



The Alabama Baptist

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Informing. Inspiring. Connecting.

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To watch the videos from this week's
issue, visit our YouTube channel
"TAB Media."



Ministering amid coronavirus

123rf.com

Churches pray for wisdom as they reenvision worship at a distance

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Jeff Fuller said it's tough to make decisions as a pastor in times like this. He wants to keep his church fed, both spiritually and physically. He wants to protect them, to hold everyone together, take care of each other and make it to the other side of coronavirus in the best way possible.

But what does that mean? "You have to pray and pray hard, and then use the wisdom that God has given you

and your leadership and the knowledge you have about the situation and make a decision that fits your church," Fuller said.

Going online

For his church — Rockford Baptist Church in Central Baptist Association — that means holding services online and dropping off DVD or CD copies to church members who don't have internet access, at least at press time while local travel was not yet restricted.

"We're a graying county, and our church is a graying church," Fuller said, referencing the data that shows senior adults are the highest-risk age group for COVID-19.

"We also have some church members not in that age group who are medically challenged and have chronic conditions."

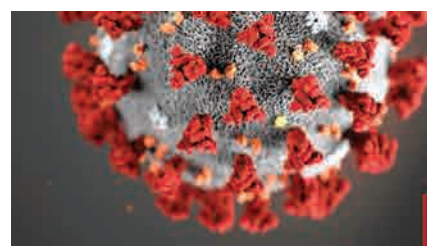
So for Fuller and leaders of his church, the best choice was to commit to take care of each other by continuing to be Rockford Baptist Church from their own homes. He

said they want to lean on God and not fear but use common sense and protect each other.

"We're making phone calls and checking on everybody," Fuller said. "We are trying to think outside the box and make sure everybody is fed and has what they need. And we're hoping no one dies from this."

Evolving situation

The needs are changing all the time, but both Fuller and Robert Mullins, pastor of (See 'Church,' page 6)



COVID-19

See pages 6-9 for information and updates

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The crossword puzzle
can be found on page 17.

Gilmore wrapping up season
with TAB Media after 8 years

Fellow staff members, advertising clients and ministry leaders across the state agree they will miss working with TAB Media’s William J. “Bill” Gilmore — affectionately known to many as “Mr. Bill.”

Gilmore served as director of advertising and most recently director of sales for The Alabama Baptist/TAB Media until late March when he began a new position with Blessings Through Action. He will serve as director of community partnerships for the Arizona-based organization, which includes the Our Action Place social media platform for Christians and the Christian News Journal publication.

Gilmore and his wife, Renee, also will be actively involved in their daughter Katelyn’s training for a potential spot with the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA).

Katelyn attended Montgomery’s Huntingdon College on a golf scholarship and has been training for the LPGA since graduating in 2019.

The Gilmores have been active members of Highland Baptist Church, Florence.



GILMORE

Before joining the TAB staff in February 2012, Gilmore worked for *The Montgomery Advertiser* and *The Times Daily* in Florence as well as *The Meridian Star* in Mississippi.

During his eight years with TAB, Gilmore worked closely with the officers of the Alabama Baptist Pastors Conference, serving as coordinator for the exhibitors’ booths and advertising sales for the program and sponsorships. “This was only possible because of the hard working individuals at TAB,” Gilmore said.

In an email to his fellow TAB staff members, Gilmore wrote, “When I first arrived at TAB, I was amazed at the amount of work and the quality of journalism from such a small group of professionals. I’m overwhelmed to have been on this journey with each of you and will miss you.”

The TAB team also will sorely miss “Mr. Bill,” said TAB Media president and editor-in-chief Jennifer Davis Rash. “Bill has been an amazing source of encouragement, support, friendship and strength for our entire team.” (TAB)

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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Variety of voices share content on TAB News



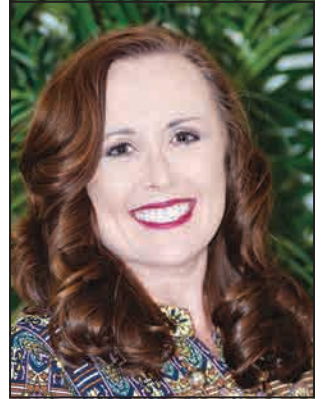
Photo by Hannah Muñoz

Sallie Bryant, a member of TAB Media’s board of directors, reads an article for an upcoming edition of the TAB News podcast. TAB News is an audio digest of *The Alabama Baptist* newspaper released on Wednesday each week and uploaded to the special cartridges mailed to TAB’s visually impaired readers. Find TAB News and TAB Media’s other podcasts at tabonline.org/podcasts or anywhere you get your podcasts.

MY RASHIONALE

By Jennifer Davis Rash
President and Editor-in-Chief

jrash@thealabamabaptist.org
@RashionalThts



It's kind of like running practice drills before the big game

By now we've accepted the reality of the temporary restrictions in place all around us. In fact, many have even managed to embrace them.

I love reading how so many of our friends and acquaintances are using the unexpected vacant schedule and season of staying home to catch up on some reading or launch a new disciplined daily routine of some sort.

Others are cleaning like they've never cleaned before and cleaning out closets and drawers that might never have been touched without the extra incentive and newfound time.

For the families who have children at home, I'm guessing there's a new global appreciation for teachers.

Several of our friends have joked — some on the brink of tears — about how they now have absolute confirmation that homeschooling is not for them.

Churches, communities, neighbors, co-workers, families and friends are stepping up and caring for “the least of these” like we knew they would.

It's encouraging to hear from people of faith across the state and nation about how they are caring for those around them.

One pastor friend told me that while he knew his family would be financially impacted by the COVID-19 situation, his primary focus right now is caring for his congregation. “I'm loving on and looking out for my people,” he said.

Watching all of the congrega-

tions circle around their shepherd — their pastor — and look for direction, comfort and hope is encouraging.

That's exactly how it should work all the time but especially during times of crises.

Families, friends and neighbors living in the same geographical areas are the tightest circle, then it expands out to the church family and many times out to co-workers and/or ministry team peers, like how we function at TAB Media.

Each church's pastor is responsible to care for his par-

ticular congregation and stay focused on them.

From there, the pastors can network through various peer groups including their local association of churches. The leaders of those peer groups, such as the associational missions director, serves to share resources and make necessary connections for pastors needing help in certain areas.

And many times the peer group leaders also have a place to come together to learn the best ways to resource the pastors in their groups. For associational missions directors, that

opportunity comes through the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions and its team of state missions leaders.

The key to all of this working smoothly in a crisis begins with already-established relationships built on trust and understanding — and of course prayer.

It's difficult to get to know each other and understand how best to navigate a situation in the midst of chaos. It can be done, but the road will be much smoother if we already know who does what on the team and are confident in each other's dedication to the overall goal. 🌈

WORKING FROM HOME

Involving our families...

Sadie loves helping TAB Media special assignments editor Margaret Colson with her work each day.

And with the recent global restrictions, Colson and her husband, Keith, are spending even more time with Sadie by their sides as they attempt to be productive from their home offices.

The Colsons also noted how much more time they have to read the weekly issue of *The Alabama Baptist* (TAB).

Share a photo of your new home office or something creative with this week's issue of TAB. —JDR



Photo by Margaret Colson

Your Voice



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

May we be able to say, 'It could have been worse'

By Bill King

Associational mission director, Tuskegee Lee Association

When I was in Mrs. Slaughter's first grade class, I had mumps.

I didn't know I had mumps, I just knew I didn't feel so well and I had a lump on one side of my neck. Mama diagnosed the lump as mumps.

The next Monday morning, when Mama came in to wake me up for school, I said, "I have the mumps in the other side."

She said, "Get up from there and get ready for school."

Then she felt the other side of my

neck and sentenced me to another week of solitary confinement.

Those two weeks were the longest I ever missed during any school year. I pretended to have mumps at least a dozen more times after that.

Since a reoccurrence of mumps is highly unusual, Dr. Mama did not fall for it. Neither did my wife, Jean, after we married, and I was in college and seminary!

Students have looked for ways to skip school, legally and with Mama's blessing, as long as we've had schools.

Every student gets sick from time to time, and we know many have faked it.

I never won an Academy Award for any of my performances, but I felt like I should have at least been nominated a few times.

In all seriousness, I can't remember a time when schools were ever closed for weeks due to sickness and certainly not due to the possibility of getting sick.

We are now in uncharted waters. Many of us had never heard of coronavirus until a few weeks ago, but now we aren't sure where it may take us.

Schools have closed, as well as many churches and businesses, and even nations.

But this is far more serious than missing a few weeks of school.

At the time of my writing, worldwide, more than 7,500 have died, more than 150 in our own country.

Here in Alabama, we have more than 50 confirmed cases.

While we may have questions, we must take serious measures to prevent further spreading — to flatten the curve, as they say.

Some have made accusations of overreacting, but it is better to be safe than sorry.

If you are well, enjoy the vacation. Let's be smart, pray and keep a positive attitude of faith.

Once this crisis has passed, may we be able to say it could have been much worse.

During this time of isolation, we long for community. Why? Because we are created in God's image. And God is in community within Himself as the triune God — Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

It's only natural that we long for community because it is hardwired deep within our souls. But in these times, what is best for the community is to limit our exposure to each other. Limit our travel and practice social distancing.

I would love to be doing life as usual. Everyone in my house feels fine — that doesn't mean anything with this disease. I could be a carrier and not know it. While I would love to take advantage of the cheap airline tickets and empty restaurants, I'm choosing to limit my travel and spend more time at home so I don't unknowingly pass along this virus to someone I love deeply. ...

So, if at all possible, just stay home and make something beautiful. Create something awesome! Read a book. Write a book! Write a song. Learn to play an instrument. Learn to paint. Put out a bird feeder. Play catch with your son. Have a tea party with your daughter. Dust off the telescope and look at the stars.

Be a beacon of hope and positivity to your family. Use this time to become a better follower of Jesus, a better husband and father and mother and wife.

Bryan Gill
Facebook

A defense of social distancing

Psalm 90 was written by Moses, the same man through whom God spoke the law to Israel.

And what do we read throughout the law? Commands of isolation and quarantine (in a different context might we even call it "social distancing"?) in the face of certain medical conditions, including highly communicable diseases.

Therefore, even from Scripture, we can see the wisdom in choosing to isolate or practice social distancing, even in terms of canceling church meetings for at least a couple of weeks until the tide turns for the better.

This does not negate our trust in God and His sovereignty as we look to Him as a refuge in the midst of this momentary trouble.

In our day and age, we have numerous ways to creatively connect and encourage worship among our church even if, for the moment, we cannot gather as a church. ...

As we decide the best courses of action for the foreseeable future in light of medical and governmental recommendations, we hope to still find ways to connect and worship for the glory of God.

Mike Bergman
SBC Voices

Share online or email news@thealabamabaptist.org

“We’re all trying to figure this out.
We need each other.”

CRAIG CARLISLE

Associational mission director

Your pastor has never pastored a church through a pandemic before.

When he opens people are going to say he should have closed. When he closes people are going to say he should have opened. When he shakes hands, people are going to say he has faith. When he shakes hands, people are going to say he’s foolish.

He’s going to make some difficult decisions to protect the flock, considering everything from your spiritual growth to legal liabilities that you aren’t even thinking about.

I pastor an amazing group of people, and your pastor probably believes the same about you.

Remember this: No one wants things to go well at church as much as your pastor. Your pastor needs

your prayers and support right now.

Pastor James Williams
Silver Spring, Md.

Don’t feel like you have to create a new ministry or a new program [to aid your community during this time]. That could be overwhelming, and a lot of times out of our expertise.

Pastor Dean Inserra
City Church
Tallahassee, Fla.

The tithe is God’s money, not ours anyway. He established this to support the work of the church. Electric bills, literature, garbage pickup and water still have to be paid for.

Vickey Weathers
Heflin, Ala.

Kindness and humility go hand in hand. But this isn’t just daily humility with others around you. This is a pervasive and deep humility before God, the One who knows all and sees all. This is intense humility, and it sets even our disagreements apart from the world.

James Hammack
theropetab.wordpress.com

Perhaps you need someone to deliver groceries because you have a compromised immune system. Whatever it is, reach out to us. If we can help, we will. We desire to serve our First Baptist Church Prattville family and the community well during this time.

FBC Prattville
Facebook post

When this is over, may we never again take for granted a handshake with a stranger, full shelves at the store, conversations with neighbors, a crowded theater, Friday night out, the taste of communion, a routine checkup, the school rush each morning, coffee with a friend, the stadium roaring, each deep breath, a boring Tuesday, life itself.

When this ends, may we find that we have become more like the people we wanted to be, we were called to be, we hoped to be. And may we stay that way — better for each other because of the worst.

Laura Kelly Fanucci
Author
via Instagram

No one has the power to make you miserable ... other than yourself! Don’t let anyone steal your joy! Remember what Jesus said: “Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”

Billy Irvin
Faith Radio

From the *Twitterverse*

@JawnO

Give your pastors some grace as they do their best to lead churches through this current crisis. “Pastoring through Pandemic” wasn’t a required course at my seminary. I imagine other pastors are processing on the go. This is a time where we all need to lean on each other.

@jaredcwilson

Don’t forget to keep giving to your church in this no-gathering interim. Use that online pay option or mail a check or whatever. Churches have workmen who will be especially worthy of their wages in this weird season, and the many missional opportunities before us need funding.

@jasonkeithallen

I’m taking Covid-19 seriously and CDC instructions seriously, not because I’m afraid of getting it. I’m

young, healthy and in Christ. I’m taking Covid-19 seriously because I’m afraid of distributing it. Love the elderly, the sick, the vulnerable (your neighbor) through this.

@LifeWay

Pray for students who are out of school and their families that the Lord would give them patience and discipline.

@bobgoff

Sometimes God lets us lose hope for a moment so we’ll retrace our steps and find Him all over again.

@CharlieDates

Sometimes I’m slow to pray because I feel like I don’t deserve for God to answer favorably. I’m right. I don’t deserve it, but that’s why I pray anyway. It wouldn’t be mercy

or grace if we deserved it. Let’s ask God to heal our land, not because we are good, but because He is.

@sometimesalight

For many pastors, your normal way of doing ministry is gone, at least for the time being. Your ability to do your job well rests on humility to learn from people who have been ministering outside established order.

@costiwhinn

Social distancing doesn’t have to disconnect pastors and people. You can still:

- ▶ Virtual meet via Skype/Zoom
- ▶ Send hand-written notes
- ▶ Make phone calls
- ▶ Create resource videos
- ▶ Start group texts sharing needs
- ▶ Launch social media groups.

What else would you add?

(Fear) will play tricks on your mind. I like to use the following acronym to describe FEAR: False Evidence Appearing Real. It takes what you see and manipulates it into something completely untrue.” (Isa. 41:10)

Caris Snider
“Anxiety Elephants:
A 31-Day Devotional to
Help Stomp Out Your
Anxiety”

In the end, it will be impossible to know if we overreacted or did too much, but it will be quite apparent if we underreacted or did too little.

Source unknown



Church has been called for ‘such a time as this’

(continued from page 1)

Crossroads Community Church, Elmore, say they feel this is an opportunity for the church to strengthen its relationships and encourage each other in new ways.

Fuller encouraged his church family to check on each other, pick up the phone and call and pray with each other. He’s also leading Bible studies online to encourage them throughout the week. The church is organizing ways to get meals or other supplies to people who need them, he said.

Taking care of others

“If you have a need, please do not hesitate to call us,” he told his church in an audio message online. “We’ll be the clearing house right here, and we’ll do what we’ve got to do.”

Mullins said the Crossroads congregation “has decided that we are going to be taking care of each other and be intentional so we don’t have people fall through the cracks.”

Airfare rates are low but advice remains to wait on ticket purchases

In early March, the International Mission Board (IMB) coronavirus task force and senior leadership recommended that missions volunteers from U.S. churches postpone international missions-related travel at least through April 30.

IMB also recommends that people who have not yet purchased tickets for future travel wait and monitor continued risks of travel before buying tickets. Individuals with pre-existing conditions or immunocompromised health issues are encouraged not to travel.



“We’re making phone calls and checking on everybody in the church.”

PASTOR ROBERT MULLINS
CROSSROADS COMMUNITY
CHURCH, ELMORE

They have taken their list of life groups and assigned part of the list to each staff member to check on.

“We’re making phone calls and checking on everybody in the

church,” Mullins said. “We are pressing on with ministry and mission, and we’ve put out a lot of information through Facebook.”

For him, the most important thing is to “make it personal.”

“The situation is going to be different in 10 days, in 20 days. It’s going to be more difficult down the road, and keeping morale up is going to be hard,” Mullins said.

“But there is an opportunity for churches to step up and encourage people like never before. That’s my takeaway — that God is going to

get a lot of glory out of this.”

Fuller said he also sees it as the opportunity for the church to rally and love each other well for the sake of the gospel. He compared it to the charge given Esther — that maybe believers are where they are “for such a time as this.”

‘This is our moment’

“This is our time. This is our moment,” he said. “God is preparing you and I to be who we need to be at a moment, at a time such as this.” 🙌

“There is an opportunity for churches to step up and encourage people like never before.”

PASTOR JEFF FULLER
ROCKFORD BAPTIST CHURCH

123rf.com

Online resources

Can't meet in person? Try these online tools

As churches make plans to livestream worship services or sermons, Sunday School classes, discipleship and life groups, church staff teams and others who meet regularly also are facing tough decisions.

Zoom might be a solution. A free Zoom account allows a meeting “host” (for example, a pastor, Sunday School teacher or small group leader) to hold an online video conference of up to 100 participants in an easy-to-use platform across devices (smartphones, tablets, laptops and desktops).

Participants can join a meeting by video or they can call in by telephone, which means most anyone can be part of a Zoom meeting.

Here are five key things to know about Zoom:

1. The host of the Zoom meeting must have an account to schedule or start a meeting. A Zoom account is not required for attendees. A free account allows the host to schedule or start meetings. Set up your account at www.zoom.us.

2. Both hosts and participants will need to download the official Zoom mobile app from the Google Play or Apple store or



123rf.com

Churches and small groups are discovering videoconferencing platforms like Zoom and other online tools like FaceTime, Facebook Messenger Video Calling, Google Hangouts and YouTube provide good options for staying in touch.

the desktop application for Windows or Mac.

3. Each Zoom account holder is assigned a personal meeting ID number (PMI). This number can be used to start or schedule all meetings, which keeps things simple.

4. Any participant who has the invitation link or the host's PMI can join a meeting in progress at any time via phone or Zoom app on desktop or mobile. (Note: *Phoning into Zoom is considered a toll, or long-distance, call.*)

5. Free Zoom group meetings have a 40-minute time limit. If time runs out, a new meeting can be started.

Staying connected

Is Zoom right for you and your group? Honestly, you won't know until you try.

Video conferencing is not the same as meeting face-to-face, but it can be a great way to keep your group connected when circumstances prevent being in the same room together. (Carrie Brown McWhorter)

For more information go to tabonline.org/zoom.

Churches are finding creative ways to minister

During the current COVID-19 crisis, churches and other groups are finding creative ways to stay in touch, hold meetings and minister to each other.

► Some churches that are already set up to livestream are offering to “meet” virtually with congregations that aren't.

This could mean the non-livestreaming congregation just watches along with the other church, or their staff might participate. For example, in some situations, both pastors might share a word.

► Congregations are often still able to interact with each other during webcasts by using the comment threads available on platforms like Facebook or YouTube.

► A few churches across the nation tried drive-in church, where families stayed in their cars in the church parking lot and tuned in to the service through the radio.

► For churches where offering plates are the only way to give, some are considering online giving for the first time. TAB can help you set up an account with Hosted Church, if you need help with that. Call 205-870-4720 or visit hostedchurch.com.

► Small groups and Bible studies are meeting through video conferencing apps like FaceTime or Zoom. Learn more about using video conferencing at tabonline.org/zoom.

► Churches are dividing up lists and making phone calls to make sure no one in their congregation goes uncared for. (Grace Thornton)

For regularly updated resources, visit alsbom.org/covid-19-resources.



Alabama Baptist Convention
State Board of Missions

SBOM available by phone, digital services

The Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) offices in Prattville will remain closed at least through March 31, but state personnel will be available to help Alabama Baptists, according to Rick Lance, SBOM executive director.

Here's what the SBOM is doing:

► All SBOM-sponsored events scheduled through March 31 have been postponed or canceled. A list of events is available at alsbom.org/canceled-and-postponed-events.

► All SBOM-related travel by state missionaries and other person-

nel has been suspended.

► Personnel at the SBOM are available to Alabama Baptists by email, telephone, FaceTime, Skype, Zoom or conference calls.

► SBOM office phone numbers are being forwarded to cell phones. A directory of SBOM personnel and phone extensions is available at alsbom.org/staff.

Regularly updated

► Updated resources will be posted regularly at alsbom.org/covid-19-resources. In addition to the latest information from the Centers for Disease Control, the

site also has links to assist congregations with matters including streaming worship services, online giving and other needs.

“We earnestly want to serve the Alabama Baptist family in any way possible during this unique time in our nation,” Lance said. “Please know that we are praying especially for the 3,200-plus local congregations during these challenging times and even as sometimes very difficult decisions are made. Pray for us too as we serve our Lord by serving Alabama Baptists.” (SBOM)

Coronavirus Christianity



Unsplash.com

How the faith community responds to crisis could have Kingdom significance

By **Richard Blackaby**
Author, RichardBlackaby.com

During the fourth century, a deadly plague struck the city of Caesarea, one of the largest metropolitan areas in the Roman Empire. Panic ensued, and people fled the city.

But one group didn't panic or flee. The Christians intentionally stayed.

Eusebius, the Church historian of that period, notes, "All day long some of them [Christians] tended to the dying and to their burial, countless numbers with no one to care for them. Others gathered together from all parts of the city a multitude of those withered from famine and distributed bread to them."

Rise to the occasion

Years later, the Roman Emperor Julian bemoaned the fact that Christians handled themselves so much better than his own pagan priests and their adherents did.

He observed, "When it came about that the poor were neglected and overlooked by the [pagan] priests, then I think the impious Galileans [Christians] observed this fact and devoted themselves to philanthropy. ... They support not only their poor, but ours as well, all men see that our people lack aid from us."

Many historians believe Christians' behavior in times of crisis ultimately transformed the Church from a fringe movement of lower-class people to the official religion of the

Roman Empire. What the world sees as a problem, the Church views as a possibility.

During the Roman Empire, the most feared form of death was crucifixion. Not only was it deadly but it involved horrific suffering. One reason the Romans used this method of execution was that it struck terror in those who beheld it.

It is significant that when the Son of God was slain for the sins of humanity, He was killed by one of the most gruesome and terrifying means of death ever known.

Ironically, out of that horrific experience came the greatest benefits in history. Salvation from sin, eternal life, everlasting communion with God in heaven and healing from all brokenness emerged from something people feared.

As the Apostle Paul said, "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men" (1 Cor. 1:25).

So, how should we respond to the coronavirus?

1. Watch for God's activity.

God is always at work around us. But He often does His best work in crises.

When facing a deadly pandemic, people may be more open to talking about life

and death. Our mortality, generally a taboo subject, suddenly becomes front and center in people's minds. People who were fiercely independent may suddenly have needs you can meet. People with whom you might never have been able to talk with about God may suddenly be open to spiritual discussions.

Keep your spiritual senses attuned to such opportunities.

2. Make the best of changed routines.

Last Sunday, our church services were canceled due to health concerns. So I drove to my parents' house and watched the live stream service from our church while eating breakfast with them.

My parents normally attend the 8:00 service on Sunday mornings, so I rarely see them. But yesterday was different.

I typically have a frenetic travel schedule. As a result, I am constantly out of shape and needing more exercise. Last week, 12 of my spring speaking engagements were canceled or rescheduled. I now have two months at home. I have thus commenced a rigorous exercise routine and a healthier diet.

I am also using the free time to study and write. There are some Christian classics I have had on my "to read" list for a while now. A pandemic may finally afford me the time I need to read them. Rather than bemoaning what I've lost, I'm excited about what I've gained.

Handle adversity well

3. Check your spiritual vital signs.

When you test the health of your heart, you don't monitor it while you're sleeping. Doctors put you on an inclined treadmill. How your heart handles adversity reveals what it's made of. America has been placed on a spiritual treadmill. Many

are panicking. Some are frantically stocking up on a year's supply of toilet paper and retreating to the safety of their house. Many are glued to their televisions, grimly waiting for the next breaking news. Some are focused entirely on themselves and any sign they might not be well. Crises have a way of exposing us for what we really are.

Yet others are calm, even peaceful. Some are making a special effort to check on the elderly and vulnerable. Some are ministering to medical professionals who are under unusual strain. Such people are determined to produce the maximum good during this time

of unprecedented disruption. What has the crisis revealed about you?

The Church has tended to grow most in times of crisis, not in periods of prosperity. While the business community rightly fears loss as a result of the crisis, the kingdom of God may be about to experience enormous gain. So, be sure to use hand sanitizer and stay out of public areas as much as possible. But at the same time, keep your spiritual eyes and ears alert, for we may be at the brink of one of the greatest movements of God in recent history.

EDITOR'S NOTE — Richard Blackaby is the president of Blackaby Ministries International, an international speaker and the author or co-author of more than 30 books. Used with permission. 🌿

"America has been placed on a spiritual treadmill. Many are panicking! ... Yet others are calm, even peaceful."

Richard Blackaby



BLACKABY

"God is always at work around us. But He often does His best work in crises."

— RICHARD BLACKABY —

Fact or fiction?

How to discern truth in media

Collect news from variety of reliable sources to determine what to trust, what to disregard

By Margaret Colson
The Alabama Baptist

The headlines offer such hope: “Gargling with salt water or vinegar will eliminate the COVID-19 coronavirus from the throat of an infected person’s system.” (False.)

“Sipping water every 15 minutes will prevent a coronavirus infection.” (False.)

“Holding your breath is a simple self-check for coronavirus.” (False.)

Each of those headlines is an actual headline published on the internet, but health officials have debunked these and many others.

So, how can a consumer of information determine fact from fiction, especially in a time of so many unknowns?

And what should a Christian do if false information is being shared as fact?

Truth crisis

“Thanks to social media, we are in a truth crisis,” according to Janet Johnson, lecturer and researcher at the University of Texas at Dallas, writing an opinion column for *The Dallas Morning News*. While Johnson suggested the truth crisis was primarily the product of social media, the truth crisis may be more pervasive.

From social media posts to blogs to news websites, numerous information sources exist today on the internet.

“Until 25 years ago, mass communication was reserved only for professionals, but today, anyone ... regardless of credentials, can play journalist,” said Gyromas Newman, associate professor of communication at University of Mobile.

The internet, he said, “changed everything. The problem is there is very little accountability on the internet.”

Michael Clay Carey, assistant professor of journalism and mass communication at Samford University in Birmingham, agrees.

“Internet access, social media and mobile technologies have made it much easier for anyone who has access to spread information,” he said. “That often works for the betterment of communities, but it also makes it easier for inaccurate or incomplete information to spread. Misinformation and propaganda have been around for a long time, but we are more likely to encounter it today because of the ease and speed with which it can spread.

“That puts a lot more pressure on us as individuals to be thoughtful consumers of information we encounter,” Carey said.

Tips for discerning

“Fortunately, the same online environment that proliferates misinformation also makes fact-checking easy,” Newman said. He offers four tips for discerning fact from fiction.

1. Determine the source of the information. Newman advises identifying the author of the information, considering the kind of website where the information is published and even looking for basic grammatical errors.

“If you can’t find the original source of the information or claims you’re reading, that should be a huge red flag,” Newman

said. “Reputable organizations will — or at least should — be transparent about the origin of the facts they present. If the ‘source’ of a suspicious or inflammatory claim is just a link to another blog post where that claim appears, then I’d be wary.”

2. Make sure you understand the purpose of what you’re reading. For example, some websites are satirical in nature. Those stories are not intended to be taken as “legiti-

mate news.” Further, he said, “Some sources may openly promote a certain ideology. If so, be cautious.”

3. Don’t just get your news from social media. “If you’re scrolling through and a story interests you, read it if you like, but do your homework before you believe it or pass it on,” Newman said. He suggests examining the news story on numerous credible websites to help determine its veracity.

“We can, and should, research what we see and read,” Newman said of social media. “Was that photo we saw really taken this week, or is it an old image that is making its way around social media again? Was the controversial quote, presented to us in a vacuum on Facebook, taken out of context? It is especially important to do this kind of homework before we share something produced by a source that we may not be familiar with.”

4. Trust God for discernment. “Finally, but most importantly, keep your prayer life right,” Newman said. “Scripture makes it clear that the Lord gives wisdom generously to those who ask, so ask. Trust Him to give you the wisdom of discernment, and you’ll benefit not only in the media world but also in your daily relationships.”

Finding a trusted information source

When looking for a trusted source for information, Newman said, “As a general rule, traditional, mainstream news sources are best. There has been growing mistrust of traditional news, especially over the past two decades, but that mistrust, at least as far as the fabrication of information is concerned, is largely unfounded.”

While some news sources, particularly cable news networks, may tend to lean more conservative or

liberal, which is called “framing” or “second-level agenda sources,” they still are accountable for presenting facts. Those facts may be presented in different ways, however. For example, if two news organizations were reporting on the same protest, one organization might produce a video of protestors marching with

signs and another organization might produce a video of protestors being arrested. Both reported facts, but from different angles.

For that reason, Carey emphasized, “It is important to get news from a variety of different organizations, not just one single organization or from organizations that

share ideological perspectives.”

Consulting multiple sources “is the best way to combat the framing effect and get the most honest picture of the issue,” Newman said. “However, there’s not one source that’s completely trustworthy all of the time. Remember, treat nothing as gospel, except the gospel.”

Pointing out misinformation

When misinformation, either intentional or unintentional, occurs, it’s valuable to “acknowledge inaccurate or misleading information when we see it,” Carey said. “It’s easy to dismiss intentional efforts to mislead as, ‘Well, it’s just the internet.’ But misinformation has consequences.”

Newman emphasized “our duty as U.S. citizens and as Christians” is to respectfully point out error.

“Another problem with the anonymity of the internet is people feel like they can be jerks to one another. Don’t be that person.

“We must each do our part to correct misinformation and be beacons for the truth as God calls us to be. As Edmund Burke said, ‘The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.’ Do your part!” 🌈



CAREY



NEWMAN

New resource for bivocational ministers available

Bivocational ministers in Alabama have a new resource to help them navigate the unique challenges and pressures of their calling.

The Alabama Baptist Fellowship of Bivocational Ministers recently launched a private Facebook group as an online space for pastors and church leaders to share concerns, needs and resources.

"We want to connect bivocational staff members," said Tim Henning, pastor of New Beginnings Fellowship, Trussville.

Henning was elected president of the Alabama Baptist Fellowship of Bivocational Ministers at the 2020 Bivocational Minister/Spouse Retreat held Feb. 21–22 at Shocco Springs Baptist Conference Center in Talladega.

While no exact numbers are available, an estimated 50–65% of churches are served by pastors who also work other jobs, said Joe Wright, executive director of the Bivocational and Small Church Leadership Network.

In Alabama, an estimated 55% of pastors are bivocational. Many more serve in other church roles. All are pulled in many directions, Henning said.

"A lot of bivocational pastors, because they're spending so much time working, they're disconnected from others," Henning said. "This Facebook group is one way to bring some connection to people who are very, very busy."

Ken Allen, lead church health strategist for the Ala-

bama Baptist State Board of Missions (SBOM) and adviser to the support organization, said he hopes bivocational ministers will join the Facebook group because it will offer a "communication point for all things related to the unique demands and calling of those involved in bivocational ministry."

The purpose of the Facebook page is threefold, Henning said.

1. To connect bivocational pastors, as well as student and children's pastors, those serving in Christian education and "anyone, man or woman, who is paid in part by the church."

2. To encourage bivocational workers through prayer and sharing needs.

3. To share resources from the SBOM, TAB Media and other entities.

The group will not be a place to debate doctrinal differences or political perspec-

tives, or to criticize people, ministries or entities, Henning said.

"We are trying to expand the ministry of the Fellowship to be a blessing," Henning said.

In addition to Henning,

serving as officers in 2020 are: vice president, Benjie Miller, pastor of Bynum Baptist Church, Weaver; treasurer/secretary, Ken Wells, pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church, Scottsboro. (Carrie Brown McWhorter)

Find the Facebook group at www.facebook.com/groups/bivoministries.



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Dr. John Thweatt
pastor of FBC Pell City, Alabama



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Theology 101

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW

The Doctrine of God

God's Divine Actions

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

Flowing from the essential nature of God, which last week we termed His divine attributes, are numerous divine actions that are consistent with that nature. This week, Theology 101 calls some of these to mind. The Bible's opening witness to God is His action of creating. By His powerful word, He spoke into being the heavens and the earth. Using His divine image as the pattern, God created human beings as male and female (Gen. 1:27).

Fast on the heels of His creative action came God's action of blessing the human pair (Gen. 1:28). Through the generations, God has consistently been the source of material and spiritual blessings.

Early in the biblical record, God began acting as One who calls. He called Abraham and made him the covenant promise of a great nation of descendants. As the covenant-keeping God, He also became the God of Isaac and Jacob. Ultimately, He entered a new covenant under whose terms He promised to bless all who enter His spiritual family through faith in Christ.

Through the human generations, God also has shown Himself to be our speaking God. He spoke to the fathers through the prophets and has spoken to all of us through His Son (Heb. 1:1-2). He continues to speak to us through the words of Holy Scripture and through the inward impressions of the Holy Spirit.

Given the rebelliousness of the human race and due to His own

loving nature, God had shown Himself to be our forgiving God. His action of forgiving repentant sinners has opened the way for Him to amass a spiritual family that spans generations. In so doing, our gracious God has adopted believers into His family.

For sinners (in which category we all find ourselves), a most blessed action of God is that of forgiving. Given the fact of human inconsistencies, the need for divine forgiveness threads through all generations. However, though He is our loving God, He is not indulgent. As a perfect Father, God acts in loving discipline of all His wayward children. Hebrews 12:6 asserts, "Whom He loves He chastens. He disciplines every child He receives."

Just as was noted last week in thinking about the attributes of God, so this week in thinking about the actions of God, the potential list far exceeds our ability to compile a total list of those actions. However, we might add that His actions also include promising and commanding, choosing and calling, empowering and commissioning, even as He also rewards faithfulness, rebukes failures and restores the repentant.

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.



Health screening day provides for physical, spiritual needs

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

Patrick Sawyer called it a divine appointment. When he came on staff at Valleydale Church, Birmingham, as community connections pastor in summer 2019, he thought health screenings might be a great way to bless the community.

"But I had no clue where to go from there," Sawyer said.

So he started doing some research, and what he found was a local health care provider who was on the exact same page.

Justin R. Johnston, executive director of the Community of Hope Health Clinic (CHHC), had been leading a team of volunteer doctors, nurses and interpreters for years at their clinic in Pelham, serving in large part the Spanish-speaking community there. "Our goal at Community of Hope is to give primary care access to the residents of Shelby County who are at or below 200% of the federal poverty guidelines, have no access to government programs such as Medicaid or Medicare or have private health insurance," said Johnston, a member of NorthPark Baptist Church, Trussville.

Sawyer's goal was to connect those same people to a faith community.

So in November, the two held their first collaborative event — a one-day health clinic with doctors, optometrists and other health care providers. They prescribed glasses, administered flu shots and performed blood sugar and blood pressure checks, all at no cost to participants.

A couple of doctors from Valleydale Church participated, as well as

many general volunteers including Andres Pardo, pastor of the church's Hispanic congregation, Iglesia Valleydale.

"He's got a heart for evangelism," Sawyer said. "He met with pretty much all of the people who came through, invited them to church and shared the gospel with them."

At the event, volunteers distributed bags with hygiene and first-aid items, as well as a gospel tract

and church information in Spanish and information on how to become a patient at CHHC.

Then after the event, when the glasses arrived, Pardo was able to meet with the families and take them their glasses, which they received free of charge.

"Some of the families are coming regularly on Sundays now," Sawyer said.

Before, the Spanish service at Iglesia Valleydale might have 10 in attendance at most — now they're running between 35 and 50.

"It's just taken off," Sawyer said. "We're seeing it explode, and we give all the glory to God."

For CHHC, the partnership was a shot in the arm too, Johnston said. They've continued to work with

other churches and are planning to replicate the model soon with Shelby Baptist Association

in another part of Shelby County.

And Johnston's team plans to conduct a second health screening day with Valleydale Church at the Express Oil Change and Tire Engineers' training center. The date and times will be confirmed once COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.

"We want to blend gospel proclamation with gospel demonstration," Sawyer said. "This is a perfect way for us to do that."



Photo courtesy of Community of Hope Valleydale Church, Birmingham, and Community of Hope Health Clinic work together to show and share gospel love.

For more information, visit communityofhopeclinic.com.

3 stories

you should know



AP Photo/Jessie Wardarski

Liam Elkind selects a bag of oranges at a New York City supermarket for 83-year-old Carol Sterling, who is isolated at home due to the coronavirus outbreak. Elkind and his friend, Simone Policano, amassed 1,300 volunteers in 72 hours to deliver groceries and medicine to older New Yorkers and others most vulnerable since the virus swept the city. They call themselves Invisible Hands and provide some human contact and comfort, at a safe distance. (AP)

White House urges isolation at home

The White House released updated guidelines on March 17 encouraging Americans to stay at home and avoid unnecessary interactions with others through April 1, a 15-day window, in an effort to slow the spread of the coronavirus in the United States.

The advice contained in “15 Days to Slow the Spread” urges Americans to:

- ▶ avoid gatherings of 10 or more people
- ▶ avoid eating in restaurants, use drive-thru, carry-out or delivery options — which matches what was happening with Alabama restaurants at press time (drive-thru, carry out and delivery only)
- ▶ delay discretionary travel
- ▶ practice frequent handwashing and sanitize frequently touched objects often. (TAB)

US closes land borders to slow virus spread

The U.S. and Canada will suspend non-essential travel between the two countries due to the coronavirus pandemic, President Donald Trump said March 18.

“We will be, by mutual consent, temporarily closing our Northern Border with Canada to non-essential traffic. Trade will not be affected. Details to follow!” Trump wrote on Twitter.

The administration also said it will turn back all undocumented immigrants and asylum seekers at the Mexico border, citing the virus’ threat to detention facilities.

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, director-general of the World Health Organization, said, “WHO continues to call on all countries to implement a comprehensive approach, with the aim of slowing down transmission and flattening the curve.” (TAB)

— NEWSBRIEFS —

Federal agencies adjust schedules, deadlines due to coronavirus spread



Several federal agencies, including the U.S. Census Bureau and the Internal Revenue Service

(IRS) have announced changes in response to the spread of the coronavirus in the U.S.

The Census Bureau announced March 18 that it will pause field operations until April 1. Households can still respond to the 2020 Census online using a desktop computer, laptop, smartphone or tablet, and can also respond by phone or mail.

2020 Census invitations have been mailed to all U.S. households.

In late May, census takers will begin visiting households that have not yet responded to the census to help complete the count.

U.S. Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin announced March 20 that the income tax filing

deadline has been moved from April 15 to July 15. Individuals and corporations will have the extra 90 days to file and make payments without interest or penalties, Mnuchin announced via Twitter.

Mnuchin’s announcement only affects 2019 federal income taxes.

The Alabama Department of Revenue announced it would mirror IRS extensions, noting that other assistance may be available on a case-by-case basis to individuals and businesses that cannot file their tax returns on time due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

More information about Alabama tax filing help is available at revenue.alabama.gov/news. (TAB)

TAB Media garners Best in Class honors for newspaper, social media



The Alabama Baptist/TAB Media earned two Best in Class honors from Associated Church Press (ACP) for work done in 2019. These awards, along with eight other awards, were announced March 19 during a Zoom awards ceremony by ACP leaders.

TAB won the top Best in Class honor for regional newspaper — an Award of Excellence.



TAB screen grab

Judges noted “a nice, inviting presentation with informative stories.”

TAB won a Best in Class Award of Merit for social media presence and shares this honor

with ministry partner Dogwood Media Solutions.

TAB also won awards in the general ACP competition for the social media post featuring Tua Tagovailoa’s faith story last fall, the 2019 Alabama Baptist State Convention coverage, the SBC special issue last June, overall newspaper design, print publication redesign, front page newspaper design, in-depth reporting on the border crisis and service journalism related to caring for the elderly. (TAB)



TAB screen grab

— ALABAMA NEWS —

McLemore retiring after 28 years at Lindsay Lane Baptist, Athens

Almost 28 years ago, Dusty McLemore became the pastor of a group of 39 people called Lindsay Lane Baptist Church, Athens.

After Jesus saved him from a life of compulsive gambling, the Athens native answered the call to ministry and enrolled at Heritage Bible College. At the beginning of his pastorate at Lindsay Lane Baptist, he worked at an office furniture company to make ends meet. And slowly through the years, the church grew to around 2,500 members.

"It's been a journey. It's overwhelming. God has just shown His favor on us," said McLemore, who plans to retire April 5.

He originally planned to preach his last sermon as pastor that day, but in light of the coronavirus, Lindsay Lane is planning to organize a special service to honor him and his wife, Patsy, as soon as the church returns to normal meetings.

After his retirement, McLemore will work in a part-time role with the North American Mission Board to help mobilize pastors in Alabama and Mississippi. (Grace Thornton)



MCLEMORE

March 31 but will now be held July 14.

Ivey made the announcement in a March 18 press conference.

"[Holding the election] means we would be taking a human health risk just having people standing in line to vote," she said. "I'm also aware that our faithful poll workers are often retired and among those who have the highest risk with this disease." (TAB)

ALCAP honors Cheryl Corley for 20 years of service

For years, Cheryl Corley's downstairs neighbor — who happened to be Dan Ireland's mother — was like a "second grandma" to her kids. And as Ireland, then executive director of Alabama Citizens Action Program (ALCAP), would visit his mother, he asked Corley several times if she needed a job.

For a long time, she said no — but then one day she was ready for a change. And 20 years later, ALCAP has been a "wonderful" place to be, Corley said. "It's given me a lot of experience and knowledge and good times."

ALCAP honored her for her two decades of service at its board meeting March 10.

"Everyone who enters our door or calls our office is greeted by her smiling manner," said Joe Godfrey, current ALCAP executive director. "ALCAP is blessed to have [her] serving faithfully for 20 years." (Grace Thornton)



CORLEY

Persecuted church

Christians in India attacked, expelled by Hindu extremists

NEW DELHI, India — A Christian family was attacked and expelled from their village and a Christian leader in another area was beaten and run over in ongoing violence toward Christians by Hindu extremists in India.

The attacks occurred within a seven-day period in India's Madhya Pradesh state.

On March 4, Hindu nationalists accused Isaac Paulose — an elder at Grace Fellowship Church and coordinator of New India Evangelistic Association — of conversions and beat him, then ran over him with motorcycles.

On March 9, a family was attacked and expelled from their village. Two days later, the family's 9-year-old daughter was threatened as she was going to the family's refuge in the jungle after school. Attackers threatened her with death if she returns to school. Sources said her father was promised safety if he renounced Christ.

India is No. 10 on Open Doors' 2020 World Watch List of countries where it's most difficult to be a Christian. (MS)



Morning Star News photo

Alabama primary runoff dates postponed in response to COVID-19

Gov. Kay Ivey has postponed Alabama's upcoming primary runoff between Jeff Sessions and Tommy Tuberville due to COVID-19 concerns.

The election was originally scheduled for

News near you

BESSEMER ASSOCIATION

► **Kevin Blackwell** is the new disciple making/teaching pastor at **The Station Church, Birmingham**. He also works at Samford University in Birmingham as assistant to the president for church relations and executive director of the Ministry Training Institute. He and his wife, Lorie, have four children.



BLACKWELL

SARDIS ASSOCIATION

► **Sardis Baptist Association** has postponed its 125th anniversary celebration for a later date. The anniversary was originally scheduled for March 28.

SHELBY ASSOCIATION

► **Mitch Thrower** is the new pastor of **First Baptist Church, Indian Springs**. His first Sunday was March 15. He previously served as pastor of Pineview Baptist Church, Thomasville. He and his wife, Diane, have five children.



THROWER

SOUTHEAST ALABAMA ASSOCIATION

► **Eric Dawsey** is the new pastor of **Gordon Baptist Church** near Dothan in Houston County. He was installed as pastor on March 8. He and his wife, Bridget, have one child.



DAWSEY

OTHER

► **Paul Hall**, longtime director of the **Alabama Singing Men**, died Jan. 31 at the age of 89. Hall directed the all-men's choral group from 1973 through 1992.

Hall joined the school of music at Samford University in Birmingham in 1970 and served

as associate dean of music graduate studies at Samford from 1982 to 1995.

In 1974, he received Samford's John H. Buchanan Award for Excellence in Classroom Teaching.

Hall served as music minister in churches in Virginia, Louisiana and Alabama. He also served in the U.S. Air Force during the Korean War as an officer.

Hall is survived by his wife Peggy; his son, John; two daughters, Beth, and Susan; six grandchildren and five great grandchildren. (TAB)



HALL

EDITOR'S NOTE — Many events across the state are being canceled or postponed due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Please check with the host church or association to confirm an event is still taking place before attending anything previously announced in The Alabama Baptist. Due to the circumstances, TAB will not print any event announcements until further notice.

Birmingham congregation starts 'needed ministry' for weather safety

Kelley Bearden says she's always been weather aware.

It's not because she's been through a tragedy herself. For some reason, she's always just been sensitive to the threat of severe weather.

She's also sensitive to the fact that not everyone has a way to know it's coming.

So as Bearden and other members of Shades Crest Baptist Church, Birmingham, worked to help provide food to the needy through Sowing Seeds of Hope and another organization in Perry County, she had an idea she couldn't shake.

"I thought, 'There's got to be a way to get them weather radios too,'" she said.

At first, she let the idea go — it seemed cost prohibitive. Weather radios run about \$25 to \$30 each.

But then meteorologist James Spann came to speak to a group at Shades Crest Baptist, and he mentioned that his weather staff was available to program radios for such a purpose.

Afterward Bearden talked to him, and with his advice on where to purchase the radios plus a large donation from a Sunday School class, she rounded up some radios, had the engineers at ABC 33/40 program them and then took them down to Perry County.

"In December, Sowing Seeds of Hope had an event with food distribution, and with the help of Judson College and some local churches, we were able to pass out the weather radios too," Bearden said.

It was good timing — the following week, storms rolled through the area.

"There were warnings for Perry County," Bearden said. "I was glad to know that more people now have radios."

Spann said that gift by



Wikimedia photo

Shades Crest Baptist was a needed ministry.

'Siren dependency'

"Most people die in tornadoes from the siren dependency, the idea that you will hear a siren before a tornado," Spann said. "It happened in Nashville [recently]."

At least 24 people died March 3 when tornadoes swept through Tennessee.

"You should never, ever rely on a siren," he said. "They can't be heard in a

house or building during a storm and sure won't wake anyone up. They reach a limited number of people outdoors."

Every home and business in Alabama needs a NOAA Weather Radio, Spann said. "They cost about \$30, and for low income families that can be cost prohibitive. This is why the ministry by Shades Crest was so remarkable. They handed out the weather radios all programmed and ready to go." (Grace Thornton)

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CHURCH POSITIONS

MINISTER OF MUSIC

Fellowship Baptist Church of Gardendale, Alabama (3228 Teresa Drive), is prayerfully seeking a minister of music. Send resumés to: Fellowship Baptist Church, 3228 Teresa Drive, Birmingham, AL 35217, or email: bobbyjshipp1@gmail.com.

CHOIR DIRECTOR

First Baptist Church, Leeds, Alabama, is seeking a part-time choir director to lead a traditional worship service. Position would also coordinate with current contemporary praise team for second service and work with our choir for special events. Email resumé to: rbras699@aol.com.

MINISTER OF YOUTH

First Baptist Church, Leeds, Alabama, is seeking a full-time youth minister. Position would also assist in pastoral duties. Email resumé to: rbras699@aol.com.

BIVOCATIONAL YOUTH DIRECTOR

First Baptist Church, Union Grove, is seeking a bivocational youth director. Send resumés to: FBCUG, P.O. Box 125, Union Grove, AL 35175.

BIVOCATIONAL YOUTH PASTOR

Bethany Baptist Church, Crane Hill, is seeking a bivocational youth pastor. Send resumés to: Bethany, 1612 County Road 201, Crane Hill, AL 35053 or email resumés to: office@bethanybysmithlake.com.

PART-TIME YOUTH MINISTER

Mount Enon Baptist Church in Dothan, Alabama, is seeking qualified candidates for a part-time youth minister. The minister of youth will be responsible for giving direction to the overall ministry of grades seven through twelve to promote evangelism and discipleship by planning, promoting, coordinating, conducting and evaluating the youth activities of the church. Regular youth meetings will be held on Sunday morning/evening and Wednesday night along with planned social events and spiritual conferences/retreats throughout the year. Salary depending on experience. Housing benefit may be offered to the successful candidate who is called to serve. Interested candidates should send resumé, along

with contact information to: esorrells@dssecurity.com. For more information please visit: <http://mountenon.net>.

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MINISTRIES

TAB PODCASTS

The TAB Media podcast channel now offers four podcasts: TAB Talks, a radio show featuring a special guest or guests that comes out on Mondays; TAB News, an audio digest of the weekly newspaper that comes out on Wednesdays; TAB Briefs, which will offer three current faith-based news and culture stories and comes out on Fridays after debuting first on Facebook Live at The Alabama Baptist newspaper on Facebook; and TAB Stories, a seasonal, long-form, in-depth feature into the life of a specific person church or ministry. Listen to the TAB Media podcasts anywhere you get your podcasts or at www.tabonline.org/podcasts.

Giving people a 'hand up'

Feeding ministry shares Christ, provides hot meals for those who need help

By Grace Thornton
The Alabama Baptist

When Patricia Edwards started coordinating WEMO Café, she never expected just how much a homeless man named Troy would become a part of her life.

She never expected he would find purpose there, find Jesus there — and pass away there during one of their normal lunch shifts.

And she never imagined she would be the one whose voice was most prominent at his memorial service.

"A couple of years ago, Troy found us — someone on the street had told him about us," Edwards said of WEMO Café, a ministry run by West Mobile Baptist Church.

Every Thursday from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., the volunteers of WEMO Café serve a hot lunch to anyone who comes through their doors at the Hangar, the church's youth building. Anyone

can eat, whether they can afford it or not. Volunteers are available to talk to diners, to pray with them or to simply socialize. The church also offers those who come a hot shower and clean towels, if that's a need. If a person has money to contribute for lunch, a donation box is available. If not, everyone is welcome to eat anyway — they just ask for a little help with wiping down tables, folding towels or washing dishes.

And during the lunch, someone from the church comes and leads a Bible study.

"It's a great ministry. We want to give people a hand up, not a hand-out," Edwards said.

That's exactly what happened with Troy.

From helped to helper

"We took him under our wing, he began to serve and he got saved," she said. "We just talked about Jesus and the relationship we have with Jesus, and over time he came to trust us. Every Thursday, he had a purpose there at WEMO Café."

He became a regular part of the volunteer staff, helping put out towels and even sparking the idea for a library.

"I asked him, 'Tell me what as a homeless person your needs are besides your basic things,'" she said. "He told me that homeless people read a lot but don't have access to many books, so I started going to the thrift store and buying lots of books."

Troy even came along with Edwards and her husband to serve

at events at West Mobile Baptist like Trunk or Treat. There, he was just her friend Troy, a man with a purpose, not merely "that homeless man" living on the street.

"He was like our family," Edwards said.

So it came as a shock to all of them the day he experienced a heart attack at WEMO Café. Emergency responders came, and he was pronounced dead after he arrived at a local hospital.

"We were the ones to let his family know," she said. "It was abso-



Photo courtesy of Patricia Edwards

Stevie Glover, a member of West Mobile Baptist, and Frances Sibley, a volunteer from Spring Hill Avenue United Methodist, prepare food for WEMO Café.

lutely in God's timing that he was at the café, because if he would've been in his tent, it would've taken us days to go looking for him, and if he would've been at Walmart, no one would've known who he was. He was with people he knew loved him."

Edwards wrote a letter to his family, sharing a little bit about who he had been during the past two years and what God had done in his life.

When Edwards and her husband went to Troy's memorial service, the person officiating read her whole letter aloud.

Meeting needs

"It was a comfort to the family to know where he had been and what his life had been like," she said. "They didn't know if he was a Christian or not or that he had served the Lord and served others."

And she learned more of his story

from his family too. Before moving to the streets of Mobile, Troy had been a supervisor at a shipyard, but then several members of his family died within a short span of time. The grief had been too much for him.

In Mobile, God found Troy, Edwards said.

"We sure do miss him," she said. "It broke our hearts, but the last two years he was a part of something, and he knew Jesus."

Kevin Cobb, pastor of West Mobile Baptist, said WEMO Café has been a great way for the church to meet physical and spiritual needs.

"It is a ministry that requires significant investment of time and resources," Cobb said. "But it is a way for us to be the hands and feet of Jesus to people who desperately need us to pour into their lives, and we get to do it right here on our campus." 🌿



Photo courtesy of Patricia Edwards

Patricia Edwards and her friend, Troy, serve at trunk or treat at West Mobile Baptist Church.

To give to the Alabama Hunger Offering, which helps fund ministries like WEMO Café, send checks to the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions, P.O. Box 681970, Prattville, AL 36068-1970, with 'Hunger Offering' in the memo line.



Dear Alabama Baptists,



Rick Lance

I wanted to take a moment, in the midst of a period of time when we all might be feeling isolated, to connect with you.

Just a few weeks ago - it seems like a year by now - we didn't have much of an idea what the coronavirus (COVID-19) was all about. Now we do. We know that we're on the front end of a potential curve that we hope will peak out earlier here than in some places around the world.

Today I just want to remind you what you already know. From friend to friend, from my heart to yours, I want to remind you of Psalm 46. The God of Psalm 46 will see us through this time of need. Remember, He is our refuge and strength, a very present help in times of trouble.

The tenth verse of that chapter tells us to "be still and know that I am God." This is an opportunity in the midst of all this frantic pace and disruption of our routine to pause and remember, very simply, He is God.

To provide assistance to your church during these days, your State Board of Missions has placed a number of resources online related to the coronavirus. Visit alsbom.org/coronavirus and you'll find the most recent statements, releases and blogs from the State Board of Missions, the Southern Baptist Convention, Alabama Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

You'll find practical helps on topics like live streaming worship services and initiating online giving. There's also a listing of postponed and canceled SBOM events which will be kept up to date as decisions are made.

Perhaps most importantly, you'll find a prayer suggestion online. We do need to remember our government officials in prayer, regardless

of party affiliation. This is a time for Americans to come together - for Alabama Baptists and all Southern Baptists to come together. Therefore, we pray for our leaders. We pray for the doctors, the nurses and the medical teams who are now going to be exhausted and overtaxed during this period, this critical time we're in. Also, be sure and think about the neighbors around you, especially those who are at risk. And certainly, pray for each other.

In coming days, you'll learn about some ways we can stay connected through virtual online gatherings, for times of prayer, encouragement and idea sharing. I hope you can take advantage of these opportunities technology provides for such online meetings within your church, association and state.

We earnestly want to serve the Alabama Baptist family in any way possible during this unique time in our nation. Please know that we are praying especially for the 3,200-plus local congregations during these challenging times and even as sometimes very difficult decisions are made. Pray for us too as we serve our Lord by serving Alabama Baptists.

And remember always, you can reach out to us. Visit alsbom.org/staff and click on any state missionary's name for a direct phone number or email address. If you have any need that we can help you with, we're going to try to meet it. Even as we seek to comply with health guidelines by limiting staff travel and working remotely, we're still here for you.

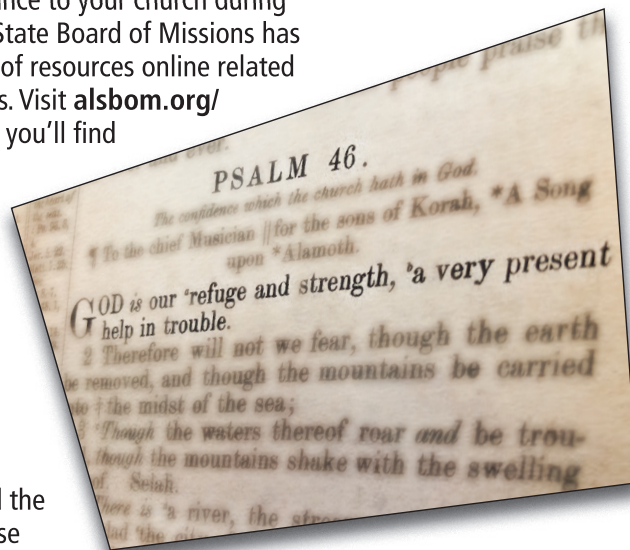
Alabama Baptists, thank you, thank you so much for being a part of the family. With God's help, knowing He is sovereign, we'll see this through together.

Rick Lance
State Missionary and Executive Director
Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions

 Matthew 6:33



Alabama Baptist
STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS



Missions lifestyle focus of Alabama WMU conferences

Women and teen girls from across the state gathered recently for Renew and Complete, annual conferences of Alabama Woman's Missionary Union (WMU). Renew for women was

held Feb. 24 at Westwood Baptist Church, Alabaster. More than 500 women attended the event, which included Bible teaching, worship, missions updates, WorldCrafts shopping and opportunities to connect

with representatives from ministries like WorldSong Missions Place and Baptist Nursing Fellowship.

"Our desire is that Renew is truly a day away with friends — an opportunity to join with other like-minded

women of all generations to worship our Lord, grow in Him and fellowship together," said Pat Ingram, missions and ministry consultant for Alabama WMU.

Shelly Edwards Johnson, worship leader at Woodstock City Church in Woodstock, Georgia, led worship, pointing attendees to the conference theme, "To Draw Near."

Courtney Veasey, founder of Brunch Ministries, spoke on spiritual disciplines and the theme of renewal.

'The Lord's creation'

"You are the Lord's creation," said Veasey. "He created you and then He redeemed you."

Candace McIntosh, executive director of Alabama WMU, said the theme of missional living resonated with participants.

"Renew is unique because you are not only spiritually fed through the music and Bible teaching but you are challenged to step outside your comfort zone and join God in His

mission," McIntosh said.

Complete, WMU's conference for teen girls and their leaders, was held March 6-7 at Eastern Hills Baptist Church, Montgomery.

Complete for girls

Chelsea Kellum, preschool and children's pastor at Crossroads Community Church, Elmore, led Bible study on the theme "Being Bold!" based on 2 Corinthians 3:12. Jordan Boyer, assistant worship pastor at Crossroads Community Church, led worship.

Breakout sessions offered opportunities to learn more about ministries to refugees, missions experiences and life concerns of teenage girls, said Trish Jackson, Alabama WMU's missions lifestyle strategist for preschool, children and students.

"It's so exciting to see hundreds of girls praising God and learning to be bold in their faith, prayers and actions," Jackson said. (Lanell Downs Smith, TAB)

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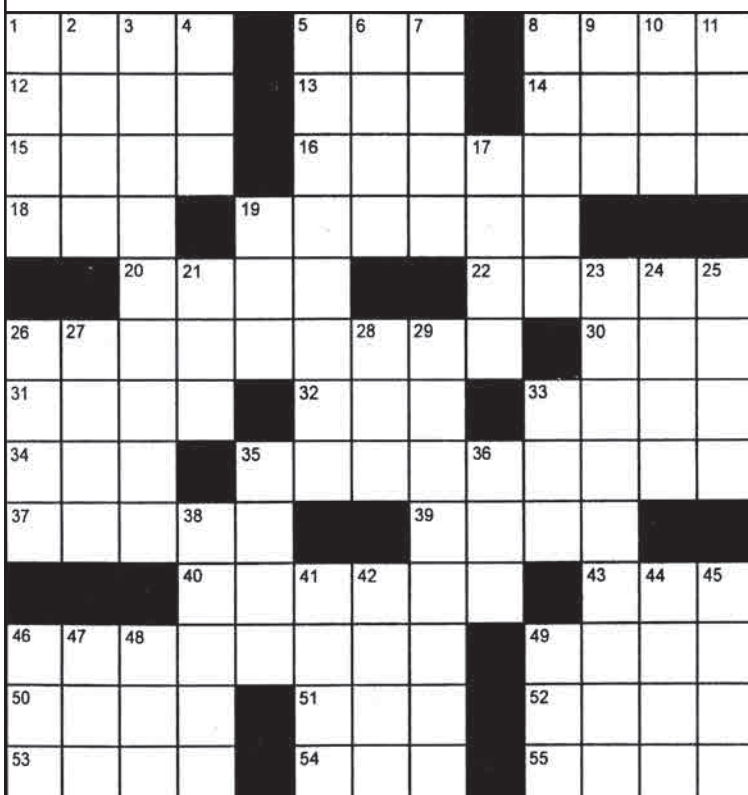
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Christian Crossword

By Lee Esch Copyright 1994 ©Barbour Publishing Inc.



Across

1. Ruth's second husband. (Ruth 4:13)
5. Special attention. (abbr.)
8. Donkey's cry.
12. He is ___ even to subdue all things. (Phil. 3:21)
13. Note of debt.
14. Citrus fruit.
15. Frog's cousin.
16. Paul's companion. (Acts 13:2)
18. Israeli Jew. (abbr.)
19. Took care of.
20. But Peter followed Him ___ off. (Matt. 26:58)
22. Concise; to the point.
26. Engraves.
30. He that hath an ___, let him hear. (Rev. 2:7)
31. Reserve Officers' Training Corps.
32. Assist.

33. Capital of Peru.
34. For there is ___ God. (1 Tim. 2:5)
35. Approximates.
37. Pertaining to Norwegians.
39. Become pale.
40. The blood of Jesus Christ ... cleanseth us from _____. (1 John 1:7)
43. British fliers. (abbr.)
46. The Lord our ____ Lord. (Mark 12:29)
49. Tale.
50. The golden calf was one. (Acts 7:41)
51. Cereal grass. (sing.)
52. We have seen His ___ in the east. (Matt. 2:2)
53. And straightway they forsook their _____. (Mark 1:18)
54. Speed measurement. (abbr.)

55. Segment of time served.

Down

1. Body wash.
2. Woodwind instrument.
3. Gypsum.
4. The letter "Z" to a Britisher.
5. Lake _____. (Sea of Galilee)
6. Allow temporary possession.
7. Coagulated milk.
8. Knife part.
9. Eve was created from one.
10. Physicians group. (abbr.)
11. Affirmative reply.
17. Let down your ___ for a draught. (Luke 5:4)
19. Roofing substance.
21. Government airwaves overseer. (abbr.)
23. Repeat.
24. Jesus Christ, the ___ yesterday, and today and forever. (Heb. 13:8)
25. He shall rule them with a rod of _____. (Rev. 2:27)
27. Unacceptable deed. (informal)
28. Tiny portion.
29. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity _____. (1 Cor. 8:1)
33. Boy.
35. Slippery fish. (plural)
36. What is ___, that thou art mindful of him? (Ps. 8:4)
38. Travels by water.
41. Cloth producer.
42. Break suddenly.
44. Mount Sinai. (Gal. 4:25)
45. Barn locale.
46. Cotton _____. (Eli Whitney invention).
47. Lengthy lyrical poem.
48. Speck.
49. Ultrafast airplane (abbr.)

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS

For March 29

Explore the Bible

By Robert E. Jackson, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Christian Studies, University of Mobile



AT PEACE Romans 5:1–11

Justified with Benefits (1–5)

Because we have been justified, we have peace with God. Because we have peace with God, we can approach Him by faith through His Son.

This access to God, and the resulting intimacy, enables us to stand firm through trials and difficulties.

Peace with God also has the benefit of allowing followers of Christ to overcome anxiety and anticipate the triumphant return of His Son joyfully.

Tribulations are unpleasant, but believers can boast in them because they do not define us. Instead, these difficulties lead to a chain reaction in personal growth resulting in perseverance.

Trials, filtered through the sovereignty of God, result in a character that increasingly looks like our Lord. In other words, the pressures of this world do not break us, but God uses these pressures to transform us into the image of His Son.

Naturally, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us changes our outlook on everything. We experience God's love more fully and are filled with hope or the assurance that He is working all things for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (see Rom. 8:28).

A justified person exhibits a hope or confidence that cannot be explained apart from the presence of the living Lord.

Justified Through His Death (6–8)

When faced with trials, I have heard people question God's love and faithfulness. When this thought enters our minds, we can remember what Christ has done for us on the cross.

Honestly, looking at ourselves, no innate goodness exists that draws Christ to us.

All humans are weak, helpless sinners which in the original language translates to wicked sinners who cannot help themselves.

From this teaching, we see that

everyone stands in opposition to God. And yet, Jesus' love is so great that He died for our sake.

God's love is not only in the past but is now and forever.

In our lives, we find it challenging to love people who are unkind or hate us, much less die for them. Think about it, would you die in the place of an ISIS fighter who is seeking to kill your loved one?

In sharp contrast to our limited love, Christ accepted the death on the cross for people who are unworthy.

I cannot fathom the depth of this kind of love. God demonstrates His love for us through the sacrificial death of His only Son.

Justified Equals Reconciliation (9–11)

Paul further explains that people, apart from God, are enemies of Him. Put another way, humans are antagonistic to God.

Let us face the fact that our sinfulness is repugnant to the holy and pure Lord and rightly deserves His wrath.

Instead of divine judgment, God's love through the shedding of Christ's blood on the cross made it possible for fallen humanity to be reconciled to Him.

Praise God, we are no longer God's enemies; we have been saved from His wrath. Not only did Jesus die for us, but He also lives within us.

This statement is profound; our faith is in a Savior who is alive. In Christ, we are no longer weak, helpless enemies of God. Instead, the living Lord ensures that we "are strengthened with power in our inner being through his Spirit" (Eph. 3:16).

We have been justified. We have been reconciled to God. Christ is alive and grants us power to live differently than the world.

Such wonderful facts lead to great joy because we were once enemies of God but are now His friends. To God be the glory, great things He has done and is doing! 🌈

Bible Studies for Life

By James Riley Strange, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of New Testament, Samford University



SANCTIFIED 1 Corinthians 6:9–20

Today's word, "sanctified," means to be made holy, to be set aside for God's use.

This happens in both collective and individual ways.

God chose Israel to be "a light to the Gentiles" (Isa. 42:6; 49:6).

Similarly, He elected the Church to proclaim the gospel (Eph. 1:4–5). But God also sanctifies each believer to live as He desires.

The Corinthians weren't living that way, however. In 1 Corinthians 6, we learn that some were suing one another in "unrighteous" law courts rather than settling disputes among "the saints" — the supposed "sanctified" or "holy ones" (see 1 Cor. 1:2 and 6:1).

In verse 8, Paul accuses the Corinthians of wrongdoing and in verse 9, he begins warning them that wrongdoers have no place in God's kingdom.

We are set apart from our old way of life. (9–11)

Paul lists vices that some Jews and Christians typically ascribed to Gentiles (see 5:1–2).

▶ "Fornicator" designates general sexual immorality (see vv. 13 and 18).

▶ "Idolater" is a derogatory term for someone who worships the Roman gods.

▶ An "adulterer" is a married person who has sex with someone to whom he or she isn't married.

▶ The next word is "soft;" here it means to be cowardly or morally weak.

▶ The next word is "rare;" it combines "male" and "bed."

The terms that follow are clearer in understanding.

In verse 11, Paul says that some Corinthian believers used to do these things, but then Paul reminds them of their baptisms: they were "washed," "sanctified" and "justified." These behaviors, therefore, must be abandoned.

Rather than providing a list of vices against which the Corinthians should judge others, Paul invites them to ask which vices they themselves commit.

For example, one person may deal with greed while another person has committed or is committing adultery.

We are set apart to be one with Christ. (12–17)

Some philosophical schools of Paul's time had sayings similar to, "All things are lawful for me" (see 1 Cor. 10:23).

Paul agrees but says that more importantly, all things should be mutually "beneficial" or "helpful" in the church (see 1 Cor. 12:7).

"Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food" is another philosophical maxim, meaning that one should act according to nature.

Apparently, some Corinthian believers used this philosophy to justify having sex with prostitutes. As it was unnatural to deny the stomach food, they reasoned, so it was unnatural to deny the genitals intercourse.

Paul corrects this notion: the body is meant for the Lord and the Lord for the body.

Paul's response has dual meaning for his hearers.

Paul is talking about both physical bodies (15–17) and the church as the body of Christ (18–20). Both "bodies" are to be sanctuaries of the Holy Spirit (see v. 19).

We are set apart to glorify God. (18–20)

Physical fornication, or sexual activity with someone other than one's spouse, is a sin against one's own body.

Just as the Spirit filled Christ during His ministry (Luke 4:1, 14), the church now is the body of Christ, the temple in which the Holy Spirit now dwells (3:16–17).

Therefore, spiritual fornication, such as worshipping gods other than the one true God, is a sin against the church, the body of Christ.

"Price" also has dual meaning, for the word can also mean "offering" or "worship" to glorify God.

As Christ glorified God with His body on the cross, let us glorify God with our body, the Church. 🌈



Media reviews

MOVIES/TV

Nature documentaries lead March streaming recommendations

By Michael Foust
Correspondent, The Alabama Baptist

You likely didn't notice, but Netflix pulled some of its most beloved nature documentaries from the platform just before Christmas.

Gone are "Planet Earth" (I and II), "Blue Planet" (I and II), "Frozen Planet" and several other excellent documentary series from BBC Earth. That's because Discovery won the rights to BBC Earth titles and will launch its own streaming service this year.

Exploring creation

If you're a lover of nature documentaries, don't fret. Most of the major streaming services have plenty to offer in the nature documentary realm, even if BBC Earth currently doesn't have a home.

Although Disney Plus is

best known for children's animation and superheroes, its Disney Nature collection is nearly as impressive, with seven feature-length films residing on the platform.

These child-friendly movies include "Chimpanzee," "Born in China," "Bears," "Wings of Life" and "African Cats." (My 4-year-old son loves them.)

Netflix, even without BBC Earth's best series, offers its own excellent original nature programming, including "Our Planet" and "Night on Earth," as well as shorter documentaries

worth exploring. ("Untamed Romania," which entered the platform in recent weeks, is a pleasant surprise.)

Amazon Prime includes multiple episodes of PBS' "Nature," which remains the best-produced nature documentary in the United States.

Hulu has the best faith-



Disney Plus photo

'Disney Nature'

based nature documentary, "The Riot and the Dance: Earth," which follows Gordon Wilson as he explores God's creation.

In our city-centric culture, nature documentaries soothe the soul. Watch any of them and you'll quickly see why David wrote, "On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate" (Ps. 145:5).

Also streaming this month:

For adults/teens

► **"Space Jam" (Netflix)** — Michael Jordan helps Bugs Bunny win an intergalactic basketball game. It's rated PG and has a few elements (including sensuality and misuse of h-ll)

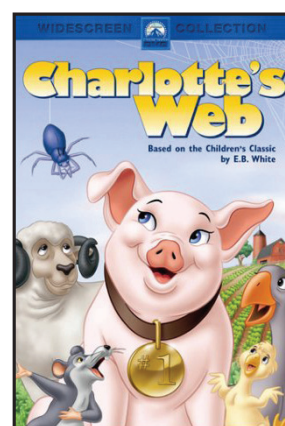
that may trouble parents. (That's one reason I can't recommend it for all children.)

► **"The Young Messiah" (Netflix)** — It's a live-action, 2016 film that imagines what Jesus would have been like as a 7-year-old. It's almost entirely fiction, although the plot mirrors what

Scripture teaches about Christ: He's sinless and has authority over Satan. (Both truths are depicted on screen.) Some moviegoers walk away from "The Young Messiah" inspired. Others say it never should have been made. I'll let you decide. Rated PG-13 for some violence and thematic elements.

For children

► **"Charlotte's Web" (Netflix)**

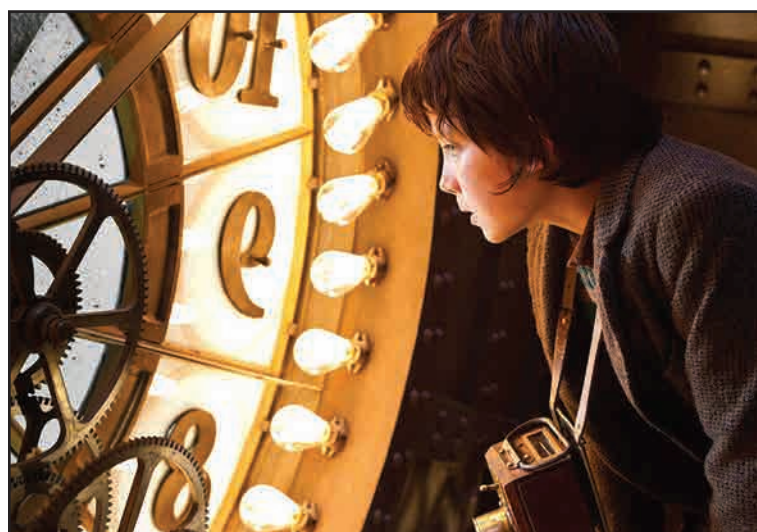


(Hulu) — It's the 1973 version of the classic story about a spider who devises a plan to save a young pig from slaughter. It's a great tale of love and friendship. Rated G.

► **"Hugo" (Netflix)** — An orphan who lives in a train station tries to uncover a secret message left behind by his late clockmaker father. Rated PG for mild thematic material, some action/peril and smoking.

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.



'Hugo'

Photo courtesy of Jaap Buitendijk/GK Films

‘Always stay faithful’

Baptist summer camp in rural Maine helps make campers’ faith ‘layered’

By **Trennis Henderson**
WMU National Correspondent

Ann Lawrence, manager of Farmington Conference Center in rural Maine, knows the eternal difference camp can make in the lives of young people.

Nestled in a region of the nation with a small evangelical Christian presence, Farmington is the only Southern Baptist-related conference center in New England. In that challenging setting, Farmington’s staff and volunteers are seeking to shine the light of Christ for children and youth.

“Camp changed my life — so camp kind of has a place in my heart,” said Lawrence, who also serves as the director of Farmington’s annual girls camp.

Focusing on the overall goals of

input, output and impact, Lawrence said her team invited several of the older campers to help brainstorm camp goals, such as the ideal number of campers and staff needed and the output of life change among campers.

The bottom line, she said, is that “we want the kids to be faithful followers of Jesus and making disciples, and that’s all we’re about.”

“Missions is one of our avenues for them getting that to happen, for them to see the possibilities of what God might lead them to, but we don’t try to say you’re going to be a missionary,” she said. “We say we’re all missionaries. If we accept Christ, we’re all to help make disciples of others.”

How does that happen in practical terms at a rustic, picturesque Baptist camp in New England that



WMU photos by Pam Henderson

Campers at Farmington Conference Center in Maine learn practical lessons about cooperation and teamwork through activities like working together to form a circle by unknotting their arms while holding their teammates’ hands.

ministers to a few dozen children and teens each summer?

‘Very intentional’

It happens with typical camp activities ranging from swimming, hiking, archery and a ropes course, as well as overnight tent camping, cookouts and s’mores. Staff members purposefully seek to build personal relationships with each camper. Add in Bible and missions studies, daily devotionals and nightly worship services in an outdoor amphitheater and the camp’s spiritual focus becomes clear.

“We’re very intentional on what

we present as far as their quiet time, their Bible study, the worship time and even reflections, which are often called devotions,” Lawrence said. “We figure the more you layer, the more they hear God’s word, the better off they’re going to be, so that’s what we’re doing. The more they interact with God’s word, the better.”

As Farmington staffers and volunteers seek to duplicate that impact each summer among children and youth from across New England, Lawrence said one of their biggest prayer requests “is always that we stay faithful.” 🌈



Campers divide into small groups for prayer time as part of an evening worship service at Farmington Conference Center in Maine.