Adoption Not Abortion

By Cyndi Harrell McDaniel

When I first heard about the New York legislation on abortion I remained quiet while I tried to let what happened sink in. All day I read post after post on Facebook of outraged people expressing their feelings. I felt like I was kind of in shock. That whole first day I just kept thinking that this has to be jokes. How could someone abort a full term baby? At that first day ended and the next day dawned. I began to let the reality of what COULD have been, run from my mind to my heart. I feel warm tears run down my face and I felt like I could barely breath. I didn’t audibly say anything to anyone yet, I just silently cried out to my Heavenly Father. This one hit close to home for me.

It was personal. This could have affected our family. Our boys. Our sons! Not just one son, THREE sons! I had already held one son in my arms as he took his last breath and it suddenly hit me we could have been minus three more. You see, my husband and I have three adopted boys from a special needs adoption agency in the heart of New York City. (Joseph) a Hispanic 25 week gestation micro-preemie who has spastic quadriplegia Cerebral Palsy and eats by G-tube, (Jude) a 30 week gestation, Jamaican cocaine baby. A micro-preemie with a severe lung disease and (Jacob) a Puerto Rican cocaine baby with severe ABDH. Two of the birth moms kept their pregnancies from their families so they could place the babies for adoption.

The best of my knowledge those grandparents do not even know our boys exist. All three boys’ parents lived in New York City at the time of their births and chose life(adoptions) for them when they were born. They chose Adoption not Abortion. Each mother knew that they carried a son who was special needs, there were disabilities present, or at least the strong possibility it would present itself after delivery. Thankfully each mother still chose life.

What if those birth moms were pregnant now? Each of them presented with a stereotypical (reason) for abortion. They could have been pressured or presented with the choice to abort our sons after they found out about the disabilities. I couldn’t even imagine life without the light our boys shed on our family and those who knew them. If you could just see (and hear) the sound of our severely handicapped son singing at the top of his lungs to praise music or hear him calling me from the next room “Mom you gotta see this”. Dance parties in his room. His teacher taught him the Christian praise song Fearless and that little boy will look at you and say, “God made Joe Joe Fearless” and know what? He did! God made our Joseph Fearless. Just like he is! And our other two sons. They are little caterpillars that we’ve watched become butterflies right before our eyes. Jacob...
Adoption Not Abortion

continued from page 1

and Jade. Little leaders. Little boys that are confident, smart, and have fought against the odds to already be more than they were ever supposed to be. One of our sons was described by the adoption agency as “the ugliest baby we’ve ever seen” before the adoption agency placed him with us. It almost makes me laugh when I think about it. He’s beautiful now! To the eyes on the outside but even more on the inside. What if his mother had aborted him because of malformed anomalies in turn? That’s what we were told when they first called us about his placement.

Both Jacob and Jade are Little Evangelists for Jesus at the age of 11 and 13. I KNOW God has big plans for each of them! That’s why I walked around in shock for the first 24 hours. I could not imagine them not here on this earth. Not in our family.

My Heart even hurts outside of my own family and My testimony runs deeper than this. My heart breaks to think of what a mother will go through if she chooses a late term abortion. That might seem the right choice, the easier choice at the time, but what will happen in her heart and in her mind afterwards?

All I can say is please choose adoption and not abortion. I know not everyone feels they can parent a special needs child, and some really don’t think they have the money to add another child to their family. Unfortunately, rapes do still happen. I know some women feel like they don’t have any other choice. I am not here to judge them even if abortion is the choice they’ve made. What I am here to say... there is ANOTHER choice. Choose adoption not abortion.

There are many women who’ve had abortions that regret it all their lives. They mourn that choice even if the abortion was at four weeks when there wasn’t even a heartbeat yet. Some of those women/girls don’t even feel they deserve to parent a child after an abortion. If that tumor happens at late gestation abortions, I can even imagine the torment and pain a mother will experience in late gestation abortions. There are so many couples waiting for a child to love. Not a perfect, healthy, white or black child, any child.

We have three sons that God knew before they were born. Thankfully their moms who live in NY also chose them before they were born too! “I knew you before I formed you in your mother’s womb. Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you” Jeremiah 1:5.

And America, all I can say is Pray! We HAVE to pray!!! Some of the biggest churches in the world were founded on just a few people who chose to pray. God moves when we pray. God hears and he moves. “If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and I will forgive their sin and heal their land” 2 Chronicles 7:14

Cyndi has an undergrad degree from WCU and masters work from Liberty University in Student Ministry. She and her husband Jason have 3 biological children, 6 adopted children and 1 grandchild. They have fostered over 70 kids for Buncombe County DSS and have a calling to the “least of these” locally and internationally. They attend Upward Christian Fellowship in Hendersonville, NC. Cyndi enjoys using her gifts homeschooling, caring for her large family, teaching, speaking, decorating and event coordination through her business She Shines Events.
**Church Directory**

The Bridge Church of WNC
207 Pinebridge Avenue
Spruce Pine, NC 28777
www.bridgewnc.org
Pastors - Tom & Tammy Anglin
Sunday Service 10:30AM
Wednesday Service 7:00PM
Church Office M-F 9:00AM-3:00PM
*“Name of Jesus Christian Church”*
Our passion is to help connect the Body of Christ in this area in order to see the work of God transform our community, state, nation and world. (See John 17:21)

Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church
2187 Jamestown Road
Morganton, NC 28655
828-594-8212
Pastor Rick Mercer
Sabbath (Saturday) Bible Study - 9:30 am
Sabbath Worship - 11:00 am
Vegetarian Buffet after church
Wednesday Praise, Prayer & Proclaim - 7:00 pm
www.morganton7d.org

West Burnsville Baptist Church
222 West Burnsville Church Rd.
Burnsville, NC 28714
(828) 582-3990
Pastor: Terry Long
Sunday School 9:45 am
Worship Service: 11:00 a.m.
Wednesday Service 6:30 p.m.
Church visitor: Greeting God through knowing, growing, going. in bold church and impact the world.

Great Hope Seventh-day Adventist Church
2074 U6 Hwy 70 E
Morganton, NC 28655
828-458-0240
Pastor Barry Mallory
Sabbath (Saturday) Bible Study - 10:00 am
Sabbath Worship - 11:30 am
Vegetarian Buffet after church
Wednesday Praise, Prayer & Proclaim - 7:00 pm
www.greathopedsa.com

First Advent Christian Church
211 Longview Road
Morganton, NC 28655
828-437-8206
www.firstadvent.org
Pastor Patrick Bradshaw
Associate Pastor / Senior Pastor
Guzman
pastoralcare@firstadvent.org
Sunday School 10:00 AM
Worship Service 11:00 AM
Wednesday Prayer Meeting 6:30 PM
Choir Practice 7:15 PM
Soul Searching 4:30 PM
Praising Christ crucified, risen and coming again!

Burrumon Baptist Church
4688 Burrumon Rd.
Morganton, NC 28655
828-437-2357
For more information, please visit www.burrumonbaptist.org
Dr. Luke A. Lane
9:30am - Early Worship
9:45am - Sunday School
11:00am - Worship
6:00pm - Evening Worship

Pine Branch Baptist Church
4 Church Road
Spruce Pine, NC 28777
Phone: 828-765-9011
www.pinebranchbaptist.net
Rev. Bobby Joe Greene
Sunday School - 9:45-10:45am
Worship Service - 10:45am
Sunday Evening - 6:30pm
A Bible-believing Fellowship Loving God and Loving People

Faith Fellowship Church
Chap-Ray Rd.
Hendersonville, NC 28791
(828) 697-9284
www.ffn.org
www.floraudio.org
Pastor: David Gillsie
Sunday School - 10:00 am
Worship Service - 10:45 am
Wednesday Bible Study - 7:00pm
Those that are poor are blessed by the Lord.
And he delighteth in his way.
Psalm 37:23

Barnyard Baptist Church
281 Barnyard Rd.
Morganton, NC 28655
828-584-8212
Pastor - Steve Williams
Sunday School 9:45 AM
Worship Service 11:00 AM
Sunday Evening Camp Meal - 5:30 PM
Wednesday Evening Service 7:00 PM
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February 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 4
Love
By Barbara Harrell
Mitchell County

Many of us think of February as the month of Love. Valentine’s Day is a prominent holiday. Much money is spent at this time of year for flowers, candy and other gifts to show someone that they are loved. Let’s explore two types of love that we experience in our lives. (There are others)

Eros – The one most often thought of is the romantic love between a man and a woman. This love is certainly a God-given love that the Bible has a lot to say about. We can read many stories in the Old Testament—Jacob working for seven years for Rachel was one classic example. Song of Solomon is a beautiful example of Eros love. The New Testament has Mary and Joseph to show us what real love is about, but make no mistake, God planned for this love to be between a man and woman united in Holy Matrimony. A union that also included Him. Modern day examples for me would be Billy and Ruth Graham. She prayed for a mate that would be strong in the Lord. Listen to her poem of prayer to God for that man.

Dear God, I prayed, all unafraid
(as we’re inclined to do),
I do not need a handsome man
But let him be like You,
I do not need one big and strong
Nor yet so very tall
Nor need he be come genius,
Or wealthy, Lord, or all;
But let his head be high, dear God
And let his eyes be clear;
His shoulders straight, where do his state,
Where his earthly sphere;
And let his face have character;
A ruggedness of soul,
And let his whole life show, dear God,
A singleness of goal;
Then when he comes (as he will come)
With quiet eyes alight,
I’ll understand that he is the man
I prayed for long ago.

When she found him, her prayers changed and now she prays for him but also for their love to be pure and to grow over the years. This is her prayer.

Train our love that it may grow
Slowly... deeply... steadily;
Till our hearts will overflow
Unconstrained and readily.

Discipline it, too, dear God
Strength of steel
Throughout the whole;
Teach us patience, thoughtfulness,
Tenderness, and self-control.

Deepen it throughout the years,
Age and mellow it
Until, time that finds us
Old without, within
Will find us lovers still.

Dong and I have experienced this kind of love that grows and stays together for almost 55 years now. No, it is not perfect, but it has been close. There are always many adjustments in the beginning but if God is at the center, He will guide you and

continued on page 43
Four Things the World Needs to see from the Church

By Jason Koon
Burke County

The American Church seems to be in decline, and while this isn’t the first time in American history that we have dealt with this, there is no question something is wrong in the Church today. People are leaving in droves and a majority of those who remain report that they rarely or never experience God at Church. This is the third article in a series looking at what the world needs to see from the Church if we’re going to remain relevant in the coming decade.

Holiness

“When lost people come to Church,” Dr. Tony Merida observes, “they expect to be taught the Bible.” I was disappointed in myself at how surprising these words were to me, but it’s true. Why would someone come to Church, if not to hear God’s Word? Even a lost person, even an atheist – if they’re taking time out of their day to attend a worship gathering – it’s probably because they’re at least willing to hear what the Bible says.

This is radically counter-cultural today, however. For years, we’ve been told that we have to make the Bible relevant, be sensitive to non-believers, change our language so they’ll understand what they’re hearing. And certainly, all this does have its place, but in spite of that, one overarching fact remains. If someone doesn’t want to hear what the Bible has to say, they’re probably not going to come to Church regardless of what we say or how we say it.

In 2012, Pastor Jim Henderson and atheist Matt Casper wrote a book together called “Jim and Casper Go to Church.” The premise is simple. Pastor Jim takes atheist Matt to twelve prominent American Churches and asks his thoughts on each. They travel to modern Churches with light shows and fog machines, mega-Churches with tens of thousands of attendees, prosperity Churches with seventy-million-dollar budgets, house Churches only a few dozen strong, and everything in between. And out of all these Churches, the Church Casper liked most was…you’ll never guess. First Presbyterian Church Chicago, Illinois.

But do they have choir robes and a stony liturgical service? Yep, and Matt wasn’t exactly a fan of the robes and had some trouble following along in the book. Isn’t it kinda boring, with lots of prayer and dry prose readings? Yes again, but what Casper said about First Pres. is as profound as it should be self-evident. “It’s Church!” he said. “I expected to pray and hear scripture read, if I wasn’t ok with that, I wouldn’t have come in the first place.” He said he liked that First Presbyterian was honest about who they were. They didn’t hide the fact that they were Christians and didn’t try to dress Church up as something it’s not.

The world expects to hear the Bible when they come to our Churches, they expect us to pray when we have a need or a struggle, and they expect to see God’s people trying to live like God’s people and having the humility to repent when they fail. The Church desperately needs to see holiness from the people of God. Not smug, ur-picky legalism, we’ve seen too much of that over the years, but holiness. Holiness that is born out of love, rather than pride. Holiness saturated with love for Christ, not a naive fantasy of what America used to be. They need to see Christ-likeness from us; Christ-likeness lived out in love, humility, and integrity so that anyone who happens to be watching might see it and give glory to our Father in Heaven.

Jason Koon is Pastor of Bridge42 Church in Morganton, NC.
Just a Word from My Heart
By Preacher Chris Rathbone
Mitchell County

It's been a rough week in our small community. Another accident has taken another young person's life. This one was pretty close to home for me. God gave me the privilege to be this family's pastor for almost 11 years. When I received the tragic news early that morning my heart was broken. I cried and prayed. My heart was burdened heavily as I struggled to make sense of it all. I hugged my sons a little tighter. A good girl was gone. A good family was devastated. So many in our community mourned, even if they didn't know this family personally, many hearts were broken for them. Just an accident that no one saw coming.

Over the almost 20 years that I've been in ministry, these circumstances always trouble me personally. Our community has lost several young people just in the last 2-3 years. In my mind I always wonder about what might have been. My struggle personally is thinking of the lost potential. How these young people had so much life ahead of them. The contributions they could have made to this world. They could have gotten married, had kids, grandkids, etc. The church sure could have benefited in their service to the kingdom of God.

This particular young woman was certainly no different. I watched her grow from just a baby when I first met her. She grew up in church and her faith was in Jesus as her Savior; I'm looking now at the picture of when I baptized her. Beautiful, bright, and a smile that lit up her entire face when she smiled at you. Her family told me how she had plans for the future. So many of her family and friends have spoken over the last several days of the impact she had already made in their lives. I continue to you, I struggle in these circumstances. Not that I've lost faith and trust in God, but sometimes it's just hard to understand why things happen the way they do.

This entire world is under the curse of the consequences of sin. Death entered in at the fall in the Garden of Eden and not a single one of us is immune to the fact that physical death can happen to any of us, anytime, anywhere, and regardless of what age we may be. That is a truth that cannot be changed while this earth remains and while we live in these bodies of clay. And even good Godly folks have to endure the hardships of this world.

However, we do not mourn as others who have no hope. Jesus always reminds me that our focus must be on the bigger picture. The eternal and heavenly plan that Jesus died to secure and fulfill. Even though Jesus gives an abundant life in Him while we live here, the sacrifice that He made on the cross and His resurrection from the dead was to give us hope for eternity. If our hope is only in this life, what kind of future would there be to look forward to. Even if we live a long life here it is not even a grain of sand on the timeline of eternity. The plan God has for us is not to live here eternally, but to live with Him eternally. Whether we go into His presence at a young age or a good old age, the outcome is the same for the person who is saved. For the believer, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

You know, my plan for this young lady would have been for her to live a long life. To enjoy life to the fullest. To experience many of the blessings that God gives us here. But when I listened to how this young woman had already impacted so many, I'm reminded that the days of her life were written before she was even born. She finished the race that Jesus had for her to run. Now, she is in the presence of the One who caused her light to shine so bright. Her faith is now sight and even if we don't understand it all, she now does. She is more alive today than she was while here.

Let us keep looking up. May we continue to trust God's eternal plan through Jesus Christ. Let us help those who are hurting. Keep on serving God and each other. Keep on praying for and loving one another. And most importantly, let us continue to exalt the Lord Jesus and what He has done for us. I'm looking forward to the day when He calls us all home to be with Him. I'm looking forward to the day when all questions will be answered, and all things will be made new. To God be the glory, great things He hath done.

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Preacher Chris Rathbone serves as Pastor at Mine Creek Baptist Church.
High Country Prison Ministry

God is Alive and Well
By Jody Griffin
Avery and Mitchell Counties

Periodically when the time is right, incarcerated men will request to be baptized. Though not a required religious accommodation, efforts are made to solicit the assistance of Community Religious Volunteers who provide the wonderful service of worship that includes the baptisms as part of an existing worship hour. These services are always well attended by men who want to encourage the new believers who are making this profession of their faith.

As a way of assisting these men, I spend time talking with them about their reasons for such a request. Not to talk them out of it, but to help them understand the power that comes when public testimony of faith is declared in obedience to the Scripture and accountability is created in the very fact that they have yielded themselves to God. What if for faith to be demonstrated to Jesus Himself died on the Jordan River when he came before John.

Baptism in prison is perhaps the most inspiring thing anyone can witness. Oppressor bathes the water, then lifts to an upright posture the face of those baptized who are always very much startled! But they aren’t the only ones smiling.

The men who have gathered to witness the baptism are responding with joy themselves! They sing with a gusto not often employed! They pray with a fervor reminiscent of an old-time evangelist! They rejoice in the miraculous love of God expressed in Jesus Christ!

The moral of this story? God is alive and well within the walls of the correctional institutions that dot our common landscape! Lives are being redirected, souls are being saved, and the community of Christians is thriving!

On the day this writing, this chaplain has enjoyed the incredible privilege of hearing from a young man who has been inspired by a fellow offender’s testimony to pray and receive eternal life through salvation by faith in Jesus’ Name! Requesting baptism, he desires to begin his new life now so that his life, his family, even other offenders can see what God has done for him and be inspired to seek the same.

Filled with excitement, he asked questions and soaked up answers. Something tells me his life in Christ will soon touch others. But how can this be? He is in prison. Obviously, he committed a crime and was convicted and sentenced for such.

But listen to me closely now, that crime does NOT define him. His new life, The life he found in prison, through the witness and guidance of a fellow convicted felon, THAT is what defines him now! Though bound by walls and fences, he is now free indeed! He is free to grow and learn from his past errors and he is free to grow into a man of God. Again why? Because he is bound by love.

Why is ministry within the correctional institution important? Because it helps those who have fallen GET BACK UP. Because it helps those whose sin has trapped them TO BE FREE! Indeed!

I thank God for the privilege given to me as Community Funded Chaplain at AMC to share in days like these and to be reminded that no matter what I’ve done, HOPE can be found in Jesus Christ! New life awaits! Eternal life awaits! Abundant life awaits! What are you waiting for?

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

Marlene’s Meditations

When Silk Turns to Sackcloth
By Marlene Hous
Burke County

Imagine the cares of precious silk as you move through the richest rooms in the palace. Treasured and privileged, you will consult with the most sought-after designer to have a new robe spun from the Mulberry silkworms, the finest silk in the world. Some 6,000 silkworm cocoons later, a golden sheen of fabric catches the sunlight as you parade before the king, vying for his attention.

These rights and privileges of an opulent lifestyle belonged to Rizpah, an obscure woman in the Bible but the specially chosen concubine (acquired for her beauty and intelligence rather than political alliance) of the first king of Israel, King Saul. We catch a glimpse of her in 2 Samuel 3:1, and she glides fully into view in 2 Samuel chapter 21. Her looks and charm maintained a relationship with the king strong enough to produce two sons, Armoni and Mephibosheth.

Rizpah’s story plunges from the heights of silk luxury into the grief of losing sons to a violent death due to her husband’s actions. King Saul, the father of her two sons, had killed some of the Gibelites. In doing so, he had broken a sworn oath with Jephthah, the Israelite leader, and made with him some 400 years earlier (Joshua 9). When a famine dragged on for three years in the reign of King Saul’s successor, King David, he asked the LORD why, and in 2 Samuel 21:1, God said it was because King Saul had killed the Gibelites. King David allowed the Gibelites to set the punishment, and they chose to have seven of King Saul’s sons hanged. Two of them included Rizpah’s sons. What shock must have rippled through her as she learned that her two sons would be executed. But she did something that has resonated through millennia and that speaks to us today. She honored her sons in death by guarding their bodies from the vultures that would have devoured their bodies clean. What a gruesome and morbid sight must have met her as she opened her eyes each morning. She had been cast down from her lofty position as the powerful concubine of King Saul. Now, her skin was dried and roughened from daily exposure to the elements. Her voice was raspy from driving the carriage away. And her once-legendary beauty had faded under the sun’s relentless heat and the drought that plagued Israel.

However, her determination to send a message to anyone who lifted their eyes to the hill on which her son’s bodies hung loud and clear. The beauty of her sacrifice transcended her physical deterioration, and the fierce shining light of her devotion was illuminating her message to us today. It was 1,000 years later.

2 Samuel 21:10 says, “And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest upon them, nor the beasts of the field to pass by.”

Samuel describes her movements. As she prepared for the hideous job of driving away the beasts and birds, she spread sackcloth on a rock. This fabric, unlike the value and beauty of her usual silks, fell through. The ugly dull surface suited the purpose of wearing it as a symbol of grief and repentance. This was her life now, errnoing the purposes of being ignored by the nation of Israel and descending into the depths of humiliation and shame. Even the dignity of burying her sons was denied. The people who once envied her and tried to copy her beauty and style turned their heads, denying her existence and ignoring her tragedy.

She placed that sackcloth because a turning point of grace and mercy. She carefully spread the sackcloth upon the rock, recognizing her grief and longing for restoration. The word, the indicates that the rock was singularly qualified in her eyes to support her need. In the Bible, the word picture of a rock is often used to symbolize God’s qualities:

Determinate 22:1 uses the view of a rock as it declares God’s unyielding truth and grante surety of righteousness. “He is the Rock, his work is perfect; for all his ways are judgment; a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.”

2 Samuel 22:2 again uses a rock to visualize the protection and delivering qualities of God. It says, “And he said. The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer.”

In Psalm 42:2, God’s Word assures us that God not only delivers but gives comfort comparable to the solidity of a rock and a plan for our lives as solid as a rock. It says, “He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.”

God intentionally used the idea of the rock, a familiar sight to us, to send a message of one word. He underscores the life-changing focus that we can experience with new life in the fabric of our heart, upon our Rock of Ages.

When your skin turns to sackcloth and your life plunges into despair, spread the sackcloth of your sadness on the Rock that can deliver you, give you a sure-footed focus in life, and hope in the future.

Marlene Hous is a regular contributor to Blue Ridge Christian News. Her passion is to delve deeply into the truths of women’s Bible topics and to discuss those in Bible Studies called Backyard Pass to Bible Women. She and her husband discover joy, nurture, and challenges in their church. Her contact is marlenehous@bellsouth.net.

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www.brcnews.com
February 2015 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 8
In All Things Give Thanks
Doug Harrell
Mitchell County

A lot is going through my mind as I sit down to write this column this morning. Yesterday, one year ago I was told that I had leukemia, and a week later was told that I had 2-4 months to live without treatment and 16-18 months to live with treatment. That news turned your world upside down. To say the least, we all know from experience that time here is limited, but when you hear those words directed in your direction, it makes you stop and think. Well, a year has passed, and I am still here writing life lessons for another month and I am doing well considering. I am still having to do a chemotherapy regimen that goes for three weeks each month, but the leukemia appears to be in remission, thank you Lord.

This past year has been one of the greatest learning years of my life, fancy that, you never know what priorities will change when you face the end of the road here on this earth. It has been a year of blessings that we hard to believe, new friends made, lives that have touched me and others and I have had the opportunity to touch. Prayers that have been offered up for me and prayers that I have been able to pray for others around me. The opportunity to be a witness to what would never have presented itself without the illness, and the treatment regimen of the leukemia. As the scripture says in Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose." At first it was hard to read this scripture and believe, but now I do! Not many weeks ago I was praying and actually gave thanks to the Lord for the leukemia moments after I said that I thought, Doug you have gone totally crazy, you absolutely hate this disease! You see, the week before I received the news that I had leukemia, I had attended a funeral for one of my daughter’s mother-in-law who had died with leukemia and a year and a half earlier I had done the funeral for one of my dearest friends here on this earth, and who was also my business partner that had died with this dreadful disease. But today, as I look back over the past year, I would not change a thing! I know it sounds crazy, but the blessings outweigh the hurt, the relationship with my Lord today makes it all worthwhile.

The song, “Just a Closer Walk With Thee” has been a theme song this year and when I hear it, it echoes and rings true, still today. Being willing to accept God’s will, knowing that it might not be healing of this earthly body, was a challenge, and I have been blessed that God has seen fit to keep me here a while longer, it appears. I learn the key to this life is to be able to say, either way, I am okay, and truly mean it. Now don’t get me wrong, I am human and want to live as long as I possible can and have a decent lifestyle. I truly enjoy most of my journey day by day, but do realize that there is a graduation day coming.

Deminstration 31:7: “Be strong and of good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord thy God, he it is that doth go with thee, he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.” This has been a stronghold this past year, learning to lean on him and depend more than ever before in my life. I think many of us, myself included, at times think we can handle it, we can deal with it within our own strength, that my friends comes to an end at some point when we realize that we have no control over life’s true meaning and direction. Now don’t get me wrong here, God does not want us going around complaining and moaning all day long, we need to keep focused on the future with an attitude of gratitude, giving thanks and not nursing about the irritants that come our way. We need to be at peace in accepting his good and perfect will for your life, and your days will be blessed ways you can only imagine.

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

By Pastor Bruce Cannon  
Mitchell County

**Fear not, little flock: for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.** (Luke 12:32)

February is known by many as the month for love although every day should be a day for love. And, we should take every opportunity to express love both to God and to man. The Scriptures teach that we love because He (the Lord) first loved us. (1 John 4:19) He placed within the heart of man the desire to love and be loved.

There are so many Scriptures which speak about love. Luke 11:32 states that the Father takes great delight in giving gifts to His children. James wrote, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variation, neither shadow of turning.” (Jas 1:17) Every gift the Lord gives is a “good” gift. Why does God give so many gifts? He loves us!

A couple of days ago I participated in the funeral of a beautiful 19-year-old young lady who died due to an auto accident. During that service, her mom sang and spoke. Now? God gave her, for that occasion, gifts of strength, grace, peace and comfort. She sang, with a praise team, a song entitled, “surrounded” by Michael W. Smith. The message of the song is that when we think we are surrounded by battles, as children of God, we are instead surrounded by Him. In doing so, this song touched so many hearts. She simply shared what God had given her. The Lord gives so many tangible gifts, but it’s the many intangible ones that really bless us and enable us to bless others. He gives peace which passeth all understanding (Phil. 4:7). He gives joy unspeakable (1 Peter 1:8). He, as stated above, gives the ability to love and be loved. He gives abundant grace.

These are the gifts that we must share with others. They are also gifts which, when given, come back to us in an abundant manner. When we give love, it comes back and increases our love and ability to love. When we demonstrate peace, we are able to help others experience peace. When we show forth joy we are able to help others have joy which further increases our own.

Take the month of February and give these wonderful gifts to others. Give them what God has so freely given us. And as you are doing so, make sure you do not forget the one’s closest to you. Make sure you give abundant love, peace and joy to them as well. They will greatly love you for doing so!

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

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No Regrets—“What Daughters Need to Hear, and Fathers Need to Share”

By Pastor Dean Honeycutt
Mitchell County

When I was at a For King and Country concert a few weeks ago they played a song about young ladies called “Priceless”. And from this song God gave me a story to share with you.

What do you believe about yourself that others do not see about you? Is tough being a young lady because people are always judging you. She is too tall, too skinny, too much makeup, feet are too big. Why are young ladies so obsessed with taking pictures of themselves and are distracted when they do not get the attention from social media? Is it because many young girls do not get the affirmation and confidence from home that they so desperately need?

When you look in the mirror what do you see? For King and Country sing a song called priceless. The song is about what God sees in all young girls and that you are “priceless.”

Mirror, mirror, mirror on the wall,
Tellin’ lies, pointing out your flaws.
That’s who you are,
That’s who you are,
It might be hard to hear,
But let me tell you, dear.
If you could see what I can see, I know you would believe
That I am who I am.
There’s more to who you are,
No matter what you’ve heard.
This is what you’re worth,
More than all the money or the diamonds and pearls.
Oh, this is who you are.
Yeah, this is who you are.
I see you dressed in white.
Every wrong made right.
I see a face in brown.
At the sight of you.
Oh, so priceless.
Irreplaceable, unmatchable, incomparable.
Darling, it’s beautiful.
I see it all in you.
Oh, so priceless (For King and Country).

Here are some things that God sees about every young lady. And truths you need to believe about yourself. It is based on God’s word to Mary. Luke 1:45 (KJV 1900) 45 And blessed is she that believed; for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

You see no one believed Mary, but Mary believed God.

1. I am beautiful.
   Luke 1:28: You are highly favored. You are the recipient of God’s grace. You need to understand that God looks on the inside. God sees you as you really are, and he accepts you for who you are. He does not accept your sin, but he accepts your person, who you are.

2. I am intelligent.
   Luke 1:48-54: Mary is intelligent because she ascribes to God who He is. His worthiness. That is what intelligence is: it is worship. Worship is acknowledging who God is and what He has done for you. Spend time getting to know God and what he wants to help you face a cruel world. Mary spent three months with Elizabeth. You might say sheltered for a time, but now she must go back and face the world.

3. I am Brave.
   Luke 1:38: 38 Mary goes and visits her cousin Elizabeth who is six months pregnant with John the Baptist. Mary says three months and goes back home. She is now showing and is obviously with child. Can you imagine what people are saying about her now? There is a young lady that obviously loved the Lord before she became pregant and now no one believes her. Not even Joseph. What do you think people are saying? Mary, she had us fooled, pretending to be something she’s not. But Mary is brave, she remains faithful to God. You must be brave to follow God.

   Young lady you must be brave. Sometimes you may be left out of the parties and social circles. You may not get that much attention on social media. That is ok God is on your side.

4. I am loved.
   Luke 1:28: We have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

God loves you more than anything. Love God first. Does God care about what you do yes, He does. When you understand God’s love for you and that you are “priceless” you do not need to seek affirmation from someone else. Young boys can mislead you. True love waits, true love is kind. true love respects, true love is patient. true love will last, true love is God’s love. I can only love others to the capacity at which I love God.

One of the most amazing things here is that Mary did not have to face this alone. God sends an Angel to Joseph. Matthew 1:24 God has a talk with Joseph through an angel and Joseph steps up to be the man God has called him to be. Joseph loves Mary.

5. I am engaged or espoused.
   Luke 1:27: Matthew 1:18, 24, 25. What does this mean? It means you are promised to another. Mary and Joseph were promised to another. Why is this important to you? You need to believe that somewhere, and at some time God has a spouse for you.

First, you are a Christian and you are promised to God. You are the bride of Christ. Second you are promised to your future mate. Why would you look for someone when God has planned someone special just for you? What are the odds of someone raised in Texas marrying someone from North Carolina? God brought Pam and I together. In the providence of God Pam and I met at Mars Hill College. Mary could have gone and found someone or even Joseph to legitimize her pregnancy, but she did not do that. Why not? Because her own chastity and purity with God was far more important than anything the world was saying about her.

With this book and what you will read in the next weeks, I hope you will affirm these truths in your daughter’s life. God bless.

Pastor Dean Honeycutt shepherds Snow Hill Baptist Church in Bakersville, NC. He may be reached at 828-583-0215, snowhillbaptist@gmail.com, or visit their website at www.snowhillbaptist.com.

And all thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children. Isaiah 54:13

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February 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 11
Winter
By Allen Buchanan
Mitchell County

As much as I dislike rainy cold Winter days, I’m blessed with shelter and food, love and good health. In 2000, when doctors said I needed to take early retirement, I fought the decision. Even today I struggle with trying to occupy my time. I’m reminded today that for over 20 years I went to work in all sorts of weather conditions. Walking or dragging my manual wheelchair in and out of my truck was okay in 60°+ temperatures. In freezing conditions the temperatures were detrimental to my health. Looking back, I clearly see where God’s plan guided each breath, each decision for my survival, knowing that I press on because He will not forsake me. Do you have that assurance? It’s so easy to obtain, just believe. Believe that Jesus is God’s only Son and He came and died for ALL mankind’s sin. You need to repent and ask for His forgiveness of your sin! BELIEVE!

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

God’s Love Builds Bridges
By Rev. John B. Sorensen

When does eternal life begin? As Christians, we don’t have to wait until the day we leave this earth to appreciate eternity. We can live with an eternal outlook even today. John 10:16 tells us that we can have abundant life right here, right now. Isn’t that great? But what does that mean? Abundant life changes every aspect of our lives. It impacts our marriages, our families, our jobs, our decisions, and our values. It also provides a natural bridge to share the Gospel with those we love and the people we meet.

When we accept Christ’s love for us, we naturally begin to illuminate His love towards others. That love builds bridges. Our family and friends notice a change in the way we value them. Strangers we meet on the street sense something different about us. These encounters give us the perfect opportunity to not only show God’s love, but share it as well.

But how do you start? Well, I’m glad you asked.

One way to enter a spiritual conversation is simply by asking. The most generous, loving thing that we can do is to ask the people in our lives about their spiritual convictions. There are many ways to approach this, but here’s one question that I have found works well: “What gives you the most meaning in your life?” Another way to replace this is, “Is your day-to-day living, what keeps you going?” Most people appreciate such questions. Asking shows you care deeply about them and what matters most in their lives.

Share your story. When we respond with Christ’s love to the people around us, many people want to know why. They love stories. Sharing about our personal experiences deepens our relationships, and it allows us to share the message of salvation in a way that is non-threatening and very personal.

Bear in mind the reason behind your actions. 1 Peter 3:15 tells us to always be prepared to “give the reason for the hope that you have.” Our actions alone are not enough. Acts of kindness are wonderful, but they point no one to Christ. We have to use words. But 1 Peter also warns us to do so with gentleness and respect.

Finally, continue to build the bridge. If your friend doesn’t make a commitment to Christ, don’t walk away from the relationship. Continue to meet together, listen, and share. Pray for them. They might not be ready today, but they might be open to hear the Gospel from you or someone else in the near future.

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

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. Ephesians 5:22

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Facing an Unknown Future
By Billy Graham

Unexpended and unsoiled, the new year lies before us—365 days of golden opportunity. We stand at the
dividing of two streams; one called Yesterday, and the
other, Tomorrow. We know everything and every
turn in the river Yesterday, but the river Tomorrow
stretches out into an unknown future.

We are living in a world that is far different from
our world of Yesterday. We are living in troubled and
difficult times.

Too many people, this new year will bring suffer-
ing, sorrow and untold sadness. Many will be called upon to walk through the
“valley of the shadow of death” (Psalm 23:4). During this new year, some will
stand at the grave, bemoaning lost years of bereavement as a minister says of a
departed loved one: “Dust you are, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19).

Some people will be harmed by accidents on highways, and others will be vic-
tims of cancer or heart attacks. Some may fall victims to the attacks of terrorists,
and others will experience financial disaster.

And millions of people, wandering aimlessly in life’s struggles, will be filled with
inner fears and frustrations and fail to realize their cherished dreams, hopes and
ambitions.

These are cold, harsh, depressing facts. But we need to remember that the new
year is a venture into the unknown, and we are going to have to rethink our lives.

So much of our time year in, year out, is spent in an effort to take a spiritual
inventory of our lives to see if our spiritual resources are sufficient for the needs and
demands of the coming days of trial, temptation and sorrow. In the midst of all this, it is
but one hope—the hope that Jesus Christ is coming again. Without that hope, we cannot
face the future.

New Relationship
First, as we face the new year, we need to have a new relationship with God. It
is imperative that we come into this blessed realization that God loves us—what
ever our ethic, religious or political background, and that Jesus Christ is Savior and
Lord. Many are the effects of a spiritual inventory of our lives.

The psalmist David, outwardly religious but inwardly corrupt, committed
cries of adultery and murder. Realizing that a mere profession of religion could
not save him, David prayed, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a
good spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10). David had walked with God, but he
reflected off the path of victorious living. He fell before God’s face and said, “O
God, cleanse me, make me a new person!” (Cf. Psalm 51:2). And God forgave
him and cleansed him.

In an hour when the media applauds impurity, when it is the style to be unfaith-
ful to marriage vows, when men and women of many matrimonial ventures are
the idols of avarice, I believe that down deep there is a heartbeats for the reality
of Christ’s experience.

Jesus insisted that we become recipients of this experience with God: “You must
be born again” (John 3:7). Jesus, who declared Himself to be the Truth (John
14:6), eliminated forever the possibility of man saving himself by respectability,
outward honor or charitable works.

Not until we admit and confess that we are lost, that our entire existence is
warped by deep-rooted sin, that our every imagination is criminal evil, can we
become conscious of the need of the new birth.

The Bible says, “having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible,
through the word of God which lives and abides forever” (1 Peter 1:23). The
regeneration of the individual is much more needed than the revolution of society.

When an individual is regenerated by the grace of God, that power will be felt
throughout the society in which that individual moves, and it will have a continuous
chain reaction.

Do you want to change the world? Then accept Jesus Christ as your Savior
now, at the beginning of this new year, and live a life dedicated to Him.

Time’s Importance
Second, as we face the new year, we need a new sense of time’s importance.

One of the most cherished gifts that God gives us is time. Many a person through
carelessness and wasting time has seen opportunities slip away. The Bible says,
“Don’t number our days, but gain a heart of wisdom” (Psalm 90:12). Again, it says, “Redeem
the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:16).

Time is the dressing room of eternity. In the few fleeting days of life on this
planet we are given the opportunity to prepare for eternity, and the Bible says,
“How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation” (Hebrews 2:3).

We can waste time by idleness and by unprofitable conversations and excessive
attachments to worldly amusements. But we can redeem time by employing it
wisely, by attending to character-building, by meditating on the greatness of God,
and by using this time to pray. In this new year, to read God’s Word in this
new year. Let us take time to be pleasant, to witness for Christ, to help the
 needy, to spend time with our loved ones, to develop a sunny disposition.

On the sundial at All Souls College, Oxford University, in Oxford, England,
there is this Latin inscription. Prenez temps a destination, which is translated, “Take
your time and have no charge.” Someday you must give an account of your
time. What are you going to do with the 12 months that lie before you?

Life’s Values
Third, as we face the new year, we need a new appraisal of life’s values. Books on
the market are designed to restore man’s lost confidence in himself. “Believe in
yourself” is the message of many a modern puppet.

But a man who is drowning doesn’t need faith in himself, he needs a lifesaver.
A condemned man walking to the electric chair doesn’t need faith in himself, he
needs forgiveness. A man lost in the jungle doesn’t need faith in himself, he needs

to know the way out. The Bible says, “He who
trusts in his own heart is a fool, but whoever walks wisely
will be delivered” (Proverbs 28:26). If we are to face this
new year with faith only in blundering, floundering
man, then this year is destined to take us to new lows
in human suffering and misery. Christ, indeed, is the hope
of the world. At this new year let us ask our Father for a new
sense of eternal values and live
every day with those eternal values in view.

New Power
Fourth, as we face the new year, we need a new power.
The Bible says, “You shall receive power when the Holy
Spirit has come upon you” (Acts 1:8). The world has
never been more ripe for harvest than it is at this very hour. Our nations are under-
going an unprecedented search for purpose and meaning, which God can use for
good to turn individuals back to Him in repentance and faith. But we need Christ’s
power, the infilling of the Holy Spirit. If we are to have that power of the Spirit of
God, we need to yield our lives unreservedly to Him.

I believe that God’s judgment is falling upon our world, and that unrest in
the world is causing people to talk about spiritual things. People want to know
more about who God is and if He really loves them. Many people are looking for
consolation and hope—for the present and for the future—that transcend the
moment-by-moment issues they see on TV or hear on the radio. We need to turn to
God as never before. You can do that now by giving your life and your heart to
Jesus Christ.

Scripture quotations are taken from The Holy Bible, New King James Version.

Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave
them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of
spirits, and live? Hebrews 12:9-11

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Commanded to Love
By Jim Huskins
McDowell County

In Matthew 22:34-40, our Messiah lists the “great” commandment as: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” He added: “And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” These two commandments demand all that a God-fearing person does. When I suggest that God expects his forgiven children to live lives of obedience to His commandments, I am often told that Jesus only gave two commandments, and that if we have a warm feeling toward God and our neighbors than we are fulfilling the law. But is that what scripture teaches? What does it mean to “love, God with our heart, soul and mind.”

The Bible defines what it means to love God, and that definition has nothing to do with our feelings or best intentions. On the contrary, Biblical love is an active rather than an emotional process. Consider the following statements from the Apostle John.

John 14:15: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” John 14:21: “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.” John 14:23-24: “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me.” John 15:10: “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love.” John 15:6: “And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it.”

Our culture defines “love” as a warm feeling that requires no action. The Bible defines loving God as keeping his commandments. Which of these approaches should be a Christian follow? When we intentionally disobey or ignore God’s commandments, we are showing Him that we do not love him. Only our obedience to His Word makes clear our true love for Him. Rather good intentions or sincere motives are enough. Jesus made this fact clear in Matthew 15:8: “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.”

The father of lies takes merciless advantage of our Biblical ignorance. Only Satan’s influence could cause many teachers and preachers to refer to God’s commandments as a “Scary checklist of dos and don’ts.” I am often told that I should focus more on grace—God’s love for us—but how could I possibly accept His love for me without responding by loving Him in the manner He has clearly stated.

Anyone who enjoys the blessings that come from a long-term, loving marriage relationship knows that your spouse has different preferences regarding how he or she prefers to be loved. When many of our spouse’s preferences may be obvious or intuitive, it would be stupid to blatantly ignore him or her in a clearly stated preference. Such an approach would guarantee that the happy marriage would rapidly deteriorate.

This same dynamic exists in our relationship with God. Regardless of how many times we have been told by some preacher or well-meaned teacher that He does not expect us to follow his commandments, the Bible states the opposite. Regardless of the situation, the Bible always demands that we keep His instructions. See Deuteronomy 11:26-28. Paul never claims that God’s law is a curse. To do so would be to contradict all of scripture. His references to the “curse” of the law are used in several ways. The most common is to make it clear that we do not have to keep the law for salvation. Our salvation is a free gift of grace through faith. Paul also refers to the “curse” associated with sin. See Genesis 3:17 and Deuteronomy 28:15. Paul always knew that God’s law is impossible to keep. See Deuteronomy 30:11 and Romans 10:5-8. Paul never claims that Torah is canceled. He makes clear the opposite. See Acts 24:13-14 and Romans 7:12.

Of course, some of Paul’s teachings regarding Torah are difficult to understand. Peter told us that even the case while the Apostles were still living. The fact remains, however, that we are commanded to love God, and He tells us plainly that loving Him means keeping his commandments. I suggest that you choose this day when you will serve.

Obedient Heart Fellowship believes that the entire Bible is true and relevant. We accept salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, and we attempt to love and serve Him by keeping his commandments. We meet each Sabbath—Seventh Day—at Abba’s House, 72 South Main Street at Marion. 10:00 A.M. 828-640-7913.

Jim & Beverly Huskins are members of Obedient Heart Fellowship.

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The Rest Of The Story
Doug Harrell

This one truly did happen, and it may have been the funniest event that Clint ever wrote about in his six month tenure on Harrell Hill Farms. The barn he tells about was an absolute mess and the manure was as he described it, awful! It was a total accident that the hose was being used in the barn — or at least I was holding it, got turned on by Clint. I would honestly agree to do that on purpose but once it happened, I have never seen a more hilarious sight than he was. Read, laugh and enjoy.

Clint's Chronicles on the Funny Farm
By Clint Pollard

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

Ancient Cow Manure!

My friend Doug, along with yours truly (Farmer Clint), set out one balmy morning to construct a new critter chute, or cow tunnel, or cow funnel, or whatever it is you call the sleender little space where cows unknowingly go before they meet the head gate. Ya know, this farming business gets pretty tricky if you don’t know what you’re doing so I try to stand back a wee bit when we tackle a new challenge.

Now one would imagine that constructing a narrow chute/tunnel funnel would be fairly simple, some 2x4's, 4x6's, 3/8 plywood, screws and electric screwdriver, and a 2 ton headgate. Simple enough, right? Wrong answer!

Ya see the choice location for our construction project is the “Aunt Mae Barn”, so called after Aunt Mae Byrd (Doug’s Aunt). An aside, I’ve learned over the last many moons that Doug and Barbara are related to everyone in Mitchell County and beyond. So if you’re local please feel free to drop by for dinner with your distant relatives, anytime I. Really, tell Barbara that Farmer Clint sent you.

Anyway, the floor of the Aunt Mae Barn is really not a floor, of course. Even I know you don’t put floors in a barn, whatshas-in-I’m simple! So the floor is really the ground and in this barn it’s not really the ground because GROUND IS DIRT. Oh no, we can’t have dirt ground on Harrell Hill Farms — this GROUND is 100% cow potties, about 6 feet deep and at least 100 years old.

Now you are likely saying, “So what is your problem, Farmer Clint?” Hundred year old cow pies must be firm and packed down! True enough…unless the tin roof of the barn has holes in it the size of Haley’s Comet and we’ve just had torrential rains. Another question I have for the Lord some day, low come it doesn’t rain when you need it on the crops but it pours when you have to dig in cow manure?

As we walk — actually slough — into the barn it is clear this will be a story for the ages. I’m taking knee deep in ancient cow manure, so thick and poopy I can barely lift one foot in front of the other. And, naturally, when I take a step the debris faces splatter all over me and the surrounding area.

Doug has another brilliant idea, we will submerge a small bilge pump in the liquid dung and pipe it right out the window. I am constantly amazed the ingenuity required to be a farmer… but I’m learning so very much!

Naturally it is MY JOB to hold the little pump under the water prehistoric mastodon dung while Doug props the hose on the window sill. That was working fine until I allowed the pump to rise slightly losing its vacuum. With a look of frustration and disdain Doug turned to tell me to hold the pump deeper in the muck and mire.

As he addressed me (a bit too harshly in my opinion) the hose pipe dislodged from the window and sank dead in the water. I dropped the pump into the sledge, causing it to suck even harder, and I was blasted with the full force of a cow manure firehose! I was immediately blinded.

I ingested heaves only knows how much gravy, patrid cow droppings; my ears filled to overflowing… I was totally deluged by an E-COLI shower! I dared not screams lest I swallow a terminal dose, I could not run as my fully submerged boots seemed forever vacuum-held a foot below the surface dung. My shirt was bursting buttons, my pants leaped high, perforated manure dripping from my hair…

I thought Doug was going to pass out! Once he finally regained composure he FINALLY managed the manure streams back out the window.

Gaping for air I looked at my friend, “Ya know,” I said, “if any other human on planet earth did that to me they would die right now!” With that crooked smile and a twinkle in his eye, Doug replied, “Yeah, but it’s me, huh? And we are friends… Wanna go have some hunch?” (Finish? How can anyone think about hunch after that? Hummm, sounded like a good idea to me.)

Returning to the farm house I began losing myself down, hose down my shirt, down my pant legs, head to toe. When Barbara peeked out the door, “What are y’all doing?” she asked. “Oh, just get into a bit of a mess,” I explained, “and don’t want to drag it into the house.” Doug clucked, “Pollard, you are a tip! Indeed I am.

Comedic relief on Harrell Hill Farms, excuse again I dodged a bullet — death by e-coli amoeba. Thank you Lord!

Humbled in the Hills,
Farmer Clint

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February 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 15
Neuropathy

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How to Recover Your Conscience
By Alan Griffin

The first time the word “conscience” was mentioned in the Bible is John 9:9 (NKJV) we have the Pharisees trying to trap Jesus into disagreeing with the laws of Moses. They brought to Him a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery, and according to Mosaic Law she should be stoned to death. They asked Jesus what He had to say about the matter, and He said, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. John 9:9 (NKJV) Most, if not all of these men, were guilty of the same sin being convicted by their own conscience they left.

When mankind fell from God through sin he became to thinking of having a soul instead of being of one. Many today view themselves as a body, but in all reality we are a soul of thoughts and emotions that resides in a body of flesh. Our body grows old and dies, and our soul lives on forever. Man wanders around the world today a moral fool saving to himself, “If I go to hell, I will have plenty of company,” by thinking further from the truth. We say if we believe what the desires, you end up in hell you will be in total darkest with only your regrets to occupy your mind. It is a place totally devoid of the Spirit of God, and the loneliness there will crush your heart for the concern of your loved ones.

Today we do everything in our power to block the voice of our conscience. Drugs, alcohol, food, relationships, work, shopping, social and entertainment media, are all part of Satan’s plan to block the voice of our conscience. This has led to an unprecedented absence of mental illness in today’s world. There are not many sane people left who are grounded in reality. Most of us struggle with one or more of the problems above, and lack the laser vision and laser therapy needed to root out the basic issues.

Every facet of our lives reveals the inner strife of mankind. If we have any kind of conscience at all, it is weak from neglect and ignored on a daily basis.

I would like to take you down the road to reality for one minute. Sin and hell is what God says it is, if God had to send Fit S, he would have been crucified on a cross, and laid to die a horrible death, it is asking too much for us to believe that these things are true! We have the witness of the Holy Spirit inside of us, and if we have difficulty believing the word of God then it is evident we have sin in our life. The Holy Spirit of God operates in three different fields inside of a healthy man or woman. Whether part or present, a healthy conscience tells us when we are doing wrong. It leads us to righteous living, and makes us aware of present and future judgment.

A healthy conscience guides our outer life away from sin and encourages us to do what is right. It teaches us, it disciplines us, and encourages us to put others first. It isolates us from the sin in our life, and separates us from evil. Man’s fear resists his conscience because it proves we are lost, and our soul is destined for universal loneliness. We stand before the anger of God, and realize our just punishment is to spend eternity in hell. We realize our mind is corrupted, and it is in need of a cure that only Jesus Christ can provide. The conscience is always on God’s side, and the inner voice will always instruct you to do what is right. It is our counselor, our radar, and our GPS to rightful living. It helps us remove the roadblocks of sin so we can have fellowship with our Creator. It is one of the main ministries of the Holy Spirit, which lives inside our mind.

All of us have had moral illumination because the Holy Spirit’s presence lights the way for the inner man to follow. It is up to us to absorb that light and take heed of its guidance. So, we renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling of the word of God deceitfully, but by manifesting all the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. 2 Corinthians 4:2 (NKJV) The purpose of a good conscience is to achieve a pure heart, having sincere faith, and setting an example for others to follow. We are all guilty of doing wrong. It is time we try to do what is right, and give the Holy Spirit of God an opportunity to lead us in righteousness. The Bible says true, living according to the word of God, doing what the Bible says, and restraining ourselves from doing wrong.

When we take the first step there is a transaction within our human spirit, and we grow in confidence that we are forgiven, . . . forgiven because the ultimate sacrifice for our wrong doing. He placed His Son on a cross to pay for our sin debt, and to free us from the curse that has been on mankind since the fall of Adam. By faith, God awakens our soul from slumber of death, and teaches our conscience to expose us to the conviction of our sins. This is the beginning of the process of regeneration where the Holy Spirit cleanses us by submission.

He transforms us into a being of light, and in time removes all darkness from our inner being, and exposes us to the wonderful world of eternal life.

We can start this process with a simple prayer. Dear heavenly Father, I have let the confusion of this world blind me to Your presence. I believe that blocking the inner voice You have given me is a fatal flaw of my being. I pray, Father, that You remove the sin from my soul so that my conscience is once again in working order, leading me to a path of righteous living, and making it possible for me to have fellowship with You. In Jesus Christ’s name I pray, Amen.

Alan Griffin started the kidnichrist ministries in November 1997. He has worked with inner city kids for 2 years. He founded Cervical Cancer Initiative, which is a foundation about raising awareness of cancer. He has joined the ministry in 2000 to work on the ministry’s many projects.

February 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 16
Love Shouldn’t Hurt
By Tracy Black
Mitchell County
February is a month for love. It is the premise of a fresh start with the new year and the ultimate day for lovers; and sweethearts is upon us. As we exchange the Valentine cards and chocolates let’s not lose sight of reality. The reality is everything that seems like love. Here are some of the signs of an abusive relationship.

JEALOUSY – jealousy is a way of love is the abuser would have you think. It is a sign of possessiveness and lack of trust. The abuser will continuously talk to you and accuse you of flirting or being jealous of the time you spend with family, friends or children.

CONTROLLING BEHAVIOR – The abuser may question you about where you went, who you talked to, insist on making the decision about what you do, what you wear, limit phone use and who you can talk to on the phone, who your friends are, etc.

QUICK INVOLVEMENT – The abuser may insist on a commitment very early in the relationship. Many battered women knew their abuser less than 6 months before they were engaged, married, or living together.

UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS – Expects you to meet all his needs. To be the perfect wife, mother, lover, or friend. He will say things like “If you love me, I am all you need,” etc.

ISOLATION – The abuser will try to cut you off from all relations. If you have the need for friends, you are a whore. If you have woman friends, you are a lesbian. If you have a male friend, you are “bad with the wrong strings.” He may try to keep you from going out or going to school.

BLAMES OTHERS FOR PROBLEMS/FEELINGS – He thinks someone is always out to get him or doing him wrong. He may make mistakes and then blame you for upsetting him. He will tell you that you are at fault for almost anything that goes wrong. He will tell you, “You make me mad.” “You make me happy.” “You control how I feel.” Although he makes the decision about what he thinks and feels, he will use feelings to manipulate you.

HYPERSENSITIVITY – The abuser is easily insulted claiming you “hurt his feelings,” when he is really very mad or takes personal setbacks as attacks against him. He may rant and rave about things that have happened which are a part of everyday life.

CRUELTY TO ANIMALS OR CHILDREN – The abuser brutally “punishes” animals and seems to be insensitive to their feelings. He may expect children to be capable of doing things beyond their years, tease children until they cry, beat the children, keep them isolated in their room, etc.

UNEXPLAINED SEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH ANOTHER PERSON – Many like to throw you down and hold you during sex. May occ fantasies where you are helpless. Let you know the idea of rape excites him. Shows little concern about whether you want to have sex and will manipulate you into complying. May have sex with you while you are sleeping or demand it when you are tired or ill.

TREATS OF VIOLENCE TOWARDS others – The abuser may frequently use threats of physical violence meant to control you. Ex: “I’ll slap your mouth out.” “I’ll break your neck.” “I’ll kill you.” The abuser will try to let you know that they do not mean it that everybody talks like that.

BREAKING OR STRIKING OBJECTS – The abuser may break your prized possessions. This is used to terrorize you into submission. He may beat on a table or furniture with his fist, throw objects around, etc.

ANT FORCE DURING AN ARGUMENT – The barber may hold down your head, physically restraining you, while you are being abused.

Despite what anyone tells you, none of these characteristics are part of a healthy relationship. If you recognize your relationship here, please reach out for help. Mitchell County SafePlace is available to talk to your 24 hour hotline, 282-765-5404. Here to listen, we don’t even have to see you in person. Remember, love shouldn’t hurt.

Tracy E. Black, Interim Executive Director Mitchell County SafePlace

Receives Grant to Support Workforce Development Initiative
By Pati Jensen
Mitchell County
The Mitchell County Chamber of Commerce has been awarded a grant from the NC Department of Commerce “Maximizes Carolinas” program. The $7,500,000 grant (with 15% of the matching funds from local partners) will assist in kickstarting a Mitchell County Workforce education and awareness initiative.

The project was developed in response to many existing companies indicating they are struggling to find skilled workers. This is especially true in the manufacturing sector. Feedback from local industries and employers has established that there is a lack of understanding on what career opportunities are available in Mitchell County and that locationing the information when available is extremely difficult. The new workforce initiative funded by the Maximizes Carolinas program is designed to alleviate those issues.

The workforce initiative will be distributed through the new Regional Workforce Development Board and Mitchell County’s Workforce Development Board, Assistant Director, Pati Jensen. This Board is regional NC Economic Development Partnership industry manager, Stilt Sjage.

“Staff at Work in Burke have been very supportive in seeing their project become a model for Mitchell County,” said Pati Jensen. “The Work in Burke program has been very successful and we appreciate their program staff being such a great resource for replicating their project in Mitchell County.”

The program is modeled after the Work program facilitated by the Burke Development Inc. The Burke program was addressing the same issues that the industry in Mitchell County is facing and became a great resource for them. The project was route to model to help Mitchell County in the community.

The program will begin immediately with a partnership with Mitchell County Schools CTE program to survey students and parents in the school system to gather input and feedback on workforce issues. The next steps will include the development of a website and periodic workforce information on recruiting and identifying required positions.

“When meeting with our industry partners, we were hearing of the issues they were having in finding qualified workers to meet the needs of their business and at the same time many concerns about the future workforce pipeline that would keep our future expansions and employment plans successful,” said Jensen. These conversations with business leaders led to the Chamber’s research opportunities to help and respond to this rollout to the Work in Burke program and the Maximizes Carolinas grant.

“We appreciate the assistance provided by the NC Department of Commerce to our efforts,” said Jensen. With the fast changes taking place in the workplace, it is important for industries to ensure their workforce education and training keeps up with the changing school through certification programs or degrees. With all our partners engaged in these efforts, we believe we can control the information gap that exists and assist more of our students in finding a career that is right for them right here in Mitchell County.”

The Maximizes Carolinas Sector grants are designed to “address skills gaps in robust and emerging industry sectors” according to the NC Commerce website. These grants can be used to address challenges such as applicants lacking specific skills and the lack of sector brand awareness and workforce training opportunities.

“The CTE programs in Mitchell County Schools and the workforce development programs at the Mountain Community College are doing an excellent job in working with our students and our community,” said Jensen. “Our local industry is stepping up to the plate to engage partners within our education systems as well. This new workforce initiative will benefit our community by providing the tools and resources they need to improve their workforce.”

In addition, the Chamber has also supported this initiative from the NC General Assembly and the Mitchell County Economic Development Commission. “We appreciate the General Assembly, Duke Energy and our EDC office for coming on board so early in this project, showing their support for workforce development in our communities and their confidence in this initiative, said Jensen.

The mission of the Mitchell County Chamber of Commerce is to support business and promote our community. The Chamber is made up of hundreds of businesses, industries and individual members whose goal is to promote Mitchell County, our surrounding region and its economy.

The Chamber operates two locations in Mitchell County. The Mitchell County Visitor’s Center is located in the Museum of N.C. Minerals, just off the Blue Ridge Parkway. The Visitor’s Center greets tens of thousands of visitors each year and provides them with information about the county. Administrative offices for the Chamber are located on Cross Street in downtown Spruce Pine.

Contact: Pati Jensen, 282-765-9333 pjensen@mitchellcountychamber.org

Pati Jensen is the Director of the Mitchell County Chamber of Commerce.

February 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 17
Denison Forum

Veteran Visits Wife's Grave Over 1,500 Times

By Dr. Jim Denison

Ted Richardson is a ninety-three-year-old veteran. He and Florence met as teens, 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 boxes 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 1,500 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 Bathsheba. 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 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. 9).

These ways to redeem our challenges:

1. 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.

2. We should view adversity as opportunity, for three reasons.

One: Adversity helps us evaluate the health of our souls.

Charles Spurgeon, commenting on the fact that needs depend upon water for survival (Job 8:11), asked himself: “Do I solely serve God when I am in good company, or when religion is profitable and respectable? Do I love the Lord only when temporal comforts are received from His hands?”

He then observed that “a 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, turning on the light does not create life in the cellars—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 pervasive influence.

The Christian who has faith has more 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...
Free Home Remedies Program Helps Prevent Substance Use & Helps with Recovery

Pain and stress can often lead people down the path of substance misuse as they turn to prescription opioids or other substances in the attempt to find relief. Though substances may dull the pain or stress for a time, more and more must be taken to continue the feelings of relief, which can eventually lead to addiction.

The best way to manage pain and stress is to address the health of the whole person—mind, body, and spirit. As readers of the Blue Ridge Christian News, you know the importance of spiritual wellness which comes through relationship with God and with other believers. The First and Great Commandment calls us to love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength. We could all stand to build our capacity to supplement our spiritual work with increased mental, emotional, and physical awareness. Yet, attending to physical and emotional/mental needs is sometimes difficult due to a variety of reasons like busy schedules, time off from work, and cost.

Thankfully, local residents have the opportunity to take part in a free program that helps people address the needs of the whole person through safe and effective pain and stress management techniques. Home Remedies: Community Options Addressing Pain and Stress is a collaborative effort by the local non-profit organization Partners Aligned Toward Health, the Mitchell-Yancey Substance Abuse Task Force (a program of PATH), RHA Health Services, and Blue Ridge Regional Hospital. Home Remedies’ overarching goal has been to reduce opioid use for pain relief.

“T’was exciting to say we have served over 75 individuals and have a core group of 15 faithful attendees since starting last May,” notes Program Director Margaret Rosi. “The program is meeting all of its objectives: helping participants relate to their experience of pain with more coping tools and poise, and tolerating pain or suffering through complementary health practices, including mindful attention practices, movement, and health coaching.”

“Home Remedies provides information and support for patients and providers to work together on bridging a gap that exists in pain management,” Rosi says. Physicians at chronic pain rehabilitation centers across the country emphasize that we need to consider how to treat pain via different modalities other than pain medications alone. These modalities include mindfulness practices and alternative medicines such as anti-inflammatory diet, movement therapy and massage, which are shared through Home Remedies.

“Mindfulness, or mindful attention, is simply the practice of stopping, noticing and reflecting on what one is experiencing in the moment with curiosity and free of judgment,” Rosi explains. “Mindfulness practices are mental exercises that bring our attention, for example, on our breathing or sounds around us. Regular practice is proven to positively affect our emotions, improve our concentration and memory, build compassion and shift our response to stress and pain.”

This innovative program connects participants to local complementary healthcare providers who share strategies and benefits of complementary practices that can be used in addition to or in place of pharmaceutical pain medication, or more invasive procedures like surgery.

While studies clearly show mindfulness-based programs and alternative medicines relieve pain and stress, it’s even more convincing when friends and neighbors agree that it works for them. Just ask area residents who have attended Home Remedies about their experiences.

“Sometimes I felt like throwing in the towel,” explains participant Barbara Banks. “This program has given me the courage to go on, especially when I see others dealing with the same sort of problems. This is a great support group.”

Another participant, who asked to remain anonymous, has attended nearly all of the sessions. He had been relying on opioids for knee and back pain, forced to plan his days around the impact and side effects. “The pain from my neuropathy often felt like someone was putting a pin in my feet,” he says. “One night I fell asleep with the leg of my coffee table on my knee to create a constant pain versus the stabbing.” This participant no longer takes opioids and says his knee and back pain is greatly reduced thanks to alternative therapies.

While he still feels pain, he is living the lessons he is learning in class. “I’ve been reading more and more about mindfulness since the program has started,” he says. “I think that’s part of what has helped my blood pressure drop, along with losing weight, something my doctor also appreciates. My attitude has also changed and I’m trying hard to keep making lifestyle changes that can continue helping.”

A faithful participant who comes to support a loved one in chronic pain believes she has also benefited from the program. “The speakers have been wonderful. I’ve gotten lots of good ideas for things I can do to keep myself in good condition. I particularly enjoy the mindfulness exercises we do every week.”

It’s rare that a community has an educational opportunity to access this information at no cost directly from licensed or certified professionals who practice locally,” Rosi adds. “Many doctors are not aware of the benefits of alternative medicines for pain management or haven’t developed a network of trusted alternative medicine providers to share with patients. Home Remedies supports providers and patients alike as they seek alternatives to address pain and improve quality of life.”

To learn more, support our work, or get involved as a volunteer, contact PATH at (828) 688-7100, info@pathwnc.org, or www.pathwnc.org. For questions specific to Home Remedies, visit www.path-homeremedies.org or contact Jeff Spargo at jeff@pathwnc.org.

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February 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 19
The Source of the Gospel

By Dr. Tom Walker
McDowell County

This is first in a series of studies on the gospel. The word “gospel” basically means “good news.” It seems today for something to sell it has to be bad news. Most news today is an attack on a governmental leader’s character, about someones killing, fires that destroy many people, or floods that leave people homeless. We all long to hear good news but most of what we hear is bad.

I want to think with you on the “good news.” It is good news that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). We deserve to be eternally separated from God forever, but God in mercy and grace let us know there is salvation in and through His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. For a person to get to the Father, He or she must realize the truth and the life of what Jesus said in John 14:6, “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

Let’s think together about the source of the gospel. Where did it originate? Who began it or brought it about? I can easily answer that question from the Bible. Seven times in the Bible the phrase “Gospel of God” is mentioned (Rom. 1:1; 15:16; 2 Cor. 11:7; 1 Thess. 2:2,8,9; 1Peter 4:17). The little word “of” in the Scripture is a source Word. When the Bible says the gospel is the “Gospel of God” it simply tells us the gospel did not originate with man, but it is God who provided it to poor lost sinners on their way to Hall.

The “Gospel of God” involves the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 says, “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand. By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.”

It Was Provided From a Personal God

God sits upon a heavenly throne, rules the universe and has all power in Heaven and on Earth. Yet, He wants to be personal in the life of every person on the earth. Through the gospel we can know the Lord Jesus Christ personally. Christendom is a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

God of course is an everlasting God. Man has a beginning in the Garden of Eden but his creator, but God Almighty never had a beginning. He is the eternal God who owns His existence to no one. Deuteronomy 33:27 states, “The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and thou shalt not be brought unto ruin from before thee; and shalt say, Destroy them.” He is called the “everlasting God” in three different passages in the Bible (Gen. 21:33, Isa. 40:28, Rom. 10:30). Someone said, “God stopped out of nowhere and created everything out of nothing.”

I used to hear a song often many years ago, which lyrics said, “He’s a personal Savior, He’s mine I know, he loves me so, he did say a personal favor, that’s why I tell it out, where ever I may go.”

The Bible does not seek to prove the existence of God, in Gen. 1:1 it assumes the existence of God. Gen. 1:1 says “In the beginning God created the heavens and the Earth.”

The gospel came from a personal God who wants a personal relationship with mankind.

It Was Provided With A Heart of Love

The Bible says clearly in 2 Peter 3:9, “The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is long suffering toward you, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

It is clear that the Lord doesn’t want anyone to go to Hell. He wants everyone who will trust the blood and sacrifice of His Son to go to Heaven. Justice demands sin must be paid for to be forgiven, but grace says you can have a free gift of eternal life through Christ. He paid the penalty of sin that we could be forgiven and that the charges that we have against us could be dismissed. The love of God is such a mysterious fact and yet it is a blessed fact. Two main things prove the love of God. One is what Christ did for the sinner in Calvary and the other is that He provided the Gospel of God for helpless, hell bound sinners.

It Was Provided as the Only Solution for Man’s Sin

There are not many cures for man’s sin. Years ago, it was said of civilization that all roads led to Rome, but all roads do not lead to God.

My life’s verse is Jeremiah 5:21, which says, “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

Man, in his human nature is unquestionably ungodly. The only way for a person to become righteous before God is to be made the righteousness of God in Christ.

Christ took the sins of the world upon Himself so that we could be saved and be reconciled to the Lord. He was able to be our Savior because He was absolutely sinless. He made the payment for our sin. In the presence of God’s imputation, our sins are not imputed or credited to our spiritual account, they are put on Christ. The righteousness of Christ is imputed or credited to us. When God looks at the Christian, He sees the righteousness of His Son. This is why we can have eternal life.

It Was Provided to Give Hope in a Dark World

John 1:5 tells us, “And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not.”

There is so much darkness within the lost sinner and there is certainly a great deal of darkness in society. Society is so corrupt and so anti-God and anti-Bible. Today people are guided by situation ethics. Instead of just following what the Bible says, they say you let the situation guide you. In other words, much of society says, “If a man and a woman love each other, it is alright for them to live together rather than getting married.” No, the Word of God says it is wrong to live a sexually, immoral life. The Bible says, “Fornication” (1 Cor. 6:18).

Jesus and his gospel shine as light in darkness. When Jesus comes in through belief in Christ and the “Gospel of God”, it is then that light and hope enter into the darkness of the heart.

Light produces warmth. Thank God for the warmth and security our faith in the Gospel has brought to us. If you don’t have Jesus you have missed the warmth of His presence in your life.

We should be so thankful for the Gospel of God. God is the source of it. If you have never trusted Christ as your Savior, it is the desire of the Lord that you do so.

Tom Walker is President of Foothills Baptist Bible College and Pastor of Zion Hill Baptist Church in Marion, NC.
Grow and Learn
Pistor Terry Cheek
Mcdowell County

While studying Gods Word, I am constantly seeking growth and maturity as a Christian. I believe there are many Christians out there who are seeking the same growth and maturity. In addition, talking with others I learn there is a lack of understanding about how to get there. We now have two very serious problems, both of them linked together. First, there is a need to grow and learn, second, there is a lack of direction.

Recently, while in Gods Word I ran across a passage of Scripture, which I feel answers both questions. The Apostle Paul while writing to the church of Thessalonica had these words to share. “First Thessalonians 5:16-18 Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.” The church of Thessalonica was growing and maturing. They had many problems and needed direction. Let’s expand three obvious points that Paul makes.

First, we are to rejoice. Don’t just read this and move on, it is a building block of our Christian growth. We are not talking about just being happy, or satisfied or even content Paul is telling us to be thrilled about Jesus! In addition, we should be this way daily Notice the word evenmore. Evenmore refers to a continuous process that builds upon itself and in this case it is founded upon Jesus Christ. Do you remember the means and days immediately following your salvation? Do you remember how thrilled you were? Paul is reminding the church of this and making us see that we need to have daily Jesus and make time daily to read His word. I can live rejoicing in say Lord and Savior. When I can’t find this, I know to look at my heart because I have something between my Lord and me. Find an attitude of rejoicing and experience it on a daily basis.

Second, we are to pray. Prayer is one of the most neglected parts of many if not most Christians lives. What happens if we do not have a good prayer life? We do not study Gods Word well, neither do we walk close to the Lord. Prayer is the key that unlocks the treasures of a Christian life. Jesus tells us in Luke 11:9 “And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” Do you see how prayer is the key that unlocks the treasures of a Christian life? It is one of the disciplines of our faith, because it is too important. So actually, we can truthfully say a effective prayer life will help foster the attitude of rejoicing evenmore.

Prayer keeps our relationship with God fresh and well grounded in Jesus Christ. However, our prayer life should be constant. The term “without ceasing” in my opinion is terribly misunderstood by many Christians. Paul isn’t talking about us going through our day constantly talking aloud to God. Paul is, I believe, referring to us having a heart that is sensitive to the needs of others and being able to readily identify prayer needs as they come before us. Do we want to win people and circumstances that need God? If the answer is yes then our heart must be paying attention to what is going on around us. Having the proper attitude and supporting it with a proper prayer life will greatly improve any Christian’s walk with the Lord. It will encourage us, edify us, and motivate us to seek an even closer walk tomorrow, not because we have to, but because we want to.

Third, we should be thankful. This should be understood for the Christian. Christians are a thankful people; I really believe that, however, I believe we slip when it comes to the depth of our thankfulness. This depth takes on many different perspectives. For example, I am amazed when I sit in a restaurant and watch people receive their food and without giving a thought to being thankful, they just dig in. Lori and I are approached occasionally by folks thanking us for being thankful! In public, for the food and service we receive. Yes, we pray in public. We have never been told we couldn’t give thanks, if the restaurant would not allow it, then we have already decided we cannot dine there. We also pray at home. Does that mean we are the measuring stick for prayer? No, no at all, we are a work in progress. I’m certain there are many who can help us grow closer by displaying a deeper thankfulness for others. I share this to encourage your exploration and examination of your prayer life. It’s not only necessary, it’s crucial to your walk with the Lord.

Paul closes by reminding us this is Gods Will in Jesus Christ and it concerns you. This is very personal and very deep and very achievable. To grow and mature in our relationship with God requires us to have a heart that is evermore rejoicing, that is praising without ceasing and that is thankful in all areas of life, public and private. Until next month, I pray for God to richly bless each one of you!

Terry Cheek is pastor of Calvary Missionary Baptist Church in Marion NC. You can contact Terry by email at terrycheek3@gmail.com or by phone at (428) 405-6220.

4-H Robotics Team AstroBros Compete at Regional Competition
By Kim Slocnick
Mitchell County

The 4-H robotics team AstroBros competed at a regional competition in Hendersonville on Jan. 12/10. They presented their solution for alleviating the social impact that a robot face when spending time away from the human environment for an extended period of time. They used a robot named “Trevor” as their solution. The team used the robot to perform a task in a simulated environment, including a maze and various obstacles.

In addition to the competition, the team also presented a lesson plan for classroom use. The lesson plan includes activities and exercises to help students understand the concept of robotics and the importance of human interaction. The team’s goal is to encourage students to pursue careers in robotics and related fields.

The AstroBros team plans to continue developing and refining their solution for the regional competition and prepare for future competitions.

Mitchell County 4-H

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

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February 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 21

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Terry Cheek is pastor of Calvary Missionary Baptist Church in Marion NC. You can contact Terry by email at terrycheek3@gmail.com or by phone at (428) 405-6220.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. John 13:34-35
Weddings, Graduations and Saving the Best Until Last

By Dr. Tracy Jessup

“When the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. John 2:1-2”

Our family eagerly is anticipating several milestones in 2019. Our son’s fiancé will graduate from Gardner-Webb University with her degree in Elementary Education on Mother’s Day weekend. Two weeks later, on Memorial Day Weekend, she and our son will be joined together as husband and wife. Two weeks later, our daughter will graduate from Crest High School. And two weeks later, my wife and I will celebrate our 30th wedding anniversary. I am hopeful that these events will go more smoothly for us than the news I read of a Swedish couple whose honeymoon was plagued by six natural disasters. An April 8, 2011 online story reported by Business Insider reported on the honeymoon of Safina and Erik Svanstrom.

“First, they were stranded in Munich, Germany, thanks to a terrible snowstorm. Then when they finally arrived in Cairns in Australia, the area was struck by a ferocious cyclone. Soon after, they journeyed to Brisbane. But that city was struck by floods, so they went to Peta – only to be greeted by bush fires. They must have been extremely relieved to land in Christchurch, New Zealand. Until the 6.3 magnitude earthquake struck the city, causing huge devastation. The couple then travelled to Japan, which was rocked days later by the March 11 earthquake (www.businessinsider.com/honeymoons-from-hell-plagued-by-natural-disasters-2011-4)”. While not as disastrous, today’s page conveys a potentially embarrassing situation at a wedding, providing the setting for the first miracle of Jesus. The hosts ran out of wine. In The NIV Bible Background Commentary: New Testament, Craig Keener writes, Weddings lasted seven days, and hosts invited as many people as possible, especially distinguished guests like prominent teachers. To run out of wine at a wedding was a social faux pas that would become the subject of jests for years [since the host was responsible to provide his guests with adequate wine for seven days] (p. 266). Jesus, at his mother’s request, intervenes and instructs the waiters to take six stone water jars, which were used for ceremonial purification, and fill them with water. He then told them to draw some out and take to the chief steward. “When the steward tasted the water that had become wine... the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, ‘Everyone serves the good wine first... But you have kept the good wine until now’” (John 2:5-10).

John refers to what Jesus did as a sign, a sign that only a few people saw and those who believed already were his disciples. New Testament Scholar George Beasley Murray writes, “the concept of sign... is used especially of events that demonstrate the truth of God’s word through his prophet... and so authenticate the prophet himself, it also denotes events that lead things to come, especially in reference to the eschatological future” (Word Biblical Commentary: John, p. 33).

Not only is the miracle a sign, but a sign that revealed the glory of Jesus. It is difficult to hear the word “glory” following the celebration of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany, without recalling the prologue to John’s gospel. “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of the only son, full of grace and truth” (1:14). God’s glory is not always what we expect it to be, and this is seen most vividly at Calvary. Again, Beasley-Murray writes, “the hour that struck in Cana leads momentarily to the moment of the exaltation of the Son of Man to heaven via his cross, when the wine of the kingdom of God was made available to the whole world” (p. 38).

Prayer: Lord, may our lives overflow with the awareness that you, who saves the best until last, have the power to redeem our past, transform our present, and hold our future in your hands.

Located in the North Carolina foothills, Gardner-Webb University is a private, Christian, liberal arts university that prepares students to become critical thinkers, effective leaders and compassionate servants in the global community. Emphasizing a strong student-centered experience and rigorous academics, Gardner-Webb ignites learning and service opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.

Dr. Tracy Jessup serves as vice president for Christian Life and Service and senior minister to the University. He is a graduate of Gardner-Webb with a B.A. in music and earned his M.Div. degree at Samford University’s Saxon 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 pastorate, pulpit supply, and preaching revival services. He and his wife, Teresa, have two children, Christian and Emma.
Tossed on the Seas of Life

By Tim Iron

The boat had been adrift at sea for days. Grown men began to weep for fear of dying. Their assigned fate was up to the mercy of the storm. The vessel was one of the largest in the flotilla, a huge oared ship which carried the largest star-ship of Rome. The captain, a seasoned veteran of the sea, knew the risks of sailing in the late season on the Adriatic. No man sailed this ocean in the winter and lived. Yet, due to his circumstances of his city’s plight, he had no choice but to continue. He ordered his large ship to set sail and set the course of their ship for home. The captain, knowing of his duty, was determined to keep his crew alive.

The storm was relentless, but it was the ship’s commander’s duty to keep his crew alive. The ship was equipped with a sturdy hull, a strong mast, and a well-stocked cargo of food and water. The crew was well-trained and knew how to handle such a situation. They were determined to survive.

As the ship navigated through the storm, the crew continued to fight against the elements. They banded together, using their skills to keep the ship afloat. They worked tirelessly, pulling ropes, steering, and keeping the sails full. Despite the challenges, the crew remained steadfast in their determination to reach safety.

The storm eventually subsided, and the ship was able to make it to land. The crew was met with cheers and praise for their perseverance. They had managed to overcome the storm and return home.

However, the journey home was not without its challenges. They faced storms, rough seas, and treacherous waters. But with the help of the crew and their captain, they managed to navigate through it all.

In the end, the ship successfully reached land, and the crew was able to disembark and start their new journey. They had overcome the storm and the challenges that came with it. And they did so together, with strength and determination. They were a testament to the power of human spirit and the resilience of the human soul.

Timothy F. Iron lives in Colleton, NC, with his family. He is the former Director of the Trail of Faith in Walhalla, where he still volunteers and helps with tours. He now teaches Math full time at Watauga High School in Boone. He is the author of a new Christian series, “Children of the Light,” with the first book being released in February, “Brave He is to Fear,” and his recent book being released, “The Light in the Darkness.” He is an active blogger, artist, and musician. Timothy also has a BIEE from LF, and is a Lay Speaker. He can be reached at timiron@live.com

There is no fear in love: but perfect love casteth out fear; because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

1 John 4:18
Baptist State Convention
of North Carolina

Nostalgia
By Joel Reed

Evoking a sense of nostalgia is an integral part of Disney’s filmmaking strategy. We see it in recent films like the Star Wars franchise, Beauty and the Beast and Mary Poppins Returns. This brilliant strategy involves crafting movies that both mirror the contours of the original and stand on their own for a newer generation.

Nostalgia is defined as “a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past, typically for a period or place with happy personal associations.” It has the unique ability to carry a person to the past like nothing else. In essence, nostalgia brings whois familiar to the forefront of a person’s heart.

When appropriated correctly, nostalgia can powerfully connect generations of people to a greater, common good. But if mishandled, nostalgia can take a darker, more sinister path.

Consider that after the Lord delivered the children of Israel from Egyptian captivity, God was teaching them to trust Him by miraculously providing for their needs. The Israelites were not to take hold of all God had promised until they started looking wistfully for many of the foods they enjoyed in Egypt. However, while in Egypt, the Israelites were slaves. But the uncertainty of the future led them to long for the familiar. Nostalgia and blindness to the full truth of their past, and they began to weep over all they had lost, which did not please the Lord.

God never calls His people to nostalgia. He always calls us to remember His faithfulness. The psalmist declares, “I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will recount all of my wonderful deeds.” (Psalm 11:1). The psalmist doesn’t long to return to the past but remembers the Lord’s faithfulness to him in order to step into an uncertain future with hope and confidence.

Nostalgia often leads to despair because it promises something it cannot deliver — a world that never changes and a life that seems simple and comfortable. There is only one problem — the world is always changing. That’s why the Lord says, “Remember Me” rather than “Remember how it used to be.”

The Bible, in fact, condemns such thinking. When our great hope is in a person rather than a timesnap, our greatest days are always ahead of us. Here’s how some biblical writers speak of Him:

• “The Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (James 1:17).
• “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).
• “For if the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed” (Malachi 3:6).
• “And this God who never changes promises always to be with His people and to watch over their righteousness and goodness both now and forevermore.”

Instead of looking back to what is familiar for ultimate hope when things get tough, we can always look ahead to what feels uncertain knowing the Lord will meet us and guide us through it because He has been faithful to us along the way, and He’s already waiting on us.

Perhaps the Lord has been patiently waiting on your church to make the shift from nostalgia (longing for the past) to remembrance (longing for Him). Then He can unleash His people to do a new thing in 2019 for the sake of His great name.

Josh is the Leader of Adult Evangelism and Discipleship for the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.

Gardner-Webb University

GWU Hunt School of Nursing

From Jackie Bridges

GWU Hunt School of Nursing
Adds New Doctor of Nursing Practice
Programs in August 2019

Degrees will be offered in Fea-
by Nurse Practitioner and Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. — The
Hunt School of Nursing (HSON) at
gardner-Webb University is pleased to announce the beginning of new entry level post baccalaureate Doctor of Nursing Practice programs for Family Nurse Practi-
tioners (DNP-FNP) and Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioners (DNP-
PMHNP). The DNP-FNP will be a transition of the currently offered Master of Science in Nursing — Family Nurse Practitioner to a doctoral level entry program. Pending approval by The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) and the Accreditation Commission on Educa-
tion in Nursing (ACEN), the new programs will enroll their first cohort of students in August 2019.

The Doctor of Nursing Practice — Leadership program has been offered in the HSON since 2010. The DNP-FNP and DNP-PMHNP will continue the school’s tradition of leadership in nursing education programs and further the HSON distin-
tinction of preparing healthcare providers in a community of faith and learning.

“The addition of the Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner (PMHNP) Program to the Hunt School of Nursing builds upon the strong foundation of our current Family Nurse Practitioner Programs” observed HSON Dean Nicole Wa-
ters. “We will continue to strive to provide an advanced practice nursing educa-
tion in a caring and faith-based environment. The PMHNP will meet the current needs of our community partners and expand mental health services within our community.”

The HSON has achieved several recognitions for its nursing education pro-
grams. Recently the school’s online programs were ranked ninth in the nation by OnlineColleges.com. Additionally, the Master of Science in Nursing program has also received multiple honors from such sources as College Choice, the U.S. News & World Report and Ntonebn.org.

While providing an exceptional learning experience, faculty and staff promote the school’s mission to “enhance the health status of the global community by preparing individuals to practice holistic and professional nursing through the provision of student-centered programs of study for a diverse student population that promotes academic excellence within a Christian, private, liberal arts setting utilizing teamwork and community engagement.”

For additional information on the proposed new programs, please contact the Gardner-Webb University Graduate Admissions Office at gradschool@garder-
webb.edu or visit www.garderwebby.edu/nursing.

Located in the North Carolina foothills, Gardner-Webb University is a place where Christian compassion meets critical thinking. A private, Christian, liberal arts university, Gardner-Webb emphasizes a strong student-centered experience and rigorous standards to prepare students to become effective servant-leaders within the global community. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.

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— H.O. Hirt, ERIE Founder

February 2019 • Blue Ridge Christian News page 24
Celebrating Recovery

Helps On The Way!!!
By Christy Young
Mitchell County

Wow! How assuring to hear that help is on the way in times of disaster or distress? It's a sense of security, safety, and comfort to know that help will soon be arriving. The past few months have been somewhat difficult for my family. My dad is having a lot of health complications, and I have been overwhelmed with emotions. As I have begun to pray, God has revealed himself over and over. God is always good! As we travel through this life, it is often easy to focus on the trials we are facing. But, God reminded me lately that my blessings were never enough hardship that I have ever faced. Hebrews 4:16 says, “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace in the time of need.” The door to the throne is always WIDE open to God’s children. We can come anytime, we don’t need an appointment. Wow, that means that we can walk straight to the throne of grace when we need help. We have a direct line to the Father! I have realized that I am weak, and I am in such need of God’s strength in both the good times and bad. But, it is so great to know that in our time of despair that we serve a God that is always faithful, compassionate, and able to calm our storms. I don’t know what the future will bring, but I do know with complete confidence that I serve a God that will hold my hand to the end. God promised that he will never leave us or forsake us. So, no matter what storms, hardships, or trials that you may be facing...Our God is always near. Find your strength and refuge in HIM and believe in faith that help is on the way.

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

Town of Valdese

April Craft Market
By Morrisa Angi
Burke County

Valdese, NC - January 23, 2019 - The Historic Valdese Foundation is excited to announce the spring craft show. The annual April Craft Market will be held on April 13th, 2019, at the Old Rock School in Valdese, and craft vendor applications are currently being accepted. Vendor applications are available for download at visitvaldese.com. This event isstrictly for handmade items only.

The April Craft Market will feature a variety of handmade crafts and gift items, very similar to the annual “Christmas in November Craft & Gift Show” that is held in Valdese on the second weekend in November. “We are very excited for this event,” states Morrisa Angi, Director of the Community Affairs and Tourism Department in Valdese. “Our spring craft show continues to build and build with amazing vendors and attendees! We are thrilled to bring this event back this year for our community to enjoy.”

The craft show will be held at the Old Rock School from 9:00 am to 4:00 pm with approximately 45 vendors offering handmade crafts, gifts, and baked goods. The first 100 shoppers will receive a complimentary shopping tote. Shoppers are also invited to visit the Piedmont & Western Railroad Museum the day of the show for their special open house. Door prizes will be offered including furniture, show tickets, gift cards and some decor.

All proceeds from this event will go towards the Historic Valdese Foundation, which is a 501C-3 non-profit organization dedicated to helping with special projects and events in Valdese.

For more information about the April Craft Market, visit www.visitvaldese.com, or call 828-879-2129.

Morrissa Angi is Director of Community Affairs and Tourism.

“Faces you know.”
We cannot change the outcome, but we can affect the journey.
~ Anne Richardson

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February 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 25
The Rotary Club of Spruce Pine recently presented Chris Westerveer with the club’s “You Make a Difference” Award. He was nominated by Rotarian Reid Duncan in recognition of Westerveer’s long-time community service. He has been a member of both the Fire Department and EMT. He joined as a junior member at the age of 17. In addition, Westerveer has devoted thousands of hours to youth programs especially his high school and for twenty years he has been a member of the Sages Mountain Ski Patrol. Both Chris and his wife, Elizabeth, have devoted their lives to Service Above Self, the motto of Rotary, right, was presented the award from Club President, Floyd Stays, as a club meeting in December.

Exaina Percival lives in Little Switzerland and is a member of the Rotary Club of Spruce Pine.
The Key to Fulfill Your Purpose in Life!

By Joyce Meyer

God loves you and He has a plan for your life. You are a wonderful creation made by Him and you have a unique purpose to fulfill in this world.

Ephesians 2:10 (AMP) says that as Christians, “we are His workmanship [His own master work, a work of art], created in Christ Jesus... for good works, which God prepared [for us] beforehand [taking path which He set], so that we would walk in them [living the good life which He prearranged and made ready for us].”

It’s so exciting to know we are each created with a purpose and God has a good life that He has prepared in advance for us to live. But it’s important to understand that we have an enemy, Satan, who wants to keep us from having the life Jesus died to give us.

Yes, Satan has a plan for us, too, and his plan is destruction and death. John 10:10 (ESV) says the enemy “comes only to steal and kill and destroy.”

The good news is that we have everything we need through Christ to overcome the enemy. We just have to know who we are in Christ, believe that we have His authority, and know how to release the power God has given us.

The Measure of Your Faith

Faith in God is required of us to release the power and authority we have in Christ. Romans 12:3 (ESV) says each person has a “measure of faith that God has assigned.” This means God has given you enough faith to do His will, whatever it may be, no matter what the enemy throws at you to stop you.

There are many challenges and difficult situations we face in life. You may have a child with special needs to care for, or maybe you’re in a difficult marriage. You could be facing a devastating illness or have serious financial problems. Whatever your situation is, God has given you enough you need, through Christ, to keep you moving forward in His plan for your life.

We need to always remember that God is greater than our problems—suffering is too hard for Him and nothing catches Him by surprise. When we’re going through hard times and the enemy is attacking us, we don’t need to ask, “What can I do?”

The question is, “What can God do?” The Word says all things are possible with God, and greater is He who lives in me than he who is in the world. (See Matthew 16:26 and 1 John 4:4.)

I want you to really get this in your heart today: In Christ, you have enough faith and the strength you need to do whatever you need to do in life! Get rid of “I can’t” thinking and focus on the faith of God’s Word, which says, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (See Philippians 4:13.)

The Simple Solution to Overcome Enemy Attack

Prayer is a simple powerful way to interrupt Satan’s plan because we release our faith through prayer. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (ESV) says, “Pray without ceasing.” This basically means prayer can be as natural as breathing, and our first response in every situation. It’s so amazing that we can talk to God all the time.

Now the enemy doesn’t want us to pray, so he will do everything he can to discourage us. He wants us to think prayer is hard, that we need to use eloquent speech and sound poetic, that we need to be careful what we ask God for so we don’t overextend Him with too many requests, or that we have to be in a certain place with a certain posture (on our knees, head bowed, eyes closed) for God to hear us. But it’s actually simple to pray effectively.

James 5:16 (ESV) says, “...The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” God wants you to come to Him honestly, with a sincere heart, and just talk to Him as a friend. Be yourself and don’t approach conversation with God as a religious activity. Humble yourself before Him and open your heart to Him. He loves you and wants you to talk to Him will for your life victoriously.

As a believer in Jesus Christ, you are God’s child and He is always with you. He is Almighty God, and if God is on your side, who can be against you?

In Christ, you have what you need today to live in victory. Put your faith in God and His Word, pray, take God-inspired action, and fulfill your true purpose in life!

For more on this topic, order Joyce’s three-CD series: Unleashing the Power of Faith. You can also contact us to receive our free magazine: Enjoying Everyday Life, by calling (800) 727-9873 or visiting www.joeyemeyer.org.

Please note: The views and opinions expressed throughout this publication and/or websites are those of the respective authors and do not necessarily reflect those of Joyce Meyer Ministries.

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 (Buchanan). She hosts the Enjoying Everyday Life radio and TV programs, which air on hundreds of stations worldwide. For more information, visit www.joeyemeyer.org.

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Catawba River Baptist Association - The churches of CRBA are concerned with the vast drug abuse present 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 then we are willing to help you begin this ministry, please give us a call at 828-437-0137. You may also contact Bobby at rsuitt@cbarc.net. Your help and prayers are greatly appreciated.

Our Association is joining with FOUN and Missionaries in an effort to provide wheelchairs. Their goal is to raise around the world. If you have a wheelchair you are not using (condition does not matter) please consider bringing it to our CRBA office in Morganton. We will be collecting wheelchairs over the next few months and then will repair them and give them to a person in need. This new ministry will bless families in locations around the world.

To God Be the Glory!

We have an exciting mission opportunity for folks in our Association. There are many people in the eastern part of our state who are still recovering from recent hurricanes and devastation and we want to take a team of men and women March 18–21, 2019 to do cleanup and some construction in Lumberton, NC. This trip will not cost you anything as all supplies, lodging, and food will be provided free of charge through our partnership with Baptist on Mission. If interested, please call our CRBA office at 828-437-0137 for more information and to sign up.

In partnership with the Baptist Foundation of North Carolina, we are offering assistance for ministers and their spouses for the purpose of preparing Wills and Estate Planning. In addition, the first 10 couples scheduling their free one-hour appointment will be awarded $100 to help with any legal fees. To schedule your 1-hour appointment February 15th or 19th please call our CRBA office at 828-437-0137.

Because of the financial gifts of individuals and CRBA churches, the above pastors were blessed with “pedals for pastors” to help them do ministry in this area more effectively. Thank you CRBA for your generosity and willingness to do missions locally, nationally and around the world. We will continue to collect for “Pedals for Pastors” for a few months ahead. Remember, a gift of $20 will provide a bicycle for a pastor in India.

Green Street Baptist Church, High Point, NC - Disciple-Making Conference is set for this coming weekend and we are looking forward to begin and learn this ministry, this is a great opportunity for us to increase the number of people and make our church aware of God’s plan for our church.

Mount Home will be hosting the “Encounter Tour” on February 14th, 2019. The program will begin at 7pm. Tickets are available online at https://www.eventbrite.com/e/the-encounter-tour-morganton-nc-tickets-49898578214 or through Mount Home Baptist Church.

Great Hope Seventh-day Adventist Church - Reviving (or promoting) Diabetes Classes will again be offered for 6 Mondays, January 7th through February 11th, 6:00 pm. Scientific evidence will be shared in a group setting, along with healthy and tasty foods. These classes will be the history of faith (Toro Pez, official “City of the Reformation” and capital of historic Waldensian Valleys, a very friendly small town in the quiet foothills of the Alps, with low rental prices for furnished apartments), we are very grateful if you forward this offer. In all cases we will be very grateful if you would make this offer known in your community.

We thank you for your help!

Care Partners: Want to make a difference, touch lives, and impact your community? If so, several Volunteer opportunities are available in the following positions: Administrative Office Volunteer, Patient/Family Support Volunteer, Recreational Support Volunteer, Visiting Caregiver Volunteer, Special Events Volunteer, and a newly added position, Pastoral Care Volunteer! For more information on these positions, please contact CarePartners Hospice and Palliative Care McDowell Volunteer Services Department at 828-652-1100 ext 301. You can make an everlasting impact with just a few hours of your time a week! Call today to learn more!

Cross United Methodist Church - Saturday, February 9th, 2019, 11 a.m. – 2 p.m. at Cross United Methodist Church

New Community Outreach Benefits McDowell Families with Children Teens for Christ B.E.A.R Closet (Baby Equipment and Restaurant Closet)

Beginning Wednesday, August 1st, 2018, the youth group at Cross United Methodist Church located at 85 West Cross Street in Marion will launch a new outreach ministry benefiting families with children. The outreach will be open the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of each month from 6:00 to 6:30 p.m. on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of each month from 9:00 to 10:00 a.m. For more information or if you are interested in volunteering opportunities call (828) 801-8790 or email TeensforChristBEarCabinet@ymail.com.

Achrelle Street Baptist Church is in need of a pianist. Please call Lynda Burnette at 828-432-3491.

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Achrelle Street Baptist Church is in need of a pianist. Please call Lynda Burnette at 828-432-3491.

First Baptist Mortanog currently has 55 adult choir robes that they would like to make available to another church. If your church is interested please contact David Thayer at 828-437-2444 ext 16.

First Baptist of Marion - Malachi Bihla Study Led by Lisa Harpr Thursday, February 7th – April 4th 3:30 p.m. - Fellowship Hall Dial the church office 652-6300 for sign-up. Deadline is Thursday, January 31. There is no workbook to purchase for this study.

Belize Mission Trip February 5-12, 2018 BFC’s relationship with the Baptists of Belize will continue this winter by sending a mission team to work in the western region of the country. Our construction crew will continue work on the San Elena Baptist Primary School, helping complete a second story addition. The medical team will provide free medical clinics to underserved communities near the Guatemalan Border, where there is a large immigrant population. Our team will stay in San Elena at the Aguada Hotel. The week will end with two nights at San Pedro on the coast. Funds to cover our ministry costs are already raised. However, each team member provides their own travel costs, which are estimated at $1,100 par person, covering airfare, ground transportation, lodging, international travel insurance, T-shirt, and most meals. For more detailed information, promotional flyers are available near the Chapel or see Scott Hageman. A minimum of 10 persons are needed to go on this trip with a maximum number of 25. A valid passport is required, which should not expire within 6 months of travel.

Registration Form and $100

The Children’s Committee is creating a library for the children and families who are served by the location. We are collecting donations of new and gently used, good condition books for children of all ages and reading levels, as well as resources for parents. The donations will supplement the selection of books currently on hand. Please leave donations in the main office. Thank you!!

Grace Community Church - Vacation Bible School June 24-28, 2019 More information to come SOON

Night to Shine - Buddies Needed!

On February 8th we will be hosting Night to Shine, a prom for people with special needs, this year’s theme is “You are the best. It is so amazing tonight! There are 2 ways you can be part of this night.

First, we need buddies, people to hang out and enjoy the night with one participant. We currently have around 160 attendees signed up, but only 90 buddies. If you would like to register as a buddy, please click here.

Second, you can sponsor an attendee for only $25. This will help with the cost of their food and gift bag. Please click here to become a sponsor.

Mitchell County

Bear Creek Baptist Church - Thursday, February 14, 11:30 a.m. - Senior Adult Valentine Lunch in Fellowship Hall

Women’s Prayer Breakfast Feb 8th, 8:30 am at DT’s. Celebrate Recovery This is a Christian and Biblical Based Program, giving up and help for men, women and families suffering from addiction. Any questions contact Josi Wise.
Bits ’n Pieces

382-0601

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, Baptist Mission Rally—Saturday February 15, 2019 Newbridge Baptist Church at 199 Elk Cove Ave. Asheville, NC—Meal at 5:45 and Program at 6:00

Association Mid-Year meeting on February 25, 2019 at 7:00pm—First Baptist Church in Spruce Pine, NC

Association Bible Drill will be Saturday, March 16 at Bear Creek Baptist Church

Altapass Baptist church invites you to their Annual February Bible Conference February 17-20th.

Sunday Services 10:30 to 7:00pm, Mon-Wed Morning 10:00am Evening Services 7:00pm. Fri, Sat 7:00pm

Guest speakers and Special Music. For more info contact Rev. Marcus Benfield at 828-850-3346.

Mitchell County Chamber - Yaa Village: We are announcing the Opening of Yaa Village Commercial Share Kitchen! We’ve realized there’s a gap that needs to be filled between the production of local food and their consumption. That’s why we started Yaa Villages Commercial Share Kitchen so we could provide a certified area at a reasonable cost for local farmers to sell their products. This way we help to support community entrepreneurship with their part-time business.

So, if you have a product you want to market and sell (like jams, jellies, baked goods etc) or you need a commercial kitchen for catering, having a private Pop Up Kitchen and having access to your leisure time imagination; we hope our Shared Kitchen can provide you with a solution.

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

We are also serving Lunch on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 12:00 pm to 2:00 pm

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 representatives will coordinate the event.

After Hours begins at 4:30 pm and ends at 6:30 pm (unless other arrangements are made).

March: The Toe River Arts Spruce Pine Gallery & The Mitchell House
April: The Mitchell News Journal
May: Lofty’s Glory Rating and Tabing, Bakersville, NC
June: The Brian Center
July: KB’s
August: Mitchell County Animal Rescue
September: The Toe River Arts Spruce Pine Gallery
October-November: OPEN
We do not have After Hours in December.

Summer 2019 Workshops at Pea Island
Summer 2019 workshop descriptions are here!

A few facts:
- We’re offering 103 workshops this summer.
- Scholarships are available for all 103 workshops!
- Registration opens January 15.
- Scholarship applications open January 1 and are due by February 15.

Mitchell County Historical Society
We are happy to announce that Mitchell County Historical Society will be holding SCAN DAYS on Saturday, February 9 at our office in the Historic Courthouse in Bakersville, and Saturday, February 23 at Grassy Mountain Museum.

These sessions will be from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Our genealogists will be there to help you scan your old photos of family, letters, and/or documents to be stored electronically on a computer. You can then send these old treasures to family or friends from your home computer. Also, you will be adding to MCHS’s visual archive of historical people, families, important letters, etc. You can also get answers to your genealogy questions.

You can, of course, keep your materials to take home with you.

If you have any questions, please give us a call at 682-4371 (Wed.-Fri., 10 to 4)

Toe River Arts June Studio Tour Applications- Open to all current Toe River Arts member artists/craftpersons. A self-guided art tour studio tour and open house. Toe River Arts provides Tour Guides, road signs, exhibition of participants’ work, and other promotion for the event.

Deadline: Wednesday, March 6th.
Giftshop Jury Applications
Open to current Toe River Arts members living in Avery/Mitchell/Yancey counties. Submit up to 3 pieces for review or one or both galleries. Work must be original, handmade, professional, ready for display, and salable in the Toe River Arts venue.

Deadline: Friday, March 16th

Interested in volunteering? Contact us at info@toeriverarts.org

Run For Holland - I have exciting news that I couldn’t wait to share! After 5 years of being organized Run For Holland has finally received its 501(c)(3) status. This means that we are recognized by the IRS as a tax exempt and that we can give donors tax deductions when they make charitable gifts. The ability to apply for grants and other public or private allocations available only to IRS-recognized, 501(c)(3) organizations.

With that being said, I want to ask you all to consider donating to Run For Holland as 2018 comes to a close. To date, we have been able to give over $33,000 in grants to the local disabled community and hope that being “official” will allow us to do even more in the years to come. Run For Holland started with a small vision to help the local disabled community through awareness, whatever that means. Because of people like you it has grown into a Non-Profit organization that is reaching thousands of people per year through awareness, education, and financial support.

Can you help us grow our budget for 2019?

P2 registration is open to feel free to sign up for the 2019 race on Saturday May 18th, 2019.

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

Comprehensive Transportation Plan - Mitchell County the towns of Eakerville and Spruce Pine, the High Country Rural Planning Organization (HCROPO), and the North Carolina Department of Transportation - Transportation Planning Division (NCDOT TPD) are working together to develop a Comprehensive Transportation Plan that will identify transportation needs for the next 23 to 30 years. The study includes alternative modes of transportation (bicycle, pedestrian, and public transportation). The public is encouraged to provide feedback for the Mitchell County CTP by taking an online survey at the link below. The deadline to take the survey is November 9th.

Hard copies of the survey are available at - Mitchell County Administration building - Bakersville Medical Clinic - Bakersville Medical Clinic-Spruce Pine - Mitchell County Chamber of Commerce - Mitchell County Transportation Authority - Museum of NC Minerals

You may return the survey to Bakersville Medical Clinic, (BKVLP or SW Office) or Mitchell County Administration Office.

Yancey County

Higgins Memorial Sunday, February 3, the youth are sponsoring the “Super Bowl of Caring.” We will be watching the game, which kicks off at 6:30, and invite you to join us (EVERYONE IS INVITED) Tacos and all the fixin’s will be provided by the Family Life Committee. Would you consider bringing in a tray / plate of food for the football hours orevears or finger food? So, please see David Bush Sunday morning at the Welcombe Wagon or call the church office. We also ask you to bring canned goods for donation to Reconciliation House next Sunday, January 27th, or February 3rd. See the drop-off box at the kitchen window.

ABIDE Invitation Ladies! Please save the date of Friday, February 22, 2019 (date changed) from 6:00 to 8:00 pm for the next ABIDE Women’s Ministry Big Event! Come and find out about your “Perfect Love” in Jesus, our Lord and Savior! Dinner will be provided so come and join the worship, food, fellowship, door prizes and fun! Please invite your friends or neighbor as all are welcomed! In order for us to have an accurate meal count, please RSVP on or before February 18, 2019. Let us know the total number attending by calling the church office at 828-682-2385 or by emailing Kathy at elginmam2013@gmail.com

ASAP - Join ASAP on February 23 for our 16th annual conference hosted at the AbTech Conference Center in Asheville, NC. This one-day business and marketing conference provides beginning and established farmers tools to grow their farm businesses. The conference includes workshops led by experienced farmers and agricultural professionals, a farmer networking meeting, one-on-one consulting, exhibitor hall, a new farmers market manager track, and much more. Learn more about the 2019 Business of Farming Conference.

Want to promote your business to local farmers? Consider sponsoring or exhibiting at the conference. It is a unique opportunity to reach farmers who are looking to grow their businesses. Contact Robin Lane for more information.

Street Ministry in Burnsville - Hello, I’m Rev. Robinson a local Christian andymm, Pastor. Street Ministry is a group of Burnsville city. I have had my ministry since 2010 and now working on my 2nd album. My ministry hosts evens 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 for a love offering. I have done shows at Marshall, Bakersville, and Burnsville, and 3 at the Burnsville town center. My music is produced by Ryan Angle at the Bridge Church there in Spruce Pine. I am looking to expand my testimony of hope thru Christ to our neighboring counties then states. If you’re interested, you would need to talk more about what you believe and why you’re involved in our community. Contact Robin Lane for more information.

continued on page 29
Intentional Compassion
By Dan Quirico
Burke County

Without a doubt, it is disheartening to observe the spiritual downward trend in America. The news is filled with tragic stories that reflect a society that has turned its back on God. Having rejected the authority of God and His Word, mankind has placed themselves in authority. It can be said of America that “every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25).

Tragically, many Christians sit idly by watching society continue its rebellious path. Some seem unmoved by it; others claim to pray for opportunities. To those seeking an opportunity, I would ask what more of an opportunity do you need? Would you know an opportunity if it presented itself? Tragically, I find this is often an excuse for idleness.

As believers, we must determine to display intentional compassion. We cannot continue to sit idly by doing nothing; rather, we must determine that we are going to be intentional in our display of compassion. In doing so, we will readily take advantage of the many opportunities to display kindness to those whom God directs into our lives. Learning how to become intentional in our compassion is vital for the Christian life.

Intentional compassion begins first by becoming intentional in our love for God. Every devout Jew recited the Shema twice daily. Part of that included Deuteronomy 6:4-9, where we read of the importance of a right view of God that demonstrates itself in a genuine passion for God. The Bible states in Deuteronomy 6:4-5: “Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is one LORD: and thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” The fact that only one act excites demands that He be served exclusively and loved wholeheartedly. Until a person regards God exclusively, he cannot serve and love Him wholeheartedly. Loving God with this passion is the first step in becoming intentional in our compassion.

Such love for God will inevitably manifest itself towards love for fellow man. John wrote in 1 John 4:7, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.” We have an obligation to love one another. That does not mean that we eliminate the boundaries of separation that truth inevitably forms. But we must still have the proper attitude and demeanor towards one another, even with those with whom we might disagree. The implications of the words “one another” suggest that our love for one another contains no exceptions, allows for no bitterness, and is demonstrated with no hypocrisy. Such love does not happen by accident; it requires that we be intentional. Such intentional compassion invests itself in the lives of others as the parable of the Good Samaritan so aptly teaches in Luke 10. The religious leaders observed a need, yet were unmoved by it. To them, the man’s problems were nothing more than an inconvenience. But a devoted Samaritan did what was necessary, sacrificing his own time, energy, comfort, and resources to display compassion.

While intentional compassion requires great investment, the rewards are infinitely greater. Those who love as the Bible teaches will discover they have great reward in Heaven, a place where “neither shall death nor unconquerable sorrow, nor enmity, nor any evil thing be there” (Matthew 28:35). Intentional compassion is what ministry is all about. It begins with a passion for God that is evidenced in obedience and service to Him. Such love inevitably manifests itself in others, resulting in compassion and mercy it will demand. But such service is not too great for the one who loves God wholeheartedly.

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

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Grace Community Church

My Heart, His Dwelling Place
By Jerry Lewis
McDowell County

For the LORD has chosen Zion: he has set his heart on it for his dwelling place:
"This is my resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it; I will abundantly bless her provisions; I will satisfy her poor with bread. Her priests I will clothe with salvation, and her saints will shout for joy: There will make a horn to sprout for David: I have prepared a lamp for my anointed. His enemies I will clothe with shame but on him his crown will shine." (Psalm 112:18-19, RSV)

Psalms 132 is clearly about David’s desire to move the tabernacle to Jerusalem. When David became king, the tabernacle (and by extension the Ark of the Covenant) was in Shiloh. It took two years for David to make Jerusalem the capital of Israel and move the ark there.

However, the Psalms is also clear that God had chosen Jerusalem (Zion) before David brought the ark there. David was simply doing what God had already ordained. So how is this Psalm applied to you and me today?

This morning, in my time with the Lord, this is what I did. I do not think I’m off base with this. The reality is, if you belong to Jesus, it is because God chose you. He called you and redeemed you. This is not a treatise on predestination and election. Books have been written to tackle the profundity of the passages on both election and the free will of man and woman. I believe both.

But read this passage like this:

For the LORD has chosen me; he has destined me for his dwelling place.
Then God speaks...

"You are my resting place forever; here I will dwell, for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless you; I will satisfy you with bread. You will clothe with salvation, and you will shout for joy. Then I will make a horn to sprout for you: I have prepared a lamp for you, Your enemies I will clothe with shame, but on you my crown will shine."

In the New Testament, our hearts become Christ’s home. He no longer dwells in the temple, but we become the temple. What if we truly believed this! Lived out of it! Appropriated this into our lives!

Is your heart His resting place? Has it occurred to you that, if you are born again, He has destined to dwell in you? He longs to satisfy you. He longs to clothe your nakedness with His salvation. Your enemies (the world, Satan and your sinful nature) He will clothe with shame.

We are, of all people, most blessed. Dwell on this today.

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

Morganton Baptist Church
Does New Gillette Ad Insult Men?

By Dr. Jim Denison

Thirty years ago, Gillette made famous the tagline, “The Best A Man Can Get.” The company launched the slogan at Super Bowl XXIII in January 1989, kicking off a $50 million campaign in nineteen North American and European nations. The slogan was translated into fourteen languages. Procter & Gamble acquired Gillette in 2005 and continued to use its iconic tagline. This week, the company released a new ad calling on men to reject bullying and sexism. “The Best a Man Can Be” is the theme.

Reaction has been overwhelmingly negative. The ad currently has more than twice as many dislikes as likes. Critics say it insults men and is filled with stereotypes. And, as Forbes notes, consumers are skeptical of profit-motivated companies telling them how to behave.

Is “traditional masculine ideology” the problem?

The Gillette ad is just the latest skirmish in a growing battle over masculinity in America. The facts are alarming: *Men commit 90 percent of homicides in the US and represent 77 percent of homicide victims.* 

- More than 73 percent of those arrested in the US are male. Men outnumber women in prison by more than ten to one.
- They are 3.4 times more likely than women to die by suicide. Male suicides have risen from about 20,000 a year in 1981 to 25,000 in 2016.
- Life expectancy for men is 4.5 years shorter than for women.
- Men are more likely than women to use illicit drugs.

In response, the American Psychological Association recently released a report. “The APA’s publication is founded on the modern belief that ‘masculinities are constructed based on social, cultural, and contextual norms.”

According to the APA, “It is critical to acknowledge that gender is a non-binary construct.” In other words, we are not simply men or women—gender is fluid and determined by a host of factors, only one of which is a person’s biological sex at birth. As a result, the APA wants to help men “create their own concepts of what it means to be male.”

The APA identifies the problem as “traditional masculinity ideology,” which it characterizes as “anti-femininity, achievement, eschewal of the appearance of weakness, and adventure, risk, and violence.”


“If it is not good that the man should be alone”

David Fruch all notes in National Review that “grown men are the solution, not the problem.” He calls on men to shape their inherent aggression, sense of adventure, and physical strength for virtuous ends.

In this view, we need more fathers to raise sons with discipline, respect, and encouragement. I encourage you to read his thoughtful analysis in its entirety. While I agree with Fruch, I’d like to point to a biblical balance vital to the well-being of all people.

On one hand, “the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it” (Genesis 2:15). Work and keep translate Hebrew words meaning to improve and guard. Men were created to produce and protect, to work and provide.

On the other hand, men were not intended to be self-sufficient. Immediately after creating the first man, God created the first woman, explaining, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (v. 18). To fulfill their life purpose, men need women, other men, and especially their Father.

“One thing a clenched fist cannot do”

Self-reliance is a destructive illusion. “No man is an island” is not just a poem’s a fact. As I have often noted, self-sufficiency is spiritual suicide. It cuts us off from the only true source of abundant life (John 10:10).

Frederick Buechner: “To do for yourself the best that you have in you is to do to yourself what the world has done to us: hurt and wear you down, to make you complacent and just enough to be useful for something else. You are more than a tool, a thing used. You are more than a resource, a part of a process. You are a person, made in the image of God, a creature to be cherished.”

“Now he is praying for us” (Romans 8:34) as his Spirit works to transform us into his character (v. 29). He is ready to help every man become “the best a man can be.” And every woman to become the best she can be as well.

Nick Foles is proof. The Philadelphia Eagles quarterback is anyone’s definition of a “true man.” He has an NFL passing record, been named Offensive Most Valuable Player at the Pro Bowl, and won last year’s Super Bowl, where he was the game’s Most Valuable Player. He wore his WWJD bracelet in the championship game. More than 100 million people saw his faith on display. I noticed the bracelet on his wrist again during last Sunday’s playoff game with the Saints. Foles plans to become a student pastor when he retires from football one day.

Let’s ask “What would Jesus do?” all through this day. Then let’s ask him to help us do it. We will be our best and the people we serve will be blessed, to the glory of God.

Jim Denison Ph.D. writes and speaks on cultural and contemporary issues. His daily column is distributed to more than 113,000 subscribers in 98 countries. See more on the website www.denisonforum.org. Copyrighted and printed by permission from Denison Forum.

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February 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 31
NC Senate District 46

Sen. Warren Daniel
WarrenDaniel@ncleg.net
919-715-7823

North Carolinians already face a number of challenges in their day-to-day lives, including access to basic needs like medical care and broadband. But now they face a new challenge as well: Democrats are waging a war on small towns, trying to take away the value of their vote through judicial gerrymandering.

In status across the nation, Democrats face the same problem that they do here in North Carolina: too many of their voters are concentrated in the urban centers of the state, resulting in lopsided victories in a few districts and modest defeats in the rest. Rather than convincing more voters in rural areas to vote for them, Democrats are pushing a flawed “proportional representation” argument in lawsuits that seek to have liberal judges strip rural voters of their political influence and change 200+ years of geographic diversity in government. Democrats would love nothing more than to have a system that does cities outsized influence where they can just ignore rural voters, but our government doesn’t work that way. In fact, our system is specifically designed to protect against that scenario. The voices of citizens in rural areas count just as much as those of citizens in cities.

In November, North Carolina Democrats jumped on this bandwagon, filing a lawsuit in federal court asking the Democratic-controlled North Carolina state courts to draw new legislative maps to favor Democrats and reduce the influence of rural voters. They argue that a 50/50 Republican-Democrat statewide vote should result in a 50/50 party split in the legislature.

Democrats conveniently turn a blind eye in instances where the argument would benefit Republicans. Based on their own logic, Democrats should be up in arms about the fact that Wake and Mecklenburg County Republicans have no representation in the N.C. State House despite winning about a third of the vote in each county during last year’s elections. Yet they remain silent.

The effect of the matter is, while Democrats may claim their goals with this lawsuit are just “fair maps” and ending “partisan gerrymandering,” their real goal couldn’t be any clearer: get liberal judges to judicially parsymander the maps to elect more Democrats and reduce the political power of rural North Carolinians.

According to a report released Thursday by the nonpartisan Fiscal Research Division, NC collected $118 million more in tax revenue than projected over the first two quarters of the fiscal year. Corporate tax collections exceeded expectations by $37.1 million over the 6-month target. In fact, corporate income tax collections are up 15.5% over last year. The state has reported six consecutive revenue surpluses, including a $520 million surplus in May 2017, a $456 million surplus in May 2018, and a $400 million surplus in August 2018. This has been a trend that coincides with the NCGA’s historic tax reforms. The report also predicted a forecast for stronger wage growth in 2019 and suggests that salary gaps are ahead of projections. "Current data on income and overall economic activity (i.e. Gross State Product) indicate that the State’s economy is growing at a steady, solid pace.

The 2019 Session of the NC General Assembly is underway, and I am privileged and humbled to continue serving in the NC Senate on behalf of the people of Avery, Burke, and Caldwell counties. We enjoyed meeting with the family of Tim and Naomi Smith, who traveled to Raleigh for the Senate’s Opening Day Ceremony.

Here are some excerpts from Senate ProTem Phil Berger’s remarks:

"Since 2011, we have adhered to bedrock conservative economic policies: low taxes, responsible spending, and responsible regulations that accomplish their purpose without unnecessary red tape.

"We reformed the people’s money through tax cuts. Today, 99% percent of state taxpayers pay less or nothing at all compared to before 2011. And today, the private sector is creating jobs by the thousands in our state, in part because of lower taxes and a more reasonable regulatory burden.

"And people outside of North Carolina have noticed. In almost every major category, North Carolina ranks at or near the top. Forbes has ranked us the best place for business two years in a row. We were one of the Tax Foundation’s top 10 business climates and overall.

"Our population growth last year was the fourth highest.

"We’ve improved the county and the country in job creation since 2011. Poverty is down. Income growth is up. By almost every metric, North Carolina is booming, and now is the time to change our conservative economic policy approach."

As always, if you can be of assistance to you, please contact my Raleigh office via phone or email. It is a pleasure to serve you in the state Senate.

NC Senate District 47

Sen. Ralph Hise
Ralph.Hise@ncleg.net
919-731-3460

Opening day of the new session for the 2019-2020 biennium of the North Carolina General Assembly convened on January 9th in Raleigh. I was honored to be sworn in as a member of the 47th District and thankful for the opportunity to continue serving my constituents in Mitchell, Madison, McDowell, Polk, Rabun, and Yancey counties for another term. In addition to being sworn in for a fifth term in the Senate, I was also sworn in for my first term as Deputy President Pro Tempore. Both offices of office were administered by North Carolina Supreme Court Chief Justice Mark Martin.

I am proud of the legislative accomplishments of the North Carolina Senate over the past eight years and look forward to the work ahead in the biennium. Following are my top legislative priorities:

1. Control spending to no more than inflation plus population growth
2. Reduce and reform our franchise tax
3. Remove local control over health care services, including expanding the scope of practice for nurses and including CON (Certificate of Need)
4. Expand work requirements in Medicaid and welfare reform
5. For this legislative session, I have been appointed co-chair of the Finance Committee and the Redistricting and Elections Committee.

I look forward to the continued work on keeping our state a great place to live, work, and raise a family. As always, please share your thoughts with me on these or other issues related to state government by emailing me at ralph.hise@ncleg.net or calling me at 919-731-3460.
The newly elected General Assembly convened on January 9th. The first order of business was the re-election of officers: Senator Phil Berger of Rockingham County is the President; Pro Tem and leader of the state senate and Representative Tim Moore of Cleveland County to serve as Speaker of the state house. I look forward to continuing my work for the citizens of Burke County. Of course, there are a variety of concerns that we will likely address over the next several months. However, as this session begins, there are two issues that I will single out at this stage. These two issues are the General Assembly’s progress in addressing school safety during the last session, including the millions of dollars in grants established to assist local school systems in protecting our state’s children. Protecting our children includes ensuring that our state is able to recruit and retain school psychologists to care for increasing mental health needs within the classroom. Last session, the legislature took some important steps in this area. However, I will continue to work this session to improve our process of recruiting and retaining school psychologists to keep our students safe.

In 2015, I was proud to be the lead sponsor of our state’s Right-to-Try law that gives terminally-ill patients access to treatments not yet approved by the FDA and a chance at life should the therapy work for them. Last year, the federal government passed a similar Right-to-Try law. Now, this session, I will work to enhance terminally-ill patients’ access under the law by examining ways to allow easier access to life-saving drugs. Specifically, I am studying Texas’ expansion of their Right-to-Try law, which expanded access for not only terminally-ill patients but also the severely, chronically ill.

**US House of Representatives NC District 11**

Washington, D.C. - Congressman Mark Meadows (NC-11), Chairman of the House Freedom Caucus, and a member of the House Oversight and Government Reform and Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, and Congressman Joaquin Castro (TX-20), Chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and a member of the House Foreign Affairs, House Intelligence, and House Education and Labor Committees, have reintroduced the Global Electoral Exchange Act (F.R. 793). This bipartisan measure would authorize the Secretary of State to administer exchange programs for electoral authorities with overseas partners, promote best election security practices, and strengthen democratic institutions abroad.

"Fair, trustworthy, and accountable elections are critical to defending democracy among our international partners—and they are fundamental to who we are as a nation," said Rep. Meadows. "America is equipped with the needed expertise to bolster good governance and freedom in the world's democracies, making the world safer for Americans and boisterous our national security. Under this bipartisan bill, American election administrators and experts will be better able share sound election administration practices abroad, helping to prevent the rampant violence that all too often follow poorly-run, unfair elections. Anything we as a nation can do to promote healthy and secure election practices in other countries is a welcome development, and I want to thank Rep. Castro of Texas for his work on this critical initiative."

"We've seen in all pockets of the world how insecure electoral mechanisms can lead to deadly violence and tainted election results. That's why the United States should assist democracies abroad in designing and preserving strong electoral institutions. This supports their quest for an inclusive society based on the principles of democracy," said Chairman Castro. "The Global Electoral Exchange Act seeks to help the United States share our best election security practices abroad, which in turn will strengthen democracy worldwide and advance bipartisan U.S. national security interests abroad. Free and fair elections indicate democracy health, and I'm glad to lead this legislative effort that will help improve global security and promote democratic institutions."

Background: This legislation seeks to establish a Global Electoral Exchange Program that would promote international exchanges of best election practices on cybersecurity, transmitting results, data transparency, election dispute resolution, eliminating any discriminatory practices, and making voter education information and polling places easily accessible. The Global Electoral Exchange Act would require the U.S. Department of State to brief the House and Senate on status of activities as well as provide a summary of all exchanges.

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**Billy Graham’s Answers on Abortion**

**By Billy Graham**

**Know that the Lord, he is God!**

*It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.*

**Psalm 100:3 (ESV)**

With recent abortion laws changing in our country, it’s important to note what the Bible says about the issue. Throughout God’s Word, it’s clear that human life is precious to Him. More than ever, we need biblical answers to questions regarding abortion and the sanctity of life. Billy Graham once said, “I know it’s common today to think of abortion as a simple answer to an inconvenient problem—but it is actually a far more serious issue. Your child isn’t simply a mass of cells; he or she is a human being in God’s eyes.”

Here are a few My Answers from the evangelist.

**Q. Why is abortion such a big issue for Christians?**

**A.** The spiritual condition of man is at the root of the abortion issue. Until man’s spiritual condition is changed by the power of Jesus Christ, we will not find a solution to this problem. It is that produces the problem of most unwanted pregnancies, as well as all the other disorders which plague the human race. It is also sin that produces the miscarriage that women have “a right to take the lives of unborn babies. The apostle Paul writes, “The acts of the sinful nature are: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfishness, dissensions,ections and disputes.” (Galatians 5:19-21)

**Q. Who is a “child”?**

**A.** Life is sacred, and we must seek to protect all human life: the unborn, the child, the adult, and the aged. Several Bible passages tell of the sacredness of life and speak to the subject of abortion.

Since the Supreme Court removed restrictions on abortion in 1973, abortions have risen to an alarming level. Mr. Graham strongly opposes “abortion on demand” and was instrumental in the founding of the ministry of Care Net, one of largest networks of pregnancy centers in North America. Care Net seeks to provide the most accessible and effective abortion alternatives possible. For a discussion on the alternatives to an unwanted pregnancy, you may visit Care Net’s website, where there are opportunities to call, email or live chat with someone confidentially.

Some of abortion’s unseen consequences are deep regret and guilt over what happened. If you’ve had an abortion and are experiencing this, you’re not alone. What you did was wrong in God’s eyes—but He has not rejected you or abandoned you.

**Know more about God’s love for you today.**

**Q. I’m single, pregnant, and don’t know what to do.**

**A.** Two wrongs don’t make a right (as the old saying goes), and I pray you won’t compound your problems by making another wrong decision about your future. Yes, it was wrong for you to get pregnant—and it also would be wrong for you to end the life of the little child who is growing inside you. I know it’s common today to think of abortion as a simple answer to an inconvenient problem—but it is actually a far more serious issue. Your child isn’t simply a mass of tissue; he or she is a human being in God’s eyes. God told Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I knew you” (Jeremiah 1:5).”

**Q. What should you do first?**

**A.** You need wise counsel from someone older than you—someone who can talk with you about your options (including placing your child for adoption). Ask God to lead you to the right person or agency (your pastor may be able to help you). You may also find it helpful to contact Care Net, one of largest networks of pregnancy centers in the United States. Care Net seeks to provide the most accessible and effective abortion alternatives possible. For a discussion on the alternatives to an unwanted pregnancy, you may visit Care Net’s website, where there are opportunities to call, email or live chat with someone confidentially.

Then urge you to turn to God—just to put this problem into His hands, but to give your whole life to Him. God loves you, and no matter what you’ve done He wants to forgive your past and guide your future. Make your commitment to Christ, and then ask God what you do when you’re learning about your relationship with your parents.

Are you in trouble? There is hope. Find peace with God today.

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**continued on page 46**
Burke United Christian Ministries

By David Burleson

Burke County

The winter months bring many challenges to Burke United Christian Ministries (BUCM) and the clients we serve. Recent snow and very cold temperatures have created a higher than usual demand for food, clothing and household supplies. Because of our wonderful staff and volunteers at BUCM, lunch was served every day and dinner was served on our usual nights of service, Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. We have also been able to take care of the food and clothing needs of our clients. The winter months are particularly difficult for our homeless clients. During the last year, BUCM served 399 homeless clients. Of the 399 homeless clients, 54 were under 10 years with the support of the Homeless Outreach Warning Initiative (HOWI) committee and other community members, winter has been a little warmer and comfortable for our homeless community.

The amount of food needed at BUCM for the soup kitchen and food pantry has also increased during the winter months. We are extremely grateful to our churches, businesses, restaurants, grocery stores, civic groups and individuals that contribute food and supplies for BUCM. We are very thankful that several individuals choose to give BUCM their birthday and Christmas gifts to help others. This was especially true for many of our children and teenagers.

We are very thankful that several church youth groups plan to collect food during the annual national Souper Bowl of Caring event. This year’s event will be on Sunday, February 3. This is one of the largest food drives of the year. We also appreciate the Burke County Schools for doing a Souper Bowl of Canning Food Drive for BUCM and other agencies in our community. A huge thank you to Dr. Larry Pumpan, the staff and students of the school systems for doing this drive for our community.

Also, gently used clothes, shoes and other supplies donated by our community have helped meet the needs of our clients. Costs and other warm clothes have been especially appreciated during the winter months. Because of the generosity of many in our community, our clients have clothing and other supplies to keep them warm.

During the winter months, we have seen God at work in tremendous ways at BUCM. When there have been needs, we have what is needed show up right on time. It has been a blessing to see what God has done through the people of Burke County.

I also want to invite everyone to our breakfast fundraiser on Saturday, February 9 at Friday Friends. The All-You-Can eat Breakfast will be from 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. and the cost is $10. For good food and fellowship be sure to come out and support BUCM. Another way to support BUCM is to donate clothes to our clients. We still need volunteers for our clothing closet and store, the food pantry, reception and food service. If you would be interested in assisting being a volunteer or making a donation to BUCM, please call us at 828-433-8075 or visit our webpage at bucm.net.

Burke United Christian Ministries is very excited about what God is planning to do in 2019.

David Burleson, Director of Burke United Christian Ministries

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A. "Words of Wisdom" No Words of Wisdom

B. "Are You Committed? What Would You Have Done?"

February 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 34
Financial Help
By Dave Ramsey

Dear Dave,
My husband and I have about $20,000 in credit card debt, plus payments on a new truck. We also have a camper he bought before we got married that we’re still making payments on. I recently received a $5,000 inheritance and would like to use that money to help get us out of debt and open a savings account. My husband says he is on board, but he keeps buying things we don’t have the money for. I don’t want to waste the inheritance to go waste, so what can I do? Tessa

Dear Tessa,
I want you guys to get control of your finances and have a better life, too. But until your husband is willing to get rid of the camper and the truck, I’d hang on to the inheritance money.

Right now, you need more than his words—you need his actions. At this point, the real issue isn’t the debt or the idea of using the gift you received to pay off the debt. The issue is you can’t see a future where your husband isn’t going to repeat the same financial mistakes. You need to have a future cleared up, and it isn’t going to be cleared up until he proves he has changed his heart and his ways. In his case, that means showing he has become a grown-up and isn’t buying toys he can’t afford anymore.

I know where you are, and I know what he is right now. I’ve been there.

Years ago, I was a “grown man” but I was still really a little boy buying things I couldn’t afford to impress people’s eyes. I knew this guy in school who liked shiny trucks, shiny trucks, shiny trucks, and that sort of thing. But it’s time for him to sell all the crap, grow up, and start putting you and your family first. Talk to him. Explain how important it is to you that you’re both on the same page financially and in every other aspect of your marriage. Until he proves he’s ready to do that, though, I’d say just hold on to the inheritance money.

—Dave

Dear Dave,
How do you feel about timeshares, and the free trips and dinners they offer as part of their sales pitches? Is it possible to win with these things? Dan

Dear Dan,
In my opinion, timeshares are a complete waste of time and money. Lots of folks go into this kind of thing believing they’ll play the game and win. They think they’ll get a vacation weekend and other free stuff, then just say “no” when the time comes. The problem is, most people aren’t as tough as they think.

Besides, don’t you really want to waste a weekend of your life letting some pushy salesperson twist your arm? That’s not my idea of fun.

As a whole, timeshares have an incredibly high dissatisfaction rate. It’s almost impossible to find anyone who’s happy they bought one, and there are great reasons for this. Why would you pay thousands of dollars for a place you may or may not get a chance to visit once a year? Add to this the fact that you have no equity in the place, and you’re stuck paying ongoing maintenance fees.

My advice? Don’t take a chance playing the game, Dan. There are much better uses for your time and money.

—Dave

Dear Dave,
I’ve been late on a credit card bill several times, and it was turned over to a collection agency. They have offered a couple of different payment options. If I agree to one of these, does that mean the original creditor gets paid, too? Carter

Dear Carter,
A collection agency either owns the debt outright, or they’re directly representing the credit card company in these kinds of situations. It’s not unusual for things to be handled this way when someone has defaulted on a loan.

Unless you have the cash to make good on the debt outright, I’d go ahead and accept whatever deal makes the most sense for you and your current financial situation.

You’re not going to be completely wiped out on your credit score for this, but turning over to collections, so an indication of settlement on a credit card you defaulted on is really no big deal.

But here’s my best piece of advice—stop using credit cards!

—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.
Unashamed of Our Identity
By Rev John McCouey
Room Mountain, Tennessee

The key verse to understanding the entire epistle of Romans is found in Romans 1:16. Here, Paul declares: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes.” Today, the reason so many churches are besieged same-sex marriage, neglecting the call to evangelism, approving other ‘pasts’ to God, and preaching self-help instead of the doctrines of sin and salvation is because they have not taken this verse to heart. They are ashamed of the Gospel, so they change it and redefine it—blunting the two-edged sword of God’s Word and deactivating its power. And our society is reaping the consequences. My friend, the call on your life and mine is to remain unashamed of the Gospel, to lovingly lift high the Truth of our Savior, and to trust Him with our lives. All of us will, at some time or another, be tempted to hide our light under a bushel. In fact, as you seek to serve and witness for Christ more and more, this temptation may become even stronger. Satan will try to convince you that it’s not worth the effort. Beloved, stand firm in that evil day. Remember that it is the Gospel that breaks the iron yoke of sin, shuts the chains of addictions and things open the heavy gates of darkness. May God grant us each the grace and understanding to remain unashamed. Have you had moments when you wanted to hide your light before others? “Ask God for courage to be a faithful witness. The call to live for Christ, unashamed of the Gospel, is clear in Scripture. But how do we live with such boldness? The answer is three-fold, and it comes from a close look at Romans 1 and the life of the apostle Paul. The first reason Paul could live unashamed of the gospel was because he knew who he was and to whom he belonged. He knew that Jesus was Lord Christ and he knew that he had been set apart by Him to be His apostle (Rom. 1:1). Paul knew that his identity was in Christ, and nothing could take that away from him. In a day when so many people are muddled up about who they are, when it is fashionable to question your gender or define yourself by your political party, it is refreshing to see the apostle Paul hold so tightly to his blood-bought identity. He was not confused about what his purpose on earth was supposed to be. He knew his identity—he was a servant of Jesus Christ. My beloved friends, this is the best kept secret you can have. Remember, “You also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ” (v. 6). Finally, root yourself in this glorious identity today, and you will be acknowledge regardless of what opposition comes your way. Don’t turn out on the path that come from knowing who and whose you are! How do you define yourself? Does this align with who the Lord Jesus Christ says you are.

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

A Bold Start in 2019
By Kisty Eldridge

“And he said to them, ‘Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.’—Mark 16:15

The year 2019 will be the first full year the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) will exist without Billy Graham. His oldest son, Franklin Graham, has spoken often about how much he misses his father, who went to be with Jesus in February at the age of 99. “We rejoice and praise God that any father was given the privilege of preaching the Gospel to more people face to face than any other person in history,” Franklin said. “But the job isn’t finished. We have another generation who needs to hear this wonderful message.”

In 2019, BGEA President Franklin Graham, his son Will, Graham, and several other associate evangelists will advance the mission Billy Graham dedicated his life to carrying on.

In addition to taking the Gospel message to the Northeast U.S. next spring, Franklin will travel to major cities on at least three other occasions where local Christians have invited him to come and preach.

Please join the BGEA in praying for God’s Work to move hearts and souls around the world.

Thailand
The first Festival of the year took place in Bangkok, Thailand, on Jan. 18-20. With a population of more than 8 million, the riverside capital is about the size of New York City.

Bangkok is dotted with thousand—visible reminders of the nation’s strong ties to Buddhism. But the small population of Christians is passionate about sharing the hope of Jesus Christ. That passion may be due in part to the consequences they often face for putting their faith in the Lord.

“If a member of a Thai family becomes Christian it is often seen as a rejection of the family and their Thai heritage,” said Vital Hoffman, BGEA’s vice president of Crusade ministries.

Thai Christians have faced difficulties over the years, including a royal prohibition against Christianity in the early 1700s and persecution under the Japanese occupation during WWII. But what could have pushed Christ followers away from their faith seems to have brought them together in unity.

“Although Christians make up about 1 percent of the population, they are vibrantly sharing the message of Christ” Hoffman said. “More than 540 churches were involved in the Festival.”

Australia
On the 60th anniversary of Billy Graham’s historic tour of Australia, Franklin Graham will share the Gospel in half-a-dozen cities from one end of the continent to the other.

In 1959 Billy Graham traveled across Australia and New Zealand sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. More than 3 million people—a third of Australia’s population at the time—attended a Crusade event.

The Sydney Morning Herald called the tour “one of the most remarkable religious phenomena ever experienced in this city.”

“Australia today is a nation in need of spiritual revival,” Franklin Graham said. “Secularism has put down roots, and almost one in three people claim to have no religion at all. The Bible says, ‘God was moved by prayer for the land’ (2 Samuel 15:14, NASB)—pray that God will touch that land and open many hearts to the life-changing power of the Gospel.”

BGEA is partnering with more than 1,200 churches throughout Australia for the Graham Tour, which will stop in Aeta, Darwin, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Sydney from Feb. 2-24.

“Much has changed in the world in the past 60 years, but Franklin Graham delivers the same life-changing message his father

continued on page 37
delivered in Australia all those years ago,” Haun said. “The tour across Australia is singularly focused on sharing the Gospel—the Good News of Jesus Christ—so that lives, and the nation, may be changed.”

Colombia

On Easter weekend, April 19–20, Franklin Graham is scheduled to hold a Festival of Hope in Cucuta, Colombia, on the border of Venezuela.

Preparations for the Festival come at a time when millions of people in the region are searching for hope.

In what has been called the Venezuelan Exodus, up to 20,000 Venezuelans are streaming out of their country each day, fleeing unprecedented levels of poverty and violence. Cucuta is often one of the first stops on the refugees’ long and dangerous journey to a better life.

In October, Franklin traveled to Cucuta and visited an aid station set up by Samaritan’s Purse to provide food, water and basic supplies to Venezuelans passing through in droves.

“People are leaving by the millions,” he wrote. “It is a heartbreaking situation. Some people in Colombia are opening their homes to assimilate these fleeing into their communities, and the churches are opening their doors and their doors to help.”

As believers around the world pause to celebrate the resurrection of Christ, the BGFA will partner with many of those local churches to share the hope of Jesus with people who desperately need it.

“They’re coming to Colombia looking for hope,” Franklin said. “We want to share not only [relief with them—we want to share our faith and trust in Jesus Christ. God has not forgotten them.”

Cambodia

In November, Franklin Graham will hold his first Festival in Phnom Penh, Cambodia’s bustling capital city of 1.5 million people.

This historic event will give Christians a chance to celebrate and share their faith in Christ—something they have not always been able to do without risking their lives.

“Christian history in Cambodia has been written with blood,” Haun said. “Arms have been used against Christians in the 70s [under the Khmer Rouge] are well documented. Yet, the Word of God can’t be bound, and God’s remnant will always be present, no matter the circumstances and opposition.”

Cambodian Christians are a tiny minority in the primarily Buddhist Kingdom of Cambodia. Most like their Thai brothers and sisters in Christ, the Cambodian believers have faith that can’t be contained.

“The Church in Cambodia is vibrant,” Haun said. “A delegation of senior Christian leaders came to invite Franklin to Phnom Penh. Without hesitation, Franklin accepted the invitation.”

A public launch of Festival preparations is set for mid-February. Haun said discussions with government officials are currently underway to secure a proper venue.

“We are asking all Christians to pray for this historic effort.”

Kristy works with the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association.

FROM THE BLUE RIDGE CHRISTIAN NEWS

www.bronews.com
Churches to Take Next Steps to Share Resources, Support Neighbors
By Colby Boston
Mitchell County

Spruce Pine, N.C.—A room full of pastors and church leaders from Mitchell County gathered on January 15 to learn more about Healthy Neighbors Network (HNN), a program that is helping to coordinate resources and services to support people in need in Macon County, and talk about opportunities to develop a similar program in Mitchell County.

Amy Fossmann of the Neighbors Feeding Neighbors Food Ministry shared the experiences she and her husband, Allen, have in visiting people in their homes across the county and helping them to find the resources they need. Pastors and volunteers from churches were excited to hear about the Macon County HNN program and brainstorm how they could work together to share resources and serve in ministry.

Healthy Neighbors Network 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 2006 and has 500 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 2015 to learn about the program. Since then, he’s been eager to bring those ideas home to Mitchell County. Once he started having conversations with local pastors, they too became excited. “This program is going to be great for Mitchell County,” said Pastor Clay Dula from Liberty Hill Baptist Church. “Sometimes the churches feel overwhelmed by the need in our community. By working together, we can do more and encourage more people to work in ministry with us.”

Ten churches have indicated an interest in joining the program and will be sending representatives to a training on Tuesday, February 12. To learn more or sign your church up to participate, contact Colby Boston at 828-766-1872.

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

Hospice General In Patient Room
By Heather Steuer
Mitchell County

On January 24th, 2019 we had the pleasure of opening our Hospice General In patient room. The Brian Center and Hospice & Home Care of the Blue Ridge have partnered to offer this service. The room is dedicated to patients in our facility and is in our community that have special needs. We are thrilled to have the opportunity to partner with such a dedicated organization. The ribbon cutting ceremony was such a special day for everyone involved, it means so much when you get to see a vision come to fruition!

I would like to take this opportunity to talk about the heart of our leader/administrator, Shelley Tindle. Shelley started at the Brian Center in April 2017. Initially she came as an interim administrator. It did not take long for her to fall in love with the residents, staff members and the mountains (her words). Shelley came to us from South Carolina and for over a year she lived in a hotel in Marion. She sacrificed time with her husband and her babies because she believed in our building so passionately. Every Friday she commuted 5 hours from home and every Sunday evening she drove 5 hours back. I wanted to share those things because I firmly believe actions speak louder than words. Shelley’s commitment is evident and her influence on the residents, staff and community are pure. We are thankful for Shelley and excited to say that she is now officially a Mitchell County resident.

As a team we will continue to focus on improving our current services in addition to introducing new resources that our community can benefit from. We look forward to 2019 and the positive changes to come.

We would like to thank Hospice and Home Care of the Blue Ridge for supporting us.

Thank you, Mitchell County Chamber for helping us with the event, it truly was a success.

Heather Steuer has been in Healthcare for 13 years. She loves all the things that bring people together. She is passionate about the golden rule, treat others as you would like to be treated.

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Pause...and Consider

Love Gifts
By Ken and Jan Merop
Avery County

It has been said that we can give without loving. But we can’t love without giving.

Giving may manifest itself in words of gratitude and praise; in acts of selfless service to another; in giving one’s time; in giving presents that reflect someone’s personality or interests; or in simple hugs and kisses.

It’s wonderful to be the giver of such gifts and equally so to be the unexpected receiver—especially when a yearning in one’s heart is acknowledged and then acted upon by one who loves you.

My recent interest in sketching scenery from photos is a relaxing pastime that I pursued fairly regularly. But, not wanting to leave pencils, sketch pad, eraser and the like on the dining table, I’d gather everything together and put it away each time.

Eventually, my pastime became a thing of the past. Out of sight, out of mind. I imagined how fun it would be to have a simple easel set up permanently near a window. Then in seeing it each day, I’d take a few moments to add to the picture—or to plan more concentrated sketching time.

I like drawing scenes with trees and thought a book that could teach me how to achieve more authenticity would be helpful.

I mentioned this to Ken and he immediately said, “Let’s go see what we can find.”

We had fun that evening just looking and trying to figure out what would be best for me. I didn’t even know if an easel was appropriate for what I was doing—how unfamiliar I am in this type of art.

In fact, because of my uncertainty, I began to back away from my request. Perhaps, we shouldn’t invest in these things. After all, it’s just a simple hobby.

However, on Christmas morning, I opened two special gifts: a beautiful table top or lap top oak easel and a book on how to draw trees. The easel has a place to hold the picture from which I’m sketching along with my sketch pad. It also has a drawer to hold my supplies.

I doubt I would have ever purchased these things for myself. But my husband acted upon the wondering and yearning of my heart. I felt so special receiving that gift and knowing he believed in me.

Love expresses itself in many ways. 1 Corinthians 13: 5 it says, “Love rejoices in the truth.” Such rejoicing in truth happily celebrates the achievements of another—no matter how small or simple they may be.

With Valentine’s Day approaching, let’s read 1 Corinthians 13 in the Bible (the Love Chapter) and examine how we are to love. Selah

FAMILY PORTRAIT

Buttercup feathers announce the growth of these new Sandhill Cranes arrivals. Mama and Papa set the example so their babies are well nourished and able to grow to maturity. May our family portrait be legacies of biblical love and maturity.

“You shall teach them diligently to your children...in your house...walk by the way...teach them to your children.” Deuteronomy 6: 7

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Lisa Beene, Clinical Operations Officer HH of the Blue Ridge, Shirley Tindle, administrator Brian Center, Christina Jenkins, Executive Director HH of the Blue Ridge, Shirley Topper, Unit Manager Brian Center

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Check out our new Website
www.brcnews.com
And find us on Facebook
The Backyard Creeper
By Christy Lowman
Barke County

This month I thought we would discuss a creature that creeps in your backyard at night that most people despise. It is not like the animal solely based on their looks. Maybe I am weird but I have always thought they are fascinating and cute especially when they are babies. Hopefully after I tell you some facts about this animal you will look past their looks and like them as well.

This animal is one of the best animals to have in your backyard regardless of how they look. They protect you by eating around 5,000 deer ticks every season! Deer ticks are harmful to people because they can carry Lyme disease that can make you very sick and can lead to death or untreated. This animal has been known to eat, 50 sharp teeth, and white grayish fur. Have you guessed what this despised but helpful animal is?

The opossum. The only marsupial that lives in North America. Do you know what a marsupial is? Marsupials are animals that raise their young in a pouch, like a kangaroo. Opossum babies are also called jeevys just like baby kangaroos. Opossum babies, when born are the size of a honeybee. They live in their mother’s pouch for 2-3 months. After this, they will remain there in their den but when they go out they will catch a mother on her back for another 1-2 months.

Opossums don’t only eat ticks, they eat vegetation such as berries in your yard and roodent. They clean up spilled bird seed from your bird feeders, eat over ripe fruit from your fruit trees, berries, vegetables, snails, and even carrion. Carrion is dead animals and roadkill. Can you see how opossums are an important clean-up animal that visits our backyard and road?

The adult opossum grows up to 12 lbs., about the size of a house cat. They are one of the shortest-lived mammals for their size. Two to four years is their normal lifespan. Predators unfortunately include owls, hawks, and dogs.

Another important part of the opossum is that it is not dangerous to humans. They don’t bite and are not aggressive. They are docile and can be handled with ease. They are also gentle and make great pets. They are known to be friendly and curious. They are also great at cleaning up their own litter and do not spread diseases.

Have you ever seen a person, maybe at school or church, that is a little different? Maybe the other kids think this person is ugly, gross, dumb, or just plain weird. Maybe they are misunderstood like the opossum. This kid might like things that you find unusual. Maybe he or she likes to draw, or listen to open. Maybe they sit by themselves and have no one to talk to. Perhaps you are uncomfortable around this person or don’t know what to say, so you avoid them. Ask God to help you with this and He will. If you see someone that is being left out for being different go up and be their friend and pray for them. That is what Jesus did when He walked on earth. He treated everyone the same, even the despised, hated people, the ones that had diseases and were ugly. He showed them love and compassion on the cross for them just like He did you and me.

God made this person just like He made you. Not everyone is popular, or beautiful in our eyes, but everyone is loved and beautiful in God’s eyes. He made each one of us different. This world would be boring if we looked the same, acted the same, liked the same things. Ultimately God made each of us unique and gave each of us a different job to do. Treat everyone like you would want to be treated.

Dear Lord please give us the compassion and desire to reach out and love everyone that you have given the gift of life. We are all equal in your eyes. You made each and every one of us unique and have talked to us with a certain job to do.
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Happy Valentine's Day
perfect as you struggle along.

In December we printed a story about a young lady that praised and prayed for her "perfect" man. Only God could orchestrate a love story like this, because little did she know that her young man was praying and praying for his "perfect" woman. With both having heavy burdens to overcome, God brought them together to become man and wife as His eight. With God in the center of this marriage they will continue to grow and last for many years to come.

What makes all this possible—only the Love of God. We cannot even imagine the love He has for us. This love is called Agape Love. The Bible is filled with examples of this love. I remember a Bible study I did on Deuteronomy. Well, I didn’t think of it as the Love Book. However, that is what I found as we delved deep into this book—God’s love for His people. As the children of Israel came to the end of their journey God talked with Moses about what would happen. Moses would get to see his land, but because he disobeyed he would not go into the land. Deuteronomy 32:48-49 “Go up this mountain of Abarim, Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, across from Jericho: view the land of Canaan, which I give to the children of Israel as a possession, and die on the mountain which you ascend, and be gathered to your people, just as Aaron your brother died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his people.”

One of the most poignant pictures of God’s love is found when Moses died as the Lord said to do in the above scriptures. Deuteronomy 34 Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, across from Jericho. There the Lord showed him the whole land—from Gilgal to Dan, 2 all of Naphtali, the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Mediterranean Sea, 3 the Negeb and the whole region from the Valley of Jericho, the City of Palms, as far as Zoar. 4 Then the Lord said to him, “This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it.”

3 And Moses the servant of the Lord died there in Moab, as the Lord had said. 4 He buried him in a city in the hill country of Moab east of Beth Peor; but to this day no one knows where his grave is. 5 Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not dim, nor his strength gone. 6 The Israelites grieved for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days, until the time of weeping and mourning was over.

9 Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit[9] of wisdom because Moses had laid his hand on him. So, the Israelites listened to him and did what the Lord had commanded Moses.

10 Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. 11 Who did all those signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt—a Pharaoh and all his officials and his whole land 12 and all the might of Egypt. 13 For no one has ever done the mighty works or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.

Many times I read this but missed this picture. God was the only one there when Moses died and God buried him, but not just this. He carried him from the top of the mountain to the valley to bury him and no one knows the place.

God is concerned for His people and the ultimate picture is Jesus on the cross. He loved enough to die for us so we can live.

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Wyman Is The Unpardonable Sin?
I Am Afraid I May Have Committed It.

By Kurt Bomar
Avery County

There are a lot of difficult passages in the OT. This is one of them. I hope to shed light on this passage as well as others this year because 2 Tim. 3:10 tells us: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuke, correction 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.”

Many Christians have heard that there is an unpardonable sin and true in deed that something grave they have done before or after conversion might be that sin. I have talked with several people who struggle with this to try to look at it. These seem unfounded. While there is an unforgivable sin, it is not one that a true believer in Jesus Christ can commit.

The one sin which God cannot forgive is mentioned in Mark 3:28-30 and Matthew 12:31-32. Jesus had been performing miracles, including driving demons out of people by the power of the Holy Spirit. Instead of recognizing the source of Jesus’ power and accepting Him as God’s Son, the religious leaders accused Him of being possessed by the devil and driving demons out in the power of the devil. Jesus responded by saying, “I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of man will be forgiven him. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven, because it is against an eternal sin.” The key to understanding this is to look at who Jesus was talking to. He was talking to the religious leaders of the day who were assigning the works of the Holy Spirit to Satan. So, it was a rejection of the Holy Spirit which deeply offended Jesus.

This point for us is that if we have received Jesus as our Savior and Lord, we have not blasphemed the Holy Spirit; we have accepted His witness. Our study Bible explains it as follows: “To commit this sin one must consciously, persistently, deliberately, and consistently reject the testimony of the Spirit to the deity and saving power of the Lord Jesus.” If a person keeps doing that until death, there is no hope of forgiveness and eternal life in heaven.

Once again, the unpardonable sin is not some particularly grievous sin committed by a Christian before or after accepting Christ, but is thinking or saying something terrible about the Holy Spirit. Rather, it is deliberately resisting the Holy Spirit’s witness and invitation to turn to Jesus until death and all opportunity.

Jesus Himself assures us, “Whoever comes to me I will never drive away” (John 6:37). Our God is a compassionate and merciful God. He desires that no one should be lost, but that all should come to salvation through repentance and personal faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord (2 Peter 3:9; Acts 2:21).

“Let not your heart be troubled!”

Beth, (think about it)

Kurt Bomar is a pastor of Walnut Grove Church.

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Sudoku

Solution on page 14

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2 9 5 6 8 4 3 7 1
8 1 7 5 9 2 4 6 3
4 6 3 1 2 8 5 7 9
7 5 9 6 3 1 2 8 4
6 3 8 2 4 7 9 1 5
9 2 1 7 5 8 3 4 6
5 4 2 3 6 9 1 8 7
3 8 7 4 1 5 6 2 9
1 7 6 9 8 4 3 5 2
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Barbara Harrell loving mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. Part owner of Blue Ridge Christian News.

February 2019 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 43
Fix Your Eyes.
By Chelsea Elevins
Terry County

God spoke these few words to me as I wrestled with myself. My frustrations, confusions, and mishaps. The sun was setting and scattered throughout. The pastures were stills of orange sheen. Big tears began flooding my eyes as I sat in the presence of my Father; the stillness of my Father.

In the stillness of His presence, I felt my world came to a sudden halt. The world that I so often see through the lens of my own troubles, frustrations, and confusions. I pulled my car to the side of the road and right there. God began to work on me and my vision that often seems so blurred.

And as I began to reflect on 2018, I saw a year filled with God’s presence. In both the difficult and joyous days. Some of my wildest dreams have come true this year. I have overcome many hardships, explored new talents and places, and found myself all over again a little day by day. But you want to know what is crazy?

There are times when I don’t feel those tears of growth in my life. I don’t feel that good things are coming or that I am clothed in strength and armor that is everlasting andbulletproof. There are times when my vision of what is doing in my life is blurry and I am David with my very own Goliah. A giant personalized to my doubts, fears, and unbelief towers a shadow over me.

Maybe your vision of life is blurry from time to time too? Your armor of prayer, praise, and worship doesn’t feel so bulletproof. But, as I sat beside the road in my car, the sun painting a sherbert sky, and a new year ahead God spoke to me these few words:

Daughter, FIX YOUR EYES.
Fix your eyes, don't you see how far I have carried you this year?
Don’t you see how far you’ve come?
Don’t you see the prayers answered?
Don’t you see the heart restored?
Don’t you see a year ago, you were the lost sheep? You were so lost, you couldn't remember who I had made you to be. You were so broken but wouldn’t allow me to heal you, your very own Father. Instead, you looked to everyone else. But still, I risked everything to find you, my daughter.
I found you in the dark, confused, frustrated, and lost. I put you on my shoulders and carried you back home to me and I rejoiced with thanksgiving and gladness because I had found you, my lost sheep.

Yah, when God began to speak these words to me my heart hit the floor because it’s true, he rescued me.

Looking back a year from this point, I was so lost. To be honest, my vision is still blurry from time to time. Doubt, fear, and worry cloud my way many times and the giants are tare again with his cloud of darkness over me.
This year has been a season of growth, silence, stillness, and waiting. At times I have been frustrated and impatient in this season of waiting. But, it is so true, this year, my Father rescued me. My God rescued me.
He put me on his shoulders, and He carried me. Not only, He carried me.
He became my strength in times of weakness. He became my true joy in times of sadness. He became my calm in the storm. He became my legs when I couldn’t walk. He became the light when I lost my way. He became my shepherd when my vision was too blurry to see clearly the path ahead of us.

He truly rescued me.
He fixed my eyes.
He fixed my eyes on Him.
When I was lost, I now walk home rejoicing with gladness and thanksgiving alongside my Father and boy, I can’t wait to be home with Him.

Along the journey beside Him this year I see that although it’s been a dry season of waiting at times, it’s also been a year of walking, talking, healing, and rejoicing alongside my Father.
We have been through a lot this year, over hills and into valleys, stormy days and sunny days, my Father and I.
Through this journey home with Him I, the rescued lost sheep, have learned one of the most important things I could ever learn and that is this: to FIX MY EYES ON MY FATHER.
My vision is much more clear through my Father’s lens.
My thoughts are much more clear with my Father on my mind.
My laugh trembles deeper and my smile grows bigger with the joy of my Father.
And nothing, not Goliah or my other giant, can make me turn my eyes away from Him now that I have felt Him so strongly.
This year has been a season of provoking, growing, resting, and healing. It’s been a journey over mountains and through valleys. I have had stormy nights and days filled with sunshine. At times it hasn’t made sense.
But my Father has been with me every step of the way and it will make sense when I make it home.
You see, He rescued me. He picked me up and carried me on His shoulders and I fixed my eyes upon Him.
And I continue to fix my eyes upon Him and rejoice with Him, my Father, on my journey home with Him.
This year, 2019, I will see the sun shining in pastures as I pass by, I will feel the warmth of His presence in my heart. I will feel His rain as drops of grace and His still breaths breathe over me as He always has.
At that moment I will look to Him, my Father by my side, and I will remember how He rescued me and fixed my eyes on Him.
And one day, perhaps one day soon, I will have all of Him, and all these years will make sense when our journey is over as He welcomes me home to be with Him forever.
But, until then, I will fix my eyes upon Him, my Father, my Redeemer, my rescuer.

Chelsea Elevins lives in Burnsville, attended Mountain Heritage High School and South College.

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Not Like the World
By Pastor Shawn Thomas
Burke County

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

This is SO applicable to Christians today. People are always saying things like: “we need to be like the world; we need to entertain like the world, to be businesslike like the world,” and so on. But God says NO! “You shall NOT do what is done in the land...” He says His goal for His people is NOT to be like the world! They are to follow HIS word instead. He says in 4, “You are to perform MY judgments and keep MY statutes, to live in accord with them; I am YOUR God.”

Sadly, too many in the church are doing the opposite, using the world’s standards as their model and guide, for worship, for business, for finances, relationships, ministry, morals, etc. But this is a tragic mistake. God says we are NOT to be like them. “You shall NOT do what is done” by them!

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

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

Shawn Thomas is Senior Pastor at Pleasant Ridge Baptist Church in Morganton. His messages and devotionals are available at www.shawnthomas.com

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A. You've probably heard the old saying that "Two wrongs don't make a right"—and it's true, especially in this case. What you did by having sex before marriage outside of marriage was wrong in God's eyes—but allowing the little child that is growing inside your girlfriend's womb to be killed would also be very wrong in God's eyes.

In other words, don't ask God to bless something that is wrong—which is what you'd be doing if you prayed for Him to change your girlfriend's mind about an abortion. Does this mean you shouldn't pray? No, not at all—but the prayer you need to offer is twofold. First, you need to offer a prayer of confession, asking Jesus Christ to cleanse you of your sins. Then you need to offer a prayer of submission, turning your life over to Christ and asking Him to guide you and help you do what is right.

I hope you won't think I'm harsh or judgmental; that isn't my intention at all. But you are standing at a major crossroads in your life—and I pray you won't take the wrong road. God loves you, and your greatest need is to discover this great truth. Jesus said, "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete" (John 15:11).

You have some hard decisions ahead—but isn't it better to face them with God than without Him? Don't be pressured into doing something wrong or unwise, but ask God to help you find the right path for your child—through adoption, for example.

Q. Our teenage daughter is pregnant. What advice should we give her?

A. Almost every week I receive at least one letter from someone facing this problem, and my heart goes out to you during this difficult time. Perhaps your daughter's sad experience will make someone who is tempted to take the same path see to stop and reconsider.

My prayer is that you and your daughter will not end the life of the little child who is growing within her. Yes, abortion sounds like an easy way out—but all human life is sacred, and should never be taken without just cause. Yes, it was wrong for your daughter to have sexual relations outside the commitment of marriage—but two wrongs don't make a right, and it would be wrong for her to do the wrong of this little child.

May you and your daughter carefully and prayerfully consider your alternatives. Every year, hundreds of thousands of childless couples yearn to adopt a baby, and I urge you and your daughter to consider this option. She then could have the satisfaction of knowing her baby will grow up in a loving, caring home.

Above all, may you and your daughter turn to Christ, and find in Him the forgiveness and peace He alone can give. God loves your daughter, and He wants to help put her feet on a different path in life. The Bible's promise is true: In Christ "we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:14).

Q. I got an abortion. I can't forgive myself, and I know God won't forgive me either.

A. Many people may agree with your friends—but I'm thankful you know otherwise, for ending the life of the little child who was growing in you wasn't right in God's eyes. God's words to Jeremiah apply to every human being, born or unborn: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you" (Jeremiah 1:5).

But you are wrong when you say God can never forgive you! King David in the Old Testament was a great and good man in many ways—but later in life he strayed from God. He committed adultery with another man's wife, and then to cover up his sin he arranged for that man to be killed in battle (see 2 Samuel 11). Adultery … lying … murder … How could God ever forgive him?

And yet God did forgive him! David honestly faced his sin, repented of it, and sought God's forgiveness: "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight" (Psalm 51:4). And when he did this, God forgave him and cleansed him of his sin. David could then truly say, "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered" (Psalm 32:1).

This can be your experience as well. God loves you, and Christ died to take away any sin you ever committed—everyone. Don't let your emotions or anything else keep you from Christ. Ask Him to come into your life today, because in Him "we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:14).

You can have forgiveness through Jesus Christ today. God cares about all lives, including yours. Find peace with Him today.

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