

The Alabama Baptist

Toll free 800-803-5201
www.thealabamabaptist.org

November 27, 2025

Vol. 190, No. 24
Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Rick Lance (left), executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, introduces Jarman Leatherwood as the 2026 convention president.

‘Proven leader’

Leatherwood elected Alabama Baptist State Convention president

By Jennifer Davis Rash
The Alabama Baptist

The urgency to increase the number of bivocational ministers in Alabama Baptist life continues to be an emphasis heralded by Craig Carlisle, immediate past president of the state convention.

During the final session of the Nov. 11–12 state convention annual meeting, Carlisle’s message garnered extra attention as he proudly handed the reins to a businessman who also serves as a bivocational pastor.

Huntsville pastor

Jarman Leatherwood, bivocational pastor of House of Hope and Restoration Church in Huntsville, is the new Alabama Baptist State Convention president. He was elected by acclamation Nov. 12.

Leatherwood previously served two one-year terms as first vice

president and two one-year terms as second vice president. He also preached the convention sermon in 2023 and works with church planters across the state.

Also elected as new officers are:

First vice president — Ryan Whitley, founding pastor of CrossPoint Church in Trussville. He was elected ahead of Kenneth Wells, bivocational pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church in Scottsboro, with a vote of 206 to 112 with 2 ballots not counted.

Second vice president — Mat Alexander, pastor of First Baptist Church Gadsden. Alexander ran unopposed.

Other officers re-elected were Debbie Oliver as recording secretary and Mike Jackson as statistical secretary and registration secretary. Oliver and Jackson both serve on staff of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

Carlisle, director of missions for Etowah Baptist Association, said, “I love Jarman Leatherwood. He is my brother in every way. In 2020, the Etowah Baptist Association called Jarman to serve on our staff as a part-time minister. During that time Jarman and I had many deep conversations about life and ministry and the impact we have upon those we serve.”

Influence and impact

“I watched Jarman build relationships in our association. I saw people respect him and seek his counsel about many things,” Carlisle shared with The Alabama Baptist. “In the course of our working together, we began to talk about his rising influence and the possibility of him serving the Alabama Baptist State Convention as an officer.

“Those conversations led to me nominating him for second vice

president of our convention (in 2021), which he won without opposition. Since then, Jarman’s influence and impact have continued to grow. All of this led to what happened when he was elected to serve
(See ‘Jarman,’ page 5)



Photo by Bekah Gordon/Dogwood Media Solutions

Newly elected 2026 Alabama Baptist State Convention officers are Jarman Leatherwood (center), president; Ryan Whitley (left), first vice president; and Mat Alexander (right), second vice president.

SPOTLIGHT SPONSOR ...

Reliable Sign Services — Signs are your silent greeters — the first impression your business or church makes before you even say a word. How’s yours working out?



Entity reports



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Russell Klinner (left), Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center; Rod Marshall (center), Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries; and John Ashworth (right), The Baptist Foundation of Alabama, give a joint report during the 2025 Alabama Baptist State Convention Annual Meeting in Huntsville.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

President Greg Davis gives the Alabama Citizens Action Program report during the Tuesday afternoon session.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

President Ken Schroeder shares how Alabama Baptist Retirement Centers make a difference.



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist
Editor-in-Chief Jennifer Davis Rash shares about the ministry of TAB Media Group.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Executive Director Wendy Westerhouse shares how God is at work through the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Executive Director Candace McIntosh gives the Alabama Woman's Missionary Union report.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Rick Lance (right), executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, talks with University of Mobile President Charles Smith (center) and Samford University President Beck Taylor (left).

The Alabama Baptist

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

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

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

Website: www.thealabamabaptist.org
Email: news@thealabamabaptist.org
or subscribe@thealabamabaptist.org
Periodicals postage paid at Baton Rouge, La.

ANNUAL TAB SUBSCRIPTION RATES
Includes print, digital, app and full web access

Group Rate per subscriber per year — \$16.25

Individual — \$34.95 per year (26 issues)

JENNIFER DAVIS RASH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

NEWS SERVICES
Baptist Press (BP)
Religion News Service (RNS)
Morning Star News (MS)

POSTMASTER
Send address changes to:
The Alabama Baptist
3310 Independence Drive
Birmingham, AL 35209

ADDRESS CHANGE
Send old and new addresses,
and name of church to:
Subscription Department
3310 Independence Drive
Birmingham, AL 35209
Allow two weeks.

To the best of our knowledge, all of the ads in *The Alabama Baptist* represent legitimate companies and offerings. However, one should always exercise normal business caution in responding to ads. Also, the information in Alabama News is typically provided by or approved by the individual, church or association represented.

Member of Alabama Press Association

Accredited member of Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability



TAB Media Group
among top in nation

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



The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.

Be determined

Carlisle urges Alabama Baptists to combat forgetfulness with deliberate effort

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Craig Carlisle says “how soon we forget” is more than a proverb — it’s a way of life.

“The problem is that most of our memories, especially with regard to great matters of the soul, are like a sieve that lets the fine flour through but catches and keeps the chaff,” he said.

“We tend to hold fast to those things that we would be better off to forget and forget what we would be better off remembering.”

Carlisle, director of missions for Etowah Baptist Association who wrapped up his time as Alabama Baptist State Convention president Nov. 12, said Moses addresses this problem in Deuteronomy 8.

He preached from that passage during his president’s address on the theme Compelled to Remember at the ABSC annual meeting Nov. 11 at Whitesburg Baptist Church in Huntsville.

“Thankfully Moses gives us principles that will help us avoid



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist
CRAIG CARLISLE

this pitfall,” Carlisle said.

1. We are compelled to obey.

“If we do not obey God, we forget Him,” Carlisle said. “We may preach in God’s name, we may go from meeting to meeting seeking a blessing, and we may be consistent in presenting prayer requests for God’s help in our lives. But if we are not obedient to God, that is the

same as forgetting God.”

To be faithful, Alabama Baptists must “make a determined and heartfelt effort” and not lean on “our natural powers of recollection.”

2. We are compelled to be humble.

Moses uses words like “humbling,” “testing,” “hunger” and “provision” to help the Israelites see their utter dependence on God, Carlisle said. “This is what God does to the Israelites and to us. He brings us to the end of ourselves, so that we would acknowledge our helplessness.”

The experience of being in need not only teaches dependency on God, it also opens the door for God’s provision, Carlisle said.

3. We are compelled to overcome our forgetfulness by recalling that all we have is God’s gracious gift.

In verse 14, Moses describes how people “living in the lap of luxury take credit for their prosperity,” Carlisle said, noting that it’s easy in those situations to forget the rescuing God has done in the past.

“We naturally focus on our own hard work and perceived brilliance.

Yet God gives the body, the brain and the talent,” Carlisle said. “How do we overcome our forgetfulness? A deliberate effort at memory begins our recovery.”

He asked Alabama Baptists to remember these things:

- ▶ Remember that the local church is the headquarters of the convention.

- ▶ Remember that the Cooperative Program is “still the best way to fund missions and theological education,” he said.

- ▶ Remember that “making our churches safe places for children and teenagers must remain a high priority.”

- ▶ Remember to invest in the Calling Out the Called initiative to encourage raising up more pastors.

- ▶ Remember to “continue to let bivocational ministers know they are valuable, important and needed.”

- ▶ Remember to elevate the importance of praying for revival.

- ▶ Remember that “we are going churches for a coming Christ, and we pray that Jesus will come soon, but until then, we’re going to keep going,” he said.

Resolutions on cooperation, protection of unborn children

Alabama Baptist messengers to the state convention annual meeting in Huntsville adopted three resolutions during the Nov. 11 afternoon session.

Two of the three resolutions related to issues important to Baptists while the third resolution (On Appreciation) shares the traditional note of gratitude to all who worked on, helped with and provided space for the annual meeting.

▶ **Resolution #1 — On Cooperation** focuses on continued support of the Cooperative Program and

“commendation for the convictional clarity” of the Baptist Faith and Message 2000.

“Both the Cooperative Program and BFM 2000 exemplify the spirit of cooperation and shared purpose that has characterized Southern Baptists and Alabama Baptists, fostering effective ministry and faithful witness in a rapidly changing world,” the resolution reads.

“Both the Cooperative Program and our confession of faith have encouraged Southern Baptists and Alabama Baptists to remain steadfast in commitment to reaching our state and the world for Christ, impacting

generations for the glory of God.”

▶ **Resolution #2 — Against Abortion-Inducing Drugs** was the only resolution to be amended from the floor, but the amendment was considered a “friendly amendment” and provided a new introduction to the resolution. The new introduction reads:

“WHEREAS, we as Alabama Baptists believe that all human life is sacred, created and sustained by God and that abortion by medical procedure or by abortion-related drugs is contrary to God’s creative design.”

From there, specific

points of concern are outlined.

The amendment was offered by Chris Farmer, pastor and messenger from First Baptist Church Dawes.

An excerpt from the resolution states that chemical abortion drugs pose serious health risks — especially without in-person exams or ultrasounds, which can miss life-threatening conditions like ectopic pregnancies — and raise concerns about coercion or lack of consent.

The resolution urges

federal authorities to empower states to enforce laws protecting unborn children and to address the distribution of abortion-inducing drugs through delivery services.

The committee did not disclose how many resolutions were submitted. Chair Mat Alexander, pastor of FBC Gadsden, said deliberations are confidential, so only the resolutions officially presented to messengers can be reported. (TAB)

For the full text of the three adopted resolutions, visit tabonline.org/resolutions-2025.

Passion to share the gospel

Messengers approve \$37.5 million budget, set offering goals, vote to extend Alaska partnership

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Messengers to the Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting voted Nov. 11 to keep the same \$37.5 million budget moving into next year with a 50–50 split between Alabama Baptist and Southern Baptist ministries.

They adopted the 2026 budget during the report of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions on Nov. 11 at Whitesburg Baptist Church in Huntsville.

Messengers also approved the same special offering goals as 2025:

- ▶ Lottie Moon Christmas Offering: \$12 million
- ▶ Annie Armstrong Easter Offering: \$6 million
- ▶ Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries: \$3 million
- ▶ Myers-Mallory State Missions Offering: \$1.2 million
- ▶ World Hunger Offering: \$800,000

Alaska partnership

During the SBOM report, Alabama Baptists also voted to extend the partnership with Alaska Baptists “indefinitely with periodic reviews assessing the effectiveness of the collaboration.”

The two state conventions established their partnership in 2021, and in a video message to Alabama Baptists on Nov. 11, Bruce Rowell, president of the Alaska Baptist Resource Network, shared his gratitude.

“Alabama Baptists have left a permanent mark on the Great Land, on the Last Frontier where we do ministry,” he said.



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist
Rick Lance, executive director of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, introduces Alaska Baptist leaders and the partnership with Alabama Baptists during the Tuesday afternoon session of the 2025 Alabama Baptist State Convention Annual Meeting held at Whitesburg Baptist Church in Huntsville.

Rowell noted that Alabama Baptists have given over \$300,000 in direct financial support to Alaska Baptists, as well as thousands more to individual ministries and churches.

“And so many Alabama Baptists have come to work alongside us in disaster relief, missions engagement, supporting our convention meetings, collegiate ministry, local churches, summer camps, construction teams, long and short-term missions,” he said. “You have preached in our pulpits, you have worked in our Bible schools, you’ve been our friends.”

Moving forward

Rowell said now Alaska Baptists are moving forward into a new season of work with Rickie Wilson, the newly called executive director/treasurer of the Alaska

Baptist Resource Network.

Wilson was present for the SBOM report in Huntsville and said he wanted to “thank Alabama Baptists for this opportunity to say thank you from Alaska.”

“I want you to know Alaska Baptists are so grateful for everything you’re pouring into Alaska,” he said.

Wilson also noted that he has “worked with Alaska Baptist staff already. ... They have a heart for the gospel.”

One of those staff members is Jae McKee, an Alabama native who now serves as director of missions and church planting for the ABRN. He has served as a natural point of contact for Alabama Baptists throughout the partnership.

McKee also shared during the report about a road trip he took with SBOM staff this past summer to

interview 15 pastors and hear “their passion and their compulsion to share the gospel with every person in the state of the Alaska.”

He thanked Alabama Baptists for their support and for the way they have been a part of all of the stories they heard from pastors across Alaska.

Scotty Goldman, director of the SBOM office of global missions, said there are many opportunities for Alabama Baptist churches to get involved in ministry in Alaska.

“There’s still a lot of work to be done,” he said, noting that Wilson and McKee can’t resource the whole state of Alaska by themselves. “We need to work alongside these folks in reaching people.”

In other updates

Goldman presented the Volunteer of the Year award to Dr. Patrick Daugherty, an oncologist and member of Woodmont Baptist Church in Florence. Daugherty has served in missions work on all seven continents.

Mark Wakefield, state disaster relief strategist, presented the Tommy Puckett Award for Excellence to five individuals who made the “strategic contribution” of setting Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief up on a new software program, a change that was desperately needed and could have cost the ministry thousands of dollars.

Those five award recipients were three volunteers — Melinda Maddox of First Baptist Church Clanton, Mike Chandler of Hunter Street Baptist Church in Hoover and Tami Power of Willowbrook Baptist Church in Huntsville — as well as two SBOM staff members, Mickey Crawford and Scott Whittington.

ALABAMA BAPTIST STATE CONVENTION COOPERATIVE PROGRAM BUDGET FOR 2026

(Approved by convention messengers Nov. 11, 2025)

STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS MINISTRIES	
Total for State Board of Missions Ministries	12,221,234
STATE CONVENTION ENTITY MINISTRIES	
▶ University of Mobile	3,040,540
▶ Higher Education Scholarships	470,656
▶ Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries	405,405
▶ Shocco Springs	709,460
▶ The Alabama Baptist	608,110
▶ The Alabama Baptist Retirement Centers	253,380
▶ The Baptist Foundation of Alabama	202,705
▶ The Alabama Baptist Historical Commission	152,025
▶ The Christian Life Commission	24,475
▶ The Education Commission	3,230
Auxiliaries and Other Ministries	
▶ ALCAP	101,350
▶ Alabama Woman's Missionary Union	557,430
Total for Convention Entity Ministries	6,528,766
TOTAL STATE BOARD & ENTITY MINISTRIES	18,750,000
<i>(FUNDS INVESTED IN ALABAMA)</i>	
SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION MINISTRIES	
Total for Southern Baptist Convention Ministries	18,750,000
<i>(FUNDS INVESTED NATIONALLY & GLOBALLY)</i>	
GRAND TOTAL COOPERATIVE PROGRAM BUDGET	37,500,000

Jarman 'is a friend to many and an encouragement to all'

(continued from page 1)

as our state convention president.

"Jarman is our president because he is the right man for this time. He is our president because he has proven himself to be a leader. He is our president because he is a loving pastor of his flock, and he will love Alabama Baptists well," Carlisle said. "And did I mention Jarman is the first African American president of our state convention in our 202-year history?"

'Faithful brother'

Robert Mullins, executive director of Madison Baptist Association where House of Hope and Restoration Church is a member, nominated Leatherwood for president.

"Jarman is a faithful brother in Christ who deeply loves the Lord, his family and his church. His life

reflects a genuine commitment to following Jesus," Mullins said.

"He is a friend to many and an encouragement to all. Above all, Jarman is a disciple of Jesus Christ.

"His love for the Lord is evident in everything he does, and he seeks to shine the light of Christ everywhere he goes."

Leatherwood has served with Samford University's Ministry Training Institute, is a graduate of Luther Rice Seminary and is working on a master of divinity degree from New Orleans Seminary.

With a background in computer information systems, Leatherwood owns Wood's Construction, which provides HVAC services in the Huntsville area and beyond.

He and his wife, Camillus, have three children.

King calls for two-fold love: God and the broken

By Leann Callaway
The Alabama Baptist

When Andy John King, pastor of Lindsay Lane Baptist Church in Athens, delivered the convention sermon at the Alabama Baptist State Convention annual meeting on Nov. 12, he spoke out of Mark 12:28-34 and posed the question, "Of all of God's commandments, which one is the most important?"

"That's a great question; isn't it?"

King noted. "This is one of life's most basic questions: 'What does God expect of me?'"

"This is the kind of question that targets the aim of our existence. In this setting, this question is not one that is uncommon," he added. "What did Jesus say was the most important, the greatest?"

"Jesus answered this common question summarizing the law of God in its essence," King said. "But did you notice that the first word in His response was the word, 'Listen?'"

King reminded the audience that our love is a response to God's love toward us and His sacrifice for us.

"Is that too simple of a theme to preach — too simple of a pledge of allegiance to make that out of love for God, there will be unity in our body?"

"There will be continued min-

istry. There will be fulfilled mission. There will be respect for one another. There will be a tight grip on His commands because we love God. We are to love God more than ourselves. We are to love God above all, but Jesus is not done."

'Who is my neighbor?'

King continued, "Jesus said to love your neighbor as yourself.

"Who is my neighbor? This question was asked in Luke 10 by an

expert of religious law when Jesus answered with the parable of the Good Samaritan.

"Church, we learned that our neighbor is anyone who is broken. Our neighbor is anyone who is in need. Of all people, followers of Jesus cannot ignore when people are hurting," King said.

"Do you know when people are hurting they are actually seeking the help of a God that most of them do not know?"

"Of all people in our neighborhoods, we should be known as the light. We have to know our neighbors to know that our neighbors are hurting. We are representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ, citizens of heaven. If I read and acknowledge this commandment with the understanding that to love God, that also means I'm going to love my neighbor.

"That's how change happens."



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Andy John King, pastor of Lindsay Lane Baptist Church in Athens, urges messengers to love deeply in his convention sermon during the Wednesday morning session of the 2025 Alabama Baptist State Convention Annual Meeting.

CONVENTION ATTENDANCE

960 people attended the 2025 annual meeting:
767 messengers and 193 guests from 368 churches

PLANNING FOR NEXT YEAR

Date: Nov. 17-18, 2026 / **Place:** First Baptist Church Trussville
Convention preacher: Steven Fraser, Riverbend Baptist Church, Gadsden
Alternate for convention preacher: Mark Bethea, FBC Montgomery

Compelled to live as new creations

By **Lonnie Wilkey**
The Alabama Baptist

The love of Christ should be all that Christians need to be compelled to help fulfill the Great Commission, observed campus minister Matt Daniels.

Daniels serves on the campus of the University of North Alabama in Florence and delivered the first theme interpretation on “Compelled to Live as New Creations” during the Nov. 11 opening session of the state convention annual meeting.

He reminded messengers that “Christ made us new. He didn’t recycle us. He didn’t refurbish us. He didn’t patch us back together. ... He took what was old and made it new.

“He took what was dead and made it alive. ... That is the work that Jesus does.

“That should compel us to get up and do the work of helping other people to come to know this hope.”

Daniels sees students sharing Christ’s love — including Conner Byars, who joined him on stage.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

MATT DANIELS

Byars described leading students to the Lord and witnessing their transformation into new creations.

One of the young men Byars led to the Lord was “cold and callous” when they met, Daniels added.

“Now, we can’t get away from him,” Daniels joked. “He just wants to talk and to love on you and that’s because of the love of Jesus Christ.”

“That’s what Jesus does — He changes us, and He redeems us.”

Daniels concluded with a challenge. “I just want to encourage you that it is time for us to just stop sitting idly by and watching the world perish.

“We weren’t given this life as a new creation to sit around and hoard it for ourselves. ... We can love our world as new creations so that those who are lost

can be found and those who are dead can be made alive.”

EDITOR’S NOTE — To read this article in its entirety, visit tabonline.org/Daniels.

Compelled to be ministers of reconciliation

By **Lonnie Wilkey**
The Alabama Baptist

Montgomery Baptist Association pastor Dewayne Rembert was excited about being asked to provide a theme interpretation on “Compelled to be Ministers of Reconciliation” during the Nov. 11 afternoon session of the state convention annual meeting.

“It’s important that we as Christians be ministers of reconciliation,” said Rembert, pastor of Flatline Church at Chisholm in Montgomery.

“We’re called by God to do it,” he said, adding that it applies to all Christians, not just pastors.

And why is this particular message so important to Rembert? “I didn’t hear the gospel until ... I was 26 years old. For 25 years, I didn’t know about the reconciling love of Jesus Christ,” he said.

Rembert said it broke his heart after he was saved when he

discovered around him people who knew about Jesus but never shared it with him.

“We have to allow God to break our hearts and pay attention to the people around us because they

need this Jesus that we’ve got.”

Rembert noted that the convention’s theme verse, 2 Corinthians 5:14, reveals three important truths: God is sovereign, God loves us and God is good.

“When you have a clear view of Christ’s love for the lost, you’re going to always want

to share Jesus with people.”

Reconciliation “is simply making right a broken relationship,” Rembert said. “Christ came to reconcile us back to God the Father as we go and share the love of Christ with others.

“That is God’s heartbeat.”

EDITOR’S NOTE — To read this article in its entirety, visit tabonline.org/Rembert.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

DEWAYNE REMBERT

Compelled to be laborers together for Christ

By **Shawn Hendricks**
The Alabama Baptist

Don’t go alone, stressed Spencer Bell during his message Nov. 12 at the state convention annual meeting. Ministry work, he noted, is about “working together with Him.”

Pointing to how Paul begins 2 Corinthians 6:1, Bell said, “I believe (the words of this verse) define us. I believe they refocus us. I believe they remind us that we’re not called to go alone.”

Bell, an associate in the office of evangelism and church revitalization for

the State Board of Missions, gave the theme interpretation “Compelled to be Laborers Together for Christ,” emphasizing three truths.

1. Working together means we rejoice in godly partnership.

Bell emphasized the importance of following Paul’s example in viewing the Philippian believers with joy.

“I think it begs the question for you and I today: Every time somebody thinks of [us] ... do they think of us with joy?”

“Paul rejoiced in godly partnership because Paul knew without partners, there is no progress.”



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

SPENCER BELL

2. Working together means we resign to a guided path.

In addition to rejoicing in partnership with oth-

ers, Paul also addressed “our partnership with and through the Lord Jesus Christ,” Bell said.

“If He began the work, He’ll finish the work — and friend, we’re just along for the journey.

“If I’m really going to be compelled to work with Christ, I’ve got to ... say, ‘God, You’re going to lead me; You’re going to guide me; You’re going to use me. I’m going to trust You.’”

3. Working together means we receive a greater perspective.

Paul had a greater perspective — even as prisoner in Rome, Bell said.

“[Paul] always said it’s not I who lives, but it’s Christ who lives in me. ... I really believe God chains us and puts us in places and opens doors for us that we would not open ourselves.

“Our simple prayer needs to be ‘Lord, have your way with us — that we might wait for You to tell us what to do and that we might be workers together with You, compelled until You come.’”

EDITOR’S NOTE — To read this article in its entirety, visit tabonline.org/Bell.

‘Emotionally invested’

Alabama Baptists focus on God’s call to serve as ambassadors

When Hayden was a student at the University of Alabama, she met some of Christ’s “ambassadors” at the Baptist Campus Ministries.

She became a believer. And then she became an ambassador for Christ herself.

“I served on mission in several different countries short term throughout my years as a college student,” Hayden said. “And now the love of Christ compels me to go and serve Muslim women overseas.”

She’s currently discerning what part of the world the Lord might be calling her to, and she would love prayers for wisdom. She shared that testimony with those gathered at the Tuesday evening session of the Alabama Baptist State Convention on Nov. 11 at Whitesburg Baptist Church in Huntsville.

Conference theme

The conference theme — Compelled, taken from 2 Corinthians 5:14 — summed up Hayden’s journey, and about 20 others joined her on the stage to share their own stories of heading into new areas of ministry.

All introduced themselves one by one and shared that they were “compelled by the love of Christ to be His ambassador” in the place where they serve now or will serve soon.

They ranged from international missionaries to church planters to associational leaders.

As part of the evening, those present also heard a message from Jeff Iorg, president and CEO of the Executive Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, who said



Photo by Bekah Gordon/Dogwood Media Solutions

Southern Baptists are ambassadors for Christ and have been given a clear message and mission He wants communicated to His world.

Reading from 2 Corinthians 5:20, he said the Bible “very simply states we are ambassadors for Christ. There could not be a more lofty, more honorable or more significant title given to us than being ambassadors for Jesus Christ.”

Iorg observed that the next “big idea” in the text is the message of reconciliation which is found in 2 Corinthians 5:18–19.

“Reconciliation is the great message that God has entrusted to us and asked us to deliver over and over to people who need to hear

that more than any other message from our lips,” he said.

Iorg encouraged those present to have a sense of urgency that pushes them to invest time in people who need to hear the gospel.

Russ and Cindy Leaphart, church planters with New Mercies Community Church in Huntsville, are among several missions and ministry leaders recognized during the Tuesday evening session of the 2025 Alabama Baptist State Convention Annual Meeting.

He also said urgency requires involving yourself in the task emotionally. “When I talk to people about Jesus, I want them to see something in me that says I am emotionally invested in this because it changed my life ... and it can change yours.”

Iorg concluded his message by reminding Alabama Baptists they have a message of how “Jesus died for you and was resurrected so your sins could be forgiven and you could have new life. And the time for that is right now,” he said. “Let’s walk out of here tonight more committed than ever to be ambassadors for Christ.” (Grace Thornton, Lonnie Wilkey)



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Jeff Iorg, president and CEO of the SBC Executive Committee, reminds Alabama Baptists to have a sense of urgency about investing in those who don’t know Christ because Jesus transforms lives for the better.

PASTORS CONFERENCE

Wolf presented with lifetime award, encourages pastors to 'press on'

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Jay Wolf said a long time ago, he made a promise to Jesus.

He promised that he “would press on all the way to the finish line because I have one compelling goal, and that is to hear Him say when I pass through the portal of death, to hear ‘well done.’”

Encouraging focus

That is the end game, Wolf told those present at the final session of the Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference on Nov. 10 at Whitesburg Baptist Church in Huntsville.

“So between now and then, we’ve got a job to do; we’ve got a world to win; we’ve got a race to run,” he said.

Preaching from Philip-
pians 3:12–14, he said he

had a one-point message — “That’s what we’re here to do is to say like Paul, ‘I press on.’”

Wolf, pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church Montgomery, told stories from over the years of God’s faithfulness in his 55 years of ministry, 32 of which were at FBC. He shared about how as a 13-year-old young man, his uncle’s funeral prompted him to ask questions about what would happen after he died. A schoolteacher encouraged him to read the Bible, and he gave his life to Christ.

From there, God drew Wolf into the church, and at 16 he started teaching Royal Ambassadors and began to see how fulfilling it was to see lives changed. He surrendered to the ministry at 17, and as the years passed, Jesus’ hold on him contin-

ued to prompt him to get up each day and say, “Lord Jesus, I surrender.”

“That’s the way to start your day — that’s the way to live your life, friends.”

Earlier in the evening, Wolf was named the fourth recipient of the Fred Wolfe Lifetime Pastoral Ministry Award.

The award is named in honor of Fred Wolfe, a longtime Alabama Baptist pastor and SBC leader who died in 2021. It is given annually to a pastor who has invested through mentoring, discipling and encouraging other men of God.

Richard Richie, pastor of Blue Springs Baptist Church in Somerville, presented him with the honor and shared about how God used Jay Wolf to change his life over the years, starting in 1989 when Wolf baptized



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Jay Wolf (right), pastor emeritus of FBC Montgomery, receives the Fred Wolfe Award during the Monday evening session of the 2025 Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference held at Whitesburg Baptist Church in Huntsville. Richard Richie (left), conference secretary treasurer, presents the award.

him at First Baptist Church Alexandria, Virginia.

‘Holy privilege’

Chad Hess, ABPC president and pastor of Woodmont Baptist Church in Florence, also shared that Wolf is gifted at preaching “with clarity and creativity as he communicates biblical truths and biblical principles for all areas of life.”

“Jay Wolf has been an excellent pastor,” Hess said.

Wolf felt “honored” by the award, saying, “I can’t thank you enough, but primarily I want to thank the Lord for giving me the high and holy privilege of serving him for the last 55 years,” he said. “Serving Jesus on the menu of life, my friends, is filet mignon and crème brulee — there’s nothing better.”



THE PLACE FOR PASTORS



SCAN THE QR CODE OR VISIT NOBTS.EDU FOR MORE INFORMATION

PASTORS CONFERENCE

'Our purpose' is 'not about us,' Luter says

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Fred "Chip" Luter III said he didn't want to be too offensive, but he wanted to ask a question to those gathered at the Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference on Nov. 10.

"Why are we here? What's our purpose? Is it to have the biggest pulpit? ... Why, pastors, are we really here?"

Luter, senior associate pastor and senior pastor elect of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, said God put each pastor at their church for

this season for a pre-determined reason.

"Our purpose has already been written, and it's not about us," he

said, noting that pastors are to proclaim the preeminence of Christ and the reconciliation he offers.

During the conference, six

other speakers joined Luter in challenging pastors along similar themes.

John Brock, pastor of Highland Baptist Church in Florence, said they must make the preeminence of

Christ the primary subject of their prayers for the next generation, and they must model a Christ-centered

life for them as well.

"Christ will only be pre-eminent in the next generation to the degree that He is preeminent in this generation," he said.

Throughout the day, pastors also heard from:

► Jay Wolf, pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church Montgomery, who



Chad Hess (right), president of the 2025 Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference, leads a panel discussion with (l to r) Ethan McCreary, Richard Blackaby and Seth Hood during the Monday afternoon session held at Whitesburg Baptist Church in Huntsville on Nov. 10.



BROCK



LUTER



MALONE

shared about "pressing on" until the end and was presented with the Fred Wolfe Lifetime Pastoral Ministry Award (see story, page 8).

► Dowand Malone, founding pastor of Greater Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church in Sheffield, told pastors that "Christ alone

must remain the foundation of our work" in church planting.

► Kyle Reno, pastor of Crossgates Baptist Church in Brandon, Mississippi, who shared that God "has more for your prayer life than you could ever imagine or fathom."

► Zane Pratt, who serves on the International Mission Board staff and is an assistant professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, said the purpose of holding up Christ in missions is "not just to make converts, but to make disciples who are being

transformed into the image of Christ.

► Richard Blackaby, president of Blackaby Ministries International, talked about the preeminence of Christ in spiritual leadership and said he thinks "one of the greatest problems in the church today is that there are too many spiritual leaders doing their work in the flesh."

Blackaby also spoke on a panel with Seth Hood, pastor of First Baptist Church Colbert Heights in Tuscumbia, and Ethan McCreary, pastor of Church on the Hill in Huntsville. The panel — moderated by ABPC president Chad Hess, pastor of Woodmont Baptist Church in Florence — discussed topics such as ways to sharpen the leadership of a church staff and the importance of building a team of advisers.



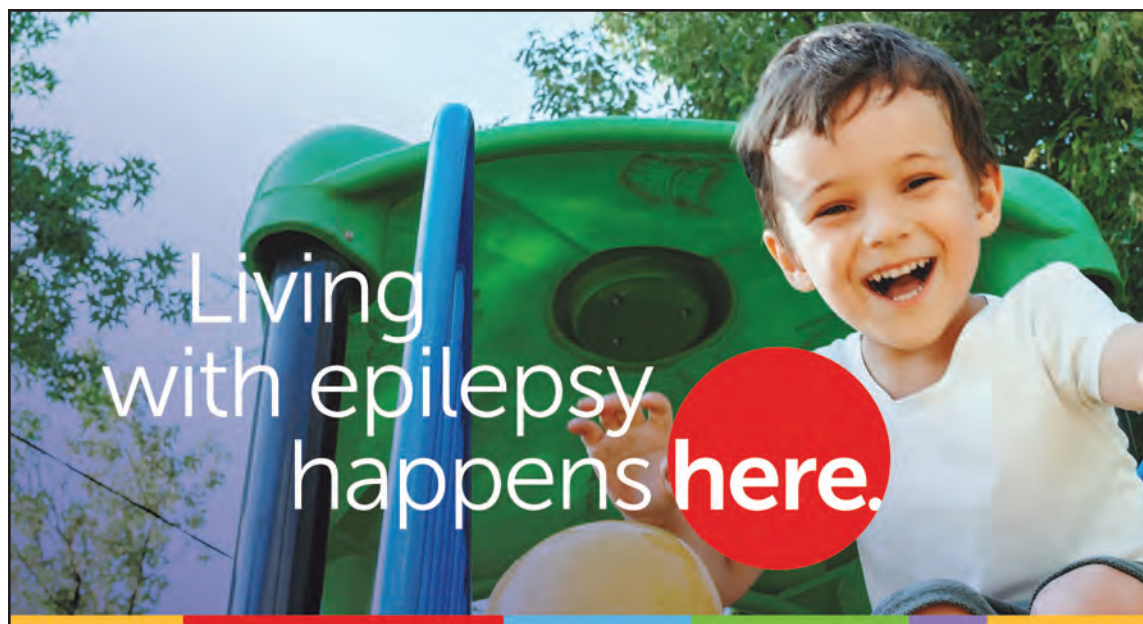
RENO



BLACKABY



PRATT



Living with epilepsy doesn't mean childhood has to pause. At Children's of Alabama, we provide the expert care, treatments and technologies families can rely on, so kids with epilepsy can keep doing what they do best—laughing, playing, and simply being kids.



ChildrensAL.org/epilepsy

LEEDS STAINED GLASS & CHURCH FURNITURE

SINCE 1995

Toll-free: 888.699.9679

AL local: 205.699.9679

Call for **FREE** on-site consultation

Ask for Terry Barnes, Owner

information@LeedsStainedGlass.com

Visit www.LeedsStainedGlass.com

for an online gallery of windows and church furniture!



WEEK OF PRAYER FOR INTERNATIONAL MISSIONS

AND LOTTIE MOON CHRISTMAS OFFERING

November 30-December 7 / alsbom.org/lottiemoon



These are more than initials of random people. These letters represent real missionaries who are products of Alabama Baptist churches. They are representative of more than 300 Alabamians who serve around the world. As you pray for them during this focus on international missions, you may not know their names or exact locations, but your prayers reach a Father who knows. Thank you not only for praying, but for giving both through the Cooperative Program and the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering.



To learn how your church can connect personally with international field personnel, contact Scotty Goldman, sgoldman@alsbom.org, (334) 613-2387.

For more information about field personnel from Alabama serving around the world, please visit a18c.org.

This resource is made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through the Cooperative Program.

Boards & commissions

Trustees, board members elected to serve State Board, other entities

EDITOR'S NOTE — Messengers voted to elect or reelect the following during the 2025 Alabama Baptist State Convention. An asterisk () before the name indicates a layperson. The executive committee and State Board of Missions members are grouped by associations. Board members of convention entities are designated by church membership.*

Executive Committee

Chair 2025–2026:

Jarman Leatherwood

(state convention president)

Darryl Craft, Kevin Wilburn, Carl Williams, *Rita Nielsen, Randy Gunter, Buddy Champion

State Board of Missions

Terms to expire 2028: Eric Hankins, Baldwin; Wayne Horton, Bibb; Larry Byrd, Birmingham Metro; Greg Corbin, Birmingham Metro; Rosevelt Morris, Birmingham Metro; Steven Weems, Birmingham Metro; Danny Alldredge, Blount; Bill Cannon, Bullock; Roger Willmore, Calhoun; Derek Staples, Calhoun; *Wayne Rawlings, Calhoun; Jeff Fuller, Central; Marc Hodges, Chilton; Jason Moye, Choctaw; Rex Kent, Coffee; Danny Wiggins, Coffee; Seth Hood, Colbert-Lauderdale; Robert Klotz, Coosa River; Bill Hart, Dale; *Leah McRae, East Cullman; Matt Smith, East Cullman; Dave Bearden, East Liberty; *Becky Luther, Etowah; Randy Gunter, Etowah; Ricky Hall, Geneva; *Patti Oliver, Lookout Mountain; Mike Foreman, Marshall; *Judy Wesson, Mobile; Neal Hughes, Montgomery; Todd Russell, Montgomery; *Donna Sims, Pine Barren; George Cooley, Pleasant Grove; Keith Taylor, Randolph; Matt Hawkins, Russell; James Preachers, Sardis; Chris Jones, Shelby; John Thweatt, St Clair; Matt Helms, Tennessee River; Jeff Redmond, Tuskegee Lee; Keith Ray, Tuskegee Lee; Tim Mathis, West Central; Justin Olvey, West Cullman; Nathan Carroll, Winston

— Convention entities —

The Alabama Baptist

Terms to expire 2029: Craig Carlisle, First Baptist, Gadsden; *George Foust, Mount Zion, Huntsville; Bradley Rushing, Mount Gilead, Dothan

Board of Aid for Students in Church-Related Vocations

Terms to expire 2029: David Nelson, North Shelby, Birmingham; *Jerry Reeves, First Baptist, Leroy; *Tammy Simms, Church on the Hill, Huntsville

Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries

Terms to expire 2029: *Barry Bledsoe, First Baptist, Montgomery; *Derry Johnson, Integrity, Hueytown; *Hope Williams, Woodmont, Florence

Christian Life Commission

Terms to expire 2029: Jamie Baldwin, First Baptist, Tallassee; Mel Johnson, First Baptist, Prattville; Philip Morris, Chulafinnee, Heflin; Matthew Smith, East Side, Cullman

Education Commission

Terms to expire 2029: *JoAnne Hodum, Coosada, Coosada; *Trish Jackson, Glynwood, Prattville; *Edith Smothers, Coosada, Coosada

The Baptist Foundation of Alabama

Terms to expire 2029: *Rick Gibson, First Baptist, Tuscaloosa; *Diane Kennedy, Springhill, Mobile; *Joel Lake, First Baptist, Tuscaloosa; *Doyle Powell, First Baptist, Montgomery; *Marcalyn Price, Parkway, Auburn; Jay Wolf, First Baptist, Montgomery

Alabama Baptist Historical Commission

Terms to expire 2026: *Becky Nelson, Golden Springs, Anniston

Terms to Expire 2029: *June Mathews, First Baptist, Trussville; *Joyce Peters, Shades Mountain, Birmingham; William Tucker, Heritage, Montgomery; *Sarah Walters, First Baptist, Birmingham

Alabama Baptist Retirement Centers

Terms to expire 2029: *Amanda Catrett, First Baptist, Trussville; Mike Ingram, Millbrook, Millbrook; *William McCrary, First Baptist, Montgomery; *Pamela Veazey, Millbrook, Millbrook; *Roger Yeagan, Bethsalem, Clanton

University of Mobile

Terms to expire 2029: *Ann Amster, First Baptist, Montgomery; *Paul Carter, Cottage Hill, Mobile; Tim Cox, Liberty, Chelsea; Nickolas Funderburk, First Baptist, Dothan; *Terry Harbin, Dayspring, Mobile; *Paul Lewis, Spring Hill, Mobile; *Ronald Moore, Dauphin Way, Mobile; *Ricky Ray, First Baptist, Gadsden

Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center

Terms to expire 2028: Paul Dunbar, First Baptist, Opelika
Terms to Expire 2029: *Ricky Barber, First Baptist, Talladega; *Art Cowart, First Baptist, Prattville; *Larry Ferguson, First Baptist, Childersburg; Corey Sizemore, CrossPoint, Trussville

— Report of Committee on Committees —

Committee on Boards and Commissions

Chair 2025–2026: Ben Hayes

Terms to expire 2027: Matt Haines, Central Park, Decatur; *Marina Foreman, First Baptist, Arab; Tim Lynch, Meadowbrook, Oxford; *Kelley Redmond, Parkway, Auburn; Mike Grimes, Grandview, Dothan; *Amy McCullough, First Baptist, Frisco City; *Angela Davidson, Eastern Shore, Daphne; Tim Mathis, First Baptist, Selma; Adam Brewer, Glory Fellowship, Jasper; *Misty Coleman, First Baptist, Winfield; Daven Watkins, First Baptist, Pelham; Marc Hodges, First Baptist, Thorsby

Audit Committee

Chair 2025–2026: *Jay Knight, Church at Brook Hills, Birmingham

Terms to expire 2028: *Barry Bledsoe, First Baptist, Montgomery; *Jo Ellen Johnson, Shoal Creek, Deatsville

Insurance Committee

Chair 2025–2026: W. Robert

DuBois, Heritage, Montgomery
Terms to expire 2028: Chris Britton, County Line, Prattville; *Bill Davis, Bethsalem, Clanton; W. Robert DuBois, Heritage, Montgomery

Committee on Time, Place & Preacher

Chair 2025–2026:

Chris Crain, Lakeside, Birmingham
Terms to expire 2026: John Brock, Highland, Florence; Rob Cain, Circlewood, Tuscaloosa; Derrick Hartley, Parker Memorial, Anniston; Justin McAlpin, Westmeade, Decatur; Donnie Sills, First Baptist, Anniston; Jeremy Smalley, Eastern Hills, Montgomery

Memorials Committee

Chair 2025–2026:

David Byrd, Northside, Jasper
Terms to expire 2026: David Byrd, Northside, Jasper; *Pat Ingram, Millbrook, Millbrook; Herman Pair, Lakeside, Birmingham; Bob Smith, First Baptist, Trussville; *Donna Wilson, First Baptist, Prattville

Committee on Order of Business

Chair 2025–2026:

Rusty Sowell, Providence, Opelika
Terms to expire 2028: Robert Heard, Carrollton, Carrollton

Committee on Resolutions

Chair 2025–2026:

Derek Allen, First Baptist Tillman's Corner, Mobile
Terms to expire 2026: *Dawn Cox, Liberty, Chelsea; *Jennifer Foster, Heritage, Montgomery; Clint Landry, First Baptist, Wetumpka; Jesse Reeder, Moulton, Moulton; *Josh Sullivan, Meadowbrook, Rainbow City; Trey Waldrop, First Baptist, Tallassee

ALABAMA BAPTIST STATE CONVENTION

LIFE AT CONVENTION

Right: Convention President Craig Carlisle (right) leads a prayer over Rickie Wilson (center), executive director of Alaska Baptist Resource Network. Messengers voted Nov. 11 to extend the partnership between the two states "indefinitely with periodic reviews." The partnership began in 2021.



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Above: Chris Farmer, pastor of FBC Dawes, suggests a friendly amendment to a resolution brought by the Resolutions Committee during the Tuesday afternoon session. His amendment refined language in the resolution, which spoke against abortion-related drugs and procedures.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Above: Scotty Goldman (left), director of global missions for SBOM, recognizes the 2025 outstanding missions volunteer of the year, Dr. Patrick Daugherty, an oncologist who has done missions work on every continent. Daugherty is a member of Woodmont Baptist Church in Florence.



Photo courtesy of Mark Gainey

Above: The Nov. 11 Disciple-Making Leaders Lunch hosted by Disciple Making Ministries of Alabama and sponsored by The Baptist Foundation of Alabama is one of several gatherings designed to encourage, connect and resource ministry leaders around the annual meeting sessions.

Below: Alabama Singing Men and Women share special music during the memorial service in the Tuesday morning session Nov. 11. **Right:** Debbie Campbell, director of communications for TAB Media Group, and Waffles the sloth share about the Kids Edition (thebaptistpaper.org/kids-edition) in the exhibit hall at the Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference on Nov. 10.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash/The Alabama Baptist



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Above: Josh Smith, bivocational pastor of Edgefield Missionary Baptist in Stevenson, raises his hands in worship. Smith opened the Tuesday morning session in prayer, and was among several pastors to pray over messengers, including Kyle Sullivan, pastor of Pleasant Ridge Baptist in Hueytown; Scott Peters, pastor of Bethel Baptist in Brent; John Roland, pastor of Beulah Baptist in Sterrett; and church replanter Parker Allen of Southside Baptist in Cullman.



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Above: Ryan Whitley (right), pastor of CrossPoint Church in Trussville, prays over Gary Hollingsworth, pastor emeritus of FBC Trussville who is currently serving as ERLC interim president. **Right:** Leon Ballard, bivocational pastor of York Baptist Church who has been in ministry for 70 years, stands in recognition for his service as a former convention president (1997-1998).



Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist



State Disaster Relief director Mark Wakefield (left) recognizes five individuals for their work on a DR software upgrade: Melinda Maddox, FBC Clanton; Mike Chandler, Hunter Street Baptist, Hoover; Tami Power, Willowbrook Baptist, Huntsville; Scott Whittington, SBOM; and Mickey Crawford, SBOM (not pictured).

Photo by Travis Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

TO VIEW A GALLERY OF PHOTOS, VISIT TABONLINE.ORG/LIFE-AT-CONVENTION.

UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

First person: Thanksgiving is a lifestyle

By Rick Lance
Executive director, State Board of Missions

Many, O Lord my God, are Your wonderful works which You have done; and Your thoughts toward us cannot be recounted to You in order. If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered” Psalm 40:5 (NKJV).

An old hymn exhorts us as believers, “Count your blessings. Name them one by one.” That may be an impossible task according to this and other verses, but we should strive for thankfulness in overflowing measure toward our Lord and Savior — first of all for His matchless, atoning sacrifice on Calvary.

Most recently, I thanked God for the 2025 annual meeting. This gathering of Alabama Baptist messengers and guests on Nov. 11–12 in Huntsville at Whitesburg Baptist Church for the State Convention meeting was indeed a family reunion and a harmonious one at that. Thanks to Darryl Craft, Whitesburg’s senior pastor, who leads a team that provided a superb welcome to all who attended. Together, we focused on being compelled by the love of Christ

in all we do as we seek to fulfill the Great Commission. I am thankful for our family of congregations, local Baptist associations, entities and SBC mission boards and ministries.

I can think of many other things for which I am thankful — not just during this special time of the year but year-round. Here are five more:

1. Conversion and Calling.

I am so grateful to God for new life in Christ. As 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NKJV) says, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” I am likewise thankful for His calling upon my life to serve at your State Board of Missions.

2. Family.

That includes my precious wife, Pam, and our two daughters – and then also our four grandchildren. I’ve said before that one of the most underestimated blessings on earth is being a grandparent.

3. The Family of God.

“I’m so glad I’m a part of the family of God,” declares

an early praise-and-worship chorus. To be part of the Body of Christ is truly a gift from God. I hope and pray that you are serving the Lord in a local church.

4. Good health.

This is certainly nothing to be taken for granted. Good health should be seen as a gift from God. I am grateful for this blessing from God.

5. Alabama Baptist faithfulness.

Churches in our state are mostly not the largest. But we are pacesetters, consistently #1 in Cooperative Program gifts to the SBC. As Christmas approaches and, with it, the season for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering, I would be remiss if I didn’t mention that in 2024 Alabama Baptists gave \$12,546,558, surpassing the goal! May we be even more generous this year!

As we celebrate Thanksgiving, let us continue to remember the message of 2 Corinthians 5:14 — that “the love of Christ compels us” to be ever thankful and grateful to Jesus Christ, the Messiah, who died for all and gave us the gospel that we must share with others.



LANCE

WORD search

- | | |
|----------|---------------|
| BAPTISM | MESSIAH |
| BAPTIST | NATIONS |
| BELOVED | PREPARE |
| BRANCH | REDEEMER |
| COVENANT | REPENT |
| DOVE | RIGHTEOUSNESS |
| EMMANUEL | ROOT |
| FIRE | SALVATION |
| FRUIT | SHEPHERD |
| HEAVEN | SHOOT |
| HOPE | SPIRIT |
| ISAIAH | STRAIGHT |
| JESSE | VOICE |
| JORDAN | WAY |
| KINGDOM | WELL PLEASD |
| LIGHT | WILDERNESS |

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

“Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him.”

MATTHEW 3:13

“For the love of Christ compels us,
because we judge thus:
that if One died for all, then all died.”

CHRISTIAN Crossword



2026 Intentional Leader Series

We've got dates set for the next Intentional Leader Series, and we would love for you to join us! The Intentional Leader Series resources pastors with the tools and information needed to flourish as a leader.

Here's what to expect in 2026:

- ▶ **Feb. 10, 2026** — Intentional Leader Series: Preacher — led by Herb Reavis, pastor of North Jax Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Florida.
- ▶ **April 21, 2026** — Intentional Leader Series: Pastor — led by Dale Huff, retired pastor, state mission-

ary and former director of the State Board of Missions office of LeaderCare.

▶ **July 14, 2026** — Intentional Leader Series: Person — led by Tim Beougher, Billy Graham professor of evangelism and church growth at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

▶ **Sept. 15, 2026** — Intentional Leader Series: Pathfinder — led by Kevin Blackwell, executive director of Mobile Baptist Network.

All four will be held at the SBOM in Prattville. For more information, visit alsbom.org/ils.

2026 E3 Conference

Join us for a time of fellowship, worship and impactful messages at the 2026 E3 Conference — Evangelize, Establish, Equip. At E3 — set for March 1–2, 2026, at Heritage Baptist Church in Montgomery — speakers will encourage and train attendees to share and live out the gospel.

▶ Sunday night speaker: Mark Johnson
 ▶ Monday morning speaker: David Burton
 ▶ Worship leaders: Parker Webb & Guilford
 The event is free, except for an optional \$5 lunch program.
 For more information, visit EvangelizeAL.org/E3.

Order your 2026 CP Desk Calendar

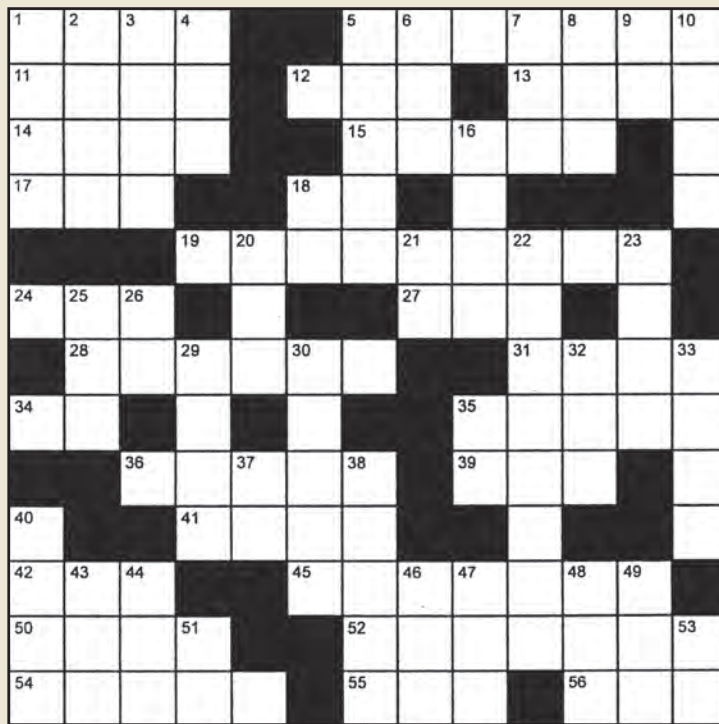
Looking for a way to learn more about and pray for the ministries made possible by gifts through the Cooperative Program? The 2026 CP Prayer Calendar is just what you need. The calendar features one ministry each week and provides practical prayer prompts to guide you. Plus, it's de-

signed to sit on your desk or end table as a convenient reminder to pray. Order your copy by visiting AlabamaCP.org or emailing BethEdfeldt@alsbom.org. Start 2026 out right by praying for the ministries Alabama Baptists support week in and week out through the CP!



ACROSS

1. Matthew, Mark, Luke, ____.
5. Yet will I leave a _____. (Ezek. 6:8)
11. Jesus cried ... ____, Eloi, lama sabachthani? (Mark 15:34)
12. Sun. (Spanish)
13. Ancient South American Indians.
14. Jesus ... touched him, saying, I _____. (Matt. 8:3)
15. ____ yourselves unto God. (Rom. 6:13)
17. Jacob ____ pottage. (Gen. 25:29)
18. Mom.
19. Ye say that I cast out devils through _____. (Luke 11:18)



By Amy Rognlie Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

24. Under oaks and poplars and ____s. (Hos. 4:13)
27. North northeast. (abbr.)
28. Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but _____. (Gen. 32:28)
31. But ____ found grace in the eyes of the Lord. (Gen. 6:8)
34. Maine. (abbr.)
35. Sharpen every man his _____. (1 Sam. 13:20)
36. ____ thy wife shall bear thee a son. (Gen. 17:19)
39. Give ____ to my words, O Lord. (Ps. 5:1)
41. Texas city: El ____.
42. Choose.
45. Joseph took them both, ____ ... and Manasseh. (Gen. 48:13)
50. Butter substitute.
52. I beseech _____. (Phil. 4:2)
54. No scrip, no bread, no _____. (Mark 6:8)
55. A time to rend, and a time to ____.

19. Ye say that I cast out devils through _____. (Eccles. 3:7)
56. Cow noise.

DOWN

1. Where is He that is born King of the ____? (Matt. 2:2)
2. A dish of many ingredients.
3. God will ____ thy right hand. (Isa. 41:13)
4. Nothing.
5. Ye are a chosen generation, a ____ priesthood. (1 Pet. 2:9)
6. The child did minister unto the Lord before _____. (1 Sam. 2:11)
7. Same as 4 down.
8. With; as well as.
9. North Carolina. (abbr.)
10. Weed.
16. Thou hast been in ____ the garden of God. (Ezek. 28:13)
18. Myself.
20. Period of time.
21. Zinc. (abbr.)
22. ____ the king of Syria was sick. (2 Kings 8:7)
23. The ____ out of the wood doth waste it. (Ps. 80:13)
25. A faithful witness will not _____. (Prov. 14:5)
26. Master of science. (abbr.)
29. They that sow in tears shall ____ in joy. (Ps. 126:5)
30. To obliterate.
32. All that handle the _____. (Ezek. 27:29)
33. ____ me, O Lord. (Jer. 17:14)
35. Southeast. (abbr.)
37. Egyptian sun god.
38. (Love) always protects, always trusts, always _____. (1 Cor. 13:7; NIV)
40. Space.
43. Palestine Liberation Organization. (abbr.)
44. There met Him ____ men that were lepers. (Luke 17:12)
46. Color.
47. The second ____ shall be an emerald. (Ex. 28:18)
48. They departed from _____. (Num. 33:45)
49. Deceased Chinese leader, ____ Tse-tung.
51. Old English. (abbr.)
53. He had sent messengers to ____ king of Egypt. (2 Kings 17:4)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

YOUR CHURCH DESERVES A STRONG FOUNDATION

Every pastor feels the weight of shepherding God's people. Vision and mission are clear, but resources are often stretched thin. And financial stability is essential for churches to keep ministry thriving. We can help your church grow stronger through services that include:



Legacy Ministry

Vision Campaigns



Investments

Educational Scholarships



Church Loans

Online Giving Platform



NEW SERVICE!

Ministry Accounting

Simplify your church's finances with professional bookkeeping, payroll, and reporting built just for ministries.



Let us help your church have more money for more ministry!



THE BAPTIST FOUNDATION
OF ALABAMA



www.tbfa.org

Blackaby: Seek revitalization, not full calendars

By Michael J. Brooks
The Alabama Baptist

Richard Blackaby said his dad, Henry, was a pastor in Southern California when he called a family meeting that included 8-year-old Richard.

“Dad told us God was calling us to a dying church in Canada. The church had 10 members. My dad said if the church belonged to Christ, why must it die?”

In addressing the Alabama Baptist Conference of Associational Leaders on Nov. 10 at the Whitesburg Baptist Church’s south campus in Huntsville, Blackaby said there is always a “long line” to the best churches, but much shorter lines to the hardest churches.

“My dad said we’d never regret going with God’s will, and I’ve found this out in my life,” he said.

“So much of what we do is from our own abilities, or as Scripture says, ‘of the flesh.’”

“A good question to ask ourselves is ‘What makes us weep?’ We should be broken when God’s church is declining. ... Revitalization is motivated by the Holy Spirit, and it begins with prayer and repentance.

“Churches can decline when members insist on their own preferences rather than seeking the will of God in evangelism and ministry.”

Blackaby suggested that “God is more than powerful enough to encourage you to revitalize your church.”

In a separate session, Blackaby used John 15 to teach about fruitfulness.

“We’re often faithful to do things we’ve always done whether those things bear fruit or not. It’s amazing to



Photo by Michael J. Brooks/The Alabama Baptist

Ric Camp (right) of Shelby Baptist Association, in his role as president of the 2025 Alabama Baptist Conference of Associational Leaders, invited Richard Blackaby (left) to share with those attending the annual meeting in Huntsville on Nov. 10.

me that churches in danger of dying may still have full calendars,” he said.

“Satan delights in filling our calendars. ... Jesus in this passage talked not about salvation or faithfulness but fruitfulness. He said bearing fruit brings honor to the Father.”

Blackaby said there are

many kinds of fruit, though we naturally think of conversions as primary.

Different kind of fruit

“I once reminded church leaders of a lady who was sitting in worship the Sunday before praising God, who a few months before tried to take her life,” he

said. “And I reminded them of a young man sitting with his parents and worshipping who had been a runaway a few weeks before. These things are the fruit God gives when we seek to glorify Him.”

Blackaby said there is a difference between results and fruit and between working hard and working with the power of the Holy Spirit.

“Our natural abilities are part of God’s design for us, and God uses them, of course; but fruit is what God does when we abide in Him,” he said. “We need to seek fruit in our preaching and teaching and in our conversations. Anything God does isn’t unimportant, and we seek to honor Him in our work, not ourselves.

“And in the new year, we seek God’s pruning us so that we produce more fruit for His glory.”

For more information, visit abcal.org online.

Faith Moments

Principles for a much-needed awakening

Next year, our nation will celebrate its 250th birthday. As Alabama Baptists, we want to seize this historic moment, not merely for patriotic reflection, but for prayer and proclamation of the gospel. We are calling every church to set aside Wednesday, Sept. 30, 2026, for a focused time of prayer for revival during your midweek gatherings. Then, on Thursday, Oct. 1, we will launch simultaneous revivals across Alabama, lifting the name of Jesus and praying for a great spiritual harvest.

As we look toward this pivotal year, I am reminded of James Burns’ classic work, “Revivals: Their Laws and Leaders.” Burns identifies sev-

eral principles of spiritual awakening that can guide us as we ask God for a much-needed awakening:

1. The principle of the fullness of time: God’s Kingdom moves forward in divine rhythm. Seasons of spiritual dullness are often followed by a mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit that changes everything. It seems we may be on the verge of such a moment — a fresh movement of God’s Spirit in our day.

2. The principle of the emergence of the prophet: Every great revival gives rise to spiritual leaders who speak boldly for God. Pray that God will call and equip men and women for such a time as this.

3. The principle of variety: No two revivals look the same. For

example, the First Great Awakening was marked by powerful preaching, while the Prayer Revival of 1859 centered on united intercession.

4. The principle of recoil: Every revival eventually wanes. We are seeing “puddles” of revival. Now is the time to seek Him earnestly. Let us not miss this divine moment.

5. The principle of theology: During seasons of revival, theology is renewed and sharpened. The Church returns to the timeless truths of Scripture, the authority of God’s Word, the power of the gospel and the centrality of Christ.

6. The principle of spiritual growth: Revivals are God’s instrument to awaken His people. When the Holy Spirit moves,

believers are never the same. Change erupts like a spiritual volcano. During the Welsh Revival, transformation was so profound that even the pit ponies in the coal mines had to be retrained; they no longer understood their masters, who had stopped cursing. Churches were open 24 hours a day, crime plummeted and police officers formed gospel quartets to sing at revival services.

Dear Lord, please do it again! Let’s unite in prayer, proclaim the gospel boldly and prepare our hearts for a fresh outpouring of God’s Spirit across Alabama and beyond.

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



International & national headline news

UM plans to establish Tom Elliff Center for Missions with historic gift

The University of Mobile has announced plans to establish the Tom Elliff Center for Missions to better “equip and encourage every UM student to embrace their Great Commission calling,” said University of Mobile President Charles Smith.

Made possible by a historic multi-million-dollar investment by generous donors, the center’s name will honor Tom Elliff, a pastor, preacher and missionary advocate who served as president of the International Mission Board. A search for the center’s leader is underway. Those who wish to apply — or to submit letters of recommendation — may email a cover letter and resumé to humanresources@umobile.edu. (UM)

Southeastern Seminary alumni celebrate 30 years of the 2+2 program

Alumni of the first 2+2 program, a joint initiative of the International Mission Board and the seminaries of the Southern Baptist Convention, gathered at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

in October to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the program’s founding at SEBTS.

Eight of the original nine units reunited — some of them for the first time since returning from the field in 1997. The ninth unit, the only one unable to come to campus, is still actively serving on the international missions field.

Visit sebts.edu/cgcs or imb.org/go for more information about the 2+2 program, which emphasizes theological education and hands-on ministry preparation for international missions. (IMB)

Registration open for IMB’s Mission College 2026 in Virginia

Missions College 2026, hosted by the International Mission Board, will be held Jan. 21–24 near Richmond, Virginia. The event will bring together “missionaries, IMB staff and churches in one place to strengthen relationships and take advantage of strategic opportunities to reach the lost,” said IMB President Paul Chitwood.

Missions College is designed for anyone seeking to grow in their role in God’s global mission,

including pastors and church leaders; missions team members, mobilizers and prayer leaders; students; and young adults exploring how God might be calling them and others passionate about seeing the gospel reach the nations.

Find more information and registration details at imb.org/events. (IMB)

Samford expands global footprint with international study campus

Samford University has acquired a 10,000-square-foot home on 14 acres near San Jose, Costa Rica, where it will establish its second global study center — Finca de Samford, which translates to “Samford Estate.”

The purchase comes two years after University President Beck A. Taylor commissioned university leaders to develop a second global study center complementary to the Daniel House in London, only in a less cosmopolitan setting, preferably in a Spanish-language country in the Americas with a developing but politically stable climate. (Samford University)

NEWS ITEMS COMPILED BY THE ALABAMA BAPTIST STAFF

DESIGN

FABRICATION

INSTALLATION

SERVICE



CHURCH SIGNS AND LIGHTED CROSSES



Whether your church needs a completely new sign or would like to update your existing sign, Reliable Signs can help! We handle everything from the design to manufacturing and installation. We have worked with hundreds of churches all over the state.



www.reliablesigns.com • 1.800.729.6844 • 205.664.0955

Alabama news

CHOCTAW ASSOCIATION

► **Spring Bank Baptist Church, Silas**, celebrated its bicentennial anniversary Oct. 12, beginning with a celebration service featuring a slide show of photos and special music by Jayden Waite and Riley Pitts and the southern gospel group Deliverance from the University of Mobile. Following a brief intermission, Susan Walker



Photo by Madison Allen

(right), a commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented a commemorative plaque with Steve Marcereau (left), deacon chair, and pastor

Brian Walley (center) accepting on behalf of the church. Walley also read letters of commendation. Justin Olvey, a former pastor and now director of missions for West Cullman Baptist Association, was the guest preacher. Hannon Hill and James Williams shared what the church means to them. Lunch was served in the fellowship hall. Everyone was invited to ring the old church bell outside in honor of deceased church members.

FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION

► **Lakeview Baptist Church, Highland Lake**, celebrated its 25th anniversary Oct. 5. Deacon Dan Hopper shared the church history followed by a special presentation by Ken Blackwood (right),

a commissioner for the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, with pastor Mark Lacks (left) accepting on behalf of the church. Special music was provided by the praise team and the children's choir. Three charter members were awarded certificates of recognition. Mary Bellew and Gene Martin, both founding members, shared about the humble beginnings of the church. Lunch was served following the service.



Photo by Alison Blackwood

MORGAN ASSOCIATION

► **New Friendship Baptist Church, Somerville**, celebrated its 150th anniversary Oct. 12. It was one of 26 charter churches that helped establish Morgan County Baptist Association in 1919. Tommy Smothers, a former pastor of 35 years,



Photo by Alison Blackwood

was the guest preacher and another former pastor, Ron Manly, shared a testimony about the church during his years as pastor. Pastor Jimmy Chenault (left) recognized all former pastors and their families and also the men who were called into the gospel ministry while attending the church. Spe-

cial music was provided by guest soloist Coretta House and New Hope Road gospel group. Ken Blackwood (right), the association's director of missions and a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, presented commendations to the church. An outdoor under-the-tent luncheon was served.

SAND MOUNTAIN ASSOCIATION

► **New Home Baptist Church, Pisgah**, hosted its 2025 Fall Camp Meeting at New Home Bible Camp, Henagar, Sept. 28–Oct. 1. Evangelist Heath Williams from Stokesdale, North Carolina, was the guest preacher.

TUSKEGEE LEE ASSOCIATION

► **Notasulga First Baptist Church** celebrated its 175th anniversary Oct. 5. The church history was presented by deacon Daryl Weldon, and Bill Cannon shared memories of his time as pastor. Special music was



provided by the group We're Still Here plus the praise team and youth and children's choir.

Pastor Andy Chamness (left) accepted the commemorative plaque given to the church by Calvin Milford (right), a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. A meal was served following the service.



Photo by Kori Ledbetter

ALABAMA NEWS ITEMS COMPILED BY DIANNA L. CAGLE AND DEBBIE CAMPBELL

WORSHIP PRACTICE
Equipping leaders to live what they lead

After 45 years in full-time worship ministry, **Dr. Charlie Martin** now serves churches through **Worship Practice** — an equipping ministry designed to strengthen worship leaders, choirs, and musicians.

Whether you need short-term worship leadership, a customized ministry retreat, or one-on-one mentoring, **Worship Practice** provides practical guidance built on theological depth and real ministry experience.

205-454-8838
theworshippractice@gmail.com
theworshippractice.org

2026 Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference officers



Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Carl Williams (second from right), pastor of First Baptist Church Demopolis, will serve as president of the 2026 Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference. Other officers are (l to r): Richard Richie, pastor of Blue Springs Baptist Church, Somerville, secretary-treasurer; Derek Allen, pastor of First Baptist Church Tillman's Corner, Mobile, vice president; and Chris Jones, pastor of Meadowbrook Baptist Church, Birmingham, president-elect.

2026

EVANGELISM EVENTS

from the State Board
of Missions



STATE EVANGELISM CONFERENCE

Sunday-Monday, March 1-2
Heritage Baptist Church
Montgomery

FREE EVENT
*(except for optional
\$5 lunch on Monday)*



Mark Johnson



Parker Webb & Guilford



David Burton

Senior Adult Evangelism Conference

ENCOURAGE

Monday, May 4

9:30 a.m. - Noon

FBC Prattville



Edwin Jenkins



Greater Vision

Questions?

Contact Kirstin Goldwire,
kgoldwire@alsbom.org,
334-613-2245.

EvangelizeAL.org/events

*These events are made possible by gifts of Alabama Baptists through
the Cooperative Program.*



TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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

CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR

First Baptist Church Scottsboro, is seeking a Spirit-led, biblically grounded, full-time senior pastor. Please send resumés to: Pastorsearch@fbcscottsboro.org. Deadline for resumés is Dec. 31.

SENIOR PASTOR

Central Baptist Church, North Little Rock, Arkansas, is seeking a senior pastor. Three years minimum senior pastor experience required; seminary experience preferred. Send resumé to: cbcnlrpastorsearch@gmail.com. Deadline to apply: Jan. 31, 2026.

PASTOR

Full-time pastor — Jasper, Alabama. Pastor retiring. Prayerfully seeking a pastor to preach the inerrant Word of God and shepherd our flock. (SBC) Resumé: northsidebaptistchurchjasper@gmail.com

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Brent Baptist Church in Bibb County, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a part-time pastor (up to 20 hours a week) who has a heart for missions, outreach and growing disciples. Please email resumé to our church office at brentbaptist.office@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

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

MINISTER OF MUSIC

Clanton First Baptist Church (Clanton, Alabama) is prayerfully seeking a full-time minister of music. This position will be asked to lead both choir and congregational worship and oversee all aspects of music in the life of our church. A degree and/or formal training in music is preferred. Candidates should have experience with digital sound equipment, ProPresenter and live-streaming services. Clanton FBC is an active, mission-minded church in a growing area. Additional information about the church may be found at clantonfbc.org. Resumés may be emailed to: justin.nelson@clantonfbc.org.

MUSIC/WORSHIP LEADER

Cedar Bluff First Baptist

Church in search of a music/worship leader, bivocational. Email resumé to: CBFBC@tds.net or mail to: Cedar Bluff First Baptist Church, 3500 Old Hwy 9, Cedar Bluff, AL 35959.

BIVOCATIONAL MUSIC MINISTER

New Center Baptist, Hartselle, Alabama, (newcenterbaptist.org) seeking bivocational music minister for blended services, leading choir and coordinating volunteer musicians. Email resumé to: raykballaw@gmail.com or contact pastor at 256-221-6880 for more information.

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.

YOUTH MINISTER

Seeking youth minister at The Baptist Church at McAdory (McCalla). Candidate must be SBC member with passion for discipling students and leading Christ-centered ministry. Submit resumé: Personnel Committee, 4954 Eastern Valley Rd., McCalla, AL 35111, or tbcam.bcm@gmail.com.

BUSINESS

STEEPLES, ETC.

No job too big or too small. Call for free on-site consultation. Toll-free 1-888-699-9679 or Alabama local 205-699-9679. Ask for the owner, Terry Barnes. Visit gallery at leedstainedglass.com.

TRAVEL/VACATION

LARGE BEACH HOUSES

Planning reunion at the beach in the 30A area? Large houses for between 18–35. Short beach walk, private pool, arcade, beach chairs provided. Owner managed, 877-868-4659, <http://www.funretreats.org>.

LOG CABIN

Lake Guntersville area, beautiful view and fully furnished. Discounts to ministers. Log on to <https://paradisevistatravel.com/2024/08/20/paradise-vista-cabin> to see pictures. Email Karen for reservations at kwlwdc@gmail.com or call 205-540-3600.

Persecuted church

Court thwarts father's quest to recover kidnapped daughter

A judge dismissed a Christian father's court petition to recover his young daughter, whose custody was awarded to her kidnapper.

Christian Daily International-Morning Star News reported that Shahbaz Masih of Sattukatla in Pakistan's Punjab province is trying to get back his 13-year-old daughter. Masih said his daughter was abducted July 29 by a 30-year-old Muslim man.

In Pakistan, which is predominantly Muslim, the national minimum age of marriage for a Christian is 18.

However, Islam's sharia law allows Muslim girls to be married at much younger ages.

According to Christian Daily-Morning Star, "Typically, kidnapped girls in Pakistan — some as young as 10 — are abducted, forced to convert to Islam and raped under cover of Islamic 'marriages' and are then pressured to record false statements in favor of the kidnappers," rights advocates say.

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

Displaced Christians sheltering at Sudan school threatened

A Sudanese Christian school where hundreds of individuals displaced by war had taken refuge was stormed in September, and the occupants were threatened and told to leave.

Morning Star News reported that three Muslims forcefully gained entrance into Evangelical School of Sudan in Omdurman on Sept. 3.

The intruders threatened the displaced people — most of whom are Christians — and demanded that they leave the property.

A church leader said the school, owned by the Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church, was targeted by Muslims sent by an Islamic businessman who has repeatedly tried to seize the property by force.

In Sudan, the Rapid Support Forces and Sudanese Armed Forces have been engaged in a civil war since April 2023, with refugees getting caught in the crossfire.

The United Nations commissioner for human rights said tens of thousands have been killed in this civil war, and nearly 12 million are displaced in locations inside and outside Sudan, according to Morning Star.

Religious favoritism, discrimination surface in Indonesian job ad

A job ad by a regional Religious Affairs Office in Indonesia discriminating against non-Muslims has been modified following objections, sources said.

The Oct. 10 ad by the Tarakan Regency Ministry of Religious Affairs Office in North Kalimantan Province specified that applicants for custodial and office security positions must be Muslims able to recite the Quran, which the Tarakan branch of the Indonesian Christian Student Movement (Gerakan Mahasiswa Kristen Indonesia, GMKI) called a discriminatory government policy.

Michael Jama, chairman of the Tarakan Branch of the Indonesian Christian Student

Movement, criticized a job posting requiring, calling it discriminatory and unconstitutional.

"The Religious Affairs Office does not



MS photo

belong only to Muslims, but to all Tarakan residents from various religious backgrounds," he said, reported Kraya.id.

India's harshest anti-conversion law approved in Uttarakhand

Uttarakhand state in India recently passed an amendment to its controversial anti-conversion law expanding punishment to life imprisonment.

India's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party introduced and passed the Freedom of Religion Bill, 2025, expanding penalties for "forced conversions" to life imprisonment and fines up to 1 million rupees (\$11,446) and adding provisions that criminalize promoting or encouraging religious conversion through social or digital media.

"When laws criminalize social media discussions about faith, they threaten every citizen's fundamental right to religious expression in the digital age," said Vijayesh Lal, general secretary of the Evangelical Fellowship of India. "These provisions ... could turn ordinary conversations about belief into criminal acts."

Christian support organization Open Doors ranks India 11th on its 2025 World Watch List of countries where Christians face the most severe persecution.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Sunday School Lessons

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.

Professor of Biblical Studies, University of Mobile



For December 7

AFFIRMATION Matthew 3:13–4:11

Obeying God (3:13–17)

John the Baptist initially told Jesus that Jesus should baptize John, not vice versa. When Jesus explained that the baptism was to be done to fulfill all righteousness through this act of faith, John submitted to the Father's will.

While these acts of obedience occurred, the triune nature of God was made manifest. The Son came up out of the water. The Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove. The Father spoke from heaven and affirmed the Son: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." The Father affirmed Jesus' obedience.

Hearing God (4:1–4)

Jesus prepared to face temptations through spiritual disciplines. He fasted and prayed, He committed Scripture to memory and He submitted to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. The Master modeled what He taught us to pray: "And do not bring us into temptation but deliver us from the evil one" (6:13).

Temptations are common to humanity (1 Cor. 10:13). These can be categorized as lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). Temptations focused on these three categories worked to tempt Eve (Gen. 3:6) and David (2 Sam. 11:2, 4, 27), but Jesus did not yield to them. If we desire to overcome temptation, then we need to learn from the Master.

When tempted with the lust of the flesh to turn stones to bread, Jesus responded by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3. "It is written: Man must not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God."

Familiarity with Scripture is beneficial, but hearing from God and heeding His Word are essential for walking by faith.

Trusting God (5–7)

After hearing Jesus quote from the Torah, the tempter responded by misusing Psalm 91:11–12.

In this instance, the temptation was the pride of life. Jesus had no need to prove that He is the Son of God.

Rather than attempting to do so, the Master rebuked the devil once again with another Deuteronomy (6:16) quote: "It is also written: Do not test the Lord your God."

How do Christians demonstrate that we trust God? We do what He says. Jesus makes this clear in His teaching (John 14:15).

Worshipping God (8–11)

The enemy of God was foolish enough to think that the Creator of the universe would yield to the temptation of worldly glory — the lust of the eyes. "I will give you all these things."

Really? Once again, Jesus responds with a quote from Deuteronomy (6:13), but this time with an emphatic, "GET OUT OF HERE!"

Each of us was created to worship. Those who do not know the One true God find or create something else to worship. As the Apostle Paul writes, "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served what has been created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever" (Rom. 1:25).

After 40 years in the wilderness, Moses instructed the parents preparing to enter into the promised land to pass on God's instructions to their children.

In particular, in Deuteronomy 6 he underscores the responsibility to model living faith for the next generation. Jesus highlights this, modeling for His disciples how to live by faith when tempted by the devil.

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

For December 14

INVITATION Matthew 4:12–25

The content of this passage focuses on the inauguration of Jesus' Galilean ministry, His invitation for others to become His apprentices and the infiltration of His preaching and powerful works into Galilee and beyond. Lest we view this text as merely another story in the life of Jesus, let us ask the Lord to teach us how to apply its content to our lives.

Starting Out (12–17)

Jesus left His hometown of Nazareth around the age of 30 (Luke 3:23) and moved to Capernaum on the northern coast of the Sea of Galilee. Seven centuries prior, the Prophet Isaiah anticipated the coming of the Messiah. "The people who live in darkness have seen a great light."

The light that Matthew highlights in this quote from Isaiah 9:1–2 immediately precedes one of the great nativity prophecies in verses 6–7. Every Christmas season, I look forward to listening to choirs singing "For Unto Us a Child is Born" from Handel's "Messiah." The words that Isaiah prophesied were fulfilled with the coming of Jesus.

As the Lord grants us witnessing encounters in the weeks leading up to Christmas, we must be faithful to present an uncompromised gospel. Jesus calls listeners to repent (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 13:3) and believe. And what we believe matters. The Christmas story of Bethlehem must be told with the anticipation of the Passover Lamb who faced Gethsemane, Golgotha and the grave. The infant who had been placed in a manger grew to be the holy Man crucified on a Roman cross and whose body was placed in a borrowed tomb before He arose from the dead.

Calling Out (18–22)

Jonah's sons Simon and Andrew

worked with their dad as fishermen on the Sea of Galilee. Andrew had already introduced his brother to Jesus. (See John 1:35–42.) Jesus called them out to a new task, and they followed Him immediately.

James and John, the boisterous or argumentative sons of thunder — Jesus' nickname for them (Mark 3:17) — were actually sons of Zebedee and were fishermen like their father.

What about the family business? How would they provide for their families? How long would they be walking in the dust of this rabbi from the hill country? All they knew was that Jesus was calling them to fish for people.

Answering the call to tell others about Jesus requires sacrifice and commitment and faith. A call to ministry is a call to preparation. This calling to serve Jesus is an invitation to hallelujahs, hardship and heartache. Some who hear will repent and turn to Jesus. Many will reject and trust their own path. Unlike the fish stories of the big one that got away, when people remain lost after a passionate witness to follow Jesus, there is no exaggeration — just brokenness.

Reaching Out (23–25)

Jesus began His ministry with three main activities: teaching, preaching and healing. As more people heard about His authority over diseases and the demonic, His fame grew.

From the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus was modeling for His disciples how to make disciples who would make disciples. He began with fishermen whom He trained to fish for men. Through His multifold ministry that reached people far and wide, He was preparing them for the mission He had for them after His crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus was equipping them to make disciples of all the nations.

"And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.'"

Matthew 4:19

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sunday School Lessons

By Jeffery M. Leonard, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Biblical & Religious Studies, Samford University



For December 7

WHEN YOUR FAITH FALLS SHORT Matthew 17:14–20

Few stories are as quintessentially American as the “rags-to-riches” story. Perhaps it is because our country is so young compared to other nations or because we rose from such humble beginnings to attain our current status, but we do seem to love stories of individuals who overcome tremendous odds to achieve success. It is our love for the underdog that has made Rudy, Secretariat and the '69 Mets household names.

It is hard to find a greater set of underdogs than the band of disciples Jesus called. In time, these men would go on to spread the message of Jesus far and wide through the ancient world. Their beginnings, though, were exceedingly humble, and they were painfully slow when it came to understanding and following their Master's message.

Jesus preached an ethic of putting others first; His disciples were caught arguing over which one of them was the greatest (Mark 9:34). Jesus warned that He would soon be arrested and crucified; James and John ignored the warning and instead asked Jesus for the best seats in the Kingdom (Mark 10:37).

Jesus asked His inner circle to pray for Him in the garden; even these close friends fell asleep instead (Mark 14:37, 40, 41). One disciple betrayed Jesus, another denied Him and all fled for cover when He was arrested. It was certainly an inauspicious start to the disciples' ministries.

We are helpless when we do not rely on Jesus. (14–16)

One passage in particular illustrates the chief failing that the disciples had to overcome. On a certain day, Jesus arrived to find a crowd of people arguing with His disciples. One man emerged from the crowd and begged Jesus to heal his son.

The son's affliction was apparently epilepsy because his symptoms are described as growing rigid, grinding his teeth, foaming at the mouth and falling down (cf. Mark 9:18).

Doubt often reflects a lack of faith. (17–18)

Even though the man had brought his son to Jesus' disciples for healing, the disciples had been unable to help him.

One can detect the tone of exasperation in Jesus' response as He says, “You unbelieving and perverse generation, how long will I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring him here to Me.”

Taking matters into His own hands, Jesus rebuked the demon that had plagued the boy, and the boy was healed instantly.

Even a little faith is great when it looks to Jesus. (19–20)

The question, of course, was why the disciples themselves had not been able to heal the boy. They had certainly tried, but even with the disappointed crowd pressing them to act, they had been unable to do so.

When they pressed Jesus with this question privately, Jesus replied that it was because of their lack of faith. He then went a step further and said that with faith even the size of a mustard seed, they would be able to move mountains.

It would take some time for the disciples to develop their “mustard seed” of faith. While growing their faith was important, training it toward the right object was equally important.

In time, the disciples would come to recognize that their faith was only the channel through which their Lord worked.

As they came to increasingly depend on the risen Christ and let Him work through them, they would leave their disappointing origins behind and go on to be powerful servants for God.

For December 14

WHEN YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES FALL SHORT 2 Corinthians 1:8–10; 12:6–10

On January 27, 1967, NASA experienced one of the worst accidents in its history. As the race to the moon turned to the Apollo missions, three astronauts boarded the Apollo I capsule for a launchpad test. Tragically, a fire ignited in the capsule, and despite heroic efforts to rescue the men, all three perished.

A memorial display for the astronauts at the Kennedy Space Center bears the name “Ad Astra Per Aspera,” a Latin phrase that translates roughly to “a difficult road leads to the stars.” This phrase offers a somber recognition of the great sacrifices that were involved in completing the lunar program.

But the truth of this phrase is certainly not limited to the attempt to get a man on the moon. It is equally true of a life of faith. While its destination may be grand and glorious, the path that leads to that destination can be exceedingly difficult.

Trying circumstances draw us to rely on God. (1:8–10)

The Apostle Paul was no stranger to hardship. Almost from the moment he stopped resisting God and turned to follow Christ, he began to suffer for his newfound faith.

In his second letter to the Corinthians, he describes a life of hardship, beatings, imprisonments, sleepless nights, hunger and more (2 Cor. 6:4–5). Elsewhere in the same letter, he describes sufferings he endured in his ministry that were so intense that he “despaired of life itself” and felt he had “received the sentence of death” (1:8–9).

Showing a kind of faith that can be hard to imagine, Paul actually took courage from these afflictions. He saw them as a kind of spiritual lesson, teaching him to rely not on himself but on the God he served.

Trying circumstances keep us humble before God. (12:6–8)

Paul recognized God's hand in another kind of suffering he endured, this time in the form of some sort of internal affliction.

The exact nature of Paul's affliction has eluded scholars. He describes it as a “thorn in the flesh” and “a messenger of Satan,” but these descriptions are open to considerable interpretation.

Some have proposed that it might have been a matter of bad eyesight (cf. Gal. 4:15; 6:11). Some diseases are also suggested. Regardless, it was clear that the apostle longed to be free of his condition.

He notes that he prayed three times for God to remove it from him but God would not. The visions and revelations Paul had experienced were so great, he worried, that he might grow boastful. Paul saw this thorn in the flesh as God's way of keeping him humble.

God strengthens us by His grace to endure trying circumstances. (9–10)

Paul was clearly a charismatic individual. His rhetorical skills still shine through nearly two millennia after his death, and the many converts he made and churches he founded could easily have led him into a dangerous arrogance.

God used Paul's suffering to teach him that it was God's grace that he needed, not his own great talents. God's power would be better displayed in Paul's weakness than in his spiritual power.

As Paul learned this lesson, he came to see great benefit in his suffering. He was willing to endure insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities because he knew, “When I am weak, then I am strong.” He recognized that it was precisely when he was weak that the power of Christ rested upon him.

“On Him we have set our hope that He will deliver us again.”

2 Corinthians 1:10

'Calling Out the Called'

a response to a dire need

By Michael J. Brooks
The Alabama Baptist

Craig Carlisle believes the congregational landscape is in crisis due to a dearth of pastors to lead churches.

"Thom Rainer is the first I heard who called attention to this in 2011 when he wrote about baby boomer pastors [born 1946–64] retiring," Carlisle told pastors from Birmingham Metro Baptist Association Oct. 30.

"Churches will search longer than expected for new pastors and find it more stressful and more challenging than ever before."

Carlisle has been director of missions for Etowah Baptist Association for the past eight years and currently serves as second vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention.



CARLISLE

Concerning statistics

Carlisle noted that Danny Akin, president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, said the six Southern Baptist Convention seminaries have a combined enrollment of 13,000 students, down from 17,000 five years ago.

"Dr. Akin said that less than 50% of our seminary students plan to seek established pastorates," Carlisle said. "They want to do church plants or work in parachurch organizations. And 25–30% are females who are studying for other ministry roles.

"Many of the current students in seminary aren't there to 'finish' their calling but to 'find' their calling."

Carlisle said one of the major issues is that the work of bivocational ministers has often been overlooked.

"One is no less a minister if he serves a church part-time," Carlisle asserted. "Men

can feel called to law enforcement or teaching or other vocations and feel called to serve as pastors, too. I think we've done a poor job of emphasizing this. Bivocational ministers are overworked, underserved and underappreciated."

The call to missionary service is wonderful, but "we have mission

fields across our counties too," Carlisle added.

"I remember my pastor, Troy Morrison, often giving an invitation to young men considering a career in pastoral ministry," Carlisle recalled. "I think this has almost disappeared, but I encourage pastors to do this today — and also to tell young men that you can have a career and be a pastor. Fifty-five of our churches in EBA have part-time or bivocational ministers."

Feeling burdened by the struggle of many congregations, Carlisle felt prompted to meet with leaders at Samford University, which sparked a larger discussion with leadership of the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions. From these meetings came the first "Calling Out The Called" emphasis Aug. 10.

"I heard from several churches in which young men answered the call to ministry (that day), and I trust there were many more," Carlisle noted. "But it doesn't have to be young men who answer this call. Older men can respond to God's call to be pastors or other ministers in our churches."

Another idea under consideration is to have bivocational "hubs" in each of the 12 districts in Alabama, with something of a residency.

"Men wouldn't have to move to these areas, but they would get training and encouragement from larger churches with more resources."

Carlisle also envisions the posting of a sermon library with outlines bivocational pastors could draw from to write their own material.

Concluding with a familiar Scripture passage, Carlisle told the group, "Paul asked in Romans 10, 'How can they hear without a preacher?' My heart breaks when I think about our need, and I'm compelled to

share my vision with others who will help 'call out the called' to do God's work."

Carlisle completed his second term as president of the Alabama Baptist State Convention at the close of the convention's annual meeting at Whitesburg Baptist Church in Huntsville Nov. 11–12.

Lass

WORDS

BY KEN LASS
The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Team spirit is contagious

I was sitting in the bleachers, watching my 4-year-old grandson play baseball. His team was all boys except for one very sweet, very determined little girl.

As the game unfolded, it was clear she was struggling to keep up. Try as she might, she just couldn't seem to hit the ball. The rest of her team fared much better, scoring plenty of runs and going well ahead of their opponent, even though the little girl was a sure strikeout every time.

That is, until the last inning, her final trip to the plate. She came up with the bases loaded and swung earnestly at the first two pitches, missing both times. Then it happened.

On the third pitch, she gave one last, desperate swing. She seemed almost shocked when she heard the ping of the bat against the ball. She stood in partial disbelief as she watched the ball trickle out toward third base, her coaches and family screaming at her to run!

Overflowing joy

Finally comprehending what just happened, she dropped the bat and ran with every fiber of her strength toward first, narrowly beating a tag by a fleet-footed boy from the other side.

The hit scored a run, adding to her team's dominant victory. When the game concluded, the children gathered around their

coach as he held the game ball up high in the air.

You must understand, when 4-year-olds play a baseball game, the only things they really care about are the post-game snacks and the game ball. After praising his team for their efforts, the coach presented the ball to the little girl. She was stunned. She broke out into a smile wide enough to light up an entire ballpark. Clutching her prize, she gleefully ran over to the backstop screen to show it to her family. Her overflowing joy touched all of us.

Jubilation

In Psalm 21 David writes, "The king rejoices in your strength, Lord. How great is his joy in the victories you give!" That coach knew other players were more deserving of the game ball, but he also understood the joy it would bring that little girl.

We all broke out in loud applause for her. Somehow, we all shared in her jubilation.

That's the thing about true joy. It's contagious.

MEET THE AUTHOR

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