



# BLUE RIDGE CHRISTIAN NEWS

*In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.*  
*1 John 4:9*



## The Inspiring Word

### The Gift That Keeps on Giving

By Dr. Terry Cheek  
 McDowell County



With Christmas fast approaching, this year retailers seem to be starting their advertising much earlier than usual. Of course, I have been saying that for previous years also. Honestly, advertising seems to start earlier every year. Recently I have seen many advertisements claiming to have the gift that keeps on giving. All of these have been very expensive gifts, usually high-end automobiles, luxury vacations, diamonds, gold, even insurance, and investments. As I said each of these had one thing in common, they were very expensive.

If we really look at each of these expensive gifts, and really any materialistic gift, we see they are far from being the gift that keeps on giving. Every one of them will break, wear out, can be lost or stolen and they will all lose value given time and conditions.

Commercialism has made its mark on Christmas and sadly it doesn't seem to be going away anytime soon. The Christian doesn't have to allow commercialism to dictate our Christmas! And, we know, there is a gift that keeps on giving. Let's investigate God's word and have Christmas refreshed and simplified before we become overwhelmed with materialism.

Even though we know, we should take time to remember that Christmas is the story of the incarnate birth of Christ. Not just any birth but Christ, the Messiah, coming to dwell among men. Let's allow our minds and hearts the time to absorb that thought. God came to earth in the flesh of man and willingly walked among us. God talked with us, healed us, met our physical needs and even cleared up centuries of religious corruption regarding His teaching. Those are some of the fringe benefits of His coming, but they were not His primary purpose. Luke chapter two tells of His birth. In Matthew 5:17 Jesus gives us a glimpse into His purpose for coming. From the KJV we read "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." From our Bible we learn that Jesus came to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. We were and still are unable to fulfill or meet God's law. I realize most people reading this are shaking their heads in agreement, at least I hope you are. The Bible fulfills many applications in our life. I believe the most important one is the application pointing us to Jesus for salvation. Again, from Jesus' own words found in John's gospel 12:47 KJV "And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him

not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world." Some today will say, Jesus didn't come to judge, it's His own words and true they are. Jesus didn't have to come to judge because we have already been judged and found guilty. Without a proper relationship with God we have no hope. Without Jesus there is no hope! Jesus came to save the whole world, what an amazing thought that is. In case you're wondering how all of this will fit into my title, "a gift that keeps giving." Read this piece of scripture. Romans 6:23 KJV "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." The pay-day we are promised through a life of unforgiven sin is death. But the gift of God, free pardon and forgiveness of sin, is eternal life! God's gift is Jesus Christ and God's gift when accepted and applied is a gift that keeps on giving for eternity.

If you're not certain that Jesus is your Lord and Savior, I beg you do not put it off any longer. Call upon Him this Christmas and ask Him to come into your heart, forgive your sin and accept the free gift of eternal life. There is a gift that keeps on giving but we cannot buy it, all we must do is accept it. Romans 10:9-10 KJV sums it up nicely "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. (10) For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Merry Christmas everyone and remember Jesus is the reason for the season.

Until we meet again, either in print or in person, may God richly bless you is my prayer.

Terry is the Executive Director and broadcaster of The Inspiring Word media ministry. You can contact Terry by email at [theinspiringword@gmail.com](mailto:theinspiringword@gmail.com) Or by visiting [www.theinspiringword.org](http://www.theinspiringword.org)



## Genesis: The Missing Piece of the Puzzle

By Calvin Smith

Most church leaders would agree that the western world is becoming 'less Christian' every year.

### Worldviews

Nations once built upon biblical foundations are watching the collapse of godly values in our culture and Christians seem powerless to stop it. Competing worldviews like atheism, humanism, communism, new age, and the occult are being vigorously promoted in education, the media and one-on-one to children and adults alike.

Nations once built upon biblical foundations are watching the collapse of godly values in our culture and Christians seem powerless to stop it. With so many areas for the church to deal with we need to ask ourselves, how do we make a difference? Where do we focus our efforts? Did this happen by chance, or is there a deeper issue? Church leaders are busy with programs, counselling and such but it seems as though something's been lost. It's like a giant puzzle, and the church can't seem to find the 'missing piece'.

When things are crumbling around us, we need to go back to basics. Without a strong foundation, a structure will eventually erode and collapse. Psalm 11:3 says, 'If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?' This verse should cause us to examine our foundations, which may lead us to a better realization of why we face the issues we do.

### Atheistic worldview

It's like a giant puzzle, and the church can't seem to find the 'missing piece'. But before we look at our own foundations, let's look at those of the polar opposite of the Christian worldview—atheism. A-theism, by definition, states foundationally that there is 'no God'. All worldviews provide answers to the big questions in life like 'Where do we come from?' How do atheists explain our origins without God? Their answer is evolution. This gives them an explanation for our existence without God—naturalistically. Briefly stated the grand theory of evolution embraces the following.

### Cosmic evolution

Billions of years ago time, matter and energy came into existence as the result of the 'big bang'. Over billions of years the galaxies, stars and planets formed—all by themselves.

### Geological evolution

The earth started as a hot molten orb, eventually cooling down enough for water to condense and fill the oceans.

### Chemical evolution

After some time, the first self-replicating life form spontaneously generated from non-living chemicals.

### Biological evolution

This simple organism became more complex over millions of years via genetic

mutation and natural selection, ultimately producing all of the life forms that have ever existed on our planet.

### Human evolution

Eventually, ape-like creatures developed higher brain functions and humans evolved, forming societies and cultures that developed laws, religions, and institutions like marriage. Evolutionists point to the geologic column and the fossils it contains as 'scientific proof' of these processes.

### Heat death

Because the entire universe is subject to the laws of entropy, the future ultimately is 'heat death', where there will be no more available energy. No life will exist, and perhaps everything will collapse and begin all over again.

### No ultimate hope

The atheistic worldview, based on this supposed history, says that we had an accidental beginning; we developed through random processes and that there is no ultimate hope for the future. It says that there are no absolutes, no basis for morality or ethics outside of what each person decides is right for themselves.

Atheism vs. theism is sometimes misrepresented as 'science' vs. 'faith'. This is untrue because evolution is a worldview that is also based on faith. In fact, evolutionists and creationists have the exact same scientific facts to examine. There isn't a scientific observation that a creationist would disagree with an evolutionist about. Creationists disagree with evolutionists' conclusions because we do not agree with their starting presuppositions.

The real difference is that of the world history that each group believes in, by faith. Why by faith? Because we cannot travel back in time to see the first life form evolve or observe God create the universe. So, our understanding of what happened in the past is ultimately accepted by faith. We can use scientific methods to observe evidence in the present, and then assess which history is best supported by that evidence.

### The key piece of the puzzle; Christ died for our sins

Many Christians believe the creation/evolution issue to be a side issue, an unprofitable area on which to focus. To many, it seems divisive and has little relation to proclaiming the Gospel.

To find out if this is a side issue or not, let's move to the core teaching of virtually all evangelical churches. Almost every Christian would agree that the key piece of the Christian worldview is our Savior, Jesus Christ. The Bible says that Jesus became the 'last Adam', died on a cross for the sins of the world and paid the penalty that we deserve so that on judgment day we won't suffer eternal separation from God in hell.

### Virgin birth

Traditions like Christmas arose from the event of Jesus' birth, foretold in the Old Testament. Christ was 'born of a virgin', the sinless Son of God, perfect in every way so that he was able to take on the sins of the world as the only suitable sacrifice.

*continued on page 6*



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*"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace: that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation: that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!"*

Isaiah 52:7 KJV



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# Church Directory



## The Bridge Church of WNC

207 Pinebridge Avenue  
Spruce Pine, NC 28777  
www.bridgewnc.org

**Pastors - Tom & Tammy Anglin**

Sunday Service 10:30AM  
Wednesday Service 7:00PM  
Church Office M-F  
9:00AM-3:00PM

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Our passion is to help connect the Body of Christ in this area in order to see the Fire of God transform our community, state, nation and world! (See John 17:21)

## Berry Chapel Baptist Church

280 Chapel St.  
Spruce Pine, NC 28777  
828-765-6590  
www.berrychapelbaptist.com

**Pastor - Steve Williams**

Sunday School 9:45 AM  
Worship Service 11:00 AM  
Sunday Evening Care Meal/  
Ministry - 5:30 PM  
Wednesday Evening  
Service 7:00 PM

Where Everybody is Somebody  
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## Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church

2187 Jamestown Road  
Morganton, NC  
828-584-8212

**Pastor Steve Beltz**

Sabbath (Saturday)  
Bible Study - 9:30 am  
Sabbath Worship - 11:00 am  
Vegetarian Buffet after church  
Wednesday  
Praise, Prayer & Proclaim -  
7:00 pm  
www.morgantonsda.org

## Faith Fellowship Church

Champ Ray Rd.  
Morganton, NC 28755  
(828)-675-9284  
www.fccn.org  
www.fccradio.org

**Pastor: David Gillespie**

Sunday School - 10:00 am  
Worship Service - 10:45 am  
Wednesday Bible Study - 7:00pm  
"The steps of a good man are  
ordered by the Lord:  
And he delighteth in his way."  
Psalm 37:23

## Altapass Baptist Church

3631 Altapass Hwy  
Spruce Pine, NC  
828-765-0660  
altapassbaptistchurch@ccvn.com  
www.altapassbaptistchurch.org

**Dr. Marcus R. Benfield**

Sunday School - 10:00am  
Worship - 11:00am  
Sunday Evening - 7:00pm  
Sunday Youth Program - 7:00pm  
1st & 3rd Sunday  
(Conductors for Christ ages 5-11)  
2nd & 4th Sunday  
(Teen Discovery ages 12-18)  
Wednesday - 7:00pm

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Bible Believing Church"

## Grassy Creek Baptist Church

793 Old NC 226 Hwy  
Spruce Pine, NC  
828-765-4620  
www.grassycreekbc.org

Sunday School 10:00am  
Morning Worship 11:00am  
Sunday evening 6:30pm  
Wednesday:  
J.A.M. (Jesus and Me) 7:00pm  
Seekers (young adults) 7:00pm  
Mid-week worship 7:00pm  
"That Mitchell County  
may know Christ"

## West Burnsville Baptist Church

222 West Burnsville Church Rd.  
Burnsville, NC 28714  
(828)-682-3990

**Pastor: Terry Long**

Sunday School: 9:45 a.m.  
Morning Service: 11:00 a.m.  
Evening Service: 6:00 p.m.  
Wednesday Service 6:30 p.m.

Church vision: Glorifying God through  
knowing, growing, going, to build the church  
and impact the world.

## Burkemont Baptist Church

4668 Burkemont Rd.  
Morganton, NC 28655  
828-437-2357

For more information,  
please visit  
www.burkemontbaptist.org

**Dr. Luke A. Lane**

8:30am - Early Worship  
9:45am - Sunday School  
11:00am - Worship  
6:00pm - Evening Worship

## Plumtree Presbyterian Church

4527 Hwy 19E  
Plumtree, NC 28664  
828-765-6919  
www.plumtreepresbyterian.org

**Pastor Ryan Bridgeo**  
pastor@plumtreepresbyterian.org

Sunday School 9:45 am  
Worship Service 11:00 am  
Life Groups Tuesday-Thursday evenings, 7:00 pm  
Fusion Youth Wednesday's, 6:30 pm  
Healing Services 2nd Sunday of each month, 6:30 pm

John 15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you  
and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that  
will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you  
ask in my name.

## Bear Creek Baptist Church

327 Bear Creek Road  
Bakersville, NC 28705  
www.bearcreekbaptist.com

**Reverend Bruce Cannon**

Sunday School 9:45 AM  
Worship Service 10:45 AM  
Discipleship 6:00 PM  
Evening Worship 6:45 PM  
Wednesday Worship 7:30 PM

"For God so loved the world, he  
gave his only Son..."

## Great Hope Seventh-day Adventist Church

2907d US Hwy 70 E  
Morganton, NC  
828-475-2040

**Pastor Barry Mahorney**

Sabbath (Saturday)  
Bible Study-10:00am  
Sabbath Worship - 11:30am  
Vegetarian Buffet after church  
Wednesday - Praise, Prayer &  
Proclaim - 7:00pm  
www.greathopesda.com

## Pine Branch Baptist Church

48 Church Road  
Spruce Pine, NC 28777  
Phone: (828) 765-9101  
www.pinebranchbaptist.net

**Reverend Bobby Joe Greene**

Sunday School • 9:45-10:40am  
Worship Service • 10:45am  
Sunday Evening • 6:30pm

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## St. Lucien's Catholic Church

695 Summit Street  
Spruce Pine, NC 28777  
Phone (828) 765-2224

Sunday Mass 9:00 am  
Wednesday Faith Formation  
6:00 pm  
Food Pantry Wed. 1:00-  
4:00pm

## First Baptist Church of Spruce Pine

125 Tappan Street  
Spruce Pine, NC 28777  
828-765-9411  
www.sprucepinefbc.com  
www.splfbc.blogspot.com

**Dr. Rocky Branch  
Senior Pastor**

Sunday School - 9:45 am  
Sunday Worship - 8:30 and 11:00 am  
Sunday Evening - 6:00 pm  
Wednesday Evening - 6:30 pm

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## Spruce Pine United Methodist Church

11090 Hwy. 226 South  
Spruce Pine, NC 28777  
www.sprucepineumc.org  
spumc3@bellsouth.net  
828-765-7446

**Pastor Rick Schilling**

Sunday School - 10:00am  
Sunday Worship - 11:00am  
Choir Wednesday - 7:00pm

The mission of Spruce Pine United  
Methodist Church is to be a beacon on  
a hill spreading the Good News of Jesus  
Christ through: Worship, Fellowship,  
Education, and Nurturing Service

## Newland Christian Church

2800 Millers Gap Highway  
Newland, NC 28657  
Phone (828) 260-1404  
www.newlandchristianchurch.com

**Pastor - Phillip Greene**

Sunday School: 9:45 am  
Sunday Worship: 11 am  
Sunday Evening Bible Study: 6 pm  
Wednesday Evening Prayer Meeting: 7 pm

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Who DESERVES Forgiveness?

By Brian Barrier  
Burke County

It was a warm day when my mother placed me gently in the basket and left me by the river. She had no choice really. At only three months old, I was now a liability. I was one of the lucky ones because a wealthy and powerful woman raised me as her own. One day, when I was a grown man, I witnessed one of my people being beaten and I killed the offender and hid his body in the sand. I am a murderer. My name is Moses and I would later be chosen by God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. I was also given the Ten Commandments from God. My sins were forgiven.

I was known for slaying the great giant, Goliath. Later, I became king over all of Israel and was even known as being a man after God's own heart. It happened in the spring, at the time when kings go out to battle. While walking around the roof of the king's house, I saw a beautiful woman bathing. I inquired about her and found out that she was the wife of one of my soldiers. I had her brought to me and laid with her. I even sent her husband to the front lines of the battle to his death. My name is King David. My sins were forgiven.

These are only two of many examples throughout the Bible of people that committed what we might consider great sins but were found righteous and walked close to the Lord. The obvious lesson here is that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" Romans 3:23. We know that all sins are forgiven when we confess our sins, turn away from them and accept Jesus Christ as our Savior



and Lord. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name". John 1:12.

As modern-day Christians, we read these stories in the Bible but all too often we don't make the connection to our fellow man (woman). We know that we were born into sin and we are only saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ who died on the cross and became the sacrifice for our sins, past, present, and future.

But do you know all this, right? Can anyone be forgiven for any sin? And what about forgiving those who have wronged us? The Bible says, "Then Peter came and said to Him, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?'". Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven." Matthew 18:21-22

I can't think of a better time than when we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ to meditate on the Word of God and what it says about forgiveness. As you read the following letter from a prisoner that we send a copy of the Blue Ridge Christian News to each month, think about the forgiveness that you have received from God even though you don't deserve it. It is only through a relationship with Jesus Christ that is made possible. Read this letter. Pray. If there is someone you have been reluctant or even refusing to forgive, now is the time! The Bible says, "For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." Matthew 6:14-15.

Brian Barrier is a life-long resident of Burke County, U.S. Army Veteran, a member of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church and Publisher of the Blue Ridge Christian News.

Dear Editor,

I received the Blue Ridge Christian News last week here at Sangrean Correctional Inst.

I have enjoyed reading for several days now and I have shared it with some of my Christian friends here.

I thank you so much for it and I hope I can stay on your mailing list. God will truly bless you and your staff for remembering me.

I am truly sorry for the trouble I caused several years ago. I was 20 years old while at Sangrean Correctional Inst. I got my license about 2:00 AM in the morning and I cried like a baby. I asked God to forgive me, and to change my life. What did he ever do to me? I will never ever go back to being the selfish, ungodly creature I was.

My life has always been easy in here since that time. However, God helps me everyday to deal with the many walks of life you come across everyday in here. God has blessed so many ways, I can't even count them.

I trust a lot of people that trusted me, and I realize that some folks will never believe that I am now a new creature in Christ. I understand their feelings, however, God only God only knows my heart and I do too. Please express to your readers my deep feelings of remorse for my wrongful actions, and I long so bad for each one of your readers to forgive me. But also tell them I am a true Tragedy to Triumph story, because of the forgiveness I received. Once again thanks so much, God bless your staff, and your family.

God is so Good

**Benjamin Franklin**  
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Resurrection

Easter Sunday is the Celebration of Jesus' resurrection, the demonstration of his victory over sin and death. Jesus acknowledged the link between these 'earthly', real-time/space events relating to spiritual truths when he spoke to Nicodemus about being born again.

Jesus says; 'I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?' (John 3:12) The Bible makes it clear that if these events didn't actually occur we are still lost in our sins, our faith is in vain, and we are to be pitied above everyone.

But why was the crucifixion necessary? Why did Jesus have to suffer such a horrible death? To understand this, we must return to the foundations of our faith, rooted in the Old Testament. Jesus acknowledged the authority of the O.T. each time he said 'It is written ...' or 'Have you not read ...'

The book of Genesis gives us a clear understanding for the reason Jesus came. It was to fix the problem caused by the head of the human race, the first Adam.

Creation

The Bible describes God's creation of a perfect world, a paradise where everything was 'very good'. Genesis 1:29 says that man and animals ate plants (there were no carnivores) and therefore no bloodshed. There was no sin, corruption or death.

The Fall

God gave Adam a command that he should not eat from the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and told him that death would be the consequence should he do so. Unfortunately, Adam chose to exercise his free will in clear rebellion against God.

As a result, God cursed the earth, and suffering and death entered the world. Because Adam was the head of the human race his sin nature was passed on to all his descendants. Romans 5:12 says, 'Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned ...'

Mankind is now separated from God, not just able to die physically, but spiritually dead as well.

Judgment

In Genesis 6 we read how God judged the wicked in a global flood where '... all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered.' (Genesis 7:19) This judgment was sent specifically to destroy everything living on land, except for righteous Noah, his family, and representative kinds of land animals on board the great Ark. This is a perfect cause-and-effect explanation of the fossil record, the billions of dead things buried in sedimentary rock all over the earth.

This parallel to the coming judgment is spoken of in 2 Peter 3:6 and 7: 'By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the Day of Judgment and destruction of ungodly men.'

The Law

After this God established the Law through Moses, which taught right from wrong and social doctrines. Most importantly it showed that mankind could never reach God's standard, that 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.' (Romans 3:23) Paul says '... I would not have known what sin was except through the law.' (Romans 7:7) The knowledge of sin and judgment leads people to seek mercy at the cross of Christ.

Restoration

The blessed hope of the Bible is the time after God's coming judgment when He will restore the earth to the way it was in the beginning as far as sin and death are concerned. There will be '... no more death or mourning or crying or pain ...' (Revelation 21:4) We will get new, incorruptible bodies. The last enemy, death, will be destroyed ...

Foundational knowledge—transforming power—blessed hope

Perfection, corruption, judgment, salvation, and restoration. This is the 'big picture' of the history of the world and humanity as it has been taught and accepted by the Christian church for some eighteen hundred years now. Up until about 200 years ago in the western world, even most non-Christians accepted this history. So, what changed? Does this have any bearing on the struggles the church is facing?

Around 200 years ago the concept of 'millions of years' started to gain popularity when certain people reinterpreted the rocks and fossils, not as a result of Noah's Flood, but as a record of millions of years of history. The idea of a long-pre-history 'recorded' in the rocks paved the way for Darwin's theory of evolution—its mooted slow step-by-step processes needing eons of time, which 'long-age' geology provided.

Today this long-age history of the world is promoted by virtually all public educational centers. Many Christians have adopted portions of this 'history' and attempted to reconcile it with the Bible. Many wonder if God may have used evolution, or if millions of years of evolutionary processes are compatible with the teaching of Scripture. Some people feel that science and religion are two separate areas of thought and that the Bible has no bearing on the real world. Many simply believe it's a side issue.

Contrasting worldviews

Let's look at just one aspect of the evolutionary story and see how it impacts Christian theology. Many Christians that may not believe in the evolution of animals and man per se still believe in millions of years of earth history. But the idea of millions of years comes from an interpretation of the sedimentary rock layers all over the world, which are assumed to have been deposited slowly, and which contain fossils.

Where do you fit the 'Millions of Years'?

Virtually no one would attempt to fit these millions of years of history after the

continued on page 42



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# High Peak Baptist Church

## Why Won't God Bless Me

By Kevin Purcell  
Burke County

Often people will ask me, "Why aren't things working out the way I hoped?" This question often comes after their life swirled out of control and they blamed God for not blessing them with an easier life. But why didn't he bless them?



### Doesn't the Bible Promise Life Gets Easier?

People often cite 1 Corinthians 10:13 claiming this promise proved false since things are getting too hard. The verse says, "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it."

Well-meaning believers focus on a few words at the expense of the true meaning of the text.

- Overtaken – A crisis took over their lives, so God's word didn't hold up in their lives.
- Beyond what you are able – "This crisis is beyond what I am able to handle."
- Way of escape – "I want out of this suffering, but I don't see any way of escape."

Here's the problem. Focusing on a few words or phrases divorces this verse from the truth of God's teaching. He's not teaching that you won't have any problems in your life that will keep you from struggling too much. He does not promise only short-term suffering that soon gives way to happiness and an end of suffering. In fact, this passage doesn't address general suffering AT ALL!!

1 Corinthians 10 addresses sin. Verse five says God was not pleased with many of the Old Testament people due to sins like lust and sexual sins. Their sins served as bad examples to us. If you think you're standing up to temptation, be careful. Don't get too proud, lest you fall. That leads us to our verse above. It promises a way of escape for the sinner who gives in to temptation.

Many TV preachers and I am sure local preachers of the prosperity Gospel promise every Christian wealth and ease. Give money to TV preachers and God will make you rich and your life will get easier. That's a perversion of the Gospel of the worst kind. It makes the world think the church is all about grabbing people's cash and getting rich instead of what it's about, God overcoming our sinful mistakes to promise eternal life and purpose-filled life. Not an easy life, but a worthy life.

### Why Won't God Bless Me?

This takes us back to the original question. Why doesn't God bless my life? Imagine a couple of teens who are seniors in high school with a bright future. They grew up in godly Christian homes and their parents taught them about morality, the love of Jesus and how to live a life that honors God. They want to follow that teaching in their dating relationship.

Unfortunately, the couple makes a bad decision. His parents went out to celebrate Christmas at a party and won't come home till after ten o'clock. So, he suggests they go to his house and watch movies. They find the latest romantic comedy. They begin to feel romantic towards one another he kisses her, caresses and ... You can guess where it leads. They didn't plan it, but they also didn't listen as the Holy Spirit in them warned them with feelings of guilt. God provided the way of escape, but they didn't follow that off-ramp and sped along towards sexual sin.

About five weeks later she confides in her boyfriend that she might be pregnant. They get a test at the local CVS and it tests positive. Two lives that had such great promise now looks out of control.

They can't abort the child. That's just wrong and they know it. They also don't think getting married is the right choice. "I'm not sure I'd want to live the rest of my life with him. We've only been dating for three months." So, instead they both drop from our school, find full-time jobs and move in together. The mobile home they rent is nothing special, but it's adequate. But their jobs take them out of church and away from the positive influences of their parents' home. They neglect their relationships with Jesus and start to make more bad choices.

Soon, one crisis led to another. One temptation led to another. These new parents find their lives falling apart. They feel like this has overtaken their lives. They feel trapped. So, they wonder, "Why doesn't God bless us and make life easier?"

Can you guess the answer? God doesn't bless sinful lifestyles. This started with the poor choice to be alone at the boy's home. It continued with sexual contact and eventually gave in to the ultimate temptation. They kept making mistakes by living together, leaving fellowship of other Christians in a church setting. They did the right thing by having the baby but didn't choose to raise the child in a biblical environment. At each choice, a quiet impulse pulled them to make the right choice and they ignored it making the wrong choice most of the time.

A good father won't reward a child for beating up his brother, stealing candy at the store, or cheating on his school assignments. God won't bless the life of a sinner running away from His will.

### There's Still Good News

Despite all the bad choices the couple above made, God would still bless them if...

1. They ask God to forgive their mistakes and commit to repent and follow Jesus.
2. They chose to make their relationship with one another right by getting married and committing to a biblical marriage that applies the lessons of Ephesians 5:22-33.
3. They chose to immediately start asking God to help them find jobs that will let them attend worship with fellow believers and until then find a fellowship on a

Wednesday or Sunday night or Tuesday or Thursday for that matter so they can receive teaching, encouragement, discipleship, and opportunities to serve King Jesus.

Here's the great thing about Jesus. He loves us so much and He desperately wants to bless us. But He loves us enough to never bless us when we're making self-destructive choices.

*Dr. Kevin Purcell is the pastor of High Peak Baptist Church off Exit 107 on I-40. He's also written about church and Bible technology for [www.ChurchTechToday.com](http://www.ChurchTechToday.com) and other publications. He covers Bible software and tech at [www.KevinPurcell.org](http://www.KevinPurcell.org) and on his YouTube channel at [www.youtube.com/c/KevinPurcellBehindThePulpit](http://www.youtube.com/c/KevinPurcellBehindThePulpit).*



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By Jody Griffin  
Avery and Mitchell County

*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6, KJV)*

"Tis the season to be jolly!" Yaddah, yaddah, yaddah, blah, blah, blah...

While the Christmas season does seem to bring out the best in many, there are countless others who struggle to experience joy this time of year. The gleeful chorus of carols can do more harm than good when the world seems dark all around you. Everyone else's joy can serve to heighten one's anxiety when the feeling isn't mutual.

Want to be a real blessing this Christmas? Consider giving of yourself, not necessarily your money. Look around and find someone who lacks a joyful spirit this season. They may be hungry or thirsty, a stranger in need of shelter, or they may need clothes to keep them warm. They may be in prison, in need of someone who will pray for them, care for them and even visit them. Each one of these activities would be used by Jesus later in His ministry to distinguish the 'sheep' from the 'goats' (Matthew 25).

It makes one think of the setting of the Lord's birth. A stable where sheep, goats, cattle and more found shelter in the night. The humble beginnings of Jesus' life on earth are in stark contrast to the staggering self-interested consumerism of today.

Look around you. Stop humming Christmas carols long enough to hear what is on someone's mind. Love them by listening, caring and sharing. You need not buy them anything. YOU are a gift in yourself.

Reflecting on this passage might be helpful for anyone trying to give back some of the blessings they have been given.

Walk into a nearby rest home, nursing home or arrange a visit to a jail or prison. (These require preapproval...so be sure to contact your choice of setting and make prior arrangements!) Visit with someone who looks, or acts like they might not get much company. Speak with them even if they are unable to speak back. There are more hurting people in the world than we want to see. We are afraid of knowing the enormity of the need, might steal our joy...

Nothing could be further from the truth! It truly is 'better to give than to receive'. Think about it. The One who is the "Reason for the Season" found His destiny giving Himself for the sake of others. When we learn what that really means, NO ONE will be overlooked at Christmas. No one...

The Prince of Peace will be found by those who look for Him in the lives of those in need!

Merry Christmas!

*Jody Griffin is pastor of Central Baptist Church in Spruce Pine and Community Funded Chaplain at Avery-Mitchell Correctional Institution.*



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Life Lessons

By Doug Harrell  
Mitchell County

I once heard a man say if you think about how blessed you are to have what you have, rather than what you don't have, you will be surprised at how much you can achieve! Wow, what a message! Changing our focus on things makes all the difference. The song "Count Your Blessings" goes like this:



**"When upon life's billows you are tempest-tossed,  
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,  
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,  
And it will surprise you what the Lord has done.**  
Refrain:  
**Count your blessings, name them one by one,  
Count your blessings, see what God has done!"**

One of the greatest blessings, if you are an American citizen, is just being born here or living here in America. I know we aren't perfect, but I have been blessed to be able to travel around this world, there is no place on earth like America! We did not get to choose where we were born, we just won the lottery!

Travel to some other places, go out in the sugar cane fields that are still harvested by hand with a machete, hauled in by oxen, and the families are housed in 9x9 huts. Look at the news of people in communist countries that are imprisoned or killed because they are Christians if they are found with a Bible, too bad!

Again, I may not be politically correct here, but I give thanks for our great military, our law enforcement community, our first responders and firefighters. I give thanks for pastors that preach God's truth, for the opportunity to be able to write these daily devotions that I post without being imprisoned as a spy against the government. I give thanks that I can say what I believe and have the freedom to say it. If we are not careful, there are many that would take away that freedom. It is not politically correct on many of our campuses to profess Christian beliefs, to believe that God created us male or female, that marriage was between a man and a woman, to believe that men should go to one bathroom and women to another. It is not correct to think that men that are biological males (but say they are females) should not be allowed to compete against women in sporting events!

When we count our blessings, one of the things that we must not forget is that our freedoms are not free, someone paid the price to defend those freedoms. The question here is, are you willing to stand up, are you willing to say these things I believe? We may not all be soldiers, but will we be willing to stand up to ridicule and scorn by letting our faith be evident to all? The song "Stand up, Stand up for Jesus" says it this way:

**"Stand up, stand up for Jesus,  
Ye soldiers of the cross;  
Lift high his royal banner,  
It must not suffer loss.  
From victory unto victory  
His army shall He lead,  
Till every foe is vanquished,  
And Christ is Lord indeed."**

Today, more than any time in my memory, it is critical that we put on the armor of God, that we are willing to raise the sword of faith.

*"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." 1 Corinthians 16:13 KJV*

*"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord." 1 Corinthians 15:58 KJV*

Now is the time for Christians to stand up and be counted, to be bold in their faith, to not cower in fear of rejections to state firmly, in God's word I believe and will not waver. To vote for leaders that will honor and uphold our constitution and our laws, that will value the heritage of our great nation, to proudly say, "IN GOD WE TRUST."

To God be the glory.

*Doug Harrell is a life-long resident of Mitchell County, Owner of Harrell Hill Farms, Inc., a member of Bear Creek Baptist Church.*

*Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Matthew 2:1*

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Slivers Of Light

By Patricia Jackson  
McDowell County

Recently, before the morning daybreak, I witnessed an unexpected display of God's majesty and beauty. Silver colored, thin slivers of light streamed downward from the rising morning sun, a stunning reminder of the awesomeness of God's creation.

As the sun climbed slowly over the tree-lined horizon, the narrow slivers of light grew in numbers, intensity and length. For those who are not familiar with the word or meaning of "sliver", it is an indicator of the presence of something bigger. A sliver of light is a small piece of light, heralding the new day and the hope of light in our soul and the world. The light was necessary for making God's creative works visible and all life possible.



*"And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. 4And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. 5And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day." (God's first words recorded in Genesis 1: 3-5) God's light is with us always, whether it be night or day.*

*"I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness." John 12:46. That same light that shone brightly two thousand years ago, is the same light that illuminated the world at creation. It is a holy light that penetrates our hearts and lives within each of us as believers. Jesus is the Light of the World. He called His disciples to be the light unto the world as well. Just as a small lamp can give light to a large room, each of us individually can be that beacon of light in our homes, workplaces, church, and communities.*

Matthew 5:16 tells us *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."* Jesus came to shine the ultimate light, the light of salvation in our lives. Those who follow Him are called children of the light. We should endeavor to walk in the light of holiness, peace, and joy, sharing our faith with others.

In 2 Corinthians 4:6, Paul uses these words to illustrate God's re-creating work in sin-darkened hearts. *"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ".* The darkness of sin is dispelled by the light of the gospel. The phrase "it is always darkest before the dawn" is not a biblical scripture, but rather a folklore saying. When we are facing disappointment, sickness or other problems, it may seem life is dark. But the rising Son brings us hope and a renewing of God's presence to shine His light in our lives. Remember, the darkest night produces the brightest stars. *"And the light shineth in the darkness and the darkness comprehended it not."* John 1:5. Sadly, the world we live in is engulfed in spiritual darkness and there are many people who still do not comprehend the light of Christ.

*"Is there some good I should have done?  
Is there some soul I should have won?  
Have I hurt someone thoughtlessly?  
Lord, give me light, that I might see".  
(Author: Zac Poonen)*

Patricia Jackson is the Assistant Teacher for the Ladies Class at Redeemed Free Will Baptist Church, Glenwood, NC. She is a grant writer for non-profits, a published author and retired Nursing Home Administrator. She lives in Rutherford County with her husband.

*Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Matthew 1:18-25*



*Luke 2:11 - For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.*

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A Mountain Christmas Trail of  
Lights & Holiday Events

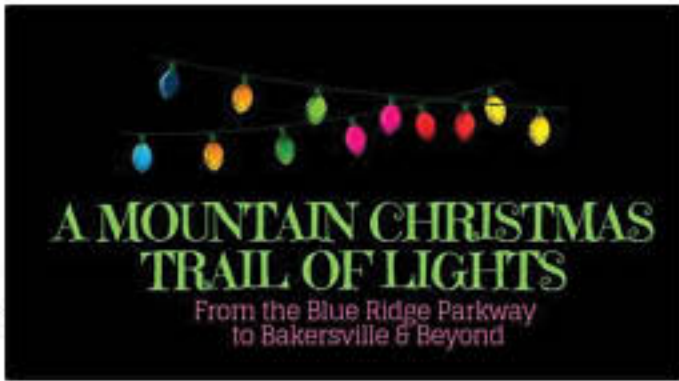
By Patti Jensen  
Mitchell County



The Mountain Christmas Trail of Lights and Holiday Events will kick off in Mitchell County on Saturday, November 30th with events in both Spruce Pine and Bakersville.

The Trail of Lights and Holiday Events is a new project by the Mitchell County Chamber of Commerce in partnership with the Town of Spruce Pine, Town of Bakersville and business owners and organizations throughout the county. "It is exciting to see everyone rally around this project and come together as a county to create a festive celebration for both our community and visitors who will come to see the lights and take part in the events," said Patti Jensen, Director of the Mitchell County Chamber of Commerce.

The Trail of Lights will go from the Blue Ridge Parkway to Bakersville and beyond, beginning November 30th and ending on New Year's Eve along with a month of holiday events and happenings. "We have visited every business from the Parkway to Bakersville to share information about the Trail and invite them to participate," said Jensen. "We have asked all businesses and homeowners to call us at the Chamber to let us know they are participating so that we can add them to our online map. And it's not too late to be added to the map!" It's important to remember that a business or homeowner can do as little or as much as they like to add lights to their property. "The thought is that we want everyone to join in the fun in any way they can", said Jensen. "This is a way for everyone to come together as a community, as a team, to create this special experience for our county."



"This project has been something we have been talking about for a year," said Patti Jensen, Executive Director of the Mitchell County Chamber of Commerce. "We began discussing holiday plans with local organizations and leaders and focused on two things," said Jensen. "There really wasn't much planned in the county after the first weekend in December and we knew that if we could build out the month with holiday events, we could not only create a great holiday experience for Mitchell County families but also create an opportunity to bring more people into Mitchell County to shop with our local businesses."

The trail will go from the Blue Ridge Parkway on Hwy 226 to Spruce Pine, travel down Summit Avenue then through downtown Spruce Pine, back out Roan Road to pick up 226 N to Bakersville and then on to Loafer's Glory and Mine Creek. The Chamber will be providing a prize to the light display judged as the Best of the Mountain Christmas Trail this year for one business and one residence! "We have recruited some amazing judges from our local Senior Center who will be traveling on a Trail of Lights van to view the lights and submit their scores," said Jensen.

In addition, the community has put together a full calendar of events for the holidays and is asking for local organizations, businesses, and churches who are hosting a holiday event to send their information as soon as possible to the Chamber at [pjensen@mitchellcountychamber.org](mailto:pjensen@mitchellcountychamber.org). "We have over 30 holiday events and happenings on the calendar now and it is packed full of things for locals and visitors to do as well as encourage people to create new holiday events this year from Thanksgiving until New Years," said Jensen. The Chamber says it isn't too late to call or email to add holiday and church events to the free calendar.

The Kickoff Weekend will begin on November 30th with Small Business Saturday in Spruce Pine and Bakersville. Spruce Pine's events will feature special shopping deals, the Polar Express Storytime, an Ugly Sweater Contest, a drawing for a Christmas, the lighting of the Christmas Tree and ending with the Spruce Pine Christmas Parade at 6 pm. Bakersville will be kicking off their Christmas "Neath the Roan season with a raffle and Small Business Bingo, an ArtWalk, Tree Lighting and Christmas Concert. Events continue in both towns every weekend until Christmas.

The Chamber is asking the public to follow the Facebook page for A Mountain Christmas Trail of Lights and begin to help spread the word. The website for the Trail is [www.amountainchristmastrailoflights.com](http://www.amountainchristmastrailoflights.com) and features events, the trail map, a church event page and more. For information, to be added to the trail or add an event, call the Mitchell County Chamber at 828-765-9033.

"The Trail of Lights is a way for our community to come together to celebrate the holiday season and to offer it as a gift to our citizens and visitors," said Jensen. "We hope that this is the start of something special for our county that will continue to grow for years to come."

Patti Jensen is Interim Director of the Mitchell County Chamber of Commerce.



# Billy Graham Evangelistic Association

## 'We Lost Everything But We Did Not Lose our Praise'

By Lizzy Long

It's been two months since Hurricane Dorian pummeled the Bahamas, leaving at least 61 dead, hundreds missing, and thousands of homes damaged or destroyed. The Billy Graham Rapid Response Team (RRT) has witnessed many make a profession of faith since deploying to the islands. They're offering prayer and a listening ear to residents like Carmen Jones, who told chaplains she thought she was going to die.

As water poured into Carmen Jones' home in Freeport, Grand Bahama, she prayed for help to come. She and her two grandchildren were caught in the strongest hurricane to ever hit the islands. "Rescue never came," Carmen explained to Billy Graham chaplains Miguel Cabrera and Gary Cain, sitting on her front porch amid the wreckage.

She recounted her 72-hour journey of survival. Water was up to her neck when Carmen instructed Jahnyah ("Nyah"), 11, and Jahiaer, 8, to head to "the man-hole," or attic.

"None of us could swim," Carmen said, describing how her grandchildren clung to her as she paddled down the hallway.

"I went underwater twice ... almost drowned, but God blessed Nyah. Nyah pushed me back up—I don't know how she did it."

Placing a two-foot ladder below the manhole, they pushed Jahiaer, who was nearly hypothermic, into the attic. Then Carmen helped lift Nyah before trying to go up herself. "I made an attempt to go up and fell back in the water—bajoom!" Carmen exclaimed. Popping up from the waves, Carmen headed for the ladder again while saying to God, "I can't make this."

Carmen turned toward the chaplains and patted her right knee, "My body was weak. Having had multiple strokes, this side automatically freezes after being in the water so long." After asking God for help, she noticed a mattress floating in Jahiaer's room. She maneuvered it under the manhole while Nyah hovered over the opening, asking her grandmother if she could come down and help.

"Nyah never left," Carmen recalled. Her granddaughter kept shouting, "Grammy, I've got you!"

But Carmen still wasn't sure she would live. She fell back into the water again before stepping onto the mattress as a ledge. "Here's the deal," she told her grandchildren. "There's no guarantee Grammy's going to make this. But here's what I want both of you to do. If Grammy doesn't make this journey with you, when the rain, the water goes down, jump out of that manhole, and run for your lives." "No!" Nyah persisted. "Grammy, you've got to make it."

Carmen looked up toward heaven, telling God, "If this is the way I've gotta go, then so be it. But if my work is not completed, then You've got to show me a way out of this. My body doesn't have the strength to climb anymore, Father."

"Grammy," Nyah paused. "If you are going to stay down there and die, we are coming down and we're going to die with you."

Carmen pleaded for God to let her live as she tried to climb into the manhole again. This time, she made it. Nyah reached down and grabbed her grandmother, helping Carmen pull herself up. "I don't know who the invisible angels were," Carmen told chaplains. "All I know is it had to have been God. I sat down and said, 'Thank You, Father.' It wasn't my time."

She had no idea what lay ahead, but told her fearful grandchildren, "God didn't bring us this far to leave us, so we're gonna be all right."

In the manhole with only four miniature bottles of water, no food and no insulin for Carmen, who's diabetic, she held onto her faith, praying and singing hymns.

"We lost everything, but we did not lose our praise," Carmen explained. Her heavenly perspective is one chaplains often encourage on deployments.

The family spent three days in the manhole, monitoring water and eventually losing track of time before the lingering storm passed.

"At the end of [the hurricane], I asked God, 'Why?'" Carmen said.

She knew the answer as she sat around a pile of rubbish. God brought to mind how she fought for Nyah's life while still in her mother's womb. She heard God say to her, "You saved Nyah and I allowed her to save you."

As Carmen prayed with chaplains, she recognized the complete picture of God's grace in her life.

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# United Baptist Church

## Patriot Pastors: Civil Air Patrol Chaplains Serve Community, Church, and Nation

By Steven Mathews  
Burke County

The Civil Air Patrol is perhaps America's best-kept secret when it comes to character and leadership development in the lives of young people. Founded one week before Pearl Harbor was attacked, the Civil Air Patrol played a vital role in the defense of America's homeland during World War II. In the 75 years that followed, the Civil Air Patrol has transitioned into one of America's premier search-and-rescue organizations. Over ninety percent of all aerial search and rescue operations in the United States are performed by Civil Air Patrol aircrews. The Civil Air Patrol is the official auxiliary of the United States Air Force. The greatest strength of the Civil Air Patrol is the cadet program, in which young people from 12 to 21 learn character development, leadership skills, and aerospace education. The Civil Air Patrol has a strong history of turning boys and girls into men and women who are prepared to serve as leaders in the military, society, and the church.

The Civil Air Patrol Chaplain Corps is the largest volunteer chaplain force on the planet, with over 900 chaplains and character development instructors nationwide. In this article, I'd like to encourage my colleagues in ministry to consider joining the Civil Air Patrol Chaplain Corps. The opportunities for ministry and personal enrichment are tremendous, and the need is great. Even with such a large chaplain corps, most local Civil Air Patrol squadrons function without a chaplain. There is a squadron near you, waiting for someone to bring your gifts, calling, and education to their young people and adults. There are over 2,000 Civil Air Patrol members in North Carolina, but only 18 chaplains. There are squadrons all over the state. Western North Carolina squadrons are in Asheville, Shelby, Boone, Hickory, Gastonia, Statesville, and Charlotte.

What ministry opportunities can the Civil Air Patrol provide to a local pastor? Many! Here are a few that come to mind:

### Develop Relationships with the Community

The Civil Air Patrol has a community presence in schools, in families, and in the emergency services community. A chaplain in the Civil Air Patrol may have an opportunity to develop relationships with people throughout these communities. As an emergency services chaplain, a pastor can receive an open door to minister to people in times of deep crisis.

### Networking with Other Clergy

Civil Air Patrol chaplains come from a diverse range of theological and ecclesiological backgrounds but are united in their service to God and to their country



through the Civil Air Patrol. Each Wing (state) has an annual conference, and each region holds a week-long Region Staff College at least every two years. At these events and through other informal opportunities, chaplains meet for education, edification, and encouragement. As a Civil Air Patrol chaplain, a pastor can meet and network with dynamic partners in ministry and form lifetime bonds with fellow servants of Christ.

### Model Volunteer Ministry

Pastors ask their church members to volunteer their time and efforts to the ministry of the local church. We ask our people to carve out time from work, school, family commitments, and personal interests to serve the Lord through the ministries of our local churches. As a chaplain in the Civil Air Patrol, the pastor can model this commitment to volunteer service. What is more powerful than leadership by example?

### Train the Next Generation of Church Leaders

As pastors, we lead the church today and prepare leaders for tomorrow. The Civil Air Patrol is a great incubator for leadership. In our area, many of the cadets in local Civil Air Patrol squadrons are Christian young people. These are the next generation of pastors, deacons, elders, teachers, missionaries, and mature disciples of Jesus Christ. Today they are enthusiastic youth earning ribbons and medals. Tomorrow they will take up the torch of leadership in the church. As a chaplain in the Civil Air Patrol, the local pastor can have an active role in developing character and leadership traits in young Christians and reach the Next Generation with the Gospel.

Many cadets in the Civil Air Patrol come from strong Christian families. Many others are unchurched and unreached with the gospel. The chaplain in their Civil Air Patrol squadron may be the only minister involved in their lives. Many families unwilling to bring their children to church will bring them to the Civil Air Patrol. The squadron chaplain can develop meaningful relationships with these young people and their families through Civil Air Patrol which they might not be able to reach in any other way.

### Personal and Professional Development

The Civil Air Patrol has a robust training program for its adult members. The Chaplain Corps offers specialized ministry training in areas that seminary may have missed. It also provides training in leadership and organizational skills. Much of the training is online and is free. A chaplain can even take classes online from the Air Force, including Squadron Officer School, Air Command and Staff College, and Air War College. As a pastor, you need to constantly grow in ministry and leadership skills. Civil Air Patrol can be a great resource.

The Civil Air Patrol is not the military. If you join as a chaplain, you can't be mobilized and sent overseas. It's a volunteer organization, a "force multiplier" for the Air Force. The time commitment for a chaplain is usually a few hours one night each week, as availability allows. There are no age or fitness requirements. There are high academic standards, however. A chaplain in the Civil Air Patrol must meet the same requirements as an active-duty Air Force Chaplain, including a seminary master's degree, ordination, and denominational endorsement.

If you think chaplaincy in the Civil Air Patrol might be an outlet for your ministry calling, gifts, and preparation, please send me an email. As our North Carolina Wing Chaplain, I'm glad to answer questions and provide more information. Please email me at [steve.mathews@ncwgc.org](mailto:steve.mathews@ncwgc.org).

Think your pastor might be interested in volunteer chaplaincy in the Civil Air Patrol? Show him or her this article!

*Steve Mathews serves as pastor of United Baptist Church in Valdese, and as Wing Chaplain for the North Carolina Wing of the Civil Air Patrol. He may be reached at [steve.mathews@ncwgc.org](mailto:steve.mathews@ncwgc.org).*

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Hearts on a Mission – NCBAM Call Center  
By Melanie Beeson

When I accepted a part-time position with the North Carolina Baptist Aging Ministry (NCBAM) in 2011, I was doing volunteer work in my church and community. I felt led to shift my mission focus to working with aging adults through my position at NCBAM. I did not know just how much my heart would shift and my love for meeting the needs of aging adults would grow. I have since transitioned to full-time Call Center Director for NCBAM. The outreach of the Call Center has become an integral part of my personal mission direction.

This mission-minded focus is prevalent among all Call Center staff. NCBAM receives calls from vulnerable aging adults across the state who are often facing overwhelming obstacles. Whether the need is as complex as a wheelchair ramp or as simple as an occasional friendly visitor, Call Center Specialists show the love of Christ through actively listening to each caller and responding with care and compassion. We recently received a thank-you note from a client that read, "NCBAM was a blessing. They could not have been more helpful. They were loving, kind, and included me and my family with the process. We would love to say, THANK YOU!"

To meet the varied needs of aging adults, the Call Center relies on churches and church volunteers. Churches are often looking for mission opportunities in their local communities and we connect them to aging adults in need. Call Center Specialists work diligently to build relationships with volunteers across the state. Volunteer Larry Brush, with Judson Baptist Church, spoke of the collaboration of Call Center staff and church volunteers when he stated, "You (Call Center Specialists) get to do more than we even do. You do for all these people and never get to see the end result. We get to be there and see their smiling faces. I want you to know that volunteers are thankful for all you do."

If you are 65+ and need help maintaining your independence at home, or if you can assist an aging adult in your community, phone the Call Center at 877-506-2226. You will speak with a Christ-loving, compassionate Call Center Specialist and experience firsthand the mission-minded ministry of NCBAM!

Melanie Beeson serves as Call Center Director for NCBAM. Reach Melanie at [mbeeson@bchfamily.org](mailto:mbeeson@bchfamily.org)



The Call Center appreciates volunteers who have helped NC's aging adults the past ten years. (l-r) Call Center Specialists (CSS) Sharon Chastain, Renee Adkins, Director Melanie Beeson, CSS Trina Ivey, Shirley Carlson, and North Central Regional Director Samantha Allred. (Shirley Carlson was with Baptists on Mission in Coastal NC following Hurricane Dorian.)

Humor  
By Buddy Freeman  
Madison County



"LAUGHTER IS HEALTHY FOR YOU"

A school teacher asked her class to write an article on the subject of baseball. "You have 30 minutes to complete it," she told the class. Sara handed in her paper after writing for less than a minute. The teacher asked, "You can't be finished already?" "Yes, I am," said Sara. The teacher looked at her paper and read, "Game called off on account of rain."

A wise man said, "There are two times in a man's life that he cannot understand women – before marriage and after marriage."

A teacher told her class, "You have my assurance that if you repeat a word eight or ten times, it will be yours for life." In the back row, an attractive young girl sighed and closed her eyes, whispering softly to herself, "Tom, Tom, Tom."

A Sunday School teacher asked, "Now, Harold, what can you tell me about Goliath?" Harold said, "He was the man, David rocked to sleep."

Dr Buddy Freeman is now serving as the pastor at First Baptist Church of Marshall, NC. Recently Retired

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M	A	N	E		R	O	U	T		H	E	A	D	Y
A	M	O	S		M	E	G	O		A	R	M	O	R
D	E	S	P	A	I	R		P	A	R	A	B	L	E
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E	S	T	I	M	A	T	E		S	H	E			Y
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W	A	X	E	N		C	H	O	P		H	A	R	E
A	M	E	N	D		H	O	L	E		E	D	E	N
N	E	S	T	S		O	W	L	S		R	E	S	T

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## Sudoku Solution

3	2	5	1	4	7	8	9	6
6	9	1	3	8	2	7	4	5
7	4	8	9	5	6	3	2	1
2	1	3	5	7	8	9	6	4
4	8	6	2	9	1	5	3	7
9	5	7	4	6	3	1	8	2
1	7	4	8	2	9	6	5	3
8	6	2	7	3	5	4	1	9
5	3	9	6	1	4	2	7	8

## Gardner Webb

### Toilet Paper and the Second Coming

By Tracey Jessup



"As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we beg you, brothers and sisters, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here." 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2

On December 19, 1973, Tonight Show host Johnny Carson started a near month-long toilet paper shortage in the United States. During his monologue he stated, "You know what's disappearing from the supermarket shelves? Toilet paper... There's an acute shortage of toilet paper in the United States."

Actually, Johnny Carson simply was the spark that ignited the panic and truthfully, 1973 was a year marked by shortages. Gasoline, electricity, and onions were goods and services heavily reported to be in limited supply. But the toilet paper shortage all started with an unsubstantiated rumor. Zachary Crockett describes it in this July 9, 2014 post for priceonomics.com:

"In November of 1973, several news agencies reported a tissue shortage in Japan. Initially, the release went unnoticed and nobody seemed to put much stock in it -- save for one Harold V. Froelich. Froelich, a 41-year-old Republican congressman, presided over a heavily-forested district in Wisconsin and had recently been receiving complaints from constituents about a reduced stream of pulp paper." On November 16, Froelich released a press statement indicating The Government Printing Office was facing a serious shortage of paper. The statement received little fanfare.

"However," Crockett continues, "a few weeks later, Froelich uncovered a document that indicated the government's National Buying Center had fallen far short of securing bids to provide toilet paper for its troops and bureaucrats. On December 11, he issued another, more serious press release: 'The U.S. may face a serious shortage of toilet paper within a few months...we hope we don't have to ration toilet tissue...a toilet paper shortage is no laughing matter. It is a problem that will potentially touch every American.'" Carson saw it in the papers, included it in his monologue, and panic ensued.

In today's passage, the Apostle Paul addresses an unsubstantiated rumor that had greatly alarmed the Thessalonian believers. The rumor was that the day of the Lord had already come, and evidently, this rumor was spreading rampantly "by spirit," "by word," and "by letter." Both then and now, rumors that speculate and cause fear about the return of the Lord need to be addressed. Paul imparts two important truths to inspire confidence and hope in the church. He assures them that Jesus is coming again and that part of the purpose of his coming is the gathering of believers together with Christ.

Paul concludes chapter two with this benediction: "Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word" (vv. 16-17). We must let go of the rumors and hold fast to the comfort, hope, and strength of the truth of the gospel.

Prayer: Lord, instead of falling for rumors and becoming alarmed, help us to stand firm in Christ Jesus.

Dr. Tracy Jessup serves as vice president for Christian Life and Service and senior minister to the University. He is a graduate of Gardner-Webb with a B.A. in Music and earned his M. Div. degree at Samford University's Beeson Divinity School. He completed his Ph.D. at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He also teaches in the undergraduate department of religious studies and enjoys the opportunity to serve the local church through interim pastorates, pulpit supply, and preaching revival services. He and his wife, Teresa, have two children, Christian and Anna.

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# Clint's Chronicles on the Funny Farm

## The Rest of the Story

Clint had many strengths; a vivid imagination was certainly one of them. He often said that Harrell Hill was his haven of safety and solitude. Clint had had his share of hard times, some of his own makings, as we all do. His worldly experiences were amazing. He had traveled the world over in his very successful corporate life, and yet he was a little child in so many ways. He tended to see things with both fear and joy to the degree that escapes most of us, and that is our loss. Oh, for the ability to exhibit the enthusiasm for life that Clint was able to do in life, and in death.

Farmer Doug

## Clint's Chronicles on the Funny Farm

Dear Friends,

Many of you have written or called about Clint's Chronicles on the Funny Farm. It seems that you take great pleasure in my many foibles and near-misses with danger. Also, some of you question my veracity – that would be TRUTH telling – regarding these tales. A couple of things you should know: clearly the Lord is protecting me from myself and the myriad monsters and events that seek to snuff me out, and these stories are absolutely true (not to say I don't exaggerate a teeny tiny bit ☺) Now get a load of this.



### Coyotes in the Corridor!

Since moving to Harrell Hill farm back in March my insomnia has all but disappeared. At first, I considered it a miracle but I think it has more to do with arising at 4:00 am, working like a pack mule in the torrid sun, gorging myself on Barbara's marvelous home cooking, fighting off all manner of vermin and dodging life-threatening equipment at every turn. Whatever the cause(s), one night in August I was snoozing peacefully at the Harrell's farmhouse, a cool mountain breeze wafting through my open windows.

Doug told me a few days prior that packs of coyotes – I think he said packs... hmmm, or did he say platoons, or pods, or wads... just not sure. Anyway, I was awakened by howling, snarling, moaning monsters I knew could only be the coyotes... and they were very near the house.

With my newfound farmer courage and a strong desire to protect Doug and Barbara, I bolted upright in my comfy bed, sprung into my city slicker flip flops and galloped down the stairs to investigate the ruckus.

I never experienced true darkness before Harrell Hill. I guess the fact that there isn't a city light, an interstate light pole, not even a stoplight in the holler makes nighttime real. In any event you get the picture... it was DARK outside. I stood on the porch listening as the howling critters moved closer and closer to me. (By the way, I was on the back porch because Barbara had seen a groundhog – and you remember what they do to me – on the front porch days earlier. I wasn't tempting fate by invading his lair.)

So, it's about 2:00 am and I can literally hear the coyote paws striking dew-covered grass nearby. Well, it seemed the right thing to do to GET OUT OF THERE now. I quickly sauntered, okay I stumbled and dashed, into the back door to escape what could be a catastrophic event.

The inside of the Harrell farmhouse is dark like an underground coal mine, so my hands are 'feeling' for the walls as I struggle to again find the staircase and retreat to my warm bed. I was thankful to have escaped yet another vicious wild animal attack... at least so I thought.

It seems that sometime during the early evening house, long after farmer Clint had passed out in my bed, the Harrell's son, two granddaughters and their itty-bitsy teacup Yorkie dog named Kringle had come for a visit.

I finally came upon the stairs and began the steep climb to safety, all the while contemplating the sheer terror of what might have happened to me had the savage coyotes managed to corner me on the porch.

Suddenly, out of the pitch black of night, an animal screamed, it jumped on my bare leg and growled like a grizzly bear... the nightmare was true. I screamed – not sure how my friends slept through the cries for help – and nearly plunged backward down the staircase. I sensed the soft fur and a very wet tongue attacking my legs. I knew it was only moments before the creature would take its first chunk of farmer Clint flesh.

I regained my balance, dropped to my hands and knees, and duck-walked quickly up the mountain staircase... arriving at the landing and frantically searching for the light switch. I knew this was the end; the carnivores would soon drag my lifeless carcass into the woods. But at least I would confront my attackers and put up a fight.

The blinding light shattered the pitch-black night, startling me and the beast. When what to my wondering eyes should appear... but the itty-bitsy Yorkie named Kringle, so glad to see me ☺. I first thought it was a mirage, possibly an out-of-body, near-death experience. So, this is what a coyote looks like? Not what I expected ☺.

My heart nearly stopped... my breathing was labored... my nerves completely frayed... is there no safe place at Harrell Hill Farms? Can a farmer not feel secure in his own farmhouse? (Well it's not actually my farmhouse but you know what I mean.)

I slouched in the corner, unsure of the vision before me... what was it, where did it come from, why was it now sitting in my lap licking my face at 2:30 am? Where were the coyotes, they must be close behind?

That's when I remembered Doug telling me that his son, Greg, and granddaughters were coming for a short visit and would arrive at 9:00 pm or so. "That's it," I said aloud. "This vicious teacup Yorkie must belong to Greg."

I rubbed Kringle's belly, rustled his fur a bit, shooed him down the STEEP staircase and slinked back into my bedroom.

The beasts continued to howl outside, nearer than ever now, but I didn't care. I was tired... I was safe... I was happy... I was home. I had cheated death once again, a new adventure on the Funny Farm.

Still humbled in these hills,

Farmer Clint



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## What is Perfection

By Christy Young  
Mitchell County

What is perfection? The dictionary defines perfection as a condition of quality or being free of flaws or defects. Perfection is something that I have always strived for. I have always prided myself on doing well and pleasing others. But, I will admit often it weighs me down and I feel empty. Striving to please others and finding your self-worth in this world leads only to self-condemnation. It finds root within your heart and weighs you down from the importance of what God's will and purpose is for your life. Romans 8:1 says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." I have begun to realize that perfection is only in the eyes of my Savior. When He chose to create me, He created me perfectly in His image. He loves me in spite of my failures. Although I fail every day, I am embraced in His love and grace. My identity is in the finished work of Christ, not by my accomplishments.

To find peace and self-worth, we must embrace what Jesus has done, repent with a pure heart, and follow the path that Christ has set before us. Let us rest in the work that Christ did on the cross! I find peace in knowing that I can come to the throne of grace, no longer having to bear the weight of my failures. His grace did the work for me and you. God sees you as a masterpiece, His perfect work. He created each of us to fulfill a purpose. What direction will you follow? Will you judge yourself on the standards of this world or that of God?

I challenge you to find your success in your Creator, not the eyes of the world. Strive to mature in your walk with Christ and find your worth in eyes of Jesus. Imagine as He suffered and died for you and me, we were on His mind. WOW! Despite our failures, He loved us SO much that He took our sins upon Himself. As we approach this Christmas season, let us remember what the greatest gift ever given was... JESUS, OUR LORD, and OUR SAVIOR. Find peace through the grace and faithfulness of Christ Jesus. Don't allow the adversary to conform you to believe that you are worthless and imperfect. Always remember that your worth was bought on a cross at Calvary by a God that is faithful, true, and loves you beyond measure.

*Christy Young is the blessed wife of Chris Young and proud mother of Hunter and Holden. She is a life-long resident of Mitchell County, bookkeeper at Young, Miller & Gillespie, PA, and a member of Bear Creek Baptist Church.*



## "Christmas Times A' Comin"

By Bruce Cannon  
Mitchell County

It almost seems impossible that this should be the December edition of the Blue Ridge Christian News, that Thanksgiving has past and we are soon celebrating our Savior's birth. Yes, the cold winds are blowing, some snow has already fallen so "Christmas Times A' Comin."

I love Christmas! For the most part, people have a giving spirit which as we know, began in the heart of God when He gave His Son to be the Savior of the world.

As we prepare for this celebration, and as we celebrate Jesus' birth, let us not let Him get lost in the hustle and bustle of Christmas. There are presents to be bought, trees and houses to be decorated, and parties to attend, but let's keep the main thing the main thing.

One of my favorite verses is John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave..." What did God give?

A. The perfect gift. It's a gift everyone needs, it's the right size and shape, and one that we can all take great pleasure in receiving.

B. A gift that will last forever! It's not one that breaks when it is used but is eternal. Unlike some gifts that wear out with excessive use, this gift gets better and better the more it is used.

C. A gift that does not cost its recipient anything, nor does it cost anyone to give the gift to others. The One who made it possible paid the whole price so this gift can be freely received by all.

What is this gift? It's Jesus. It's salvation. It's forgiveness. It's help, hope, encouragement, love, grace, mercy, peace, satisfaction and fullness of life. And it's so much more!

Faith Hill's song, "A Baby Changes Everything," expresses my sentiments perfectly! This baby changed everything. No longer does mankind have to die lost in sin. No longer does he or she have to face the challenges of this world by himself or herself. This Baby (Jesus) changed all of that!

His death and resurrection, as we all know, makes it possible to go to Heaven at our death AND makes it possible to have Heaven come down to us while we live. For, as Peter wrote in First Peter, we can enjoy Heavenly blessings while still here on earth. We can have His obvious presence, His power, His guidance and so much more here. And it's all because of a baby born at Christmas 2000 years ago.

Enjoy Christmas. Know that you are loved beyond all measure by a God who cared enough to send His very best to you.

Merry Christmas from our home and hearts to you! Bruce and Wendy Cannon



*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14*



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## The Light Still Shines

By Caron Cline  
Burke County

Between 5 and 6 BC, a young peasant girl from Nazareth received an unexpected visitor with a startling message that would forever change not only her life, but the lives of all mankind. Mary led an ordinary life, but she was no ordinary girl. She was a chosen vessel, set apart before the dawn of time for an unfathomable assignment.

*"Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you! But she was greatly troubled at the saying and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be. And the angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High'."*

With heart and mind racing, Mary managed to find the breath to ask, 'How will this be, since I am a virgin?' And the angel answered her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you: therefore, the child to be born will be called holy-the Son of God'."

As this announcement settled upon her, faith arose within her as she answered Gabriel. "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." The angel departed and the waiting began.

Whispers, innuendos, and misunderstandings had become the norm for Mary. In the beginning, she wondered how Joseph could ever believe what had happened to her. Would he break their betrothal by divorce? Would he publicly humiliate her? No, the angel confirmed Mary's explanation and Joseph took her as his wife. Now he, also, shared the burden of judgmental stares and cynical glances. In addition to these difficulties, "a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn."

Every prophecy that Mary had ever heard concerning the coming Messiah had been fulfilled on this night in a dirty stable in the little town of Bethlehem. Often, they had wondered together if this baby would appear significantly different than other newborns. But, no, He seemed so ordinary; and, so far, their reality fell far short of their expectations. Just the two of them in a damp and dark cave filled with animals, waiting for the light of dawn. Yet "in the same region, there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger'. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!' When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us. And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger'."

Mary and Joseph were astounded to learn that shepherds were the first to hear of the Savior's birth yet elated to realize that God was orchestrating every circumstance in spite of evidence to the contrary. Angels had appeared to them in the night sky and announced the birth, they said. The confirmation of God's plan for these new parents, both thrilled and humbled them anew. After seeing the baby Jesus, the shepherds "made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them."

This good news of great joy is for all the people. Isaiah had prophesied hundreds of years earlier, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. You have multiplied the nation; You have increased its joy; they rejoice before You as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil...For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end..." Joy is defined by Webster as 'the prospect of possessing what one desires'. Jesus came to bring joy, that those who believe in Him might have the prospect of possessing a life of purpose and abundance. He came to bring light that those who believe in Him would no longer dwell in the kingdom of darkness but instead would shine as His lights in a dark and hopeless world.

Light always overcomes darkness. Isaiah prophesied for God by saying "It is too light a thing that You should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make You as a light for the nations, that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth". The Messiah would be for all the people. "For God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ". We are now the carriers of His glory; possessors of treasure in earthen vessels. The darker our surroundings, the more obvious our light, because Jesus, the hope of glory, lives in us. He desires that His salvation reaches to the ends of the earth through ordinary people like you and me. During this Christmas season, watch for opportunities to shine the light of Jesus' love among those who



have previously had no room in their hearts for Him. Proclaim the good news of great joy that is for all the people.

Caron Cline is a follower of Jesus Christ who loves to teach the word of God. Her desire is to see every believer growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.

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Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them:  
because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the  
world. 1 John 4:4

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Christmas Memories

By Chris Rathbone  
Mitchell County

Many of you have followed my articles over the past few years. Memories and stories from the past are something I really enjoy sharing. No doubt that my family had some rough times over those years growing up, but if we aren't careful, we allow the rough times to overshadow the wonderful memories that God allows us to make with family and friends over the years. Sometimes it makes me feel a little sad though because I realize that there is no way to go back to those times. However, those memories give us many reasons to give God thanks for allowing us to make them. So, in this month's article, I'll be sharing some random Christmas memories of my childhood.

The Estatoe Church of God was the church in which I grew up. Every year, of course, our church family would have a Christmas program. As a child, many of us were "volunteered" to play a part in those programs. There was always a combination of being scared about being up in front of everyone and at the same time excited to be a part of the plays. Often the parts weren't even speaking parts, but we still got nervous. The simplicity and beauty of those programs will forever be etched in my mind. The power of the story of God loving us so much that He came in the flesh in His Son Jesus was something that, as a boy, I didn't completely understand. However, I never doubted the truth of it. Even now, I still feel the power of God's love in my heart as my church does plays, programs, music, etc., as we choose to celebrate Christ's birth. Every year as everyone was leaving the Christmas programs there at the Estatoe Church of God, we received a gift bag. It was a small brown paper bag filled with an apple, orange, banana, candy cane, and a candy bar. As a child, I was so excited to get that bag of goodies! So many wonderful times shared with wonderful people that I will never forget.

Then, of course, there were family gatherings. On the Atkin's side of the family, my grandmother "Mammie" had 22 grandchildren and no telling how many great-grandchildren. Even if everyone couldn't come to the family Christmas gatherings, there was always a huge crowd. Organized chaos is what it seemed like most of the time. Everyone laughing, talking loudly, eating, etc. If the weather permitted, all the children were outside running around and playing. We didn't even try to buy each other gifts because we were such a large family. So just being together was gift enough. Mammie usually received the gifts. Usually new aprons, bedroom slippers, gowns, and sometimes new dresses she could wear to church. I don't know how she did it, but she was always able to give all the children a few dollars for Christmas. Back then a couple of bucks was a big deal to a boy!

There was also a gathering on the Rathbone side of the family. Every year we would



gather at Paw and Maw's house. Over the years they moved several times. The earliest I remember was the Ol' Wilson place on Cattail Creek in Yancey County. Then they moved down to the what we called The Depot House near "downtown" Pensacola. The last house they lived in was in Burnsville city limits above the Rec. Park. It didn't really matter where, the point was that every year we gathered as a family. In those days the holidays were a wonderful opportunity to basically have a family reunion! And boy did we ever! Talk about some meals! Those occasions were special for sure because we certainly didn't eat like that too often around the Rathbone household. As a boy, the Blueberry Yum Yum was a highlight for me. Most of the time I would go ahead and get me a big ole' bowl full with my meal just to be sure it all didn't get gone (if you know what I mean). Many of my family members that were present then have gone on. It makes me miss them and the times we had but at the same time I'm thankful to have them in my heart.

We certainly can't talk about childhood Christmas memories without talking about some of the gifts! First is the "Brown toboggan experience" as my boys like to call it. Deyton Elementary was the school I attended in the 1st grade. Mrs. Masters was my teacher and was one of my favorites. She was such a sweet lady, firm with making us mind, but sweet and loving in the process. Somehow, I remember these things as if they happened yesterday. We drew names that year for Christmas as a class. The day of our class party came with food and fun. The time came for us to exchange our gifts. Most were just small simple gifts such as a Matchbox or Hot Wheels car for the boys and small dolls for the girls. Mrs. Masters did it alphabetically. As I watched those kids before me open their gifts one by one, the anticipation was building tremendously. I saw the cars, the army men, the toy guns, etc. and was on pins and needles waiting for my name to be called. My name was called, I hurried to the front, got my present and raced to my seat. I quickly tore the wrapping paper off and opened the box. All the while thinking "What will it be? A car, an action figure, a gun, a knife?" My mind was racing with excitement. When I open the box, my heart dropped! There it was in all its glory: A brown toboggan. Now I know that was probably all my classmate's family could afford, but as a boy in the 1st grade, that's not what you think about. Mrs. Masters tried to smooth it over by saying, "Just think, you'll be warm this afternoon when you go outside to play." I didn't want to be warm; I wanted a toy! It was everything I could do to hold back the tears as I looked at that brown toboggan. It's silly now but was certainly a big deal for a 1st grader!

Growing up, Dad and Mom may not have been able to give us a lot for Christmas, but they always made sure we had something to open come Christmas morning. Every year was the same. We didn't buy a Christmas tree. A neighbor allowed us to search on his property and cut one, usually a small white pine that was more akin to a Charlie Brown tree. But by the time we put our decorations on it, we were happy. Back in those days the stringy icicles were popular. Even if the tree wasn't much, by the time we got all those icicles on it most every hole was covered. We loved the lights, especially the ones that twinkled. We would lie on our backs under the tree looking up through the branches watching the lights blink for the longest time. In those days it seemed like Christmas Day took forever to come, but now it's here and gone so quickly. We could hardly sleep on Christmas Eve and would always beg to open a gift. Sometimes they let us and sometimes not. Of course, we were up at 5 am on Christmas morning begging Dad and Mom to get up so we could open our gifts. Such excitement and joy that we as children had because of God's blessings on our family.

Don't misunderstand when I write about these memories. Our family had our struggles, heartaches, and hard times. That's just part of living in this world. We can choose to allow those struggles to rob us of the good we experienced, or we can choose to be grateful for those wonderful memories God allowed us to make. Times sure are different now. All us kids grew up, have families, and lives of our own. Not too often do we get to see each other nowadays. But at the same time, we are making memories with our kids and grandkids. The point is this, be thankful this Christmas for the memories of the past. Make it a priority to intentionally make time for your family so that your kids and grandkids, Lord willing, will have memories to share. Most importantly, make sure that everyone in your family hears about Jesus who made these times possible. Celebrate Him, celebrate His birth, His death, and His resurrection every day. Celebrate God's love for us all and cherish the memories He gives us with family and friends.

I hope everyone has a wonderful Christmas and blessed New Year. Whether you choose to celebrate or not, I pray God's blessings on you and your family. Let us never forget that it's all about Jesus!

Preacher Chris Rathbone serves as Pastor at Mine Creek Baptist Church.



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## Discover Your Ministry

By Alan Griffin

I attended church most of my life, but like so many others that sat in a pew, listened to the sermon, and went home, seemingly unchanged. Sadly, my life-style did not reflect my beliefs. I lived for myself, and only myself. Needless to say, living for myself led to unhappiness. No matter how hard I tried nothing ever seemed to work out. My business, financial, and personal relationships were in ruins. I finally reached the point I couldn't take it anymore. Fortunately, I had the answer inside of me, and on November 8th, 1997, I surrendered my life, my will, my emotions, and my possessions to Jesus Christ. Not once have I ever looked back. *"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all people, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."* Galatians 6:10



The change Christ made in me was nothing short of a miracle. I went from a self-indulging individual to a servant of Jesus Christ and a son of God. Today I spend my time thinking of others and how I can lead them to a closer relationship with God. This is one of the secrets of Christianity. The more you think of, and care for others, the more God thinks of and cares for you. One of the greatest revelations I know to mankind is the more you give the more God gives to you. I am in a contest with God. I try to out give Him. It is a contest I can never win. In the past 20 years He has blessed me beyond my belief. He has been there for me every step of the way, and I must tell you, it is a wonderful feeling. I am never alone. He is always there beside me wherever I am and whatever I am doing. During times of struggle when I can't bear the burden, He carries me bearing the burden for me.

Our ministry started when I was walking to church one day, a young nine-year-old boy named Billy Ray asked me where I was going. I said, "To church, do you want to go?" We sat up in the balcony at church. The next week, he brought a friend. The next week, his friend brought a friend, and so on and so on. In time we bought an 8-passenger van that we would fill with so many kids, it's a wonder we didn't get in trouble. I will always remember Kamari sitting in between the seats because he was the smallest. We moved on to a 15-passenger van with the same results. When people ask me how many kids came to church that day my answer is usually, "I don't know" because there are more kids than seat belts. We drove vans for eighteen years and took hundreds of kids to church. A few years later we added a clubhouse where we meet before and after church for fun and Bible study. We feed the kids breakfast and lunch on Sunday, then take them home. The point to all of this is if you let God work inside of you the results are amazing. *"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."* Romans 8:28

The next step is a comprehensive Bible study program. The Bible is the mind of God or at least a little splinter of it. This splinter, the Bible, is a lifetime of study. You can read it repeatedly learning more the last time than you did the first. It is kind of like peeling an onion. Every time you peel another layer, you learn something else. I have been studying it most of my life and am amazed when I read and discover something I had not noticed before. To get started we pray to our heavenly Father to open our spiritual ears and eyes. Let's ask Him to reveal to us the message He has for us that day. There are numerous study guides that will help us further understand the Bible. Some of my favorites are Billy Graham, J. Vernon McGee, Oliver Green, R. A. Torre, Charles Spurgeon, H. A. Ironside, and, finally, Dwight L. Moody. The Word of God is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path. Through daily Bible study and prayer God will show us the way. *"Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt has lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid."* Mathew 5:13-14

When you first accept Christ as your Savior there is a learning period where you spend time with Him daily. For some, this might only be a few months before they go headlong in their ministry. For many it is a lifetime because without Bible study and prayer we do not grow as Christians. We stay "babies" in Christ and spend our time at church sitting in the pew watching others. Without Bible study and prayer, we do not grow in faith, so it will be difficult for us to grow a ministry. Without Bible study and prayer, the Holy Spirit doesn't have a work inside of us, and we never produce fruit. We become the branches that are cut down and thrown into the fire. We become the one whose seed falls on rocky ground. We hear the Word and receive it immediately with joy, yet we have no firm root because we have neglected our studies. Soon affliction and persecution arise, and we immediately fall away. *"Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation."* 2 Corinthians 5:17-18

Have you known people who move from job to job, whenever conflicts arise because they have not mastered the art of conflict resolution? The same result can occur spiritually in our everyday lives. When you neglect Bible study and prayer, we find ourselves constantly fighting a losing battle, instead of engaging in the good fight of faith. When you continually try to work things out on your own without the assistance of God, you become frustrated, fatigued and worn down. This causes you to give up, or just accept the falsehood of "that's just who I am." You accept being "average" as a way of life and never reach the fullness of His plans for your life. You fail to overcome. *"Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full."* John 16:24

The next step is to find a church where you can get involved. This will not happen in the Sunday service. To fully benefit we must attend Sunday school, Wednesday prayer service, and other occasions. Eventually, you will meet the

people who make the church work. Hang out with them, and soon you will be serving Christ. Don't be afraid to join the choir, help with kids during Sunday school, or Wednesday services. One of the greatest rewards I ever received was working with kids. I tried sharing Christ with adults, but most would not listen. With kids their eyes and ears are wide open. They are receptive to the Word of God. They haven't closed off their minds to the basic principles of being a Christian. *"As the Spirit of the Lord works with us, we become more and more like Him and we reflect His glory even more."* 2 Corinthians 3:18

When you go to school or work you are a minister. The people you talk with every day that have not had an opportunity to accept Christ as their Savior are your responsibility. You are obligated by God to respond to their needs. God has chosen you to share the Gospel with them the good news. As Christ leads you, you lead them. Be prepared so you know what to say. If you apply these principles, the Holy Spirit will lead you in the direction of your ministry, and God will bless you beyond your belief. It is an amazing thing this living for Christ. Christ in you and you in Christ. There is no greater experience on earth.

### The Cracked Pot

There was a water bearer who provided water for the King every day. He had been doing so for many years. He had one good pot and one cracked pot. He walked a mile to and from the well and when he returned to his master's house the good pot was full of water and the cracked pot had leaked half its water on the journey back from the well. The cracked pot became depressed because he felt like he wasn't providing his full share of the water. As they were coming back from the well one day the bearer told the cracked pot not to be distressed because all along the side of the path where the cracked pot was carried were beautiful flowers that brightened up the kingdom. What the cracked pot did not realize is that the water that was lost because of his crack made the flowers grow. You see everyone has a ministry in Christ. *"He will show you, what is good; and what the LORD requires of you? To act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."* Micah 6:8

Please believe I am not trying to brag or boast. I am simply trying to show you what a very average person can do with Christ's help. I would never have done these things on my own. I am not capable of it. It is very important for you to understand the good things you see me do is not me. It is Jesus Christ living through me. I am of average education. I am of average intelligence. I have average means of employment. I am a roofer. I did all these things in my spare time while I continued to work and support my family. One of the things I am proudest of is that I have never taken money for my own benefit. I have volunteered everything that I have done. I have focused my ministry on the principles that Paul the Apostle established in his letters to the New Testament churches. He worked as a tentmaker, and I work as a roofer, taking money I earned and putting it towards the ministry. One person can make a difference. You can make a difference, and I am going to show you how. *"Therefore, I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them."* Mark 11:24

The first thing we need to do is clear a pathway to our mind so we can communicate with God. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred He is already there trying to have an influence in our life. To get an open field of communication we need to clear our hearts of all our sins. I know it sounds complicated but it's not. Thanks to the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ we have an open avenue to our Heavenly Father through prayer. The best approach is to create a prayer journal. Take a notebook, sit down and write out what you want to say to God. Be specific. Start from the beginning and go over your entire life. Things that have separated us from Him is just the beginning. We can go in detail about how we are thankful, about concerns we have for others, and how God wants to use us in Christian service. We should persist in our prayers because we don't get clear directions for our ministry in a day, a week, or a month. Paul and Moses spent years in the desert searching out the will of the Father. When you have completed a prayer, read it to God. When you are finished, put your prayer journal in a very secure place, or shred the pages you wrote. This is a personal letter to God, and it is no one else's business. *"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints."* Ephesians 6:18

A lack of communication with God prevents us from developing an effective prayer life, and an ineffective prayer life leads to a life of mediocrity. Prayer is the key to unlocking the heart of God. When you walk out to your car at night and get in to drive off you turn your headlights on. When you first turn them on you are lucky if you can see to the end of the driveway. When you drive off you can, maybe, see a couple of blocks ahead of you. This is how God works. He may give you an overall picture of your ministry, but He reveals the details a little at a time.

Alan Griffin started the kidsnchrist ministries in November 1997. He has worked with inner city kids for 21 years. He found a need for specialized Biblical literature that would reach people of all ages and has been writing since 2005. The ministry has expanded their websites to reach around the world. Kidsnchrist.com, millennialchristian.com, teensnchrist.com, seniorsnchrist.com, picture-verse.com, and soulworks-smallgroups.com. We had an outreach of over 13,000,000 people last year with 36,000,000 impressions. If you have any questions for Alan you can reach him at alan@kidsnchrist.com




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## Eleven Thousand Scientists Say Population Control Necessary Response to 'Climate Emergency'

By Rev. Mark Creech

"Scientists have a moral obligation to clearly warn humanity of any catastrophic threat to 'tell it like it is.' Based on this obligation and the graphical indicators presented, we declare, with more than 11,000 scientist signatories from around the world, clearly and unequivocally that planet Earth is facing a climate emergency." This is the first paragraph of the apocalyptic sounding document released this week, published in Bioscience, calling for immediate action by world authorities on so-called climate change.

Written by the Alliance for World Scientists, the document lists many of the thing's climate alarmists have proposed before: The need for a carbon-free economy, increases in solar and wind energy, curtailing habitat and biodiversity loss, eating less meat, etc. But something scientists are also calling for in response to this alleged "climate emergency" should send shivers up the spine. They demand population control.

The authors write, "Still increasing by 80 million people per year, or more than 200,000 per day; the world population must be stabilized – and, ideally, gradually reduced – within a framework that ensures social integrity." In other words, fewer humans make for less use of the planet's resources, and, therefore, a more stabilized environment. The suggestion is troubling. Knowing humankind's bent for evil, one can only ponder what public-policy initiatives world leaders might pursue if the climate gurus are believed and if their prognostications are greeted as absolute. What will result? Forced abortions or something worse?

"There are proven and effective policies that strengthen human rights while lowering fertility rates and lessening the impacts of population growth on GHG emissions and biodiversity loss. These policies make family-planning services available to all people, remove barriers to access and achieve full gender equity, including primary and secondary education as a global norm for all, especially girls and young women," the scientists declare.

Well, paint me green. Won't that make your solar panels hot and get your wind-mills to turning!

Never mind that only two years ago, more than 30,000 American scientists



signed a petition challenging the climate change narrative, and more than 9,000 of them held PhDs in their respective fields.

Never mind demographers have been warning for several years that the birth rate of Western nations is below replacement level, which could critically create severe imbalances and prove detrimental to infrastructures, economies, healthcare, and a host of other matters necessary for sustaining western democracies.

Nevertheless, arguments for population control as a means for reducing climate change effects are rapidly becoming mainstream. Beware!!!

Yifat Susskind, in a recent edition of Ms. Magazine, not exactly a pro-life friendly resource, rightly contends "the most nefarious population control projects claim to serve some unassailable social good, like poverty reduction or peace." She further warns that we should be cautious about "rights-based and social justice language that positions contraception and family planning as core strategies to reduce carbon emissions." Susskind cites the El Paso terrorist, who wrote in his manifesto: "If we can get rid of enough people, then our way of life can be more sustainable." "The eco-fascism of the far-right couches its racist intent as concern for the environment demonizes women of color for 'overpopulation' and stokes fears of an end to white racial 'purity' and power. It uses the current specter of looming ecological collapse to reawaken a genocidal impulse...wiping out those deemed unfit to survive," writes Susskind.

Of course, the great question of the hour is who will determine which humans will be allowed to produce more humans and which will not. Or worse still, what if the "powers that be" assess the crisis of climate change is much worse than previously thought, and more than just the unborn must be eliminated? Then who is allowed to stay and who must go? Who makes these incredible determinations?

When it comes to the alleged need for controlling population groups, the world has a terrible track record, and no specific or corporate governmental body has ever proven worthy of trust. Historically, the people targeted have been the poor, people of color, the mentally and physically disabled, political enemies - anyone deemed unworthy by those in control.

Vaclav Klaus, a Czech economist, and politician, who became the second President of the Czech Republic, once referred to global warming hysteria as "a prime example of the truth versus propaganda problem." Having lived through many years of communism, Klaus said: "I feel obliged to say that I see the biggest threat to freedom, democracy, the market economy, and prosperity now in ambitious environmentalism, not in communism. This ideology wants to replace the free and spontaneous evolution of mankind by a sort of central (now global) planning."

"The environmentalists ask for immediate political action because they do not believe in the long-term positive impact of economic growth and ignore both the technological progress that future generations will undoubtedly enjoy and the proven fact that the higher the wealth of society, the higher is the quality of the environment."

When referring to the devil, Jesus admonished, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). The Bible also teaches that the devil employs counterfeits of the great truths of God.

Christ voluntarily gave his life's blood on the Cross to atone for sin, redeem humanity, and the created order. The Bible also teaches that it is not God's will that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9).

Climate alarmists, however, would load us up with unnecessary guilt for using God's good gifts of the Earth, and then tell us the way of atonement for mankind and the planet is by forcibly shedding the blood of thousands, even millions of innocents, through population control.

Reverend Dr. Mark Creech is Executive Director of the NC Christian Action League. You may contact him at [rev.markcreech@christianactionleague.org](mailto:rev.markcreech@christianactionleague.org) or 919-787-0606

*And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. Luke 2:8*



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## Habits of the Heart: A Study of the Spiritual Disciplines

Dr. Jack R. Hodges, Jr.  
Burke County



Paul wrote the following words to young Timothy, who had answered the spiritual call to ministry and was preparing himself to serve the Lord, "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness." (1 Timothy 4:7) The pathway to following Christ Jesus in humble obedience is the pathway of discipline. The Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ came to set us free from sin and death so that we could (and would) follow Him and experience a deep, intimate, and eternal relationship of faith. Our Lord desires that we love Him, follow Him, and serve Him and in order to do that, the Christian must follow the pathway of spiritual discipline. I invite you to take a journey with me over the next months as we dig into what I prefer to call the "Habits of the Heart." These are the spiritual disciplines learned through daily devotion, study, and practice that allow us to most powerfully serve the Lord with all that we are.

You certainly know what a habit is, right? The dictionary defines a habit as: "An acquired behavior pattern regularly followed until it has become almost involuntary." The truth is that we have all developed learned behavioral patterns over the course of our lives that have turned into habits. These are routines, customs, manners, or even quirks that have become a part of our daily lifestyle and/or choices (e.g., I bite my nails when I am anxious or hungry). Many of our habits are unconsciously applied. Some of them, however, we consciously choose when a threatening situation occurs (e.g., we attack, defend, retaliate, run, hide, etc.). Each of these habits, both consciously and unconsciously applied, seeks to help us navigate through life. They are all learned and, more specifically, I believe that they function to help us survive. But God doesn't want us to merely survive—He wants His children to spiritually thrive and serve Him with joy, gladness, and passion. When you were saved by faith in the finished work of Christ on Calvary, He set you free from the bondage to the flesh and this old world.

Unfortunately, it seems that in our time and age, spiritual disciplines (Habits of the Heart) are all too often considered a bothersome, "dirty word" for most Christians. They smack of burden, failure, or legalism. But God calls His people to "discipline [themselves] for the purpose of godliness." These Habits of the Heart are intended for ordinary people who have jobs, families, children, as well as being involved in lay-ministry through their church. Although these disciplines are all too often thought of as some dull drudgery aimed at squeezing out all life and energy from our lives, that is not what these spiritual habits are meant for. I love what Richard Foster describes as their true, godly purpose. He says, "The purpose of the disciplines is liberation from the stifling slavery to self-interest and fear." Let me add that they are designed by God as a part of our training, preparation, and spiritual health. That is what Paul had in mind when he counseled Timothy to "discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness."

What is a consistent spiritual journey about? What are the major elements of discipline in the believer's life? What are the main "habits of the heart?" The Bible doesn't provide a complete list, but we find showered upon every page of scripture the essential elements of a spiritual walk and journey with God in Christ. There appear to be seven generally accepted core disciplines or habits: Solitude; Simplicity; Fasting; Study; Worship; Service; and Prayer. Foster identifies twelve (12) unique and separate spiritual disciplines, which he places into three separate categories: INWARD disciplines; OUTWARD disciplines; and CORPORATE disciplines. Stay tuned as I share with you each month one of these "habits of the heart."

Dr. Jack R. Hodges, Jr. is the Senior Pastor at Pleasant Hill Baptist Church in Morganton, Burke County. He has served as a pastor, a biblical counselor and a International Mission Board missionary.

## The Gift We Need

By John McCoury  
Roan Mountain, Tennessee



You cannot escape Jesus Christ. In Luke 2 His birth affected Caesar's politics (vv. 1-3), the ministry of the angels (vv. 8-15), and the activities of common men (vv. 15-20). On that day, shepherds were looked upon as the lowest; God singled them out to be the first human messengers of the Messiah's birth. His coming touched worshipers (vv. 21-38) and even scholars (vv. 39-52). The angels sang about Him, and He is still the theme of the greatest music. Luke wrote about Him, and He is still the subject of the greatest literature. The shepherds hastened to behold Him, and He is still at the center of the greatest art. Teachers listened to Him and marveled. He is still the focal point for all truth and wisdom.

In His development, Jesus was perfectly balanced: intellectually (wisdom), physically (stature), spiritually (in favor with God), and socially (in favor with man); and He is still the greatest example for childhood and youth. He alone is worthy of our worship! Oh, come! Let us adore Him! THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT, like the magnetic spirit that comes over us and draws us together during this annual season, is literally the Spirit of God working to bring us back to the wonder of the most amazing mystery that has ever struck this earth: that God became human. In the wonder of it all, as believers and unbelievers alike are caught up in that remarkable draw toward the warmth of Christmas, God does a work through this familiar story.

When Jesus came, born in a manger in the obscure town of Bethlehem, His people didn't want their Messiah to look like that. They wanted a warrior with a big sword who could overthrow the powerful Roman government. They wanted someone to bring rescue and revolution. They wanted a political leader who would set up a kingdom and make them charter members. They were waiting for that gift. They wanted a leader who would get rid of the Roman soldiers. But God knew what they needed. He sent them a leader who would get rid of the problem of sin. But when you want somebody to overthrow the government, a little baby born in Bethlehem does not seem like much of a gift at all. Jesus didn't arrive on a white stallion swinging a big sword. He never once talked about overthrowing the government. He had no political agenda. He didn't come to be served, but to serve. He didn't wear a crown, except a crown of thorns.

Christmas is about God's love for the world. It's about God's gift to us. But at Christmas, how do we "thank God for this gift too wonderful for words?" (2 Cor. 9:15) Jesus Christ is the God-man. He is our High Priest, who intercedes for us when we go to the Father with our prayers of confession and praise and intercession and petition. You see, He came to touch the lives of the world. Maybe you've never connected the dots until today. Maybe for you Christmas has been about a tree, an old man with a white beard, a bunch of gifts (some of which you don't even want), and a lot of irrelevant traditions which you've never really been able to put together. Understand this today: Christmas is about God's love for the world. It's about God's gift to us. By simply receiving this gift, a gift you didn't even realize you needed, your whole life can be transformed. If there has never been a time when you have personally committed Your life to Christ, what in the world are you waiting for? This is your moment. It doesn't matter what your age is. It doesn't matter how shameful your past is. Jesus doesn't care what your track record has been. He doesn't care if you've been in church, all your life... It doesn't make any difference whether you know a lot of religious things or can even quote verses from the Bible. If you've never believed in Jesus, you're not going to go to heaven. Jesus is the Way. He is the Truth. He is the Life. Without the Way, there isn't any going. Without the Truth, there isn't any knowing. Without Life, there isn't any living. Come on join the family! God has given you a gift that you need. Today you can receive it.

John McCoury is pastor of Evergreen church in Roan Mountain, Tennessee and also chaplain at Roan Highlands Nursing Center.

And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.  
Luke 2:7



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## Jerusalem Council

By Jim Huskins  
McDowell County



Those who teach that God's instructions for a living have been abolished often cite an important event in Acts chapter 15: the Jerusalem Council.

Supposedly, this Council teaches that "Gentile" Christians are only required to keep the four parts of Torah listed in verse 20: "Write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood." They also teach that Peter claims in verse 10 that Torah is an unbearable burden. Neither of these positions holds up to proper exegesis.

The debate before the Jerusalem Council involved one issue: whether keeping Torah is necessary for salvation. Many have convinced themselves that the council was called to decide if Torah should be abolished, but in fact, no one present at this meeting made such a proposition.

Verse 2 says that Paul and Barnabas had been properly teaching that salvation is a free gift of God by grace through faith and does not depend on works. However, men from Judea came to Antioch and taught that all believers must be circumcised before they can be saved. In order to clarify this matter, Paul and Barnabas traveled to Jerusalem and asked the leaders of the Church to rule. After much debate involving joyful reports of evangelism among Gentiles, the Council declared that circumcision and keeping other aspects of the Torah are not necessary for salvation. They did not, however, say that Torah has been replaced by "grace."

Peter begins the response of the Council in verse 7. He makes it clear that salvation by grace through faith is available to everyone. He makes a powerful statement in verse 9: "(God) made no distinction between us and them." In other words, Jews and Gentiles are the same in God's eyes. This is exactly what Paul teaches in Galatians 3:28 and several other places. Those who claim that Torah is abolished by "grace" teach the opposite. They insist that Gentile Christians constitute a "special" category who are exempt from God's instructions for living.

These same teachers believe that in verse 10, Peter refers to the Torah as a burden which, "Neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear." This is an impossible interpretation because it would make scripture contradict itself. Psalm 19:7 says that Torah is perfect and revives the soul. Psalm 119:44-45 says that keeping Torah continually results in freedom and safety. That's the meaning of the Hebrew idiom "walking in a broad place." Deuteronomy 30:11-16 states that Torah is neither difficult nor distant. This theme will be repeated in 1 John 5:3 and James 1:25 where we are taught that Torah is not burdensome. If God says that Torah is perfect, brings freedom and safety, and is not difficult, then we cannot claim that Peter teaches the opposite.

The "burden" Peter references are the necessity of keeping Torah for salvation. Romans 3:23 teaches that all of us sin. Sin separates us from God. Salvation is impossible without grace made available through the life and death of Jesus. God does not require us to keep Torah perfectly in order to receive salvation. However, those who desire salvation by grace through faith must then make whole-hearted effort to live Godly lives. Jesus makes that clear in John 14:15, "If you love me, keep my commandments." Sin is defined by scripture as violating Torah. Teaching that Christians are under no obligation to keep Torah is the same as teaching that Christians are free to sin. Neither Peter nor anyone present at the Jerusalem Council makes such a claim.

James concludes the findings of the Council. He begins by quoting the prophets: Amos 9, Zechariah 8, Daniel 9 and Isaiah 45. The summation of those prophecies is that God will, in the latter days, unite the nation of Israel with believers from all nations. The terms of this union are spelled out in Jeremiah 31:31-34. The "New Covenant" is Him writing His Torah on our hearts so that all know His ways instinctively. Verse 34 of that passage says that no one will have to be taught about God because all will know Him.

In his summation, James acknowledges that we have not yet reached the culmination of this promise. He is aware that Gentiles who have accepted Jesus were schooled from birth in the ways of pagan worship. He realizes that new converts will need time to learn Godly living. The four items mentioned in verse 20 are intended to curb the worst abuses of paganism. Then in verse 21, which is almost always ignored by teachers of Acts 15, James makes it clear that new believers can and should study Torah every week at Synagogue. They could not study on their own since almost no one could afford to own scripture scrolls.

I've been told by Christians who describe themselves as "on fire for the Lord" that they could not possibly evangelize if God requires: "A lot of stuff that I don't have time to tell you right now." The Great Commission; however, makes it clear that we are to teach new converts to live like Jesus. He walked every day in the Torah. The notion that Gentile believers are only bound to the four items mentioned in verse 20 is ridiculous. Torah is God's instruction manual for how He wants His children to live. The Jerusalem Council underscored this truth by giving both a starting place for learning to live Godly lives and a lifelong process for continuing that study: attending synagogue each Sabbath.

Obedient Heart Fellowship believes that the entire Bible is true and relevant. We accept salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, and we attempt to love and serve Him by keeping his commandments. See Revelation 14:12. We meet each Sabbath—Seventh Day—in Marion. 11:00 A.M. at Bartlett Wellness Center, 551 Burma Road West, 28752 828-460-7913

Jim & Beverly Huskins are members of Obedient Heart Fellowship.

*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6*

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Bird Of Peace

By Christy Lowman  
Burke County

The dove is known as the symbol of peace. It is mentioned in the Bible several times. First, Noah sent the dove out to look for evidence of dry land during the flood. Then, the Holy Spirit flew down in the form of a dove when Jesus was baptized. These are just two examples of how doves were used in the Bible. Did you know you can find a dove right outside your house, on powerlines, in trees, or just walking around pecking the ground for food? If you hear "coo, coo," while you are outside then you just heard a dove.

Doves can be found all over the world and can adapt to any environment except for Antarctica. Some do migrate south for the winter while others stay and endure it.

Doves have small heads, pointed bills, round bodies, and long tail and wing feathers. There are over 300 species in the dove family, but the most common colors are gray, white, brown, and peach. Their wings are very muscular and can take up to 40% of their total body weight. Mourning doves can reach up to 55 mph when in flight. Their wings make a whirling sound while they are flying. Over 3000 years ago, people started training doves to deliver messages for the military, noble figures and royalty. Doves can find their way back home from thousands of miles away!

The common dove that we see, eats up to 2500 seeds a day to meet their high-calorie requirement. They also munch on fruit, plants, insects, grass, and people food. The white-winged dove loves to eat snails for calcium. When doves forage for food they will only walk around and peck the ground. They will not shuffle leaves around to find food as chickens do. Doves are the only bird that can drink water without raising their heads.

In the wild, doves only live 3-5 years, but they are able to live around 30 years in captivity.

Doves mate for life. They build their nests out of sticks, twigs, grass stems, and pine needles. They only have 2 eggs at a time but have up to 9 sets of eggs a year. Both the male and female take turns taking care of the new hatchlings. They do this by secreting milk in their throat that they use to feed them. This milk is called crop milk and has a much higher level of protein and fat than the milk mammals produce for their young.

Christians usually show the dove with an olive branch to symbolize peace. You see the dove being symbolized more often around Christmas time.

This time of year, has become a busy and sometimes chaotic time. The high demands we put on ourselves can make us stressed out and miserable. Sometimes getting together with other family members can not be a very peaceful time. This Christmas I wish you and your family a time of peace. Enjoy Christmas with each other and focus on the real reason for the season: to celebrate Jesus's birth. If He had not been born, there would not be any chance for us to have eternal life.

And who knows maybe you will go outside and find a white dove looking down on you this Christmas season!

Dear Lord, I pray for peace for all of us this Christmas season. I pray we will slow down and take the time to celebrate the real reason for the season: Jesus's birthday! In Jesus's name, I pray Amen.

"And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:10-11

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Christy Lowman is a Christian author and illustrator that lives in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains with her husband and two children. She enjoys writing and illustrating books for all ages. Some of her short stories are published with Guideposts and HCL. Christy gives all the glory to God in everything she does. A portion of every book sold from the Small Bible Character Series will be donated to battle human trafficking. If you enjoy her books, 'like' her author page on Facebook and let her know! You can buy her books at [https://www.amazon.com/s/ref=dp\\_byline\\_sr\\_book\\_1?ie=UTF8&field-author=Christy+Lowman&search-alias=books&text=Christy+Lowman&sort=relevancerank](https://www.amazon.com/s/ref=dp_byline_sr_book_1?ie=UTF8&field-author=Christy+Lowman&search-alias=books&text=Christy+Lowman&sort=relevancerank) You can reach her at <https://www.facebook.com/authorChristyLowman/> or [christysoaps@yahoo.com](mailto:christysoaps@yahoo.com).



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Make Room in Your Heart

By Glenda Ward  
McDowell County

December should be the kindest month of the year. Kindness describes words and actions designed to enrich the life of another person / other people. The birth of Jesus Christ definitely qualifies as an act of kindness. The words were spoken to Joseph, "...for He shall save His people from their sins", (Matthew 1:21), are truly works of kindness.

In Ephesians 5:22, Kindness is listed as one of the fruits of the Spirit. We will never develop kindness as a way of life without the power of the Holy Spirit, however, we must cooperate with the Holy Spirit.

Kind words and kind actions can be life-changing! Kindness develops over time as we open our hearts to become more loving people.

Knowing that the old nature is self-centered, we must consciously learn to keep kindness as our agenda every day. When we do, we will have the help of the Holy Spirit. There is so much blessing in living a life with outstretched arms.

It seems peace is nowhere to be found and the night is anything but silent. You or I may ask, "Lord, what do You want me to do about all of this?" Can one person or family make a difference? It seems I hear a quiet whisper from within say: "The only way to get rid of darkness is to add more light."

Jesus said, "Ye are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). He lives within us and wants to shine through us. Through His power, we can let that happen this Christmas season and throughout the coming New Year.

We shine when we are kind by simply treating those we interact with in a considerate way; we can brighten someone's day and way. Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if you have love one to another" (John 13:35).

We also radiate when we are real within ourself. One of my favorite Thanksgiving/Christmas decorations is a mosaic candle holder. When a candle is placed inside it, all the broken pieces multiply and spread the light. The seemingly imperfect places in our lives can do the same. We don't need to have it all together. We just need to say, "Jesus, please use all of me for your glory."

When we are real, others are drawn to us and that gives us the opportunity to brighten their lives with encouragement. Every thoughtful word or act is a spark that can spread farther than we might ever realize.

Most importantly, we shine because we keep Jesus Christ first. No matter what anyone may say, He is still the reason for the season – and the reason for the light within us. Our Savior knows there will always be heartbreaking news headlines. They existed the night He was born as a baby in Bethlehem and will continue until He comes again. He also knows that because of what He did on the cross and through His resurrection, the darkness has already been defeated.

Every time we see Christmas lights this Christmas, let us remember this invitation and celebration: "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee" (Isaiah 60:1). The darkness will not last forever. The light always wins in the end. And we can all make this world a little brighter wherever we are today.

Delight in both the simplicity of the story of Jesus and how His birth has changed you forever.

Glenda Ward is a member of Grand View Baptist Church in McDowell County. She is the mother of five grown children. Glenda is a Christian writer/author of "Something to Think About" – weekly Christian Articles. She writes Church Programs & Bulletins, VBS Material, Christmas and Easter Programs; all material based on the KJV of the Bible. Also testing the field in tributes, individual memorial writings, etc.



Having The Right Attitude Towards The Lost

By David Valls  
Mitchell County

Since the Christmas season is approaching, I was going to write something about the importance of the season and then continue our series on the purpose of salvation. That planned changed. The Lord has burdened my heart to write something different. I was listening to a song by Casting Crowns entitled "Does Anybody Hear Her".... The song talks about people all around who are lost and hopeless searching for hope. As I was listening, I thought about all the people around us with that need to know about Jesus and yet many times they go unnoticed, unseen and unheard. They are trying to find the hope that is inside of us. We (the church) are the ones that bear the responsibility to share with those who feel unloved, unwanted, unseen and unheard. They need to know there is a Jesus that loves the unlovable, desires the undesirable and wants the unwanted.

Many times, we are quick to pass judgment on people that we have never even met... and because we do not feel they meet our "lofty" expectations, we may look the other way. Is that the Jesus we want to portray to the lost? We are to speak the truth in love and give constructive criticism rather than judgmental criticism, which amounts to finger-pointing and thinking we are somehow more righteous than the lost. Let us never forget we were once lost just as they were! Being saved does not make us no longer sinners. We are still sinners saved by God's amazing Grace, which we did not nor could ever earn! Romans 3: 23 says "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

Let us be more like the publican and less than the pharisee, who lifts our heart toward heaven and says Lord I'm glad I am not like that publican... or are we more like the publican who would not even look toward heaven and smote his chest and say Lord be merciful to me? Because we often think so highly of ourselves, our attitude toward the lost is pharisaical... showing them how good we think we are, rather than showing the love of Jesus. If they only think they are welcome in church if they meet OUR standards, then they will get the impression that Jesus will not accept them as they are. Gone are the days when people just come walking into church. If they will not come to us, then we must go to them! We must witness to the lost in this world. In the area we live, it is often assumed everybody already knows about Jesus...but you would be surprised to find how untrue this is. The best way for people to hear about Jesus is for we the church to take the message to them by going outside the walls of the building and making disciples. Matthew 28: 19-20 Jesus says "Go, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." We should not want our failure to mention Jesus to even one person, result in them missing out on heaven.

David Valls attends Middle District Freewill Baptist Church in Buladean. I am from Mitchell County. I have been the adult class Sunday school teacher for the past 13 years.





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## Four People Killed At A Family Gathering In Fresno: Why We Need To Emulate The Kindness Of Tom Hanks

By Jim Denison



I had planned to begin my article today by focusing on the kindness of Tom Hanks, whose portrayal of Fred Rogers will open in theaters this Friday. Then I opened my computer this morning to learn that another shooting was making headlines.

Fresno Police Lt. Bill Dooley described the tragedy: "This was a gathering, a family and friend gathering in the backyard. Everyone was watching football this evening when unknown suspects approached the residence, snuck into the backyard and opened fire." Ten people were shot and four died.

Tom Hanks "is just as nice as you think he is". The more that violence fills the news, the more we need examples to give us hope. That's why Tom Hanks is such an important model for our culture.

Hanks' movies have grossed nearly \$10 billion worldwide. His portrayal of Fred Rogers will be at least his seventy-first film.

But Hanks is known at least as much for who he is in real life as for who he is on the movie screen. His powerful recent interview with the New York Times is subtitled: "Hanks is playing Mister Rogers in a new movie and is just as nice as you think he is."

Here are some examples cited by the Times reporter: When Hanks was shooting *Angels & Demons* in Rome, a bride and her father couldn't approach the chapel because of the film crew, so Hanks stopped filming and escorted them to the altar. He once bought some boxes of Girl Scout cookies, then offered selfies to passers-by as an enticement to buy. He found a woman's student ID and used his Twitter feed to get it back to her.

What do college students want most in a mate?

Time magazine reports that researchers asked 2,700 college students to narrow down the characteristics that were most important to them in a lifetime mate, and one emerged from all cultures: kindness.

Kindness works for churches: Congregations in California are responding to the state's housing crisis by sharing their parking lots with people who live in cars, providing mobile showers for the homeless, and exploring ways to build affordable apartments on their own land. One minister explained: "This is just one part of how we live out our faith."

Kindness works for managers: according to Forbes, science now shows that it's more productive to praise people for their successes than to correct their mistakes.

Kindness even works for popes: Pope Francis hosted 1,500 homeless and needy people for lunch yesterday as the Roman Catholic Church marked its World Day of the Poor. Last week, a mobile clinic was set up in St. Peter's Square, where volunteer doctors gave free specialist health care to the poor.

Why is kindness so rare?

Why is kindness newsworthy? One reason is that it is so rare.

The Times reporter tells us that Hanks altered his schedule for their second interview. They were in Santa Fe, with an elevation of 7,200 feet, and the reporter had gone to an urgent care center for oxygen that morning.

So, Hanks changed his plans for the day and met her ahead of their appointment so she could leave town earlier. She contrasts his graciousness with numerous other celebrities she has interviewed who were noteworthy for their rudeness.

A secular culture that defines our success by prosperity doesn't leave much margin for helping others find prosperity at our expense.

"Our citizenship is not of this world."

That's the negative side of our subject, so here's the positive: when we treat kindly those we don't have to treat well, we obey and emulate our Lord.

Consider the obedience of kindness. Jesus taught us to "love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High" (Luke 6:35). His best friend reinforced his message: "Let us not love in word or talk but indeed and in truth" (1 John 3:18).

Now let's note the way kindness emulates our Savior. James Koester of the Society of Saint John the Evangelist: "We live in a world where Me is king. But our citizenship is not of this world. We are citizens of another country, whose king is a servant, whose orb is a towel, whose scepter is a washbasin, whose crown is humility, and whose motto is service. As citizens and subjects of that kingdom, we cannot swear ultimate allegiance in any other way than taking up our towels, holding our basins, and getting down on our knees."

However, let's remember that one of the "fruit of the Spirit" is "kindness" (Galatians 5:22). That's why we should pray today and every day for the Spirit to help us be kind to those who need such grace.

Why "everybody can be great"

On February 4, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his last sermon at Ebenezer Baptist Church. He preached from Mark 10:43, where Jesus stated, "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant." Dr. King offered these observations:

"Everybody can be great because everybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve. You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don't have to know Einstein's theory of relativity to serve. You don't have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve.

"You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love. And you can be that servant."

Will you "be that servant" today?

Jim Denison Ph.D speaks and writes on cultural and contemporary issues. His daily column is distributed to more than 113,000 subscribers in 208 countries. See more on the website [www.denisonforum.org](http://www.denisonforum.org). Copyrighted and printed by permission from Denison Forum.

# WANTED

## THE WESTERN SIZZLIN STEAK OF THE WEEK



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Will God say, "Well Done"?

By Rev. John B. Sorensen

When you arrive in Heaven, do you want to hear God say, "Well done, good and faithful servant"? I do, and I hope you do too.

We know that God is the "author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2) but finishing strong isn't something that just happens. It must be worked on.

One way we can finish strong is to share our faith. One of the last commands Jesus left us was to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:18).

When we share our faith intentionally, we bear eternal fruit. People will give their lives to God. This is not good news for a moment. This is good news for eternity! The fruit of our obedience will last forever. And, praying with others to receive the free gift of eternal life is one of the greatest joys that we, as believers, can experience.

Is this what you live for – to share the best news of all with the people around you? Are you being a light to your family? Your friends? Your neighborhood? Your world?

I've met many believers whose main purpose is to reach others for Jesus Christ. They have surrendered their lives to what the Lord has called them to do, to live for His glory, and to use the talents that God has entrusted to them to spread His Kingdom. I have no doubt they will finish strong and hear the words, "Well done."

Let me tell you, there is nothing more rewarding than knowing you are being faithful to our Lord's Great Commission and that you have had a part in telling people how they can go to Heaven someday.

Do you want to make sharing the Gospel part of your daily lifestyle? You can start right now:

1. First, surrender your life, your will, and your future to God. Determine to obey Him in all ways, including the Great Commission.
2. Ask God to fill you with deep compassion for those who are lost around you – the ones who are a heartbeat away from eternity, with or without God.
3. Intentionally share the Good News of eternal life with the same love and compassion that God showed us.
4. Continue to disciple those who pray to receive the free gift of eternal life and help them grow in their faith.

As followers of Christ, the greatest legacy we can leave is to be remembered as those who talked about Jesus and the Gospel. Let's finish well together and strive to hear those coveted words, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

Rev. John B. Sorensen, D.D. is the President/CEO of Evangelism Explosion International, headquartered in Arden, N.C. EE has been a leader in equipping Christians to share their faith for more than 50 years. For more free tips and resources, visit [evangelismexplosion.org](http://evangelismexplosion.org).



Hello from The Shire!

By Nancy Malik  
Avery County



Christmas time is near, always a wonderful time here in the High Country of the Blue Ridge; Avery County. Avery County sends out thousands of Christmas trees every year to the rest of the country and the world! What a great thing to be remembered for; Christmas Trees. Martin Luther, in the early 1500s, as a devoted Christian, is said to have brought an evergreen into his home and decorated it with lights to symbolize God's ever-green life and the light of Christ.

Christians have had ways of celebrating the birth of Christ for centuries and countries around the world join together to remember the birth of a precious baby, sent from heaven, for our souls! Here, the celebration is full of joy for His birth!

Brenda Kay and Kenny Melton are great examples of people who give with all their hearts! Brenda Kay, owner of Brenda Kay's fabrics and florals, across the street from our new community pool in Newland, and her son, Kenny, gather toy donations and money every fall from the people of the community to donate to the Niswonger Children's Hospital and Salvation Army in Johnson City every December.

The Melton's hearts are huge, but their way to raise money and get toy donations is sweet. If you would like to donate to this loving cause, please stop by Brenda Kay's shop and do that. Look around at her beautiful inventory of fabrics and florals. They are unique. She creates vases of beauty for events from new babies to weddings and beyond. Great gift ideas are there and crafts to create as your heart desires!

Kenny will have his 18-wheeler parked out in the Roses/Ingles shopping center in early December for donations to his worthy cause. Please bring your donations of new toys, not used, as the children at the hospital cannot take them due to their compromised immune systems.

Brenda Kay also makes thousands of red bows for garland for the Christmas season and her store is full of life. If you ever need prayer, stop by. One is always ready!

Merriest Christmas, beautiful Avery County. We are blessed beyond belief to live in a gorgeous part of the country, that loves the Lord so much and shows it!

Nancy Malik and her husband moved to Avery County in 2017. Her husband passed in 2018. She is a member of Heaton Christian Church. Nancy taught preschool, elementary school and middle school over many years. She is the grandmother of eight!

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# Tim's Treasures

## The Christmas Wish

By Timothy W. Tron  
Burke County

My time at Crossnore may have ended recently as the Lord has led me elsewhere, but there will forever be a piece of me in that special place. There were many heartbreaks, many moments where you felt your heart being torn in two. Of all the many unexpected blessings, my fondest memory is that of bedtime. For not only did it mean the end of a usually very tiring day was at hand, but it also allowed for us staff, Cottage Parents, to perform the duties of putting to bed the little ones.

As you might imagine, we would read from their favorite books, speaking softly and cherishing their laughter. Then when it came time to tuck them in for the night and quietly leave the room, they would be one more request. Before you could make it to the door, they would ask for one last favor; to pray with them. For every prayer lifted, you could always be assured of one request that was never forgotten, one prayer request that every single child would ask, "Mr. Tim, would you please pray that I get to go home soon."

Your heart would break once more as that tender voice spoke in sweet, hushed tones.

No matter how close we might have felt to each child, no matter the bonds that were formed, you knew then what mattered most in their little hearts; going home. The stories from which they had survived were often horrific and beyond belief. The majority of them were there because of no fault of their own. Their only wish was to return to a place that had caused so much trauma, so much bleakness, that it created an environment so unhealthy that they had been physically removed for their own safety. Yet, each one, no matter how severe the despair, would ask to return.

It would literally tear your heart into pieces as tears would come to your eyes each night you closed your eyes to pray for them.

They knew that no matter what, the Children's Home was not their home, but the place from which they came was their true home, if in name only.

Likewise, Jesus knew that this world was not his home. As he said in the gospel of Matthew, "And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven." And he reminded his disciples in the gospel of John, "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

Unlike those forsaken children at Crossnore, Jesus knew that this earth was not his home. He was also aware that his Heavenly home was not his home in name only, but that He was of his Father. He, Jesus Christ, was and is the Son of the only one true living God, sent to earth to die for the sins of the entire world, and even those yet to come; even those little children who asked for prayers in His Holy name.

How precious it was to hear of those little voices lifting in prayer their needs and concerns of others. So often they would pray for those whom they felt less fortunate; when in truth, they were more needful. It was obvious what Jesus meant when he said in the gospel of Matthew, "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

We might imagine one night, as Mary knelt beside the bed of the young Jesus, that he too, might have asked for the same prayer. How heartbroken Mary might have been at first if Jesus would have asked that same question, "Please pray that I might go home soon to be with my real Father," but when she realized the miracle to which she had been glorified, she would have known that it was the truth.

Yes, the birth of Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, was the answer to the curse of sin from the first man, Adam. We celebrate each year this precious gift, and with each season, those forgotten children suffer the heartaches of being away from their home. Although they are richly rewarded with bountiful blessings of donations and tidings, they would quickly tell you in the end, the gift they would prefer over any other, was not one of this world, not of the flesh, but that to return home; to go from whence they came.

And so, it was with Christ; that he too may return to His Father when his work on earth was done; his meat as he called it; to do the will of His Father.

Each of us can be thankful that when we walk with Christ, we too, can claim the victory in defeating death because of his sacrifice for our sins. "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come."

Yes, this world is not our own, but that which is in Heaven, that kingdom to come.

So, this Christmas season, be thankful to have an earthly home with all the riches of the season. But most of all, pray for those little ones separated from their mommies and daddies, for whatever reason. And at the end of the day, when the gifts are opened and the last dish washed, pray this prayer. That no matter where on this earth we might be, that as Jesus said, "For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God," that we all may too someday finally go to our real home, that which is in Heaven.

And in this Christmas season, take a moment to give thanks for all you have that is not of this world. And lastly, be sure to say a prayer for those who are less fortunate because they might be closer than you think.

Merry Christmas to all.

Thanks be to God.

"They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." -Jn.17:16



"Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come." -Heb.13:13-14

Timothy W. Tron lives in Collettsville, NC. with his family. He is the former Director of the Trail of Faith in Valdese, where he still volunteers and helps with tours. He now teaches Math full time at Watauga High School in Boone. He is the author of a new Christian series, "Children of the Light," with the first book being, "Bruecke to Heaven," and his recent book, being the second, "The Light in the Darkness." He is an active blogger, artist, and musician. Timothy also has a BSEE from UF, and is a Lay Speaker. He can be reached at twtron@live.com

And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. Luke 2:7



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## Regional News

**Baptists on Mission** - Mission teams are needed to do Vacation Bible School, Evangelistic Outreach, and Construction projects in our partner states of Alaska, Vermont, Maine, and Pennsylvania. Mission teams can make a great impact in reaching these communities for Christ. Visit our website for full lists of projects at <https://baptistsonmission.org/Mission-Projects/United-States/New-England> or contact NC Baptists on Mission at 919-467-5607 or [mabernathy@ncbaptist.org](mailto:mabernathy@ncbaptist.org)

**Deep Impact Kids**, Are you looking for a mission opportunity for the children in your church? Deep Impact Kids will be serving in many communities across the state with hands-on mission projects designed for 1st-6th-grade children. Sign up your church now for a weekend, mini-week, or full week at one of these locations: Camp Cale, Red Springs, Shelby, Mundo Vista, Caswell, or Truett Baptist Camp. For more information contact Dollie Noa at [dnoa@ncbaptist.org](mailto:dnoa@ncbaptist.org). Website <http://baptistsonmission.org/camps/di-kids>

### Events at the Billy Graham Library -

Kids Paint on the Patio December 10, 2019, 2:00 - 4:00 and December 17, 2019, 2:00 - 4:00 Celebrate the true meaning of Christmas at the Billy Graham Library with a children's craft on our heated patio. Children will be led and coached to exercise their artistic abilities (no matter the skill level) in creating a Christmas-themed craft to take home.

Snacks, warm drinks, and storytime will be included as we gather together for this Christmas-themed painting activity. Suggested for children ages 12 and under. The cost is \$25 per child. Space is limited. All sales are final, no refunds provided.

Craft on the Patio (Adults) December 11, 2019, 2:00 - 4:00

Take a break from the busyness of the season for a relaxing afternoon at the Billy Graham Library. Exercise your artistic abilities (no matter your skill level) and craft a holiday decor item to take home as a reminder of the true meaning of Christmas.

Snacks and warm drinks will be provided as we gather together for this Christmas-themed activity. Suggested for adults and teenagers (ages 12+). The cost is \$25 per person. Space is limited. All sales are final, no refunds provided.

Paint on the Patio (Adults) December 18, 2019, 2:00 - 4:00

Take a break from the busyness of the season for a relaxing afternoon at the Billy Graham Library. Exercise your artistic abilities (no matter your skill level) while being led by a professional artist to create a beautiful canvas to take home as a reminder of the true meaning of Christmas.

Snacks and warm drinks will be provided as we gather together for this Christmas-themed painting activity. Suggested for adults and teenagers (ages 12+). The cost is \$25 per person.

**Ombudsman Program** - Volunteers needed to advocate, protect the rights of long-term care residents

Boone, NC (June 26, 2019) - The High-Country Area Agency on Aging Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program is calling for volunteers in Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey Counties. Volunteer ombudsmen, also known as Community Advisory Committee's (CAC) serve as advocates for residents living in nursing homes and assisted living facilities.

CAC members are trained, certified volunteers who are assigned to a local long-term care facility to advocate for residents' rights.

To learn more about becoming a volunteer ombudsman or to request an application, call Stevie John at (828) 265-5434 Ext. 126 or visit the High-Country Area Agency on Aging website at [www.highcountryaging.org](http://www.highcountryaging.org).

**BIBLE STUDY FELLOWSHIP** - Acts and Letters of the Apostles

In The Acts and Letters of the Apostles study, we see evidence of God's Unstoppable Spirit, the growth of His Unstoppable Church, and the Unstoppable witness of His people. Join us for this incredible study. Women Begin Thursday, September 12 - May 7, 2020

Women's Day group meet @ First Presbyterian Church, Spruce Pine 10 am-11:30 am Mitchell County Women's Evening group meet @ Grassy Creek Baptist Church, Spruce Pine 5:45 pm-7:15 pm Mitchell County

Men's Begin Tuesday, September 10, Men meet @ Higgins Methodist Church, Burnsville 6:55 pm-8:25 pm - Yancey County Contact: Nancy Ball (843)597-1196 (Day Women) - Angie Woody (828)467-3830 (Evening Women)

### Avery County

#### Christmas Services At Mountainside Lutheran Church

Mountainside Lutheran Church in Linville invites you to celebrate the Advent season with Sunday worship services at 10 am. Our Christmas Eve service is scheduled for December 24 at 6 pm and our Christmas Day service at 10 am. For the first time, Mountainside is offering a Christmas Day service for members and guests in the area.

"We invite you to join us in worship for our special Christmas services," states Pastor Bryan Chestnutt, "celebrating the beautiful and powerful love of God, who dwells among us, to fill us with the joy and peace of Jesus."

Centerpieces of the church during the holiday season are a towering Christmas tree decorated with numerous ornaments that are handcrafted by members of the church and a large handmade crèche.

Mountainside Lutheran Church, a member congregation of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, is located on the grounds of Camp Linn Haven on US Hwy 221/ NC-181 near Linville. Visit the church website at [www.mountainsidelutheran.org](http://www.mountainsidelutheran.org) or contact us at [mountainsidelc@bellsouth.net](mailto:mountainsidelc@bellsouth.net) or 828-733-4404.

### Burke County

**Catawba River Baptist Association** - Mission Insight Training - MissionInsight is a tool that enables churches to better understand their congregations and community

at large and is free to each of our CRBA churches. It uniquely integrates information about your congregation and visitors with demographic and analytical tools to help you solve your most complex strategic missional challenges. Imagine knowing which projects are most needed ahead of time, what is needed in your neighborhood and what may be changing in your community before those changes happen, enabling you to adapt your future missions accordingly. This training will be offered on Wednesday, December 18th, at 10 a.m. at our CRBA office in Morganton. This free training will be conducted by specialist Chuck Campbell from the Baptist Convention of North Carolina. Whether a pastor, staff member or church leader, this training will help you as you plan to reduce lostness in your community. While this is free, each person is encouraged to call our CRBA office at 828-437-0137 so we can help you be prepared for this wonderful training.

How do you take a new Christian and help them to become a reproducing disciple? That is a question many have asked and have had difficulty finding the answer. To help our leaders train their church members to become reproducing disciples we will train participating pastors/leaders for 10 weeks beginning January 21st at 10 a.m. at our CRBA office. We (Chuck Campbell and I) will be demonstrating the G3 discipleship tool (The Imperative Life of a Christ Follower) for the purpose of duplicating it in our CRBA churches. We will first be training pastors and staff and then will offer to other leaders. If you are interested in being trained in using this wonderful discipleship tool; meeting weekly for ten weeks and then reproducing it in others, please give us a call at our CRBA office.

Our Annual Toy Store Ministry is approaching quickly, and we are now scheduling volunteers to serve four-hour shifts from December 9th through the 11th. The opportunities are below:

- Shoppers
- Counselors
- Churches to bring a meal for the volunteers
- People to check-in our guests
- People to help set-up on Sunday afternoon (December 8th) beginning at 1 p.m.
- People to help clean-up on Wednesday afternoon (December 11th) beginning at 2 p.m.

We are celebrating 25 years of consistent ministry to Burke County families during the Christmas season. Please join us by praying and volunteering. To volunteer please call our CRBA office at 828-437-0137.

**Downtown Morganton Events** - December 3, 2019 - Morganton Christmas Parade at 6:00 pm; December 14, 2019 - Holiday Farmers Market - 10:00 - 2:00 pm at Morganton Mini Market, 111 North Green Street; December 17, 2019 at 7:00 pm, The 5 Browns -City of Morganton Municipal Auditorium, 401 S College St; Holiday Carriage Rides, November 23 - December 28, 2019; 9

Where: 102 East Union Street - Carriage pick up will be located on the East Union Side of the Courthouse Square; When: Fridays and Saturdays November 23-December 28; 5:30-9:00 pm; There is no better way to view downtown Morganton's Christmas lights than with a horse-drawn carriage ride through town. Whether it is a romantic evening for two or an evening out with the family, enjoy carriage rides in downtown Morganton throughout the holiday season. Tickets are \$5 for Adults and \$3 for Children 12 and under; Carriage Rides may be booked beginning at 5:00 pm on the night of your preferred ride. No advanced bookings will occur. Carolina Carriage Company staff will be on-site (East Union ...Street adjacent to Courthouse) beginning at 5:00 pm to take your reservation. Rides begin at 5:30 pm and will depart from the Courthouse Square on East Union Street lasting approximately 20 minutes; No call ahead reservations are accepted. Carriage Rides are offered every Friday and Saturday from November 23rd through December 28th. (Free carriage rides offered on Saturday, November 23rd. First come, first served). Be sure to dress warmly as these rides occur after dark!

**Great Hope Seventh-Day Adventist Church** - CHRISTMAS MUSICAL CONCERT with lovely and rich soprano voice of Monique Jenkins, accompanied by Judy Cobb on the piano. This will be on Saturday, December 14, at 7:00 pm. Great Hope Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2907 US Highway 70, Morganton (across from Foothills Thrift Store in Drexel). Free admission

**JIRDC Annual Christmas Parade** - Dec 5, 2019, 3:00 PM - The Center's gates will close at 2:30 in order to get everyone parked before the event begins. The Christmas Parade at J. Iverson Riddle Developmental Center will feature marching bands, fire trucks, floats and a visit from Santa Claus. The whole family will enjoy this free event. Call (828) 438-6586 for more information. J. Iverson Riddle Developmental Center, 300 Enola Road, Morganton, NC 28655

Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church Events - The Giving Heart Thrift Shop is OPEN every Tuesday and Thursday from 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Like us on Facebook at @thegivingheartthriftshop, The Giving Heart Thrift Shop is a ministry of the Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church.

God's Closet - Morganton FREE Shop Day! Just in time for the Christmas shopping season! Sunday, November 3, 2019, from 2:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m., at the Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2187 Jamestown Road, Morganton, N.C.

\$1.00 Entrance Fee and then all the clothing is FREE! There will be clothing for children ages 0 - 18 years old! Also, FREE childcare while you shop or they may shop with you, your choice!

Journey Through Bethlehem takes place on Thursday, December 5th. through Sunday, December 8th., from 6:30 p.m. - 8:30 p.m., each night. Please join us for this interactive Nativity experience! There will be live farm animals, music, hot chocolate, and cookies! This event is completely FREE! Journey Through Bethlehem will take place at the Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2187 Jamestown Road, Morganton, N.C. Golf cart rides will be available for handicap visitors.

**Rutherford College** - Our Annual Christmas Parade and Town Hall Christmas will take place on Saturday, December 14th beginning at 1 pm. The Town Hall Christmas

will immediately follow the parade inside.

**Valdese Events**

November 26 through December 24 | Lights are on nightly from 6 pm to 9 pm  
Apple Cider & Hot Chocolate will be on sale for \$1.00 in the visitor's center  
November 30th: Shop Small! Shop Local! Shop Small Business Saturday!  
Check out the local shops in Downtown Valdese and support our local merchants!  
December 7: Valdese Annual Christmas Parade  
Downtown Valdese will kick off the Holiday Season from Church Street to Morgan Street as Main Street fills with everything from fire trucks to go-carts! P&W Railroad Museum will have an open house at the Old Rock School. Interested in being in the parade? Go to [visitvaldese.com](http://visitvaldese.com) to download the free application.  
December 7: Movies at the Rock presents A Christmas Carol (2009)  
Old Rock School Auditorium 7 pm | \$2 Admission | Registration is preferred | Visits with SANTA!  
Concessions will be available | Doors open at 6:30 pm  
December 13-15 and December 20-21: Old Colony Players Christmas – A Christmas Story  
Old Rock School Auditorium | December 13,14, 20 and 21 at 7:30 pm; December 15 and 22 at 3:00 pm | Go to [oldcolonyplayers.com](http://oldcolonyplayers.com) or call 828-522-1150 for info.  
December 13: Christmas in Valdese  
Celebrate the Christmas Season in Valdese on the Old Rock School front steps beginning at 6 pm. Enjoy a tree lighting celebration with Santa and a special presentation of Christmas Carols by the Valdese Elementary School Children.  
December 14: Mingle with Kris Kringle at the Old Rock School  
Sponsored by the Valdese Fire Department, the event will feature a pancake breakfast, face painting, and meet in greet with not only SANTA but SPARKY too! Admission is \$2 per person. 3 sessions will be available at 8:30 am, 9:30 am, 10:30 am and registration opens November 1st at [visitvaldese.com](http://visitvaldese.com).

**Lincoln County**

**Corinth Baptist Church**, 7929 West NC 10 Hwy, Vale, NC 28168 (1/2 mile west of Banoak Elementary School), will present a LIVE NATIVITY on Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings, December 6, 7, & 8, from 6-8 PM. Light refreshments will be available in the Fellowship Hall and crafts for children. The event is FREE and open to the public. For more information, contact the church office at 704-462-1547.

**McDowell County**

**Cross Mill United Methodist Church** - Cross Mill United Methodist Church in Marion is now accepting donations of NEW items for an upcoming fundraising auction. Proceeds from the auction will go toward much-needed church building repairs and our 24/7 Sharing Food Pantry Ministries. Any business and/or individual donations would be greatly appreciated. Call 828-460-9257, 828-442-8098 or 828-803-8790.

**New Community Outreach** Benefits McDowell Families with Children Teens for Christ B.E.A.R. Closet  
(Baby Equipment and Resource Closet) - Beginning Wednesday, August 1st, 2018 the youth group at Cross United Methodist Church located at 85 West Cross Street in Marion will launch a new outreach ministry benefiting families with children The outreach will be open the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of the month 4:00 to 6:30 p.m. and the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. For more information or if you are interested in volunteer opportunities call (828) 803-8790 or email [TeensforChristBEARcloset@yahoo.com](mailto:TeensforChristBEARcloset@yahoo.com)

**First Baptist of Marion** - The Children's Committee is creating a library for the children and families with the church and daycare. We are accepting donations of new and gently used books for children of all ages and reading levels, as well as resources for parents. The donations will supplement the selection of books currently on hand. Please leave donations in the main office. Thank you!!!  
A Christmas Musical: Heartstrings - If you love Christmas stories and the impact they can have on your faith, then we have a new story for you this Christmas Season!  
In less than a month, the FBC Marion Christmas stage production begins. Join us for this three-week developing story about angels, musicians, life getting messy, and God working Christmas miracles! The story is told through a variety of new and traditional music.  
Wednesday Evenings December 4, 11, and 18 6:30-7:15 p.m. Youth Ministry Center

**Mitchell County**

**Annual Christmas Parade** – Saturday, December 7, 2019 – 6:00 – 7:00 pm. Join the town of Bakersville to celebrate the holiday season!

**Celebrate Recovery** - This is a Christ and Biblical Based Program, giving hip and help for men, women, and families suffering from addiction. Any questions contact Josh Wise@ 385-0061  
There will be a meeting every Thursday night with someone there to talk to men, women, and their families. There is also a Children's program.

**Grassy Creek Baptist Church** - We will have our Christmas programs on December 15th. The Cantata, "The Name Jesus", will be Sunday morning at 11 am service and our Youth Play, "Twas the Clash Before Christmas", Sunday night @ 6:30 pm. The candlelight service will be on December 22nd at 6:30 pm. Thank you very much for your help.

**Journey to the Manger** - a Live Nativity - Saturday, December 21, 2019 at the Bakersville Creek Walk from 6:00 – 9:00 pm. Don't miss this special event, brought to you by ten local churches as part of Bakersville's Christmas 'neath the Roan festivities.  
Follow the Journey, which begins at the Fire Department end of the Creek Walk, and commences at the Manger to welcome the birth of Jesus.  
The Fire Department will be selling hotdogs, chips & drinks starting at 4pm. There will be a live Christmas performance after the Nativity and 4-H will sell s'mores & hot chocolate near the Creek Walk pavilion.

**Mitchell County Chamber** – A Mountain Christmas Trail of Lights Coming to Mitchell County!  
Calling all businesses, homeowners, churches and beyond!  
Be a part of the 2019 Mountain Christmas Trail of Lights!  
Decorate your home, business, and trees, fences everything that doesn't move, or for that matter moves slowly...  
Be a part of this wonderful event that will be a gift to our community and a wonderful event for visitors to come and enjoy!  
The Mountain Christmas Trail of Lights will run from the Blue Ridge Parkway to Bakersville and points beyond along NC 226.  
Special emphasis will be placed on Downtown Bakersville, Spruce Pine and the communities along the trail to let folks know the side roads and hollers that are decorated and available to be seen.  
The Trail begins on November 24th and continues through January 1st, 2020! There will be more details to come but for now, help share the word!  
Spruce Pine Downtown Events  
TRAC Studio Tour - December 6-8th, Mitchell & Yancey County

**The National Day of Prayer** - The National Day of Prayer for 2020 will be held on the first Thursday of May, the 7th, 2020. Please watch for updates through the upcoming months. Call 239-248-2139 if you are interested in praying for this National Day of Prayer, "for such a time a this".

**Tipton Hill Community Foundation (Tipton Hill)** – Country Breakfast, the first Saturday each month, 7:30 – 10:30 am, at the old Methodist Church, across from Jerry's Store. Come join us for homemade sausage, scrambled eggs, gravy, jellies, juice, and coffee. Eat-in or take-out, all funds support the Tipton Hill Community Foundation.

**Toe River Arts**  
December 6-8, 2019 10:00 – 5:00 Tour Time  
The Toe River Arts Studio Tour is perhaps the largest and the longest-running studio tour in the country; you will find craftspeople and artists in nearly every medium, many tops in their field and several new-to-the-tour participants.  
FREE, and self-guided, this adventure will lead you to some unique places situated between Mt. Mitchell and Roan Mountain. Visitors travel through valleys, past streams, across rivers, over hilltops, and experience breathtaking mountain vistas as they make their journey through the Toe River Arts region. Meet the artists, see where they create and where they live.  
Toe River Arts will sponsor a Meet-The-Artist reception at their Spruce Pine location on Friday evening, December 6 from 5:30 – 7:30 pm after the tour closes for the day. A sampling of participants will be on display geographically so one can plan a route for the rest of their journey.  
For more information, please call 828.682.7215

**YaYa Village** - We are announcing the Opening of YaYa Village Commercial-Share Kitchen!  
We've realized there's a gap that needs to be filled between the production of local food and their consumption. That's why we started YaYa Village Commercial Shared-Use Kitchen so that we could provide a certified area at a reasonable cost for locals trying to sell their products. This way we strive to help community entrepreneurs with their part-time business.  
So, if you have a product you want to market and sell (like jams, jellies, baked goods, etc.) or if you need a commercial kitchen for catering, having a private Pop Up dinner, hosting a class or whatever you're imagining, we hope our Shared Use Kitchen can provide you with a solution.  
Come visit our space, get an application and let us talk to see what is that you have in mind!  
We are also serving lunch on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12:00 pm to 2:00 pm

**Yancey County**

**Burnsville Christmas Parade** – Saturday, December 7, 2019, 1:00 – 3:00 pm. Come out and enjoy the Burnsville Christmas Parade through downtown Burnsville, NC. A great kickoff to the Christmas Season.

**Feed-A-Child Yancey County** - Higgins fills bags on the second Tuesday of each month. We have been fortunate to have enough volunteers to fill the bags so far. They are going to continue the program this summer through the churches in the county that have Wednesday night meals. If you have any questions about Feed-A-Child they can be directed to Bill & Nancy Watkins at 828-675-5367.

**West Burnsville Baptist Church** – Nineteenth Annual Christmas Pageant – Christmas Unwrapped. Performances will be December 7 at 7:00 pm, December 8 at 10:30 am and 3:00 pm. December 9 at 7:00 pm. West Burnsville Baptist Church, 222 West Burnsville Church Road, Burnsville, NC. All performances are free. Bring your family and friends and expect to receive a blessing! Reservations for large groups can be made by calling the church at (828) 682-3990.



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### Lights of Home

By Allen Buchanan  
Mitchell County



While attending college at McDowell Tech, I got a part-time job in the evenings from 5-10 pm. That meant I was driving Monday-Thursday Highway 221/226 to Bakersville. Driving during the daytime was okay but I didn't like driving that far after dark. Especially since I had to drive up Coxes Creek (226). If you're not familiar with this route, it's a steep, winding road that truckers use around the clock. Many accidents and, unfortunately, deaths have occurred. I know people that don't like to visit us because they despise the mountain road so much.

When driving toward home and approaching the Woodlawn community, if you look upward slightly to your left on a clear night you can see the lights of businesses at the top of Coxes Creek. Further to the East, the lights of Little Switzerland and Big Lynn Lodge glow. A feeling of peace would come over me that the weather was okay. No fog or snow to slow me down. If I didn't see any lights fear would fill my being.

One early Spring night, down on the floor of Woodlawn, I couldn't see a single light on the mountain. I could feel the fear creep in as I gripped my steering wheel. After turning left off 221, I drove 226 for about 2 miles before fog covered the road in a sharp curve before me. I slowed my car down to 10 mph and even slower as I continued. It wasn't long before I lost my way. I waited for other car lights and none came. What seemed like an hour past and I wondered what was around me? I have no clue as to why I got out of my car thinking I could walk around a little and try to see where I really was. Less than 6 feet in front of my car was a guard rail. "What am I going to do?" I decided to back up some and wait on another car. In a few minutes I saw the lights of an 18-wheeler and thought I would follow it. I was able to do that through 3 curves until it drove off and left me in the fog, alone again. Did you know you can pray with your eyes open and drive too? I've done this often in life. God's grace brought me across that mountain and through the thick fog that night. Even though I told my family I don't want to work down there anymore and travel that road at night, come morning right back down 226 I went. As I write this, I reminisce back over all the trips in life that I've made and how I'm still here. God's Grace is the only explanation.

This past July, our family said goodbye to my mom. I was by her bedside shortly before she was greeted by our Lord! During those last moments, she sat up in bed and stared at her bedroom wall. I don't believe she saw a blank wall. I think she was gazing at the lights of that heavenly city, her eternal home. Beyond the fog of sickness, across the valley of the shadow of death are the lights of Home! Shortly after her last earthly breath, she spoke with the utmost clarity, and probably said: "I love you, Jesus!" He, in turn, said, "Well done my good and faithful servant!"

*Allen Buchanan is a freelance Christian writer. Allen attends Bear Creek Baptist church.*

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# SEARCH (Sustaining Essential and Rural Community Healthcare)

## SEARCH Resumes Meetings with Ideas and a Plan

By Susan Larson, Co-leader

Residents from across Mitchell and Yancey counties came together recently to learn what SEARCH has planned and to give feedback – as well as to be fed at a grand community dinner. Before hearing about the plan, attendees reflected on the issues they see as critical to the health of their own communities. The list was long, beginning with the need for jobs, which Doug Harrell said could be improved if young people were educated about farming.

Having meaningful activities for young and old alike was a need expressed at one table. Participants said all children, adults, and senior citizens need greater access to exercise. Elderly apartment dwellers got specific attention, too, as they are often lacking in organized activities. All ages were included when another table focused on food insecurity as an issue.

A thread running throughout the reports was the toll that drug abuse and addiction are taking on individuals, businesses, and families. Schell McCall of PATH discussed the day-long training (M-Y Community Cares) recently conducted on the topic which attracted a cross-section of the community to learn what addiction is and how to deal with it. A related topic was the effects of childhood trauma which educators are recognizing as a significant challenge to learning for children. Britt Kaufmann spoke of the resiliency training which is becoming available to teachers and the public.

SEARCH leaders revealed the main points of their strategic plan, developed with the help of a consultant over the summer. In existence since June of 2017 when Blue Ridge Regional Hospital decided to close Labor and Delivery, SEARCH (Sustaining Essential and Rural Community Healthcare) announced its top three priorities going forward. One is to seek nonprofit status, which would allow it to broaden its scope by raising funds, primarily through grants. Another is to make the 100+ pages of material collected at 15 Listening Sessions in both counties accessible by topic on the SEARCH website for local agencies and nonprofits to use. And the third priority is to research access to care, in particular, charity care, for uninsured and low-income residents and to share the results broadly.

As a healthcare advocate SEARCH is also focused on the specific needs of our rural area. Of late that has included watching local issues such as the future of the Mitchell County Health Department and ambulance service in Mitchell and Yancey counties, whose HCA contract expires in June of 2020. SEARCH expects to adopt a new working model that combines two concepts. SEARCH will continue to function as a backbone organization to collect, hold and utilize knowledge while also being an incubator for health projects, responding to healthcare-related issues and needs.

In order to achieve these goals, SEARCH will need to identify people and resources within the region and beyond. To date, the work has been accomplished almost exclusively by a committed but small group of volunteers, who are seeking others to join them. A list of ways people can get involved and skills needed is posted on the website, [www.searchwnc.org](http://www.searchwnc.org)

At the November meeting, a topic many people wanted to hear more about was philanthropy. SEARCH leaders were able to share some very positive impressions from a meeting they had the day before with Antony Chiang, CEO of Dogwood Health Trust. Knowing that the group wanted to hear more about the new foundations and how to access them, SEARCH Leaders said they'd explore devoting the next meeting early in 2020 to the topic of philanthropy. The date and details will be announced on the SEARCH website and in the local media.

Susan Larson is a co-leader of SEARCH. She resides in Mitchell County with her husband, retired physician Dr. David Larson.



SEARCH co-leader Karin Rolett describes the new strategic plan.



Doug Harrell from Tipton Hill talks with tablemates about the need for education in farming.

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# YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

## US House of Representatives NC District 11

### Supporting Our First Responders

On October 29, the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure Committee passed H.Con.Res.37, to designate October 28 as National First Responders Day. We owe the brave men and women who serve across the country as first responders a debt of gratitude for the work they do to keep our communities safe. I proudly sponsored this resolution because I believe first responders deserve to be recognized for their commitment to safety, defense, and honor. This resolution allows Americans to recognize and honor their service and sacrifice for our country.

### Fighting Baseless Impeachment Inquiry

Last week was the first time the American public was able to see the House Democrats' witnesses testify in public during the official impeachment inquiry. Over the past six weeks, depositions have occurred behind closed doors with selectively leaked information coming from Adam Schiff, Chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, who has been blatantly misleading the American public.

The first two public hearings featured Ambassador to Ukraine, Bill Taylor, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, George Kent, and former Ambassador to Ukraine, Marie Yovanovitch. The bottom line: none of these witnesses had first-hand knowledge of the phone call between President Trump and President Zelensky. Additionally, the military aid to Ukraine was ultimately released without any commitments from the Ukrainian President.

It is incomprehensible that some in Congress are working to impeach a duly elected president on hearsay alone. As a member of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform, I will continue to listen to the facts and fight for the transparency the American people deserve.

### Fighting for Federal Agency Transparency

I co-sponsored H.R.4929, Too Long, Didn't Read Act of 2019. This bill will improve and expedite the process of reading and filing out paperwork for federal benefits. Far too often, this task places unnecessary burdens on families and individuals with confusing language and lengthy forms. Americans value their time and deserve clear and concise communication with federal agencies.

The bill directs the Office of Management and Budget to require federal agencies to place important action items at the beginning of their letters to Americans. They would also be required to include information such as the deadline for the action item, how to complete it, whether it is required or optional, and how to contact the agency. This will streamline the process of applying for federal benefits and will make rules and regulations easier for Americans to navigate. I am proud to join Rep. Seth Moulton and my colleagues in this bipartisan effort to make the government more efficient for the people it serves.

### Congratulations to C.A.R.E. of Transylvania County

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is taking measures to prevent substance abuse in communities across the nation. As part of that effort, HHS awarded the C.A.R.E. (Community Awareness Recovery Effort) Coalition of Transylvania County Drug-Free Communities Project with a \$125,000 grant. The C.A.R.E coalition is a grassroots non-profit organization focusing on reducing substance abuse and misuse in Brevard and the surrounding area. I admire their dedication to a healthy and vibrant Transylvania County and am glad their hard work is being recognized.

### Faith-Based Adoption

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced on November 1 that the agency will not continue enforcing an Obama-era rule that forced faith-based adoption agencies to go against their religious convictions by affirming gay marriage or else risk being shut down.

This Obama-era practice was a violation of the First Amendment as well as the Regulatory Flexibility Act of 1980, which governs the issuance of certain federal regulations on small businesses and organizations. HHS will continue to comply with applicable Supreme Court decisions and nondiscrimination provisions in the law. The discretion of faith-based agencies when it comes to who they allow adopting children in need and who become part of their foster care networks is based on religious conviction.

I applaud HHS Secretary Alex Azar for this crucial step forward in the Trump Administration's effort to uphold religious freedom and the rule of law in America for all people. Any federal regulation that interferes with moral convictions is at risk of violating religious liberty outlined in the Constitution, and impeding the incredible work done by faith-based agencies across the country to alleviate the foster care crisis.



Congressman  
Mark Meadows  
202-225-6401  
[www.meadows.house.gov](http://www.meadows.house.gov)

## NC House District 118



Rep. Michele D. Presnell  
[Michele.Presnell@ncleg.net](mailto:Michele.Presnell@ncleg.net)  
919-733-5732

The General Assembly adjourned on October 31, 2019, to return on November 13, 2019 to vote on the newly redrawn Congressional maps ordered by the court.

Upon returning we learned of 5 additional bills that had been ratified by the General Assembly but since vetoed by the Governor. These bills were given the veto stamp on 11-6-19 and 11-8-19.

Two of the bills that were vetoed are salary bills, HB231-UNC & Comm. Coll. Pay/Retiree Bonus and SB354-Strengthening Educators' Pay Act. These two bills provided salary increases for the teachers in the public schools in addition to salary increases to the employees of the UNC-System, N.C. Community College System, and a cost-of-living supplement for retired teachers and state employees. SB354 also provided much-needed salary increases for public school personnel. The individuals impacted by the veto need an answer as to why they were singled out.

Why on God's green earth would the NCAE (NC Association of Educators) representing the teachers, publicly state their support for these vetoes? What kind of organization, on behalf of teachers, would tell their membership that a 0% raise is better than a 3.9% raise? As it stands now, the teachers and others will receive nothing, unless the Senate was to override the Governor's veto when they return in January.

**LOOKING FORWARD...** We were able to pass several bills that are very positive and will do a lot of good.

The House of Representatives voted to add an additional \$180 million in HB200 2019 Storm Recovery/Var. Budget Corrections. This in large part is due to having our financial house in order and giving us the ability to draw on additional monies saved. The bill appropriates over \$121 million from NC Savings Reserve Account for federal matching funds and another \$59 million of state emergency funds to support recovery from prior hurricanes to include Dorian, Florence, and Matthew as well as Tropical Storm Michael. Additionally, the funds will provide flexible local government loans to assist communities impacted.

SB356 - DOT Cash and Accountability was desperately needed to pull DOT out of a cash strapped hole to meet its financial obligations. The state is facing work stoppages on hundreds of transportation projects and layoffs of potentially thousands of workers due to the current cash problems at DOT. This bill will meet the immediate transportation funding needs and provide strict accountability measures like cash balance reporting requirements from the DOT in the future. "While we have concerns about how the DOT arrived at its shortfall, this General Assembly is prepared to meet the immediate needs of storm victims in North Carolina and to support infrastructure funding for our state's rapid population and economic growth," Speaker Moore said.

SB199-Child Sex Abuse/Strengthen Laws. The primary purpose of the bill is to protect children from sexual abuse while strengthening and modernizing sexual assault laws. The bill encompasses the duty to report crimes, expands the statute of limitations for misdemeanor crimes against children, protects children online from high-risk sex offenders, and extends civil statute of limitations and requirements of training. The passage of this bill was unanimous in the House.

The General Assembly has adjourned until January 14, 2020. We have had some difficult days and contentious times during our long session, but we have managed to get some important things done.

# God Bless America

# YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

## NC Senate District 47



Sen. Ralph Hise  
Ralph.Hise@ncleg.net  
919-733-3460

Since Republicans gained the majority in the NC General Assembly in the 2010 elections, the far-left NC Association of Educators (NCAE) has focused on convincing the public and classroom teachers that legislative Republicans are anti-teacher. However, the numbers prove that nothing is further from the truth. Teachers have received seven consecutive pay raises, and, in the last five years, teacher pay has increased by more than 20%, the third-highest rate in the nation. Average teacher salaries have increased nationally from 47th to 29th, currently second in the Southeast.

Gov. Roy Cooper claims that he supports teachers, but the facts prove otherwise. He vetoed the 2017 and 2018 budgets which provided close to 10% in raises over the two years. Fortunately, the Republican supermajority in the General Assembly overrode Gov. Cooper's veto, ensuring that teachers did receive their promised raises. In the state budget, the General Assembly passed in June, teachers were to receive a 6th and 7th consecutive raise. True to form, Gov. Cooper vetoed the teacher pay raise, leaving teachers with nothing for the next two years. In an attempt to provide the teachers a raise despite the Governor's veto of the budget, Republican legislators passed a 3.9% pay raise for teachers and sent the bill to the Governor for his signature as a mini-budget item. Once again, Gov. Cooper vetoed a teacher pay raise.

Unfortunately, the teachers have been left high and dry, not only by Gov. Cooper but also by the organization whose stated purpose is advocacy of teachers and public education. A recent report released by Democratic State Auditor Beth Wood reveals the NCAE has only 5,391 members on automatic payroll deduction, which is about 5% of all teachers. The NCAE, in violation of the law, refuses to provide any additional information about its membership numbers, leaving the public to conclude that the NCAE probably only has 5,391 members. So, the NCAE, which represents just 5% of teachers, is fighting tooth and nail to keep the other 95% of teachers from getting a pay raise. It's just not right and it's hard to believe. What kind of an advocacy organization tells its members that a 0% raise is better than a 3.9% raise? And what kind of governor agrees?

As always, please share your thoughts with me on these or other issues related to the state government by emailing me at [rhise@ncleg.net](mailto:rhise@ncleg.net) or calling me at 919-733-3460.

### Governor Cooper Fights Election Integrity Measures with Vetoes

Many of you recall that, after Governor Cooper's opposition to a proposed

Voter ID law, the citizens of North Carolina voted in favor of a constitutional amendment that would require voters to present and display a photo ID when voting in person.

After the constitutional amendment was approved, we in the state legislature passed legislation needed to actually put the Voter ID requirement into operation. Governor Cooper, continuing to fight against requiring photo ID, then vetoed the operational legislation. Fortunately, enough of Governor Cooper's own party voted with us to override his veto. Thus, the Voter ID requirement is now not only part of our state constitution, but we also have the legislation in place so that elections boards across the state will know how to carry out the requirement and comply with the voters' decision that photo IDs should be required for all voters.

Subsequently, the legislature's efforts to preserve the integrity of our elections continued. The legislature adopted a law to require the State Board of Elections to review the voter registration status of persons disqualified from jury duty because they are determined not to be United States citizens. Citizens across North Carolina are called to serve jury duty based on the voter rolls in each county. There are occasions when persons called to serve on the jury are excused because they are found not to be U.S. citizens. The State Board of Elections has stated that it does not have a maintenance process for the removal of such non-citizens actually disqualified from jury duty.

The legislature's law would create such a removal process. Again, Governor Cooper vetoed this legislation, despite its being designed to give us greater confidence in the integrity of our elections. Hopefully, a way around this latest Cooper veto may be found. Clearly, non-citizens are not entitled to vote. If they are determined ineligible for jury service because they are not citizens, only someone hoping to take advantage of illegal votes would want to keep them on voter rolls.

## NC House District 86



Rep. Hugh Blackwell  
919-733-5805  
[Hugh.Blackwell@ncleg.net](mailto:Hugh.Blackwell@ncleg.net)

## NC Senate District 46



Sen. Warren Daniel  
[Warren.Daniel@ncleg.net](mailto:Warren.Daniel@ncleg.net)  
919-715-7823

As we near the end of another calendar year, I wanted to share some of the economic successes in NC over the past several years.

Since Republicans took control of the General Assembly in 2011, they have returned taxpayer money to North Carolinians through historic, economy-boosting tax cuts. When Democrats controlled the legislature, they imposed the highest taxes in the Southeast – and some of the highest in the country – on working North Carolina families. They used the revenues extracted from the citizenry on failed spending programs that threw North Carolina into an economic budget crisis during the recession, leading to historic deficits approaching \$3 billion.

During the very first year they held the majority in the legislature (2011), Republicans upheld their promise to return \$1 billion to North Carolinians' pockets by eliminating "temporary" sales and income taxes. Then, in 2013, Republicans implemented historic and comprehensive tax reform that served as a model for the entire nation. The Tax Simplification and Reduction Act cut the individual tax rate from 7.75 percent to 5.8 percent while increasing the marital standard deduction from \$6,000 to \$15,000.

In 2017, lawmakers passed further tax relief, by reducing the individual tax rate to 5.499 percent and increasing the standard deduction to \$17,500. Next year, the individual rate will decrease again to 5.25 percent and the standard deduction will rise to \$20,000.

Job growth in North Carolina has been steadily increasing since 2011. From November 2011 to August 2019, 769,939 jobs have been added in our state. This represents a growth rate higher than the national average. (US Bureau of Labor Statistics.). And our unemployment rate has dropped from 11.5 to 4.0.

Here are some additional legislative highlights from this year. In 2019, the General Assembly has passed several important pieces of legislation, including:

- the Born-Alive Survivors Protection Act; • a bill to Require Cooperation with ICE detainees; • the Small Business Health Care Act;
- Tax Reforms raising the standard deduction by 7.5%; • A bill to remove foreign citizens from the voting rolls; • the Prison Reform Act;
- the Testing Reduction Act; • a bill to Combat Absentee Ballot fraud; • a bill to Strengthen Child Sex Abuse laws; and
- the Standing Up of Rape Victims Act.

Many of these bills are now law. However, a few of them were vetoed by Governor Cooper (the Born-Alive Act, the Require Cooperation with ICE detainees, and the bill to Remove Foreign Citizens on Voting Rolls.)

As 2019 continues to quickly roll on toward an entirely new decade, I am especially thankful for the opportunity to represent the 46th Senate District. My family and I would like to wish each of you a joyous Christmas season filled with family, friends, and fellowship. Merry Christmas.



### Statement on Raid Against ISIS Leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence Chairman Richard Burr (R-NC) released the following statement on the U.S. raid against ISIS founder and leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi:

"The U.S. raid against Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi marks an important milestone in the campaign against remaining ISIS leadership. The world is safer without al-Baghdadi in it. ISIS fighters should take note that their leader died in a hole, miles away from them, in what he thought was a safe haven. The message is clear. There is no safe haven."

Passing of Senator Kay Hagan

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Senator Richard Burr (R-NC) released the following statement on the passing of former North Carolina Senator Kay Hagan: "Brooke and I are deeply saddened by the sudden and untimely loss of Kay Hagan. Kay dedicated much of her life to serving North Carolina, and she will be remembered for her tireless work on behalf of the home and the people she loved. In our time as Senate colleagues, we worked across the aisle together frequently on issues that we both knew would determine what type of country our children would inherit, from conservation to our common defense. She tackled everything she did with a passion and a sense of humor that will be missed. Our thoughts and prayers are with her family."

5 Ways to Stay Safe During the Dangerous Holiday Driving Season

The holidays can be the happiest time of the year, but unfortunately, they can also be the most dangerous, with more fatal car crashes occurring due to increased travel time, more alcohol use and excessive speed, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA).

NHTSA predicts that during this Christmas week, from Tuesday, December 24, 2019, at 6 p.m. through Thursday, January 2, 2020 at 5:59 a.m., 799 people will lose their lives nationwide due to car crashes. While it may be uncomfortable to consider these predictions, NHTSA's report says that analyzing and forecasting fatalities can serve as useful warnings to the public, making roads safer.

"No one wants to think about what can go wrong, especially at such a joyful time of year, but as the saying goes, prevention is better than cure," said Jon Bloom, vice president, personal auto, Erie Insurance. "The good news is that there are specific things that people can do to help keep themselves and their families safe this holiday season."

Erie Insurance offers these five tips for safer holiday driving.

- Keep your car road ready. Proper maintenance will help keep your car in shape for whatever road conditions you encounter. In addition to getting regularly scheduled oil changes, make sure your car's fluids are topped off and that filters, hoses and other components are in good working order. If they're showing signs of wearing out, replace them.
- Maintain properly inflated tires. Not maintaining the right tire pressure can lead to flats and blowouts, which could cause you to lose control of your car and crash. Pay close attention to your car's tire pressure monitoring system. If you see an alert that tire pressure is low, fill them as soon as possible.
- Be ready for emergencies. While maintaining your car can reduce your chance of being stranded along the side of the road, it could still happen. Keep an emergency kit in the car with a cell phone charger, blanket, and first aid kit, along with bottled water and snacks. Also, check with your insurance agent to ensure your policy includes Emergency Roadside Service coverage so that if your car does break down, you can call for help.
- Give yourself plenty of time. With speeding being one of the top causes of car crashes, it's important to remember that there's no prize for arriving first. It's much better to drive the speed limit -- or even lower, depending on road conditions and build in a few extra minutes to get where you're going, especially when driving near busy shopping malls or on holiday travel days when traffic is heavy.
- Stay sober or designate a driver. Celebrating with a holiday toast? Plan ahead and have a designated driver or use a cab or ride-sharing service to get home. Regardless, never get behind the wheel if you've been drinking.

While the holidays can be a particularly perilous time to drive, taking precautions can help ensure you, and others on the road, have a safe season.

Thankful for Christmas  
By Dean Honeycutt  
Mitchell County



I am so thankful for Christmas and all that it means to us. And I wonder why do I believe in Jesus who I cannot see or touch? I believe every word the Bible says about the virgin birth of Christ. God left heaven and came to earth in a miracle birth. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary. God came to earth as a little baby born in a place livestock was kept, because all the rooms were taken in the inn. Mary wrapped God's Son in swaddling clothes. Similar strips of cloth would be used later to wrap our precious Savior's body in for burial.

Jesus the Godman voluntarily emptied Himself of deity to experience humanity. God became flesh and lived among us. Jesus lived a sinless life and took my place on a Roman Cross becoming my substitute. Jesus's death on that Roman cross satisfied God's anger against my sin. Jesus's death on that cross paid for my sin, something I cannot do because I am a sinner. I cannot pay for my sin nor can I work my way out of sins debt. Jesus's death alone atoned for my sin. Grace is God's riches at Christ's expense. Grace is the unmerited favor of God in Christ Jesus. In order to have my sin forgiven I place my faith in the finished work of the cross.

Christmas reminds me that Jesus came to earth to die for me. He did not have to come, but He did. For God so loved the world that He sent His only Son Jesus. Christmas reminds me of the miracle God did in my life. I believe in Jesus because Jesus changed my life. I will never forget the day I was saved, and Jesus came into my heart. My life has never been the same since that glorious day. I thank God that Jesus saved me and gave me eternal life. So, we celebrate the birth of Christ at Christmas and we give gifts, and these gifts remind us of the greatest gift of all Jesus the Christ.

May you and your family have a wonderful Christmas, and may you focus on the true meaning of Christmas. Help your children understand why God had to come to earth, and why Jesus is the greatest gift ever. Jesus is the greatest gift we can share with others. The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Yes, Jesus is a gift and what a wonderful gift He is. Father thank you for sending your Son and thank you, Father, for saving me.

Merry Christmas from my family to yours.

*Pastor Dean Honeycutt shepherds Snow Hill Baptist Church in Bakersville, NC. He may be reached at 828-385-0213, snowhillbaptist@gmail.com , or visit their website at www.snowhillbaptist.com.*

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The Beauty of Hope  
The Spirit of Love  
The Comfort of Faith  
May these Gifts be yours  
Yours this Christmas Season*



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## The Gospel and the Virgin Birth

By Dr. Tom Walker  
McDowell County



This time of the year I am hearing in the world of Christmas music about snow, sleigh bells, reindeer, mistletoe, silver bells and a host of other things. All of that is acceptable, but this time of the year is a time to celebrate the virgin birth of the God-man the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was not just another man; Jesus is both God and man. That is a unique identification with humanity that had never happened before in all the history of mankind.

The word "Gospel" basically means "good news." It is the good news about Jesus and all that involves his coming to earth to redeem mankind. That would not have happened had Jesus not been born of a young virgin by the name of Mary.

There are some who do not believe in the virgin birth. Arianism teaches that the "virgin" of Isaiah 7:14 should read "young woman," and that at some point God created Jesus. The Ebionites, an early Jewish Christian sect that closely followed Jewish law, taught that Jesus was Joseph's biological son and because of Jesus' righteousness, God chose Him to be a prophet and anointed Him with the Holy Spirit. The Gnostics, who believed the physical and the divine could not co-exist, claimed that God could not inhabit a material body; therefore, Jesus only appeared to be human. That is the error that Paul had to deal with over and over in his writings in the epistles. The King James translators were right in choosing the word "virgin."

It is essential that we connect the Gospel we preach and the virgin birth of Christ.

### A Sign Was Promised

Isaiah 7:14 says, *"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."*

Observe to whom the promise was made. The promise was made to Ahaz, who was the son of Jotham, the eleventh king of Judah. The prophet Isaiah sent a message to the terrified Ahaz, but Ahaz would not turn to God and trust Him for deliverance. Instead, he plunged deeper into idolatry and self-destruction. Ahaz said he did not want to test the Lord, but by refusing to follow God's directive to ask for a confirming miracle, he was testing the Lord's patience (as well as man's patience). Though Ahaz refused to request a sign that would have confirmed the truth of Isaiah's message, the prophet said God would give him one anyway. The sign was to be a boy named Immanuel.

Notice the elements involved in the promise. There are three of them in number. First. The boy would be born of a virgin (v.14), he would be raised up in a time of national calamity (v.15), and while he was still a youth, the two-king alliance would be broken (v.16).

### A Sinlessness Was Accomplished

We know as sinners, we all sin at one time or another in our deeds, actions or attitudes. There is not one person, male or female, who reached the point in life that they are above sin and sin-free.

For Jesus to be the perfect sacrifice to die for the sins of mankind, He had to be sin-free. There could not be one spot or blemish in the Lord. The Lord Jesus Christ was fully God with an eternal, sinless nature. Christ was sin-free. Having a biological father would have annulled Jesus' deity.

Think about the importance of His sinlessness. Jesus is fully God with an eternally sinless nature. Here is what Hebrews 7:26 says, *"For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens."*

Notice three very important, outstanding words in that verse that jumps out to me. Consider the words in Heb. 7:26.

The Bible describes Jesus as "holy." That means to be set apart and separated to God; to be separated from sin and from all evil, and from immoral, wicked, and lawless behavior. Jesus Christ is perfectly and eternally set apart from sin and free from all immoral and lawless behavior. Jesus Christ is absolutely holy.

Christ is also "harmless." That word means blameless, not evil, free from all guile, deception, envy, and malice against anyone. We might say that Jesus Christ was so good that there was nothing but good in Him.

Our Lord is "undefiled." unstained by sin; absolutely free from all moral impurity, uncleanness, and defilement. Jesus Christ was completely free from anything that would keep Him from approaching God. He is absolutely and totally undefiled.

Jesus is "separate from sinners." He is totally different from sinners. He never sinned; He never caved into sin. He was tempted just as all men are, but He never yielded to temptation—not to one. He stands apart, completely separated and different from all other men. Jesus Christ is the Perfect and Ideal Man. Jesus Christ is absolutely separate from sinners. He is totally qualified to be the sin sacrifice for all the people of this world.

He is made "higher than the heavens." Those that Jesus raised from the dead would have to die again. But not so with Christ for He alone was raised to never die again. Christ was taken up to Heaven in bodily form to remain forever in the presence of the Father. He was so exalted that He will never leave his position of sovereignty as the Supreme and Majestic Lord of the universe.

Deut. 17:1, *"Thou shalt not sacrifice unto the Lord thy God any bullock, or sheep, wherein is blemish, or any evil favouredness: for that is an abomination unto the Lord thy God."*

Numbers 19:2 says, *"This is the ordinance of the law which the Lord hath commanded, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee a red heifer without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke."*

Note from these two verses that a sin sacrifice had to have no blemishes or no spots. They were not even to have carried a yoke on them. The sin sacrifice could

not have faults, flaws, or spots. It had to be absolutely perfect and flawless for the Lord to accept it as an offering for sin.

Think also about the endurance of His sinlessness. It is not a phase that Jesus goes through which someday may change. He has been sinless in eternity past, is sinless now, and forever will be sinless. It must be that way because He never has possessed a sin nature. Conservative theologians generally believe that the sin nature comes through the Father. Joseph was not the biological father of the Lord Jesus. The Bible says the Holy Ghost overshadowed the virgin Mary and out of that glory cloud, the Lord Jesus was conceived in the womb of the Mary by the Holy Ghost (Matt. 1:18).

### Salvation is Portrayed

Joseph had no part in the birth of Jesus Christ. Mary's role was clearly passive. She merely accepted God's gift to her and to the world.

This is a picture of the work of salvation being God's work alone. The Bible says in Ephesians 2:8-9, *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast."*

It is an announced portrayal. The Bible clearly says that Jesus came into this world to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). He did not come to start a new religion or merely to become a martyr for what He believed. Christ had the salvation of mankind in mind. This is what we celebrate at Christmas. The Messiah has come!

It is an acceptable portrayal. I accept the fact that salvation is of the Lord. It is clear if a man could gain his own salvation or do anything to keep it, that God would not get all the glory in a person's salvation. How wonderful that salvation is by grace! It is no wonder there is joy in Heaven when a person is saved.

The virgin birth and the Gospel are inseparable, for there would never have been full salvation for mankind, there would have been no good news if our sinless Savior had not come in the flesh. Let's celebrate Him this Christmas!

If you deny that Jesus is God come in the flesh, you are an unbeliever and are in danger of an eternity in hell without God and without hope (1 John 4:2-3).

Tom Walker is President of Foothills Baptist Bible College and Pastor of Zion Hill Baptist Church in Marion, NC.



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4 Realities Regarding the Mission of God

By Josh Reed

Often times, the mission of God doesn't seem to match our conveniently constructed models. In Acts 8:26-40, we catch a glimpse of how God brings about what He has promised is going to happen in Revelation 5:9-10. God orchestrated circumstances in such a way that Phillip and the Ethiopian eunuch met on a desert road to bring about His will, and He continues to do so today for the same purposes. But we also see some things about this mission that are often missed, or even rejected, in the West. In this passage, we see four realities regarding the mission of God that must be embraced in order to stay faithful to the mission.



1. The mission of God is inconvenient

Think about how inconvenient the Lord's assignment for Phillip was. Phillip had just been scattered from Jerusalem, is a family man needing to provide and seemingly is a blue-collar, lighter-skinned Middle Eastern father. Not very convenient to go to a place that is known for robbers, in a desert place at noon in order to talk to a wealthy, dark-skinned Ethiopian eunuch. For someone limited on time, surely there were better assignments. In the West, our culture is built on convenience, constantly attempting to make life more comfortable. While some conveniences may have their place, the mission of God is never convenient, at least not the way our culture thinks about convenience.

2. The mission of God is inefficient

Phillip is praying and is directed to go to a desert place. Once there, he is directed by the Spirit to run alongside a chariot of foreigners. The eunuch's journey to Jerusalem was conceivably five months long, one way. Once there, he is doubly denied entrance into the assembly at the temple for being a Gentile and a eunuch. While efficiency has its place, the mission of God is hardly efficient and the details surrounding Phillip and the Ethiopian eunuch underscore this point. In the West, as one of the holdovers from the Industrial Revolution, our culture loves efficiency. We value seeking the greatest output for the least input.

3. The mission of God is ingenious

God combats the core human instinct to "go our own way," even attempting to earn His favor by our convenient, efficient means. The gospel is a gift, and the only way to be made right in God's eyes is to admit you need it and simply receive it. Nothing is more convenient than that! But the genius of God is that to grow in this grace is to receive His mission — "it is more blessed to give than to receive." Grace writes a blank check for the obedience of the recipient.

4. The mission of God is indisputable

God has given us the end of the story. Either it is true, or it isn't. And if this story is the true story of what He is doing in the world, then the reason His mission seems inconvenient and inefficient to many is perhaps that we're living for a different story.

My experience has been that those who take Him at His Word and act on it discover that He's proven Himself, and what He is doing in this world, every step of the way.

Josh Reed serves as the senior consultant for the Adult Evangelism and Discipleship Team.

I'm Dreaming of a 'Right' Christmas

By Phillip Greene  
Avery County



Christmas is a time to spend with your families...it's a time when we all sit back and analyze our lives. We reflect on family members that pass on, we reflect on family and friends, and we reflect on our lives. Several people use their Christmas cards to send mass letters to update family and friends on their lives over the past 12 months. We use Christmas to reflect on a majority of things, but due to the commercialization of Christmas, are we forgetting to reflect on the reason we celebrate all together?

Christmas in many cases has become about that perfect present, the perfect tree, and the perfect light show...but with all the hustle and bustle...where is the Perfect Son in all of this? With all the hoopla around Christmas these days, are we making time for Jesus? I can remember when I was younger seeing signs everywhere that said, "Jesus is the Reason for the Season." Now, those signs have faded into the background; those signs have been replaced by signs that read, "70% off", "Buy one, get one Free", and "Financing Available".

Why have we let the materialism of Christmas override the Reason we celebrate? Why have we seemingly become like Peter in his denial of Christ, by taking Christ out of Christmas? What was so hard when Jesus was the Center of our Christmas Experience? What has changed?

We can blame it on a number of things...but it all comes down to one thing... YOU and me! We need to refocus our Christmas; we need to refocus our lives... we need to refocus on Jesus. Not just for December 25, but every day of our lives...if our day revolved around Christ as the centerpiece, our Christmas would revolve around the reason we celebrate. Every day should be Christmas... Every day we should celebrate the birth of our Lord.

Every day we should be thankful for the love of a Father who would send his Son to this world with a plan for salvation. God looked at the world, saw OUR sin, and knew there was only ONE way to save us from ourselves...JESUS CHRIST! This Christmas remember your focus...remember the reason...remember Christ this Christmas.

So, with the Christmas season upon us and many stressing over the final gift ideas; many feel the strain of the family coming to town or trying to prepare for the trip to visit with family and friends, and many are too busy to see the real reason for the Christmas season.

It started with a woman — a virgin; pure, blameless, favored by God. It had to be this way...it was what God told the world would happen.

*"3 Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. 4 He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. 5 And he will be their peace."*  
— Micah 5:3-5 (NIV)

Israel had fallen away; it had become their custom...and God was tired of it. But He did promise redemption...in the form of a baby — His Son!

God made the promise to save Israel, and His promise carries resoundingly into today. God sent His only Son. A Child, who would become a man, shows us the right way to live, and then...this Child, the one we celebrate, gave up His life to save the world. Jesus came to the earth with a purpose, to die for the world.

*"For God did not send His Son into the World to Condemn the World, but that the World, through Him, might be saved."*  
— John 3:17

It was all in the plan...a virgin, a carpenter, a star, a small town named Bethlehem...and a baby. Christmas is about His birth, but we can't remember His birth without remembering the reason He came. This Christmas remember the path to the cross went through the stable in Bethlehem.

So instead of dreaming of a White Christmas, let's dream of a RIGHT Christmas.

Phillip Greene is the Station Manager/Program Director for WECR-AM Radio/Glory 1130.



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## Savior Like A Chicken Under The Tree

By Steve Bietz  
Burke County

The mob is already there. No one has yet realized it, but by the end of the week, these attentive faces will be transformed into faces of frenzy, faces of hatred. And Jesus, who then will not resist or even answer them, is answering them now. He is exposing the crowd and the evil that makes them what they are...lost humanity bent on destroying the very one born to save them. He knows their sinful hearts. He knows just how far those hearts will take them. The evil in their hearts will take them to the judgment hall before the corrupt High Priest and puppet government called the Sanhedrin. That evil will take them to Pontus Pilate who cannot mask his cowardice with false patriotism. The evil in their hearts will take them through the streets of Jerusalem, where their voices will scream out, crucify Him. Their evilness will finally take them to Golgotha, where their addiction to suffering and death will express itself in the torturous death of yet three more men.

But evil can take them no further than that. Having made them the villains of history's most important scene, evil abandons them there to face the finale alone. How very alone, became apparent when the sky turns black and the heavens thunder. They must have felt evils cold hand when word came that the temple curtain has been torn, and the priests had fled in terror. And when the Man, whose life they had demanded cries, "Father, why have you forsaken Me," they are the ones who have been forsaken.

Sabbath comes, but it brings no joy, and no sense of connection. They are blindly and horribly lost. But, if that mob is already present, then so is the Savior. Christ knows their evilness. He has seen it and felt it and heard it. He has lived among it and always called it by its name. He calls it by its name now. Numerous times in Matthew the twenty-third chapter, Christ condemns the evil in man's heart. He directs much of His words to the Pharisees, the superstars of piety, the henchman of destruction. He uses language, unprecedented in His teaching. It is by far the strongest language of His ministry and on this last day of teaching in the temple, Jesus seems determined in exposing the evil for what it really is.

The words come like claps of thunder. So dark in their vision, so powerful in their expression. The disciples and those who have followed His ministry, know Jesus to be a man, not just of words, but actions. They have seen Him cleanse the temple and cast out demons and even raise Lazarus from the dead. But in these words, He seems to reach further, deeper, and they must begin to wonder just how far He will go. With words of condemnation give way to an act of destruction. "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; you neither go in yourselves nor do you allow those who are entering to go in." Matthew 23:13. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness." Matthew 23:27.

Yes, just how far was Jesus going to go with His strong words of severe censorship. Matthew 23 does not have what literary experts like to emphasize, no romance, no paradox, no poetry, and no gentle phrasing. This is just plain talk. He speaks of those who murder the prophets, not accusingly, but matter of factly. He knows the crowd will not argue the point. It's just one of many sins. And yet this incident is not about our sinfulness, rather it is about His grace. When the evil that we mostly are becomes so great as to even seek to destroy Him, He loves us still. Jesus wants all to know that He has always intended to save us. Jesus lays out the truth. You are the murderers. You are the ones motivated by evil. Christ says I am not for I am Love sent from Love.

Then, without warning, Jesus chokes up. His words turn to tender heartbrokenness. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing." Matthew 23:37.

Did Christ's earthly parents, Mary and Joseph, have chickens? Did the boy Jesus have the opportunity to quietly sneak up to watch the chicks play around their mother's feet? Did He see them run beneath the hen's strong wings when frightened? And then, did He think of the prophecies concerning the Messiah. On this day, no little barnyard lies before Him. Instead Christ looks into the faces of the human beings He came to save. He knows how needy His church is and He must stop and say how much He cares for them and for us. He reaches past the condemnations, past the evil He sees in every heart, past the terrible experience that lies just ahead, and grabs onto salvation. Christ says that what matters most, is not that you are killers but that there has been born for you, a Savior.

We have a Savior, who came to save us, even from ourselves. Like a chicken under our Christmas Tree, a package of love as He wants to gather each of us to Himself if we only let Him. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, I long to gather you to myself like a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings. No more tender expression has ever come from lips as it did from the lips of Jesus. We have a Savior like a chicken under our Christmas Tree. Under His wings, O what precious enjoyment. There we can hide till life's trials are over. Sheltered and protected, no evil can harm us. Resting in Jesus we're safe evermore. When this world looks for us, may they find us under His wings? Don't forget this Christmas, that under the tree, is a Savior like a chicken. A savior born to save.

Steve Bietz, Pastor, Morganton Seventh day Adventist Church.

*But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, Galatians 4:4*



## I Ain't Apologizing!

By Lee Strobel



When I tell people that God used "apologetics" to change my life and eternity, some of them respond with a blank stare. They think "apologetics" means I'm sorry for something. Actually, apologetics is quite different from that. In fact, it may very well be the key to keeping our children and grandchildren from leaving the faith.

The word "apologetics" comes from the Greek *apologia*, which means "reasoned defense." Simply put, apologetics offers philosophical arguments and scientific and historical evidence for the truth of Christianity, while also providing good answers to tough questions that skeptics raise about the faith.

Both aspects of apologetics were crucial in my spiritual journey. I was an atheist, trained in journalism and law, who decided to investigate Christianity in order to disprove it and thus liberate my wife from her newfound faith in Christ. But during my two-year quest, I found a wealth of evidence for the truth of Christianity and solid responses to the spiritual objections that I had harbored. Ultimately, I reached my verdict in the case for Christ: Jesus is the unique Son of God, who proved his divinity by rising from the dead.

So, for spiritual skeptics like I was—and their numbers are increasing in America and beyond—apologetics can help us get past the spiritual "sticking points" that hinder our journey to God. But that's not all apologetics does. It also serves to deepen the faith of Christians, which makes them more confident and willing to reach out to others with the life-changing and eternity-altering message of Christ.

A theme verse for apologists is 1 Peter 3:15: "But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect..."

Indeed, that last sentence suggests that how we answer the questions of skeptics can be every bit as important as what we say. Apologetics isn't effective when Christians merely pontificate or try to force-feed information into unwilling recipients.

Instead, contemporary apologetics means we do more listening than talking; we honor questions rather than be offended by them, and we seek to reflect God's love to others. That way, we're emulating Jesus, who came "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

My friend J. Warner Wallace, a homicide detective and atheist who became a Christian after investigating the evidence as I did, said recently: "Evangelism in the 21st Century is spelled A-P-O-L-O-G-E-T-I-C-S." That might be a bit of an exaggeration, but not much! More and more, people today want reasons to believe in Christ.

That's why it's even more important to incorporate apologetics into the children's and student ministries of our churches—and for each of us to become conversant with why we believe what we believe. It's also why we have now launched the Lee Strobel Center for Evangelism and Applied Apologetics at Colorado Christian University—to equip churches, ministries, and individual Christians to be beacons of truth and grace.

Our goal is ambitious: to spark spiritual renewal in America. Watch for our first courses to be offered online next Fall—and consider whether you'd like to be part of this exciting endeavor.

*Lee Strobel is a teacher, speaker, award-winning journalist and the author of several books, including: The Case for Christ and The Case for Faith. He has been a featured guest on national networks including: Discovery, CNN, 20/20, PBS, ABC and Fox. He wrote and produced his own TV show, Faith Under Fire.*

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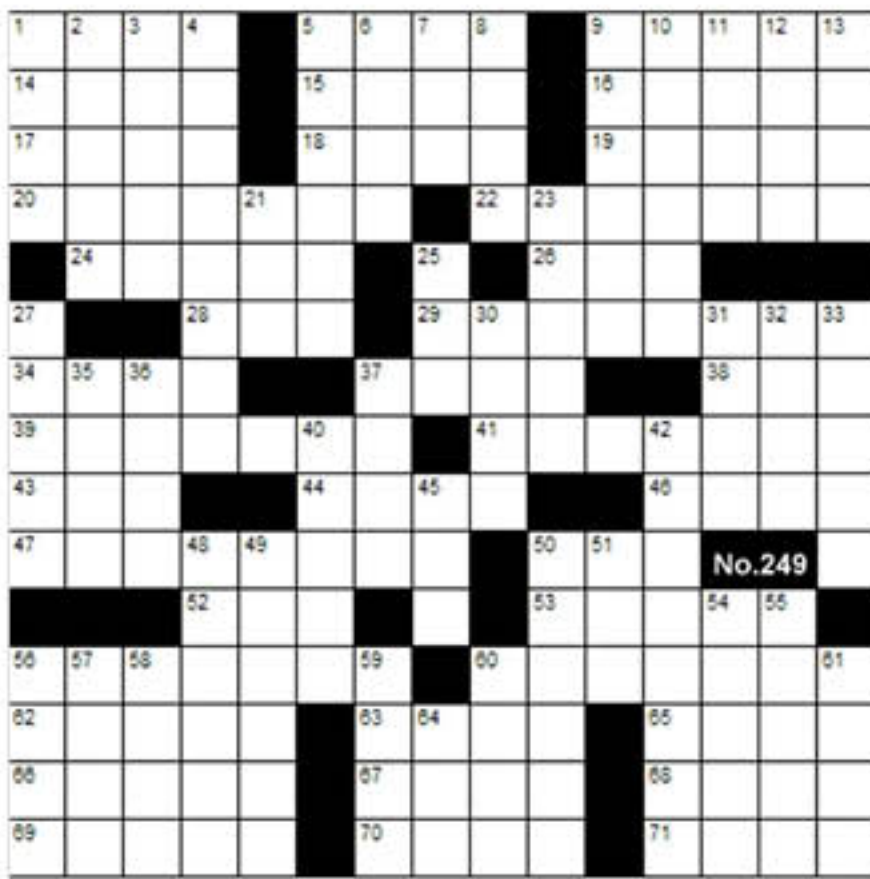
1. The gray-haired and the \_\_\_\_ are on our side (Job 15:10)  
 5. If anyone \_\_\_\_ anything to them, God will add to him (Rev 22:18)  
 9. the Mount of Olives will be \_\_\_\_ in two from east to (Zech 14:4)  
 14. clothe his neck with a flowing \_\_\_\_ (Job 39:19)  
 15. my ears have heard the \_\_\_\_ of my wicked foes (Ps 92:11)  
 16. Traitors, \_\_\_\_, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than (2 Tim 3:4) KJV  
 17. 30th book of the Old Testament  
 18. "Lord, first let \_\_\_\_ and bury my father." (2,2) (Matt 8:21)  
 19. Put on the full \_\_\_\_ of God so that you can take your stand (Eph 6:11)  
 20. pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in \_\_\_\_ (2 Cor 4:8)  
 22. Jesus told his disciples a \_\_\_\_ to show them that they (Luke 18:1)  
 24. an idol cast in the \_\_\_\_ of a calf (Exod 32:8)  
 26. obtain (Matt 24:18)  
 28. seven of every kind of clean animal, a male and \_\_\_\_ mate (Gen 7:2)  
 29. Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for \_\_\_\_ (Jonah 1:3)  
 34. they shall \_\_\_\_ like young lions (Isa 5:29)  
 37. Its posts he made of silver, its \_\_\_\_ of gold (Song 3:10)  
 38. stored up huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the \_\_\_\_ (Gen 41:49)  
 39. The islanders showed us \_\_\_\_ kindness (Acts 28:2)  
 41. the nations conspire and the \_\_\_\_ plot in vain (Ps 2:1)  
 43. a beast coming out of the sea. He had \_\_\_\_ horns and seven (Rev 13:1) KJV  
 44. a quarter of a cab of seed \_\_\_\_ for five shekels (2 Kings 6:25)  
 46. the veil of the temple was \_\_\_\_ in twain from the top to (Matt 27:51) KJV  
 47. sit down and \_\_\_\_ the cost to see if he has enough (Luke 14:28)  
 50. thy cousin Elisabeth, \_\_\_\_ hath also conceived a son (Luke 1:36) KJV  
 52. we never used flattery, \_\_\_\_ did we put on a mask to cover up (1Thes 2:5)  
 53. a pet of him like a bird or put him on a \_\_\_\_ for your girls (Job 41:5)  
 56. David made this a \_\_\_\_ and ordinance (1 Sam 30:25)  
 60. his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming \_\_\_\_ (Dan 10:6)  
 62. thou hast increased and \_\_\_\_ great (Ezek 16:7) KJV  
 63. who \_\_\_\_ your wood and carry your water (Deut 29:11)  
 65. rabbit (Deut 14:7) KJV  
 66. Therefore now \_\_\_\_ your ways and your doings (Jer 26:13) (KJV)  
 67. dug a \_\_\_\_ in the ground and hid his master's money (Matt 25:18)  
 68. all the trees of \_\_\_\_, that were in the garden of God

(Ezek 31:9)

69. Foxes have holes and birds of the air have \_\_\_\_ (Matt 8:20)  
 70. \_\_\_\_ shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there (Isa 13:21) (KJV)  
 71. I will give him \_\_\_\_ from all his enemies (1 Chr 22:9)

## DOWN

1. As \_\_\_\_ man who casteth firebrands (1,3) (Prov 26:18) KJV  
 2. Everyone who competes in the \_\_\_\_ goes into strict training (1 Cor 9:25)  
 3. son of Seth (Gen 5:6) KJV  
 4. He \_\_\_\_ of escaping the darkness; he is marked for the sword (Job 15:22)  
 5. The \_\_\_\_ of heaven were following him, riding on white horses (Rev 19:14)  
 6. being not a forgetful hearer, but a \_\_\_\_ of the work (James 1:25) KJV  
 7. Then they \_\_\_\_ another well, but they quarreled over (Gen 26:21)  
 8. your hand and put it into my side \_\_\_\_ doubting and believe (John 20:27)  
 9. A generous man will himself be blessed, for he \_\_\_\_ his food (Prov 22:9)  
 10. So I went to \_\_\_\_ and dug up the belt (Jer 13:7)  
 11. with the precious blood of Christ, a \_\_\_\_ without blemish (1 Peter 1:19)  
 12. Asa destroyed her \_\_\_\_, and burnt it by the brook (1 King 15:13)  
 13. from Jerusalem, and from the coast of \_\_\_\_ and Sidon (Luke 6:17)  
 21. A man finds joy in giving an \_\_\_\_ reply (Prov 15:23)  
 23. But neither so did their witness \_\_\_\_ together (Mark 14:59)  
 25. the seventh letter of the Greek alphabet  
 27. They are like \_\_\_\_ beasts, creatures of instinct (2 Peter 2:12)  
 30. the poison of \_\_\_\_ is under their lips (Rom 3:13) KJV  
 31. they had gone through the \_\_\_\_ unto Paphos (Acts 13:6) KJV  
 32. when they had \_\_\_\_ the miracle that Jesus did (John 6:14)  
 33. do not be \_\_\_\_ in your heart to utter anything before God (Eccl 5:2)  
 35. for your little \_\_\_\_, and for your wives (Gen 45:19)  
 36. Sarah was Lot's \_\_\_\_  
 37. according to your great compassion \_\_\_\_ out my transgressions (Ps 51:1)  
 40. Abraham set \_\_\_\_ seven ewe lambs (Gen 21:28)  
 42. but protected Noah, a \_\_\_\_ of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5)  
 45. LORD bless his land with the precious \_\_\_\_ from heaven (Deut 33:13)  
 48. Jesus, knowing their evil \_\_\_\_, said, "You hypocrites (Matt 22:18)  
 49. they will tear down your \_\_\_\_ and destroy your lofty shrines (Ezek 16:39)  
 50. the western foothills and the mountain \_\_\_\_ (Josh 10:40)  
 51. He said to \_\_\_\_, "Daughter, your faith has healed you



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(Mark 5:34)

54. made it grow up over Jonah to give \_\_\_\_ for his head (Jonah 4:6)  
 55. \_\_\_\_ the bridegroom Come out to meet him (Matt 25:6)  
 56. and the \_\_\_\_, and the pelican, and the gier eagle (Lev 11:18) KJV  
 57. the tongue can no man \_\_\_\_; it is an unruly evil (James 3:8)  
 58. third of a shekel for sharpening forks and \_\_\_\_

(1 Sam 13:21)

59. the wall will cry out, and the beams of the woodwork will \_\_\_\_ it (Hab 2:11)  
 60. it shall not be lawful to impose \_\_\_\_, tribute upon them (Ezra 7:24) KJV  
 61. Then Jesus \_\_\_\_ the multitude away (Matt 13:36)  
 64. For \_\_\_\_ great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty (Zech 9:17)

Solution on page 14



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I'm Dreaming of A RIGHT Christmas

By Steve Williams  
Mitchell County



Howdy Folks,  
Guess what, Christmas is right around the corner. There is one thing that I really believe, if you're going to do something that you need to do it Right. (Like Celebrating Christmas). Christmas has really taken a beating over the years. At Christmas we say that we are celebrating the birth of Christ. But Christmas today is so far from that it is pitiful, to say the least. Many people say they want a Right Christmas, just like they say they want a Right Relationship with God. We want it white and bright. We want the tree, the decorations, the lights, the eggnog, and the presents. We want everyone to be happy. We want to be able to get and give plenty. We want peace and joy to abound, but in reality, Christmas often turns into a real hassle. You are rushed and pushed for time. You spend money you don't have, for people you don't even know, to acquire things they don't even want or need. Christmas is filled with many distractions. Between the personalities, the presents, and the practices, it is easy to forget the real reason for this day.

In fact, many of the things we do and love at Christmas are nothing more than ancient pagan rituals and symbols hijacked by the Christian church. In our struggle to get it right, we often get it dead wrong and end up making ourselves and others miserable. I believe God wants us to get it right. I believe that He is not so interested in our having a WHITE Christmas as He is interested in our having a RIGHT Christmas. So, how can we have a right Christmas? What can we change in our lives that will allow Christmas to be a time of blessing and joy instead of being a time of stress and tension? Well the Bible says in Isaiah 9:6 "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." So Just How Can We Have A Right Christmas this year?

1st Remember Just Who's Birthday We Are Celebrating. The Bible Says A Child Is Born. This passage is predicting the Birth of Jesus Christ. So many people today forget whose birthday we are celebrating at Christmas and others don't have a clue. Have you ever had someone you loved, and they loved you, forget your birthday? It hurts you not think it hurts God when we get caught up in Christmas and forget Him. 2nd Remember the Son that was given. God's Son was given so that you and I could have a personal relationship with Him. Jesus came and gave His life that you and I might have eternal life through our relationship with Him. Christmas to a Christian should not be about gifts and games, but it should be about the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. (John 3:16) (3rd) Remember that our lives rest upon His shoulders. God is to be the Ruler of our lives and when He is not governing our lives, something is wrong. That's why so many Christians are asking, what's wrong at Christmas? When your will overrides God's Will you'll never have a right Christmas. (4th) Remember to Worship Him. You say, what am I going to worship? You're going to worship a Wonderful Counselor who gives you sound biblical words of advice for your life from His Word. You will worship a Mighty God, who has never lost a battle in His life, and He can help you through your battles. You will worship an Everlasting Father who will never leave you or forsake you. You will worship the Prince of Peace, who can Give Peace in the Middle of a Storm, "At the brink of a Disaster", "In The Darkest Hour", "When everything is falling apart", "When there seems to be no hope." The Bible says He will give you peace that will pass all our understanding. See brothers & sisters we can shop till we drop, and we will never be able to find the RIGHT CHRISTMAS until we remember what God has already given us through His Birth, His Death, His Resurrection and His wonderful gift of Salvation. Merry Christmas and I hope you have a Right Christmas this year.

Words of Wisdom:

- Christmas is not a time nor a season, but a state of mind. To cherish peace and goodwill, to be plenteous in mercy, is to have the real spirit of Christmas. Calvin Coolidge
- I think we've taken the meaning of Christmas out. People don't stop and think about Jesus or the birth of Jesus. When they think of Christmas, they think of Santa Claus and - for the children, and they think of giving gifts and out-giving the next person of spending their time looking for the right thing for somebody who has everything. Billy Graham
- Christmas is a season not only of rejoicing but of reflection. Winston Churchill
- Maybe Christmas, the Grinch thought, doesn't come from a store. Dr. Seuss

Words of Humor:

Three Wise Woman  
Do you know what would have happened if it had been three wise WOMEN instead of men who meet Jesus? They would have asked for directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, cleaned the stable, made a casserole, and brought disposable diapers as gifts!

Steve Williams is the Pastor of Berry Chapel Baptist Church in Spruce Pine.

GOD'S SNOW

By Joy Baldwin  
Madison County



The kettle on the old wood stove  
Whistled a pretty tune  
As all the children laughed and played  
Christmas is coming soon.

They sat around Grandma's table  
Creating bells to hang  
As Grandpa slid open the curtain  
They all began to sing.

"God's snow is lovely flakes of white  
Oh see how gently they fall  
So soft and careful to land just right  
For the pleasure of one and all.

The snow is pure like Jesus  
And comes from the Father above  
Cleansing all within its reach  
Filling the earth with God's love."

The family sipping hot chocolate  
Now under the Christmas tree  
Exchanging such beautiful presents  
Sung thank God for His gift to me.

Purest love to us our Jesus gives  
The Christmas story has been told  
He comes gently as a snowflake  
Leaving cleansing, like God's snow.



Joy is a resident of Madison County, where she now lives with her husband, Danny Joe Baldwin. She is currently a member of Mt Zion Baptist church in Marshall, NC. As a previous member, she calls Forks of Ivy Missionary Baptist Church in Weaverville, "home away from home". She is currently singing with the Gospel Group "Jonah's Voice" out of Mars Hill, NC. Her latest song "Homecoming" will soon be heard by many.

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By Dave Ramsey

## Emotions, basics, and change

Dear Dave,

I've gotten out of debt before following your plan, but I always seem to fall right back in. I find myself spending more than I mean to whenever I go out shopping or running errands. I'm tired of all this, and I want to stop busting my budget and get control of my money once and for all. Do you have any advice?

Patrick



Dear Patrick,

Years ago, when I lost everything financially, there were two or three extremely strong emotions that spurred me toward change. Probably the biggest emotion was fear. I was scared to death I'd be broke for the rest of my life, and not be able to take care of my family. Don't misunderstand me, though. I don't think you should ever live your life in fear. But a reasonable, healthy level of fear where some things are concerned can be a fantastic motivator.

Another emotion was disgust. I realized the way I had been living and handling money was stupid. So, I made a proactive, conscious decision that I was going to change, and things were going to be different. The third emotion was contentment. You know, advertisers try to make us believe our lives will be better, and we'll be happier if we just go out and buy their stuff. I can tell you from personal experience when this idea is crammed down your throat every day, it can warp your perception of contentment and happiness. Lots of stuff does not equal lots of happiness.

If you've tried several times and are still falling back into the same old trap, maybe you should approach your situation in a practical, day-to-day way. Stop going places where you're tempted to spend money on silly things. When you go out running errands and shopping, make a list of only the bare necessities, and take along just enough cash to pay for them.

Spending money on a bunch of stuff you don't need, and probably don't even really want, isn't going to bring you contentment. It's just going to bust your budget, and put you in a financial hole that will, sooner or later, become very difficult—if not impossible—to dig your way out of! —Dave

Dear Dave,

Does the amount you advise saving for a beginner emergency fund in Baby Step 1 double for a couple, or does it stay the same?

Charlie

Dear Charlie,

Whether you're single or married, Baby Step 1 of my plan is to save \$1,000 as quickly as possible for a starter emergency fund. This may not sound like a lot of cash to have on-hand in the event of an emergency, but you need to remember the \$1,000 figure is a temporary thing.

Baby Step 1 is saving up \$1,000 for a beginner emergency fund. Baby Step 2 is paying off all debt, except your home. The vast majority of folks working my plan are debt-free, except for their mortgage, in two years or less. Then, you move to Baby Step 3, which is increasing your emergency fund from \$1,000 to three-to-six months of household expenses.

In reality, we're talking about a pretty short period of time where you'd have just \$1,000 in emergency savings. Plus, it serves as an exercise in financial discipline. A lot of people have nothing saved before beginning the Baby Steps.

If that makes things seem a little scary at the start, it's not necessarily a bad thing. A healthy level of fear can be a fantastic motivator. I don't want anyone constantly living their lives in fear, but that added push—that sense of urgency—can make you work harder to get out of debt, and move on the Baby Step 3, as quickly as possible! —Dave

## Baby Step for weddings

Dear Dave,

We recently started following your plan, and it has made a huge difference in our financial outlook and our marriage. When it comes to the Baby Steps, when do you recommend setting aside money for a wedding? We have a daughter, and we want to be able to do as much as possible for her when the time comes.

Jim

Dear Jim,

That's a good question. There's not really a Baby Step specifically for weddings. In my mind, it should probably come after Baby Step 5—setting aside a college fund for your kids. Maybe part of this is the dad in me, but in prioritizing these things I think a good education is more important than a big wedding. Don't get me wrong, a wedding is a wonderful event and cause for lots of joy and celebration. But it's also a one-day event. Plenty of people have inexpensive, beautiful weddings, and enjoy long, wonderful lives together!

—Dave

Dave Ramsey is CEO of Ramsey Solutions. He has authored seven best-selling books, including *The Total Money Makeover*. The Dave Ramsey Show is heard by more than 14 million listeners each week on 600 radio stations and multiple digital platforms. Follow Dave on the web at [daveramsey.com](http://daveramsey.com) and on Twitter at [@DaveRamsey](https://twitter.com/DaveRamsey).

## Spoken Blessings

By Jan Merop

Avery County



God, the ultimate Creator of all, is at no loss of words or ways to speak to us. A soft whisper on our hearts; a thought-provoking idea that won't go away; a clap of thunder that suddenly awakens us to a reality we've ignored for too long.

God's voice will never lead us away from Scripture.

He communicates through his written word directly or will provide Scriptural assurance to authenticate his voice when a tenacious thought lingers demanding our attention.

After all, he is the Word that became flesh and dwelt among us as we have just celebrated during this Christmas season.

His pervading peace that embraces us at the core of our being helps us discern His voice. So, flee from confusion or unsettledness.

Truth is another way to be sure it is God's voice and not another because he is Truth.

In John 14: 6, NLT Jesus declares, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."

In other words, truth isn't some concept we make up to fit our circumstances. Truth is a person, the Lord Jesus Christ. His truth is absolute, not wishy-washy. He says in Malachi 3: 6, "I am the Lord, and I do not change."

God speaks through a deep sense of belonging. He knows me inside and out. And, a wonder of wonders, he wants me to know Him, too. He says in Malachi 3: 17, NKJV "They shall be Mine," says the Lord of Hosts, "On the day that I make them My jewels."

Then in John 10: 22 Jesus said, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me...No one can snatch them away from me."

So, to sum up, our Christmas musings, we know that God speaks blessings over us in so many ways. We need to tune our ears and hearts to Who He is. Get to know His word, His attributes, His names. Then we will be able to better recognize when He is speaking to us.

Let's grasp and cling to Ephesians 1: 3, 4, & 5, NLT that says He "has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ...God loved us...decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ...and it gave him great pleasure." Spoken blessings from God. What a wonderful way to complete this year and launch us into the next. May we emulate Him and speak blessings to others. Selah

## God Speaks

*Open God's book, the Bible.*

*It is His love letter to you and me.*

*Read with open heart, eyes, and ears.*

*Discern with a loving and willing spirit*

*in tune with God's Holy Spirit.*

*The Light will come on and illumine you.*

*Seek Him as the shepherds and wise men did long ago.*

*"And you will seek Me and find Me,  
when you search for Me with all your heart."*

*Jeremiah 29: 13*



Ken and Jan love residing in the mountains of Avery County. Visit Jan's new blog @ [pauseandconsider.net](http://pauseandconsider.net), Journeying with Jan; and Ken's photos at [kenmeropphotography.com](http://kenmeropphotography.com). [kenmeropphotography.com](http://kenmeropphotography.com) is currently off-line. But Ken's photos can still be seen at [ken-merop.pixels.com](http://ken-merop.pixels.com).

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And find us on Facebook**

# New Dimensions School

By David Burleson  
Burke County

It is difficult to believe that almost half the school year, and the Christmas holidays are ready to begin. The New Dimensions' children have achieved a great deal of success thus far and we anticipate even more achievements during the remainder of the school year. Our students have improved academically, competed well athletically, and participated proudly in a variety of other activities. Most importantly, we are proud that our children have progressed in their character development and citizenship skills.

It was the renowned author, Charles Dickens, who once said: "There seems a magic in the very name of Christmas." I know that each of us shares Dickens's sentiments, even more, when we think of the meaning of the holiday season and the anticipation of being with family members and friends. The festivities of this time of year offer us many opportunities to be with those who make our lives special and to reflect upon our numerous blessings.

During this magical season, I am most thankful for the privilege of serving as your director. I am grateful to the staff members who share their many gifts of encouragement, love, knowledge, and patience with every student each day. Each staff member makes daily contributions to academic and personal success for every child.

With continued community support and the dedicated staff of New Dimensions, we will exceed the level of past accomplishments and experience even greater growth in 2020. Quality schools are vital to the economic development of our county. Therefore, our school is dedicated to preparing our children for successful, productive citizenry.

I want to thank everyone in our school that works so diligently each day to provide the best possible education to our students. My gratitude is extended to each parent who has provided support to his/her child and to the school. We are very blessed to live in a community that conscientiously assumes its responsibility to educate children and to provide the necessary resources for their success.

During the entire month of December, New Dimensions is providing numerous opportunities for our school family to give back to community organizations that assist those in need. From food drives to providing Christmas presents, our school is very involved in helping others.

Our school has many activities planned to help our families celebrate the holidays. These activities include the following:

- Thursday, December 5 – Student Half Day
- Thursday, December 5 – J Iverson Riddle Parade
- Tuesday, December 10 – New Dimensions K-4 Christmas Program – Middle School Auditorium – 6 p.m.
- Wednesday, December 11 – Warrior Wednesday
- Thursday, December 12 – First Grade Fieldtrip to the Nutcracker – Hickory
- Thursday, December 12 – New Dimensions 5-8 Christmas Program – Middle School Auditorium – 6 p.m.
- Friday, December 13 – City Officials to Greet Students
- Monday, December 16 – Readers Theater – All Classrooms – 8 a.m.
- Thursday, December 19 – Polar Express Night at NDS – Middle School Auditorium – 5:30 p.m.
- Monday, December 23 to Friday, January 3 – Christmas Break

As 2020 approaches, we anticipate the year with excitement; yet, we know much work is yet to be done. It is imperative that we continue to work together as a community to continue to emphasize the importance of education. It is also of great importance to meet the needs of each student that is in our school.

As our school continues to work with parents and the community to fulfill the challenge of educating our children, please share your ideas and suggestions. Your input is greatly appreciated and needed. Together, we can accomplish so much for the young people of our school.

Best wishes to you and your family for the most blessed of Christmases and the best of new years. With your continued support, the New Dimensions Charter School can and will help each child achieve all the success and happiness he/she so richly deserves. Together, we can make sure that no child is left behind.

David Burleson is the Director of the New Dimensions Charter School in Burke County.



## Holidays in Valdese

### Concerts at the Rock

January 11, 2020: Darin & Brooke Aldridge  
February 15, 2020: Nu Blu with Merle Monroe  
March 7, 2020: Carolina Blue Band  
Old Rock School • Tickets available online  
at [concertsattherock.com](http://concertsattherock.com).

### Movies at the Rock

December 7, 2019: A Christmas Story  
\*with visit from Santa & Mrs. Claus!  
January 10, 2020: Wizard of Oz  
March 13, 2020: Space Jam  
Old Rock School Auditorium • 7pm • Register online

### Old Colony Players Presents: A Christmas Story

December 13-15 & 20-22 • Old Rock School  
For ticket information go to [oldcolonyplayers.com](http://oldcolonyplayers.com)  
or call 828-522-1150

### Valdese Christmas Parade

December 7, 2019 • Downtown Valdese • 10AM  
The parade will begin at the corner of Church Street & Main Street and will continue to Morgan Street. There will also be an open house at the Piedmont & Western Railroad Museum.

### Christmas in Valdese

December 13, 2019 • Old Rock School • 6PM  
Town tree lighting, Christmas carols by Valdese Elementary Students, and a visit from Santa!

### Mingle with Kris Kringle

December 14 • Old Rock School • 8:30AM-11:30AM  
Breakfast provided by Valdese Fire Department with Santa and his elves. 3 Sessions available.  
Tickets available at [visitvaldese.com](http://visitvaldese.com).

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account of Adam and Eve. They try to fit it into the Bible before Adam and Eve appear on the scene. But if that's true then we must reconcile the fossil record, which is a record of death! Paleontologists have even discovered carnivorous activity, cancerous tumors and thorns in the fossil record.

## Death before sin

This has massive theological implications. When we accept the idea of millions of years we are saying that there were millions of years of death, disease, and bloodshed before Adam sinned. But this contradicts the clear teaching of the Bible where God pronounced His completed creation 'very good' and where death occurred because of the event of Adam sinning.

When we put millions of years of time into the Bible like this, suddenly portions of Scripture make no sense; Romans 6:23 '... For the wages of sin is death ...' 'If death occurred before Adam sinned, what are the wages of sin?' Romans 5:12 '... by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin ...' Death could not have entered because of Adam's sin if it was there already. Hebrews 9:22 '... without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness ...' What would the shedding of blood have to do with forgiveness of sin if bloodshed had been occurring for millions of years?

## This affects the Gospel

This directly affects the Gospel message because Jesus was sent to repay the debt that Adam's sin brought. Jesus died a physical death, shed His blood, conquered sin and death and promised to return and restore the world to the way it was 'in the beginning'. If millions of years of bloodshed occurred prior to man's sin, what will God restore the world to in the future?

If the world really is millions of years old then the creation account seems more like mythology than history, but this is inconsistent with Jesus' teaching. He gave a direct endorsement to, and a warning against disbelieving, the writings of Moses in John 5:46-47 when He said 'If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?'

Most non-believers today deny the writings of Moses, and so reject the teaching of Christ. Creation is thought of in evolutionary terms; sin is 'something fun', the law is no longer 'right from wrong' but whatever you decide. And the belief in a global Flood is almost universally rejected.

For Christians, denying the writings of Moses but clinging to the teachings of Jesus is inconsistent thinking. Unfortunately, atheists seem to understand these inconsistencies more than most Christians and capitalize on them when trying to undermine the Christian worldview and promote their own. Look at the following quote from atheist Richard Dawkins from the February 1978 issue of *American Atheist*:

'It becomes clear now that the whole justification of Jesus' life and death is predicated on the existence of Adam and the forbidden fruit he and Eve ate. Without the original sin, who needs to be redeemed? Without Adam's fall into a life of constant sin terminated by death, what purpose is there to Christianity? None. What all this means is that Christianity cannot lose the Genesis account of creation ... Christianity is fighting for its very life.'

## Not a side issue

Far from being a side issue, the creation/evolution debate is at the forefront of the assault on the Christian worldview. Creation Ministries International exists to help pastors and church leaders equip their congregations in this vital area of origin from a God-honoring, 'Bible first' perspective.

Many times, it is hard to share the Gospel of Jesus because of questions that arise from the books of Moses. Most Christians have questions about science and the Bible, and many struggles with their faith because of them. Witnessing can be difficult because the world asks tough questions in these areas and many Christians feel ill-equipped to answer. Many times, it is hard to share the Gospel of Jesus because of questions that arise from the books of Moses.

What about dinosaurs? Where did Cain get his wife? How do you know there's a God? What about evolution? Could Noah get all the animals on the Ark? Was the flood global? What about dating methods?

## Equipping the church

CMI's expert speakers, many of whom are Ph.D. scientists, accept invitations from churches to present answers to these and many other questions in a professional, nonconfrontational manner, while never straying from the authority of Scripture.

They can show your congregation many examples of how science supports what the Bible says in Genesis. The presentations are fast paced with PowerPoint graphics that hold the attention of everyone from Jr. High and up.

From testimonies that we have received over 30 years of ministry, a pattern has developed. After meetings people become excited about the word of God, see that it can be defended logically, and begin witnessing with more boldness.

If you're interested in booking one of our speakers or would like more information you can contact us or email [events@creation.info](mailto:events@creation.info)



## Ruth Offers Wisdom in Handling Unknowns

By Marlene Houk  
Burke County



2 Chronicles 20:12 "Neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon you."

Lysa TerKeurst states in her book, "When we need to know something, as a Christian, it makes us turn to God. We are willing to follow God even though we don't know what we're doing." (TerKeurst, 2018)

Does the unknown affect us? Building that first house? Learning the intricacies of a new job? Caring for our first baby: that tiny human, helpless and dependent upon our knowledge and wisdom?

My husband and I experienced significant confusion when we brought our daughter home. She seemed quite delicate and dainty, but what was coming out of her wasn't! After seven times, while my husband paced frantically, he suggested we take her back to the hospital! Even after years of helping my mother keep babies in our home, I was confused myself. After we calmed down and realized a baby's diet may cause her to assimilate differently and newborns needed to get their systems working, we heaved sighs of relief. But those emotions ran high because we didn't know what to do.

After reading the book of Ruth, I realized that unknowns fill her story. Not knowing creates within us emotions ranging from eagerness to fear and from rapid heartbeat to goosebumps. Unawareness creates devastating results as in the sinking of the Titanic.

But, as Christians, when we realize that God knows our unknowns, we don't need to fret about them. We do need to research, collect information, and make decisions. But many times unknowns still exist. If we train ourselves, they can encourage us to trust the God who knows. We can then make our decisions—but leave the outcome to Him. Knowing that God is already in the future, waiting for us, clears the fog of panic and empowers us to focus.

The best emotion to come from unknowns could be amazement and wonder when God shows us spiritual truth. Imagine what Ruth felt as she realized that God had indeed taken care of her and Naomi by preparing Boaz for them. Experiencing the truth of God's care birthed wonder in her heart at the generosity of her newly found Redeemer.

Ruth's unknowns show us how to cope with our uncertainties. Looking at Ruth's story in a generic way reveals that her unknowns are very similar to ours today. The following list contains a few of the unknowns in her narrative.

1. She didn't know about her direction in life.
2. She didn't know how to walk with a friend through grief.
3. She didn't know how to find a husband.
4. She didn't know who to trust. She possibly knew her future husband for less than three months.

How do we handle the feelings that arise from unknowns in our lives? Does your heart sink at the array of many choices? Sometimes being healthy eludes us and causes frustration and fear. Conversely, you may be eager to attack your lack of knowledge. Many might shout, Google! I agree because I research as quickly as an eyelash can blink. Or, perhaps, an unknown requires us to consult an expert such as a specialist, repairman, or doctor. Our struggles may demand to articulate them to a professional such as a counselor or psychiatrist to help us separate our emotions from our identity.

As Christians, our confusion pushes us to follow the Truth, nudges us to go and work in God's fields, and causes us to look to Jesus who pierces our concerns with clarity.

How is Ruth showing us methods for dealing with our unknowns?

1. Follow the truth that you do know: For example, Boaz followed the Mosaic law that he knew. (Ruth 3:11-12) We know that Christ fulfilled the law and that John 14:6 says that He is the truth. So, when we follow Him, we follow the truth.
2. Go do the next right thing. (Ruth 2:2) Ruth asked Naomi if she could go, and Naomi said go. Ruth went, even though she didn't know where to connect with her kinsman-redeemer. Her story overflows with Ruth going to the fields to provide for her mother-in-law.

3. THINK about the way God works in your life. (Ruth 2:12) Realize truths from what God has already done. Ruth, at some point, learned that Boaz's mother was a prostitute, rescued by Hebrew spies. They saved Rahab and her family, and she became Boaz's mother. (Matthew 1:5) Ruth could reason from this that God was an inclusive God, and he would find a way for her to fit in too.

Now, a few decades later, we demonstrate more relaxation in our role as mom and dad. We followed parenting truths gleaned from years of advice. My husband and I activated this wisdom in the daily care of our children. And we acquired priceless truths from this journey. We learned, like Ruth, that our unknowns lead us to God and His ways for dealing with them. Ruth's plan for managing unknowns (follow, go, think) is ready for you to glean from the Master's hands.

Reference: TerKeurst, Lysa. *It's Not Supposed to Be This Way*. Thomas Nelson, 2018.

Marlene Houk is a regular contributor to *Blue Ridge Christian News*. Her passion is to delve deeply into the truths of Bible women and to discuss those in Bible Studies called *Backstage Pass to Bible Women*. She and her husband discover joy, nurture, and challenge in their church. Her contact is [marlenehouk@bellsouth.net](mailto:marlenehouk@bellsouth.net). Learn more about women in the Bible at Marlene's website: [www.MarleneHouk.com](http://www.MarleneHouk.com)

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School Board Celebrates Deed Presentation

By Cheryl Shuffler  
Burke County

The Burke County Board of Education celebrated a gift of land from the state on Friday, October 25, 2019 during a special called meeting at Liberty Middle School. The North Carolina Department of Agriculture signed over to Burke County Public Schools the nearly 50 acres of land that Liberty Middle and North Liberty School sit on, as well as an additional 28 acres of land near the Liberty property and behind Patton High School.

Burke County Board of Education Chair Randy Burns said when he realized Burke County Public Schools had been leasing the land from the state for Liberty Middle and North Liberty, which opened in 1989, he sought the Board of Education's permission to pursue acquiring the land. Burns contacted Burke County Board of Commissioners Chairman Johnnie Carswell, who in turn reached out to Burke County's state legislators Rep. Hugh Blackwell and Sen. Warren Daniel. Carswell, Blackwell, and Daniel were all at Liberty for Friday's meeting, as were North Carolina Department of Administration Deputy Secretary Mark Edwards, Assistant District Forester Nathan Gatlin, Burke County Board of Commissioners Vice Chairman Scott Mulwee, Commissioner Jeffrey Brittain, County Manager Bryan Steen, and County Clerk Kay Draughn. In addition to Burns, Board of Education Vice Chair Buddy Armour and members Edna Weller, Dr. Don Hemstreet, Seth P. Hunt Jr., and Rev. Dr. RL Icard were present.

Burns said, "Today is a celebration. We have worked for a year and a half to two years on getting this land and today, we got it." Burns thanked all of those involved in transferring the land over to the schools and invited Blackwell and Carswell to speak.

Blackwell said, "This is a fun occasion." He thanked Sen. Daniel for his collaboration on the project, the Department of Agriculture for their willingness to donate the land and the North Carolina Department of Administration for processing the deed. The land was formerly part of a forestry education center in Morganton, and Blackwell read a letter from North Carolina Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler stating excitement for the opportunity for the land to continue to be used for education purposes.

Carswell said he is excited for the future. "This is what collaboration can do," Carswell said. "Mr. Burns and I talk daily about education and the needs of our students. Burke County Public Schools has one of the hardest working boards and collaboration between the boards of education and commissioners has never been better. We are looking to the future and are all about advancing. We don't know what Burke County will be like in 10 years, but this county is growing, the population is coming back, business is moving here, and I am excited to be a small part of the future. We are moving forward, and this is a great day for our county."

Burke County Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Larry Putnam recommended the Board of Education accept the donation of 77 acres of land from the Department of Agriculture in accordance with the board's policy on gifts. Following a motion from Armour on recommendation with "appreciation to all involved," and a second on the motion from Hunt, all school board members approved accepting the land as a gift from the state.

Weller recognized Burns for his efforts in acquiring the land and said, "We are such a great team working together and working with the county and the state to get this done."

Burns shared his appreciation to all involved, including fellow school board members. He said, "I am blessed to work with an awesome board. It is a pleasure to serve the students of Burke County with them and all of this would not be possible without our teamwork and collaboration."

Upon formally handing over the land deed to Burns, Administration Deputy Secretary Edwards said, "I can think of no better use of these resources than for the land to be put to use for educating the next generation."

Liberty Middle School student government representatives participated Friday by leading the group in the Pledge of Allegiance and leading those in attendance on a tour of the school following the meeting.



Cheryl Shuffler is the Public Relations Officer for the Burke County Public School System.

Dreadful or Delightful? Perspectives for a God-honoring Christmas

By Dan Qurollo  
Burke County

Is it not hard to believe that 2019 is nearly past? Nearly all of us will readily acknowledge this year passed by quite quickly. As it draws near to its conclusion, we are faced with the busiest time of the entire year. Each year, we find ourselves overcommitted, exhausted, and flustered. Many have made previous resolutions to never let it happen again; yet, many find themselves right back in the same rut. Many tragically approach this time of year with dread, when God would have us approach it with delight. Doing so necessitates that we gain a proper perspective and strive to maintain it. Adopt these five principles to ensure this time of year is delightful, not dreadful.

1. Prioritize the important. If you do not consciously prioritize things, that which is most important will soon be crowded out, often unintentionally. The most important element of any person's life is his relationship with the Lord. Daily cultivate that relationship through prayer and Bible study. Make sure that the family maintains the proper priority and they truly sense their importance. That may mean setting things down and just enjoying some time together.
2. Realize perfection is not a requirement. For those who know me, you know I am a perfectionist and like everything to go smoothly – perfectly actually! However, the reality is often much different. Accept that everything may not be perfect, that somebody might be unhappy, or that you did not measure up to a certain standard (often your own). Determine to enjoy the time and not become flustered trying to make everything perfect. While attempting to serve Jesus, Martha grew very frustrated over her sister's lack of involvement. Interestingly, it was Martha who was rebuked (Luke 10:38-42).
3. Avoid overcommitment. Many of us struggle to say "No," especially this time of year. It seems that everybody has a party or another event to attend. God knew what He was doing when He gave us twenty-four hours in a day and seven days a week. Recognize your own limitations and avoid being overcommitted. Overcommitment inevitably results in stress, frustration, and hurt feelings.
4. Avoid last-minute preparation. If possible, strive to avoid the last-minute preparations, regardless of what they might be. Little enjoyment and satisfaction are derived from last-minute shopping, cooking, wrapping, etc. Manage your time wisely to avoid last-minute preparations.
5. Find some quiet time. One of the most intriguing statements to me in the Word of God is found in Luke 2:19 where we read, "But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." Despite the unexpected location to give birth to the Messiah and the visit of the shepherds, Mary found time to ponder all that transpired. Jesus frequently took time away from everyone in order to find His needed quiet time (cf. Mark 1:35) and instructed His disciples to do the same (Mark 6:31). Find some quiet time and spend it with the Lord. You will be amazed at how this time will recharge you and enable you to maintain the right perspective.

Pastor Dan Qurollo is pastor Morganton Baptist Church. Check us out on our website [www.morgantonbaptist.net](http://www.morgantonbaptist.net) or find us on Facebook and YouTube.



Sudoku

Solution on page 14

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## The Amazing Rest of God!

By Joyce Meyer



God wants us to enjoy our everyday lives. John 10:10 says that Jesus died for us so we "may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance [to the full, till it overflows]" (AMP). But it seems so many people who say they believe in Jesus are not really enjoying their lives.

It's tragic to think that Jesus paid the price for our sins, that He suffered to make that sacrifice, and yet there are Christians who are struggling just to get by and make it through each day.

The key to having abundant life in Christ is living by God's grace through faith. Because grace is His power working in us that enables us to do whatever we need to do in life.

### Don't Go It Alone

When we try to do everything in our own strength and leave God out of the equation, we just get worn-out and frustrated by our mistakes and failures. But when we lean on God, we enter into His rest and can enjoy our lives, no matter what our circumstances may be.

Hebrews 4:9-11 (AMP) says, "So there remains a [full and complete] Sabbath rest for the people of God. For the one who has once entered His rest has also rested from [the weariness and pain of] his human labors.... Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest [of God, to know and experience it for ourselves] ...."

Now the rest of God is not a rest from work—it's a rest in work. It's partnering with God to do what He is calling you to do by His grace and leaving the part you can't do in His hands, trusting Him to do it. Hebrews 4:3 says it this way: "For we who believe [that is, we who personally trust and confidently rely on God] enter that rest...."

### Start by Believing

When I'm trying to believe, I haven't entered God's rest. But when I do believe, I have complete rest in Him. Living by faith is not a life of struggle—it's rest. And you can enter God's rest in every area of your life.

I've discovered that the stress in my life is caused by the way I approach my circumstances and the attitude I have toward them. It was a turning point for me when I realized that the world will probably never change, but I can learn how to change the way I go about handling situations that are challenging.

One key to this is knowing that as believers in Christ, we are partners with God—we have a part and He has a part in everything He calls us to do. When we don't do the part, we can do and we try to do His part, that's when we live stressed-out with worry, fear, anxiety, frustration, no peace, and no joy.

The reason this happens sometimes is that we think God needs our help. We meditate on the problem—rolling it over and over in our mind, worrying, trying to figure out how things should work out. It's like we're telling God, "I kind of think You need my help, and I'm not sure You can take care of this situation, Lord."

We need to realize that worrying is useless! It's like sitting in a rocking chair, rocking all day, wearing yourself out and getting nowhere. Trusting God means we give up worrying, reasoning, and anxiety and we enter His rest with simple childlike faith—we live by grace through faith!

### Living by Grace

Ephesians 2:8-9 is a great scripture that says we're saved by grace through faith. And we walk out our relationship with God and His plans for our lives the same way we receive salvation: by grace through faith.

This is possible because Jesus made the perfect sacrifice for us when He gave His life, taking our guilt and condemnation and paying for our sins. Through a personal relationship with Jesus, we access God's grace so we can do what He's calling us to do.

It's so amazing to know that God is always with us, giving us His grace for everything we need to do in life. Trust God's unconditional love for you today. Do what you can do and give Him everything else. And when you find yourself getting frustrated or feeling overwhelmed, like you just can't do it anymore, remember to stop, get your focus back on Him and enter His rest once again.

Joyce Meyer is a New York Times bestselling author and founder of Joyce Meyer Ministries, Inc. She has authored more than 100 books, including *Battlefield of the Mind* and *Overload: How to Unplug, Unwind and Unleash Yourself from the Pressure of Stress* (Hachette). She hosts the *Enjoying Everyday Life* radio and TV programs, which air on hundreds of stations worldwide. For more information, visit [www.joycemeyer.org](http://www.joycemeyer.org).



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# Retirement Resources Management

## One Last Thing Before The End Of The Year

By Steve Gaito  
McDowell County



As we wrap up 2019, there is one tax-saving strategy to implement. I am talking about a ROTH IRA conversion. Back in 2018 the Trump tax plan significantly reduced individual tax brackets. This is good news for those that have retirement plans like IRA's, 401(k), 403(b) and 457 plans. For them as well as most workers they would have a limited time to pay less taxes on these income sources. The bad news is that these low tax brackets sunset in 2025 and return to the 2017 levels, if nothing is done. This sunset provides a unique opportunity for anyone with a qualified retirement plan. Properly structured you can convert these plans to a ROTH IRA and insulate these accounts from future tax increases. Because of the current tax brackets and the sunset, you can spread out the taxes on these plans over the next 5 years and pay less taxes over the long haul. I often get the question of why should I pay taxes now instead of delaying as long as possible. The answer is simple math. This is the very reason you should consider this. I believe that taxes will be higher in the future and if the "Secure Act" is passed your estate would pay considerably more. Let me show you how this works:

Bill has an IRA worth \$250,000 and a 4% withdrawal per year and is in the 25% tax bracket state and federal. If he converts the \$250,000 over 5 years that is \$50,000 per year and he stays in the same tax bracket. He would pay \$12,500 in taxes each year or \$37,500 in taxes and have \$212,500 in a ROTH IRA. Now if Bill takes the 4% from either of the accounts it would be like this.

Keep as IRA  $\$250,000 \times .04 = \$10,000 - \$2,500(\text{taxes}) = \$7500$  after taxes  
Roth IRA  $\$212,500 \times .04 = \$8,500$  tax free

The other question is since there is more money in the existing IRA it will grow larger. Let's see what happens in 10 years:  
Keep IRA grows at 6% per year would be  $\$454,849 \times .04 = \$18,194 - \$4,549 = \$13,645$  after taxes  
ROTH IRA grows at 6% per year would be  $\$386,622 \times .04 = \$15,465$  tax-free.

So, you can see that you will have more income while still just withdrawing 4%. Now if taxes increase, which I believe will happen, you will have already paid your tax obligation and now have reduced the taxes you would have paid over your lifetime.  
There are many things to consider when converting IRA's to ROTH IRA's and therefore I provide analysis to see what impact this will have on your current tax

situation as well as your lifetime tax obligation. My goal is to help you pay the least amount of income taxes over your lifetime and even your estate. There are also other options to a ROTH IRA which I can review and see if they are appropriate for you and your unique situation.  
The bottom line is now is the perfect time to consider converting your qualified retirement plans to a tax-free option. If you mention this article, I will waive the fee for analysis through the month of December.  
Finally, as December is the month, we celebrate the birth of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, I encourage everyone to share the love, grace, and peace that only Jesus can bring. I wish you the best this Christmas and the coming year.  
Merry Christmas

*Steven W Gaito is a certified financial planner, owner of Faith Based Health Care and Retirement Resource Management, National Speaker on the topic of Social Security optimization, quoted in national publications like Money Magazine, US News and World Reports and Fox Business. Loves to educate and teach on financial topics like taxation of retirement accounts, long term care, healthcare, and efficient savings plans for small businesses. Has provided financial planning for missionaries through the International Mission Board.*

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# The Characters of Christmas The Unlikely People Caught up in the Story of Jesus

By Daniel Darling



With its sparkly lights, piles of gifts, and heartwarming sentiments, it's easy to become caught up in the flurry of activity at Christmas, forgetting about Who is at the center of it all. How do we recapture our love for the Christmas story, for Jesus, and better understand those who played a pivotal role in His birth?

"Christmas is more than Hallmark movies and trips to Grandma's house," says Daniel Darling, author of *The Characters of Christmas* (Moody Publishers/October 2019). "It is the celebration of the birth of the Son of God, the long-promised Messiah. It's the in-breaking of the kingdom of God. That's why it's important for us to not get caught up simply in the sentimentality of Christmas without realizing what it is we are celebrating."

In *The Characters of Christmas*, Darling, a prolific writer, and the author takes readers back to the time of Christ's birth, looking at the unusual group of misfits, societal outcasts, and often overlooked characters in the Christmas story. From the angels to the shepherds to the innkeeper (did he really exist?), and even Herod himself, Darling brings each one to life, explores their role in the Christmas story, and digs deep to reveal truths from their lives that impact believers today. He shares fresh takes on characters like:

- **Joseph:** Joseph was a man of simple faithfulness who did the next right thing in front of him. He knew who he was, and he was committed to Scripture.
- **Mary:** This young, Jewish peasant girl is at the center of everything. Mary said yes to the hard call of discipleship, even though the circumstances were extraordinary.
- **The Innkeeper:** The Bible doesn't even mention an innkeeper, but someone must have told Joseph and Mary the inn was full. Regardless, in the end, the innkeeper found room for Jesus. What do we do when Jesus interrupts our life?
- **Simeon and Anna:** You may not see them in your everyday Christmas pageant, but these two ordinary people faithfully anticipated the coming of Jesus, against all odds.
- **The Wise Men:** There were most likely more than three, but these men sought Jesus at a great personal sacrifice. We can learn a lot about generosity from these men—we give gifts to each other and to the work of the Lord as a celebration. Our King has come and His joy overflows from our hearts to our hands and into the lives of others.

Darling also shares insights into the song of the Angels, the shepherds, Herod, Simeon and Anna, Zechariah and Elizabeth, as well as gives a detailed look into the surprising people in the lineage of Christ.

"All the characters of Christmas point, not to themselves, but to the central figure in the Christmas narrative, Jesus, the One whose birth, life, death, and resurrection change everything," says Darling. "This supporting cast allows us to get a closer look at the One who is worthy of our worship."

*Daniel Darling is a prolific author and speaker who believes Christmas music should be sung all year round. He currently serves as the Vice President for Communications for the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission.*



# Something To Think About - Do We Have Guardian Angels?

By Dennis Love  
McDowell County



The Bible gives believers a wonderful promise in Hebrews 1:14. It says, "That angels are ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those of us who are heirs of salvation." This simply means that if you are a Christian, you have one or more angels assigned directly to you. These angels are the ones that we refer to as guardian angels. So, the answer to the question "Do we have guardian angels?" is YES we do. Notice that the unsaved person doesn't have them, but God has provided them for His people. In Matthew 18:10, Jesus said, "Take heed that you despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in Heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in Heaven." This verse specifically declares that children have guardian angels. Jesus Christ gives a strong warning concerning little children. He said, "Don't despise the little ones." He is reminding us that they are surrounded by strong protectors. It is proof positive that God gives to His people guardian angels. Perhaps you can recall a moment in your life when you received help, or some kind of guidance, or some kind of protection that was beyond human explanation. I could share several instances in my life, and if you will think about it, so could you! The Bible says in Psalm 34:7 that, "The angel of the Lord camps round about them that fear Him, and He delivers them." The word "camps" or "encampeth" means "to pitch a tent and stay." Therefore, God has promised His people that we have an angel standing right next to us!

Isn't that a wonderful promise! Your guardian angel is not cruising over you at 30,000 feet. He isn't checking on the conditions in South Africa or Europe. Your guardian angel is standing right next to you at this very moment. In fact, you are more protected than the President of the United States when he is surrounded by his secret service. Now maybe you are thinking, I am not that important. I am not the President. No, you are not, but you are a Child of the King. You may not be a ruler, or an emperor, or the Pope. But you are next of kin to the great I Am! God is right now watching over you and protecting you! As long as you walk this earth, your guardian angel will walk with you. They are ministering spirits sent forth to minister to those of us who are heirs of salvation.

In my opinion, that's something wonderful to think about!

*Dr Dennis Love is the Senior Pastor at Glenwood Baptist Church in Marion, NC. He and his wife Vicki have been married for 39 years and they have been in Marion for five years. They have two sons and three grandchildren.*



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Christmas Pageant  
By Wanda Harding  
Yancey County

West Burnsville Baptist Church presents the 19th annual West Burnsville Christmas Pageant, "Christmas Unwrapped," a musical dramatization of the life of Christ. Join us as we unwrap the true meaning of Christmas and celebrate almost twenty years of sharing the story of Jesus. Performances are Saturday, December 7 at 7 pm, Sunday, December 8 at 10:30 am and 3 pm, and Monday, December 9 at 7 pm. Admission is free. You may make reservations for large groups by calling the church office at 828-682-3990. The church is located at 222 West Burnsville Church Road, one mile west of town square.



Wanda Harding lives in Burnsville with her husband of 51 years and has been part of the Creative Team for the pageant since its inception.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16



NOT Like The World  
By Shawn Thomas

*"You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; shall not walk in their statutes."* (Leviticus 18:3)

This is SO applicable to Christians today. People are always saying things like: "we need to be like the world; we need to entertain like the world, be businesslike like the world;" and so on. But God says NO!! "You shall NOT do what is done in the land ...". He says His goal for His people is NOT to be like the world! They are to follow HIS word instead. He says in 4, "You are to perform MY judgments and keep MY statutes, to live in accord with them; I am YHWH your God." Sadly, too many in the church are doing the opposite, using the world's standards as their model and guide, for worship, for business, finances, relationships, ministry, morals, etc. But this is a tragic mistake. God says we are NOT to be like them. "You shall NOT do what is done" by them!

Lest we think this is an "Old Testament" concept only, Jesus echoed this same warning in the New Testament. In Matthew 20, He told His disciples: "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant ...". Just like His Father in Leviticus, Jesus points His disciples to "the way of the world" and then says: "it is NOT this way among you."

Again, Jesus is declaring that His followers are to be different. They are not to do things the way the rest of the world does. The question for those of us who consider ourselves to be His followers is: ARE we indeed different? Or are we just "doing what is done" in the land around us?

Shawn Thomas is a Southern Baptist pastor for almost 35 years, I currently serve as Senior Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Angleton, Texas.





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