Freedom to Hope

By Marlene Huk

Isaiah 51:1: The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; “Every dollar we had went to buying drugs,” Julie says. “We used to be a family involved in sports with two young boys, but Danny had sold our home, our car, everything to finance our drug addiction.” Years later, desolate, homeless, and desperate, Julie met someone at a women’s shelter who said, “You’ve got to go to Freedom Life.”

Freedom Life, tucked into the foothills of western North Carolina, operates in the perfect spot to serve as an area of significant need in the McDowell community. They are committed to ministering to the complex needs faced by men and women who are currently incarcerated in jail or prison, who are in transition from jail or prison back into the community, or who have a criminal record and simply need help. In seeking to provide assistance to justice involved men and women and their families, Freedom Life uses a holistic approach that groups their very complex needs into four main areas:

- Spiritual
- Relational
- Mental/Emotional/Addiction/Physical Health
- Practical (job, housing, transportation, financial, basic needs like food & clothing)

According to their website, www.freedomlife.org, in 2012, Danny Hampton, who at that time worked as Prison Chaplain and Case Manager for McDowell Mission, saw the potential and need to create an entirely new ministry to help people whose lives had been impacted by judicial prosecution and incarceration. Six years later, this faith-based solution to addiction and reentry offers amazing results of freedom.

Freedom Life offers “Life Plan” development and guidance that includes multiple levels of engagement depending upon a person’s own commitment to their life transition and transformational need. The plan may be as simple as a hot meal and room for the night or as involved as addressing all four areas of need mentioned above at the same time. In Julie’s journey, her Life Plan included faith. She says, “I wake up every morning thanking God because Freedom Life has pulled me out of the pit.” Julie works full-time, a new experience since twelve years ago when she became an addict. She now owns a car, and has a place to live.

Freedom Life provides personal and pastoral guidance, resources, and hope. The results may vary from managing others in the process of recovery and reentry through workforce development to singing in the music outreach team or working outdoor furloughs. Some have regained custody of their children. Planning toward new and unassisted lives offers hope to all. Many individuals are living proof that the program works and goes beyond expectations.

Chris relates his experience to Freedom Life. “I was a car wreck in 1995 and during that time I wound up getting hooked on prescription painkillers. Eventually that led me to prison several times. I prayed to God and asked him for help. That’s how I got to Freedom Life. Now, out of prison, I play in the music ministry here at Freedom Life with Ray and David and Danny Scott. It’s a feeling like I’ve never had in my life, better than any drug that I’ve ever had.”

Heep and support in the form of practical areas such as housing, resourcing, workforce development, and medical needs propel the clients to greater success. Counseling and support groups help restore mental and spiritual health. Bible Study and pastoral care lift depressed spirits. Freedom Life also provides grief counseling, accountability, parenting resources, in-prison ministry, and preparation for reentry.

“I didn’t think nobody wanted me unless I was drinking or using,” says Ken, a participant in the Freedom Life program. “I was in jail around Thanksgiving of last year when God sent Danny (Executive Director), Melissa (Client Care Director), and Scott to talk to me. They were my heroes. This is a beautiful journey. It’s so easy to talk to the people at Freedom Life. They not only helped me with my medical concerns, but they showed me the right way to go.”

The goal of Freedom Life is to “build an interconnected support network of churches and other community agencies and organizations. This connects support systems is the backbone of an overall effort to provide help and support to man and woman currently incarcerated and released.” Our eighty organizations, churches, and government agencies work with Freedom Life to assist justice involved individuals.

Not only does Freedom Life’s ministry affect the incarcerated and reintegrated individuals, but the non-profit also impacts their families and communities. Danny, a client, and Chase, his son, reflect on this influence. Chase says, “December 16, I got to move back in with my Dad, just because of Freedom Life’s ministry and the grace of God. It’s unbelievable now what my life is as compared to my life as a child. My little brothers are coming back in two months, and I couldn’t be more excited.” Chase’s father adds to his son’s appreciation. He comments, “It’s time to grow up, you know, and realize how much we are hurting our kids and the damage we’ve already done to them and try to change and reconcile. Siming here with Chase today is proof that it can happen, but it didn’t come from just sitting around and wishing it. It takes a lot of work. I thank God for Danny Hampton and Freedom Life.”

In 2017, Freedom Life:
- Reconnected 930 men and women in jail and prison and over 160 men and women in the community
- Reconnected over 270 men and women who committed or recommitted their lives to Christ
- Led over 120 Bible studies and facilitated over 100 Bible-based support groups
- Provided over 2,500 hours in Bible based spiritual counseling
- Performed multiple concerts in prison, jail, churches, and the community
- Helped multiple volunteers offer mentoring/discipleship in jails and opened their third transition house
- Provided over 20,000 miles of transportation and over $63,000 in financial resourcing
- Averaged a 7% recidivism rate among level three clients (Recidivism is the likelihood that the person will commit another crime: the lower the number, the more successful the program)

Freedom Life participates statewide efforts to reduce recidivism. They work with the State Reentry Council Collaborative and established a local McDowell Reentry Council in November of 2018. They also work regionally to help support State Reentry Council capacity. In an incredible God-used decision in September of this year, the federal government awarded Freedom Life $500,000 for their Second Chance Act grant, one of only eleven national awards. Along with other local grants such as the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, regional and state grants such as the Kate B. Reynolds Foundation and Melvin F. Lane, this federal grant will enable the organization to facilitate the

continued on page 3
Does your child experience any of the following?

- Test anxiety
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- Excessive worry
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- Self-harm
- Difficulty sitting still
- Difficulty paying attention

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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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Worship Service: 11:00 AM
Wednesday Evening: 6:00 PM

In the Lord's Name!

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Phone: (828) 765-9101
www.pinebranchbaptist.net
Pastor: Reverb. Joe Greene
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Spruce Pine United Methodist Church
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Pastor: Dr. Jerry Rezler
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The mission of Spruce Pine United Methodist Church is to be a place where people can grow in Christ and share the Good News of Jesus Christ through Worship, Fellowship, Education, and Nurturing Ministries

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recovery and reentry of even more candidates.

Julie’s two sons, caught in the life of addiction through their mother, have now started on the journey back to health and freedom through Freedom Life. She says, “It’s been an amazing journey. I learned how to apply the Bible to my life through Freedom Life. I’ve cried. I’ve allowed those who care to peel back my life like an onion. And I’ve realized Jesus’s death and resurrection 2,000 years ago still works today.”

“I trust Freedom Life,” Monica, another client says, “I think God sent them to me.”

Jessie, whose past includes involvement with the justice system, agrees that Freedom Life transformed her. She says, “I spent time with Danny Hampton and Melissa and through spiritual counseling, I found a home church. It’s OK to not know what you’re going to do with your life. Because no matter what, at the end of the day, God knows. He knows the past, the present, and the future.” By God’s grace, Jessie was able to regain custody of her two beautiful daughters.

Are you willing to labor together with Freedom Life? Volunteers for transportation, monitoring, office work, and other tasks are needed. Monthly giving (online or by mail) enables this ministry to continue the programs necessary to restore the lives of justice-involved individuals. Your giving is so important because grants that Freedom Life has been blessed to receive are only for a short time and sustainable income through contributions like yours must be there to replace the grant funding. Currently Freedom Life is needing to raise $260,000 to replace grant funding that will be ending in 2019.

Let’s help people like Julie, Kim, and Chris to recover and reenter our communities as productive citizens for God’s glory. Let’s help them to find freedom to hope! Contact Freedom Life at (828) 519-2224, email info@freedomlife.org or go to their website: www.FreedomLife.org.

Marlene Hock is a regular contributor to Blue Ridge Christian News. Her passion is to delve deeply into the truths of Bible women and to discuss these in Bible Studies called Backstage Pass to Bible Women. She and her husband discover joy, nurture, and challenge in their church. Her contact is marlenehock@bellsouth.net.

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Laughter is Healthy for You

By Buddy Freeman
Madison County

Many banks have a new kind of Christmas Club in operation. The club helps you save money to pay last year’s gifts. Nothing destroys the Christmas spirit faster than looking for a place to park.

Christmas is a race to see which gives out first—your money or your heart. Christmas shopping should include buying toys for children that have fathers who would enjoy playing with them.

Christmas is the time of the year when Santa Claus comes down the chimney and your savings go down the drain.

Santa Claus is people with the “brotherly love.” On Christmas eve Santa carries the bag. After Christmas dad is holding the bag.

A mother gave her grown son two sweaters for Christmas. The next time he visited, he made sure to wear one. As he entered her home, instead of the expected smile, she frowned and said, “What’s the matter you didn’t like the other one?”

A Mall Santa is taken aback when a woman, around the age of 35, gets in line to sit on his lap. When it is her turn, she sits down on Santa’s lap. Santa tells her, “we don’t normally listen to the Christmas wishes of adults.” The woman says, “I’ve only got one wish and it’s for my mother.” Santa says, “Oh, that is nice of you. Okay, we’ll make an exception this time. What would you like me to bring your mother for Christmas?” The woman answers, “A Son-in-law.”

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

Billy Graham’s Prayer for a New Year

By Billy Graham’s Prayer for a New Year

This prayer from Billy Graham, written for the Saturday Evening Post in 2008, is just as relevant more than a decade later.

“O Father and our God, as we stand at the beginning of this new year we confess our need of Your presence and Your guidance as we face the future. We express our hopes and expectations for the year that is ahead of us—but You alone know what it holds for us, and only You can give us the strength and the wisdom we will need to meet its challenges. So, help us to humbly put our hands into Your hand and to trust You and to seek Your will for our lives during this coming year.

In the midst of life’s uncertainties in the days ahead, assure us of the certainty of Your unchanging love.

In the midst of life’s inevitable disappointments and heartaches, help us to turn to You for the stability and comfort we will need.

In the midst of life’s temptations and the pull of our stubborn self-will, help us not to lose our way but to have the courage to do what is right in Your sight, regardless of the cost.

And in the midst of our daily preoccupations and pursuits, open our eyes to the sorrows and injustices of our hurting world, and help us respond with compassion and sacrifice to those who are friendless and in need. May our constant prayer be that of the ancient Psalmist: “Teach me, O Lord, to follow Your decrees; then I will keep them to the end” (Psalm 119:32).

We pray for our nation and its leaders during these difficult times, and for all those who are seeking to bring peace and justice to our dangerous and troubled world. We pray especially for Your provision on all those who serve in our armed forces, and we thank You for their commitment to defend our freedoms, even at the cost of their own lives. Be with their families also, and assure them of Your love and concern for them.

Bring our divided nation together, and give us greater vision of what You would have us to be. Your Word reminds us that “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord” (Psalm 33:12).

As we look back over this past year we thank You for Your goodness to us—for beyond what we have deserved. May we never presume on Your past goodness or forget all Your mercies to us, but may they instead lead us to repentance, and to a new commitment to make You the foundation and center of our lives this year. And so, our Father, we thank You for the promise and hope of this new year, and we look forward to it with expectancy and faith. This I ask in the name of Our Lord and Savior, who by His death and resurrection has given us hope both for this world and the world to come.

Amen.


Do you have hope for the new year—and for eternity?

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Do you have a joint replacement surgery scheduled? The Brian Center Spruce Pine invites you to reserve a room with us ahead of time. Call us a week before surgery to tour the building, meet our therapy staff and see where you will be staying. It’s our goal to provide a smooth transition from the hospital to our building and get you back home as quickly as possible. Contact Michelle Plummer @ (828) 765-7312 or Heather Steuer @ (828) 284-8362 to make your appointment today.

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For many years Billy Graham has taken questions and answered them from a Biblical standpoint. We have included several of these in the paper this month on the beginning of a New Year. Search and find them throughout the paper. These are little gems of wisdom.

Q: Every year, I always make a long list of New Year’s resolutions, but since I never keep them I’ve decided this time to make just a few. Does the Bible say anything about making resolutions?

A: Yes, the Bible certainly encourages us to examine our lives and resolve to change them if necessary (although not just at the beginning of a new year). The Psalmist, for example, made a resolution to keep his speech pure: “I have planned no evil, my mouth has not transgressed” (Psalm 17:3).

Why, however, do so many of our resolutions fail? Sometimes it’s simply because they aren’t realistic. Instead, they’re only wishful thinking, with no way to make them actually happen. For example, you might resolve to make a million dollars this year, but if you don’t have any way to earn it, it probably isn’t going to happen. Other resolutions fail because we aren’t willing to make the sacrifices necessary to reach them.

But the real problem is within ourselves—within our own hearts and minds. We’d all like to be better people, but no matter how hard we try, we find ourselves tripped up by our own moral failures and weaknesses. Even the Apostle Paul experienced this: “I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out” (Romans 7:15).

What is the solution? The solution is to turn to God, confessing our sins to Him and seeking His help to live the way we should. Begin the New Year by turning to Jesus Christ and inviting Him into your life. Then ask Him to help you keep the person He wants you to be. This is what Paul did, and that’s why he could say, “I can do all this through Him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13). Begin the New Year with Christ.

Q: This past year wasn’t very good for me, and I can’t blame anyone but myself. I know I need God, but how much do I have to clean up my life before He’ll have anything to do with me? He must be very angry at me.

A: The most important truth I can tell you is that God still loves you, in spite of the fact you’ve spent most of your life ignoring Him. No, God doesn’t love your sin—but He does love you, and He wants to forgive you and come into your life and change you.

And that’s why God won’t refuse to have anything to do with you until you’ve cleaned up your life. He knows how weak you are, and He welcomes you just as you are. If God didn’t love you, Jesus Christ never would have left Heaven’s glory and died on the cross for you. But He did—because He loves you! Let the truth of God’s Word sink deep into your soul. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

Think of it this way. When you’re sick, do you have to wait until you’re almost well before you can see the doctor? Of course not. Your doctor will help you no matter how sick you are—and the same is true with Christ. Jesus said, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32).

Don’t stay on a dead-end road; don’t reject Christ any longer. Instead, by faith turn to Him today, repaying of your sins and asking Him to forgive you and save you and come into your life. It’s the most important decision you will ever make. Ready for a new start? Receive God’s forgiveness now.

Q: Every year I make a long list of New Year’s resolutions, and every year I forget every one of them. Is it just a waste of time to make a list of New Year’s resolutions?

A: No, it’s not a waste of time to examine our lives and admit that we need to make some changes—if we’re honest about actually doing it. Unfortunately, most lists of resolutions aren’t really resolutions at all; they’re only a series of wishes, without any plan for making them happen.

But let me suggest you ask yourself two questions as you think about your list. First, what is God’s goal for you during the coming year? What does He want you to see happen in your life during 2018? In other words, don’t just write down anything that happens to come to mind: seek instead God’s priority for your life. Perhaps you have never given your life to Jesus Christ— and if not, make this your one resolution. And if you do know Christ, make it your goal to draw closer to Him during the coming year. Jesus said, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness” (Matthew 6:33).

Second, how will you achieve God’s goals for your life? Goals are important—but if we don’t have any plan for reaching them, we’ll probably fail. Take time to read God’s Word and pray every day. In addition, ask God to guide you to a church where you’ll hear God’s Word, and also find friends who can help you spiritually.

New Year’s Day is coming up soon. Maybe not only the beginning of a new year for you, but also the beginning of a new life. And it will, as you seek God’s will and learn to walk with Christ every day. Want to find new life in Christ? Find out more.
High Country Prison Ministry

God Helping Prisoners
By Jody Griffin
Mitchell County

Jesus answered, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

A new year brings new opportunities to live and serve in God’s Kingdom. It’s the very reality that serves as the theme of the ministry of the Chaplain. Over and over I hear from men who are struggling to make sense of their circumstances and who are striving to navigate their way through incarceration. And over and over I point them to the One Who has the power to help them begin again.

I call these my “Top Ten Tips” for surviving and even thriving in prison!
1. Start with this moment. The past truly is the past and we cannot change it. But in this moment, we can embrace the gift of God and begin the rest of our lives as a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17).
2. Live in the Truth. We have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. No need to deny it, but our focus should be forward! Yes, I’ve made mistakes, but from this day forward I am trusting God to help me overcome those mistakes and become the man I am created to be for the GLORY of God! (And for the benefit of myself and those who love me.)
3. Live life in the smallest increments of time possible, paying attention to how this hour/minute/breath is my opportunity to reflect the new life I have received.
4. Acknowledge the Victories. When you overcome temptation to take instead of giving, tear down instead of build, hate instead of love, enjoy the sweet sense of accomplishment.
5. Own up to the defeats. NO ONE is going to get it right ALL of the time. When you fail, admit it. God already knows, but desires that we confess our sin. He is patient and just, to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
6. Take advantage of the opportunities to worship God, study the scriptures, fellowship with other believers and participate in the Kingdom of God we have been invited to see and experience!
7. Realize that there are many (hundreds? Thousands? Perhaps even Millions?) people who have experienced redemption in their own lives and who are praying for you!
8. Let THIS be the day that you begin again and then tomorrow and then the next day and so on until you have experienced grace so much that you are ready to offer it to yourself AND to others.
9. Use the resources right in front of you to grow in understanding and wisdom. The wise man LEARNS and GROWS. The foolish man keeps repeating the same mistake expecting a different result!
10. Begin with those closest to you and then work your way outward until you have been completely honest about your journey. Remember that the Bible is filled with “less than perfect” people who God used to do great things.

Happy New Year! And I pray for a Happy New You!!

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Billy Graham Answers:

Q. I can’t wait for this year to end. It’s just been one problem after another—family sickness, a couple of deaths, financial issues, you name it. I begged God to solve them, but nothing happened. Where was God in all this?

A. The most important thing I can tell you is that God knew what was going on in your life, and He deeply cared about you, even if it didn’t seem like it at the time. In the midst of a terrible time for God’s people, the prophet Jeremiah could still say, “His compassions never fail” (Lamentations 2:22).

Frankly, I wish I knew why God allows hard times to come to us, but I don’t—not fully. What I do know is that evil is real, and sometimes it seems to gain the upper hand, at least for a time. I also know that God knows all about evil and suffering, for His only Son, Jesus Christ, endured the suffering and death of the cross. But beyond the cross was the empty tomb, and because of Christ’s resurrection, you and I can have hope—both now and forever.

When hard times come we can do one of two things: We can either become bitter and turn against God, or we can turn in faith to Him, and find in Him the strength and hope we need. Which will you be for?

As you stand on the threshold of a new year, turn to Jesus Christ and ask Him to come into your life. Then ask Him to give you His strength and wisdom as you face life’s challenges. Remember: When we know Christ, nothing will be “able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:39).

Find peace with God today.

Q. It’s been a hard year for me, and I’d give almost anything to know what the new year has in store for me. How can I find out? A woman in our town claims to be able to tell your future, and I’m almost willing to give her a try.

A. I sincerely hope you won’t go down this path. At best you’ll simply be wasting your money—and at worst you could find yourself getting enmeshed with occult spiritual forces that are enemies of your soul. The Bible warns us to avoid occult practices, and calls them “detestable to the Lord” (Deuteronomy 18:12).

Only God knows the future, so no matter how hard we try, even our best efforts will only be guesses. But this ought to encourage you—because if God knows the future, then you can trust your future into His hands! Wouldn’t it be better to face the future with Him than without Him? God loves you, and you can trust His promise to be with you and guide you. The Bible says, “For I know the plans I have for you…” (Jeremiah 29:11).

Don’t be deceived by those who claim to know the future, and don’t be burdened by worry and anxiety about your future. Instead, ask Jesus Christ to come into your life and commit your future into His hands. Then Him to help you trust Him every day, and to live the way He wants you to live.

In addition, urge you to seek out a church where you can grow in faith, and have fellowship with people who can help you make right decisions about your future. You need them—and they need you.

Put your future in God’s hands.

Q. My brother died in a car wreck last New Year’s Eve. He’d been to a party and had too much to drink, and he ended up killing not only himself but also the two passengers in his car. Please urge people not to drink and drive. It just isn’t worth it.

A. Thank you for your heartfelt concern, which I hope every reader will take very seriously—especially as we stand on the brink of a new year. What better New Year’s resolution could we make than to turn away (with God’s help) from everything that harms us?

Every year alcohol and drugs cause thousands of deaths and injuries on our highways, and I support every effort to get drunk or impaired drivers off the road. Alcohol, the Bible says, can be as deadly as a poisonous snake: “In the end it bites like a snake end poisons like a viper” (Proverbs 23:32).

Unfortunately, we read or hear of fatal automobile accidents so often today that we sometimes get used to the news. Yet every accident is a tragedy and takes away the love of someone we love in an automobile accident. In my view good driving isn’t just a good habit; it’s a moral and spiritual obligation that every driver should take to heart. Jesus’ words should apply to our driving as much as to any other part of our lives: “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you” (Matthew 7:12).

May your brother’s death turn your heart and mind to eternity, and Jesus Christ and to His love for you. Life is uncertain; we never know what tomorrow holds. But when we know Christ, we know we are safely in His hands—both now and forever.

Have you placed your hope in Jesus?
By Doug Harrell

As the years have passed, I have realized more and more how important our heritage is to each of us. Our values are certainly influenced by our growing up years and the lessons taught by our parents, our teachers, church leaders and others that have influenced our lives. We are a product of our heritage, but we can change that heritage if we determine to do that! That can be good or bad, depending on the decisions we make on a day to day basis. I have seen people that grew up with Godly parents and teachers that wear astray, I have also seen people that grew up in terrible situations but turned their lives around and became wonderful, productive members of society. We tend to think about the health of our body constantly but worry little about having a healthy mind when really the mind controls most of what we do.

“Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore, get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee; she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her.” Proverbs 4:7-8

As we start the new year, I have found it to be critical to make goals and plans for the things that I would like to accomplish for the year, as the Bible says, “A people without a vision shall perish” and many people today just go with the flow. New Year’s to be fruitful, we must direct the flow and again, we need to always be seeking God’s will for our lives as we make the plans. “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy soul, and duration to thy bones.” Proverbs 3:5-8

Barbara and I have for years taken a day at the end of each year to spend really talking together about our goals and vision for the year coming up. To be really effective, we have found that we must take the time to write down our goals and then we must make a plan that we can follow. This plan must start with steps that we need to make now, not a year later. What path do we need to be on and what changes do we need to make in our lives to make our goals become a reality. New Year resolutions are great and quite common, it is also quite common to discard them after a few weeks into the New Year. The act of writing down, reading your goals back to yourself, and writing down a plan of action that will lead to the accomplishment of the objectives is critical to success.

The old adage “The height of stupidity is to expect a different result from doing the same thing over and over again.” If things are to be different, you must act differently. If you are going to buy a ticket to travel, the first thing you must determine is when you are wanting to go. This is totally true in life. Another thing that you must work on if you are to change and accomplish things with your life is that you must first learn to love yourself! This may sound egotistical, but it is really not at all. One of the great commands of the Lord is to love thy neighbor as thyself. This means that we are expected to love ourselves.

One way we can truly love ourselves is to be in the will of God and to make right decisions daily. Think about how God would react to the decisions you were getting ready to make. The little bracelet that people wear that says WWJD “What Would Jesus Do” will make you stop and think. Do the right thing, ask God’s divine wisdom and guidance, set goals for yourself that are in agreement with God’s will, make a plan of action that is in line with what God would condone and move forward with your life. The year 2019 can be your year to excel, have faith and take the first step toward the changes you want to make and stay on track by spending time seeking wisdom each day. God Bless and Happy New Year.

Doug Harrell is a life-long resident of Lumpkin County, Owner of Harrell Hill Farms Inc, a member of Bear Creek Baptist Church and Publisher of the Blue Ridge Christian News.

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By Allen Buchanan

Red Letters

Wonder how many of us use words or phrases every day without ever considering their origin or definition. Many publications offer a new “word of the day”. My wife and I have a mutual friend that occasionally shares the “new word” with us. Those that play Scrabble rely on each word to beat their opponent. Everybody begins a new year with a new calendar. It’s possible the new calendar you will be using has a new “word for the day.” Another calendar feature that comes to mind are those wonderful “red letter days.” Wonderful because the red letter mark holidays that more often than not you don’t have off work.

A red letter day is any day of special significance or opportunity. According to Wikipedia the use of red ink dates all the way back to the Roman Republic (506–27 BC). In medieval manuscripts, initial caps and highlighted words were written in red ink.

In my life, another use of “red ink” stands out within the pages of the Holy Bible. These red words are there to indicate Jesus’ speaking. When I open God’s word and see those red words, I know that they require special attention. They reveal that Jesus placed great importance on helping people who needed it most; the poor, the sick, the orphans, the prisoners, and the weary. He urged all those who follow Him to do the same. Jesus’ words weren’t just meant to be read; they were meant to be lived out. If you respond to Jesus’ words, your faith should touch the lives of those you help and point them to the hope they need.

As a fan of David Crowder, I recently purchased his latest release, “I KNOW AGhost” The song “Red Letters” grabbed my heart and soul reminding me of the special “red letter” day in 1965 when I accepted Jesus as my personal Saviour. If you think about it without Jesus all of us are prisoners of the world. We are held in bondage by Satan and our life just drags on. Sure, Satan has us blinded by all the lies he tells us. Until we grow tired of the old life and accept Jesus, until He breaks the chains, we cannot change on our own. Once you accept those “red letters” spoken by Him in His Word, change will come. Once you accept that Jesus died on the old rugged cross you will gain eternal life and a home in heaven. May 2019 be filled with many red-letter days with Jesus.

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

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Veteran Visits Wife’s Grave
Over 1,300 Times

By DR. JIM DENISON

Ted Richardson is a ninety-three-year-old veteran. He and Florence met at ten, then he left to serve as a Marine in World War II. But he took her picture with him everywhere he went. They got married after the war. Ted says Florence always took care of him—for seventy-two years. So, now it’s his turn to take care of her.

Ted visits his wife’s grave six days a week, without fail, taking three buses to get there. He cares for it meticulously—trimming weeds and brushing away leaves. He has already arranged for his church to bring flowers to Florence’s grave after he dies. He has already visited over 1,300 times. He says it’s worth it to be close to the love of his life.

Adversity is opportunity. As you look back over 2018, what events come to mind? If you’re like most of us, your challenges and problems loom large. If someone you loved passed away, their death marked your life. History feels the same way. When we think of David, Goliath is followed immediately by Babelsheba. Our first thought about Abraham Lincoln or John F. Kennedy is usually their assassination.

But we don’t have to let our losses define us. Like Ted Richardson, we can choose to honor the past by the way we live in the present. And we can view adversity as the opportunity it is.

In Zechariah 13, the Lord foretells of a day when “one third” of the people will survive the judgment to come (v. 8). Then “I will put this third into the fire, and refine them; as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested” (v. 9).

With this result: “They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, ‘They are my people’; and they will say, ‘The LORD is my God’” (v. 9c).

Three ways to redeem our challenges:

Gold and silver must be refined to be useful to the craftsman who employs them. Water must be purified to be healthy for those who drink it. We should view adversity as opportunity, for three reasons:

One: Adversity helps us experience the blessedness of our souls.

Charles Spurgeon, commenting on the fact that needs depend upon water for survival (Job 8:11), asked himself: “Do I only serve God when I am in good company, or when religion is profitable and respectable? Do I love the Lord only when temporal comforters are received from Him?" He then observed that “the godly man often grows best when his worldly circumstances decay.”

In fact, this is an excellent way to know that a person is godly. As C. S. Lewis noted, “tuming on the light doesn’t create rats in the cellar—it merely reveals them.” When we respond to adversity by turning away from God, we discover that we sought his blessings more than his presence. But when we trust him in hard times, we discover that our faith is deeper than our circumstances.

Two: Adversity provides a platform for persuasive influence. The Christians whose faith has most impressed me are those who have suffered the most while remaining faithful. We think of Joseph in prison, Daniel in the lion’s den, and John imprisoned on Patmos. I am remembering parents who lost children, patients who endured horrific physical pain, and spouses who walked loved ones to the gates of paradise.

A skeptical culture watches Christians suffer to see if we believe what we say. Hard times can be powerful times for the gospel.

Three: Adversity invites us to recalibrate our life purpose. Robert McFarlane was Ronald Reagan’s National Security Adviser, a twenty-year veteran of the Marine Corps, and the architect of the Iran-Contra plan. When his plan failed, McFarlane resigned his position and later attempted suicide. I heard him speak several years ago at the National Prayer Breakfast. He described the incredible power he had achieved, the ladder to success he had climbed. But then Bud McFarlane told us with tears in his eyes that it was nothing. He got to the top, and there was nothing there.

Only after he fell off that ladder did he discover that it was leaning against the wrong wall—that life really consists of loving God and loving people. Nothing else.

“The whole of humanity needs you.”

One prediction for 2019 I make with certainty is that, as Jesus noted, “in the world you will have tribulation” (John 16:33). But every time adversity finds us, we can view it as an opportunity to evangelize ourselves spiritually, impacting others with our faith, and refocus our lives.

And we can know that God will use us in spite of—and often because of—our challenges and failures.

If you wonder across the coming year if your flawed life can make a difference, remember this reflection by Catholic theologian Michel Quost:

If each note of music were to say: one note does not make a symphony, there would be no symphony.

If each word were to say: one word does not make a book, there would be no book.

If each brick were to say: one brick does not make a wall, there would be no house.

If each drop of water were to say: one drop does not make an ocean, there would be no ocean.

If each seed were to say: one grain does not make a field of corn, there would be no harvest.

If each one of us were to say: one act of love cannot save mankind, there would never be justice and peace on earth.

The whole of humanity needs you as and where you are.

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

For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Jeremiah 29:11

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**Burke County Schools**

**Reading Specialist Receives Grant For Flexible Seating**

By Cheryl Shuffer
Burke County

Drexl Elementary School reading specialist Suzanne Jensen received a $1,000 grant for flexible classroom seating from the Betty and Fred Crawford Endowment through the Alpha Nu Chapter of the NC Delta Kappa Gamma Educational Foundation.

As a reading specialist, Jensen works with students on improving their reading skills. She said research shows that students improve academically when study time incorporates movement versus a traditional stationary seated position.

Jensen said, "Many of my struggling readers also have focus and attention problems. Using active seating in the classroom gets students moving and helps improve cognitive performance, time on-task, concentration, and overallattitude toward learning.

Flexible seating allows students to wobble, rock, or bounce which increases oxygen to the brain and core strength. It helps keep young minds more alert and focused. A positive learning environment helps students feel more comfortable during class which in turn helps improve motivation for learning."

Jensen is grateful for the grant that allowed her to furnish her classroom with the bright, colorful seats that have a creative and modern look. She said the flexible seating allows students to quickly pair up or work in small collaborative groups without having to move chairs or desks.

Jensen’s goal is to see struggling readers get more excited about coming to reading class. "A more exciting learning environment is one way to help students improve attitudes toward school and learning," she said. "Many of my students have trouble concentrating and are wiggedy in stationary seats. These seats should give them some wiggle room without being disruptive while helping them stay focused on the lesson. An uncooperative student is a distracted and unproductive student. These seats make it much easier to move around for partner work and collaborative group work in the classroom than the traditional student chairs."

Burke County Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Larry Punzans said, "Kudos to Mrs. Jensen for seeking out this grant to update her reading classroom with this flexible furniture. We know that students today learn much differently than we did, and this is another great example of how we are meeting students where they are and doing what we can to help them be as successful as they can. Thank you to the Crawford Endowment, Alpha Nu and Delta Kappa Gamma for making opportunities such as this available to our teachers."

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

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**Bear Creek Baptist Church**

**I Know Who Holds Tomorrow**

By Bruce Cannon
Mitchell County

As this article is read the New Year will most likely have already come. The previous year will have passed, and we will be facing many challenges and opportunities ahead. I am so thankful that while we do not know what tomorrow holds, we know who holds tomorrow. This is the message of the song, I Know Who Holds Tomorrow by Alison Krauss.

I don’t know about tomorrow; I just live from day to day.
I don’t borrow from it’s sunshine, For it’s skies may turn to grey.
I don’t worry o’er the future, For I know what Jesus said.
And today I’ll walk beside, Him, For He knows what is ahead.

Many things about tomorrow, I don’t seem to understand
But I know who holds tomorrow, and I know who holds my hand.

Our Heavenly Father knows everything and is already in our tomorrow readying grace, amazing circumstances and will be our merciful and faithful High Priest when the trials or hardships of life come.

Our world is constantly changing. Leonard Sweet, Christian minister, wrote the following comment, “If you were born before the year 1900 the world you were born in was no longer exists.” He is referring to those values once held dear being cast aside by so many, so quickly. Things such as absolute truth, strong work ethics, integrity, honesty, respect for authority and so forth are some of those things which he speaks.

While some changes are good, many are not. Recent news stories substantiate my point. For instance, news articles dated December 2018 state that Asheville, NC is readying itself for the sale of recreational marijuana. Recreational marijuana is already being sold in ten states with thirty-three selling medicinal marijuana.

My wife and I recently traveled to California to visit the Rocky Mountain National Park. We saw some of the most beautiful sites created by our God. But, we also saw marijuana sales outlets in what seemed like every town. …even the smallest of towns. They had a sign on the road. I cannot imagine what western North Carolina would be like with recreational marijuana sales. What a tragedy that would be.

According to the National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL), state legislators in twenty-one states considered bills in 2018 that would legalize adult use marijuana for recreational purposes. Twenty-two states and the District of Columbia have decriminalized small amounts of marijuana with North Carolina being one of the twenty-two. 2019—what are you going to bring to our way? Will it be a further distancing from God? Or, will it bring revival to His Church? Pray with me for the latter. Indeed, the need for the Church to be what the Lord intended it to be has never been greater!

What is the answer? Prayer! A genuine spiritual awakening! A powerful move of God upon our state and national leaders! We must claim and practice passages such as II Chronicles 7:14 and God will hear our prayers, forgive our sins and heal our land.

Rev. Bruce Cannon currently serves as the Senior Pastor of Bear Creek Baptist Church in Bakersville. Formerly he served as Director of Missions for the Hudson Baptist Association and has served on the General Board of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.

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**2019 Happy New Year!**
Kid’s Corner

New Year’s Resolutions

Compiled by Barbara Harrell
Mitchell County

People have been making New Year’s resolutions for 3,000 years, going all the way back to the ancient times of the Babylonians. The start of a new year that makes us think about new beginnings and a way to mark a brand new starting line. A "resolution" is a determination to do or not to do something. It’s a plan for your future actions or ways of thinking.

In reality, there’re no difference whatsoever between 11:59 p.m. on December 31 and midnight on January 1. No magical number brings good, bad, and no change; and no cosmic calamity wipes out all the bad things from the last 365 days. (I know. Bummer. . .)

The Bible doesn’t forbid us from making goals and plans for the upcoming year. There’s nothing wrong with planning ahead, so long as you realize that God may change your mind. For example, Christ said, “Today is the day of salvation; therefore let everyone who is in a hurry to get somewhere be on the way, but the Lord establishes his steps.” (Also see James 4:13-17.) When you boil it down, that’s all New Year’s resolutions are anyway—personal plans and goals.

Here are 10 New Year’s Resolutions: Every Christian Should Make:

1. Resolve to stay faithful to Jesus Christ. He is the one True Way, Truth and Life. There’s no reason to look elsewhere.
2. Resolve to not let anything— a career, a significant other, social media, a house— become an object of worship.
3. Resolve to watch your language and not speak any destructive talk, especially about God, Christ, or the Church.
4. Resolve to prevent burnout by putting aside work one day a week. Trust God to provide for your needs that day and just enjoy the time life gives you.
5. Resolve to talk to your parents on a regular basis, and show them love and respect.
6. Resolve to be more less. Channel any feelings of rage, which Jesus said are as severe as murder, into worshiping God and serving others.
7. Resolve to honor your commitment to your spouse. Whether in thought or in deed, stay pure and loyal in the union God made you.
8. Resolve to make things not your interests, including stuff you can hold and put in your pocket, and plenty that you can’t, like music downloads, streaming movies and hours on your timesaver.
9. Resolve to speak about others with truth and love, not gossip.
10. Resolve to be content with what you have, and not worry about that others are missing.

If these sound familiar, good! SHARE these New Year’s resolutions to encourage people to live a life that honors God.

Here are some resolutions for teens: Would those fit your lifestyle?

1. Improve your Physical Life

Simple enough, right? Just give more at playtime. A lot of teens make this resolution and soon fail because they take too big a step at first. If you’re not used to playing often, jumping into an active lifestyle can seem like a daunting task. Maybe start off playing each morning when you get up, or even while you brush your teeth. Start off giving five minutes a day. Then maybe add another five minutes. Soon you’ll find that you’re going to God more often and for more things. Don’t worry about what to talk to Him about, just talk. You’ll be amazed by the results.

2. Read Your Bible in a Year

Getting into the habit of reading the Word is also a common New Year’s resolution for many Christian teens. There are plenty of Bible reading plans out there that guide you through reading your Bible in a year. It just takes discipline to open up your Bible every day, start reading the entire Bible, but choose a year to focus on a specific topic or area of your life that you want God to help you improve. Find a reading plan that works for you.

3. Help Other People

God calls us on throughout the Bible to do good works. Whether you adhere to the idea that you need good works to get to heaven, like Catholics do, or, like most Protestants, helping others is just a part of Christian walk. Most churches have outreach activities, or you can even find local volunteer opportunities through your school. There are so many people who just need a bit of assistance, and helping others is a great way to set a Christian example.

4. Get Involved in Church

Most churches have youth groups or Bible studies geared toward Christian teens. If not, why not be the one to get a group together? Start your own Bible study or put together an acurvy that some other Christian teens at church can enjoy. A lot of youth groups offer a good meeting place to start a group for New Year’s resolutions.

5. Use a Devotional

Reading your Bible is an essential part of anyone’s Christian walk because it keeps you in God’s Word. Still, using a devotional helps you take the concepts in the Bible and apply them to your everyday life. There are numerous devotionals available for Christian Teens, so you should be able to find one that fits your personality, interests, or your place in your spiritual growth.

6. Plant Some Seeds of Faith

How many times have you evangelized to friends or family? Make your goal this year to talk to a certain number of people about your faith. While it be great if someone converted or “got saved” through your discussions, don’t get too caught up on that number. You’d be amazed how many people will end up believing from a discussion you have about what God has done in your life. It just may not happen while you know them. Also, use platforms like Facebook or Twitter profiles to demonstrate your beliefs and show others the faith you live by. Your different viewpoints make for some interesting conflict. Yes, God dictates that we honor our parents, so take some time to get to know Mom and Dad a little better. Do things with them. Share bits of your life with them. Even a small amount of quality time with your parents will go a long way in helping your relationship.

To get more from your personal relationships, but almost all mission trips will change you forever. Between the spiritual preparation before you leave on your trip to the work you will do on the trip itself, God works through you and for you as you see people eager to hear about Christ and as you hear their appreciation of the time you are doing on your trip. There are many mission trips that you can find that take place in Detroit to Campus Crusade for Christ Student Venture that conducts trips around the world.

Bring Someone to Church

A simple idea, but it takes a lot of courage to ask a friend to come to church. Faith is something most Christian teens have difficulty discussing with non-Christian friends because it is often something very personal. Yet, many Christians would never have come to Christ without that one friend who asked them to come to church or talk to them about their beliefs. That’s a great! But who might you shout down? Are there two or three other people who will be curious about why your faith is so important to you? Telling them to your youth group services or activities can help show them why.

Okay, now that we have looked at some resolutions for teens, adults and even children, let’s look at some things to look at in putting our list together.

As you begin to choose the various things you want to focus on in the next year, examine them individually, and ask yourself these questions:

1. What’s my motivation?

2. Resolve that God looks at the heart, and that means He is aware of our motivations (1 Samuel 16:7)? Sometime we do things so automatically that we forget to think about WHY we want to do the thing. Examining your own heart is a good practice when you’re making a decision to change. We will value accomplishing the goal more when our motivations are in the right place.

3. How do you know if your New Year’s resolution is God honoring? It sounds like a small command but, PRAY about it. Ask God if your resolution is something He desires for you too (James 1:5). If a New Year’s resolution is not God-honoring or is not a part of the plan the He has for you, your results are going to be quite different.

4. Am I willing to let God help me?

"I can do all things through him who strengthens me."—Philippians 4:13

"As for me, I went to the mountain, and I spoke with God, and God said to me, 'Come,' I have a Word for you."—Acts 21:11

Ask God to show you how to accomplish those goals and what steps you need to take. He may only give you the first step, but that’s okay. You can trust Him to direct you throughout the end. If possible, look for an accountability partner to help cheer you on. There’s nothing like encouragement and high-fives from a good friend to keep you going.

If you are properly motivated and dedicated, and you are willing to allow God to be a part of the process of getting you to goals and accomplishing your New Year’s resolutions, then your chances of success are going to skyrocket. You never know, you may find that God puts you in your life’s work that will keep you going when you’re ready to give up.

New Year’s Day is a great opportunity to start making positive changes for your life. But don’t count on it, and don’t count on God having a direct role in your New Year’s resolutions.

“At the hour that you come in, you shall be received; and at the hour that you shall go out, you shall be received."—Psalm 37:5-6

Barbara Harrell, loving mother-grandmother and great-grandmother. Part owner
Blue Ridge Christian News.

www.brcnews.com

January 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 12
What if I Stumble? What if I Fall?

Sent by Alan Griffin

“My name is Katy. I had gone to church all my life. Rarely would I miss a Sunday. I had been involved in my Sunday school class and with the Youth. I am a good person who has believed in God and I had a consistent relationship with Him. Life was relatively good and peaceful. In a matter of nine months, I started doing things I had told myself for years that I would never do. I have always been in control of my actions until my townhome moved into was new and clean. Kids played outside, and there were so many things to see and do. I met many new kids my age, and we did things together every day after school. I had a boyfriend, but not long after I moved we broke up. So, I started dating a guy in the neighborhood. ‘Troy’ was really cool and everybody liked him. We started spending more and more time together. One day I told him I didn’t want to see him anymore. Keeping your own temptations or others around you was so out of control I related to having sex. After that Troy treated me differently. He wasn’t affectionate anymore, and sometimes he wouldn’t even bother coming over to get me. We finally broke up a couple of months later.

I can’t, for the life of me, figure out what happened. I have discussed all my friends and counselors, but no one has come up with a reason. I have taken my church and school. None of them have come up with a reason for it. I have tried to talk to people, but nothing has turned them down for you. If we can’t make up our mind about a situation, we should talk about it. We do well defining our self the first time, but when we are not able to do it, we need a fresh start. The truth is, we are not alone and that is very important. We need to have some kind of control over ourselves when we are not alone.

We have to remain united wherever we stand. We are in a situation where people are trying to change us, we have to remember who we are. We are sons and daughters of God and a representative of Jesus Christ. Don’t let someone else lead you into a situation. Lead them to Christ. If you have a boyfriend, make him focus on his relationship with you. You shouldn’t be running after the same thing as when you were alone. Don’t let a bunch of foolishness like drugs and premarital sex get in the way of your dreams. Keep a comfort zone of people you can trust around you. Turn peer pressure into positive pressure.

The worst thing was, I was being taught to keep our discouraged Cartesian value. We are not to lose our faith by absorbing the values of the pagan world. We are not to be isolated from unbelievers either. Giving into temptation is a gradual thing. Not every one is tempted when he draws away by his own desires and is carried away by it. When you give birth to sin, and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.” James 1:14-15. When we are enticed by temptation we don’t plan to go for it beyond the first step, but the reality of it is, it is always harder than we think. When you give into temptation you will soon realize that you will commonly and naturally practice the temptation you are a slave to, and when you are able to give in to it again. Immorality is a disease and you are only deceiving yourself.

The more times you submit to the temptation the stronger the desire becomes. As time goes on the enjoyment of the desire fades and you will require stronger drugs and more powerful stimuli to get the same satisfaction. This is the way sin destroys your life.

The saddest thing about all of this is we lose our relationship with God. It is so gradual that most of us don’t even realize we have fallen out of fellowship until it is too late. Sin desensitizes our spiritual longings and makes the still small voice of God inside us to deafen the point we don’t listen anymore. Now when we are given the one desire being his desire.

“For the flesh lusts against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.” Galatians 5:17. However, we can achieve victory by setting out to fight temptation.

Therefore, let him who thinks he is able take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken us except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” 1 Corinthians 10:13. God will help you fight temptation. He has given us a direct line of communication to Him through prayer. Secondly, He has given us the sword of the spirit which is the Word of God.

Temptation by its very nature is a lie. Satan with his deceitful nature presents what is evil as good and what is harmful as helpful. He presents drugs as an anti- dose to our problems, but presents his bills as freedom. He presents sin as liberation of the soul. Temptation always offers something that sounds good, but in the end it only brings death and destruction. “Satan was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand the truth, because where truth is in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.” John 8:44.

There is a method to the way Satan deceives us. He tries to attack us as we are weak. When our bodies are sick or when our mind is depressed. Satan will often attack us when we are idle. When boredom comes creeping in he leads us to temptation. He will lead us to God’s wisdom trusting more in our own reason than the Word of God. Kelipling the praise of man over the written truth, we start feeling sorry for ourselves, neglecting our prayer life, rebelling against our parents, lying, stealing and cheating like it was our only way to achieve success. We have a false sense of security and we become even less confident in our own ability. We may even decide that we don’t need God anymore and stop all association with our church life.

We are lost in our trespasses and sins. We have turned our back on our blessed Savior and there is only one way to get Him back! Repent, which means to stop what we know we are doing wrong and go towards what we know is right.” Nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen, and repent and do the works you once did, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—since you are lukewarm.” Revelation 2:5. True repentance is where we are sorry for sinning against God. Turning from that sin, completely stop doing that sin and turn to our Heavenly Father whose spirit lives inside of us. When we stop committing sin it is not because we fear the consequences of sin. It is not because we fear the judgment of God. True repentance from the heart looks at the sin with hatred and moves away from sin. We look at sin in its true light and see that the idea was crossed on the cross to defeat the things we have been doing.” I say to you that we have sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us if we confess our sins. He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the whole world.” 1 John 3:2-3.

You cannot overcome the power of sin by yourself. It is absolutely impossible. You will try and fail until you finally give up. You have to turn back towards God. He alone has the power to heal you. He is the Great Physician.

1.) “Therefore submit to God.” James 4:7. Surrender your entire life to Him. Pray to Him, “Lord I have made a miserable mess of my life. Please come in control of my life, my will and my emotions.” Take a spiral ring binder and write Him a letter every night for 30 days. Tell Him everything that has happened to you during the day. Tell Him how lonely you feel because I know you feel the loneliness you are trapped in your life. You are going to have to abandon all those people that lead you astray. You cannot have a relationship with them. You cannot help them because you are in a position now where you can’t even help yourself.

Prayer is an extremely important weapon that God gave us to fight temptation. Your spiral binder or prayer journal helps you to put your thoughts together before you go to your Heavenly Father in prayer. Two things we want to ask our Father daily is to “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” Jesus said, “Watch and pray. lest you enter into temptation. The spirit is indeed willing, but the flesh is weak.” Matthew 26:41. This means we should pray on a daily basis and when we are tempted. When we pray our prayer journal we should go to a room by ourselves and close the door. Get down on our knees and elbows and read our prayer cast to God.

This is consecrated prayer. Then we should be in a prayerful mind continuously. Our eyes should be open as we carry on a conversation with God as we walk, drive, sit or stand. You don’t have to be in a church or even in a place. I always pray to my Heavenly Father, “I surrender all my resistance in my soul. Please enter my mind and will and speak the Words of life to me. Remove me from the world of the lost so that Your love will fill my heart with unspeakable joy.”

2.) “You have to fight this.” James 4:7. You have to fight this. This is not given to you. You are fighting for your life and everything you have believed in since birth. Fight. Resist. Expel the notions and desires of your past. Refuse your life on things you use to do prior to your temptation. Concentrate on your work or studies. Write a letter to one of your old Christian friends and let them know how you are doing. You cannot have a relationship with them. You cannot help them because you are in a position now where you can’t even help yourself.

3.) “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” James 4:8 Don’t just
read your Bible, commit it. We must take it in the Word of God for our own use. We must take it on its appearance. It must be a part of our very being. When we eat food it becomes us. When we read the Bible it becomes all of us. When we study the Word of God it is our food it is received into our hearts and it becomes us. People don’t change themselves. People don’t change people. If that was the case there wouldn’t be any crime or hatred. It is the Bible that changes people. “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual powers. Against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having your feet shod with the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the weapon of God, praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful in this and with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.” Ephesians 6:11-18.

4.) Choose your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, you double-minded…” James 4:8 Refrain from any sin whatsoever. Carry on a continuous conversation with God at all times. As you walk to your class discuss with Him the things you read in your Bible that morning. Avoid thinking about the things you did while you were on drugs. Wash your hands of the people and the places you use to know and go. Above all resist. Fight. This is your future.

5.) “Lament and mourn with me, and let your eyes be tears of sorrow.” James 4:9 This is not a pleasant task. This will not be a happy time for you. Cry Out To GOD! Beg Him for His help because He says, “With My love I will keep you by My power alone. I don’t care where you have fallen or where you have been. I will never forsake you, My love never ends, it never ends.” Through the years of depression I had separated myself from God, and I had found myself in a state of emptiness that was unbearable. On November 8th, 1997, I place my hands on the Bible and cried out to the Lord for help. Little did I know I was changed instantly.

6.) “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord and He will lift you up.” James 4:10 I know for a fact that God had His hand in healing me. For those many years I was a stubborn, hard headed, self-indulging fool that placed my will above everybody else’s. The hatred I hid inside of me it was no wonder I did the things I did. “For we ourselves were also once fools, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Titus 3:4-7. He changed me into a loving, caring person who is now consumed with the welfare of others. My goodness He has changed me.

I no longer live for myself which is the emptiest existence there is on earth. I live for my Heavenly Father and my King and Savior Jesus Christ. It is an obstacle great enough to stop my service to them. I went from a person who was condemned to die to a servant of Jesus Christ and a son of God.

I have a prayer for you, “Dear Heavenly Father, I pray that you will submit yourself to God. Surrender your life to Him that you will trust Him and obey His word. I pray that you will resist the sins and temptations that have trapped you into a lifetime of suffering. I pray that you will draw near to God through His Holy Word study and prayer. I promise you that He is eagerly waiting to draw near to you. I am begging you to wash your hands of your sinful life, purifying your heart and separating yourself from the people that have led you astray. I especially want to pray for you during your time of struggle when you are fighting addiction, loneliness and despair. Realize the days will feel long and the nights even longer. I pray for you all these things so that one day a new dawn will rise in your life and all the things in your past will be gone. You will be a new creation. Designed, developed and molded into a servant leader of God. You will have need of absolutely nothing save your Bible and the faith that it delivers through the power of the Holy Spirit. Your light will shine forth by your actions and words. I pray that your blessings will be many and one day, I will see you shining like a star when we are all free from sin again.

In Jesus Christ’s name I pray. Amen

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Sudoku Solution:

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5 9 7 2 4 3 1 6
1 3 6 5 8 9 7 2 4
9 8 1 7 3 5 2 6 4
4 6 5 1 9 7 3 2 8
2 1 7 6 5 4 1 3 8
3 2 8 5 6 1 8 9 7
7 9 6 3 5 4 2 8 6
8 7 3 4 2 5 1 9 6
6 4 3 1 8 2 9 5 7
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Crossword Solution:

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AFIG Pairs S DAR
T BADE SIT M CAH
OMER AMEN IGAM
WEASEL MET L SE
H AM SWARMED DE
COLUNSE YEAU
NAME LAM IRAMP
GEM DISCERN HIS
ESALU MONE A
ASA SEA HABITAT
SENATHE BAD LI
ALARM ENNOH A
ALARM MORE GAT
EDEN BERED STEM
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KidsnChrist

Continued from page 13

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Clint’s Chronicles on the Funny Farm

The Rest of the Story

Doug Harrell

As any of you that have worked around heavy equipment know, getting serious injuries and talking about them isn’t always popular. I am used to it now, but I still feel bad about it happening. I also feel bad about the bucking horse. You can understand the relief I had when Clint, with his usual bravado, looked me in the eye and came out with his customary, strong as a bull, comment. Read and enjoy.

Funky Farm –

Dear Friends,

One morning I set out to gather a few heads of slightly rotten cabbage for my friend Boris the Hog. Picking my way through the cabbage patch, searching for the ones not fit for human consumption, was relaxing for me. The cool mountain air, punctuated with the sound of cabbages, resounded in my body and spirit for the challenging day ahead. And I loved delivering the vegetables to my piggy friends as they squealed and grunted in delight upon my arrival. This was the ONE CHORE I know how to do and rarely screw up.

Having fulfilled my role as "Caterer to the Pigs," I returned to the farm to learn my fate for the balance of the day.

Snarf and Son;

Farmer Doug has a large workshop where he repairs, jury-rigs and invents farm implements. As many of you know, there are literally thousands of doo-dads and moving parts that go into keeping a farm productive. And call me crazy, but I never imagined the plethora of things that can break during a day’s work.

This particular morning, I first turned the parts, pieces and tools to work. Then I learned that it must be a scrap-metal junkyard...somewhat akin to Fred and Lamont Sanford’s place. Auto engines, pointsy sharp shards of metal, large chains, oil cans, gas cans, a huge compressor, big tills of Servers know what, carburetor-de-gunk junk, a little flog/dampening wheel, fan belts of every make and length...you name it...a gizmo or piece of junk and you’ll find it there.

Every now and then an old American Motors Rambler would show up, Doug would disassemble and rebuild it only to replace it with another.

Farmer Clint “The Weider”...yeahhh

Hardly a day passed that Doug would not remark, “Well, we have another opportunity for repair.” Rent assured, my friends, the “we” is his statement refers to him and Jesus because I can’t repair anything. Left to me, a “fix” would be to call Mr. John Deere himself to come and correct equipment malfunctions.

Many times Doug would draft his brother, Farmer Larry, to jury-rig broken stuff. They like to walk in circles around the fracturedicky, dirty-Scotty, scratchy-augie and tell gobblydegook about what is broken and how to correct the malfunction. They call it “Harrell Hill Engineering,” I call it giberish. You may recall when they hoarded around a broken down old jeep, then suddenly they lifted the hood and inserted a piece of mulch to make it run. And purr it did...that’s nuts, I don’t care who you are! Nevertheless, I now walk around with a scrap of mulch in every pocket for emergencies.

Doug was preparing to perform some harcullasch task, like moving a mountain, with his GIANT backhoe. But first we needed to grease all the ball joints — AND I HELPED — and then there was a broken something-or-other that needed welding. Now I loved watching Doug weld things. Secretly I always hoped he would teach me that skill...but so far to no avail. I guess he figures my spiritual gifts do not include handling a torch! Whatever his reasons: for making me sit on the sidelines I still enjoy watching the sparks fly and hot metal drool. And it would be ever so cool to wear those welder’s mask, but alas it won’t happen.

A buddy used up the welding torch I wondered to myself, “Hummm, that weld is mighty close to the fuel tank...flame-tower meet diesel fuel...not a good combo.” I mentioned the concern to Farmer Doug who peered over his safety glasses and gave me that smile that says, “Pollar, it’s best if you don’t say anything at the moment.” So I stood aside and watched in awe.

We finished the welding job...Yes I said “we” even though I was but a casual observer – and it was time to loosen up the joints on the backhoe.

Now the backet on this monstrosity has a kind of jerky-festy motion; rather than a smooth move from side to side or up and down it’s more like a sudden lurch. This abnormality isn’t a problem of course, if a man is working in the field alone. On the other hand, it could be hazardous to an unluck standing a wee bit too close.

He Flies Through The Air With The Crassest Of Ease...

Doug was focused on his weld and making sure everything was mechanically sound as I moved in for a closer look. Unaware of my proximity to the bucket, he manipulated the lever to one side when...SIT...that 4,000 lb backet literally leapt to the side to catch Farmer Clint in the middle of his chest.

Now it’s one thing to imagine being slapped by a backhoe but, as you might ex-

pect, I was startled and terrified to find myself performing these serial antics only to have an abrupt STOP as I smashed against the shed wall. I think I exhaled rather noisily as every gram of air departed my lungs.

And you think I was surprised? Farmer Doug appeared as though he’d seen a ghost! I needed to know that he had a very careful conscience and always took extraordinary measures to avoid putting me in harm’s way. Yet, it seemed, despite his best efforts I could be seriously injured.

Hit Me With Your Best Shot...!

Having recovered from the initial shock of being a human cannonball, I quickly wriggled and waggled all my parts and decided God had protected me from injury. And seeing the terror on the face of my friend, I remarked...”Is that all you’ve got?”

Farmer Doug, ashen and pale-faced, looked down at me from high atop the backhoe and said, “You could have been REALLY hurt. You scared me to death!”

I thought perhaps a little comic relief was in order as I replied, “You hit me but I SCARED YOU! Well, let me tell ya something—pal! Farmer Clint took your best shot and I’m still standing...strong like hell!”

As I recall we walked across the road to the farmhouse and had our normal morning cup of cappuccino with Barbara. Not much was said about my mishap with the backhoe, it was a toss-out-tuss with disaster. We just relaxed and enjoyed another gorgeous day at barrel Hill Farms.

Surely God was watching over me and Farmer Doug that day as once again I cheated death on the Funny Farm.

Humbled in the Hills,

Farmer Clint

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NC Christian Action League

Is it Worth It?
By Rev. Mark H. Creech

The late Dr. Billy Graham once said, "The Christian life is not a constant high. I have my moments of discouragement. I have to go to God in prayer with tears in my eyes, and say, 'O God, forgive me,' or 'Help me.' It comforts me to know someone as faithful as Dr. Graham has said something like this because I too have experienced discouragement on many occasions.

There were the times when as a pastor I was broken-hearted at the spiritual lethargy and backsliding of my parishioners. Nothing I did to stir them seemed to make any difference. It was hard when certain members of the church betrayed me or purposely made it difficult to lead effectively. It was especially difficult when the Board of Deacons at one church called for my resignation, when I had done nothing worthy of censure or dismissal. Instead, I had been proclaiming the unadulterated Gospel of Christ, which some found offensive. It was terribly discouraging as a young pastor to discover that doing right doesn't always lead to a right result or that I would be rightly treated by people who should know what was right.

As executive director and lobbyist for the Christian Action League, there have been a lot of discouraging experiences.

There was the time when my lobbying activity blocked the proposal for a state-operated lottery dead in its tracks, when suddenly and unexpectedly everything changed, and the dastardly predatory racker gamed passage by one vote. Then there was an egregious piece of alcohol legislation that I was sure my advocacy had killed, but it was revived and passed by an act of political treachery. Certainly, painful was when a rogue federal judge overturned the Marriage Protection Amendment added to North Carolina's Constitution - a measure that I had labored on for ten years to see passed. Then there was the repeal of HB 2, commonly known as the bathroom bill, good sense legislation to protect women and children from having to share restrooms, showers, and locker rooms with men. HB 2 died from the media's manhunt scare campaign and formidable political pressures from Leftist groups. Nothing done was affectual to save it.

Not long ago when I was discouraged and in a dark place, I hid away in my bedroom. While lying on the bed, I cried with my dog and urged me to share what was troubling me. I opened up and recalled a sentence that I had mentioned in this article, and concluded: "So many losses! So many disappointments! It causes you to ask, is it worth it? Why labor so passionately, so sacrificially, in the face of such failure?" Seeking my comfort, Kim tenderly kissed me on the cheek and said, "Yes, it was worth it. It was worth it because Jesus is worth it! And it is worth continuing because He is worthy. He is worthy every arduous mile of the journey, every insult, every injury, every inconvenience, and every incapacitation.

Tears filled my eyes. How could I ever forget that Jesus was worth it? O God, forgive me, help me.

Indeed, I cannot separate the causes for which I have given much of my life from Jesus Christ Himself. I am upholding them in obedience to His call. But the defenses can be somewhat disillusioning - somewhat confusing - that righteousness often doesn't succeed - that evil often wins the day. It can be very discouraging. Nevertheless, what lifts my heart out of the muck and mire of confusion and enthusiasm is that Jesus is always worthy to defend or advance the purposes of God.

Our Lord doesn't call upon us to succeed, but to serve.

Thank it if Jesus preached for decades while the people of His day only scoffed at the truth. The prophets proclaimed the Word of God to wayward Israel, but Israel did not turn from her sins, and God's own people murdered many of them. What about Jesus? When He came to the end of His ministry, it appeared to many, as though His disciples hadn't actually believed Him. Despite three years of concentrated and exhaustive ministry, His inner circle forsook Him, and the religious authorities had Him crucified. The Disciples of Christ suffered tremendously for their faith, and most of them died violent deaths.

Still, the apostle Paul admonished, "So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, because you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless." (1 Cor. 15:58)

Knoll Staton has beautifully stated that followers of Christ need to be positive and optimistic and encourage each other as they approach the end of days. "Christians should preach the kind of hope that will cancel depression, the kind of values that will cancel self-pity, the kind of victory that will cancel defeatism, the kind of power that will eliminate weakness," says Staton. "Christ has already won! So, has everyone who is in Christ? We are already winners because of Him.

One day we will see the Lord take all of our labors for his name's sake and weave them into an incorruptible kingdom tapestry, where the words of Christ's model prayer will finally be answered, "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." (Mt. 6:10)

Yes, it's worth it. It's always worth it because Jesus is worth it.

Reverend Dr. Mark Creech is Executive Director of the NC Christian Action League. You may contact him at rcreech@christianactionleague.org or 919-787-3662.
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“ar steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord.”

—PSALM 37:25, NIV
Standing By The Cross

By Shawn Thomas

One of my favorite stories of the Civil War is of a Union
officer whose unit was coming under particularly heavy fire
from the Confederate cannon. Someone rode up to him and
said they thought he was getting so much heat his officer
posted "Old Glory," the American flag, in such a prominent
position over that it made a great target for all the Confederate
artillery, and they were focusing on bringing it down.
They suggested to him that he move his flag to some less conspicuous
position. He thought the idea was glorious but impractical, and despite his
sin, he made a vow: "Let it
wave high; it's our glory." In just a few moments that officer
died for Confederate
men. But he stood by his
"glory" to the end.

Just as our country's flag is the glory of the patriots; so, the cross of Jesus
Christ is the glory of the Christian. And just as the soldier is called to stand by
his flag, so he is called to stand by His Christian Cross.

I love the picture of: 25: here when it says: "Therefore the soldi...these
doing. But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother's
sister Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene.

Why should we join into Heaven, what had been arrested, and was
being crucified, they didn't abandon Him. There they were, bravely: STAND-
BYING BY THE CROSS.

One of the very remarkable things about the Bible is its emphasis on women
— considered as the equals of men in the cause of women's rights adopted by
the modern world. The Bible has authenticated up to thousands of godly
women throughout the pages. This is one of these places. All of Jesus'
disciples (except John) had scat
tended (Matthew 26:56: "then all the disciples left Him and fled"). Peter had
denied Jesus three times to a slave girl, but these women stood there by
His cross. They were witness to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ at that
moment. But the reason it says the women saw Jesus is because they did.
They were indeed the ones who first saw Him risen from the dead. And they were the ones
the Bible says were there "STANDING BY THE CROSS."

"Standing by the cross" here I believe is more just than a description of their
physical location. It also pictures their commitment to the Lord: standing by the

Now just a word about "the cross." Most of us know what "the cross" is. It is
what Jesus was nailed to, and what He died on, that day. Over time, and because
Jesus was nailed to that cross, the word "cross" has come to mean a number of
items and pieces of jewelry. Even many lost people wear ornaments
featuring the cross. But we need to remember what it originally was: the cross was
the Roman instrument of the death penalty. It was the "electric chair," or the "hang-
man's noose," of their day. Jesus and the others were put to death on the cross, in
the most gruesome and torturous way.

In another sense, what happened on the cross is glorious. Peter 2:21 says that
"He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross," so that we could be
forgiven and come back to God. That is the message of the gospel. That is what
Christ did for us. But today we are abandoning the message of the cross; it is not "popular" any
more. But true followers of Jesus will imitate the example of these women,
and stand by the cross of Jesus.

Now, that does not mean that we need to literally "go to a cross somewhere and physically "stand by it," like they did. But I want
us to think of some practical ways in which we DO need to "stand by the cross" of
Jesus:

How are you going to get into Heaven? One of the most famous questions used
in evangelism is to ask a person, "If you were to stand before God, and He were
to ask you, 'Why should you tell me?' what would you tell Him?"

I want you to think about that for a moment. Right now. If you were to stand before
God right now, and He were to ask you, "Why should I let you into My heaven?"
what would YOU say to Him? Think about what YOUR answer would be.

There are a whole lot of wrong answers to that question. And unfortunately
sometimes, even now you may still have found some very wrong answers in
your mind.

— Some of you just said, "Well I'm trying my best to be good."
— Or "I try to treat everyone right, and live by the Golden Rule, or the 10 Com-
mandments."

Or "I go to church," or "I got baptized."

If you said ANYTHING that is like that, anything that is based on what YOU are or
good things that you have done, you need to listen to me right now. NONE of
those things is going to get you into God's heavenly body. The Bible says in Romans 3:20:"Not by works of righteousness which we have done for God will we save

There is ONLY ONE way we can be saved: and that is by the cross of Jesus
Christ. See, God made us to live with Him in heaven forever, but every one of
us sinned, and rebelled against God, and we deserve to be punished apart from
Him. But the Bible says in John 3:16: "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." That is the only way we can be saved. That is the way God
did for us, as the cross of Christ. We've got to put our trust in the cross.

That's why the Apostle Paul said in Galatians 6:14: "But may it never be that
I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." When he's talking
about "boasting" there, he's talking about where your hope for salvation is. He's
saying, "I don't want you to put your trust in me or in in anything else. He's saying
my only "boast," my only hope of heaven, is in the cross of Jesus. For His salva-
tion, Paul was saying, I am standing by the cross! And that's what we need to do
if we want to become your trust too. Your answer to that question, "Why should God let you into heaven?" Has to be "I DON'T deserve to be there! The only way I will get in, is by the cross of Jesus, and what He did for me.

It's frustrating these days to preach about things like "sin," and "the cross," I say it is not fashionable "these days." The truth is, it has NEVER been fashionable by worldly standards to preach and reach the cross. In fact, the first image or "art" that we have of Jesus Christ was basically a "graffiti" left in the early Roman Empire. It showed a man with a head of a donkey, hanging on a cross. It was a cruel and unusual punishment. But that's not the way we see the arrival of the cross, an example of how many of the Romans thought that the cross of Jesus was foolish. And that's exactly what Paul said in I Corinthians 1:17-18: "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleavage of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void. For the word of the cross is foolishness to those that are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." He said this gospel featuring the cross is foolishness to the world — but as we have seen, it is the only thing that God has ordained to save us. So, we must NOT abandon the message of the cross. It must always be the center of our ministry.

It was for Paul. He wrote: "And I, brethren, when I came to you, I did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. For the cross of Christ is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." When I came, THIS was the message that I preached crucified: — the message of the cross. He said, in fact, I spouted such that, you might have thought I didn't know anything else BUT Christ crucified! The cross was SO much Paul's message and its focus. And the cross should be OUR message and focus too. Everything we do in minis-
try needs to point people to the cross of Jesus.

In our dealings with other people, and our personal witnessing, we need to "stand by the cross."

We need to remember that it is only the message of the cross that will save you. We need to make sure that we tell people about the cross when we talk with them.

Listen: your unique personality, our cool behavior, our witty intellect, will not save anyone. We may make great friends of people, or attract a lot of admiration from others, but we will not see anyone genuinely saved unless we "stand by the cross."

Jesus Christ crucified is the gospel. Remember, we looked at I Corinthians 15 a few weeks ago, where Paul shared about what "the gospel is," and he said it was "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures." THAT is the gospel, taking about how Jesus died on the cross. For us. So, if we are going to be successful witnesses, we have to share the message of the cross. If we don't share about the cross with someone, we can't really say we have shared the gospel with them.

In Acts 8, the Lord brought Philip to the Ethiopian Treasurer, who was reading the Book of Isaiah, but didn't understand it. And the Bible says that beginning with the scriptures, Philip began to explain to him the truth of the gospel. THAT's what we need to share with people: we need to "preach Jesus to them."

We need to share that message of the cross. Sometimes we do everything BUT: we share about our church, or about a 12-step program, or whatever. But we need to make sure we "stand by the cross." The cross is the only thing God has said that can really save and change someone.

Now, don't misunderstand me. There are a lot of good things we can do to "plant seeds" in people's lives, and a lot of these are great things to do. When we live a godly life in front of others, or do acts of kindness, or build relationships, or whatever, that's not a bad thing at all. But the cross is the only thing God has said can really save and change someone.

But you know what the truth is? We all fail Jesus, don't we? But here's the thing. Even when we let Jesus down, even when we DO fail to "stand by the cross," and do things wrong, can we fail Jesus by Him love and kindness? — THAT IS WHAT HE WENT TO THE CROSS FOR! Because WE ARE going to fail. ALL of Jesus' disciples failed, didn't they? Peter (who said he'd never deny Him) wasn't there at the cross. Thomas, who so boldly said, "Let us go too, that we may die with Him," was there and didn't even believe. Also, there was Judas, except John and those women, and they failed Him in other ways. ALL HIS DISCIPLES FAILED JESUS. And you know what the truth is? WE WILL TOO. And that is what the cross is all about. Jesus didn't die so that all of us "good people" could get saved. And you know what? It's true. And Peter failed Jesus; Thomas failed Jesus; Judas failed Jesus; YOU and I have all failed Him too. But that is exactly what the cross is for. Jesus bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that all of us in sinful failings could find the forgiveness we need, at the

t
That's why we preach about the cross. That's why talk about the cross. That's why God calls us, like these women in John 15, to stand by the cross.

Shawn Thomas is Senior Pastor at Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church in Mungen. His messages and devotions are available at www.shawntomthomas.com

www.brcnews.com

January 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News: page 18
Many years ago, I struggled with trying to forgive someone who had hurt me deeply. The feeling of betrayal that was in my heart was almost crippling to me spiritually. For many months it seemed the situation was on my mind continuously.

First thing in the morning and the last thing on my mind before sleep, if I was able to sleep. There was a wide range of emotions that seemed to come and go. Some days it was anger. Some days it was a broken heart and tears. Often I would argue with God about it, saying, “Why would you allow this? Why would you allow me to be hurt this way?”

I found the most well-known portions of scripture that deals with forgiveness is found in Matthew 6:14-15. Peter asks Jesus, how many times he should forgive a brother that has sinned against him. Peter even suggests that 7 times might be sufficient. Jesus answers Peter, “Seventy times seven.” Jesus isn’t necessarily saying that after 490 times you don’t have to forgive someone, but rather he was pointing out the power of unlimited forgiveness. Jesus teaches a parable in the following verses about a certain king who took account of his servants. There was found a servant who owed him “enormous talents.” Some disagree exactly how much money this servant owed. However, it is believed to be equal to several million dollars in today’s society. The point is that the servant was遍布 the king would be the debt. The king commanded that the servant and his family be sold along with all his possessions. The servant realized his situation and fell down before the king and begged for the king’s patience and he would pay him. Even though he promised to pay the debt, more than likely there was no way he could.

A terrible event then takes place. The king is moved with compassion, sets the servant free and forgives all his debt. Can you imagine that?

The parable doesn’t stop there. Jesus teaches that the same servant who had just been forgiven so much went out and found a fellow servant who only owed him a small amount of money. He laid hands on him, even grabbed him by the throat and demanded payment. His fellow servant fell at his feet and begged for patience in paying what he owed. However, there was no compassion in his heart. He had his fellow servant put in prison till the debt was paid. There’s no way a man can work to pay his debt if he’s in prison!

When his fellow servants saw what he had done in refusing to forgive, they told the king about what had happened and this servant who had been forgiven so much was brought before his lord. The king called him a wicked servant and said to him, “I forgave thee all that debt because thou desirest me. Shouldst thou not have had compassion on thy fellow servant, even as I had pity on thee?” His lord was angry with him and handed him over to the tormentors (prison) till he paid the debt he owed. Jesus also gives a warning that the same shall be done to us if we don’t forgive others their trespasses.

You see in this parable, the servant who refused to forgive was placed in a prison of his own making. Had he remembered the compassion and forgiveness that he was given and extended to the others, he would not have been placed in prison. By his own doing, he was in a prison of unforgiveness. A prison that only unforgiveness would have helped him avoid.

The Lord began to deal with my heart using this parable with my own forgiveness. He helped me to first of all realize once again what a great debt of sin that He had forgiven me. Secondly, he helped me to realize that if Jesus was willing to forgive me, I should choose to forgive others. Even if my old flesh doesn’t feel like it wants to.

I’d like to tell you that all this happened immediately, but it didn’t. Matter of fact, I confess that it took probably a couple of years. Have I forgotten what happened? No. But I have chosen to forgive what happened. Yes, it was a choice that Jesus helped me make because in my flesh I didn’t want to. Payback is what my flesh wanted, but in my spirit, Jesus wanted me to choose forgiveness because of how much He had forgiven me.

There are some things that Jesus reminded me of through that experience. First, how much He loves me to forgive me like He did. There wasn’t any way I could pay off the debt of sin that I owed, and Jesus forgave me by his grace and mercy. I did not deserve forgiveness, but He gave it to me. Another thing he reminded me of is that He expects me to extend forgiveness to others. Even when it’s hard to do so.

There’s also some things Jesus taught me through that experience. When we choose to harbor unforgiveness towards someone, we put ourselves in a spiritual prison. We seem to believe we are getting back at someone but truthfully we are only harming ourselves. It costs us spiritually because as long as we have the sin of unforgiveness in our hearts our relationship with Jesus will never be what it should be. We put ourselves in prison and the whole time we’re there the key to get out is in our hands and we refuse to open the door.

We must remember some things also. There are people who will hurt us and know they have hurt us, and they will ask for forgiveness. There are people who will hurt us and know they have hurt us, and do not care, and will probably never ask for forgiveness. There are people who will hurt us and possibly don’t know the hurt they have caused. We are never told that the key of forgiveness is not held by the ones who may have harmed us, but the key is ours. Forgiveness is more for us than it is the offender. Its set us free from the torment of this prison we are in, so we can move on. If we choose to hold on to the hurts of the past it will keep us from healing in the future. We’ll be confused endlessly with invalid claims that will hinder where God wants us to go in our relationship with Him.

This issue has been on my heart for a while. I felt as though there is someone who will read this that needs to choose forgiveness and be set free from that prison.
Blue Ridge Regional Hospital

Churches Look to Work Together to Share Resources, Support Neighbors
By Colby Boston
Mitchell County

Churches in Mitchell County are invited to learn about a program that is helping to coordinate resources and services to support people in need in Macon County. The program is called Healthy Neighbors Network (HNN). HNN uses software to connect churches and allow them to communicate about people in need, keep track of who needs help, and coordinate volunteer support.

HNN is modeled after the Congregational Health Network (CHN) program in Memphis, Tennessee. CHN started in 2004 and now has 100 churches and 700 volunteers working together to support their community.

Colby Boston, Volunteer Engagement Specialist at Blue Ridge Regional Hospital, was on the team of representatives from across western North Carolina who traveled to Memphis in 2011 to learn about the program. It was amazing to see what the Memphis program was doing," said Colby. "They were using the CHN program to rebuild the neighborhood connection and safety net that had been lost since the introduction of HIPAA in 1996 and were working within communities to coordinate care in a HDA compliant way that allowed neighbors to help neighbors in need. As soon as I heard about CHN I knew it would be a good fit for Mitchell County."

“Every day we hear about people in our congregation and in our community who need help,” said Rev. Jeremy Trolley of Spruce Pine United Methodist Church. “Sometimes we can meet the need and, other times, we either don’t have the resources or the people power to help. If we can connect with other faith communities, we can share our strengths and resources to do more."

Healthy Neighbors Network is currently up and running in Macon County, with eighteen churches and agencies coordinating services. Since their program launched in June, they have served over 497 people with 146 acts of kindness and coordinated over $11,000 in aid. In Macon County, 57% of the financial assistance has been directed to housing needs—rent assistance or utilities. 46% of the assistance has been directed to providing food security.

“We had a phone call with two of the pastors from Macon County—a Lutheran minister and a Baptist minister,” said Rev. Dr. Marcus Beauford of Atlantic Baptist Church. “It was really helpful to hear how they are working together across denominations to support people in need. I am excited about the opportunity of starting a Healthy Neighbors Network program in Mitchell County.”

Faith leaders interested in learning more about Healthy Neighbors Network are invited to an informational meeting Tuesday, January 15 at 6:00 p.m. in the Community Room in the May-Berry-Hill Center (189 Hospital Drive, located beside Blue Ridge Regional Hospital). Dinner will be served to please RSVP with your name and congregation to Colby.Boston@asaj.org. For more information about Healthy Neighbors Network Mitchell County, call Colby Boston at 828-666-1872.

Colby works with Blue Ridge Hospital and will be heading up the HNN.

Burnsville Seventh-Day Adventist Church

Greetings Friends and Happy New Year!
Pastor Ed Cusser
Yancey County

Recently while reading chapter one in the Gospel of Luke, the story of Zechariah and Elizabeth caught my attention. Reading about their experience, reminded me that their story is one of great faith and hope. Luke 1:5, provides the setting, “In the days of Herod. It was a dark time because Herod the Great was an evil person (see Matthew 2). Yet in the midst of this darkness, there were two shining lights, Zechariah and Elizabeth. In Luke 1:5, we get a glimpse of their character: “And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.” The word “walk” in Scripture has to do with a person’s life, especially their conduct. Zechariah and Elizabeth conducted their lives according to God’s Word. They patterned their lives after the divine standard, His ten commandments. To me, Biblical righteousness is an inward quality that manifests itself in loving obedience to God. Living our lives according to the divine standard, His ten commandments does not save us, instead it is a love response to our God who saves us. Salvation is a free gift from our Lord, all we have to do is accept it. So, Zechariah and Elizabeth were righteous in their character, their love for God motivated them to be obedient to His Word, and they were steadfast in their faith to God. They were committed to living our faith. What a living testimony they must have been for God. Luke 1:7, provides us with an insight to a challenge they were facing, “they had no child.” For a Jewish couple to be childless was thought to be a sign of God’s displeasure. At the very least, this resulted in shame and reproach (see Luke 1:25). Surely, to have a child was a desire of their hearts. Certainly, they prayed. They waited. But only hearing silence. What do you and I do when God is silent? Zechariah and Elizabeth could have reacted in anger and bitterness. Instead they continued serving God with hope in their heart. Nothing had changed except the passage of time. Zechariah and Elizabeth still were steadfast in their devotion to God. Why? They did not let their personal challenge keep them from loving and serving God. Nothing has changed. They were still right before God. They still patterned their lives after God’s Word. They loved God and refused to allow this to become a stumbling block in their relationship with Him. “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” (Hebrews 11:6). Faith knows that silence does not last forever. “While He was serving” (Luke 1:16). Zechariah is getting ready to hear from God. What if he had quit? How often do we miss out on hearing from God because we cease serving and trusting in Him? While Zechariah was serving God, an angel of the Lord (Gabriel, Luke 1:19) appeared. Gabriel came to announce that he would have a son. Luke 1:14-16 emphasizes John the Baptist’s role in God’s redemptive plan. John would be the forerunner who would announce the coming Messiah—Jesus! Zechariah and Elizabeth were willing to be used by God, they learned that God’s silence is not forever. They were faithful to His plan in spite of their challenge. What about us? We are waiting for Jesus second coming. As we wait, will we continue to serve and worship Him, in spite of our challenge(s)? What I need is the kind of faith displayed in the lives of Zechariah and Elizabeth. Like them, we need to trust the Word of God, His promises, and His commandments. Luke 1:14-17 reiterates that God does not lie. Could He come in 2019? No one knows the day or hour of His appearing, but until that glorious day, let us continue to lovingly obey God’s Word and remain steadfast in our faith, like Zechariah and Elizabeth!

Ed Cusser is the pastor for the Burnsville and Erwin Hills Seventh-Day Adventist Churches. Previously he served churches in Ontario (Canada), New York, Kentucky and North Carolina. He also is accredited Chaplain, Lieutenant Colonel, having spent 28 years in the US Air Force. Pastor Cusser and his wife of 15 years, Carol have four adult children: Melissa, Kaylee, Meegan and Drew. He enjoys sharing the love of Jesus and encouraging others to prepare for His soon return.

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January 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 20
Will the Real Abomination Please Stand Up?
By Jim Huskins
McDowell County

The so-called holiday season is winding down. Everyone has recently celebrated something, but I am amazed at how few Christians even notice a winter celebration which John the Baptist called “the Day of Atonement” or the Feast of Dedication. This 20-refers to was important enough for Jesus to make a trip from Galilee to Jerusalem to keep it.

Dedication is not one of God’s appointed times listed in Leviticus. Rather, it commemorates an event in Jewish history which foreshadows a prophecy in Malachi 3:15, “For so the Lord of hosts shall be exalted in Zion, and he shall be exalted in our heart.” While this prophecy may have additional fulfillment in the actions of the future antichrist, it was at least partially fulfilled in the year 70 when Titus of Rome put an end to Jewish sacrifice and offerings by ordering his army to destroy Jerusalem, plunder the temple, and erect pagan idols where the temple had stood.

Remarkably similar events took place in the year 175 B.C.E. when Judas was ruled by Syrian leader, Antiochus Epiphanes. He invaded Judea, occupied Jerusalem, plundered the temple, and stopped all the commanded sacrifices for three-and-a-half years. He made capital crimes of bribing the high priest, sacrificing children, keeping Sabbath, defiling God’s fast days, and following God’s dietary laws. His goal was to replace these practices, and he tortured or murdered any foes faithfully keeping God’s instructions. He killed anyone who would not sacrifice to Zeus or eat pork. He murdered at least 100,000 righteous Jews.

In 167 B.C.E., Antiochus erected an altar to Zeus in the temple. He sacrificed a pig on the altar and sprinkled swine blood in the Holy of Holies. These events provoked a revolt led by the Maccabees family. Within two years, a rag-tag guerrilla insurgency of faithful Jews defeated the most powerful army in the world.

In 153 B.C.E., the Temple was restored and a new altar constructed. The temple was rededicated, and an eight-day festival was proclaimed for this event. The name for this festival comes from the Hebrew word for dedication: Ha-mikdash. Among other things, Hanukkah is a time of reminder that those who oppose God always attempt to keep others from obeying God.

The agenda of Antiochus Epiphanes is a type and shadow of the actions of Titus of Rome which resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. When Jesus foretold these events in Matthew 24, he referred to the desecration of the Temple and the accompanying ban on worshipping His Father as the “Abomination of Desolation.” Antiochus and Titus both foreshadow the character and actions of the coming antichrist.

During our recent celebration of Hanukkah, my wife and I were struck by a sobering realization: The abominable agenda of Antiochus Epiphanes and Titus in ancient Jerusalem is still with us. That agenda is: You must profane God’s festivals and holy days. You must set up idols. You must eat unclean animals. You must not circumcise your sons. You must not remember God’s instructions for living, the Torah. The shocking source of this call to action—to which Jesus referred as abomination—is no longer some pagan king or general.

As Christians, we must be on the watch for this renewal, world-wide body which claims to love and serve our Messiah.

The early Church, under the leadership of the Apostles and their disciples, kept Torah. They recognized that their obedience had nothing to do with salvation, but also knew that we who accept salvation by grace through faith have no option but to attempt to live lives of obedience to the One who made us and saves us. First John 2:3-4 tells us that our obedience is proof of whether we have received saving grace. The entire book of James underscores this truth. The second chapter of the Book of Ephesians has a tenth verse. The Great Commission of Jesus concludes with “teach them to observe all my commandments.”

The truth of obedience to Torah was lost in the Fourth Century when first the Roman Empire and then the Roman Catholic Empire began forcing “Christians” to follow the agenda of abomination: made it illegal to keep Sabbath and required worship on the day dedicated to pagan sun gods; replaced God’s holy days and feasts with celebrations venerating pagan gods at winter solstice and following spring equinox; falsely proclaimed that Jesus revoked God’s clear dietary instructions given in Leviticus; forbade the study of Torah and made the possession of Hebrew language scripts a crime.

Since the Roman Emperor, Constantine, supposedly converted to Christianity in 311, every generation has seen a systematic assault against those who attempt to keep Torah. Hanukkah is a time to remember the fact that, following the perfect sacrifice of Jesus, the bodies of His followers are now God’s holy Temple. Given our human frailty, these temples need constant dedication. The only way to achieve this dedication is sincere repentance and obedience.

God never gave us the option of choosing how we will worship and serve him. On the contrary, he gave us clear instructions on how to live and obey. Adam and Eve were not permitted to dictate terms to God, and the result was catastrophic. Should we pattern our lives on the words of well-intended misinformed human teachers, or should we diligently study the entire Word of God to learn how He wants us to dedicate His temples of grace?

Obedient Heart Fellowship believes that the entire Bible is true and relevant. We believe in salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, and we attempt to love and serve him by keeping his commandments. We meet each Sabbath—Seventh Day—at Abba’s House, 72 South Main Street in Marion. 10:00 A.M. 828-460-7913

Jim & Beverly Huskins are members of Obedient Heart Fellowship.
North Carolina Baptists

How To Read the Bible In the New Year (And Why You Should)

By Brian Uphaw

Early in my ministry, I met a sweet widow named Marie. Marie was a godly woman. She was a poet, a prayer warrior, and a lover of Scripture.

I remember once that Marie told me that she had read through the Bible from cover to cover more than 20 times in her life. Her declaration both inspired and intimidated me.

Common sense indicates that Christians should read the Bible, but the reality is that few people read any part of the Bible, much less all of it. A recent study conducted by LifeWay Research revealed that more than half of Americans have read little or none of the Bible.

However, Bible reading is foundational and critical to our spiritual growth. A LifeWay Research study also identified Bible engagement as the top spiritual discipline that a believer could participate in, but the same study found that only 47 percent of Christians engage with the Bible on a weekly basis.

During the 2018 Southern Baptist Convention annual meeting in Dallas, Texas, Robby Gallaty, pastor of Long Hollow Baptist Church in Hendersonville, Tenn., shared a recommendation of a discipleship-making task force that was commissioned two years ago by the North American Mission Board and LifeWay Christian Resources.

The task force made three recommendations to churches, the first of which was to increase efforts toward Bible engagement. The others were to examine the connection between salvation decisions and group involvement and to examine the number of groups that multiply on a regular basis in our churches.

“Bible engagement is more than just reading the Word,” Gallaty said. “It is allowing the Word of God and God Himself to lead us and change our direction, our actions and our thinking.” Gallaty pointed out that when people engage the Bible, they give more, serve more, go more and evangelize more.

In an effort to increase Bible engagement, Gallaty encouraged churches to participate in 8x20 Challenge so that by the end of the year 2020, the percentage of believers who engage the Bible would increase from 47 percent to 80 percent.

A special website — 8x20.org — includes resources such as articles, Bible reading plans, and apps for smartphones or tablets. More information is available on the resource.

Bible reading is a popular New Year’s resolution, and there are a number of popular reading plans available online and through apps like YouVersion. Following are some plans you may want to consider, some of which are also available on the 8x20 website.

Bible reading is foundational and critical to our spiritual growth. Foundations 250 (F250)

The F250 plan is a 260-day reading plan that highlights the foundational passages of Scripture that every disciple should know. This plan was designed for those who have never read the Bible before or those who may have attempted to read through the Bible in a year but failed. It includes one or two chapters of reading for five days each week with weekends off, which can be used as catch-up days if needed.

Chronological Reading Plan

In this article, I wrote, “Why you should consider reading the Bible chronologically,” author Trevin Wax wrote, “This plan takes you through the Bible’s grand narrative, so that you can follow the storyline chronologically, helping you see how the Bible fits together to tell one big story that points to Jesus Christ.”

The CSB Day-by-Day Chronological Bible incorporates daily readings from the Old Testament and New Testament. This plan was co-authored by Bob Hostetler, the NIV’s and CSB’s managing editor, and New Testament professor George Guthrie’s “Read the Bible for Life” plan.

I have previously used this plan and love it so much I will be using it again in 2019. M’Cheyne plan

Developed by and named for the 19th-century Scottish minister Robert Murray M’Cheyne, this plan takes readers through the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice over the course of a year. Each day includes readings from two Old Testament passages, one New Testament passage and a passage from either the Psalms or the Gospels. The Baptist State Convention of North Carolina’s Embrace Women’s Evangelism and Discipleship Ministry is encouraging N.C. Baptists to utilize this plan as part of its Bible reading challenge in the coming year.

Moravian Daily Text

This past year, I used the Moravian Daily Text as my daily Bible reading. The first printed edition, known as Die Loopsung (Wachworte), was published in 1731. The readings were organized by Count Zinzendorf for the Bohemian and Moravian refugees who had settled on his estate feeing persecution. This is the same plan that Dietrich Bonhoeffer used. The plan takes readers through the Old Testament once and the New Testament in two years and the Psalms each year.

It is a little more liturgical in that the Sunday readings are based on the church calendar. Using this plan served as a reminder not only of power of the Word, but the great providence of God in preserving His Word throughout the generations of the church.

It has helped me understand that I am a part of something bigger than my own spiritual growth, a great tradition of discipleship.

These are just a few of the many available Bible reading plans you may want to consider. Others will take you through the entire Bible in as little as 90 days or anywhere from one to three years.

No matter which plan you choose, make a commitment to engage with the Bible in the year ahead. As Don Whitney, author of Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life, has said, “No one is changed by an unread Bible.”

How do you plan to read the Bible in 2019? What other plans have you found helpful? Leave a comment below or others may be inspired and encouraged to read the Bible in the new year.

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www.brcnews.com

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Bringing Light in the Darkness

Jewish Practice Of Tikkan Olam Brings Light At Dark Time Of Year

By Keesa Kay
Tennessee County

Joel Edelson only meant to sell books to pay for college. Instead, going door to door, he became the first Jewish man of the folks in a rural area he traveled had ever met in their lives.

"I became an ambassador for Judaism," says Edelson, president of the Chabad-Lubavitch WNC, an organization that provides social, religious and educational opportunities at The Chabad House of Asheville. "This world has to become a place where everyone feels at home, and there is no feeling of hatred. Traditions and kindness never become ancient or outdated, but are timeless."

The setting the world right

In the Lubavitch tradition, divine sparks scatter as the vessels holding the light of creation shatter in their travels through the universe. With tikkan olam, each person has a duty to restore the world, sending those sparks back home to the creator.

"At this time of year, when it is so dark, many religious celebrations bring the feeling of light," says Rabbi Rachel Jackson of Agudas Israel Congregation in Hendersonville. "Every act of tikkan olam lightens burdens and helps set the world right."

For some, tikkan olam means restoring the world through social action. For others, tikkan olam manifests itself most clearly in a warm smile shared on a cold night.

"Tikkan olam is a way of creating and doing good," says Edelson, "and it can be done anywhere we are."

A duty to help

"Tikkan olam means making the world a better home, for ourselves, for others, and even for God," says Edelson. "We can do this through philanthropy, charitable acts, extending a hand, sharing a kind word. If someone's not feeling well, a smile or a kind word can be healing. Without a doubt, who I am today as a father, a person, a spouse and a teacher, literally has been built on singular comments from parents, teachers, friends and others who took the time to care."

A duty to help

Every individual and each branch of Judaism has a slightly different perspective on tikkan olam, but for all — be they Reconstructionist, Reform, Conservative or Orthodox — doing good for others deeply matters. It's a duty, one of the 613 mitzvot, or obligations, for leading a fulfilling life.

"Each one of us can do something to help in this world," says Jackson. "We can't solve everything, but we can help. It doesn't matter how you help, as long as you do something to heal the hurt in the heart of the world."

Every time someone does an act of kindness, or just as a form of gratitude, every time someone gives claritiously, or tzedakah, a little bit more light — long ago scattered and scattered — returns to the shining beauty of the Lord, Edelson says.

"So many times, we ourselves don't even know when a simple act of kindness or generosity can be crucial to a life-changing. When we speak, we don't quite realize the affect it can have," Edelson says. "Sometimes a meaning we never intended can leave a person hurt, or something kind can make another person feel so much better, far out of proportion of what we intended, and it works in both directions."

The need to mend cracks to tikkan olam exists at the core of religious, says Sam Hausfather, head of the Lore Tseyyors Tikkan Olam Committee at Congregation Beth HaTephila, a Reform congregation in Asheville. Making a difference to others, to the community and to the world becomes central to daily life.

"In every religion, tikkan olam is something built into you because so many of the stories and holidays emphasize that we were once slaves in Egypt," Hausfather says. "It's our responsibility to work for a better world so other people don't experience that struggle."

Meeting needs

Volunteers from Asheville's Congregation Beth HaTephila prepare and serve lunch for up to 100 homeless people every month at the Veterans' Restoration Quarters, a program of Asheville Buncombe Community Christian Ministry. Photo courtesy of Congregation Beth HaTephila

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Evergreen Church

The Grace of God
By Rev. John McCoury
Roan Mountain, Tennessee

This month we will look at James (2:5-7): The emphasis here is on God’s choosing, and this involves the grace of God. If salvation were on the basis of merit, it would not be by grace. Grace implies God’s sovereign choice of those who cannot earn and do not deserve His salvation (Eph. 1:4-7 and 2:8-10). God saves us completely on the basis of the work of Christ on the cross and not because of anything that we have or have not done. God ignores national differences (Acts 10:34). The Jewish believers were shocked when Peter went to the Gentile household of Cornelius, preached to the Gentiles, and even ate with them. The topic of the first church council was, “Must a Gentile become a Jew to become a Christian?” (Acts 15). The answer the Holy Spirit gave them was, “No!” In the sight of God, there is no difference between Jew and Gentile when it comes to salvation (Rom. 10:13-15) or salvation (Rom. 10:13-15).

God also ignores social differences. Masters and slaves (Eph. 6:9) and rich and poor are alike to Him. James teaches us that the grace of God must be the rich man poor because he cannot depend on his wealth, and it makes the poor man rich because he inherits the riches of grace in Christ (Rom. 1:9-11). The Lord “hath respect of persons” and is not partial (James 2:1-9). He brings down the proud, and raises up the lowly. He casteth down the haughty (James 4:10). The Lord is the God of all, and He will give everyone the reward according to his works (Rom. 4:11). He is the One who is able to save us from sin and unrighteousness (2 Pet. 2:9). He is the One who will judge the living and the dead (2 Cor. 5:10). He is the One who will judge the world (Rev. 20:11-15).

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope through the power of the Holy Ghost. — Romans 15:13

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

Walnut Grove Church

Take Him Out and Stone Him
By Kurt Sommer
Every County

Deut. 17:18 “If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, 19 his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. 20 They shall say to the elders, 21 ‘This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard.’ 22 Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid.”

There are a lot of difficult passages in the OT that are thrown in the Christian’s face as being inconsistent with a loving God. This is one of them. I hope we shed light on this passage as well as others later this year because I Tim. 1:16 tells us: All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

And, 1 Pet. 3:15 says: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have, but do this with gentleness and respect,”

So why was this drastic action taken over a rebellious son, and why did all the men of the community (many of whom may have liked the young man) have to have his blood on their hands too? I think for several reasons.

First, for proper motivation. The pain that would have followed such a drastic action would certainly make the man resolved, as they walked back to their tents, to do whatever it took to make sure their own sons didn’t follow the same path of rebellion and receive the same fate.

Second, evaluation. If I were one of those men, I’m sure I would think back on what I knew of the young man and wonder could I have done something in his life to turn him around when I had the chance?

And third, Proclamation. The stoning proclaimed that rebellion was neither a “sting” nor an inevitable part of growing up. It was simply not to be tolerated. If it still seems too harsh, remember that when God starts a new work it is vitally important that people realize that He is “covenant” in His standards. Here a new nation was being birthed and they would be the standard for the whole world to follow. Therefore, they must start our pace. Remember when another new work was started, the Church, Aaron and Sippai, who led to the Holy Spirit were also supernaturally aided on the spot. (Acts 5)

No, what is different today? Paul tells us that the punishment for rebellion is always death (Rom. 3:23)

But because another son, the perfect son, because sin and took my place on the cross—I am forgiven completely. The standard for sin hasn’t changed, but Christ has paid the price and for that we should be eternally grateful.


Kurt Sommer is pastor of Walnut Grove Church.

Happy New Year 2019

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

-HO. Hirt, ERIE Founder

Never Easy
By Carolyn Dort
Mitchell County

While grief is never easy, this is the time of year when grief becomes almost impossibly difficult. The holidays seem to intensify the sense of loss, which is often due to heightened expectations that often accompany special days. The empty place at the dinner table, the gifts that are no longer purchased, the altered or abandoned traditions all contribute to a feeling of depression. In spite of the spirit of excitement, bright holiday decorations, and anticipation of the big day, those in grief struggle to be present and to participate, and often pressed by putting on a mask to disguise the grief. In last month’s issue I wrote about GriefShare which is an ministry of Western Carolina Church in Spruce Pine. Surviving the Holidays and Loss of A Spouse are both designed to address some of these feelings. Each is a single 2-hour presentation.

Since then with much prayer, consideration, and counsel, I feel the Lord is leading our team to start up GriefShare again. Loss of A spouse will be offered by Western Carolina Church on Thursday, January 17 at 6:00pm in the church wing. Participants will view the video presentation, followed by discussion for those who desire. While sharing is encouraged, it is not required, so just listening is an option. A take-home journal is available for each person attending. There is no charge to attend, and light refreshments will be served. For additional information or to RSVP, please contact Carolyn Dort at the church office 828-761-4433 or 828-487-1437. This seminar is open to everyone, whether or not you have lost a spouse. While RSVP is suggested, it is not necessary in order to attend, so please join us.

Carolyn Dort makes her home in Ledger and is a teacher of Exceptional Children at Greenlee Primary School. She is a widow with two sons and five grandchildren. She is a member of Western Carolina Church in Spruce Pine.

Billy Graham Answers:

Q. Did people in Biblical times celebrate New Year’s Day, like we do now? Or is it only a holiday that doesn’t have any religious significance, but just celebrates the beginning of another year?

A. Every year, God’s people in Old Testament times celebrated the end of the old year and the beginning of the new one (just as people of Jewish heritage do today). Their calendar was somewhat different from ours, and this celebration always occurred in the fall.

For most people today, New Year’s probably has little religious significance; it only marks the beginning of another year. However, people in Bible times saw the end of one year and the beginning of another very differently. For them, it marked the end of the annual harvest and reminded them of God’s goodness to them. In fact, they celebrated one of their major annual festivals then, setting aside time to thank God for His kindness and mercy (see Leviticus 23:16).

What will be the end of this year and the beginning of the new one mean to you? Will you celebrate it as so many do, not even thinking about God or how He wants them to live? Or will you pause to look back over the past year, thank God for His goodness, and seek His forgiveness for the ways you failed? Most of all, will you pause and commit the coming year — and your whole life — to Jesus Christ? Only God knows what the future holds, either for us as individuals or for our world. But when we know Christ, we know we belong to Him, and we are securely in His hands forever. Let the Psalmist’s words be your guide: “Commit your way to the Lord, trust in Him” (Psalm 37:5).

Find peace with God today.
**Richmond Community College Sign 2+2 Articulation Agreement for Human Services Program Students**

By Nina Mastandrea

**Avery County**

**BANNER ELK, N.C.** — In a recent articulation agreement between the two institutions, Richmond Community College human services technology program students will now be able to seamlessly earn their bachelor’s degree online at Lees-McRae College.

The transfer student agreement allows Richmond Community College students who have completed their Associate of Applied Arts degree in human services technology to transfer into the human services program at Lees-McRae and earn their Bachelor of Arts and Applied Science (B.A.A.S) with ease.

Transferring with 65 to 68 credits fulfills the general education core curriculum in the Lees-McRae online program. Completing the core curriculum allows incoming students to focus on the courses needed for their human services degree.

"Thanks to the outstanding education a student receives at Richmond Community College, we know that students are well prepared to complete a rigorous undergraduate degree through Lees-McRae College," Provost and Dean of Faculty Todd Lids said. "We are proud to partner with Richmond CC and be a part of a student’s journey to a career or to advancement in the human services field." Human services-related job growth is expected to be more than 13 percent through 2024, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Jobs in the human services field can be found in mental health, child care, family services, social services, rehabilitation, correction, and educational agencies.

"This career field is vital to a caring and helpful society, and I am glad we can contribute to the preparation of current and future professionals here in North Carolina and beyond," Lids added.

Richmond Community College, located in Hamlet, North Carolina, offers educational opportunities, cultural enrichment, and workforce development and training that enhances the quality of students’ lives and supports economic development in Richmond and Scotland counties, according to the RCC website.

Nineteen in the Blue Ridge Mountains of western North Carolina, Lees-McRae College is a private, four-year college offering diverse baccalaureate and graduate degrees, strong athletic programs, and an outstanding facility. Field-specific career preparation and hands-on learning enhance the broad core curriculum. For more information, please visit www.lcnc.edu or call 328-898.5241.

Nina Mastandrea is the center manager of Lees-McRae College.

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**Hold Dental Bus Clinic in Spruce Pine**

By Rev. Don Ford

**Mitchell County**

The Medical/Dental Bus Ministry of the North Carolina Baptist Men began in 1989 to assist with the physical and spiritual needs of residents across our state. North Carolina Baptists on Mission offer the use of the mobile dental units to churches and service organizations within NC to assist people without insurance, the elderly, minority groups and more.

On Saturday, December 1, 2018, Spruce Pine First Baptist Church hosted a dental clinic in Mitchell County. Liberty Hill Baptist Church prepared breakfast while SPFBC provided lunch for those in attendance. Over 30 individuals including dentists, hygienists, nurses, interpreters, counselors, and other assistants volunteered their services and time for dental screenings. The Mitchell Baptist Association sponsored the clinic covering costs for patient materials, dental bus mileage, and driver lodging.

There are currently two mobile dental units serving North Carolina. The newest vehicle was placed into service only a few months ago. Each unit is equipped with two dental exam rooms. Treatments include restorations (fillings) and extractions. A third unit was recently retired after 20 years of service and permanently located in Murphy, NC to serve as a stationary clinic for the 5 most Western NC Counties.

Many thanks to the churches and volunteers who helped to serve 34 patients at the Mitchell County clinic. A big “thank you” to Dr. Taylor Townsend, Dr. Charlie Nash, Drs. Kyle and Rebekah Duncan and their staff who made the clinic such a success.

Rev. Don Ford, Clinic Coordinator Don Ford has served God as a minister for over 40 years. He and his wife Deborah live in Spruce Pine and have one daughter who lives in Atlanta, GA.

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Hebrews 11:1

**New faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.**
History records for all to see that nations have been destroyed not by enemies from without, but by the destruction that is evidenced by immorality, dishonesty, greed, and pride from within.

Apparently, some of us living today have come to the point where we do not know where Christianity stops and where modern society begins. The good life has become inseparable from the maximum possible consumption of things. The problem is a mixed conception of Christianity. We accept a religion in general, presided over by a God in general, with extremely hazy ideas about what it all means. But since this seems to be the popular view, we are quite undisturbed about it and live about in our little bubbles, blissfully unaware of the frightening tragedy occurring.

The Bible many times warns that toward the end of history as we know it, there will be a return to pre-flood conditions of gross sin and wickedness. The Scripture says concerning the people of Noah's day, "Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." (Genesis 6:5)

Christ referred to this condition in Matthew 24 when He said, "As the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day the flood came upon them and took them away, so also will be the coming of the Son of Man" (Matthew 24:36-37).

As the great Day of Judgment draws nearer, we see these very things happening about us. It would seem that we were reading from an article in a modern newspaper a few days ago as we read Paul's Thessalonians to Timothy: "But know this, that in the last days perils will come. For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, slanderers of good men, fools, faithless, heartless, envious,壑, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away." (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

This certainly leaves no room for doubt as to what the world is going to look like just before the climactic event that will ring the curtain down on history. People are asking—am I living in the closing days? I do not know. The closing days of history may be a hundred years or a thousand years from now. But there are many indications that we are now living in the closing period of history, and we are warned from the Scriptures that we are to repent and return to Christ as that day draws nearer.

All ancient civilizations have gone down to destruction through sin. Rome went on a gigantic spree toward the end of her history—just as the world has been doing for the past several years. Nero committed suicide in 68 A.D. Rome's overthrown came more than 400 years later. One moment, almost omnipotent power was within Rome's grasp; and the next, destruction.

The world today is heading the same way. Immorality and uncleanliness occupied the minds of Roman rulers and of satanists; so today, we see a world saturated with sexual sins in places high and low.

A few years ago, the sensibilities of intelligent, keen-minded citizens were shaken, and startled. Now familiarity has bred a measure of contempt. Prophet are of no avail, and they are ignored by those who have deliberately chosen the way of sin and death. The days of Noah are returning to the earth, and a catastrophe is great and terrible please those who refuse to enter into the ark of salvation, which is Jesus Christ.

Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. Here was one of the great men of all the ages, God's chosen man, the one person who had remained true to God throughout. One, Noah's friends and relatives who believed as God died before the flood came.

The carpenters who helped him build the ark were themselves eventually lost. This is a warning to millions who belong to the church today. You are helping to build the church but have never really known Christ as Lord and Savior. We are reminded of the words of our Lord when He warned that there would be those in the latter day crying out, "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you, depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" (Matthew 7:22-23)

There are thousands of people today who think they are saved, who have a false notion that they can be a Christian and live any way they like. In their manner of living, they are indistinguishable from the world. It is true that they attend church with some regularity and do many good works. But they are resting in the comfort of being in "the name of Jesus" for their salvation, and they are not doing the works of faith that are required as an evidence of one's relationship with God.

The Bible says there will come a day when we shall call upon God, but He will not answer. There will come a day when we will seek God, but we will not find Him. The Bible reads: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). The Bible warns against hardening our hearts against God. The Bible warned the people of Noah's day, "My Spirit shall not continue with man forever." (Genesis 6:3). You cannot come to Jesus Christ unless the Spirit of God brings you, and unless you yield to the prompting and urging of the Holy Spirit. I beg of you to come to Christ while there is yet time.

Outside the ark, men and women were struggling for their lives, clutching at pieces of driftwood until the pitiless hand of death reached up and drew them down beneath those cruel and relentless waves. All were lost. There was not one soul outside the ark who did not perish. They had had their chance but turned it away. There were hundreds that day who were close to the ark and yet lost. This fearful scene from the Bible is a prototype, a shadow of that day of judgment that lies before our world. The Bible says, "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment." (Hebrews 9:27)

The ark is a symbol of Jesus Christ. In this day, when the clouds of judgment are beginning to gather, Christ is the refuge. You must cross the threshold and pass into the ark. Accept Christ now as your Savior before it is too late.

Are you in? You may be close, you may be outside. The universal and terrible storm is coming. The days of Noah may be upon you. Are you ready for the Day of Judgment?

Even if the world does not end in your lifetime in a catastrophic judgment, the moment you die will be the end of the world for you. The world that you live in will die with you. Are you ready for death? Are you ready for the judgment that is about to come the moment you step out into eternity?

History repeats itself. What happened thousands of years ago will happen again. There is a possibility it could happen in this century or even in this decade. However, while there is life, there is hope. The Spirit of God is knocking faithfully at the door. If we repent, mend our ways and throw off our sins, we can yet be used of God to bring healing and help to a dying civilization.

Let me ask you—do you know Christ? He is the only One who can redeem us. But before He can come in, we must be broken, repented and contrite. The Lord will not despise a broken and a contrite heart. The Bible says that during Israel's crisis, God sought for a man who would stand in the gap, but He found none (see Ezekiel 22:26). Will you be one who will stand in the gap to stop the flood tide of evil that is deluging the world?

Let Christ into your heart today. You can then be saved and be inside the ark. The storms of judgment can break; but it will never touch you, because you are in Christ Jesus. And there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:1). ©1960 BEGA

Unless otherwise noted, Scriptures verses are taken from the Holy Bible, New King James Version.
Cataba River Baptist Association—The churches of CRBA are concerned with the vast drug abuse problem in Burke county and we want to help by beginning a Celebrate Recovery ministry. If God has put this type of burden on your heart and you are willing to help us begin and lead this ministry, please give us a call at 842-437-0137. You may also contact Bobby at crba@crba.us. Your prayers are greatly appreciated.

Great Hope Seventh-day Adventist Church—The Forks over Knives movie will be shown on February 1, 2023, at the Rock School’s Waldemans Room (downstairs) in Valdese, Thursday January 2, 7:00 pm. This film has something for your life! The film features leading experts on health with people talking for years. Do yourself a favor for the new year and see this movie and invite others to come, too. A love offering will be taken to cover expenses.

Westward Destined Classes will again be offered for 6 Mondays, January 7 through February 11, 6:00 pm. Scientific evidence will be shared in a group setting, along with healthy and tasty food samples. These classes are worth much but are offered free at the Great Hope Seventh-day Adventist Church at 901 Davis Street, Valdese, NC. 28690.

Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church: The Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church’s former Community Service Thrift Shop is RE-OPENING at The Giving Heart Thrift Shop! Located at 402 East Main Street in Glen Alpine, N.C. 28604. The new store will be open on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Like us on Facebook @thegivingheartthriftshop

The Giving Heart Thrift Shop will be offering gently used & brand new clothing of all sizes and for all ages! As well as, furniture and small home goods!

God’s Closet—Morganton FREE Shop Day! When: Sunday, February 3, 2023, from 2:00 p.m. until 5:00 p.m. When: Monday, February 13, 2023—Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church 218/1 Janeswade Road, Morganton, N.C. 28655

Town of Valdese—Movies at the Rock—The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe January 11, at 7:00pm.

The Italian School of Catholic Teachers: SELMI in Torre Della (Valeum Valdenses Italy) organizes a second six-week intensive language course for beginners (see attachment for more information) from Monday 18th of January to Sunday 23rd of March 2019. If you are interested in this activity, send us an email at ruscello@legalit.org. This is a great opportunity to learn Italian and meet new people.

McDowell County

McDowell United Methodist Church—New Community Outreach Benefits McDowell Families with Children

Teens for Christ B.E.A.R. Closet (Boys & Girls Youth Of Our Community) Beginlizing Wednesday, August 3rd, 2016 the youth group at Cross United Methodist Church located at 85 West Cross Street in Marion will launch a new outreach ministry benefiting families with children. The Outreach will be open the 1st and 3rd Wednesday of each month from 5:00 PM – 6:30 PM and the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays 9:00 am to 1:00 pm. For more information or assistance in getting help please call (288) 803-8790 or email TeensForChristBEARCLOSET@yahoo.com.

Ashville Street Baptist Church is in need of a pianist. Please call Lynn Dunette at 828-438-2401 for more information.

First Baptist Morganton currently has 25 adult choir robes that they would like to make available to another church. If your church is interested please contact David Thayer at 828-437-2944 ext 16

First Baptist of Marion—Belie Mission Trip February 5-12, 2023 RBC’s relationship with the Baptist of Belize will continue this winter by sending a mission team to San Pedro Sula and La Ceiba. The trip will feature a new partnership with the church. Funds to cover our ministry costs are already raised. However, each team member provides their own travel costs, which is estimated at $31,000 per person, covering airfare, ground transportation, lodging, international travel insurance, T-shirt, and most meals. For more details and information, promotional flyers are available near the Chapel or see Scott Hagaman. A minimum of 10 people is needed to launch this mission trip with a maximum number of 25. A valid passport is required, which should not expire within 6 months of travel. Registration Form and 11000

Mitchell County

Bear Creek Baptist Church—Women’s Prayer Breakfast Jan 11th, 8:30am at DT’s Celebrate Recovery

This is a Christ and Biblical Based Program giving hip and help for men, women and families suffering from addiction. Any questions contact Josh Wise at 335-0061

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

Mitchell County Baptist Association—Happy New Year—in partnership with the Mitchell County Chamber of Commerce, we are excited to announce the opening of the Mitchell County Chamber of Commerce Visitors Center.

The Visitors Center will be located at 2020 N. Main St., Alexander NC. 28002. The center will be open Monday through Friday from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. The center will provide information about the Mitchell County area, including accommodations, dining, attractions, events, and more.

The Visitors Center will also offer a gift shop, where visitors can purchase souvenirs and other items related to Mitchell County. The gift shop will be open Monday through Friday from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm.

In addition to the visitors center and gift shop, the Mitchell County Chamber of Commerce will be hosting a variety of events throughout the year, including the annual Mitchell County Fair and the Mitchell County Fall Festival. These events will provide opportunities for visitors to experience the local culture and community.

We look forward to welcoming you to Mitchell County and hope you will enjoy all that the area has to offer.

Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church—Announcement

Happy New Year—Baptist Mission Rally: Baptist Men Region 9, Tuesday, February 19, 2019 Newbridge Baptist Church at 150 Elkswood Pl., San Pedro Sula, N.C.—Meal at 5:45 and Program at 6:50 P.M. We will be hosting a Baptists Men’s Mid-year meeting on February 25, 2019 at 7:00 PM. First Baptist Church in Spruce Pine, N.C. Baptists Men’s Day is January 27, 2019 to recognize the awesome work the Men do in the churches.

Sincerity of Human Life Sunday will be observed on January 20th.

Mitchell County Chamber-YaYa Village We are announcing the Opening of YaYa Village Commercial Storage Kitchen! We’ve realized there’s a gap that needs to be filled between the production of local food and their consumption. That’s why we started YaYa Village Commercial Shared Use Kitchen so that we could provide a commercial area at a reasonable cost for locals trying to sell their products. This way we strive to help community entrepreneurs with their part-time business.

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So, if you have a product you want to market and sell (like jams, jellies, baked goods etc.) or if you need a commercial kitchen for catering, having a private Pop Up dinner, hosting a class or whatever you’re imaging; we hope our Shared Use Kitchen can provide you with a solution.

Come visit our space, get an application and let us talk to see what you have in mind!

We are also serving Lunch on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12:00 pm to 2:00 pm. Sign up for 2019 After Hours! Business After Hours are held to provide an opportunity for Chamber members to network while allowing the Member to sponsor a chance to address and/or showcase their facilities. Business After Hours are held monthly to bi-monthly, and generally on a Tuesday or Thursday (unless other arrangements are made). The Member sponsor and the Chamber representative will coordinate the event. After Hours begins at 4:30 pm and ends at 6:30 pm (unless other arrangements are made). Send your questions and reserve your month by emailing Kelly at knops@mitchellcountychamber.org.

2019 After Hours

January: David on the Corner, Rakeversville, NC February: OPEN March: OPEN August: OPEN May: Lee’s Catering & Catering, Rakeversville, NC June-November: OPEN We do not have After Hours in December.

Book Signing with June Devo Hohman, author of “Murder on Main Street’s” newest book. This book will launch at the Market on Oak January 12th. June will be at the Market on Oak from 11:00 am until 1:00 pm.

“Arms in the 1920’s is a city with two faces. By day, it’s a dashing beacon of America’s Jazz Age. At night, it’s a city of secrets and lies. Prohibition takes hold, speakeasies and illicit distilleries spring up alongside lavish mansions. Nothing can slow the influx of tourists thirsty for strong liquor— or quell the greed of those eager to provide it.”

“Aoga Between the two worlds, this two very different men, beautiful wealthy Lady Strickland throws herself into re-building her grandparent’s Art Deco hotel while revealing in everything the city’s nightlifes has to offer a blonde bombshell flapper. When her shy, unsucessful sister is caught up in Miami’s vicious mob underworld, Liza turns to the doctor she’s loved for years. But it may be up to a young pilot and former restroom to save her sister and salvage the legacy her family.”

www.mcrnews.com

January 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 28
Street Ministry in Burnsville. Hello, I’m Roc Robinson a local Christian Rapper/ Street Minister out of Burnsville NC. I have had my ministry going since 2015 and now working on my 3rd album. My ministry host events to raise money for different local nonprofits and to share testimony. I also go around to these different churches and share testimony/perform for free or a love offering. I have done shows at Higgins, Monti Piemonte, Griffich Chapel, and at the Burnsville Town Center. My music is produced by Ryan Aagin at The Bridge Church there in Spruce Pine. I am looking to expand my testimony of how thru Christ to our neighboring counties than states. I am letting. If you would like to talk more about my ministry and aim in our community you can contact me on my cell or email. I am going to link to my first Christian Rap Tracks Called “Vision” thanks and God Bless Y’all!

Mitchell Vance Substance Abuse Stand Alert!

Mayland Community College - Contact Allen for January Info.
Allen Cook
Director, Mayland Small Business Center
Mayland Community College
(828) 766-1295
acook@mayland.edu

As part of our spreading “Good News”, we have provided these pages for information for your organization or church that would be of interest to the public. I send out reminders in a group email to remind those of you who have requested it, or used this service regularly. If you wish to be added to the email please email me at barbarah@brcnews.com. One of the things any of you using this service needs to remember is that we publish only once a month and the info has to be submitted a month ahead. When sending info please send to my email: barbarah@brcnews.com.

A great way to get your meeting dates, events, and other info to the public.
The Old Cost
By Timothy W. Iron
Barke County

Today, in an effort to keep my current wardrobe from deteriorating too far, I run through the bundles of items tucked away in storage, layering them together into the well-worn pockets of my everyday uniform, landing upon an odd feeling shape. Retrieving the metal objects, the curious shape of T-post wire was immediately visible. The edge of the coat was frayed, the cuffs torn in places where they had been exposed to the elements. Many had been in the freezing cold, or daytime blistering summer heat, invariably a tree would fall across a fence, and its immediate repair was required. The jacket had been my companion for those benches-winter nights.

It was always in the sense of finding a "hole" in the fence line. Anytime the call came in, "You've got cows out," the daggie was hit and home the job of finding the livestock; getting them back in, and then repairing the breach in the wire would begin. Each time, the anxiety of fighting time, fearing the loss of one's livelihood from the possibility of animals getting hurt or killed by a car was always present. Directing traffic was always an uncertain side of the job. Yet, it was those times of dread, those tribulations that produced the character of the man I am today. Knowing that those things that once created turmoil today provide me contentment in the darkest of times. In a manner of speaking, I fear less of losing my mind than I did, if they ever come again.

When the seemingly impossible task looms ahead, do we, as so often referenced in the Bible, grip up our join, with faith as our shield, and boldly march forward into the fray? Would we find ourselves, as the Apostle Paul, reflecting back on our lives and finding contentment in all, being one of the reasons I am here, why I am here, and how I am here? "Not that I speak in regard of want, for I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content: I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound, everywhere and in all things: I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer want." - Phil 4:11-12

Pastor Joe's sermon today spoke to the very thing that I had found myself lacking—contentment.

The past few years, since birthing my journey in Christ, there has not been one place where I have not been challenged, often times beyond what I thought possible. To cover the same area of time and the events would have not more than a couple pages of manuscript. But to summarize, it began with moving an entire farm of 20+ years and selling a horse with land. To add to the complexity, since God never makes anything easier than we expect, my learning curve for becoming a new farmer, husband, and father was steep. Many days, out in the freezing cold, or daytime blistering summer heat, there was no escape. Knowing that our ER Teams rarely adhered to the alarms, they kept on working. Not long after, security came through and told staff of an ER nurse who had not tested a test, there was really a fire.

In all my 25+ years working in or around the original building in which any team was housed that night back in the RTP, there had never been a fire in any of our buildings. It was considered the Holy Grail. With each new wave of fire, the worst, but never, again, I repeat never a full-blown fire that caused the overhead sprinkler to engage; but that night was the first.

That was when the world seemed to begin to spin out of control.

During this entire course of 25+ years, any background through the Telecom industry had me from one end of support, research, and beyond. My technical background covered all that was possible in the realm of communications; wavelength, wireless, optical, and data. If anyone could run our team solo, I was one of the few individuals capable. At this point, it may sound as if I am bragging, but the ER Manager and the leadership who allowed me to not be a 'staff' position, the result was over; you would have to quit your job. If God had not put me in this new place, we would have dropped the ball, and our company would have been held liable by hundreds of companies that had our support written within their contract.

During the early course of 25+ years, any background though the Telecom industry had me from one end of support, research, and beyond. My technical background covered all that was possible in the realm of communications; wavelength, wireless, optical, and data. If anyone could run our team solo, I was one of the few individuals capable. At this point, it may sound as if I am bragging, but the ER Manager and the leadership who allowed me to not be a 'staff' position, the result was over; you would have to quit your job. If God had not put me in this new place, we would have dropped the ball, and our company would have been held liable by hundreds of companies that had our support written within their contract.

While the end of the handoffs and calls were closed on my end, I stopped and prayed.

This was truly the work of God, "But why?" I asked.

"Someday, it will become apparent," was the reply.

From working nights for nearly ten years, I had learned that when you are exhausted and need to stay awake, it was important not to eat. You could drink coffee, but that was not an option. I learned to drink water, and I dozed off and through the night.

Before logging in that night, I went to the altar of a nearby church and prayed. In that prayer, I asked God for strength and guidance, to help make it through the night and the next day. The next day at the Trail I had two tours booked, and there was nobody to lead them but me. In other words, I needed all the help I could get. As God would have it, easy was not in the plan.

www.brecnews.com
January 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 30
Religion vs. the Gospel
By Jerry Lewis
AdDowel County

It is so easy, and tempting, to be religious and void of the grace of God that leads to a joyful life. In these comparisons, Tim Keller helps us to see the allure of religion and the freedom of a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Take time to examine yourself on each of these. It's a let to take in--and for many a paradigm shift. When we wander, we wander back into work-oriented salvation—not to grace.

RELIGION: I obey—therefore I am accepted.
The GOSPEL: I am accepted—therefore I obey.

RELIGION: Motivation is based on fear and insecurity.
The GOSPEL: Motivation is based on grateful joy.

RELIGION: I obey God in order to get things from God.
The GOSPEL: I obey God to delight and resemble Him.

RELIGION: When circumstances in my life go wrong, I am angry at God or myself.

I believe, Joe's friends that anyone who is good deserves a comfortable life.
The GOSPEL: When circumstances in my life go wrong, I struggle but I know all my punishment fell on Jesus and that while He may allow this for my training, He will exercise His Fatherly love within my trial.

RELIGION: When I am criticized, I am angry or devastated because it is critical that I think of myself as a 'good person.' Threats to that self-image must be destroyed at all costs.
The GOSPEL: When I am criticized, I struggle, but it is not critical to me to think of myself as a 'good person.' My identity is not built on my record or my performance but on God's love for me in Christ. I can take criticism.

RELIGION: Prayer life consists largely of petition and it only hears up when I am in a state of need.

My main purpose in prayer is control of the environment.
The GOSPEL: Prayer life consists of generous stretches of praise and adoration. My main purpose is fellowship with Him.

RELIGION: My self-view swings between two poles. If and when I am living up to my standards, I feel confident, but then I am prone to be proud and un-sympathetic to those failing people. If and when I am not living up to standards, I feel insecure and inadequate. I'm not confident. I feel like a failure.
The GOSPEL: My self-view is not based on a view of myself as a moral achiever.

In Christ I am simultaneously sinful and yet accepted in Christ. I am so bad He had to die for me and I am so loved He was glad to die for me. This leads me to deeper and deeper humility and confidence at the same time. Neither swaggers nor bullying.

RELIGION: My identity and self-worth are based mainly on how hard I work. How moral I am, and so I must look down on those who perceive as lazy or immoral. I disdain and feel superior to the other.
The GOSPEL: My identity and self-worth are centered on the one who died for His enemies, who was excluded from the city for me. I am saved by grace. So, I can't look down on those who believe or practice something different from me. Only by grace am I what I am. I'm no longer need to win arguments.

RELIGION: Since I look to my own pedigree or performance for my spiritual acceptance, my heart manufactures soils. It may be my talents, my moral record, my personal discipline, my social status, etc. I absolutely have to have them, so they serve as my main hope, meaning, happiness, security, and significance, whatever I may say I believe about God.
The GOSPEL: I have many good things in my life-family, work, spiritual disciplines, etc. But some of these good things are ultimate things to me. None of them are things I absolutely have to have, so there is a limit to how much anxiety, bitterness, and despondency they can inflict on me when they are threatened and lost.

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

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. John 14:6

Tim’s Treasures

...pulling up in the drive that I began eating.
Once I went to bed, I didn’t get up for another 10 hours.

Why had there been such a challenging and to a previous life? Why had the struggle been so great? In the end, it was as if God was showing me what it was to “suffer need.” When we reach the end of our physical life here on earth, we see many of our loved ones face those last few days in extreme pain. As we watch and pray for their relief, we learn that to cross over from this life to the next is not easy.

Jesus was tortured beyond belief, dying a painful death on the cross. His ending was anything but easy. It was as if the whole world had been consumed by fire, and in the end, the veil was torn in two on that day. Unlike certain death, we can trust that when we accept Christ into our lives, we face the end with a promise, that when we pass from this life to the next, we shall live forever more. Yes, to cross that River of Jordan and to reach that far distant shore will be the greatest beginning to an ending we shall know.

Not that I speak of respect for: for I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewithal to be content. I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound, everywhere and in all things, I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound to and to suffer need.

Yes, although we might face in our not so distant future may seem overwhelming, we can take comfort in knowing that we are not alone. We may suffer, we may be tried, we may be abused, we may have plenty, but in all things may we find true contentment. For as someone once said, true contentment is to, “Live above your circumstances.”

May the challenge you face allow you to seek God in greater affections than ever before.
“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

The old jacket still fits, even though it may not be presentable to wear in public, yet it says more of who I am than one might know. To live above our circumstances is what life should be about, and in the end, always giving thanks to God for all that is.

Be content in all that you have.
Thanks: bato God.

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

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I hope everyone had a wonderful Thanksgiving and spent quality time with friends and family. We had our two college students home for the holiday, and ended up spending two days of our four days without power due to the ice storm. It was a little bit of an adventure, and I did learn how to run my generator, but it certainly gave us a renewed appreciation for electricity, and for the electric workers who spent much of their holiday helping to restore power to thousands of homes in our area. Once our power was restored on Sunday evening, it was off to Raleigh for the legislative session.

This week the state Senate passed SB24, Implementation of Voter ID Court, Amendment—https://www.ncleg.net/Sessions/2017Bills/Senate/PDF/SE24p2cd.pdf— in response to North Carolina voters’ widespread support of a Constitutional Amendment requiring photo identification to vote. Senate Bill 24 would create a new “Voter Photo ID” that can be obtained for free at local county boards of election. The bill also allows voters to use a wide range of IDs in place of the Voter Photo ID such as NCDMV Driver’s license or ID Card, US passport, Military or Veterans ID, or a Federal ID Card from a state or local government entity, and several other identification forms. For anyone unable to get a photo ID due to a “reasonable impediment,” they would be able to sign an affidavit and still cast a ballot. There would also be exceptions for religious purposes as well as anyone who was affected by a natural disaster within 100 days of the election. In instances where a person has his or her driver license suspended or revoked, the DMV would be required to send them a special ID card automatically under the bill. I fully expect the bill to pass with very few changes and then sent to the Governor’s desk. Since the bill was sponsored and passed with the help of both parties, I am hoping that the Governor will not veto the bill, essentially vowing the mandate of the 2018 election.

As many of you know, on Election Day, North Carolina voters issued a clear mandate for voter ID by approving a constitutional amendment requiring a photo ID to vote. Despite the fact that the amendment passed with more than 55 percent of the vote, liberal activists are refusing to accept the will of the people, and are actively trying to hijack our democracy by demanding judicial review to cancel the voter ID result. Here are some ID’s that will be acceptable to use if SB24 becomes law:
- NC drivers license.
- NC special identification card or other form of non-temporary ID issued by the DMV.
- US passport.
- NC voter photo identification card.
- Tribal enrollment card issued by a federally recognized tribe.
- Tribal enrollment card issued by a tribe recognized by NC under Chapter 71A that is issued in accordance with a process proposed by the State Board requiring an application and proof of identity equivalent to the process for approving a college or university identification card, and is signed by an elected official of the tribe.
- Student identification card issued by a constituent institution of the University of North Carolina, the North Carolina Community College system, or eligible private postsecondary institutions, if approved by the State Board.
- Employee identification card issued by a state or local government entity, including charter school, if approved by the State Board.
- Drivers license or special identification card issued by another state, D.C., or a territory or commonwealth of the US, only if the voter’s voter registration was within 90 days of the election.

HURRICANE RELIEF: SENATE BILL 823

The N.C. Senate on Wednesday unanimously passed legislation continuing the ongoing Hurricane Florence recovery efforts by appropriating almost $300 million more from the Hurricane Florence Disaster Recovery Fund, with much of that money going to help North Carolina farmers. Senate Bill 823, sponsored by Sen. Harry Brown (R-Onslow) and Sen. Jackson R-Sampson), appropriates $300,836,000 from the Hurricane Florence Disaster Recovery Fund, and $240 million of that will go towards aiding North Carolina farmers struggling to recover in the wake of Hurricane Florence. Agricultural losses are expected to top $1.1 billion. The rest of the money will be appropriated as follows: $23,500,000 to repair and renovate K-12 public school facilities; $15,500,000 to match federal funding to mitigate or mediate coastal storm damage to beaches and dunes; $50,000,000 to purchase mobile health and mental health capabilities; $100,000,000 to provide assistance to commercial fishing assistance; $5,000,000 to provide loans to small businesses affected by Hurricane Florence; $5,000,000 to purchase mobile health and mental health capabilities; and $5,000,000 to purchase mobile health and mental health capabilities.

The bill also provides for a mechanism to address a catastrophic loss of agricultural lands and disaster aid, including disaster aid, and includes a provision for the Governor to seek federal assistance to aid agricultural and small business recovery. The bill also includes a provision for the Governor to seek federal assistance to aid agricultural and small business recovery.

As always, if you have any questions or need assistance with any issues related to state government or any other state issues, please contact your Raleigh office via phone or email. It is an honor to serve you in the state Senate.

NC Senate District 47

Sen. Ralph Hise
Ralph.Hise@ncleg.gov
919-733-3480

NC Senate District 46

Sen. Warren Daniel
Warren.Daniel@ncleg.gov
919-733-7823

On Election Day, November 6, 2018, over 51 percent of North Carolinians passed a constitutional amendment titled Require Photo ID To Vote. In any Senate district, the six counties averaged for approval of Voter ID was over 66 percent, with over 70 percent of voters approving in McDowell, Mitchell, and Rutherford counties, over 60 percent approving in Polk and Yancey counties, and nearly 56 percent approving in Madison County.

In late November, the N.C. General Assembly returned to Raleigh to finish up the work of the 2018 short session. This included enacting enabling legislation for the Voter ID constitutional amendment approved by voters. These measures, two Republicans and one Democrat sponsored and filed Senate Bill 24—Implementation of Voter ID Court Amendment. The bill was discussed, debated, and amended by both Senate and House Republicans and Democrats as it worked its way through the legislative process. The 32-page bill covered a range of issues related to Voter ID, including showing of IDs for certain first-time voters, approval of student and employees ID cards for voting identification, exceptions based on religious objection, reasonable impediment, and natural disaster; rules regarding mail-in absentee ballots; voter education; and notice that fraudulent or false declarations are a Class 1 felony.

Section 1.2 of the bill specifically sets forth the acceptable forms of photo identification for voting identification:
- Any of the following that contains a photograph of the voter and is valid and unexpired, or has been expired for one year or less:
  - NC driver’s license.
  - NC special identification card or other form of non-temporary ID issued by the DMV.
  - US passport.
  - NC voter photo identification card.
- Tribal enrollment card issued by a state or federal recognized tribe.
- Student identification card issued by a constituent institution of the University of North Carolina, a community college, or eligible private postsecondary institutions, if approved by the State Board.
- Employee identification card issued by a state or local government entity, including a charter school, if approved by the State Board.
- Driver’s license or special identification card issued by another state, D.C., or a territory or commonwealth of the US, only if the voter’s voter registration was within 90 days of the election.
- Any of the following that contains a photograph of the voter, regardless of whether the card contains an expiration or issuance date:
  - US military identification card.
  - Veteran identification card issued by the US Department of Veterans Affairs for use at Veterans Administration Medical Facilities.
- For voters over the age of 65, any of the identification cards above that bear a date of expiration that was not expired on the day that the voter reached the age of 65.

For any election held before January 1, 2021, any approved student identification card or employee identification card that does not contain an expiration date would be deemed an acceptable form of photo identification.

The Senate Bill 24—Implementation of Voter ID Court Amendment was sent to the Governor on December 6. Despite the fact that a majority of North Carolinians passed a constitutional amendment requiring voter ID and that the implementing legislation was sponsored by a Democratic senator, along with significant bipartisan support, Gov. Roy Cooper ignored the wishes of the majority of his constituents and vetoed the legislation on December 14. Subsequently, the Senate and House overrode the Governor’s veto, and the bill was enacted into law on December 19. However, contrary to the laws of the Southern Coalition for Social Justice and the North Carolina NAACP filed lawsuits against the legislation. Sen. Hise is now the standard tactic for liberals groups who don’t get their way.

As always, I welcome your thoughts with on issues related to state government by emailing me at Ralph.Hise@ncleg.gov or calling me at 919-733-3480.

Warm regards,

Sen. Ralph Hise
A “rinsiter,” “crucial” New Year

Gov. Roy Cooper saw fit to label 55% of North Carolinians as “rinsiter” and “crucial” as he vetoed voter ID legislation on Dec. 14. The House and Senate met this week to override Gov. Cooper’s ill-advised veto of Senate Bill 824, which will put our state in compliance with our constitutionally-mandated voter ID. The people spoke in November, and we delivered.

On Friday, Gov. Cooper vetoed a bill that would allow liability coverage for Haywood County School buses that must briefly travel out of state. I worked with the Haywood County Schools Superintendent, the Attorney General’s Office, the Dept. of Public Instruction and others for months to create that language.

The General Assembly will reconvene on Dec. 27 to work on the governor’s additional vetoes. Whenever we meet, I will vote to allow the liability coverage Haywood County Schools wanted and the governor denied.

Happy New Year to you, too, Gov. Cooper.

Wasting disease hits Tennessee

The following is a press release from the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.

With the preliminary detection of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in white-tailed deer in western Tennessee, the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission reminds deer hunters of a new rule that prohibits the importation of whole deer carcasses and restricts the importation of specific carcass parts from anywhere outside of North Carolina.

The new rule, which was implemented for the 2018-19 deer hunting season, is an effort on the Commission’s part to prevent the spread of CWD into the state. CWD is a transmissible, always fatal, neurological disease that affects deer and other cervids such as elk, moose and reindeer/caribou.

The rule states that anyone transporting cervid carcass parts into North Carolina must follow processing and packaging regulations, which only allow the importation of:

• Meat that has been boned out such that no pieces or fragments of bone remain;
• Casings with no part of the skull or spinal column attached;
• Antlers, antlers attached to cleaned skull plates, or cleaned skull free from meat, or brain tissue;
• Cleaned lower jawbone(s) with teeth or cleaned teeth; or
• Finished taxidermy products and named hides.

Additionally, all carcass parts or container of cervid meat or carcass parts must be labeled or identified with:
• Name and address of individual importing carcass parts;
• State, Canadian province, or foreign country of origin;
• Date the cervid was killed; and
• Hunter’s license number, permit number, or equivalent identification from the state, Canadian province, or foreign country of origin.

These new restrictions aim to prevent the infectious agent of CWD from contaminating new environments by way of disposal of carcass tissues, particularly those of the brain and spine, as CWD contaminants can persist in the soil for years.

On Friday, officials with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA) announced they were enacting their Chronic Wasting Disease Response Plan following the preliminary detections of CWD in white-tailed deer in Hardeman and Fayette counties, which border the Mississippi state line. TWRA biologists are testing additional deer and are trying to contact the owners who harvested the infected deer.

Out of concern for the serious effects CWD could have on North Carolina’s deer herd, the Commission developed a Chronic Wasting Disease Response Plan in 2003, with subsequent revisions over the years to respond to the disease’s ever-growing spread. The plan identifies and guides the implementation of short-terms (approximately one year) efforts if CWD is detected in the state’s deer herd, or if CWD is detected in deer within 30 miles of its borders. Agency biologists also conduct statewide sampling of deer every year and attempt to sample all deer that show signs of the disease or die of unknown causes.

With Tennessee’s preliminary detection of CWD within its borders, two states bordering North Carolina will have CWD in their deer herds. In Virginia, Shenandoah and Frederick counties, bordering West Virginia, have confirmed cases of CWD.

About Chronic Wasting Disease

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) disease in deer, elk, moose and reindeer/caribou and is always fatal. The source of the disease is an abnormal protein (PrPSc) that collects in the animal’s brain cells. These brain cells eventually burst, leaving behind microscopic empty spaces in the brain matter that give the brain a “spongy” look. This in turn causes behavior changes such as decreased interactions with other animals, listlessness, lowering of the head, a blank facial expression, and walking in a set pattern.

CWD has no known impacts to the health of humans or livestock. However, the Commission recommends people not eat:
• Meat from a deer that looks sick
• Any of the following organs: brain, eyes, spinal cord, spleen, testicles and lymph nodes
• Meat from an animal that tests positive for the disease
• Normal field dressing coupled with boiling out a carcass will remove most (if not all) of these body parts. Cutting away all fatty tissue will remove remaining lymph nodes.

How to Prepare a Deer (Capre and Skull Plate) for Importation to NC

To help hunters better understand how to comply with new regulations, the Commission has posted a video “Preparing a Harvested Deer for Importation to NC,” on its YouTube Channel, which features a demonstration by Taxidermist D. Price of Outback Taxidermy on preparation of a deer carcass for importation into the state.

For more information about CWD, visit the Commission’s CWD web page.

Yancey community tops now total nationwide

Buck in Yancey County got 34 inches of snow as part of the recent winter storm. The community of 2,221 people, located in South Toe, toppled the nation in total snowfall.

Happy New Year

From my family to yours, I hope you have a happy new year.

I look forward to working for you in the up-coming year.

A Year of Accomplishments

This year has been an eventful one in the United States Senate. We’ve gotten a lot done for North Carolina, which weathered devastating natural disasters, including Hurricane Florence. We’ve worked to strengthen our national defenses and fought for our men and women in uniform. And as a nation, we honored the legacy of some incredible American leaders we lost this year.

Forefront in most folk’s minds are the natural disasters that tore through our state. Hurricanes Florence and Michael, and tornadoes in Guildford and Rockingham counties, left untold damage in their wake. They cost many their livelihoods, and some their loved ones. Senator Tillis and I, along with our colleagues in the House and Governor Cooper, have been hard at work securing various recovery funding to help families, individuals, and businesses get back on their feet as soon as possible. Rest assured we will continue our work until the job is done.

I’m proud to have worked on several fronts this year to ensure America has an effective national defense and intelligence community. In January, Congress appropriated essential intelligence tools to keep Americans safe. In May, we confirmed the first female head of the CIA, Gina Haspel. In June, the president signed the 2019 defense spending bill into law, securing nearly $30 billion for North Carolina installations like Fort Bragg, Camp Lejeune, Cherry Point, and others.

North Carolina and North Carolina’s America’s partner, Reverend Billy Graham, Navy war hero, POW, and Arizona Senator John McCain, and the 41st President of the United States, George H.W. Bush. The world came to know all of these leaders for their kindness, generosity of spirit, and devotion to causes bigger than themselves. We could all stand to learn from their shining examples, and we are forever in their debt.

As we move into a new year, I am confident that Congress will continue fighting on behalf of my American people. I’m lucky to have such a great partner in the Senate in Thom Tillis and the North Carolina delegation in the House of Representatives. It’s truly an honor to serve our great state in Congress. Thank you and God Bless.

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The Gospel and Christmas

By Dr. Tom Walker
McDowell County

Christmas is a wonderful time of the year. It goes deeper than presents, evergreen trees, bells, tinsel, singing, and host of other things. The fact of the matter is the very core of Christmas, the heart of Christmas is that Jesus came into this world that He might die in the place of sinners. By doing that, Christ made atonement possible.

The Gospel of Christ primarily has to do with the death, the burial, and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. At the same time, there would have been no death, burial and resurrection if it were not for Christ's virgin birth. It should be noted that Mary the Mother of Jesus was a virgin. Some modern translations translate virgin as a "young woman." That does not go far enough. Mary was a virgin for she had not known a man in a natural, physical way. When she was told she would give birth to Christ she asked the messenger, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" That was Mary's way of declaring she was not pregnant.

Isaiah 7:14 says, "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." Luke 1:27 says, "To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and his mother was called Mary." The Gospel of Christ is dependent upon the virgin birth of Christ to provide the One who could be the source of the "good news." In the virgin birth, the Ancient of Days became a babe in Bethlehem. He who founds in the heavens becomes an infant crying in a cradle. He who made all flesh became fleshed with flesh. The Maker of all became helpless infant. God and man. It was then that Jesus came in the line of Jesus the Christ. This incarnation is a miracle and a marvel.

Never forget the virgin birth is essential to have a Savior for mankind. Why is the virgin birth necessary?

It is Necessary For Jesus To Be God
If you examine Isa 9:3 Jesus is called, "Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace." When Micah speaks of the Messiah in Micah 5:2 he described Him as one "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting to everlasting." To answer the question of why we need a virgin birth, it is really to answer the question of who Jesus is. As Christians have mentioned in this paragraph, Jesus Christ, the Messiah is more than mortal. If Jesus were not the virgin born Son of God, He could not be the Messiah of Israel, or the Savior of all who believe.

It is Necessary For Jesus To Be Human
Notice what the angel Gabriel said to Mary in Luke 1:32-33, "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." Jesus is the rightful heir to the throne of David. Mary was a descendant of King David through her father, Heli. If Jesus had been the biological son of Joseph, he could not have been a rightful heir to the throne of David. Jesus was born of a woman named said from a man named Clovis. That would legally have kept him from the throne. Jesus 2:26 says, "Thus saith the Lord, Whose is man child, a man that shall not prosper is his days; for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling over Israel." It is Necessary For The Reliability Of The Scripture: When you read Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23 is clear that a virgin would bear a son named Immanuel. If Christ was not conceived of a virgin mother, without a human father, the testimony of the Bible would not be true, and the reliability of the Scriptures could be questioned. Since it did happen as prophecy said it would if the Bible is proven to be inspired and reliable. It is completely accurate in all it states.

It is Necessary For Jesus To Be a Sin Bearer For His Own Sins
No man could make an eternal, effective sacrifice for the sins of mankind. All people have sinned (Romans 3:23) and all of us by nature are the children of wrath (Eph. 2:3). Jesus came and lived a sinless life through His divine nature filling the physical body in which He inhabited. Christ offered Himself to God as a lamb without spot or blemish (1 Peter 1:19 and Hebrews 7:27). The sinless life and virgin birth of Christ made it possible for the Sinless One to become our personal Savior.

It is not enough for you to realize intellectually that Christ was born of a virgin. To be ready to go to Heaven when you die or when the Lord comes, you must personally receive Christ as your Savior. Christ can come to live in your heart today and every day. Have you known you are a sinner receive Him as your Savior. John 1:12 declares, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name." EVU

Tom Walker is President of Footsteps Baptist Bible College and Pastor of Zion Hill Baptist Church in Marion, NC.
Marlene’s Meditations

Wisdom Found
By Marlene Hook
Burke County

Proverbs 4:7 Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore, get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.

I sat at my new grandbaby, imprinting her image on my heart. Two months later, her personality is beginning to shine through and her interaction with family offers endless delight. Her body language, habits, and desires rise to the top of my priorities, and more time with her becomes priceless.

In much the same way, I am drawn to the Creator of my soul. His imprint on my heart emerges as top priority, and our relationship a constant, daily interaction. To discover the facets of my relationship with Jesus Christ and my Father, and to spend more time with Him, remains at the front of my mind. The Bible, much like tests and face-to-face video, fills the void until I can be in my Savior’s presence.

Like noticing a newborn’s uniqueness, one startling and clear observation from studying the Bible rises to the surface. The people in its ancient pages share some obvious similarities to us today. Clearly, biblical characters seem to match modern conflicts and dramas in their emotions, reactions and circumstances. Hatred, deep love, jealousy, anger, envy, and determination look and act the same way as they have for thousands of years. Bible roles that include motherhood, fatherhood, extended family, leadership, husband and wife, and a myriad of other relationships operate in any millennium with matching vocabulary. And life repeats many of the same circumstances such as birth, death, miracles, and tragedies, whether the year is 3 BC or 2018 AD.

God created mankind with skills and abilities to experience a myriad of cultures, industrial advancements, and advances in all facets of life. But, He keeps our emotions, reactions, roles, and relationships within the same realm of possibilities as in Adam and Eve, the first humans. Thus, God enables us to study their stories, growing wisdom. This standardization of emotions, roles, circumstances, and thinking simplifies the processes of realizing the messages from the Bible. Their stunning victories and despairing defeats speak to us, and we understand their wisdom more quickly because we have experienced the same emotions, roles, and circumstances. Coming from the same viewpoint of life shortens the words needed to help us assimilate the Bible’s messages.

Recently, a young woman asked on Facebook, “What is the best advice you can give?” My answer (adapted for this article) hopefully reflects how God created mankind with a sifter that facilitates our growth in grace and knowledge. (2 Peter 3:15) The acrostic is WISDOM.

W-Who in the Bible matches your seed or challenge? Find him or her and listen to their messages.
Romans 15:4
I-Incorporate biblical concepts into all facets of life. This helps us to prepare for the storms.
Colossians 3:4
S-See the bigger picture. As a Christian, our lives are distinctly detailed by our Redeemer, so relax and release control.
Phil 1:6, Jeremiah 29:11, 2 Samuel 22:33, Colossians 3:3, etc.
D-Dare to allow emotions to rule the expression of your intellect and spiritual gifts. When we focus on God, He rules the expression of our intellect and spiritual gifts.
2 Chronicles 20:12, Philippians 2:5
O-Observe the Lord’s working in our lives. Focus is then transferred from ourselves to God. Our minds then prepare to receive His answer, and our eyes open to biblical thinking. Ask yourself: What is the Lord teaching me about Himself through my life experiences? Proverbs 3:6
M-Memorize the Bible and teach your children to do the same. The Holy Spirit has a foundation to use it in His capacity as Teacher and Comforter. John 15:26

After studying Bible women for ten years, I realize that the messages of all biblical characters offer spiritual richness and depth. I can relate to similar circumstances. This ability to identify with them enhances the process for acquiring God’s wisdom. Our emotions, interests, abilities, and skills point us to God, and He designs the very fabric of our lives to show Himself to us.

When pictures of my granddaughter come through my text, my world stops on its axes as I enlarge the picture, save it to my album, and adore her tiny cherubic face. When we pursue the God who places us in the palm of His hands, and examine the names of His chosen ones, when we stop everything we’re doing to dwell on His working in our lives, and when we place Him as our top priority, that is W-I-S-D-O-M!

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Marlene Hook is a regular contributor to Blue Ridge Christian News. Her passion is to delve deeply into the truths of Bible women and to discuss those in Bible Studies called Backstage Pass to Bible Women. She and her husband discover joy, nurture, and challenge in their church. Her contact is marlenehook@bellsouth.net
Dear Dave,

My name is 75, and I’m the executor of her estate. She has $500,000 in retirement accounts, and the only debt she has is around $70,000 on her mortgage. Most of her money is in the stock market, with only $20,000 in a money market account, and this worries me. She lives well within her means, so am I wrong to be concerned? Also, do you think she should go ahead and pay off her mortgage? Keith

Dear Keith,

Yes, I would recommend she go ahead and pay off the mortgage. If she can do that at age 75, and still have $410,000 left, that’s the way to go.

Now, in the stock market at her age sounds like a stock to you. I don’t think it’s a bad thing at all. It’s not what the typical financial planner tells you to do. For the most part, they’ll tell you to get super conservative with your money as you get older. But from what you’ve said, she’s not going to use this money. She’s going to use the income from this money. So, the money going to be left alone. If she’s in good mutual funds, and not single stocks, I’m not worried about her.

Let’s pay off the mortgage, and then she can start taking her income off the remaining. With the house payment out of the way, she won’t need as much in terms of income, because she won’t be sending money to the bank to pay the note on the house anymore. I’m comfortable with that. I’m 58, and I’m 100 percent into stock through mutual funds. I don’t have anything else, and I really don’t ever plan on changing that.—Dave

Dear Dave,

What happens to my Roth 401(k) when I change jobs and go to a company that doesn’t offer this type of investment savings account? How should you proceed in this situation? Jamie

Dear Jamie,

Anytime you leave one company for another, you should always roll your 401(k) from your former employer into an IRA (Individual Retirement Account). If it’s a traditional IRA, you roll it to a traditional IRA. If it’s a Roth IRA, you roll it to a Roth IRA. You would choose your own mutual funds, and you would manage your own accounts, with the help of a financial advisor of your choosing.

When it comes to choosing a financial advisor, my advice is to find someone with the heart of a teacher. A good financial advisor will help you make informed decisions about your money, and they will explain all aspects of your investments until you fully understand everything. It’s short, a quality advisor will never encourage you to invest in something you don’t understand.

Also, look for someone with the ability to assess your overall retirement picture. You need someone who will help you map out a complete retirement plan, and your advisor should be able to explain the big picture and provide a comprehensive, easy-to-understand strategy for achieving your retirement goals.—Dave

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

Making the Most Of Your Opportunities In This New Year

By Pastor Steve Williams

Mitchell County

Howdy Folks, and a Happy New Year. All of us could say we have missed opportunities in our life last year. It might have been a good buy on a car, house, or some investment.

True Story: Some years ago, at a recent area along the East Coast, a small community was having an open town meeting about some financial problems that they were facing. Among the two dozen or so people was one man, no one seemed to know who he was. Then he thought he was apparently visiting in that area and had just dropped in on the meeting. He started to make a comment on various projects as they were considered, but he was quickly interrupted, so, for the rest of the time, he kept quiet and still, and he left early. Just as he went someone arriving late came in, & said breathlessly, “What was he doing here? Is he going to help us?” The rest of them said, “Who are you talking about? Who was that man?” The person who had just arrived said, “You mean you don’t know? That was John D. Rockefeller! His yacht is in our harbor. Didn’t you get his help? In despair someone said, “No, we didn’t get his help, we didn’t know who he was!” What a missed opportunity.

Have you ever wanted to kick yourself because you missed a golden opportunity? As Christians God is allowing us to enter into a New Year and I believe we need to take advantage of every opportunity that He gives us! Think about it. How many times did we miss opportunities to make a Positive Difference in Someone’s Life, or to be a Blessing to Someone Who’s Hurting? How many opportunities did we miss to Witness to a Lost Friend? How many missed opportunities to Minister to our spouse or Children because we were too preoccupied? Many of us missed an opportunity to make an eternal difference in a person’s life because we failed to seize the moment. Has an opportunity ever knocked on your door and you were so caught up in other things that it slipped through your fingers? I’m convinced that it has happened to all of us. But I pray that it will stop, and that we would wake up to the opportunities that will show up in our lives this coming year. Andy Stanley made the statement in his book “Visioncasting.” We “Don’t need to pray for more Miracles, we just need to be more sensitive to the opportunities that God brings our way.”

AMEN! Why is it that some people seem to take advantage of the opportunities that come their way, while others allow them to pass them by? It’s easy to say, “Well, they were just lucky.” I don’t think luck has anything to do with it, they were just more sensitive to the opportunity God gave them! I’ll never forget the story about the shoe salesmen that went to Africa. He was there two weeks & he wrote back a letter saying, “Please bring me home, nobody wears shoes here...” They sent another salesman in his place and in a couple of weeks, he sent a letter back to the company saying, “Please send all the shoes you can, because nobody wears shoes here...”

We must realize that we have the power to be a blessing in someone’s life even today! This coming year you will have opportunities showing up all around you, take advantage of them—don’t wait. So many people are waiting on the big thing to come around to do. Other people say “I’m waiting on God to show me something, while they are already surrounded by so many needs of others. Don’t wait for the day to be, but be the day. You be a blessing. Be faithful in the little things that God puts in your life. Remember little is much when God is it. Building a great life for Christ is like building a house, you build it one block at a time. Touch a life today, tomorrow and the next day, and the next. The Bible says in Ephesians 5:16-17 “Redesigning the time, because the days are evil.” Therefore be ye wise not without wisdom, but understanding what the will of is.“ I believe God’s will is for us to take advantage of the opportunities He gives us each day. Who will you touch in this coming year?

Words of Wisdom for the New Year

• No matter what your past, your future is spotless. N/A
• Most successes are built on failures. N/A
• Obstacles are those things you see when you take your eyes off of God. N/A
• There’s a place for people with no problems, it’s called a cemetery. N/A
• Be a turtle: he makes progress when he sticks his neck out. N/A
• Start the day by asking yourself what’s possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible. N/A

Something to think about:

God wants a part of every little bit, every tiny, tiny bit, thing in your day. But the question is, will He let us?

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

Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord thy God, he is it that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Deuteronomy 31:6
JUST ONE REQUEST

Dear Master for this coming year
Another year I enter
Its history unknown;
Oh, how my feet would tremble
To tread its paths alone!
But I have heard a whisper;
I know I shall be blest;
"My presence shall go with thee,
And I will give thee rest."
What will the New Year bring me?
I may not, must not know;
Will it be love and rapture,
Or loneliness and woe?
Hush! Hush! I hear His whisper;
I surely shall be blest;
"My presence shall go with thee,
And I will give thee rest."
--Unknown Author

HIS UNFAILING PRESENCE

Just one request I bring:
I do not pray for happiness,
Or any earthly thing—
I do not ask to understand
The way Thou leadest me,
But this I ask: Teach me to do
The thing that pleaseth Thee.
I want to know Thy guiding voice,
To walk with Thee each day.
Dear Master make me swift to hear
And ready to obey.
And thus the year I now begin
A happy year will be—
If I am seeking just to do
The thing that pleaseth Thee.
--Unknown Author
The Beauty of Brokenness

By Joyce Meyer

There’s a story about a little boy who was very poor and needed shoes. He was standing in front of a shoe store, barefoot and shivering with cold. A woman approached him and asked him why he was standing there, looking through the window. He told her, “Well, ma’am, I was asking God to give me a pair of shoes.”

The woman took the boy into the store, washed his dirty, bare feet and put new socks and shoes on him. The boy was so touched by her compassion that he asked her, “Ma’am, are you God’s wife?” She assumed if she showed him that kind of love, she must be related to God.

This story is one of the best examples of what it means to walk in love. And our goal as Christians is to show God’s love so people see Jesus shining through us.

It Starts with Communion

Matthew 28:20 (ESV) says, “Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” It’s interesting to see here that Jesus blessed the bread, broke it, and then gave it to the disciples.

We usually refer to this scripture when we have communion to remind us of the sacrifice He made for us. And just as He gave His life and was broken for us, we must be broken so we can live for Him.

We don’t like to think about God breaking us, but it’s really a wonderful thing. See, when we’re born again, the seed of God’s nature—all that He is—is planted in our spirits.

First Peter 1:23 says, “You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.” And John 19 tells us that as believers, “God’s seed (His principle of life, the essence of His righteous character) remains permanently” in us (AMP).

This means we have what it takes to be like Jesus and love others the way He loves us. But we all need God to do a work in our souls for us to be able to walk in love. We have to grow spiritually for our soul—mind, will, and emotions—to be molded into the image of Christ.

We don’t need to pray for God to give us love, because we already have His love in us. We need to pray for Him to show us how to walk in love...for God to show us whatever He needs to do in our lives so His love can flow through us to others when we do. He will deal with whatever is in us that is standing in the way: pride, unforgiveness, selfishness, insecurity, fear, or any other ungodly attitude or behavior.

How Brokenness Works:

Isaiah 64:5 says, “O Lord, You are our Father, we are the clay, and You our Potter, and we are all the work of Your hand” (AMP). I know what it’s like to be broken and molded by God. I used to have so many problems; I was hard to get along with and harsh. There were a lot of things I didn’t understand because I had been mistreated, and I thought it was good to be hard and not let anyone push me around. I believed everyone else had a problem, not me.

I remember praying so diligently for God to change my husband, Dave, because if He would just be the way I wanted Him to be, then I would be happy. But one day God spoke to my heart so strongly and said, “Dave is not the problem.” My response was, “Well, who is? It’s just me and him. What do you mean Dave is not the problem?”

It was devastating to realize I was really the problem, but it was also the beginning of a beautiful work God wanted to do in me.

Even though I was hurting and hard to get along with, I really loved God and wanted to live for Him, but I had to give Him control so He could mold me into His image. I began to pray things like, “God, do whatever You need to do in my life to change me. I’m the clay and You are the Potter.” Romans 8:29 says you are predestined to be molded into the image of Jesus, and I want to be everything You created me to be.

The journey hasn’t been easy, but I can honestly say that the hardest times in my life became blessings because God used them to bring me close to Him so I could really know Him and grow spiritually. That’s His plan for all of His children.

I want to encourage you today to spend time with God and search out the promises He has for you in His Word. Trust His wisdom and do what He shows you to do. As you put your faith in God to break you, mold you and make you what He’s created you to be, the Potter will make you an amazing work of His hand!

For more on this topic, order Joyce’s four-CD series Live 2 Love. You can also contact us to receive our free magazine, Enjoying Everyday Life, by calling 717-987 or visiting www.joymeyer.org.

Joyce Meyer is a New York Times bestselling author and founder of Joyce Meyer Ministries, Inc. She has authored more than 100 books, including Battlefield of the Mind and Overload: How to Unplug, Unwind and Unleash Yourself from the Pressure of Stress (Hachette). She hosts the Enjoying Everyday Life radio and TV programs, which air on hundreds of stations worldwide. For more information, visit www.joymeyer.org.
The Smartest Thing You’ll Ever Do
By Rev. Mark Creech

The Psalmist proved to God, “Give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments” (Psalm 119:73).

I’ve met a lot of people in recent years that I thought were brilliant. In their presence, I felt much like an intellectual pygmy. And though I wasn’t looking for fault, I couldn’t help but notice a common deficit in some of them: they had no spiritual judgment. It wasn’t that they were ignorant. It’s just that the things they had learned and embraced were inconsistent with God’s Word. Their unbelief had dwarfed their understanding of what should have been the simplest of life’s issues.

Charles Spurgeon once said, “A man without a mind is an idiot, the mere mockery of a man; and a mind without grace, the sad perversion of a mind... Fools can sin, but only those taught of God can know. We often speak of gifted men, but he has the best gifts to whom God has given a sacrificial understanding wherewith to know and prize the ways of the Lord... He who made us to live must make us to learn, he who gave us power to stand must give us grace to understand.”

Many years ago, I knew a man who had lived as impoverished and rough life. He was illiterate. By the standard of many, he was a hopeless and abject failure. One day he heard the Gospel of Christ and believed. He started listening to the Bible on cassette tapes. Over time, he became a changed man. He was humble, gracious, sincere, and remarkably real.

The last time I was with him, I listened to him teach a Sunday-School lesson that blew me away. He still couldn’t even read, but he understood better than most what life was about, and what our Creator-God requires of us.

One of the most judicious individuals to ever live was King Solomon, who said, “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom” (Proverbs 4:7).

Solomon also said, “Wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it” (Proverbs 8:11).

What is wisdom? Wisdom is different than knowledge. We’re living during a time when there is an explosion of knowledge, unlike any time in human history. Anyone can get an education today. Illiteracy has nearly been stampeded out. Yet there seems to be very little wisdom. A wise person knows and comprehends: what’s true, what’s good, and what’s enduring. A wise person has the proper set of values, and all knowledge is filtered through these moral standards. Dr. George Sweeting, former president of Moody Bible Institute, has long concluded.

“The wise man, the man who has been given wisdom from above, is the man whose life is an open book testifying to the saving grace of Jesus Christ.”

In his epistle, the apostle James contrasted a life devoid of spiritual judgment with a life directed by God’s wisdom. In chapter 3 and verses 13-18, James said that there is wisdom from above and wisdom from below. Earthy wisdom, he said, is characterized by envy, strife, confusion, and every evil work. Wisdom from above, however, is pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, and without panting and hypocrisy.

When James talks about carnal wisdom, his description matches our nation’s current political and social climate to a tee. Why can’t we come together? Why are we seemingly driven further apart with each passing year? It’s because we have thrown out what God has said or we’ve revised or redefined it to suit our sensual desires. We have become slaves to our passions and pleasures, and these push us to malice, jealousies, bitterness, greed, spite, and hatred.

Cicero said, “It is insatiable desires which over-turn not only individual men, but whole families, and which even bring down the state.”

During the third century, the Bishop of Carthage, Cyprian, wrote to his friend Donatus, “It is a bad world, Donatus, an incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and good people who have learned the great secret of life. They have found a joy and a wisdom which is a thousand times better than any of the pleasures of our sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they are happy. They are masters of their souls. They have overcome the world. These people, Donatus, are...and I am one of them.”

Will you become “one of them” in 2019? Will you turn away from your sins, deny yourself, and receive Christ? Will you pray with the Psalmist, “Give me understanding, that I may learn thy commandments”?

It has always seemed to me that life’s most conflicts. But trust me, it’s the right start for a New Year and a new life. It’s the smartest thing you will ever do. It’s what our entire nation desperately needs.

Brravened Dr. Mark Creech is Executive Director of the NC Christian Action League. You may contact him at rev.markcreech@christianactionleague.org or 919-878-0600.

Pause...and Consider

Beneath the Surface
By Ken and Jan Metrop
Avery County

Throughout the winter months, I would find myself looking at the areas that would be in bloom come spring.

Everything was dormant the first fall/winter/spring when we first moved to the North Carolina mountains. So, I had no idea what was beneath the surface. In fact, I didn’t know anything was beneath the surface. The shrub-like bushes certainly weren’t pretty... yet Hydrangeas and Flame Azaleas were waiting their turn to wow us...along with other varieties. I couldn’t imagine what their buds held.

But, now I can picture the colorful array of perennials that are preparing to bloom. And I can’t wait to see if the bulbs we planted in a newly formed rock garden last fall will indeed burst forth and brighten the landscape in spring and summer.

Life is like the seasons.

We experience the glorious long winter nights when sickness or even death knock at the door of family or friends. Yet, in the midst of the cold realities of life, gentle snow falls from heaven’s storehouse and blankets the world in winter white.

The purity of the glistening snow refreshes and restores a measure of hope.

Other days we bask in the refreshing cool air accompanied by bright sunshine and take a walk knowing these days will pass, too. These are the days of prayer, friendship, and caring.

At last, what we’ve been waiting for arrives. The winter of our sorrow passes and we move forward with expectancy into what God has for us this April and May, beginning God’s new growth season. We hold onto the hope that a spring snowstorm won’t freeze the beauty we’ve longed for. Sometimes it does, though. Then we summon more faith that He will bask in the sunshine of spring and summer and the blooms of better health in the days ahead.

Ecclesiastes 3:1, 2, 4, NLT reminds us, “For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to harvest...a time to cry and a time to laugh. A time to grieve and a time to dance.”

Expect the God of Creation and Lover of our souls to be present in every season because “God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart” (vv. 11).

He is beneath the surface (as well as above and around) causing us to blossom where we are planted. And dance! Selah

FROSTY COVERING

The quiet expectation alive within the snowy atmosphere was an invitation for us to walk slowly under the sky.

As we held the clean mountain air and observed the delicate etchings of the snow’s designs, we marveled at the artistry of our Creator’s hand.

“All things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things exist.” (Colossians 1:16 & 17)


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New Life for the New Year

Pastor Terry Cheek
McDowell County

By the Lord’s amazing Grace, we find ourselves at the beginning of another New Year! 2019 is in front of us and once again, we ask the question: what will I do with it? By the way, it’s a healthy question to ask. There is a lot to be said about making plans, commitments, promises and even the popular resolution for a new year. However, it is more difficult to look back and say we have kept them. Keeping any plan, commitment, promise or resolution requires that we embrace with our heart what is necessary to fulfill the expectations placed upon our new year’s life. Let’s spend sometime on this thought.

Every year we make promises with the fullest intention of keeping them. Maybe we’re going to drop a few pounds, quit smoking, or get away from immorality, maybe we’re going to get back in church or quit drinking or doing drugs. Having the best intention’s, we too often find ourselves falling short, year in and year out. With it comes the feeling of being a failure. You let yourself down, maybe even your family, friends or a spouse. Why? Why do you fail? The Bible contains the answer, and some words of encouragement for you, please keep reading!

First, we must realize we don’t have what it takes to overcome the pitfalls of life. The pitfalls of life come from sin and within each one of us, is a sin nature. Maybe you have never heard of this. Simply put we are born separated from God because of the inherited sin of Adam and Eve. We are told in Romans 3:10 “As it is written. There is none righteous, no, not one.” and again in Romans 3:23 “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” We cannot overcome the sin nature within us. That doesn’t mean we should give up and submit to sin. We should flee from it and if we resist him, he will flee from us. There is the problem. We don’t necessarily want to resist sin. As a matter of fact, from birth sin is normal and acceptable and even welcome.

Second, God, as normal and acceptable as sin is, we have one of us that has a consequence or penalty that comes with it. Every one of us, are headed for this penalty. Notice with me Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Sin has a death penalty.

This death penalty is an eternal death, a death beyond our heartbead. That isn’t encouraging news to begin a New Year with, is it? How stopped right here, we could find no hope and have no confidence moving into 2019, but the Bible continues to let’s continue in it! God has a gift. A payment for the penalty (consequence) of sin, a payment that takes the place of an eternal death. God offers eternal life, death. Think of it this way. We all have debt of some type, a house, or car, another large purchase. Suppose someone just stepped up and paid it all off and let you keep the purchase. How awesome would that be? You see we all were born with a sin debt that we could not pay.

Third, the eternal life that God offers was provided by Jesus Christ! Jesus paid the debt for our sin! Romans 5:8 “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Commendeth is an old English word that simply means God shows or displays, in this case His love. Even while we are living with a sin nature embedded in our lives and having no hope, Jesus died for you! He did this to prevent you from dying as eternal death. All the pleasures you may find in sin; for example, drinking, drugs, immorality, greed, lying, cheating. They are short lived pleasures. Short lived, maybe because the end is death. It’s important to understand, we are not sinners because we sin, we sin because we are sinners! Jesus is the salvation of sinners.

Fourth, how does Jesus remedy our sin nature. I’m glad you ask! Your Bible tells you in Romans 10:11 “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth Jesus is Lord, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” And with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Simply put, confess and believe! Confess that Jesus and only Jesus can save you! Then tell another person who can take the place of Jesus Christ as your savior. You must be willing to confess that. To confess Jesus as your savior, you must believe that God did raise Jesus from the dead. That’s right, it’s no fairy tale. Jesus resurrection is a reality you must accept by faith, then by that same faith confess Jesus as the only forgiveness of sin, your sin!

This miracle is called being born again! Having this new life in Jesus Christ gives you His presence daily. That’s right, Christ lives within you. In that fact is the strength you need to fulfill your New Year resolutions. Whatever the challenge, commitment or resolution may be with Jesus in your life you will have what it takes to make the right decisions and you will have the faith to see God lead you to success His way in 2019! Accept Jesus as Lord and Savior for the New Year and find happiness and success you never imagined. Until next month may God keep you finally in His grip!

Terry Cheek is pastor of Calvary Missionary Baptist Church in Marion NC. You can contact Terry by email at terrycheek65@gmail.com or by phone at (828) 460-6120.
Are Screens Affecting Our Children's Brains?

By Dr. Jim Denison

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) has been studying the effect of screen time for children. The preliminary results are in and they’re not good.

The NIH report shows that nine- and ten-year-old children who spend more than two hours a day in front of a screen each day score lower in thinking and language tests. This is troubling since the average “teensager” spends up to six hours a day on their tablet or phone.

In addition, scientists have found that children with daily screen usage of more than seven hours show premature thinning of the brain cortex. This is the outermost layer that processes information from the physical world. While it’s too soon to know with certainty that screen time usage causes the changes to the children’s brains, scientists plan to be monitoring this relationship carefully.

Are your children addicted to technology?

The NIH report is just one example of the growing effect of technology on our children. Another study related smartphone use by children to sleep deprivation and other problems associated with poor attention spans. This is alarming since two-thirds of children take their smartphones to bed with them.

One group of scientists found that the more time four-year-olds spent interacting with media, the shorter their sleep was at ages four and six. A study published by Harvard Medical School has shown that blue-lighting light emitted by devices such as smartphones and tablets suppresses the production of melatonin, a sleep-inducing hormone vital to good sleep.

Counselors warn that digital addiction is a growing problem. The compulsion to continue playing video games or using technology is escalating. China has identified internet addiction as one of its main public health risks. In some parts of Asia, digital addiction rates may be as high as 26 percent.

Among American children between the ages of eight and eighteen, around 8 percent could already be classified as addicted. A 2010 study found that children in this age group spend more than seven hours a day consuming media.

Experts warn that victims of digital addiction can experience “destructive dependence, extreme change of personality, isolation, and physical signs such as withdrawal.” It’s not surprising that researchers encourage parents to limit and monitor their children’s screen time.

Practical ways to manage technology

In The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in its Proper Place, Andy Crouch offers practical commitments parents can make to help their children and family manage technology. Among them:

- Turn off technology one hour a day, one day a week, and one week a year.
- Use screens for a purpose and together rather than aimlessly and alone.
- Dedicate car time to conversation with no technology.
- Be sure spouses have each other’s passwords and parents have complete access to their children’s devices.

I would add this: community is vital to our soul. We were made to do life together. Every image of the Body of Christ in the New Testament is collective—a vine with many branches, a body with many parts.

By contrast, technology isolates us. For every family that plays a video game together, there are multitudes of children (and parents) who play them alone. A computer or handheld device is intentionally isolating. It’s hard for two people to use one keyboard or focus on the same screen.

Such isolation can be devastating.

The Wall Street Journal is reporting that loneliness undermines health and is linked to early mortality. It is worse for loneliness than being obese or physically inactive.

While technology can foster a sense of community through social media, it’s no substitute for in-depth personal relationships. Nothing replaces spending time with those we love. A screen is not a parent.

“We are familiar with his evil schemes.”

Here’s the bottom line: God intends parents to be the pastors of their families. We cannot delegate their souls to their teachers at school, ministers at church, or online friends.

Fathers are told to “bring [children] up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4). We are to value our children as “a heritage from the LORD” (Psalm 127:3).

One of the many reasons I admire the Jewish culture is its commitment to the home and family. The father is responsible for teaching the Torah to his children. The NIH report shows how we need to be modeling Jewish faith and culture. The survival and prosperity of the Jewish people across forty centuries are largely due to this passionate commitment of each generation to the next.

The family is God’s invention and design for us (Genesis 1:28). But the devil hates all of God’s loves. He has stolen technologies from their purposes and infected them with pornography, violence, and digital addiction. He will. Paul said of Satan, “We are familiar with his evil schemes” (2 Corinthians 2:11 NLT). Can you say the same?

Jim Denison Ph.D speaks and writes on cultural and contemporary issues. His daily column is distributed to more than 110,000 subscribers in 236 countries. See us on the website www.denisonforum.org. Copyrighted and printed by permission from Denison Forum.

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Job titles and Jesus
By Dr. Tracy Jesup

"John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who was and is and is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. — Revelation 1:4-5"

Often, I am asked about the length of my title and I sometimes am asked to describe what I do at Gardner-Webb University. In a September 7, 2017 article on Forbes.com entitled “How Important is Your Job Title?” contributor Ashley Shah posits this scenario:

"If you saw “Paradigm in Crisis” at Yahoo on an application that you were evaluating, would you know that title is for the person in charge of all information security at Yahoo? More importantly, would you believe it? It looks more like a book title than a job title. And you don’t want to be HR’s resume entertainer on their lunch.” Shah concludes, “When applying for a job you not only give a job title, but what that job entails.”

In writing to the seven churches in Asia, the Apostle John begins the communication of the revelation by stating titles of God the Father such as “him who is and who was and who is to come,” (v. 4) and “the Alpha and the Omega...who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (v. 8). The work of God the Son is described in even more detail. Jesus Christ is “the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.” He also is the one “who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father” (v. 5-6). All of these titles and descriptions reinforce the truth that this is the Almighty God sending grace and peace to his servants.

At the end of a seminar on Isaiah 6:9-16, Ken Langley, parish of Christ Community Church in Zionsville, Indiana, shared the story of Aragon in J.R.R. Tolkien’s The Return of the King, the final book in The Lord of the Rings trilogy. “Aragon, the rightful king of the North, has long lived in obscurity, pursuing his comforts to serve his subjects and fight his battles, repeatedly risking his life for them. At last he prevails over the forces of the dark lord, and is poised to enter the city where he will rule at last. When Aragon enters the fortified city of Minas Tirith for the first time as king, the city’s steward proclaims Aragon’s royal pedigree for all the citizens to hear. ‘Here is Aragorn son of Arathorn, chieftain of the Dunedain of Amaran, captain of the Host of the West, bearer of the Star of the North, wielder of the Sword Reforged, victorious in battle, whose hands bring healing, the Elfstone, Elessar of the line of Valandil, Isidur’s son, Isildur’s son of Numenор. Shall we be king and enter into the City and driy forth these waters?’ John writes of another king—Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth, who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father.”

Drayer: Lord, we acknowledge who you are and pray that your kingdom will come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

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

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Sudoku

Solution on page 14

January 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 43
Taxes, everyone’s favorite subject.

There’s been a lot of buzz about the new tax reform bill this year. Changes are always hard, and taxes are harder. And with all the changes taking place this year, the thought of filing your taxes can feel overwhelming at best. While we can’t simplify the process, a lot of people are wondering how this reform will impact them and their tax accounts.

The good news is there are some nice things in store for most people with the tax reform. Let’s walk through a few you should know before filing your taxes.

Updated Tax Brackets and Lower Income Tax Rates

The new tax brackets and income tax rates are one of the most talked about changes when it comes to the tax reform. The main thing you should know is that the seven tax brackets we already have in place will stay that way, but tax rates for each are going down through 2025. For example, if you’re single making $50,000 a year, your tax rate will drop from 25 percent to 22 percent. In 2026, these cuts will expire, unless there is another bill in the future that changes that. For now, people are paying less in taxes.

The New Standard Deduction

The standard deduction is dollar amount that you’re able to deduct from your taxable income. Under the new reform, the standard deduction has nearly doubled! Before the reform, the standard deduction for an individual was $6,350. Now, it’s $12,000. For a married couple it used to be $12,700, and that has gone up to $24,000. So, if you’re single and would normally do an itemized deduction, if it equals less than $12,000 you would take the standard deduction instead.

Changes for Married Couples

Married couples will rejoice this tax season. Before the tax reform, some married taxpayers were bumped into a higher tax bracket when they combined their incomes. The new tax brackets have doubled for people filing jointly, so no more marriage penalties this time!

Updated Child Tax Credit

People with kids will be happy with at least one part of the new tax reform. Previously, parents who made less than $100,000 jointly and $55,000 individually received a $1,000 tax credit for qualified children under age 17. Now, that credit has increased to $2,000 and the income limits were raised to $150,000 jointly and $100,000 individually. If you have kids and fall below these income levels, that’s $2,000 back in your pocket!

More Reason to Give

If there wasn’t enough incentive for charitable giving before, there is now. Before these changes, taxpayers used to be able to deduct up to half of their income in qualified charitable donations. That limit has been increased to 60 percent of your income!

These are just a few of the changes from the reform. If you still feel overwhelmed, don’t worry. Even the IRS is scrambling to keep up with the changes and has given us a year. If tax time is a time to consider hiring a professional to do your taxes, this would be the time to do it. You don’t want to guess on your taxes!

About Rachel Cruz

As an New York Times best-selling author and host of The Rachel Cruze Show, Rachel helps people learn the proper way to handle money and stay out of debt. She's authored three best-selling books, including Love Your Life, Not Theirs and Smart Money Smart Kids, which she co-wrote with her husband, Dave Ramsey. You can follow Cruze on Twitter and Instagram at @RachelCruze and online at rachalcruze.com, youtube.com/rachelcruze or facebook.com/rachael.mcrus.
Morganton Baptist Church

This Year, I’m Going To...

By Pastor Dan Quirile
Burke County

Most likely, you are thinking the same thing that I am thinking: where did 2013 go?!! It surely seems that the older we get, the faster the years pass by. The beginning of a new year is often filled with many resolutions that often soon fall by the wayside. I have often thought that the first few months of a year would be the perfect time to be an exercise equipment salesman! Others look at a new year and regard it as a clean slate. To them, this is a chance to make things better. Tragically, many of these resolutions fall by the wayside within the first few months of the year. The treadmill becomes a rack on which clothes can be hung. Resolutions to become a better person often fade with the passing of time, leaving individuals more disheartened than ever before. What happened? Why did these resolutions that were made sincerely seem to fall so quickly by the wayside?

One of the greatest problems with many resolutions is the basis on which they are made. For some, the motivation is a selfish motivation to gain greater favor or acceptance with certain individuals. For others, the motivation is to create what they regard as a more favorable life. While other motivations can be listed, the problem with such motivations is that they are often insufficient to sustain enduring change. For example, the person who seeks acceptance but fails to discover it will often be quick to abandon the resolution. When a more favorable life seems unattainable, people are quick to abandon the resolution they thought would produce that. These resolutions are not rooted in that which is going to last.

When it comes to the matter of resolutions and desired change, one cannot do so successfully without relying on God, the One responsible for changing lives. Those who accept Him as Savior are described as “new creatures” in 2 Corinthians 5:17. He desires to make us more like Him and is constantly at work in our hearts to achieve His goal, but He will not force His way upon anybody. When we submit ourselves to His plan and depend upon His strength, we will discover the strength to make truly lasting resolutions – resolutions that have eternal benefit. We will discover the joy of a life that is well-pleasing to Him. Such a resolution is the greatest resolution one can make!

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

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