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Baptists 'recharge, refocus' around evangelism



Hundreds of Arkansas Baptist ministers and others gathered to worship, pray and hear inspiring messages Jan. 30-31 at the annual Arkansas Baptist State Convention 2017 Conference on Evangelism and Church Health held at Geyer Springs First Baptist Church in Little Rock. Photo by Caleb Yarbrough

LITTLE ROCK - Excitement and anticipation for ministry in the new year were high as Baptist ministers and others gathered Jan. 30-31 for the Arkansas Baptist State Convention (ABSC) 2017 Conference on Evangelism and Church Health at Geyer Springs First Baptist Church in Little Rock.

The multifaceted event - historically known as the evangelism conference - featured a number of speakers, interactive luncheon workshops, a prayer focus and an exhibit hall.

The annual conference is a great way for pastors and church leaders to "recharge their batteries and refocus on evangelism," said Terry Bostick, team leader for ABSC's evangelism and church health team.

"The ABSC Evangelism Conference is one of the consistently best opportunities in Arkansas each year," was tweeted by Chad Graves of Conway about the event.

The Conference on Evange-

lism and Church Health was a time of spiritual growth, fellowship and conviction, as the hundreds attending heard inspiring messages from a variety of speakers.

Robert Smith

Using 2 Kings 13:20-21 as his biblical text, Robert Smith, who serves as Charles T. Carter Baptist Chair of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Ala., urged attendees at the Conference on Evangelism and Church Health to preach a gospel that lives beyond the grave.



Smith

Elijah passed the mantle of his prophetic leadership to Elisha before Elijah ascended into heaven without dying. The two men shared ministries that were "mutually effective," said Smith. Although Elisha ultimately died and was buried, the body of a dead man that was tossed into Elisha's grave came back to life, signifying his

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Tenn. pastor resigns IMB over mosque flap

NASHVILLE, Tenn. - Ongoing discussion of a federal court case concerning religious liberty for Muslims has prompted the resignation of an International Mission Board (IMB) trustee and a revision of the IMB's process for submitting friend of the court briefs.

Dean Haun, pastor of First Baptist Church in Mor-

ristown, Tenn., resigned from the IMB trustee board in November based on his conviction the IMB should not have joined a friend of the court brief last May supporting the Islamic Society of Basking Ridge, N.J., (ISBR) in its religious discrimination lawsuit against

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Gorsuch 'a strong constitutionalist' SBC leaders praise Trump pick

Tim Yarbrough
Arkansas Baptist News

WASHINGTON - Southern Baptist leaders are praising President Donald Trump's selection of Judge Neil M. Gorsuch, 49, a federal appeals court judge from the Denver-based 10th Circuit, as an associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court to fill the seat vacated by the death of Justice Antonin Scalia.

President Trump made the announcement during an evening ceremony held at the White House Jan. 31. In remarks, the president said Gorsuch fulfills a campaign promise he made to voters to nominate "the very best judge" for the Supreme Court "who respects our laws and is repre-

sentative of our Constitution. ... someone who loves our Constitution and interprets them [sic] as written."

Gorsuch appears to fit that description, as the judge is known for a strong conservative record and is a proponent of originalism and of textualism in interpreting the U.S. Constitution.

He was appointed by President George W. Bush in 2006 and has written against the legalization of euthanasia, sided with Christian employers and religious organizations in the *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* and with the Little Sisters of the Poor Supreme Court cases.

Republican lawmakers and

conservative groups applauded President Trump's nomination of Gorsuch as "outstanding" as Democrats questioned whether the nominee has sufficient "respect for constitutional values of liberty, equality and justice for all," media reported.



Gorsuch

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., who kept the late Justice Scalia's seat open through the presidential election so voters could make their voices known,

said in a statement, "Like Justice Scalia, [Gorsuch] understands the constitutional limits on the authority of a

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POSTAGE INFORMATION

ABN Digest

Stories of interest
to Arkansas Baptists

Satanic statue at Capitol clears committee hurdle

LITTLE ROCK – If Arkansans get a Ten Commandments monument on the grounds of the Arkansas Capitol, it is looking like they may have a satanic statue to go along with it.

State officials in January advanced plans for a satanic statue during a meeting of the Capitol Arts and Grounds Commission, the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* reported.

A subcommittee of the commission OK'd plans Jan. 25 for a public hearing for a proposed 8½-foot, 3,000-pound statue of Baphomet – a horned figure with the head of a goat that is associated with Satanism.

Plans for the statue were presented by the New York-based Satanic Temple as about 30 people protested outside the subcommittee meeting, the newspaper reported.

"We're tasked with determining if it's a safe, long-lasting, blending-in monument that goes on the grounds," Kelly Boyd, subcommittee chairman and chief deputy secretary of state, told the *Democrat-Gazette*. "We're not tasked with determining political sides or anything else."

The Satanic Temple submitted plans for a Baphomet statue after Arkansas lawmakers passed a bill in 2015 that allows a 6,000-pound monument of the Ten Commandments – paid for by private funds – to be added to the Capitol grounds. Plans are currently being drawn up for the monument.

The law refers to God and the Bible and describes the Ten Commandments as "the moral foundation of the law" in Arkansas and the United States, the *Democrat-Gazette* reported.

For more ABN Digest, go to
arkansasbaptist.org/abn-digest

Tornado damages William Carey Univ.

HATTIESBURG, Miss. (BP) – An EF3 tornado that ripped through southern Mississippi Jan. 21 in the wee hours of the morning damaged nearly all of the 30 buildings on William Carey University's Hattiesburg campus and left seven students injured.

The twister ripped roofs from buildings, twisted metal around trees and overturned cars.

A statue of Christ remained unharmed, becoming the iconic image of the storm, the *Gulfport Sun-Herald* reported. And for many, the statue was a symbol of the hope to move forward and a reminder that no one died on campus from the destructive force of nature that claimed the lives of four people in the surrounding area.

William Carey is affiliated with the Mississippi Baptist Convention and has campuses in Hattiesburg and Biloxi.

The tornado was among a line of storms to hit the Southeast Jan. 21-22, killing at least 18 people and leaving damage from Mississippi to Georgia, according to the Associated Press.

Four people died in southern Mississippi, CNN reported.

While there were no deaths on the William Carey campus, the injured included a member of the women's soccer team who lost three fingers when a door slammed on her hand, Mia Overton,



Most of the vehicles and buildings on William Carey University's Hattiesburg, Miss., campus were damaged by a Jan. 21 tornado. *William Carey University photo*

university spokesman, said. A separate group of students was returning to campus as the storm struck, and the tornado picked their car off the ground.

The Jackson *Clarion-Ledger* reported that three first-year medical students studying in the Medical Arts Building found themselves "surrounded by rubble."

In another building, a professor was in his third-floor office when much of the roof detached.

Four buildings may have to be demolished and replaced,

including Tatum Court, the "iconic building in the center of campus" erected in 1914, Overton said. The university "would like to try to save" Tatum Court "if at all possible. But we don't know if that's going to be feasible."

Also facing potential demolition are two dormitories and the building housing William Carey's School of Business, Overton said. *The Clarion-Ledger* reported damage to most vehicles on campus and a "gaping hole" in Green Science Hall.

Of William Carey's approxi-

mately 4,400 students, 800 live on the Hattiesburg campus, Overton said, noting many had gone home for the weekend. There is no estimate how many people were on campus when the storm hit.

The national Woman's Missionary Union and the WMU Foundation have awarded a \$5,000 grant from the HEART (Humanitarian Emergency Aid for Rebuilding Tomorrow) Fund to assist international students and the children of missionaries (MKs) attending William Carey University.

GORSUCH

continued from page one

federal judge and that the duty of a judge is to apply the law even-handedly, without fear or favor, and not to rule based on one's empathy with a party in a case."

It appears that some Democrats, embittered by Republicans' refusal to consider former President Barack Obama's choice to fill a vacancy created by the sudden death last February of Justice Scalia, plan to oppose the nomination vigorously.

Democratic Senator Chuck Schumer of New York has said he is ready to block any candidate he sees as outside what the party deems is the mainstream of

American society.

"Now more than ever, we need a Supreme Court Justice who is independent, eschews ideology, who will preserve our democracy, protect fundamental rights, and will stand up to a President who has already shown a willingness to bend the Constitution," Schumer said in a statement.

Baptist support

In spite of being highly critical of President Trump during the presidential campaign, Russell Moore, president of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), applauded Gorsuch as an "exceptional choice" by the new president.

"Judge Neil Gorsuch is an exceptional choice for Supreme Court justice. He is a

brilliant and articulate defender of Constitutional originalism in the mold of the man he will replace: Justice Antonin Scalia," said Moore in comments posted at erlc.com.

Larry Page, executive director of the Arkansas Faith and Ethics Council, applauded President Trump's nomination of Gorsuch.

"President Trump's nomination of Colorado federal appeals court Judge Neil Gorsuch has been roundly praised by many diverse segments of our nation. In fact, all but the most doctrinaire liberal social warriors are finding the pick to be refreshing," Page said in written comments to the *Arkansas Baptist News*.

"What the far left loathes about the Gorsuch nomination is the very thing that has

left conservatives encouraged and optimistic about our nation's future. Judge Gorsuch is what is known as an originalist, not unlike the late Justice Antonin Scalia. He believes that the federal Constitution should be held to mean precisely what the authors of that document intended by the words they penned. The most vociferous of the Gorsuch detractors want the Constitution 'interpreted' and 'applied' to the changing mores and values as reflected in the culture.

"In short, these critics want the Constitution to be viewed as a 'living document' whose meaning evolves to suit and accommodate their latest whims and deviations from the norm."

Contact Tim Yarbrough at tim@arkansasbaptist.org.

'Life is winning,' Pence tells marchers

WASHINGTON – Vice President Mike Pence declared "life is winning again in America" in his historic appearance Jan. 27 before a massive March for Life crowd that included a contingent of Southern Baptists attending the Evangelicals for Life conference.

Sworn in as vice president only a week before, Pence became the first person holding that office to speak in person at the March for Life in its 44-year history. No president has ever appeared at the annual event.

Pence's appearance – as well as promises and actions by the new Trump administration – seemed to provide a heightened level of optimism among the marchers. President Trump had signed an executive order Jan. 23 to reinstate a ban on federal funds for international organizations that perform or promote abortions overseas.

Pence also had promised during the election campaign to work to defund Planned Parenthood and to enact a permanent, government-wide ban on federal funding of abortions, something the House of Representatives voted to do Jan. 24. Trump announced a pro-life nominee to the Supreme Court Jan. 31 (see related story page 1).

Southern Baptist ethicist Russell Moore and the staff

of the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) participated in the March for Life Jan. 27 in the midst of the Evangelicals for Life conference being held in Washington.

Moore said he was honored to march with pro-life Americans and urged evangelical Christians to become more involved in the event.

"This is an important moment each year for advocates of human dignity, and our gathering this year sent another message to Washington and beyond that unborn life matters," said Moore, ERLC president. "I'm thankful for this generation's stand for life, and my prayer is that what this march stands for will soon not be known as a movement, but as a consensus."

Moore said, "It's imperative for evangelical Christians to be part of this march. We are, after all, committed to the Good News of everlasting life. We should march to show that every life has dignity and also that Jesus offers forgiveness for every sin, freely offered to everyone, no matter what he or she has done."

Roman Catholics have been the main force behind and the primary participants in the March for Life since its beginning in 1974, one year after the Supreme Court legalized



A massive crowd of participants in the annual March for Life in Washington braved the cold Jan. 27. Marchers included a contingent of Southern Baptists attending the Evangelicals for Life conference being held in the city.

abortion throughout the country in the Roe v. Wade decision Jan. 22, 1973. The ERLC and Focus on the Family have sought to increase evangelical participation in the march the last two years, co-hosting the three-day Evangelicals for Life conference around the event and making time in the schedule for attendees to take part in the march.

'New dawn for life'

During the Washington march, Kellyanne Conway, counselor to the president, spoke of the hope among pro-life Americans.

"This is a new day, a new dawn for life," she said at the

March for Life rally, adding it is "a time of incredible promise" for the pro-life movement.

Pence urged pro-lifers to be compassionate toward all Americans.

"We have come to an historic moment in the cause for life, and we must meet this moment with respect and compassion for every American," said Pence, a former congressman and a former governor of Indiana.

He quoted a Bible verse in encouraging the pro-life movement to demonstrate "respect for the dignity and worth of every person."

"[A]s it is written, 'Let your gentleness be evident to all,'" Pence said, quoting Phil. 4:5. "Let this movement be known for love, not anger. Let this movement be known for compassion, not confrontation. When it comes to matters of the heart, there is nothing stronger than gentleness.

"I believe that we will continue to win the hearts and minds of the rising generation if our hearts first break for young mothers and their unborn children, and if we, each of us, do all we can to meet them where they are with generosity, not judgment," he said.

Eric Metaxas, evangelical author and radio talk-show host, said at the rally, "[W]e pray that this message of love and forgiveness would get out to the women of America – that the God of the Bible and everyone who follows Him loves those women who have made this tragic choice and want to extend the love of Jesus to those women."

Rally for life at State Capitol

LITTLE ROCK – Arkansans from across the state lifted up their pro-life voices Sunday, Jan. 22, at the 39th Annual March for Life held at the Arkansas State Capitol.

The event is held in January each year to mark the anniversary of the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion in the United States in 1973 – resulting in the deaths of an estimated 60 million unborn children.

The Arkansas Right to Life (ARTL) was the sponsor of the march, which is a nationwide event – the largest of which is held in Washington, D.C.

Andy Mayberry, president of ARTL, lead marchers along with elected officials, invited dignitaries and other special guests to the steps of the Capitol for a brief program, which

included politicians, religious leaders and others.

During the program, Arkansas Right to Life reported on its top legislative priority for 2017, the Arkansas Unborn Child Protection from Dismemberment Abortion Act (HB 1032).

"Arkansas Right to Life is committed to the promotion of the Safe Haven Law in Arkansas to help mothers overwhelmed with an infant to know that there is help that is legal, safe and anonymous that protects both mother and child," said Rose Mimms, executive director of ARTL.

Ark. Gov. Asa Hutchinson and Lt. Gov. Tim Griffin attended the event.

"This General Assembly has the opportunity to protect life," Hutchinson told the

crowd, speaking specifically about HB1032, a bill to ban a method used to terminate pregnancies of women in their second trimester. The governor said that he has read the bill and that "when it passes, I will sign it into law."

"We want to end abortion; we want to make sure they have a right to life," Mimms told a reporter for THV-11. Mimms added that the "gloomy weather" was no match for supporters of the march because of the importance of standing up for the right of the unborn in the country.

In addition to Little Rock, the first-ever March for Life was held in northwest Arkansas in front of a Planned Parenthood facility in Fayetteville. The event was organized by the NWA Catholic Respect Life.

ABN Digest

Stories of interest
to Arkansas Baptists

Trump spotlights religious liberty at prayer breakfast

WASHINGTON (BP) – The Trump administration "will do everything in its power to defend and protect religious liberty," President Donald Trump said Feb. 2 at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington.

President Trump told faith leaders gathered at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, "We will be a country where all citizens can practice their beliefs without fear of hostility or fear of violence."

Among steps he proposed to safeguard religious liberty was a promise to "get rid of and totally destroy the Johnson Amendment," a 1954 law that bars churches and other tax-exempt organizations from endorsing political candidates. The promise drew attention within hours from major media outlets and echoed statements Trump made during the 2016 presidential campaign.

America should repeal the Johnson Amendment and "allow our representatives of faith to speak freely without fear of retribution," Trump said at the prayer breakfast.

Among Southern Baptists in attendance were former Southern Baptist Convention Presidents Jack Graham and Ronnie Floyd; Wendell Estep, pastor of First Baptist Church in Columbia, S.C.; Student Leadership University President Jay Strack; former Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission President Richard Land; and Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church in the Los Angeles area.

The breakfast included a keynote address by U.S. Senate chaplain Barry Black, and music by Christian recording artist Bart Millard of Mercy Me.

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Editorial & Opinion

"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have..."

1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)

Common sense takes center stage in Washington

Headline: "Common sense takes center stage in the Washington; liberals go crazy!"

There is no debate. Voters in the United States elected a dramatically different leader in Donald Trump in November.

Called "the blue collar billionaire" by some political pundits, President Trump is making good on his campaign promises in a big, big way. The question that remains to be answered is, "Can 21st century America tolerate the president's approach to issues that – only a generation ago – were seen as common sense and what was best for the country?"

For example, liberals, who apparently cannot fathom

the idea of turning anyone away from our borders for any reason, are attempting to turn illegal immigration into a civil rights issue.

Since when do immigrants to our country have civil rights? They aren't yet citizens of the United States. We are a sovereign country – and one that has been very

compassionate to immigration throughout our history – we can keep anyone out that we want. Open borders are chaos and anarchy.

While Scripture instructs us to have compassion on widows and orphans and to care for immigrants and foreigners (Isaiah 1:17), it also addresses self-defense and borders (Luke 11:21, Psalm 82:4).

President Trump is correct to slow immigration and to take a serious look at who is attempting to enter our country. As if we needed another reason to make the decision, all we have to do is look to the problems Europeans have brought on themselves by opening their borders to extremists.

It is ironic that it took a Manhattan billionaire to make the gutsy decision to slow the flow of immigration to our country – after politician after politician caved on the issue, putting the American public at risk.

While many evangelicals took pause and others held their collective noses while voting for Trump, it appears their gamble may pay off in support of causes that are important to them.

For the first time in the history of the March for Life movement, a sitting vice president addressed pro-life marchers in Washington, D.C. Additionally, President Trump's

senior advisor, Kellyanne Conway, spoke to the rally.

President Trump made history, posting on Twitter as the

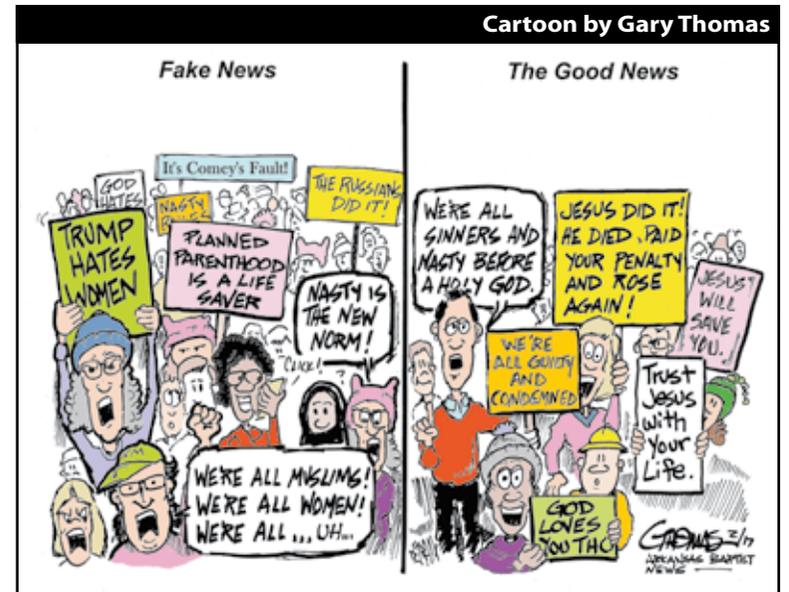
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Pressing On

Tim Yarbrough

Phil. 3:14



PP receives a half billion annually; it's time to defund it now

Planned Parenthood receives over half a billion dollars of taxpayer money annually. They do so by a clever "sleight of hand" trick. They and their supporters tout the services, other than abortion, that they provide and how women's health would be in dire straits without the preventive measures that the humanitarians at Planned Parenthood offer. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The fact is abortion is the reason Planned Parenthood exists; it is their mission, and all the talk about their other services being extensive

and indispensable is just so much "smoke and mirrors." Planned Parenthood is the nation's largest abortion provider. In 2013-14, it performed 324,000 abortions, much of that funded with our tax dollars, and the ratio of abortions they perform is on the rise. In 2006, Planned Parenthood

provided one in five of all abortions, but by 2015 it had grown to one in three.

The unvarnished truth is we don't need Planned Parenthood. Consider the facts – not feelings or subjective opinions – but hard, irrefutable facts. The level of

their preventive services has fallen precipitously, and their prenatal services hardly exist. The level of cancer screenings performed by Planned Parenthood has been dramatically reduced since 2006, and from 2009 to 2013 its adoption-to-abortion ratio was a dismal 209-to-1. In an investigative video report, the Live Action pro-life organization sent individuals to Planned Parenthood clinics to request prenatal care. All but five of 97 clinics they contacted refused them.

There is no one supporting the defunding of Planned Parenthood who desires for women to be deprived of access to health care. There are alternatives – thousands of

other health-care facilities that provide all the services that Planned Parenthood purports to provide (with the exception of abortion).

How about this for a ready solution to this exaggerated dilemma? The taxpayer funds that go to Planned Parenthood could be redirected to Federally Qualified Health-care Centers, which outnumber Planned Parenthood facilities by a 20-to-1 ratio. They are evenly distributed over the country, serving all people.

Planned Parenthood is a malignancy on our culture. It may also be a criminal enterprise. The list of possible crimes is extensive: illegally selling aborted babies' body parts for profit, covering up

rape and child abuse, aiding and abetting sex traffickers, excessive government billing for services, and providing women's confidential medical information to vendors.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "The test of the morality of a society is what it does for its children." To turn a blind eye to the evil committed against children by a sinister organization like Planned Parenthood and to do nothing to eradicate it – is to come up short in Bonhoeffer's estimation – it is to fail in a most serious crucible.

Larry Page is executive director of the Arkansas Faith and Ethics Council. Visit arfaith.org online or email Page at llp@arfaith.org for more information.



Faith & Ethics

Larry Page



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Tim Yarbrough, editor/exec. director
Jeanie Weber, administrative assistant
Caleb Yarbrough, associate editor
Margaret Colson, writer/copy editor
Barbara Vick, circulation coordinator
Advertising: ads@arkansasbaptist.org
Phone 501-376-4791, ext. 5161

Toll-free 800-838-2272, ext. 5161
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Why was Jesus baptized?



Baptists Ask

Ken Gore

In the Gospel of Matthew, John the Baptist declared to the crowd, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matt. 3:2, NIV). John’s baptism was a sign of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. When Jesus asked to be baptized, John hesitated, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” (Matt. 3:14, NIV). After Jesus urged that He needed to do this “to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15, NIV), John then consented.

Because Christians attest that Jesus did not sin (Heb. 4:15) and did not need to repent, many have wondered why Jesus wanted baptism. Some believe it was to show Jesus’ approval of John’s baptism. Others think Jesus did it for the benefit of His followers. Still others saw it as a symbolic foreshadowing of Jesus’ destiny: His death, burial and resurrection. While these are all plausible, Matthew’s account is not so much about baptism as it is about Jesus.

When Jesus was baptized, three things happened. First, the heavens opened, symbolizing no separation between heaven and earth. Second, the Spirit of God lit on Jesus like a dove. Third, a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17, NIV). Jesus’ baptism demonstrates that He is unlike anyone else who was baptized. At this event, God the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit were present together – and the heavens opened!

After Jesus’ baptism, Jesus declared to the crowd the same message as John: the Kingdom of heaven was near (Matt. 4:17). The mantle had been passed from John to Jesus.

Jesus’ baptism, along with many other events, verified that Jesus is no ordinary man. Throughout his Gospel, Matthew showed that Jesus was an extraordinary teacher, preacher, healer and Savior. In short, He is Immanuel – “God with us” (Matt. 1:23).

Ken Gore is H.E. Williams professor of religion chair, and chairman of the department of Christian studies at Williams Baptist College. Baptists Ask is reader-driven. Send your questions to tim@arkansasabaptist.org.

Simple points

In a culture where there is a lot of noise, anyone with a real and important message has to learn how to stand out. In my field of work, the audience is moms who often need something they can read quickly before deciding if they need to dig deeper, so we use a lot of numbers and bullet points. If we shout out “7 ways to ...” or “3 quick tips for ...,” we’re bound to grab the attention of our readers.

The trick, though, is to provide information that is quick and easy to read but takes a little more thought to implement. Why? Because there aren’t really any quick and easy fixes to the parenting and homeschooling needs of our audience – or life in general, for that matter. The moms we write for might need to know they can search quickly for a suggestion, but they also have to realize that it will take a good bit of time and energy to implement that suggestion and make it work.

It is no different in our spiritual lives. The massive amount of information out there forces us to speed-sort it all to determine what will and won’t help us. But once we find what we seek, we have to slow down. There is no way around it.

Were I to put this concept into three bullet points, it might look something like this:

Seek: What is it God is trying to teach me right now? Is it spiritual or practical? Whatever it is, it will most likely be all around me. Every Scripture passage or devotional I read

will hint at it. Friends will mention it. It will come up in sermons. If I am seeking and paying attention, I will find it.

Ponder and Study: Once I have found that for which I am seeking, applying it to my life is not a matter of snapping my fingers. I must prayerfully dig into Scripture and explore the lesson God is pouring into my life.

Act: At some point, though, I have to stop studying and choose to act – often while I’m still learning. I have to make this new truth an active and ingrained part of my life. I can’t just wander into it. I cannot expect it to mystically become real to me. I must engage and move forward.

Three points can be quickly read and quickly processed, but the implementation will take time. It may take weeks, months or even years. That is where it gets tough. That is where we falter.

Our amazing Lord and Master is speaking to us, my friends. He has already given us the information we need to grow in our relationship with Him and reach this lost world. The message and instructions are simple. But the implementation is going to take something we are often loathe to give: time, energy, sacrifice and complete surrender. We have our attention-grabbing bullet point message. Now, what are we going to do with it?

Ann Hibbard is a member of East End Baptist Church in East End. Read her blog at annhibbard.com.



Uncovered Dish

Ann Hibbard

‘Teach them to tell it’

A personal Christian testimony is a powerful thing. The sad thing is, it seems more and more churchgoers really do not understand exactly what it is or how to share it. By true definition, a testimony is a first-hand account of something. So, a Christian testimony is a first-hand account (or story) of Christ’s transformational work.

A common basic outline is: 1) My life before Christ, 2) How I realized my need for Christ, 3) How I responded in faith to Christ and 4) The difference Christ has made in my life. It is important that each believer learn to tell his or her faith story or testimony. There are many reasons why. Here are just four of them:

1) A testimony enhances worship. Anytime a believer articulates his or her story of God’s grace, forgiveness and adoption, that believer is reminded of God demonstrating His love through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This leads to the believer expressing a deeper sense of gratitude, awe and wonder toward God. This is thanksgiving and worship.

2) A testimony better prepares a believer for personal evangelism. A meaningful gospel presentation is incomplete without a personal testimony of a changed life. Without a personal testimony, the gospel can sound like a religious sales pitch. A personal testimony produces first-hand evidence and legitimacy to the hearer. It is difficult to argue with a personal account of a miraculously changed life.

3) Teaching someone to share his or her testimony is a

proven evangelism method. As crazy as it might sound to many church people, I have seen many people make professions of faith as they are thinking about their personal testimonies.

Through the years, as I have led numerous evangelistic training seminars and trained hundreds for service on international mission teams, I conservatively estimate that I have seen more than 100 individuals discover that they have never been born again, leading to a true salvation experience. I have even seen a young man get saved in a seminary class I was teaching. In most of these cases, as people are trying to write their personal testimonies, they discover that they really do not have one. The Holy Spirit utilizes this to convict them of their loss and draw them to a true profession of faith in Jesus Christ.

4) A testimony enhances Christian fellowship and helps to develop personal relationships within the church. A person’s story helps us understand not only that person’s experiences, but also that person’s very personhood. It helps define for us who that person is as well and helps us understand that person’s personality, attitude and actions. It helps us love each other more deeply and accept each other for who we are. It reminds each of us that without God we are nothing.

Every believer has a testimony. What’s yours? Tell it, and teach others to tell their stories too.

Eric W. Ramsey is an evangelism and mission strategist and serves as associate pastor of First Baptist Church, Fort Smith.



Answering the Call

Eric Ramsey



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COMMON SENSE

continued from page 4

march got underway: “The #MarchForLife is so important. To all of you marching — you have my full support!”

And now the president has nominated constitutionalist Neil M. Gorsuch as an associate justice for the Supreme Court (see related story page 1).

Perhaps Russell Moore, president of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC), can rest a bit easier now that it appears President Trump is, indeed, on the side of causes important to most evangelicals.

In comments posted at erlc.com, Moore applauded President Trump’s choice: “His career is one that exemplifies the very best of intellectually robust conservatism, judicial restraint and faithfulness to the Constitution. I heartily support President Trump’s excellent appointment. I look forward to Judge Gorsuch’s voice on the Court for decades to come and pray that he will be an articulate and

stalwart advocate for religious liberty and human dignity at all its stages.”

While a few weeks does not define the presidency of Donald Trump, it is off to a great start. It’s our job as Christians — just as with the past Obama administration — to pray daily for our president and other leaders.

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:1-4, ESV).

After all, without God giving them their power, they would have no authority over us: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God” (Romans 13:1, ESV).

Tim Yarbrough is editor/executive director of the ABN.

‘Everyone is family’ at Williams Baptist

It felt great to be a part of something. Today, Carlene and I went to Williams Baptist College (WBC) to discuss what it was like to be students there and to move on from the small Christian liberal arts school after graduation.

Looking around the room, I saw so many people who are fantastic professionals in their fields. We had two



Williams Baptist College
Chase Crawford

graduates who attained doctorates in psychology. Man, did I feel under-qualified!

While in that room, numerous people spoke of the excellence in academia at WBC. Williams certainly prepared us with a rigorous curriculum. I also know the professors strive for excellence in their relationships with students at Williams.

I think that is why I was asked to be there. I may not have been the best student in class, but every student is con-

sidered family at our school. That’s what I love about Williams.

Everyone is family.

As graduates shared their experiences from their time at our beloved school, others in the room simply nodded in agreement. It was almost as if we had all attended

school during the same four years. Each of us, no matter what year we graduated, seemed to have similar experiences.

WBC created a formative moment in each of our lives that we all still feel the effects of today. Williams is much more than a school to us. It is our home.

Chase Crawford, of Pocahontas, is a WBC graduate with a bachelor degree in Christian ministries. He and his wife, Carlene, recently joined a panel of Williams alumni during an accreditation team visit. This was Chase’s reflection on the day.

Campaign success draws closer

I am excited to announce Camp Siloam has received a \$250,000 challenge grant from the Mabee Foundation for the Feed My Sheep campaign to construct a new dining hall. God has shown His hand in so many incredible ways over the past year. I love seeing His hand at work. The award of the Mabee Foundation grant is more evidence that God wants to use Camp Siloam for tremendous kingdom work in the years to come.

Camp Siloam had received a Mabee Foundation grant for the large worship center in the early 1990s. Two years ago, I asked the Mabee Foundation directors if we would be eligible for another grant. They said, “Get to 40 percent of your campaign goal and then apply.” I took that as a Yes.

I am so grateful for what the Mabee Foundation has

done for Camp Siloam, but with the award, the Mabee Foundation has issued Arkansas Baptists a challenge. The Mabee Foundation’s mission is to spur on the last giving of a capital campaign with challenge grants. The \$250,000 grant won’t become available to Camp Siloam until we have



Camp Siloam

Jason Wilkie

met the campaign goal and started construction. The Mabee Foundation is giving us one year to accomplish the campaign goal. Folks, I really need your help finishing the campaign by Jan. 1, 2018!

The Feed My Sheep campaign was launched November 2015 with a goal of \$3.4 million. In the 14 months since the campaign launch, Arkansas Baptists have given an amazing \$2,160,000. The first \$1 million came from 800 people making gifts and pledges ranging from \$1 to \$300,000.

Many of those people heard about the need for a new din-

ing hall through the church campaign which has raised \$137,660 through the giving of 53 churches. Charles and Genevieve Bonner were touched by the legacy of ministry here and gave \$1 million in October through the Arkansas Baptist Foundation. The Bonners’ gift made it possible for Camp Siloam to apply for the Mabee Foundation grant.

We are blessed to have so many people, who care about the ministry, involved in the campaign. Camp Siloam needs to raise \$1.1 million to finish out the campaign by the end of 2017. We are trusting that God has a plan to finance the building that is so needed.

Thank you to everyone who has made the campaign a success so far. I look forward to seeing what God is going to do in the coming months.

Jason Wilkie is executive director of Camp Siloam. For more information about Camp Siloam visit campsiloam.com.

What does the Foundation do?

The Arkansas Baptist Foundation has been around since 1949. Despite the long tenure of the Foundation, I don’t think there is another ministry in the Arkansas Baptist State Convention (ABSC)



Baptist Foundation

Dillon McClain

that is shrouded in so much mystery or subject to misunderstanding of our purpose. It is my goal to repeat the message of the Foundation’s purpose until every person or ministry remotely connected to ABSC understands the resources they have available to them so that we can continue in cooperation to further the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Whether it’s from a pastor or lay member who has been in the Southern Baptist world his or her entire life, the question I get most often is, “What does the Foundation actually do?”

The Foundation’s primary purpose is to promote biblical stewardship within Southern Baptist churches and ministries and to encourage Arkansas Baptists to be good stewards of their resources by participating in what God is already doing in our state and around the world.

On a daily basis, this means that the Foundation can provide investment management and oversight for the assets of any Arkansas Baptist agency, institution or church. Generally, the Foundation can provide access to a wide variety of investment vehicles that are, typically, lower in cost because of the aggregate pricing we receive.

Additionally, we serve as a resource and reference for tax, finance, estate planning, charitable giving, and legal and governance issues. Put another way, the Founda-

tion is available to serve as a planned giving office to help those who wish to make charitable gifts to any Arkansas Baptist ministry or to serve as a sounding board for any technical issues that a ministry might incur.

For individuals, we provide free estate planning for anyone in denominational service. This includes revocable trusts, wills, powers of attorney and health-care directives. Moreover, we provide estate and charitable planning assistance to Arkansas Baptists intending to make a kingdom impact.

These services only scratch the surface of what the Foundation does, and I hope to elaborate on what we do in subsequent articles.

Dillon S. McClain is an attorney and vice president of the Arkansas Baptist Foundation. For more information email us at info@abf.org.

200-plus Ark. students lift voices at PraizFest

Lisa Falknor
Arkansas Baptist News

BENTON - Of the more than 200 Arkansas students sitting in the First Baptist Church, Benton, choir loft, one came forward. Like the other students, she wore jeans and a light blue T-shirt that read "PraizFest 2017."

Director Kendall Lucas, other choir members, the orchestra and the audience listened attentively as she read Psalm 8:9: "Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"

And then the choir sang, "Soli Deo Gloria (God and God Alone)," echoing the words: "Oh how majestic is Your name, the uncontested King of all creation."

That song kicked off the 3 p.m. finale worship concert Jan. 28 during PraizFest, a statewide youth choir experience.

"I'm so grateful these words are in your minds," Larry

Grayson, Arkansas Baptist State Convention (ABSC) evangelism and church health team member, told the choir. "I hope they're also in your hearts."

For 13 years, Arkansas students in grades seven through 12 have gathered for the annual PraizFest sponsored by the ABSC evangelism and church health team. This year 19 churches participated in the event held at First Baptist Church, Benton.

PraizFest began Friday night, Jan. 27, with solo try-outs and sectional practices. On Saturday, the mass choir first practiced together and then sang for an hour at the finale concert under the direction of Lucas, music pastor at Denton Bible Church, Denton, Texas.

PraizFest is an opportunity for Arkansas youth choirs to practice choral excellence, to fellowship with other believers, to enhance worship in their respective churches and

to learn Christian doctrine through song.

Student minister Glenda Riddle directs the First Baptist Church, Ashdown, youth choir and also leads the PraizFest soprano sectionals and is the rehearsal pianist.

"I love it," Riddle said. "We would not miss it."

"For 13 years I've been taking our choir," she said. "It's always wonderful. My kids always come back and are bigger singers (louder and more excited) because they've sung with a huge choir."

Gathering with other students is her favorite part of PraizFest, said senior soprano Lindsey Haller from Union Valley Baptist Church in Beebe. "I really just enjoy being with students around the state and singing praises to God. It's a cool opportunity," she said, also admitting that participating in PraizFest is also hard work.

"It's a long two days," Haller said. "You practice a



The youth choir from First Baptist Church, Ashdown, pose for a photo during PraizFest. The church has attended all 13 years of the event. Photo by Lisa Falknor

ton, but the overall price for it all is singing at the end, hearing 200 voices praising God. It's an awesome experience!"

Trey Fennessee, a sophomore from Cedar Heights Baptist Church in North Little Rock, said the two-day event changed him.

"I gained a greater passion for worship, for Jesus," said the first-time PraizFest participant. "Before I came, I wasn't into singing, but after this ex-

perience, I really gained a passion for it."

Grayson said that every year PraizFest is "amazing" and "incredible."

"This year I'm blown away by the depth of lyrics and the theology in the songs," he said, adding, "I'm so glad we're able to implant that into their minds."

During the concert, Lucas

See **PRAIZFEST** page 13



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RECHARGE

continued from page one

ministry outlived his physical life.

In order to preach a gospel that goes beyond the grave, preachers must preach a gospel that promotes “alien righteousness.” People must understand, Smith preached, that “apart from Christ they are dead.” God imputes His righteousness to His people, but no one person is indispensable, said Smith, explaining that when he became a Christian, “The Trinity didn’t become a quartet.”

For the gospel to go beyond the grave, preachers must also preach the truth of Christological exclusivity. Elisha’s

name, he said, means “my God is salvation,” urging attendees not to offer a “salvific buffet” but rather to preach, “There is no salvation outside of Jesus Christ – none at all.”

Finally, he called on pastors to preach messages that are “fueled by the Spirit of God.” In Spirit-fueled preaching, “There is this reality of the eternal witness of the Spirit (Who) ... takes and applies the Word to people that you and I preach to,” said Smith.

Herb Reavis

Herb Reavis, pastor of North Jacksonville Baptist Church, Jacksonville, Fla., answered the question, “What kind of church does God attend?”

Drawing his answer from Revelation 1, Reavis said that God attends a church that “produces a dynamic Christian.” John, the apostle, exemplifies the kind of Christian God wants us to be, Reavis said.

“If you really know Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior, you may fall down, but you’re going to get back up. You may stray, but you’re going to come back because you’re in the grip of His grace. Even though you may leave Him, He doesn’t leave you,” he preached.

He said that there is “purpose in pressure” in the Chris-

tian’s life and that the Bible doesn’t differentiate between God being a person’s Lord and a person’s Savior.

The church that God attends emphasizes that “faithfulness is success,” said Reavis. “You’ve been hoodwinked into thinking success in ministry is a number and a visible result. When it’s all said and done, there is no human number that’s gonna blow God’s mind,” he said.

The church that God attends, he continued, gathers on a special day. “Church is not a funeral service; it’s a celebration that Jesus Christ is alive,” he said.

Also, the church that God attends fulfills a unique responsibility of seeking to save the lost. “Let’s don’t curse the darkness; let’s turn on the Light,” he said.

Finally, the church that God attends, he said, worships a living Savior. “I need to go to a church that God attends because ... sometimes I need to be corrected ... sometimes I need to be encouraged ... sometimes I need to get a touch of revival,” he said.

In his second sermon of the conference Reavis spoke from Luke 3 about “power priorities.”

Reavis shared that, after graduating from high school, he attended the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago to prepare for his call to ministry. He said that he used to ponder what the secret was to the school’s founder, Dwight L. Moody’s, fruitfulness until it dawned on him that “it was the power of God.”

Reavis said that while at Moody he would spend time in the library reading about men and women involved in revivals throughout history. The one thing that they all shared, he said, was the power of God.

“Today we have personalities, we have programs ... strategies ... facilities,” said Reavis. “But the one thing that we are lacking is the power of the living God coursing through the DNA and the veins of the local church and those who minis-

ter the word of God.”

Reavis listed three priorities for attendees to have the power of God in their lives: 1) the act of obedience, 2) the anointing of the Holy Spirit and 3) the approval of God.

“I’ve come to this place in my life, as I seek to serve Jesus Christ, win souls and lift up the banner of the cross. I’ve come to the place where if God is happy with me and Mama is happy with me, then I don’t give a hoot if anybody else is happy with me,” said Reavis.

David Allen

Preaching from Hebrews 1:1-4, David Allen, dean of the School of Preaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Ft. Worth, Texas, said that the Scripture teaches that speech is a vehicle of revelation, communication and salvation.

“Jesus is the speech of eternity translated into the language of time,” Allen said.

The opening words of Hebrews go on to teach “seven wonders of Jesus,” Allen said. Those seven wonders, which describe Who Jesus is and what He does, are: 1) Jesus is the heir of all things; 2) Jesus is God’s

agent of creation; 3) Jesus is the radiance of God’s glory; 4) Jesus is the exact representation of God’s nature; 5) Jesus sustains the universe by His powerful Word; 6) Jesus made purification for sins and 7) Jesus is God’s great King, as He sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Most of the book of Hebrews focuses on the sixth wonder of Jesus making purification or cleansing for sins. “Such is the love of God that although He is all of these things, He is also the Savior,” said Allen.

“It’s a wonderful thing to know about God – to know facts about Him ... it’s a whole lot more wonderful to know God personally through His Son Jesus Christ. There’s nothing in the universe like knowing Jesus Christ personally. There’s nothing in the universe like sharing Him with someone who doesn’t know Him,” said Allen in closing.

In his second sermon of the conference Allen spoke from Hebrews 6. The subject of Allen’s second sermon was, “my anchor holds.”

“Genuine hope for a Christian produces confidence in your life. It produces assurance in your life,” said Allen.

“We have this hope anchor which keeps us no matter what. ... Every link of the chain of hope that connects you to Christ as your anchor of hope has indelibly printed on every link four words: “Thus says the Lord.” And when God speaks and promises salvation, nothing can change that,” he said.

Allen explained that the largest anchor used on ships, used only in the worst of storms, is the storm anchor. He said that Christ is our storm anchor; He holds us even in all circumstances, good and bad.

Allen said that all people find themselves either in the midst of a storm, on their way out of a storm or heading into a storm.

After sharing about the death of his wife following a battle with cancer, Allen said, “Hear me when I say this today. Everything that I have ever believed, everything that I have ever taught and everything that I have ever preached about this Jesus from the time I was 16 years old in the pine



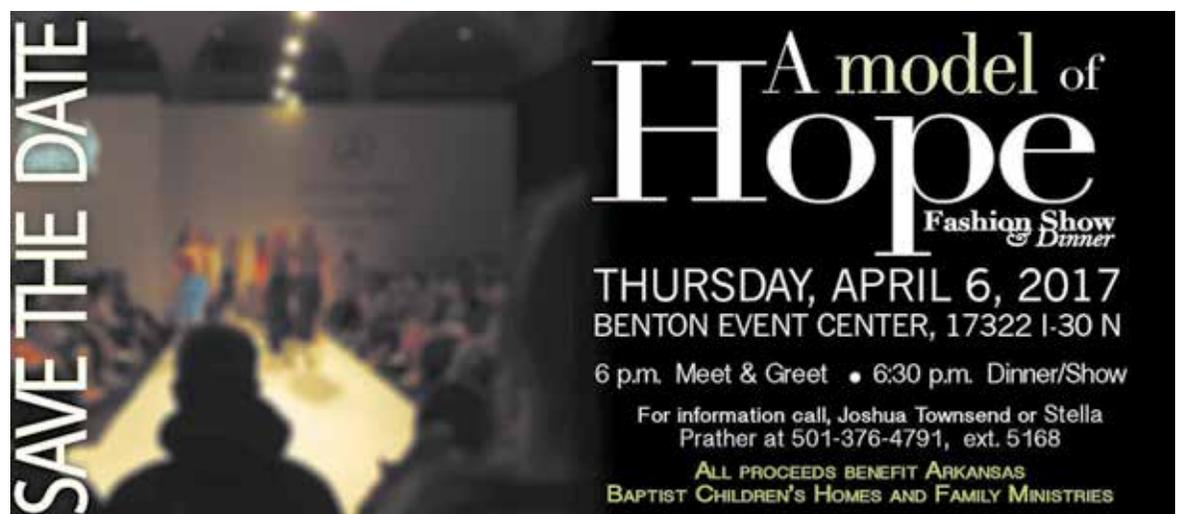
Gaines



Allen



Reavis



thickets of north Georgia until this moment today – Jesus has proven Himself to be everything He claimed to be.”

“He is my anchor of hope. ... As long as you are tethered to Him, neither hell nor high water can keep you from Christ,” said Allen.

stand up and be obedient to His call.

“Those who plant in tears will harvest with shouts of joy. ... They weep as they go to plant their seed, but they will sing as they return with the harvest,” said Gaines.

Steve Gaines

Steve Gaines, pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Cordova, Tenn., and president of the Southern Baptist Convention, shared five characteristics of gospel preaching: 1) prophetically declared, 2) scripturally based, 3) Christ-centered, 4) evangelistically persuasive and 5) spiritually fruitful.

Speaking from Acts 2, Gaines said, “Gospel preaching requires a gospel preacher. ... When somebody stands up for Jesus, other people start standing up for Jesus. Some of you are waiting on someone to stand up for Jesus. Why don’t you stand up for Jesus? Maybe there are 11 people behind you that would do the same thing if you would just do it.”

Citing a quote from author E.M. Bounds, Gaines said that many Christians want a better program to help them do ministry better, but that God is looking for “better men” to

Vance Pitman

Vance Pitman, pastor of Hope Baptist Church in Las Vegas, Nev., and a national mobilizer for the North American Mission Board, said the kingdom of God is a recurring theme of the Bible.



Pitman

Pitman said when God mentions something in the Bible 100 times in 16 books, “God must think it is important.”

While he grew up Southern Baptist, Pitman said he heard little about the kingdom of God.

“We’ll never understand the mission of God and the mission of our church without understanding the kingdom of God,” he said.

“The kingdom of God ... is the big picture of what God is doing in the world.”

Reading from Revelation 5, Pitman said God’s purpose is to establish His kingdom, not your (or any) particular church.

Referencing Revelation 5:9-



David Allen, dean of the School of Preaching at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Fort Worth, Texas, preaches during the Arkansas Baptist State Convention’s State Conference on Evangelism and Church Health held Jan. 30-31.

10, Pitman said, “The church you pastor and the church I pastor isn’t the goal,” adding that churches that were at the center of New Testament are gone.

“The church is simply a temporary tool” to further God’s kingdom, adding that Jesus’ last instruction to the church while on earth in Acts 1:3 was not to forget the kingdom.

Speaking from Philippians 4:15-19, Pitman emphasized: 1) “When God births a church, it’s always about something bigger” and 2) “When God births a church, He invites us to join His kingdom

activity.”

Pitman said in conclusion, “When you engage a city, your church ought to look like the city. Our church looks like a bag of Skittles.”

He asked, “Where is God opening doors in the world where we can join Him?”

Pitman emphasized that all churches should be “sending churches” so as to further the kingdom of God.

“What if we quit being so concerned about keeping them (members), but more concerned about sending them?” he asked.

more than anything else is someone who loves Jesus. ... We have got to get our friends to Jesus,” said Cook.

Speaking from Matthew 28, Cook asked the audience if they, and their churches, are living out the Great Commission in their lives.

“There is nothing wrong with singing our songs to the Lord. And there is nothing wrong with parsing the Greek if you want to do that and it helps your congregation grow closer to Christ,” said Cook. “But if we are not doing what He called us to do, what in the world are we doing?”

Christians should go out of their way to bring their friends to Jesus. Cook cited Mark 2 where a disabled man was lowered through the roof of a home where Jesus was staying.

“You have to be an idiot to turn away from the gospel of Jesus Christ,” said Cook. “So here’s the question: If the gospel is still compelling, and we believe it is, why aren’t our churches growing?”

Cook said that churches must have a compelling message, passionately invite the Spirit of God into their gatherings and teach their members

how to share Christ and how to create and take advantage of opportunities to share the



Cook

Todd Cook

Todd Cook, senior pastor of Sagebrush Community Church in Albuquerque, N.M., began his sermon by sharing how when he was 16 years old, one of his best friends was killed in an automobile accident. After hearing about the death of her son’s friend, Cook’s mother asked him if he knew if his friend, John, was a Christian. He did not know if he was or not.

While attending John’s funeral, Cook said he made two decisions: to take His relationship with Christ seriously and to never again miss the opportunity to share Christ with his friends.

“We live in a world that is lost and dying and very, very confused. What they need

See **SPEAKERS** page 10

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Recordings of sermons from the Arkansas Baptist State Convention State Conference on Evangelism and Church Health are available for purchase through MasterSound Media. MasterSound may be contacted at 817-983-1995 or by visiting mastersoundmedia.com.

Gaines: 'What difference does prayer make?'

LITTLE ROCK – Speaking at the Prayer Leaders' Workshop Monday morning prior to the kickoff of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention (ABSC) 2017 Conference on Evangelism and Church Health, Steve Gaines asked, "What difference does prayer make?"

Sharing from the life of Daniel, Gaines, who is senior pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church, Cordova, Tenn., and the current president of the Southern Baptist Convention, said that prayer moves the hand of God, reveals the will of God and blesses the heart of God.

"The same God that spoke to Daniel can speak to you," said Gaines.

"The same God that used Daniel can use you. He may not use you at the same level, but as far as I'm concerned, it's good to be at any level with Jesus. Everything is big if

you're doing it for Jesus."

Gaines urged the gathering of church leaders to draw near to God in prayer.

"Until you pray, you got no business doing anything else. Get a passion for it," he said.

Closing out the first session, Gaines said, "When it comes to prayer, I'm not a salesman; I'm a satisfied customer. Life's better when I pray."

In the second session, Gaines urged leaders to pray seven characteristics for their church from Acts 2:40-47.

He said leaders should pray for a saved church, a praying church, a miraculous church, a giving church, a united church, a worshipping church and a soul-winning church.

"The number one thing you need is to learn how to pray and pray. If you don't 'get' prayer, you've missed it all."



Steve Gaines, senior pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Cordova, Tenn., and president of the Southern Baptist Convention, speaks during the Arkansas Baptist State Convention Prayer Leaders' Workshop Jan. 30. Photo by Caleb Yarbrough

CBCNLR to host Feminar March 10-11

NORTH LITTLE ROCK – Central Baptist Church in North Little Rock is hosting Feminar, Friday and Saturday, March 10-11.

The theme of the weekend event is More than Conquerors, with Romans 8:37 as the focal passage.

Speakers include Feminar creator Janet White, who has spoken at every Feminar since its inception in 1986, and Cindy Beall, a writer, speaker and mentor to women from

Oklahoma. Worship leader is Laney Wootten, worship leader at Mobberly Baptist Church – Marshall campus, in Longview, Texas.

"I hope Feminar will be a dynamic event that will encourage, push, motivate and convict women to grow in their faith," said Thomas Sewell, youth pastor at Central Baptist Church.

For more information or to purchase tickets, go to feminar.org.

SPEAKERS

continued from page 9

gospel with their friends and the people they come in contact with every day.

"Have we become a holy huddle of 'our four and no more' and to hell with everybody else?" said Cook. "I don't want to offend anybody, but if you're not baptizing somebody you are not a church anymore. You are a country club, and you need to hand the keys over to somebody who wants to do something more with it than what you are doing.

"Our world is going to hell in a hand basket ... and the

gospel of Jesus Christ is what is going to be the hope of this world," said Cook.



Thank You!

God has been good to allow me to work with so many dedicated Arkansas pastors over the years. I have had the privilege of serving churches around the state. One of the greatest joys I get in life as an evangelist and a pastor's son is to be able to seek to complement another pastor's ministry and help edify his church. If I can ever be of service to you, let me know. My goal will be to bless the Lord, you and your people.

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Searching for identity in a gender-confused world

CONWAY – Recently, the Boy Scouts of America reversed a policy upheld for more than a century to open its membership to transgender children and youth.

The ruling resulted after an eight-year-old who was born a girl asked to return to the Cub Scouts due to a “major shift in policy” and was granted reinstatement.

A representative of the Boy Scouts told *USA Today* how the organization justified the decision, “Communities and state laws are interpreting gender identity differently.”

As society as a whole continues to shift on the issue of gender identity, the social media

giant Facebook has gone out of its way to acknowledge the transgender community as well. In 2016, Facebook expanded its gender options to 71. Users may click “agender, gender fluid, two-spirit person” and 68 other choices. For those who don’t fit into those categories, they can fill in their own description.

Where the gay rights issue has been simmering for decades, transgender rights used to be on the “fringes of public conscience,” said Rhyne Putman, assistant professor of theology and culture at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS). “All of a sudden, we’re having serious

discussions about what to do with public restrooms.”

Putman will address this cultural new normal in Conway, Feb. 25, as a key speaker at the Lead>Defend Conference, an annual, statewide apologetics and leadership gathering for high school students, collegiates and young professionals. The conference, sponsored by the Arkansas Baptist State Convention college and young leaders team, will be held on the campus of the University of Central Arkansas in Conway. The theme is Cultural Collision.

Putman spoke on the subject of gender confusion and homosexuality for more than

an hour at a similar conference Jan. 2-6 called Defend 17 Apologetics Conference held at NOBTS seminary chapel.

The church needs to address transgender equality differently than they have in the past, Putman said.

“Let me be honest,” Putman told the audience. “The Christian Church historically (over the past few decades) has not handled this discussion all that well. It’s not that we haven’t spoken truth. ... We haven’t always been communicating truth the best way to people who are hurting,”

Putman said he speaks on this subject with sensitivity

because “tides have turned in recent years.” He’s talking to millennials and what’s called post-millennials, generation Y and generation Z, those tempted to change the traditional view on gender to adapt to the culture.

“There are some changing attitudes on sexuality,” he said. “In fact, I suspect a lot of people in youth groups have viewpoints on sex that are diametrically opposed to their parents and grandparents, and that’s simply because there is a major cultural disconnect.”

Putman’s answer to gender confusion – for the Christian at least – is the authority of Scripture. As believers, the biblical standard is key because “obedience to the Bible is obedience to God,” he said. He quoted 2 Timothy 3:16, “If Scripture is inspired by God, useful for teaching, correction and reproof, it is useful for us as believers having to deal with how we think through this issue,” he said. Later, he added: “Don’t buy into the cultural narrative.”

Lead>Defend is 10 a.m. – 5 p.m., and will feature three main sessions.

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Obituaries

Jean Carolyn Wright, 82, of Little Rock, wife of John B. Wright, pastor of First Baptist Church in Little Rock from 1972 to 1991, died Jan. 19.



Wright

Jeanne, as she was known, was recognized as an extraordinary Bible teacher. According to family members, she was named after the famous scholar and theologian, Dr. B. H. Carroll, founder of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Wright had a passion for teaching English as a second language to members of Friendship International, which she led for many years.

She and her husband were appointed by the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention (now the International Mission Board) to serve a four-year term as missionaries in Seoul, Korea, following his retirement.

Wright was preceded in death by a brother and is survived by her husband of 65 years, three children, six grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.

Burial took place Jan. 23 at Roselawn Memorial Park in Little Rock, followed by a memorial service at First Baptist Church in Little Rock.

Charles Abanathy, 83, of Paragould, died Dec. 24.

He was a pastor in north-east Arkansas for more than 63 years and had served as pastor of SonLight Baptist Church in Paragould since 2002.



Abanathy

Abanathy served as moderator, camp director, and for many years faithfully served on numerous other committees of the Greene County Baptist Association.

Abanathy was retired from Emerson Electric after 43 years.

He was preceded in death by two brothers and one sister, and is survived by his wife of 60 years, Gail, four children, an adopted son, nine grandchildren and 13 great-grandchildren.

Funeral services were held Dec. 27 at Heath Funeral Home in Paragould.

Burial took place in Greene County Memorial Gardens in Paragould.

Tommy McCallie, 74, of Carlisle died Jan. 11 after a long battle with lung cancer.



McCallie

He served as associate pastor of Trinity Chapel Baptist Church, north of Carlisle, for

the past eight years.

McCallie made his living as a farmer and rancher in his younger years and then as a master builder with numerous projects in and around Carlisle and central Arkansas.

Trinity Chapel Baptist Church was one of many projects he and his son Willy built.

He is preceded in death by a brother, and is survived by his wife of 57 years, Miriam Buffalo McCallie, three children, nine grandchildren, four great-grandchildren and two brothers.

Funeral services were held Jan. 14 at Trinity Chapel Baptist Church. Burial followed at Walters Chapel Cemetery in Hazen.

John Grisham, Sr., 87, father of novelist John Grisham, died at his home in Mountain View Jan. 22.

He was preceded in death by his wife of 63 years, Wanda.

Grisham is survived by two sons, three daughters, eight grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

Grisham moved his family to Southaven, Miss. in 1967 and lived there almost 30 years, where he was active in First Baptist Church.

He led the drive to incorporate Southaven in 1980 and was elected to the De Soto County Board of Supervisors in 1985.

From 1974 to 1990, he was owner of Grisham Equipment

Company in Southaven.

He was a 32-degree Mason in the Scottish Rite.

After leaving Southaven, he and Mrs. Grisham retired to Mountain View, where they were active members of First Baptist Church.

He was buried next to his wife in a private service.

Church life

First Baptist Church, Bull Shoals, participated in the Bull Shoals 2nd annual Christmas Parade on Dec. 10. Adults and children from the church handed out books telling the Christmas story, candy and goody bags to the children along the parade route.

Yorktown Baptist Church in Yorktown (near Star City) will hold revival services March 12-15, with evangelist Sam Moore. The Mackey Willis family will lead the worship. Sunday services are at 6 p.m. All other services begin at 6:30 p.m.

On the move

Mike McCoy is serving as interim pastor of First Baptist Church, Imboden. McCoy is associational missionary for Black River Baptist Association in Hoxie.

Larry White is the new pastor at Woodland Heights Baptist Church in Conway. White



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previously served as associational missionary of Faulkner Baptist Association in Conway since 2008.

Billy Dawson, senior pastor of Second Baptist Church, Russellville, and head football coach at Russellville High School, has been named head football coach at Fayetteville High School.

Classifieds

PASTOR

Growing Southern Baptist church in Jonesboro, AR seeking **full-time pastor**. Please visit www.southcarawaybaptistchurch.com for more information.

Rural church in challenging location needs visionary **bi-vocational pastor**. Send resume to Midway Baptist Church, 208 Cathy Rd., El Dorado AR 71730 or kenny.code3servicesllc@gmail.com.

Maple Grove Baptist Church in Trumann, AR is seeking a **full-time pastor**. Please send resume to: Maple Grove Baptist Church, 13509 Maple Grove Lane, Trumann, AR 72472. ATTN: Pastor Search Committee or to ronniedye33@gmail.com.

Witt's Chapel Baptist Church of Maynard, AR, seeking **full-time pastor**. Please send resume including references to: Dennis Barber 486 Thompson Road, Maynard, AR. 72444.

First Baptist Church Barling, AR. 72923 seeking a **bi-vocational pastor**. Parsonage is available. Email resume to fbcbarling@aol.com.

Cocklebur Baptist Church, Ward, AR is prayerfully seeking a **bi-vocational pas-**

tor. Parsonage is available. Accepting resumes through April 30, 2017. Email resume to PastorResumeCBC@gmail.com or mail to 4138 Cocklebur Rd, Ward, AR 72176.

Wonderful opportunity for an existing pastor who is being led by God to make a move. First Baptist Church Dexter, MO has a call for a **senior pastor** who supports the Baptist Faith and Message 2000. We have an average Sunday morning attendance of 450+, budget of \$1.35 million, and no debt. Please visit us at our website and learn more about our church and staff. Interested applicants can apply: www.fbcdexter.org or pastorsearchfbcdexter@gmail.com. Applications will be reviewed as received and accepted until position is filled.

OTHER STAFF POSITIONS

Bayou Meto Baptist, Jacksonville, is seeking a **part-time children's minister**. Contact the church office at 501-988-1966 for more information or where to send resume to.

Covenant Baptist Church, a traditional Southern Baptist Church in Collierville, TN, seeks a **full-time minister of music/senior**

adults to provide leadership to the total music ministry of the church to include preschool and children's choirs, youth, adult, and senior adult choirs, and leadership in senior adult ministry. Send a cover letter and resume to Personnel Committee, Covenant Baptist Church, P.O. Box 1165, Collierville, TN 38027-1165, or to drsam@mybcc.org. Applicants must also provide a DVD of a recent service you have led or a link to a video of a recent service.

First Baptist Church, Mountain View, Arkansas, seeking **part-time music and worship minister**, interim or permanent. Prefer 10-15 years experience for permanent position. Comfortable with variety of music, choral directing, and technology. Send resume to searchteam@fbcmountainview.org.

The Bartholomew Baptist Association is accepting resumes for the **associational missionary** position. Send all resumes to bartholomewbaptist@yahoo.com. Deadline for resumes is February 28.

FBC, DeWitt is searching for the **man God has to lead our music and youth ministries**. This is a F/T opportunity. Submit resumes by March 1 to office@fbcdewitt.com ATTN: Personnel Committee.

FBC Lockesburg is seeking a **part-time music minister**. Please send resume to mayer4316@gmail.com.

FBC Dardanelle is seeking a **worship leader, part-time or full-time** with other duties. Send resume to fbcdardanelle@gmail.com.

FBC in Star City, AR is seeking a **full-time youth pastor**. Responsible for planning and overseeing all ministries related to 6th - 12th grade students. Contact: firstbaptiststarcity@gmail.com.

Hillcrest Baptist Church, Jasper, TX, is seeking a **full-time youth minister**. Send resumes to: Bro. David Nugent, Hillcrest Baptist Church, 3196 U.S. Hwy. 190W, Jasper, TX 75951, or email rhondahsm02@yahoo.com. For questions or information, call Bro. David Nugent at 409-384-3371.

FBC West Fork seeking **part-time worship leader** - send resume and questions to westforkfbc@yahoo.com.

FBC West Fork seeking **full-time student minister**. Send resumes or questions to westforkfbc@yahoo.com.

First Baptist, Mansfield, MO, is seeking **bi-vocational youth pastor** for growing youth group. Contact us at firstbaptist618@centurytel.net or 417-924-3306.

net or 417-924-3306.

East End Baptist Church is seeking a **bi-vocational worship leader**. Responsibilities will include leading music in Sunday morning and evening services and leading the choir. Contact the church at 4701 East End Road, Hensley, AR 72065 or by emailing pastor@eeb-car.com.

Small church in southeast Arkansas is seeking a **music leader** for Sunday morning worship. Contact Larry Toller, pastor, at 870-413-1938.

Union Baptist Church, El Dorado, is prayerfully seeking a **bi-vocational music minister**. Please send resume and DVD/link to Jonathan Morris, 144 Crain City Rd, El Dorado, AR 71730, or email jmorris.ubc@gmail.com.

Small church needs **music director**. Sundays only. Contact sulliglenda@yahoo.com if interested.

Bear Creek Springs Baptist Church is seeking a **full-time student pastor**. Those interested should send a resume to Bear Creek Springs Baptist Church, Attn: Senior Pastor, 179 Devito Loop, Harrison, AR 72601.

Annual women's event set to encourage, equip

ARKANSAS BAPTIST women, do you want to be inspired in your Christian faith? Then, make plans to attend the upcoming Inspire event designed just for you.

The Arkansas Baptist State Convention is hosting its fourth annual Inspire women's event, 8:30 a.m.-3:45 p.m. Sat., March 11, at First Baptist Church, Cabot.

"We are excited to offer an opportunity for the women of Arkansas to gather for a time of worship, Bible study, fellowship and fun. There is something special about women gathering together. As women, we tend to put the needs of others before our own. As a result, many women are running on empty. Inspire offers an opportunity for women to be take a break from their normal routines so that they can be refreshed and changed," said Andrea Lennon, Arkansas Baptists' women's ministry specialist, serving on the

evangelism and church health team.

Inspire will provide powerful worship, dynamic speakers and practical breakout sessions for women of all ages and stages of life.

The theme for this year's Inspire is More Like Jesus. This theme will set the tone for the day as attendees focus on how to be More Like Jesus in every

area of life.

Keynote speaker for the event is Rachel Lovingood, a popular women's ministry speaker and author. Worship leaders are Cory and Stephanie Epps, from First Baptist Church, Benton, where Cory serves as worship and music

associate and Stephanie serves on the worship team.

A variety of breakout sessions will be offered. Each breakout session will relate to the theme for the day. Breakouts include: How to Be More Like Jesus: at Home, at Church, at Work, in my Heart,

in my friendships, in my community and to the nations.

"My prayer for the women who attend Inspire is that they will be encouraged, challenged and changed ..." said Lennon.

For more information or to purchase tickets, go to absc.org/inspire.

PRAIZFEST

continued from page 7

directed the youth and audience to the doctrinal messages in the songs, specifically "Once and for All." "Everyone believes in God," he said, "but when you say, 'I believe Jesus Christ is Lord,' that's powerful; that's an awesome statement."

Lisa Falknor is the northwest regional correspondent for the Arkansas Baptist News.

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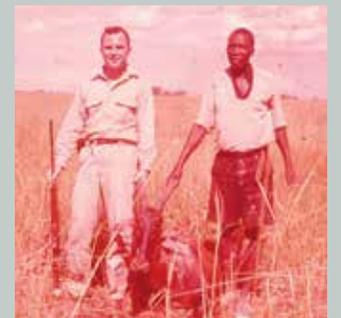
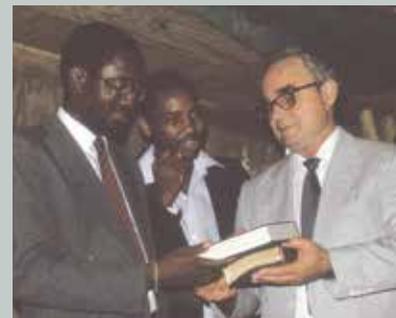
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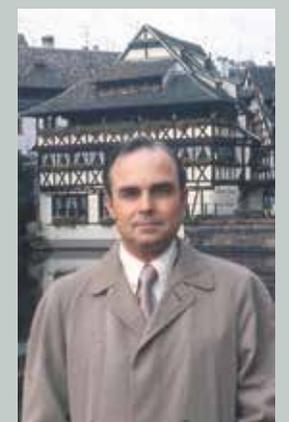
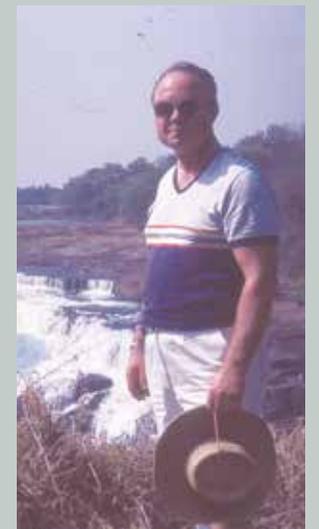


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Scenes from the ABSC evangelism conference and related events



The worship band from Cross Church in northwest Arkansas (left) leads worship during the Arkansas Baptist State Convention's State Conference on Evangelism and Church Health Jan. 30-31 at Geyer Springs First Baptist Church, Little Rock. Bill Emeott (above), lead kids ministry specialist for LifeWay Christian Resources, leads a workshop for preschool and children's ministers Jan. 31. *Photos by Caleb Yarbrough*



Bill Bumpas (above left), *Arkansas Baptist News* Podcast host, interviews Randy Garrett (above right), Arkansas Baptist State Convention disaster relief (DR) director. Arkansas Baptists (right) pray during a time of focused prayer during the evangelism conference. *Photos by Caleb Yarbrough*



MOSQUE

continued from page one

a local planning board. Tennessee's *Baptist & Reflector* newsjournal reported Haun's resignation Jan. 23. The Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (ERLC) also joined the brief.

Amid continuing discussion, IMB President David Platt released a statement to Baptist Press noting, "As a result of discussions among IMB trustees and staff over recent months, we have revised our processes for our legal department filing any future amicus briefs. IMB leaders are committed in the days ahead to speak only into situations that are directly tied to our mission."

In March the ISBR filed a

federal lawsuit because they had been denied a building permit to build a mosque on land owned by the Islamic Society. In May an amicus brief was filed in court by 20 different faith-based organizations arguing and agreeing that the mosque project should be approved. Among the signers of the brief were the IMB and ERLC.

Haun said he became aware of the brief when he started receiving questions about the IMB's decision after a story was posted on a satire and parody website called *The End Times*.

While Haun was still an IMB trustee, he contacted Platt with his concerns, and the amicus brief was addressed at a confidential "trustee forum" in August,

the *Baptist & Reflector* reported.

Haun resignation

Haun, a former Tennessee Baptist Convention (TBC) president, told Baptist Press that resigning from the IMB trustees "was one of the most heart-wrenching decisions that I've ever had to make in my ministry because I feel like I've been a faithful Southern Baptist all my life."



Haun

First Baptist Morristown took up its normal Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions in December, Haun said, out of a desire to continue to support IMB missionaries. The congregation is escrowing funds it would have given through the Coop-

erative Program, the *Baptist & Reflector* reported, and "praying about their long-term response" to the action of the IMB and ERLC. But First Baptist continues to support TBC ministries.

Haun cited two reasons for his resignation: 1) The amicus brief "at least borders on" an "unholy alliance" with followers of a religion that denies both the deity and the atonement of Jesus; and 2) Joining the brief does not comport with the IMB's stated "mission and purpose."

IMB's mission

The preamble to the Baptist Faith and Message (BF&M) notes, "Baptists cherish and defend religious liberty." A statement on the IMB's website notes, "IMB's specific interest in the brief arises out of the belief that all peoples

of the world have the right to religious liberty. ... The IMB is responsible for carrying out its ministry consistent with the entirety of the Baptist Faith and Message, not only the portions related to sharing the gospel."

Platt said the IMB continues to affirm that everyone should be able to freely worship according to their religious conviction, adding, "At the same time, our primary purpose as an organization is 'to partner with churches to empower limitless missionary teams who are evangelizing, discipling, planting and multiplying healthy churches, and training leaders among unreached peoples and places for the glory of God.'"

This story was compiled from reporting by Baptist Press, Baptist News Global and the (Tenn.) Baptist & Reflector.

FEBRUARY 19, 2017

I cannot even begin to relate to the tragedies faced by Naomi and Ruth. I have never watched my husband and sons die during a famine in a foreign land, leaving me without the cultural means to care for myself and my two daughters-in-law. I have never been the daughter-in-law from a pagan country who becomes a destitute widow, faced with a choice to leave her homeland and her pagan beliefs.

Ruth's choice to place her complete faith and trust in the God of her husband, the God of Israel, was made evident as she clung to her faithful mother-in-law, sacrificially committing to hard work in a foreign land. The result? Ruth not only becomes the redeemer's bride, but also becomes King David's great-grandmother. I believe that, in the end, Ruth would say it was worth it all.

As believers, we long for the day when, in eternity, we no longer ex-

perience the tragedies that are part of this sinful earth. But, even as our hearts are focused on what we know is the "end-game" of the victory that is ours through a relationship with Christ, we can't forget that we are on this earth for His purpose.

Most often, God reveals His purpose in us and through us as we re-

spond in faith to the difficult things thrown our way. Many times, though, I have to admit that in my pursuit of God and His purpose, I prefer it to be handed to me on a silver platter as I'm pampered in the comfort of convenience and privilege, and definitely all in my timing.

What would it look like for me to pur-

sue Christ the way He pursues me, to do whatever it takes to follow Him and make Him known? In the midst of every situation, I am faced with a choice. I believe He's worth it. How about you?

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Faith through trials

RUTH 1:6-18

Susie Thompson
Greenwood

I am reminded of the old story of a man standing at a signpost on the outskirts of his town with his grandson. A man approached them on his way into town and asked, "What type of people will I find in yonder town? I am new to these parts." The old man asked him, "What were the people like in your old town?" The traveler replied, "They were kind and gracious – truly the salt of the earth." The old man smiled and said, "You will find the people of our town much the same. God bless you and welcome!" The traveler replied, "I thought as much," as he gathered his pack and strolled into town.

In a little while, another traveler appeared on the horizon. When he approached the old man and his grandson, he asked, "What type of people will I find in yonder town? I am new to these parts." The old man asked him, "What were the people like in your old town?" The traveler replied,

"They were mean and spiteful – truly they were the devil's own." The old man grimaced and said, "Friend, I'm afraid you'll find our town much the same. I pray I'm wrong, but I fear you will find little to like in our community." The traveler replied, "I thought as much," as he gathered his pack and trudged into town.

When the second traveler was out of earshot, the grandson looked at his grandfather and asked, "Which is it grandpa? Is our town good or bad?" The grandfather replied with a chuckle, "It all depends on the eye of the beholder."

Friend, not every-

thing is subjective. However, our feelings and attitudes often can be subjective. If we want peace in the midst of life's storm, we must focus on the Prince of Peace. If not, we will surely sink into the sea of despair just as Peter began sinking into the lake (Matt. 14:30).

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Practicing joy

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9

Jeff Thompson
Greenwood

FEBRUARY 26, 2017

Let's take a look at those who are part of God's redemptive story in the book of Ruth.

Elimelech moved his wife, Naomi, and their sons to a pagan land in an effort to escape the famine. His death left her a widow.

Alone, Naomi, a respected woman of faith in her homeland, watched her sons

marry Moabite women. After the death of both sons, the fate of these two widowed daughters-in-law weighed heavily on her shoulders.

Ruth, now widowed and childless, left her homeland and her god and committed her life to working, caring for Naomi and seeking redemption for their family.

Boaz took notice and cared for Ruth and Naomi, and he was surprised by Ruth's pursuit of him.

In each of these lives, along with every step of their journeys, God was weaving together His purpose – one of redemption and worth. I imagine Ruth and Boaz never dreamed they would become part

of the lineage of the King of Kings. But, they would not have met if Elimelech had not moved to Moab. God placed Ruth in the right field, at the right time, to find her kinsman-redeemer in

her unlikely relative, Boaz. Naomi, after watching her sons marry pagan women, saw God's redemption as Ruth followed her back to Bethlehem

and into a faith relationship with the God of Israel.

By living their lives with faith and sacrifice, they each became part of God's redemption story, offered to us through Jesus. We see how God can work through any person, in any circumstance or season of life, to bring glory to His name. The world desperately

needs us, as believers, to see ourselves and those around us as God's creation – shaped and fitted together for His glory and His purpose. How amazing that He will do God-sized things through God-shaped believers who are prayed up, prepared and empowered to be all about His purpose. Are you ready?

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Redeemed and secure

RUTH 3:8-13; 4:13-17

Susie Thompson
Greenwood

We had just moved to a new home at 3900 Hartline. My dad grinned and asked me if he had ever told me the story of Mrs. Hartline. I said No, and he replied, "She was the woman who taught me the joy of giving." Mrs. Hartline was a poor woman raising a brood of young children; her husband was an alcoholic who rarely contributed to family coffers.

It was January, cold and snowy. Mrs. Hartline and her children walked to church with the holes in their shoes patched with cardboard. My dad was her pastor. He was young and a new father trying to finish school, raise a family, pastor his church and make ends meet.

It was Lottie Moon offering season. As he tells the story, he was convicted by his own sermon about giving sacrificially so he put his last \$20 in the offering plate for the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering. It was the money

he and my mother had saved for his textbooks that semester. On the way out the door, Mrs. Hartline shook his hand and slipped something in his

palm – four \$5 bills. He looked at the money; he looked at Mrs. Hartline and her children, their cardboard soles melting away

as they faced a cold walk home on snowy streets. He immediately said, "Mrs. Hartline, I can't take your money." She looked at him and said, "Bro. Harold, we want you to use that to pay for your school books." He shook his head and said, "No, you use that to buy your children some shoes."

He said she looked at him with stern eyes, squeezed his hand tight and said, "Bro. Harold, you wouldn't dare rob me of the joy of giving!" He bowed his head and said, "No ma'am." She broke out in a smile and said: "Thank you." That Sunday my dad learned what it meant to give with joy.

BIBLE STUDIES FOR LIFE

Giving with joy

PHILIPPIANS 4:10-20

Jeff Thompson
Greenwood

La. tornado destroys church, delays NOBTS chapel

NEW ORLEANS (BP) – An EF-3 tornado that touched down in eastern New Orleans Feb. 7 heavily damaged a Southern Baptist church's facility and briefly interrupted a chapel service at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary.

Initial reports estimated 250 homes damaged with 31 people injured. No fatalities have been reported.

The tornado – one of several to strike Louisiana Tuesday – devastated the three-building campus of Suburban Baptist Church in New Orleans, a predominately African American congregation. Pastor Jeffery Friend and his wife Stephanie were not injured, though their home was heavily damaged, Stephanie Friend told Louisiana's *Baptist Message* newsjournal.

Friend posted on Facebook that she is "praising God for lives spared" but "devastated at the loss of our church and our home."

Louisiana Baptist Disaster Relief workers arrived Feb. 8 to assess damage to the Friends' home, the church campus and a pastorium occupied by a New Orleans Seminary student and his family.

"I know who Jesus is," Stephanie Friend said according to a report from New Orleans Seminary, "so I'm not concerned about my well-being. I'm just trusting Him to do what He does."

Suburban Baptist and its neighborhood also sustained heavy damage from Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

The New Orleans Baptist Association is providing a room for the Friends at Providence House, the hotel operated by New Orleans Seminary.

"Please join us in prayer for churches and families affected by the severe weather in our region today," the association said in an email. "Early reports tell of severe damage to at least one church, Suburban Baptist, and several homes in New Orleans East.

"As soon as we have more information regarding damages and the response of Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, we will communicate requests, as well as material, ministerial, and volunteer needs via e-mail and on our website," the association stated.

At New Orleans Seminary, President Chuck Kelley began

a Feb. 7 chapel service with an announcement about potential storms and a prayer for the region. When weather intensified some five minutes later, campus police interrupted the service and attendees sheltered in place.

The tornado touched down about three miles away before passing. The service resumed in 10-15 minutes, and no damage to the campus was reported.

Later in the day, Louisiana Baptist Disaster Relief workers gathered at the seminary's Leavell Center for Church Growth and Evangelism in preparation for assessing damage in the area.

Louisiana Baptist Disaster Relief director Gibbie McMillan told volunteer DR workers, "What we're trying to do is be the hands and feet of Jesus to [storm victims] and let them know we care in a tangible way."

McMillan urged prayer for area residents and said he plans to set up a webpage for online donations to the relief effort.

"We know there will be a need for teams and resources soon to help with the situa-



Suburban Baptist Church in New Orleans sustained major damage Feb. 7 from an EF2 tornado. NOBTS photo

tion," McMillan said.

Several Louisiana communities were hit hard with severe weather, with the National Weather Service reporting tornado touchdowns Tuesday in multiple communities between New Orleans and Baton Rouge.

As of mid-afternoon Feb. 7, more than 10,000 people were without power due to the tornadoes.

Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards declared a state of emergency for much of south-

eastern Louisiana.

"I am heartbroken to once again see Louisiana families suffering in the wake of devastating tornadoes today," Edwards said in a news release. "We are working tirelessly to ensure that every citizen affected by this storm receives the resources they need as quickly as possible."

Seminary administrators are working to assess how many students and faculty members were impacted by the tornadoes.

Football prayer complaint leads to employee training

CHATTANOOGA, Tenn. (BP) – A public school system has agreed to update employees on applicable constitutional law after a special interest group complained of a Southern Baptist pastor's impromptu prayer over an injured player at a high school football game.

The Hamilton County Department of Education (HCDE) will "provide additional training to its employees on the application of the Establishment and Free Exercise Clauses in public schools," HCDE attorney D. Scott Bennett told the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) Jan. 30.

The FFRF complained Jan. 27 that students' constitutional rights were violated at a Sept. 9, 2016 football game because of a prayer by Eric Dill, student pastor of Bayside Baptist Church in Harrison, Tenn. While the school system will initiate additional training,

Bennett said no laws were broken when Dill prayed over a Central High School football player who appeared temporarily paralyzed after a tackle during the game against East Ridge High School.

"During these tense minutes, a local youth pastor was asked to pray for the young man," Bennett said in a Jan. 30 letter to the FFRF. "During the prayers, a number of students circled around the pastor. Out of respect for the injured player and the young men who were praying, many coaches and officials also bowed their heads. No coaches led any prayer.

"Rather than being an unconstitutional endorsement of religion," Bennett wrote, "this was human compassion at its finest." The injured student has since made a full recovery.

Dill, a 1999 Central High School graduate and former quarterback, said the injured

player himself and members of both teams requested prayer. Dill described the injured player as motionless for nearly 30 minutes after a tackle, crying uncontrollably and unable to move his legs.

"If a student asks me, 'Eric pray for this,' especially in something like this, I'm going to pray," Dill told NBC affiliate WRCB-TV.

"If I believe in a God who answers prayers, how bad do I have to hate the kid who's injured or the player who asked, or the players who are hurting not to pray?"

The coaching staff bowed their heads during the prayer out of respect for the injured students, Dill said, not as an encouragement to other students to pray.

"Those coaches would never do anything to jeopardize their influence or care over those students. They would never do anything intentional to do that," Dill told WRCB.

"They're not perfect and I'm not a perfect person, but they care for and love those players as much as they can."

A game attendee complained anonymously to the FFRF, which in turn filed the complaint from its Madison, Wis., office. The FFRF contended that coaches or other school employees led the prayer.

"While it is laudable for students and coaches to express concern over an injured player, coaches may not use an injury as an opportunity to engage students in a religious exercise," the FFRF complained.

"Certainly, the coaches represent the school and the team when they act in their official roles as head coaches of the high school teams. ... We trust that this was a unique situation given the circumstances of the night and that coaches are not regularly leading their teams in prayer, or participating in team

prayer circles initiated by students."

The FFRF requested that football program participants be reminded next football season "of their obligations with respect to religion."

Dill said he doesn't fault the complainant, but would only like the person to know the grace and truth of Jesus stated in John 1:14.

"What I believe is these people need Christ, and we as believers have a responsibility to show them Christ," Dill said Feb. 7.

"What I want them to know is the truth, that God's love has changed me," Dill said. "I was spiritually dead and my heart, in and of itself, is wicked and evil. But God's love has transformed me, and I want them to know the same love and the same God that I know and love."

The complainant is "someone Jesus died for, and I want to treat them as such."



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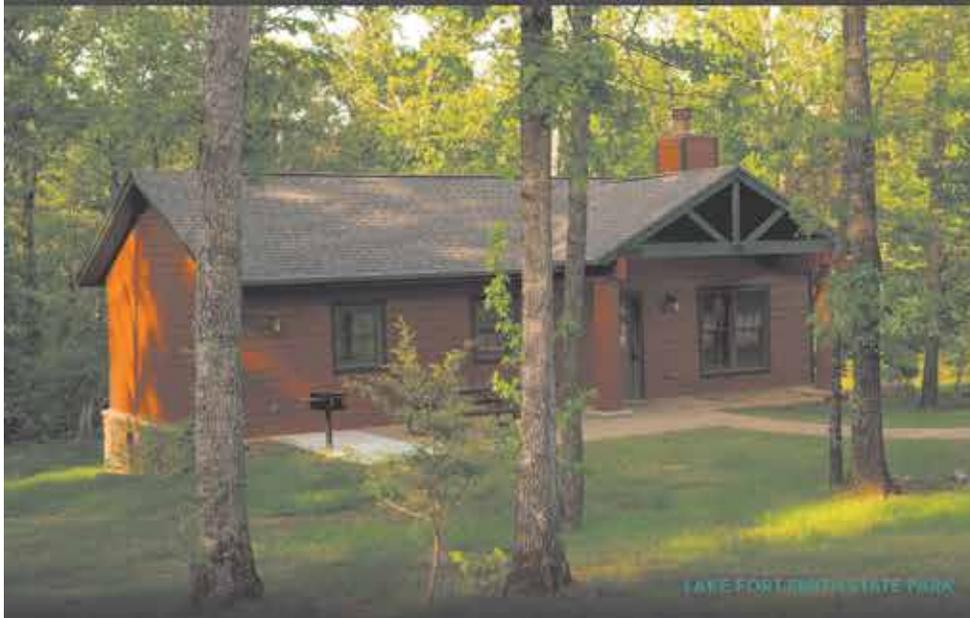
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