



The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

INSIDE



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Camp Baldwin

Photo courtesy of Camp Baldwin

Baldwin and Mobile Baptist associations ready to minister again through coastal camps and getaways

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

The place Gil Johnson calls home has “some of the best sunsets around.”

And he says you and your church are welcome to come visit.

Johnson, director of Camp Baldwin, says they have their own little sanctuary on Wolf Bay, and people “can come and feel the difference.”

“I love having guests come through and have that oppor-

tunity to retreat away from everything else going on out in the world,” he said.

“You can see the relief some of them have, just getting to fellowship, watch the sunrise and enjoy a meal. There’s refreshment that happens here.”

Traditionally, nearly 9,000 guests come every year to Camp Baldwin, a ministry of Baldwin Baptist Association.

The 66-acre camp is a rental facility — they don’t do any programming. But

they can house your church’s retreat and provide meals and activities like ziplining, water trampolines, swimming, fishing, miniature golf, a gym, canoes, kayaks and

a challenge course.

While the camp has been quiet during the pandemic

season, leaders hope to see lots of groups back soon.

“We host youth and children’s groups, family camps, women’s retreats, marriage retreats — you name it,” Johnson said.

Spiritual retreat

Rick Ellison, director of missions for Baldwin Association, said the camp is a great place for a spiritual retreat.

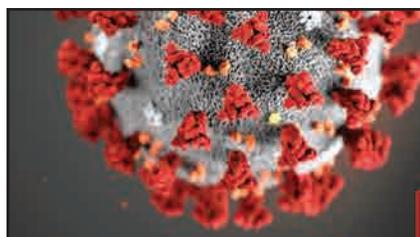
“We have all kinds of groups that come from all kinds of places to use the
(See ‘Camps,’ page 14)



Photo courtesy of Camp Whispering Pines
Camp Whispering Pines



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COVID-19

See pages 6-7 for information and updates

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The crossword puzzle can be found on page 15.

Inspiration from our younger TAB readers



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

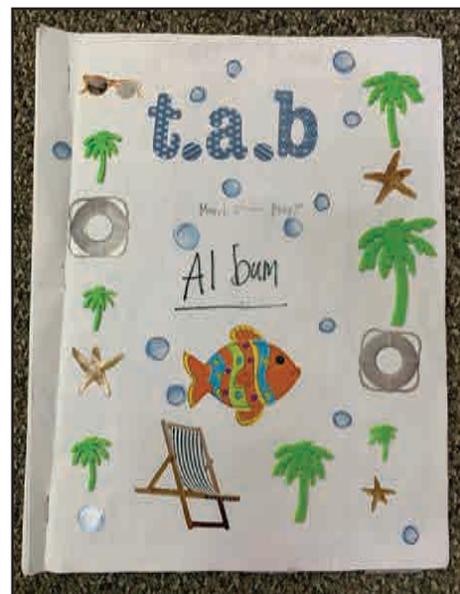


Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash



REINHARDT

Ruby Reinhardt, the cub reporter from Tallassee who has been producing her own customized versions of *The Alabama Baptist* for a few months now, has stepped up her game by adding color and professional fonts thanks to a scrapbooking gift bag donated to her by Jennifer Rash's friend Gail Deavers, member of North-Park Baptist Church, Trussville. Gail heard about Ruby's production efforts with TAB and wanted to support her creative work. Ruby's dad, Billy, is pastor of Riverside Heights Baptist Church, Tallassee, in Elmore Association.

Randy and Janie Johnson's 19-month-old granddaughter Carleigh takes a serious interest in a recent issue of *The Alabama Baptist*. She reviewed every page carefully. Janie noticed how intent Carleigh was examining the papers and captured a photo of her in action. Janie and Randy serve at Grove Hill Baptist Church, where Randy is interim pastor. Grove Hill Baptist is in Clarke Association.



Photo by Janie Johnson

Send your photos to news@thealabamabaptist.org

TAB Media

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

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MY RASHIONALE

By Jennifer Davis Rash
President and Editor-in-Chief

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@RashionalThts



Thank you for having the difficult conversations

A phrase we've used a lot the past year and a half at TAB Media is "your voice matters."

We've also worked to encourage everyone to pull a seat up at the table and have a civil conversation with us — even when the conversation is difficult.

And I'm so excited to share that the conversations are happening — and they are civil.

It really is possible to discuss an issue or topic in which varying opinions exist and remain friends on the other side.

You may be scratching your head because that type of respectful dialogue does seem more rare these days, especially with all the jabs on social media and raised voices coming across the air waves.

But we really are pulling it off here in Alabama Baptist life.

We receive a consistent flow of letters, emails, calls, text messages and Facebook comments at TAB Media — and I'm happy to report almost 100% have been kind in nature even when the person was frustrated about a situation or upset about a particular issue.

It's true that the not-so-kind ones tend to stand out a bit more, but even those were not as harsh as they seemed at first glance.

In all but maybe one or two cases, everyone remained respectful to each other on the other side of the discussion.

Sometimes we had to finally decide to agree to disagree, as

the saying goes, and then we were all good again.

Other times, the concern was merely a quick reaction to one slice of the full story — haven't we all done that at some point? — and once all details were on the table, everything calmed back down.

And other times, the results fell somewhere in between.

But in all situations, a conversation happened and that's what made the difference.

Choosing to form an opinion without all the facts and/or be-

cause it matches what makes us most comfortable will prevent open and honest dialogue.

The most productive discussions happen when everyone involved is allowed to share what is on his or her mind without judgment.

Saying what we are thinking out loud helps us better organize our own thoughts and sometimes even realize where we might be out of step. Writing our thoughts out also helps.

Hearing how others perceive a situation or understand an issue helps us know where we

might need more information or should verify a few facts.

It also could provide the evidence we need to confirm the understanding we already have.

Thank you, Alabama Baptists, for understanding that seeing a situation from different perspectives does not mean the two people are enemies and that having opposing opinions does not need to lead to insults. Thank you for having the conversations.

"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another" (Prov. 27:17).✝

RASHIONAL THOUGHTS

Simple decision to abide in Christ key to true success in life; requires intentionality and protecting the relationship

Why do we tend to make the simplest things the most complicated? That's what popped in my mind as Pastor Bill Wilks of NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville, shared on May 24 about the true key to success.

Preaching from John 15:1-11, Pastor Bill reminded us that the key to success is simple:

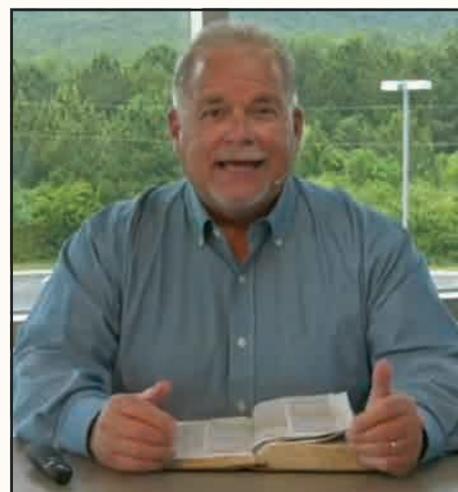
"To live out God's will for our lives to the fullest and to bear much fruit for Him."

Achieving the goal simply requires abiding in Christ, he said.

1. Abiding in Christ results in spiritual fruit (vv. 1-6).

"It means not letting anything come between our relationship with Christ ... And it must be cultivated. ... It is intentional."

As the fruit is cultivated, the



Screen grab from NorthPark Baptist Church

Father removes the fruitless branches and prunes the fruitful branches.

"He prunes us by conviction and by discipline. ... He wants our lives to bear much fruit."

2. Abiding in Christ results in answered prayer (v. 7).

"When abiding in Christ, we dis-

cern what God wants and that becomes what we want. To pray in the name of Jesus is to pray consistent with His character, in His will. It's not about using the phrase 'in His name' as a magic wand to get what we want."

3. Abiding in Christ results in God's glory (v. 8).

"The key to glorifying God is bearing fruit. Are you living to let people see Christ in you?"

4. Abiding in Christ results in great joy (vv. 9-11).

"The difficult things of life cannot take away our joy as long as we abide in Him."

It's not really anything we can do in our own strength, Pastor Bill explained. "Simply abide in Him and the fruit naturally grows in us (Rom. 15:13)."

—Jennifer Davis Rash

Your Voice



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

Reader response to May 21 editorial/open letter

Your letter to Wanda Cooper-Jones, mother of Ahmaud Arbery, in the May 21 issue concerns me.

As an attorney, I have followed the events surrounding this case. It is quite obvious from the tenor of your piece that you are either not aware of or did not take into account the facts that have surfaced since the media story broke.

On last evening's (May 19) network news, ABC carried video of Arbery's arrest three years ago of a TV to which he pleaded guilty. There are other clips of his trespassing on private property on the day of the shooting as well as 911 calls of his trespassing two weeks before.

Additionally, one of the charged individuals (a retired policeman) had been asked by police to keep an eye on the subject's property.

Any attempt to cast this story in a light of Arbery being an innocent victim is simply ridiculous.

I have enjoyed reading *The Alabama Baptist* for many years. While I find some articles just a little too far left for me, overall, I feel the paper is very well done, especially under your leadership.

However, that brings me to my primary inquiry. Why was this piece included? This family lives far from Alabama and are in no way affiliated with Alabama Baptists.

Consequently, this is a political

piece. It has no place in TAB and should not have been included.

James W. Anderson
Talladega, Ala.

EDITOR'S NOTE — TAB verified Mr. Anderson's information about Ahmaud Arbery's arrest. On May 16 and May 19, ABC News reported his 2017 arrest for attempted shoplifting and subsequent sentencing to five years on probation.

ABC News also shared about newly released text messages alleging Larry English, a homebuilder, had asked local law enforcement to notify Gregory McMichael, one of the individuals charged in Arbery's shooting death, of security camera alerts at English's property. Other people also appeared on the video surveillance at different times and English had not reported anything stolen, according to the information.

And on May 14, ABC News reported that McMichael's law enforcement certification was suspended and his firearm was taken away in February 2019 due to repeatedly failing to take mandatory training.

The trespassing information and 911 calls mentioned by Mr. Anderson have not been verified by TAB.

While it is possible Arbery could have been guilty of a crime, I still stand by the point and purpose of the editorial, which was to address a heart issue not a political issue. Local law enforcement should have been alerted to deal with any criminal concerns. — Jennifer Davis Rash

This letter is in response to your column on the opinion page of the May 21 issue.

I believe that you are being premature in your open letter to Wanda Cooper-Jones regarding the shooting death of her son, Ahmaud Arbery.

It's always difficult when someone loses his life, whether young or old, but to rush to judgment without all the facts being fully examined is problematic. It's interesting that all the pictures of Arbery in the news show him as a clean-cut, nice-looking young man. Haven't we seen that before with other cases?

Then we see pictures of that same person as they really were before the incident occurred; not so fine-looking. There are indications that Mr. Arbery was not the seemingly innocent jogger that he is pictured to have been.

If you haven't searched the internet to look at all sides of this incident, I suggest that you do so. The columnist, Michelle Malkin, questioned the early reporting of this tragic incident from the start.

We can feel compassion for the young man's mother, but to put the entire blame on someone other than Arbery at this point is wrong. Arbery has a history of being in trouble.

Please be as sympathetic towards the family of the elderly white couple who were gunned down by a black gunman while visiting the grave of their son.

Marion Scott
Hartselle, Alabama

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you! Preach! Preach! Preach! Thanks for your letter, your honesty and your love expressed in your letter to Ahmaud Arbery's mother in the May 21 issue.

Like many folks, on May 8 — Ahmaud's birthday — I walked 2.23 miles. One day, Lord, we will all act like your children.

Here's an excerpt from my Facebook post from May 8:

Beloved, if we're going to be Christ followers we ALL need to remember that "new command" He gave: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples,

if you love one another" (John 13:34-35).

As a few raindrops fell on me during my walk, I was reminded of the words from the prophet Amos. May they happen for Ahmaud's family and for ALL of us in need of the Savior: "But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" (5:24)

Today I walked for Ahmaud Arbery; but I hope I walk every day for the One who taught me long ago that He loves ALL the children of the world — Red, Yellow, Black and White — they are ALL precious in His sight.

Charlie Wilson
Aliceville, Ala.

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“Thank you for all you do to provide us weekly updated news.”

CHARLES T. CARTER

James H. Chapman Fellow of Pastoral Ministry, Beeson Divinity School

Bless you for your compassionate letter to Wanda Cooper-Jones, mother of Ahmaud Arbery (the young man murdered in broad daylight).

I cannot imagine the pain she, her family and friends are feeling after watching this horrific tragedy.

With your letter you have exhibited the love of Christ to another human being — just as God called us to do.

Though our words of love, support and prayers may not heal her family's wounds, for us not to speak words of love would deny the cause of Christ. Thank you for your example.

David George

www.wmufoundation.com

Your May 21 open letter to Wanda Cooper-Jones was very moving. I think you said what a lot of us would like to say.

Thanks for this.

Linda Harrison

Fultondale, Ala.

Baptist or not, I recommend *The Alabama Baptist*. It has great articles, messages, and movie and book reviews. Especially great in the May 21 issue was an “Open Letter” to Ahmaud Arbery's mother. Such a wonderful letter, full of love, compassion and encouragement.

TAB subscriber

New Brockton, Ala.

Excellent editorial in the April 30 issue of TAB — “Understanding the full picture vital to determining the solution.” Very thoughtful and compassionate encouragement to put the focus on another and not on our own perceived ability to have all the right answers.

Kathy Dean

Daphne, Ala.

Loved your Rashional Thoughts in the May 7 issue — so right on it. It's so sad that we fail miserably in what we need to be doing (loving one another).

I look forward to reading the paper each week. It is so warm and inviting and full of human interest articles plus the necessary news.

I appreciate your talent and applaud your venture to make a few changes — all good.

Sharon Hill

Birmingham, Ala.

I am so proud of your compassionate letter to Wanda Cooper-Jones. And I'm proud you are committed to work to change the hearts of those blinded by hatred and prejudice.

Gwen Reece

Retired IMB missionary

Thank you for the changes you have brought to TAB. The fresh new look, updated content and relevant information are all positive changes.

I really appreciate your column(s) each week and now look forward to TAB more than ever.

Keep up the good work. Stay safe and stay focused.

Davis M. Woodruff

Decatur, Ala.

I really enjoyed the May 28 issue of TAB. The lead story is so timely — right here at graduation time, and with so many students and parents wondering “what is next?”

Your editorial — “Considerate approach, response both important for growth” — was particularly helpful to me. I do wish I would learn not to repeat the same mistakes (whether when writing or in living).

And thanks for the plug about books on missions.

Rosalie Hunt

Guntersville, Ala.

We are thankful for all the ways TAB media helps keep us informed. Thanks for all you do.

Tommy DeRamus

**Shades Mountain Baptist Church
Birmingham, Ala.**

Congratulations to you, TAB Editor-in-Chief Jennifer Davis Rash,

and your entire staff for the recent awards received by TAB. I always expect these awards will continue to flow to TAB. God bless you all during these challenging days.

Jerry Wilkins

Northport, Ala.

Your bite-sized nuggets of wisdom in My Rashionale and Rashional Thoughts are not only timely but also transformative.

Sometimes the most significant and arresting comments are those which seek not to drain the dictionary but which capture relevancy in selective choices. In your unique style of communication, you adhere well to TAB's mission: “Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.”

Morris Murray Jr.

Jasper, Ala.

Thank you, *Alabama Baptist* newspaper, for keeping us updated on all the issues affecting us.

Laurie Mullinax

Lincoln, Ala.

Thank you, Jennifer Davis Rash, for writing and publishing the open letter to Wanda Cooper-Jones. It speaks volume about your heart and compassion and should speak volumes to all who read it and are striving to love all others through Christ.

Charlie Button

Huntsville, Ala.

Thank you for writing the open letter to Ahmaud Arbery's mother. It reflects the thoughts of so many of us who have watched and read about this in disbelief and a knot in our stomachs.

Violent vigilantism has no place in a nation where we claim a Judeo-Christian moral foundation.

That it happened to an unarmed black man at the hands of two armed white men makes it all the worse and disrupts genuine efforts at greater Christian unity.

Jerry B. Pierce

Flower Mound, Texas

‘May God make us all one’

To exercise, I have been running and running a lot. I have run in my neighborhood and other neighborhoods. Recently, I ran just short of nine miles.

During the quarantine, I have made friends with other runners. I have given air high fives, smiles and confident nods to strangers, acknowledging we are all in this together.

A few weeks ago, I said hello to one of my oldest son's baseball teammates while on a run. He is an exceptional young man, a great athlete, a student who excels academically and athletically. I have known this young man since he was seven, and I have watched him grow up into a fine human being. He is also black.

Recently I was confronted with the horrible story about Ahmaud Arbery, a young black man out for a jog when he was confronted by two white men.

After watching the video of the shooting, I was heartbroken. This could have been the young man that I greet regularly on my runs.

I firmly believe that you cannot be a believer in Christ if you are racist. If these reports about Mr. Arbery are true, then all believers should rise up and demand justice for this evil act. A mother's son was destroyed. A father's son was removed from God's earth. A future was aborted.

I am solidly pro-life from conception to death. Any time life is taken unnecessarily, I am enormously grieved. Taking a life because of skin color is the highest form of evil and wickedness.

My heart is grieving for the Arbery family and their friends. While I do not know them, I will be praying for them. God remove any prejudice from me and make me a lover of all people as all people are created in your image. May God make us all ONE!

Stuart Davidson

Eastern Shore, Ala.

Shelby Baptist Association volunteers fulfill food lists for patients visiting the association's Community of Hope health clinic. Supplies from the Mobile Daily Bread Shop help alleviate fears the patients have about running out of food.

LIVE ON MISSION

even during crisis



Photo courtesy of Justin Johnson

Learning to be a 'missionary where you are' includes finding opportunities to serve

By Tracy Riggs
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

When the COVID-19 pandemic brought restrictions on gatherings and advice to shelter at home, Tim Wheat, pastor of missional living at Shades Mountain Baptist Church, Vestavia Hills, immediately began to think about how he could help church members live on mission during the crisis.

And he wasn't alone. Other pastors and leaders began to look for opportunities for members to serve, even while staying home.

"Learning to be a missionary where you are" can mean something as simple as a prayer walk around your neighborhood and praying for your neighbors, Wheat said.

And flexibility is key, said Chris Chambers, minister of missions at First Baptist Church, Trussville, where church members are serving older congregation members by providing grocery delivery to those who can't get out.

"The methods changed but not the message," Chambers said. "We are called to share Jesus in everything we do. We are learning new ways to reach our community and our world."

Spencer Knight, minister of ministries at Hunter Street Baptist Church, Birmingham, said missions work at his church also has changed, and "it's gotten a lot busier." But with the increase in need, an increase in the desire to help has flourished.

"This experience has affirmed that God is faithful, and that Christians are people who, because they have experienced God's grace, like to display and give grace. They are people who want to continue to serve their community, love their community and to love their neighbors because of how the gospel has transformed them. It's a joy to be able to see ... that we're not a building. We're a people," said Knight.

The three churches, along with First Baptist Church, Birmingham, recently worked together to host a drive-thru food drive to benefit local benevolence ministries, including Birmingham's Christian Service Mission.

Working together

Rich Hutchens, associate pastor of discipleship and missions at FBC Birmingham, said working together makes even more sense in a time when gatherings are more difficult.

"One of the things I've discovered through this experience is just how precious human relationships are and how vital to our well-being," Hutchens said. "I think we can tend to take each other for granted when we see folks Sunday morning, Sunday evening, Wednesday night and throughout the week. When that disappeared, I felt the loss, a certain void. It's a reminder for me that God has created us to live in fellowship."

Connecting with others

Shelby Baptist Association also uses partnerships to share the gospel and connect those in need to local churches. Two of the association's ministries that have been busy during the past few weeks are the association's mobile food pantry and the Community of Hope Health Clinic, which serves uninsured Shelby County residents.

After the stay-at-home order began and many lost work, Dr. John McGuinness, Community of Hope medical director, heard fears about running out of food from patient after patient.

McGuinness wanted to buy groceries and distribute them, but Justin Johnson, executive director of the clinic, provided a better solution.

Working with Rebekah Parr, ministry evangelism catalyst for the Shelby Baptist Association, the association started setting up the asso-

ciation's Mobile Daily Bread Shop in the clinic's parking lot to distribute food to patients in need.

Adapting to needs

Adapting their normal procedures, clients served by the food pantry are interviewed by phone upon arrival, and while they wait, a chaplain speaks with each family, prays with them and gives them a Bible.

At the health clinic, a staff member speaks with each patient about their food needs and then sends a list to the mobile pantry. Volunteers at the food pantry box up what they need, add a Bible and drop off the box at the clinic. Later, each patient receives a follow-up call that includes prayer and a gospel conversation.

Sometimes that first conversation leads to another opportunity to share God's love. Recently, a Hispanic family who received assistance from the mobile food pantry also got a follow-up call from the pastor at a local Hispanic church. The family ended up joining that church's online prayer meeting. Cre-

ating such opportunities to share the gospel is the goal, Parr said.

"We as the people of God need to be ready when we're thrown a curveball like COVID-19. We can't let it paralyze us," Parr said. "The Great Commission is still our mission even though our methods may have to change."✝



Photo by Tracy Riggs

Volunteers at Birmingham's Christian Service Mission unload items collected during a drive-thru food drive.

More information about donating food to the Shelby Baptist Association's food pantry or volunteering is available at shelbybaptist.org.

To read more about the Birmingham-area food drive held May 9, visit tabonline.org/food-drive.

Opportunity for the Church to be seen as

THE CHURCH

Bessemer Association partnerships help meet food needs in community

Sheila Tyson said she knows there is a lot of need in the state right now, and her goal is to help as many people as she can.

It all started with a phone call, and it's continued with the help of local churches with the same goal.

Tyson, a commissioner for the Jefferson County Commission, said she got a call recently from someone in the area who was applying for a grant from the USDA Farmers to Families Food Box program.

Through the program, the USDA purchases fresh produce, dairy and meat products from suppliers whose workforce has been impacted by restaurant closures, then transports those food boxes to food banks, community and

faith-based organizations and other nonprofits.

The person applying for the grant needed distribution points, and Tyson said her goal was to "cover every inch of the county."



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

Terry Hollingsworth (left) of Grace Baptist Church, Bessemer, helps load boxes of fresh produce to distribute.

"I knew we had to try our best to put it in each community," she said, noting that transportation can be tough for many people in the community, especially with limited funds to use for gas.

So Tyson reached out to local churches and organizations, including Barry Cospers, associational mission strategist for Bessemer Baptist Association, who enlisted the

pastors in his association to help. When the first delivery came May 21 to the Bessemer Civic Center, 1,600 of the 2,100 boxes were desig-



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

Bill McCall (truck to the right, left side), pastor of The Baptist Church at McAdory, helps unload the 1,600 boxes of fresh produce given to Bessemer-area churches by the Farmers to Families Food Box program to distribute to the community.

nated to be distributed by Bessemer Association churches. At the distribution sites, people are able to drive through and pick up boxes without leaving their cars.

Morris Johnson — pastor of Integrity Church, Hueytown — called it a "great opportunity to meet the needs in our community."

"People are hurting right now, and we certainly want to meet that need because we know God is able, and

He always comes up with a plan to meet people's needs," Johnson said.

Another distribution site, Hopewell Baptist Church on Jefferson Avenue in Birmingham, is also feeding 1,600 children a day to help out with hunger issues in the community, Cospers said.

He said that effort plus the food box program is a "tremendous" opportunity for "the Church to be seen as the Church."

Jefferson County distribution sites will continue to receive shipments every week until June 30.

Hopes of expanding

And Tyson said hopefully it won't end there — she's planning to apply for another grant that would take the program through the end of December. Not only that, she's helped other areas get grants of their own, including Talladega, Dallas, Wilcox, Perry and Tuscaloosa counties. (TAB)

For more information about the USDA Farmers to Families Food Box program, visit www.ams.usda.gov/selling-food-to-usda/farmers-to-families-food-box.



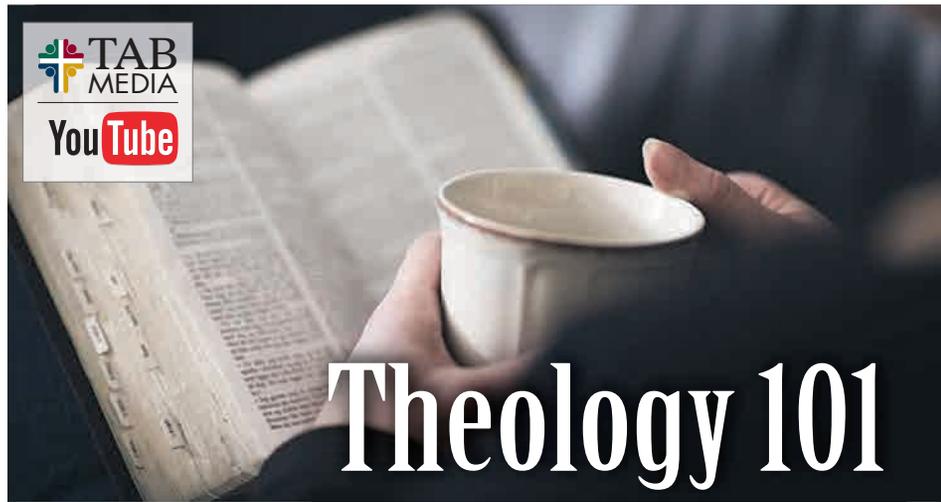
Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

Morris Johnson (left), pastor of Integrity Church, Hueytown, and moderator of Bessemer Baptist Association, was instrumental in working alongside Barry Cospers, associational mission strategist, to organize area churches for the distribution opportunity.



Photo by Jennifer Davis Rash

Cynthia Donald
Bessemer City Council



Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

Christology Through Figures

The Word Was God

By Jerry Batson, Th.D.
Special to The Alabama Baptist

After a period of extensive teaching, Jesus summarized His words with the statement: “I have spoken these things to you in figures of speech. A time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figures” (John 16:25). A reading of the Gospel of John reveals a number of such figures by which reference is made to Christ and His redemptive mission. The study of the person and work of Christ is referred to theologically as Christology. For a number of sessions, Theology 101 will choose some of those common figures of speech as an entrance-way into thinking about Jesus.

The earliest installments of Theology 101 centered on the image of Christ as the Word: the living Word, the eternal Word, the distinctive Word, the divine Word, the incarnate Word and the proclaimed Word.

This week Theology 101 considers some of the other figures by which the Gospel of John conveys insights into Christology.

‘In the beginning’

Opening the Gospel of John, we find in its first verse a three-fold use of Word as a figure that conveys truth about Christ: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Immediately we associate the idea of a word with human speech, whether spoken or written. What then does this biblical figure of Word reveal to us concerning Christ?

Christ came as the highest form of God’s communication with humanity. Previously, God had communicated with His people by signs and wonders. At a more articulate level, He had spoken through prophets for centuries.

In the fullness of time, God spoke through His incarnate Son, as stated in Hebrews 1:1–2: “Long ago God spoke to the fathers by the prophets at different times and in different ways. In these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son,” making Him the Living Word of the Living God.

Living likeness

Human words can be exaggerations that overstate the truth or lies that distort the truth. Words are nonetheless our best way of forming our inmost thoughts and of meaningful communication with others. Pictures, expressions and gestures can help, but words are more precise. Christ came as the precise and altogether accurate expression of God’s likeness and message.

If we would know God at the point of His highest self-revelation, we must know Christ the Living Word, both His ministry and His message. 

Jerry Batson is a retired Alabama Baptist pastor who also has served as associate dean of Beeson Divinity School at Samford University and professor of several schools of religion during his career.



Preparation and excitement

‘Evidence whisperer’ shares practical ways to share gospel

By Shawn Hendricks
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Retired Los Angeles homicide detective J. Warner Wallace says Christians need to be more strategic and passionate and maintain the proper perspective in sharing their faith.

Wallace’s investigative expertise has earned him numerous appearances on NBC’s Dateline, Court TV, Fox News and the nickname “evidence whisperer.” The same way a detective approaches a case, he said, is the same way Christians should approach their faith and how they share it with others.

“That same approach I take with cold cases, I’ll use also with working the case for Christianity. That’s how I became a Christian,” he told

a workshop group during the National Religious Broadcasters convention in Nashville in February. His workshop focused on practical ways to share the gospel in today’s culture.

Once a devout atheist, today Wallace is a speaker, writer, and teacher of apologetics who focuses on how Christians can be more effective in sharing their faith in a skeptical world. He is the author of “Cold-Case Christianity” and “Forensic Faith.”

Wallace, who didn’t come to faith until he was 35, said he needed to be convinced of why he should put his trust in the Bible.

“I didn’t trust your Bible,” he told the group. “I needed to know why I should trust your Bible first.”

Convincing and passionate com-

For more information about J. Warner Wallace, visit ColdCaseChristianity.com.



Photo by Van Payne/NRB

J. Warner Wallace speaks during a workshop at the National Religious Broadcasters convention in February. Wallace, a writer and teacher of apologetics, said having a plan for gospel conversations helps overcome the fear of evangelism.

munication, he noted, is an important part of sharing the truth of the gospel.

“Gen Z and Millennials are walking away from the church in the fastest way possible,” he said. “And I think we have to change the way we communicate the claims of Christianity to a generation that has got multiple claims being made on digital media.”

Preparation, the same preparation that would go into an investigation or selecting a jury, is also important.

“It turns out preparation is directly connected to your level of excitement,” he said.

Wallace said most people wouldn't be interested if he offered to take them somewhere to share their faith with strangers.

“Most of you would find a way out of it,” he said. “Why? Because you don't feel prepared, and you lack the excitement to do this.”

‘First 10 seconds’

Wallace has a friend who starts evangelism conversations with the question, “What do you think happens when you die?” And working up enough courage to ask a question like that is the hardest part, he said.

“It turns out what you're afraid of is the first 30 seconds,” he said. “Because trust me, after [someone] answers this question, it's easy. Now you're in conversation and we all know how to do that. What we're afraid of is how to start it.”

His advice? Figure out what you're going to say and then follow through.

“If you want to share the gospel more often, think about your first 10 seconds. Memorize it, painfully get it out. It's all downhill from there. It's easy after that,” he said.

He compares evangelism to a game of baseball, not tennis.

“Sometimes all I'm doing is trying to move a person from first base to second, that's it,” he said. “If I do that, that's good.”

Ultimately the goal is to get someone to home plate or a decision for Christ, but that may mean only starting out with a base hit, he said.

“I would only fail if I don't even get up to swing,” he said. “If you start looking at it that way, it will change your expectation levels. ... You're a part of a team and everybody's journey.”

For more information about Wallace, visit ColdCaseChristianity.com.

To read J. Warner Wallace's story in its entirety, visit tabonline.org/JWarnerWallace.

Multiple evangelism apps available to assist in gospel conversations

By Tracy Riggs

Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

The coronavirus pandemic brought many face-to-face social interactions to a halt, but the need for gospel conversations never stops.

A number of personal evangelism strategies are available, including many apps that can be helpful in talking to others about Christ.

Listed below are a few apps to consider, including the app's rating on Google play and the number of downloads it has received.

Available in both the Google Play and Apple App stores:

▶ **“Life in 6 Words”** (4.6 rating, 10K+ downloads)

“Life in 6 Words” bases its approach on six words. The app requires you, the user, to create an account and choose six words that describe your life. When there is someone you want to share the gospel with, open the app and direct him or her to choose six words as well. The ensuing conversation emphasizes how Jesus is part of those six words. A gospel presentation is included in the app. The app also allows users to create a “cause circle” and share prayer concerns with a group.

‘Find a church’ option

▶ **“Reach My City”** (5.0 rating, 100+ downloads)

Geared toward youth, “Reach My City” uses hip and colorful graphics and integrates the Bible app into its platform. Podcasts and videos on evangelism are included, as are sections for noting prayer requests and journaling. The “find a church” link opens a Google search for nearby churches.

▶ **“GodTools”** (4.7 rating, 500K+ downloads)

Published by Cru, “God-Tools” includes four illustrated slideshows of personal evangelism strategies: “Four Spiritual Laws,” “Knowing God Personally,” “Satisfied?” and “Teach Me to Share.” A tutorial explains how to use each of these tools. A unique feature of “God Tools” is the multiple language function. Another helpful option is the app's share function, which allows users to share more information with those they talk to.



Story approach

▶ **“Share Your Faith”** (4.9 rating, 10K+ downloads)

Utilizing an illustrated story approach, “Share Your Faith” includes audio of the gospel story. A “more” button finds explanations about gospel concepts and a “Bible” button brings up relevant Scripture. After the short gospel presentation, the app asks the user to make a yes-or-no decision. Further information and a guided prayer are included in the app.

▶ **“The God Test”** (3.5 rating, 50K+ downloads)

“The God Test” app relies heavily on apologetics. The interface asks the user a series of 10 questions about his or her beliefs about God. Videos then help explain the 10 questions from a biblical worldview. Additional tools are available, but they are not all free. This app is a companion to the “God's Not Dead” app which links to videos on how to “defend your faith” and “examine the evidence.” This app may work well in conversations with people possessing a strong non-Christian worldview.

▶ **eeHelps** (4.9 rating, 1K+ downloads)

Produced by Evangelism Explosion and geared toward

youth, users say this app takes some time to set up and learn to navigate. However, once you get familiar with the interface, users find it good for both individuals and teams. App users choose from topics related to salvation, such as “assurance of faith” and “my story,” then respond to fill-in-the-blank questions relevant to each topic.

▶ **“Life Conversation Guide”** (4.7 rating, 50K+ downloads)

Produced by the North American Mission Board, this app illustrates the “3 Circles” method of sharing the gospel. Those who are already familiar with the 3 Circles strategy may find the app helpful in streamlining a conversation, though some users say the app takes some practice. In the Apple App Store the app is listed as “Life on Mission.” Both app stores have the app available in Spanish.

Simplest apps

Available only in the Google Play store:

▶ **“Evangelism by Multiplication”** (4.2 rating, 500+ downloads)

Using a simple 14-slide presentation to present the gospel, this app relies on the “cross bridging a chasm” illustration. The app is one of the simplest available and doesn't include additional video, audio or illustrations.

▶ **“Share Good News 2”** (Not rated, 100+ downloads)

This simple app uses the Roman Road strategy, as well as additional relevant Scripture. The in-app sounds may be distracting.

EDITOR'S NOTE — A multitude of gospel-related phone apps are available on the Google Play and Apple stores, and apps are added and removed regularly. Users should use appropriate caution and vet any app prior to use.

'A vessel for God to use'



Photo by Grace Thornton

Whether working at the car repair shop and gas station he and his wife, Jo, own in Montevallo or preaching on Sunday mornings at Marvel Baptist preaching point in Bibb Association, Stan Dawson strives to share Christ as he goes.

Montevallo businessman finds Christ in his 40s, helps with nearby church restart

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Just a little over a decade ago, Bill Russell had a set of keys jingling in his pocket — keys to a little white church building in the far edges of rural Bibb County.

The church — Marvel Baptist — had long been closed. Another denomination had met in the building for a while, then somewhere along the way it was used for Saturday night singings. Eventually the key got passed back to Robert Smith, then pastor of Mount Carmel Baptist Church, West Blocton, and he had an idea.

County-wide VBS

“Robert called me and asked if we could have a county-wide mission Vacation Bible School in the Marvel building with the goal of a church restart,” said Russell, director of missions for Bibb Baptist Association. “The association joined in partnership with Mount Carmel and our VBS team to organize and conduct this project.”

And they had someone in mind to lead it — Stan Dawson.

Dawson himself had never attended a VBS as a child, or church at all for that matter. God got a hold of him at 46 after the death of a friend’s mother.

“I went to Bethel Baptist in Pea Ridge to honor his mother, and that Sunday I got under conviction,” Dawson said.

“You talk about an ol’ boy hurtin’ — I was hurtin’.”

He was saved, and after that, he felt God calling him to take the message that had saved him to other people.

Over the years, as he and his wife, Jo, continued to run their car repair shop and gas station in Montevallo, he served as a bivocational pastor for churches in the area.

And when Russell got those keys to Marvel Baptist, he thought they might belong in Dawson’s pocket instead.

“We asked Stan Dawson to teach

the adult VBS class during this project, and he did,” Russell said. “The project was a blessing.”

Bibb County replant

So, they asked Dawson to pray about restarting worship services there, and again he did — and said yes.

“We handed him the key, and he has been faithful to the task of making Marvel a preaching point here in Bibb County ever since,” Russell said.

These days they run between six and 10 on Sunday mornings — a number that, for the most part, has

been able to keep on meeting with some precautions even during the COVID-19 restrictions.

Among those are Bill Allenbaugh, who teaches Sunday School; Claude Heathcock, a “faithful member and a prayer warrior”; and his wife, Carrol, who’s earned herself the name “church lady” because she takes care of everything and everyone.

It also includes Eddie Beane, whom Dawson had known since he was a teenager and bumped into a few years back at a local auto parts store. He shared the gospel with Beane, and he and his wife, Karen,

have attended Marvel Baptist ever since.

“We’ve got a loving little church,” Dawson said. “People can come in here and if they’ve got a problem or their heart’s hurting, we want to offer them solace and peace in the Lord.”

That’s what it’s all about, he said — leading people into the Kingdom of God. Sunday after Sunday, the members of Marvel Baptist have worked to show their community what it looks like to find unconditional love and acceptance.

The church has been a preaching point in the area, but it’s not Dawson’s only preaching point — he views his service station and wrecker as a pulpit too. He uses a gold coin with an etching of Jesus’ face to start a conversation with people, and over the years he’s had the opportunity to share with people of all ages as he’s worked on cars and responded to accidents with his tow truck.

Daily witness for Christ

Russell says Dawson views his job as an opportunity to be a witness for Christ every day of the week. “Stan will talk to anyone about Jesus at the drop of the hat,” Russell said. “He will drop the hat too if no one else does.”

But Dawson said it’s not about him — it’s just about God and what He wants to do through His church and His people.

“I’m just a vessel for God to use,” he said.✝



Photo by Grace Thornton

Stan Dawson often uses this gold coin with the image of Jesus’ face etched on it to start gospel conversations.

“We’ve got a loving little church. People can come in here and if they’ve got a problem or their heart’s hurting, we want to offer them solace and peace in the Lord.”

Stan Dawson
Bivocational pastor, Marvel Baptist preaching point

COVID-19 marathon exhaustion

Cheering you on to stay the course, take one step at a time during this pandemic season

By Lisa Keane
Special to The Alabama Baptist

Recently, I have felt myself comparing our current COVID-19 reality to the half marathon training I used to do. The best word of advice I ever received in training was to take one step at a time and remember to conserve energy for the miles ahead. I feel like in these days of experiencing the impact of COVID-19, similarly, it is best for us to take each day as it comes and try to pace ourselves well.

Can feel exhausting

I remember feeling so overwhelmed in those days of training, and the miles ahead felt too daunting to think about. As our worlds and schedules are shut down and we do not know exactly where the finish line even is, it can feel exhausting at times. I think it's important to recognize that we are not running a sprint right now, but a marathon.

Personally, I am feeling the exhaustion of this marathon. My temper is shorter, I've felt more anxious, and my sleep has been disrupted. It has been vital that I remind myself I am having a very normal reaction to a set of very abnormal events. The novelty of working from home, kids being out of school, and schedules being cancelled, has worn off.

Take breaks when needed

I also have had to remind myself that we are in a long game right now where we must make sure we are taking care of ourselves for the long journey, not just for today. But what does that mean?

I think it means we don't try and



Unsplash.com

get all the work done today. We take breaks when we need to take breaks. We drop what we are doing and connect with a friend over video chat. We do the things that bring us life and fill us up in this uncertain time.

I also think it means we need to be very kind to ourselves right now.

If you have kids at home, give yourself some compassion

and grace for this moment and time. You do not have to be the perfect home-school mom or the most creative with activities. Some days the goal will be just to make it to bedtimes without one or a few meltdowns. That does not make you a bad parent.

This is so new to all of us and we are facing such abnormal circumstances. We must offer ourselves

grace. There will be days when our hope wanes and we have meltdowns ourselves (meltdowns are not just for kids).

Allow yourself to grieve all that is happening.

Don't shame yourself for those feelings, but rather allow yourself to feel them.

Find a trusted person with whom you can share those struggles.

One step you can also take in this marathon is to plan ahead.

► **Make sure you have things to look forward to on your calendar in this season** — ordinary things like a small group meeting online, a webcast or a phone call/video chat can make a big difference.

► **Sit down one night and plan out the next few days if you have kids at home.** Make sure you have

all the materials or items needed to do some different activities.

If you plan ahead, you are much less likely to be stressed figuring out what to do.

► **Develop a good routine that includes physical activity, down time, no screen time and meal planning each day.**

You cannot take care of those around you if you are not taking care of yourself well.

And make sure you are feeding your soul with God's word, an uplifting podcast or a good friend who can speak truth into your life right now.

We can make it through this marathon if we run it together. Lean on each other and let's cheer one another on during this season.

There may be days you need someone to speak encouraging words over you to keep running and keep going forward.

And some days you may feel like quitting because this race feels too overwhelming.

Remember, give yourself grace and just take it one step at a time. We are praying the finish line is not too far away.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Faith & Family is a bimonthly look at important spiritual, cultural and relational issues facing today's families.

For more articles on contemporary topics like these, go to PathwaysProfessional.org/blog.

Lisa Keane (MAMFC, LPC-S, NCC, Registered Play Therapist Supervisor) is clinical director of marriage and family for Pathways Professional Counseling, a sister ministry of Alabama Baptist Children's Homes & Family Ministries. 



3 stories

you should know



BP photo

A Jewish woman accepted Christ after watching livestreamed worship and devotionals during the coronavirus pandemic. Lisa Cohen Huff (center) was saved during an Easter night Zoom session with Jimmy Stewart (right), pastor of FBC Gulfport, Mississippi. She had been watching the church's online services led by Stewart, a childhood friend of her husband, Pope Huff (right), who was already a Christian. Huff drove to Gulfport weeks later to be baptized. (BP)

Methodists reschedule LGBTQ vote for 2021

The United Methodist Church has rescheduled its General Conference for Aug. 29–Sept. 7, 2021, at the Minneapolis Convention Center in Minneapolis.

The General Conference — during which delegates from across the globe are expected to discuss a proposal to split the denomination over the inclusion of its LGBTQ members — had been set for May 2020 in Minneapolis. It was postponed in March when the convention center announced it was restricting events at the venue to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus.

In the announcement of the rescheduled event, the Commission on the General Conference also said it's looking into ways to use technology to ensure delegates can participate in the quadrennial meeting. (RNS)

SBC leaders commend CDC church guidelines

Southern Baptist leaders commended to churches the new federal guidelines for restoring in-person worship gatherings during the coronavirus pandemic.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued interim guidelines May 22 that reminded state and local officials to take the First Amendment right of religious liberty into account when they institute reopening policies.

No church or other religious group should be called on to enact "mitigation strategies" stricter than those requested of "similarly situated entities or activities," the CDC said.

Ronnie Floyd, president and CEO of the SBC Executive Committee, said the government should "trust the churches" as it does businesses but urged pastors to carefully consider the CDC guidance. (BP)

— NEWSBRIEFS —

Geneva Association DOM McAllister to retire after four decades at helm



For more than 39 years, Dicky McAllister has been driving the roads of Geneva County, visiting its churches and offering them support. And he



MCALLISTER

currently holds the title in Alabama for longest-serving DOM at the same association.

But on June 15, he will close the door on his season as director of missions for Geneva Baptist Association.

"We started in 1981 in the living room of our home on Academy Street with only \$3,000 in the bank. But God quickly blessed us, and we were able to open the office on Main Street in Hartford," McAllister wrote in his column in the May 28 TAB local edition for Geneva Association.

"As the ministry grew, God opened doors to move into an even larger office with a chance to host missionaries, speakers and conferences and to eventually begin the thrift store ministry."

His years there have been a "blessing," he said. This month also marks 55 years total of ministry for McAllister.

Before serving Geneva Association, he served as pastor of churches in Alabama and Mississippi. McAllister plans to continue to serve through the ministry of Bellwood Baptist Church. (Grace Thornton)

Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity reopens to visitors in late May



Bethlehem's storied Church of the Nativity reopened to visitors May 26, after a nearly three-month closure due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The church, built over the spot where Christians believe Jesus was born, was closed on March 5 as the first cases of the virus were reported in the West Bank. (AP)



Wikimedia photo

Jones, disciple-making force, marks 10 years at Prospect Baptist, Eclectic



David Jones came to a point in his bivocational ministry at Prospect Baptist Church, Eclectic, when the church had grown to the point he felt they could really benefit from a full-time pastor.

And as Jones — who had a full-time job in corporate finance — weighed the idea of stepping down from the pastorate, he realized something.

"The Lord revealed to me I was resigning the wrong job."

He became Prospect Baptist's full-time pastor, and God continued to move in the church. It grew into a disciple-making force, and Jones himself continued to disciple both men in the church and people who worked in the corporate world.

"It's just been a joy to serve alongside the people of Prospect Baptist Church in carrying the gospel of Jesus Christ into our community," said Jones, who marks 10 years at the church this



JONES

— ALABAMA NEWS —

Shocco Springs open for summer retreats, camps, day programs

Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega is once again open following weeks of closure due to the coronavirus pandemic.

“Our first camp that’s still on the books is for June 18–22,” Shocco executive director Russell Klinner told TAB Media during the May 19 TAB Talks podcast.

Shocco staff members made the most of the unexpected downtime by gutting and renovating the first floor of Bagley Center. The renovations resulted in The Station, a space that combines the hospitality desk, snack shop and gift shop all into one location.

Other changes include an updated mini-golf course and a new activity called the Adrenaline Jump, in which participants step into a harness and leap from the lakeside Wet Willie tower in an “exhilarating” free fall, Mullinax said.

The cancellation of all LifeWay summer camps for children and students means lots of openings for groups who want to plan their own camps or retreats, Mullinax said.

“In the past we’ve always had to turn away groups because we have been full to capacity dur-

ing the summer months,” she said. “It’s exciting that we now have available space and an unprecedented opportunity for churches, schools and companies to bring their own groups to experience Shocco, even in the summer.”

Klinner said Shocco has experienced no layoffs or job cuts, but the financial losses sustained over the past few months due to event cancellations has necessitated putting some planned construction projects on hold.

Those funds will instead be used to sustain Shocco amid the losses sustained during the shutdown.

“As always, looking through the rearview, I can see His hand guiding and providing for us at every step,” Klinner said.

Klinner added that many have asked, “How can we help Shocco?” The answer, he said, is to plan an event.

“Let us do what we do best — serve you,” he said.

To schedule an event at Shocco for your group, call 256-761-1100.

Hear the full TAB Talks episode with Klinner at tabonline.org/podcasts. (TAB)



Photo courtesy of Shocco Springs

Renovations to the first floor of Shocco’s Bagley Center include The Station, a one-stop snack/gift shop and hospitality desk.

Persecuted church

Tennessee pastor returns home after long detention in India

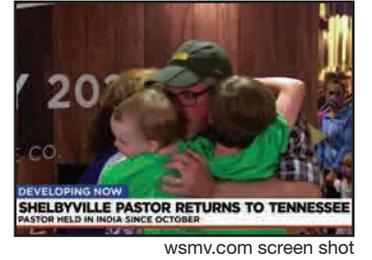
NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Tennessee pastor Bryan Nerren returned to the U.S. on May 19 after being detained in India for seven months.

Indian authorities first arrested Nerren in October 2019 and imprisoned him for six days for allegedly violating India’s customs laws. News reports said Nerren, pastor of International House of Prayer in Shelbyville, Tennessee, had \$40,000 to pay expenses

for Sunday School training conferences he was leading in India and Nepal. According to the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), who provided Nerren’s legal counsel, Nerren had led these conferences for 17 years. After Nerren’s prison release, an Indian judge confiscated Nerren’s passport and banned his travel.

Since coming to power in 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party (founded on Hindu ideology) has increasingly targeted Christians, according to International Christian Concern.

India is No. 10 on Open Door’s 2020 World Watch List of countries where persecution of Christians is highest. (Compiled from news sources)



— NEWSBRIEFS —

month. “We’ve seen the baptismal waters stirred, souls saved and lives changed. It’s been a joy, and I’m blown away at the way I’ve seen the hand of God work in our lives.” (Grace Thornton)

COVID-19 cases lead to closure of day care at Central Park, Decatur



After reopening on May 4, Central Park Baptist Childcare Center, Decatur, is closed again after two infants and two teachers tested positive for COVID-19.

Central Park learned of the first child’s illness on May 20, according to Pastor Matt Haines. The infant showed symptoms on Sat., May 16, after staying at the day care the previous week.

Haines said all children were checked daily for fever before entering the center. The infant did not have a fever May 15, the last day she was in care.

Central Park notified other parents of the positive test and made the decision to close on May 20 out of caution and in accordance with a plan made by the center prior to reopening.

On May 22, Haines learned a second child had tested positive. Several teachers were tested following the first child’s diagnosis, and two of them

tested positive as well. Haines said all four are doing well.

Haines said parents have been “very supportive” of the day care’s situation. The center will be closed at least through June 5, he said.

The center had implemented many changes in accordance with state health guidelines at the time, including group sizes below 11, limited use of common areas, new drop-off and pickup procedures and enhanced cleaning and sanitation procedures, Haines said.

Central Park Baptist Church also decided to resume online-only gatherings on May 24 and 31 as a precaution. The church had gathered in person on May 17 following state recommendations for worship gatherings.

More than half of the confirmed COVID-19 cases in Morgan County happened in the final two weeks of May, according to the Alabama Department of Public Health. (Carrie Brown McWhorter)



Facebook photo

News near you

BIRMINGHAM METRO ASSOCIATION

► The Seasoned Adult Ministry of **First Baptist Church, Trussville**, will be remembering one of its own with the Leland Dockery Tribute Cruise-In on June 20 from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the church’s front parking lot.

Dockery was a longtime member of the church, a veteran and a fan of auto shows. He restored more than 30 cars throughout his life, said First, Trussville, minister to seasoned adults Bob Smith. “I can’t think of a better way to honor his memory. We are anticipating over 150 show-quality vehicles.”

Pre-registration is available at fbctrussville.org/cruise-in-registration and onsite registration begins at 8 a.m. the day of the show. For more information, call 205-655-2403.

Buddy Champion is pastor. 🇺🇸



Photo courtesy of Camp Whispering Pines

Mobile Baptist Association's Camp Whispering Pines offers ziplining, kayaking and other outdoor activities, as well as various indoor facilities to meet each group's needs.

Camps offer beauty of nature, escape from distractions to hear from God

(continued from page 1) camp, and we see a number of people come to Christ each year through their camp experience," Ellison said.

Mobile area

And a little piece up the road in Citronelle, Mobile Baptist Association's Camp Whispering Pines also offers a place for church groups to get away.

The camp offers outdoor activities like ziplining, kayaking, a ropes course and paintball, as well as facilities like a gazebo and a large outdoor chapel.

If needed, those managing the camp can provide specialized programming like their Veritas Students and Momentum Kids Camp, which are "fast-paced, non-stop fun" with a strong emphasis on faith and community.

Thomas Wright, executive director of missions for Mobile Association, said there will always be a need for people to get away from distractions

to hear the Holy Spirit speak.

"Camp Whispering Pines, our associational camp, continues to provide effective evangelistic ministry to every age group," he said.

"In 2019, we had over 200 decisions including salvation, repentance or call to ministry or missions."

In recent years, the camp has added a hotel option to its dorm space and made a lot of upgrades and repairs.

"We will continue to use that marvelous facility with the lake, ropes course, game room, paint ball, and climbing wall to introduce campers to the still small voice of the Creator God," Wright said.

Both Camp Baldwin and Camp Whispering Pines are open and ready for groups. They also are adhering to COVID-19 guidelines.

For more information, visit cambaldwin.org or call 251-987-5100 and visit campwhisperingpines.com or call 251-866-7868.

For information about current guest guidelines, visit cambaldwin.org and campwhisperingpines.com.



Photo courtesy of Camp Baldwin

Church groups through the years have enjoyed the variety of activities available to them near the Gulf Coast of Alabama at the 66-acre Camp Baldwin, a ministry of Baldwin Baptist Association.

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or email ads@thealabamabaptist.org.

CHURCH POSITIONS

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Bellevue Baptist Church, Gadsden, Alabama, is prayerfully seeking God's man to serve as our senior pastor. Please agree with us in prayer over this matter. If you believe you may be God's man for us, your resumé may be sent to: resumesbellevuegadsden@gmail.com. Resumés may also be mailed to: Pastor Search Committee, Bellevue Baptist Church, 150 Noccalula Dr., Gadsden, AL 35904. Please check our church website (bellevuegadsden.com) or our Facebook page for more information about our church. For a job description, please contact Susan Sauls: sauls.susan@gmail.com.

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be not dismayed, for I am your God."

ISAIAH 41:10



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‘He does **restore**, He does **bring back**’

Coffee Association key leader uses all of his story to serve God, share Christ

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

The day Brad Boykin ate a “death chip,” he had at least done his homework. He and his cousin, Sean Roehler, did their research, ate a high-fat meal and took antacids before each eating half of a Paqui tortilla chip, the world’s hottest chip. “A jalapeño is 6,000 Scoville Heat Units (SHU), and a death chip is 1.9 million,” Boykin said, adding for perspective that pepper spray is 2 million SHU.

He and Roehler took the “10-minute challenge” — to eat a piece of the chip, which comes with just one chip individually wrapped and packaged in a cardboard coffin, and wait 10 minutes before drinking anything — as part of Big Dude Approved, a series of videos they produce and post online.

In recent months, Boykin and Roehler started “flipping pallets,” buying pallets of liquidated products and selling and giving away the things they unpack. They started doing live videos as they unboxed their shipments, which sometimes included snacks that they’d try. One thing led to another, and they ended up with the Paqui death chips.

And though it was a rough 10 minutes, they survived because they were prepared, Boykin said.

But over the years leading up to

that chip, he’s come across things in his life that were a lot harder to survive — things maybe he wasn’t as prepared for.

A time far from God

Things like a troubled marriage. A porn addiction. A loss of a ministry job he loved. And finally — the loss of a baby. He and his wife, Emily, already had one son when she found out she was pregnant with twins. But at 5 months pregnant, the doctors only found one heartbeat.

“When that happened, I felt like we were being punished for my sins,” Boykin said.

He’d been living his life disconnected from God ever since things had started spiraling.

“I hadn’t prayed in years at that point,” he said. “I had let myself get so far away from God.”

And if he’s honest, he didn’t know how to get back. When his son, Jonah, was born healthy, Boykin was afraid he was going to lose him too, so he didn’t let himself love his son the way he wanted to.

Jonah was six months old before Boykin let

himself believe God wouldn’t take him away.

“I was struggling with depression and felt hopeless. For a long time, I felt like it was something I was supposed to be able to fix myself and couldn’t,” he said. “I finally came to a point of forgiveness. I went from a



Screen grab from Facebook

Brad Boykin (left) and Sean Roehler topped their Big Dude Approved video antics when they each ate half of a Paqui tortilla chip — the world’s hottest chip known as the ‘death chip’ — and waited 10 minutes before drinking anything.



Photo courtesy of Brad Boykin

Brad and Emily Boykin (center) with their sons, Elijah (left) and Jonah (right).

point of feeling like I was completely lost and broken to feeling like I’d been healed.”

Boykin’s wife’s aunt invited him to sing in her church’s Christmas cantata, and that opened the door for him to start attending church again. Over time, he stopped being afraid of people asking him what had happened in his past and started allowing God to use that as part of his testimony.

“I enjoy sharing my story with people now,” he said. “I want people to know that He does restore, He does bring back.”

Finding his way back

In Boykin’s life, God restored even more than His and Boykin’s relationship — He restored Boykin’s old job too. In 2019, he and his family moved back to serve at the Vineyard Christian Retreat, Camp, and Conference Center of Coffee Baptist Association. His wife also serves as the association’s ministry assistant.

“We’re blown away, to be honest,” Boykin said.

John Granger, director of missions

for Coffee Baptist Association, said Boykin left a job where he was making three times as much money to come back to the camp because he felt like it was what God was calling him to do.

‘Heart for ... the gospel’

He said Boykin has “a heart for people and the gospel.”

“I have known Brad since he was an early teenager,” Granger said, noting that Boykin went on associational youth missions trips. “I value his partnership in the Lord’s work here in Coffee County. He is gifted with being able to do many practical things, and he has really good insight into how to share God’s Word to meet needs.”

Boykin leads missions trips and is a key leader in the associational children’s camp and in his church, the Church on Boll Weevil Circle, Enterprise. Not only that, Boykin is a regular participant in the theological classes Granger provides for bivocational pastors.

“He is more help to me than I can express,” Granger said. 🙏

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GOOD NEWS For You!



Share **YOUR** stories of how God is at work in your church and community on our Facebook page or at alsbom.org/goodnews.

During recent days, numerous Alabama Baptist pastors have shared on Facebook how God is blessing their congregations during these unusual times. Here are just a few of the good news testimonies we found:

"During our first online service, someone emailed me from another area and said that 'God spoke to my heart through your message today. I have been away from God and the church for sometime. Today I recommitted my life to Christ. I just wanted you to know that.' Had we been in our building on this day, this email would probably never shown up. God ultimately uses the bad for the good!" **—Ron Horton, NEW PROSPECT BAPTIST CHURCH, HALEYVILLE** (Winston Association)

"On the day of our very first livestream-only service, a man (not from our area) called me late that evening and said he had watched our service that day on the advice and encouragement of a neighbor. He had not been in any kind of a church since he was in high school, and he is 53 now. After an hour and a half of talking with him on the phone, he prayed to receive Christ as his Savior. He has not missed a livestream service since March 22. He is waiting until a Baptist church near him opens back up to present himself for believer's baptism and church membership. His neighbor has agreed to go with him for support and encouragement." **—Roger White, ARLEY FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH** (Winston Association)



"Our ladies' sewing ministry, called We Sew Love, usually makes clothes to send to international missionaries to use in blessing their communities. For the past several weeks, they have made more than 12,000 masks for Birmingham area hospitals, nursing homes and others." **—Rob Paul, HUFFMAN BAPTIST CHURCH** (Birmingham Metro Association)

"During the past two months, we have had five children and teenagers make professions of faith. We have been having great involvement in online worship." **—Ross Clemmons, THE GROVE, MADISON** (Limestone Association)

"During this time of pandemic, we've had six to join the church: two middle-aged adults and four in their 20s. PTL!" **—David Stancil, ENON BAPTIST CHURCH, VINEMONT** (East Cullman Association)

"My brother-in-law was saved this month, so pray for his growth as a new Christian. We have been praying for him for a long time. We are grateful to God that our offerings are up since all this mess started." **—Ronnie Day, ROACHES COVE BAPTIST CHURCH, FACKLER** (Tennessee River Association)



Preparing for What's Next

Your Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions has developed a document that will help you ask the right questions, consider helpful suggestions and access a variety of resources as you begin reopening your church facilities. It is available as a PDF to download and/or view by visiting alsbom.org/reopen.

photo by unsplash

UPCOMING FREE WEBINARS VISIT ALSBOM.ORG/EVENTS TO REGISTER

LEADERSHIP AND MINISTRY IN CHALLENGING TIMES Every Tuesday, 10-11 a.m.

JUNE 9: The Latest Trends on Regathering
JUNE 16: Ministering to Senior Adults in Challenging Times
Join us as we look at issues related to using technology, providing ministry in a post-COVID 19 world, matters related to gatherings, small groups and trips, and more.

CHURCH TAX CONFERENCE FOR SMALL CHURCHES Tuesday, June 16, 10 a.m.-Noon

Do you need a W-2 if the pastor is the only paid employee? Do you have to complete the form 941? Can the minister take 100% of his income as housing? How does a small church of 100 or less differ from a large church in tax issues? These questions and more will be answered at this free webinar led by State Missionary Lee Wright in the Office of LeaderCare & Church Health.

CHURCH ADMINISTRATIVE GUIDELINES: A TWO-PART WEBINAR

Tuesday, June 23, 10 a.m.-Noon
TOPIC: The Documents You Need for Incorporation and Bylaws

Thursday, June 25, 10 a.m.-Noon
TOPIC: Writing/Revising Your Documents for an Emergency Like the Coronavirus
Note: You will need to register separately for both parts of this webinar.

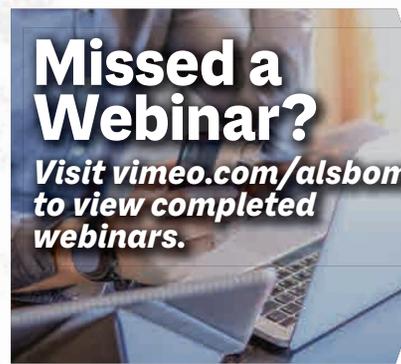
JUNE DISCIPLESHIP LUNCH AND LEARN Thursday, June 25, 12-1:30 p.m.

FEATURED SPEAKER: Alan Briggs, pastor, author and network leader for making disciples who can make disciples. (Lunch and Learn is a feature of Disciple Making Ministries, co-sponsored by PassionTree and Incite Ministries. It is designed to allow you to interact online with a nationally known leader in disciple making during your lunch hour (12-1 CST). Following the hour, there will be an additional 30-minute Q&A with the Alabama hosts.)

TOPICS INCLUDE: Making Disciples in Times of Great Fear and Anger ♦ Evangelism in Time of Social Distancing ♦ Reaching the Summit ♦ Virtual Disciple-Making Forum ♦ Leadership & Ministry in Challenging Times (various subjects) ♦ The Big 5: Sharing the Gospel During COVID-19 ♦ Church Insurance: Protecting People and Property ♦ The Truth About Truth ♦ **Plus** student ministry resources, messages of encouragement from Alabama pastors, and much more!

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Remember - visit alsbom.org/coronavirus and our COVID-19 Resource Group Facebook Page for a variety of helpful resources!

Someone You Should Know

ARTHUR WILLIAMS

By Leigh Pritchett
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Arthur Williams, 72, of Jasper is a deacon and has served in numerous leadership positions in his church and in community organizations. He is a past chairman and current member of the board of TAB Media/*The Alabama Baptist*.

His favorite ministry, in which he has served for 16 years, is at a soup kitchen administered by a group of churches. Williams works alongside wife Kathy, a team captain for that ministry. A graduate of the University of Alabama, Williams was an independent insurance agent 50 years.

Q: Describe where you focus your greatest ministry efforts.

A: The food ministry and revitalizing the church. I see my role now as a supportive role, to do what I am called upon to do, be an adviser, serve on the finance commit-

tee to be a good steward, and still be involved in Sunday School and church.

Q: Who was or is one of the most influential people in your faith life? Why?

A: The greatest influence in my faith life is my wife Kathy, without question. God sent her my way. She is a strong Christian woman and a strong example. My in-laws were strong Christian parents and that made her a strong Christian woman. She is a great mate and has been a great friend for 50 years.

My mother and my grandmother also were influential. I was brought up in church and was saved when I was 12 even though I got away from the church for a while.

Q: Tell about a "turning point" in your life and how God was involved.

A: The turning point of my life was when Kathy and I got married. We dated for four years. She got me go-

ing back to church and living like you should, according to what the Bible says. She and God got me involved. She encouraged me to get involved in church when someone would ask me to serve. I think God gave me her to turn my life around. It certainly was successful. She got me turned around.

Q: What has God been teaching you lately?

A: God has been teaching me lately that we're all a work in progress. And that's what God expects us to be. He always wants us to be changing. I think He has been showing me the importance of prayer. We are always going through troubles. Praying for friends is important. I think He has kind of been showing me I am a work in progress and should continue growing and keep praying. He has shown me several times lately that He is always there, even when I am in a valley.

MINISTRY: Striving to be a servant of Jesus Christ; doing what I am called upon to do; trying to be a positive Christian example; serving with humility in all places of service, no matter what they are.

CHURCH NAME:
First Baptist Church, Jasper
Walker Baptist Association

LIFE VERSE: "But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love." (1 Cor. 13:13)



Q: If there were one thing you could tell your younger self about faith, what would it be?

A: What I have learned and what I would tell myself is that God doesn't leave us; we leave God. When things aren't going like you want them and you get angry with God and say, "Why me?," you go back and see what a great God He is and that He doesn't leave us.

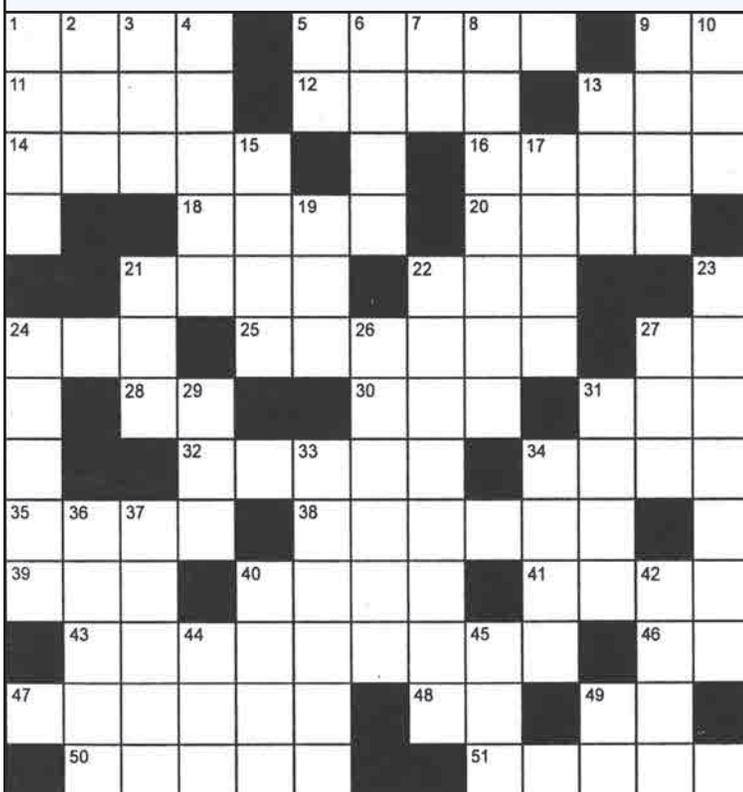
Q: Have you ever read a book or heard a song that

changed the way you think about God and faith? What was it and what did you learn from it?

A: I love the old hymns. I think hymns have a message in them. I like "Because He Lives." It emphasizes that Jesus "came to love, heal and forgive." All the worries turn to calmness because He lives. The other one I like with special meaning is "The Anchor Holds" — the chorus "the anchor holds in spite of the storm." Jesus is our anchor.✝

Christian Crossword

By Joann Horn Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

1. Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' _____. (Matt. 23:2)
5. Opposite of "thin."
9. ____ that cometh from above is above all. (John 3:31)
11. Window glass.
12. God had sworn with an ____ to him. (Acts 2:30)
13. Uncooked.
14. After the ____ of Melchizedek. (Ps. 110:4)
16. Seek things which are _____. (Col. 3:1)
18. Rip or pull apart.
20. The Lord is on my _____. (Ps. 118:6)
21. ____ shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matt. 16:26)
22. Did eat.
24. Tree of the olive family.
25. ____ than hell. (Job. 11:8)

27. Spanish for "yes."

28. Word ____ God abideth in you. (1 John 2:14)
30. A male child.
31. To gain a victory.
32. Abstain from fleshly _____. (1 Pet. 2:11)
34. Sung in praise of God.
35. To kill.
38. How large a ____ I have written. (Gal. 6:11)
39. As a ____ doth gather her brood under her wings. (Luke 13:34)
40. Part of foot.
41. Let it be so.
43. A contract.
46. Agriculture. (abbr.)
47. When he returned, he found them _____. (Mark 14:40)
48. God ____ loved the world. (John 3:16)
49. My yoke ____ easy, and My burden is light. (Matt. 11:30)
50. Type of bear.
51. Dwellings.

Down

1. Be found ... without ____ and blameless. (2 Pet. 3:14)
2. Used for hearing.
3. To sit on My right hand ____ on My left. (Mark 10:40)
4. Plural of "tooth."
5. I go ____ prepare a place for you. (John 14:2)
6. Covering for head.
7. Baptism of John, was ____ from heaven? (Mark 11:30)
8. Discipline by punishment.
9. Thou shalt ____ treasure in heaven. (Mark 10:21)
10. Female sheep.
13. A staff or scepter.
15. Philip ... heard him ____ the prophet Esaias. (Acts 8:30)
17. A coffin.
19. Took the little book ... and ____ it up. (Rev. 10:10)
21. And Jesus said, ____ touched Me? (Luke 8:45)
22. Sent to preach the gospel.
23. ____ with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Col. 3:16)
24. Tossed about by waves.
26. Let each ____ other better than themselves. (Phil. 2:3)
27. Transgression.
29. They ____ away as an eagle toward heaven. (Prov. 23:5)
31. For their ____ shall not die. (Isa. 66:24)
33. Drowsy.
34. Chair, bench or stool.
36. He that is ____ in ... heaven is greater. (Matt. 11:11)
37. To fish with a hook.
40. Take ye ____, watch and pray. (Mark 13:33)
42. Sun rises here.
44. Primary color.
45. No way.
49. Opposite of "out."

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For June 7

Explore the Bible

By Jay T. Robertson, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



CHARTED WATERS Proverbs 1:7–19

One thing is for certain during these “novel” times: we all need wisdom to navigate these trying days. Providentially, this quarter we have the joy of studying the Book of Proverbs and the Song of Songs. We begin with Proverbs.

Solomon is credited with writing the proverbs in chapters 1–29. Chapters 1–24 may have been written during his reign (970–931 B.C.). The proverbs in chapters 25–29 were Solomon’s, collected by King Hezekiah during his reign (716–687 B.C.). The last two chapters are credited to Agur and Lemuel, about whom nothing else is known.

What is a proverb? It is a brief, practical statement derived from astute observations about how life usually works. The proverbs in Scripture are divinely inspired, and since they come from God, we know they are true and beneficial. When applied in one’s life by the power of the Holy Spirit, proverbs impart wisdom. Wisdom is the righteous application of true knowledge.

Starting Point (7)

Having a right relationship with God is the beginning of knowledge. There cannot be any comprehension of true knowledge that glorifies God without a right relationship with God. The expression “the fear of the Lord” refers to a deep sense of awe, reverence, worship and humble submission to the one true God. To truly experience the fear of the Lord as expressed by Solomon, an individual must repent of his or her sin and believe in the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. However, “fools despise wisdom and instruction.” This statement is a declaration of truth and a principle believers must teach their children. As children are taught to pursue wisdom, they will encounter others going the opposite direction who will be encouraging them to do likewise. The way of the wise is contrasted with the way of the fool.

Path of Obedience (8–9)

The book of Proverbs is an instruction manual for wise living as

the covenant people of God. These proverbs cannot be lived out apart from the grace of God at work in our lives. Both fathers and mothers are responsible for teaching their children the commands and wisdom of God. Solomon appeals for his son to stay on the right path. If he stays on the path of obedience, godly wisdom typically will bring favor, respect, health and wealth if he consistently follows the path of obedience.

Resist Sin (10–14)

Godly parents seek to educate, train and prepare their children to glorify God when they move into adulthood. Even the most obedient children will face temptations, often from their friends. This very thought strikes terror into the hearts of many godly parents. This is why the Bible is so clear on the fact that godly parents must train their children in the truths of Scripture as they go through life together and not leave their children’s relationship with God in the hands of a pastor or student pastor.

The wise father instructed his son not to consent or give in when sinners entice him. “Sinners” in this context are people who do not follow the principles of godly wisdom the son learned from his parents. The Apostle Paul wrote: “Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals’” (1 Cor. 15:33). For a young person to participate in sinful activities he would have to abandon the teaching of his godly parents and live life as he wanted, with no fear of the Lord.

Sin’s Results (15–19)

The godly father urges his son to reject the way of sin. He urges him not to begin on the road of a sinfully rebellious life which can easily become a lifestyle. Solomon characterized rebellion against godly wisdom as self-destructive while those involved in the sinful lifestyle are blind to the end result. We must remember that no one ever sins and gets away with it. We must look to Christ with repentance and faith and submit ourselves to Him.✠

Bible Studies for Life

By Roy E. Ciampa, Ph.D., S. Louis and Ann W. Armstrong
Professor of Religion, Samford University



THE BASIS FOR OUR HOPE 1 Peter 1:1–9

Our hope is based on the death and resurrection of Jesus. (1–3)

Peter writes to believers scattered throughout various Roman provinces and refers to his readers as exiles in the “diaspora,” the term used for Jews who were displaced from their homeland.

Christians are like those displaced Jews: as aliens in this world we don’t fully belong in the cultures in which we find ourselves. Rather, our lives find their meaning and hope in God and His promises and provision in Christ.

The “hope” referred to in verse 3 is hope in the sense of something we confidently look forward to that gives us strength to endure present difficulties.

Thanks to our relationship with the Father, Son (Jesus Christ) and Holy Spirit (all three of whom are named in v. 2), Christians have a hope that steels our souls in even the most challenging times.

By raising Christ from the dead, God has demonstrated His power over all enemies. We endure with hope since nothing can thwart God’s plans for us.

The Father has chosen us, the Spirit has sanctified us, Christ has cleansed us with the blood of His sacrifice, and we have been given a new birth, which Jesus said was needed to enter God’s kingdom (John 3:3, 7). Peter is emphasizing that God has done all that was needed to achieve our salvation. It is all the work of God, leaving nothing that depends on us.

Our hope is secure for eternity. (4–5)

Peter focuses on the inheritance God has in store for those who believe in Christ.

The inheritance “kept in heaven” for us is the one Jesus spoke of when He talked about inheriting the kingdom of God, eternal life or treasure in heaven (see Mark 10:17–21; Matt. 19:29; 21:38–43; 25:34).

Peter emphasizes that the inheri-

tance awaiting us is incorruptible in every way: it is imperishable, undefiled and unfading. In other words, it will never end, be tarnished or weaken with time.

Furthermore, it is kept or preserved in heaven for us, where nothing can possibly harm it.

The reference to our inheritance is related to the references to our new birth in the previous verse and to God as Father in verses 2–3. An inheritance normally comes from one’s father.

It is because God the Father has given us new birth that we are His children and look forward to an inheritance that reflects the wealth and generosity of our heavenly Father (see Ps. 2:7–8).

Not only is our inheritance safe, we ourselves “are shielded by God’s power” until our ultimate salvation is fully realized. Our Father is committed to protecting us and providing us with the inheritance He has prepared for us.

Our hope is displayed through genuine faith. (6–9)

Peter goes on to explore other ways in which faith in Christ transforms our experience of living in a world in rebellion against God and those who seek to honor Him.

Peter stresses the difference faith makes in the midst of suffering, grief and various trials. It allows one to rejoice sincerely and thoroughly in light of the knowledge of what can never be lost.

The genuineness of one’s faith will be made even more obvious than gold that has been refined by fire, and its value — more than gold — is revealed in its ability to lead people to love a Lord they have never seen and to prepare them to experience “praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

We can endure temporary suffering with a joy that comes from the knowledge that one’s reward will be unimaginably greater than anything that can be lost or taken away in the struggles of this life.✠



Media reviews

MOVIES/TV

'The Chosen' miniseries on life of Christ leads family-friendly spotlight

By Michael Foust
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

Have you ever watched a television series that was good at the beginning, great by the second act and left you begging for more when the credits rolled?

Such is the case with "The Chosen," the eight-part crowdfunded series about Jesus and His followers, which was released in 2019 but has received renewed attention during the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, with families hunting for entertainment. Dallas Jenkins directed it.

Each episode tells the story of Christ through the eyes of individuals who met Him: Peter in one, Thomas in another and so forth. We empathize with the disciples — with their flaws and their sinfulness, but most of all with their joy when experiencing God's grace and mercy.

Full experience

We also encounter the humanity and deity of Christ in a way few other

films have displayed. We see Him joke and laugh. We watch Him interact in day-to-day life with those around Him. Of course we see Him teach and perform miracles too.

The acting is stellar, the cinematography spectacular and the plot gripping. Even the music is catchy.

Binge-worthy

"The Chosen" is, hands down, the best thing to "binge watch" this summer. And it's free. (Although you'll probably be so inspired when it's over that you'll want to help fund future projects.)

It has been dubbed the first-ever multi-season show about Jesus, and it is as inspiring as it is entertaining (Episode 6 — which examines the healing of the paralytic lowered through the roof — drew me to tears multiple times).

The series does employ a bit of artistic license, but it always stays within the framework of the biblical account.

To watch "The Chosen," download The Chosen app



VidAngel Studios photo

'The Chosen'

in the app store on your smartphone or tablet. From there, you can watch it on your device or on a television through a number of connections, including Roku, Chromecast, Apple TV, Fire TV and Android TV. It's also available through VidAngel (VidAngel.com).

Also worth watching this month:

▶ **"I Still Believe"** (DVD, Home Video)

— The No. 1 movie in America on its opening night, the latest faith-based film from the Erwin Brothers is now available on DVD, Blu-ray and digital platforms. It tells the true story of Christian musician Jeremy Camp's marriage to his first wife, Melissa, who died of ovarian cancer. It's one of the most inspiring films I've seen. It was

released on all home video platforms May 5.

▶ **"Unplanned"** (Prime streaming) — It's the story of Abby Johnson, the Planned Parenthood



clinic director who became a pro-life activist after assisting with an abortion. The movie was slapped with an "R" rating even though the graphic content is minimal and the disturbing content is more in the "PG-13" range. Indeed, it deserved a PG-13; this one is

not for children.

▶ **"Radio Theater: The Chronicles of Narnia"** (Focus@Home Streaming) — Focus on the Family launched free streaming during the pandemic with the promise of additional content and has added the excellent "Chronicles of Narnia" radio drama series, hosted by Douglas Gresham, stepson of author C.S.

Lewis. Visit focusonthefamily.com/streaming.

▶ **"More Than Funny"** (YouTube) — A hilarious 80-minute comedy special featuring one of the funniest men in America, Michael Jr. Best of all, it's free, squeaky clean fun for the whole family. "More Than Funny" includes Michael Jr.'s stand-up comedy but also features three real-life inspiring stories. Search for "More Than Funny" on YouTube, or visit Michael Jr.'s YouTube channel. 🙏



'The Chosen'

VidAngel Studios photo

Meet the reviewer

Michael Foust covers the intersection of faith and entertainment as a media reviewer for The Alabama Baptist. He also is the husband of an amazing wife and the father of four young children.

'Looking for how He can use us'

Texas Acteens group stays on mission amid challenges of social distancing

By **Trennis Henderson**
WMU National Correspondent

Missions discipleship is personal for Mary Lou Sinclair and her Acteens group — even amid a pandemic.

Sinclair has served as the Acteens director at Freeman Heights Baptist Church in Garland, Texas, for more than 20 years. During that time, five of her Acteens have been named National Acteens Panelists and three others have been selected as Top Teens.

They also have traveled extensively through the years to participate in missions trips, state and national Woman's Missionary Union annual meetings and Blume, a national missions gathering for girls.

A close-knit group that reflects the church's multicultural community, the Acteens describe themselves as family and thrive on frequent fellowship among the teens and their adult mentors. Based on their close connections, the sixth through 12th grade girls refuse to let coronavirus-induced social distancing and sheltering in place derail their missions and ministry focus.

Anticipating good things

"We can't begin to understand what is happening right now," Sinclair acknowledged, "but we, as Christians, can be sure that there will be some good that comes out of all of this."

On a practical level, Sinclair

asked Marisol Sandoval, one of Freeman Heights' youth ministers, to set up virtual Acteens meetings online to keep the group connected.

Sandoval, a former Top Teen who grew up as a member of Sinclair's Acteens, now serves alongside Sinclair as an Acteens leader.

In order to help transition the group's meetings to video conferencing, "I had to learn everything I could about Zoom," she said.

'Adapting well'

"It's worked out pretty awesome. The girls are adapting well," Sandoval added. "They want to be with us. They want to see us. They want to hear from us. It's been really neat that we have the ability to use technology for our Acteens meetings."

Sinclair said their virtual meetings still include several typical features such as "praying for people in our church, praying for national and state WMU, having our lesson and having Bible study."

Along with using available tech options to stay in touch, the teens and their leaders also have been continuing with missions projects, such as a virtual prayer walk of their neighborhood using GPS mapping. They sewed protective masks for residents in area apartment buildings and sent letters of encouragement to members of a local Chinese Christian church in case they were feeling ostracized during this time.

Sinclair said the goal of the letters simply is to say to fellow Christians,



Video screen shot by Pam Henderson

Acteens leaders Marisol Sandoval (top left) and Mary Lou Sinclair (bottom) share a virtual update with WMU national correspondents Trennis and Pam Henderson about how restrictions related to the coronavirus pandemic have impacted their Acteens group at Freeman Heights Baptist Church in Garland, Texas.

"We're praying for you, we're so thankful that you're here and safe and we want you to know that we care about you."

As her Acteens navigate a new normal, Sinclair plays a huge role in encouraging their ongoing missions commitment.

"Mary Lou is one of those people who does whatever's needed," said Larry Venable, her longtime pastor at Freeman Heights. "What she has done with Acteens is fabulous, just teaching them spiritually, getting them involved in missions activity and growing. ... She's definitely captivated by her relationship with Christ and the gospel."

While coping with social distancing, loneliness and disappointment, "I think there's been a lot of growth spiritually," Sandoval reflected.

"This has definitely taken us out of our comfort zone. We know from looking in the Bible that whenever we're taken outside of our comfort

zone, there's growth and we learn to trust in God. We learn how important relationships are.

"It's hard because we can't really go and hug them," she said. "That's one of the hardest things for this social distancing because you just want to hug them and just comfort them and you have to trust God that He's there to comfort them and love on them."

'God finds a way'

Before the current crisis erupted, Sinclair said she was involved in event planning with a group of state WMU leaders who "talked about being the hands of God and being able to use the tools that we have in our hands to do ministry."

During a recent follow-up video conference call, "we talked about how the things in our hands are totally different than what they were before," she said. "But God finds a way and we just have to be looking for how He can use us to do His ministry."

Even amid the turmoil of a global pandemic, pursuing new and creative ministry opportunities is precisely what Freeman Heights' Acteens continue to do — just as Mary Lou Sinclair has faithfully taught them. 



WMU photo by Pam Henderson

Acteens at Freeman Heights Baptist Church in Garland, Texas, typically take time to pray for missionaries, state and national WMU leaders and other prayer concerns during their meetings together. Those prayer times have now shifted to video conferences as they continue to focus on praying for needs at home and around the world.