America’s birth is inspiring and a reason for national pride. Woodrow Wilson once commented that if a nation doesn’t remember what it was yesterday, it won’t know what it is today or what it’s trying to do. If we don’t know where we’ve come from or what we’ve been about, it’s futility. We must understand the heartbeat of our founding fathers and teach our children. Compare America’s birth to a child developing in the womb and being born. The colonies had been functioning separately from England and had become like married couples who leave father and mother and go on to create a new family unit. But, instead of the parent country’s grasp becoming looser, it tightened. And the colonies, like new parents-to-be, began to hope, dream, and plan for a future with a new birth of freedom. When on July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was signed, it had not come about by wild-eyed men with selfish ambitions; but, those of honor and means who sacrificed everything for liberty. When at last the new nation was born, extraordinary celebrations exploded and they continue with national pride to this day. Yet, right now an indescribable sense of sorrow clouds the landscape as we no longer celebrate the truth. We seem to be in denial of the very real displays of the deep and abiding faith in God carved and proclaimed in our nation’s Capital. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are being replaced by a culture of death that mocks personal liberty. How can one pursue happiness when the very foundation is cracking beneath our feet? God Almighty gives and sustains life. He blessed and made America a world leader. Yet he is viewed as an ogre to be removed from public life. As a nation, we have given, lent, sent, and built up. But for several decades we have borrowed, spent, and mortgaged our children’s futures – tearing down the pillars which support our beliefs. The United States of America was born through the grace and purpose of the God of the Bible. The Bible says in Psalm 33:12, NIV, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.” Even knowing this truth, headlines prove we have misplaced our trust. Let’s not wait a moment longer to place our trust where it belongs and seek His face, turn from wickedness, and receive forgiveness and healing for our land. God is and always has been our only hope. Let’s celebrate America’s birthday in truth. Selah

Pause...and Consider

Celebrate the Truth
By Ken and Jan Merop
Avery County

America’s birth is inspiring and a reason for national pride. Woodrow Wilson once commented that if a nation doesn’t remember what it was yesterday, it won’t know what it is today or what it’s trying to do. If we don’t know where we’ve come from or what we’ve been about, it’s futility. We must understand the heartbeat of our founding fathers and teach our children. Compare America’s birth to a child developing in the womb and being born. The colonies had been functioning separately from England and had become like married couples who leave father and mother and go on to create a new family unit. But, instead of the parent country’s grasp becoming looser, it tightened. And the colonies, like new parents-to-be, began to hope, dream, and plan for a future with a new birth of freedom. When on July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was signed, it had not come about by wild-eyed men with selfish ambitions; but, those of honor and means who sacrificed everything for liberty. When at last the new nation was born, extraordinary celebrations exploded and they continue with national pride to this day. Yet, right now an indescribable sense of sorrow clouds the landscape as we no longer celebrate the truth. We seem to be in denial of the very real displays of the deep and abiding faith in God carved and proclaimed in our nation’s Capital. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are being replaced by a culture of death that mocks personal liberty. How can one pursue happiness when the very foundation is cracking beneath our feet? God Almighty gives and sustains life. He blessed and made America a world leader. Yet he is viewed as an ogre to be removed from public life. As a nation, we have given, lent, sent, and built up. But for several decades we have borrowed, spent, and mortgaged our children’s futures – tearing down the pillars which support our beliefs. The United States of America was born through the grace and purpose of the God of the Bible. The Bible says in Psalm 33:12, NIV, “Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.” Even knowing this truth, headlines prove we have misplaced our trust. Let’s not wait a moment longer to place our trust where it belongs and seek His face, turn from wickedness, and receive forgiveness and healing for our land. God is and always has been our only hope. Let’s celebrate America’s birthday in truth. Selah

Illumination

“…One nation, under God, with liberty and justice for all.”
A celebration of freedom illuminates the night
As a dazzling thunder flash bursts into the inky sky.
Let’s be a colorful illumination of God’s light ~ sparkling and shimmering in the darkness.
“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”
Matthew 5:16

Ken and Jan love residing in the mountains of Avery County. Visit Jan’s new blog @pauseandconsider.net, Journeying with Jan. Ken’s photos can be seen at kenmeropphotography.com.
A Grateful Girl

By Patti Jensen
Mitchell County

“Be to me a rock of habitation to which I may continually come; You have given commandment to save me. For You are my rock and my fortress.” Psalm 71:3

Be to me. Three simple words that capture what my heart longs for when I reach for God's hand in my life these days.

I recently read a post by Tera Elness who was speaking about this verse and she explained that these words reminded her of what Jesus taught his own people to pray...Give us this day our daily bread. When we say those words, we are praying...give us what we need. Our sustenance. Give us you Jesus. Daily. Every hour.

In these uncertain times, it is easy and probably common for all of us to start to swirl in all of the questions, the uncertainties, the what-ifs. The worries. From minute to minute and day to day, it is easy to get carried away in the news and social media. Some of us have become tied to the media as we wait on the "experts" to tell us what to do, what we need, and what is best. And then that advice changes from day to day. No wonder we are all worried and frustrated and tired.

Many of us are in despair as our loved ones are sick and we cannot be with them. We are separated from our loved ones, our church families, and our communities. It's easy to feel alone and distant.

But friends one thing never changes. God is our rock. He is our fortress in times of trouble. His Word is true and never fails.

So we lift our voice to Him in our quiet time, in our prayer, as we drive down the road..."Be to Me". Be to me my rock and my fortress. Be to me my comforter and counselor...for that is who You are.

Be to me my strength when I am weary of the world around me, for You are my strength. Be to me my joy, for in your presence there is fullness of joy.

Be to me my rest, for You are my resting place.

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Be to me my rest, for You are my resting place.

Psalm 71:3

Families Reaching Families with the Gospel

By Rev. John B. Sorensen

It’s no secret that families all around us are struggling. Finances. Broken relationships. Raising children. Health problems. The pressure can feel overwhelming at times. While there are many programs today that help serve these needs, it is their spiritual need that is often neglected.

How about your own family? How is your spiritual health? Well, one of the ways to approach both problems is to reach out to another family in need. When we step out of our circle, our comfort zone, to help someone else, we allow our own spiritual health to grow.

Last year, Barna Research released a study on the state of Christian families in our country. They found families who engaged in daily devotional time and regularly invited others into their homes contained a greater “spiritual vibrancy” than families that did either one of those activities alone (Households of Faith, 2019).

As Christians, we often talk about the five means of spiritual growth: Bible Study, Prayer, Worship, Fellowship, and Witness. While the first three can be practiced both individually and together as a family, church, or small group, the last two can only be practiced with other people. In other words, we grow spiritually when we do it together as a community.

So how can your family be more intentional about growing spiritually as a family and reaching others in need?

1. Invite another family to your home for a cookout or dinner. Share your story with them about how God has met the needs of your life.

2. Help meet someone's physical needs in your community. Then pray for them. Let them know that God cares about their spiritual health as well as their physical needs.

3. Offer to study the Bible together in your home or at a coffee shop. Choose a book of the Bible or a study that is appropriate for their situation. Then ask others to join you.

4. Invite them to join you at church. Be intentional about connecting them with other families who can form a loving support network around them.

If you have children, include them. Brainstorm as a family about different ways you can help out families in your community. Get creative. Then make a plan. Make your efforts a family outreach. Children can actively participate in all areas of spiritual growth.

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By actively reach out and engaging with other families outside of the home, we not only have the opportunity to share the Gospel with other families in our community, but we also put ourselves in a position to grow spiritually and to draw closer together.

In doing so, we honor God individually and as a family.

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.

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In Every Issue

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Life Lessons - p. 9
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“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace: that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation: that saith unto Zion. Thy God reigneth!”

Isaiah 52:7 KJV

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

Call us at 828-765-6800 to enroll in this important outreach effort.

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In Psalm 11:3, we see God asking the righteous a question. “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” I read where a news reporter once asked someone the following question. “What are the two greatest problems facing America?” The man replied, “I really don’t know—and I really don’t care!” Whether the man realized it or not, he answered the reporter’s question. The two greatest problems facing our nation are (1) Ignorance—“I don’t know” and (2) Apathy—“I don’t care.” No two single factors are working harder to destroy the very foundations of our nation than Ignorance—“I don’t know.” And Apathy—“I don’t care.” Three thousand years ago King David asked this very probing question when he asked; “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” We are right now living in a time when many of the moral and ethical values that formed our nation are crumbling right before our very eyes. What are the foundations that have made America great under God, but are being destroyed right before our eyes? First of all:

**The Foundation of Dignity**

Do you know what made America a great nation under God? Human dignity and the value of human life is what made this a great nation under God. But sadly, that foundation has now been destroyed. It was destroyed when the courts in our land ruled that innocent, defenseless, unborn children have no right to life. For some people, these precious little lives are simply globs of flesh, underserving of any human dignity. The foundation of human dignity and the value of human life is being destroyed right before our very eyes. SO, the words of King David should echo throughout our land and these words should be spoken throughout the halls of Congress and the United States Senate—“If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” Then the second foundation that has made America great under God is:

**The Foundation of Devotion**

Of the things that has made our nation great is our devotion to God—our devotion to the home—and our devotion to the nation. Was not this great land of ours birthed because of our ancestor’s devotion to God? Our devotion to God also came from some of our oldest educational colleges. Did you know that each of our nation’s oldest colleges was founded by a Bible-based denomination wanting primarily to do one thing—train ministers? Harvard was founded in 1636 by New England Puritans. For years, Harvard was so devoted to God that their commencement addresses were given in Hebrew. Princeton was founded in 1746 by the Presbyterians. The Anglicans founded Columbia in 1754. And the Baptists founded Brown in 1764. And the list goes on and on. But that devotion is no longer found in our colleges and universities today. You wouldn’t be hard-pressed to even find the Ten Commandments on display at any of these places of higher education today. The foundation of devotion is being destroyed right before our very eyes. SO, King David’s question, “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” is a question we should be taking seriously before our devotion to God, our devotion to home, and our devotion to our country, become forgotten words in our vocabulary. Then the third foundation that has made America great under God is:

**The Foundation of Duty**

One of the things that has set our nation apart through the years has been our ethic. I’m thankful that I was brought up in a family where I was made to work whether I wanted to work or not. Hard-working people is what has made our country great. But like the other foundations that I have mentioned, this foundation is also being destroyed right before our very eyes. We are now living in the age of entitlements. Duty is crumbling right before us as more and more people feel entitled to live off of some type of federal assistance. Hard work has always been the key to success in our country and it will always be. It still does my heart good to see young people who are not afraid to go out and do an honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay. SO, the words of King David asking the question should be sounded loudly and clearly throughout our land today. It doesn’t need to be a whisper. This needs to be shouted and even roared throughout our land. “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” Our duty to get out and work is being destroyed right before our very eyes. Then the fourth and final foundation that has made America great under God is:

**The Foundation of Decency**

Common decency is being destroyed right before our very eyes. Common decency and basic morality have been the foundation that has made America great under God. But today, common decency and basic morality are being radically redifined. Do you remember seeing the movie “Gone with the Wind”? What’s the one line you remember most in that movie? It was where Rhett said to Scarlett, “Frankly my dear, I don’t give a damn.” Now excuse me for saying that, but I’m making a point here. Back in the day, when this line was spoken it sent shock waves throughout our land. Many people in our land went into an uproar over it and condemned it. YET, today that four-letter word has been replaced with a lot of other four-letter words that I cannot mention in this paper, and these words are looked upon today as being acceptable and even laughable. Most television networks now show nudity and it goes without complaint from anyone. Pornography is now a multimillion-dollar industry. And today’s lifestyles that not very long ago were hidden in little dark alleys and closets are now paraded proudly down Main Street in almost every American metro city and even in smaller towns across our land. So the foundation of dignity—devotion—duty—and decency are being destroyed right before our very eyes. But we haven’t answered the question, have we? WE CAN PRAY. Let’s pray that these great four spiritual foundations—The foundation of Dignity—The foundation of Devotion—The foundation of Duty—The foundation of Decency might be restored before we witness the complete and final fall of our nation spiritually. Let’s Pray!

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**Let’s Pray**

By Dennis Love

McDowell County

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

What We Believe

Here are some of the essential elements of our faith at the Blue Ridge Christian News:

God
God is the Creator and Ruler of the universe. He has existed eternally in three persons and chooses to manifest Himself in these three ways: as God the Father, as God the Son, and as God the Holy Spirit. These three are co-equal and are one God.

(Genesis 1:1, 26-27; 3:22; Psalm 90:2; Matthew 28:19; 1 Peter 1:2; and 2 Corinthians 13:14)

Jesus
Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, who is fully God and fully human in His incarnation. He lived a sinless human life and offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all humanity by dying on a cross. He arose from the dead after three days to demonstrate His power over sin and death. He ascended to heaven and will return again to reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

(Matthew 1:22-23; Isaiah 9:6; John 1:1-5; 14:10-30; Hebrews 4:14-15; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Romans 1:3-4; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Timothy 6:14-15; Titus 2:13)

The Holy Spirit
The Holy Spirit is the very Spirit of God, fully divine, manifested in the life of every believer from the moment of salvation. He is equal with the Father and the Son as God. He is present in the world to make men aware of their need for Jesus Christ. He provides the Christian with power for living, understanding of spiritual truth, and guidance in doing what is right. The Christian seeks to live under His daily control.

(2 Corinthians 3:17; John 16:7-13; 14:16-17; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 2:12; 3:16; Ephesians 1:13; Galatians 5:25; Ephesians 5:18)

The Bible
The Bible is the divinely inspired, authoritative, infallible, living and active Word of God to all men. It was written by human authors under the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is the ultimate source of truth for Christian beliefs and living. In it we find a guideline for right relationship with God and God's creation, and a blueprint for personal, emotional, and spiritual growth.

(2 Timothy 1:13; 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:2-21; Psalm 119:105, 160; 12:6; Proverbs 30:5)

Humanity
Humanity is designed and made by God in His image. We have been created as cognitive, moral, ethical, and physical beings and have been equipped by God for both relationship with Him and with one another. Both male and female are gifted by the Creator with characteristics which equip them for the purpose for which they have been created: relationship, dominion, and responsibility. Although God designed us to have fellowship with Him, we became alienated from God through disobedience. As a result, all human beings are born with a sinful nature and choose to sin against God. We are incapable of regaining a right relationship with God through our own efforts.

(Genesis 1:26-28; Psalm 8:3-6; Isaiah 53:6; 59:1-2; Romans 3:23-25; 52:22; Colossians 1:21; 2 Corinthians 5:17)

Eternity & Eternal Security
Our soul, the essence of our being, was created by God to exist forever. That forever is spent in one of two places: eternally present and in union with God because of His forgiveness and salvation or eternally separated from God because of sin and unbeliev. At the moment that our body dies, those who are saved are immediately taken to heaven. Those who have rejected God's gift of salvation will spend eternity separated from God in hell. Because God gives man eternal life through Jesus Christ, the believer is secure in that salvation for eternity. Salvation is maintained by the grace and power of God, not by the self-effort of the Christian. It is the grace and eternal power of God that gives this security.

(John 3:16; 5:11-13, 10:29; 1 John 2:25; Romans 6:23; Revelation 20:15; 2 Timothy 1:12; Hebrews 7:25; 10:10-14; 1 Peter 1:3-5)

Salvation
Salvation is God's gift of redemption and reconciliation to Himself and is offered freely to all who accept, by faith alone, Jesus Christ as God's only son and receive Him as Lord and Savor. We can never make up for our sin with self-improvement or good works. It is only by trusting in Jesus Christ as God's offer of forgiveness that you can be saved from sin's penalty. Eternal life begins the moment you receive Jesus Christ into your life by faith.

(Romans 5:1, 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9; John 1:12; 14:6; Titus 3:5; Galatians 3:26)
Galatians 5:1 - Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

According to the most recent data published in Bloomberg, the Environmental Protection Agency set the value of a life at $10 million. The Food and Drug Administration declared that life is worth $9.5 million. And the Department of Agriculture has determined that one life is worth $8.9 million (Dave Merrill, “One Value Your Life More Than the Federal Government,” 10/19/17).

What are human beings that you are mindful of them? Perhaps you never have considered the worth of one human life, whether the life of another or your own life. No doubt, all of us have experienced times when we felt our value was insignificant or overlooked. With everything we have, we often strive to earn and prove our value and significance. But God says we have value and are significant because He made us and we belong to Him. Human life is sacred “from the womb to the tomb” (to borrow a phrase from Shane Claiborne), which is why we should be troubled by the deaths of George Floyd and Ahmad Arbery. Floyd, a 46-year-old black man, died after being killed for help as a Minneapolis police officer used his knee on Floyd’s neck to pin him—unarmed and handcuffed—to the ground for several minutes. Arbery, a 22-year-old black man, was chased down and killed by two white men while jogging in Georgia.

What are human beings that you are mindful of them? Psalm 8 is a hymn that echoes the account of creation in Genesis. In comparison with the vastness of the creation—the heavens, the moon, and the stars, humanity appears to be insignificant. Yet, the Creator of the universe takes thought of us and cares for us. God has crowned us with glory and honor. We are made in the image of God and appointed as stewards of the world God created.

What are human beings that you are mindful of them? There is awe-inspiring comfort in the message that we matter to God. God takes a personal interest in us. And all we have to do to see the price that He places on the worth of one human life is look to Jesus. “God demonstrates His love for us in this: ‘While we were still sinners, Christ died for us’” (Romans 5:8).

As followers of Christ, we not only are commissioned to share this good news but also to speak out against injustice. And we pray and work to this end—that the Kingdom of God would come, and that His will would be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Prayer: Lord, help us to see each person through your eyes, and to value them as you have considered the worth of one human life, whether the life of another or your own life. No doubt, all of us have experienced times when we felt our value was insignificant or overlooked. With everything we have, we often strive to earn and prove our value and significance. But God says we have value and are significant because He made us and we belong to Him. Human life is sacred “from the womb to the tomb” (to borrow a phrase from Shane Claiborne), which is why we should be troubled by the deaths of George Floyd and Ahmad Arbery. Floyd, a 46-year-old black man, died after being killed for help as a Minneapolis police officer used his knee on Floyd’s neck to pin him—unarmed and handcuffed—to the ground for several minutes. Arbery, a 22-year-old black man, was chased down and killed by two white men while jogging in Georgia.

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Better than Bitter
By Stanley fisher
Mitchell County

Matthew 17:14,15: “And when they were come to the multitude, there came to HIM a certain man, kneeling down to HIM and saying, LORD, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatic, and sore vexed.”

The last 53 years of my life have been a school of hard knocks for me: but in hindsight, I wouldn't trade what epilepsy has taught me for all of the gold and jewels imaginable. In hindsight, I see today how GOD is constantly at work in all people's lives. I was a prodigal son for about 15 years but can take an inventory from time to time and it is encouraging to me to see how all along the way the HOLY SPIRIT has never left nor forsaken me as CHRIST said He would never do.

People though have been either too proud or afraid to associate with me...but that has been also a good thing for me while in GOD'S hands because all along it has been preparation for the calling on my life today.

The view of being looked upon as a lunatic has made me most resilient toward the attitude the world throws at Christians to the max and has been, in GOD'S hands, preparing me for missionary work in a hostile society.

Let the HOLY SPIRIT use all of the things that have had the potential of making you bitter, into something better.

Stanley Fisher is a member of the Western Carolina Church for 22 years and a member of the Green Valley and Spruce Pine Community.

“Time in Prison”
By Jody Griffin
Avery and Mitchell County

“I was in prison, and ye came unto me.” (Matthew 25:36) Joseph, Samson, Jeremiah, Micaiah, Zedekiah, Daniel, John the Baptist, Peter, James, John, Silas, Paul, Epaphras, Aristarchus, Junia, and even Jesus himself are listed in the Scriptures as having spent ‘some time in prison’.

There are some familiar names included in this list, names that most people easily recognize for their significance in Biblical history. Others are much more obscure, perhaps even unknown. Their names are more likely included in the “advanced” levels of Bible trivia (only to be heard on episodes of “Jeopardy”) and their contribution(s) to the history of God’s saving work in this world is virtually forgotten. But they contributed nonetheless…This fact cannot be ignored! While their small part in the dramatic expression of Divine love to the world (See John 3:16) may not have earned them great acclaim, their service in God’s kingdom brought them into the permanent record of God’s mercy and grace found in the Holy Scriptures.

A percentage of people whose lives are inextricably bound to the testimony of the Bible spent time in prison. I shared this thought with someone recently who responded by saying ‘But imprisoned people in the Bible were fulfilling the will of God in their life’. I responded, “Yeah…Sounds like a plan!”

During these days that have now become months of absence of volunteers among us who try to bring hope to the incarcerated by investing their time and energy to come inside the prison, I have had multiplied opportunities to preach and teach in an attempt to ‘fill the void’. And I have witnessed firsthand the enormous void created by the absence of our usual religious volunteers in particular. Regularly I am asked how our volunteers are doing, when they might be returning and how we as a body of believers ‘on the inside’ can pray for them.

It occurred to me recently how the choice to visit those in prison puts the people who enter here to serve this population in some pretty notable company. Sure, some volunteers are more well-known among this population than others. But every single one of them contributes to the overall well-being of the men who reside here and ultimately contribute to the good of us all.

And how every single one of them is actually ministering to the Lord Jesus when they come. Every. Single. One.

Thank you to all who have prayed for us through these long and anxious days of the pandemic. Thank you to those who are preparing to enter and join us in this place when the day finally comes that it is safe for you to return to us. Every time that I am gathered together with the men for Christian worship or Bible study, they speak of our need to pray for all of you. And when they do, my heart overflows with gratitude for the foundation of love and care that you have poured into their lives.

You never know how the incarcerated person you minister to is going to be used to further tell the story of the Love of our Creator God and the saving Grace of Jesus Christ, His Son! “Yeah! Sounds like a plan!”

To God Be the Glory!

Jody Griffin is pastor of Central Baptist Church in Spruce Pine and Community Funded Chaplin at Avery-Mitchell Correctional Institution.
By Doug Harrell
Mitchell County

I very seldom get angry, I find that when I do it really messes with my mind and spirit. I cannot remember a time that I have had to deal with that more than the past few weeks. I am not angry with any particular person, just the attitude in our country as a whole, the crazy stuff that is going on. I deal with chemo at the hospital or at home three weeks out of every five and that, in itself, is quite a challenge. This week that has not been the problem. What gets me is that people are dying in the hospital and no one is allowed to even go in and see them! Not good! We are not supposed to gather more than 50 people together or we will potentially die of COVID 19, yet it is okay for people to protest, riot, loot, burn down buildings and destroy things and businesses that folks have spent their lives building. I see our law enforcement being vilified and attacked as they are trying to do their job and so many are saying that needing to happen! I have had to spend more time in prayer for myself, my family, and our country, crying out to God to help us, to bring some sense to this crazy world than ever in my life.

"If I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope. It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The Lord is my portion: saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." Lamentations 3:21-26 KJV

Lord, I am seeking to honor thy faithfulness each morning, praying diligently for our country and our leaders. Remembering one of my go-to verses when I look at our world and praying that we will take heed before it is too late. The people who are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. 2 Chronicles 7:14 KJV

In today’s troubled world you are willing to stand up and be counted? It seems that everywhere we look the forces of evil are surrounding us. The very mention of God and Jesus tends to bring out those from that would remove any reference of morality from society. They tend to position themselves as the promoters of social equality and nondiscrimination, when in fact the ones that are being discriminated against are those that believe in law and order, that believe in the right to give thanks, to pray in Jesus’ name, and believe in our just system. The song “Stand up, Stand up for Jesus” has these words:

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

Put on the gospel armor,
Each piece put on with prayer;
Where duty calls or danger,
Be never wanting there.

Are we willing to stand in the face of evil, say this is not right? When those that gather to intimidate us and threaten our very core beliefs as Christians, do we go hide in a corner and say, God, will take care of it? Granted, all things are in God’s hand, but are we willing to be His ambassadors, to lift high the royal banner when we see His instructions and commands being violated? Jesus told us that blessed are the peacemakers, and I agree, but He, Himself, always stood up and did not duck the issues. When He went into the Temple and it was being desecrated, “And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.” Matthew 21:12-13 KJV

The Bible is full of stories of people that stood up for their beliefs, that said this is my rock and my foundation and I shall not be moved. We see modern-day examples of people standing up and saying “I believe” and being willing to be murdered because they would not denounce the name of Jesus Christ! Are we willing to do the same? Maybe the time has come in America for God’s people to stand and say, “WE BELIEVE”, and stand their ground peacefully if possible, but stand their ground nevertheless.

Pray for our nation, our leaders, our states, our cities, our local communities, but be willing to also take a firm stand, be willing to say, “This I Believe”!

Lord bring us back into Your fold, get us back in the houses of worship, put our families back together, let those in authority know those in authority that You have commanded. Turn us from our wicked ways and back to the roots of Christianity that this great country was founded on. Help us realize that our help comes from the Lord. Amen

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

www.harrellhillfarms.com

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Jim & Beverly Huskins are members of Obedient Heart Fellowship.

Out of Bondage

By Jim Huskins
McDowell County

“Remember the former things of old: For I am God—there is no other. I am God, and there is none like Me—declaring the end from the beginning, from ancient time, what is yet to come, saying, ‘My purpose will stand, and I will accomplish all that I please.’”

Believers who consider themselves “New Testament Christians” should investigate the layers of truth contained in Isaiah 46:9-10. One of the many difficulties of attempting to understand the final third of the Bible without the context of the first two-thirds is that God began explaining the end of our age at the beginning of His book. At a time when many Americans are giving thanks for freedom, perhaps believers should remember God’s deliverance from ultimate bondage.

Freedom is the theme of the second book of the Bible. Exodus begins with God’s people enslaved to the most powerful nation on earth. The Hebrew word for “Egypt” is “Mitzrayim.” It means a “narrow place” or “a place to come out of.” More significant than physical bondage was Israel’s entrapment in a culture of polytheism. Each of the ten plagues was an affront to one or more Egyptian “gods.” The process God used to lead His children out of Egypt bears striking resemblance to prophecies found in the Book of Revelation. Consider a few parallels:

Both events hinge on the work of two witnesses. In Exodus 4:15-16, God instructs Moses that he and Aaron will be messengers to the Israelites and the Egyptians. Both men played pivotal roles in communicating God’s instructions and proclamations as the Exodus unfolded. Revelation 11:3-6 tells of “two witnesses” who will speak on God’s behalf. These witnesses will have the power to withhold rain, strike the earth with plagues and turn water into blood. These are direct parallels to Moses and Aaron. The comparison is even more striking since verse 8 gives the location of the ministry of the two witnesses as “the great city, which is called Sodom and Egypt—where also their Lord was crucified.” The significance of Jerusalem being referenced by two names which are synonymous with sin and rebellion cannot be overstated. The heart of God’s kingdom will become a place His children must escape. The work of Satan and his beastly representatives will cause Jerusalem to become as morally bankrupt as Sodom and ancient Egypt.

Another parallel between Exodus and Revelation is the first plague. God turned the waters of Egypt into the blood. Egyptians worshipped the Nile. They were forced to learn that their river is creation, not a creator. Similar plagues are found in Revelation 8:8, 8:10, and 16:3-4. No doubt many Egyptians died from lack of water. People around the world will die near the end.

Also common to these passages is a plague of debilitating boils. Some scholars propose that the “furnace” mentioned in Exodus 9:8-11 was an altar for human sacrifice. See also Revelation 16:2. During the Exodus, Israelites did not suffer this plague. In Revelation, it only happens to those who bear the mark of the beast.

A fourth parallel is a wilderness. Moses tells Pharaoh several times, including 5:1, that God wanted His people to travel into the wilderness to worship Him. After the tenth plague, they did. In Revelation 12:14, the woman, who represents the Nation of Israel, is born into the wilderness for her protection.

Revelation 12 also contains a passage that is key to understanding who will be saved. Verse 17 defines the woman’s offspring as “Those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.” This qualification is stated again in Revelation 14:12 which defines “the saints” as “those who keep the commandment of God and the faith of Jesus.” Revelation 22:14 says: “They washed their robes, so that they may have the right to the Tree of Life and may enter through the gates into the city.” “Wash their robes” is a Hebrew idiom which means “obeys God’s commands.”

Exodus is a type and shadow of end-time events. Pharaoh demanded obedience to his decrees, Satan, and his beast will do the same. In both situations, obedience to God’s instructions is crucial. Israelites who did not place the blood of the lamb on their door frames did not escape the death angel. Believers who do not obey God’s Torah and keep faith in Messiah will have no part in the Millennial Land. There we will experience the absence of pain and death and sorrow. There we will drink Living Water, eat of the Tree of Life, and walk in the Light of God’s presence. Never again will we shed a tear. The key to such marvelous freedom is to join through the work of Messiah—out of the wilderness and into the Promised Land. There we will be reunited. The marvelous prophecy in Ezekiel 39:25-29 says that many prophecies detail the greater exodus God will use to bring His children together at the end of the age. Revelation 11:4 tells us that the “two witnesses” are “two olive trees.” They represent the House of Judah and the House of Israel which will be reunited. The prophecy of Ezekiel 39:25-29 says that God is going to lead the scattered family of Jacob—which Gentiles are allowed to join through the work of Messiah—out of the wilderness and into the Promised Land. There we will experience the absence of pain and death and sorrow. Never again will we shed a tear. The key to such marvelous freedom is found in the words of that simple, old hymn: Trust and Obey.

Obedient Heart Fellowship believes that the entire Bible is both true and relevant. We accept salvation by grace through faith in Jesus, and we attempt to love and serve Him by keeping his commandments. See Revelation 14:12. We hope to soon resume meeting each Sabbath—Seventh Day—in Marion. lostranger@ mindspring.com

Jim & Beverly Huskins are members of Obedient Heart Fellowship.

Check out our Website-www.brcnews.com
And find us on Facebook
Read Acts 12:1-19a “So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.” Acts 12:5.
As we review the events of Acts 12:1-19, a question comes to mind: Why was James killed (see verses 1-2), and Peter delivered? Could God not have saved James as well? There is no question that he could have. Well, why didn’t He?
The only answer that this chapter suggests is found in Verse 5. Peter was kept in prison, just as James. But the difference was that earnest prayer to God was made for Peter by the church, and as a result, Peter was set free. You say, What difference does it make? Couldn’t God just have set Peter free anyhow? If God determined that James would die and Peter would be set free, what difference did the prayer of the church make? But let us never forget what James (not this James, but Jesus’ brother, who wrote The Epistle of James) says: “You have not because you ask not.” (James 4:2).
In his wisdom, God has designed that His people shall participate in what He does. He is impressing upon His people here that when danger threatens the program of God or the people of God, it is a call to prayer. God will hear that prayer and answer it and set people free when He would not have done so otherwise. This is the great lesson of this chapter. We are not to take the events of our day for granted, as though there were nothing we could do about them. Prayer becomes a mighty, powerful thrust on the part of the people of God, to change events. Prayer is the most natural response of a heart that is dependent upon God. If you are counting upon God to do something, then you will pray about it. You will trust Him; you will communicate with Him. If you are not counting on Him, you will not pray. If you are really counting on something else, or on someone else — if you think that by your own clever maneuvering you can get out of a situation, or if you are trusting other human beings to come through — you will not pray. The basic motive of prayer is a sense of dependence. If you really think that God, and God alone, can work and that there are elements of a situation in which only He can change things — then you pray. This is what happened to this early church. When they realized that James had been put to death and that this vicious attack of the enemy could be successful, it suddenly crystalized in their minds that they had a part to play in God’s program. They were to go to God in earnest prayer that Peter might be delivered. And God set him free in a wonderful way. This passage highlights for us what prayer does, and that is basic for us to learn today. God works, in the same way, today as He did in these first-century days, and he will respond to our prayers in very much the same way. Father, teach me how to pray. I don’t always need to know what to pray for, but I do so desperately need to pray. I need to pray for others; to pray about the dangers that beset us as a nation and as a world. Help me to open my heart and be honest before you. I know that in the mystery of prayer, a mystery that I cannot fathom, something is happening that makes possible the activity of your Spirit to work in unusual ways, ways that otherwise would never happen. When prayer is worship, the focus is on the character and will of God. Are we learning to worship Him by praying Jesus’ prayer: ‘...nevertheless, not my will but Thine be done?’
John McCoury is pastor of Evergreen church in Roan Mountain, Tennessee and also chaplain at Roan Highlands Nursing Center.

The last several months have demonstrated the reality that we live in troublesome times. We have witnessed firsthand the reality of the sinfulness of mankind and the shocking actions that many have taken. The times in which we live have manifested themselves in a variety of responses for believers. While some have become more courageous, others have become more fearful.

Worry is a reality that I think every believer battles to different degrees. Its commonality among people has caused some to despair of its sinfulness before God. Worry cripples us spiritually, not enabling us to grow in a manner that is pleasing to God. Philippians 4:6-7 indicates that one of the means by which worry is defeated is through prayer.

Paul issued two commands in Philippians 4:6: “be careful for nothing” and “let your requests be made known.” The first command implies action that is already occurring and needs to stop. They were full of care, and Paul commanded them to stop. Worry is the fleshly response to situations, the outcome of which I cannot control. Regardless of how we attempt to justify worry, we must realize that worry is inevitable when I fail to look to God in prayer.

According to Philippians 4:6, the solution to worry is prayer. Using different terms that have only a slight distinction, Paul commands believers to continuously pray while maintaining a thankfulness for each situation God is doing in my life. The result of such prayer is promised in verse 7: “And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” God has promised those who stop worrying and continuously pray that His peace will guard our hearts and minds. Such peace exceeds our ability to comprehend.

Maybe you are worried about something you are facing. Since worry is the opposite of faith, allow me to ask a few questions in closing.

1. Is God worthy of my trust? This establishes the faithfulness of God. Until we establish the faithfulness of God in our own minds, we will naturally place our confidence upon that which we believe is reliable.
2. Is God capable? This establishes the competence of God. Until we establish the competence of God in our own minds, we will naturally place our confidence in that which we believe is sufficient.
3. Who am I in Christ? This establishes the relationship with God. Until we establish our identity as believers who belong to Him and embrace the implications of that which we believe is secure.

The means through which worry can be defeated.

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

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

“INSURANCE is the most IMPORTANT thing a person has because it protects him against the loss of everything he has in the world.”
-H.O. Hirt, ERIE Founder

www.brcnews.com
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Carol Layton is the Director of Communications and Administration for NCBAM currently experiencing an increased level of isolation – and for an indeterminate more concerned than ever. “More than one million North Carolinians 65+ are the adverse health risks associated with social isolation and loneliness and is now NCBAM’s director, Dr. Sandy C. Gregory, began the Hope Line because of for Hope Line volunteers. helping others.” NCBAM has also implemented a monthly support group meeting volunteers can learn how to maintain and nourish their emotional health while stressful. We’ve updated the training to incorporate self-care strategies so that conversations, and when a volunteer has three of these in a row, that can be pretty responded with extra guidance. “Many of the incoming Hope Line calls are heavy Integrative Medicine developed and teaches the training provided to all Hope Line themselves or by a family member or caregiver. Whitney Brooks, Board Certified Integrative Health Coach through Duke Integrative Medicine developed and teaches the training provided to all Hope Line communicators. When the pandemic brought unprecedented challenges, Brooks responded with extra guidance. “Many of the incoming Hope Line calls are heavy conversations, and when a volunteer has three of these in a row, that can be pretty stressful. We’ve updated the training to incorporate self-care strategies so that volunteers can learn how to maintain and nourish their emotional health while helping others.” NCBAM has also implemented a monthly support group meeting for Hope Line volunteers. NCBAM’s director, Dr. Sandy C. Gregory, began the Hope Line because of the adverse health risks associated with social isolation and loneliness and is now more concerned than ever. “More than one million North Carolinians 65+ are currently experiencing an increased level of isolation – and for an indeterminate length of time. NCBAM wants to help as many as possible by making the Hope Line available for both inbound and outbound calls.”

By Terry Cheek Th.D. McDowell County

“I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.” Job 19:25.

Here we are in July, I want to begin by wishing ev- eryone a happy and safe Independence Day. I encourage you to take a few moments, reflect on our Declaration of Independence, or better yet read it and remember the faith, dedication, and determination of our founding fathers.

Since March 2020 America has been dealing with one issue after another and it appears to me that many of us have forgotten how to deal with each other. There seems to be a lot of finger-pointing and name-calling. There is killing, violence, rioting, and looting. Some of this comes from evil and some of it comes from emotion. God’s word gives us sound wisdom for dealing with what appears to us to be unfair circumstances.

The Bible tells us Job was a righteous man, yet God allowed things to happen in his life that seemed very unfair. My background scripture for this month is Job 19:1-7 & 19:23-29 and my key verse is printed above, Job 19:25. Within the justice system is the concept of innocence (also known as innocent until proven guilty). This isn’t something invented by America, it goes back many centuries. In the simplest form, it means the burden of proof is on the prosecution to honestly prove guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. Yes, this practice allows from time to time a guilty person to walk free, but it is one of the best safeguards to keep innocent people from being unjustly convicted.

Job believed in this type of justice. There was one problem, as far as Job could tell his friends were not extending the benefit of the doubt to him. After seeing Job’s friends seemed to presume him guilty until proven innocent. We may remember going through times like these, where it seemed we were being punished for no reason. Through this frustration, we pour out our hearts to God and nothing seems to change. People close to us may think we deserve what we are getting. Family and friends become desensitized to our situation. Never give up, hold on to the hope God will do something about the problem. This is where we find Job.

The story of Job is a lengthy one, if you haven’t read it, I suggest you take time and do so, you will receive many blessings from his testimony. From his story we learn that over time Job developed a complaint, how long will this continue? Job was counseled by three friends who gave some very bad advice. They were convinced Job’s troubles were of his own making, they accused him of sin and told him God was punishing him.

There is a twofold lesson here. First be careful who you seek counsel from making sure they are capable of giving sound godly advice, free from their personal opinion. Second, you may be at some point to give counsel, if that happens prayerfully take time to understand and be sensitive to the one asking you for help. If you cannot approach the person with an innocent until proven guilty attitude, then you better refer them elsewhere. Then pray for them and yourself as they seek answers.

So how does Job 19:25 fit into all of this? Job was resilient in reaching for hope when there seemed to be no hope. He knew God as akinsman-redeemer, someone Job needed in his life and that redeemer would be standing when everyone and everything else was gone. Is God your redeemer today? Have you accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior? If not, I want to encourage you to do so, you know He is calling you to salvation, why continue to reject Him. I have talked with many folks who have walked away from church because of circumstances like Job went through. Let me encourage you to be resilient, get back in church, look to your redeemer, and place your hope in Him.

The testimony of Job’s faith gives us reason to hope! When it seems as though our world is falling apart, we can draw strength from the fact we have Jesus and His promise to never leave us or forsake us, His promise of a resurrection. If Job could find faith in his day and his situation then we should be able to do the same. We can learn from Job’s testimony how to deal with others during difficult times and how to lean on God daily with faith and resilience. What about the other people, the friends of Job? Let God deal with them, Job did, and everything turned out fine. Until we meet again, in person, or print may God Bless you is my prayer.

Terry is the Executive Director and broadcaster of The Inspiring Word media ministry. You can contact Terry by email at theinspiringword@gmail.com Or by visiting www.theinspiringword.org
Habits of the Heart: A Study of the Spiritual Disciplines
"Submission"

Dr. Jack R. Hodges, Jr.
Burke County

In this monthly series of articles, I have chosen to survey twelve (one each month) spiritual habits of the heart or spiritual disciplines that we must pursue in our faith journey to maturity in Christ. Richard Foster, in his book Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Maturity (Zondervan, 1978), divides these twelve into three categories: inward disciplines; outward disciplines; and Corporate disciplines. Today, look with me at the spiritual discipline of "submission," which is considered to be one of the outward disciplines. An "outward" discipline seeks to take us from the immediate presence of the Lord and present us as living witnesses of Jesus to the world outside our front doors. Each of these is not outward only, however—meaning, the focus is not on what we do—but rather, on the attitudes of our heart that find expression beyond ourselves.

James commanded (James 4:7-8), "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded." He continued in verse 10, "Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you.

The word "submit" is a difficult word for our modern society, much less the modern-day church. Perhaps it is because individuals have seen and experienced leadership that has misused power and authority and has manipulated and controlled others to get what they want. Or perhaps it is because we are overcomers with pride, selfishness, and worldly living.

However, the Word of God is absolutely clear children of God are to submit to God. The Greek word for "submit," found here and elsewhere in the New Testament, is (Hupataghe—Yntrmz), which literally means "to place oneself under the authority of another." Simply stated, it means that we are to obey. That is, we are to give up our own wishes, wants, desires, and plans and yield them and ourselves to the wants, wishes, desires, and plans of the Lord. We don’t lose our own freedom nor our freedom to make our own choices—rather, we, by faith and trust, offer ourselves to Sovereign God to do with us as He needs and wishes.

Many, if not most, New Testament Scriptural verses use this word in the Greek middle or passive tense—always indicating that we are deliberately acting or responding to the will of God. The Greek word for "submit," found here and elsewhere in the New Testament, is (Hupataghe—Yntrmz), which literally means "to place oneself under the authority of another." Simply stated, it means that we are to obey. That is, we are to give up our own wishes, wants, desires, and plans and yield them and ourselves to the wants, wishes, desires, and plans of the Lord. We don’t lose our own freedom nor our freedom to make our own choices—rather, we, by faith and trust, offer ourselves to Sovereign God to do with us as He needs and wishes.

In the deepest sense, we are subjecting ourselves to and we are actively obeying the wishes and commands of God. He is not forcing us to comply. He has not taken away our freedom. Rather, our Savior and Redeemer is asking us to give up our hearts, minds, and choices over to His plans and purposes.

Truly, godly submission is a personal and intentional choice. It does not involve coercion, intimidation, force, threat, pressure, or obligation. To submit to God requires faith and trust in the one to whom we are offering our obedience and submission. We can offer our submission to Him because our God is faithful and trustworthy. He only requires of us what will give Him glory, accomplish His plans and purposes, and allows Him to offer us the benefit of blessings from Him. To submit to another believer, in the context of the Body of Christ, the church, requires that we trust, honor, and respect the person, even if we don’t always agree or understand. To submit to God is offering our submission to the God who is always perfect and worthy of our trust.

One doesn’t submit to destructive pressure, demands, or expectations. One doesn’t submit to calls for abuse or to be abused. One doesn’t submit to evil. One doesn’t submit to anyone who asks us to violate the laws of the Lord which we find in the Scriptures. Many, if not most, New Testament Scriptural verses use this word in the Greek middle or passive tense—always indicating that we are deliberately acting or responding to the will of God. The Greek word for "submit," found here and elsewhere in the New Testament, is (Hupataghe—Yntrmz), which literally means "to place oneself under the authority of another." Simply stated, it means that we are to obey. That is, we are to give up our own wishes, wants, desires, and plans and yield them and ourselves to the wants, wishes, desires, and plans of the Lord. We don’t lose our own freedom nor our freedom to make our own choices—rather, we, by faith and trust, offer ourselves to Sovereign God to do with us as He needs and wishes.

No study of the spiritual discipline of submission is complete without mentioning that there are limits to submission. Any such limits would have to do with either: (1) a denial of the love of God or love for others; or (2) an effort to force someone to act against their will or conscience. Submission requires that we trust the Lord’s goodness and wisdom and that we do our best to trust and obey His guidance. The limits to submission are those that result from our own disobedience or unbelief. Submission requires faith and trust in the one to whom we are offering our obedience and submission. We can offer our submission to Him because our God is faithful and trustworthy. He only requires of us what will give Him glory, accomplish His plans and purposes, and allows Him to offer us the benefit of blessings from Him. To submit to another believer, in the context of the Body of Christ, the church, requires that we trust, honor, and respect the person, even if we don’t always agree or understand. To submit to God is offering our submission to the God who is always perfect and worthy of our trust.

What is submission? Slavery, bondage, or servitude? Absolutely not! The Spiritual Disciple that God desires to become a "habit" of your heart is that which seeks to constantly and consistently offer our obedience, support, and whole-hearted investment in the work of ministry and service—which honors and glorifies God. As you seek to serve the Lord, don’t neglect the way of submission.

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

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July 2020 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 13
The United States of America is in a dangerous position. It’s a position that we as a nation have put ourselves and we have no one else to blame. The sad part is that most Americans seem to be oblivious to the circumstances we are in and the consequences that will soon come. Even in the face of truth, as a nation, we have shaken our fist in the face of God and declared that we no longer need Him and that we know best. There are some reasons why I believe our nation is in such dire straits.

First, we have forgotten the foundation on which this great nation was built. There is no room in this article to cover this vast topic. However, if one honestly searches out the history of our founding, there is overwhelming evidence of what our founding fathers had in mind for our nation. Even in light of the facts of history, millions of Americans still declare that our founding fathers wanted our nation to be a godless nation. In my personal opinion, I call that willful ignorance. They chose to ignore the truth and chose to make up a history for themselves that does not exist.

Second, we as a nation have no moral compass. There seem to be no moral boundaries which can guide our nation as a whole. This began when we as a nation forgot our foundation. When we forsake God and His word then anything goes. When every man wants to do what is right in his own eyes, it leads to moral chaos. Even in the laws of man, some guidelines and laws are there to benefit and protect the general public. A simple example of this is traffic laws. If there were no speed limits, stop signs, traffic lights, etc., imagine the chaos that would result in major traffic areas. These are put in place to help protect the citizens that travel these roads, not to restrict freedom but to protect. The same can be applied to God’s word for us. God has given certain guidelines for us to follow. Marriage, family, honesty, relationships, business, money, government, etc., the Bible gives us teachings on such things, not to restrict the freedom of mankind, but to protect us from suffering the consequences of ignoring these truths and following our own ways.

Yet as a nation, so many Americans argue that anything goes. Even when we suffer the consequences of such belief, people will still argue for no moral boundaries to guide us.

Next on my list is this: we elect ungodly leaders. Those who ignore our nation’s foundation and refuse to believe in any kind of moral compass will obviously choose to elect people who will support such ideas. The Bible specifically states that the government was instituted by Almighty God to promote the good of society. Paul writes in Romans 13 about the government being ordained by God and that “rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil.” The idea is that the government’s responsibility is to promote that which is good for the benefit and welfare of the people it governs. Verse 4 states this about leaders in government positions: “for he is the minister of God to thee for good.” The God-ordained institution of government was put in place to promote and protect that which is good and rebuke and punish that which is evil (Verse 4, “a revealer to execute wrath on the wicked...”). The belief that Christians are to have no influence or authority whatsoever in government affairs is a man-made lie. Why would God institute the government to promote good and then expect His people to have nothing to do with it? If good people do not participate, then how will good be promoted? The answer is it won’t! Ungodly leaders will promote ungodly practices and laws. The Bible states in Proverbs 29:2, “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.” We as a nation will not elect righteous leaders because our nation wants a government that will promote unrighteous living. Most people want leaders who will disregard our nation’s Godly heritage and protect the ungodly practices in which they desire to live. We do not elect leaders based upon righteous merit or Godliness. Our nation desires someone who will promise wealth, prosperity, and a right to live any way one chooses, even if it goes against what the Bible teaches. Our government has many ungodly people in positions who care nothing about following what is right. The ones who would stand for what is right are ridiculed into silence and when they do good men and women do nothing, wickedness will always prevail. It should be an understood truth that for a government to promote that which is good there must be good people in that government. Otherwise, wickedness and ungodly chaos will prevail not only in our nation but in any nation.

Please pray for our nation. Not only pray for our nation but pray for ourselves as citizens of this nation. Our choice of leaders cannot be based upon corruption, deceit, the promise of money, a great economy, etc. Our choice should be based on what is right in the eyes of God. If you don’t care what is right, then just ignore our nation’s history, ignore what the Bible teaches, and elect leaders based on man’s desires and judgments. Then as a nation, we will get exactly what we asked and worked for, a nation without God. And when we suffer the consequences, as we already are, we will have no one to blame but ourselves. God have mercy on this broken nation.

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Proverbs 14:34 “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.”

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

By Chris Rathbone
Mitchell County
to shoulder with my very first KILLER GROUNDHOG. (Okay, maybe not shoulder to shoulder but he was a whop-per?)

I always thought groundhogs were like prairie dogs, or tiny and cute like Chip and Dale. Well, now I know—they resemble Simba, or Aslan, or King Kong, or any number of other prehistoric beasts. (You laugh yet you are reading this from the comfort of your easy chair, not staring Godzilla in the face).

I had spilled beans from one end of the garden to the other; lost my three-legged stool, tripping over and destroying many tomato plants, stumbling through young broccoli spears, and squishing most of the tender beet sprigs… I jumped into my farm truck—an 1801 vintage Jeep but that’s a story for another day—and slammed the door.

My heart was pounding like a sack full of angry opossums, my blood pressure sky high. I’m not sure I had taken a breath during the battle for the blue lake bush bean patch. Yet after a half hour or so, I again sensed the peace of the Lord; all was well with my soul; the monster had slithered into the woods. I dismantled my jeep and resumed the harvest of blue lake bush beans—confident that I had survived yet another test on the Funny Farm.

Humbled in the hills,

Farmer Clint

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THE REST OF THE STORY:

This was the second Funny Farm Story that Clint wrote back in 2010. He was just getting his sea legs, so to speak, on writing these articles. As I read back through them, I see the supper table, a big home-cooked meal that Barbara had prepared, and usually a cake of some kind to finish off the meal. This is where we had the pleasure of listening to Clint’s tale of the day and the adventures he had subjected me to, in reality, had created for himself. One of his enduring qualities was his ability to poke fun at himself without reservation and to revel in telling the story. I have often thought he would have been a winner at the storytelling contest over in Jonesboro, Tennessee. I would have loved to have seen him participate in something like this. He was such a competitor in every walk of his life that I do not doubt that he would have been a winner here as well.

It was always a laugh-a-thon around the supper table just listening to the events unfold. His description in real life was just as full of life, if not more so than his written stories are. I hope you enjoy this one as much as I did when I re read it today.

Have a blessed day.

Farmer Doug
One such day last week fits the bill — pouring rain with dark overcast skies. Through the course of the day, as the hard, driving rain continued to fall outside, inside I continued to work from home at my new-found career. The position at App State is a blessing in and of itself, and in that, there is a testimony that can be shared. But, also, there were the peripheral things of the day that made it bright. That day’s evening meal was one of the comfort foods. Again, like those materials that comprise the structure of the Retreat, the food that brings a sigh to my spirit is that of good ‘ole’ country food. That evening the family and I sat down to a big pot of ham and beans, and cornbread. For dessert, I had also baked oatmeal cookies from scratch. In a sense, I had returned to my roots; the things in life that make us who we are.

I was blessed in life to be raised by depression-era family members. Again, I could dwell on the negativity of my life, but to be able to look back and be thankful for the journey, regardless of how difficult or challenging it might have been, allows me the vision to look ahead with gratitude. Being reared by those who had little gave me the appreciation for those “roughhewn” things of life. While I’ve never had the “best things” of this world, I seem to be blessed beyond measure in other things, those that mean the most, God and family. My faith is not polished and practiced of that of a seminary student, but rather that from which I have gleaned from the pages of the Word itself. Like those cornfields of my youth, when we would walk row after row behind the trailer being pulled by Grandpa’s tractor, gleaning missed cobs, I have studied the Bible for truth. It is in God’s word that one can find comfort and solace even in the lengthiest rain spell, or as now, the longest time of forced isolation known to our generation.

As a farmer, I can tell you that there is a breath of relief, a sigh of thanks that goes up when the rain begins to fall after the fields have been properly dressed with fertilizer when the rows of corn are safely in the ground. Through the replenishing of the earth’s moisture it as if the farmer’s soul is also renewed. As it says in the 23rd Psalm, “My cup runneth over;” is an expression best displayed by the overflow pipes of a farm pond and the satisfaction within the farmer’s heart. Yet, while the rains fall, there is a sense of reward and comfort on the farm where others find dread and gloom. It is a mindset that many fail to notice in the modern world. A connection to nature, and our Creator, has been lost by so many in the pursuit to make life “better.”

Should we sit and dwell on wondering if we are the just or the unjust, or should we press onward as the Apostle Paul would say? In my heart, and my prayer for those in this world who are hurting is that we would seek to press on to find God, to bring him close and to find beauty in even those things that matter little to the world. In the coming day, try to spend time with a friend or family member that you haven’t heard from in a while. Reach out to those who continue to find the need to self-quarantine. The worst thing we can do is to leave someone alone who might be feeling lost and hopeless when we ourselves have been blessed. Even if our own worlds are nothing but stones and roughhewn logs, we can still be a comfort to those around us if we choose to do so. It is up to each of us to be the light in a dark world.

While our blessings may be worthless by the world’s standards, they are priceless in the kingdom above. Embrace love to thy neighbor and be thankful for the rain, just or unjust. Thanks be to God.

“But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” — Mt, 5:44-45

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

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By Tim Tron
Burke County

It becomes obvious, as my mind reflects on what to write about this morning, that I have unintentionally surrounded myself in the comfort of rocky, and coarse elements from nature. Sitting in the Retreat and listening to the birds of the morning, my eye wanders to the things that are near. From the roughhewn lumber sawn to the local sawmill to the river rock that encompasses the fireplace in the Retreat, there is a sense of “raw” earth which exudes from this place. The trees were harvested from where the building now sits and were masterfully sawed by Tony Moritz. The rocks were provided by the Gragg family’s section of the John’s River. Through all the harvesting and collection, there was the journey of life and interaction with those that helped to obtain the resources to make it all possible, each one a story of their own. While the building is not the polished brass or pure, waxed floors of the highest cathedrals, the Retreat is a place of humble submission. In my heart, I like to think that it’s a place not far removed from God’s creation. Here, in this forest abode, there is a deeper connection with the One above, less of the man-made interferences we so often seek. It is in this vein that this story begins to unfold.

The scripture from Matthew struck a chord with me earlier this week, "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust." A long time ago, in the other life, we were walking through an antique store in Cameron, NC. I overheard some life cutouts and enjoying one another’s fellowship when they mentioned the scripture from Matthew. It had been a time during a lengthy drought. My pastures were dry and the cattle were beginning to suffer. The garden had nearly all but dried up. It was during a time such as that when the comment struck a chord with me. One man said to the others, “You know the Bible says that it rains on the just and the unjust?” The others murmured their agreement, knowing where this was probably headed, when he continued, “I wish it would JUST rain.” At which point, the others joined in laughing and continuing to have a good time.

As the memories of that dry-spell comment rang in my head, the words of the scripture echoed once more, “It rains on the just and the unjust.” It was then that I stopped and thought about the verse and what it meant to our time under the Quarantine-life of COVID-19. In this time, so many find that their lives have been centered on the things of this world. Their idols, albeit justified in their time, have nearly all but dried up. It was during a time such as that when the comment struck a chord with me. One man said to the others, “You know the Bible says that it rains on the just and the unjust?” The others murmured their agreement, knowing where this was probably headed, when he continued, “I wish it would JUST rain.” At which point, the others joined in laughing and continuing to have a good time.

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Americans’ happiness falls to an all-time low: Three reasons for encouragement and the path to our best life
By Jim Denison

If you’re feeling stressed this morning, know that you’re not alone.

A recent General Social Survey shows that just 14 percent of American adults say they’re very happy, down from 31 percent who said the same two years ago. That year, 23 percent said they had often or sometimes felt isolated in recent weeks. Now, 50 percent say that.

In total, fewer Americans are likely to call themselves happy than at any point since the survey began in 1972. The study aligns with research analyzing words on Twitter, which reported that Americans’ happiness in recent weeks was the lowest ever recorded.

According to a new report by the American Psychological Association, more than 70 percent of Americans say this is the lowest point in US history they can remember. And the percentage of Americans who are “extremely proud” of their country has fallen to 21 percent, the lowest since Gallup began measuring this sentiment in 2001.

In response to the discouragement of these days, let’s begin the week with news stories that offer trinitarian reasons to be encouraged.

A star so large, Saturn’s orbit would fit inside it
Did you see the “ring of fire” solar eclipse yesterday? Such an eclipse happens only once a year. It’s a “ring of fire” event because the moon is at its farthest point from our planet when it passes between us and the sun; its small size in the sky leaves the sun’s outer rim visible, making it look like a bright ring.

Parts of China, Central African Republic, Congo, Ethiopia, India, and Pakistan were able to watch the full annual solar eclipse. Those in southern and eastern Europe and northern Australia were able to see a partial annular eclipse. If you live in North America, you were out of luck.

Our moon could cause such an eclipse only because our sun is relatively small. By contrast, researchers have been studying a red supergiant star named Antares. They announced last week that the star is so large, Saturn’s orbit would fit inside it. Not just the planet, but its entire orbit around our sun.

Psalm 147:4 proclaims that our Father “determines the number of the stars; he gives to all of them their names.” Here’s why His astounding omnipotence is so relevant today: verse 3 assures us, “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” And verses 5 and 6 add: “Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure. The LORD lifts up the humble; he casts the wicked to the ground.”

Our God created every one of the one billion trillion stars in the observable universe (that’s 1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 stars). He measures them and the entire universe with the palm of His hand (Isaiah 40:12).

Now His power is available to heal the brokenhearted and encourage all who humble themselves enough to trust Him.

A watch that costs more than $1,200,000. I found my Father’s Day gift in the news last week: a Vacheron Constantin Celestia watch. It displays the time, local and low tides, the relative position of the earth and moon to the sun, the length of day and night, the time of sunrise and sunset, and the position of the sun in the signs of the Zodiac. It also indicates equinoxes and solstices. The back of the watch displays a large star map, which makes one rotation a day. The watch can be yours for just over one million pounds (that’s over $1,200,000).

As unique and expensive as this watch is, know that you are even more unique and expensive.

Anna Quindlen writes: “There are thousands of people out there with the same degree you have; when you get a job, there will be thousands of people doing what you want to do for a living. But you are the only person alive who has sole custody of your life. Your particular life. Your entire life. Not just your life at a desk, or your life on the bus, or in the car, or at the computer. Not just the life of your mind, but the life of your heart. Not just your bank account, but your soul” (A Short Guide to a Happy Life, quoted by James Clear).

Jesus considered your eternal life worth His tortured and crucified death (Romans 8:34). And He is praying for you right now because He loves you (Romans 8:34).

A boy in Iceland joins a basketball camp in Oakland
One last news story. Bjarki Robertson participated in the Golden State Warriors’ basketball camp last week. The eleven-year-old did the drills along with the rest of the kids in the annual event. He even joined in the fist bump at the end of a recent workout.

Here’s why Bjarki is making headlines: he did all of this in Iceland. The Warriors used video technology to bridge the four-thousand-mile gap between Oakland and Reykjavik. “He’s basically speechless,” Bjarki’s mother said of his experience.

What the Warriors did through technology, the Holy Spirit does through a divine agency. If Jesus is your Lord, His Spirit lives in you as the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16; John 14:17). He will coach you and lead you through every problem and decision you face (John 16:12–15).

Here’s my invitation to you this morning: Name your greatest challenge, fear, or worry. Now trust it to your omnipotent Father, specifically and intentionally.

Plan your visit at
downtownvaldese.com

Thank Jesus for loving you and praying for your needs right now. And ask the Holy Spirit to show you the path to your best life today.

All of God there is at this moment.

Jim Denison Ph.D speaks and writes on cultural and contemporary issues. His daily column is distributed to more than 113,000 subscribers in 208 countries. See more on the website www.denisonforum.org. Copyrighted and printed by permission from Denison Forum.
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Steve Williams is the Pastor of Berry Chapel Baptist Church in Spruce Pine.

Satan or God.

Victories Are Dangerous

By Steve Williams
Mitchell County

When I think of July, I think of Freedom, Independence, the great Victories that America has experienced. I am thankful to be an American and to live in America. But if America and the people in America do not wake up and smell the roses we are going to experience one of our greatest defeats. What I see happening to America is that it is regressing instead of progressing. We are allowing the tail wag the dog of its Spiritual Morals and Values. Yes we have won many battles and wars, yes we have built a strong financial economy, and yes we are a world leader, but when you view yourself better than you really are, is when you have trouble. Think with me for just a minute. When is a championship team most likely to lose a game? Right after it’s biggest victory. Players become overconfident, they relax and let down their guard, and suddenly they are upset. This happens in the physical sense and also the Spiritual. What I believe is going on in America and also in our churches is people don’t think this can happen to us. Christians and America Wake Up. When is a Christian most likely to be defeated? Right after he has been on a spiritual high, he becomes easy prey for Satan.

America has been blessed and has been riding a financial high, Stock Market, Jobs, Unemployment, we have been doing so good, then bang here comes the Coronavirus, and almost puts America at a standstill. Christians God has blessed us so greatly. But remember, when is a Christian most likely to be defeated? Right after he has been on a spiritual high, they also become easy prey for Satan.

There are many examples found in the Bible of people who fail after great victories in their life. After Samson single-handedly slew a thousand Philistines with the jaw bone of a donkey, then he laid his head is the lap of Delilah, and his head was shaved and he lost his power. When David was at the pinnacle of his political glory, he fell in love with another man’s wife. Immediately following Jesus’ Baptism after hearing the voice of God from heaven, Jesus was led into the wilderness where He was tempted by the devil. And of course, when Peter told Jesus that he would never deny Him, Peter became vulnerable to Satan’s attack and he too failed. Folks I can see the same thing happening to us if we fail to wake up.

The Bible says in 1 Cor 10:12 “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” The Bible also tells us in Prov. 16:18 “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” The evil one is in the world today. Satan is doing a battle with our minds to make us comfortable with evil instead of good. And this usually happens after some great experience or some spiritual victory in our lives.

What we have to understand as Christians is that you never have it made with a Christian walk with the Lord. There is never a time we can unbundle our armor, lay down our sword, and take R. and R. No matter how close we may have walked with Jesus, no matter how clear our perception of the truth may have been, no matter how sincere a confession we may have made, we are always vulnerable to backsliding or regressing to a lower spiritual level. Guard your mind, guard your values, and guard your life, because victories are dangerous in the Christ Walk.

Words of Wisdom:

• Wars may be fought with weapons, but they are won by men. It is the spirit of men that wins the battles.

• Victory belongs to the most persevering. N/A

• Wars may be fought with weapons, but they are won by men. It is the spirit of men that wins the battles.

• There is no fool like a careless gambler who starts taking victory for granted. N/A

• Many times, we miss out on God’s best because we give up too soon. We don’t really realize how close we are to victory. N/A

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Something To Think About:

The greatest battles of the world are not fought with guns, and bombs or by combat soldiers on the battlefield of this world. They are fought in the minds of people. The mind is the oldest, most common battlefield known to the human race. Ever since God provided Adam and Eve clear instructions on how to live happy, successful lives, a fierce battle has been raging over who will control man’s thought processes, Satan or God.

Words of Wisdom:

• There is no fool like a careless gambler who starts taking victory for granted. N/A

• Many times, we miss out on God’s best because we give up too soon. We don’t really realize how close we are to victory. N/A

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

Psalm 145:17 (KJV 1900) “The LORD is righteous in all his ways, And holy in all his works.”

“The Bible says the Lord is righteous, and what does that mean? Well, the original meaning of this word meant which that is perfectly straight. Let me explain this in a way that I can understand. I am building a garage and I am laying cement blocks to build this garage. If I lay those blocks without something to guide me then those blocks will be crooked. If they are perfectly straight, or level and my building will look horrible and everybody who looks at it will know it is not straight. The row of blocks will look like a snake.

Someone would even say the person who laid those blocks did not know what they were doing.

However, when I use a level and a string, I can lay those blocks straight. That string when pulled tight is the guide that I use to lay my blocks in a straight line.

And we have a saying in carpentry work, “the string does not lie.” The blocks will be laid what we call “true” or straight. I cannot place those blocks in a straight line without that string. The string will continue to keep the blocks straight as I build the garage.

The word righteous or “straight” is the word God uses to describe Himself to us. Righteousness is the moral and ethical standard and course of standard which is the nature and will of God. Therefore, God is completely “straight” or righteous and the standard of which everything is compared to. This is the same thing when the Bible says God is just and Holy. God is always conformed, without error or flaw in all that He is and does. God can never make a mistake or deviate from what is straight and righteous.

So, if God built a garage His garage would be perfect. The reason it would be perfect is because God is perfect, and he cannot make a mistake. My garage would not be perfect because I am not perfect. If I compare my garage to God’s garage one could see plainly my garage is flawed.

Therefore, if I compare my righteousness to God’s righteousness my righteousness is not straight, it is flawed. My righteousness is off course. The Bible says our righteousness is filthy rags. So, I am not good, I am not straight, and I am terribly flawed. And I cannot correct myself. No matter how hard I try I cannot be righteous or just.

So, what really Matters? Proverbs 14:34 (KJV 1900) “Righteousness exalvateth a nation: But sin is a reproach to any people.”

What really matters is my relationship with God. What causes me to love people, love my family, act with kindness, treat others with respect, and act with integrity comes from God. I cannot do these things on my own. I cannot reform myself, I have to transform my heart. Remember my righteousness is flawed so on my own I can never act and do the things that please God. So, I need His righteousness. And the only way to receive it is in Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ died on the cross for my sin and my unrighteousness. When I place my faith in Christ alone, the Holy Ghost at that moment of salvation comes and lives inside me. Giving me now a righteousness that I did not have before. Romans 8:10–11 (KJV 1900) “10 And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin: but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 11 But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.”

The only Hope for our Nation is God. Not reform. The only way to stop violence and murder and stealing and vandalism and rioting and abortion and child abuse and pornography and the many other sins that are destroying our nation will not be solved by tearing down statues or defunding the police or politics. The only hope for our nation and true justice is Jesus Christ. Many people do not want to talk about the true sinful nature of man.

The media does not talk about the source of our sin because if they admitted a moral failure then they would have to talk about God and His solution to our heart lives inside me. So do not expect them to go there or try to explain the truth about the heart of man. We live in a very deceitful world. Many people and young adults and children are being deceived by political movements that are ungodly.

I ask you the Church to wake up and pray and preach the Gospel. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes. The church is absolutely being run over right now. The Bible affirm in the last days people would turn from the truth and believe lies. How many people out there are consulting pastors and what the Bible says about a godless nation? America is drowning in our sin. I often wonder about this Psalm. Psalm 60:1–4 (KJV 1900)

“1 O God, thou hast cast us off; thou hast scattered us, in the midst of the waves of destruction. 2 Thou hast shewed thy people hard things: 3 Thou hast made the earth to tremble; thou hast broken it: thou hast been displeased; O turn thyself to us again. 4 Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee, that it may be displayed because of the truth. Selah.”

That raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.”

The only Hope for our Nation is God. Not reform. The only way to stop violence and murder and stealing and vandalism and rioting and abortion and child abuse and pornography and the many other sins that are destroying our nation will not be solved by tearing down statues or defunding the police or politics. The only hope for our nation and true justice is Jesus Christ. Many people do not want to talk about the true sinful nature of man.

Pastor Dean Honeycutt shepherds Snow Hill Baptist Church in Bakersville, NC.

James 1:25 - But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth [therein], he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the word, this man shall be blessed in his deed.
Do you take quizzes about yourself and share them? To some, they provide fun and entertainment. Here are several of the quirkiest listed on Buzz Feed:

- Design a Mansion, and We’ll Tell You What Season Matches Your Personality
- We Know How Many Kids You Will Have Based on Your Design of a Park
- What Kind of Donut Are You?
- Build Your Dream Home and We’ll Reveal What Kind of Sneeze You Have

Personality and other quizzes seem irresistible and bring a sense of pleasure and identification with others. We crave to know more about ourselves and how others perceive us. And we love to share our results, even when we know they are constructed to make us feel good about ourselves. An article on LeadQuizzes.com says that psychologists believe we fulfill our social, self-esteem, and fulfillment needs when we answer the questions and that quizzes help us to enter and identify with a larger group of people who feel the same.

God created within humans these needs (social, self-esteem, and fulfillment). He then encourages us to know ourselves, describing our pursuit as wise in Proverbs 14:8. The first part of the verse says, “The wisdom of the prudent is to know his way.”

Our social needs include a void that only a relationship with God can fill. He even sent His Son to die for our sins, breaking the barrier of unholiness so that we could fellowship with Him in freedom if we choose.

From these ten brief words in Proverbs, our libraries contain thousands of books and resources about the psychology of knowing ourselves and our businesses. The marketing world plays with the nuances of these needs by creating quizzes designed to engage customers through self-analysis. For them, the ultimate goal, of course, is to sell products.

Although many of these quizzes analyze light-hearted parts of our lives, there are more serious tests that can guide a company to a stronger position in the economy. One of the basic quizzes in my business administration degree’s capstone course was an assessment called the SWOT analysis. Here is what each letter means.

**Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats**

The idea in business is to turn the weaknesses of an organization into strengths and to change the opportunities into business revenue. The threats are to be recognized and diluted or quarantined if possible. The SWOT quiz or analysis for a business reminds me of the many verses in the Bible that address these categories.

**Strengths:** When our world crumbles and all that is dear to us is attacked, we need strength. And 2 Samuel 22:33 reveals an unending source from which to draw. The verse declares, “God is my strength and power: and he maketh my way perfect.”

**Weaknesses:** When our weaknesses disappoint us, then we can know from 2 Corinthians 12:9 that the Lord can reveal Himself through the cracks of our faults, offering a perspective for future crises. The verse says, “And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

**Opportunities:** When God-given opportunities present themselves, we can enthusiastically act. Galatians 6:10 encourages us by saying, “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”

**Threats:** Identifying threats highlights the urgent need for protection. This is true in business as well as in the Christian life. Our largest threat as believers is the devil as 1 Peter 5:8 declares, but his sinister presence is diminished and shielded by our armor found in the wardrobe room located in Ephesians chapter 6:10-18.

When we assess our faith by taking the SWOT analysis, what a delight it is to find solutions in the Word of God. During my earthly crises, a SWOT analysis from the Bible offers peace, perspective, and even pleasure in Jesus’ presence.

Taking the quiz called, pick a Photo In Every Color, and We’ll Reveal Your Best Quality might be fun, but knowing who I am in Christ brings me fulfillment, joy, and purpose for eternity.

Marlene Houk is a regular contributor to Blue Ridge Christian News. Her passion is to delve deeply into the truths of Bible women and to discuss those in Bible Studies called Backstage Pass to Bible Women. She and her husband discover joy, nurture, and challenge in their church. Her contact is marlenehouk@bellsouth.net Learn more about women in the Bible at Marlene’s website: www.MarleneHouk.com
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July 2020 - Blue Ridge Christian News
By Patti Jensen
Mitchell County

Spruce Pine—2020 will mark the 61st Anniversary of the NC Mineral and Gem Festival in Spruce Pine. For sixty-one years, Spruce Pine has welcomed rock hounds and jewelry lovers to the NC Mineral and Gem Festival where they enjoy aisles and aisles of beautiful jewelry, gemstones, and minerals from around the country.

“The NC Mineral and Gem Festival has been an important part of our community’s history for over sixty years,” said Patti Jensen, Mitchell County Chamber Director. “This event celebrates our history as well as provides an economic impact on our small businesses that is especially important this year.”

The NC Mineral and Gem Festival is coordinated by the Mitchell County Chamber of Commerce, the area’s largest business organization. “The decision to host the event this year was not made lightly, and our Board is working to provide a safe event for our attendees,” said Jensen. The prevailing support for the thought that our community and our small businesses need the event to take place was the overarching reason for the Board of Director's decision to move ahead with planning.

“We are a small rural community and we love our community and the people that live here. We want to provide the safest event possible for them and our visitors. That means that the event will be different this year, with several safety precautions in place,” said Jensen. Visitors considering coming to the event this year are encouraged to read the safety measures that will be in place for the event on the Festival’s website at www.ncgemfest.com.

Spruce Pine, North Carolina has been deemed the most important mining district in the world and has celebrated nature’s resources in this mountain area for decades. “The world would come to a slow crawl without the rich minerals from the Spruce Pine area,” said Patti Jensen with the Mitchell County Chamber. “Spruce Pine provides over 90% of the world’s purest quartz for the production of computer chips among many other uses. And did you know that the “sand” at the Master’s in Augusta is tracked in from Spruce Pine?”

The popular mine tours will happen this year during the Festival on Thursday, July 30th, and Friday, July 31st. These tours are sponsored by The Quartz Corporation and visitors can visit a local working mine and dig for treasures to their hearts delight. Anything they find they can keep! The tours are a ticketed item and require reservations. Space is limited and these tours are very popular so reserve spots early! Those interested in taking part in a tour will also need to read the extra safety measures that will be in place including face coverings and social distancing. The number of slots for the tours will be reduced this year as well.

Festivalgoers can enjoy shopping, ample parking, and nearby food services. Attendees can shop for fine jewelry from the top jewelers in the country, have their own custom jewelry designed on-site, as well as shop for minerals, gemstones, fossils, and beads. Local gem mining establishments offer special mine tours as well as well as special events at their business locations.

The week is full of activities including an outdoor gem show, the Grassy Creek Mineral, and Gem Show, sponsored by the Parkway Fire Department. This event is held the entire week from Sunday-Sunday and is just a few miles down Hwy 226 from the NC Mineral and Gem Festival.

The 61st NC Mineral and Gem Festival will be held July 30-August 2nd at the same location as last year. Just steps away from the former location and still located in the Spruce Pine Commons Shopping Center, the location boasts a beautiful 42,000 square foot space and will also host food vendors, a gift shop by area, and a special display by the Mitchell County Historical Society. The physical address of the location is 12085 South Hwy 226, Spruce Pine, NC. The times are Thursday-Saturday 10-6 and Sunday 12:30-5:00. Admission is $4 with Senior Citizens admitted on Thursday for $2 and Mitchell County Residents admitted on Sunday for $2.

For more information contact the Mitchell County Chamber of Commerce at 765-9033 or visit www.ncgemfest.com. Sponsors of the Festival include Mitchell County Chamber of Commerce, Duke Energy, Quartz Corporation, and Western Sizzlin.'

Patti Jensen is the writer and creator of the lifestyle blog “A Grateful Girl” which features encouragement, a focus on gratitude with some lifestyle tips and recipes thrown in for good measure! Patti is married to Jack and has two daughters, two great son-in-laws and a new granddaughter, Georgia Grace. You can find her posts on Instagram and Facebook and on her blog at http://www.agratefulgirl.com.
A Pastor's View

II Corinthians 4:17
"Encouragement In Affliction"

By Shawn Thomas
Angleton, Texas

There is a lot of discouraging news around these days, and many people would say, we need some encouragement! Nowhere can we find more encouragement than in the word of God. I hope that you will take time every day to read the Bible for yourself and find these specific words of encouragement that God has for you. In my own Bible reading not long ago, I read II Corinthians 4:17, which says, "For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison."

This verse gives us at least 3 reasons we can be encouraged in our times of affliction:

FIRST, it says our afflictions here are only TEMPORARY. They are "momentary," it says. They don't last forever.

Think about this coronavirus crisis. It may seem like it is really taking a long time. I saw where someone posted last March that it felt like the date was March the 97th! I’m sure to a lot of people, it DID feel like March lasted that long! But in a few years, we will look back on this whole COVID-19 episode as just a very brief time in our lives.

It is the same way with all of our afflictions. They are just temporary. And sure, some particular afflictions may stick with us our whole lives — but even our life on earth is very brief, compared to eternity. James 4 says we are merely a "vapor, that appears for a while and then is gone.

SECONDLY, the Bible says, our afflictions here are "LIGHT."
Now, someone may say, “Well, it doesn’t feel very ‘light’ to me! What I am going through feels pretty heavy!” And it probably does feel that way. We need to understand that Paul doesn’t discount the very real sufferings that we go through here on earth. He wasn’t speaking ignorantly, from some “ivory tower.” Paul knew very personally what it means to suffer here on earth. He shares later in II Corinthians about how he had “afflictions on every side; conflicts without; fears within; hunger, and thirst, and nakedness, and perilous seas, and sword.”

But in the same way, he could say that these real sufferings are “light” — compared to the greater privilege of the “glory” that will be revealed to us in heaven. He says, God has a reward waiting for us there, that is WORTH all the suffering we may undergo here on earth. It’s like Jesus said in John 16, "Whenever a woman is in labor she has pain because her hour has come; but when she gives birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy that a child has been born into the world."

There’s probably not much pain in this world greater than that of childbirth. I am pretty grateful not to have experienced it! But every mother I know, says that the pain was worth it — because of the unequalled joy of the LIFE that came through it! The pain was nothing; it was “light,” compared to the greater privilege of the life of that child.

And so, the Bible says it is with our afflictions here on earth. They seem heavy to us now. But COMPARED to what God has waiting for us, they are “light.” John Newton, the author of “Amazing Grace,” said that when we are in heaven, we will look back on all of our trials on earth and we will say, “Is that all we had to go through, to be able to enjoy all this glory?”

That’s what Paul is saying here. When we are in heaven, experiencing the glory of God, and the eternal pleasures He has for us there, we will say, “What light things we had to go through, to be able to experience all this glory.”

No matter how hard it seemed to us on earth at the time, in eternity we will agree with Paul here: our tribulations on earth were “light.”

Finally, Paul says the afflictions we experience now have a PURPOSE: they are “producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.”

Most of us are willing to work hard and endure hardship when we see that there’s a good reason for it. But there’s nothing more frustrating than doing something that doesn’t seem to have any purpose.

I recently read about how a certain man went into the military, and since they didn’t have anything for them to do at the camp, the new recruits were told to move a pile of dirt from one end of the camp to another. There wasn’t any purpose in it; it was just to kill time and keep the men busy. There’s nothing worse than feeling like you are just doing “busy work” that doesn’t have any purpose.

Now, we may sometimes feel like our afflictions are just useless “bumps in the road” that don’t have any meaning or purpose, but God says NO! Everything that happens to you DOES have a meaning; it DOES have a purpose. No life experiences are wasted with God. He is using it all to bring His ultimate purposes for you to pass.

And here He tells us what that purpose is: He says our affliction is producing in us an eternal weight of glory! God is using our afflictions for His purposes: to strip us of our sins and impurities; to build our character; to make us like Christ; and to grant us a reward in heaven that is an “eternal”, “weight” of “glory!”

Our sufferings are not “wasted.” We aren’t just “moving dirt from one end of the camp to the other.” God has a purpose for everything we are going through. Our affliction has a purpose.

SO: our job in the meantime is to endure the afflictions God has allowed to come into our lives, and to believe what He says here: that our afflictions are only "momentary"; they are "light"; and they are being used by God for His purposes — and that there is an “eternal weight of glory,” far better than anything we had to go through, waiting for us on the other side!

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

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- Original Image -
Neuropathy
By Miguel Cruz
Yancey County

This month I would like to discuss Neuropathy, mainly because I recently had 3 patients in a row who had been diagnosed with it and very unhappy with their treatments thus far and the options given to them. Below is a definition of neuropathy from an online dictionary.

Neuropathy: is a general term describing disease affecting the peripheral nerves, meaning nerves beyond the brain and spinal cord. Damage to peripheral nerves may impair sensation, movement, gland, or organ function depending on which nerves are affected; in other words, neuropathy affecting motor, sensory, or autonomic nerves result in different symptoms.

Oddly enough, all 3 were men in the ’80s, had been under medical care for several years, taking medications but symptoms progressively getting worse.

My favorite part is that all 3 were not ready to give up. Their main goal was to remain active and they had gotten to the point where they could not do anything without severe pain.

Interestingly all 3 were ultimately told different things, one (we’ll call patient A) was very dismayed over the fact the doctor basically told him there was nothing more could be done, and he would have to live with it and control the pain as best he could with medication. Another (patient B) was given an option of several thousand dollars’ worth of injections and medications but considered experimental so Medicare would not likely pay for it. The third (Patient C) was not happy with the pace at which the doctors were moving as appointments were made for testing and specialists, which would drag out for months, and in the meantime, nothing is being done.

Every neuropathy patient I have ever seen has also had chronic back or neck pain to go along with it. So that needs to be addressed as well, keep in mind that the nerves going down the legs and arms start in the spinal cord usually in the same area the back and neck pain is.

All my patients start with a thorough examination and possibly x-rays to determine the cause of their complaints, then we have them return the next day to review the findings and talk about our options for treatment and the costs. In most cases I will recommend something they can do at home that may help, this was done in all three cases above. The recommendation was to use an ice pack over the area of pain in the spine which was the low back in all 3.

Patient A could not believe how much better he felt the next morning after having used the ice, best he felt in a year were his words. Patient B felt little difference and patient C noticed they were able to move around better the next morning which was usually difficult for the first few hours.

The two that had a positive response from the ice had obvious inflammation in the spine which was causing much of the pain and quite possibly irritating the nerves causing the neuropathy. By the way, they are continuing to make excellent improvements as of this writing which is 2 weeks later. Patient B is making slow improvement but his is much more complicated as we will discuss.

Neuropathy involves the nerves as we see by definition, what is causing the nerve damage is what can complicate things. For nerves to be healthy they need good blood supply including any blood sugar issues. Oxygen levels and anemia must be examined. Some sort of exercise needs to be part of the recovery process and lastly, the nerves must be examined in the form of certain vitamins and minerals and glucose.

It has been my experience that just giving medications for neuropathy brings short term relief at best. The best long-term relief comes with a comprehensive plan involving all the above necessities. Circulation issues must be addressed, nutrition must be addressed including any blood sugar issues. Oxygen levels and anemia must be examined. Some sort of exercise needs to be part of the recovery process and lastly, the nerves must be examined for possible mechanical irritation coming from the spine.

If you have been diagnosed with neuropathy and find the results of your treatment are unsatisfactory, you should be discussing these issues with your doctor and if they are unwilling or unable, then find someone who can guide you through the complexities of getting your health back.

Spending time in prayer, asking for a favor from your health care provider to listen to your needs and guidance from the holy spirit to find the best course of treatment.

Dr. Miguel Cruz is in practice along with his wife of 35 years, Lesia Cruz who is a certified Integrative Nutritionist. They own Cruz Life Center in Burnsville NC. Dr. Cruz accepted Jesus Christ in the summer of 1979 while in chiropractic school. He has since dedicated his life towards helping people grow in physical health and spiritual health.
In the last few months, we have been examining each piece of the armor that Paul described in Ephesians chapter 6. Each piece is essential; no piece can be left out if we plan to have victory as followers of Christ.

We have learned that the belt of truth must be worn, positionally, and intentionally so that our core is protected. Everything else hinges on this foundation of truth. We must also put on the breastplate of righteousness, positionally and intentionally, so that we may see Jesus through our attitudes and actions. His righteousness, justice, truth, and holiness must be manifested in our lives. The next item to be added are our shoes of peace.

The Roman soldiers wore sandals made of leather with straps that wrapped around the calves up to the knees. Soldiers could walk up to 25 miles a day without shoes. The thick soles of the soft leather and open-air design. A strip of metal was built into each shoe for stability. Each shoe had two different sizes of metal studs on the bottoms which provided traction when walking, running, or standing firm while fighting. Soldiers needed to be able to stand firm, especially if the ground was muddy and these spikes kept them on their feet.

We must stand firm concerning the gospel of Jesus Christ. In our culture, it seems as if we are on a slippery slope concerning the good news of Jesus and His sacrifice for our sins. The narrow road of only one way to heaven is under serious attack, but it always has been. We must always be prepared to share the gospel of peace.

Gospel comes from the Greek word ‘euangelion’ and it means good news or good tidings. Jesus, Himself, preached the gospel. Mark 1:14-15 states that Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God, saying ‘The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel’. Jesus also commissioned his followers to preach the gospel. Luke 9:2 says ‘And He (Jesus) sent them (His disciples) out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing’.

Although Jesus is the Prince of Peace, sometimes the gospel seems anything but peaceful. When the message is received with faith, the hearer is immediately at peace with God through the sacrifice of Jesus. However, those who reject the truth of the gospel are immediately in conflict with sincere believers. Light and darkness cannot coexist.

Jesus was quite honest concerning this tension between those who receive this message of peace and those who do not, even in one’s own family. Jesus instructed His disciples in Matthew 10:34-36 concerning these things: ‘Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a son against his father; and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s enemies will be a member of his household’. Those are strong words for the gospel is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes and that power produces radical transformation. Old things pass away and new things replace the old. There is a cost to following Jesus, yet it does not compare to the peace He paid for our redemption.

Paul reminds us in the first few chapters of Ephesians that we have redemption through Jesus’ blood and the forgiveness of all our sins. We are reconciled to our heavenly Father and we have peace with Him through Christ Jesus. Therefore, we must put on our shoes of peace and spread the good news of the gospel.

One thing to note is that our feet are not shod with the gospel but with the readiness of the gospel. John Piper says he thinks this means ‘let your feet be ready to move with the gospel’. Paul probably had Isaiah 52:7 in mind as he thought about the feet of people bringing the good news of peace.

Peter challenged all believers to be ready to answer the hope that is within. Our salvation story is the tool that the Holy Spirit will use to draw others to the Savior. The Shoes of Peace

We must prepare to share the gospel; to hurriedly herald this good news as God gives opportunity. The phrase, ‘gospel of peace’, is a Greek phrase for ‘gospel of bliss’. Bliss means perfect happiness or great joy. We are to have our feet shod with the readiness of the gospel of perfect happiness or great joy. The good news we carry has so much more power than we can imagine. People in our world are desperate for peace. In describing the armor that every believer must wear for spiritual victory over the enemy, peace takes center stage.

The devil has an agenda but our God has a greater agenda. The devil’s agenda is to steal, kill, and destroy. God’s agenda is that we have eternal life as well as abundant life. Peace in abundance is our birthright through Jesus, and this good news will bring rest and satisfaction to all who receive them. 

We must realize that all these qualities are found only in Jesus Christ. Our responsibility is to listen and then share the gospel of Christ. Those words of peace will bring rest and satisfaction to all who receive them. Hebrews 4:3, in the Amplified version says: ‘For we who believe (that is, we who personally trust and confidently rely on God) enter that rest (so we have His inner peace now because we are confident in our salvation, and assured of His power)’. Believing and receiving the gospel message is what allows us to enter the rest of God. Jesus said from the cross, ‘it is finished’. Why? Jesus did all the work necessary to secure our peace with God. In the words of the Old Testament, we have entered into a permanent Sabbath. We have ceased striving and now rest in the finished work of the cross, a place of inner soul peace testifying to the world of the amazing grace of God.

Our responsibility is to spread this gospel of peace wherever we plant our feet and to do so in an attitude of peace and rest. Let’s get ready and stay ready! The shoes are just our size!
McDowell Technical Community College

Garrison Named MTCC Interim President

McDowell County

The NC State Board of Community Colleges, meeting on Friday morning, affirmed the decision of the McDowell Technical Community College Board of Trustees to name Mr. Ryan Garrison as Interim President of McDowell Tech effective July 1, 2020.

The decision comes after Dr. John Gossett announced in late March that he would be leaving his role as McDowell Tech’s current president at the end of June to assume the role of president at AB-Tech in Asheville.

Garrison is currently Vice-President of Finance and Administration at McDowell Tech. He will assume the position of president on an interim basis to find a permanent replacement for Gossett. That process can vary but is often several months long at other colleges.

Garrison has indicated that he will not be a candidate for the permanent position as president. Once a new president takes helm at the college, Garrison will return to his full-time role as Vice-President for Finance and Administration.

Garrison is a 1996 graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics. In 1999, Garrison also received a B.S.B.A in Accounting from Appalachian State University. In 2008, he also earned a Master of Arts degree in Higher Education from Appalachian.

Garrison has been in his current role at McDowell Tech since June of 2008.

Humor
By Buddy Freeman
Madison County

“Laughter Is Healthy For You”

A man and his wife attended a dinner party at the home of their friends. Near the end of the meal, the wife reprimanded her husband. She said, “That’s the third time you have gone for dessert. The hostess must think you are an absolute pig.” The husband replied, “I don’t think so. I’ve been telling her it’s for you.”

A new bride had cooked her first meal for her husband. She said, “My mother taught me to cook and I can cook two things well – apple pie and meatloaf.” The husband took a bite of his supper and asked, “And which one is this?”

A lawyer asked a defendant, “Do you wish to challenge any of the jury members?” The defendant said, “Well, I think I could take the little guy on the end.”

A man walked into a bank to rob it and he gave the teller a note that said, “This is a stickup. Give me all your money.” The teller passed a note back to him that said, “Fix your necktie. We are taking your picture.”

An inmate wrote his wife a letter. It said, “Don’t plant the potatoes – that’s where I buried the money.” He later received a letter from his wife that said, “Honey, they have dug up the entire backyard.” He wrote back, “Now you can plant the potatoes.”

Dr. Buddy Freeman is now serving as the pastor at First Baptist Church of Marshall, NC.
Joy is a resident of Madison County, where she now lives with her husband Danny Joe Baldwin. As a previous member, she calls Forks of Ivy Missionary Baptist Church in Weaverville, “home away from home.” She is currently singing with the Gospel Group “Jonah’s Voice” out of Mars Hill, NC. Her latest song “Home-coming” will soon be heard by many.

**Poem**

**A DADDY’S PRAYER**
By Joy Baldwin
Madison County

I pray that all who enter here
Will feel a Welcome love
A peace that comes from knowing
He’s looking from above.

I hope that they will notice
A lovely Bible there
While sitting at the table
A witness of His Pow’r
Tho some may be discouraged
I feel that they can see
The hope we have in Jesus
Is our total victory.
So, when the day is ended
I know I’ve done my best
If I can point them to the cross
My God will do the rest.

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GOD BLESS AMERICA

July 2020 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 28
Mountains
By Nancy Malik
Avery County

The beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains give us joy, praise, thanksgiving, and wonder as a gift from the LORD. He took special time, I think, to place on earth a mountainous area with four perfect seasons. These mountains provide vistas, blue ridges, spectacular skies, and seasons that usually last 3 months as they roll into the next one. This area is also a part of the Bible Belt of the United States. It seems there is a church on every corner. If you have lived here all your life, you might take this lovely place for granted. I am a mountain girl myself and have lived in Colorado, Montana, Oregon, and summers were spent in New Mexico. Mountains are important to me. My point is: do we appreciate the mountains in our lives? God uses mountains throughout the Bible as special places. Sometimes He places them in our lives to teach us to climb higher than before. Having climbed some big mountains, 13,000’-14,000’ and more, gives you so many lessons. Timing, best shoes, clothes for the weather, water, food, sunscreen, and a way to call for help if needed. Like a Boy Scout or Girl Scout, be prepared. In life, it could be a new life, death, loss of money, fire, an accident, or any number of unexpected events that can make things change quickly. Being in the middle of summer in the High Country, knowing that fall and winter are coming with many unknowns, we need to keep our eyes on Jesus. He has given us The Word so we can understand some of the situations we are in right now. We need to pray and ask for His direction through this time and we need to be with our Body of Christ, The Church, so we can reach out to each other in areas of need. Mountains are a part of the life of the Blue Ridge. Mountains are a part of life for all. Mountains can be full of grandeur or for those climbing up hard, tough slopes, which can be a hard fall down and sometimes ending up at the bottom just to start all over again. But life, like a mountain, has ups and downs. Jesus is there every step of the way if you are one of His own. It’s important to remember that when so many changes can happen in a very short time. The Body of Christ in the world today is not alone. We are all over the map, but some places have very few when other places have many followers of The Word. What is your mountain? I have one that can leave me very sad and lonely. But Jesus is there 24/7, even if you find yourself on a spot on a mountain that has no way to move on, up or down, look up to Him! He is nigh! Mountains are powerful statements in our lives. Jesus is everything in our lives. May your mountain be attainable because of Him in your life.

Nancy Malik has lived 3 years in Avery County. She is a member of Heaton Christian Church. She has taught creation science to children for many years. She has a radio program, entitled Adventures in Creation M – F. 8:10 am, and 12:50 pm on Glory 1130 am radio.

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NO TRIPS SCHEDULED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE
The rebirth of Israel as an independent nation in 1948 is one of the most significant events in world history. Never before has an entire race of people been without a homeland for so long without assimilating into surrounding populations. However, no other conquered race had the promise of God to “give all this land of Canaan to you and to your offspring forever.” Genesis 17:8 (NLT)

The scriptures prophesied that Israel would be dispersed among the nations then brought out from among them in a gradual process that would culminate in the establishment of Israel as a nation in a single day. And that's exactly what happened.

The Bible also foretold a year in which this would happen. Those who study the Word of God recognize the restoration of Israel as the primary sign of the end of the age. Jesus promised the generation that witnessed this event would also witness His return. Matthew 24:34 (NLT)

Long ago the Bible predicted these events would transpire in the last days:
1) The gathering of the Jews into their homeland
2) The rebirth of Israel in a single day
3) The rebirth of Israel in the year 1948
4) Israel's possession of Jerusalem
5) The nations of the earth aligned against Israel
6) The war of Gog and Magog
7) The rebuilding of the Jewish Temple

Five of these seven prophetic events have already been fulfilled, and the final two are certain to follow.

The Gathering of the Jews
Numerous biblical prophecies foretold of the re-gathering of Israel as a nation. Approximately 2,700 years ago, God revealed to the prophet Ezekiel a “Valley of Dry Bones” (Ezekiel chapter 37). God spoke of these bones (the Jews) gathered together and covered with flesh and muscles (re-gathered from the nations) with life being breathed into them (a dead nation brought to life once again).

"Then he said to me, 'Son of man, these bones represent the people of Israel. They are saying, 'We have become old, dry bones - all hope is gone.' Now give them this message from the Sovereign Lord: O my people, I will open your graves and bring you to life again. Then I will bring you back to the land of Israel. When this happens, O my people, you will know that I am the Lord.'" Ezekiel 37:11-13 (NLT)

Beginning in the late 19th Century, the birth of the Zionist movement culminated in the gradual emigration of Jews from all over the world to resettle the land of Israel. Each decade the number of returning Jews increased until finally, the nation established in the gradual emigration of Jews from all over the world to resettle the land of Israel. When this happens, O my people, you will know that I am the Lord.” Ezekiel 37:11-13 (NLT)

Israel became a nation in a single day
God foretold long ago that after He brought His scattered people out from among the nations, He would declare them to be a nation in a single day:

"Who has ever seen or heard of anything as strange as this? Has a nation ever been born in a single day? Has a country ever come forth in a mere moment? But by the time Jerusalem's birth pains begin, the baby will be born; the nation will come forth. Would I ever bring this nation to the point of birth and then not deliver it? asks the Lord. 'No! I would never keep this nation from being born,' says your God." Isaiah 66:8-9 (NLT)

This is exactly what happened on May 14, 1948. Having been brought to the brink of extinction by the horrors of the Holocaust, Israel was reborn in a single day

Israel Becomes a Nation in a Single Day

Israel’s victories in the wars since then brought out from among them in a gradual process that would culminate in the establishment of Israel as a nation in a single day. The prophets foretold long ago that after He brought His scattered people out from among the nations, He would declare them to be a nation in a single day:

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Israel the Messiah.

In the last days, Russia and a coalition of Muslim nations led by Iran will gather a horde of armies together in an effort to wipe Israel off the map. Israel will appear defenseless in the face of this massive invasion force with none of its worldly allies willing to come to its defense. However, God has made it clear that Israel is here to stay. The War of Gog/Magog

"Therefore, son of man, prophesy against Gog, Give him this message from the Sovereign Lord: When my people are living in peace in their land, then you will rouse yourself. You will come from your hometown and your mighty army, and you will cover the land like a cloud. This will happen in the distant future. I will bring you against my land as everyone watches, and my holiness will be displayed by what happens to you. Then all the nations will know that I am the Lord." Ezekiel 38:14-16 (NLT)

The Third Temple

In the last days, the Jewish Temple will be rebuilt. The Temple will then be desecrated in an act known as the “abomination of desolation.” Both the prophet Daniel and Jesus refer to this act as a clear signal of the beginning of the Great Tribulation and the identity of the Antichrist.

"The time will come when you will see what Daniel the prophet spoke about: the sacrilegious object that causes desecration standing in the Holy Place." Matthew 24:15 (NLT)

This event, which will occur three and a half years into the Tribulation, will trigger the Great Tribulation, a time of unimaginable horror for the human race.

Following this time period, Jesus will return triumphantly to establish His Millennial Kingdom.

Why All This Is Important

Jesus told his disciples the primary sign of His soon return would be the restoration of Israel:

"Now learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its buds become tender and its leaves begin to sprout, you know without being told that summer is near. Just so, when you see the events I’ve described beginning to happen, you can know his return is very near, right at the door I assure you, this generation will not pass from the scene before all these things take place. Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will remain forever." Matthew 24:32-35 (NLT)

The fig tree Jesus refers to is Israel. It’s been six decades since Israel was once again declared a nation against all worldly odds. Jesus promised that the generation which witnessed the fulfillment of this prophecy would not die off until all the things of which he spoke came to pass. Given the past credibility of the Bible and God’s Son Jesus Christ, we should fully expect these events to come to pass. What this means is that Jesus is going to return soon, within this generation. A wise person will prepare accordingly.

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Scott W. Murphy, D.M.D., P.A.
General Dentistry for the Family

The rebirth of Israel in 1948 has been accompanied by constant war and conflict with surrounding Muslim nations. The main focus of world attention today concerns Israel's relationship with its neighbors. Just as God foretold, Israel has become a "burdensome stone" for the world's political leaders. The majority of the Islamic countries surrounding Israel have made it clear their primary goal is the destruction of Israel. However, God has made it clear that Israel is here to stay.

The War of Gog/Magog

In the last days, Russia and a coalition of Muslim nations led by Iran will gather a horde of armies together in an effort to wipe Israel off the map. Israel will appear defenseless in the face of this massive invasion force with none of its worldly allies willing to come to its defense. However, God has made it clear that Israel is here to stay. The War of Gog/Magog

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Britt Gillette is the founder of End Times Bible Prophecy and the author of Coming To Jesus and Signs Of The Second Coming.

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It’s a cool, sunny Friday afternoon and we are both off work and free. Life is good. We are so blessed with happy homes and places where we can escape the confines of the house amid a pandemic and social distancing. We choose to go mountain biking. Exercise clears the mind and brings peace to the soul.

Freedom, fresh air, flying down the hill — and suddenly a flash of the handlebars, a bone-jarring crunch of head and neck — and then it went dark. Life changed as I knew it in the blink of an eye. Why am I in the dirt and not on my bike? Why is it so hard to breathe? I kept trying to call out for my wife, but no words would come. Denial, they say, is not just a river in Egypt, but more of a male trait in the face of reality. Hence, I refused to go to the ER at that moment, put on a cracked helmet, and walked rode my bike out of the woods.

God in His infinite grace and mercy gives us wives — aka common sense — to keep us from an early demise. I found myself sitting in the emergency room Saturday morning being asked if I wanted something for pain. I said I wasn’t hurting. I didn’t understand that something I wanted would help me to move from the place of a death sentence to the place of life. God’s decision to use the Babylonians to execute judgment. In the end, Habakkuk was right. He, too, found himself in the place of life and not death. For the vision is yet for the appointed time; it hastens toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it tarry, wait for it; for it will certainly come, it will not delay... Habakkuk 2:3

Kim Todd's newly released “Heaven’s Postcards: A Mother’s True Story” is a heart-wrenching but beautiful story that will give hope to people who have lost a loved one.

FULL RELEASE TEXT

“Heaven’s Postcards: A Mother's True Story”: helps others to experience the presence of the Lord through their daily life. “Heaven’s Postcards: A Mother’s True Story” is the creation of published author Kim Todd, a writer and licensed building contractor. She also teaches Bible studies in her home and is a deacon at Summit Church.

Todd writes, “Heaven’s Postcards is a true story of a family’s devastating loss of a child and the amazing events that followed. Through a series of astonishment signs and miracles, God assured this family their son, Zach, was in heaven walking beside the Lord. This heartfelt story will influence the way you view your daily life and inspire you to embrace the comforting promise of life after death.” Published by Christian Faith Publishing, Todd’s new book is a stirring memoir of how a family was devastated from the sudden loss of their son as a result of a car accident. The story details how the family was restored through their faith in Christ and the incredible events that followed.

With this book, the author shows how amazing miracles from heaven happen when you have faith and reach out to God in your deepest pain. View a synopsis of “Heaven’s Postcards: A Mother’s True Story” on YouTube. Consumers can purchase “Heaven’s Postcards: A Mother's True Story” at traditional brick & mortar bookstores, or online at Amazon.com, Apple iTunes store, or Barnes and Noble.

For additional information or inquiries about “Heaven’s Postcards: A Mother's True Story,” contact the Christian Faith Publishing media department at 866-554-0919.
NC House District 86

State Legislature Approves Funds for Western Campus of NCSSM

As some of you may know, the budget vetoed last year included funds to allow the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics to begin operations and ramp up for the opening of its new western campus under construction in Morganton. Due to the resulting budget stalemate, the NCSSM opening had to be pushed back from August of 2021 to August 2022. Fortunately, the General Assembly has again delivered the needed operating funds. I was pleased to be the lead sponsor of a House bill to provide these funds. The NC House of Representatives unanimously passed the new bill on June 4. The same bill then passed the North Carolina Senate on June 10. I am grateful that Senators Warren Daniel and Ralph Hise took the lead there. Having passed both legislative branches, the bill was presented to Gov. Cooper on June 22. It passed the Senate with a 40-4 vote and will be taken up by the NC House this week.

Other bills aimed at easing the difficulties placed on North Carolinians resulting from the pandemic include:

- **H 158 – COVID-19 New Driver Response** waives the road test requirement to obtain a Level 2 limited provisional license until statues, scheduled to occur between 5:00 P.M. on July 1st and 5:00 P.M. on July 10th.
- **H 118 – COVID-19 Liab. Safe Harbor** would for a limited time, in claims arising from contraction of COVID-19, provide immunity from liability for any act or omission not amounting to gross negligence, willful or wanton conduct, or intentional wrongdoing. This bill was presented to Gov. Cooper on June 24.
- **S 730 – The No Patient Left Alone Act** ensures that hospitalized patients can designate at least one visitor to be with them in accordance with hospital rules. This bill is in response to tragic instances of hospital patients being completely alone during their hospital stays and for many, even dying alone, without the comfort of having spouses and family members close by and saying last goodbyes to loved ones. This bill passed both the Senate and the House on June 25 and will be presented to Gov. Cooper.

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

NC Senate District 46

After hearing numerous heartbreaking personal stories of constituents and citizens from across our state that have been prohibited from visiting hospitalized family members, I was inspired to file S730, the “No Patient Left Alone Act” in May during the NC General Assembly Short Session. This proposed law requires licensed hospitals to ensure the opportunity for at least one visitor to visit a patient admitted to a facility during a period in which a disaster, emergency, or public health emergency has been declared. It provides for a minor who is admitted to a licensed hospital the opportunity to have at least one parent, guardian, or person standing in loco parentis the opportunity to visit. After hearing numerous heartbreaking personal stories of constituents and citizens from across our state that have been prohibited from visiting hospitalized family members, I was inspired to file S730, the “No Patient Left Alone Act” in May during the NC General Assembly Short Session.

The NC Senate District 47

Since reconvening the short session on April 28th, the legislature has been focused on providing relief from Gov. Roy Cooper’s shutdown orders, which have created financial burdens and other hardships to citizens in our state. Following is legislation passed by the Assembly this past month.

- **H 594 – Temp Open Gyms/Health Clubs/Fitness Ctrs.** authorized the reopening of indoor and outdoor exercise and fitness facilities, gyms, health clubs, and fitness centers to open and resume operations, provided specific conditions were met. At the time this bill passed, gyms and fitness centers in all four surrounding states had reopened. The bill was updated to give Gov. Cooper the flexibility to close these businesses provided he obtained the concurrence with his Council of State. Unfortunately, Gov. Cooper vetoed this bill nine days after it was presented to him. An attempt to override the veto in the House failed on June 24.

- **S 599 – Open Skating Rinks/Bowling Alleys** authorizes existing skating rinks and bowling alleys to open and resume operations, provided specific conditions are met, and temporarily allows minor league baseball stadiums with existing food and beverage establishments to have outdoor seating up to ten percent (10%) of the permanent seating capacity of the stadium provided certain conditions are met. This bill was presented to Gov. Cooper on June 22.

- **H 258 – Open Amusement Parks/Arcades/Venues** authorizes amusement parks and gaming and business establishments with video games and arcade games, existing on March 10, 2020, to open and resume operations, provided specific conditions are met. It also authorizes existing venues for receptions or parties to resume operations, provided specific conditions are met. This bill was presented to Gov. Cooper on June 24.

- **H 686 – Freedom to Celebrate the Fourth of July** was ratified on June 24 and is awaiting action from Gov. Cooper. The bill states, "Governors shall not prohibit parades or firework displays discharged in accordance with Article 54 of Chapter 14 of the General Statutes, scheduled to occur between 5:00 P.M. on July 1st and 5:00 P.M. on July 10th." Other bills aimed at easing the difficulties placed on North Carolinians resulting from the pandemic include:

- **H 158 – COVID-19 New Driver Response** waives the road test requirement to obtain a Level 2 limited provisional license until DMV resumes administering road tests. It also provides accommodations for students enrolled in a driver education course in the spring semester of 2020. This bill was signed by the Governor on June 19.

- **H 118 – COVID-19 Liab. Safe Harbor** would for a limited time, in claims arising from contraction of COVID-19, provide immunity from liability for any act or omission not amounting to gross negligence, willful or wanton conduct, or intentional wrongdoing. This bill was presented to Gov. Cooper on June 24.

- **S 730 – The No Patient Left Alone Act** ensures that hospitalized patients can designate at least one visitor to be with them in accordance with hospital rules. This bill is in response to tragic instances of hospital patients being completely alone during their hospital stays and for many, even dying alone, without the comfort of having spouses and family members close by and saying last goodbyes to loved ones. This bill passed both the Senate and the House on June 25 and will be presented to Gov. Cooper.

As always, please share your thoughts with me on these or other issues related to the state government by emailing me at ralph.hise@ncleg.net or calling me at 919-733-3460.
Do you have any idea what the most popular bird in the whole wide world is? There are more of this bird than any other, more than 50 billion are born a year. This is more than the entire population of people that live on the earth. Do you know what this bird is?

It’s a chicken!

Chickens are pretty smart animals. Did you know that a chicken can remember more than 100 faces of animals and people? They also have their own unique language made up of over 30 different sounds! Chickens were domesticated in South China around 6000BC. The tropical Red Jungle fowl is believed to be the direct ancestor of the domestic chicken. Originally, they were domesticated for cockfighting. Now they are bred for meat and raised for eggs. Approximately 97 chickens are killed every 65 seconds in the world for food. Humans consume more chicken a year than beef. Domesticated chickens also cannot fly far. A chicken’s life span is 5-10 years, or less if it’s raised for meat. The oldest living chicken recorded was named Matilda who lived 16 years!

Chickens are omnivores they eat grass, insects, and root vegetables as well as some fruits, grains, and nuts. They also eat small animals like lizards. They have a bone in their neck called the keel that holds a sac containing 9 oz of fat! Due to hyperpigmentation, these birds are completely black including their internal organs!

I want to touch base today about racism. Do you know what that means? Racism is where you don’t like a person because of the color of their skin. It also includes treating a person differently or making fun of them because of the difference in their skin. You might be wondering what in the world does this have to do with chickens? Well, several years ago my children and I raised some chicks from the time they were two days old. We had one Americana and eleven Barred Rock pullets (female chicks). The Americana had golden-brown feathers while the Barred Rocks had black and white feathers. They grew up together but when they got older, I noticed that all of the black and white chickens started being mean and picking on the only golden-brown chicken. She wasn’t allowed to eat any of the grain until after everyone else was finished if she tried before this happened, she was pecked and chased back into the chicken coop. We had to build another chicken coop to put her in where she would be safe and free of being picked on. She was allowed to eat what she wanted and not just the leftovers.

Did you know that God deemed it that there is only one race of people? We are all direct descendants of Noah, we all have the same color of blood, and Jesus came here and died for all of us, no matter what color our skin is. Not only that, but there also is not a pure bloodline left in any person. For example, I consider myself a Heinz 57, direct descendants of Noah, we all have the same color of blood, and Jesus came here and died for all of us, no matter what color our skin is. Not only that, but there also is not a pure bloodline left in any person. For example, I consider myself a Heinz 57, meaning my ancestors came from all over the world even though my skin is white.

Did you know that God mentions loving others many times in the Bible? It is so important that He commands us to do so. Dear Lord please help us to love one another.

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Did you know that God mentions loving others many times in the Bible? It is so important that He commands us to do so. Dear Lord please help us to love one another.

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." John 13:34 NIV

Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love. 1Corintians 13:13 NLT

Interesting Facts about CHICKENS

https://www.thefactsite.com/chicken-facts/

Christy Lowman is a Christian author and illustrator that lives in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains with her husband and two children. She enjoys writing whimsical books for all ages. Some of her short stories are published with Guideposts and FCI. Christy gives all the glory to God in everything she does. A portion of every book sold from the Small Bible Character Series will be donated to battle human trafficking. If you enjoy her books, ‘like’ her author page on Facebook and let her know! You can buy her books at https://www.amazon.com/s?field-keywords=Christy+Lowman&sort=relevancerank. You can reach her at https://www.facebook.com/authorChristyLowman/ or christy@highcountrycpa.com.

www.brcnews.com

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Burke County Public Schools

Burke County

Burke County Schools, Blue Ridge Healthcare Foundation Unveil Food Truck

By Cheryl Shuffler

A ribbon cutting ceremony today at the Olive Hill Resource Center, members of the Burke County Board of Education, along with officials from the Blue Ridge HealthCare Foundation and Carolinas HealthCare System Blue Ridge, declared the new Burke County Public Schools food truck open for service. The 20.5-foot, state-of-the-art, professional-grade food truck rolled into town on Wednesday and on July 7 will start rolling into neighborhoods to feed students. On the outside, the truck is outlined with bold teal and orange that match the district’s logo. The dominate design on the truck is the logo and tagline: Igniting Learning for a Brighter Future. Abstract art splashes in a rainbow of hues dot the ends of the truck. The serving side of the truck features differ from the driver’s side in that it includes the Blue Ridge HealthCare Foundation’s name and logo. Part of the Foundation’s proceeds from its annual gala in 2019 helped purchase the food truck as the Foundation donated $42,500 to Burke County Public Schools. The inside of the truck is a chef’s dream kitchen on wheels complete with everything needed to meet any foodie’s taste buds.

The truck will be used most immediately as part of the district’s summer feeding program. During the regular school year, it will travel to field days, sporting events and other special school events. It also will serve as a classroom on wheels for high school culinary students and pop up around town to serve the public at festivals and other venues.

Burke County Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Larry Putnam said, “With the popularity of food trucks, we saw this as a way to relate to our students and provide mobile food options that will allow us to travel out into the community. We are grateful for our friends at Carolinas HealthCare System Blue Ridge and the Blue Ridge HealthCare Foundation for their willingness to partner with us on this venture that will truly have an impact on students’ lives. The food truck will serve our students not only by providing meals, but also by providing the real-life work experience for high school culinary students.”

Burke County Public Schools Child Nutrition Director Daniel Wall said, “In a typical summer, we feed about 600 students at two elementary schools. We are in different times now with COVID-19 and are feeding kids grab-and-go style through car rider lines at five of our schools and off one yellow bus. We have been able to double the number of students served so far this summer and expect that to only increase with the arrival of the food truck. This is an opportunity for kids to access meals they might not be able to get otherwise.”

Carolinas HealthCare System Blue Ridge CEO Kathy Bailey said, “In today’s society, we are dealing with hungry children. We need to provide food for them. The food truck is a fun way for them to learn about healthy eating and making lifestyle changes such as cutting back on sugar and eating more fruits and vegetables. The truck also addresses an unfortunate need in the community—feeding hungry children. We hope our partnership with the school system continues to grow and we find creative ways to meet the needs of our community.”

Blue Ridge HealthCare Foundation Executive Director Traci Riebel said, “The Blue Ridge HealthCare Foundation finds it an honor to be a part of this special project that will reach numerous children within the community during the summer months. We will be providing information on important health topics as well with some fun giveaways.”

Hospital representatives and Board of Education members enjoyed the first meal served off the food truck. The menu included shrimp and grits, pork sliders and chicken mozzarella ciabatta.

Starting July 7, the truck will replace the yellow school bus that has been delivering meals on Tuesdays and Fridays to three Morganton locations. The food truck will serve free meals to children 18 years old and younger on Tuesdays and Fridays at 11 a.m. at Hillcrest Elementary, 201 Tennessee St.; at 11:45 a.m. at PPG Paint Store, 511 Burkenmore Ave. and at 12:30 p.m. at Walker Road Baptist Church, 100 Walker Road.

Cheryl Shuffler is the Public Relations Officer for the Burke County Public School System.
We were all made subject to deception, not willingly, but by a hope that we would be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. All of creation cries in hardship and pain under the weight of sin and death. We wait for the glorious hope of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to liberate us from the curse that was placed on all of mankind through Adam’s sin. Many believe that it was by some freak accident that Adam and Eve were deceived into sinning. That somehow Satan sinned past God on us and caused all of mankind to fall. That is not the case at all. God through His infinite wisdom designed a plan to defeat sin in all who will listen. A plan that will transform the souls of spiritual beings into immortal physical beings with all the attributes of a spirit. We will be the first of a humanized heavenly race of people who will join with Christ with the redemption of our bodies into eternal sons and daughters of God. Man is a trinity. He is made up of spirit, body, and soul. The spirit and soul are not identical. The spirit of man is his intelligence. It knows and its reasons. The soul of man is even truer to the breath which God breathed into the dust of the ground. The God-centered person is controlled by the spirit which in turn controls the soul, and the soul controls the body. The soul is the seat of our emotions, our desires, and our affections. The soul is the part of a man who is happy or sad, is angered or expresses anger, is ready to fight or in need of rest. The soul is what God calls the heart. We are spiritual beings dwelling in a body of flesh. Through our spirit, we can communicate with the Holy Spirit of God. This process of communication was made possible by the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit helps us in our ability to commune with God. Many times, we do not know what we should say, so the Holy Spirit says it for us with sounds spoken in grief which cannot be heard. Those of us who search our hearts, know the mind of Him who intervenes for us according to the will of God. “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to.” Romans 8:28 NKJV

I am confident that I lived as a spiritual being before my birth on earth, and I am confident that I will live after my death. The Bible tells us God foreknew us before the foundations of the earth were laid, and I believe we knew Him. “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” Romans 8:29 NKJV. These things are hidden from us new so that we can exercise our free will to choose as to who we will follow. I am not sure when sin came into play. Nor do I know how it infected God’s creation. Whether it is something that has been going on all along or it was put into play at the moment when the minds of those He wanted to be separated from His chosen elect were turned away. Our Heavenly Father wants all to come into accordance with His plan for salvation. We are told whosoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. However, with God’s infinite wisdom, He has already foreseen those who will choose the path of righteousness.

Those who are destined to hear the call of God have been justified by faith. “So then faith, hearing, and believing by the word of God.” Romans 10:17 NKJV. When we study our Bible daily the Holy Spirit has worked within our hearts, and we grow in faith. The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sins which causes us to confess that Jesus is the Son of God. Therefore, God justifies us as if we have never sinned. We no longer live under the law of sin but under the law of faith. For through the knowledge of faith we realize there is no good in us. The good we would like to do, we do not do, but the evil we do not want to do we practice anyway. If in our minds we wish to do those things and do it anyway, it is not us sinning, but the sin that dwells within us from the curse of Adam which is passed down from generation to generation through our Dad.

The most wondrous thing is, he whom God justifies He also glorifies in Christ’s likeness. Romans 8:30 NKJV. “If God is for us, who can be against us.” Romans 8:31b NKJV. The love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:39 NKJV. The love He has for us is so great that nothing will separate us from it. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:35,36-39 NKJV

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

Why and How to Give
By Steve Gaito
McDonnell County

For those of you who regularly read my column, this month will be a little different. I want to share a way to help non-profit organizations with your qualified retirement plans (IRA, 401(k), and 403(b)). But first I would like to share why the YMCA is such an important organization to me and how you can help them.

In full disclosure, I have a long history with the YMCA. I also help them raise funds to support community programs. For most people, they think of the YMCA as a place where basketball started, a pool where they teach people to swim or a gym where people work out. While all this is true, the YMCA is so much more. In general membership fees pay for the operation of the facility and staff. This is why I have a membership with the YMCA. It helps keep the doors open. But that is only half of the story. I mentioned I have a long history with the YMCA. In fact, it goes all the way back to my grandparents. While cleaning out some boxes while we were moving, I found a letter from my grandfather that said all he ever wanted to do was work for the YMCA. My grandmother actually played for one of the first women’s basketball teams. I started swimming with the YMCA when I was 6 years old and went through the youth program until I left for college. I have worked with their camps for many years and have been assistant director for Camp VIssit of the two largest YMCA camps in the world. There are many stories that I can share, but there is one that stands out the most and the reason I raise money for the YMCA. When I was an assistant program director, I worked out of the old downtown YMCA and since I had my commercial driver’s license, I had the privilege of picking up inner-city boys and girls for an evening program. These were some rough kids, but they loved going to the YMCA. They would get picked up early in the evening and would swim or play in the gym. They would tease me as I drove the bus and criticize my basketball skills. I never had a problem in the pool but loved the fact that these kids would trust me to teach them how to swim. Many years later when I was at a fundraising event for the YMCA one of these kids came up to me and said you probably do not remember me, but I remember you. You saved my life. At first, I was a little confused because I surely would have remembered something as significant as saving a life. He later explained that he was one of the kids in that Y Guys program and that was the highlight of his week. He kept in school and now he was an after-school counselor at the YMCA. It is funny how things come full circle. When I was the assistant director I had little idea that this program was funded by the generous gifts of local businesses. It was, and still is, a program that changes lives. As I look at the YMCA here in Marion, I see a need. Not the same need, but a community leader that has and will always have more needs than resources. I see the YMCA feeding the community in a time of need. I see them teaching kids how to swim. I see them hosting Bible studies, I see them caring for children. I see them encouraging healthy lives through spirit, mind and body. I see the YMCA as so much more than a membership. It is why I give and encourage others to give to this great organization. This is because my membership is for me to use the facilities, but my gift is for others to benefit from all they have to offer. I have witnessed these challenging times if you have the resources will you consider partnering with the YMCA to help those in need in our area? I personally am trying to raise $20,000 for a youth leadership program and I need 20 businesses or individuals to give at least $1,000 each to make this happen. This can be paid in several ways that fit your budget.

Like the young man who now works for the YMCA in Raleigh, you have to invest in them now to make a difference tomorrow. Please join me.

If you are age 70 or older this is important to know if you make charitable contributions. In these challenging times if you have the resources will you consider partnering with the YMCA to help those in need in our area? I personally am trying to raise $20,000 for a youth leadership program and I need 20 businesses or individuals to give at least $1,000 each to make this happen. This can be paid in several ways that fit your budget.

Your IRA example is subject to income tax and up to this year you had to withdraw a certain amount of money to satisfy your required minimum distributions (RMD’s) starting at age 70 ½. With the SECURE Act, this age was moved out to age 72 if you had not reached age 70 ½ by January 1, 2020. These distributions often created additional tax consequences for money that was not needed. Here is where you can benefit from what is known as qualified charitable distributions (QCD). This allows you to directly give to a qualified charity without having it characterized as income. So as an example. Let’s say that you want to give $10,000 to the YMCA to help develop young leaders. If you don’t take advantage of the QCD you would give the $10,000 and if it is less than $24,400 for a couple receive no additional tax break. If you pull it out of your IRA you will pay the taxes and still get no further benefit on your taxes. So, in essence, your gift costs you the taxes you pay on the gift to the YMCA. Now if you are over age 70 you can still get your standard deduction and if you gift it directly from your IRA you do not have to pay the taxes on the money. This saves you money, helps a great organization and you still get all your standard deduction. The net result is you can give more without any tax consequences. There is a limit to this of $100,000 per year, but if you want to give more give me a call and I can connect you with people that can help structure your gifts to minimize your taxes. Is this not a great deal? If you have questions please feel free to reach out to me. I am glad to help you give to the YMCA, your church, or any other charitable organization.

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

Has provided financial planning for missionaries through the International Mission Board.
The Orchard at Altapass finished filling the ice cream freezer, swept the floors, folded the t-shirts, turned on the lights, and unlocked the doors to the red barn on Saturday, June 13 as they began their 26th season.

Things were a bit different from 2019, as there was to be no live music or dancing later that day, no scooped ice cream or sample tastings, and only a limited number of folks allowed inside at a time. Sanitizer was everywhere, and all visitors were asked to sanitize their hands before entering the building. Staff wore gloves and masks, and about half the visitors were masked.

Visitors—from the next town over, across the state, neighboring states—stood or sat on the back deck watching the barn swallows swoop in and out of their nests, feeding their young. They sat at tables on the dance floor or picnic tables outside the red barn. Folks walked the trails looking for the tiny green apples that filled the trees. Grimes Golden will ripen first next month. Children—lots of them—behaved and the few leashed pets minded their manners. And all remembered the physical distancing rule.

Folks asked questions about the ripening times, the performances, how long this all will last. For some, there were no answers. “I miss the music,” one guest offered. “But being out in the open and breathing the clear air is still worth the trip. I completely understand.”

The Orchard is located at 1025 Orchard Road near Spruce Pine at mm 328.3 on the Blue Ridge Parkway and is a not-for-profit working orchard, music, and educational venue. Hours are 10 AM to 5 PM, currently Saturday and Sunday. Family- and pet-friendly. Wheelchair accessible. For information please visit altapassorchard.org or call 828-765-9531.

Kate Groff is the Programs Coordinator for the Toe River Arts Council.
47 after the way which they call evil (Acts 24:21) KJV
49 for an image of a bull, which grass (Ps 106:20) KJV
50 About ten days, the LORD struck Nabal (1 Sam 25:38) KJV
51 he will _ those who fear the LORD (Ps 115:13) KJV
52 Moses brought their _ to the LORD (Num 25:7) KJV
53 He traveled through that _ , speaking many words of (Acts 20:2) KJV
54 were as swift as the _ upon the mountains (1 Chr 12:8) KJV
56 are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only _ in the morning (Acts 2:15) KJV
57 _____ honors his father, and a servant his master (1,3) (Mal 1:6) KJV
60 Go to the _ , you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! (Prov 6:6) KJV

Solution on page 14
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