1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed.
2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)
3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.
4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)
5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.
6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.
7 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.
8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.
9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.
10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.
11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.
12 And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.
13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying,
14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.
15 And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.
16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.
17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.
18 And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.
19 And Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.
20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

Luke 2:1-20
David Pope, MD

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

Isaiah 52:7 KJV

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Christmas is a series of religious and cultural celebrations around the world. The most common dates for Christmas celebrations are December 25, although it is observed on different dates in different cultures around the world. The word "Christmas" is derived from the Greek word "Krismas" which means "a turn of the year". The celebration of Christmas dates back to the Roman Empire, where it was celebrated as a festival to honor the birth of the Sun God. Over time, the Roman festival of Saturnalia and the Celtic winter solstice celebrations merged with the Christian tradition to form the modern Christmas celebration.

The Christmas tree is a symbol of the holiday season, and it is believed that the tradition of the Christmas tree originated in Germany. The Christmas tree was first brought to England by Catherine of Aragon, the first wife of Henry VIII, in 1529. The tree was originally decorated with candles and fruit, and it was not until the 19th century that the modern Christmas tree with presents under it became popular.

Christmas carols are another important aspect of the holiday season. The earliest Christmas carols were written in England in the 16th century, and they were composed as a way to spread the message of the holiday to the masses. Many of the carols that we sing today were written in the 18th and 19th centuries, and they are still popular today.

The Christmas star is another symbol of the holiday season. The star of Bethlehem is mentioned in the Bible as the sign that announced the birth of Jesus Christ. The star is a symbol of hope and guidance, and it is often used to symbolize the importance of the holiday.

Christmas is a time of joy and celebration, and it is a time when families come together to share in the spirit of the season. Whether you celebrate Christmas with family and friends, or you choose to celebrate it on your own, it is a time to reflect on the meaning of the holiday and to share your love and goodwill with others.
Good Will
By Pastor Terry Cheek Th.D.
McDowell County

I find myself struggling to write this month. So much has happened. We have experienced mass shootings, sexual immorality, unheard of disasters and frustrations. How do I write about the spirit of Christmas? How do you find the encouragement to read about Christmas? I found the answer to the series I began two months ago, HOPE! I find the strength to write, preach, teach and even worship is HOPE through Jesus Christ.

From Luke’s gospel in chapter two we read about the birth of Christ. Before the inanimate birth was read beginning with verse 8 the account of angels coming to the Shepherds. What a blessed event this was. The common man, tending their flock, then suddenly the sky opens and a glorious light shines around them. The heavenly conversation is amazing to read repeatedly. But, one word stands out in my mind as I write this article. The word endiavlos, or translated in English “good will.” There is no better time to spread good will than Christmas.

God spread good will to humanity with the birth of Christ, our Messiah. Good will is understood to be delight in the life of another or others. Over thousands of years mankind has waited on the redeemer. Now, we read He has arrived and with Him comes good will.

The Church can share the good will of God’s word every day of our lives. With the gospel we have an opportunity to meet, in some way the material needs of those around us. Look around, there are families struggling, children having to suffer because of bad decisions of adults. There is a home, next door to us who only need a friendly visit. The nursing homes and hospitals are full of kind, loving and lonely folks wishing they could hear a Merry Christmas and have someone ask if they could pray with them.

I’m not trying to guilt trip anyone into anything. I realize Christmas is a busy time of the year. There is shopping, cooking and gatherings; can you find time to spread good will in someone’s life. Lori and I have found that place this year. We have committed ourselves to the local mission’s center and their Christmas meal. We pray that HOPE will be given through good will. If you really want to find HOPE in the world we must work to find one, first giving of yourself and spreading good will. Once you see that it really works you will want to find a way to do this every day throughout the year. Merry Christmas everyone and look for HOPE from good will!

Terry Cheek is Pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Marion.

Morganton Baptist Church

An Amazing Gift
By Pastor Dar Qureilo
Burke County

This time of year often brings a variety of emotions. For those who have lost loved ones or experienced separation, this season is a painful reminder of things they used to enjoy but are no longer able to enjoy. For far too many, this season is a time of stress and frustration. Others seem to be untouched by it, while children often have themselves battling anticipation of finally being able to open their gifts. Sadly, many Christians have lost the wonder of this time of year.

For believers, this time of year should truly be something special. The more I ponder the amazing gift of Jesus Christ, the more amazed I am. I am amazed at the condition in which the Savior was born. Though He is God, He was born in deplorable conditions. Yet His entrance into this world in such a fashion serves to remind us that He is indeed the Savior of all men.

I am amazed at the statement made by the angel to Joseph in Matthew 1:23: “Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.” What an incredible thought that God would dwell with those who would reject Him. Jesus was no ordinary baby; He was the same God in human flesh.

I challenge you to make a conscious effort to set aside time to quietly ponder the true nature of Christmas. Determine that this year will not be another year filled with stress, frustration, and anxiety. God never intended the season to be such. Reflect on the various scenes of Scripture and place yourself near the manger. Worship the One worthy of our praise, and you too will be amazed at all this season offers.

Pastor Dan Qureilo is pastor of Morganton Baptist Church. Check us out on our website www.morgantonbaptist.net or find us on Facebook and YouTube.

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First, soldiers across the country took a knee during the national anthem to protest the mistreatment of minorities in America. For most, the action was deemed an improper venue for making their statement, and highly disrespectful to the nation's flag which is a symbol of the patriotic ideals and spiritual qualities of its citizens.

Now the California chapter of the NAACP is advocating we discard the national anthem because it's allegedly racist. The organization's president Alice Huffman says, "The song is wrong. It shouldn't have been there, we didn't have it 'til 1931, so it won't kill us if it goes away." Huffman says the protests at sports events are what led her to look at the lyrics and determine, "It's racist, it doesn't represent our community, it's anti-black." She believes that if we did away with the national anthem it could improve race relations.

Huffman's contentions are based on a controversy surrounding the anthem's third stanza—one most Americans know nothing about—one that's rarely, if ever sung, as the opening to an official state or athletic occasion.

The stanza includes these lyrics: "Their blood has wash'd out their foul footsteps pollution. No refuge could save the hireling and slave. From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave."

Some historians argue these verses are a celebration of the death of two units of black American slaves who fought for the British in exchange for their freedom in the War of 1812. Francis Scott Key, who penned the national anthem, they say, was against abolishing slavery, and an owner of slaves who referred to blacks as inferior people. The best that can be said of Key, it's argued, is that as a Christian he advocated that Masters should treat their slaves with kindness. The claim, therefore, is that the third stanza is reflective of Key's racism and his belief that the blood of mercenaries and slaves who fought against America would wash away the pollution of an invading British army.

Still, others historians assert that when Key mentioned "slavery" he was actually referring to the British Navy's practice of impressment, which was kidnapping Americans sailors and forcing them to fight on British man-of-war ships. This was a matter of utmost concern to Americans as one of the reasons for the War of 1812.

The word "hirelings" most likely referred to German Hessians who were mercenaries fighting for the British. Some add that the verses do reference slaves who were fighting for the British, but if not, then it becomes a question of how black is black because the fourth stanza speaks of "freemen," which would have encompassed both blacks and whites who fought for America.

Moreover, it's said that Key was a man of contradictions that did own slaves but opposed slave trafficking. He was known to have freed several slaves. And as a lawyer, he represented free or charge, both black freemen and slaves in court. So, if it's right, I think it's impossible to know because Key didn't specify one way or the other what he meant in the third stanza.

Nevertheless, there is one thing for which we can be certain. If we continue to look outside of ourselves, whether it's getting rid of the Confederate flag or monuments to heroes of the Old South, or doing away with the national anthem, the problems of racism will continue. Racism is a virus of the soul.

This week, I contacted my friend, Clarence Henderson, and asked his opinion about the movement to slash us of the national anthem. Henderson is a long-time civil rights activist, one of the four young black men who bravely occupied one of the seats at a Greensboro Woolworth's lunch counter in 1960. Henderson currently serves as the president of the North Carolina chapter of the Frederick Douglass Foundation. Henderson said, "We as a country need to be more concerned about uniting America than dividing it. In the words of Dr. King, 'Unless we learn to live together as brothers we will perish together as fools.'"

Henderson added that he believed the intent of the lyrics of the anthem was meant to inspire. "Unfortunately, we have become a country that finds racism in just about everything," he said. "In order for America to continue to become a more unified nation, we need to seek to resolve rather than create."

I think it's interesting to attend to the sacrifice the national anthem as an antidote to racism. It comes so close to the celebration of Dr. Billy Graham's 95th birthday.

Graham spoke out against racism many years ago during the height of the civil rights movement and said, 'I say today there is only one possible solution [to racism] and that is a vital experience with Christ on the part of all races. In Christ, there is no wall of partition is broken down, the Bible says. There is no Jew or Gentile, or black or white or yellow or red. We could be one great brotherhood in Christ. However, until we come to recognize him as the Prince of Peace, and receive his love in our hearts, the racial tensions will increase."

Henderson, of the resolve we need—the one that can create something meaningful—the one that has the power to create the new man—the one that has the power to generate an entirely new social construct based in God's love for all people—the one that isn't simply a mere ornamentation of the exterior but goes straight to the core of the matter.."

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Reverend Dr. Mark Creech is Executive Director of the NC Christian Action League. You may contact him at rev.markcreech@christianactionleague.org or 919-737-9665.
Do You Know What I Know?
By Jody Griffin
Mitchell and Burke County

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. (John 8:32)

Christmas is coming soon. Families are making plans for gifts and food and celebrations. But not all families are able to get excited about the Holiday season. Some are suffering. Some are crying. Some are wrestling with questions like, "Why isn’t Tandy here with us?" or "When will Momma be home?"

While it is not easy to believe that many children of incarcerated parents may be struggling with the answers to these questions this Christmas, it is also tragically true that there are children and loved ones of correctional employees faced with the same reality. And for these families there is no "projected release date" set as a boundary for the current period of imprisonment.

For these children and family members, their Daddy, Mommy, sister, brother, spouse or significant other, son or daughter will never be coming home. They are not coming home because of the decisions of one or more to sever the future of those charged with insuring their safety and well-being. They are not coming home because they were killed fulfilling their mission of securing the safety of the incarcerated and the professional staff that serves the incarcerated.

Do you know what I know? The truth is that a career within the walls of any correctional institution is a career that carries great risk. Do you know what I know?

Correctional employment in most states equals some of the lowest paid professionals in any field.

So, why do they do it? If the work carries risk of life and limb, and if the work promises little if any financial benefit, why would people subject themselves to such conditions? I know the answer because I have the privilege to witness it every day...

The reason most of the people do what they do in the dark and difficult circumstances they do it in because of the difference they can potentially make in some else's life. That's right. You read it correctly. They do what they do because they ultimately believe that public safety is worth it. They do what they do in some way they know that this work matters, and that of these they protect, some will be changed by the experience of incarceration and find hope for a new life direction.

It is an incredible honor for me to serve as Community Funded Chaplain at Aver-Mitchell Correctional Institution. Every day I witness the love and dedication process in the commitment of Custody and Program personnel. I see the earnest expressions of those who serve in administrative roles, medical and dental technicians, mental health professionals, and social workers. I see case managers scrambling to meet ever increasing case loads and specialty staff like food service professionals who literally face the aforementioned risks every single day. Every. Single. Day.

Do you know what I know? The good people who work and the good people who volunteer to serve behind the walls and within the gates do so at great risk. They are deserving of the prayers of all people who know and value their dedicated service. They literally depend on the goodness of people in the surrounding community to pray for their protection and for the accomplishment of their mission day in and day out.

As the Christmas season approaches and you hear the popular Christmas tunes I pray that you will consider these words and answer the questions we have pondered these last few months. Do you see what I see? Do you hear what I hear? Do you know what I know?

There is a light that shines in the darkness. It is the Light of Life. His Name is Jesus. And He has promised that "ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free...

May the Truth of God’s Word be alive in our hearts and through our lives this holiday season. God Bless you for reading, for caring and for PRAYING! Merry Christmas!

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

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Editorial
By Barbara Harrell

As we get ready to move into December and the Christmas season, I find that I am rather melancholy. Thinking back to childhood and the wonder of the season. My sister and I used to count the lights hung for display all the way home from Baltimore on the old Highway 1. My Dad would work up there, and we became city dwellers (U.O.I.). The trip back to Western North Carolina was a real highlight of the Christmas season and not every house had lights.

Years before that living on White Oak in Bakersville, we were so excited because this was the one time of year we could have candy. A trip to Harper and Cates Store with the glass counter filled with loose candy was an afternoon of awesome sight to a little girl. We were allowed to pick a few pieces, and it went into the prized little brown bag, to be cherished for weeks. The Christmas tree secured from a field, where it was growing wild, and lots of tinsel and a few packages under it meant it would soon be time for Santa Claus.

But the most exciting thing was getting ready for the Christmas play. Even if I didn’t have a part, it was this year’s show and the sight of costumes and the stage and the lights and everything was a real treat.

The play that would tell us again how a tiny baby born in a manger in Bethlehem would become my Saviour. This was the highlight of the year as well as the season.

Looking around me today as we move into this season it brings a certain sadness that so many people have lost the wonder of this season, as we once again hear that old old story that should still fill us with awe. Too many gifts, too many lights, too much candy has left us just as jaded to the entire season. When my grand-children were little I would make individual cakes for each to decorate for Jesus’ birthday. It is with much pride I have watched our children raise those grand children in the old traditions with the church and Jesus’ birthday being the center. This year Doug and I have focused much of our year and even our time space to the drug problems of this county and our disintegration of use. As we move into this season today it looks much different. Our projects for helping humanity have changed. We are now trying to help poor hungry children who live in homes where the parents are addicted and can’t even feed them, alone fill those stockings and gift boxes.

Many of these same children have had at least one parent spending time in the prison system because of that same old drug problem.

I would throw out a challenge to our readers. If you are looking for a place to make a real difference this Christmas season—get involved with some of these precious children whose needs are great. Get involved with our elderly who are being left behind and are isolated from homes. I see in my mind’s eye a trip made with my grandchildren who were coming to Miami Camp this summer. It was probably the most significant thing we did. We visited the Brown Center and read to and loved on those precious ones who feel so unneeded now.

If you know someone who is struggling with addiction don’t be afraid to step out and reach out your hand to help, even if it means inviting them to have a meal in your home. This is God’s child deserving of God’s love just as we are. Merry Christmas and God Bless each and every one of you and let’s Go Out and Make a Difference for Our Lord!!


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**Life Lessons**

By Doug Harell

As we approach Christmas I find myself thinking back to Christmas past and the things we did. I remember mother baking and working to fix food and goodies to take to folks in the community. We would always go out in the woods and find a pine or cedar tree to decorate with popcorn strands that we would string on a long piece of thread to make a kind of roping. The popcorn, the little strands of tinsel and the few lights later on, when we could afford them. Mother would take some of the trimmings off the tree for gristmill and I would take a shotgun and shoot some mistletoe on the tops of the oak trees out past where Carl and Gloria Drake now live in Harrell Hill. We would also gather some kolly branches with the red berries on it for window decorations. Another great memory was going on our yearly shopping trip across the Iron Mountain to Johnson City to Christmas shop. We would even get to go out at my great Uncle Harry’s restaurant, that was the only time I can remember going out to eat during the year back then.

The most important event that would take place would be our Christmas Play at the little church on top of the hill, Pleasant Grove Church of the Brethren. Back then there were lots of younger in the community and we would have parts, along with the grownups, in the play. The focus of the entire community and church was around the birth of Jesus, not just gifts. There were no big displays of lights on the houses or anything like that, most of us just barely had lights in the house and many of us still had the old one-hold oilhouse where our Christmas dreaming was done looking through the Sears Catalog. Certain pages you did not tear out because you wanted to be able to look at them again. The community would get together and go Christmas Caroling. Most of the time we rode on the back of my granddad’s old 5’ Chevy fladed track, and went to the houses of those that could not get out. It seemed that everyone in the community was in a loving and happy mood. We would sing, looking back, that was not always the case though.

Christmas morning was always something we anticipated for weeks, hoping to get our wished-for gift from Santa Clause and our Christmas stocking. I still have the hand-tack shooting stock that mother made for me one year and still fill it Christmas morning. The gifts were very meager in comparison to what happens today. If we were lucky we get a piece of clothing and a toy. On the Christmas that I had turned 12, I will never forget, that I got a Savage single shot, full choke 16-gauge shotgun and I thought I had hit the jackpot. My dad, A.D. Harrell, was an avid hunter and outdoorsman and he wanted to be sure that I followed that example. So looking back, I think that was as much for him as it was for me. Today I long for the attitude of gratitude that was exhibited during Christmas of old, not the amount of entitlement that we and our children seem to put forth today. It seems as if everyone is trying to outdo the neighbor in their decorations, gifts and whatever, over the Christmas season. I long to see the emphasis put back on the Savior’s birth, not just the window lights. The reason for the season is not to make a bunch of money selling merchandise and all that, even though even though the amount of money is so that we and our children seem to put forth today. It seems as if everyone is trying to outdo the neighbor in their decorations, gifts and whatever, over the Christmas season. I long to see the emphasis put back on the Savior’s birth, not just the window lights. The reason for the season is not to make a bunch of money selling merchandise and all that, even though even though the amount of money is so that we and our children seem to put forth today. It seems as if everyone is trying to outdo the neighbor in their decorations, gifts and whatever, over the Christmas season. I long to see the emphasis put back on the Savior’s birth, not just the window lights.

**Snow Hill Baptist Church**

*No Regrets Family*

**Is Jesus the Center of the Universe?**

(A Christmas truth)

By Pammi Dew Haynes

Mitchell County

Christmas is a wonderful time of the year. And for most of us Christ will be at the center of our holiday. However, for far too many people the true meaning of Christmas is lost in tradition and the decedence of commercialism.

The first Christmas, the angels brough a simple message to the shepherds keeping watch over their flock, “for unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2: 11) A very simple message with profound meaning which is still true today, Jesus is the reason for the season.

Though the world at that time may not have recognized the supremacy of Christ, the angels certainly did, as they proclaimed, “glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace goodwill toward men.” (v.14) A. B. Buez-Lightyear would say “to infinity and beyond.” So, in all infinite space and earth Jesus Christ is the glory of God and the image of the invisible God. (Colossians 1:15, Revelation 21:23) Jesus is the center of everything unseen and unknown.

Secular science tells us the observable universe is an infinite amount of space around us. In every direction it is unending. No matter how far or how long my travels I would never reach the end, space is endless. So, where is the center of space? Secular science tells me it is at the center of our universe, the center is relative to any position. So, this model and idea places man at the center. And this is the way most people think. We tend to see ourselves in the center and our family, possessions, and needs revolve around us.

But, if we are at the center, where does that leave Jesus? That leaves Jesus revolving around us with all the other things that are going on in our life. It is sad to say but Jesus is often only one of many things in our life. It is sad, if you want to know where someone’s priorities lie see where they spend their money and their time.

What the world and secular science fail to realize is the spiritual reality of that which is visible and invisible. That Jesus Christ is the center of all things and is not confined by time, space, or matter, Jesus is eternal and before all things in relation to time and all things seen and unseen, exist and are held together because of Jesus. In other words, Jesus is the center of all things and is the glue that holds all things in their place. Colossians 1:16 (KJV 1900)

16 For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him, and for him:

Colossians 1:17 (KJV 1900)

17 And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

Wow what an amazing truth. The Bible teaches Christ is supreme in all things. The way we really enjoy Christmas is putting our number one priority on the Number One priority and that is Jesus Christ. Acknowledging the supremacy of Christ keeps my focus where it needs to be. If you teach the children the supremacy of Christ then they will understand the true meaning of Christmas. If one day we know about traditional Christmas were taken away, Christmas would still be Christmas and have meaning and purpose. Whether because it is based on the person of Jesus Christ and not what the world has made it out to be. May you have a wonderful Christmas, focus on Jesus Christ and your Christmas will be full because all fulfillments are in Jesus.

Pastor Dean Honeycutt shepherds Snow Hill Baptist Church in Bakersville, NC. He may be reached at 828-385-0113, snowhillbaptistc@gmail.com, or visit their website at www.snowhillbaptistc.com.

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A Meditation

At This Time of Year

By Timothy Eller
McDowell County

At this time of year, we must remember a few Scriptures foretelling our Savior’s birth.

Isaiah 7:14

“Therefore, the Lord himself shall give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel”.

The words also made known in the Synoptic Gospels as the angel heralded him as Emmanuel “God with us”

Isaiah 9:6

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

The servant of the world came as a baby, king and prince of peace.

Isaiah 43:10-13

“Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. 11 I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no saviour. 12 I have declared, and I have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: therefore, ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, that I am God. 13 Yea, before the day was, I am he: and there is none that can deliver out of my hand: I will work, and who shall let it?”

Jesus was Emmanuel God with us the savior of the world

We must remember what Christmas is about. Being with family, loving each other, and having time off and gifts matter. But without the savior of the world there would be no reason for the season. Remember Jesus this holiday season.

Tim Eller graduated from Carolina Graduate School of Divinity and has been involved in prison and jail ministry for the past fifteen years. Currently he is operating in the capacity of a servant of Jesus Christ.
An Author’s View
By Marlene Hous
Burke County

Hebrews 12:2 Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Displeasing and directing change, an author creates words out of nothing. A little foreshadowing here, a mountain of tension there, protagonists and an antagonist thrown in, but, everywhere, the mystery of the story suggests...

God is the Master and Creator of Storytelling. His stories are infinitely grand, as in the creation of the universe, and yet, incredibly tiny, as in the tiny earthly shell that formed the un-born baby Jesus. And, yet, Bible stories are rich with the sense of an unseen Hand that creates and directs these stories.

Such is the story of Sarah, Abraham’s wife, in the Old Testament book of Genesis, 18:1-21, in the book of beginnings. Having just finished my Bible Study on Following the Footsteps of Sarah’s Faith, I realized anew from the sermon’s text the following Sunday morning that her path was not of her choosing. God directed her first tiny steps on the cobble stones of ancient Ur and her last pedaling steps before her final days.

Statistically, God underscores her importance by including her in five books of the Bible. He points to her significance for women everywhere as He calls her our spiritual mother and then underscores that by including 19% of all first-mentioned words in her story. Of all the colorful characters in Genesis with their larger-than-life stories, Sarah’s has more first-mentioned words (in the KJV) than any other character. What a subtle yet strong way to underscore 1 Peter 3:6!

Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.

Her story feels like Niagara Falls, plummeting to the pit of fear as she is captured, once, twice, by a pharaoh and a king, locked up in their whims and crushed under their culture. She encounters moments of ultimate shame such as when she realizes who is at fault for their infertility. Her fury turns upon her maid, Hagar, and her anger blazes as she turns on her. And yet, the roar of her joy as she births Isaac years later soars like the phumes of the Falls, sprying everyone down through millennia with God’s power and love. Her fame spreads far and wide as myths visit her story, observing her journey from earthly fireball to a famous place in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11. Every joy and battle in her story weaves into itself the supreme authority of the One Who wrote it, designed to bring Sarah to a place of greater faith that would influence eternity.

Through her came the earthly line of Jesus, Savor of the world. God fulfilled His promise, and her precious little boy, Isaac, became the ancestor of Jesus through King David. What significance her story reveals when seen from the aerial view of eternity and through God’s eyes. Every day that Sarah heard the wall of a newborn, one of the tents in the tribe of Abraham, her heart sighed, looking forward to the day that God would, according to His promise, let her hear her own baby’s cries as he entered the world...to fulfill God’s story within his own life...

As God finished Sarah’s faith, polishing it with His love and grace, and setting it carefully on display for all to stare and wonder, so He carefully and lovingly writes our story, each detail uniquely folded with all the traits of a great story and yet has one single purpose, to glorify Him.

Rest in this and know that, no matter our failures, triumphs or feelings about them, God writes our story and the plots and twists of our lives are, like Sarah, to ultimately bring glory to Him!
Town of Valdese

Parade
By Marissa Angi
Burke County

Valdese, NC — November 27, 2017 — The Town of Valdese is proud to announce that James Hamby, James Queen, William Church, and Richard Lutz will all be honored as Grand Marshals for the Valdese Annual Christmas Parade, which will be held on Saturday, December 2, at 10:00am. Hamby, Queen, Church, and Lutz are all being honored as World War II Veterans who are still living in Valdese. “We are incredibly honored that so many WWII Veterans are able to join us as Grand Marshals of this year’s Christmas Parade. These men served our country heroically and it is humbling that they accepted our invitation to kick off this year’s Christmas season,” states Seth Edwards, Valdese Town Manager. The Grand Marshals will be featured at the beginning of the parade lineup.

The parade will begin at the corner of Church St. and Main, and will conclude at the corner of Morgan St. and Main. “We are so excited to kick off the Holiday Season with our annual Christmas Parade. The parade is a great way to get everyone in the holiday spirit!” states Marissa Angi, Director of Community Affairs and Tourism for the Town of Valdese.

The Piedmont & Western Railroad Museum will host an open house at the Old Rock School the morning of the parade. Parade visitors are invited to view the HO scale model railroad exhibit which stretches from Marion, NC to Leadville, TN. Admission is free, and donations are greatly appreciated.

“I would also like to thank our Valdese Merchants Association for working so hard to coordinate the professional parade floats and sponsoring the finale float with special guest SANTA!” Angi adds. “This event is a great time to come together as a community to celebrate the holidays.”

Attendees are encouraged to visit the downtown merchants while they are in town for the parade. Several merchants have gone above and beyond with their Christmas window displays this year. The Valdese Merchants Association is hosting a People’s Choice Award for the most festive window in downtown. The public is invited to vote for their favorite on the Town of Valdese Facebook page. The business with the most festive window will win $100.

For further information regarding the Christmas Parade and upcoming Holiday events in Valdese go to www.visitvaldese.com or call 828-879-2129.

Marissa Angi is Director of Community Affairs and Tourism

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Great Selection “Great Prices “Great Cause

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Reformers Unanimous

By Justin Norris
McDowell County

Many blessings to my brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus! My name is Justin Norris, director of the Reformers Unanimous of McDowell County. Reformers Unanimous, as we like to call it, RU, is a Biblical based, Christ-centered recovery program designed to rescue, recover, and restore those with addictive behaviors with the power of the victorious life found only in Jesus Christ. My wife, Kayla, and I started out with what we truly felt was a calling to be missionaries to the inner city of Philadelphia. After several months of prayer and preparation, our pastor at New Manna Baptist Church, Tony Shirley, approached us about this ministry and expressed the great need in our community. We had a past of addiction ourselves and the inner city of Philadelphia was a perfect place for us to minister. This type of ministry is what we had in mind, so we decided to seek The Lord more intently. The close of 2016 brought us to a decision, and we decided it was most certainly Gods will to stay and minister in Marion, North Carolina. We went to Rockford, Illinois and learned what this ministry entailed and decided this was it. So, we set a startup date on May 26th, 2017, and we have been growing and have had the pleasure of seeing lives made free and transformed through the gospel of Jesus Christ! Here are a couple of our attendees who have experienced this very thing, and these are their testimonies.

"My name is David Orostica. I grew up in a Catholic family in the Republic of Colombia in Central America. From the time I was 6, I was out of church and started running the streets. At the age of 8, I was introduced to drug dealing and started to traffic drugs myself. I didn't start doing drugs until I was 9, and for 22 years from that time, I lived a life of hustling, gang activity, and violence. In that time, I finally learned and even took others' lives and had many attempts at my own life. It became such a problem that my family had to move to Florida to hope to get me away from my lifestyle, but it only continued. Addiction took many loved ones and close friends in these years and God was completely absent from my life until I made the decision recently to seek Him, ask for His forgiveness, and turned my will and life over to Him. Since that moment, I have had 6 months of victory over drugs and am actively living in the community, church, and other organizations. I am still striving to better myself and fulfill the purpose that God has planned for my life and blessed me with."

"My name is Ruthie Tapal. I was raised in church as a whole life and my mother taught me about The Lord. Unfortunately, at the age of 14, I began making wrong decisions and started using drugs. From then on, I was in and out of jail, met my instructions, and even served two sentences in prison. In those dark years, I sometimes prayed, and every once in a while, darknessed the doors of a church, but I felt there was no way out of this lifestyle and hope was lost. On March 1st, 2017, I finally started an attempt at a sober life, but it wasn't until June 2nd, when I went to Reformers Unanimous at New Manka Baptist Church, that my life changed. I learned what having a true relationship with Jesus Christ really was and that's when I became truly free. I want to thank God for saving me, for this program, and for my church that started it, and mostly, I want to thank my mother for planting the seed of God's Word in my life. I have never had victory over addiction for 9 months and have a true relationship with my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." It is our passion to be a guidance and help to anyone who struggles with any addiction, and we believe with all of our hearts that "once an addict, always an addict" does not have to be the standard. They can have complete and true freedom only through Jesus Christ. Proverbs 13:12 says "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but when the desire comes, it is a tree of life." We defer hope when we believe our addiction is an incurable illness that we must battle the rest of our life. The Bible tells us in John 3:36 that "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye SHALL be free indeed." We welcome you to our program at New Manna Baptist Church located at 245 East Court Street, Marion, NC. Our meals start at 6:30 PM and our program starts at 7 PM until 9 PM every Friday night. You may contact Justin Norris at (828)544-9883, or Kayla Norris at (828)381-1689 at any time. We look forward to serving you and your loved ones!

Justin Norris is the Director of RU of McDowell County.

www.brcnews.com
The Book
By Lisa Ellis
Tennessee

The fragrant aroma of the fresh cut Fraser fir from North Carolina permeates the air. The tree in all its glory stands as the centerpiece of the festivities. Beneath are carefully wrapped gifts tied in red and green ribbons adorned with matching bows. After what seems forever Christmas morning has finally arrived. The excitement grows not only for the children but other family members as they gather. Then one by one the gifts are distributed and the revealing of the contents begins.

Unable to wait any longer the children make haste ripping and tossing paper from one end of the room to the other. Shrieks of screams echo off the walls as they become recipients of the latest toys, games and gadgets they’ve been advertised on TV since Halloween. Grammy also wastes no time as she nips off the paper and pulls out her annual gift from Grandpa, a long flannel night gown; however, this year it’s green pants instead of the usual red.

Not to be out done her gift to Grandpa is matching flannel pajamas. Uncle Zeke proudly displays the sweaters hand knit by his sister, Ann Jodie. Uncle Zeke doesn’t have one arm longer than the other but his dear sister evidently thinks so!

All eyes turn toward sis holding a small box in her hand. She carefully removes the tiny bow and slowly opens the box. Please don’t let it be a grocery store gift card. Diamond earrings? He really came through this year! Hope he remembers how much he loves her when the bill comes next month. Brother grins ear to ear as he shows off his new battery powered drill. No shorts and ties for this Tool Man. Speaking of ties, Scuffy Dad is delighted with his yellow bowtie and matching dress shirt. It doesn’t take a lot to make Mom happy. She often says that having the family together is her best gift but this year there was an extra-large box under the tree for her. The family thought it was about time she had her very own “Lazy Girl” recliner!! Attached was a tag that said, “Put your feet up Mom and let us take care of you today.”

As usual it was another fun-filled time with gifts for everyone including the annual hilarious gag gift for an unsuspecting recipient. Still talking and laughing the hungry group headed toward the kitchen for the much anticipated home cooked breakfast. I stayed behind to pick up the wrapping paper and fancy bows that had been torn asunder and scattered to end far. With an overstuffed trash bag in hand while turning to leave the room to join the others something caught my eye. From the new exposed bare floor beneath the tree I retrieved an unopened gift. It was wrapped in what appeared to be ancient parchment paper and tied simply with brown twine. With trembling hands I untied the string and gently peeled away the fragile paper. Inside was a book and with the book was a note. “To You, from Martha.”

“The Book” (to be continued)

Crossword Solution

Sudoku Solution

Need to go Christmas shopping but don’t have a way?

Merry Christmas

Mitchell County Transportation - 688-4715
Shopping in county or out of county
Clint's Chronicles on the Funny Farm

Dear Friends,

I am always amazed by the notoriety arising from my adventures at Harrell Hill Farms. Wherever I roam folks point, gawk and question my veracity, wondering aloud if Farmer Clint’s musings are factual. Saking a quizzical meal at Waterna Sizzler, I hear, “Hey, I know you! Did you pass a certain someone’s yard?” How embarrassing! At a local church the lady says, “Be careful of those killer groundhogs!”

My manhood is nibbled. On Facebook a friend suggests, “Harrell Hillians beware! It’s grapevine time and Farmer Clint soon will be nipping the John Deere!” J’d like to see him climb out of the river only to be assaulted by moons on all sides! I can’t even escape at Wal-Mart, “Seen any coyotes, cops I mean yanks, lately?”

When will it ever end?

As I reminisce about my agricultural prowess over the last year I am amazed that one man could survive to many near misses with death on the farm. There are nights I awaken, terrified of “what might have been” yet thankful for God’s protective covering.

This month I want to share two short stories, more evidence of how easily things can go awry!

Hazmat Suit

It was a sweltering summer day as Doug dispatched me to spray insecticide on rows of beans and tomato plants. While I don’t recall the exact name of the chemical, I believe it was first cousin to Agent Orange. Despite temperatures in the 90’s, my buddy insisted that I wear a ridiculous crepe suit, gloves and hat. Always compliant, I slathered on my then fat self into the hunter green material, donned my former’s gloves and set off to eradicate the pesky vegetation.

I had the presence of mind to stand down wind of the fine chemical mist so as not to drink too many of the tiny droplets. And spray I did... up and down... all around... bugs gasping for their last precious breath as I bobbed and weaved around the rows. Dodging the swarms of hornets, gnats numbers of creepy crawly things I maneuvered throughout the vast garden. Mission accomplished.

Returning home that evening the skin on my neck was burning, tingling, and feeling as though a gazillion bees were nesting on my blood. As I looked in the mirror I noted what appeared to be a vast blister, better said lyrpoxy. Alas, my life flashed before my eyes as I envisioned the end... surely the disasterly chemical mixture was expediting my trip to heaven. I hurried to the farm house kitchen, hoping only to bid farewell to Doug and Barbara.

Running headlong into my mountain man friend, my eyes telegraphing terror and distress, he asked, “Polka, what’s wrong with you?” I explain how I followed his instruction. “Doug, I wore the suit and gloves even though the heat was nearly exhausting. I even thought to stand windward of the spray. But, as you see, my skin is being eaten from the outside in.”

That crooked smile and mischievous look, the one he always displays just before he asked, “Polka, I don’t know what I’m gonna do with you,” that one... and he asked, “Ou, did you get tangled in the beans?” Thinking back, I reconvened how a couple times the corn rows had wrapped their stringy vines around my neck, once nearly taking me to my knees. “You are allergic to the bean vines, lots of folks are,” Doug said. “Take a shower, dry it off and you’ll be okay in a couple days.” Snickered, having a bit too much fun in my opinion, my friend offered me a piece of cake. And I devoured it, thankful that God spared me death from the nuclear material.

Waving Watermelon...

I had been plowing, hoeing, raking and otherwise eating dust all day long. An extended dry spell plagued our mountain farm as Doug lovingly and painstakingly taught me the process of harvesting hay. I recently learned to lift and transport the round bales (a story for another day) and was returning to the barn with a fresh load.

As you know from previous musings, I love driving the tractor. Tooling along down Harrell Hill Road I was “one” with the land... content in my role as farmhand extraordinaire... privileged to captain the Kioti along our rural roads.

I’m telling ya, this was a hot day and I’d had no water for a few hours (Doug doesn’t give me breaks). As I rounded the bend I saw a lovely lady standing at the intersection of Harrell Hill Road and Byrd Road. Drawing near I recognized Betsy, Doug’s cousin and my friend. Her arm was extended as though flying a kite, but I quickly noticed that instead she was waving a piece of watermelon.

As I passed by, I could nearly see the sweat trickle, dripping, cool red melon. And I wondered aloud. “Why is Betsy standing there waving a slice of watermelon? Such unusual customs in these mountains.” Nevertheless, I smiled, tipped my Farmer Clint hat as a gentlemanly gesture, and went to deposit the hay. All the while wishing I could figure out a way to gratefully watermelon from Betsy.

A week or so later Doug remarked, “You owe Betsy an apology.” I searched the cobwebs of my mind to comprehend what I possibly could have done to offend this wonderful lady. “What did I do now?” I winced. Once again, his eyes two mischievous marbles, my friend explained, “Betsy tried to flag you down for some watermelon last week and just drove by and waved.”

Immediately I went on the attack, defensive to the extreme I proclaimed, “Now look, I don’t know the rules of etiquette here. What was I supposed to do? You know I like Betsy, and you know I like watermelon. What you don’t know is that I WANTED Betsy’s watermelon!” But how was I to know the wanted to share with me? It just didn’t seem right to stop and say, “Hi Betsy, may I please have your watermelon?” Or what if I had leaned from the tractor and said, “Guess that watermelon Betsy!” Bursting into laughter my friends Doug and Barbara nearly died at the hilarity of this vision.

That was an important day, though, in my education at Harrell Hill Farms. What I learned is that on the farm virtually every gesture has meaning, and every movement has purpose beyond what is apparent.

A few days later I apologized to Betsy for my faux pas. “That’s okay,” she said. “There’s always another day and another watermelon.” So, if you’re new here and don’t know what to do, remember... never fly by a lovely lady waving watermelon in your direction!

Farmer Clint

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Merry Christmas

from your local independent agent

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www.brcnews.com December 2017 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 15
**“Holiday Grief”**
By Jacob Wills

The holidays are depicted as happy times of family and friends gathering around the table to celebrate life and faith. This depiction is true for some people, as they are healthy, close to relatives, and gainfully employed. It can be a different story for some people, however. Many people spend the holidays alone. This time is particularly difficult for elderly people who live alone. Many of them rely on public transportation, meals on wheels, senior centers, and neighbors for food and support. Their lives are made easier by these services. During the holidays, many of these services aren’t available. Many of our local seniors are left with meals, or any way to get out of the house. Many seniors in nursing facilities miss their homes the most during the holidays. The memories we all cherish cannot be replaced by their families. Thanksgiving and Christmas are holidays that many elderly people spend alone and hungry. What can we do during this time, and all year, to honor those who have given so much to us?

First of all, we can open our eyes and hearts to see a need. Many times, during the holidays we can focus on our families, food, and presents. Getting all of this together can be overwhelming. During this time, it is really important to remember the “Season for the Season.” Jesus came to serve the marginalized people of this world.

This season is about giving, loving, and sacrificing. It is important to remember that children who are less fortunate are our responsibility. We have a responsibility to care for those who care for us. We have a call to minister to those who are hungry, impoverished, sick, and homeless. We are called to do this not only at Christmas and Thanksgiving, but all year long. If you choose to volunteer serving food to the homeless, prisoner, or shut-ins, it will open your eyes to the great need in our world. Participate in the nursing home and spending time with them enhances their lives beyond measure. In giving we receive. People need someone to love them. They need someone to care about them regardless of what they have done or been.

Secondly, we can identify people in our own community that need help. We can visit them, identify their need, and make them our adopted family. We need to make our churches aware of the needs of others around us. We need to reach out and help. If we look in our communities, we are given the ability to see what we are taking. Action speaks louder than words. Reach the gospel everywhere and when necessary use words.

Finally, we need to develop meaningful relationships with elderly people. As we get older, our priorities in life change. When you are young, climbing the ladder of success seems to be very important. When you are older, relationships are the most important aspect of life. Working in Hospice is not only about a patient’s physical needs, but emotional, socio-economic, and spiritual needs. We provide comfort and family to our patients regardless of circumstances or ability to pay. Our clients become a part of the Hospice family. Many of them have no other family present in their lives. Many times, after being placed on hospice our patient’s lives improve. Seniors need companionship and community. They have much to share when it comes to life experience and love. If you choose to make them a part of your life, they will certainly receive more than you give.

Our challenge during the holidays is not to buy our kids all they want or cook the best meal, nor is it to have the best decorated house, it is to be Jesus to marginalized children. If we can make people’s lives better, we are sharing the Spirit of the Christ Child.

Jacob Wills is an ordained pastor and Bereavement Coordinator for Yancey County Hospice. You may contact him at jacob@hospiceofyancey.org

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**Christmas Traditions**
continued from page 5

The wine used, themselves, were astrologers and studied the stars and planets and knew, according to Jewish rabbinic, of the triangle that it had appeared before the birth of Moses. Perhaps they interpreted it as a sign of a great event in the life of the Jewish people. This may have been the star of Bethlehem. Pictorially it was the special announcement of the Hebrew people.

Many people prefer to believe that the strange star did appear, and that it was simply a miracle and throughout the world today, the Christian holiday has usually begun with the appearance of the first star of Christmas Eve.

The Festival of the Star is held in Poland. Right after the Christmas Eve meal, the village priest, acts as the Star Man and tests the children’s knowledge of religious history. In Alabama, boys and girls carry a star shaped figure from house to house and sing carols in hopes of receiving treats. In Hungary a star shaped pattern is carved in a half of an apple as a purpose to bring luck and happiness.

In general, the Christmas star symbolizes hope and high ideals - hope for good fortune, hope for reaching above oneself. For all human beings, regardless of religion, stars hold special meaning for all the heavens, no matter what barriers keep them apart on earth.

**Candles**

There are many different reasons why candles are associated with Christmas, although no one knows when they first became customary.

They were used during ancient winter solstice celebrations as a way of remembering that spring would soon come. One of the earliest records of candles being used at Christmas is from the middle ages, where candles were used to represent the star of Bethlehem. Jesus is sometimes called the Light of the World by Christians. This might have started the custom of the Advent Crown and Advent Candles.

Candles were also originally used to decorate Christmas trees, until safer electric lights were invented.

**Traditions of Christmas Bells**

Bells, especially church bells, have traditionally been associated with Christmas for a long time. In the Anglican and Catholic churches, the church day starts at sunrise, so any service after that is the first service of the day. So a service on Christmas Eve after sunrise is traditionally the first service of Christmas Day! In churches that have a Bell or Bells. They are often rung to signal the start of this service.

In some churches in the UK, it is traditional that the largest bell in the church is rung four times in the hour before midnight and then at midnight all the bells are rung in celebration.

In the Catholic Church, Christmas and Easter are the only times that Mass is allowed to be held at Midnight. It is traditional that at midnight Masses, the church and altar bells in many cases are rung while the Priest says the "Glo-ri-a!" (Glow is excels in praise of Christmas Day! in churches that have a Bell or Bells. They are often rung to signal the start of this service.

Having a Mass at Midnight at Christmas dates back to the early church, when it was believed that Jesus was born at midnight, although there has been no proof of this! A lot of Church have midnight services on Christmas Eve, although many only have a service of Christmas Day. In many Catholic countries such as France, Spain and Italy, the midnight Mass is very important and everyone tries to go to a service.

In Victorian times, it was fashionable to go carolling with small handhelds to play the tunes of the carol. Sometimes there would only be the bells and no singing! Handbell ringing is still popular today.

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**Christmas Candy Canes**

The Christmas Cane originated in Germany about 250 years ago. They started as straight white sugar sticks.

A story says that a choirmaster, in 1670, was worried about the children sitting quietly all through the long Christmas nativity service. So he gave them something to eat to keep them quiet. When he wanted to reward them Christmas, he made them into a star shape like a shepherd crook, to remind them of the shepherds that visited the baby Jesus at the first Christmas. However, the earliest records of candy canes come from over 200 years later, so the story, although quite nice, probably isn’t true.

Sometime around 1800 the red stripes were added and they were flavored with peppermint or wintergreen.

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**Respiratory Therapist Joins Hospice and Palliative Care of the Blue Ridge**

Hospice of the Blue Ridge is happy to welcome Elizabeth Hollowfield to our team. She is a life-long resident of Mitchell County who knows and loves the communities we serve.

Elizabeth earned her Bachelor of Science degree from ETSU, and is a registered respiratory therapist who has served our community for over thirteen years. Her experience has equipped her with the important skills necessary to serve patients who are coping with COPD, CHF, lung cancer and other respiratory issues.

Recently we launched a program entitled “Breathe Easy” to provide more extensive care and education to these patients. Elizabeth will be instrumental in leading our efforts to continuously improve respiratory care for all of our patients. Her knowledge, experience, and creativity are extremely valuable as Hospice of the Blue Ridge continues to grow its range of services.

The “Breathe Easy” program is another way that we strive to fulfill our promise to provide the highest quality of care possible. We know Elizabeth’s role will contribute to our success and we look forward to working with her to benefit those in our care.

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Joy in Tribulation
By Billy Graham

In the late fall of 1966, approximately 36,000 square miles of land in northern Italy were engulfed as the rain-swollen Po and Arno rivers ran wild. Nearly a million tons of mud and muck were dumped in Florence stone. One hundred thousand persons were left homeless. Dredging of canals and other measures of the Renaissance were damaged or mined.

Nowhere does the Bible teach that Christians are to be exempt from the tribulations and natural disasters that come upon the world. It does teach that the Christian can face tribulation, crisis, calamity and personal suffering with a supernatural power that is not available to the person outside of Christ.

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Jesus Christ spoke frankly to His disciples concerning the future. He told them from on high. No one could accuse Him of deception. No one could accuse Him of securing allegiance by making false promises. In inimitable language He told them that discipleship meant a life of self-denial and the bearing of a cross. He asked them to count the cost carefully, lest they should turn back when they met with suffering and privation.

"In inimitable language He told them that discipleship meant a life of self-denial and the bearing of a cross.

Jesus told them that the world would hate them. They would be "as sheep in the midst of wolves." (Matthew 10:16). They would be arrested, scourged and brought before governors and kings. Even their loved ones would persecute them. As the world hated and persecuted Him, so it would treat His servants. He learned further, they would put you out of the synagogues; yet the time is coming when whoever kills you will think that you offer God service." (John 16:2)

Many of Christ's followers were dispossessed in Him, for in spite of His warnings they expected Him to subdue their enemies and to set up a world political kingdom. When they came face to face with reality, they "went back and walked with Him no more." (John 6:60). But the true disciples of Jesus suffered for their faith.

Tertullus, a Roman historian, writing of the early Christian martyrs, said, "Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were tied to the tails of horses and dragged through the streets. Even those who looked beyond suffering were struck to the ground in the streets and burnt, to serve as nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle." How true were the words of Paul to the early Christians, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22)

Bushed in the Blaze
We are told that the martyrs were rejoicing to their deaths, as if they were going to a marriage feast. They bathed their hands in the bloodkin for them, and they shouted with gladness. One early martyr, witnessing their heroism, wrote, "The union of Christians is by their blood, or were doomed to the fires and burnt, to serve as nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle." How true were the words of Paul to the early Christians, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22)

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The Christians of the early church believed that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Romans 8:18). Thus, they could regard present difficulties as of little consequence and could endure them with patience and cheerfulness.

We are not surprised that the early Christians rejoiced in suffering, since they looked at it in the light of eternity. The nearer death, the nearer a life of eternal fellowship with Christ. When Ignatius was about to die for his faith in A.D. 107, he cried out, "Nearward the sword, nearer to God. In company with wild beasts, in company with God." (Romans 8:18). Thus, they could regard present difficulties as of little consequence and could endure them with patience and cheerfulness.

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In all ages Christians have found it possible to maintain the spirit of joy in the hour of trial. In circumstances that would have crushed most people, they have so completely risen above them that they actually have used the circumstances to serve and glorify Christ. Paul could write from prison at Rome, "I went to the prison cell of the Roman soldiers, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel" (Philippians 1:12).

Count it as a Blessing
In our day millions of Christians are suffering in many parts of the world.
Revival
By Jim Hart

Last summer, a number popped up on my phone that I recognized. It was a fellow pastor I hadn’t heard from in at least a year. A pastor who far exceeds me in Methodist hiearchy, and I caught myself saying out loud, “wonder what she wants with me?” This pastor who happens to have a bunch of letters after her name and a degree from Yale on her wall wanted to know if I would come out to her church and talk about the mission of Crossnore School and Children’s Home as it relates to the Gospel. It will be a great gathering the said. And then, she slyly slid a word in to our conversation that strikes fear to my heart - revival. You see, I grew up in an Eastern NC Baptist Church. We didn’t live very far from highway 301 which was the main route from Delaware to Florida. Every spring and fall, traveling preachers would come through town, set up their tents and advertise a new old-fashioned tent revival.

I went to a few of those revivals. I can still hear the words and see the actions of these preachers burned into my memory - lots of hard preaching and jumping around. I will never forget the red faces and white dried lips of those pastors as they laid the law down on we sinners who showed up on that steamy Saturday night. So, when I was asked if I would come preach a revival, my automatic thought was so I can’t do that. I don’t have that kind of charisma about me. It is not one of the gifts God gave me. Then the said they would have food, and I was instantly in. You see, I love a good church potluck. Nothing like putting your life at the mercy of a casserole that has been simmering in the backseat of someone’s car on a warm spring day. Undaunted by any amount of gastro intestinal distress, I agreed to her request.

Friends, I loath the word revival. I am tired of all the words we church folks, both preachers and congregations use about growth - revival, renewal, refresh - the list goes on. We get together and talk about ways to make our churches grow, how to get new folks in church, how to grow membership. The words fly about, and the ideas start flowing. It’s a contemporary service with a band. Or maybe, we can build a really nice playground. A playground will attract people with kids. How about if we get some hip App. students with skinny jeans and Chacos to be our youth pastor? That will work. Or, I have a great idea, let’s have a revival. We can advertise it. It will be for several days, and we can get different pastors to come speak. It will be great!

Friends, we need to stop offering tosia cassettes and electric preachers. We need to stop offering them great playgrounds and hip young folks in skinny jeans. We need to revive, refresh, renew with Jesus. We need to offer folks Jesus. And not just so they will come to our church, not so they will put in the offering plate, not so we can count them as a member and turn them in on our end of the year reports, but because as Christians, as followers of Christ, it is what we are called to do. By walking along beside others and by sharing the Good News, we are being the community of faith, we are in communion with one another and that is what the church is called to do and to be. The church is not called to lock ourselves away inside our stained-glass theatres, only worry about our personal prosperity and by that, I mean, our own personal salvation. We are called to offer people Jesus.

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus went into homes and synagogues, teaching and healing. People came to him, the sick and the demon possessed. Those who couldn’t come on their own were brought to the feet of Jesus by others. They were offered Jesus.

While in Capernaum, a paralytic was brought on a mat to the feet of Jesus. They didn’t turn away because of the crowd. They were not deterred. They offered their friend Jesus by digging through the hard-baked roof, making a hole to lower their paralyzed friend down to Jesus. We cannot give up on offering folks Jesus, even when it’s hard… even impossible.

On December 11, 1911 that is exactly what Dr. Mary Martin Sleepe did. A woman who had already been turned down for medical school because of her gender, a woman who grew up in a time when women were usually only educated on how to be a great wife and mother, dug through the roof of inequality, poverty and disease by offering the people surrounding a small community in Western NC, medical care and education. And, she did it by first offering them Jesus.

Dr. Sleepe and her husband Doctor, as she referred to him, spent their first Sunday in Crossnore attending Sunday School in what she referred to as the most interesting building in town. It was an interesting building across from the general store and post office. No one knew exactly how old it was. Sleepe wrote that it looked like it was made from wood from the Ark. It was nothing more than a poorly made shed. But, it was the schoolhouse church, and magistrate’s courtroom for the whole region. It was a dark and gloomy building. The inside was stained from smoke from a poorly fitting pipe. As Dr. Sleepe sat and listened to the very serious but sickly Sunday school teacher, some folks noticed her Bible was different from theirs. They were amazed at the amount of information within the margins of her Oxford Teising Bible, and they wanted one.

On that cold Sunday, Sleepe told everyone that she would give them a Bible just like hers if they memorized 200 verses of scripture. Within a short time, a young boy showed up and accepted the challenge. He insisted on standing while reciting his verses. He said he had never sat down to learn them, so he stood and recited all 200. It was the entire genealogy in Genesis.

From these humble beginnings in nothing more than a shed and a determined woman offering people Jesus 200 verses of scripture at a time, The Crossnore School began. Today, Crossnore School and Children’s Home is a residential group home house for more than 125 kids ranging from 14 months old to 20 years old. More than 300 kids in western NC are touched by our outpatient, Day Treatment and educational services. What Dr. Sleepe started in the early 1900s continues today. We may not memorize 200 verses of scripture at a time, but we offer hope, healing and the help to break the cycle of abuse and neglect so prevalent in the lives of our children. Today, we offer our children Jesus in a Christian sanctuary of hope and healing and friends, that is a revival.

Jim is the Director of Christian Education and Campus Pastor at Crossnore School and Children’s Home. He lives in Crossnore with his wife Caroline and their five out of control children.

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I Don't Want to Talk About It:
Part Two
By Jason Koen
Burke County

This is the second part of a series about things that as Christians often hesitate to speak about, but about which the Bible is very clear.

On some level, we love to talk about politics, maybe a little bit too much, and perhaps that is the problem. Pontius Pilate, when Jesus was standing before him, asked about the location of Jesus' kingdom, to which Jesus famously replied, “My kingdom is not of this world.” The Disciples, for their part, didn’t really get it either. We all remember Peter, in Matthew’s Gospel, confessing His faith that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah, but we forget that at that moment Jesus went into a speech about how the Messiah would have to suffer and die at the hands of “sinful men.” Everyone who heard this would have known that he was speaking about the Jewish-Roman power monopoly that dominated the landscape during this time, the very power monopoly Peter believed Jesus had come to overthrow. This didn’t fit with his conception of the Messiah (or anyone else’s at that time). The Messiah was supposed to be a strong warrior King, a King that would overthrow Roman rule and establish Israelite national sovereignty once and for all, but Jesus had other plans. Just like he told Pilate, “My kingdom is not of this world.”

We know now that Jesus didn’t come to release God’s people from the bondage of the Roman Empire, his mission was to liberate us from a far more sinister enemy, that of sin and death. We know now that He didn’t have time to mess around with temporary warriors like the Romans. This has not changed. I worry about modern-day Christianity in many ways. I worry that our biblical literacy is lacking and that we are losing touch with the ancient roots of our faith. And I worry that we are becoming more like Peter, you know the guy to whom Jesus said, “get behind me Satan!” In the days after the presidential election last year Facebook became a bizarre place. I saw articles warning that Trump would bring a permanent end to democracy in America and I saw hymns of praise extolling God for engineering the rise of His anointed to the presidency, and everything else is in between.

Now, the Psalms are filled with hymns of Praise to God for the King, and the Prophetic books are often extremely harsh on unscrupulous men who wield power without wisdom. I’m not saying these are not legitimate expressions. I’m not saying Christians should stay out of politics altogether. I’m not saying we shouldn’t do all we can to make this world a better place while we’re here. I’m just saying that “My kingdom is not of this world.”

The election of a Republican does not add to the inheritance we have in Christ or threaten our once firm hope in the coming Kingdom. Our hope is in Jesus and in His Kingdom, a kingdom that cannot be taken, a kingdom that is coming regardless of who is elected and what laws are passed. Until then, we, like Jesus, may have to suffer at the hands of sinful men and women. This world may become an increasingly dark and dangerous place for us, or it may not, I don’t know. But I do know that Jesus also said, “take heart, for I have overcome the world.” We are to overcome as He has overcome. We fight this battle not with swords or arrows, or well-crafted political campaigns; we wage this war with the same good news of the love of Jesus and the Wisdom of God.

Jason Koen is Pastor of Bridge42 Church in Morganton, NC.

The Gift of Peace
By Rick and Cindy Mercer
Burke County

It seems more and more that our nation and our hearts are at unrest and peace seems to be nowhere in sight. The news is a constant reminder of another heart ache due to the latest disaster or tragedy. Sometimes, just the storms in our own lives give us another stark reminder that the enemy is trying desperately to steal our joy and our peace. Lorenzo Dow went through a period of soul-searching. He wanted a relationship with God. He wanted to be filled with the Spirit. And finally, God inspired him, “Believe the blessing now.” That is, “Believe that you’ve received it.”

That proved a breakthrough for Lorenzo. He said, “A gentle running peace filled my soul.”

Before, Lorenzo had bounced often between ecstasy and melancholy. He was often discouraged. But now Lorenzo began to experience what he called a “simple, sweet, running peace from day to day, so that prosperity or adversity didn’t produce the ups and downs as formerly, but my soul is more like the ocean, while the bottom is still calm.”

Lorenzo Dow was filled with the Spirit. And he was filled with the quality of peace. He became a powerful man of God.

Peace is not an attribute we strive for. It is not a state of mind we achieve through some meditative state. Peace is a gift God offers. We receive it by faith. When we open our hearts to the Spirit, the Spirit brings peace. Isn’t that a comforting thought?

Scripture calls the Holy Spirit our Comforter. The New Testament word is paraclete. It means “one who stands alongside.” He is the one who holds us up and supports us, encourages us, strengthens us, and gives us peace.

Peace is a state of calm assurance when everything else around us is seemingly out of control. It is the result of trust, of knowing that someone much greater than we are in control. Peace is the opposite of worry.

Worry projects the worst possible scenario on the screen of our minds. Peace trusts that God will work to accomplish His good in every situation. The apostle Paul declares, “He [Jesus] Himself is our peace” (Eph. 2:14). Jesus is the “Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6). Receiving Him, we receive peace. And when we are at peace with God—being at ease is not an option.

The old hymn states it well, “Peace! Peace! wonderful peace, coming down from the Father above; sweep over my spirit forever, I pray, in faithless blinews of love.”

So during this Christmas season, open your heart to receive heaven’s Dove of Peace. Accept this gift of peace. It is yours for the taking. You will receive the very best gift ever—the gift of peace!

Rick Mercer is the pastor of the Morganton Seventh-Day Adventist Church at 2187 Jamestown Road, Morganton. They can be reached at 828-820-3549 or cmercer@earthlink.net. Check out www.morgantonadvent.org. Their passion is to share the love of Jesus with all who will listen.

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The Journey

Blue Ridge Hospice & Palliative Care

By Brent Price
Mitchell County

As we begin to prepare for another Christmas why don’t we pause for a moment? We have been invited on a journey. The invitation for some persons is loud and clear, direct and unmistakable. For others the invitation is a slight tug on the heart, a whisper or perhaps a hunger for something we can’t find words to express. Even though we may travel with others, the experience is always uniquely our own.

As foolish as it may sound to some people, see your eyes on a star and follow it to the place where a child is waiting. Don’t get distracted by deception and shortcuts. Embrace those who travel with you and help those who grow weary along the way.

There is no roadmap, no soothing voice of a GPS, only Spirit. The Spirit is wireing the map on your heart. Follow it.

Don’t allow deep discounts or coupon codes to hinder you. Whatever you think you might gain is an illusion. No matter how much you may thank God, this endless accumulations will come to nothing. Batteries die, things break and there’s always the newest model that makes toys obsolete. Don’t get stuck in this madness.

Prepare and take that first step. Pray, search, listen. Turn off your cell phone. The journey might be long, especially if someone is counting on you to help them along the way. Focus on seeing and hearing with your heart. Pray some more. You don’t have to take much with you—the smallest glimmer of faith and hope, a willing heart, perhaps a need you can’t put into words. Remember, God has promised to provide bread for your journey and light for your path.

Before long, there you are, standing in the presence of perfect love. Slowly you realize that you packed more than you thought. The hands of a child reach toward you to accept your burden and your pain, your worry and your doubts. A hope that is more than wishful thinking begins to burn inside and you realize that your life is the best gift you can offer.

The trip was worth it, every step and stumble. However, the arriving is just another beginning. Keep your bags packed.

Brent Brent Price is a chaplain at Hospice & Palliative Care of the Blue Ridge.

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What’s Your Attitude Toward Christmas
By Pastor Steve Williams
Mitchell County

What’s your attitude toward Christmas? I hate to say it, but we live in a time where we have developed the wrong attitude about Christmas. The world has tried to steal Christmas just like the Grinch did in the book Dr. Seuss wrote many years ago. Many of you know the story of what happens in the town of Who-ville. The Grinch hated seeing the people celebrating Christmas so he tried to figure out a way to stop Christmas from coming to Who-ville. He decides that if he steals all the presents, decorations and special Christmas food then he will stop Christmas from coming. He spends the whole night before Christmas sneaking around and stealing everything Christmas from all the houses in Who-ville. When Christmas morning comes the Grinch is shocked that his plan didn’t work - Christmas still comes to Who-ville. The people are still happy, and they gather hand in hand to sing Christmas songs. He learns that Christmas is more than just presents and decorations. TODAY THE WORLD TRIES TO STEAL THE REAL CHRISTMAS AWAY FROM US BETTER THAN THE GRINCH TRIED TO STEAL IT FROM WHO-VILLE.

The Grinch tried to steal Christmas by taking away some of the things related to Christmas - but that only helped the people of Who-ville to focus on what was left - which was actually more important. The world steals Christmas better than the Grinch because it doesn’t take things away. It just replaces what is most important about Christmas with things that draw our focus away from the real meaning of Christmas. Everyone who lived down in Who-ville liked Christmas a lot. But the Grinch, who lived just north of Who-ville did not! “The Grinch hated Christmas, the whole Christmas season, and no one quite knew the reason, it could be perhaps his shoes were too tight. It could be, his head wasn’t screwed on just right... But, I think the most likely reason of all, was that his heart was two sizes too small.”

We can never have the right Christmas with the Wrong Attitude. To have the right attitude at Christmas is to know what Christmas is really about. It’s about giving and gifts you find on and under a tree. It’s about Black Friday sales, and deals of a life time or trying to find the right gift to make someone happy. It’s about a Savior who came to this world over two thousand years ago and gave his life for you and I might have eternal life. It’s about a relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who desires to live in you and show you His Love, His Presents, and His Power each and every day of our lives. It’s also about experiencing the greatest love that a person can ever imagine. It is an unconditional love. There is nothing you can do to stop this love for you, and there is nothing you can do to make Him love you anymore. See, to me, the real meaning of Christmas is God’s Love. He offers us to freely, to all who believe in Him. Folks, toys come and go, things get old and tear up, the things we hold dear to us, soon leave us, but God’s Love is forever. The Right Attitude for Christmas is to have the attitude of Love toward our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Don’t get caught having the wrong attitude this Christmas.

Words of Wisdom:
- Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference. - Winston Churchill
- People may hear your words, but they feel your attitude. - John C. Maxwell
- Weakness of attitude becomes weakness of character. - Albert Einstein
- Happiness depends not on external conditions, it is governed by our mental attitude. - Dale Carnegie
- The greatest discovery of my generation is that a human being can alter his life by altering his attitude. - William James
- The only disability in life is a bad attitude. - Scott Hamilton

Attitude is Everything.

There once was a woman who woke up one morning, looked in the mirror, and noticed she had only three hairs on her head. Well, she said, “I think I’ll braid my hair today?” So, she did, and she had a wonderful day.
The next day she woke up, looked in the mirror and saw that she had only two hairs on her head.
"H-M-M," she said, “I think I’ll part my hair down the middle today?” So, she did, and she had a grand day.
The next day she woke up, looked in the mirror and noticed that she had only one hair on her head.
“Well,” she said, “today I’m going to wear my hair in a ponytail.” So, she did, and she had a fun, fun day.
The next day she woke up, looked in the mirror and noticed that there wasn’t a single hair on her head.
"YEA!” she exclaimed, “I don’t have to fix my hair today!” Attitude is everything. N/A

Steve Williams is the Pastor of Berry Chapel Baptist Church in Spruce Pine.
Blessed by a Good Man
By Preacher Clara Rathsough
Mitchell County

There is not a family or individual who has not been
down the hard road of losing a loved one to death.
At some time in our lives we will have to go through this
type of heartbreak. No family is immune to this fact. Not
even mine.

Several years ago, our family got the news that no one
wanted to hear. My father-in-law, Jr. Holman, was
diagnosed with cancer. There is no way one can prepare themselves for this kind
of news. I believe that no matter how it happens, we are never prepared to give up
the ones we love. Our family went through all the emotions and ups and downs
just like everyone else. For me it is one thing as a pastor to try to help another
family, but it’s another thing for my own family to go through it. When you’re the
pastaor, who is your pastor? Guess I hadn’t thought of that till it happened.

We had a wonderful group of people who rallied around us. Our church families
mean so much to us during this time. They prayed, visited, prepared food, called,
etc. They will never know how much it helped. It’s wonderful to know that when
you need someone, there are those who will be there even without knowing.
I really don’t understand how people make it through such times without the support
and love of family, friends, church families, and most importantly the love and hope
of Christ. During these difficult times is when our Lord draws us so close. We often
may feel as if we can’t make it through, but His grace is always there at just the
right time.

We often hear of the horror stories of how bad a person’s relationship is with
their in-laws. Fact of the matter is, I believe the relationship, will be what we
make it. If-in-laws want to have a great relationship they can. If either side
wants to be difficult, they will be. If they want to be a blessing they will. I believe
it’s a matter of what we choose to be. I can honestly say that I had one of the
best relationships with my father-in-law. You may think that is impossible, but I
experienced it.

Our friendship started some 28 years ago. I started dating this pretty little girl
at the head of White Oak outside of Bakersville. The road stayed hot as I traveled
up as often as Jr. and Linda would tolerate me. The first time I met my future
in-laws as a teenage boy, I was anxious to say the least. On my first visit I split
almost an entire glass of sweet tea on the sofa. Talk about blowing a first impres-
sion! They extended a little grace and Jr. rubbed it in, but they accepted me
for me, wants and all.

From day one, Jr. treated me like a man. He showed respect and never spoke
down to me. Without even realizing it, he was helping me grow into a man. I’m
sure that there were times that he asked himself, “What is wrong with that boy?”
By respecting me, he earned my respect for him. Respecting one another was a
key in our relationship as in-laws. Respected him and the relationship he had with
my wife as her father and he respected me my relationship as her husband.
Mutual respect goes a long way in building strong friendships.

When my boys were born he tried to be the best Papaw he could be.
You grandparents are very
different when it comes to grand-
children! All together Jr. had five
grandsons. You read it right, five
grandsons. He gave them toy guns,
knives to whittle with, and always
made birthdays and Christmas extra
special. There is no doubt that the
boys knew they were loved by
Papaw.

We realize that our family will never be the same. We do rejoice however that
we have a hope in Christ that even death cannot take away. God allowed our
family to make many wonderful and precious memories that will be in our hearts
always. Our family, just like others, will continue to press on with the hope that
we will see Jr. (a.k.a. Papaw) again one day. We will cherish the time God gave
us. I will always cherish the friendship that me and Jr. had. I will miss him. I was
truly blessed by a good man.

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

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30 Years Loved
By Heather Bonaminio
Mitchell County

November 16, 1917 marks the 30-year anniversary for Sherri Buchanan at the Brian Center in Spruce Pine. What an achievement. Sherri began her employment at the Brian Center on the day the doors of the long-term care facility opened, and before the first resident was admitted. Many have come and gone since that day.

Residents who have since passed on to their heavenly life with Jesus and those who have been rehabilitated and returned to their homes.

Co-workers who have moved on to other opportunities, passed on or retired.

Sherri is the “face” you see first and the voice you hear when you call. Sherri has touched many lives here as well as in the community and her church. Sherri has been a light guide for all to see. She has sat with family as their loved ones took their last earthly breaths. She has comforted those grieving and rejoiced with those who have received a new house.

Sherri is very active in her church and choir. She has been a Bible drill leader since 1991 (25 years). Quite an accomplishment since Sherri will often remind you “she is only 29 years old.” I am not math teacher, but I am pretty sure that does not add up. (LOL) Through it all, one thing stays the same—Sherri is well loved by all. When Sherri says she will pray for you, you can count on it! Sherri loves to sing for her Lord and often sings special music at Bear Creek Baptist Church where she has been a member for almost 35 years. Over the years, she has led many children, some of which are now grown with kids of their own participating in Bible drill. Personally, I have had the privilege of working with her in Bible drill and my kids like many others call her their “other Mom”.

One of Sherri’s favorite verses (she has many) is Psalm 56:3 “What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee”. Sherri often has relayed to her drillers that when she was a kid, she was afraid of the dark and would repeat this verse whenever she had to go somewhere dark. This is something that will always stick in my mind as well as the children she has served. Because of Sherri it is also one of my favorite verses. I always think of Sherri when I see or hear it.

Sherri lives in Bakersville with her husband of 35 years, Allen. Please join me in congratulating Sherri for this huge accomplishment. We wish her 30 more years with us at the Brian Center. (She will still be 29!)

Heather Bonaminio works at the Brian Center and attends Bear Creek Baptist Church. She and husband, Jim, have 2 daughters, Katie and Elizabeth.

Will You Choose to Hear the Bells?
By Jerry Lewis
McDowell County

Last night after an amazing First Wednesday worship service, Greg and Jackie Stewart sent this to me from their devotional (Glimpse of God’s Grace, Donatella).

Henry Wicksworth Longfellow was no stranger to the suffering of war. During the Civil War near the Christmas of 1863, he found out that his son had been injured in battle. How could he bear being so far away from his son on Christmas Day when he desperately wanted to be at his side to help and comfort him?

In spite of his despair, Christmas bells penetrated his sorrow and made him aware of God’s gracious love—a love that could be with him and his son at the same time. As he listened to the chimes, he penned the words to “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day.”

I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day
Their old familiar carols play, And wild and sweet the words repeat Of peace on earth, good will to men. I thought how, at the day had come, The bells of old Christmas Had rolled along the unbroken song Of peace on earth, good will to men. And in despair I bowed my head: “There is no peace on earth,” I said, “For hate is strong and mocks the song Of peace on earth, good will to men.” Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: “God is not dead, nor doth he sleep; The wrong shall fail, the right prevail, With peace on earth, good will to men.”

Till, ringing, singing, on its way, The world revolved from night to day, A voice a chime, a chant sublime, Of peace on earth, good will to men.

No matter how many wars are fought, no matter how many battles are lost or won, God is near, helping, comforting and guiding those who trust in Him. There is no limit to His powerful healing and grace. There is no measure to His love. Perhaps the greatest lesson to be learned during such troubled times is that Jesus truly is our Lord of Lords, our Prince of Peace.

So, I have a new tradition (started about 5 years ago actually). Every Christmas I Google this YouTube video. Yesterday, in the middle of a hectic day, I stopped to listen to the bells. Since 2010, almost 40 million others have done the same! Maybe it will bring peace in the midst of your chaos.

Jerry Lewis is Senior Pastor at Grace Community Church in Marion.

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Making Disciples
By Brent Ramsey
Mitchell County

When thinking about the vision of FORGE ministries, we take our cue from Jesus when he says, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men”—Matthew 4:19. Our vision is that our college students and young adults (ages 18-27) in Avery, Mitchell and Yancey County would be growing as mature disciples of Christ by becoming radical followers of Jesus. And, in turn, they are making disciples who make disciples...who make more disciples...who make disciples...who make disciples...and that this would ultimately lead to our young adults bringing Jesus to the nations.

FORGE was founded in Mars Hill, North Carolina in 2013 with the vision to lead students to become fully devoted followers of Christ. FORGE is casting young adults each and every week, forming relationships, equipping them with the Gospel and sending them out in the world. Although our focus is college students and young adults, FORGE has no direct affiliation with any school, church, or denomination. Our hope is to have a relationship where we can work with local colleges, churches, and organizations to better help ignite our future leaders with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Starting January 9th, FORGE will host a weekly worship gathering each Tuesday night during the Spring and Fall semesters. Opportunities for community and discipleship are provided through LIFE Groups (gatherings of 10-14 young adults) throughout the year, and are primarily student led. Additionally, FORGE offers numerous retreats, social events, and mission projects/trips for students to get connected to.

Weekly gatherings will be held at The Grove Church in downtown Spruce Pine (next to D’Jais). For more information please feel free to give me a call at 828-467-1016. We hope you are as excited, as we are!

Brent Ramsey is Youth Leader at Grassy Creek Baptist Church. He has studied at Gardner-Webb university and ETSU. He also is a Counselor at Maryland Community College.

By Doris Thompson
Mitchell County

The trees are trimmed with a star on top,
The candles in the windows are aglow.
All the goodies are baked and ready,
And every child wishes for snow!

The halls are decked with holly...
The light posts are trimmed with bows.
The mailbox has donned a new cover.
The warm fire sparkles and glows!

There’s “last minute” shopping and wrapping,
The streets are crowded each day.
All the shoppers are excited and calling,
“Merry Christmas,” as they go on their way!

The presents are stacked ‘neath the tree.
A wreath is placed on the door.
Everything seems to be ready,
But wait...is there not one thing more?

Is there room for Christ in our holidays?
Do we celebrate His birth Christmas Day?
Or do we say, “There’s no room in our Inn,”
As we rush on our merry way?

If we’d take time for the sad and lonely,
And reach out and do our small part,
Then we’ll truly put Christ in our Christmas,
And make room for Him in our heart!

Doris is retired and serves as our resident angel of Spruce Pine.

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Training Our Children

By Dr. Tom Walker
Sedale County

The Bible says, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6). What an encouraging promise is found in this verse. The words “train up” (chabab) is also translated “dedicate” in Deuteronomy 20:5. Those are the only two ways the Hebrew word is translated in the Old Testament.

The word Deuteronomy 20:5 is used in the context of dedicating a house. Verses 1-3 in Deuteronomy deals with instructions having to do with military service. Deuteronomy 20 makes it clear that “the officers were responsible for making sure the army was composed of qualified men. However, the most qualified were not necessarily those most gifted for battle. They were rather the men most committed to the Lord and free from any distractions that might dampen their spirits for battle. Therefore, for humanitarian reasons as well as for the morale of the army anyone who had built a new house and not begun to “use” (this sense of the Hebrew word chabab is preferable to dedicating) it was granted an exemption” (Bible Knowledge Commentary). The house that is dedicated is one that is inhabited and is dedicated by its owner.

The word “train” in our English language means to educate, to teach, to form by instruction or practice or to bring up. There are too many parents who are not taking time to train their children. Some parents are content that the television or video games are occupying the time of their kids. If Hollywood with its violence and low morality trains our children, then our homes and our society is in deep trouble. If all our kids have to train them are video games or the internet lives will be deficient and defective.

Training takes time. Parents today use the busyness of life as an excuse for not taking ample time with the children. The mother or dad who will not devote time to train or dedicate their children will have sons and daughters who will be lacking in what they ought to know.

There are three things we need to grasp from Proverbs 22:6. Notice a command, a course and a comfort.

A Command

“Train up a child”

It is a definite command. This responsibility cannot be passed on to someone else. Multitudes of moms and dads expect the church to train up a child. Although the church should have a part in doing so, it does not exempt the parents of a child from doing their part in it. There are always great benefits that come to those who obey the Lord, no matter how time consuming it might be.

It is a demanding command. To do what our text says to do will take a sacrifice of time by the parents. Life is busy and there are a lot of things we want to do and need to do, but this important responsibility cannot be overlooked.

It is a demonstrated command. Deuteronomy 6:4-9 tells us what God told the Hebrews to do in training their children: “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.” What did the Hebrews do? They taught their children diligently to receive instruction. They also talked of the Scriptures during the activities of the day, when they were to bed, and when they arose in the morning. That would be a good practice to incorporate into our daily family life.

It is a doable command. It is not something that is out of our reach or impossible for us to accomplish. God would never command us to do anything that He would not give us grace to perform. With His commands are His enabling. Isaiah 41:10: “Fear not thou, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”

This training involves not only verbal instruction but also setting the right example before the children in both action and attitude. Children not only watch how you act but also how you react. What if your children emulate outside the home what you are in the home? If they did, would you be satisfied with what you would see in them?

Paul told Timothy in I Timothy 4:2: “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”

These words should be true in the home as well as in daily life outside the home.

A Course

Note the words “in the way he should go.” There is a way that leads to death and another that leads to life. The word “way” speaks of a course or direction of life.

Children deserve not to be misled about life and what makes it up. They need direction from the parents who have already walked the way the young person is walking. Parents have so much wisdom to impart to their children if they will only take time to convey it to the children.

The course a child should take is a good course. There are so many things in life that are detrimental to the lives of our children. Due to the wayward direction of our society it is one of the utmost importance that we show them the way.

The course a child should take is a godly course. The Bible says in I Timothy 6:5, “But godliness with contentment is great gain.” Our children must see and possess godliness in an extremely godly society. It is so important the children be taught to live as Jesus was the example for us to live.

The course a child should take is a grace course. Life really begins when one realizes that he cannot save himself. As a result, one looks to the grace of God as the avenue to be saved. The right way is given in Ephesians 2:8-9 which says, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” And Ephesians 2:10: “So that we may be zealous to preach Christ to you who are in Rome also, among whom you are also.”

The course a child should take is a grace course. Life really begins when one realizes that he cannot save himself. As a result, one looks to the grace of God as the avenue to be saved. The right way is given in Ephesians 2:8-9 which says, “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” And Ephesians 2:10: “So that we may be zealous to preach Christ to you who are in Rome also, among whom you are also.”

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December 2017 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 26
Hearing the Holy Spirit
By Joyce Meyer

As born-again believers in Jesus Christ, we serve a true God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In Genesis 1:26 (AMP) God says, “Let Us (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) make man in Our image…” This verse reveals God as the Trinity, and we need to worship and have relationship with each Person of the Godhead.

It seems more common to hear people talk about God and Jesus, but the Holy Spirit does not get enough of our attention. It’s important to understand that He is a person who has a personality, a will, knowledge, a mind, and He thinks and feels things. For example, 1 Corinthians 2:11 (AMP) tells us that “no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.”

In John 16:7 we learn some of the facets of His personality and how we need Him to work in our lives. In this verse Jesus says, “…if I do not go away, the Helper (Comforter, Advocate, Counselor—Counselor, Intercessor, Standby) will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him (the Holy Spirit) to you [to be in close fellowship with you].” (AMP)

This scripture teaches that He is our…
- Counselor—always go to God first for counsel and let Him speak to you His way, through the people or things He chooses.
- Advocate—He pleads our case when we’re in trouble.
- Intercessor—He prays for us and through us when we don’t know how to pray on our own.
- Sustainer—He stands by us, ready to act on our behalf when we need something.
- Strengthener—He gives us God’s grace to do whatever we need to do in every situation.

He’s all these things and much more! God is literally everything we need, and as we fellowship with the Holy Spirit, we can have “the mind of Christ [to be guided by His thoughts and purposes]” (1 Corinthians 2:16 AMP).

Learn the Sound of His Voice
The Holy Spirit is the only One who fully knows the mind of God, so when we pray for God to give us wisdom or the knowledge we need, it’s important for us to learn the Spirit and the way He will speak to us. In 1 Corinthians 2:12-6:19, and He communicates to us what He hears God say. John 16:13 (AMP) explains that He is “the Spirit of Truth” and He guides us into the Truth. “For He will not speak on His own initiative, but He will speak whatever He hears from the Father…”

One way we learn how to hear the Holy Spirit is by understanding that He has emotions and He can be grieved. Ephesians 4:30 (AMP) says, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God…”

Because He lives in us, when He feels grieved, we feel it too. Ephesians 4:29-31 (AMP) lists some behaviors that cause Him to be grieved: unwholesome (soul, profane, worthless, vulgar) speech, bitterness, wrath, anger, and clamor (perpetual animosity, resentment, strife, unfounded, dander, every kind of malice (all spitefulness, verbal abuse, malice).

When we choose to think and speak in ways that go against His nature, we will feel conviction, and the best thing we can do is confess our sin and repent immediately.

James 3:8 teaches that no one can “tame the human tongue” and sometimes we make mistakes and say wrong things. But we can learn from our mistakes; we can pray and ask God to help us only say things that are right and pleasing to Him. I know it’s easy to be insensitive and say the wrong things sometimes. The other day I was wearing a blouse that didn’t fit me right, and I said to someone, “This thing is way too big for me but it would probably fit you.” Afterward, I couldn’t believe I had said it!

We need to pray for God to help us hear His voice, giving us wisdom and direction in the thoughts we choose to think about and the words we speak. As our Counselor, He wants us to pause us in everything we do, and we can learn how to hear His voice.

Listen for the still, small voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to your heart. You can hear it as you wait quietly in His presence, while you’re studying His Word, in the midst of your circumstances, and even through nature. God is talking to you!

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 (Bachman). She hosts the Enjoying Everyday Life radio and TV programs, which air on hundreds of stations worldwide. For more information, visit www.joycemeyer.org.
Avery County Chamber

December 1 Christmas Parade, Downtown Newland
December 2 A Small Town Christmas & Parade of Lights, Banner Elk
December 8 Lighting of Country Town Square Sylva Newland
December 9-10 Sugar Mountain Saddlebug Sugar Mountain Resort
December 22 Yule Log Bouffe and Hayride Beech Mountain
December 31 New Year’s Eve Celebration, Beech Mountain and Sugar Mountain Resort

Burlie County

SunTrue Bank is having a special promotion for the Veterans of Foreign Wars Children’s Christmas Party! Please help make this Children’s Christmas Bright! Donate a New unwrapped toy or stocking stuffer. Children’s ages range from 0 to 12 years old. Party is December 16, 2017. Thank you for your Support.

Catshaw River Baptist Association - Nearly 275 years after it was first performed, Messiah has become a holiday season staple. Experience the joy of the season by singing along (or just listening!) to the much beloved music of Handel’s Messiah. Singers are encouraged to bring a copy of the score if they have one (a limited number will be available at the door). The experience is unique, and the choir is you!

During the fall of 2016 Keues Pipe Organ Company refurbished and significantly upgraded the First Baptist Church organ, restoring it to its original splendor, and more. The organ features three manuals, with 49 ranks of pipes, and its recent renovation has enhanced the instrument tremendously.

Organists Mrs. Rebecca Myrick-Poost will accompany the soloists and assembled choir in this Messiah sing-along. A highly accomplished musician, Mrs. Myrick-Poost holds degrees from Appalachian State University, Lenoir-Rhyne University, and the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music.

Event will be held at First Baptist Church - 501 West Union Street on December 10, 2017 at 3:30 pm. Admission tickets are $7.00 Youth Tickets: $5.00. Tickets available at the Comma Box Office or online at http://www.commonline.org.

Morganton Seventh-day Adventist-Burlie County - The Silver Creek Adventist School would like to invite everyone to their Christmas Program, Saturday, December 16th, at 11:00 am and Christmas Service, 1:00 pm. Morganton, N.C.

The Mountain Vietnamese Adventist Church will be having their Christmas Cantata on Saturday, December 23rd, at 11:00 a.m. Everyone is invited to attend. Morganton SDA is located at 2187 Jamestown Road, Morganton, N.C.

Adventist Church, 2187 Jamestown Road, Morganton, N.C. - Don & Donna Bold will be performing their unique blend of folk Mountain Gospel in concert at the Mountain Vietnamese Adventist Church, 2187 Jamestown Road, Morganton, N.C. Sunday, December 6th, at 7:00 pm.

Christmas Health Social - December 17th, at 5:30 pm. Please bring a plant based dish and copies of the recipe to share if you would like!

Adventist Church, 2187 Jamestown Road, Morganton, N.C. - Journey through the manger scene, hear wonderful Christmas hymns, see live farm animals and experience the true reason for the season, our Savior Jesus Christ! Each journey lasts approximately 30 minutes. A golf cart will be available for those with disabilities. This event is completely FREE for all who wish to attend!

Waldeins Trail of Faith - 401 Church Street NW, Valdese, North Carolina 28690-1256. We have all of our lights on now through December the 24th every night from 8pm to 10pm. We serve hot chocolate and hot apple cider in the visitor center and offer 18 different lights on the farm. We also offer a donation per vehicle to help offset the electric bill for the months of Nov. and Dec. We also have a gift shop that is open. The lights will be on Dec. 24, but the visitor center will be closed. Dec. 25, we will be closed no lights and no visitor center open.

McDowell County

Grace Community Church - New Prayer Line Launches in Marion, North Carolina - January 3, 2018. Says "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." A. J. Gordon said. "You can do more than pray after you have prayed, but you cannot do more than pray until you have prayed." Churches in McDowell County believe God's Word and agree with A. J. Gordon. That's why they have launched 559-PRAY, a prayer line where people can call anytime, leave a prayer request, and a McDowell County resident will pray for them. Here's how it works. The prayer line (559-PRAY) is housed at Freedom Life Ministries (freedomlifeministries.org). Each day prayer requests will be sent to 25 partnering churches in McDowell County who will immediately send those requests to prayer warriors in their church who will pray for them. The effect is knowing that your prayer request is covered daily by hundreds of people across McDowell County. 659-PRAY will begin on September 1. Between now and then, please ask your pastor if your church is involved. If not, encourage your leaders to reach out and get on board. For more information, please call Robin at (828) 724-8995. Contact: Chris Allison Cell Phone: 828-359-7312 E-Mail: cairis@rockmotel.com

Ecuador Mission Trip - We will be taking a group to Ecuador in June of 2018 to help with construction, medical assessments and support for women and children. The cost is $1,500 (more info to come). If you are interested email robin.graceforall@gmail.com

Greeneel Baptist Church - Sunday, December 2, 7:30 at Greeneel Baptist Church Church 3, 5:00 Greeneel Baptist Church's address is: 1507 US Highway 70 Old Fort, NC 28762 This year's theme is "Glory to God in the Highest." There will be groups of selections by men of the chorus and another one will be by the ladies of the chorus and children of the community. We will have solos by Ashleigh Phillips, Jonathan Tipper, Ron Springs, Patrick Ellis and Jamie Burnett. Duets will be by Jamie Burnett and Jonathan Tipper, Savannah Allison and Jamie Burnett, and a trio by Ken Hendley, Savannah All- lion and Jamie Burnett. Carolers Early and David Heasley will be directing, and Howard Smith is the pianist.

There is no admission, but donations are appreciated.

The public is cordially invited to attend. The choristers hope that the concerts will be a blessing to you and help you remember the real meaning of Christmas.

Mitchell County

All Saints of America Orthodox - On Saturdays beginning in June, All Saints of America Orthodox Mission will be having Divine Liturgy at the meeting hall located at Trinity Episcopal Church, 15 Hanlock Ave, Spruce Pine, NC 28777. The Liturgy will be served weekly on Saturdays at 11:00 AM. Fr. Steve Webb, the priest appointed to serve the new mission, will be officiating. While All Saints of America Orthodox Mission is a part of the Russian Orthodox Church, all services are performed in the English language. Afterwards, all are invited to a picnic at 1004 Deer Park Lake Rd. Spruce Pine, NC.

Bear Creek Baptist Church-Ledge - Celebrate Recovery

This is a Christ and Biblical Based Program, giving hope and help for men, women and families suffering from addiction. Any questions contact Josh Wise at 335-0021.

There will be a meeting every Thursday night with someone there to talk to men, women, and their families.

Drug Task Force - The addictions session to be led by Dr. Fagan on December 5th at Bear Creek Baptist Church will not only include information about the STOP Act and Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) but also address NARCAN and the opioid epidemic.

In addition to this session in Mitchell County, there will also be a session in Yancey County later that afternoon on December 5th for those who cannot attend both. Both of these sessions are meant for anyone - not just medical professionals.

If you plan to attend Dr. Fagan's discussion at Bear Creek in Mitchell County, please RSVP to one of the folks listed in the attached flyer. If you are interested in attending the Yancey County presentation, please RSVP directly to me - the number of folks I will need to accommodate service space. We use once we have an idea for interest in Yancey County, I will send out details on the time that afternoon of December 5th and the location.

Berryl Chapel Baptist Church - CHRISTmas Concert-Sunday, December 17, 2017 5:00 p.m. Refreshments following. No charge. Come & enjoy as evening of CHRISTmas worship with Dawn Hughes and Monica Hanley-Kritz. Piano duets, flute/piano duets, and singing. In the business of the day, take time to sit still and worship THE KING OF KINGS and THE LORD OF LORDS!

Burlies Heating and Plumbing - Join us for our 2nd annual Christmas Shop located at the showroom at Burlies’ Plumbing and Heating Showroom on December 4 from 4:00-8:00 p.m. Drop by and shop for Christmas gifts (or for yourself) while enjoying Hot Chocolate or Coffee! There will be unique, local, and handmade gifts!

Calvary Chapel Asheville - Spruce Pine-Calvary Chapel Church in Asheville is sponsoring a home fellowship and Bible Study in Spruce Pine. The fellowship is held on Thursday evenings at 7:00pm at 79 Sassa Dr. (Grassie area) - off Spruce Creek Rd. Call John Jackson (704-793-3799 for information and directions. Bring your Bible.

Spruce Pine Citizens and Businesses - Due to the outpouring of complaints of speeding on Oak Ave. We will start a zero tolerance for any speeding inside the city limits in Spruce Pine, NC. Effective Wed. Nov 1 we will start enforcing the speed limits and the citation will be issued the state. Everyone make your travels to Spruce Pine a Safe and Slow trip!

Support group for caregivers of those with memory loss: to hold meetings the first friday of each month from 1-3pm - Care & Share, a newly-formed support group for caregivers of loved ones who have memory loss, will hold monthly meetings at the offices of Hospice & Palliative Care of the Blue Ridge, 236 Hospital Dr. in Spruce Pine, from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM. High Country Caregivers.
Foundation welcomes and encourages all caregivers to attend

Families dealing with a loved one with memory loss can quickly become exhausted, traumatized, and isolated, and this new group intends to provide support, friendship, education, information and referrals for caregivers. Monthly meetings held on the first Friday of each month will offer refreshments and fellowship. There will be opportunities for caregivers to tell their stories, learn useful tips, trade information, and give and gain support to others in the same situation.

For further information about the group and the meeting please contact Suzanne Russell at (714) 414-5857 or Janet Ottum at janottum@yahoo.com.

**Mitcheel County Baptist Association** - Week of Prayer for International Missions and International Mission Study - Dec. 5-10, 2017

**Mitchell County Chamber** - Parkway Playhouse

* Get The Hook Improv Comedy Troupe, our teen group will share their talents with you on Dec 1 & 2 at Parkway Playhouse at 7:00. Tickets are just $5 each and will be available at the door.

* Our Christmas Show will be performed by the Parkway Players on Dec. 15 and 16 at 5pm and Dec 17 at 3pm at Parkway Playhouse. Tickets are just $5 each and will be available at the door.

* Info on the Mainsage at Parkway Playhouse in 2018! Coming soon!

**Spruce Pine Farmer's Market** - We will be moving indoors at the Pizza Place. We will have food for any mood!!! Winter squash, tomatoes, cabbage, potatoes, cucumbers, bell peppers, kale, mustard, chard, microgreens, collards, eggs, pork, beef, cookies, raisins, onions, brownies, cheese strip. You can also find essential oils to heal and help with what ails you! Come out and see us. Wednesdays 2-5 in the parking lot under the blue tents.

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

**Women's Prayer Breakfast** - If you would like to join a group of women who are dedicated to praying, learning about God's will, and fellowship, come join us for breakfast at DFC's in Spruce Pine. We will be seating by 10:00am. Open to all-for more information call Barbara Farrell at 828-467-3644 or email at barbarah@bcnews.com. December is on the 8th.

**Yancey County**

**Higgins Memorial United Methodist Church**

Special Services
Thursday, November 30 * 5:00 pm * Pre-Advent Family Event
Sunday, December 3 * 11 am * Hanging of the Greens
Sunday, December 3 * 24-hour Prayer Vigil (Look for the sign-up sheet, coming soon!)
Friday, December 8 * 6:30 pm * Higgins Family Christmas Play & Festival
Sunday, December 10 * 3:00 pm * Praxis Team Christmas Concert
Sunday, December 17 * 4:00 pm * Christmas Music and Love Feast (potluck)
Sunday, December 24 * 5:30 pm * Christmas Eve Candlelight Service

We look forward to worshipping with you!

**Yancey County Meals on Wheels (Burnsville)** - Volunteers needed to deliver meals to Yancey County shut-ins, any weekday, 10:30 am - noon. If you would like to volunteer, please call the Yancey County Senior Center at 828-851-9011.

**Maryland Community College**

No classes have been listed for December! For more info Contact Allen Cook

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Merry Christmas!
Burnsville Seventh-Day Adventist Church

Christmas Season
By Edward Couser
Tunney County

Is not God's grace amazing! When we consider our world's history, God's grace has been evident. He has consistently rescued sin those who have committed their lives to Him. His grace is not only His desire to save everyone, but also His power manifested in loving conviction for all and actual deliverance for those who believe. The greatest revelation of God's grace was in the coming of His Son Jesus. Because of Jesus, we have clear and undeniable testimony of God's love for sinners. Jesus died on the cross for you and me. "We ourselves owe everything to God's free grace. Grace in the covenant ordained our adoption. Grace in the savior effected our redemption, our regeneration, and our exaltation to heirship with Christ." - Clarck

Avery County FFA

Members Earn National Degree
6 American Degrees for 2017
By Gwen Clark
Avery County

EL Byrd, Jacob Keener, Chari Nelson, Ben Clark, Chris Clark and Alex Clark have earned the highest award an individual can earn from the National FFA-The American FFA Degree.

The six began their membership in the Avery County FFA as freshmen at Avery High in the Fall of 2012 and graduated high school in 2016. They enrolled in Agricultural Education classes and paid their FFA dues. Through the following four years of high school, this group of young people continued to be FFA members, served as chapter officers, participate in Leadership conferences, participate in many Career Development Events (competition teams), and earn the Greenhand, Chapter, and State FFA Degrees. All these experiences helped to lead to the coveted American FFA Degree and Gold Key that is earned and awarded to less than 1% of all FFA members.

Each FFA member is required to keep a Supervised Agriculture Experience account and keep records of work experience, hours worked, and all money earned or spent on the SAE project. From raising Fraser Fir Christmas trees, welding, mechanics, landscaping, environmental studies, and community service work, these six FFA members earned their American FFA Degree.

2017 American FFA Degrees recipients from Avery County FFA are as follows: Elijah Wilkes (EL) Byrd, son of Tony and Saelea Byrd of Insigals, Jacob Keener, son of Lisa Vance of Allamont, Chari Marie Nelson, daughter of Janet F. Nelson and the late Tim Nelson of Pisgah, Ben, Chris, and Alex Clark are the sons of Reed and Bunny P. Clark of Newland.

The 90th National FFA Convention was held in Indianapolis, Indiana on October 28-29, 2017. The American FFA Degree Ceremony was held on Saturday, October 28, 2017 at the Lucas Oil Stadium. There was a record number of attendees with over 80,000.

Sponsors of the American FFA degree are the agricultural companies CIII, Eisen, and Syngenta. There were 4,071 American degrees earned and awarded at the convention. The state of North Carolina had 61 FFA members to earn the American FFA degree with 6 of those being Avery County FFA members.

The newest six American Degree recipients join 20 other American FFA Degree recipients from the Avery County FFA bringing the total to 26 for the Avery County FFA Chapter. The American FFA degree award has been earned by the following Avery County FFA members:

2011 - Jed Clark and Olivia (Watson) Hagele
2012 - Lakeesa (Stauney) Byrd
2013 - Kari Stanley
2014 - Michelle (Cuthbertson) South, Dustin Clark, Slayla Vance, Carson Rose Clark, Codie (Hicks) Berry, and Dakoda Gay
2015 - Abigail Griffith
2016 - Graham Avery, Sawyer Avery, Paige Johnson, Mackenzie Ladford, Jodi Poor, John Clark, Austin Danals, Jerimiah Vance, and Kate Masters
2017 - EL Byrd, Jacob Keener, Chari Marie Nelson, Ben Clark, Chris Clark, and Alex Clark

Congratulations to the American FFA Degrees for 2017.

The FFA Mission: The FFA makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for productive leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education.

The Agricultural Education Mission: Agricultural Education prepares students for successful careers and a lifetime of informed choices in global agriculture, food, fiber and natural resources systems.

Mrs. Gwen Clark is a retired Agricultural Education Teacher/FFA Advisor at Avery County High School. She is a graduate of NC State University (BS) and NC A & T State University (MA). She is a National Board Certified Teacher and has been teaching for 29 years. She and her husband, Dee Clark, have been married for 26 years and attend Crawford Baptist Church.

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. Matthew 2:11

Ed Couser is the pastor at the Burnsville and Erwin Hills Seventh Day Adventist Church. Previously served churches in Ontario (Canada), New York, Kentucky and North Carolina. He also is a retired Chaplain, Lieutenant Colonel, having served 25 years in the US Air Force. Pastor Couser, and his wife of 55 years, Carol have four adult children, Melissa, Kaylee, Morgan and Drew. He enjoys sharing the love of Jesus and encouraging others to prepare for His soon return.

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December 2017 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 30
Evergreen Church

"God With Us"
By Rev John McCoury
Room Mountain, Tennessee

As we start thinking about this Christmas let us review the Christmas Story in Matt. 1:21-25. "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS; for he shall save his people from their sins.

New all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did see the angel of the Lord had hidden him, and took unto him his wife. And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son; and he called his name JESUS. In this passage we see a special Child (11-25).

The birth of Jesus was different from every other birth. He was conceived by the Spirit in Mary's womb and born with a sinless nature. He is "God with us," and He is also God like us because He took our nature and entered into human life and experience. What a wonderful Savior! We also see The virgin birth of Jesus Christ is vitally to the truth of the gospel (Isa. 7:14). Since Jesus Christ is God, He existed before Mary; therefore, He could not have been conceived as other babies. He was not only born, but He "came into the world" (John 18:37). He is both God and man, the sinless Lamb of God (Jn. 1:29). Matthew opens and closes his book "God with us" (1:23; 28:20). In Psalms 145 v. 18 The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon his name in truth" Psalms 145 v. 18 isn't that a great promise? It's one you can put to work today. Let's look at it more closely. First, God is near to those who are stumbling "The LORD upholds all who fall, and raises up all who are bowed down" (v. 13). You may have stumbled and fallen. Perhaps you just didn't do what you should have. Maybe you stumbled in your job, and you are embarrassed and worried about it. Perhaps you have stumbled in your relationships. Maybe you are near to those who carry burdens. Those who are bowed down with the weight of care can find rest if they will call upon Him. God is near to those who are hungry. "The eyes of all look eagerly to You, and You give them their food in due season" (v. 16). Verses 16 shows how simple It is to God to answer prayer. You "open Your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing."

All God has to do is open his hand to meet our needs today. The problem is, we often don't open our hearts and cry out to Him. Fourth, God is near to those who call upon Him. We have this great promise: "He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him. He will also hear their cry and save them" (v. 19). Finally, God is near to those who love Him. "The LORD preserves all who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy." (v. 20). Follow the advice of James. "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." (James 4:8). God is not far from you. He's waiting for you to take that first step, to cry out to Him and say, "Lord, I want to draw close to You. Here I am - Have you stumbled? Are you carrying a burden, or are you needy?" I promise to be near to all those who call upon Him. This Christmas, may we feel and see that "God with us" and "THE LORD IS NEAR TO ALL WHO CALL UPON HIM". Merry Christmas to all.

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

Habitat For Humanity

Goes Green
By Steve Bruton
Mitchell County

Mitchell-Yancey Habitat for Humanity is very excited about our current home build project in Ledger, right down the road from Mitchell High School. Two weeks ago, volunteers from Bear Creek Baptist Church, First Presbyterian Church of Burnsville, Higgens United Methodist, Western Carolina Reality, and our Wedemey Core Team came together to build the outside walls. But instead of constructing with traditional stick framing, we opted to be the first builders in Mitchell or Yancey County to utilize Eco-Panls "green" construction technology.

Eco-Panels LLC out of Mockville, N.C. worked up our original Ledge Habitat house design plans and a month later arrived on site with forty-one 8’ x 4’ 120 pound specially processed Eco-Panels. Once all the panels were strapped, our experienced and inexperienced volunteers jumped right in to erect the walls. Exactly one hour and forty-five minutes later, the last panel was locked into place. As one of our volunteers stated, "This has to be some kind of record!"

What also makes this so amazing is that our Habitat construction volunteers will not need to spend time and energy to insulate, frame out the windows and doors, cut the exterior outlets, or wrap the outside walls with Tyvek. And because of the four and a half inch super dense polyurethane foam sandwiched between OSB, the walls are several times stronger than stick framing with a wind rating of 200 mph, and up to five times more energy efficient. The end result will be a healthier, stronger, and safer home with lower cost, power bills for the recipient family. We couldn't be more excited!!

During this outside build Eco-Panels company owner and president, Charles Leahy, was on hand to educate several folks who came from Kansas, Tennessee, South Carolina, and from all across North Carolina, to learn at the construction site. Leahy also addressed about a dozen students at the job site from Mitchell High School's drafting and cabinet making classes. One of the highlights of Leahy's message to the students was when he demonstrated the polyurethane foam's ability to withstand fire from a 3600 degree how torch flame. The Mitchell High Construction class courses are taught by Terry Lewis and Mitchell Warren who recognized as opportunity to teach their students about the new and innovative "green" construction technology.

Our Habitat affiliate would like to send a special Shout Out and Thank You to Spruce Pine Subway for providing our Habitat work crew with their tasty sub sandwiches.

If you would like to help volunteer on our Ledger home on Wednesdays, Thursdays or Saturdays from 5pm to 1pm, and we really do need and appreciate your help, please contact Steve Bruton, Mitchell-Yancey Habitat Volunteer Coordinator, stevebruton1@gahoo.com, or 406-804-0999.

Steve Bruton is the Mitchell-Yancey Habitat For Humanity Volunteer Coordinator

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www.brcnews.com December 2017 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 31
US House of Representatives NC District 11

Tax Reform Passes the House

Some major news from Congress this week: the House passed a historic tax reform package, H.R. 1, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, which I supported. It’s a delivery that is long overdue. Memo: dads, small business owners, and working families across the country sent us to Congress to create a simpler and fairer tax code that grows our economy, works for American families rather than D.C. special interests, and returns power from bureaucrats in Washington back to the people of Main Street. Today is a monumental step toward fulfilling those promises.

Make no mistake, though: we must not allow ourselves to view this vote as a job completed. This is not a time for extended celebration or victory laps. The task of reforming our tax code will not be finished until BOTH chambers, the House and the Senate, come together and send a proposal to President Donald Trump’s desk. It’s on ALL of us to keep working and make that happen.

While the bill isn’t perfect, and there are some changes that need to be made, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act is an excellent first step toward keeping our promise. Now the process moves to the Senate side, where they’re already working overtime on their own bill. Once the Senate passes their version of a tax reform bill, our two chambers will likely go to conference for a final measure. I’m very confident this will be finished and placed on the President’s desk within the next few weeks.

However, the bottom line is: the American people have had it with political statements or symbolic victories—they want results, and the results won’t be delivered until President Trump signs the bill into law. Congress must run through the tape and finish what we promised.

No more excuses. Let’s get the job done.

In September, I joined the National Pro-Life Women’s Caucus, a project of the Susan B. Anthony List, as a signatory of a letter sent to President Trump, requesting a reversal of an Obama administration policy of forcing states to reimburse abortion providers. Medicaid is the largest taxpayer funding stream for Planned Parenthood, the nation’s largest abortion provider. Specifically, we requested that the Trump administration direct the Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to allow states to direct where they can be providers under Medicaid. The Governor of South Carolina has asked for this flexibility, and the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals approved Arkansas’ decision not to fund abortion providers in their Medicaid program. I believe all states should have the flexibility to set standards that serve the best interests of their respective Medicaid programs and the health and safety of the women and the programs serve. The Trump administration is currently reviewing the request. I hope that this administration will rescind the Obama policy and issue a new interpretation that allows states flexibility in deciding which Medicaid providers they will reimburse.

In November, I signed, along with over 100 legislators, including about 70 members of the NC General Assembly and the Lieutenant Governor, an amicus brief that was filed before the U.S. Supreme Court. The brief supports Rowan County’s petition for overturn of the 4th Circuit Court of Appeals ruling that the county commissioners could not open their meetings with prayer. The freedom to hear the prayers of other legislators, as well as a legislator’s freedom to express his or her own prayers before a legislative body has a long historical precedent and is a bedrock of our nation’s traditions. The 4th Circuit Court’s ruling against the Rowan commissioners is wrong, and, as a signatory to the brief, ask that the U.S. Supreme Court grant Rowan County’s petition and reverse the 4th Circuit Court’s decision.

I wish you all a Merry Christmas, as we celebrate the birth of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ!

As always, please share your thoughts with me on issues related to state government by emailing me at ralph.hise@ncleg.net or calling me at 919-733-3460.

NC Senate District 47

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

NC House District 86

Confronting Opioid Abuse

A growing recognition of the deaths and anguish caused by opioid abuse is causing many to ask what the legislature may be doing to curb what amounts to an opioid epidemic across the state of North Carolina. Opioid addiction is one of the greatest health care challenges we face. Each day, four North Carolinians die from opioid overdoses. One out of every 100 births has a newborn addicted to the mother’s opioid-adding medication. In contrast, just a decade ago, infants were born without these addictions.

Many who initially get addicted on pain meds prescribed by physicians, then progress to heroin and finally restore that are even more potent.

Back in March of four of my colleagues in the House took the lead in introducing The Strengthen Opioid Misuse Prevention Act, or “STOP Act” for short. I was a sponsor of this bill along with others. The Act, which we are asking opioid abuse on several fronts: by limiting the number of opioid pills prescribed at one time by a provider, by requiring prescribers to query the Controlled Substance Reporting System to see if a patient is getting additional opioids from more than one provider and by allocating $20 Million for the treatment of substance abuse and addiction for those already suffering from opioid addiction.

The STOP Act became law on June 19th of this year. The bill is a first significant step. However, I am concerned we will continue to see its effectiveness and supplement our efforts across North Carolina to determine what additional actions may be needed.

Throughout our efforts, we also remain firmly mindful of the need to effectively treat and meet the needs of our citizens who have very real need for pain relief so that they can get the proper quantities of proper meds in a way that provides real relief without addiction.

The House and Senate both took huge steps forward in a years-long effort to reform our nation’s tax code this week. The House passed their version of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act on Thursday, and just last night, the Senate Finance Committee passed our bill. This is a historic opportunity for North Carolina and the country as a whole, and I’m very pleased to see our progress to this point.

Under this legislation, it is estimated nearly 26,000 new jobs will be created in North Carolina alone, and the average middle-income family will see their tax bill reduced by $2,400 per year. I mentioned last week the doubling of the child tax credit and the standard deduction. You should also know I was very pleased to have two amendments included in the Senate Finance Committee’s final package. These provisions include improvements to the ABLE Act by allowing rollovers from 529 college savings plans and allowing disabled individuals who work to save a portion of their income in an ABLE account without risking the loss of benefits. I also sought to preserve the mortgage interest deduction, as well as the child and dependent care credit and dependent care FSAs. These are crucial provisions to one of the most important pieces of legislation I’ve worked on in my time in Congress.

Long story short, Americans need a break from the crushing burden of our tax system put on them. While our economy has continued to stagnate over the last fifteen years, our paychecks have not increased as fast as they should, and too many jobs have left our communities to run up the scoreboard. This bill is a great chance for our state and our country. I look forward to continuing our work to put money back into the pockets of Americans.
Dear Friends,

On the eve of this Holiday season, I would like to wish all of you a Merry Christmas. Let’s take this time to reflect on the many blessings God has bestowed upon us. I hope you are able to take a few days away from your busy schedule this season to relax and enjoy time with friends and family. In this update you will find some information about the steps we are taking to maintain revenue in legislative practice. God bless you, and thank you for your support.

You may have heard about the recent federal Fourth Circuit Court decision striking down the Rowan County Commissioners’ practice of opening their public board meetings with prayers led by the members themselves. On November 15, I, along with 50 fellow members of the General Assembly, have introduced Rowan County’s petition to the U.S. Supreme Court urging them to take up the case. Here is some background about the case, describing what happened in the lower courts and what it is for the elected officials in the Fourth Circuit and across the country.

Summary of the Rowan County Case

Legislative prayer is as old as the First Amendment. Indeed, it’s even older. Thirty days before Congress approved the First Amendment, it enacted a statute mandating that the House and Senate pray for the chaplain who opened sessions with prayer. Marbury v. Madison, 46 U. S. 519, 529 (1830). That practice, the U. S. Supreme Court explained in Marbury, “has continued without interruption ever since that early session of Congress.” Id. at 788. The same has been true in nearly every State and thousands of local legislative bodies—with those governments opening sessions with prayer led variously by chaplains, lawyers, laypeople, or some combination of those groups. To this day, even the federal courts (and our State courts) open each session with “God save the United States and this Honorable Court”—short prayer, but a prayer nonetheless. In light of that “unbroken and unbroken history of more than 200 years,” the Marbury Court concluded, “there can be no doubt that the practice of opening legislative sessions with prayer has become part of the fabric of our society.” Id. at 792.

But that hasn’t stopped challenges to the historical practice. Just three years ago, two residents of Greenville, New York challenged that town’s practice of opening public board meetings with prayer. The town invited local ministers of any faith to offer prayers of their choosing and did not prescribe or preselect any particular prayer, and yet the challengers claimed that the prayers violated the Establishment Clause because they were “secular.”

Following its decision in Marbury, the Supreme Court in Town of Greece v. Galloway, 134 S. Ct. 1811 (2014) rejected the citizens’ argument, explaining that “[t]he history and tradition of legislative prayer is not rooted in religion but in longstanding traditions observed by those who resort to prayer for reassurance and comfort.” Town of Greece, 134 S. Ct. at 1823. The Court rejected the argument because the prayers were “part of a longstanding tradition.” Id. at 1824.

In a separate opinion in Town of Greece, Justice Kennedy, writing for himself and two other Justices, explained that “the ‘principal audience’ for legislative prayer is the public, but it was designed and adopted by the local government for the purpose of giving the public the assurance and comfort that prayer imparts.” Town of Greece, 134 S. Ct. at 1825. To be sure, “many members of the public find that these prayers meaningful and would join them,” but “[t]heir purpose is largely to accommodate the spiritual needs of lawmakers and constitute them to a tradition dating to the time of the Framers.” Id. at 1836. Justice Kennedy also explained that legislative prayer allows many legislators to “reflect the values that they hold as private citizens.” The prayer is an opportunity for them to show who they are and what they are without denying the right to dissent by those who disagree. Id.

With the Town of Greece decision in 2014, I and many others thought that the issue was settled. The First Amendment permits legislative prayer—a practice that has gone on since before the Founding.

That brings us to Rowan County. Rowan County’s Board of Commissioners, like countless other legislative bodies, opens its public meetings with prayer. There is no pre-drafted or preselected prayer, each County Commissioner, on a rotating basis, can offer a prayer of their choosing—regardless of their religion or faith. The County’s practice is no different from how numerous other legislative bodies have started their sessions since our country’s earliest days (and even before). Indeed, the NC House and NC Senate’s practice of inviting its own members to volunteer to pray is very similar to Rowan County’s.

And yet earlier this year, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit held, by a 10-5 vote, that Rowan County’s practice violates the Establishment Clause. The County commissioners’ practice is no different than the practice of other legislative bodies that have started their sessions since our country’s earliest days (and even before). Indeed, the NC House and NC Senate’s practice of inviting its own members to volunteer to pray is very similar to Rowan County’s.

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Rural Life
By Chelsea Tiley
Mitchell and Yancey County

I’ve reheated my coffee four times today and haven’t had a sip. Though messy buns may be the hairstyle du jour among Hollywood’s in-crowd, mine is out of necessity and is not in any way, shape, or form, fashionable. I’m not exactly sure which day this week I showered but I swear I took one at some point. If this sounds familiar or describes you then we are a part of the same club—MMOMD of little children. As a mom of four kiddos, myself, I depend on a steady supply of coffee and jeans to get through the day. On days like today, I am grateful for an e-pen on rural healthcare but sitting down at my computer I have come to the conclusion that I can’t. I just can’t. I can’t write about the state of healthcare in our region when more businesses are closing. I can’t write about the state of healthcare in this region where more families are moving away. I can’t write about the state of healthcare in our region when more people are dying. I can’t write about the state of healthcare in the mountains to tie it all together. There are real people and my words about these very real and grim situations don’t do them justice. I can’t write about the state of healthcare because it is intertwined with so much more. It is not just healthcare at stake here. Its quality of life. I close to plannin’ my family in Mitchell County for many reasons, the least of which being that my roots are here. Truly, it was a good for a small town and the quality of life that comes with it that made me long for the mountains. And that quality of life is in serious jeopardy.

Small town living is not for everyone. But I am quite certain every person can agree that it is small town that we find so much of what we love about our country. “Mom and Pop” stores, the local pizza shop, small town Christmas parades, and the Friday night basketball games at the high school. All those places and people that give quality to our lives. But today I find myself bemoaning the fact that yet another business I love is closing its doors. Businesses closing, families leaving, vital services (like healthcare) slipping away. Why? Why? Like many of you, I find myself groping for answers and coming up with few I know I should. Like, dang, I’m going to be raising some good cheese bread come January. Or the knowledge that families have come to know and admire have been forced to leave since the closure of Labor and Delivery at our local hospital. It was brought to my attention recently that with the new year, Blue Ridge Regional Hospital may no longer have doctors on staff at night. Sure, there will be physicians in the emergency room but not in the hospital itself. Which may not matter to you until you, or someone you love is saving overnight. Then it will matter a great deal. Another service lost. Another card deal against our small town. Like watching dominoes, I shudder to think what will fall next.

This is where you come in. This is why SEARCH began. SEARCH, Summertime Essential and Rural Community Healthcare, began in response to the closure of Labor and Delivery at BETH. But has expanded to so much more. SEARCH is comprised of local citizens, clergy members, and healthcare professionals that care about the quality of life here in the mountains. SEARCH knows that every decision made by those at a distance affects more than just those people that receive the services administered. Every decision that overlooks the people of this area in favor of focusing wallies trickles down to each of us. No one is excluded. Jobs are lost. Families leave. Small businesses lose necessary patrons. Author business close its doors. How can we combat this? The first step is to get involved. Attend a SEARCH meeting. Talk to your neighbors. Relay your concerns to your pastor, your county commissioner, or your physician. You deserve to be heard. You deserve a purpose-filled life and access to quality, accessible, and affordable healthcare. So let’s think about “It’s Time to SEARCH” meeting will be held December 31st at 6 pm at the First Baptist Church of Duansville. I hope to be there, messy bun and all, doing what I can to improve the quality of life for my family and the lives of all that call the mountains home. Now please excuse me while I reheat my coffee.

Chelsea Wilson Thayer is a native and resident of Batavaria, NC. She is motivated by her husband, Bryan, and four children to live a life of purpose and service to those that call rural Appalachia home.

WNC Communities, Linda Lamp
Tipton Hill Community Foundation
By Linda Lamp
Mitchell County

Regional Honore to Tipton Hill Community Foundation
ASHEVILLE, NC The WNC Honors Awards is built on a 68-year-old tradition of recognizing rural community development clubs for their innovative ideas and grassroots solutions. These centers and clubs are the backbone running through our beloved mountains. The culmination of this year’s program occurred at a luncheon held on Saturday with 240 community leaders from 15 counties and the Eastern Band of Cherokees. Commissions of Promise receive a cash award of $1,000 and are chosen because of the initiatives implemented by the commission that show promise and can be replicated around the region. Tipton Hill Community Foundation from Mitchell County received this high accolade for raising over $24,000 for facility improvements and continuing efforts on a community museum. The museum to be housed in the facility will preserve the history of the community through historical documents, artifacts and memorabilia. The foundation was also recognized for their work collaborating with the Center for Rural Health to open a telemedicine clinic to serve local residents by providing remote diagnosis and treatment through telecommunications technology.

“We should all be grateful for the dedication rural communities put into making the mountains a place we can all be proud to call home.” shared Linda Lamp, Executive Director. “For over 68 years, the WNC Honors Program has served as an inspiration for continuing and replicating community success.”

Generous sponsorships from Harrah’s Cherokee Casino Resort, Harrah’s Valley River Casino & Hotel, Biltmore Farms, Inc., Duke Energy, Mission Health, The McClure Fund, First Citizens Bank, Buncombe County Farm Bureau, Carolina Farm Credit and Wells Fargo brought in a record amount of $40,500 to award to the 65 community centers and clubs in the region.

Community centers and clubs across the mountain region voluntarily participate in the annual cash awards program by submitting an application to WNC Communities, a nonprofit dedicated to strategies to improve rural community life. The 65 communities involved this year represent over 13,500 volunteers with an impressive 173,000 hours in research programs dedicated to education, health, conservation and years highlighting the mountains’ great art, craft, and music traditions, as well as collaborative efforts with government, churches, community colleges, nonprofits and small businesses. In addition, the collective fundraising efforts of these communities brought in over $86,000 for everything from neighbor helping neighbor to local parks to community gardens, school supplies, senior meals, military honorariums, preserving mountain heritage and funds dedicated to the upgrades and maintenance of these rural Biasons known as community centers.

Scott, Javana, Kita & Anne receiving the award on behalf of the community foundation.

Linda Lamp has worked in the nonprofit industry for over two decades and is currently the Executive Director of WNC Communities.
Light
By Allen Buchanan
Mitchell County

My wife came home after a painting party proudly displaying her version of what everyone had painted that evening. I, too, was very proud of her accomplishments. I admired 3 canning jars hanging on a tree limb. Inside each jar was a single glowing white candle. Across these jars was written, “Be A Light In The World”!

When thinking about the light of each candle within the jars, I recalled a song that I’ve known since I was a child. “This Little Light of Mine, I’m going to let it shine…”

According to Wikipedia, Harry Dixon Loes wrote this gospel song. Depending on the source, the song may take its theme from Luke 11:33, where Jesus said, “No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; that it may shine unto all that are in the house.”

Have you ever noticed in the night no matter how dark it gets in your home, there are tiny lights everywhere? Nearly every electrical item you own has a standby light. Even if you focus on lighting enough in your house, it usually grows larger. In some cases, light can lead you to safety.

Our world today is filled with lost and hurting people seeking answers to give them hope for a brighter tomorrow. As a Christian, you are to be that hope, that light. With your faith and trust in Jesus, you can shine your light, love on them, leading them to His saving grace. The brightest future anyone can have is spending eternity in Heaven.

“This Little Light of Mine…” What a better phrase for December. A light in the world is what we all need to be. Isn’t it what we expect of our children? Aren’t we supposed to strive to be like our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ?

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

Mary Christmas!

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

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Christmas Celebration
By Sheryl Tron
Burke County

Again, this year Valdese is lit up for Christmas. For 19 years now, the Waldensian Trail of Faith has been sharing the lights display. Founded in 1993, the Trail is an outdoor museum consisting of 11 acres that portrays the history of the Waldensian people back to the time of the Biblical Apostles.

The Trail of Faith is the story of the Waldensian people. The Waldensian people were considered to be people who lived by the scripture and were “tormented, exiled, and martyred, and still the faith that drove them from the Alpine Valley of Italy to the foothills of North Carolina survived.”

There will be music and singing to precede the reading of the Christmas Story.

Visitors of the Christmas lights display are encouraged to stop by the Visitor’s Center where hot chocolate and hot apple cider will be served alongside refreshments.

The Trail of Lights will be open Nov. 21 through Sunday, Dec. 31 from 5-7 p.m. every night. The Visitor Center will be closed Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. There will be no lights on Christmas Day, but the lights will be on Christmas Eve.

The Waldensian Trail of Faith is located at 401 Church St., NW in Valdese.

Sheryl Tron works as an office assistant at the Waldensian Trail of Faith.
Tim's Treasures

Sled Hill
By Timothy W. Iron
Burke County

"The tiffany cometh not, but for to steel, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."—John 10:10

As a child, ! was enthralled with sliding down top of Sled Hill and overlooking the trees, rooftops, and hillsides in the tiny town of New Harmony. I feel as if I were somewhere else, somewhere in another place and time. Life would eventually lead me on a journey, led by the Master's hand, to mountain tops beyond my wildest dreams, back to a beginning that no one knows.

In those places, the grandeur of God's majesty would take my breath away as He would open my mind to the Truth. It was as if back then, He was preparing me for the future, but it was beyond my comprehension, as it so often is. But before those magnificent peaks and that walk of fires came a humble beginning. Yet, even now, in my mind's eye, I can still see that view on a sunny day as clouds whirled overhead, throwing shadows that raced across the lush green pastures below that were sewn into a patchwork of squares that bordered the edge of town on the farm we knew as home.

It was here that the hill, which to us was a mountain in those days, that the event of a lifetime would occur on a snowy day, quite unlike that bright sunny day, yet full of wonder and awe that it would be a lifetime of memories to continue it all.

Christmas was just around the corner, so everyone was anxious for our first snowfall of the season. The weather on that winter morn was gray and dull with clouds hanging so low it felt like you could reach up and touch them. The forecast was for a few inches of snow, but now, by noon, there was already a blanket of white so deep it covered everything around that old farm house there on the edge of town that sat just below Sled Hill. As the snowflakes fell like giant goose-down feathers, more and more family began to gather until the house couldn't contain us all and at the suggestion of grandma, we hit out for Sled Hill with anything we could find that might act as a sled, including one real working sled.

At that point, it was just us kids, out on an exploratory expedition. Looking back, grandma's suggestion for us to go explore the conditions seemed to be a perfect way to quiet the house and make more room for the adults as it was time to come to visit. For us kids, it was the perfect excuse to play in the snow.

Either way, it would become soon known as the stuff of legends.

I don't know which of us tried to go down first, but by the time we reached the bottom of the hill, the snow was so deep you couldn't slide down easily without first making a trough. The initial attempts all met with crashes. It wasn't until someone made a run nearly to the bottom of the hill that our luck began to change. It wasn't long before the runs were stretching out into unbelievable lengths.

One family was the first to report back to house base was necessary, this was going to be the sledding event of the century, Christmas had come early! We went up and down that hill so many times that afternoon that we eventually became bored and had to return back to the house for warmth and recuperation. If you asked us kids, you knew that for us to have to stop doing something that was good enough to go up the long hill that passed the house at Mr. Wolfe's house, past the backyards of the Labyrinth, past the hilltops and eventually to the pasture gate at the far end. All along the lane were huge Carapa trees that would provide an unusual supply of fish bait in the meantime from the worms that would till off their leaves but now stood barren and dark as a uniform figure that looked overhead which stood as butwacks against the snowscape, one side becoming white as they too became part of the ever-dazzling season scene. Once you reached the pasture gate, you had a good quarter mile to reach the base of the hill, that now stood silent and foreboding as the snow-covered sledding run loomed while disappearing into the snowfall from above, becoming one in their obscurity of eyesight.

The report from our adult led expedition told of some of the best sledding conditions that they had ever seen in their lifetime. Our eyes nearly popped out of their heads at this exhilaration. The wheels were soon put into motion for preparations for a night sled, something we children had never heard of nor thought of before. Grown men began to brainstorm, and the idea of putting torches along the sled run was thrown out. "And why not," came a reply which soon put some of the creative minds in the family to work to build the home-made torches that soon lined the sled path before darkness set in and put off a warming glow to the glowing white ice that had begun to form on the trail to the top of the hill. I don't know what we ate, nor what we ate, all I can recall to this day was the sledging and sliding down the incline that loomed like a monolithic scull in the night sky. The hill became so slick that the only way to get back to the top was to find footholds on the side of the run that had been made before; otherwise, you'd find yourself sledding without a sled. By the end of the night, only the brave brave would slide from the top of the hill, and fast and slick was the ice. Those who did try found themselves becoming human torpedoes flying down the hill as their sleds rode ahead.

While wekids were climbing up and down the hill, a giant bonfire began to grow, where we would find ourselves warming our frozen extremities and finding hot dogs or other fire baked goodies to savor our hunger that had grown without our knowledge. As the faces of family and friends gathered around the blaze, we realized that when grandpa and grandma were also there gathered around that giant fire, it was the event of a lifetime. Grandma would rarely venture this time of year, especially when he had the 3:00 AM milking coming, but this was no ordinary day or night. We continued on that night until arms and legs would no longer move and slowly we all left the snowy and ice-covered hill behind. As the embers of the fire began to glow in the darkness, the last snowflakes fell in its warmth with a hiss. A tiny puff of smoke escaped and drifted down like the night sky, like our memories that drifted off with our deep as soon as our hats hit the pillows that night.

In the event of a lifetime, a memory was made that affected so many in this recollection brings forth memories from so many that if we were all gathered together, you might mistake our ages as children once again and hear the crack of snow underfoot as our minds raced down that hill once more.

There have been many Christmas seasons that have come and gone since that day. Many of those adults have gone on to be with the Lord while others have grown and moved away. The old farm yard was torn down and the farm drastically altered to adapt to changing times. The old milk barn is still there, but now it is the offices and warehouse for a flower farm. While one can stand at the road that once went by the house and look back to where the old frosty porch used to be, all one can see is the mind's eye coming from whence we came. Time is the thief that comes so steal and destroy, but we cannot allow it to slip away. Life is about living, our past and our memories and sometimes there all combine into the unforgettable.

A life lived abundantly. So it was in the late daylight hours we held our "Sled Hill." Somewhere in your life, you too have had or will have a "Sled Hill." When you do, or if you have, embrace those memories or that time with all you can, for it sometimes only comes around once in a lifetime.

Again, live life abundantly, and strive to make the most of every opportunity. Thanks be to God.

Timothy W. Iron is the Executive Director of the Waldsmans of Faith. He lives in Waldsmans with his family. He is the author of "Bravehearts to Heaven," and an Eagle Scout. He has a B.S.E.E. from UF; is an Eagle Scout. He is now teaching in Winteeva.

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December 2017: Blue Ridge Christian News page 36
Selling Your Home During The Winter
By Dave Ransey

Thinking of selling your home sometime next year? Why wait? Existing home sales have increased from November to December an average of 4.5 percent in the past three winters. That means even though there are less homes on the market, buyers are out there buying at a steady, if not increased, pace. That’s great news for you winter seller.

If you’ve got a home on the market right now, you might feel like the Grinch stole your Christmas. Everyone knows winter is the season of giving, and spring is the season of selling. Plus, working home closings into a busy holiday schedule is like trying to shove a 20-foot tree into your living room.

But selling your home during the holidays doesn’t have to spell disaster. You may be surprised that there are advantages to selling your home in the winter. Here are some of our favorites:

The internet has no seasons:

Traditional home buying and selling seasons have evolved as a result of instant internet access to property listings. While spring is still the hottest home-buying season, serious home buyers are always on the lookout, checking out the latest listings on their tablet before bed or while waiting for their kid’s football game to end.

Today’s buyers do the bulk of their home searches online, and that’s especially true when the weather outside is not so cheerful. This means your online listing and photos are especially important. Make sure you use high-quality photos that show off your home’s selling points. Photos of the exterior in all seasons can help, as can including a video tour and night shots of the exterior with all the lights on.

Make sure you work with an experienced real estate agent to get your listing up-to-snuff for online house hunters. An expert agent can help you know how to show off your home’s best features.

Competition dries up:

Come spring, sellers will flood the market and your home will be just another nib in a great big pond. But right now, you’ve practically got the market to yourself.

Since 2014, existing home inventory has fallen an average of 1.5 percent from November to December. That’s 1.5 percent less competition on the market if you list your home during the winter. Buyers have fewer homes to choose from, which means you could sell your home faster.

Buyer: mean business:

Most folks want to curl up under a blanket next to a warm fire on a cold winter day. If a buyer is trudging around in freezing weather to look at your home, they must be serious. That’s because many winter buyers are working against a deadline, whether it’s an expiring lease, relocation, or a contract on their current home.

Getting tax breaks before year’s end:

Winter home buyers may also be motivated to capture the tax benefits of buying a home before year-end. Home buyers can write off some of the expenses of their home purchase on their taxes. There are usually multiple tax benefits to owning a home they can take advantage of too. Typically, a homeowner can count on the following being tax-deductible:

- Mortgage interest
- Private mortgage insurance (PMI) premiums
- Real estate taxes

These tax benefits could make a potential home buyer want to get a house bought and closed before the new year. And if you’re selling your home and buying another, you could ring in the new year with more tax breaks, too.

Remember that selling or buying a house can complicate your tax situation, which is why it’s always a great idea to lean on a tax expert’s knowledge. They can make sure you get every deduction and credit you’ve earned.

Take care:

You may think people are less likely to see your home during their hectic holiday schedules. That can be true, but keep in mind most people have more time off around the holidays. That means more time for browsing their favorite home apps, dreaming about their future decor, and even scheduling home showings.

Three tips to set the buying mood:

Nothing says welcome home quite like walking out of the cold into a nice, warm house that’s dressed up for the holidays. Admit it: Your home looks great this time of year!

It’s easier to make a house feel like home in the wintertime. Here are a few tips to help you set the buying mood:

- Keep it simple. Decorations should accent — not overpower
- Keep the lights on, even if the season is dark. Even the smallest twinkling lights make a home feel cozy.
- Make sure the home is clean and well maintained. Winter is a great time to make sure the home is in good shape for the next buyer.

Merry Christmas!
Crossword

ACROSS
1. They shall come from the east (Luke 13:29)
2. She shall shave her head, and her tail (Deut 21:12) (KJV)
3. I will make all your enemies turn their back and run (Ex 23:27)
4. They shall take gold, and silver, and purple (Exodus 28:3)
5. The LORD commanded the blessing (Ps 133:3)
6. To Joppa, where he found a bound for that port (146:1) (Acts 1:13)
7. Putting its doors and bolts and in place (Neh 3:15)
8. Do not let your hand know what your right hand is doing (Matt 6:3)
9. Father, keep through your own name those whom thou hast (John 17:11) (KJV)
10. The LORD appointed a time, saying, To inowor (Exodus 9:5)

DOWN
1. And your toil another man's house (Prov 15:10)
2. Now there arose up a king over Egypt (Exodus 1:8)
3. Is there any tawny on the white of an eye? (Job 6:9)
4. Surely I have acted like a fool and have greatly (1 Sam 26:21)
5. Peter knocked and a servant girl named came (Acts 12:13)
6. There was what looked like glass (1:3) (Rev 4:6)
7. And from the Book of the Law of God (Neh 8:8)
8. One beka person, that is, half a shekel (Ex 38:26)
9. Donkeys that work the soil shall eat fodder and (Isa 30:24)
10. Men, I can see that our going is to be distressing (Acts 27:10)
11. Joshua, who seen all the great works of the LORD (Judg 2:7)
12. Seventh letter of Greek alphabet
13. They are with the bowmen of the mountains (Job 24:8)
14. The curtains of the temple were torn in two from top to bottom (Matt 27:51)
15. From them that pass by securely men from war (Mic 2:8) (KJV)
16. A robe, a wool tunic, a turban and a coat (Ex 28:4)
17. Gave it his disciples, saying, Take and this is my body (Matt 26:26)
18. Roman emperor (454-58 A.D.)
20. In the beginning God created the heaven and the (Gen 1:1)
21. Thou shalt make the robe of linen (Exod 28:39) (KJV)
22. Experienced in the art of engraving (2 Chron 2:7)
23. A man scoop fire into his without his clothes being burned (Prov 6:27)
24. Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of (John 19:5)
25. Shechem set men on the hilltops to ambush and every one (Judg 9:25)
26. As an enemy pleasing to the LORD (Num 29:2)
27. But man is and is laid low, he breathes his last (Job 14:10)
28. To seek an (1 Sam 21:11), He will cast lots with arrows (Ezek 22:21)
29. For it is easier for a to go through a needle's eye (Luke 18:25)
30. Salvation is found in no one, for there is no other name (Acts 4:12)
31. Three every man under his vine and under his fig (1 Kings 4:25)
32. I looked at the earth, and it was formless and (Jer 4:23)
33. Silver in two bags, with two of clothing (2 Kings 5:23)
34. There must not be even a of sexual immorality (Eph 5:3)

SOLUTION ON THE NEXT PAGE

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- Friday, Dec. 15th - Farmers Daughter TN
- Tuesday, Dec. 19th - Kehl’s and Wal Mart - Asheville
- Thursday, Dec. 21st - Bristol TN - Speedway in Lights (vanse leave the senior center at 4:15pm) $2.00 per person

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Bats
By Christy Lowman
Burke County

By now, you have probably figured out that I love animals. I enjoy researching and learning fascinating facts about the creatures God has created. But today, I’m going to talk about a mammal I don’t like. Bats. I don’t like bats. Why you ask? Because they like to fly too close to my head! I cannot tell you the number of times that a bat touched my cheek or swooped within inches of my head. That’s why I do not like bats, but that is not fair to them. God made bats, so they deserve to be recognized. Besides, there are a lot of fascinating facts about bats, so many that I will be sure to include them in this article.

There are over 1,400 species of bats. These species are divided into 2 groups: megabats and microbats. Megabats are very large bats that only eat fruit. The largest is the rare Giant Fruit-eating bat. Its wingspan can reach up to 6 feet across. Megabats have a very narrow head and a flat nose. They have eyesight and rely on a great deal on their God-given superpower. Most microbats eat insects, and some eat small animals. Vampire bats are also included in the microbat group; they are the only mammals that are a bloodsucker. The smallest microbat is the bat that flies over the smallest mammal, which weighs less than a penny and is the size of a thumbnail.

Bats come out at night and are the only mammals that can fly. The Mexican free-tailed bats can fly up to 200 miles a night, as fast as 50 mph, and up to 10,000 ft high. At night, brown bats can see up to 1200 mosquitoes an hour and can live up to 30 years.

Black Bat Cave, Texas is home to 30 million Mexican free-tailed bats that eat 200 tons of insects every night. More bats live in this cave than people living in Mumbai, India, one of the largest populated cities in the world. When this family of bats leaves the cave, it looks like a storm passing through on the radar. I would not want to be outside when this occurs!

I want to talk about bats’ superpower, called echolocation. Echolocation is the ability to make sounds and noises that reflect back to you in the form of echoes. The echoes bounce back to them and help them navigate at night and find food. Echolocation shows the exact location of their prey. This God-given gift is so sensitive that bats can sense objects as thin as a single human hair. This superpower also starts bats off with nothing on their minds but then, as they learn more, they don’t eat them. I like to think of the echolocation as a gimmick for fixing the bats. It’s an invisible shield from God, that bats bounce sounds off of to protect and keep them safe from objects and to help them locate and distinguish between poisonous and safe food to eat. To me, this is amazing!

Even if I don’t care much for bats, they are really cool!

Did you know that God also gave you an invisible shield? He sure did! It is part of the armor of God, called the “shield of faith.” This shield will protect you from whatever the enemy sends your way. The devil wants to attack and destroy us because we are made in the image of God, but by using this shield, we can have faith that the shield is real and that God is protecting you. Ask God to give you your very own shield and to protect you from anything that might come your way and He will! God will put a forcefield around you to keep you safe. He will create a safe haven for you. He will wrap his arms around you like an eagle’s wings and shield you from your storm you may encounter. Our God is mighty, and awesome, and He is all we need! Don’t forget to praise and thank Him each and every time He protects you.

That makes God super happy!

In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. EPHESIANS 6:16

Our soul waits for the LORD; He is our help and our shield. PSALM 33:20 NIV

Dear Lord, we thank You and praise You so much for Your shield that protects us from the things we see and the things we don’t see. We pray that You will help develop the faith of each child so they will rely solely on You in all parts of their life. For You are mighty, and awesome and are worthy of all our praise. AMEN.

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The Rotary of Spruce Pine
By Doug Sudduth
Mitchell County
The Rotary Club of Spruce Pine welcomed Paulya and Denny Lottstoem to their regular meeting on November 16. Introduced by their longtime friend and Rotarian, Dr. Andy Woodard, the couple spoke of their work beginning in 2002, when they went to Tanzania to bring health care to underserved people. As a physician and nurse, Denny and Paulya have worked not only in the United States, but in Guatemala and Antarctica before answering the call to go to Tanzania. With the late Mary Ellen Hites, they founded International Health Partners, U.S. & TZ, with the mission of planning, financing and building health care facilities in Tanzania. The St. John’s University School of Nursing at Dodoma opened and has now more than 900 students, about 500 enrolled in the BSN program, 250 in the diploma nursing program, and 150 students in the laboratory technician’s program under the umbrella of the nursing school. St. John’s is now setting up the standards for continuing education opportunities for nurses in the entire country.

International Health Partners TZ joined with JIMA (For the Children of Tanzania) to form IHJP-JIMA-TZ and is building The Children’s Hospital at Ziga. Since breaking ground for the hospital in June 2013, IHJP-U.S.-JIMA-TZ has made progress developing the infrastructure to support the proposed 12 units of the hospital, as well as housing for the staff and for the medical and construction volunteers who have come to help during the past four years. The Ombushere Department was the first unit of the hospital to open in 2014, thus providing care for both pediatric and adult patients. The Children’s Hospital is already making a difference in the lives of children and families as we learned through the numerous photographs that Paulya shared in the presentation. She noted that Rotary clubs in Illinois and Missouri have donated equipment for the X-ray building and water purification units. Donors pay the salaries of the 40+ employees who can now feed and educate their families. Donors also pay for building materials, the subcontractors and for the upkeep of the facility. Paulya explained that providing medical care is both challenging and rewarding. With dedicated volunteers and generous donors Paulya and Denny are optimistic about the future of the Children’s Hospital at Ziga.

Spice Pine Rotarians appreciate Dr. Woodard making us aware of the international Health Partners organization and for inviting this dedicated and inspirational couple to share the story of their work with us.

Doug Sudduth is the Public Relations Officer for the Spruce Pine Rotary Club.

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Court on God for Christmas Surprises
Ken and Jan Mote
Avery County

What was your best Christmas surprise? Did a loved one show up at your front door and surprise you? Did you open a gift that you never expected to receive? Did you get to take a trip you had always dreamed about?

Christmas is about surprises, isn’t it?

Rarely do we go around telling our loved ones what we are going to give them unless it is necessary for them to know so we don’t duplicate or misunderstand. But those are usually exceptions to the rule. I’ve described before how my engagement ring from Ken came wrapped in a large box, then smaller until I lifted out a shoe box containing a wooden shoe handcrafted by a friend. Thrilled with any surprise, I never expected the smaller box with my engagement ring to fall out of the shoe into my hand. My surprise and delight overflowed into tears of happiness.

Pleasing those we love and care about is an overflow of the great heart of our God in whose image we are created. He delights in surprising us.

In Psalm 37: 3 & 4, NKJV, it says, “Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart.”

After the angel’s first surprising visit. Mary lived out her pregnancy and her trip to Bethlehem with Joseph. I imagine she longed to get settled at a welcoming inn. But, surprise! No room at the inn except a nearby stable. But,一经 Jesus was born and placed in a manger bed; she must have marveled at what God had wrought within her and the good man he had given her to help raise this Son of the Highest.

And even if she may have begun to wonder anew about it all, in moments she saw them coming. Surprise visitors — shepherds with a look of awe and wonder on their faces who had encountered angels — as she and Joseph had also in Gabriel’s visits to them.

As the shepherds spread the good news and people marveled at all they heard, Scripture says in Luke 2:19, “But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.”

Mary allowed God to hold and reveal his surprises at the right time.

How might God surprise each one of us this Christmas? We can count on Him as we keep our hearts open and ready to cherish within us that which He reveals.

Selah

BEAR ALL THINGS

Love came down on Christmas morn
So that all who believe can be born.
Freely share that love so graciously given
Easing burdens for others with an eye toward heaven.

“Love...bears all things.”
1 Corinthians 13:7

“Bear one another’s burdens...”
Galatians 6:2

Ken and Jan reside in Land Harbour in Avery County, where they have moved in retirement because they love our mountains. They have written for us in years past.

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Serving God in Your Bodily Illness
By Shaws Thomas
Burke County

"But you know that it was because of a bodily illness that I preached the gospel to you the first time ..." (Galatians 4:13)

So, the Apostle Paul had a "bodily illness" which was hindering him as he sought to serve the Lord. But as we see in Galatians 4, he didn’t let that stop him from serving.

In fact, verse 13 says it was "because" of the bodily illness that Paul was able to preach the gospel to the Galatians. What these exact circumstances were, we do not know — nor the exact nature of Paul’s illness; though both 13 and 14 describe it as a bodily (literally "Belly") condition, and in 15 he mentions that the Galatians "would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me," perhaps giving a hint as to the nature of his physical problem. But those are the only clues we have, perhaps because the specific nature of Paul’s difficulty was not as important at the fact that 1) the Galatians accepted him despite it, and 2) that Paul allowed the Lord to use him in it.

There are numerous lessons for God’s people here, among them that the “health and wealth prosperity gospel” is false. The New Testament does NOT indicate that God will heal us of every physical illness if we merely believe. The Apostle Paul himself had a physical condition which God did not immediately heal. We also read in II Timothy 2:9 where Paul said “Triumphus I left sick in Miletus.” So much for a supposed guarantee that God will heal every physical infirmity here in this world. That teaching is not supported by the scriptures.

Another lesson, for the ill persons themselves, is that we should not wait for perfect health to serve God. Quite honestly, that day may never come, and your opportunity to serve and be blessed by your potential service will have passed. Do not wait for the “perfect” circumstances, but serve God as He gives you strength NOW. And give you strength He can — often way beyond what you may imagine. Remember what the Lord told Paul when he asked Him for physical healing: “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” God can give us great strength, even when we are physically weak, if we will present ourselves to Him as vessels for service. This should not be taken to mean that there are not circumstances which limit our ability to serve. This writer has personally spent time sidelined from active ministry by incapacitating illness. There are times when we simply cannot serve.

But we should also recognize that sometimes we think our limitations — physical or otherwise — automatically exclude us from being used by God. And we should remember that often, as in the case of Paul here, God has plans to use us IN SPITE of them, so that He may be the more glorified.

Share this:
Shaws Thomas is Senior Pastor at Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church in Morganton. His messages and devotionals are available at www.shawsthomas.com

A Bed In A Bath Room
By Don Stafford
Mitchell County

My name is Rev. Don Stafford, and I have been the community funded Chaplain at Mountain View Prison for the past 12 years. I believe this is one of the greatest ministries that Christians can be involved with. In Matthew 25:31-46 the Bible says, “I was in prison and you visited me... Truly I say unto you, inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me...” Through this ministry I have seen so many seeds give their life to Jesus Christ. It is such a blessing to see these men grow in the knowledge of the Bible. Many inmates ask to be baptized, and I was privileged to baptize 46 of them last year (2016/17).

I am employed by The Blue Ridge Prison Ministry Board. Each board member is a member of one of our local churches. Local churches support this ministry by giving a regular monthly financial gift. Rev Steve Williams is the treasurer for this ministry. If your church would like to give to this ministry please send your gift to the Mitchell Baptist Association, marked for the prison ministry. I believe God will bless you for it. Please remember that missions begin at home. At almost any given time there are 988 inmates at Mountain View Correctional. Two inmates live in an approximately 8x12 room with only 1 commode, sink and 2 small bunk beds. Everything an inmate owns must fit in his locker which serves as a closet, file cabinet, medicine cabinet, food pantry and safe. Can you imagine living in this environment? Sometimes tempers flare because one inmate may try to bully the other. This can turn into a fight, and one or both end up in (the hole) segregation, where you spend 23 hours a day with only 1 hour out for a shower and exercise.

Each day begins at 5:45am when the cell doors open and ends at 11:30pm. The inmates spend their days either working a job, going to school, reading, watching TV, playing games, exercising, talking on the phone or going outside on the yard. Through Mayland Community College the inmates are offered GED/HSE, Commercial Cleaning, Masonry Tile, Masonry Block, Carpenter and Life Skills as well as Geriatric programs.

I hope this article has been a blessing to you and encourages you to pray for all incarcerated men and women everywhere. I look forward to sharing more with you in future articles about this fulfilling ministry.

Don Stafford is the pastor of Ledger Baptistic Church. He is employed by Blue Ridge Prison Ministry Board and serves as a chaplain.

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To Receive $50,000 Grant
Dr. Edward Bukwald
Granite Falls, North Carolina

Dr. Edward Bukwald of Granite Falls Family Medical Care Center was recently awarded a $50,000 grant from the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI). The funding will provide technical assistance and allow Bukwald to develop a community research team to work in conjunction with academic research centers and perform community-based, patient-centered research.

"This grant gives us the opportunity to bring the academic research community to our own community," said Dr. Bukwald. "We will be able to involve patients in our research endeavors, hopefully looking into issues patients may find relevant to their own health and the health of our community."

Dr. Bukwald is available for appointments at his practice location in Granite Falls. For more information, call (828) 308-3166 or visit him online at bujwaldmd.com.

Edward Bukwald, M.D. Named “One of America’s Best Family Doctors” by the Consumer Research Council of America. Dr. Bukwald has been providing personalized, leading edge family medicine for more than 25 years. Dr. Bukwald is Board Certified by the American Board of Family Medicine (ABFM) and is an American Academy of Family Practice (AAFP) Fellow. A member of the American Academy of Family Practice National Research Network, Dr. Bukwald has published several research papers in his field. He is also an active member of the American Academy of Family Practice and the North Carolina Academy of Family Practice.

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Oh, Little Town of Bethlehem
By Pastor Kurt Bomar
Avery County

Micah 5:2 tells us that the little city just 5 miles outside of Jerusalem would be the birthplace of the Messiah. When the Wise Men spent upwards of a year traveling to arrive in Jerusalem and sought directions to this place, the scripture identified it as the birthplace. Did you ever stop and wonder why the religious leaders didn’t go themselves? To them it was only 5 miles away. They knew the Scriptures but that wasn’t enough. It isn’t enough today.

My first point is this: We can easily be like them. We know the Word. We know what we should be doing, but we stop there. We know the greatest commandment...but are we loving our neighbor as ourselves?

But anyway, the Wise Men got there and found Jesus. Because of that event the city is a top destination spot for Christians around the world and has been for 2,000 years. What is the little town of Bethlehem like? Unfortunately, it’s not like the words of the song. Tourists flock to see this quaint little town but did you know that Bethlehem has made the top five lists of “the most disappointing cities in the world”. They go there expecting to see something special but are disillusioned because it’s just another Middle Eastern town. They go into the church of the Nativity, assuming it will be awesome. But as they walk in, they see the church itself divided into three sections (Catholic, Eastern, and Russian Orthodox) because these three groups have been fighting for centuries over who should control the site. And there are objects hanging from the ceiling that look like Christmas tree ornaments in a garage sale. The scene is complete with hawkers trying to sell you cheap souvenirs. With church groups fighting and dusty relics hanging, no wonder Bethlehem appears to be disappointing.

Buy wait, it’s perfect! He was born in a stable. I’ve been in them. They stink. There are cow patti’s everywhere which means there are flies everywhere. But it had to be so.

This brings me to my second point: Jesus came to a real world as a real man to help real people. And Bethlehem mirrors reality today. This dirty little town is one of the best-known places in the world for one reason... Jesus was there! And so too, with you and me. Jesus comes into little people like us—people who are somehow dusty and small and not at all impressive—and he makes us great, not because of who we are, but because of whom we are. We are His.

The discipled were a good picture of this. They started out as a rag tag group of kids who played in the streets and in one short generation they changed the whole world. The interesting thing about their ministry is that the religious leaders were astounded at them and noted that though they were untaught, they had been with Jesus. Jesus has a plan for all of us. We may look like Bethlehem. We may be ignorant like the disciples, but if we will spend time with Jesus there is no limit to what he can do through us.

Do you want to have an impact on the world? Then don’t just know the Word, spend some time with Jesus. It’s all about him.

Merry Christmas,
Kurt Bomar is pastor of Walnut Grove Church.

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, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6

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Community Support
By David Burleson
Burke County

As the Christmas holiday season approaches, I want to thank everyone in our community for assisting us in making the Burke United Christian Ministries a caring and inviting place for our clients. It is an honor for our entire staff to work with a community that understands the mission of our ministry to be the hands and feet of Jesus as we help and support our clients and to give them hand up from the obstacles they face. In my opinion, the most powerful statement about the success of any ministry is what we do for our clients every day and how we encourage them to be the best person they can be.

Remember, people watch what we do much more than they listen to what we say. Our actions speak volumes and it is incumbent upon us to model and display the character of Christ in the world in which we live. If we want to make our world a better place, we must start with one person at a time.

Because of the generosity of our supporters, we were able to provide Senior Santa bags to over 200 of our precious senior saints. It is a true blessing to provide these wonderful seniors a little extra for their Christmas.

Because of the work of many of our elves, especially Pam and Lorie, Cringle’s Christmas Corner has opened in the BUCM Store for You Clothing Store filled with beautiful, handmade crafts. If your home needs a little extra Christmas magic, be sure to come visit us until Saturday, December 23.

Also for Christmas, BUCM will provide two special events for our children. On Thursday, December 14 BUCM will be hosting an evening with Santa in our soup kitchen from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. We will also have a Polar Express night on Thursday, December 21 from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. There will be a pancake bar, hot chocolate, popcorn and a showing of the Polar Express.

We want to thank the following groups for doing food drives for Burke United Christian Ministries:
1. Liberty Middle School
2. Liberty Bells
3. Freedom Anchor Club (Power Puff Game)
4. Morgan Town’s Freedom High School Class
5. Mill Elementary
6. Hillcrest Elementary School
7. Morganton Day School
8. Outreach Bound
9. Food Fight (Summit Community Church, Mt. Home Baptist Church, Faith Community Church, and Morganton First Presbyterian)
10. Glory Land Baptist Church
11. Boy Scout Food Drive
12. Continental Tees
13. Morganton Children’s Dental Center
14. Blue Ridge HealthCare System
15. Lowe’s Nursery

One small gift to a child in need will mean much more than anything we can provide. I wish for each of you a very blessed Christmas season and my prayer is that you will have an opportunity to spend time with family and friends. Thank you again for what you mean to our ministry. All you do for others is appreciated.

David Burleson is Director of Burke United Christian Ministries.

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Burke County Schools

Telemedicine Program Expands
To Include All Schools
By Cheryl Stuffer
Burke County

The Healthe-Schools telemedicine program in Burke County Public Schools has expanded to include all school campuses, allowing a school nurse on site and a nurse practitioner off site to examine students with medical needs. The program started with six schools in 2015 and has offered through Healthe-Schools, which is part of the Center for Rural Health Innovation. The grants came from Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation, the Community Foundation of Burke and the Burke Women’s Fund.

Burke County Public Schools Superintendent Larry Demasi said, “Healthy students are successful students. We are grateful to the Center for Rural Health Innovation and Blue Cross Blue Shield, the Community Foundation of Burke and the Burke Women’s Fund for the opportunity to equip all of our schools with telemedicine devices. It has been a very successful program in six of our schools thus far, and we look forward to continued success as all of our students, as well as staff, can now benefit from it.

Students can get a diagnosis, a referral, if needed, a prescription, if needed, and, in most cases, stay in school and go back to being actively engaged in learning. No one has to wait for an appointment or miss school and work.”

Parents will soon receive an enrollment form for basic health and insurance information on their child. When a child falls ill at school, instead of mom and dad having to go to work and take the student to a doctor’s office, the school will contact the parent and give them the option of having the school nurse and a nurse practitioner examine the child via a secured video feed.

The examination takes place in the school nurse’s office and a nurse practitioner on site feels the examination. The two workers together examine the child and record basics such as height, weight, and temperature. They can use an otoscope or ear, nose, and throat. The nurse practitioner can see over video feed what the school nurse can see in person, such as infected ears or red throat.

The nurse and nurse practitioner have the capabilities of testing for strep and flu. Other common ailments they see include sinus infections, respiratory issues, head lice and rashes.

While students with contagious illnesses are sent home, 85 percent of the students the school nurse and nurse practitioner see are not contagious and can stay in school. The program sends records to the student’s primary care physician to provide a continuation of care and keep parents in the loop.

Allison Bell, program director for Burke County Healthe-Schools, said, the 10 new devices purchased with the grant money come from TycoCare and include a camera, stethoscope, otoscope, ear, nose, and throat depressor and headphones.

Burke County Public Schools has 13 school nurses, six stationary telemedicine sites and new 10 mobile devices to offer telemedicine in every school.

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

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SILENT NIGHT

A Christmas Poem (a true story)
By Joyce (Joy) Harwood Baldwin

An old man toiled with rugged hands
To dig a ditch that day
Unaware his heart would change
As he began to pray.

The children singing “Silent Night”
Their sweet sound filled the air
When it reached the old man’s ears
He listened with all care.

The words and music spoke to him
That Jesus was a child
The Spirit gently touched his heart
“Holy infant so tender and mild”

The old man tired and weary
Began to weep with joy
“Thank you, Father, for this child
Your precious baby boy.

Until today I could not see
Nor did I understand
The boundless love You had for me
Even since the world began.

God’s love unveils through song
This night has set me free
My heart rejoices now to know
You gave your son for me.”

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 Warmsville, “home away from home”. She is currently singing with the Gospel Group “Jonah’s Voice” out of Mars Hill, NC. Her latest song, “Homecoming” will soon be heard by many.

A Caring Partner at Home

When2ece was unable to live independently, her daughter, Mary became her round-the-clock caregiver. When her medical needs became too much for one person to handle, the compassionate team at CarePartners Hospice ensured that both Beth and Mary’s physical, social, and spiritual needs were being met.

Tommy Burleson DSS, Ashley Phillips DSS, Lisa Pittman CDSA, Dan Barron G&L, Billy Pendley DSS left across from rear entrance, North Augusta CDA, Anna Garcia TRACES, Tiffany English FOCUS, missing from the photo are: Alexandria Stevenson CVC, Dale Buchanan Bear Creek Baptist, Katherine Savage SRPC, Cassie York TRACES, Terri Nefier-Sport MCHS, Jeremy Pearsall ACAPS, Ron Peichl ACAPS, Autumn Snyder HCA, Breanna Grace CDA, Torey Emery FSN. Thank to Tammy Lynn Hopson for her photo session at Mitchell County DSS.

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Wendy works at Children’s Development Services Agency. She studied at Gardner-Webb and is a founding member of the HOPE Movement.
America’s Epidemic: How Opioid Addicts Find Help in the Church
From: Decision Magazine
By Sarah Elshof Zylstra

Jim Quigley had been sober for four years and was one semester away from graduating from Bible college when his stopped car was rear-ended by someone going 50 mph. He ended up with two artificial discs in his spine and a prescription for opioid painkillers.

“Somehow I was allowed to take sleep aids for a day if I took them like the label instructed,” he said. “But in my mind, if I took all eight at one time, no matter, I wasn’t really abusing them.”

A sound after surgery, his prescription ran out, and he quit using. But he fell back into alcohol and drug abuse and, three years later, came back to prescription opioids.

“My last year down in Florida, I was in the hospital in three different times for pneumonia related to my substance abuse,” Quigley said. “I was on an IV drug user. I had used heroin and had carcinoma in my lungs. I almost lost my hand and my leg. It was three different units for suicide attempts. One time I took so much medication that I was in a coma for four days.”

Quigley’s cousin found him a long-term rehab place in North Carolina. His first night at Freedom Farm Ministries, a local pastor told the room, “A lot of you guys have had at one time a relationship with the Lord. You’ve got it, so far away from God, I don’t know how you could ever get back to Him. I need to tell you-—God hasn’t gone anywhere. You just need to repent.”

“I said the first honest prayer I’ve said in years,” Quigley said. He would go on to graduate from the program, then work his way up to executive director. Today, Quigley works with those addicts’ families.

“Ultimately, I can’t change anybody,” Quigley said. “I just continue to present the truth to them and see God grab hold of their lives.”

Freedom Farm is just one way that Christians are tackling the opioid crisis, which killed 33,000 Americans in 2015 and almost 2,500 Canadians in 2016. In 2017, one in ten Americans—who make up less than 3 percent of the world’s population—consumed 80 percent of the world’s opioids and 99 percent of its hydrocodones (semi-synthetic opioid like Vicodin or Lortab). Canadians are the second highest opioid users after Americans.

This summer, President Donald Trump declared the opioid crisis a national emergency, in response to a commission report that said the country was “enduring a death toll equal to Sept. 11 every three weeks.” Thanks to opioids, overdoses on drugs is now the most common cause of death for people younger than 50.

Opiate Grapes

Opiate—which includes heroin, codeine, and morphine—are drugs made from the opium poppy. When ingested, the chemicals attach to receptors in the brain, blocking any signals of pain and replacing them with euphoria.

Opioid Stats in the U.S.

12.5 million people abused prescription opioids.

2.1 million people misused prescription opioids for the first time.

2 million people had prescription opioid use disorder.

18,000 people used heroin.

150,000 people used heroin for the first time.

33,000 people died from overdosing on opioids.

Sources: 2015 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (SAMHSA), and MMWR, 2016, 65 (03-S1): 1445-1452 (CDC).

Using opium to replace pain with pleasure has been around as long as the poppy—ancient Sumerians called it the “joy plant.” It’s been causing trouble almost as long, including two major wars between England and China, the morphine addiction of injured Civil War soldiers, and the invention of a German diphtheria that was supposed to be less addictive but turned out to be heroin.

Today’s epidemic was fueled by the development and aggressive marketing of OxyContin in the late 1990s. Opiate manufacturers: such as Purdue Pharma, which manufactures OxyContin, assured doctors that modern opiate pills weren’t addictive and could be safely used for long periods of time. And from 1999 to 2015, pain prescriptions more than doubled.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, most of those prescriptions have been filled in towns and small cities inhabited largely by poor white residents, many of whom are unemployed or uninsured.

“Central Appalachia has a history of economic or social malaise,” explained Covenant College psychology professor Kevin Fama. Coal mining is “a dangerous, tedious, and labor-intensive job. Poverty tends to produce family dysfunction, which is passed down from generation to generation. A combination of hopelessness, emotional wounds, and physical pain make substance abuse highly likely.”

“Last summer, we had 26 overdoses in four hours in Huntington, [West Virginia],” said Chris Priestley, who pastors a church about three hours away. “They ran out of ambulances.”

One family member of North Carolina pastor Donnie Griggs became addicted through prescription medication for pain, another began with marijuana and gradually moved up.

“It puts you, ‘We are drowning in this,’” he said. “Everywhere I go, small towns are being eaten up with this.”

Whether through churches or Christian recovery centers, many addicts have found freedom from addiction through Jesus Christ.

The Church’s Response

Not every church can whip up a recovery center, especially those small churches in rural areas where opioid abuse is more rampant.

“We have to recognize what we can and cannot do,” Priestley said. He aims for preventative care by providing Gospel-centered preaching, Biblical counseling and solid pastoral care. His Crossroads Church partners with other organizations and the medical community.

“We want to connect people to care that is comprehensive, while also being present and welcoming them to a new Gospel community,” he said. “You can hope and heal alongside those who love Jesus.” He added, “We’ve truly seen transformation in those scenarios.”

Tips on Overcoming Addictions

Communities like the one Priestley is offering are a tremendously effective support for an addict’s recovery. Eames said. Churches can also play a key role in relieving the underlying stressors—financial, relational, spiritual—that may send a person to opiates in the first place.

Griggs calls out opiates from the pulpit, saying: “When we talk about our town’s brokenness, we put a name on it. We talk about the pill addiction.”

That seems to encourage people to ask for help, he said, though the shame and deep and extreme complex for those whose addiction grew out of legitimate doctor’s prescriptions.

“My doctor said I needed this—I hear that so much,” Griggs said. “For a soccer mom to go to the hospital and say, ‘I’m addicted to OxyContin or heroin—there’s a stigma in our town… People really feel trapped.’

Opioid addiction is both simply sin and also very messy. In clowns are especially long and sharp, and they often skid is through the loneliness of a doctor’s prescription.

“I’ve seen a lot of good people who love Jesus get hooked on this stuff,” Griggs said. In addition, “a lot of people are taking their hopelessness to this instead of the cross. This has been prescribed as a way to deal with pain and sadness, because I don’t think the church has done a great job of explaining how the Gospel encounters us in our suffering and mourning.” The church has almost made it sound like you aren’t doing all the time, something is wrong with your Christianity.”

But the church also has the right answer. Along with providing presence and support, it can point addicts to the only solution for sin.

“Addicts are not immune from the hope of the Gospel,” Priestley said. “That’s pretty important to remember, to stay grounded instead of getting overwhelmed, I’m called to preach the Gospel—that’s not irrelevant to my city’s crisis. That actually applies… We have every reason—because of the cross and the resurrection—to have hope for the future.”

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Abandoned from an article that originally appeared on The Gospel Coalition website. The full version is available at thegospelcoalition.org.

What Your Church Can Do

Facilitate a workshop or dedicate a teaching time that focuses on the opioid crisis, led by someone from a substance abuse organization.

Join existing substance abuse coalitions, or help to start one.

Affirm the fact that treatment works, but treatment and aftercare are better sustained when a person comes to faith and Christ is supported by a faith community.

Incorporate substance abuse issues into prayer, Bible studies and sermon.

Encourage members of your congregation to question doctors when pain medications are prescribed. Could these drugs lead to dependence?

Educate your congregation on the risks of keeping unused pain medication, and be sure your community has a collection center for unused drugs.

Source: James R. Copple, SAI

Sarah Elshof Zylstra is senior writer for The Gospel Coalition and a contributing edition at Christianity Today.
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