Baptist Press

Cheaha Area Crusade draws thousands as 40+ area churches work together to plan, pray, follow up

By **Grace Thornton**, *posted* **October 7, 2026** *in* **Evangelism**

Rick Gage, Evangelist and Founder and President of GO TELL AMERICA, speaks during the Cheaha Area Crusade. Photo courtesy of Go Tell Crusades

METADATA:

Topic(s): EVANGELISM
Format(s): TEXT ARTICLES

James Howard said he'd been praying for a buddy of his for years. But he didn't expect it to be the lights from the football field that got him.

"He lives right behind the school," Howard said. "So he called me … he said, 'What's going on at the football field? The lights are all going on, the music's going on,' and I told him, 'We're having church.'"

Howard invited him to come to the Cheaha Area Crusade, led by evangelist Rick Gage's Go Tell America team in partnership with more than 40 area churches.

Howard's friend told him his car was messed up.

"I said, 'That's good. Mine ain't. I'll be at your house this afternoon, pick you up,'" Howard said. "It's the guy that I've been praying for I went to high school with. He was my best friend in high school. And he was one of the guys that I've been praying for day in and day out. And now he finally reached out to me, wanting to come."

Lasting impression

His friend came, but he left early. The next day, he called Howard and said he couldn't get the speaker's words out of his mind. He began to tell Howard about the alcoholism that ran in his family and his need for salvation.

"I was able to talk to him and pray with him, and I led him to the Lord that day," Howard said.

Later that day, he took his friend a Bible and found that his wife was ready to give her life to Jesus too. Then Howard watched as his friend poured out every drop of alcohol from his refrigerator.

"So now he's on fire. … He wants to get in church. He wants to get plugged in," Howard said.

Local churches, he noted, were planning to follow up with his friend and his wife for baptism and discipleship "because the sound was going through the community, through the trees, and he just heard it and he wanted to know what was going on."

He was one of more than 320 commitments to Christ made during the crusade, held Sept. 27–Oct. 1 at Saks High School Stadium. More than 7,000 people attended, with an additional 8,000 students addressed in local schools during the week.

The event was in conjunction with the Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions' Celebration 250 Alabama, a vision to reach the state and nation with the gospel. As part of Celebration 250, an outreach event was held in each of Alabama's 12 regions Oct. 1.

Typically Go Tell America does their events from Sunday to Wednesday, but Gage said they tacked on a fifth night to the Cheaha Area Crusade to end on Thursday, Oct. 1. The churches in the area first met about the crusade in summer 2025, and under the leadership of Eric Snider, pastor of First Baptist Church White Plains, began working, praying and fasting to prepare for the event.

Snider said he first heard of Go Tell in the early 1980s as a teenager when they put on a similar crusade at his school.

“I knew Alabama Baptists were wanting a special night on Oct. 1,” he said, and while at Shocco Springs for an event, he saw a sign for Go Tell.

“It just seemed like God was putting it all together,” Snider said.

He said he’s “very thankful” for every church who helped pull off the event. “All those pastors and laypeople – 400 volunteers – they ought to be commended,” he said.

‘Power-packed week’

Joey Hanner, pastor of First Baptist Church Saks in Anniston and outreach leader for the crusade, said “every night was special.” Christian band Rush of Fools led worship, and speakers included:

- Hank Parker, a professional bass fisherman
- Hugh Freeze, former Auburn University football coach
- Shane Pruitt, national Next Gen director for the North American Mission Board
- Tim Lee, Vietnam War veteran
- Runks Runkles, youth evangelist
- Ken Freeman, evangelist

Gage said it was “a power-packed week, and it was all for the glory of God, and we came together for the purpose of enlarging the kingdom of God.”

Hanner agreed and said it was evident the Lord “knew exactly who needed to be there.”

He said the prayer partners who talked with people who responded to the altar calls had been trained beforehand in sharing their faith and have intentionally stayed connected with the people they talked with at the crusade.

Each day during lunch, participating churches also met together to pray over the people who made decisions the night before and make a plan on how to connect them to local churches.

“It was awesome to watch God put things together,” Hanner said.

This story originally appeared in The Alabama Baptist.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

- **GRACE THORNTON**

  Grace Thornton is a freelance writer in Alabama.

  Read All by Grace Thornton ›