participant, care partner and volunteer.

Liberty Park Baptist Church in Vestavia Hills and First Baptist Church Huntsville both have thriving Respite for All programs in place.

Visit respiteforall.org to learn more about the opportunities. (Respite for All Foundation)



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Pathways Respite Ministry at The Church at Liberty Park offers a program providing respite for caregivers of adults with dementia, stimulation and socialization for participants (those with dementia) and a fun way to serve others.

Breaking the cycle of a dysfunctional family

BY CAROLYN TOMLIN • THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

Biblical guidelines for building strong families

A recent study indicates that 70 to 80% of Americans consider their families to be dysfunctional. However, it has been proven that family connections are fundamental to our emotional and psychological well-being. In other words, we need each other.

Several years ago, I invited a dear Christian woman and friend to my home for her 90th birthday celebration. During our conversation, I said, “Your family has always been a role model for me and many others.”

This sweet lady looked down

and replied, “Honey, if you only knew!”

Family issues

In talking with numerous friends and acquaintances, I realize that no family is perfect. Regardless of what we may pretend, it seems that all families have some sort of problem. Often, they are hidden or not discussed outside the family. Someone has said, “A dysfunctional family is the new norm.”

Children who grow up in dysfunctional families may have difficulty later in life. These conflicts may surface in relationships, particularly in marriage, with friends and between co-workers.

When children grow up in a dysfunctional family, they may not be aware of what is OK and what is not OK in family relationships. When this happens, they tend to repeat this behavior when they have families of their own.

Many of these negative behav-

iors continue through generations. However, it doesn't have to be this way. We can break the cycle.

What does it take?

How can families become more loving and enjoy being together as a generational clan?

For starters, we need to develop a willingness to change. We should be aware of the problem and learn to set firm boundaries. The Bible is our guide for making a difference in building strong





Photo by pressfoto on Freepik

families. Colossians 3:13 says, “Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

Nothing new

What does the Bible say about dysfunctional families? We see in the Scriptures that family problems are nothing new.

The same problems experienced when the Bible was written continue today. The Book of Genesis is like a modern-day script.

Look at the following stories:

▶ **Adam and Eve.** This is the first man and woman God created. They could eat from any plants in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Eve ate and the fruit was good, so she encouraged Adam to do the same. When God asked Adam about eating the fruit, he blamed his wife for his sin (Gen. 3).

▶ **Cain and Abel.** Cain was the firstborn of Adam and Eve. Because of jealousy, he killed his brother, Abel. Then he lied to the Lord when asked about Abel (Gen. 4).

▶ **Abram and Lot.** Abram and his nephew, Lot, acquired flocks, herds and tents. Quarreling arose between the herdsmen of both men. Abram decided that parting company would be best.

When overlooking the land that the Lord had given Abram, Abram told Lot to choose the land he wanted. Lot chose the plain of Jordan because it was beautiful and like a garden. Abram was left with the less desirable area of Canaan (Gen. 13).

▶ **Isaac and Rebekah.** Isaac was the son of Abraham and Sarah. Isaac married Rebekah, and they were the parents of Esau and Jacob. Rebekah and Jacob plotted together to trick Isaac into blessing Jacob

instead of Esau, who was the firstborn and would inherit his father’s riches (Gen. 27).

▶ **Joseph.** This son of Jacob and Rachel was favored by his father but hated by his brothers and sold by them into slavery (Gen. 37).

Dealing with dysfunctional family members

- **Ask** God for wisdom as you deal with family matters.

- **Pray** for guidance, strength and courage.

- **Become** the person you would like your family to be.

- **Accept** the limitations of others.

- **Take** responsibility for your own well-being instead of expecting others to give it to you.

- **Talk** with a Christian counselor.

- **Read** books written by Christian authors on family dynamics, challenges and encouragement.

Traits of people from

dysfunctional FAMILIES

- ▶ **Have** low self-esteem
- ▶ **Show** little compassion for others
- ▶ **Seek** approval from others
- ▶ **Are** intimidated by disagreement
- ▶ **Seek** friends who are emotionally insecure or have been abused
- ▶ **Avoid** emotionally healthy and caring individuals
- ▶ **Blame** others for their own lack of responsibility
- ▶ **Have** a poor self-concept when caring for themselves
- ▶ **Fear** rejection or being left alone, which may result in staying in an unpleasant work environment or in a threatening relationship
- ▶ **Express** feelings of hopelessness
- ▶ **Lead** lives of few or no boundaries
- ▶ **Display** a personality of needing to be in control
- ▶ **Behave** impulsively, not considering the possible consequences of this behavior

“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”



Happy and healthy

COMPILED BY CARRIE B. MCWHORTER

Plan ahead to make fall activities safer for everyone

October kicks off the season for campfires, tailgates, family gatherings, office parties, gift-giving and all things festive. But nothing puts a damper on the fun like a trip to the emergency room.

The Alabama Department of Public Health offers the following tips and resources to help everyone have the safest, happiest, healthiest season possible.

Holiday food

Between traditional holiday meals, a constant parade of snacks and sweets in the workplace and at church, and the buffet your friends set out for the big game(s), there's a lot of food in your immediate future.

But nothing spoils a party like getting sick or injured and having to miss. It's important to keep healthy practices in mind along the way.

For hosts, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offers four simple steps that can be used when it comes to any meal, whether it's the Thanksgiving feast or a quick evening supper: clean, separate, cook and chill. These steps help you get food from the kitchen to the plate to the fridge without making anyone sick.

As a guest, practice food safety, and wash your hands or use hand sanitizer before and after you handle food or utensils.

For more information on food safety, visit [fsis.usda.gov/food-safe-](https://fsis.usda.gov/food-safe-ty/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/steps-keep-food-safe)

[ty/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/steps-keep-food-safe](https://fsis.usda.gov/food-safe-ty/safe-food-handling-and-preparation/food-safety-basics/steps-keep-food-safe).

Holiday gifts

There's nothing quite like the feeling of giving someone the perfect gift (and getting the perfect gift is pretty cool too!).

But there are some considerations to be made, especially when buying gifts for children. Consider the age and skill level of the child.

If you're buying for someone three years of age or younger, be mindful of small parts that can become choking hazards. If you're buying for older kids, include any appropriate safety gear like helmets or pads. If in doubt, ask a child's parents what they consider appropriate, and go from there.

Read the instructions and warning labels on a toy first, and follow the age and safety information provided.

Assemble toys according to the instructions, and secure all parts.

Separate and store toys by age levels. Teach children to put toys away after playing. Safe storage prevents falls and other injuries. If a toy box has a hinged lid, be sure it has lid support that holds the lid open at any angle to which the lid is opened. Make sure bins or other toy storage containers have no hinges that could catch little fingers. Toy boxes should have rounded or padded edges.

Do not leave products with accessible batteries or high-powered magnets within reach of children. Both pose serious risks to children if swallowed.

Use good judgment. If you are in doubt, do not allow your child to play with a potentially hazardous toy.

Holiday travel

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration views

"Thanksgiving Eve" as the start of the holiday period, as it is the traditional day when people begin traveling to family get-togethers.

But whether you are going to grandma's, trying to get to the airport to make your flight or driving home from a friend's after 12 straight hours of SEC football, you need to buckle up, obey the rules of the road and get a ride with someone if you're unfit or too tired to drive.

Holiday heat

As fall gives way to winter, you may find yourself enjoying a nice evening around a firepit, or maybe even in somebody's field with an enormous bonfire. If building a fire, be sure to build it a safe distance from your

home, your shrubs and other flammable materials. Never use gasoline or other accelerants on a fire, as they can ignite and cause a "flashback," leading to serious burns or death.

Holiday stress

Though the focus is often on fun, many people struggle during the holidays for a variety of reasons. Holidays can be stressful and lonely, leaving people feeling vulnerable and even hopeless. If you or someone you know is feeling this way, please dial 988, the national number for all mental health, substance

abuse and suicide crises. (Information provided by the Alabama Department of Public Health, alabamapublichealth.gov)

Family Health History Day

While you are visiting with family members you may not see very often, it's a good time to ask them about your family health history.

Use what you learn as motivation to change unhealthy behaviors and to take a proactive approach as far as health screenings. These are especially important if you have a family history of:

- ▶ Breast/ovarian cancer

- ▶ Colon cancer
- ▶ Diabetes
- ▶ Heart disease
- ▶ Osteoporosis

Visit Family Health History at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for more information: cdc.gov/family-health-history.

(Information provided by the Alabama Department of Public Health, alabamapublichealth.gov)



Photo by Freepik

Pumping iron

BY SCOTT BARKLEY • BAPTIST PRESS

Senior adults see gains through weightlifting

Don Currence was 61 in 2017 when he made a health-conscious decision by adding another plate.

That would be several plates, actually. At his age, the choice to take up powerlifting was a different path.

But it's one that Currence says has him feeling like a true athlete for the first time in his life as he approaches 70.

Pumping iron is growing more popular and is recom-

mended for senior adults as they lose muscle mass.

A recent report by the U.S. National Institute on Aging highlights the benefits that lead to prolonged independence. Other studies point to shielding the brain from dementia or similar cognitive decline.

Going old school

There is nothing wrong with water aerobics or walking, as any movement is better than none. But for reaching another level, it's time to go old school.



Photo courtesy of Heather Benoit/DMBC

Heather Benoit, fitness director at Dawson Memorial Baptist Church in Birmingham, promotes a

Ralph Tutwiler, 68, cranks out leg presses at Dawson Memorial Baptist Church in Homewood.

comprehensive approach that includes cardiovascular training, stretching and mobility, alongside strength training.

"Building and maintaining strength is key to aging well," she said. "It's especially important because of age-related muscle loss each year. It's a huge predictor of if — or when — you fall as

to how well your body can handle the impact."

Older clients are hesitant to lift heavier weights, she said, especially those who have never done it before. And while many prefer machines, she encourages free weights or cable machines to challenge their core muscles. Plans start with an assessment of their strength, mobility and balance and typically begin with body weight exercises. Lateral movements strengthen the hips alongside other balance exercises.

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BP photo

Don Currence does a one-legged box squat under the eye of his trainer, Chance Wolfe.

Currence, administrative pastor at First Baptist Church Ozark, Missouri, and registration secretary for the Southern Baptist Convention, gutted through the first couple of weeks of soreness after he started.

Now, Monday through Saturday workouts begin at 6 a.m., lasting up to and beyond an hour and a half.

A long journey on a road Currence had never taken but was hungry to travel began with his lift coach, Chance Wolfe.

“Yes, it costs money to

have a personal trainer, but the accountability and Chance’s understanding of my limitations with a fused right knee and ability to continuously come up with exercises and techniques are priceless,” said Currence, who trains with Wolfe three times a week and works out at a community gym the rest of the time.

Wolfe helped Currence compete in the Adaptive Athlete category with USA Powerlifting, setting personal records of 305 lbs. in straight-legged deadlifts and a 215-lb. one-legged box squat.

Southern Baptist Convention President Clint Pressley has made lifting a lifelong habit. At 56, he still has a way to go before senior saint status but knows the importance of current choices that bring later results.

All ages

“It won’t be long, and I’m counting on the simple compound movements of weight training to help me age better,” he said. “I don’t think weightlifting is the fountain of youth. We still get old, just as God intended, but I do believe

consistent weight training makes aging more enjoyable [to achieve] better balance, mobility and just raw strength. I recommend men and women of all ages start lifting.”

There is also a distinct ministry and gospel-centered reason, said Andy Cartee, minister of recreation at Dawson.

“God made us mind, body and soul, and each part matters,” he said. “When we take care of our bodies, we are honoring Him and staying ready to serve others.

“For senior adults, this can mean having the energy to keep loving their families, encouraging younger generations and staying engaged in the life and purpose God still has for them. Neglect of their bodies will impact their health and thus limit the ways the Lord can use them.”

Community bonds also

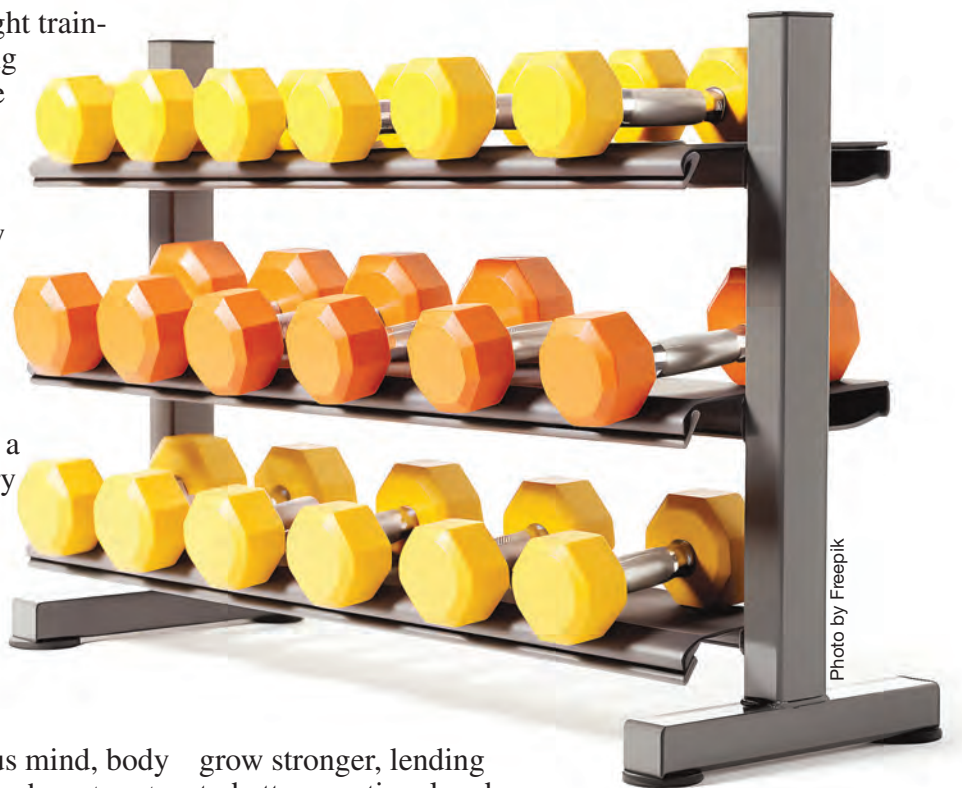


Photo by Freepik

grow stronger, lending to better emotional and mental health. That aspect of getting to the gym or a workout group is just as important, Cartee added.

“Honestly, some of our older adults are not here because they love pushups or stretching,” he said. “They come because they love being together.”

His church holds a class taught by its 27-year-old associate recreation minister “with the soul of an 80-year-old,” said Cartee. Workouts include prayer time.

“That part of the class has impacted many of the seniors who come but are not believers,” he said. “Those friendships, even in these later years, highlight the gospel for many who have gone a long time without knowing Jesus. Some are here for the facility’s convenient location, but they realize this community is different. The difference is Jesus.”

Not every church has recreation or exercise facilities, but the path can start with something as simple as a pair of walking shoes.

“Just move,” said Currence, who also spoke highly of the sense of community he experiences at his gym.

“A daily walk is a good start. My church does fitness classes where most activities take place while sitting in a chair. But you are not too old to start lifting weights.”

Currence has competed in numerous 5K races, swimming, jumping rope and doing broad and box jumps.

‘Sense of self-worth’

“They’ve all increased my sense of self-worth,” said Currence, who credits those habits and his faith for the confidence in running for and being elected Ozark’s mayor.

One of those mayoral duties came Sept. 6, when he threw the first pitch for the annual softball game between the Ozark police and fire departments.

“I had to learn the technique to throw it my way,” he said. “But I am able to do it.”



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IN OTHER NEWS

To learn about the growing trend of romance scams, see the Sept. 18 issue of The Alabama Baptist or visit tabonline.org.

Health care cost literacy

BY FAMILY FEATURES

Cutting medication costs without cutting corners

Research suggests some 27% of Americans skip prescriptions each month due to cost. More than half of Americans who filled a prescription this year said the cost felt like a financial burden.

Cindy George, a senior personal finance editor at GoodRx (goodrx.com), shared expert advice to help consumers improve their health care cost literacy, reduce expenses and stay healthy without overspending.

Many people assume the pharmacy counter price is non-negotiable, but the cost of the same medication can vary significantly, she said.

“Costs can vary by upwards of \$100 from one pharmacy to the next, even in the same zip code,” George said. “Understanding how to compare prices and find the most affordable option is incredibly valuable.”

Compare prices online

By entering the medication name, along with dosage and zip code, individuals can quickly compare prices in their area using GoodRx.

George said only about half of prescriptions are fully covered by insurance without restrictions.

“Cost comparison tools can help people find lower prices on both ge-

neric and brand-name medications, regardless of their coverage status,” George said.

Cost literacy involves understanding how insurance works, what’s included in a plan’s formulary, how to interpret billing documents and how to challenge costs that seem too high. According to George, “health care cost literacy” is one of the best investments you can make in your financial well-being.

George recommends a few strategies that can reduce out-of-pocket costs for medications:

▶ Always compare prices, including your insurance copay. “People

assume their insurance is the best deal for accessing a medication at the lowest cost, but that’s not always true,” George said.

▶ Use savings programs. Many pharmaceutical companies offer copay cards or assistance programs that can dramatically reduce costs.

▶ Consider a 90-day supply. For chronic conditions, ask your health care professional whether you can switch from a 30-day supply of medication to a 90-day supply.

▶ Try delivery. Ordering through a mail-order pharmacy can add convenience and, in many cases, offer lower prices.



Unsplash.com

Making Medicare Simple — With Someone Who Truly Cares

By Abigail Jackson Bradford

Recently, I've been reminded just how overwhelming Medicare can feel. Someone convinced one of my grandmothers to switch plans to something that doesn't meet her needs. My paternal grandmother hung up, upset after being pressured by a pushy caller. Even at my dentist's office, the assistant admitted she was anxious and overwhelmed about signing up for Medicare for the very first time.

Stories like these are common. But Medicare doesn't have to be confusing, frustrating, or stressful. The Annual Enrollment Period is here, and it's the perfect time to make sure your plan is working for you—without the pressure. That's where I come in. My name is **Abigail Jackson Bradford**, and I would be honored to walk this journey with you.

Why I Do This

Many of you know my father, Rob Jackson, who has been an Alabama Baptist minister for years. He taught me to live with integrity, to serve with a genuine heart, and to finish well. **That's the foundation of my work with River Valley Senior Solutions (RVSS).** Our former **chairman of deacons** and I are committed to helping people

like you find peace and confidence in Medicare decisions. **We are local** — from Alabama for Alabama.

What You Can Expect from Me

- **Step-by-step guidance** — so you never feel lost or overwhelmed.
- **Trust you can count on** — I take something complicated and make it clear.
- **Protection from mistakes** — avoid costly errors and missed deadlines.
- **Plans designed for you** — because I represent multiple companies, you'll have real choices.
- **Peace of mind** — confidence in the decisions you make.
- **Long-term support** — not just this year,



Let's Take the Next Step
The Medicare Annual Enrollment Period is October 15–December 7. Let's take the next step together!

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For official information about Medicare, visit Medicare.gov or call 1-800-MEDICARE.

Rating well

BY LINNIE RUSSELL • THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

Keep an eye on credit report to ensure buying power, find fraud, correct errors

Credit fraud is a growing concern for people of all ages, as credit report errors can have a negative impact on everything from renting an apartment to purchasing a new car or even affording insurance.

A credit report provides a record of your financial activity, including loan payment history and credit usage. Credit reports are the basis for credit scores, which have a wide-ranging impact in our lives.

Employers often consider credit scores when making hiring decisions. Lenders use credit scores when setting rates and granting loan requests. Insurance and utility companies check credit scores before offering potential customers their services, and most apartment managers screen rental applicants based on credit scores.

Checking your credit report for accuracy can help ensure your credit score isn't being artificially deflated by errors or out-of-date information. It won't lower your credit rating, and it can even alert you to potential fraud and identity theft.

For these reasons, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau recommends checking your credit report at least once a year. You should also check your reports prior to making important financial decisions like applying for a new job or making a major purchase that involves a loan, such as buying a house or car.

How do I request my credit report?

Equifax, Experian and TransUnion are the three primary credit bureaus that collect data from financial companies to create your credit report. These companies, usually banks and credit card companies, are called "furnishers."

Every year, you have the right to



Photo by Drazen Zigic on Freepik

request one free credit report from each bureau. For most people, each report will have somewhat different information. You can order all three reports at once to compare them, or you can check them individually at different points throughout the year.

You may even be able to review your credit report more frequently online, at no extra cost. By law, a credit reporting company can charge no more than \$14.50 for a credit report, according to the CFPB. Visit AnnualCreditReport.com to request your free credit report.

There are other third-party companies that can provide access to your credit reports.

Some potential benefits of these products include regular updates on reported credit activity, identity theft protection and easier access to your

credit scores. However, these services are not always free. It's important to be mindful of hidden fees or subscription costs when considering a credit report monitoring service.

What are the most common errors, and how do I report them?

When you receive your credit report, look for information that appears inaccurate or outdated.

► **Identity errors.** Always check your personal information (name, date of birth, address) for mistakes. Make sure you haven't received a "mixed file" — a report that includes accounts belonging to someone else with a similar name to yours.

► **Account status errors.** These might include incorrect dates, duplicate debts or accounts falsely re-

ported as delinquent. Make sure any closed accounts aren't still reported as open. If you're an authorized user on someone else's account, verify that you aren't listed as the account owner.

► Data management errors.

Simple but serious numerical problems like incorrect account balances or credit limits.

If you do spot legitimate errors, your credit report will always include detailed instructions for resolving them. You may need to dispute the errors with both the credit bureau and the furnishers who provided that incorrect information. For template letters and advice on filing a dispute, check out the CFPB's website.

After you file your dispute, the credit bureau will investigate before coordinating with furnishers to correct any errors. The furnishers will then notify all credit reporting companies of the corrections, allowing them to update your reports.

How can checking my credit report alert me to financial fraud and identity theft?

While reviewing your credit report, you may notice evidence of fraudulent activity. According to the CFPB, this may look like "accounts you didn't open, wrong amounts on your accounts" or inquiries about your credit score "from companies you've never contacted."

If you suspect fraud, it's important to first contact your credit card company and bank to place holds on your accounts. Then reach out to the Federal Trade Commission at IdentityTheft.gov. They can walk you through the process of securing your identity and — if you haven't already — contacting one of the primary credit bureaus to place fraud alerts and a credit freeze on your accounts.

A credit report provides a record of your financial activity, including loan payment history and credit usage. Credit reports are the basis for credit scores, which have a wide-ranging impact in our lives.

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“Tell the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord, and His might, and the wonders that He has done.”
Psalm 78:4



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Media reviews

BY TOMMY ELLISON, TRACY RIGGS FRONTZ AND STEVE POTTS • THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

Book selections explore Christian worldview in suffering, anxiety, magic and ministry

Saying Goodbye: A Biblical Worldview of Death, Disease and Disappointment

By Jim Henson

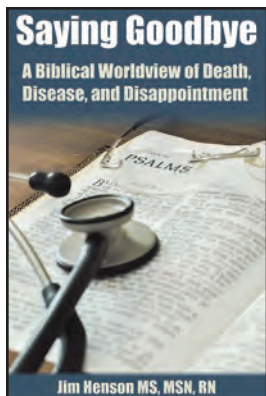
Independently published, 2015

Former hospital administrator and registered nurse Jim Henson has written an extremely helpful meditation about how the Christian worldview sees the most painful realities of handling disease, discouragement and death itself.

Henson, who lives in central Alabama, is a former hospital administrator and a registered nurse and has degrees from Oklahoma Baptist University and the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

He draws on his extensive experience as a thoughtful Christian with significant medical training, as well as insights gathered from people he encountered in his work.

His chapters have a devotional depth as he traces the reality of death and disease from the Garden of Eden through the redemptive work of Christ. Along the way, he



shows the hope that faith in Christ brings to those who suffer and to their families. He gives wise counsel to anyone seeking to support and help those in pain.

He discusses the death of his infant child in Chapter 4 and job loss in Chapter 5, and he gives insightful perspectives of how things work in American health care in Chapter 6.

He lays out the importance of the sanctity of life from a Christian perspective and discusses the need for wisdom in discerning God's will in painful circumstances in Chapter 7. Chapter 8 is his assertion on the essential need for forgiveness and salvation and is especially on target.

He gives many biblical insights, practical suggestions and spiritual reminders throughout this inspiring and uplifting book.

Those in health care work and chaplaincy programs will find this volume of special interest, as will pastors and Christians in general. (Steve Potts)

Sparrows

By Jason Gray and Jes Woller

Centricity Music, 2024

Singer-songwriter and author Jason Gray addresses the epidemic of anxiety and the problem of bullying in his new children's book, "Sparrows," based loosely on his hit song of the same name and his own experiences as a child with a stutter.

"I have a speech handicap, and the protagonist of the story, Ellie, also has a speech handicap that she's very anxious about being teased at school. The book is about how she's bullied by her anxiety but also by a classmate named Annabelle.

"When she hears the preacher preach about Matthew in Chapter 10 where Jesus speaks about the sparrows — to look at the sparrows and that if God looks after the sparrows, small as they are, how much more

will He look after you? The idea in that verse gives her the tool that she needs to overcome both her anxieties," Gray said.

Gray's 2016 song "Sparrows" was also based on his experiences with anxiety. Gray realized he should



write more songs about the topic to help other "poor people who struggle with anxiety." Throughout the book, there is a sparrow on every page.

Gray said that it's "like an Easter egg hunt" for those reading it.

To learn more about Gray, his music and his tours and to buy "Sparrows," go to JasonGrayMusic.com. (Tracy Riggs Frontz)

No Illusion — This Stuff Really Happened

By David Garrard

Independently published, 2024

David Garrard's newest book, "No Illusion — This Stuff Really Happened" offers a fascinating glimpse into the life of a professional magician who has dedicated his career to both entertainment and ministry.

Garrard, an accomplished magician and minister, is a graduate of Samford University in Birmingham and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He served as minister to children at St. Matthew's Baptist Church in Louisville for 42 years.

This dual calling — magic and ministry — shaped a life filled with extraordinary moments, unforgettable characters and lessons rooted in faith.

The memoir is packed with short stories that range from happy to

sad, exciting to reflective. Whether recounting his early fascination with magic or his long tenure in children's ministry, Garrard's writing is warm, relatable and rich with spiritual insight. He uses vivid anecdotes to connect the dots between life's challenges and God's promises.

He recalls a childhood coloring assignment where he failed to follow instructions — choosing his own colors instead of the prescribed ones. The resulting lesson? Life, like art, works best when we follow the Creator's design.

For those who know Garrard personally, this book is a treasure trove of stories involving familiar faces and shared memories. Even for readers new to his world, the memoir offers valuable lessons and compelling glimpses of life behind the scenes of both his magic shows and ministry work.

Garrard often reminds his audience, "Life is like a roller coaster," full of twists, turns and surprises. Yet, as he poignantly notes, "God is with us before we are born, walks with us daily and promises to take us home." This message under-



scores the book: God's presence is constant, and His promises are unwavering.

If you've ever seen Garrard perform, this book will deepen your

appreciation for his work. If you haven't, it's the perfect introduction to a man who has spent five decades captivating audiences and inspiring faith.

The book is available directly from the author at davidgarrard-magic.com. (Tommy Ellison)

EDITOR'S NOTE

Reviews of films, books, music or other media that appear in *The Alabama Baptist* 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 Group.

'Healing' force

BY CARRIE BROWN MCWHORTER • THE ALABAMA BAPTIST

Samford's new WOW choir offers outlet for people with aphasia to express their faith

These days, Sid Burgess has trouble communicating his thoughts verbally due to aphasia, but the longtime pastor's mind still echoes with familiar church music, which is why Samford's new Words of Worship (aka WOW) Choir caught his attention.

"I was stunned when I saw that folks at Samford were organizing a choir for people with aphasia — that is, for people like me," said Burgess, a 1971 graduate of Samford. "Typical of an aphasia person, I cannot remember the names of any of those good people, but I do remember they said we could look forward to singing familiar old sacred songs like 'All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name.'"

Aphasia is an acquired language disorder caused by a brain injury, including stroke or infection. It's often called an invisible disability because there are no outward signs of the condition despite the significant impacts it has on a person's daily life and activities.

Communication disorder

WOW is a project of Samford University's Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders, whose practitioners serve those with aphasia among other conditions. The project seeks to explore how individuals living with aphasia can better engage with their faith and how churches can be more inclusive of those with communication disorders.

The WOW Choir, also called the Samford Aphasia Choir, is a big part of the project.

Karen Flynn, professor in the department and one of the founders of the choir, said there are many



The International Aphasia Choir (singaphasia.com) began in 2020 to provide resources and virtual opportunities for those with the condition. Samford University's WOW choir is part of the growing global effort to raise awareness.

aphasia choirs around the world, but WOW is the first she knows of with a faith-based foundation.

Flynn said the idea for the choir began with Samford assistant professor Kelly Jackson, who teaches the department's course on aphasia. Flynn, department chair Angie Barber and Bryan Gill, director of Samford's Office of Faith, Learning and Vocation soon got onboard.

They all recognized that while the concept of an aphasia choir was not new, Samford was in a unique position to incorporate faith into the effort. Gill helped expand the project into an interdisciplinary, campus-wide effort involving more

students, Flynn said, and they began planning the choir's launch.

Individuals who experience aphasia don't fit into neat categories, Flynn said, but common difficulties include word retrieval, reading, forming sentences or understanding complex language.

"They can't speak. Maybe they can't understand what's being said during a service. And so socially, they tend to become isolated," she said. "One thing we know that's critical about faith is that

it helps just in overall healing and well-being, so having the ability to participate helps them have a connection to their faith community."

The goal of the WOW Choir is

to offer an alternative, Flynn said — "to provide an outlet for people with aphasia to engage with and express their faith through music in an environment that supports their unique communication needs."

The music for WOW will be adapted to meet the needs of each person who participates, Flynn said. And those who lead the choir will use a variety of methods to help with communication, including visual aids for song lyrics, gestures and facial expressions.

Understanding and time

Choir members also will get understanding and time, something individuals with communication disorders don't often find in other group settings.

Organizers hope an offshoot of the project will be the opportunity to educate the community, including faith leaders, on the unique challenges of aphasia and how best to support those who have it.

Flynn said the choir's adapted music can be shared with churches, and the project will champion inclusive practices, helping ministers better engage those with communication disorders in church activities.

Even more important, the choir will be an outlet for those with aphasia and their caregivers to gather together to sing, fellowship and show others how music can be a healing force in challenging circumstances, Flynn said.

The Samford Aphasia Choir is free to participants, and no previous choir or music experience is needed to join. Virtual options also will be available, Flynn said. The pilot phase of the project is set for this fall with the hopes of hosting the first concert in the spring.

For more information about WOW, contact SamfordWOW@samford.edu.

Learn more about aphasia and hear the International Aphasia Choir at tabonline.org/aphasia.