The Alabama Baptist

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May 14, 2026

Vol. 191, No. 10
Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.



Thinking ahead to summer: consider a subscription to The Kids Edition newspaper

In a world full of screens, a new kids' faith-based newspaper offers something special — a chance for kids to slow down, engage with real pages and build a lifelong love of reading and reflection. It's fun, colorful and faith-filled — a wholesome break from digital noise.

The Kids Edition, published by TAB Media Group, is ecumenical in nature so families of all Christian denominations will feel comfortable with the content.

Originating out of a conversation with specialists serving the Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries, The Kids Edition debuted in October 2025, said Jennifer Davis Rash, president and editor-in-chief of TAB Media Group.

Getting kids off screens

"Parents of young children are seeking solid, trustworthy resources to help get their kids off screens," Rash said. "We have received glowing responses from across the state and nation and are excited to see the engagement grow with churches, homeschool groups, grandparents and parents."

TAB Media Group's Carrie Brown McWhorter and Lauren C. Grim, along with Julie Donavan and others, work diligently to produce the monthly newspaper with a fresh look and feel each time it is printed, Rash said.

The newspaper is filled with articles, puzzles, jokes and other items of interest to children — offering parents and grandparents a family-friendly gateway into discussions related to Christian values and principles.

For information on how to order, visit: thebaptistpaper.org/the-kids-edition-bundle-copies.

And for additional children's resources produced by TAB Media Group, consider the TAB Kids Truth Series activity books by Denise George (available on Amazon). New books will be added to the series seasonally. (The Alabama Baptist)

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The Kids Edition

For more information or to sign up for a bundle subscription for your congregation, homeschool, after-school or community children's program, visit thebaptistpaper.org/the-kids-edition-bundle-copies.



Photo by Debbie Campbell/TAB Media Group

The Kids Edition is a colorful monthly newspaper for children and preteens filled with engaging stories, activities and faith-centered content. Bundle subscriptions are mailed to one address and make it easy to get copies for your group.

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
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Individual — $34.95 per year (26 issues)

JENNIFER DAVIS RASH
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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TAB Media Group among top in nation

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 11.

OPINION



Rashional Thoughts

By Jennifer Davis Rash, President and Editor-in-Chief
Email: jrash@thealabamabaptist.org / Social media: @RashionalThts

Aimlessly twirling in the outfield might leave us out of some cool God moments

Seven-year-old J dances to the beat of her own drum — and she proved it even more during her city baseball league's opening game in early May.

I can't really blame her though. For someone as spunky as she is, it must be beyond difficult to stand way out in right field with no action for what seems like an eternity while a constant flow of confusion and minimal movement takes place inside the diamond.

Watching her small sways shift to larger, more choreographed dance moves with an occasional twirl, I smiled wondering what narrative flowed through her mind.

Wandering mind

Where had she transported herself as she worked hard to remain disciplined enough to protect her slice of the field?

The rhythm of that moment might have allowed her to dream a little or process something going on in her world.

While joining the team definitely forces a bit of growth in patience, contentment and focus, it doesn't prevent her mind from wandering off to a faraway place.

My mind wanders off in some situations too, especially when I'm juggling several pending tasks or unresolved issues.

If someone talks around a subject longer than needed or writes too much content without getting to the point quickly, then it takes a good bit of discipline to remain fully in the moment.

Think about how hard it is to stay focused for those of us who didn't grow up in a digitally saturated world. It must be near impossible for those who've only known such an existence.

So, how can we stay truly engaged with each other, build genuine community and fully grasp the needs and concerns of others while battling the never-ending distractions garnering so many people's attention?

How do we retrain (or in some cases train for the first time) ourselves to fully listen and ask the types of questions that lead to understanding?

How do we gain the confidence and poise needed to communicate clearly our needs while recognizing everyone carries some type of pain or difficultly?

Beautiful model

Our friend Willie Brunetti advocates for helping each other out this way: "Here's what I need ..., and here's what I can do ... ."

It's a beautiful model watching families, teams, congregations and communities in general come together by sharing their gifts, talents, strengths and abilities.

When we all bring our superpower to the table to share and, at the same time, be willing to accept the assistance of another's superpower, wow — some really amazing results will surface.

And if we do it in accordance with God's guidance and join Him where He is working, then I'm not sure we can contain the stories that will be told about where and how God is working. It truly will be more than we can ask or imagine, like what is referenced in Ephesians 3:20.

But back to focusing and staying in the moment — why does it matter for those of us called to love God, enjoy Him and share Him with the world around us?

It would be easy to convince ourselves that attending church regularly, serving in a few roles to keep the routine church life rolling along and even sharing Scripture here and there with others is enough.

We might even be disciplined enough to sincerely pray for needs on the prayer list and study the Word consistently.

But if we ignore the deep cuts and intense pain flowing through so many in our communities — and many times behind the smiling faces sitting on our pews — then we are much like the spunky 7-year-old twirling in the outfield unaware of what's happening in the infield.

We might easily end up so caught up in our thoughts, concerns and daily preferences that we totally miss out on assisting a teammate in need of mentoring, encouragement or support.

And we will likely never know the God story we won't get to tell.

"Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

Ephesians 3:20–21

OPINION

Your Voice



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

Letters to the Editor

The opinion piece by Matt Lovelace "War respects worship and America should too" in the Feb. 19 edition of The Alabama Baptist is one all should read.

I'm so glad you shared it with TAB to publish.

What happened in Minnesota was unbelievable, but it was true. It happened.

All who believe in prayer need to pray for the people in our country. We need to pray for all leaders everywhere.

We also need to pray for our military troops and their families, and for the people who have lost someone in the service and for those servicemen and women who now have disabilities.

These heroes should be treated as heroes always.

TAB reader
Birmingham-area

I found the article "Finding grandeur of God's love in rural ministry" in the April 2 edition very relatable.

I have been involved with a production-oriented church in the past. Now belonging to a smaller church, I definitely agree with Rich Bitterman.

The closeness of a smaller congregation is comforting and uplifting. In other words, we are family!

Jerri Sherer
Jasper, Alabama

The April 2 article "Finding grandeur of God's love in rural ministry" was well written and a great example of the importance of both getting back to our roots and staying the course.

I like the fact that the focus of their church is based on warmth, longevity, values and relationships instead of entertainment. With entertainment the show must get bigger and bigger as the congregation gradually gets desensitized, until the message gets lost entirely in the pomp and circumstances.

Stephen Aycock
Jasper, Alabama

In the April 2 "Finding grandeur of God's love in rural ministry" article, Rich Bitterman highlights, without being antagonistic or jealousy-oriented, numerous components of the Christian faith in church life and worship which may all too often be overly prized, mitigated, neglected or ignored.

The captioned sections — "Present not polished" and "Heartfelt and grounded" — so accurately capture the tenor and tone of his selected words regarding his appraisal and assessment of Christian pragmatism at Cedar Ridge Baptist Church.

Without a spirit of meanness or unnecessary critique, his notice of some elements in contemporary churches may create an "ouch" to the unsuspecting.

Nevertheless, Bitterman breathes freshness and encouragement to those Christians and churches which may be struggling with just how well things are going in their corner of contemporary Christianity.

After all, mega churches do not have a monopoly on God's preferred style or pattern of worship and service. So, this article could be a wake-up call for strong and steadfast faithfulness where you are, what you are doing and contemplation of just how well God measures modern versions of the Christian faith.

Conversations sometimes mention a concern about the lack of fancy productions and lights and other items, but these may actually be or become substitutes for "digging deeper" and "ministry in its purest form."

Morris Murray Jr.
Jasper, Alabama

In response to Jennifer Rash's 30-for-30 challenge, I want to say I appreciate your work.

I find encouragement in the columns by Jennifer and by Ken Lass.

The email updates put me in touch with stories around the world.

I enjoy Stephanie Hendricks' feature in The Kids Edition, although I am decades older than a child.

Thanks for bringing truth with a touch of grace.

Mike Mayfield
Bessemer, Alabama

In response to the opinion piece "Finding grandeur of God's love in rural ministry" in the April 2 edition of The Alabama Baptist, I agree with the author Rich Bitterman.

I don't think you get the kind of meeting concerns which fellow Christians need in a mega church. I think some of these mega churches are impersonal and it actually takes away from the worship experience. Our smaller church makes people feel the warmth and love of our members which this article clearly documents and displays.

Darrell McBride
TAB reader

"Sleep is so important; it helps with the recovery process with our endocrinology system, it helps supply oxygen into our brain and to our organs, and overall helps our bodies and our muscles recover from the activities of the day," said **Anna Caitlin Paylor**, a family nurse practitioner who works at Wilmington North Carolina's Health's Sleep Clinic.

"We try to teach students that the Lord has strategically brought you to Auburn, and He has placed you in the classrooms you're in for a purpose — what are you going to do with it?" said **Kennedi Kruger**, associate Baptist campus minister at Auburn University.

We often fail to recognize God working around us because we expect Him to do one thing and then He does another.

Richard Blackaby
Author, Bible study teacher

"We get our kids tutors for math, coaches for sports & counselors for health. However, we tell them to figure out their spiritual life on their own. That's why many struggle. Disciple your kids & get others in their lives that will help them with the most important thing ... their soul!"

Shane Pruitt
@shane_pruitt78 on X

> "Resolution One: I will live for God. Resolution Two: If no one else does, I still will."
>
> JONATHAN EDWARDS
> *American preacher, philosopher and theologian*

"This is not just another building destroyed — this is a direct attack on the church in Ukraine, on people of faith who gathered peacefully to worship God. Please stand with us in prayer and action," said **Pavel Unguryan**, a former member of the Ukrainian parliament, on a recent attack on a Baptist church in Ukraine that left a pastor dead.

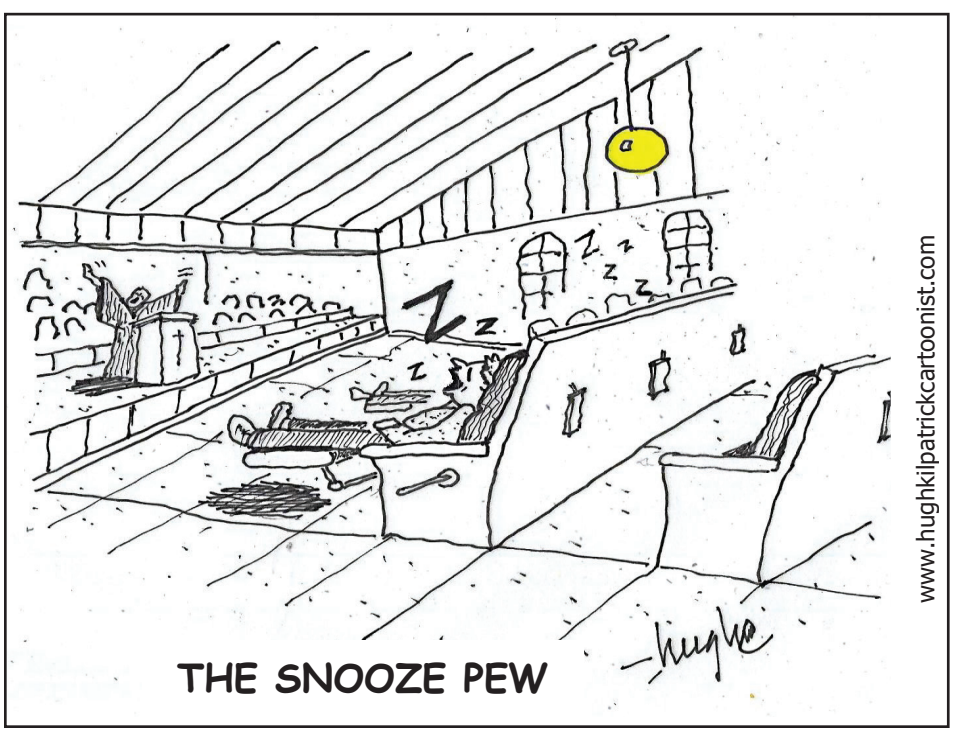
"Don't let your kids find out about drugs, alcohol and online predators the hard way," noted **Shane Plyler**, executive director of COMPACT and a lieutenant with the Shelby County Sheriff's Office. "Be the first to tell them about what they are, why they are dangerous and how to prevent issues." COMPACT is a law enforcement-based task force encouraging digital safety, addressing mental wellness and working to prevent youth substance misuse.

"God is real, and we can trust Him. That sounds very simple, but for those who have never experienced anything with God — which might be somebody who has been in church all their life — God is real. God is a living God, not just something talked about on Sundays, and we can trust Him with our lives," said **Bob Hartman**, Petra founding member, guitarist and songwriter.

"Looking back at my life, I see how God put me where He wanted me to be to learn what He wanted me to learn and gain the knowledge He wanted me to gain in order to do what He wanted me to do. "God works all things together for good. I look at it, and now I have such gratitude to God for everything He's done."

Apart from suffering, we simply cannot learn about God or relate to Him on an intimate level. Believing God is real and present is one thing. Trusting that He is enough no matter what you face is another matter entirely. Though we are quite capable of cognitively grasping these ideas, we cannot embrace them fully until we experience their reality for ourselves. Trials force us to move beyond superficial knowledge about Jesus into a meaningful, daily walk with Him. Much to our chagrin, the power of Christ's resurrection is always preceded by the fellowship in His sufferings (Phil. 3:10).

Adam Dooley, pastor
Englewood Baptist Church
Jackson, Tennessee



Lass WORDS



BY KEN LASS
The Alabama Baptist

DEVOTIONAL THOUGHTS

Living a model for love

The desk in my home office is covered with photos, most of them of my family. The biggest one is a portrait of my mom and dad, which sits directly above and in front of me. They were reasonably young in this rendering, like 50-ish. This is how I remember them. Not old and gray and feeble as they became before passing on.


Photo courtesy of Ken Lass

Clearly, it's a professional photograph. Mom is in the foreground, wearing a brown and grey-striped blouse with a bow at the neckline. Dad is behind, looking over her right shoulder, dressed in a navy blue suit and tie and light gray shirt. Both are smiling warmly as they look to their left, slightly off-camera. They look so happy, so connected, so much in love.

Lessons learned

I learned so much from them. They explained to me how to deal with disappointment, how to drive a car, how to handle money, stuff like that. But they didn't have to teach me love. I saw it every day; I knew what it looked like. I never saw two people more in love with each other than Mom and Dad. I never saw them fight.

Oh, there were differences of opinion certainly, but getting mad at each other never seemed to be an option. They cared way too much about each other's feelings. I used to catch them glancing at each other, sheer adoration in their eyes, even after many years.

A verse in Psalm 17 says, "Children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children." We usually think in terms of children being a source of pride for their parents, but perhaps the opposite is even more important. As a child grows into adulthood, he or she should be able to feel admiration, gratitude, and yes, even pride, for not only what their parents taught them, but what was modeled for them.

Because of what I observed from my folks, I knew what kind of relationship to seek when it came to finding my own spouse. By the grace of God, I found such a relationship. There is nothing more valuable to pass down to our children and grandchildren than how to love.

But true love is not so much something you teach as something you live.

MEET THE AUTHOR

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

NEWS

Alabama news

AUTAUGA ASSOCIATION

▸ **Calvary Baptist Church, Prattville**, will host a free men's prayer breakfast May 16, 7–8 a.m. followed by a blood drive, 9 a.m.–2 p.m. All blood donations will be used for hospitals in the River Region. Mike Watts is pastor.



JONES

BIGBEE ASSOCIATION

▸ **Dale Jones** is the new pastor of **Eutaw Baptist Church**. He previously served as pastor of First Baptist Church McCalla. He has three adult children and five granddaughters.

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

▸ **George Wright**, pastor of **Shades Mountain Baptist Church in Vestavia** for the past nearly five years, announced his resignation from the church via a video on social media May 1.

"Over the past couple of weeks it has been clear to us that our time here at Shades is coming to an end," he said. "As heartbreaking as this has been for our family, we are trusting the Lord to lead us in this season. ... We love Shades Mountain, and we love you. ... There is nothing in my life that disqualifies me or is preventing me from living out [my purpose] and pursuing God's calling. ... I want to thank you for the way you've loved us and prayed for us as a family these past five years."

He preached his final sermon at Shades on May 3 and a reception was held for him following the services.

Church leaders reported on the Facebook post: "As a church, we trust that the Lord is guiding us. Our leadership and staff are committed to walking through this season with care, unity and faith."

▸ Beeson Divinity School of Samford University named **Jacob and Suzanne Simmons** 2026 Alumni of the Year. Jacob serves as pastor of Hope Community Church (a revitalization of McElwain Baptist Church), Birmingham, and his wife, Suzanne, is a clinical pastoral education (CPE) educator at UAB Hospital.



Facebook photo

CLARKE ASSOCIATION

▸ **Oak Grove Baptist Church, Coffeeville**, will have homecoming May 17. Everyone is invited to meet in the church cemetery at 10:30 a.m. with the worship service to follow in the sanctuary. Lunch will be served after the service followed by afternoon singing featuring Glory Road.

MUD CREEK ASSOCIATION

▸ **Union Hill Baptist Church, Rock Creek**, and **West Jefferson Baptist Church, Quinton**, have entered a foster, caring relationship. Mike Stevens, senior pastor, and Justin Salter, associate pastor, both of Union Hill, invite everyone to join them for prayer and worship Sunday mornings at 9:30 a.m. at West Jefferson, currently without a pastor and worship pastor.



Facebook screenshot

ST. CLAIR ASSOCIATION

▸ **Paula Brown** recently retired as church administrator for **First Baptist Church Ashville**. She served in this role for 28 years, working alongside three pastors, the late James Sampley, Jay Stewart and current pastor Nathan Daniels. To commemorate her years of service, a tree was planted in front of the education building and the congregation held a reception in her honor. She and her husband, Glenn, have two adult children and four grandchildren.



Submitted photo

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

West Mobile Baptist celebrates 'cutting the rope' of church's debt

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Kevin Cobb grew up fishing, and he served in the Navy, so the illustration was just what came to mind first.

"We're dragging an anchor, and we've got to cut the rope."

West Mobile Baptist Church — a growing congregation — had carried a large debt for nearly its entire history. In 1990, they had gotten a loan to buy a piece of property and build a building, and as the years went on, they added on and purchased more property and rolled that into the existing debt.

And in 2020, Cobb felt a burden to lead the church to get rid of it.

"I told the pastor search team that eliminating our debt would be a focus of my pastorate, trusting the Lord to lead me in how that would happen," said Cobb, who had served as the worship and college pastor at West Mobile Baptist since 2014.

Loan payments were taking up close to $100,000 of the church's budget each year, he said. "I knew if we were going to go where God has for us, we needed to stop dragging the anchor."

The church agreed.

"We just felt like moving forward it would open up our budget to give more to missions and ministries," Cobb said.

Special campaign

So in late 2021, West Mobile Baptist began its "Cut the Rope" campaign, refinancing about $833,000 on a 10-year fixed note. They paid it off in four years and five months, saving the church around $100,000 in interest.

They recently celebrated that accomplishment by having charter members participate in a rope-cutting ceremony with a large anchor representing their debt.



Photo courtesy of West Mobile Baptist Church

Pastor Kevin Cobb (center) and charter members of West Mobile Baptist Church prepare to cut a rope attached to an anchor to symbolize the church retiring its longstanding debt in mid-March.

"We went all out and had a big celebration," Cobb said. "We talked about our past, present and future, and then we had a big meal where the staff served the church. We wanted to show them 'we want to pay you back for all the hard work you've done in getting this debt paid off.'"

He said they give God the glory for everything He's doing at West Mobile Baptist. The church is growing, even "busting at the seams" in some areas.

"I am thankful that I get to serve these amazing people and our outstanding team, and I praise the Lord for allowing us to get this done," Cobb said. "Most of all, I look forward to seeing what God will do in the days ahead as we love God, love others and make disciples."

‘Tearing walls down’

Alabama pastor, outdoorsman helping others avoid pit of addiction

By Shawn Hendricks
The Alabama Baptist

Dangling a dead — but “nice 4-plus footer”— timber rattlesnake from a branch, Alabama pastor Matt Kelley declared the venomous reptile “almost got me.”

Kelley and a hunting buddy were recently checking a camera for one of his outdoor videos, and he walked up on the rattler while it was in the middle of finishing off a bird — a badly timed encounter that could have resulted in a territorial snake lashing out at an unwanted intruder. But Kelley, an avid hunter and outdoorsmen, promptly grabbed a “little ole sweetgum” branch and disposed of the slithering critter with a quick strike or two to its neck. Kelley then shared an impromptu object lesson on social media about how sin can sneak up on all of us when we least expect it.

Whether discussing snakes or the finer points of scouting turkeys and deer, Kelley is always on the hunt for ways to help steer people, particularly young students, away from addiction and other sinful choices — and ultimately toward a relationship with Jesus Christ. Through his nonprofit Equip Ministries Inc., Kelley shares videos on social media and goes into schools and speaks at outdoor ministry events to share his stories — and how he’s been sober for nearly three decades.

“Listen, the Bible teaches us in 2 Corinthians 11:14 that the devil disguises himself as an angel of light. He doesn’t look like the devil, y’all,” Kelley said in the Facebook video. “He looks like the people you’re in a relationship with ... he looks like an addiction, he looks like a good job promotion, he looks like some type of status increase. You gotta be careful where he might be lying.”

Kelley, pastor of Forest Hill Baptist Church in Linden, knows all too well the struggle to escape the pit of alcohol and drug addiction. He knows personally how it can start for a 15-year-old preacher’s kid from “the innocence of a few cold beers with some friends at a party.”

That struggle fuels his passion for helping others as he drives to schools and churches across the Southeast and beyond. Kelley said it was his past battles that ultimately led to a “vision from God” to launch Equip Ministries Inc.



Facebook screenshot

Matt Kelly uses a branch to hold a dead timber rattlesnake.

“We started Equip, and I told my wife, ‘Could you imagine if we could get 10 schools, we could be in front of 3,000 students,’ ” he told The Alabama Baptist. “And our first year, God put us in 18 schools (that year). In 2025, I was in 61 schools.”

Honest approach

While on the way to speak at Woodland High School in late April, Kelley shared in a phone interview with The Alabama Baptist his plans that morning to give his “turkey presentation.” In the fall, he typically shares about deer hunting.

“The whole point,” he noted, “is to give the student a visual of what it looks like to be tempted and then to have the end of that presentation end in the harvest of that animal ... the picture is that it ends up costing them their lives.”

Kelley said many church leaders get it wrong when jumping to the negative consequences of drug and alcohol addiction. He called it a well-intentioned effort to “scare their students away from trying drugs and alcohol.”

Instead, Kelley starts by telling students “you’re probably going to like it.”

“The adversary ... does it one sip at a time,” he said. “He makes it look and smell and taste and feel good on the front end. Those are things we can’t deny. ... Your brain will enjoy that feeling, which is why we have addiction.”

On a turkey hunt, Kelley said, he’s using a similar strategy, “deceiving this turkey all the way in until the BAM.”

“I tell (students) that when that turkey sees everything with a decoy set up ... everything he’s been hearing with his ears, well then he is 100% deceived — and when that happens, he’s probably going to die.”

For more information, go to equiponeministries.org.

Drew Dockery, pastor of education and spiritual growth at Valley View Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa, told TAB that Kelley has a way of “tearing walls down” when he speaks to people — whether at a school or at a men’s event, where he’s often more free to share the gospel.

‘Walks the walk’

“Matt is a real outdoorsman. He doesn’t just talk the talk, he walks the walk. He knows what he’s doing, both in his relationship with the Lord and the outdoors,” said Dockery recalling when Kelley spoke at one of the church’s men’s events. “That naturally lets the walls come down, and then he’s almost instantly got that relationship, got their trust as he’s built that common ground through the outdoors. Then he begins to present the gospel in a way that anyone can understand and relate to.”

And at the end of his 45-minute presentation in schools, Kelley said he also isn’t afraid to put students on the spot by challenging them to stand up and take a pledge in front of their peers to live their lives sober.

He then tells them, “If you’ve got to look to your right or your left to see if your friend is going to do it, you’re not ready. This has to be your decision that you want to live your life sober.’ ”

During a presentation in Montana last year, a student told Kelley he had been sober for 352 days since the pastor last spoke at his school.

“Those kind of stories — and there’s countless others — that’s what keeps me coming back,” he noted.


TAYLOR DIVNEY
Director of Admissions
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‘WE MUST HAVE A SONG’

‘You pastors are in a storm ... take up your cross daily,’ Clifton says

By Michael J. Brooks
The Alabama Baptist

Mark Clifton arrived in Birmingham on a stormy night to talk to pastors and other ministry leaders about the storms of life.

“You pastors are in a storm, headed into one or coming out of one … this is just the way life is. Jesus said to ‘take up your cross daily’ and serving Him is a tough assignment.”

Clifton, executive director of replant for the North American Mission Board, was keynote speaker at “Recover, Renew, Rejoice,” sponsored by Birmingham Metro Baptist Association.

Clifton noted he had been a pastor since 1978 and both his father and great-grandfather were pastors.

“I came through the church growth movement in the 80s and a lot of good came from this,” he recalled during the April 28 event. “But one bad thing was the impression that if your church grew large, you’re a winner, and the rest of us were losers.

“Sometimes God calls us to leave what’s comfortable and go to a hard and difficult place. Only eternity will reveal the worth of what we do in our churches.”

Rest amid the storm

Clifton spoke from Mark 4 about Jesus calming the sea, explaining that He needed to leave the crowds to rest. While the disciples had seen storms before, this time they thought they might perish.

“We will encounter storms even when we’re obediently traveling with Jesus,” Clifton said. “But Jesus could sleep because He had total trust in God’s providence. He knew that nothing would abort God’s plan for Him.”



Photo courtesy of Gary Schultz

Mark Clifton, executive director of replant for the North American Mission Board, speaks at “Recover, Renew, Rejoice,” sponsored by Birmingham Metro Baptist Association on April 28.

Clifton added, “And you can sleep during the storm, too, with the assurance that Jesus knows more about your church than you do.”

Preparation

Some storms are greater than our ability to navigate, and there’s no way to meet them without preparation, Clifton said. He suggested four ways:

“I think we must have a song,” he said. “There’s something about music that touches the soul and gives comfort. We’ve all seen dementia patients who hear Scripture, but their mouths begin to move and they try to sing familiar hymns they’ve known all their lives. Good songs strengthen and minister to us.”

Second, he noted, “have a Scripture.”

“I love 2 Corinthians 1:9 where Paul wrote, ‘Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death, so that we would not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead.’ Struggles point us to the power of God and remind us not to be prideful but trusting.”

A third preparation is to have a friend.

“We all need a friend we can go to for counsel and prayer,” Clifton said. “The pastorate can be lonely, and we need someone we trust to confide in when the burdens are heavy.”

Finally, Clifton suggested pastors practice spiritual discipline.

“Every day we must find time to read His Word and pray, and this practice must continue when the storms come,” Clifton said. “The wind and waves still obey His voice. We will hear His voice in the storm when we hear it every day in the discipline of devotion.”

HAVE ONE OF THESE OR KNOW SOMEONE WHO DOES?





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NEWS AND INFORMATION
sponsored by the State Board of Missions

Students share God's Word through Bible Drill

Biblical literacy is at an all-time low across all age groups, said Belinda Stroud, who leads Bible drill for the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions.

But this year, she saw something worth celebrating — across the state, Bible drills saw more drillers and more churches involved.

"Two years ago, a former Bible drill church leader came to observe a regional drill and said she was praying for one person from their church to begin learning God's Word and participate in drills again," Stroud said. "This year, their church had eight children and youth participate. I am hearing stories like this from all over our state."

Six regional drills were held across Alabama in April, and on April 25, children and youth gathered for the State Bible Drill and Speakers Tournament at the SBOM in Prattville.

"I had the privilege to travel all over Alabama hearing students from grades 3–12 share God's Word in our regional and state Bible drills," Stroud said. "It felt like a family reunion being able to see seniors in high school drill for the last time and head off to college, having former state drill winners help with judging the drills, watching second and third generations in a family continue in drills and seeing many students and children participate in drills for the very first time."

She said she is thankful Alabama Baptists continue to make learning how to navigate God's Word a priority, "because we know His word will remain in these students' hearts and minds forever."

"The methods we use to teach children God's Word may have changed, but His Word never changes and is always relevant," Stroud said.

To learn more about Bible drill, visit kidzlinkal.org/bible-drill.

To learn more, visit kidzlinkal.org/bible-drill or scan the code below with your smartphone's camera.



Photo by John Thomas

Speakers Tournament winners — 1st place: Noah Oswald (right) of Dawson Memorial Baptist Church in Homewood; 2nd place: Alexander Luna of Hunter Street Baptist Church in Hoover.



Photo by John Thomas

High school winners — 1st place: Ruby Kate Parris (left) of Mount Zion Baptist Church in Alexandria; 2nd place: Alyvia Browder of East Centre Baptist Church.



Photo by John Thomas

Youth winners — 1st place: Taylor Shoupe (center) and 2nd place: Henry Swann (right), both of Pilgrim Home Baptist Church in Newton; 3rd place: Scout Brown of Elkdale Baptist Church in Selma.

WORD search

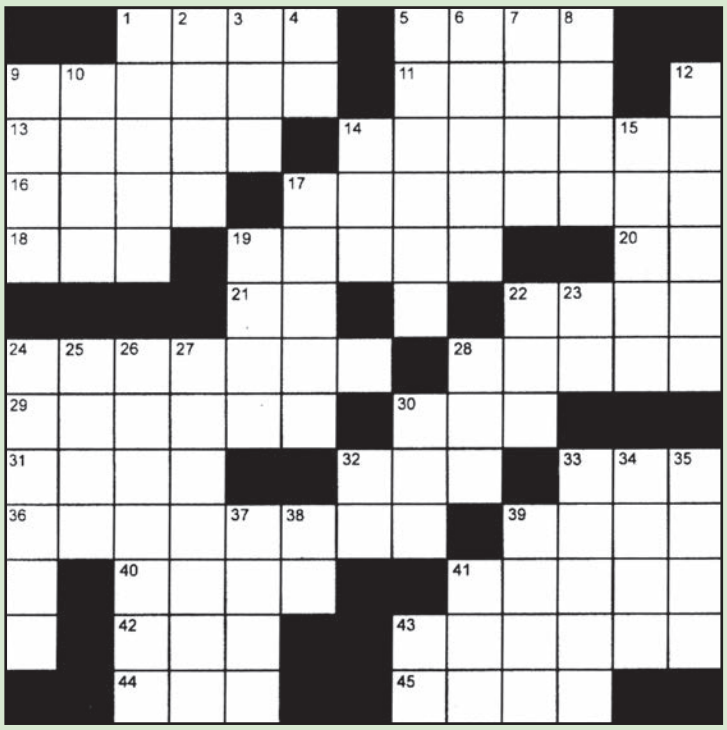
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P S T R E N G T H D E K C I W

"The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?"

PSALM 27:1

CHRISTIAN crossword



By Janet W. Adkins Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.

ACROSS

1. Lot sat in the ___ of Sodom. (Gen. 19:1)
5. Son of Shem. (Gen. 10:22)
9. Rehoboam sent ___, who was over the tribute. (1 Kings 12:18)
11. Where the altar is in an Eastern church.
13. Person.
14. Sick people ... taken with ___ diseases. (Matt. 4:24; modern spelling)
16. Elder son of Zeus.
17. Sanballat the ___. (Neh. 2:10)
18. Name prefix. (Simon ___ Jonah)
19. Pertaining to an ecological sere.
20. Newspaper person. (abbr.)
21. British thanks.
22. False god.
24. Hide thyself by the brook ___. (1 Kings 17:3)
28. ___ in me, and I in you. (John 15:4)
29. By the ___ of Babylon, there we sat down. (Ps. 137:1)
30. Fairy queen.
31. He was. (Latin)
32. Coastal Athletic Association. (abbr.)
33. Put on strength, O ___ of the Lord. (Isa. 51:9)
36. Let his habitation be ___. (Acts 1:20)
39. Curved molding.
40. Neighbor of Iraq.
41. Snatches.
42. Voluntary time off. (abbr.)
43. When Sanballat ... and ___ ..., heard of it, it grieved them. (Neh. 2:10)
44. A curvy shape.
45. Norse god.

DOWN

1. Wife of Hosea. (Hos. 1:3)
2. Belonging to a son of Jether. (1 Chron. 7:38)
3. Sunbathe.
4. Printer's measure.
5. He laid the foundation thereof in ___ his firstborn. (1 Kings 16:34)
6. Edom ___ted from under the hand of Judah. (2 Kings 8:20)
7. So be it.
8. Seagoing prefix.
9. And ___ told Jezebel all that Elijah had done. (1 Kings 19:1)
10. He set it up in the plain of ___. (Dan. 3:1)
12. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a ___. (Matt. 19:24)
14. In the borders of ___ on the west. (Josh. 11:2)
15. Abraham ... offered him ... in the ___ of his son. (Gen. 22:13)
17. Warms.
19. Mix.
22. Business watchdog.
23. The king of ___ they took alive. (Josh. 8:23)
24. Give recognition.
25. For the laborer is worthy of his ___. (Luke 10:7)
26. Avoiding.
27. Short answers.
28. Motorists' club.
30. Woman's name.
32. Court. (abbr.)
33. Once more.
34. Slew the kings of Midian ... Zur ... Hur and ___. (Num. 31:8)
35. Network.
37. Southeast Asian country.
38. Is there any taste in the white of ___ egg? (Job 6:6)
39. NASA prefix.
41. In Him ... is the love of ___ perfected. (1 John 2:5)
43. ___ visit the fatherless and widows. (James 1:27)

All Bible verses are KJV unless otherwise specified.

UPCOMING EVENTS

sponsored by the State Board of Missions

National Day of Prayer for VBS, May 17

Each year, the third Sunday of May is set aside as a day for churches to ask God to move through this thing we call Vacation Bible School. It is a time for churches to pray not only for their own VBS, but also for the ones taking place down the street and around the world.

VBS remains one of the top evangelistic outreaches of the church, resulting in 7,000 professions of faith across Alabama each year and around 70,000 annually throughout the Southern Baptist Convention (according to Lifeway Christian Resources).

You're encouraged to consider having a time of prayer for Vacation Bible School during your church service on Sunday, May 17, or you can choose another time or occasion soon that works best for your church.

For suggestions about specific prayer points and other information, please visit alsbom.org/prayforVBS.

MIX Worship Arts Camp

Does your child or teenager love music and fine arts? MIX Worship Arts Camp is the perfect place for them to spend a week this summer.

The camp, which is three camps in one — MIX for completed 2nd grade through 5th grade, MIX6 for completed 6th grade and REmix for completed 7th grade through 12th grade — is set for July 6–10 at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega.

MIX Worship Arts Camp will build lasting friendships and focus on discipleship and worship.

Lindsay Lyon, a former camper, said the camp made a big impact on her and taught her it was "not about the performance."

"It's not about what other people think about you. It's about worshipping the Lord," she said. "And this camp is the one thing that helped me understand that most of all."

Register by May 31 to get the Next Best price of $350.

For more information or to register, visit mixworshipartscamp.org.

Going to the SBC Annual Meeting in Orlando?

If you're making plans to be at the Southern Baptist Convention Annual Meeting and Pastors Conference June 7–10 in Orlando, be sure to stop by the State Board of Missions booth in the exhibit hall, pick up a free gift and visit for a while.

Our booth space is 319, which you'll find toward the front of the hall to the left of Guidestone. Come see us.

BUILDING VITAL RELATIONSHIPS

The Summit of Fort Payne helps women close the 'revolving door' of drug addiction

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist

Jails have revolving doors, but not the physical kind. They're the kind that many inmates face when discharged, especially if addiction is a factor.

A Monday night prayer group noticed this revolving door after starting a ministry for the women in the local county jail. The group kept seeing the same faces. It didn't take long to recognize that more needed to be done.

"Even though they may have tried to change, nothing about their surroundings did," said Casey Rice, executive director of The Summit of Fort Payne. "They had to go back to the same place they had been before, so it made it really hard for them to have a solid foundation of recovery."

There wasn't a place to build the new life that would keep them from returning to the old, so the prayer group started praying about this specific need while also acting in faith that God would answer their prayers. And He did.

"Some of the men in that group started looking around for real estate. (They found that) the Truett Cathy family had some property, and so this prayer group got together and created a little video showing their vision for the ministry and what they wanted to do," Rice said.



Photo by Tracy Riggs Frontz/The Alabama Baptist

Residents of The Summit of Fort Payne work together in the kitchen of the 16,000-square-foot home where they live while walking through addiction recovery and preparing to live independently after incarceration.

'Roadmap for life'

Truett Cathy was the founder of Chick-fil-A, a devout Baptist and four-decade Sunday School teacher who believed "the Bible is a roadmap for life." In addition, he deeply believed in giving and serving.

"My wife and I were brought up to believe that the more you give, the more you have," Cathy said in 2008 when he won the William E. Simon Prize for Philanthropic Leadership.

However, Cathy understood loss. Two of his brothers, including one who was his partner in their first restaurant, were killed in a plane crash. Later, one of his first two restaurants was destroyed by a fire. Health problems landed him in the hospital. But he used these experiences, and Chick-fil-A was born.

When the Cathy family representatives saw the video, they decided to donate the property. They knew Truett would have been pleased.

This wasn't just an answer to a prayer; it was above and beyond what they could ask or think. The land totaled 96 acres. The main house was 16,000 square feet. There was an additional pool house, as well as two other homes. It was the perfect place.

The women start in the big house. The additional two homes are for women who finish the program to continue recovery while they can get on their feet.

To learn more about The Summit of Fort Payne or the thrift store that helps fund the ministry, visit SummitofFortPayne.com.

The recovery program is intensive.

It's 12 months of about three hours of Bible study each day, including personal or group studies. The program is completely based on Bible study and Christian principles.

Not only do they learn Christian values, but they also learn how to get along with each other.

"As a graduate of a similar 12-month recovery home program, I've told people that's probably one of the hardest parts of completing a program like this," Rice said. "While we deal with it the best way we can, we try to encourage the ladies through Scripture to try and handle it calmly first of all. Then if a staff member sees that there's controversy arising, she'll ... get them in a more personal setting to try and talk it out and serve as a mediator."

Community support

"When you get thrown into a place like The Summit and you've got problems on top of problems and your own way of dealing with things, you have to do a whole lot of trying to just accept people for who they are in that moment in time," Rice said. "You've got different life experiences that cause you to view situations from different points of view and perspectives. There's really not much that's going to change that. Plus, you're not the same person. You shouldn't be the same person at the end of your first phase (one to four months later) as you were when you got there."

Although there is a core staff, volunteers and program graduates have a huge role. They come and do projects and spend time with them, Rice said. This involvement not only helps the women in the short term, but it builds relationships outside of the program, which is important for the main goal of leaving with a community of support.

"When they leave The Summit, they've already got healthy connections and relationships out there where if they are tempted or if they find themselves in a sticky situation, they're more likely going to call somebody that they got real close with. These relationships that are being built are vital."

TAB CLASSIFIEDS

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For more information call 205-870-4720, ext. 200.

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.

PASTOR
Pine Hill Baptist Church, Pine Hill, Alabama, is seeking full-time pastor. Average congregation size: 55–60. Pastorium provided. Submit resumés to: victoria.collins10@gmail.com or call/text 334-455-9833.

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
Mt. Carmel Baptist Church, Cordova, Alabama, seeking bivocational pastor. Resumés accepted through May 20. Submit to: mountcarmelcordova@gmail.com.

BIVOCATIONAL PASTOR
Southside Baptist Church, Talladega, is searching for a bivocational pastor. Please send resumés to: sbctalladega@gmail.com.

ASSOCIATE PASTOR
Stapleton Baptist Church is seeking to hire a full-time associate pastor to oversee all aspects of worship ministry and age-graded ministry under the direction of the senior pastor. The ideal candidate would meet the biblical qualifications of a pastor, have a passion for families, missions, evangelism and possess the necessary musical abilities to lead worship. Please submit resumés or direct questions to: daniel@stapletonbaptistchurch.org.

MUSIC MINISTER
Part-time music minister position. Montevallo First Baptist Church, Montevallo, Alabama. Blended service. For more information, contact pastor@montevallofbc.com.

MINISTER OF YOUTH
The First Baptist Church of Jemison, Alabama, is seeking a minister of youth. Inquire at secretaryjfbc@jemison.firstbaptist.com.

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

OTHER POSITIONS

OPERATIONS MANAGER
Etowah Baptist Missions Center, located in Gadsden, Alabama, is a faith-based poverty-alleviation organization looking to hire an operations manager. Candidates must be a member of a local church and preferably reside in Etowah County. The role will include facilitating daily processes to run the center, administrative duties, monitoring resources, volunteer oversight and scheduling. The role requires organization along with strong leadership and problem-solving skills. Questions can be directed to the executive director, Lance Hughes, at 256-295-7531 or by email at jobebmc@gmail.com. A more detailed job description will be provided upon submission of resumés.

MINISTRY ASSISTANT
Palmerdale Cross Baptist Church is prayerfully seeking a part-time ministry assistant to provide administrative and financial support to the pastoral staff and church leadership. This position helps ensure smooth day-to-day office operations, assists with financial processes and supports the church's overall mission and ministry with professionalism, confidentiality and a servant's heart. Send resumés to: dholley@palmerdalecross.org

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~A resource for congregational vitality~

More scattered congregations are soaring than gathered congregations

Philip, an engineer and devoted husband in a family of five that recently moved to town, scheduled a visit with Ryan, the lead pastor of Central congregation. Philip is interested in learning more about this congregation.

After initial introductions, Philip happily shared that his family has been deeply involved in ministry causes through their previous congregation. Having moved over 400 miles to a new city, they are impatient to find a congregation where they can join in disciple-making and missional engagement. They are especially looking forward to doing this not just as individuals, but as a family.

He asked Ryan, with genuine curiosity, whether this congregation is centripetal or centrifugal.

Ryan cleared his throat and responded with a warm smile, "I've never been asked that before. Honestly, I'm not quite sure how to define those terms within a congregation. I imagine an engineer might have a more precise answer. Please, share more with me."

"Oh, I'm sorry," Philip said with a warm smile. "That was engineer talk. In our previous congregation, many of our friends worked for a local engineering firm. Let me share a little more."

A centripetal congregation, often known as a come-and-see or gathered congregation, draws people in with its inviting atmosphere. It warmly emphasizes bringing everyone together for worship services at the church, participating in internal programs and supporting community outreach efforts.

Also known as nickels-and-nose gatherings, these are where people come together to count the number of individuals gathered at the facilities each week.

People are mainly invited to come to the church facilities to connect with God because that's where spiritual activities take place. Over time, this can help build a warm, close-knit community that feels like a supportive holy huddle.

A centrifugal congregation is all about going out and serving others. It's like a lively refueling station where gathered believers are energized and equipped for scattered ministry.

These congregations inspire and support people as they carry out their ministry in workplaces, schools and neighborhoods. As they go about their daily lives, they actively serve others. From Monday to Saturday, they live out their faith in the community, acting as everyday missionaries in their own neighborhoods.

The nickels-and-nose factor in a centrifugal congregation is all about people living out God's call in their lives wherever they scatter during the week. The congregation's gathering times are wonderful opportunities to find spiritual and emotional support. To grow in an understanding of Christ and how He ministered along the roads, in towns and cities, and even in the Temple.

Personal ministry

Everyone is warmly encouraged to discover God's calling for their life and personal ministry. Whether they're gathering for worship or heading out into the world to serve in ministry. It is a wonderful journey to find out where, when, what and how to live out that calling.

Ryan expressed genuine enthusiasm, "I have only been here about 15 months, but that is exactly the focus and missional experience and journey I am building a leadership core to launch. I need a few more families to join us in embracing this vision. It has already captivated a wonderful group of families. I truly hope you can see it as a place full of opportunity."

Philip responded with genuine interest, saying, "I really appreciate the idea of being part of a dedicated movement to help more people go and serve. I'd love to discuss it further. I'll share this with my wife and three teenagers. I'm thrilled about the adventures it might inspire."



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

George Bullard spent five decades in Baptist congregational and denominational ministry. His ministry 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 May 24

OUR ATONEMENT
Matthew 26:17–30

The Old Testament is God's progressive special revelation of His interactions with creation — both material and immaterial, living and nonliving, sentient and nonsentient, mobile and immobile, Jews and Gentiles — through the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Atonement is the redemptive work of God to restore the fellowship with Him that the creatures who bear His image have broken. New Testament terms related to atonement include propitiation (the act of making atonement) and expiation (the satisfaction of the offended party).

Our passage this week focuses on the institution of the Lord's Supper, with Jesus inaugurating the promised new covenant (Jer. 31:31–34) and completing the Passover as the Lamb of God (1 Cor. 5:7; John 1:29, 36).

In order to receive a fuller picture of the events of that night, the Bible student would benefit from a harmony of the gospel accounts.

The reader would do well to read The NIV Harmony of the Gospels (Thomas and Gundry) or the CSB Harmony of the Gospels (Cox and Easley).

Coming Betrayal (17–25)

Go where Jesus tells you to go. The Feast of Unleavened Bread takes place over seven days, beginning with Nisan 15.

Jesus and His disciples were not from Jerusalem, so they needed to find a place to celebrate Passover together. Jesus already knew the details, but He sent the disciples to go to prepare the place.

Say what Jesus tells you to say. Not only did Jesus send them to a specific location, but He also told them what to say when they arrived. This seems simple enough: Go to a certain place and speak to a certain man.

Do what Jesus tells you to do. The disciples did what He sent them to do. They went to the place, and they spoke to the man. Mission accomplished.

This is probably the greatest challenge believers face today. We know where Jesus is sending us. We know what we are supposed to say. The problem is in the doing. This is why James writes that we must be doers and not hearers only (James 1:22–25).

One among them was not a disciple. Judas went with them, and he may have spoken when they arrived. He participated in the meal, yet his heart was not in following Jesus.

Instead, he was willing to sell Jesus' freedom for the price of a slave — 30 pieces of silver. Judas knew it, Jesus knew it and by night's end, the rest of the disciples would know it.

Coming Atonement (26–30)

Take and eat. Jesus gave new meaning to the Passover celebration. He was the sinless Lamb (1 Pet. 1:19) who was sacrificed to protect believers from eternal death.

Every time Christians eat the bread in the Lord's Supper, we are declaring, "By faith, I have received the broken body of Jesus on my account. I trust Jesus alone to save me."

Drink from it. Once again, Jesus redefined the focus in the Passover. Rather than looking back to Egypt, now believers would look back to the shed blood of Jesus as the fulfillment of the promised new covenant.

Do this in remembrance of Me. When we take the cup, we say, "By faith, I have received the blood that Jesus shed as the means of my cleansing."

The broken body and shed blood of Jesus are the entry fee into the Kingdom. Thank you, Jesus!

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

For May 31

OUR SAVIOR
Matthew 27:27–31, 45–54

Mocked (27–31)

Handed over. Pontius Pilate examined Jesus, but the Good Shepherd said nothing to defend Himself. When Pilate heard about his wife's dream, he determined not to condemn Jesus. Instead, he allowed the crowd to choose between a seditious criminal Barabbas and an obviously innocent rabbi named Jesus. They chose Barabbas and requested the crucifixion of Jesus, so Pilate handed Jesus over to be flogged and publicly executed.

Hailed. The soldiers mocked Jesus, treating Him more like a jester than a king. They gave Him a royal robe donated by Herod (Luke 23:11), a crown fashioned with thorns and a reed to signify a scepter in His right hand. They laughingly bowed before Him and cried, "Hail, King of the Jews!" Their empty acts of worship were intended to humiliate Jesus.

Humbled. They beat Him with His "scepter." They tore open His brow with the thorns in His crown. They spat upon Him and then paraded Him through the streets to His own execution. They eventually fastened His hands and feet to a Roman cross.

Forsaken (45–49)

Darkness during the day. Jesus was crucified around midday yet the sky turned dark. From noon until three in the afternoon, darkness covered the land.

Comfort on the cross. Jesus responded to this trial as He did so many trials before — meditating on Scripture. The first part of Psalm 22 is almost a blueprint of Jesus' crucifixion: seemingly forsaken (v. 1), despised (vv. 6–8), surrounded yet alone (vv. 11–12), thirsty (v. 15), crucified (v. 16) and gambling for clothes (v. 18). The second half of the song, however, speaks of the ends of the earth turning to the Lord and His righteousness being declared in the future. Far from being a lament, Jesus found comfort by meditating on the psalm, as He later quoted Psalm 31:5.

Misunderstood by the mockers. Evidently, the crowd confused Jesus' Aramic word for "My God" for the word for "Elijah."

Purpose in the pain. Biblical Hebrew utilizes different words that are both translated as "why?" One term carries the idea of "from what" or "what caused this?" Another term means "for what?" In this quote from Psalm 22:1, Jesus asked the Father to reveal the purpose for His suffering.

Son of God (50–54)

Curtain torn. Josephus describes the veil as Babylonian in origin. Scholars disagree about the height and width of the veil, although all agree that it was massive. This curtain, which separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, measured approximately four inches thick. The veil was torn from top to bottom during an earthquake that split rocks. This demonstrated that God was now accessible to humanity through the priesthood of Jesus Christ.

Centurion touched. I can still hear the actor John Wayne's 1965 cameo as a Roman centurion in "The Greatest Story Ever Told" as he said: "Truly, this man was the Son of God!" Long before I read the story in the Bible, I became familiar with this Roman soldier who recognized something special about Jesus. But was this saving faith he expressed? Was he the first Gentile Christian? Was he the centurion whose son Jesus healed?

We know the events were seismic in proportion and Jesus' resurrection made dead men alive again.

The gospel of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection is still the power of God to bring salvation to everyone who believes. Jesus still brings the dead to life!

"And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up His spirit."

Matthew 27:50

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Sunday School Lessons

By Rony Kozman, Ph.D.
Assistant professor of Biblical Studies, Samford University



For May 24

A MISSION WITHOUT BOUNDARIES
Acts 13:1–3; 44–52

When God calls you to go, go! (1–3)

In the church of Antioch, there were several teachers and prophets including Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius and Saul (or Paul). While the church was worshipping together, the Holy Spirit told them to appoint Barnabas and Saul for His work.

The church responded by fasting and praying and then sending the two on their appointed mission.

In Acts 1:8, Jesus said to His disciples that the Holy Spirit would come upon them and that they would testify of Jesus in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth.

In Acts 9, we read of Saul's encounter with the resurrected Christ, and Jesus called Saul to proclaim Jesus to Gentiles, kings and the Israelites (v. 15).

While Paul did not witness the breadth of Jesus' ministry in the way that the apostles of Acts 1 did, Jesus no less commissioned him to be an apostle and to take the name of Jesus to Jews and to Gentiles.

After a time of separation (11:25–26), Saul and Barnabas reunite in Antioch where the Holy Spirit calls them and sends them on their mission.

They travel to various places, including the island of Cyprus, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystre and Derbe.

On this mission, Paul is taking the gospel to the ends of the earth just as the apostles were commissioned in Acts 1:8 and he was in Acts 9.

We will encounter rejection as some people reject the gospel. (44–47)

In Acts 13–14, we read of Saul and Barnabas traveling to various places to preach the gospel.

When Saul and Barnabas arrived at each place, they would often first go to the synagogue and preach the gospel to their fellow Jews (13:5, 14, 43; 14:1).

Sometimes we read that there were both Jews and Greeks in the synagogue (14:1).

Their message was variously received. It was welcomed by some Jews and Gentiles (13:43), and it was also rejected by Jews and Gentiles (13:45; 14:2–5).

When it was rejected by Jews in the synagogues, Saul and Barnabas then turned to the Gentiles (13:46).

We read that in Pisidian Antioch, a number of Jews "stirred up persecution" against them (13:50).

In Iconium they escaped a near stoning (14:5). And in Lystra, the rejection they experienced was so severe that Paul was even stoned and dragged out of the city (14:19).

We will experience joy as some people embrace the gospel. (48–52)

The way that Paul and Barnabas responded when they were rejected from a city was to move on to the next one. When they were persecuted and driven out of Pisidian Antioch, they moved on to Iconium. And when they were mistreated by both Gentiles and Jews at Iconium and almost stoned, Saul and Barnabas escaped and fled to Lystra and Derbe to preach the gospel there (14:5–7).

Although Saul and Barnabas experienced much rejection and opposition, there were still some who received their message and "were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit" (13:52).

Even though there was large rejection and persecution of the apostles in these cities, when they finished making disciples in Derbe, they then returned to the places where they were persecuted — including Lystra and Iconium — in order to encourage the disciples who had believed their message.

For May 31

DON'T FORGET TO REMEMBER
Joshua 4:1–7, 20–24

God calls us to remember what He's done. (1–3)

When the Israelites arrived at the waters of the Jordan, Joshua commanded the priests to carry the Ark of the Covenant and to walk into the waters.

The people would then follow them until they reached the other side of the Jordan (3:5–17). When the priests with the Ark put their feet in the water, "the waters flowing from above stood still ... while those flowing toward the Dead Sea were wholly cut off" (3:15–16) so that "all Israel were crossing over on dry ground" (3:17). What was the purpose of this sign?

God tells Joshua that the reason the waters of the Jordan would be parted is so that God would "exalt [Joshua] in the sight of all Israel, so that they may know that I will be with you as I was with Moses" (3:7)

And after the people crossed the waters we read that "all Israel ... stood in awe of him, as they stood in awe of Moses" (4:14). And just as Moses took the people to Sinai where he received the Law and delivered its commandments to the people, so also Joshua relays Moses' commandments to the people (4:10)

Memorials help us remember ways God has worked on our behalf. (4–7)

After they had crossed the Jordan, Joshua instructs Israel to choose 12 men each of whom are to take a stone from the Jordan and to carry it to their camp (4:1–3).

These 12 stones representing the Twelve Tribes of Israel serve as a memorial for the people and for the subsequent generation so that the Israelites may tell their children the story of how God cut off the flow of the water that Israel crossed the Jordan on dry ground (4:6–7).

By retelling and recounting how God brought the people across the Jordan through Joshua, the people simultaneously recount how God rescued them out of Egypt through the sea via Moses.

We are to remember God's faithfulness and power. (20–24)

This is a reminder for that present generation. A number of them were armed for war and ready for battle against Jericho (4:12–13).

They themselves can remember God's power and faithfulness to their forefathers when God brought them out of Egypt through the sea and defeated Egypt's army and chariots.

So now, since God brought them through the waters of the Jordan, they can trust God will also give them victory at Jericho.

The 12 stones are also a memorial to future generations to remember and trust God's faithfulness to his people and to fear the Lord forever (4:24).

And they are a memorial for us today who are in the Kingdom of the Son of David. We remember that God rescued us from the spiritual forces of darkness and from this present evil age through our baptism into Christ (1 Pet. 3:21). And we now present our body parts to God as weapons of righteousness in his Kingdom as we ourselves battle against "the desires of the flesh that wage war against the soul" (1 Pet. 2:11).

"When your children ask in time to come, 'What do those stones mean to you?' then you shall tell them that the waters of the Jordan were cut off before the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord."

Joshua 4:6–7

Consistent message

Third Day celebrates 30-year journey, named 'one of the best rock bands, period'

By Tracy Riggs Frontz
The Alabama Baptist



Courtesy photo

Contemporary Christian rock band Third Day recently wrapped up its 30th anniversary tour in Atlanta on May 10. The band formed in 1991, and Mac Powell said he's seen God's faithfulness and goodness through the years.

Formed in 1991, Third Day is a contemporary Christian rock band that has had incredible success by the world's standards. It was named "one of the best rock bands, period" by Billboard Magazine and has racked up many major awards, had 31 No. 1 hits and has made media appearances on shows such as "The Tonight Show with Jay Leno" and "60 Minutes on CBS News."

The band's message has been the same throughout all those years, no matter who they were speaking to or performing in front of. Recently, Mac Powell, the band's lead singer and a songwriter and founder of Third Day and self-proclaimed "old man," went on a deep YouTube dive and watched some old live Third Day footage. He found that he said the same thing in 1996 as he did in 2000, 2005 and 2010.

"For us, there was an important message in the music," Powell noted. "There were several of them, but the main thing was just to know that God has a great love for every one of us no matter who we are, where we come from, what we've done or not done.

"God loves us, and we wanted to encourage people every night and in fact, we still do," he said.

30th anniversary tour

Third Day was brought back together for a 30th anniversary tour, All the Hits, celebrating their official, nationwide breakthrough year in 1996. The tour began March 19 in Jacksonville, Florida, and wrapped up May 10 in Atlanta, with a stop in Birmingham on May 1. Zach Williams was the special guest and opener.

Powell started this journey with Mark Lee, another member of Third Day. But they didn't start out as a Christian group. They went to high school and were in several bands together during that time, starting with their marching band where Lee played trumpet and Powell played trombone.

Then at the end of his senior year, Powell was having some hard times that renewed his prayer life for the first time since he "was a little kid." He started reading his Bible, wanting God's direction for his life. Feeling he shouldn't play in a rock band anymore, he told Lee he wanted to quit.

"Mark (Lee) said, 'Why don't we start a Christian band?' I had no idea what that was. I'd never heard of Christian music before. So he played me some stuff, and my girlfriend at the time, who is now my wife of almost 30 years — she was a strong believer — played me some Christian music that she'd been listening to as well.

"I was just blown away. I couldn't believe that people were making this modern-sounding music with a spiritual and Christian message. So I knew that's what I wanted to try to do with my life," Powell said.

For more information about Third Day, visit thirdday.com.

Although hearing Powell sing in a senior assembly originally led Lee to ask him to try out for his band, Powell is also a songwriter. Sometimes, though, it's a struggle. He'll get an idea that he just has to get out. It weighs on him. It's a "positive irritation" until it's complete.

"It's fun on one hand to have that exciting [feeling], that you have a song that you can't just lay down and let go of but at the same time, it's irritating," he said.

Powell never really thought about giving up and plans to sing until he can't sing anymore. Though he's had recent fleeting thoughts of retiring and can see how nice it would be to not have to get up very early in the morning to fly somewhere, he doesn't see retirement in his future.

"As long as I'm allowed to sing and the Lord allows me to physically be able to sing, I'll be singing for little old ladies in a little church somewhere," he said.

In fact, when Third Day amicably decided to go their separate ways in 2018 — although the other guys in the band were "talented and smart" and went out and got "real jobs" — Powell says he kept singing and songwriting because that was all he knew how to do.

"It was just time to move on and do some other things, and we never knew if we would have the chance to play together like this. It's been amazing.

"I mean, it's the biggest and I believe by far the best show we've ever done. The response that we're getting from our fans has just been overwhelming and just amazing," he said.

God is faithful

Through the 30-plus years of this journey, Powell has learned that God is faithful and that He is good. Although it hasn't been all smooth sailing — including his wife having a brain aneurysm five years ago where he almost lost her — he felt it was a time of learning to trust even more.

"I found my faith being something that I needed in those hard times — not being something that pushes me away from God but bringing me closer to Him. It's just His faithfulness, His goodness and the things that we've been singing about and talking about for over 30 years now. Those are still true in our lives."