



# The Christian Index

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## LaVerne Thomas 32 years at Baptist Village but not retiring from ministry

By Joe Westbury  
Managing Editor

**WAYCROSS** — When she was in her late 20s working on her and husband's farm, LaVerne Thomas could not think of being any happier.

She had a full-time job as a mother, housewife, and helped with farm chores when her husband wasn't working at the railroad. When she was in her late 30s and her family was largely grown and out of the house she was busy welcoming grandchildren into the world.

But as the boys grew and left home she asked God what He wanted her to do with the rest of her life.

"One day I was washing some blackberries and I heard God speak to me with His answer. A strange warmth, a calmness, came over the room and the hair on the back of my neck stood on ends, if you know what I mean," she remembers.

### A surprise answer from God

God told her He wanted her to serve Him in nursing. Even though she had never had a class or inclination to serve in the medical field and was nearing 50 years of age.

After graduating from Waycross-Ware Tech with a licensed practical nurse degree, she began her career at Baptist Village. It was a decision that brought immense joy and spanned more than 3 decades.

On Dec. 29 Thomas ate celebratory cake and nibbled on nuts and fresh vegetables on a crudité platter as she



**LaVerne Thomas**, center and third from the right dressed in white, visits with longtime friends and staff at Baptist Village in Waycross at her Dec. 29 retirement reception. Thomas retired on Dec. 31 after 32 years and 2 months at the South Georgia ministry. BAPTIST VILLAGE/Special



**Delos Sharpton**, right, president and chief executive officer at Baptist Villages and Retirement Communities, listens as **LaVerne Thomas** recounts her three decades of service on the nursing staff. BAPTIST VILLAGE/Special

and longtime friends closed the door on 32 years and 2 months on the ministry's nursing staff.

residents; they were far more like family to me than just residents. You know, when you have a family member who is sick you want to give them the best possible service. And that's what I did ... I loved them," she says with hesitation.

Thomas' life could be divided into three segments. The first was her family, the second was her career blended with her ever-expanded children and grandchildren, and the third her retirement. But she does not see the third being any slower or less committed than the previous two.

"I have no plans to do anything big in retirement but that doesn't mean I don't have plans. I want to be far more involved in my church — Pleasant Valley Baptist Church — than was possible when I was working.

"I was involved earlier in my life with Woman's Missionary Union and rotated through the nursery and served as a greeter at church, but my job prevented me from being involved at a greater level," she notes with a hint of regret.

Thomas also plans for more time with the next generation in her family tree. That means spoiling six grandchildren, six great-grandchildren, and two great-great-grandchildren.

But she doesn't see retirement as retiring from serving God.

"I'll still be serving Him, just not on a time clock."

"I never had a desire to serve anywhere else," she says.

She became a fixture at the facility and watched it grow through the years — beginning in 1984 — as it added more beds to new wings, branching out from the original independent living villas to assisted living and then skilled nursing care options.

### Serving on the front lines

"I enjoyed being on the front lines, ministering directly to those people in their later years. I was serving God by serving and caring for them.

"I did whatever needed to be done," she says without boasting. "Even washing bedsheets for patients whose illness exceeded the limit allowed by the laundry service.

"My happiness came from giving quality care to the

# The Bowden Dynasty: Faith, Family, and Football

By Gerald Harris  
Editor

Bobby Bowden, one of the most revered and respected college football coaches in America, was born in Birmingham, AL in 1929. His story is a compelling one and beautifully told in the documentary *The Bowden Dynasty*, which was released nationally last month.

Bowden grew up with football in his blood and lived near Howard College (currently Samford University) and walked by their football field every day on the way to and from school. He and his friends played tag, and sometimes tackle football, as often as possible. He loved drawing up trick plays in the dirt for

his team in those hotly-contested games.

When Bowden was 13 years old he had been playing with his friends on the campus of Howard College, but noticed intense pain in his knees that was diagnosed as rheumatic fever. The illness kept him out of school for a year and he was depressed, because the doctor told him he couldn't play football any more.

## 'I will serve you'

Bowden said, "Up until I was bedridden I was in church every Sunday morning, every Sunday night, and every Wednesday. We never ate without having a prayer. We never went to bed without saying a prayer. We were



During his career **Bobby Bowden** became one of the most prolific college football coaches in America. His story is now being told in a documentary about his life and how faith played a role in his leadership on and off the field.

taught that. I remember praying, 'Lord, if you heal me, I will serve you any way you want. In fact, I would love to

serve you through football if that is what you want me to do.'" Bobby convinced his mom to take him to a specialist to get a second opinion. That doctor indicated Bobby's heart was healthy enough for

him to play football. So, he went out for varsity football the next spring.

The documentary tells about how Bobby met Ann, the young lady who became his wife, and relates her first impression of the cute, gregarious student-athlete who eventually won her heart. The courtship was intriguing and brief, but the marriage has been loving, productive (six children), and long.

Bowden's meteoric rise from an assistant college coach at Howard to his legendary career as the head football coach at Florida State University is truly a captivating and inspirational story.

However, as with any football coach there is the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat. Sometimes defeat incurs the hostility of wealthy alumni and zealous, obsessive fans. The Bowden

dynasty shows how Bobby Bowden faced adversity with courage and faith. Dynasty is a super salesman, a charmer who would recruit a player by going into the kitchen and start cooking with the prospective player's momma. He was able to recruit five-star athletes from all over the southeast like All-American Ron Simmons of Warner Robins, who signed with Florida State right out from under the nose of Georgia Coach Vince Dooley.

During Bowden's reign he established traditions, scheduled premier teams, connected with alumni, attracted fans, enlarged the seating capacity of Doak Campbell Stadium from 39,000 to over 80,000 and occasionally preached the Gospel to his players.

On one occasion Bowden used the untimely death of one of his players, Pablo Lopez, to ask his team and coaches, "If you were to have died like Pablo, where would you spend eternity?"

The wise coach said, "I gave the team a Sunday School lesson about eternity. I preached to them. I was concerned about where my players would spend eternity." It was that meeting that prompted Mark Richt, former UGA and current University of Miami football coach, to schedule a personal visit with Bowden that resulted in his profession of faith in Christ.

## An extraordinary man who served God's purpose

The Bowden Dynasty is an inspirational film about faith, family, and football. It chronicles the life of an extraordinary man leaving a legacy of one who has served God's purpose for his life.

I enthusiastically encourage anyone and everyone with the slightest interest in football or developing a life of integrity to view it with a friend.

**"I gave the team a Sunday School lesson about eternity. I preached to them. I was concerned about where my players would spend eternity."**

**Bobby Bowden**

Dynasty shows how Bobby Bowden faced adversity with courage and faith.

## Legacy established

The film also shows how Bowden became a superior recruiter. He is portrayed as

## A personal story of how gambling affects families

I have not had a lot of experience with gambling addicts, but I did have one related to some young girls who were attending a church I pastored years ago. One gambling addict was enough to last me a lifetime.

It broke my heart to see what this man was doing to his wife and daughters. His wife was a nurse and working long hours to help support the family. The husband and father was casually employed, but clearly, not a diligent worker at anything that I could see. The two

sweet daughters were superb babysitters and were kept very busy by the young families in the church, including ours.

I remember one occasion on which the older girl opened up to me as I was driving her home from babysitting our girls. She didn't cry as she told me about her dad, but the sadness in her voice was overwhelming.

She explained that he was really a good guy. But when he worked, he worked for the purpose of supporting his addiction to gambling. She

said, "We don't know what to do. He is spending everything that we make, just gambling it away, as fast as it comes in. It's tearing our family apart."

Before she got out of the car at her house, I had prayer with her for her dad. I'm confident she felt better since she had confided in me, but as far as I remember, her father never sought help and the family was in a constant state of want.

Once again, legislation in support of casino gambling in Georgia has been

introduced to our General Assembly.

I cannot imagine any legitimate business in Georgia being in favor of casino gambling. I say "legitimate" because I am certain the prostitution business and human sex trafficking business would be in favor, as would those who personally stand to gain financially from being supportive of this legislation.

Anyone who truly loves Georgia, including our governor, lieutenant governor, speaker, the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, and major



**J. Robert White**  
Executive Director

corporations located in Atlanta would certainly not want to support anything that would do harm to our citizens and their families. Let us pray for a deep-rooted consciousness about what is right to rest upon each of these in leadership so that they do the right thing for Georgia and oppose casino gambling in our state.

## EDITORIAL

### Trump's Inaugural Address – a speech about the forgotten man

Having just been sworn in as the 45th president of the United States, Donald J. Trump gave his inaugural address to the nation. He started by stating, "Together we will determine the course of America for many, many years to come. We will face challenges. We will confront hardships, but we will get the job done."

The new president continued, "Today's ceremony has very special meaning, because we are not transferring power from one administration to another or from one party to another, but we are transferring power from Washington, D.C. and giving it to you, the people."

The president added, "This moment is your moment. It belongs to you .... The forgotten men and women of this country will be forgotten no more."

Several pundits referred

to statements like these and commented that the inaugural address was a speech for "the forgotten man."

"We are now issuing a new decree and a new vision – America first! ... We share one heart, one home, and one glorious destiny .... When you open your heart to patriotism there is no room for prejudice."

It was then that the new president made his first reference to God by quoting Psalm 133:1: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity."

President Trump is well aware of the constant threats Americans face on a daily basis and talked about protecting the nation. He explained, "When America is united, America is totally unstoppable. There should be no fear. We are protected and we will always be protected.

We will be protected by the great men and women of our military and law enforcement; and most importantly we will be protected by God."

There may have been a not-so-veiled comment about Georgia Representative John Lewis, who along with some other congressmen boycotted the inauguration and to whom the president had already addressed on Twitter when he stated from the Capitol platform, "We must think big and dream even bigger. We will no longer accept politicians who are all talk and no action, constantly complaining, but never doing anything about it."

There were many things I liked about the inaugural address. It was brief. It was patriotic. It was in keeping with his campaign promises. It expressed the convictions of his heart. It was an expression of his faith. It



**J. Gerald Harris**  
Editor

was well written and well delivered. It addressed the people and recognized the desires and needs of the common man. It was inspiring. It offered hope. It reflected vision and purpose. He used "We" far more than the frequent "I" which he used so often during his campaign..

One commentator said that the president's inaugural address was "populist, anti-globalization, hostile to Washington and its elites, and unapologetically, blatantly nationalist."

Those comments provide additional reasons as to why I liked the President's Inaugural Address so much.

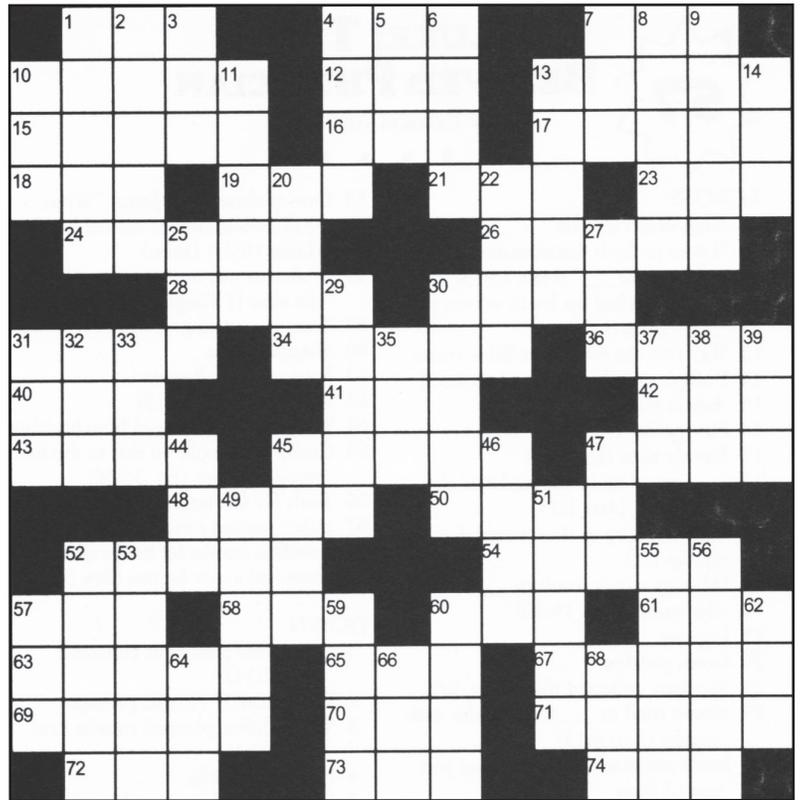
**ACROSS**

- 1. Lot's wife's lesson (Matt. 6:33) (Part 1)
- 4. Describes Lot's choice of Sodom
- 7. TV initials
- 10. St. Catherine's city
- 12. "These \_\_\_ the generations of Terah" (Gen. 11:27)
- 13. Milk mates, often
- 15. Scarf
- 16. Hollywood talent org.
- 17. Artist Andrew
- 18. Heat unit
- 19. Abraham did not \_\_\_ the Lord by pleading (Gen. 18:32)
- 21. To rescue Lot, Abram "pursued them unto \_\_\_" (Gen. 14:14)
- 23. Under brimstone, Sodom and Gomorrah would do this (Gen. 19:24-28)
- 24. Rachel \_\_\_ her father's idols (Gen. 31:19)
- 26. Holy Roman Empire's western border river
- 28. Salt Lake City site
- 30. Lot's wife's lesson (Matt. 6:33) (Part 2)
- 31. One of Lot's choices (Gen. 13:9)
- 34. The men of Sodom were not interested in these (Gen. 19:5)
- 36. Ally of Abram (Gen. 14:13)
- 40. Lot lived a long time \_\_\_
- 41. \_\_\_ Jose
- 42. Borrower's note, as in Ex. 22:14
- 43. Lot's wife's lesson (Matt. 6:33) (Part 3)
- 45. Men probably did this as they walked Sodom's streets
- 47. Lot to his sons-in-law: Go, or \_\_\_! (Gen. 19:14)
- 48. Paul was shipwrecked on one (Acts 28:1)

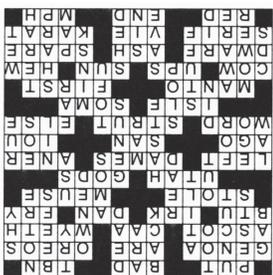
- 50. Cell body
- 52. "Samuel sent. . .every \_\_\_ his house" (I Sam. 10:25) (2 wds.)
- 54. Lots wife's lesson (Matt. 6:33) (Part 4)
- 57. Moving mooer with Abram and Lot (Gen. 13:5)
- 58. Delivery co.
- 60. "The \_\_\_ was risen. . .when Lot entered" (Gen. 19:23)
- 61. "\_\_\_ thee two tables" (Ex. 34:1)
- 63. Goliath wasn't one (I Sam. 17:4)
- 65. Remains of Sodom, Gomorrah
- 67. The Lord would \_\_\_ Sodom for ten's sake (Gen. 18:32)
- 69. Letter stem
- 70. Abram didn't \_\_\_ with Lot over land (Gen. 13:9)
- 71. Weight unit for gems as in Ex. 28:18
- 72. Sea crossed by Israel (Ex. 15:22)
- 73. \_\_\_-time: Revelation's subject
- 74. Jehu's was notable (2 Kings 9:20)

**DOWN**

- 1. Like the flies of Exodus 8:21
- 2. A Nazarite's hair remained this way (Num. 6:5)
- 3. Besides Lot, Abram rescued his goods, \_\_\_ (Gen. 14:16)
- 4. How Lot's wife looked (Gen. 19:26)
- 5. Son of Jether (I Chron. 7:38)
- 6. The men of Sodom were \_\_\_ in their sins (Gen. 13:13)
- 7. Lot's hesitation would \_\_\_ the angel's patience (Gen. 19:22)
- 8. Makes bigger, with "up"



- 9. Our (Fr.)
- 10. One who is "slow to speak" doesn't do this (James 1:19)
- 11. Before wrecking, Paul's ship was this (Acts 27:14)
- 13. Lot \_\_\_ "flocks, and herds, and tents" (Gen. 13:5)
- 14. The men of Sodom were not this (Gen. 13:13)
- 20. "Worthy to open and to \_\_\_ the book" (Rev. 5:4)
- 22. It comes before Obadiah
- 25. "God. . .sent Lot \_\_\_" (Gen. 19:29)
- 27. It has 50 states
- 29. Angel to Lot: "\_\_\_ thee, escape thither" (Gen. 19:22)
- 30. Classification in biology
- 31. Lot "seemed as one that mocked unto his sons in \_\_\_" (Gen. 19:14)
- 32. To beg the angel, Lot had plenty of this (Gen. 19:20)
- 33. Abram to Lot: "\_\_\_ we be brethren" (Gen. 13:8)
- 35. Lot's behavior in many instances would \_\_\_ his reputation
- 37. What was left of Sodom and Gomorrah
- 38. Aurora
- 39. Parsed by the Pharisees (Luke 11:42)
- 44. Surely the fire and brimstone created a big one!
- 45. What the prodigal son wasn't offered for food (Luke 15:16)
- 46. Meat alternative
- 47. Malchus's temporary loss (John 18:10)
- 49. What Lot's wife may have been concerned about (Gen. 19:26)
- 51. Capital of Belarus
- 52. "Wherewith the \_\_\_ filleth not his hand" (Ps. 129:7)
- 53. "Come. . .when his is not \_\_\_" (Luke 12:46)
- 55. "He spreadeth \_\_\_ pointed things" (Job 41:30)
- 56. Lot's granddad (Gen. 11:27)
- 57. Music choices
- 59. The Lord would \_\_\_ Lot, but he needed to leave Sodom (Gen. 19:20-22)
- 60. "Reuben said unto them, \_\_\_ no blood, but cast him into this pit" (Gen. 37:22)
- 62. Moses parted the waters so the Israelites didn't get this (Ex. 14:22)
- 64. "I will \_\_\_ evil beasts out of the land" (Lev. 26:6)
- 66. Men of Sodom's problem (Gen. 13:13)
- 68. Cooking spray brand



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