

BLUE RIDGE CHRISTIAN NEWS



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.

Be to Me

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 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 restorer, for you restore my peace and my strength.

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

Lord, we need you to be to us...all of these things and more. See us, Lord, in our places of worry, in our low places. Be to us what we need, where we are. When we call out in loud cries and when we whisper our worries and hurts.


We are Yours. The ones You hold in Your hands and though we fail. You every day, You love us. Yes, You love each one of us.

Be to us, Lord.

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>.

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. Plus, it will allow us to model Scripture in our everyday lives.

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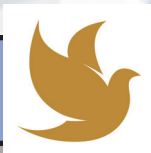
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“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace: that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation: that saith unto Zion. Thy God reigneth!”

Isaiah 52:7 KJV



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Church Directory



Bear Creek Baptist Church

327 Bear Creek Road
Bakersville, NC 28705
www.bearcreekbaptist.com

Reverend Bruce Cannon

Sunday School 9:45 AM
Worship Service 10:45 AM
Discipleship 6:00 PM
Evening Worship 6:45 PM
Wednesday Worship 7:30 PM

"For God so loved the world, he gave his only Son..."

The Bridge Church of WNC

207 Pinebridge Avenue
Spruce Pine, NC 28777
www.bridgewnc.org

Pastors - Tom & Tammy Anglin

Sunday Service 10:30AM
Wednesday Service 7:00PM
Church Office M-F
9:00AM-3:00PM

"Home of Tri County Christian School"

Our passion is to help connect the Body of Christ in this area in order to see the Fire of God transform our community, state, nation and world! (See John 17:21)

Berry Chapel Baptist Church

280 Chapel St.
Spruce Pine, NC 28777
828-765-6590
www.berrychapelbaptist.com

Pastor - Steve Williams

Sunday School 9:45 AM
Worship Service 11:00 AM
Sunday Evening Care Meal/
Ministry - 5:30 PM
Wednesday Evening
Service 7:00 PM

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And Jesus Christ is Lord!

The Rock Church

4806 US 64
Morganton, NC 28655
Phone: 828-334-3193
www.trcmorganton.com

Pastor - Billy Chapman

Sunday Morning - 10 AM
Sunday Night - 6 PM
Tuesday Night - 7 PM

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Grassy Creek Baptist Church

793 Old NC 226 Hwy
Spruce Pine, NC
828-765-4620
www.grassycreekbc.org

Sunday School 10:00am
Morning Worship 11:00am
Sunday evening 6:30pm
Wednesday:
J.A.M. (Jesus and Me) 6:30pm
Mid-week worship 7:00pm
*"That Mitchell County
may know Christ"*

Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church

2187 Jamestown Road
Morganton, NC
828-584-8212

Pastor Steve Beitz

Sabbath (Saturday)
Bible Study - 9:30 am
Sabbath Worship - 11:00 am
Vegetarian Buffet after church
Wednesday
Praise, Prayer & Proclaim -
7:00 pm
www.morgantonsda.org

Altapass Baptist Church

3631 Altapass Hwy
Spruce Pine, NC
828-765-0660
altapassbaptistchurch@ccvn.com
www.altapassbaptistchurch.org

Dr. Marcus R. Benfield

Sunday School - 10:00am
Worship - 11:00am
Sunday Evening - 7:00pm
Sunday Youth Program - 7:00pm
1st & 3rd Sunday
(Conductors for Christ ages 5-11)
2nd & 4th Sunday
(Teen Discovery ages 12-18)
Wednesday - 7:00pm

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Plumtree Presbyterian Church

4527 Hwy 19E
Plumtree, NC 28664
828-765-6919
www.plumtreechurch.com

Pastor Ryan Bridgeo
pastor@plumtreechurch.com

Sunday School 9:45 am
Worship Service 11:00 am
Life Groups Tuesday-Thursday evenings, 7:00 pm
Fusion Youth Wednesday's, 6:30 pm
Healing Services 2nd Sunday of each month, 6:30 pm

John 15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

2396 Enola Road
Morganton, NC 28655
(828) 437-4082
www.pleasanthillbc.church

Senior Pastor Dr. Jack Hodges

Sunday School: 9:30 am
Sunday Worship: 10:30 am
Sunday Evening: 6:00 pm
Wednesday Evening 6:30 pm

"Love All, Reach All, Teach All, Send All"

West Burnsville Baptist Church

222 West Burnsville Church Rd.
Burnsville, NC 28714
(828)-682-3990

Pastor: Terry Long

Sunday School: 9:45 a.m.
Morning Service: 11:00 a.m.
Evening Service: 6:00 p.m.
Wednesday Service 6:30 p.m.

Church vision: Glorifying God through knowing, growing, going, to build the church and impact the world.

Burkemont Baptist Church

4668 Burkemont Rd.
Morganton, NC 28655
828-437-2357

For more information,
please visit
www.burkemontbaptist.org

Dr. Luke A. Lane

8:30am - Early Worship
9:45am - Sunday School
11:00am - Worship
6:00pm - Evening Worship

Marion Seventh-day Adventist Church

188 Ward Dr.
Marion, NC 28752
(828) 668-4018

Pastor Tim Sheridan

Sabbath (Saturday)
Bible Study - 9:15 am
Sabbath Worship - 10:50 am
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First Baptist Church of Spruce Pine

125 Tappan Street
Spruce Pine, NC 28777
828-765-9411
www.sprucepinefbc.com
www.spfbc.blogspot.com

Dr. Rocky Branch Senior Pastor

Sunday School - 9:45 am
Sunday Worship - 8:30 and 11:00 am
Sunday Evening - 6:00 pm
Wednesday Evening - 6:30 pm

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Great Hope Seventh-day Adventist Church

2907d US Hwy 70 E
Morganton, NC
828-475-2040

Pastor Barry MaHorney

Sabbath (Saturday)
Bible Study-10:00am
Sabbath Worship - 11:30am
Vegetarian Buffet after church
Wednesday - Praise, Prayer &
Proclaim - 7:00pm
www.greathopesda.com

Pine Branch Baptist Church

48 Church Road
Spruce Pine, NC 28777
Phone: (828) 765-9101
www.pinebranchbaptist.net

Reverend Bobby Joe Greene

Sunday School • 9:45-10:40am
Worship Service • 10:45am
Sunday Evening • 6:30pm

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Spruce Pine United Methodist Church

11090 Hwy. 226 South
Spruce Pine, NC 28777
www.sprucepineumc.org
spumc3@bellsouth.net
828-765-7446

Pastor Rick Schilling

Sunday School - 10:00am
Sunday Worship - 11:00am
Choir Wednesday - 7:00pm

The mission of Spruce Pine United Methodist Church is to be a beacon on a hill spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ through: Worship, Fellowship, Education, and Nurturing Service

Newland Christian Church

2800 Millers Gap Highway
Newland, NC 28657
Phone (828) 260-1404
www.newlandchristianchurch.com

Pastor - Phillip Greene

Sunday School: 9:45 am
Sunday Worship: 11 am
Sunday Evening Bible Study: 6 pm
Wednesday Evening Prayer Meeting: 7 pm

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Let's Pray

By Dennis Love
McDowell County



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 great 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-v3 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, undeserving 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- One of the things that has made our nation great is our devotion to God---our devotion to the home---and our devotion to the country. 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 would 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 work ethic. I’m thankful that I was brought up in a home 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 financial assistance. Hard work has always been the key to success in our country and it always will 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-v3 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 redefined. 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 Scarlet, “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 multibillion-dollar industry. And today, lifestyles that not very long ago were hidden in 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 still haven’t answered the question, have we? The question again is this: *“If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?”* Surely we wouldn’t say, “I don’t know and I don’t care.” SO, what is the answer folks? Well, to know the answer we must look at the root of the problem. And the root of the problem is not a political problem. The root of the problem is a spiritual problem. So when the spiritual foundations which made America great are being destroyed right

before our very eyes, what can we the righteous do? I will tell you what we can do. It’s three words. WE CAN PRAY. When the foundations are being destroyed all around us, what can we do? 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!

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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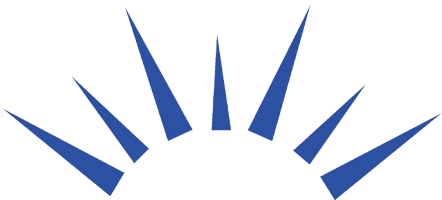
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What We Believe

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; 5:22; 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 unbelief. At the moment that our physical 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 Savior. 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)

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God Bless America, Please!

By Bruce Cannon
Mitchell County

We have all heard the expression, “Christmas In July.” The song below is actually a Christmas song sung by the group Casting Crowns. “While You Were Sleeping” has a tremendous message! It expresses the fact that while the Jewish nation was sleeping the Savior of the world was born. While they were sleeping (spiritually) He became man but they, like so many today, had no room for Him. While they were asleep He lived a life of love and light among them for years and they missed it completely! And they crucified Him.

The song takes a huge turn toward today’s attitudes by bringing the United States into focus. It asks the poignant question, “America, what will we miss while we are sleeping?” This question poses the possibility, and likelihood, that so many will miss the return of Jesus for the bride while they are spiritually dead. So many in America have missed the fact that it was Him who made America the greatest nation on the face of the earth. Wise in their own conceits and drunken on their successes, many somehow think they have accomplished all that was accomplished without His providential hand of blessing and guidance. Check out these words:

“Oh, little town of Bethlehem Looks like another silent night
Above your deep and dreamless sleep, A giant star lights up the sky
And while you’re lying in the dark There shines an everlasting light
For the King has left His throne And is sleeping in a manger tonight, tonight
Oh, Bethlehem, what you have missed While you were sleeping
For God became a man And stepped into your world today
Oh Bethlehem, you will go down in history As a city with no room for its King
While you were sleeping While you were sleeping
Oh, little town of Jerusalem Looks like another silent night
The Father gave His only Son The way, the truth, the life had come
But there was no room for Him in the world He came to save
Jerusalem, what you have missed While you were sleeping?
The Savior of the world Is dying on your cross today
Jerusalem, you will go down in history As a city with no room for its King
While you were sleeping While you were sleeping
United States of America Looks like another silent night
As you were sung to sleep by philosophies That save the trees and kill the children
And while we're lying in the dark There's a shout heard cross the eastern sky
For the Bridegroom has returned And has carried His bride away in the night, in the night
America, what will we miss While we are sleeping
Will Jesus come again And leave us slumbering where we lay
America, will we go down in history As a nation with no room for its King
Will we be sleeping? Will we be sleeping?
United States of America Looks like another silent night”
With all the lawlessness pervading America today, with the Coronavirus having caused so much death and financial hardship more people are talking about the coming of the Lord today than in the recent past. They are using Scriptures such as Matthew 24:7,8 to ask, “*Is this the beginning of sorrows Jesus spoke of in the Olivet Discourse?*” Are we seeing the precursor to the Great Tribulation period? Are we so close to the coming of the Lord for His bride that wedding music is beginning to be played in Heaven?
As we have our birthday this July the 4th pray with me that somehow, someday America can wake up, confess her sins and that God in His wonderful mercy and grace will be able to turn back this tremendous onslaught of evil that has risen up in our midst today. “God Bless America, land that I love,” please. In Jesus Name, we pray! Amen!

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

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.



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What are Human Beings That You Are Mindful of Them?

By Tracy Jessup

“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?” --- Psalm 8:3-4 (NRSV)

“What are human beings that you are mindful of them?” 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, “No One Values 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 Ahmaud Arbery. Floyd, a 46-year-old black man, died after pleading 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 one created in your image and for whom Jesus gave His life.

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



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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.

Rom 8:28 says...” *All things work together for good for those who love the LORD and are called according to their purposes.”*

Taking an inventory on your life is extremely crucial to being able to know what your high calling in life is: and is no sin as long as you don't try to dwell in the past, but use it as a springboard to jump into the unknown for your fear is not being used to hold you back, but to propel you forward and into the great unknown.

Be like Lots wife also, and by gazing back on what's behind from time to time: you can and will be made into a pillar of your community.

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.



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“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.

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Life Lessons

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 actually being murdered in cold blood and so many are saying that needs 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.

“This 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.

“If my people, which 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 are you 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 an outcry from those 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 justice 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 every foe is vanquished,
And Christ is Lord indeed.
Stand up, stand up for Jesus,
Stand in his strength alone;
The arm of flesh will fail you,
Ye dare not trust your own.
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 and 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 what did He do? He stood up and cleaned the house!

“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 us honor those in authority as 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.

Celebrating Recovery

“There was Jesus”

By Christy Young
Mitchell County

Recently our Sunday school class discussed the many times Jesus has shown up in our lives. I began to think about how special the presence of Jesus has been in my life. Too many times we forget how He shelters and protects us from harm, removing the obstacles in front of us. As I began to meditate on the goodness of God, I was reminded of so many times that God has shown up in such uncertain circumstances. In January 2007, my husband had an accident. He was run over by a farm tractor. I can remember so very clearly getting the call that he was being airlifted, I began to pray asking God to look over him and “There was Jesus” comforting and looking over him. Psalms 46:1 says, *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”* He was our strength and refuge and saw us through. I had an uncle that was lost. He had never accepted Jesus as his savior. For many, many years I begged, pleaded, and prayed that God would save him. Unfortunately, Michael passed away six years ago. But a couple of days before he passed “There was Jesus”. Michael asked Jesus into his heart. Praise the Lord, I have the assurance that I will see him again!!! For over ten years, my brother struggled with addiction. After many years of heartache and pain, I had almost given up on ever seeing Joshua clean again.... But, “There was Jesus”. God had big plans to use Joshua to minister to others. Even amid our pain, God is always working. He always shows up right on time. I often think about Lazarus being raised from the dead. When all hope was gone “There was Jesus”. John 11:11 says, *“Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going to wake him up.”* Mary thought Jesus was too late, but it was all in His time. Our country is somewhat like Lazarus, we have gone to “sleep”. Desperately awaiting an awakening from the Master. We are facing some uncertain circumstances in the world today. We are living in a world of fear and dishonor to God’s word and teachings. Prayer has been taken out of school and Jesus is no longer welcome in many of our homes. Our country has become complacent to sin and justifies all that God teaches against. My heart breaks! Matthew 24:12 says, *“And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold”*. Our only hope for this country is Jesus and the assurance that He will return someday. What a glorious day that will be when I can say, “THERE IS JESUS”.

Christy Young is the blessed wife of Chris Young and proud mother of Hunter and Holden. She is a life-long resident of Mitchell County, works at Mitchell County Finance Office, and is a member of Bear Creek Baptist Church.

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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 that figuratively 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 representative 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 borne 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: “*How fortunate are those who wash 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 “obey 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 Kingdom. Between now and then, we have much to do. Many have heard of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, but few appear willing to follow Him on His terms: turning from sin and obeying scripture. Such obedience requires intimate knowledge of the Bible.

Many prophecies detail the greater exodus God will use to bring His children together at the end of the age. Revelation 11:4 says that the “two witnesses” are “two olive trees.” They represent the House of Judah and the House of Israel which will be reunited. The marvelous prophecy in 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. 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 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.

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The Difference Prayer Makes

By John H McCoury
Roan Mountain, Tennessee

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.



Defeating Worry Through Prayer

By Dan Qurollo
Burke County

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 disregard 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 passeth 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 security that such a position demands, we will naturally place our confidence in that which we believe is secure.

This list is not intended to be exhaustive, but I believe it captures much of the essence of why we worry. The moment I disregard God's faithfulness, God's competence, and my position in Him I will inevitably be filled with fear. Prayer is 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.

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NCBAM Hope Line Now Offers Outbound Calls to Seniors

By Carol Layton

When North Carolina Baptist Aging Ministry (NCBAM) began its Hope Line service in the summer of 2019 to address social isolation and loneliness among older adults, no one imagined the societal changes that would occur nine months later. Over just a few days in March 2020, calls to the Hope Line increased exponentially. To meet the demand, the ministry opened the service on weekends and added two lines.

Now open daily, 9:00 am – 9:00 pm, the Hope Line (866.578.4673) continues to receive more than 100 calls each week from older adults—many of whom have been living in isolation for years. Other callers are new to the experience because of self-isolation measures or stay-at-home orders, many of whom are now alone and also experiencing feelings of fear and uncertainty. NCBAM team members and volunteers trained in evidence-based health coach techniques focus on listening and allowing callers to have a safe space to express themselves.

Knowing that many individuals most in need of a friendly call service may not initiate a call, the Hope Line now offers outbound calls. The service is free and can be requested by calling 877.506.2226 or by emailing ncbam@bchfamily.org. A link will be sent to sign up for the “friendly call” service. Call recipients must be 65 or older and live in North Carolina. Requests can be made by individuals 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.”

Carol Layton is the Director of Communications and Administration for NCBAM at Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina



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 everyone 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 our justice system is the concept of presumption 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 his friends seemed to presume him guilty until proven innocent.

We may remember going through times like these when 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 maybe ask 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 a kinsman-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



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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 Growth* (Harper & Row, 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 around us. Each of these is not outward-focused, 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 overcome 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 (Hupatágēte—Υποτάγητε); 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 ourselves 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 choosing to place ourselves under the authority of the Lord and under His Word. 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 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. And we can offer our submission to Him because our God is faithful and true. 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 I place my faith in God and the working of the Holy Spirit in my fellow brother or sister. To submit to my spouse requires that I offer my very best out of love and sacrifice to my beloved.

Oh, that the spiritual discipline of submission would become a deep and true habit of our hearts! Why is this so important? Look at the life and ministry of Christ Jesus. Jesus lived His whole life in submission to the Father. Paul gives us one of the most powerful glimpses to be found in all of the Scriptures (Philippians 2:5-8), “*Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*”

In this powerful description of Jesus, we find the Son of God giving up all that was rightly His—so that He could willingly be offered as the sacrificial lamb who would take away the sins of the world. Jesus’ example and call to follow the way of the cross is the cornerstone of the Christian journey of faith. Our lives, our

choices, our directions, our futures, our relationships are built on this spiritual principle and truth—the way of the cross. And so, Jesus’ call to follow the way of the cross is the foundation for all godly relationships. And it is, needless to say, the foundation for all of Paul’s teachings on submission.

In learning to practice the spiritual discipline of submission, we free ours to follow our Savior. In living out God’s call to live the Christ-life of submission:

1. We are free to give up our rights—which is exactly what Jesus did!
2. We are free to value the persons and opinions of others. We are free to allow God-appointed and God-anointed leaders to lead—even though they will sometimes fail or sometimes lead out of unhealthy motives.
3. We free ourselves from being responsible for another’s choice—which allows them to be responsible for their own choices before the Lord.
4. We practice self-denial—which sets us free from bondage to the flesh.
5. We are free to follow and obey Jesus’ commands—we love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matt. 5:44); we love our neighbor (Matt. 19:19), and we love and serve our spouse just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her (Eph. 6:26).

Whenever you hear Jesus voicing a command, then that command will likely require you to practice submission. Whether it concerns our vertical relationship with Him or our horizontal relationships with others—each requires submission and sacrifice—just like Jesus!

Not only are we commanded to be obedient to the Lord’s commands, but we are also commanded to submit to authorities. Paul dealt with that issue in Romans, encouraging the Roman believers to submit to governing authorities. He wrote in Romans 13:1-4, “*Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God...*” And Paul commanded the believers living in Rome (Hebrews 13:17) “*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.*”

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 law of love as taught by Jesus; or (2) an affront to Biblical teachings. Some limits to submission may be readily seen. For example, a spouse demands that their mate beat their child for no reason at all. Or perhaps, an American citizen is asked to violate the laws of the Lord which we find in the Scriptures. One doesn’t submit to calls for abuse or to be abused. One doesn’t submit to evil. One doesn’t submit to destructive pressure, demands, or expectations. In each of these and many other cases, a believer who refuses to submit on the basis of those two limits mentioned above does so in a spirit of meekness and submission—not out of arrogance or pride.

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 continuously 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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2	3	4	7	6	5	1	8	9
7	2	3	9	5	4	8	6	1
6	9	1	3	7	8	5	4	2
4	8	5	6	1	2	9	3	7
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Mine Creek Baptist Church

A Broken Nation

By Chris Rathbone
Mitchell County



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. Not all of them were necessarily Christian, but they all recognized the need for this country to strive to be a nation under God. Many of the principles on which this nation was built were based on God and His word. Many people in the last couple of generations have diligently fought to remove and disregard the facts of our nation's founding. They have intentionally worked to stop the present generation from understanding that what made our nation so great was the fact that it had such a solid Biblical and Godly foundation. Right now, one can visit our nation's capital and see scripture written on most of the monuments that were built to commemorate the history of our nation. Even in light of the facts of history and historical evidence, 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 revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil"). The belief that Christians are to have no influence or any dealing 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 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 God thinks, 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!

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.

Clint's Chronicles on the Funny Farm

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 been subjected 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 reread it today.

Have a blessed day.

Farmer Doug

Funny Farm

Dear Friends,

As late as March of this year I believed I was a country boy. My home is Hendersonville, NC, a nice town of 20,000+ only 1 ½ hours away. But my perspective changed dramatically in late March when I came to spend a few months with my friends Doug and Barbara Harrell at Harrell Hill Farm near Bakersville.

Doug and I go back more than twenty years, I was executive vice president for GTE Corporation (now Verizon) and Doug was a technology marketer. A “country boy” who done good is the way I often thought of me.

Well let me tell you, I have learned some valuable and unforgettable lessons since arriving in the real ‘country’ ...I’ve worked on the farm now for nearly six months and experienced things which could only happen in a Chevy Chase film – or to me.

Anyway, if y’all will tolerate me I want to share some of my hair-raising farm stories. We’ll call them “Clint’s Chronicles on the Funny Farm” – names will be changed to protect the innocent, and chances are I may exaggerate the facts a wee bit. It will go something like this:



A Beast in The Beans!

‘Twas a beautiful day at Harrell Hill Farms, crystal clear sky, a torrid 93 degrees as I headed for the garden to harvest a couple of bushels of blue lake bush beans. I had been nearly devoured by ticks and yellow jackets the day before – the most aggressive microscopic critters on earth. So, I donned my overalls, long-sleeve shirt, and high boots for an adventure in the bean patch.

Now what I found growing there I thought was a string bean but have since learned that there is no longer a string, just a snap. That was a pretty big disappointment to me, although I’m not sure why. Just so many new farm facts in my head these days I can hardly catalog them all!

Doug told me this was backbreaking work -- that I might want to take a three-legged stool along for more comfortable picking. Well I did that but we’d had an inch of rain overnight and the three legs kept getting mired in the dirt so it was breaking my back moving the stool around; I tossed it aside. Besides, I’ve been on the farm 3 months now, have lost 63 pounds of chubby and ten inches in the waistline. I am fit like a fiddle, strong like a bull, poised, and ready to again demonstrate my agricultural prowess.

I was hunched over piles and piles of bush beans, enjoying the solitude with the Lord, the land, and the garden. A gentle breeze cooled my sweat-soaked clothes, and I was humming praise songs and talking to Jesus. What a wonderful day He was giving me.

It is important, mind you, that I remain vigilant while harvesting these succulent little pods. For I know that bees, spiders, snakes, and other killer vermin can attack without warning. It’s simply one of the hazards of being Farmer Clint, yet one I gladly embrace. I chuckled to myself as I thought of the Scripture, *“Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”* 1Peter 5:8. Not that I expected a lion, although a hungry bear was not out of the realm of possibility. Regardless, a farmer cannot be too careful.

Somewhere, about mid-bean-row, I heard a soft rustling in the sorghum cane field. I figured it must be a deer since they had been eating virtually every other crop, we’d planted at Harrell Hill Farms. I never knew deer are such destructive beasts and was praying that he would not come over and eat all the beans. It was such a glorious day, I continued to pick and pray, to pick and hum, to pick and thank God for the joy of being one with the farm.

Then, from nowhere and from everywhere a HUGE monster burst from the perimeter of the cane field...I heard it coming, running, stomping, growling, moaning – inhuman groans akin to those portrayed in Steven King novels. I stood my ground, poised for war, girded for battle, prepared to lose my life for the blue lake bush bean patch...then I FELT IT, it was on me!

My head dropped quickly, so quickly in fact that my straw hat fell to the ground. And there, I mean right there, moving across my steel-toed boots was the ugliest monster I’ve ever met. It was BIG...it was BROWN...it had teeth like a SHARK...I screamed like a girl...it looked at me, made some guttural sound, and darted away. My friends, while picking beans and praising God I stood shoulder

to shoulder with my very first KILLER GROUNDHOG. (Okay, maybe not shoulder to shoulder but he was a whopper!)

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 dismounted 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 Just and the Unjust

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 at 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 Moretz. 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 folks cutting up 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 dying, 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 weather outside was still wet. It was the fourth day in a row of heavy downpours. It was obviously the opposite extreme to that faded memory. Yet, 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 times 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 minds, however, they wish, from sports stars to music entertainers, had all been taken away. Now, in the vacuum, many find their lives empty, void of meaning. All along, they had been living a life of earthly treasures but hadn’t stopped to take notice until now. The suicide hotlines are flooded and reports of suicides during the last four weeks have equaled that of a year’s worth of deaths previously. Sadly, some preachers even go as far as to find wisdom in the data of the Corona Virus media reports instead of their Bibles. In so doing, they purposely prevent their parishioners from receiving the very thing that they need most; the Spiritual interactions of fellowship and worship; the very thing people need most at times like this. I could go on speaking of negativity, but the tragedy remains the same, many seek what can never bring them true happiness. The question came to mind, “Do I allow myself to be brought down by the long, cloudy days, or do I make the best of what I have?”



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, greens, 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 certainly have been 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, gleaned 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. Yes, even when the rain falls, there is a sense of reward and comfort on the farm where others find dread and gloom. It is a mindset that many fails 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 Collettsville, NC. with his family. He is the former Director of the Trail of Faith in Valdese, where he still volunteers and helps with tours. He now teaches Math full time at Watauga High School in Boone. 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 twtron@live.com

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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 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 high 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' best friend wrote this about our Savior: *"If anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation [atonement] for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world"* (1 John 2:1–2).

Jesus considered your eternal life worth His tortured and crucified death (Romans 5:8). 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 Robertsson 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.



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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Berry Chapel Baptist Church

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 great also. 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 in 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 fixing to happen 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 falls." 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 unbuckle 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 who follow and of the man who leads that gains the victory. George S. Patton
- Victory belongs to the most persevering. N/A
- Many times, we miss out on God's best because we give up too soon. We don't realize how close we are to victory. N/A
- There is no fool like a careless gambler who starts taking victory for granted. Hunter S. Thompson

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.

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

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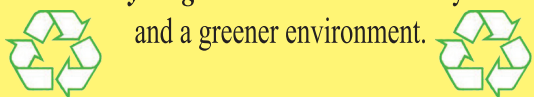
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Snow Hill Baptist Church

What Really Matters? - No Regrets Family

By Dean Honeycutt
Mitchell County

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 that which 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 not be 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 completely perfect without error or flaw in all that He is and does. And 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 exalteth 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 problem. 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 affirms 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,
Thou hast been displeased; O turn thyself to us again.
2 Thou hast made the earth to tremble; thou hast broken it:
Heal the breaches thereof; for it shaketh.
3 Thou hast shewed thy people hard things:
Thou hast made us to drink the wine of astonishment.
4 Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee,”*
That it may be displayed because of the truth. Selah.
“Oh Lord help us give us a banner to display truth in Jesus' name” amen.

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.

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 work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.



Walnut Grove Church

God Uses Broken Vessels

By Kurt Bomer
Avery County

The first time the word Prophet is used in the Bible is when God is speaking to Abimelech about his prophet Abraham. This surprised Abimelech because Abraham had just lied to him about his wife to spare his own life. Perhaps Abimelech thought, “God is he the best you’ve got? He’s a coward and a liar.”

Paul would later tell us in Rom. 11:29 *“for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable”*. That means when He called Abraham a prophet, that’s what Abraham would always be, even if he messed up. It was the same David who committed murder and adultery that God said, “He’s a man after my own heart”

I have heard many say, “God can’t or won’t use me because I’ve messed up so much, I’ve failed so miserably.” Please understand that that’s the voice of the enemy. God, on the other hand, says, “Because you didn’t earn the gifts I gave you or the calling I sovereignly placed on you, you can’t lose them! Sin in our lives will always bring about sadness and defeat, but the fact remains that God will still use sinners just as he used Abraham and David.

If you’ve put yourself on the sidelines because you think you’ve messed up too much, get back in the game!

Selah (think about it)

Kurt Bomar is pastor of Walnut Grove Church.



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Quiz Anyone?

by Marlene Houk
Burke County



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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Morganton Seventh Day Adventist

Bang, Zoom! To The Moon, Alice

By Steve Bietz
Burke County



It was called the Honeymooners. Nearly all the 1950s sitcoms on television featured upper-middle-class families with the dad wearing a suit and tie around their suburban single-family house, and the mom in an attractive dress with high heels on. I can't recall if the moms wore high heels as they vacuumed the carpet or not...I was pretty young. But with the classic American television sitcom created and starring Jackie Gleason, we leave behind the typical upper-middle-class family and instead, portray a working-class married couple in a gritty, non-idyllic manner. The show actually hardly ever left the Kramdens' kitchen in a neglected Brooklyn apartment building. The Honeymooners was a bang, zoom, to the moon show that portrayed Ralph Kramden (Gleason), Ed Norton (Art Carney), as best friends as they go from one scheme to the next to try and make a few bucks. They were usually poor choices and ended up going south while the wives, played by Audrey Meadows and Joyce Randolph, knew a hair-brained scheme to strike it rich when they saw one.

The show started with fireworks on the opening theme song and those fireworks would continue as Ralph would get so upset with his wife Alice over one issue after another. The audience knew what was coming and anxiously waited for Ralph to say those magical words: "Bang, Zoom! To The Moon, Alice!"

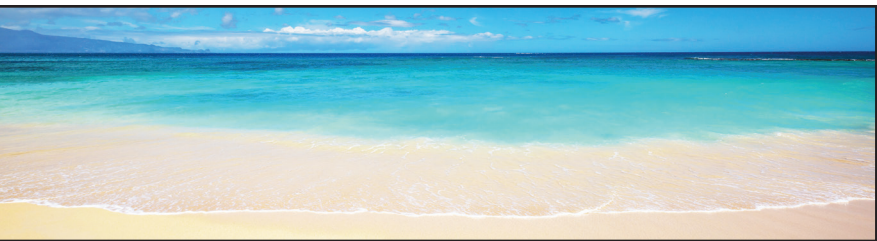
Far as I know, Alice never went to the moon and by the end of the half-hour sitcom, the fireworks were over and Ralph was telling Alice: "Baby, You're the Greatest."

In 1967, the United Nations adopted the International Outer Space Treaty, forbidding all nations from claiming the moon or any part of space, as their territory. During the decades since man landed on the moon, there have been fast-thinking entrepreneurs who have been selling land plots on the moon. And thousands of people have purchased land on the moon. Of course, so far, no one has been able to enjoy a piece of real estate on the moon.

I see a better plan for heavenly real estate that is taught in the Bible. Did you know that the Word of God teaches that you and I can own heavenly real estate? And the price is already paid!! *"In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."* (John 14:2, 3).

So, as we celebrate the 4th of July and shoot off some fireworks, you may recall the fireworks they shot off during the opening credits of the Honeymooners television sitcom. You may remember that Ralph was always ready to Bang, Zoom, Alice to the moon. But the greatest thing to keep in mind is that our Lord has prepared heavenly property that has our names on the deed. What a firework show we will witness when we all arrive in God's eternal Kingdom. We do not need to purchase moon property. Just let Jesus and His blood purchase us. May we each accept Christ as our best Friend and ask Him to be our Lord and Savior. No fireworks on earth can compare to what Christ has in store for His friends.

Steve Bietz, Pastor, Morganton Seventh day Adventist Church.



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2020 NC Mineral and Gem Festival Scheduled

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 trucked 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 heart's 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 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>.



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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 here 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. We will have all eternity to celebrate and enjoy what God has done for us — and we will see that what we went through on earth was so temporary.

So, God says, take heart; this will be over soon. Our afflictions, the Bible says, are only temporary.

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;” about his “sufferings,” and “poverty,” and “beatings” and “imprisonments” and “sleeplessness” and “hunger.” Paul didn’t have his head in the sand. He experienced more real troubles and suffering in his life than most of us will ever know. He knew very well that sufferings here on earth are REAL!

But in the same way, he could say that these real sufferings are “light” — COMPARED to 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 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 experience is 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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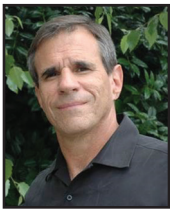


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Neuropathy

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 which means good circulation, they need oxygen and stimulation as well as good nutrition 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 is a licensed Chiropractor since 1981. 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.

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Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

The Shoes of Peace

By Caron Cline
Burke County



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 others 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 blisters because 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 slippery 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, came preaching the gospel.

Mark 1:14-15 states that “...*Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God, and 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 came to bring peace on the 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 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 price 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 running 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 stay prepared 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 is certainly worth sharing. We are called to be agents of reconciliation, just as Paul referred to himself. But it is not an easy assignment. Most of the time, the devil has us convinced that no one is interested in hearing the gospel, which is not true. People are desperately seeking peace, hope, joy, and love. They just do not realize that all these qualities are found only in Jesus Christ. Our responsibility is to listen and then share the gospel of peace in love. But if we are going to impact the lives of those around us, we must be people who allow the peace of God to rule and reign in our hearts. He is to rule and we are to rest.

The recent shelter-in-place order, based on the uncertainty of the Corona Virus, has drained the peace of many, including God’s people. We cannot allow the enemy to replace our peace with fear for we cannot share the gospel of peace under a yoke of fear. On the heels of the virus has come racial unrest, another opportunity for our enemy to steal our peace. Just hours before Jesus would suffer on the cross for our sins, He said these powerful words to His disciples, ‘*Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you*’. We must not allow the enemy to deceive us for Satan’s objective in these unprecedented days is to weaken our witness. The Holy Spirit gives us the fuel of faith to speak words

of spirit and life as we remain ready to 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!

Caron Cline is a follower of Jesus Christ who loves to teach the word of God. Her desire is to see every believer growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 3:17 - Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord [is], there [is] liberty.



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Press Release

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 as the MTCC Board of Trustees conducts a search process 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.



Ryan Garrison

First Baptist Of Marshall

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.



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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.*



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 Weaverbille, "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.



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God’s Revelation
“Where Are You?”

By Glenda Ward
McDowell County



“Thus, saith the Lord the King of Israel, and His redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last, and beside me, there is no God” (Isaiah 44:6).

There is no authority beyond and above God our Father. Our responses to Him can reveal at times that we have forgotten Who is truly in charge. We can see God’s power throughout all of Scripture and if we look back, we can also see that His presence and His power has been at work in our life already. The prophet Isaiah challenges us to think rightly about who God is. God is in control. He isn’t fretting or worried about anything. At times it may be hard for us to trust and believe that God is in charge and can be in control of our care when we’re called to place our trust and hope in Him and Him alone. But we can.

We should not fret or worry about things we cannot change but instead, we should pray. Although we may be strong in body, if we fail to heed God’s nourishment and fail to soak in His Holy Word; our daily bread of guidance, leadership, and God’s Will in our life; then we become faint in our walk with God and in seeking His nearness. We should pray for strength, wisdom, protection, and courage to face whatever struggles are currently in our lives or are to come. Our worrying should be turned into prayers lifted up through faith in Him. Through our prayers and trusting our life in His care, we can rest in His blessed assurance that He is in charge of all our circumstances and that we also have a beautiful inheritance awaiting us. Until that day when Jesus Christ returns to take all God’s children home, we should always be in prayer and supplication putting our hope and trust for our daily lives in the hands of God our Father.

Does God ever ask you, “Where are you?” “Do you want to become planted in My likeness?” Do you want to be made whole?” These are not questions based on information. God is not asking because He doesn’t know. He is asking because He wants to reveal something to you, a revelation in your life. Revelation: Is God’s disclosure to man of Himself and His Will. The revelation to be learned is both about ourselves and about Him. Through these three questions and these words: “Where are you?” God brings us to a point of revealing that we are, in a sense, hiding from His presence. And because of His great love, He is seeking us out to be in a right relationship with Him.

“To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me” (Acts 26:18).

What is it Jesus wants to reveal to us with these questions? When we come to Jesus and we find Him confronting us with such questions, the reason behind the questions is for one of two things: either information or revelation. We know God knows the information; therefore, He must be seeking some kind of revelation in our answers. It’s to open our eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, a revelation in our life. Revelation is God’s disclosure to man of Himself and His Will. So, what does God want to reveal to us?

- We need to be healed from the ongoing sin in our lives.
- We need to be healed from wounds of our painful circumstances.
- We need to heal our spiritual being to cope and live at peace with situations in our lives that we cannot change.

At the moment when we acknowledge these questions, we are forced to look inside ourselves. Even though our situations and circumstances may be painful, at least we know they are things we can seek God’s comfort for, know He is in control, be at peace with ourselves and our circumstances. Healing is good but healing can also be painful and uncomfortable. Our healing means releasing ourselves totally to God’s care. It means we are trusting that God is better than whatever lifestyle we are currently clinging to. If we are willing to say yes to needing help with our troubles and trials of circumstance, if we look inside ourselves and see that being healed means departing from situations we are trying to fix and work through ourselves, or worrying about circumstances we cannot change; and move forward into the unknown with Jesus; it is then He is willing and we receive our Revelation. It is His Will to provide solace and comfort: in times of grief, loneliness, and heartbreak. It is His Will to lessen the hurting and pain in health and feelings of distraught and despair in each of our lives. Whatever the process may be ...the process may be long, but the healing will come. All we have to do is accept what God promises. He can and will bring healing and comfort if we put our trust in Him and Him alone. You can be at peace in God’s arms and His loving care.

When Jesus faces you with these questions; recognize that He’s not after information but a revelation in your life. Look inside yourself and when you do; what will you say?

Will you let God disclose Himself and His Will to you?

Glenda Ward is a member of Grand View Baptist Church in McDowell County. She is the mother of five grown children. Glenda is a Christian writer/author of “Something to Think About” – weekly Christian Articles. She writes Church Programs & Bulletins, VBS Material, Christmas and Easter Programs; all material based on the KJV of the Bible. Also testing the field in tributes, individual memorial writings, etc.

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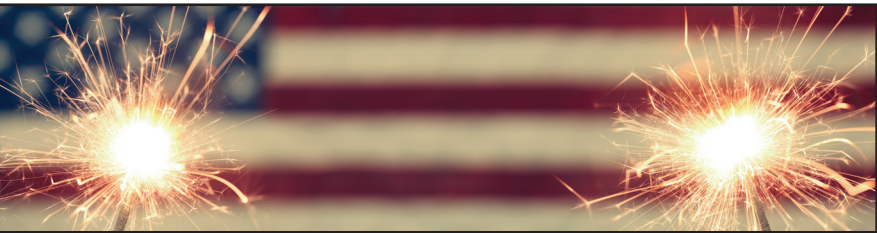
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Mountains
By Nancy Malik
Avery County

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 creations 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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Iron Sharpeneth Iron Proverbs 27:17

The Rebirth of Israel

By Britt Gillette

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 the exact 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 of exile and cause you to rise 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 of Israel came to life once again in 1948.

Israel Becomes 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, facing persecution around the world, and surrounded by their enemies, the Jewish people gathered together in Israel and declared themselves a nation in a single day. The United States recognized Israel as a nation on that same day, and Israel's victories in the wars since have solidified their place among the nations of the world.

Israel an Object of Scorn in the Last Days

The prophet Zechariah noted the following would be true of Israel in the last days: *"I will make Jerusalem and Judah like an intoxicating drink to all the nearby nations that send their armies to besiege Jerusalem. On that day I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone, a burden for the world. None of the nations who try to lift it will escape unscathed."* Zechariah 12:2-3(NLT)



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 is Israel's greatest ally, and He vows to make his presence known to the entire world by supernaturally destroying the armies arrayed against Israel:

"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 roar yourself. You will come from your homeland in the distant north with your vast cavalry 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.

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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In the Blink of an Eye

By Michael Stephanides
Burke County



It’s a cool, sunny Friday afternoon and we are both off work and free. Life is good. We are so blessed with health 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 handle-bars, 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 a trip to the ER at that moment, put on my 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 that much. To which he mumbled something to the nature of being tachycardic, diaphoretic, hypertensive, and thrashing around in the bed, ... and that I was, in fact, in pain. (See Egyptian River above). ‘Common sense’ had to wait in the car due to the pandemic.

After IV’s, CT’s, and some sweet nectar in the veins that made the world a better place, I listened to the doctor’s report.

“You have a displaced fracture of C2 right foramen (a small opening thru which vital things pass), a nondisplaced fracture of C7, as well as a fracture of the right first rib.”

“Can you even break that rib?”, I thought to myself. I’ll skip over the brain concussion as ‘common sense’ is questioning the existence of one to concuss. Post-concussive syndrome has its benefits though; I can now walk in the kitchen and have a legitimate excuse for forgetting what it was I was after.

I am now in an Aspen collar which makes me look like a turtle straining to see over a log. The dogs all laughed when I returned home wearing the equivalent of the ‘cone of shame’ we put on them to save them from themselves.

The reality of what I had done and survived began to sink in over the next few days, as well as how much I had to be thankful for. We know of another man with a similar injury who was not so fortunate and is faced with life challenges beyond imagination.

In the movie Overcomer, one man asks the other, “Who are you? What is your identity?”

To which the other replies, “I’m a coach, I’m a history professor, I’m a father,” and finally, “I’m a Christian.”

“Why is it so far down your list?” he asks.

Just before the unforgettable blink, I was a clinician, a runner, a biker, and now I sit in the house unable to work, run, bike, or even lift much of anything.

It is so incredibly hard to come face to face with our mortality and how quickly life can change. One minute healthy, and in the blink of an eye, you have a broken neck and are out of work. Why would God allow this, and to what end? How does this hardship bring glory to God? How often do we wrestle with God when we don’t understand the things that happen? When we perceive that our prayers go unanswered, or that He has somehow forgotten us. When we allow our identity to be tied up in who or what we are, or for that matter what we have accomplished, and not with the one who created us.

We were made to hear the phrase “Well done good and faithful servant.” The problem is most of us spend every energy of our lives longing to hear that from a lesser master.

Timothy Keller

Our church just finished a series on the book of Habakkuk. One of the minor profits in the Old Testament who is crying out to God about the sins of Judah and God’s decision to use the Babylonians to execute judgment. In the end, Habakkuk moves from his uncertainty, confusion, and doubt, to his proclamation “...*Yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.*” (Habakkuk 3:18).

We are definitely living in unprecedented times with COVID-19, social isolation, job losses, economic insecurity, and the uncertainty of containment and/or cure for this virus. What a great opportunity we have now, to reflect on who or what we are. What truly matters? No matter the latest social-media spin and polarized opinions. No matter the sense that the “Babylonians are coming to execute judgment on us.” No matter; we simply must remember we serve an omniscient God who has not been caught off guard by this virus and who is far greater than anything that comes our way.

Let us put aside the illusion that we are in charge and have control over our tomorrows. Let us take this time to reflect and remember that we were created in the image of God to be in fellowship with Him. That it is Christ and Christ alone who defines us and calls us by name. Let us live our lives amid our trials with a steadfast faith that He has us in His hand and is writing a story. A story we may not understand but is far greater than anything we can imagine. Let us live our lives like the apostle Paul - four years in a prison cell with a death sentence hanging over his head - who writes Philippians, commonly known as the epistle of Joy.

“*For the vision is yet for the appointed time; it hastens toward the goal and it will not fail. Though it tarries, wait for it; For it will certainly come, it will not delay.*” Habakkuk 2:3

Michael Stephanides is a resident of Morganton NC, and has lived there with his wife of 30 years. They have had the privilege of raising 3 biological children, and one adopted child, ages 24-29. Their daughters are married to great men, and they have 2 beautiful grandchildren. Michael and his wife are members of Summit Community Church in Morganton.

“Heaven’s Postcards: A Mother’s True Story”

By Kim Todd

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 astonishing 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.



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Your Government Page

NC Senate District 47



Sen. Ralph Hise
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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 General Assembly this past month to move forward in reopening our state:

H 594 – Temp Open Gyms/Health Clubs/Fitness Ctrs. – authorized existing indoor or 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 re-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, "The Governor 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.

NC House District 86



Rep. Hugh Blackwell
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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 ramping 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 now goes to the Governor for his signature to become law. It is my understanding that he will sign it. This bill will allocate roughly \$3.3 million to NCSSM for operating funds, purchase of equipment and supplies, and to establish 46 new positions at the Morganton campus of NCSSM.

Assuming the Governor's signature, the bill will become effective July 1. With this money, the western campus will be able to open and welcome its initial enrollment of 150 students who will enter as high school juniors. If all goes as intended, the second class of 150 should enter in August of 2023. This new campus of NC's School of Science and Math represents a visionary education investment by the legislature as approved by the voters in the ConnectNC Bond package. As we continue to create an economy that attracts the cutting-edge jobs of the future right here in North Carolina, NCSSM-Morganton provides another promising pathway to success for hundreds of students in our state.

NC Senate District 46



Sen. Warren Daniel
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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 and be present while the minor is receiving hospital care. Visitors are still subject to normal visitation policies and will also have access to a waiting area when the visitor cannot be in the room with the patient due to medical procedures. Licensed hospitals may require visitors to submit to health screenings and may restrict visitors who do not pass the screening or who test positive for an infectious disease. S730 allows hospitals to require visitors to adhere to infection control procedures, including wearing personal protective equipment (PPE). The bill passed the Senate in a 40-4 vote and will be taken up by the NC House this week.

There are two other pieces of legislation that I have worked on recently. First, S562 Senate Bill 562, the "Second Chance Act" would expand the eligibility for the expunction of certain offenses committed by 16-17 year-olds; remove most of the limitations on getting a charge that was dismissed, or resulted in a not guilty, expunged and expand the eligibility requirements for someone to get a nonviolent offense expunged. S562 has passed both the House and Senate and was presented to the Governor on June 18. Once it becomes law, the Second Chance Act will help a lot of people who made mistakes when they were young clear their criminal record and get a second chance. Also, where a person is found in possession of small amounts of illegal drugs, House Bill 511, the "First Step Act," would allow a judge to impose a sentence of lesser duration where there is clear and convincing evidence that the defendant was not involved in drug trafficking. The bill will also allow a narrow band of people serving an active sentence for drug trafficking to petition the court to be resentenced if they have no other felony convictions. H511 passed both the state House and Senate and was sent to the Governor on June 17.

If you would like to continue to follow the actions of S730 or any other bills or examine the voting record of your NC House or Senate member, the General Assembly website is an invaluable resource. Check out NCLeg.gov.

GOD BLESS AMERICA

The Greatest is Love

By Christy Lowman
Burke County

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 .05 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 can taste salty foods but not sweet food. They will also eat their eggs if they are not happy with or lacking something in their diet. They have 3 eyelids and can run up to 9 mph! Their hearts beat 220- 360 beats per sec. while the human heart beats anywhere between 1-2 beats per second. The color of their ear lobe tells you what color their eggs will be: Red-brown eggs, white- white eggs, and gray- colored eggs. The Americana and Araucana, and Easter egg-ers, lay green, blue, or pink eggs.

Eggs have the same nutritional value no matter what the color they are. You can trick a hen into thinking the day is 28 hours long with special lights. The result in this is bigger and stronger eggs!

An average hen lays more than 300 eggs a year. She will turn each egg around 50 times a day. Seven eggs are the record number of eggs laid by a single chicken in a day. Three hundred, seventy-one holds the record for the most eggs laid by a hen in a year! A hen must eat at least 4 lbs. of food to be able to make a dozen eggs. Mothers can talk with their babies while they are still in the egg. The largest chicken egg weighed 12 oz. and had 2 yolks inside. The record for the most yolks found inside a single egg has been 9.

We think of chickens as a common and pretty reasonable animal to purchase. However, in Indonesia, there is a rare breed that is sold for over \$2500.00 each! 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 to, 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, 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 be kind and to love one another. Help us see past the color of other people's skin and look at what is inside. True beauty is inside not on the outside. Help us remember that Jesus even loved those that killed Him, and He died for us all. In Jesus's name, I pray AMEN.

"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. 1Corinthians 13:13 NLT

Bibliography
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 and illustrating books for all ages. Some of her short stories are published with Guideposts and HCI.. 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/ref=dp_byline_sr_book_1?ie=UTF8&field-author=Christy+Lowman&search-alias=books&text=Christy+Lowman&sort=relevancerank. You can reach her at <https://www.facebook.com/authorChristyLowman/> or christyssoaps@yahoo.com.



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Burke County Public Schools

Burke County Schools, Blue Ridge Healthcare Foundation Unveil Food Truck

By Cheryl Shuffler
Burke County

During 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 truck 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, "I'm happy we could be a part of this and provide educational material for the kids. 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 Burkemont 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.



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Secrets of the Soul

By Alan Griffin

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 because of Adam’s sin. Many believe that it was by some freak accident that Adam and Eve were deceived into sinning. That somehow Satan slithered past God unseen 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 a race of spiritual beings into immortal physical beings with all the attributes of a spirit. We will be the first of a humanoid highbred race of people who will join 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 spirit of man is the mind through which all our understanding of God is derived. 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 love, and is envious or is giving. The combination of the spirit and the soul creates 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 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 mournful sounds spoken in grief which cannot be heard. Those of us who search our hearts, know the mind of the Spirit because He 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 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 now 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 place to expose the minds of those He wanted to be separated from His chosen elect. 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 hearing 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 Christ is Lord. 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 not 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 name, and *“If God is for us, who can be against us.”* The love He has for us is so great He did not even spare His only Son but delivered Him up for us all so that we could come back into fellowship with Him. No one shall separate us from the love of Christ Jesus, and in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him. There is no more condemnation to those of us who are in Jesus Christ because the law of the Spirit of life has made us free from the law of sin and death. *“For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”* Romans 8:1-2 NKJV

Many people today are possessed by drugs, violence, and sex. Their entire lives revolve around these activities. Whether they are participating in these acts themselves, or are watching others, their heart is consumed with the flesh, and those who live according to the flesh, occupy their minds with things of the flesh. The lustful person is in enmity with God and will not subject himself to the law of God. Those who feed the lusts of the flesh cannot please God. What good does the crucifixion of Jesus Christ do for us if we do not take advantage of the resurrection as well? For with His tremendous sacrifice, He paid the ransom for our sins and with His resurrection, He entitles us to eternal life. To be spiritually minded brings eternal life and peace. If Jesus Christ’s spirit resides in us the body is dead to sin, but the spirit of life is in you because of righteousness. God raised Christ from the dead, and He will also give life to us through His Spirit.

True believers owe Christ for their redemption. If we live according to the flesh we will die, but if by the Spirit we put to death the deeds of the body, we will live. If we are led by the Spirit of God, therefore we are sons and daughters of God. We are not forced to do these things in fear but do them voluntarily for our adoption into the family of our heavenly Father. The Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. If we are His children, then we are heirs of God and joint-heirs

with Jesus Christ of all creation. We suffer with Him so that we may be glorified together, and all the sufferings during this time we have on earth cannot compare to the glory which will be revealed in us when we are transformed into immortal beings. All of creation is eagerly awaiting the revealing of the sons and daughters of God.

To receive these blessings all you must do is believe and have a relationship with your heavenly Father through daily Bible study and prayer. When we believe, the Holy Spirit enters our soul immediately. However, overcoming the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life very well may take a lifetime. We all grow at different speeds based on our fellowship with our heavenly Father. All of us are one body in Christ, but we all serve in different ways. As we grow in faith, we will discover our service for God. All this is afforded to us through Bible study and prayer. You can believe, but if you do not read your Bible and have fellowship with God through prayer, you will not grow. You will become a stagnant Christian and you may very well fall back into your sins finding yourself questioning your salvation.

“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 kidsnchrist 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. Kidsnchrist.com, millennialchristian.com, teensnchrist.com, seniorsnchrist.com, picture-verse.com, and soulworks-smallgroups.com. We had 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@kidsnchrist.com



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Retirement Resource Solutions

Why and How to Give

By Steve Gaito
McDowell County

For those of you who regularly read my column thanks. 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 and was the Sr. Vice President for Camping for two of the 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 operations 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. It kept him 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 need 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 also 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 give. 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.

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. With the Trump tax laws came the increase in the standard deduction to \$12,200 per person for 2019 or \$24,400 per couple. This made tax filing much easier, but also minimized the impact that charitable contributions have on your taxes. Before every contribution was taken from the amount of your income that was taxed, with the change it only makes sense if your contributions and interest exceed your standard deduction. This change has had an impact on charitable organizations. But what is not widely known is that if you are over 70 and have a qualified retirement plan you can still claim your standard deduction and a gift from your Qualified plans to benefit from both. Normally any distribution from



your IRA for 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.

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Orchard at Altapass

Orchard at Altapass Opens

By Kate Groff
Mitchell County

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.



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Crossword

ACROSS

1 Heaven and earth will ____ away, but my words (Matt 24:35)

5 Can a man ____ fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? (Prov 6:27)

9 Moses saw that though the ____ was on fire it did not burn up (Ex 3:2)

13 not during the feast, they said, or the people may ____ (Mark 14:2)

14 Let their table be made a snare, and a ____ (Romans 11:9)

15 Would all of you throw him down this leaning wall, this tottering ____ ? (Ps 62:3)

16 dead man, "by this time there is a bad ____ (John 11:39)

17 it is a ____ thing that the king requireth (Dan 2:11) KJV

18 and offered burnt offerings on the _____. (Gen 8:20)

19 Esau went to the field to hunt for ____ (Gen 27:5) KJV

21 Men of all ____ came to listen to Solomon's wisdom (1 Kings 4:34)

23 Of them which thou gavest me have I lost ____ (John 18:9) KJV

24 "Is that your own ____" Jesus asked (John 18:34)

25 The sons of Japheth: Gomer, ____, Madai, Javan (Gen 10:2)

27 a way that seems right to a man, but in the ____ it leads to death (Prov 16:25)

28 vain for you to rise up early, to sit up ____ (Ps 127:2)

32 He brought out Israel, ____ with silver and gold (Ps 105:37)

33 All day long the battle ____, and the king of Israel (2 Chr 18:34)

35 The LORD that delivered me out of the ____ of the lion (1 Sam 17:37)

36 as a mountain ____ and crumbles (Job 14:18)

38 the wicked will drag them away, for they ____ to do what is right (Prov 21:7)

40 they shall run to and ____ to seek the word of the LORD (Amos 8:12)

41 Delilah took new ____ and tied him with them (Judg 16:12)

43 Unless I see the nail ____ in his hands (John 20:25)

44 more tolerable for ____ and Sidon at the judgment (Luke 10:14)

46 But Jonah ____ away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish (Jonah 1:3)

47 You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with ____ in it (Hag 1:6)

48 silver in two bags, with two ____ of clothing (2 Kings 5:23)

50 I have neither ____ on usury, nor men have lent to me (Jer 15:10)

52 Wherever there is a ____, there the vultures will gather (Matt 24:28)

55 The LORD has opened his ____ and brought out the weapons (Jer 50:25)

58 and like ____ out of dry ground (1,4) (Isa 53:2)

59 ____ no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips (1,3) (Dan 10:3)

61 Awake, and ____ to my defense! Contend for me, my God (Ps 35:23)

62 The ____ will be ashamed and the diviners disgraced (Mic 3:7)

63 Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ____ (Jude 14)

64 son of Seth (Gen 4:26) KJV

65 drove the sea back with a strong ____ wind (Exod 14:21)

66 She crieth at the gates, at the ____ of the city (Prov 8:3)

67 The animals take cover; they remain in their ____ (Job 37:8)

DOWN

1 What can we say? How can we ____ our innocence? (Gen 44:16)

2 Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' ____ (Num 11:28)

3 as ____ as it was sprung up, it withered away (Luke 8:6) KJV

4 save me, and we will sing with ____ instruments (Isa 38:20)

5 Be ____ and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified (Deut 31:6)

6 the turtle and the ____ and the swallow (Jer 8:7) KJV

7 all that handle the ____, the mariners (Ezek 27:29) KJV

8 lowered him in a basket through an ____ in the wall (Acts 9:25)

9 What harmony is there between Christ and ____? (2 Cor 6:15)

10 God has granted even the Gentiles repentance ____ life (Acts 11:18)

11 eyes of the LORD, which ____ to and fro (Zech 4:10) NKJV

12 the woman, and between your offspring and ____ (Gen 3:15)

15 This is the ____ of those who trust in themselves (Ps 49:13)

20 Yet no ____ is Zion in labor than she gives birth (Isa 66:8)

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22 snake (Isa 30:6)

25 They may ____ only virgins of Israelite descent (Ezek 44:22)

26 there before me was ____ standing open in heaven (1,4) (Rev 4:1)

27 figs, which are so bad they cannot be ____ (Jer 24:8)

29 Create in me ____ heart, O God (1,4) (Ps 51:10)

30 about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her ____ (Prov 31:17)

31 female sheep (Gen 33:13)

32 do not let your ____ hand know what your right hand is doing (Matt 6:3)

34 Lord, even the ____ submit to us in your name (Luke 10:17)

37 appointed priests from all ____ of people (1 Kings 12:31)

39 walk unsteadily, stumbled (Ps 105:37)

42 for it is better to marry than to burn with ____ (1 Cor 7:9)

45 together with her royal ____ and her father (Dan 11:6)

47 after the way which they call ____ (Acts 24:14) KJV

49 for an image of a bull, which ____ grass (Ps 106:20)

50 About ten days ____, the LORD struck Nabal (1 Sam 25:38)

51 he will ____ those who fear the LORD (Ps 115:13)

52 Moses brought their ____ before the LORD (Num 27:5)

53 He traveled through that ____, speaking many words of (Acts 20:2)

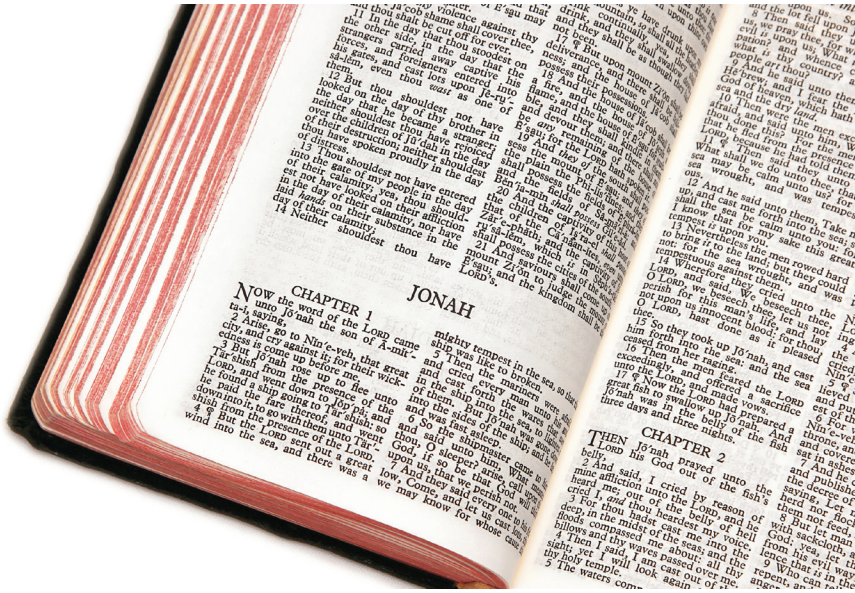
54 were as swift as the ____ upon the mountains (1 Chr 12:8)

56 are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only ____ in the morning (Acts 2:15)

57 ____ honors his father, and a servant his master (1,3) (Mal 1:6)

60 Go to the ____, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! (Prov 6:6)

Solution on page 14



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