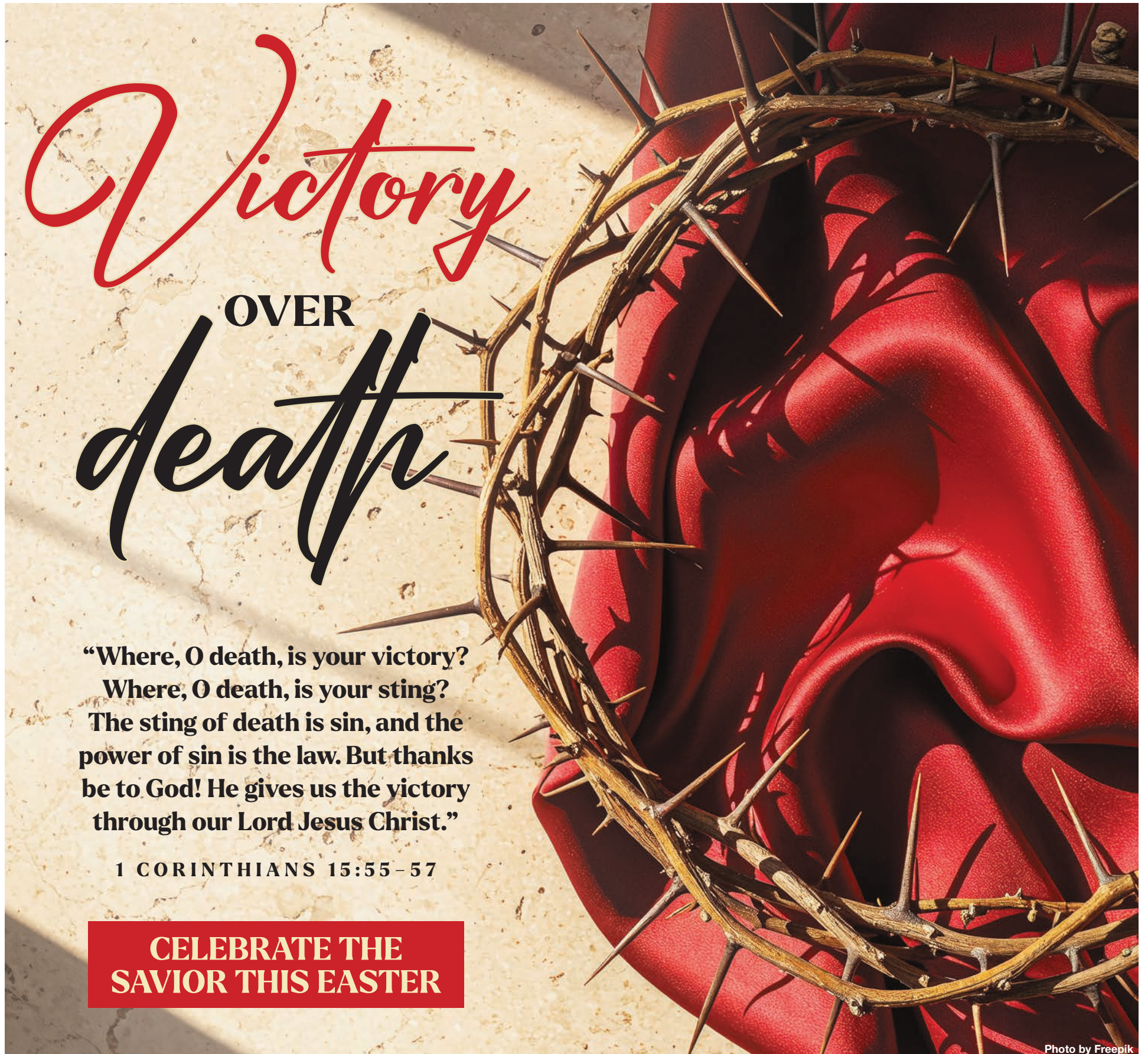


The Alabama Baptist

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

March 19, 2026

Vol. 191, No. 6
Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



**“Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?
The sting of death is sin, and the
power of sin is the law. But thanks
be to God! He gives us the victory
through our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

1 CORINTHIANS 15:55 – 57

**CELEBRATE THE
SAVIOR THIS EASTER**

SPOTLIGHT SPONSOR ...

University of Mobile — For Christ & His Kingdom



‘God is our refuge’

Church group feels God’s presence while under fire in Israel

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Ed Litton says when a missile hit about a block and a half from his group’s hotel in Israel, they could feel the explosion.

But he said they felt something else even more.

“We had the sense of God’s presence in a way that is very rare for any of us, and it stayed that way the whole time we were there,” he said.

Litton, pastor of Redemption Church in Mobile, had arrived in Israel with a group of 30 others from his church and other congregations on Feb. 27, the day before the Iran war started.

They left their hotel the morning of Feb. 28 to start their tour, and five minutes later, the alarms started going off, Litton said.

He said the typical pattern when you visit Israel to see biblical sites is to start at Caesarea Maritima, an ancient port city, but it was closed, so they journeyed on to Mount Carmel, where they visited a chapel.

At that point, they began to see more incoming fire and the response of Israel’s Iron Dome defense system.

“So we went into this little chapel and prayed and sang and had worship and taught,” Litton said. “Our theme was Psalm 46 — verse



Photo by Ed Litton

A group of 31 people from Redemption Church in Mobile and other congregations across the country take shelter and worship in a chapel at Mount Carmel in Israel on Feb. 28 while missile fire happened near them.

one says, ‘God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in times of trouble.’ So that was well chosen.”

About an hour later, a group of believers from the Czech Republic joined them for shelter and started worshipping too.

‘Made a mark’

“It just became one of the most incredible experiences,” Litton said. “It was an unplanned — by us — worship experience that made a mark on everybody in that room.”

In the days that followed, the

group was able to see a few sites, including getting a tour of the city of Jerusalem. They continued to shelter when needed, relying on the wisdom and advice of their tour company.

And eventually they made their way into Egypt, where they saw the Great Pyramids and a few other sites before returning to Alabama.

Litton joked that they had reversed the Exodus.

“I know people at home were terrified when they found out that there were groups over there (when the war started), but we did not have terror,” he said. “We felt as safe there in the midst of missiles and drones as we do at home. There is no safety like the safety of being in the refuge of Jesus.”

Stretching experience

Litton said that was a stretching experience for the group, because it’s easier to experience God’s refuge in a palpable way in a situation like this than at home watching the news.

“It also really gave us a sense of what Israel lives with all the time,” he said. “I really encouraged our people to see the missionary opportunities that we have and to also thank God for our missionaries who every day live under some level of danger and insecurity.”



Photo by Ed Litton

Though they had to use wisdom and occasionally take shelter, the tour group from Redemption Church in Mobile was still able to see sites in Jerusalem before continuing on to Egypt after the conflict in Iran started.

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 — \$19.95

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.

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

The crossword puzzle
can be found on page 11.



Rashional Thoughts

By Jennifer Davis Rash, President and Editor-in-Chief

Email: jrash@thealabamabaptist.org / Social media: @RashionalThts

Sometimes the gospel shines brightest amid chaos and crisis

Reading the urgent prayer requests coming from friends in Lebanon recently, I thought of the preparation for Easter challenge we issued a few weeks ago.

“How would I respond if what I did to another was done to me?” appeared in the Feb. 19 edition. The opinion piece asked if we might all agree to check our hearts and fast from any ugliness we discover related to how we think about or reference other people — no matter who they are or what they’ve done or not done.

The idea presented is to:

1. Humbly and genuinely pray for the Lord to show you where you are not treating others in the way He has modeled for us.

2. Confess those shortcomings to the Lord and ask Him to help you move toward demonstrating His love and grace even when the other person has differing opinions, life circumstances, decision-making skills and an overall understanding of life and the world.

3. Be intentional between now and Easter to check yourself before using subjective labels, especially when they are meant as an attack or negative description of others.

Then, as you sit in church Easter morning worshipping our Lord, remembering His sacrifice and celebrating His resurrection, reflect on your personal walk with the Lord.

What did He show you about Himself? What did He surface for you about you?

How did removing any potential ugliness toward others change you? Were you able to discover that we can still have differing opinions, disagree at the most extreme levels and even not like someone while still choosing to treat each other respectfully and with grace?

We can still work to protect the values we prefer, help educate those who don’t understand and engage the community in powerful and effective ways. And we can do it all with courage, confidence and charisma.

Privileged opportunities

Reading about courage, confidence and charisma exhibited by believers in the Middle East, I’d like to expand the Easter challenge to include a moment of gratitude for all that we as individuals and communities of believers get to experience for the sake of the gospel.

We have the opportunity every day to make a difference, and sometimes those moments are more intense than others.

Our friends at Thimar, which means “fruits” in Arabic, work to strengthen communities and churches in Lebanon and throughout the Middle East by helping believers proclaim and live out the gospel.

Part of their work includes informing those outside the region about what is happening in the Middle East. For instance, information shared in early March noted the more than 500,000 displaced people in Lebanon.

Reports indicate churches are among the main groups showing up, opening their doors, distributing emergency supplies and demonstrating the love of Christ to families in crisis.

Churches are transforming their campuses into temporary housing for those who are forced to leave their homes. The congregations and others also are providing mattresses, blankets, food boxes and hygiene kits.

Think about your church building and property for a minute. Would your congregation be willing to allow a bit of chaos and potential damage to the building to house a flow of people not from the area?

Would the vote be an easy one if the pastor asked for the contingency funds to be used up to help provide mattresses and other temporary items needed?

Rosette Mansour, who works with a group helping raise awareness for Thimar, said, “This is how the gospel advances — not through words alone, but through the church meeting people’s immediate needs with both truth and compassion.”

Running to help

Leaders of Arab Baptist Theological Seminary also are finding ways to provide shelters on campus and assist churches throughout the region.

Similar stories of churches and the seminary running toward the crisis rather than away from it continue to surface from Ukraine.

What about the crises happening in our communities? Are we running toward them or choosing to hide from them?

For the latest news out of Lebanon, visit thimar.org/war-response-updates.

Your Voice



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

Letters to the Editor

I really enjoyed reading Denise George's article on loneliness published online at thealabamabaptist.org. I particularly liked the advice she offers to lonely people and what they can do to overcome their loneliness. It's a very practical article.

Wolf Bernhardt
South Africa

Thank you for the article you published recently by Mark MacDonald on "Many churches will waste Easter opportunity. Here's why."

It was a great thought-provoking article. As I prayed about it and gave it more thought, I decided to do more research on the topic.

(Working with A.I.), here is what

I asked and what was produced:

"Many churches this Easter will have messages that do not really address the core issues of what people are going through in everyday life. Give me 20 examples of statements ... using the following sentence as a guide. 'This Easter discover blank (where blank describes things that truly express what people are going through in everyday life).'"

Some of the results include hope, rest, healing, strength, peace, purpose, etc.

From there a message can be crafted, such as "This Easter discover strength when you're tired of being strong."

And even a possible digital campaign for the nonchurchgoers:

"This Easter, discover grace before you 'fix' yourself ... where your questions are welcome and your past isn't disqualifying."

Randy Rogan
Gulf Shores

Once again, Ken Lass is somewhat of a laser surgeon in his ability to shed spiritual light on an earthly event. In the March 5 edition of The Alabama Baptist, he pitches transformative Christian insights into the midst of our turbulent times to help pave the way along life's tumultuous terrain. Concise — he is; Confusing — he is not. Christ-centered — as always.

Morris Murray Jr.
Jasper

Change must begin with the parent. In Deuteronomy 6:6, God tells parents, "... these words that I command you today shall be on your heart." Our children need to see in our own lives daily what we want to see in theirs."

Martha Peace
"Faithful Parent: A Biblical Guide to Raising a Family"

Repentance is a change of mind and heart that leads to a change in direction. It is when you do an about face and begin to march forward. It is a 180-degree turn. Lamentations 3:40-41 reads, "Let us search out and examine our ways and turn back to the Lord; Let us lift our hearts and hands to God in heaven." Aren't you grateful God allows U-turns?

Franklin L. Kirksey
Robertsdale

"Those who are there because they want to be will have an advantage over those who are there for a paycheck."

Tony Dungy
Retired NFL coach

"Your competition is not the church down the street. It is anything pulling kids away from Jesus."

Ryan Frank
@ryanfrank75 on Instagram

Why offer "precious gift" of being heard?

Sometimes I just need to vent; don't you? Thankfully, venting can become more than voicing a complaint. Writers of the Psalms were not afraid to complain bitterly to a God who sometimes seemed distant, even absent. In their wisdom, they conceived of a God who welcomed every heart-felt, honest, even angry lament as a form of prayer.

When life turns bleak and hope wanes, when pain or loss overwhelms, God offers us the priceless gift of being heard. When we are hurting, to be heard opens a

space for healing. When faith falters or doubt disables, the God of boundless compassion hears us.

The promise of Scripture is that seeds embedded in lament can sprout into hope and healing. The poet of Psalm 30 wrote from lived experience. Lament did not negate pain, dispel fear or resolve doubt. But neither did it evoke despair. In love, God transformed "wild lament into whirling dance" (The Message). Joy evoked praise and gratitude.

Communication requires listening. Theologically, listening is also

a social and ethical act. Hearing God, being heard by God, hearing another person and being heard by another person require a relationship. Out of our relationship with God comes the assurance that God is not just present, but leaning in to listen in love, even when words fail us.

And out of that assurance, may we too offer others the precious gift of being heard.

David Wilkinson
retired Baptist journalist
Baptist Center for Ethics
on Facebook

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“The place God calls you to is where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”

FREDERICK BUECHNER
author and theologian

Plug into your power source. Life can feel chaotic, but a consistent, personal relationship with Jesus changes everything. He’s the ultimate source of peace, purpose and strength — the one constant you can count on when everything else feels certain.

Find your people. You were never meant to do this alone. Healthy community isn’t just about Sunday mornings; it’s about finding people who get it, pray for you and remind you who you are when you forget. They’re your real-life support system for every high and low.

Michelle Horton Gall
@mhgcounseling on Instagram

“Every day, we hear air raid sirens,” Valerii Antoniuk, president of the Ukrainian Baptist Union, said. “Pain, cold and death have become daily realities. Yet, we live in a country where God continues to reveal His mercy and His power. Contrary to political forecasts, contrary to the enemy’s bloody ambitions, Ukraine has not been broken. The church has

not fallen silent, has not stopped, and we have not surrendered.”

When storms come, what keeps you standing?

The olive tree can withstand fires, floods and drought and still produce fruit. How? Its roots run deep. The same is true for us when we’re rooted in God’s Word.

Romans 8:28 reminds us: “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.”

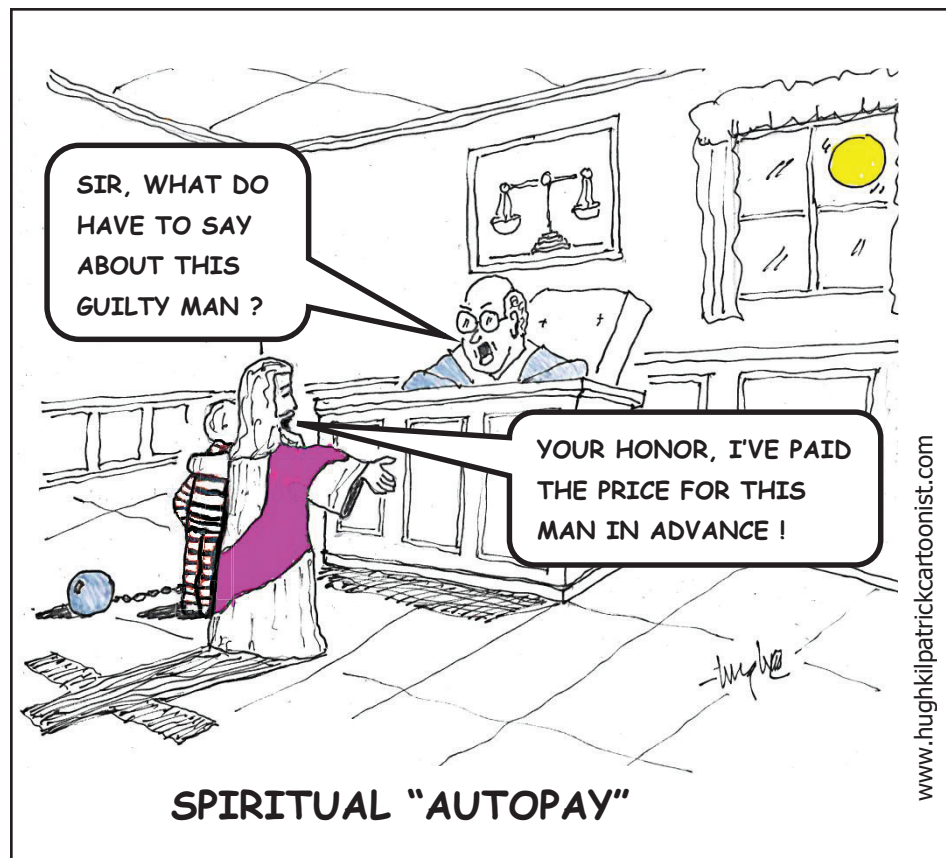
Build a faith that flourishes.
Christine Caine
@christinecaine on Instagram

“It’s hard to get in spiritual shape when you only workout on Sundays.”

Noah Herrin
@NoahHerrin on Instagram

“We may ignore, but we can nowhere evade the presence of God. The world is crowded with Him.”

C.S. Lewis



Lass WORDS

BY KEN LASS
The Alabama Baptist



DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Grandparenting, faith and bowling

We were in charge of entertaining our 7-year-old grandson for the day. It was cold and rainy outside, not fit for outdoor activities, and he was getting to the age where he was bored with the toys in our house, most of which were designed for younger children.

We didn’t want to just park him in front of a TV or iPad — he gets enough screen time elsewhere. Besides, we wanted to interact with him, use this precious time to do something together.

I came up with the idea of going bowling. He had never done that before — he didn’t even know what bowling was. We explained it to him, and he seemed excited.

When we arrived, he was in awe of how far down the lane the pins were standing. He figured he’d never be able to roll a ball, which he could hardly lift, all the way down that long journey and knock down any pins. But we asked for the bumpers to go up in the gutters to at least give him a chance.

Slow start

For the next hour he struggled to pick up the ball, approach and set it in motion.

The ball would ooze down the lane, barely moving, drift to the side and take out maybe one or

two pins. After numerous tries, I was concerned he would get frustrated and discouraged and want to quit.

To my surprise, the opposite was true. Every time he knocked something down — anything — he would jump and squeal with delight. He would proudly point up to the electronic scorekeeper when it flashed his result. “Look Grampa, I got two!” he would exclaim. He had so much fun and couldn’t wait to come back again.

Lessons learned

It occurred to me that I want to go through life like that: Expecting little and being filled with joy at whatever blessings God provides. In Paul’s letter to the Philippians he writes: “And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus” (v. 19).

It took a 7-year-old to model that for me.

MEET THE AUTHOR

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

Alabama news

OBITUARIES

DOUGLAS HAYNES

Douglas Haynes, a longtime bivocational pastor, died Feb. 2. He was 82.

A native of Mobile, Haynes spent most of his life in Randolph County. He attended Howard College (now Samford University).



HAYNES

He served as a bivocational pastor for years in Randolph, Cleburne and Clay counties as he worked a career with the U.S. Postal Service. He also served as an interim and supply pastor for years after his retirement. The churches he served included Chulafinnee Baptist and Pine Grove Baptist, both in Heflin; Delta Baptist and Mount Moriah Baptist, both in Delta; and Ethelsville Baptist.

Haynes is survived by his wife of 54 years, Colley; daughter, Donna; son, Daniel; three grandchildren; and one great-grandchild.

ERNEST TUCKER

Ernest Tucker Jr., a retired Alabama Baptist pastor, died Feb. 26. He was 80.

Tucker, who earned a master's degree in English and religion at Mobile College (now the University of Mobile), had a career as a schoolteacher but also felt the call to preach. Over the years, he served as pastor of Pleasant Hill Baptist, Millry, and Howardtown Baptist Church, Tibbie.

Tucker is preceded in death by his wife of 60 years, Pat, and daughter, Lisa. He is survived by his children, Leslie, Ashlie and Christopher; four grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren.



TUCKER

AUTAUGA ASSOCIATION

► **Mel Johnson**, who served as lead mission strategist of **Autauga Baptist Association** for almost 10 years, retired March 13. He previously served six years as a state missionary with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions in the office of global missions as Alabama Baptist Disaster Relief lead strategist. Johnson also served as pastor of First Baptist Church Geraldine and Ivalee Baptist



JOHNSON

Church, Attalla. He and his wife, Gwen, are members of FBC Prattville, where he serves as deacon chair.

► **Caden Lockett** is the new student pastor for **First Baptist Church Prattville**. He was ordained into the ministry at FBC Montgomery where he also met his fiancé, Layton Warren. Justin Hall is senior pastor.



Facebook photo

CALHOUN ASSOCIATION



HORNBUCKLE

► **Larry Hornbuckle** is the new associate pastor of family ministries for **Oak Bowery Baptist Church, Ohatchee**. He had been serving as the church's interim children's minister. Sam Fordham is pastor.

CLARKE ASSOCIATION

► **Nancy Gill** recently celebrated her 20th anniversary as ministry assistant for **Clarke Baptist Association**. She was honored with Krispy Kreme donuts and gift cards, plus embroidered Clarke Baptist Association dress shirts. Mark Presswood is the associational missionary.



Photo by Doug Rogers

ESCAMBIA ASSOCIATION



CLOWER

► **Chase Clower** is the new pastor of **First Baptist Church Brewton**. He previously served as pastor of Hillabee Baptist Church, Alexander City. Clower also served as associate pastor of FBC several years ago. He and his wife, Sarah, have two sons.

ETOWAH ASSOCIATION

► **Randy Gunter** recently celebrated 25 years as pastor of **MeadowBrook Baptist Church, Gadsden**, with a reception honoring Gunter and his wife, Kay, following the morning worship service. Under his leadership, MeadowBrook has expanded its evangelism work internationally, and the church conducts 10 to 12 trips a year. The Gunters have three sons and three grandchildren.



GUNTER

FRANKLIN ASSOCIATION

► **Tharptown Baptist Church, Russellville**,

celebrated its 150th anniversary March 1. The church was honored with two presentations made by Alabama State Rep. Jamie Kiel, who is also a church member, and Jimmy Austin (left), with the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission. Pastor Chip Martin (right) accepted the framed resolution and plaque on behalf of the congregation.



Photo by George Crummie

GENEVA ASSOCIATION

► **Eden Baptist Church, Coffee Springs**, recently celebrated a transition of leadership from father to son. **Dennis Schank** retired as pastor of Eden, having served there for five years. During his 60 years of ministry, he also served churches in Mississippi, Louisiana and



Photo courtesy of Tim Bedsole

Florida. He and his wife, Linda, have one son, **Jadon Schank**, who is the new pastor of Eden Baptist. He is a graduate of Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia. He is a retired chaplain assistant from the Alabama National Guard and currently serves as a hospice chaplain. Pictured are (l to r) Jadon, Linda and Dennis Schank.

LOOKOUT BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

► **New Bethel Baptist Church, Collinsville**, will host the annual Hubert Cox Memorial Shape-Note Singing School, March 23–27, 6 p.m. daily. All materials are provided. Music directors, choir members and music lovers are invited to attend this free event. DeWitt Cox is associational music director. Jesse Parker is pastor.

PINE BARREN ASSOCIATION

► **Christian Way Baptist Church, Camden**, celebrated its 25th anniversary Feb. 8. A prayer of thanksgiving was given by deacon James Finklea, and Jacqueline Winn shared highlights of the church's history. Ernestine Shannon led in a special anniversary song of worship, and church musician T. Dukes accompanied. The church was honored with a presentation from Jim Lambert, a commissioner of the Alabama Baptist Historical Commission, who presented a plaque with pastor Charles Autery accepting on behalf of the congregation. Dinner was served following the service.



Photo by Xavier Moye

Preparing for Easter

Plan gospel-centered events to make visitors feel welcome, loved

By Julie Donovan

The Alabama Baptist

The bustle of the Easter season is upon us.

Pastors and ministerial staff have been planning for months to make sure the church is ready for the big Easter service. This means the annual egg hunt is approaching as well.

Your egg hunt might include some inflatables or rides or maybe a petting zoo — I know we have these types of attractions at our egg hunt as well.

We want to make the egg hunt fun and bring new friends on our church campus. Along with the attractive commodities, we do not need to neglect the gospel.

Here are five simple ways to incorporate the gospel into your egg hunt.

1. Share a clear gospel message with the families.

After the egg hunt or after you

eat, make sure you open your Bible and clearly tell the families why you celebrate Easter. Walk through the story of Calvary, the death and the celebration of Jesus' Resurrection.

Resurrection eggs

For example, use six eggs from the Resurrection eggs to share the good news of Jesus Christ. The egg hunt might get them there, but hopefully this gospel time will help them begin a relationship with Jesus or at least open up questions.

2. Open a prayer table.

Designate a station/table to allow parents and children to bring their prayer requests to the Lord. Train volunteers to discuss what prayer is and how to pray with young children and their parents. Families can write their prayer request on a piece of paper and place it in a box for someone to pray over at a later date. Their prayer request can be



Photo by Lauren C. Grim/The Alabama Baptist

anonymous or have their names on it.

3. Make a gospel craft.

Prepare an easy craft for kids to complete at the egg hunt. The craft can be a bracelet that says Jesus on

it or a stained-glass paper suncatcher with a cross. Choose something easy that allows volunteers to talk about Jesus while the child is making the craft. Pray that this simple item will remind them later what it means to be a Christian.

4. Promote VBS.

Have a booth to promote Vacation Bible School through a game and/or a craft. Offer a fun treat if families register early.

5. Walk as missionaries.

Equip certain volunteers to make a connection with new guests. Encourage these volunteers to make friends with one or two people at the egg hunt and invite them to church. Sometimes people will come to church if a new friend invites them rather than a pastor or a minister.

Ask yourself why you are having this egg hunt. If it is just to gather eggs, then maybe something needs to be reevaluated.

2 reasons your church might be wasting its Easter opportunity

By Mark MacDonald

The Alabama Baptist

Just before Easter, the pressure starts to build. Extra services get added. Easter and church graphics are refreshed. Social media calendars fill up. Volunteers are recruited. None of that is wrong. In fact, it shows how deeply you care!

But here's the uncomfortable truth: activity is not the same as clarity. When churches confuse motion with meaning, Easter gets busy without becoming powerful.

Easter is the one Sunday your community is already open to a spiritual conversation. Curiosity is higher. Resistance is lower. People are more willing to say yes to an invitation. But openness alone does not create impact. Being known for clarity does.

Here's where it often breaks down:

1. You're promoting an Easter event instead of explaining a promise.

"Join us at 9 or 11!" is information. It's not inspiration. Unchurched people are not looking for a church service. They're wrestling with real life. Is there hope for my family? Can I start over? Does God care about my mess?

If your Easter communication doesn't connect the Resurrection to everyday pain, you're offering a schedule instead of offering hope.

Next step: Rewrite your Easter headline to answer a real-life question. Make the transformation obvious, not assumed.

2. You're designing for insiders.

First-time guests aren't grading excellence. They're

scanning for safety and clarity. Where do I go? What do I wear? What happens to my kids?

If those answers aren't simple online and obvious on campus, anxiety rises. Anxious guests rarely return.

Next step: Walk through your website and campus as if you haven't attended in years (or have an outsider to do this for you). Fix any confusion immediately.

Easter doesn't need to be bigger. It needs to be clearer. If you feel too close to it to see what's confusing, that's normal. Sometimes an outside perspective helps.

You still have a few weeks. That's enough time to clarify the message, remove friction and make sure your church is known for something that truly changes lives. Happy (almost) Easter!

Available on Amazon

GETHSEMANE TO GOLGOTHA
40 BIBLE STUDY DEVOTIONALS ABOUT JESUS' LAST DAY

BOBBY S. (BOB) TERRY

As we head into Easter season, there's no better time to walk through Jesus' last day before His crucifixion and resurrection.

Check out my devotional "Gethsemane to Golgotha."
— Bob Terry

New Easter devotional released by TAB Media

As Easter nears, Denise George is focusing on helping people reflect and remember Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, celebrate His victory and rejoice in the hope His Resurrection brings.

"Easter is not about a single day," said George, author of "Preparing our Hearts for Easter: Daily Devotions for Individual, Family & Group Study," released by TAB Media Group.

"It's a spiritual journey that includes reflection, repentance, gratitude and renewed faith. I believe this daily devotional helps believers enter that journey more intentionally."

George shared her thoughts on the newly released book with The Alabama Baptist.

Q: What drew you to writing this devotional, and why do you believe it will be helpful to fellow believers?

Denise George: "I was drawn to this project because I've long believed that the weeks leading up to Easter are some of the most spiritually significant days of the Christian year. Sometimes, however, they are often the most hurried."

"We prepare our homes, our church programs, our music and our schedules, but we don't always intentionally prepare our hearts."

Walking thoughtfully

"'Preparing Our Hearts for Easter' was born out of a desire to help readers slow down and walk thoughtfully with Jesus through the events that led to the cross and the empty tomb."

Q: What opportunities do Christians often miss out on during the weeks leading up to Easter that this project tackles?

Denise George: "Christians can miss the opportunity to sit quietly with the full weight of what Christ endured — His wilderness testing, His teachings, His prophecy of suffering, His flogging, Crucifixion, burial and ultimately His Resurrection. We celebrate the victory of

Easter, but we can sometimes rush past the preparation.

"This devotional intentionally slows the reader down. It invites them to reflect on Scripture, ask meaningful questions and pray with purpose."

Perfect for families

It also includes devotions for children ages 4–8, which opens the door for families to talk about deep theological truths in age-appropriate ways. This devotional guide can be used by individuals in private quiet time, by families around the table, by small groups or by churches.



GEORGE

Q: If there is one key take away from reading this devotional book, what would that be?

Denise George: "If there is one key takeaway, it is this: Christ's death and resurrection were not only distant historical moments. They were personal acts of love."

"The devotional repeatedly brings readers back to the reality that Jesus suffered, died and rose again for us. Because of Him we are offered forgiveness, eternal life and peace with God."

"My prayer is that readers will finish the book with a deeper gratitude for the cross and a stronger, more personal faith in the risen Christ."

Q: Anything else about the book you'd like to share?

Denise George: "Understanding the historical and cultural context of Jesus' death and burial deepens our appreciation for the Resurrection. Several devotions explore first-century practices and historical details that can strengthen confidence in the reality of Christ's physical death and bodily resurrection."

"My prayer is that 'Preparing Our Hearts for Easter' will bring the reader stillness, deep reflection and prayer and a personal worship experience."

"Preparing our Hearts for Easter" is available on Amazon. (Shawn Hendricks)

Easter devotional

By Denise George

AVAILABLE
ON
AMAZON



SCAN ME

Perfect for:

- Personal quiet time
- Family worship
- Bible studies
- Sunday School and children's groups
- Women's ministry gatherings
- New believers and seasoned believers alike



Published by **TAB**
MEDIA GROUP

Books to help readers reflect on Resurrection

“Everyday Gospel Easter Devotional”

By Paul David Tripp

Crossway Publishing, 2026

The message of the gospel is in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, but it also runs throughout the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

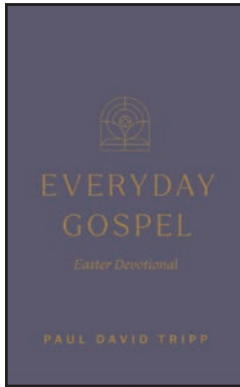
In “Everyday Gospel Easter Devotional,”

Paul David Tripp adapts 30 entries

from his 365-day devo-

tional, “Everyday Gospel,”

to highlight Jesus’ death and resurrection.



“Over thousands of years, God recorded and preserved this amazing story for us because He loves us. He wants us to know that this

story is our story, and in knowing, He wants us to be left in awe and wonder, brought to our knees in adoration and worship, causing us to live lives of gratitude, love and surrender,” Tripp writes in the introduction to this

unique Easter devotional.

Each chapter includes a reference to a passage of Scripture, a key thought, a

two-page devotion, questions for reflection and a prayer.

The devotions include personal accounts, thought-provoking issues and interpretations of Scripture that all relate to the big picture of the gospel. “Everyday Gospel Easter Devotional” can be for personal use or for families or small groups. Find it at Crossway.org or wherever books are sold.

“Easter Matters: How the Resurrection of Jesus Changes You”

By Anna Nash and Katy Shelton

Iron Stream Media, 2022

Based in the Gospel of John, “Easter Matters” is a devotional that reminds readers “of the security and freedom found when we see ourselves as God sees us.” It is an exploration of how Jesus related to those around Him, which leads to how He relates to present-day followers.

In “Easter Matters,” each topic is covered over two days in a Part 1 and Part 2 format, allowing readers to choose a 40-day or 20-day reading plan. Part 1 relates directly to a chapter in John. Part 2 includes a related guide for application to everyday life.

They alternate days — for example, Day 1 is Part

1, Day 2 is Part 2, Day 3 is Part 1, etc.

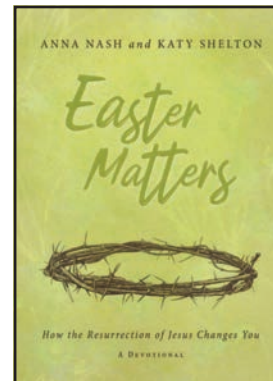
Each 2-day set is based on one chapter from the book of John, with a key verse noted in each Part 1. Part 2 uses the same chapter but has a “Process” section with questions to ponder and a “Prayer” section.

Both have related “Promises.”

“[We] have a real passion that people not be just inspired and encouraged but that they know what it looks like in their own life,

practically speaking,” Nash said.

She added that the book includes prompts for prayer, Scripture reading and journaling.



“What we ended up doing is expanding [those elements] and making it meatier and richer with more opportunities to personally apply each chapter on the second day,” Nash said.

“Easter Matters” can be found at AnnaNash.net, KatyShelton.com and Amazon.

“That Holy Week So Long Ago”

By Matthew Boswell, Illustrated by Helena Perez Garcia

Crossway Publishing, 2026

Though “That Holy Week So Long Ago” is a children’s book, its

content is for any age.

With beautiful illustrations and rhyming text, Boswell and Garcia lead the reader through the events before and including Christ’s death and resurrection — Palm Sunday, Holy Monday, Holy Tuesday, Spy Wednesday, Maundy

Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Resurrection Sunday.

“The events of Holy Week are more than moments in a story. They show

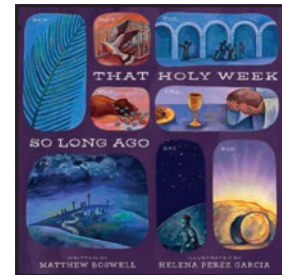
the extraordinary lengths God went to in order to save us from our sin and to display His glory. This true story announces truly good news!” Boswell said in his “Invitation of Holy Week” at the beginning of the book.

“As you read about Holy Week, I hope you see the glory and grace of King Jesus as never before. The one who gave His life invites you into a life of repenting of your sin and believing in Him as your Savior. Even today, a holy Savior still creates a holy people through the events of that Holy Week so long ago,” Boswell said.

Also included is a section with a summary of the biblical significance of each day as well as a “Note to Parents.”

“As a father whose children are quickly stretching into adulthood, I wrote this book with them in mind. I wanted them to understand, even in their teenage years, the unshakable tenets of our faith — truths that have shaped our family and, I pray, will continue to shape each of them throughout their lives,” Boswell said.

“That Holy Week So Long Ago” can be found at crossway.org or wherever books are sold. (Tracy Riggs Frontz)



SOARING WITH FAITH

A respected consultant, futurist, and conflict-mediation expert, George has devoted his life to helping Christian leaders and their churches embrace faithful, strategic and effective ministry.

Find this first-in-a-series book from ForthTelling Innovation through Amazon.

Published by TAB Media Group in conjunction with Iron Stream Media

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!





UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Time of encouragement and music for senior adults

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

ENCOURAGE is a worship service designed to encourage senior adults in evangelism and Christian living. You’ll be revived in spirit and motivated to continue serving in God’s purpose for your life.

ENCOURAGE will be held May 4 from 9:30 a.m. to 12 p.m. at First Baptist Church Prattville.

Speakers will be:

- ▶ Edwin Jenkins, retired pastor and state missionary
- ▶ Jim Henry, pastor emeritus of First Baptist Church Orlando, Florida.

Worship will be led by Greater Vision and gospel pianist Frank Jones.

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

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





Photo by Doug Rogers/SBOM

Basic Legal Issues conference

Basic Legal Issues for Churches, a conference set for May 21, can provide your church staff with helpful information about legal challenges that come up in churches today.

This conference will cover the top 10 legal issues facing the church and provide guidance in the proper operation of the church.

Topics include the lawsuit revolution, sexual misconduct, employment practices, church organization and operation, incorporation, labor law, risk management, tax law and more.

The conference will be held at the SBOM on May 21, 9 a.m.–12 p.m.

To register, visit alsbom.org/events.

Upcoming Intentional Leader Series to focus on Pastor aspect

The next Intentional Leader Series, set for April 21, will focus on the Pastor aspect of the four Ps of leadership: Person, Pastor, Preacher and Pathfinder.

This chapter in this ongoing series will be led by Dale Huff, retired state missionary and pastor. Topics will include wisdom in caring for the flock, counsel for difficult times and people and maintaining your joy in service.

Cost is \$10, which includes lunch. Register at alsbom.org/ils.

WORD search

- | | |
|-------------|------------|
| AARON | HARDENED |
| ASHES | ISRAELITES |
| BLOOD | JUDGMENT |
| BOILS | LIVESTOCK |
| CATTLE | LOCUSTS |
| COMMAND | MAGICIANS |
| DARKNESS | MIRACLE |
| DEATH | MOSES |
| DELIVERANCE | NILE |
| DUST | OBEY |
| EGYPT | PHARAOH |
| FLIES | PLAGUES |
| FROGS | RELEASE |
| GNATS | RIVER |
| GOSHEN | SERPENT |
| HAIL | STAFF |

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

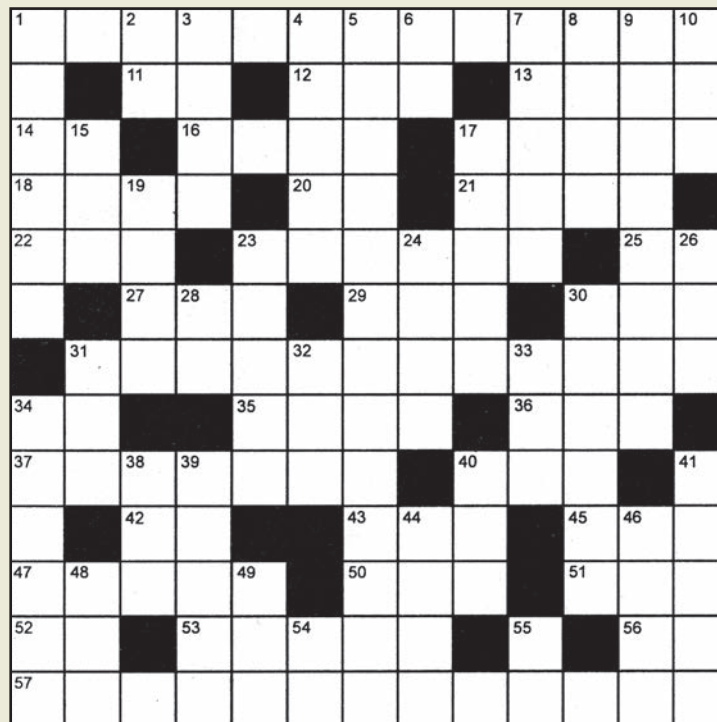
Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go in to Pharaoh and tell him, ‘Thus says the Lord God of the Hebrews: “Let My people go, that they may serve Me.”’

EXODUS 9:1

CHRISTIAN Crossword

ACROSS

1. Special worship event. (1 Cor. 10:21; three words)
11. Number of Arabian nights. (Roman numerals)
12. Whether therefore ye ___ or drink. (1 Cor. 10:31)
13. To gorge with water or delete of money.
14. Therefore.
16. Nervous.
17. The Lord make His face ___ upon thee. (Num. 6:25)
18. Condition of Jesus' steed in Mark 11:2.
20. ___ the hart panteth after the water brooks. (Ps. 42:1)
21. Animal hide.
22. Shade tree.
23. Inclined territory.
25. Speaker's interjection of hesitation.
27. Mischievous one.
29. What 41 down is to God and man.
30. What shall be done in the ___? (Luke 23:31)
31. Elements used in 57 across. (3 words)
34. That is. (Latin abbr.)
35. ___ red slippers.
36. Rebuker of Balaam (Num. 22:28)
37. A bishop must be ... no ___. (Titus 1:7)
40. A portion of a circle.
42. This comprises most of the Bible. (abbr.)
43. A bishop ... must be ... ___ to teach. (1 Tim. 3:2)
45. Said by many to be an ex-Christian nation. (abbr.)
47. Children of the mind.
50. Gloves' companion.
51. ___ thou at my right hand. (Ps. 110:1)
52. Symbol for a



By Keith Graham Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

- precious metal.
53. Lawful.
56. Usually follows "tra" in tandem.
57. Another name for 1 across. (2 words)
- ## DOWN
1. When the ruler of the feast had ___ the water (John 2:9)
 2. Printer's measure.
 3. What 41 down did in Eden.
 4. Kingly.
 5. Famine that was in the ___. (Gen. 26:1; 3 words)
 6. A thoroughfare of a holy one. (abbr.)
 7. They were to be poured out without the camp. (Lev. 4:12)
 8. Leviathan makes the deep do this. (Job 41:31)
 9. Judas' mob came with these to arrest Jesus. (John 18:3)
 10. ___ out a living.
 15. See thou hurt not the ___ and wine. (Rev. 6:6)
 17. Rate of travel.
 19. An Arabian ruler.

23. Man is born unto trouble, as the ___s flies upward. (Job 5:7)
24. Youthful equestrian's steed.
26. A grain.
28. Myself.
30. Track and field projectile.
31. Wager.
32. In ___ season we shall reap. (Gal. 6:9)
33. Neither shall they learn ___ any more. (Isa. 2:4)
34. He saw the Lord, sitting up on a throne, high and lifted up. (Isa. 6:1)
38. Fish eggs.
39. The "boot" country.
40. Modern communications giant.
41. The adversary.
44. Deborah's kind of tree. (Judg. 4:5)
46. Farm structure.
48. The Dynamic ___.
49. Describes some wines.
54. ___ ye therefore. (Matt. 28:19)
55. Atop.

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.



UPCOMING EVENTS
sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Mom-daughter overnight camp

If you're a mom with a daughter who's in kindergarten through sixth grade, you need to be at Mom & Me Spring Fling!

Spring Fling — set for April 10–11 at WorldSong Missions Place — is an exciting weekend for mothers and daughters. The action-packed overnight camp will be filled with fun and adventure and will strengthen your desire to be a part of God's mission in the world. It will also provide meaningful, memorable one-on-one time for you and your daughter.

The registration deadline is April 2, so sign up soon!

At Spring Fling, you'll enjoy traditional camp activities, Bible study and crafts, along with a special time

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



of worship and community around a campfire. You'll also hear from our missionary speakers and learn ways you can live on mission daily.

For more information, visit worldsongretreat.org/springfling.

Pray for student missionaries

March is a busy month for college students in Alabama's Baptist Campus Ministries, as many are using their spring breaks to share the gospel across our state, nation and world.

Already this month, teams have traveled to Baltimore, Atlanta, Guatemala and other locations. Five more teams are participating in Beach Reach events across the Gulf Coast the last two weeks of March.

Please pray for the gospel seeds that have already been planted and the efforts still to come, that many will come to know Christ through these student missionaries.

Also, many students are preparing now to be on mission this summer. If you would like to partner with these students in prayer, please scan the QR code to receive updates and guided prayer points as they serve.

To receive updates and guided prayer points for our summer missionaries, scan the code below.



'JESUS IS GOING TO USE YOU'

Evangelism, need for prayer, revival emphasized at 2026 E3 conference

By Dianna L. Cagle
The Alabama Baptist

As Alabama Baptist leaders gathered March 1–2 in Montgomery, each speaker shared the importance of evangelism.

"We're all commanded to do the work of an evangelist," said David Burton of David Burton Ministries.

Burton was joined by Mark Johnson, president of Louisiana Christian University, to lead the main sessions at "E3: Evangelize, Establish, Equip," the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions evangelism conference held at Heritage Baptist Church in Montgomery.

Just sharing "Has God told you today that He loves you?" can be a witness to someone in need of encour-

agement, Burton said.

"Jesus is going to use you until the day you die," Burton said. "Be aggressive. Be unapologetic."

Every believer has the power of the Holy Spirit to help them in sharing Christ with others, Burton noted.

Many times, believers tend to overcomplicate the gospel, Johnson said.

'Start blazing'

"Stop gazing and start blazing," he said. "The risen Christ has commanded us to go, and someone's eternity may hinge on our obedience."

Other highlights included six breakout sessions on Monday morning, a lunch program with Sam Rainer, who leads Church Answers and serves as a pastor in



Photo by Dianna L. Cagle/The Alabama Baptist

David Burton leads the main session March 2 at the E3 conference at Heritage Baptist Church in Montgomery. To see a gallery of photos, visit tabonline.org/E3-2026.

Florida, and a bonus afternoon session with Scott Wilkins of R.E.A.C.H. Evangelistic Strategies. Parker Webb, who hails from North Carolina, led the

music for the main sessions Sunday and Monday.

"All church health is downstream from evangelism," Rainer said, indicating that evangelism is the blood

stream. Without it, the organs of the church begin to fail.

"I think God is just waiting to bless you and your church."

Planning ahead

Jacky Connell, pastor of Eden Westside Baptist Church in Pell City, shared about Celebration 250 Alabama, an evangelistic effort tied into the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States. He emphasized the need to pray, prepare and proclaim as the targeted dates approach.

Leaders aim for Sept. 30 to be a large prayer push leading into revival gatherings that are being planned Oct. 1. More information can be found at celebration-250AL.org.

Rainer encourages neighborly focus on 'welcome and relationship'

By Michael J. Brooks
The Alabama Baptist

Evangeliism is "the headwaters of everything," according to pastor and ministry leader Sam Rainer. "All church health flows downstream from evangelism."

Rainer, pastor of West Bradenton Baptist Church, Bradenton, Florida for the past 10 years and president of Church Answers, led a breakout session at the Alabama Baptist State Evangelism Conference, at Heritage Baptist Church Montgomery on March 2.

Rainer described West Bradenton as a "neighborhood church."

"In the South we sometimes talk about having churches on every street corner," he acknowledged. "And I say, 'What's wrong with that?' This is gospel real estate, and God has called every church to bless its community. You are where you are for a reason."



Photo by Dianna L. Cagle/The Alabama Baptist
Sam Rainer leads "Evangelism and the Neighborhood Church: Primed for a Breakout," a small group session offered at the E3 conference.

Rainer's 2023 book, "The Surprising Return of the Neighborhood Church," suggests megachurches are a Baby Boomer phenomenon, citing research that suggests their number is declining.

"There's nothing wrong with being a megachurch, of course, but

we have some 400,000 churches in America. Each of these is called to bless their communities."

Rainer said the neighborhood church has a major advantage in addition to strategic location: "the power of hospitality."

Overlooked spiritual gift

"The neighborhood church offers welcome and relationship," he said. "The smaller the venue the greater expectation of hospitality, which is one of the most overlooked spiritual gifts today."

The neighborhood church generally has financial sustainability based on good stewardship, he added. And it can provide "high impact targeted ministry."

"You have a school or two in your community and you can minister in some way. For example, we adopted one school in our area, and we stock the break room for the faculty. You can believe our church has a good

reputation among them when we walk in every week with grocery bags!"

As church membership decreases, neighborhood churches also can sustain bivocational or covocational ministry, he said.

"We must raise new leaders who may choose to keep a footprint in the business world for income and witness, but feel called to serve their churches too."

Finally, Rainer suggested millennials especially are less mobile than previous generations.

"People will generally drive no more than 12 minutes to a place of worship. ... People are staying in their neighborhoods."

For more information about Sam Rainer, visit churchanswers.com.

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.

CHURCH POSITIONS

SENIOR PASTOR

Cypress Shores Baptist Church in Mobile, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking a full-time senior pastor. Please email resumé to: cypress9631@comcast.net or mail to: 4327 Higgins Rd., Mobile, AL 36619.

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: cbcnlpastorsearch@gmail.com.

PASTOR

Pleasant Grove Baptist Church located in Hixson, Tennessee (outside Chattanooga), is prayerfully seeking a full-time pastor with a servant's heart who loves God's Word and His church. PGBC is a growing, family-oriented, multi-generational congregation, celebrating 125 years of ministry this year. Pastor must be in agreement with the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 and called to preach and teach God's Word. He must also be committed to evangelizing, discipling, missions, pastoral care and community outreach. Resumés should be sent to: Pleasant Grove Baptist Church, ATTN: Pastor Search Committee, 7634 Gann Road, Hixson, TN 37343 or email to: pleasantgrovehixson@gmail.com.

PASTOR

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

PASTOR

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

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Fyffe First Baptist Church is currently accepting resumés for a bivocational pastor. Send resumés to: Fyffe First Baptist Church, 198 Church St., P.O. Box 194, Fyffe, AL 35971, or email to: Fyffefbc@farmerstel.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR

Paden Baptist Church is prayerfully seeking a bivocational pastor. Currently meeting Sunday morning and Wednesday evening. Located within

one mile of Gadsden State Community College. Send resumé to: bruceragland67@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PREACHER

Riverview Baptist Church, Millers Ferry, Alabama, is seeking a part-time bivocational preacher. We are a small church located in a retirement, recreational community. Send resumés to: monica.rice60@yahoo.com.

PART-TIME PASTOR

Samaria Baptist Church is seeking a part-time pastor. The candidate should meet qualifications according to Scripture. Samaria is a loving church and a special place for God's people to worship. We are seeking a pastor who preaches God's Word and shepherds His flock. Please send a resumé by March 20 to: Samaria Baptist Church, 70 East Lake Rd., Jasper, AL 35501. ATTN: Waylan Hall

STUDENT PASTOR

Mt. Zion Baptist Church, Alexandria, Alabama, is seeking a full-time student pastor to lead our student ministry of 80–100 students (grades 6–12). Email your resumé to: pastorsearch@mzbclife.net. Subject line: Student Pastor

SIGNS

CHURCH SIGN

Signs are your first impression. What kind of impression is your church sign making? Call us to replace/update yours with either digital or traditional. Statewide since 1994. 1-800-729-6844 or 205-664-0955. reliablesigns.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 leedsstainedglass.com.

TRAVEL/VACATION

CONDO

Condo for rent during Southern Baptist Convention. Discount for ministers. Call 334-413-8433 for more information.

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.

ABSOLUTELY THE BEST PRICES ON THE BEACH

Beachside and beachfront vacation condos in Orange Beach, Alabama. Rent direct from Christian family owners. Efficiencies, 1 bedroom, 2 bedrooms and 3 bedrooms are available. Call Don, 251-752-2366 or www.gulfshorescondos.com.

~A resource for congregational vitality~

Do congregations discern God's leading or do leaders tell them God's direction?

Jessica exclaimed, "How can I ever know God's guidance for our congregation? That's why we have a pastor — someone who is closely connected with God and can share His direction with us."

"That's so interesting," Emily responded. "I truly appreciate my pastor, but ultimately, he doesn't decide where God is leading us as a congregation. He can suggest ideas, and then we get to come together and vote on what feels right."

Amanda overheard their conversation and kindly asked, "Hey, would it be OK if I share how our congregation spiritually approaches seeking God's guidance? I truly believe there's a beautiful third way that respects God's role, our pastor and everyone in the congregation."

Discerning God's leading

When Crossroads Church was launched, the congregation supported the vision and direction of its church planter, Jacob Sterling. He was a very loving and spiritually mature leader for a pastor in his early 30s.

His vision and spiritual strategic direction were inspiring and easy to understand. It was appealing, and they truly welcomed it with open hearts.

But Jacob found himself facing a rare form of cancer and had to give up his role as pastor. That left a tremendous void in the congregation. Staff and lay leadership scrambled to hold things together. Jacob was the spiritual glue who united a very diverse congregation.

In terms of vision and direction, he personified those characteristics. No one person or team of people were able to fill that void. With Jacob gone the congregation realized the vision left with him. He owned it. They followed it.

With the leadership of a wise intentional interim pastor, they embraced a new spiritual and strategic journey. They began anew to discover why God called them to launch this congregation.

What they realized through prayer and dialogue is that God was the source of vision rather than the pastor.

The pastor is often among the first, if not the first person, to be captured by God's empowering vision. This is important because the lead pastor is the voice of God's vision.

The pastor has more opportunities than

anyone else to cast the vision to the congregation through preaching, teaching and conversations. Yet the full congregational family must engage in a prayerful discernment process to discover God's Kingdom direction for the congregation. Those congregations who do this tend to be soaring congregations.

For the congregation

Congregations must pivot from a bounded focus on going a certain direction to a centered approach of allowing a continual spiritual discernment process to navigate their journey. This means discerning the qualities and applications of God's empowering vision for the congregation is a process that matures as they better understand where God is leading.

The lead pastor and staff should be the initiating leaders, casting vision to clarify and provide guidance, but never the exclusive owners of vision.

Congregations should continually seek God's leading for a shared journey rather than assuming the pastor and staff will provide the path forward.

This might seem messy, uncertain and even scary. It really is not.

Mature congregational fellowships who are soaring with faith handle it with ease as God goes before them as a cloud by day and fire by night.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

George Bullard spent five decades in Baptist congregational and denominational ministry. His min-

istry roles included three churches, three associations, three state conventions and one national entity. In 2022, he began writing as a columnist for TAB Media Group's publication The Baptist Paper. Bullard continues to serve as a strategic thinking mentor for Christian leaders through his ForthTelling Innovation ministry. TAB Media Group is the publisher for his ForthTelling Innovation book series — available on Amazon.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Sunday School Lessons

By Douglas K. Wilson, Ph.D.
Professor of Biblical Studies, University of Mobile



For March 29

FORGIVENESS **Matthew 18:21–35**

As I write this article, MLB spring training is in full swing. When the hitter is at home plate, it is the pitcher's job (along with his teammates) to make sure the hitter doesn't reach first base. As the song says, "For it's one, two, three strikes, you're out at the old ball game." Of course, there are exceptions to the third strike, with foul balls. That's why the hitter keeps swinging the bat.

At times, we as Christians approach offenses against us like we would the batter with strikes. We might give our offender a second or third chance to treat us with respect, but then we're done with him.

Sometimes, our limit is two offenses: "Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me." We attempt to justify our unforgiveness as righteous indignation. Jesus clearly teaches Peter — and us — that He expects us to forgive with the measure that God has forgiven us.

In the three passages preceding our focus here, Matthew 18 records Jesus' warning about causing offense, a parable about rescuing the stray sheep and instructions about restoring a believer who repents. This final passage provides context for Peter's question about forgiveness.

Question **of Forgiveness (21–22)**

Seven times? Peter had heard Jesus teach on forgiveness previously (Matt. 6:12, 14–15), emphasizing that believers must forgive. Jesus had just instructed His disciples about restoring a repentant brother within the church (18:15–17).

A follow-up question was certainly in order, especially from a man like Peter who was full of questions. Was the Master expecting the disciples to forgive seven times?

Seventy-seven times? Carefully read the CSB footnotes,

and one will discover that there are two possible translations to Jesus' response. The footnote for verse 22 reads, "Or 77 times." If this is the correct translation, Jesus was countering the vengeance mentality recorded in Genesis 4:24 — "If Cain is to be avenged seven times over, then for Lamech it will be 77 times!"

Four hundred and ninety times? Jesus was not teaching us to keep a running list of offenses. Instead, Jesus was instructing us to forgive completely. Seven is a number of completeness, as in the creation account. Ten is also a number of completion, as with the Ten Commandments.

Completeness times completeness times completeness is the measure of forgiveness Jesus tells us to offer.

Compassionate King (23–27)

Jesus illustrated His instruction with a story of a king and his subjects. Servant One owed the king 10,000 talents — that is, 20 years' wages times 10,000. He begged the king to give him time, and he would pay it back. Instead, the king forgave his debt.

Unforgiving Servant (28–35)

Servant One found Servant Two, a man who owed him 20 denarii. For context, Servant One owed 200,000 years' wages, and Servant Two owed 20 days' wages. Servant One heard the same plea that he had given the king (vv. 26, 29), yet he was unwilling to forgive this comparably small debt.

Instead, he had Servant Two arrested and placed in debtors prison. The king revoked the pardon, and Servant One went to prison.

When the Father forgives our sin, He pardons us fully. If we are unwilling to forgive our brothers and sisters for their small offenses against us, how can we claim to have received full pardon for our sin debt and dishonor against God?

For April 5

OUR TASK **Matthew 28:1–10, 16–20**

Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Christians in the Western world are greeting one another this weekend with these words of celebration. In the Eastern Orthodox tradition, they will employ these greetings next week. Wherever believers celebrate Resurrection day, we have a message to proclaim: Jesus has risen from the dead!

Believe (1–7)

The angel of the Lord was supernatural. The ground itself quaked at his invasion into the material realm. He shone like lightning, his clothing was white like snow and he rolled the tomb's stone aside. At his appearance, the guards were terrified.

The soldiers were shaken. The incident report given to the chief priests was so unacceptable that they bribed the soldiers to say that they fell asleep on the job — a crime punishable by death (Acts 12:19; 16:27) — rather than testifying they had seen an angel or that the crucified corpse they were guarding had risen.

The women were sent. Although they had limited legal standing in Jewish culture, women were chosen by God to be the first human witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus. In each of the Gospel accounts, women were the first to testify of the risen Christ.

The Resurrection is substantive. From that first Easter Sunday morning, the bodily resurrection of Jesus has been fundamental to the Christian faith. The content of the earliest sermons recorded in Acts (2:32; 10:40–41; 13:30–36) testify not only to the crucifixion of Jesus but also to His physical resurrection.

Worship (8–10)

Women in wonder. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary listened to the angel's message: Jesus had risen,

Jesus was going to meet them in Galilee, and Jesus entrusted them to tell the disciples. On their way, the women met the risen Lord Jesus.

Women in worship. How could they respond but to fall at His feet and bow before Him? The Master who had been nailed to a cross and declared dead was standing in front of them!

Women in witness. The Lord reiterated His task for them to tell the disciples to head north. Jesus was going to meet them where their journey began together — Galilee.

Share (16–20)

All authority. Jesus responded to the disciples' doubts and fears by explaining that God had given Him all authority in the spiritual realm and the material realm. As such, the commission given by our crucified and risen Lord came with universal authority.

All nations. Matthew records one imperative from Jesus in this passage: "Make disciples of all nations." At the University of Mobile, we rely on the generous support of Alabama Baptists through the Alabama Baptist State Convention and the state convention's Board of Aid — as well as ministry and mission partnerships with local Baptist churches — to train our students to be Great Commission workers in North America and around the world.

At Moffett Road Baptist Church in Mobile, we equip the saints to make disciples of all nations through the Cooperative Program, the Mobile Baptist Network, our partnership with Spanish language ministries and the International Language School.

Always. The Great Commission to make disciples is self-replicating. We together have been given the commission, and His promise continues for all of us today: "I am with you always, to the end of the age."

"Then Jesus said to them, 'Do not be afraid; go and tell My brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me.'"

Matthew 28:10

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sunday School Lessons

By Rony Kozman, Ph.D.

Assistant professor of Biblical Studies, Samford University



For March 29

GOD IS FAITHFUL Deuteronomy 7:6–16

God is faithful to His people. (6–8)

In Deuteronomy 7, Moses warns the people of Israel what they must not do when they enter into the promised land. Israel had wandered in the wilderness for 40 years until the disobedient generation that refused to enter the land was killed in the wilderness.

Now, Israel is on the precipice of entering the promised land, and Moses renews with the current generation the covenant that God had made with their forefathers. He reminds them that they must be faithful to the Lord with whom they are in covenant. When they enter the land, they must not worship the gods of the people who inhabit the land of Canaan.

They must destroy the idols and the altars so they do not turn from the Lord and prove to be unfaithful to Him as they worship other gods.

They belong to God. They are a people holy (consecrated) to the Lord. God chose them to be His treasured possession, and in return they must be faithful to the Lord.

Israel must be loyal to the Lord because God has been faithful to them and to their ancestors. In other words, we must be faithful to God because God has been faithful to us.

The Lord loved Israel and rescued Israel out of Egypt because of His loyalty to their ancestors. Recall that in Genesis 15:13–16, God promised Abraham that his descendants would become slaves in a foreign land and then God would rescue them and bring them to the land He promised to Abraham's descendants.

Here in Deuteronomy 7, we read that God rescued Israel out of Egypt out of faithfulness to the covenant He made with Israel's ancestors.

God is faithful to His covenant. (9–11)

God will remain faithful with this current generation of Israelites who are entering the promised land. The same God who was faithful to their ancestors will be faithful to them also because He is loyal to the covenant and promises He has made.

But they are also participants in this covenant, and they must keep their part of the covenant. To put this in terms of the new covenant, Jesus is faithful and trustworthy, and we must persevere in our faithfulness and loyalty to Him.

We are to respond to God's faithfulness with obedience. (12–16)

God's people are called to be faithful to the Lord by keeping His commands. God promised Israel that they would receive the blessings of the covenant — bountiful wombs, flocks, grain and wine — on the condition that they are faithful to God.

As we learn later in Deuteronomy, Israel will prove faithless. They will forsake the Lord and transgress the covenant (31:16), and in return God will forsake them (31:17).

But Deuteronomy is not without hope, for Moses promises God will transform His people: "God will circumcise your heart and the hearts of your descendants, and you will love Him with all your heart and all your soul, so that you will live ... Then you will again obey Him and follow all His commands I am commanding you today" (30:6, 8).

The Lord promises He will transform His people, and He will change their hearts so they are faithful to Him.

This good news is that God will secure the loyalty of His people.

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

For April 5

GOD IS LIFE-GIVING Mark 16:1–6; 1 Corinthians 15:1–4, 20–22

The death, burial and Resurrection are historical events. (Mark 16:1–6)

In Mark 16 we read of three women who came to the tomb where Jesus was buried. They were Mary Magdalene; Mary, the mother of James; and Salome. When they arrived, they were surprised to find that the tomb was opened, and Jesus' body was no longer present in the tomb in which He had been buried.

The inclusion of the names of the women functions to authenticate the story that the tomb was found empty by these three women. And the specification of the named women indicates that when the Gospel of Mark first circulated, it did so while witnesses to these events were still alive.

Mark 16 is not the first time that we see the Gospel of Mark including its eyewitness sources. In the previous chapter — Mark 15 — we see Joseph of Arimathea as another named witness. He was a known member of the Jewish council who, upon receiving permission from Pilate, took Jesus' body, had it wrapped and laid in the tomb, and had the tomb closed (15:42–46).

Mark indicates for us that Jesus had died and was buried in the tomb, and this was witnessed by this prominent member of the Jewish council who could substantiate this claim.

This claim is a foundational historical premise of the gospel that the evangelists and the apostles proclaimed. But Joseph was not the only witness to the events that are recounted. Others saw that Jesus had died and that His body was laid in the tomb, which was shut. The three women who witnessed the empty tomb had also seen Je-

sus' death (15:40), and the two Marys also witnessed where Jesus' body was placed by Joseph of Arimathea (v. 47).

Christ's death and resurrection are central to the gospel. (1 Cor. 15:1–4)

The Apostle Paul tells the Corinthians that the death and burial of Jesus are critical components of the message of the gospel that he received and that he passed along to them.

This news preceded Paul's ministry. It is part of the apostolic tradition that he received and that he relayed to them. The truth of Christ's death, burial and resurrection — in addition to being rooted in the testimony of eyewitnesses — are also witnessed by the sacred Scriptures.

Jesus's death, burial and resurrection fulfill the Scriptures, and Israel's Scriptures testify to these events, hence Paul's emphasis that Christ has done these things "in accordance with the Scriptures" (15:3–4).

Christ's resurrection means eternal life for those who belong to Him. (20–22)

For Paul the historical reality of the resurrection of Christ secures our hope that we are no longer enslaved and entombed in our sins (v. 17), but we have been made alive from sin and will be raised in the future resurrection from the dead (v. 22).

Just as the first human brought the whole world under the sway of sin and death, so now Christ has defeated sin and death and will raise from the dead all those who are in Him. This is the hope of the gospel of Jesus' death and resurrection. Those who are unified with Christ — buried with him in baptism, raised to walk in newness of life — will be resurrected as He was.

*"But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead,
the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."*

1 Corinthians 15:20

Bringing ‘the Bible to life’

Creative evangelist Dan Bellamy captivates audiences with ‘blown-up stories’

By Leann Callaway
The Alabama Baptist

For creative evangelist Dan Bellamy, balloons are more than decorations for a birthday party. As he uses balloon sculpting to captivate the attention of all ages while sharing the gospel, his creations become “inflatable stories” that bring the Bible to life.

In addition to these stories, Bellamy recently completed his first children’s book, “The Inflated Story of Noah,” which features large-scale balloon creations photographed on location in places like Alaska, the Galapagos Islands and Israel, a project 10 years in the making. He also has written, “The Twisted Tale of Adam and Eve.”

Both books involve large balloon sculptures photographed in real-life locations to tell Bible stories — and he doesn’t plan to stop there.

Hobby leads to ministry

“I’m envisioning [a] third book as the Christmas nativity story, told with elaborate, full-page balloon scenes as the illustrations,” Bellamy explained. “The challenge is that I need large chunks of time to create something like this before the balloons begin to fade. [F]inding time to create them amid everything else is challenging.

“The other book I’m dreaming of is on the subject of loving God and loving others. Jesus marks these as the greatest commandments; yet I think they’re so easy to miss the mark on in our day-to-day lives, especially in the volatile world we live in.”

At a young age Bellamy felt God calling him into ministry, but he never expected that his favorite hobby would turn into an influential



DAN BELLAMY

Photo courtesy of Dan Bellamy

platform for teaching children about God’s love.

Today, Bellamy travels around the country performing 50–70 programs each year for churches, conferences and ministry events, sharing his inflatable stories.

“Audiences can expect to have a blast together while learning important stories and lessons from the Bible,” Bellamy said. “The balloons are incredibly versatile for different occasions.

“I think of myself a bit like Apollos watering,” he added, referring to the New Testament figure. “The church is like Paul, planting seeds year-round with faithful believers investing in their own community. While I might have the good fortune to plant a few seeds at events where I share inflatable stories, my role is generally to nurture what has been planted and help churches create a catalyst moment that creates excitement for what God is doing year-round.”

Bellamy said he felt God calling him into full-time ministry during his senior year of high school at a Centrifuge youth camp, but he never anticipated the adventures he would encounter along the way.

“I was first introduced to balloons by a talented clown named Buddy Lamb while I was preparing for a mission trip to Jamaica with the Georgia Baptist Convention while I was in high school,” Bellamy said. “It was nearly two decades before my hobby grew into inflatable stories, but during that time, balloons were always in the background.”

Transition moment

After working with youth and college students for more than a decade, Bellamy felt the Lord opening doors for him to pursue ministry through creative evangelism.

“I came to a transition moment when I was praying about my next steps, and that’s when God brought my long-time hobby to the

forefront,” Bellamy explained.

He eventually signed with a Christian talent agent.

Creating lasting memories

With a unique ability to inspire audiences through inflatable stories, Bellamy said his favorite part of the ministry is interacting with families and creating lasting memories.

“I love being able to invest in children and families while helping create exciting catalyst moments for churches that kids will remember,” Bellamy said. “I latch on to the energy and excitement and helping people better understand who God is. I enjoy the art and whimsy, but the people are what make it worth it.

“God has been teaching me flexibility and creativity. I think it’s really easy to hold so much Bible knowledge in our heads that we want to convey, and forget that Jesus was creative. He taught in parables and used miracles as teachable moments.

“The more I’m trusted to communicate inflatable stories,” Bellamy said, “the more I feel my communication outside improves.”

He remembers accepting Christ as a child and the excitement of his new faith. That is why connecting with children is so important.

“The most important message in the world, the good news of Jesus Christ, won’t impact anyone if no one is paying attention,” Bellamy said. “That’s why I use these ‘blown-up stories’ to share life’s biggest truths.

“I’m glad kids have as much fun seeing my work as I do creating it, but it doesn’t mean anything if it doesn’t impact their lives. I carry balloon sculptures to churches because I see God using my gift to bring the Bible to life for them. It’s that simple.”