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 as well. 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 gifts have been very expensive, 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 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. I like chapter two tells of His birth. In Matthew 1:17 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 fulfill.” 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 pointed to Jesus for eternity. 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 in 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 Or by visiting www.theinspiringword.org

Merry Christmas

www.bronews.com

December 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News
Most church leaders would agree that the western world is becoming ‘less Christian’ every year.

Worldviews

Christian views stem from biblical foundations and place a great deal of value on moral and historical truths. By contrast, those who reject Christian views often have a relativistic view of the world. They argue that every culture is equal and that there are no universal moral truths.

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

Christian views stem from biblical foundations and place a great deal of value on moral and historical truths. By contrast, those who reject Christian views often have a relativistic view of the world. They argue that every culture is equal and that there are no universal moral truths.

Christian evolution

Christians believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible, which includes a literal interpretation of the Genesis account of creation. This view is based on the belief that the world was created by God in a specific way, and that this account provides a historical and moral framework for understanding the world.

Biological evolution

Biologists generally agree that evolution is a process that has occurred in the natural world, and that it is a scientific fact. However, there are some who believe that evolution is not a scientific fact, but rather a myth.

Merry Christmas to Our Friends and Loved Ones

PLEASE JOIN US FOR OUR CHRISTMAS OPEN HOUSE

December 17th - 1:00 to 3:00pm Drop-In

Serving heavy hors d'oeuvres, hot cocoa and apple cider

856 Georges Fork Road, Burnsville, NC 28714

828-682-9675

Info@compassionatecarewnc.org

Compassionate Care

Western North Carolina

Palliative - Hospice - Counseling

Wonderful Care When You Need It Most

continued on page 6
Contents

In Every Issue

Clint’s Chronicles on the Funny Farm - p. 15
Life Lessons - p. 9
Your Government - pp. 32-33

“Now 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

Visit Us Online At: www.brcnews.com

Thank You For Supporting Our Advertisers!

Serving: Avery - Burke - Madison - McDowell - Mitchell - Yancey Counties

ADVERTISER CLASSIFICATIONS

APPLIANCES
Jonathan’s Used Appliances (11)

AUTOMOBILES - Dealers
Jim Armstrong (9)
John Greene Chrysler (23)

AUTOMOBILES - Repair
Barnards Auto (13)
John’s Precision Auto Body (19)

AUTOMOBILES - Tires
Buff Tire & Service (8)
Spruce Pine Tire (15)

BOOK STORE
Dellinger Bookstore (27)

CHURCHES
Alapaha Baptist (4)
Bear Creek Baptist (4)
Berry Chapel Baptist (4)
Burkemont Baptist (4)
Faith Fellowship (4)
First Advent Christian (4)
First Baptist Spruce Pine (4)
Grassy Creek Baptist (4)
Great Hope 7th day Adventist (4)
Morganton Seventh day Adventist (4)
Fame Branch Baptist (4)
Huntsville Presbyterian (4)

Spraun Pine United Methodist (4)
St. Lucina Catholic (4)
The Bridge (4)
West Burnsville Baptist (4)

CHIROPRACTIC
Cruz Chiropractic (11)

COLLEGE
Western Piedmont College (14)

CPA
Jamie Miller (20)

DENTIST
Scott Murphy (7)

DSS
Mitchell DSS (11)

ELECTRONICS/TV/SATELLITE
Radio Shack / Newland (47)

EVENTS
Freedom Life (45)
Jason Project (18)
Falisse Tourism (41)
Munday Senior Center (7)

FARM SUPPLIES
Griffith’s General Store (17)

FINANCIAL PLANNING
Retirement Resource Management (25)

FLOORING/CABINETS
Carolina Flooring/Cabinets (4)

FOSTER CARE/ADOPTION
Sewn Homes for Kids (20)

FUNERAL SERVICE
Heritage Funeral Home (39)
Sossaman’s Funeral Home (5)

FURNITURE
Book Store (45)
L&L Furniture (44)
Peoples Furniture (13)
Southwest Trading (10)

HEALTH CARE
Carolina Home Care (8)
Pratt Health Care (48)

HOSPICE
Hospice and Palliative Care of the Blue Ridge, Inc (34)
Hospice of Rutherfordton (17)
Compassionate Care of Western North Carolina (2)

HOUSING
Clayton (24)

INSURANCE
Eben Insurance (27)
First Brookland Insurance (14)
Fortner Insurance (18)
McCullom Farm Bureau (41)
Miler Insurance Group (24)
Mitchell Co. Farm Bureau (37)
Nacion Wide / Trent (31)
Premier Insurance (20)

NURSERY
Lakeview Nursery (46)

ONTHODONTICS
Small & Martin Orthodontics (13)

PHARMACY
The Prescription Pad (38)

PLUMBING/HEATING
Bullock Plumbing Heating (17)
Benjamin Franklin Plumbing (5)

RADIO
Glory Radio (9)

REALTORS
Whitson Realty (44)

REHABILITATION/NURSING
Brian Center (9)

RESTAURANTS
Abele’s Restaurant (40)
Bantam Chef (22)
Bobba’s Good Eats (14)
D’S (9)
Western Sizzlin (25)

RETAIL
Grassy Creek Clothing (31)
Mountain Time on Main (31)

STORAGE
DL Stager (34)

TRANSPORTATION
Yancey Transit (23)

TREE SERVICE
Ray’s Tree Service (21)

www.brcnews.com

December 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 3
The Bridge Church of WNC
207 Peakes Bridge Avenue
Spruce Pine, NC 28777
www.bridgewnc.org
Pastors - Tom & Tammy Anglin
Sunday Service: 10:30 AM
Church Office M-F 9:00 AM-3:00 PM

Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church
2167 Jamestown Road
Morganton, NC 28655
828-584-8212
Pastor Steve Boitz
Sabbath (Saturday)
Bible Study - 9:00 am
Sabbath Worship - 11:00 am
Vegetarian Buffet after church

West Burnsville Baptist Church
222 West Burnsville Church Rd.
Burnsville, NC 28714
(828) 388-3960
Pastor: Terry Long
Sunday School: 9:45 AM
Worship Service: 11:00 AM
Evening Service: 6:30 PM

Bear Creek Baptist Church
327 Bear Creek Road
Bakersville, NC 28705
www.bearcreekbaptist.org
Reverend Bruce Cannon
Sunday School: 9:45 AM
Worship Service: 11:00 AM
Evening Service: 6:30 PM

First Baptist Church of Spruce Pine
125 Tappan Street
Spruce Pine, NC 28777
828-765-4411
www.sprucepineb.com
Dr. Rocky Branch
Senior Pastor
Sunday School: 9:45 am
Sunday Worship: 10:30 am
Sunday Evening: 6:30 pm

Spruce Pine United Methodist Church
11090 Hwy 321 South
Spruce Pine, NC 28777
www.sprucepineumc.org
spumc@southeastrnet.net
828-765-7444
Pastor Rick Schilling
Sunday School: 9:45 am
Sunday Worship: 11:00 am
Choir - Wednesday - 7:00 pm

Altapass Baptist Church
3631 Altapass Hwy
Spruce Pine, NC 28777
928-765-0600
www.altapassbaptistchurch.org
Dr. Marcus R. Benfield
Sunday School: 10:00 am
Worship: 11:00 am
Sunday Evening: 7:00 pm

Grassy Creek Baptist Church
793 Old State Highway
Spruce Pine, NC 28777
828-765-4620
www.grassycreekbc.org

Great Hope Seventh-day Adventist Church
2574 US Hwy 70 E
Morganton, NC 28655
828-475-2040
Pastor Barry Makorney
Sabbath (Saturday)
Bible Study: 1:00 pm
Sabbath Worship: 11:00 am
Vegetarian Buffet after church

Pine Branch Baptist Church
484 Church Road
Spruce Pine, NC 28777
Phone: (828) 765-9901
www.pinebranchbaptist.net
Reverend Bobby Joe Greene
Sunday School: 9:45-10:30 am
Worship Service: 10:45 am
Evening Service: 6:00-7:00 pm

St. Lucien’s Catholic Church
695 Summit Street
Spruce Pine, NC 28777
Phone (828) 765-2224
Sunday Mass: 9:00 am
Wednesday Faith Formation
Food Pantry: Wed. 1:00-4:30 pm

Newland Christian Church
2828 Horseshoe Hwy
Newland, NC 28657
Phone: (828) 765-1404
www.newlandchristianchurch.com
Pastor: Phillip Greene
Sunday School: 10:00 am
Sunday Worship: 11:00 am
Evening Service: 6:30 pm
Wednesday Evening Prayer Meeting: 7:00 pm

Berry Chapel Baptist Church
292 Chapel St.
Spruce Pine, NC 28777
828-765-5396
www.berrychapeldc.com
Pastor - Steve Williams
Sunday School: 9:45 AM
Worship Service: 11:00 AM
Sunday Evening Service

Faith Fellowship Church
1128 Flat Rock Rd.
Flat Rock, NC 28731
(828) 765-3240
www.fcf.org
Pastor: David Gillese
Sunday School: 10:00 am
Worship Service: 11:00 am
Wednesday Bible Study: 7:00 pm
The Spirit of a man is fed by God and he delights in his ways.
Psalm 37:3

Burkemont Baptist Church
4868 Burkemont Rd.
Morganton, NC 28655
828-437-2357
For more information, please visit
www.burkemontbaptist.org
Dr. Luke A. Lane
Weekdays: 9:30 am - Early Worship
9:45 am - Sunday School
6:00 pm - Evening Worship

You can let tourists, visitors and even neighbors know where your church is and where you meet by listing in the BRCN Church Directory. This visible and effective advertising is specially priced at $300.00 per year for our churches approximately $5.75 a week!

Call us at 828-765-6800 to enroll in this important outreach effort.
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 wayward andpowerful 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 staying 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? Can anyone be forgiven for my 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.
Creation Answers

continued from page 2

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 Old Testament 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 are 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 7:12) 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, transformation, 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 centuries 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 some people reinterpreted the rocks and fossils, not as a result of Noah's flood, but as records of millions of years of history. The idea of a long-era-history 'recorded' in the rocks paved the way for Darwin's theory of evolution. It is a popular culture that is slow-step-by-step process needing eons of time, which 'long-age' geology provided.

Today this long-era 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 can be 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 see a belief in millions of years of earthly 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 so one would attempt to fit these millions of years of history after the creation of the world.
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 lives swerved 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 proves false since things are getting too hard. The verse says, “No temptation has overtaken you except 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 can 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 will soon give way to happiness and an end of suffering. In fact, this passage doesn’t address happiness. In fact, it addresses suffering that is “not light.”

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. God doesn’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 over to temptation.

Many TV preachers and I are sure local preachers of the prosperity Gospel promise every Christian wealth and ease. Give money to TV preachers and God makes 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 wanted 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, helergers they go to his house and watch movies. They find the latest romantic comedy. They begin to feel romantic towards one another, they kiss, caress and... You can guess where it leads. They didn’t plan it, but they also didn’t listen to the Holy Spirit in them warned them with feelings of guilt. God provided the way of escape, but they didn’t follow that off, averted 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 want to live the rest of my life with him. We’ve only been dating for three months.” So, instead they both drop out of school, find full-time jobs and move in together. The mobile home they live in is nothing special, but it’s adequate. But their jobs take them out of church and away from the positive influence 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 ashamed. So, they hide it and make life easier.

Can you guess the answer? God doesn’t bless sinful lifestyles. This started with the poor choice to be alone by 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 pass a child for beating up his brother, stealing candy at the store, or cheating on his school assignment. 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 repeat 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
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 ex-
perience joy this time of year. The festive 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 nec-
eessarily 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
‘goat’ (Matthew 25). It makes one think of the setting of the Lord’s birth. A stable where sheep,
goats, cattle and more roam shelter in the night. The humble beginnings of Jesus’
life on earth are in stark contrast to the staggering self-centered consumption 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 any-
things. 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 house, nursing home or arrange a visit to a
jail or prison. (These require preap-
proval...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.

May Christmass
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 machine, hauled by oxen, and the families are housed in 9x9 houses. 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 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 can put on the armor of God, that we are willing to raise the sword of faith.

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

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, immovable, 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 bold in their faith, to not cover in fear of rejection 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.

Jim Armstrong Subaru
2321 HWY 70 WEST • HICKORY • 628-322-5372
WWW.JIMARMSTRONGSUBARU.COM

“Subaru will donate $250 for every new Subaru vehicle sold or leased from November 14, 2019, through January 12, 2020, to four national charities designated by the purchaser or lessee. Pre-approved Hometown Charities may be selected for donation depending on retailer participation. For every new Subaru vehicle sold or leased during the campaign period, participating retailers will donate a minimum of $50 in total to their registered Hometown Charities. Purchasers/lessees must make their charity designations by January 15, 2020. The four national charities will receive a guaranteed minimum donation of $250,005 each. See your local Subaru retailer for details or visit subaru.com/share. All donations made by Subaru of America, Inc.

Glory 1130
The HEARTBEAT of the High Country

AM1130 WMNC NEWLAND

December 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 9
Silver Slivers of Light
By Patricia Jackson
McDewell County

"Recently, before the morning breakfast, 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 "silver", it is an indicator of the presence of something bigger. A sliver of light, 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. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night." Genesis 1:3-4

"And the light shineth in the darkness and the darkness comprehended it not." John 1:5

In 2 Corinthians 4:6, Paul uses these words to illustrate God's re-creating work in us—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."

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

Now the aim 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

A Mountain Christmas Trail of Lights & Holiday Events
By Pattie 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 Towns of Spruce Pine, Towns 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 community, 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 Pattie Jensen, Director of the Mitchell County Chamber of Commerce.

The Trail of Lights will begin at the Blue Ridge Parkway in Bakersville and extend west past the Blue Ridge Parkway to downtown Spruce Pine with 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, a team, to create this special experience for our county."

"This project shows everything we have been talking about for a year," said Patiie 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 Rwy 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 Little's Glory and Mine Cree. 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 judging on a Trail of Lights view 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. "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 Year," said Jensen. The Chamber offers r i s t o a n e t r o a l a c c e s s t o h o l i d a y e v e n t s .

The Kickoff Weekend will begin on November 30th with Small Business Saturday in Spruce Pine and Bakersville. Spruce Pine's event will feature special shopping deals, the Polar Express Storytime, at Ugly Sweater Contest, a drawing for the lighting of the Christmas Tree and ending with the Spruce Pine Christmas Parade at 6 pm. Bakersville will be kicking off their Christmas "Neal's Roan season with a raffle and Small Business Bingo, an Art Walk, Tree Lighting and Christmas Concert. Events continue at 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 spread the word. The website for the Trail is www.amountainchristmastrailights.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 828-765-5023.

"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 we can continue to grow for years to come."

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

Now the aim 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
‘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 are 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 Calleand 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 Jhuny (“Nyah”), 11, and Jhalier, 8, to head to “the manhole,” 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 Jhalier, 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 fall back in the water—boojum!” 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 pointed her right knee. “My body was weak. Hadn’t slept more than 5 hours, this side automatically freezes after being in the water so long.” After asking God for help, she noticed a mattress floating in Jhalier’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 ladder. “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 to 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! I wasn’t any 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 is 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, “Nyah 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.

Do you have the peace of God in your heart?
United Baptist Church

Patriot Pastors: Civil Air Patrol Chaplains
Serve Community, Church, and Nation
By Steven Mathews
Bunke 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 search and rescue operations in the United States are performed by Civil Air Patrol aircraft. 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 years old retire leadership, development, leadership skills, and aerobatics education. The Civil Air Patrol has a strong history of attracting boys and girls into the service of America, the military, society, and the church.

The Civil Air Patrol Chaplain Corps is the largest volunteer chaplain force on the planet, with over 1,500 chaplains and character development instructors nationwide. In this article, I’d like to encourage you, a Chaplain in your 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 all of 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 ecclesiastical backgrounds. They need help 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 Regional 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, you can meet and network with dynamic partners in ministry and form lifelong 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 our Civil Air Patrol squadrons are Christian young people. These are the next generation of pastors, deacons, altar, worship, missions, and youth directors of Jesus Christ. Today they are enthusiastic yet 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 unengaged with the gospel. The chaplains in their Civil Air Patrol squadrons 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 Civil Air Patrol offers specialized ministry training in areas that you may have missed. It also provides training in leadership and organizational skills. Much of the training is online and at your own pace. 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 can continue to 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. At our North Carolina Wing Chaplain, I’m glad to answer questions and provide more information. Please email me at steve.mathews@acwc.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 Yadkin, and as Wing Chaplain for the North Carolina Wing of the Civil Air Patrol. He may be reached at steve.mathews@acwc.org.

Hospice Carolina Footills

Serving Folk, Henderson, Rutherford, and McDowell in NC and Cherokee, Greenville and Spartanburg in SC

(828) 245-9095 NC (864) 457-9900 SC (800) 218-CARE (2279)

The hospice you choose makes a difference.
Choose the one with:
- local staff
- two hospice inpatient units
- palliative care in all settings
- grief counseling for any adult
- Kids Path®

Camp Erin

David C. Small, D.D.S., M.S., P.A.
Christian G. Piers, D.D.S., M.S., M.F.A
Orthodontics for ALL ages!

110 Juniper St. Suite 300
Morganton, NC 28655
(828) 433-1242

382 10th Ave Dr. NE
Hickory, NC 28601
(828) 322-1259

Emergency Contact: (828) 514-1981
www.smallortho.com
NC Baptist Aging

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 With, 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 977-766-2226. 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@cbcfamily.org

First Baptist Church of Marshall

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 10 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 no 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, whimpering 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

BEAR CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH
Welcomes You to Celebrate Recovery Thursday’s at 7:00pm Hope & Help from Addiction Through Christ

Out with the old, in with the new.SAVE UP TO $250.00 of the purchase price!

Trade in your old Monitor vented kerosene heater for a new Toyostove and receive up to $250.00 off the purchase price!

Peoples FURNITURE COMPANY
274 Oak Avenue • Spruce Pine, North Carolina 28777
Phone (828) 765-5557 • Fax (828) 765-5568
www.peoples-furniture.com

December 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 13
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 hardships, some of his own making, 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-famines with danger. Also, some of you question my veracity — that would be TRUE! Tell me your 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 affront me, and these stories are absolutely true (not to say I don’t exaggerate a neezy taf bit or so.) 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 jack mouse in the tornid gorging myself on Barbara’s marvelous home cooking, fighting off all manner of vermin and dodging life-threatening equipment at every turn. Whatever the case(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 possums... hmmm, or did he say platous, or posds, or wads... just not sure. Anyway, I was awakened by howling, snarling, monster noises! I knew 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 cozy bed, sprung into my city-slicker flip flops and galloped down the stairs to investigate the racket.

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 valley makes nighttimes real. In any event you get the picture... it was DARK outside. I stood on the porch listening as the howling critters screeched 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 trout porch days earlier. I wasn’t stopping fox 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! I quickly gathered my gear, the key and clicked, dashed to 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 hours, long after farmer Clint had passed out in my bed, the Harrell’s son, two granddaughters and their inquisitive dog named Kringle had come for a visit.

I regained my balance, dropped to my knees and hands, 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 lonesome carcass into the woods. But at least I would confront my attackers and put up a fight.

The blinding light shuttled the pitch-black night, starting me and the beast. What to my wondering eyes should appear...but the inquisitive Yorkie named Kringle, so glad to see me again! 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 at all.

My heart nearly stopped... my breathing was labored... my nerves completely frayed... is there so 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 stumbled 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?
Christmas Times A'Comin’

By Bruce Cannon
Adairsville

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 2:16, "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 Changed Everything,” expresses my sentiments perfectly! This baby changed everything. No longer does mankind have to die last 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 in 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

Rev. Bruce Cannon currently serves as the Senior Pastor of Bear Creek Baptist Church in Adairsville. Formerly he served as Director of Missions for the Indian Baptist Association and has served on the General Board of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.
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 the mother of Jesus. She was about to bear a son before the dawn of an age for which the heart of the earth had been prepared.

"Greetings, 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, 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.

Obstacles, misunderstandings, and difficulties became the norm for Mary in the beginning. She wondered how Joseph could ever believe what had happened to her. Would he break her betrothal by divorce? Would he publicly humiliate her? No, the angel confirmed Mary's love. And Joseph took her as his wife. Now he, also, shared the burden of judgmental stares and cruel gazes. 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 was 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 from other newborns. But no. He seemed so ordinary, and so, far, their reality fell short of their expectations. Just the two of them in a dump and dark cave mixed 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 afraid. But the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which 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 hosts 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 child lying in the manger. And when they saw it they 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 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, and those who dwelt in the land of deep darkness, upon 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 glad as 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 to 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 servants to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel. I will give You as a light to the nations, that My salvation may reach to the ends 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 clay 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.
Christmas Memories
By Chris Ratboge
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 were careful, we always had the rough times to over. Shadowed the memories of God allows us to make with family and friends over the years. Sometimes it makes life feel a little sad when I realize that there is no way to go back to those times. However, those memories gives 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 Elaine Church of God was the church in which I grew up. Everyday, 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 play. 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 into 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 at my church does plays, programs, music, etc., as we choose to celebrate Christ's birth. Every year as everyone was leaving the Christmas program there at the Elaine 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 9 great-grandchildren. Even when everyone couldn't come to the family Christmas gatherings, there was always a large 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 sew aprons, bedspreads, slippers, covers, 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. Stuck then a couple of bucks was a big deal to a boy!

There was also a gathering on the Ratboge side of the family. Every year we would gather at Paw and Mamie's house. Over the years they moved a few times. The earliest I remember was the O.W. Wilson house on Carroll Creek in Yancey County. Then they moved down to where we called The Depot House near "downtown" Penascola. The last house they lived in was in Brimfield 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 Ratboge household. As a boy, I was always looking forward to the West Virginia hollers to eat. Most of us I wasn't around to see but I hear and get 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 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 gift! First is the "Brownbag toogeban" experience as my brother and I call it. Dayton 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 at the process. Somehow, I remember these things as if they happened yesterday. We drew names that year for Christmas gifts. Perhaps that was about the same time we turned in our first report card. 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 by one by one, the anticipation was building tremendously. I saw the cars, the army men, the toys, etc. and was up 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 opened the box, my heart dropped! There it was all its glory: A brown toogeban. Now that I know that was probably all my classmates' 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 winter 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 toogeban. 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 his tree on his property and cut one, usually a small pine tree 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 circles were popular. Even if the tree wasn't thumb, by the time we got at those circles on it most every hole was covered. We loved the lights, especially the ones that twirled. We would sit on our backs under the tree looking up through the branches watching the lights blink for the longest time. In 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. 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, hardships, 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 live in our own. Not too often do we get a chance to hang out on a Christmas night. But at the same time, we are making memories with our kids and grandkids. The point is this, be thankful for 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 learns about Jesus who made these times possible. Celebrate Him, celebrate His Rock, His death, and His resurrection. 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 believe or not, I pray God's blessings on you and your family. Let us never forget that it's all about Jesus!

Preacher Chris Ratboge serves as Pastor at Mine Creek Baptist Church.
Discover Your Ministry
By Alan Griffin

I expected church most of my life, but like many others, I was never very religious. I was a bit of a rebel and listened to the sermon, and went home, seemingly unchanged. Sadly, my lifestyle did not reflect my beliefs. I lived for myself and my own comfort, without caring about anyone or anything else. I was living for myself and for the life my mother had planned for me.

No matter how hard I tried nothing ever seemed to work out. My business, financial, and personal relationships were in a state of disarray. I finally reached a point where I realized I could not continue this way. Fortunately, I had the opportunity to attend a course on the history of Christianity and I decided to give it a try. I learned about the history of Christianity and I discovered that I had been wrong about my previous beliefs and experiences.

I am now a Christian and I have found a new source of joy and meaning in my life. My faith in Jesus Christ and his Son, God, has brought me peace and hope for the future. I have found a new sense of purpose and direction in my life. I am now living for Christ and for the sake of others. I have found a new source of strength and courage to face the challenges of life.

I pray that you will also find a source of hope and meaning in your life. I encourage you to seek a relationship with Jesus Christ and to seek counsel from a Christian minister or pastor. I believe that he can help you find a new sense of purpose and direction in your life.

No one knows what lies ahead. The only thing we can be certain of is that we have a God who loves and cares for us. He is a God of love, mercy, and forgiveness. He wants to be with you and to help you through the challenges of life.

To know more about Jesus Christ and to receive the gift of salvation, please contact a minister or pastor. They will be happy to help you find a new source of hope and meaning in your life.

If you have any questions, you can reach him at alana@kidschrist.com

John’s Precision Auto Body
1385 Rutherford Road
Marion, NC 28752

(828) 652-2061
Fax: (828) 652-4860

December 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 19
Eleven Thousand Scientists Say Population Control Necessary Response to ‘Climate Emergency’

By Rev. Mark Creach

“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 signatures 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 things 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 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 OHE 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 your windmills turn faster? 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 the 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 Stsdin, a recent edition of Ms. Magazine, not exactly a pro-life friendly source, rightly contends “the most unsausable population control projects claim to serve some unsaizable social good, like poverty reduction or peace.” She further warns that we should be cautious about “right-based and social justice language that positions contraception and family planning as core strategies to reduce carbon emissions.” Stsdin sites 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 in racist intent as a 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 unleash a genocidal impulse…vpiteing out those deemed unfit to survive,” writes Stsdin.

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 ‘power 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 ambiguous 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 richer the wealth of society, the higher is the quality of the environment.”

When referring to the devil, Jesus admonished, “The thieves come only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that you may have life and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10). The Bible also teaches that the devil employs counterfeiters of the great truths of God.

Christ voluntarily gave his life’s blood on the Cross to stow 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). One may argue, Jesus would build us up with unnecessary guilt for using God’s good gifts of the Earth, and then tell us the way of stonement for nastiness and the planet is by forcibly shedding the blood of thousands, even millions of innocents, through population control.

Reverend Dr. Mark Creach is Executive Director of the NC Christian Action League. You may contact him at rev.markcreach@christianactionleague.org or 919-787-0600.

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

---

Christian Action League

Your Health Insurance Enrollment Center
Premier INSURANCE SERVICES, INC.

Contact Us Today Time is Limited

275 North Main Street Marion, NC 28752
828.652.1553 local 888.526.1553 toll free

Contact one of our knowledgeable agents today

Let us assist you with:
Medicare Supplements
Medicare Advantage
Prescription Drug Plans
Individual Health Insurance

We have been proudly serving Western NC for over twenty five years and will always continue to offer you quality products and a staff that cares about you long after the sale.

Habit of the Heart: A Study of the Spiritual Disciplines

Dr. Jack R. Hodges, Jr.
Burke County

Paul wrote the following words in a letter to Timothy, who had taken the spiritual call to ministry and was preparing 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 with Him. 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 and the people with whom we are associated.

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 choices. But you eat your meals and don’t have to think too much about it, because you’ve developed a habit.

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 bohemian, “dirty word” for most Christians. They smack of burden, failure, or legislation. 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 squashing our all life and energy from our lives, that is not what these spiritual labors are meant for. I love what Richard Foster describes as their truly godly purpose. He says, “The purpose of the disciplines is liberation from the slavery of self-interest and self-focus.” Let me add that they are designed by God as a part of our training, preparation, and spiritual health. That is what Paul laid 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 an overview on every page of scripture the essential elements of a spiritual walk and journey with God in Christ. What 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.”

And the boughs for the 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

John McCoy is pastor of Evergreen Church in Roan Mountain, Tennessee and also chaplain at Roan Highlands Nursing Center

The Gift We Need

John McCoy
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 looking upon the beast. God enlarged 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 subject of the greatest literature. The shepherds have handed their witness to Him, and He is still at the center of the greatest art. Teachers listened to Him and marvelled. He is still the focal point for all truth and wisdom.

In His development, Jesus was perfectly balanced: intellectually (wisdom), physically (strength), spiritually (in favor with God), and socially (in favor with men); and He is still the greater 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. Is the wonder of it all, as believers and unbelievers alike are caught up in that remarkable treat 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 their charter members. They were waiting for that gift. They wanted a leader who would 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 gift we intercede for us when we go to the Father with our prayers of confession and praise and intercession and petition. You see, He came to teach 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 nativity with a white beard, a bunch of gifts (some of which you don’t even want), and a lot of irrelevant, traditional which you’ve really never 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 is the world you are waiting for? This is your moment. It doesn’t matter what your age is. It doesn’t matter how shamefully 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 matter about a tree, an old nativity with a white beard, a bunch of gifts (some of which you don’t even want), and a lot of irrelevant, traditional which you’ve really never been able to put together. Understand this today; Christmas is about God’s love for the world.

December 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 21

www.brnews.com
Jerusalem Council
By Jim Huskins
McDowell County

Those who teach that God’s instructions for a living have been abolished are often cited as 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: “Wash them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from murder, and from theft, and from slander, and from greed.” They also teach that Peter claims in verse 10 that Torah is an unbearable burden. Neither of these positions holds up to proper scrutiny.

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 Peter and Barnabas had been properly teaching that salvation is a free gift of God 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 tend to focus on this verse. They teach that Gentile Christians constitute a “special” category who are exempt from God’s instructions for living.

These same believers 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. Thus, verse 10-11-14 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 5:1-3 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 refers to is the necessity of keeping Torah for salvation. Romans 1:32 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 it clear in John 14:15, “If you love me, keep my commandments.” Sin is defined by scripture as violating God’s teaching that Christians are under no obligation to keep Torah as 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 3, Daniel 9 and Isaiah 45. The summation of these prophets is that God will, in the last days, unite the nation of Israel with believers from all nations. The terms of this union are spelled out in Jeremiah 11:13-34. 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 in faith in the ways of pagan worship. He realizes that they 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 by the Torah. The notice 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 teaching to live Godly lives and a lifelong process for continuing study that endures standing synagogues 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 14:2. We meet each Sabbath—Sabbath Day—in Marion, 11:00 A.M. at Berriett Wellness Center, 551 Bums Road West, 7852 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

Open Monday - Saturday
6:30 - 11am Breakfast
11am - 9pm Lunch & Dinner
(Winter Hours - Close at 8:30pm)
Since 1971, Serving Marion and the Surrounding Communities.
Thank you for the opportunity to serve you!!
Matthew 14:16-21
And Veterans
Bird Of Peace
By Christy Lowman
Berkely 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, just walking around pecking the ground for food? If you hear "coo, coo," while you are outside then you just heard a dove.

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 whistling 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 caloric requirement. They also munch on fruit, plants, insects, grass, and people food. The white-winged dove eats leaves for calcium. When doves forage for food they will only walk around and pack 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 12 eggs a year. Both the male and female take turns taking care of the new hatchlings. They do this by secreting milk in their throats 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 be a very peaceful time. This season, 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 my 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

Bibliography
- Scientific.com/characteristics-doves-686674.html
- Study.com/academy/lesson/dove-facts-lesson-for-kids.html

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 Guidewords and JCCI. 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 http://www.amazon.com/ dp_Bible_a_z_book_173-1/dp/9781628564174

You can reach her at https://www.facebook.com/authorChristyLowman/ or christycoops@yahoo.com.

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

ASHEVILLE ELDERLY AND DISABLED VAN GOES TO ASHEVILLE MON-THRU.-FRI. 7:00 AM -4:30 PM CALL: 828-682-6144/9304

"Serving the Community" Trips for December

- Friday, December 13- Hickock’s & Lunch @ Cheddars -Asheville NC
- Thursday, December 13- Bristol Motor Speedway Lights & Dinner @ Golden Corral-TN (Leave the Senior Center @ 4:30 pm. Cost per rider will be $3.00)

ASHEVILLE ELDERLY AND DISABLED VAN GOES TO ASHEVILLE MON-THRU.-FRI. 7:00 AM -4:30 PM CALL: 828-682-6144/9304

"Serving the Community" Trips for December

- Friday, December 13- Hickock’s & Lunch @ Cheddars -Asheville NC
- Thursday, December 13- Bristol Motor Speedway Lights & Dinner @ Golden Corral-TN (Leave the Senior Center @ 4:30 pm. Cost per rider will be $3.00)
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 sin", (Matthew 1:21), are truly works of kindness.

In Ephesians 5:21, 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 in our agenda each day. When we do, we will have the help of the Holy Spirit. There is so much blessing in living a life with outnumbered 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. "The only way to get rid of darkness is to add more light."

Jesus said, "Are you 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 radiate when we are real within ourself. One of my favorite Thanksgiving/Christmas decorations is a moose candy holder. When a candy is placed inside it, all the broken pieces multiply and spread the light. The seemingly imperfections 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 the reason for the season – and the reason for the light within us. Our Savior knows there will always be heartbreak and new 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" – twenty Christian Articles. She writes Church Programs & Bulletins, TBS Material, Christmas and Easter Programs; all material based on the LITF of the Bible. Also writing and editing, individual memorial writings, etc.

Having the Right Attitude Towards the Lost
By David Vals
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 plan 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, rescues the undesirables 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. It is easy to see 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 am glad I am not like that publican... or are we more like the publican who would not even look toward heaven and smite his chest and say Lord be merciful to me? Because we often think so highly of ourselves, our attitude toward the lost is a personalistic... 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 be 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 unaware this is. The best way for people to hear about Jesus is for us 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 wait our failure to mention Jesus to even one person, result in them missing out on heaven.

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

---

WE ARE COMMITTED TO DOING OUR BEST FOR YOU!
And Our Community

"INSURANCE is the most IMPORTANT thing a person has because it protects him against the loss of everything he has in the world."

-H.O. Hirt, ERIE Founder

www.brcnews.com

December 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 24
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 family gathering, a family and friend gathering in the backyard. Everyone was watching football this evening when unknown suspects approached the residence, smashed 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 grossed nearly $10 billion worldwide. His portrayal of Fred Rogers will be at least his seventy-first film.

But Hanks is known as much for who he is in real life as for who he is on the movie screen. His powerful recent interview in 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 to pass them around as an unexpected gift. He found a woman’s lost ID and used her 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 at 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 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 tongue, but in deed and truth” (1 John 3:18).

Now let’s see 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 washtub, whose crown is broken, and whose office is service. As citizens and servants of this 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 “fruits 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 Mal 4:1-7, where Jesus stated, “For out of the mouths of infants and of nursing babies you shall speak My Words.” 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 vocation to serve. You don’t have to know who is 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?”

Denison Forum

Western Sizzling Steak of the Week

Did you know your IRA or 401(k) plan could be a tax time bomb?

As McDowell County’s only CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™ I help people pay less taxes on these plans.

Mention this add for a free analysis of your qualified plans. (IRA, 401(k) or 403(b)).

68 South Main Street, Suite 200
Marion, NC 27552
(828) 559-0299
Steve@retirerm.com | www.retirerm.com

Denison Forum

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 family gathering, a family and friend gathering in the backyard. Everyone was watching football this evening when unknown suspects approached the residence, smashed 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 grossed nearly $10 billion worldwide. His portrayal of Fred Rogers will be at least his seventy-first film.

But Hanks is known as much for who he is in real life as for who he is on the movie screen. His powerful recent interview in 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 to pass them around as an unexpected gift. He found a woman’s lost ID and used her 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 at 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 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 tongue, but in deed and truth” (1 John 3:18).

Now let’s see 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 washtub, whose crown is broken, and whose office is service. As citizens and servants of this 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 “fruits 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 Mal 4:1-7, where Jesus stated, “For out of the mouths of infants and of nursing babies you shall speak My Words.” 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 vocation to serve. You don’t have to know who is 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?”

Denison Forum
Evangelism Explosion International

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 28:19).

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 covered words, “Well done, say 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 30 years. For more free tips and resources, visit evangelismexplosion.org.

Notes from the Shire

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 our 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 tree into his home and decorated it with lights to symbolize God’s evergreen 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 Newfound Children’s Hospital and Salvation Army in Johnson City every December.

The Meltons’ 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 Ross’s/Igleses 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 hundreds 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.

Merrily 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 Heath Christian Church. Nancy taught preschool, elementary school and middle school for many years. She is the grandmother of eight!

Check out our Website: www.brcnews.com
And find us on Facebook

Clayton homes
RED TAG SALE
Best time of the year to buy a home!
September 1-December 31
(828) 433-8455
1276 Burkemont Ave
Morganton, NC 28655
claytonmorganton.com

www.brcnews.com
December 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 26
The Christmas Wish
By Timothy W. Tron
Raleigh County

My time at Crossnore may have ended recently as the Lord has led me elsewhere, but this will forever be a place 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 turn the door to the door, they would ask for one last favor, to pray with them.

For every prayer lifted, you could always assure one request that was never forgotten, one prayer request that every single child would ask, “Mr. Tron, 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 they were just a vessel, no light of lasting. 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 were 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 these 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 true living God, sent to earth to do 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 needed. 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, the one with which she had been glorified, she would have known 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, these forgotten children suffer the heartaches of being away from their home. Although they are richly rewarded with bountiful blessings of denotations 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 even when where they were.

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; but it was then, “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 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 mothers 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 we are, in this world, we might be, 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 this is 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

---

leta 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. 13:14

Timothy W. Tron lives in Colletville, NC, with his family. He is the former Director of the Trail of Faith in Valders, where he still volunteers and helps with tours. He now teaches Math, full-time at Westgate High School in Boone. He is the author of a new Christian series, “Children of the Light,” with the first book being “Erubra 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 CEU, 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
Regional News

Baptist on Mission - Mission teams are needed to go to Vacation Bible School, Evangelistic Outreach, and Construction projects in our partner states of Alaska, Vermont, Montana, and Arizona. More information and ways to impact in reaching these communities for Christ. Visit our website for full lists of projects at https://baptistmission.org/mission-projects/United-States/New-England or contact NC Baptist on Mission at 919-487-5907 or nambnomad@ncbaptist.org

Impact Kids - Are you looking for an 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 4th-6th grade children. Sign up your church now for a weekend, mini-week, or full week out of state at Camp Cape, Red Springs, Sadberry, Millsboro, Creek, or Treas Baptists Camp. For more information contact Hollie Hoke @ baptistmission.org, Website http://baptistmission.org/camps/kids

Events at the Billy Graham Library

Kids Day is October 19, 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 cast on our heated patio. Children will be led and coached to exercise their artistic abilities (no matter your skill level) and create a holiday decor item to take home as a reminder of the true meaning of Christmas.

Smacks, warm drinks, and storytime will be included as we gather together for this Christmas-themed painting activity. Suggested for 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) while being led by a professional artist to create a beautiful canvas to take home as a reminder of the true meaning of Christmas.

Smacks 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.

Ombudsmen 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 on Long-Term Care Ombudsmen Program is calling for volunteers in Avery, Mitchell, and Yancey Counties. Ombudsmen, also known as Community Advocacy 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 as application, call Servie John @ (828) 265-5434 Ext. 126 or visit the High-Country Area Agency on Aging website at www.highcountryaging.org.

BIBLE STUDY FELLOWSHIP - Acts and Letters of the Apostles

In The Acts and Letters of the Apostle study, we see evidence of God’s Unstoppable Spirit, the growth of His Unstoppable Church, and the unstoppable witness of His powerful Church. This is 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 Woman’s Evening group meet @ Crasy Creek Baptist Church, Spruce Pine 5:45 pm-7:15 pm Mitchell County

Men’s Begin Tuesday, September 10, Men meet @ Boggie Music Church, Barnsville 6:15 pm-8 pm - Yancey County Contact: Nancy Ball (828) 597-1106 (Day Women) Wendy Woody (828) 679-3800 (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 live service is a spectacular event December 24 at 7 pm at the church where the 90-member Chancel Choir will perform. An excellent service of worship at 10 am. For the first time this year, 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 Clausen, “celebrating the beautiful and powerful love of God, who dove down and died for our sins.”

Celesteas 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 hand-made creche.

Mountainside Lutheran Church, a member congregation of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, is located at the corner of Camp Twin Hawns on US Hwy 221 NC-181 near Linville. Visit the church website at www.mountainsideluth.org or contact us at mountainsideclc@bellsouth.net or 733-8404.

Burke County

Catwara River Baptist Association - Mission Insight Training - Missionalight is a tool that equips churches to better understand their congregations and community at large and is free to each of our CRA churches. It uniquely integrates information about your congregation and visitors with demographic and analytical tools to help you solve your most complex strategic mission challenges. Imagine knowing which projects are most needed ahead of time, what is needed in your neighborhood and what may be a primary in your community before those changes happen, enabling you to adapt your future missions accordingly. This training will be offered on Wednesday, December 18, at 10 a.m. at our CRA 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 or your church team to have a better understanding of your community. This training will be free, each person is encouraged to call our CRA office at 828-473-9137 so we can help you be prepared for this wonderful training.

How do you take a new Christmas and help them to become a reproducing disciple? That is the question we have asked and have difficulty finding the answer. To help our leadership train their church members to become reproducing disciples we will train participating pastors/leaders for 10 weeks beginning January 1st at 10 a.m. at our CRA office. We (Chuck Campbell and I) will be demonstrating the G3 discipleship model and the Impressive Life of a Christ Follower for the purpose of duplicating it in the CRA churches. This course will be a great investment with high payback. We will offer the course to leaders. If you are interested in being trained in using this wonderful discipleship tool, meeting weekly for 10 weeks and thus reproducing is in others, please give us a call at our CRA 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 CRA office at 828-473-0137.

Downtown Morganton Events – December 3, 2019 – Morganton Christmas Parade @ 6:00 pm; December 14, 2019 - Holiday Farmers Market – 10:00 - 2:00 pm at Morganton Mini Market, 111 North Green Street; December 15, 2019 at 7:00 pm. The 5 Brown’s–City of Morganton Municipal Auditorium, 401 S College St, Holiday Carriage Rides, December 28, 2019 @ 12:00 pm-4:00 pm

Where: 162 East Union Street – Carriage pick up will be located on the East Union Side of the Courthouse Square; West: 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 be taken. Carolina Carriage Company staff will be on-site (East Union Street adjacent to Courthouse) beginning at 5:00 pm until 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. Great carriage rides offered on Saturday, December 21st. First course, serve first. Be sure to dress warmly as its ride often goes dark!

Great Hope Seventh-Day Adventist Church - CHRISTMAS MUSICAL CONCERT with lively and rich soprano voice of Monique Jenikes, accompanied by Judy Cobb on the piano. This will be on Saturday, December 7th at 6:00 pm at Great Hope Seventh-Day Adventist Church, 2917 US Highway 70, Morganton (across from FootPeds Thrift Store in Drexel). Free admission

JIRDC Annual Christmas Parade - Dec. 5, 2019, 3:00 PM - The Census’ gate will close at 2:10 in order to get everyone parked before the beginning. The Christmas Parade at J. I. Voss 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) 436-6566 for more information. J. I. Voss Riddle Developmental Center 2917 US Highway 70, 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 @dthgivingheartshop, 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 PM – 5:00 PM, at the Morganton Seventh-Day Adventist Church, 2187 Jamestown Road, Morganton, N.C.

Remember, Christmas is a time for giving and thus all the clothes are FREE! There will be clothing for children ages 0-18 years. Also, FREE christmas work shirts or shop or shop any shop with you, your choice!

Journey Through Bethlehem takes place on December 5th through Sunday, December 8th, from 10:30 a.m. – 5:30 p.m. each day. Please join us for this interactive experience of the Nativity Story. The tickets are $6 for adults and $3 for children. 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 landmarks 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 25 through December 24: Lighted trees are on display from 5 pm to 9 pm. Apple cider & Hot Chocolate will be on sale for $1.00 to 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 Turn-On. The festivities will kick off the holiday season from Church Street to Morgan Street. Main Street will fills with everything from fine trucks to go-carts! R&W Railroad Museum will have an open house at the Old Rock School. Interested in being in the parade? Go to visitvaldese.com to download the free application.

December 7: Movies at the Rock presents A Christmas Carol (2009)
Old Rock School Auditorium? | $2 Admission | Registration is preferred. Visit SANTA with CONCESSIONS. Concessions will be available. Doors open at 6:30 pm. December 13 and December 20-21: Old Colony Players Christmas: A Christmas Carol. Old Rock School Auditorium | December 13, 14, 20 and 21 at 7:30 pm. December 15 and 22 at 3:00 pm | 900 oldcolonyplayers.com or call 828-522-1120 for info.

December 13: Christmas at 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, free prize drawing, and in person visit with Santa! Admission is $2 per person. 3 sessions will be available at 8:30, 9:30, and 10:30 am and registration opens November 1st at visitvaldese.com.

Lincoln County
Corinth Baptist Church, 7929 West NC 10 Hwy, Vale, NC 28164 (1/2 mile west of Bankom Elementary School), will present a LIVE NATIVITY on Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday evenings, December 6, 7, 8 & 9, 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 704-483-1547.

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 Ministry. Any business or individual donations would be greatly appreciated. Call 828-440-9257, 828-442-0999 or 828-801-8790.

New Community Outreach
Benefit McDowell Families with Children Teens for Christ E.A.R. Closet (Elderly Equipment and Resource Closet) - Beginning Wednesday, August 1st, 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 from 4:00 to 6:30 pm and the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays 5:00 to 11:30 am. For more information or if you are interested in volunteering opportunities call (828) 803-4798 or email TeensforChristEARCloset@yahoo.com

First Baptist of Marion - The Children's Committee is creating a library for the children and daycare. We are accepting donations of 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 family, 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 sax and trumpet music.
Wednesday Evenings December 4, 11, and 18th 6-7:15 pm. Youth Ministry Center

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

Annual Recovery - This is a Christian and Biblical Blood Program, giving help and hope for men, women, and families suffering from addiction. Any questions contact Josh Wiser @ 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 at 6:30 pm. The cartoonist 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 5:00 - 5:00 pm. Don't miss this special event, brought to you by two local churches as part of Bakersville’s Christmas tradition, 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 serving hotdogs, chips & drinks starting at 4pm. There will be a live Christmas performance after the Nativity and A 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, or trees, fences everything that doesn’t move, or for that matter move slowly…

As 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 126.

Special emphasis will be placed on Downtown Bakersville, Spruce Pine and the communities along the trail to let folks know the side roads and highways 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 save the word!

Spruce Pine Downtown Events
TRAC Studio Tour - December 6-9th, 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 339-249-2139 if you are interested in paying for this National Day of Prayer, for such a time as 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 Country Market across US 19 and just below the pedestrian bridge. Visit travel through valleys, past streams, across rivers, over hills, and experience breathtaking mountain vistas as they make their journey through the Tipton River area. Meet the artists, where they create and where they live.

Toe River Arts - Sunday, December 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 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. Artists travel through valleys, past streams, across rivers, over hills, and experience breathtaking mountain vistas as they make their journey through the Toe River Arts region. Meet the artists, 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

Yuh Village - We are announcing the Opening of Yuh Village Commercial Share Kitchen!
We’ve realized there’s a gap that needs to be filled between the production of local food and local community. That way we started Yuh 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 are a producer you want to market and sell (ike jams, jellies, baked goods, etc.) or if you used 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
Bursville Christmas Parade - Saturday, December 7, 2019, 1:00 – 3:00 pm. Come out and enjoy the Bursville Christmas Parade downtown Bursville, NC. A great kickoff to the Christmas Season.

Feed A Child - Yancey County - Higgins falls page 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 Bilt & Nancy Wedow at 828-675-5347.

West Bentive Baptist Church - Nineteenth Annual Christmas Pageant - Christmas Unwrapped. Performances will be December 17 at 7:30 pm, December 8 at 10:30 am and 3:30 pm, December 9 at 7:00 pm. West Bentive Baptist Church, 222 West Barnville Church Road, Barnville, 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.
Allen’s Offerings

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 221/220 to Rakeyville. Driving during the daytime was okay but I didn’t like driving that far after dark. Especially since I had to drive up Cones Creek (225). 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 knew people that don’t like to visit us because they despise the mountain road so much.

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

One early Spring night, down on the floor of Woodawn, 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 216 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 passed 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 hill 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 at 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 downtown 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.

Interested in finding out more about foster care?
Join us at an informational session to find out more.

December 10th
6:00 - 7:30 pm
Morganton, NC

RSVP to Sara Huffman
704-868-6278
sara.huffman@7Homes4kids.com
www.7Homes4kids.com

Our mission at Seven Homes is to reach out to youth in need of love, safety, and stability. The therapeutic vision of this mission is to serve the needs of the whole child.

www.brcnews.com
December 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 30
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 Care) 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 Kaufman 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 open new opportunities by raising funds, primarily through grants. Another is to make the annual pages of materials 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 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 adapt 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.searchnc.org.

At the November meeting, a topic many people wanted to hear more about was philosophy. SEARCH leaders were able to share some very positive impressions from a meeting they had the day before with Anony 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 developing the next meeting early in the New Year, then talk about 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.
Supporting Our First Responders
On October 29, the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure Committee passed H.Con.Res.17, 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 supported 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 filling out paperwork for federal benefits. Far too often, this task becomes unnecessarily burdensome on families and individuals with confusing language and lengthy forms. Americans deserve 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 regulations. This 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 giving us the ability to draw on additional sources saved. This will streamline the process for citizens and make rules and regulations easier for Americans to navigate.

Congressman Mark Meadows
202-225-6641
www.meadows.house.gov

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 for Americans in all places. 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.

NC House District 118

The General Assembly adjourned on October 31, 2019, to return on November 15, 2019 to vote on the newly redrawn Congressional map passed by the House.

Upon returning we learned of 5 additional bills that had been satisfied by the General Assembly but since vetoed by the Governor. These bills were given the veto stamp on 11-6-10 and 11-8-10.

Two of the bills were vetoed are salary bills, HB231-UNC & Comm. Coll. Pay/Retiree Bonus and SB354-Strongmen 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 school public personnel. The individuals impacted by the veto used 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 sell their membership that a 1% 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 HB1000 2019 Storm Recovery-Budget Corrections. This is a large part of the reason we had to have our financial house in order and giving us the ability to draw on additional sources saved. The bill appropriates over $131 million from NC Savings Reserve Account for federal matching funds and another $55 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 bill 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. This 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/Strengthens 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
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 carries the primary responsibility for that success, but the facts prove otherwise. He vetoed the 2017 and 2018 budgets which provided close to 10% 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 9.4% 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 Seth 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 government does this?

As the end of the year and the holiday season are upon us, I encourage you to email the Governor or call me at 919-733-3460.

Governor Cooper Fight: Election Integrity Measures with Yotpo

Many of you recall that, just as 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 the 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 the resources to police jury duty eligibility. 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 on voter rolls.

NC House District 86

Rep. Hugh Blackwell
919-733-3805
Hugh.Blackwell@ncleg.net

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-stimulating 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 turfed North Carolina into an economic budget crisis during the recession, leading to historic deficits approaching $2 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 6.7% to 5.75% by 2020. The personal standard deduction increased from $5,000 to $20,000.

In 2017, lawmakers passed further tax relief, by reducing the individual tax rate to 5.49% 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, 769,239 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 2018, the General Assembly has passed several important pieces of legislation, including:

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

As of today, however, few of them were vetoed by Governor Cooper (the Born-Alive Act, the Require Cooperation with ICE detainers, 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 a brave, noble death for this nation, and the world will remember this momentous occasion with immense pride.”

As a member of Congress, I have spoken out against indiscriminate violence in the Middle East and the rise of ISIS. Today, the United States took another important step toward a world free of ISIS. The raid demonstrates that the United States is committed to defeating this terrorist group. We will continue to work with our allies to ensure that ISIS does not regroup and that stability is restored in the region.”

www.brcnews.com
December 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News
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 this Christmas week, from Tuesday, December 24, 2019, at 6 p.m. through 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 Biono, 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 price 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 meal? Fan 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 for burial.

Jesus the Godman voluntarily emptied himself of deity to experience human misery. 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 sin's 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.” Jesus is a gift and what a wonderful gift life 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 Elkton, NC. He may be reached at 818-353-0113, snowhillbaptist@gmail.com, or visit their website at www.snowhillbaptist.com.

---

**The Blessings of Peace**

**The Beauty of Hope**

**The Spirit of Love**

**The Comfort of Faith**

May these Gifts be yours

Yours this Christmas Season

---

**Hospice and Home Care of the Blue Ridge, Inc.**

Hospice, Palliative Care & CAP

---

www.barenews.com

December 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 34
The Gospel and the Virgin Birth
By Dr. Tom Walker
Drew County

This time of the year I am hearing in the world of Christmas music: snow, sleigh bells, reindeer, raisterette, silver bells and a host of other things. All of that is acceptable, but the time of the year is also 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. Think about the importance of His sinlessness. That would not have happened had Jesus not been born of a young virgin by the same name of Mary. There are some who do not believe in the virgin birth. Arius, who taught the “virgin” of Isaiah 7:14 should read “young woman,” and that at some point God took away Jesus’ sinfulness. The Epistles, 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 physical body. Therefore, Jesus was only physically present. Jesus Christ is absolutely holy, sinless, and the only one capable of dealing with our sins in heaven. 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 Sigh Was Promised
Isa 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 was not in a position to want 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 an assurance. 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 sinner, we 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. Sin was sin-free. Having a biological father would have annulled Jesus’ deity.

This Lord is holy 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 the 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 apart from sin and free from all unrighteousness and the power of sin in his earthly life.

Jesus Christ is also “harmless.” That word means blameless, not evil, free from all guilt, 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” sustained by sin, absolutely free from all moral impurity, uncleanliness, 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 man 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 Holy 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. As He looked at His beloved disciple, at the One who had first believed in Him, He raised him to the dead. He raised him up to be holy, to be sinless, and forever be sinless. He is made “higher than the heavens.”

Dent. 17:1. “Thou shalt not sacrifice unto the Lord thy God any bullock, or sheep, wherein is blemish, or any evil foreboded: for that is an abomination unto the Lord thy God.”

Note from these two verses that a sin sacrifice had to have no blemishes and no spots. They were not even to have a mark 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.

Thank also about the endurance of His sinlessness. It is not a phase that Jesus grew 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 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 2:2-9, “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 annonces 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 Maccabees has come! It is an ascending 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 so wonderful 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 less-savior had not come to the scene. Let’s celebrate Him this Christmas!

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

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

We’re here to help protect your many sides.

November 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 35
4 Realities Regarding the Mission of God
By Josh Reed

Otherwise, 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 purpose. 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 needing to provide and was seemingly 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 foreign. The eunuch’s journey to Jerusalem was conceivably 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 Egyptian underscore this point. In the West, as one of the holoders from the Industrial Revolution, our culture values efficiency. We value seeking the greatest output for the least input.

3. The mission of God is ingenious
God summons the core human instinct to “go our own way,” even attempting to earn His favor by our own efforts, efficient means. The gospel is a gift, and the only way to be made right is 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 indispensable
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.

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

I’m Dreaming of a ‘Right’ Christmas
By Phillip Greene

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, we are forgetting to reflect on the reason we celebrate 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 even thinking about Jesus? I can remember when I was younger seeing signs everywhere that said, “Jesus is the Reason for the Season.” Now these signs have faded into the background. These 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 you have a devotional 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.

“...Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when the one who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelite. 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 5:4-5 (NIV)

Israel had fallen away; it had become their custom...and God was tired of it. But He did promise something...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 us from 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 west 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 WECHR-AM Radio/Glory 1130.
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 wrong 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 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 “stuckness” 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 honor 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 unwiling recipients. Instead, contemporary apologetic 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 other. 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-I-E-S-T-I-C-S.” That might be a bit of 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 the way 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, 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, 10/10, PBS, ABC and Fox. He wrote and produced his own TV show, Faith Under Fire.

---

Savior Like a Chicken Under the Tree
By Steve Bierc
Barke County Adventist

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 will not resist or even answer them, is answering them now. He is exposing the reality behind reality, and the reality behind that is the people that created it. They love 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. The evil in their hearts will take them to Pontius Pilate. That evil will take them to Pontius 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 evildoers will finally take them to Golgotha, where their addiction to suffering and death will express itself in the tormented 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 event, evil abandoned them there to face the final alone. How very alone, became apparent when the sky turned black and the heavens thundered. They must have felt cold falls cold hand when word came that the temple curtain has been torn, and the priests had fled is 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 bleeding, and they are left...but, if that is already present, then so is the Savior. Christ knows their evil. He has seen it and felt it and heard it. He has lived among them and always called it by name. He calls it by its name now. Numerous times in Matthew the twenty-third chapter, Christ condemns the evil in man’s heart. The day of judgment will open with his words to the Pharisees, “You are a brood of vipers, a flock of poison, the henchmen of destruction. He uses language, unpreached 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 sin, so powerful in their expression. The disciples and those who have followed His ministry, know Jesus to be a man, not just words of action, and words. They have since His cleanest the temple and cast out demons and even raiser Lazarus from the dead. But in these words, He seems to reach further, deeper, and they must begin to wonder just how far the devil will go. With words of condemnation give way to an act of destruction.

“Now to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; neither go in yourselves nor do allow those who are entering to go in.” Matthew 23:13. “Now to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful, 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 censure. Matthew 23 does not value what literary experts like to emphasize, so romance, no paradoxs, no poetry, and so gentle phrasing. This is just plain talk. He speaks of those who murder the prophets, not apologizing, but in fact, murder. 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 the people receive is because of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus loves us all. Jesus wants all to know that He has always intended to save us. Jesus lays out the truth. You are the murderer. You are the ones motivated by evil. Chris says I am not for I am Love sent from Love.

Then, without warning, Jesus chokes up. His words turn to tender heartbreakers: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I desired 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 children? Did the boy Jesus have the opportunity to quietly sneak up to watch the chicks play around their mother’s feet? Didn’t Jesus see them run beneath the hen’s strong wings when frightened and then, didn’t He think of the prophecies concerning the Messiah. On this day, so little bravery lies before Him. Instead Christ looks into the faces of the human race, is it not the same. We 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 grasps onto salvation. Christ says that what matters most, is that we consider one another to be precious. We are all you are killers but that there has been a good reason.

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 only we let Him. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, I long to gather you to myself like a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings. No more need express regret for what come from lips as it did from the lips of Verica. We 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 grasps onto salvation. Christ says that what matters most, is that we consider one another to be precious. We are all)

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

Steve Bierc, Pastor, Morganton Seventh Day Adventist Church

December 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 37
ACROSS
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 two from east to west (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. Taithers, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than (2 Tim 3:4) KJV
17. 36th book of the Old Testament
18. Lord, first let ___ and bury my father. (2:7)
19. Put on the full ____ of God so that you may take your stand (Eph 6:11)
22. pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair (2 Cor 4:8)
23. Jesus told his disciples a ___ to show them that they (Luke 18:1)
24. an idol cast is the ___ of a calf (Exod 32:8)
26. obtain (Matt 24:18)
27. seven of every kind of clean animal, a male and ___ mate (Gen 7:2)
28. Jonathan ran away from the Lord and headed for (1 Sam 1:3)
34. they shall ___ like young lions (Jer 5:5)
37. Its pods 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 is vain (Ps 2:1)
42. a heart being cut off by the sea. He had ___ and seven (Rev 13:7) KJV
44. a quartar of a cat of seed ___ for five shekels (2 Kings 6:25)
46. the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to its ___ (Matt 27:53)
47. sit down and the cost to see if he has enough (Luke 14:28)
50. thy cousin Elisabeth ___ had also conceived a son (Luke 1:36) KJV
51. we never used flattery, ___ did we put on a mask to cover up __ (1 Thes 2:5)
52. a pet of him like a bird or put him on a ___ for your girls (Job 4:15)
53. David made this a ___ and ordinance (1 Sam 20:25)
56. his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming ___ (Dan 10:6)
57. than last increased and ___ (Ezek 16:7) KJV
58. who ___ your word and carry your water (Deut 29:11)
59. rabbin (Deut 4:7) KJV
60. Therefore my ways ___ your ways and your doings (Jer 26:13) (KJV)
61. dig ___ in the ground and hid his master's money (Matt 25:18)
62. all the trees of ___ that were in the garden of God (Ezek 31:9)
63. Foxes have holes and birds of the ___ have (Matt 8:26)
64. shall dwell there, and ___ shall dance there (Isa 13:21) KJV
65. I will give him ___ from all his enemies (1 Chr 22:9)
66. 34. made it grow up over Joanah ___ give ___ for his head (John 4:45)
67. ____ the bridegroom___ out to meet him (Matt 25:6)
68. and the ___ and the pelican, and the goshawk (Ezek 13:18) KJV
69. the tongue can ___ man ___ it is a unruly evil (James 3:8)
70. third of a shekel for sharpening tools and ___ (1 Sam 15:21)
71. the wall will cry out and the beams of the woodwork will ___ it (Hab 2:11)
72. it shall not be lawful to impose ___ tribute upon them (Ezra 7:24) KJV
73. Then Jesus ___ the multitude away (Matt 13:30)
74. For ___ great is his goodness and how great is his beauty (Zech 9:17)

DOWN
1. As ___ man who casteth firebrands (1,3) (Prov 26:15) KJV
2. Everyone who competes in the ___ goes into strict training (1 Cor 9:25)
3. seed 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 7:21) 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 ___ for his food (Prov 22:9)
10. So I went to ___ and dug up the beit (Jer 13:7)
11. with the precious blood of Christ, as ___ without blemish (1 Pet 1:19)
12. An ash destroyed him ___ and burnt it by the brook (1 Kings 15:13)
13. from Jerusalem, and from the coast of Sidon (Luke 16:17)
14. A man finds joy in giving an ___ (Prov 15:23)
15. But neither so did their ___ together (Mark 14:58)
16. the seventh letter of the Greek alphabet
17. They are like ___ beards, creatures of instinct (2 Pet 2:12)
18. the poison of ___ under their lips (Rom 3:11) KJV
19. they had gone through ___ unto Paphos (Acts 13:8) KJV
20. when they had ___ the miracle that Jesus did (John 6:14)
21. do not be ___ in your heart to utter anything before God (Exod 5:2)
22. for your little ___ and for your wives (Gen 41:19)
23. Sarah was ___
24. according to your great compassion ___ out my transgressions (Ps 51:11)
25. Abraham set ___ seed ever ___ (Gen 21:8)
26. but protected Noah, a ___ of righteousness (2 Pet 2:5)
27. LORD bless his hand with the precious ___ from heaven (Deut 33:13)
28. Jesus, knowing their evil ___ and said, "You hypocrites (Matt 23:18)
29. they will tear down your ___ and destroy your lofty shrines (Ezek 16:39)
30. the wormwood, the fountains and the mountains (Job 10:24)
31. He said to ___ "Daughter, your faith has healed you (Luke 8:47)
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 to be white and bright. We want the tree, the decorations, the lights, the singing, the presents. We want everything to be happy. We want to able to get and give plenty. We want peace and joy to abound, but in reality, Christmas often turns into a real hassle. You’re 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 enable Christmas to be a time of blessing and joy instead of being a time of stress and tension? Well the Bible says in Isaiah 55:6 “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 Counselor, 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 simply don’t care. Don’t have a clue. Have you ever had someone you loved, and they loved you, forgive your birthday? It hurts you not to think it hurts when God gets caught up in Christmas and forgets 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 all 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 will help you through your battles. You will worship the Prince of Peace, who can give Peace in the Middle of a Storm. “You will call Me in the day of distress.” “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 plentiful in mercy, is to have the real spirit of Christmas.

Christa Coolidge

• I think we’ve taken the meaning of Christmas. 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 more 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 Grouch thoughts, doesn’t come from a store. Dr. Seuss

Words of Humor:

Three Wise Women
Do you know what would have happened if it had been three Wise Women instead of men who went Jesus? They would have asked for directions, whined on the side, helped deliver the baby, cleaned the stable, made a cassowary, 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 knitting on the old wood stove
Whistled a merry 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, fallen 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
Sang thank God for His gift to me.

Purist 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 “Jenah’s Voice” out of Mars Hill, NC. Her latest song “Homecoming” will soon be heard by many.

---

Heritage
FUNERAL SERVICE & CREMATORY
Service with Dedication & Compassion

Helping Families & Friends Honor Their Loved One.

With over 165 years of combined experience serving Burke, Catawba, and Caldwell County families, the owners and staff of Heritage Funeral Service & Crematory are committed to helping families plan a personal and meaningful ceremony that celebrates life, and begins the much-needed healing process.

Get in Touch
Our Team of Professionals Are Standing By to Help

1507 E. Main St. Vaudre, NC 28690

Phone: (828) 674-9411
Fax: (828) 874-5390

Business Hours
Mon - Sun: 9am - 5pm
24 Hour Availability
Dave Says

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 something is 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 commitment.

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 that when that 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 for you 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 comfort in the long run. You need to remodel the $1,000 figure. Stop buying things that you really want, not just need. You need to start saving money for your retirement, and you need to start saving money for 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, but when you have to have other expenses, you need to remember the $1,000 figure is a temporary thing.

Baby Step 1 is saving $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’ll have just $1,000 in emergency savings. Plus, it serves as an exercise in financial discipline. A lot of people have never saved before beginning the Baby Steps.

Saving money is scary at the start, but it doesn’t need to be. A healthy level of fear can be a fantastic motivator. I don’t want anyone constantly living in their 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 3—setting aside a college fund for your kids. Maybe part of this is the dad in me, but I prioritize 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 an estimated 14 million listeners each week on 600 radio stations and multiple digital platforms. Follow Dave on the web at daveramsey.com and on Twitter at @DaveRamsey.
New Dimensions School

By David Burleson
Burke County

It is difficult to believe that almost half of the school year, and the Christmas holidays are ready to begin. The New Dimensions’ children have achieved a great deal of success this 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 grateful for the privilege of serving as your director. I am grateful to the staff and 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 2010. Quality schools are vital to the economic development of our county. Therefore, our school is dedicated to preparing our children for successful, productive citizenship.

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 – Holiday Dinner Performance
- Tuesday, December 10 – New Dimensions K-4 Christmas Program – Middle School Auditorium – 6 p.m.
- Tuesday, December 10 – New Dimensions K-4 Christmas Program – Middle School Auditorium – 6 p.m.
- Wednesday, December 11 – Warrior Wednesday
- Thursday, December 12 – Five Grade Field Trip to the Nutcracker at the Civic Center
- Thursday, December 12 – New Dimensions K-4 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 NCSU – Middle School Auditorium – 5:30 p.m.
- Monday, December 30 to Friday, January 3 – Christmas Break

As 2010 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 Christmas 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.

Radiant Life Baptist Church
Welcomes You to
Celebrate Recovery
Thursday’s at 7:00pm
Hope & Help from Addiction through Christ

Call the agents who call North Carolina home.

828-652-4525
McDowell County Farm Bureau
21 Burcombe St
Marion, NC, 28752

FARM BUREAU INSURANCE
Auto Home Life Health Bank

December 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 41
Creation Answers

Continued from page 6

Ruth Offers Wisdom in Handling Unknowns

By Marlene Hous

2 Chronicles 20:12 “Neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon thee.”

Lydia TerKeurst states in her book, “When we need to know something as a Christian, it makes us 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, helpless and dependent upon our knowledge for their survival? 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 several weeks, while my husband paced financially, he suggested we take her to the hospital. Even after years of helping my mother care for her three babies in our home, I was confused myself. After we calmed down and realized a baby’s diet may cause her to assimilate differently and2newborns need to get their vitamins and protein, we began to see a little more of what it is to be a mother of a newborn.

After reading the book of Ruth, I realized that unknowns fill her story. Not knowing creates within us an emotion ranging from fear to hope and rapid heartbeat to goosebumps. Unawareness creates devastating results as the sifting of the tribes.

As Christians, when we realize that God knows our unknowns, we don’t need to be afraid of them. We do not to research, collect information, and make decisions. But many times unknowns still exist. If we rely ourselves, we can encourage us to trust in the process that God knows. We can then make our decisions—but know we are not alone in our outcome to Him. Knowing that God is already in the future, waiting for us, clear the fog of panic and empower us to focus.

The best emotion to come from unknowns could be considered anticipation and reward when God shows us spiritual truth. Imagine what Ruth felt as she realized that God had indeed taken care of her and Naomi by providing Boaz for them. Experiencing the truth of God’s care brought wonder in her heart at the genuineness of her newfound Redeemer.

Ruth’s unknowns show us how to cope with our uncertainties. Looking at Ruth’s story in a practical way reveals that her unknowns are very similar to ours today. The following questions are hers in narrative:

1. She didn’t know where her life was going.
2. She didn’t know about what was going to happen.
3. She didn’t know about what was going to happen.
4. She didn’t know who to trust.

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 stinks and causes frustration and fear. Conversely, you may be eager to track your lack of knowledge. Many must admit, “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, therapist, or doctor. Our struggles may demand us to articulate to professionals such as a counselor or psychiatrist to help us separate our emotions from our identity.

As Christians, we can find comfort in turning to the Lord. The Lord gives us to God’s care and Solace in God’s promises. As we look to God, we can replace our unknowns with faith and trust, knowing that every unknown is one step closer to our unknowns being resolved.

Check out our new Website: www.brnews.com
And find us on Facebook
Burke County Public Schools

School Board Celebrates Deed Presentation
By Cheryl Shaffer
Burke County

The Burke County Board of Education celebrated a gift of land from the state on 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 site sits on, as well as an additional 20 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 1996, he sought the Board of Education’s permission to pursue acquiring the land. Burns contacted Burke County Board of Commissioners Chairman Jolanda Carvess, who in turn reached out to Burke County’s state legislators Rep. Hugh Blackwell and Sen. Warren Daniel.

Carvess, 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 Gotlin, Burke County Board of Commissioners Vice Chairman Scott Mihlwee, Commissioner Jeffrey Brittain, County Manager Breyon Steen, and County Clerk Doug Doughton. In addition to Burns, Board of Education Vice Chair Buddy Armour and members Edas Weller, Dr. Don Henske, Sherri H. Hunt, and Rev. Dr. R.L. Ireland 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 get it.” Burns thanked all of those involved in transferring the land over to the schools and invited Blackwell and Carvess 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 said 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.

Burke County Board of Education Chairman Jolanda Carvess said she is excited for the future. “This is what collaboration can do,” Carvess said. “Mr. Burns and I talk daily about education and the needs of our students. Burke County Public Schools has one of the largest working boards and collaboration between the board of education and commissioners has never been better. We are looking to the future and are about advocacy. 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 community.”

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 awesome school board members.”

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.

Morganton Baptist Church

Dreadful or Delightful?
Perspectives for a God-honoring Christmas
By Dan Querello
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 overconsuming, exhausting, and hastened. Many have made previous resolutions to never let it happen again, yet, many find themselves right back in the same rut. Many magically 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 this relationship through prayer and Bible study. Make sure that the family maintains the proper priority and they truly sense its importance. That may mean setting things down and just enjoying some time together.

2. Realize perfection is not a requirement. For those who know you, you know I am a perfectionist and like everything to go smoothly – perfectly actually! However, 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 (of your own). Determine to enjoy the time and not become discouraged 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 preparations. 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 in Mass to the Word of God is found in Luke 2:19 where we read, “ShyMary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.” Despite the unspected 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 Querello is pastor of Morganton Baptist Church. Check us out on our website www.morgantonbaptist.net or find us on Facebook and YouTube.

Sudoku

Solution on page 14
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 overflow]” (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 to live.

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 our part, we can do and we try to do His part, that's when we live stressed-out with worry, fear, anxiety, frustration, so peace, and so 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 know of the kind of problem you have, and I'm not sure you can take care of his 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 in 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 (Buchtel). She hosts the Enjoying Everyday Life radio and TV programs, which airs on hundreds of stations worldwide. For more information, visit www.joycemeyer.org.
One Last Thing
Before The End Of The Year
By Steve Gazo
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 those 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 2023 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 minimize 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. He converts the $250,000 over 5 years that is $10,000 per year and his total in the same tax bracket. He would pay $12,500 in taxes each year or $75,000 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 * .04 = $10,000 - $2,500(taxes) = $7,500 after taxes
- Roth IRA $212,500 * .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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IRA type</th>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Interest</th>
<th>Total Growth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Current IRA</td>
<td>$250,000</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>$500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roth IRA</td>
<td>$212,500</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>$312,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 our 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 Gazo 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 Report 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.

Check out our Website www.brcnews.com And find us on Facebook

Freedom Life Enterprises:
- Marion Fabric & Upholstery
- Freedom Auto Detailing
- Freedom Landscaping • Commercial • Residential
- Cozy Cabin • Coffee, Gifts, Furnishings

78 West Marion Business Park
Marion, NC 28752 • 828-559-2700

www.buckstove.com
40 YEARS OF QUALITY CRAFTSMANSHIP

200 ETHAN ALLEN DRIVE SPRUCE PINE, N.C. 28777
828-765-6144
WWW.BUCKSTOVE.COM

December 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 45
The Characters of Christmas
The Unlikely People Caught up in the Story of Jesus
By Daniel Darling

With its sparkly light, 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 breaking-in 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 (and he really exists?), 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 mention him as innkeeper, but someone must have sold 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 overtakes us from our hearts to our hands and into the lives of others.

Darling also shares insights into the songs 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.
Christmas Pageant
By Wanda Harding
Tuscarawas 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 p.m., Sunday, December 8 at 10:30 a.m. and 3 p.m., and Monday, December 9 at 7 p.m. Admission is free. You may make reservations for large groups by calling the church office at 828-882-3900. 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 whoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16

A Pastor’s View

NOT Like The World
By Shara 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!

Let us think this in 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 is 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?

Shara Thomas is a Southern Baptist pastor for almost 35 years, I currently serve as Senior Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Angleton, Texas.
PRUITT HEALTH WOULD LIKE TO WISH YOU MERRY CHRISTMAS!

There's no place like home.

PruittHealth Home Health delivers premium care in the comfort of your own home. Our clinicians provide nursing services, physical and speech therapies, IV care, social services, and more.

We provide the same exceptional service, with the same caring staff, with a new name. The PruittHealth family is growing, and we remain committed to caring for you and your health.

Avery County:
(828) 733-1550

Mitchell County:
(828) 688-3421

Yancey County:
(828) 682-7825

pruitthealth.com