



# BLUE RIDGE CHRISTIAN NEWS



## Bear Creek Baptist Church

By Bruce Cannon  
Mitchell County



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

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

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

Our Heavenly Father knows everything and is already in our tomorrow's ready-ing grace, arranging circumstances, and will be our merciful and faithful High Priest when the trials or hardships of life come.

Our world is constantly changing. Leonard Sweet, a Christian futurist, made the following comment, "If you were born before the year 1960 the world you were born in no longer exists." He is referring to those values once held dear being cast aside by so many, so quickly. Things such as absolute truth, strong work ethics, integrity, honesty, respect for authority, and so forth are some of those things of which he speaks.

While some changes are good, many are not. What will 2021 bring? What new challenges will we face?

2020 has been an extremely challenging year, to say the least! COVID-19 has ravaged so many homes, taken the lives of so many people around the world, forced so many businesses into bankruptcy and closure, and has caused so many people to lose their jobs...many even their homes. It has brought about more drug and alcohol use because of forced isolation and fear:

Consider some of the other issues facing our nation.

- So much talk about moving America into socialism.

- Approving the use of marijuana across the nation.
- Removing all restrictions delaying abortions.
- The fact that evil is becoming much more emboldened.
- The Word of God being mocked and cast aside when it is the only means of truth we can live by.

When I think about many of the decisions our nation is making, a Scripture from Paul in Romans 1:22 comes to mind: "*Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.*" The decisions of our government can bring about, and will bring about, many dire consequences upon every American.

While all of the above is true, and while many more issues are facing us, our God is unchanging and able to see us through any situation that comes our way! What must we do to tap into His power, His wisdom, and His grace? In the epistle of James, he writes some valuable words of insight and instruction in 4:6-10: "*But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.*" Draw near to the Lord. Be, as best as you are able, just as close to Him spiritually as possible. Be under the shadow of the Almighty. Living there you will be in a position to experience His blessings, His protection, His peace, and His power! How do we do this? Be still before Him. Have the boldness to say as David, "search me, O God." Let Him reveal things in your life that are not pleasing to Him and as 2 Chronicles 7:14 dictates, "*shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways,*" that we might have His full blessings in our lives.

We can then, with confidence, peace, and hope, face whatever challenges 2021 may bring. Amen!

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*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.*

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***But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint. Isaiah 40:31***





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Contents

In Every Issue

Life Lessons - p. 9  
Your Government - p. 32

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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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Landis Orthodox Presbyterian (4)	Freedom Life (7)		DT's (36)	
Morganton Seventh day Adventist (4)				



# Church Directory

## Landis Orthodox Presbyterian Church

4975 US 221  
Marion NC 28972  
(828)-756-7470  
[www.landischurch.org](http://www.landischurch.org)

**Elder Mike Cloy**  
[opcmikecloy@gmail.com](mailto:opcmikecloy@gmail.com)

Sunday School 10:00 AM  
Worship Service 11:00 AM  
Fellowship Meal Following Worship  
Thursday Bible Study & Prayer 6:30pm

*Come Celebrate the Glory of God in Reverent  
Worship Ps. 96:3; John 17:1*

## Bear Creek Baptist Church

327 Bear Creek Road  
Bakersville, NC 28705  
[www.bearcreekbaptist.com](http://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](http://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](http://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

*Where Everybody is Somebody  
And Jesus Christ is Lord!*

## The Rock Church

4806 US 64  
Morganton, NC 28655  
Phone: 828-334-3193  
[www.trcmorganton.com](http://www.trcmorganton.com)

**Pastor - Billy Chapman**

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

*Come Join Us  
Tent Revival 2020*

## Grassy Creek Baptist Church

793 Old NC 226 Hwy  
Spruce Pine, NC  
828-765-4620  
[www.grassycreekbc.org](http://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](http://www.morgantonsda.org)

## Altapass Baptist Church

3631 Altapass Hwy  
Spruce Pine, NC  
828-765-0660  
[altapassbaptistchurch@ccvn.com](mailto:altapassbaptistchurch@ccvn.com)  
[www.altapassbaptistchurch.org](http://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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Bible Believing Church"*

## Plumtree Presbyterian Church

4527 Hwy 19E  
Plumtree, NC 28664  
828-765-6919  
[www.plumtreechurch.com](http://www.plumtreechurch.com)

**Pastor Ryan Bridgeo**  
[pastor@plumtreechurch.com](mailto: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](http://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](http://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  
Reaching the World with the Everlasting  
Gospel of Jesus Christ!  
[www.marionnc.adventistchurch.org](http://www.marionnc.adventistchurch.org)

## First Baptist Church of Spruce Pine

125 Tappan Street  
Spruce Pine, NC 28777  
828-765-9411  
[www.sprucepinefbc.com](http://www.sprucepinefbc.com)  
[www.spfbc.blogspot.com](http://www.spfbc.blogspot.com)

**Dr. Rocky Branch  
Senior Pastor**

Sunday School - 9:30 am  
Sunday Worship - 10:45 am  
Sunday Evening - 6:00 pm  
Wednesday Evening - 6:30 pm  
*Knowing God, Seeing God, Serving  
God, Submitting to God!*

## 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](http://www.greathopesda.com)

## Pine Branch Baptist Church

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

**Reverend Bobby Joe Greene**

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

A Bible-believing Fellowship  
Loving God and Loving People

## Spruce Pine United Methodist Church

11090 Hwy. 226 South  
Spruce Pine, NC 28777  
[www.sprucepineumc.org](http://www.sprucepineumc.org)  
[spumc3@bellsouth.net](mailto:spumc3@bellsouth.net)  
828-765-7446

**Pastor Richard 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](http://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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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)



How Israel Rescued the Promised Land From Devastation and Neglect

By James Sinkinson/Jns.org July 13, 2020

*“And I will turn back the captivity of My people Israel, and they shall build the cities which are desolate, and they shall live in them. And they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine. They shall also make gardens and eat their fruit. And I will plant them on their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, says Jehovah your God.”* Amos 9:14-15  
*“But you, O mountains of Israel, you shall put out your branches and yield your fruit to My people Israel; for they have drawn near to come. For, behold, I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown. And I will multiply men on you, all the house of Israel, all of it. And the cities shall have people, and the wastes shall be built. And I will multiply men and beast on you, and they shall increase and be fruitful. And I will make you dwell as before, and I will do better to you than at your beginnings. And you shall know that I am Jehovah.”* Ezekiel 36:8-11

Last week I toured much of northern Israel, from the Jezreel Valley and the Lower and Upper Galilee regions to the Golan Heights. The natural beauty of this part of Israel, as well as the explosive proliferation of agriculture, was striking and inspiring.

The abundance of flora in Israel today makes it easy to forget that this land at the turn of the 20th century was a parched wasteland. It also raises the questions: How did this miraculous transformation take place, and who was responsible? On his visit to Palestine in 1867, Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) called the Sea of Galilee "a solemn, sailless, tintless lake, as unpoetical as any bath-tub on earth." On the other hand, last week I found the Kinneret (its Hebrew name) a sparkling blue jewel surrounded on its north, south, and west by vegetable fields, orchards, and forests. Traveling by horseback through the Jezreel Valley, Clemens noted: "There is not a solitary village throughout its whole extent--not for 30 miles in either direction. There are two or three small clusters of Bedouin tents, but not a single permanent habitation. One may ride 10 miles, hereabouts, and not see 10 human beings."

Clemens continues, "Of all the lands there are for dismal scenery, I think Palestine must be the prince. ... Palestine sits in sackcloth and ashes. Over it broods the spell of a curse that has withered its fields and fettered its energies."

According to Allon Tal's 2002 book, Pollution in a Promised Land, the Jezreel Valley around 1900 remained an undeveloped swamp--described as "barren and boring, a miserable plain without a tree or river ... all in ruins." Tal relates how one traveler in 1905 described mud so deep that the mules fell and the donkeys almost vanished in it. It wasn't until 1924 that Zionist settlers finished the herculean two-year task of converting these marshes into the rich, fertile farmland of today. Later, in 1918, following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, Herbert Samuel was named British High Commissioner of the Mandate for Palestine. In his 1921 "Annual Report on the Civil Administration," Samuel wrote: "It is obvious to every passing traveler, and well-known to every European resident, that the country was before the War, and is now, undeveloped and underpopulated. The methods of agriculture are, for the most part, primitive; the area of land now cultivated could yield a far greater product. There are also large cultivable areas that are left untilled.

The summits and slopes of the hills are admirably suited to the growth of trees, but there are no forests. Miles of sand dunes that could be redeemed are untouched, a danger, by their encroachment, to the neighboring village. The Jordan and the Yarmuk offer an abundance of water-power, but it is unused... "After the persecutions in Russia forty years ago [1880] ... Jewish agricultural colonies were founded. They developed the culture of oranges and gave importance to the Jaffa orange trade. They cultivated the vine and manufactured and exported wine. They drained swamps. They planted eucalyptus trees. They practiced, with modern methods, all the processes of agriculture."

Palestine's devastation can be attributed to many factors, mostly centered on poverty. At the turn of the century, an estimated 70 percent of the area's Arab inhabitants were subsistence farmers. They took what they needed from the land--including unreplenished wood for fire--and allowed unrestrained sheep and goat grazing, as well as the hunting of native species, like the Syria bear and small deer, to extinction.

While early Zionists saw Palestine as " a land without people for a people without land," some 700,000 people were living in the area at that time, most of them Arab. However, Jewish immigration--bearing great intention and aspirations--had begun. Within a few generations, it would transform this neglected, relatively barren territory into a lush cornucopia of food and forests with a majority Jewish population. Fast-forward to the fruitful land I witnessed in northern Israel last week. What happened in the 100 years between 1920 and 2020?

Wisely, the Zionists focused on agriculture to support Israel's growing population of both Jews and Arabs. The new immigrants purchased largely semi-arid land, much of which had become untillable due to deforestation, soil erosion, and neglect. These pioneers cleared rocky fields, built terraces, drained swamps, planted trees, fought soil erosion, and desalinated salty land. Today, Israel is a major exporter of fresh produce and a world leader in agricultural technologies, notwithstanding the reality that Israel's geography is not naturally hospitable to agriculture. More than half of Israel's land area is desert, and its climate and dearth of water resources discourage farming.

Imagine: Only 20 percent of Israel's land area is naturally arable. Yet Israel now produces some 95 percent of its own food requirements. Much of this success, of course, is owed to Israel's phenomenal, groundbreaking inventions in agricultural and food technology--starting with drip irrigation

*continued on page 7*



"Find Me at The Feet Of Jesus"(Luke 10:38-42)

By Shawn Thomas  
Angleton, Texas



In the 1700s, Thomas Scott was a young man who felt a call to go into the ministry, but he didn't know much about it. He became acquainted with John Newton, the author of the hymn "Amazing Grace," who was pastoring a church at nearby Olney, England, at that time, and they began corresponding. Newton wrote to him: "The first lesson in the school of Christ is to become a little child, sitting simply at his feet, that we may be made wise unto salvation." (Newton, Letters, p. 248) Newton's words pierced Thomas Scott's heart, and he became an evangelical Christian, who walked 14 miles on Sundays to preach to patients in a London hospital. He served in the ministry the rest of his life and wrote a Bible commentary that was named after him. Undoubtedly that "first lesson" Newton gave him, made a strong impression, and guided him to his successful ministry: "simply sit at His feet." That is the key to an effective Christian life. And that is just what we see in Luke 10, in the passage about Mary & Martha:

*"Now as they were traveling along, He entered a village; and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who was seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word. 40 But Martha was distracted with [a]ll her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, 'Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me.' 41 But the Lord answered and said to her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; 42 but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.'"*

Jesus tells us here that THE single most important thing in life is what we see Mary doing here: verse 39 says she was "seated at the Lord's feet, listening to His word."

- This is a position of humility.
- This is a position of worship.
- This is a position of learning.

In Acts 22:3, the Apostle Paul tells the Jews in his defense that he was *"a Jew, brought up in this city, educated (literally) 'AT THE FEET'"* of Gamaliel, the great Jewish teacher. So being "at the feet" is a place of humility, and especially learning from a teacher.

This passage tells us that Mary humbled herself to worship Jesus, and to learn from His word. This is the kind of person who gets God's attention.

In the last chapter of Isaiah (66:1-2), God says: *"Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. Where then is a house you could build for Me? And where is a place that I may rest? 'For My hand made all these things, thus all these things*

*came into being," declares the Lord. "But to this one, I will look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word."*

God says here, that He is a great King. Heaven is His throne. All the earth is merely His "footstool." Who will He look to here on earth? Who will have His attention? NOT the great athlete or warrior (God says in Psalm 147 that He "takes no pleasure in the legs of a man") but to the one who has a "humble and contrite spirit, and who trembles at (His) word." THAT is who gets His attention. God doesn't turn His face towards those whom we call "great": the Lebron James, or Bill Gates, and others whom men consider great. He says His face will be turned towards the one who humbles himself before Him, and trembles at His word. That gives hope to every one of us. You don't have to be some "great person" in the eyes of the world, to be great with God. You just have to love Him, humble yourself to worship Him daily, and seek Him in His word. That is what Mary did. That is what got Jesus' attention here — NOT all the "busy-ness" of Martha (that should be a good lesson for us today too! All of our "busy-ness" doesn't get the Lord's attention; instead it is humble worship and attention to His word that catches His eye!)

This should happen in our lives every day. If you want an outline for your devotional time at home, this is it, in summary: just humbly "sit at Jesus' feet" in worship, and "listen to His word":

- 1) Have a worship time in prayer; You might read a Psalm or a few verses of praise from the Psalms; sing a worship song or two to the Lord; and give Him thanks — and then pray for the requests that are on your heart — keep a prayer list to use. Spend some time with the attitude of being "at His feet" in worship.
- 2) And then secondly, spend some time paying attention to His word. Have a book of the Bible that you are reading through, and don't JUST "read" it, but really "sit at the feet of the Lord" and LISTEN to His word.

Did you notice the word "listening" here? One of the things that characterize Mary in this story is that she was REALLY LISTENING to Jesus' words. As we know, it is very possible to "hear" something on a surface level, but not really pay that much attention to it; it is possible to "read" it, but not truly internalize it. As we spend time in God's word we need to ask ourselves, are we really "listening" to it as Mary did? Are you giving it your attention, to apply it — to DO it?

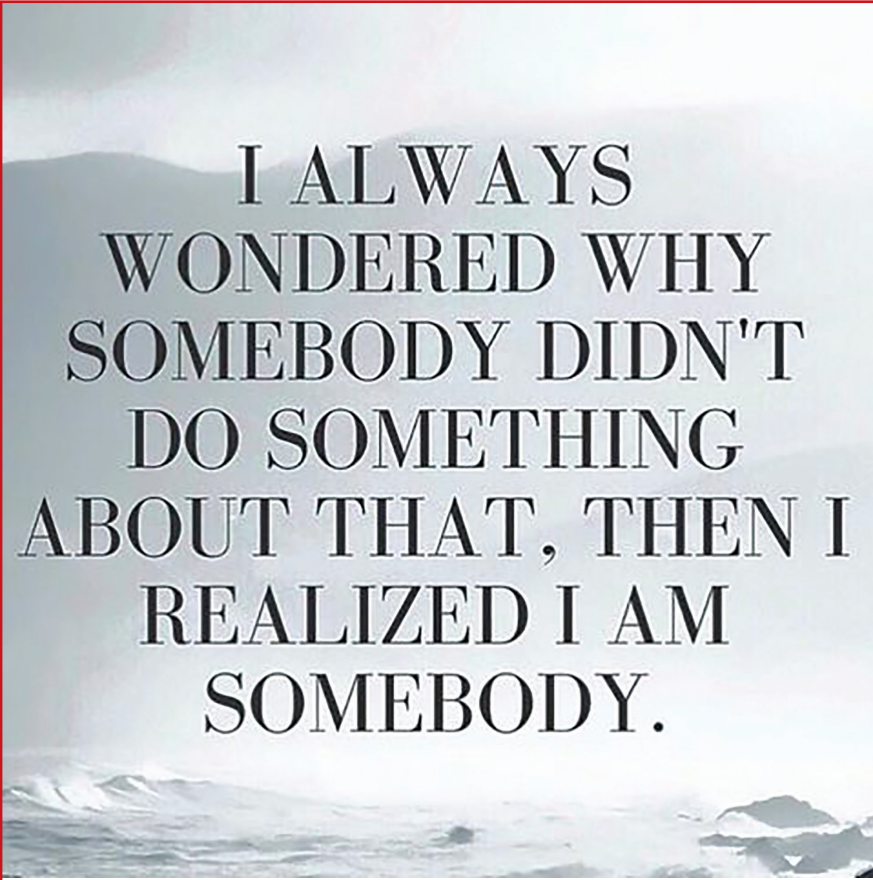
To help you with that, before you start reading, make sure you have a notepad ready to write down what the Lord is showing you as you read. Then read until you find something that God is speaking to you about, and write that down and pray about it. I was telling someone the other day: that is my reading plan. I don't typically read "so many chapters a day" or anything like that: I read "until God speaks." Until I get something that speaks to my heart or life: a teaching to understand, a sin to confess, something to pray for, a verse to memorize, or whatever. But read UNTIL ... "until" God gives you something. And have your notepad, or iPad, or computer, or whatever you use, to write that thing down on, so you can remember it, go back and pray about it, and share it with others.

But these are the 2 basic things that need to happen in our daily time with the Lord EVERY DAY: 1) we need to sit at Jesus' feet and worship, and 2) we need to listen to His word. IF we will do those two things every day, then just like Mary, it will make a huge difference in our lives.

Not long ago I went to the grocery store to get a few things for the week, and as I was checking out, the cashier asked me with a very weary voice, "So, did YOU have a good day today?" I said, "You know, actually I did. I got a lot done. I had a pretty good day!" She said, "Do you mind telling me how you were able to have a good day — on a Monday no less?!" (I was like, why don't you just tee up an easy witnessing opportunity for me there!) I said, "Well, I started today by reading my Bible, and by spending some time with God in prayer. I begin every morning that way, and it really makes a lot of difference in my day." I would have loved to have talked to her some more, but of course, we were in the checkout line, and she had to send me on, but she did say, "You know that WOULD be the best way to start the day," and she thanked me for sharing. I've prayed for her, and for the other lady who was sacking groceries, and for the others who could hear us talk, that God would use that little conversation to draw them to Himself every day in His word and prayer. It really does make such a difference, when we begin the day with God, doing just what Mary did here: sitting at His feet in worship, and listening to His word.

There's a lot more to be said about a daily prayer and Bible reading time. But for now, these are two basic things that need to take place in your time with God every morning: "sit at the feet of Jesus" in worship, and "listen to His word." If you're doing those two things in some fashion, then you are doing the most important things you can do in a day. And they are a little foretaste of what we will be doing in the Lord's presence for eternity as well!

*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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A Major Or A Minor Miracle?

By Harrietta Turner  
Mitchell County



First of all, ... we are not to major on miracles as, in comparison to the Greatness of our God Himself in all His wonder, power, and glory, all miracles are minor. It is sometimes easy to have our attention shifted from His person to His works. We can stay on guard against this happening ... and His Word shows forth Who He is and how He first speaks to us and needs to be First, above miracles, in our lives.

However, I did experience what I consider a Major miracle God granted me in answer to an immediate need this morning. To someone else, it might be considered only minor. Miracles could possibly be judged by the depth of the need they are meeting. And to me, mine was major ... whereas to others who enjoy and have more computer abilities and experience with finances it would be a minor miracle.

I have 4 electric bills to pay each month. This month they were due on the 4th. My Social Security check arrives at my bank account on the 3rd of each month which it did today. And each month I use the information already entered into the Make a payment segment of the French Broad Electric Company to pay each bill separately. This has been a very easy and efficient way to pay.

But this morning it would not let me into my payment information page saying my Username and Password were incorrect. This has never happened in all the months I've used their computer site to pay my bills. All I knew to do was to try and change my Password and when I clicked on that request, I was asked to enter the answer to my Security questions I had entered when I set up the on-line payment account and I finally found these among all the information pages I keep posted on my bedroom wall. I hadn't needed this in so long it took me quite a while to locate it. Then I came back to my computer and entered these in the appropriate place. And the response when I clicked on that page was that my answers were invalid. And I was given no further options and I had no way to pay my bills which were due by tomorrow. The power bills were for my house, the two renter dwellings, and our security light. I was concerned that there wasn't time to mail in the payments by postal mail and have them received until several days late and in the past, I had found that paying by telephone was complicated enough for me to not be successful at that without great difficulty.

Ordinarily, when I need the Lord's help I pray in general, but this time I felt the urgency to pray in the faith which is more important, and which isn't easy for me to do. But I managed to make a specific faith prayer request. And then I decided to go back to the computer and see what options I had or what I could try next.

My first attempt earlier had indicated the Username was not Correct but my now my 2nd attempt indicated a problem with both the Username and the Password. Therefore, I entered the only User Name I had and this seemed to be all right this time so then I counted the dots hiding the Password and the number of dots was one less than the Password I had typed on my printed information on my bedroom wall. I tried the only thing I could think of and that was to erase the 8 hidden-digit Password and retype in the 9-digit Password that I had saved on my wall. And then when I clicked enter it went right to the Payment Site and I was immediately able to pay all of the electric bills as usual.

How did one digit of my hidden password become missing is the question? And which of the letters or the one number had become missing? But there is no way to know how or how that could have happened between the date I last paid all the electric bills and today as I hadn't even gone to the Website since I had used it before to pay all of the electric bills.

So, to me, this was a major Miracle. Because, If I had had to hire someone to drive me to the local County FBEMC, even if I could have located such a person or if my usual driver was available in time, I would have had to pay them about \$50 to come way out to this mountain I live on to drive me way over to the office about 20 some miles away and then, of course, drive me way back to my town and then drive way back to their town in the neighboring town plus all the time involved, would have been somewhat expensive and time-consuming.

I learned how important it is to pray a faith-filled prayer and not just a casual prayer. And it gave me some food for thought about exactly what can be considered a Major Miracle vs. a Minor Miracle.

Harrietta Turner lives in Spruce Pine. She graduated from Tulane University School of Social Work.

and water desalination. Israeli dairy cows are the most productive on the planet. Even more astounding: Since Israel attained independence in 1948, the total area under cultivation has skyrocketed by a factor of 2.6 to approximately 1.1 million acres. In just the past 50 years, agricultural settlements have grown from 400 to 750. Agricultural production has expanded by a factor of 16--300 percent greater than Israel's population growth.

Wine also represents a thriving, expanding agricultural enterprise in Israel. Today, in a territory only one-thirteenth the size of New Zealand, just about the size of New Jersey, Israel supports some 320 wineries. (Trust my personal research: The output of these vines is uniformly excellent.)

As for Israel's abundant forests, we can thank millions of North American and Israeli donors to the Jewish National Fund and its parent, Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael, which have planted more than 240 million trees in Israel. This effort alone has transformed the Land of Israel--providing groves, woods, and forests of conifer, deciduous, and fruit trees all over the country.

In short, the Israeli miracle is far greater than the unsurpassed achievement of creating one of the world's most successful and powerful nations--made up of millions of Jewish refugees from all over the globe, most returning to their homeland in just 150 years. It's more, too than reviving and reinventing the Hebrew language after 3,000 years.

Israel is also the miracle of restoring a depleted, deteriorating land through determination, ingenuity, and back-breaking work.

While some resent Israel's revitalization of its indigenous national territory, Israel has, in effect, rescued the land of Palestine. Beautiful, thriving Israel today supports some 9 million Arabs and Jews--almost 13 times more people than in 1900, all enjoying one of the world's highest standards of living ... and the best food in the Middle East.

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# COVID, Here We go Again

By Dr. Miguel Cruz  
Mitchell County

I was hoping I would not need to write about this again, but I feel compelled that I must. As I was reading through some of my past articles regarding COVID, my first impression is that nothing has changed.

COVID is still around, the media is still trying their best to scare everyone, and we are all still wearing masks. Hospitals are seeing an influx of COVID patients, but they are not overflowing as predicted. People are getting COVID in greater numbers, but most are either having no symptoms or symptoms of a cold or seasonal flu. Those that are immune-compromised are getting deathly ill and some are indeed dying.

The vaccines are here, people are lining up for them thinking they will save the day. Time will tell if they help and what the side effects may be.

Driving around different areas I am noticing more closed businesses, hearing of financial hardships suffered by many small business owners, increased suicides, and increased drug addictions and related deaths. Wondering if it was all worth it. I guess we won't really know until years later when all the bean counters put the statistics together.

There is one trend I am seeing that is disturbing to me. I was shopping at Ingles when the announcements stated that taking supplements for your immune system is unproven and unscientific, but we should certainly get the flu shot. I can say with certainty that there are many natural supplements available that have clinical and scientific evidence of efficacy and I wholeheartedly recommend them to my patients with confidence and take them myself.

It seems the pharmaceutical companies are bent on giving the impression that they are the guardians of health and nothing else will help. Personally, I believe that doing all we can with a healthy lifestyle which includes exercise, diet and spiritual health will enable us to live a life with fewer health problems and less need for medications.

One thing that has definitely not changed, GOD IS STILL IN CONTROL. He is the God of HOPE, not fear.

God Bless



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. When asked what he does for a living he explains that he helps people get out of pain and improve their overall health without the use of drugs or surgery. Something everyone seems to want but nobody seems to know how to get there. 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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*Happy New Year!*



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# High Country Prison Ministry

By Jody Griffin  
Avery and Mitchell County



*“What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.”* (Luke 15:4-5)

Remember playing the game Hide and Go Seek as a child? (Of course, you do!) One person was designated the searcher while the rest of the kids would scatter. The ‘searcher’ would then count to a designated number like 10 (I always liked it when they counted to 25 as 25 enabled certain chubby little guys to find ample space to camouflage.) As the searcher counted upward, the panic would arise, and then those dreaded words from the ‘searcher’s’ mouth to my ears. “READY OR NOT, HERE I COME!”

The thrill would be listening as the ‘searcher’ approached and as I tried to be perfectly still to avoid detection. A more skillful hider could sometimes go completely overlooked. But as a less adept hider, I would soon find myself discovered and in a mad race to a “safe zone” where I hoped to arrive before feeling the searcher’s tag.

It’s a juvenile game played out many times a day by adults who fail to recognize that they are living their lives in some seriously sad attempts to evade discovery by God. God loves us and pursues us with a relentless Passion. Many people live in fear that God’s pursuit is “God out to get them and punish them”. They live in mortal terror of God’s judgment.

But God is not in pursuit of anyone for that purpose! God is seeking to capture our attention and to embrace us with Compassion, Care, and Comfort. God pursues us for the purpose of redemption! God pursues us in order to bring every person into the ultimate safe zone, the Loving Containment of Grace.

Life within the boundaries of this Loving Containment is secure and peaceful. It is a Place described by King David as being ‘beside the still waters’ (Ps. 23:4).



The Truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is that God is in pursuit of EVERY person, every day. Few people fully grasp this incredible message...

Prison can often be God’s tool used to bring someone to a clear understanding of the purpose behind God’s pursuit. Being caught up in the containment of a correctional facility can provide offenders an opportunity to consider the fruitless energy expended in running away from God. Some become aware of God’s desire to capture them and bring them into the “fold”. These are men who experience the thrill that comes in realizing the Joy their Master takes in their being found.

The Chaplain often is privileged to witness the beauty of an offender’s Epiphany to this Truth of the Great Love of God. And what an honor it is to see the fearful wanderer carried Home on the strong and able shoulders of Jesus! It brings the truest meaning to the words, HAPPY NEW YEAR! Please pray that 2021 will be a year of spiritual Awakening to the Truth of God’s Passionate pursuit of us all... and pray that CoVid will soon be a thing of the past, that our wonderful volunteers might soon return and that we might find some sense of “normal” opportunities for religious programming. Thank You and may God Bless you for your prayers and support!

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

*Happy New Year!*

**Jamie Miller, CPA**



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By Doug Harrell  
Mitchell County

Looking to the New year for some of us is concerning. The direction that our country is on worries me greatly. I don't want to go into politics with this Life Lesson but we are facing an administration that has already made several claims in their direction that are very concerning. Opening the flood gates to virtually unlimited abortions is the totally wrong direction that our nation needs to be traveling. As the scripture reads, every child born or unborn was knitted in their mother's womb by the very hand of God. *"For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well."* Psalms 139:13-14 KJV

I don't think God will cover a nation that blatantly sacrifices the unborn for the convenience of the mother or anyone else. As is stated so plainly in Proverbs, the fear of the Lord is the very beginning of wisdom, and accepting this as okay is definitely not okay! Be much in prayer that this situation will turn and that we will have a reunion and a return to the values that this nation was founded on.

Another issue that we are facing just blows me away. There have been comments from those that appear to take the reins of leadership that they are going to push to let transgender, I despise the very thought, men compete openly in all women sports! I don't care if you want to have your penis removed and breasts implanted, if you were born a male you will always be a male. Men and women are made men or women, it is not our choice, God decides that and you don't really have a vote. These folks that say they are for women's rights should be up in total arms over this. A man's body is created with different strengths than a woman's. Women have a unique strength of their own. I would like to see a transgender man give birth to a child, I bet they would want to go back to being a male real quickly!!

Let's open our borders to all and provide free everything and see how long that lasts! Provide free medical service and free college to all comers, pay off all the college debt of those who owe it. How crazy can we get? What happened to being willing to work and sacrifice, being rewarded for delayed gratification, winning the race not just participating! How about rewards for a job well done, not just showing up. If we want to just give it all away, leave your debit cards at the ATM with your pin printed on it for all to use. Leave your car unlocked with the keys in it and leave your wallet with plenty of money in it on the seat so those that need it can buy gas when they run out. Oh, by the way, take all the locks off your doors and be sure and leave your safe open so folks won't damage their fingernails trying to get it open!

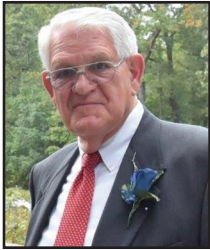
Another thing let's buyback or take all the guns from private citizens so no one can shoot anyone except the crooks who would not obey the laws anyway. Oh, and if you happened to have been born a different color, expect to be paid grievance money for something that may, just may, have happened in the past because of someone that lived hundreds of years ago.

Folks, wake up! I have grandchildren that are white, black, and brown and I sat down with some of them a few days ago and we talked about this. To begin with, all our blood is red, the skin color is only a VERY thin layer, it is what is underneath that counts. We are all entitled to what we are willing to work for, nothing more, nothing less. It is our attitude and our work ethic that makes the difference in what we receive out of life, not what someone gives us. You are not entitled to anything except the opportunity to go to work and achieve, to make a difference for yourself in this old world!

What about telling all our churches that they must hire non-Christians for their staff, welcome the LBGT to their pulpits, face fines if we don't agree to do this. May God help us all. The very foundation of our families, our churches, our very nation, is on the line. As each of us goes into the New Year, be in much prayer! *"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

Have a blessed and prosperous New Year.

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



Foster Parents – Why we Foster

Kyle and Sally McClure  
McDowell County



It wasn't until our biological children started elementary school that we realized the need for foster families in our county. Volunteering at the school opened my eyes to how many children live in conditions that are not ideal and how hard it is to find somewhere for these kids to go. We knew the Lord was calling us to foster but we didn't answer that call initially; with 3 kids already we thought there was no way we could handle anything else on our plate. But God didn't let up and after many signs from Him, we finally got licensed. We got our feet wet gradually by doing respite care, then we jumped right in. Is it always roses? No. But there is always more laughing, more love, and more fun! To us, foster care is about standing in the gap for a child. It means getting too attached to a child, opening yourself up to being vulnerable and to heartbreak. God created the family and it is sacred. Brokenness is part of foster care but God is all about restoring what is broken, and we want to be a part of that. Being a foster parent is about playing a role in God's redemptive work on earth, and what a privilege it is to be a part of something so beautiful!

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# Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

## An Encouraging Word: A Shelter from Discouragement

By Dr. Jack R. Hodges, Jr.  
Burke County



A new year has dawned. 2021 is here! When 2020 rolled around last year, none of us could have predicted the bizarre future that we would face in this past year. Indeed, viruses and sicknesses have been around since the dawn of creation. But there has rarely, if ever, in the history of humanity been the kind of cataclysmic or apocalyptic end-of-life threat to humanity that this coronavirus has posed. What we as a nation and a society have experienced has been nothing short of traumatic on so many levels of our being: physically, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. Chronic stress and anxiety are at an all-time high. People of all walks of society are taking anti-depressants and any other substance they can get their hands on to survive the pressure and stress. Suicide rates have skyrocketed and depression has overtaken this nation. We have never seen a time like this! And all of us need an encouraging word.

There aren't many words of encouragement being offered nowadays! Instead, all that we hear are discouraging words. Doom and gloom abound. The airwaves are filled with hatred and animosity and just like Isaiah predicted (Isaiah 3:5), *"People will oppress each other— man against man, neighbor against neighbor. The young will rise up against the old, and the contemptible person will assault the honored one."* The prophet Micah prophesied (Micah 7:6), *"For son treats father contemptuously, Daughter rises up against her mother; Daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; A person's enemies are the people of his own household."* Then Micah makes a powerful statement of faith and encouragement (v. 7), *"But as for me, I will watch expectantly for the Lord."*

Where will any encouragement come from? Who will offer an encouraging word? It might or might not come from a friend or family! It certainly won't be offered by our enemies or adversaries! Try as they may, the leaders of this country have failed to offer much hope for peace and/or security. Efforts to unify the divided groups, which are about as far apart ideologically as this country has ever seen, have failed to dispel fear—and have failed to offer us any real hope beyond mere survival. The future looks bleak and there aren't any real answers beyond the political jargon and empty promises. If I sound like a doomsday prophet, I don't mean to be—but let's face it, this world is an evil and cruel place. And we all know that prophetic scripture warns us that it is not getting any better—despite our best efforts to share the gospel of Christ Jesus, who alone offers hope and promise of a bright future.

Frowning faces, drooping shoulders, pleading eyes, argumentative spirits, anger, sadness, fear, and hatred abound. Everyone is longing for some hope. All are looking for some assurance and some encouragement. All are searching for some relief and yearning for answers. All are looking for someone to listen and hear

them as they cry out. There seems to be very little compassion and very little care. Do you hear the cries for help? Do you see the wounds and feel the dark, heavy clouds? Would you agree with me that very little care, concern, and compassion is to be found? And why is that? Perhaps part of the answer to that question is that everyone finds themselves in the same boat. Surrounded by the helplessness and hopelessness that is seen today, people, neighborhoods, towns, and cities are in desperate need of something. The world needs an encouraging word!

From where will encouragement come? It will only come from the Lord and from His Word of assurance and hope! Who will speak a word of encouragement? The Lord God, our Redeemer, Savior, and friend will speak to His children with uplifting words. He will answer your questions! He will respond to your needs! He will pour out His grace and mercy upon you and He will lift up your hearts and your souls—for you are precious to Him. You are His child and you belong to Him now and forevermore!

You don't have to look very far to see the heavy and overwhelming burden of discouragement that we all are carrying. As the citizens of this world emerge from a time of trauma, fear, and helplessness, they are heavy laden and full of discouragement. The reasons for such discouragement are countless. They are not new—for humankind has been facing the devastating results of sin and rebellion since the Garden of Eden.

As you and I face discouragement, what do we really need? The Word of God tells us what we need—we need a shelter or a place of refuge.

The Psalmist wrote (61:1-4), *"Hear my cry, O God; Give heed to my prayer. From the end of the earth I call to You when my heart is faint; Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For You have been a refuge for me, A tower of strength against the enemy. Let me dwell in Your tent forever; Let me take refuge in the shelter of Your wings. Selah."*

The story is told of a time when the devil once advertised his tools for sale at a public auction. When the prospective buyers assembled, there was one oddly shaped tool which was labeled "Not for sale." Asked to explain why this was, the devil answered, "I can spare my other tools, but I cannot spare this one. It is the most useful implement that I have. It is called Discouragement, and with it, I can work my way into hearts otherwise inaccessible. When I get this tool into a man's heart, the way is open to plant anything there I may desire." The legend embodies sober truth. Discouragement is a dangerous state of mind because it leaves one open to the assault of the enemies of the soul.

Is there an encouraging word for us today as we begin to live for Christ in 2021? You bet there is! It starts with Jesus! It continues each day with Jesus! And it ends in glory with Jesus! As Rick Warren once said, "The starting point in your healing is to get to know your Healer. You need to say, 'Jesus Christ, I don't know how You did this, but You took the guilt for every sin in the world—the ones have done to me and the ones done by me. You took that abuse on Yourself. I want to learn to love You, and I want You to come in and heal my heart and my mind and my body.'"

Jesus, as Lord and Savior becomes your shelter and your refuge from all that seeks to break you down, tear you asunder, push you into the dirt, and trample all over you. The Lord is the lifter of your soul. He is the bright and morning star. He is the Alpha and the Omega. He is the first and the last, the beginning and the end—and all that we hope and trust begins and ends with Him!

You have a shelter in Christ. The Psalmist would proclaim (91:2-7), *"My refuge and my fortress. My God, in whom I trust. 'For it is He who delivers you from the snare of the trapper And from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with His pinions, And under His wings you may seek refuge; His faithfulness is a shield and bulwark. You will not be afraid of the terror by night, Or of the arrow that flies by day; Of the pestilence that stalks in darkness, Or of the destruction that lays waste at noon. A thousand may fall at your side And ten thousand at your right hand, But it shall not approach you.'" And in verse 10 he spoke with assurance, "No evil will befall you, Nor will any plague come near your tent."*

Time and time again the Psalmist spoke words of encouragement over and against discouragement and fear. *"For You have been a refuge for me, A tower of strength against the enemy. Let me dwell in Your tent forever; Let me take refuge in the shelter of Your wings. Selah."* (Psalms 61:3-4) *"For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle; In the secret place of His tent He will hide me; He will lift me upon a rock."* (Psalms 27:5)

And in Psalms 27:4 he prayed and asked, *"One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the LORD And to meditate in His temple."* Are you overwhelmed with discouragement? Are you paralyzed with fear? What do you need? Encouragement! Who do you need? The Lord! You need the One who is your only shelter from the storm of life. You need the Savior who has willingly laid down His life for yours; who shed His blood for you and gave His life so that you could find shelter in Him. He offers you peace amid war and strife. He gives you hope in the face of helplessness and hopelessness. He hands you assurance when your heart is weak and your mind is overwhelmed. He draws you close to Himself, covers you in the shelter of His wings, and leads you to the path of righteousness for His name's sake.

We have heard and have been instructed over the previous year to "shelter in place." That's a term that has become for many of us, a discouraging threat to our freedom and an inhibitor of our self-pursuit of happiness and prosperity. But today, I want you to hear the blessed words of your Savior. He says "I am your refuge and strength. Come shelter in my place." He invites you, "Come unto me, all you who are weary and heavy-laden—and I will give you rest." Glory and hal-lelujah!

*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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He Holds All Things Together

By John McCoury  
Roan Mountain, Tennessee

*“The Son is the gleaming brightness of God's glory. He is the exact likeness of God's being. He uses His powerful word to hold all things together.”* Hebrews 1:3 That is an amazing statement. It is put in the present tense, saying that He is the One who is keeping things going right now.

Stanford University is the site of a linear accelerator, a mighty two-mile-long atom smasher. It is a great lever with which scientists try to pry the lid off the secrets of matter and discover what is in the miniature world of the atom, the neutron, and the proton. Linear Accelerator scientists have discovered a complexity they never dreamed of, and they have found particles that they cannot even invent enough names for. But one thing they are consistently discovering is that there is some strange force that holds everything together. They do not know what to call it, and they do not know how to identify it. They talk about a kind of cosmic glue that holds things together. Isn't it fascinating that here in the Word of God you have that exact kind of terminology used of Jesus! If you want a name for the force that holds the universe together it is very simple: His name is Jesus. He sustains the universe by His powerful word.



That is not only true of the physical universe, including our bodies and all that we are, but it is true of all the other forces and powers in the universe — physical, psychological, social, spiritual, whatever; He is in charge of them all. After the resurrection, when our Lord appeared to the disciples by the Sea of Galilee, in the most forthright terms, simple, artlessly, He said to them, *“All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.”* Matthew 28:18 This means He not only controls all the physical forces of the planet and the universe, but He controls all the events that occur upon them. This is something Christians tend to forget. We get so used to seeing things through the secular eyes of the media, and other information forces around us, that we forget that behind the events that fill the pages of our newspapers is a mighty controlling hand that brings them all together, permitting some things to happen, restraining other things.

I know that these events that capture our attention today are likewise going to seem faded and trivial soon. Yet they are not without meaning. The Bible tells us a mighty hand is shaping the destiny of nations and of individuals. All of these things have been and will always remain in the power of Him who sustains the universe by the word of His power. Lord Jesus, thank you that you are the One who holds all things together. Teach me to trust in you, even when things seem to be falling apart. Do we have a world view in which the Lord Jesus Christ is the centrifugal force? Is this merely intellectual -- or does the power of His Presence translate into confident trust in the everyday events of our lives?

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

Tender Mercies

By Patricia Jackson  
McDowell County

We notice the tone of voice in the first few words a person speaks to us, whether harsh, hurried, helpful, or kind. In a recent conversation with a telephone associate, I was left with an impression of how useful and dedicated she was to solve my problem. As I thought about her kindness, I remembered scriptures in the bible about tender mercies, found numerous times throughout the bible.

Merriman Webster defines tender as gentleness, compassion, sympathy, concern, mercy, and love. Also young, fragile, vulnerable. Where do these emotions come from? 2 Corinthians 1: 3 tells us that *“God, the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of mercies and God of all comfort.”* He showers his children with mercies and all comfort. What a blessed promise!! Abraham and Sarah received God’s tender mercies with the birth of a son. God had promised this, and “he was able also to perform.”

Why does God grant us “tender mercies”? It may be due to a need in our life, our prayer to him, and our faith. God also comforts us in our tribulations that we may comfort others in trouble or suffering.



There are many ways we might experience tender mercies. Through blessings, strength to go on, protection, assurance, guidance, loving-kindness, support, and even spiritual gifts. Perhaps through ordinary moments in our life, according to our conditions and suited to the particular situation or moment we face. These moments are often unexplained, but that doesn’t make them less real. After Jesus delivered the man from a legion of demons, he prayed that he might stay with Jesus. But Jesus refused him and told him to “go home to thy friends and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee.” Without God’s compassion and mercies, we would be consumed. (Lamentations, 3:22). His tender mercy gives us eternal life and saves us from hell.

Hebrews 4:16 tells us, *“to come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and grace to help in time of need.”* Isaiah 55: 3 tells us that there is an everlasting covenant with us, even the sure mercies of David can be ours. Just as God protected David from his enemies, he will also save us.

Tender mercies are a gift from an all-mighty God, all-knowing and seeing; to us, as undeserving as we may be. *“Remember, O Lord thy tender mercies and thy loving-kindnesses.”* Think on Psalm 25:6 daily as we thank God for our mercies and share the news with others.

Patricia Jackson is the Assistant Teacher for the Ladies Class at Redeemed Free Will Baptist Church, Glenwood, NC. She is a grant writer for non-profits, a published author and retired Nursing Home Administrator. She lives in Rutherford County with her husband. Contact information: email address: wyo2go@bellsouth.net.

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By Joy Baldwin  
Madison County

**CREATOR OF YOUR SOUL**

*God created vast new heavens  
He made the deep blue sea  
The lovely mountains, hills and trees,  
Sun's light and the heavenly breeze.*

*There was nothing everywhere  
Twas then God had a plan  
Forming creatures great and small  
With His hands created man.*

*The spoken word had power  
From God's throne above  
All creation obeyed His voice  
To us He gave great love.*

*So when you are discouraged  
In the Bible we are told  
The words you speak have power  
From Creator of your soul.*



Joy Baldwin 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 "Homecoming" will soon be heard by many.



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**No Regrets We Must Unite as a Body**  
By Dean Honeycutt  
Mitchell County

Happy New Year and God bless you. Wow, how do we wrap our minds around 2020 and what do we anticipate for 2021? Many of us have had a difficult 2020. This past year has been like a roller coaster as we have all tried to navigate the waters of COVID-19. On top of that my wife has cared tirelessly for her dad, Jimmy Self. As I write this he appears to be in his final days on earth. Thank the Lord for heaven.

Many of you have been sick and God has healed you. Others have buried loved ones. We have been separated from our loved ones due to restrictions placed on us by our state governments. Surgeries have been postponed and people have suffered. Churches have shut down and many are still struggling across our nation. At times I have been very frustrated with the executive orders from our governor. I realize that he may be acting in our best interest. However, everything we have been asked to do social distance, wear a mask, not gather, and no visits to nursing homes. All these things seem to be what we would expect to stop COVID-19 from spreading. But none of these things seem to be working.

I know hindsight is 50/50. But what difference would it had made had we allowed families and our elderly to choose for themselves to see their loved ones in our nursing homes and hospitals. We should be able to serve God and serve others in need according to the dictates of our hearts. In the story of the "Good Samaritan," two religious leaders passed by a wounded dying man unwilling to offer help. However, the Samaritan chose to risk his life and put himself at risk to help the wounded man. If we were in the same situation and the wounded man left to die alone were not wearing a mask would we "get off our donkey" to help? The point is we should be able to choose for ourselves in the exercise of our Christian faith to visit people in nursing homes and hospitals.

I know everyone has an opinion about COVID-19 and what to do. We do not hear many people saying repent and turn to God. We do not hear our leaders calling for repentance and humility before God. Instead, they are saying "science will lead us out." Every time God sent a plague, or disease to earth what the Bible calls a judgment from God before things got better people had to repent and turn to God. The very purpose of a judgment from God is to repent and turn to God for help. This is what 2 Chronicles 7:13-14 directs us to do. 13 "If I shut up heaven that there be no rain, or if I command the locusts to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among my people; 14 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.

A pestilence is a disease, it is a virus, it is a sickness. This is the exact same thing Jesus warned us about Matthew 24:6-8 (KJV 1900) 6 "And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. 7 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. 8 All these are the beginning of sorrows."


"The beginning of sorrows" here is the word for birth pains. These are the pains of contraction that a woman experiences before the birth of a child. So, Jesus is telling His church that we are going to experience some "birth pains" before the rapture and second coming of Christ to earth. The problem is Jesus told us the "birth pains" are coming and you can expect them, but the church was unprepared. Just put things into perspective. The most brilliant minds in the world and the most powerful governments could not stop Covid-19. Sounds like God is trying to get our attention. The "birth pains" will intensify the closer we move toward "The Great Tribulation." "The birth pains" prepare the Church for the Second Coming of Christ. God is preparing His Church. Ephesians 5:26-27 (KJV 1900) 26 "That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."

So as a church, we have a lot of work cut out for us as we move forward by faith. The Birth pains will come and go; they are inevitable. How we respond to a lost and dying world during times of tribulation will make a difference. The body of Christ must come together in unity and faith to do what the church is called to do. In the words of Milton Hollifield "there will be different opinions about wearing masks and seating, but for goodness sakes do not let that stop the train." The Gospel train needs to move forward by faith. Just like a marriage in sickness and in health, with or without COVID-19 we must move forward in faith. If you are part of the "Body of Christ" meet with your church family, encourage your pastor, and take the Gospel to the end of the world.

The early New Testament church hazarded their lives for the sake of the gospel. Would God expect anything less of us? I have had people tell me "we will see you in the spring or whenever." I have people tell me they are afraid to come to church, but I see them in restaurants. Folks, we are the Body of Christ, and the Body cannot function the way it needs to when parts are missing. God has a purpose in all things and as believers, we must come together as a body in unity. The Church is a local visible body of believers who meet to worship God and take the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

Live with No Regrets

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.



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# Mine Creek Baptist Church

## Come Quickly, Lord Jesus!

By Chris Rathbone  
Mitchell County

This has been a thought and prayer of mine many times over the last year. For sure it has come across the lips and thoughts of many of God's children. The events of 2020 have placed a lot of hardships upon most all folks. The emotional, mental, physical, and financial consequences will most likely be felt for a long time. A lot of folks are right now in some of the direst circumstances they have faced in their lives. For sure this past year will be talked about in history lessons (if it is allowed) for years to come if God allows time to stand. Do you know how our grandparents used to tell us of things they went through? Well, if we live long enough, we'll be telling our grandchildren about 2020!

We have endured a pandemic, clowns in politics, the bias in news media, one of the most ungodly attacks on a sitting president on either side of the political aisle, nonsensical mandates handed down by people who have no idea of the struggles of everyday working people, division on a scale not seen in decades, riots from special interest groups who just want to cause chaos, etc, etc, etc. In the middle of all this, the politicians, and media, who for the most part aren't affected that much by the decisions that they are insisting everyone but themselves abide by, are overlooking the effects this mess is having on the regular citizen.

They insisted that businesses close down or operate at a reduced capacity without any regard for how the owners or employees will provide for their families. What little help was given ended because of the division across the political landscape. While they were arguing about trying to secure funding for things that had nothing to do with helping people, American citizens were the ones scrambling to pay the bills while the rich politicians did not have to worry about anything but reelection.....just saying.

Not only has there been the economic toll, but there has been a human toll that goes beyond what the numbers the media throws at us every single day. Now before you start getting all ruffed up at me thinking I don't care about anybody, let me share a few things. I personally know folks that died or had loved ones that have died because of the effects left behind by COVID. My mom has been in the hospital for over 4 weeks recovering from it. Several members of my extended family have had it and some are now sick while I'm sitting here writing this article. Matter of fact, I've had it myself. Not for a minute am I downplaying the seriousness of this illness. Daily I pray for those who are sick and for the protection of others. Masks, social distancing, drive-in services, online services, etc., are things we have done in my family and church family to help. And you know what, folks still got sick....just saying. If you're not too mad at me to keep reading, let me share something personal that has taken place in my own family. A story and many others like it that the media and politicians are ignoring on purpose.

For many years, my mom's health has been in decline. The last 2 years have been especially tough. She was in and out of the hospital many times. During this time, my dad very seldom left her side. Keep in mind that he is almost 83 years old. He has sat at her bedside often day and night. Several times I pleaded with him to let me take him home and rest, but he would refuse. On the few occasions he did, early the next morning he was back at her side. To be honest, a few times when she was in for rehab, Dad would take her home before she was ready. This only made things worse in the long run, but all they could think about in their minds was being home together. Eventually, Mom's health declined to the point where she could no longer stand or walk. As it was no longer safe for either one of them for her to be home, she made the hard but reluctant decision to enter a local long term care facility. She didn't want to go, Dad didn't want her to go, we didn't want her to go, but her declining health condition forced a necessary decision. Dad went to see her every day. Some days staying all day till just before dark. Each evening he left, there would be tears as Mom would want him to stay. When he would get home, he called my phone saying he wanted to bring Mom home. Many times the conversation got heated between me and Dad because he thinks she can come home but her health just will not allow it. He still tells me almost every time we talk, he wants Mom home.

Now fast forward to last March. As the news of the virus came to the forefront, suddenly, my parents who have been married for over 61 years were told they cannot see each other. Dad would sometimes go to the door three times a day to see Mom only to be told he can't. He would come home and call me to tell me they wouldn't let him see her. This was a daily occurrence for months. They were only allowed phone calls, a few visits through windows, and a few outside visits with no contact. In no way am I accusing nor blaming the wonderful caregivers at our local facility, they are only doing what has been handed down to them. To Dad and Mom, however, all they could understand was that they were being kept apart. Dad was already struggling with memory issues. When he wasn't allowed to visit Mom, these issues accelerated tremendously. Since March, I have slowly watched the life and joy fade from my Dad's eyes. A man who was full of jokes, life, and busyness is dying from depression and loneliness. My Dad will most likely die because of COVID, but not in the way many would think.

We can do better. Somewhere in the middle of all this our society, especially those making blanket decisions, needs to have compassion and considerations for situations like this. The sad thing is that tens of thousands of people are suffering the same way. I've talked to many workers who share the suffering that is going on in these facilities not because of the virus, but because of loneliness. Several times both my parents have said they have nothing to live for now.

Certainly, I'm not claiming to know exactly what to do, but somewhere, somehow, someone needs to see that it is better for folks like my parents to at least be able to see each other. Many don't have but a few years left and for our society and government to force them to live it out in loneliness and misery is unethical



and immoral. Financial and health complications leave many with no other option but to have loved ones in long term healthcare facilities.

Jesus will never leave us nor forsake us; we can count on that. These have been difficult days and according to scripture will continue in that direction. I'm certainly not losing hope for my hope is in Him. My grandmother, Mammie, would pray for death or Jesus to come. As a young man with my whole life before me, I just couldn't understand why anyone would pray for that. As I've watched my parents and all the events transpire over the last year, now I understand. Keep looking up children of God, Jesus is coming soon. Even so, quickly come Lord Jesus.

*"He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Revelation 22:20*

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



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Sudoku Solution

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9	8	7	4	2	6	1	5	3
3	2	8	9	4	1	5	6	7
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Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

A New Season

By Caron Cline  
Burke County



The year 2020 on the Gregorian calendar coincides with the Hebrew years 5780-5781 because the Jewish New Year celebration, Rosh Hashanah, occurs during our month of September. The year 5780 ushered in a new decade with a focus on speaking forth. The Hebrew letter for 80 is also the Hebrew word for ‘mouth’. Interestingly, this Jewish year in which many prophesied a new decade for speaking the word of God became a year in which mouths were covered by masks, pulpits and churches were emptied, and the normal routines of life restricted. Businesses have closed, virtual education has replaced the norm, and fear of the unknown invades our thoughts. A quick survey would reveal that the average American anxiously awaits the close of 2020. But will 2021 be an improvement? Or will it hold more of the same? What is the call of God to His people during times of tribulation? Jesus promised that in this world we would have tribulation, but we were to be of good cheer for He has overcome the world! The average Christian is seemingly more full of fear than cheer. Obviously, there is a disconnect at some point. We must accept that crossing the threshold of 2021 will not erase the many afflictions of 2020; in reality, the pressures of a world in turmoil will intensify. God has entrusted His people to this very season. Acts 17 reminds us that God has appointed our times and the boundaries of our habitation; we are in this place, at this time, on purpose! Therefore, we must realign our focus, restore our worship, and resume our mission.

Isaiah was already a prophet in Israel when King Uzziah died, after reigning for 52 years. He was a king ‘who did right in the eyes of the Lord’. (2 Chronicles 26) The temptation must have been strong to place the hopes and dreams of a nation upon King Uzziah rather than God. Satan deceives many into believing that the problems in our land are political and cannot be resolved otherwise. Isaiah must have struggled with the same thoughts until God realigned his focus. Isaiah 6:1-5 are his own testimony: “*In the year of King Uzziah’s death, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the Temple. Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called out to another and said, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory’. And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of Him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. Then I said, ‘Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts’*” . Isaiah received a revelation that God was on the throne and that He had all power in heaven and in the earth. His reign was eternal and no one can thwart His purposes. Instead of focusing on the political scene, the dangers of a mysterious and deadly virus, and a volatile economy, the writer of Hebrews commands us to fix our eyes on Jesus, the author, and perfecter of our faith. (Hebrews 12) After all, “our citizenship is in heaven from which we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory...” Settling the question of Who is on the throne of our lives will restore our worship.

The angels surrounding the throne of God are in a constant state of worship. Isaiah witnessed their unending praises for the One who holds all things together by the power of His Word. As John was given the Revelation of Jesus Christ on the isle of Patmos, more snapshots of heavenly worship are released. Revelation 4:8-11 says, “*And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, Who was and Who is and Who is to come’. And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him Who sits on the throne, to Him Who lives forever and ever; the twenty-four elders fall down before Him Who sits on the throne, and will worship Him Who lives forever and ever; and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, ‘Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created’*”.

Never-ending worship is our eternal destiny and as we bring the sacrifice of praise before the throne of grace while here on planet earth our troubles will diminish in a crescendo of thanksgiving. God always inhabits the praises of His people and His Presence extinguishes the schemes of Satan, our adversary. As we realign our focus and restore our worship the Lord will set before us an open door that we might resume our mission. That mission, if we choose to accept it, is the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Regardless of the state of our society, the shutdowns, the mayhem, the anxiety, and the frustration, the power of the word of God is unhindered. More than ever, people are seeking peace, hope, and comfort amid this global pandemic. As ambassadors of the Prince of Peace our mission is simple; be prepared to offer an answer for the hope that is within. Study the Word, meditate upon it, memorize it, and expect the Spirit of God to open doors of opportunity to share the good news of a God who loved the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him will never perish but will have eternal life. Jesus Christ came into this world to seek and to save the lost. After His death, burial and resurrection, Jesus spent forty days instructing His followers on the kingdom of God, commanding them to go into all the world and make disciples. He then ascended into heaven, sat down at the right hand of God, and assumed the role of our eternal Intercessor. He is anxiously awaiting the day when His bride is complete and made ready for His return. However, for some mysterious reason, we have been commissioned to participate in this rescue mission. The time has come for us to set our minds on the things above, not on all the insanity surrounding us each day. May we realign our focus, restore our worship, and resume our mission. The world is waiting...

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.



# Obedient Heart Fellowship

## Facts First!

By Jim Huskins  
*McDowell County*

The world's most famous detective never existed. Or did he?

Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character, but his astounding deductive reasoning is rooted in reality. It existed in the mind of Sherlock's creator, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Remembered as an author, Doyle also practiced medicine. During med school, he clerked for one of his professors, Dr. Joseph Bell. Bell's keen powers of observation and frequent collaboration with the Edinburgh police were inspirations for Holmes. Bell's abilities also nurtured Doyle's talent for deduction.

Once while walking with a friend, Doyle and his companion noticed a fresh set of bicycle tracks. The other man speculated that the tracks may have been made by a person known to both parties. Doyle casually observed that such could not be the case because the man mentioned used a different brand of tires. Sherlock Holmes is the brainchild of his creator

As Holmes, Doyle often commented on the scarcity of logic. In *A Scandal in Bohemia*, he said: “Never theorize before you have data. Invariably you end up twisting facts to suit theories instead of theories to suit facts.” I call such defective thinking “reverse twist” logic.

Reverse twist is the foundation of a number of common attitudes: Why do I have to study history? I don't live in the past. Why do I have to study algebra? I'm not going to be a math teacher. Why do I have to know to whom the book of Galatians was written or what was going on back then? I just want to know what it means today. Why do I have to read the stupid Old Testament? It's gross and boring, and Jesus did away with all that. Why do I have to know anything about doctrine? That's so old fashioned. My preacher tells me what I'm supposed to believe.

Reverse twist ignores the certainty that knowing the past prepares one to better understand and negotiate the future. It obscures the fact that the most valuable benefit of studying mathematics is learning logical thought. No passage of scripture can be understood without the context that led to its creation. The first two-thirds of the Bible is the context for the part most refer to as “New Testament.” Reverse twist logic lulls one into forgetting that no preacher or teacher or spiritual guide or “mommy” will be with us when we stand before God Almighty and give an account of how we responded to His claim on our lives.

The tendency to twist facts to suit theories is rampant in the church. I recently watched a video where a Christian radio-show host referred to Matthew 5:17-19. Jesus said that He did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets. The radio host commented, “That doesn’t mean that the Law would never be abolished because it was when He fulfilled it.” The only way this man could have made such a “wretched” statement is that his theory told him a proclamation by the Son of God had to be “twisted” in order to fit his convictions rather than his convictions changed to reflect the Word of God.

One of the most damaging “twists” among believers is the widespread belief that the “church” somehow replaced the “Nation of Israel” in God’s plan. Amos 3:7 states: *“For the Lord, YHVH will do nothing, unless He has revealed His counsel to His servants the prophets.”* No prophecy claims that Unchanging God will break His promises to love and redeem Israel or replace His chosen people with some other group. The emphatic opposite of that message is found throughout scripture. Zechariah 2:8 says that Israel is the apple of God’s eye. Deuteronomy 31:6 says that God will never leave or forsake Israel. Isaiah 11:12 says that God: *“will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.”* Jeremiah 31:35-37 says that God will only abandon Israel *“If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below can be explored.”* The same promises are found in Ezekiel 37:27, Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39, Zechariah chapters 12-14, and Romans 11:23-27. The woman in Revelation 12 who gives birth to Messiah is Israel. She is protected and nurtured during the apocalypse.

Influential theologians proclaim that the “church” is now “spiritual Israel.” This is a grotesque reverse twist of fundamental doctrine: God will never abandon Israel. With the facts of Bible teaching and prophecy properly considered, it is impossible to conclude that Unchanging God has lied and reversed course. Jesus made no such claim. He stated in Matthew 15:24 that He “*was sent only to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.*”

One of the facts replacement theologians ignore or twist is that every time the New Testament uses the word “Israel”, it is referring to the blood descendants of Jacob. How could anyone conclude that the Son of God would endure the indignities and implications of the incarnation just to abandon four thousand years of God’s relationship with mankind? Jesus did not come to start a new religion. He came to fulfill the many, divine promises made to God’s people: Israel.

The actual Good News is that, by grace and through faith in Messiah, we are allowed to be grafted into His chosen people. Ephesians 2:12-13 proclaims joyfully: *“Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”* Hallelujah!

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.  
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*Jim & Beverly Huskins are members of Obedient Heart Fellowship.*



# Glenwood Baptist Church

## “Something to Think About” - Lord, What Do You Want Me To Do?

By Dennis Love  
*McDowell County*

After his glorious conversion in Acts 9, Paul asked God a question that every one of us should ask: “Lord, what do You want me to do?” Each of us is unique: no one has a thumbprint like yours. No one has DNA like yours. No wonder God has a job for you to do that no one else can do quite as you can. Paul never stopped asking this question. I’m afraid that we do. Now that we have broken through into another New Year and 2020 is behind us, isn’t it time for us to start asking, “Lord, what do You want me to do today?” Since there is a purpose for our life that is accompanied by a divine plan that existed even before we took our first breath, we must constantly ask the Lord this question on an ongoing basis. Isn’t it an awesome and profound thought that God says to you and me; *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you”* (Jeremiah 1:5.) In other words, before your parents knew you and before you were even conceived, God knew you and He knew me. You are not an accident. There is a specific, tailor-made design for your life. God has a purpose and a plan just for you. **THINK ABOUT THAT.** Before you were conceived, God knew you! God also said in that same verse that He ordained Jeremiah to be a prophet to the nations. Do we understand that God has “ordained” us for a special task for which He has uniquely gifted us? Just as God has set and assigned each star in the heavens, He has assigned you a job that no one can do quite as you can. Realize that true success in life comes with knowing God’s will for your life and then doing it. But before that can ever happen we must ask the Lord this question; “Lord, what do You want me to do?” Be sincere and ask the Lord to show you the job He has just for you to do that no one else can do like you! There is a divine plan for you! There is a divine purpose for you! And that divine plan and purpose were put in place even before you were born. Don’t you think that 2021 is the year for you to seek it and then fulfill it? This could be a spiritual year like no other if we will sincerely ask the Lord the same question Paul asked; “Lord, what do You want me to do? Now, in my opinion, that’s something to really think about! It’s not only something to really think about it, it’s something we should put into practice now before it is too late. Life will never work like it ought to work and you will never feel right until we ask this question and then carry it out to fruition. “Lord, what do You want me to do?”

*Dr. Dennis Love is the Senior Pastor at Glenwood Baptist Church in Marion, NC. He and his wife Vicki have been married for 40 years, and they have lived in Marion for six years. They have two sons and four grandchildren and two step-grandchildren.*



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# Berry Chapel Baptist Church

## God's Goal

By Steve Williams  
Mitchell County



What's God's goal for 2021? Well, let me share with you first, what I believe God's goal for 2020 was. It was to shake up this world and this nation that we are living in and He sure has done a great job. God has also shown us that common sense does not exist in our mainstream media anymore. Common sense seems to no longer exist in the lives of many people. They want to do away with Law and order, Many of these Social groups think that only their agenda matters. People in the Black Lives Matter movement say they matter. I will agree that they do but the Bible tells me in John 3:16 that all lives matter. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Government officials try to tell us that our churches are not essential. But again the Bible says Hebrews 10:25 "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another:" and so much the more, as we see the day approaching. The day is coming and people better open their eyes. What used to be right has become wrong and wrong has become right. Folks' sin has not changed, but what has happened is people have lost all common sense. To put it in simple mountain talk I believe that America and this world have lost their marbles.

God's goal for 2021 is the same as it has been since the beginning of time, and that is for man to get closer to God, to be saved, and have a personal relationship with Him. He wants to grow our faith and strengthen our faith in Him. All through the Bible, we have seen God test people's faith in Him. He tested Noah to see if he would build an Ark, Abraham to go to a place that He would show him, only when he got there. David to fight a giant that stood before him. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to stand up for Him when facing a fiery furnace. And Daniel to keep praying no matter what man said. And all of these and many more have passed the test because their faith was in Him and they stood true.

I believe Christians in America will be tested in 2021 as they have never been tested before. I believe God is trying to draw us closer to Him in these coming days. God is trying to draw us away from the things of this world that have pulled us away from God, and it is up to us to accept that challenge. In this coming year, Christians better learn to stand on the Word of God instead of ignoring it. Christians challenge all Christians to Fact Check their lives using God's Word this coming year. I believe many lives would drastically change. Christians it's sad but we have allowed this world to change us instead of us changing the world. It is time to be the Christian that we claim we are or to quit claiming to be the Christian we say we are.

We all need to understand this great truth. Christian in America our lives do not depend on who is in the White House. Our lives do not depend on who holds the most seats in the house or the senate of our government. Our lives depend on an All Mighty God who we have placed our Faith and Trust in and who has delivered our soul from hell. If you place your faith in man or a government you have only fooled yourself. If you have placed your faith in God, you will be a winner, just like all of those who placed their faith before you.

## Words of Wisdom:

- Listen to God you may learn Something.
- Truth is like iodine, it helps kill germs.
- It costs to follow God, but it costs more not to.
- All that Christ has, He shares with His people.
- The way you know you're on the right track is it's usually uphill

## Some Neat Church Signs:

- The best vitamin for a Christian is B1
- Under the same management for over 2000 years
- Try Jesus. If you don't like Him, the devil will always take you back
- You can give without loving but you cannot love without giving
- Never give the devil a ride. He will always want to drive

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

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Goodbye to 2020

By Terry Cheek Th.D.  
McDowell County

By the time you open this issue of the Blue Ridge Christian News, you will have said goodbye to 2020. Last year brought us a situation only our most dreadful nightmares would equal, COVID-19. On top of that, we lived through a hotly contested election, one that still carries question's seeking answers. On top of these two massive events, we all have memories of the previous year, some good and some not so good. If we are teachable, we have walked away from 2020 much wiser and more mature than when the year started.

As we move into 2021 many of us will continue with a tradition of resolutions and promises with good, sincere intentions. Others may plan diligently seeking prosperity and influence while an increasing number of people will become immersed in fear. Looking into the coming year let's take this time to take a deep breath and lean upon God's Word for guidance, encouragement, and inspiration. Notice with me James 2:18 *"Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works."* When we make resolutions, we are in fact displaying our faith. Are our resolutions made through faith in God, that He controls the outcome in our lives? Or are our resolutions made through faith in ourselves, that we control the outcome in our lives? The answer to these questions will determine how successful 2021 is for us. Resolutions are not bad until we approach them in our own power ignoring the role of God in our lives. Many of our personal, professional, and national problems can be attributed to our pride and not seeking God in making our decisions. Start 2021 off right, seeking God in every decision you make. You will be stronger for it.

The next issue we will face can be referred to as our success. Let's begin again with God's Word. Luke 12:16-21 *"And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: (17) And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? (18) And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. (19) And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. (20) But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? (21) So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."* Jesus' parable will touch the heart of every American. Many of us are successful beyond our wildest imaginations. God has blessed us richly is an understatement. Yet how often do we ask ourselves; what do I do with my success? To answer this, we must look into a mirror, physical and spiritual. Are we going to open more bank accounts? Are we going to build bigger barns in 2021? I'm not questioning retirement or estate planning, but I am asking you to consider how much is enough. There comes a point in life when we ignore God's conviction and pursue personal greed. God's blessing in and through our life is given to pass along and bless others. Not just materially or financially but also with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Using our financial blessing to open a door to spread the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ is laying up a treasure that can never be taxed or its value diminished by the stock market.

Bear with me for one last thought. 2021 for some will be a year of fear. For example, the loss of jobs, health, and loved ones can bring about tremendous fear. Let's again turn to God's Word. 1 Peter 5:8-9 *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: (9) Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world."* Fear is the product of the devil! As it was in Job's life God may permit the devil to afflict our life to our benefit in the end. God has not asked any more of us than He has our brothers and sisters in Christ before us. Will we suffer in the coming year? Yes, in ways we do not know, but yes, we will. The opportunity we have right now is to prepare for it and approach it with faith that will resist the devil and bring glory to God! Are you ready for 2021?

Until we meet again in print or person may God keep you firmly in His grip.

Terry is the Executive Director and broadcaster of The Inspiring Word media ministry. You can contact Terry by email at [theinspiringword@gmail.com](mailto:theinspiringword@gmail.com) Or by visiting [www.theinspiringword.org](http://www.theinspiringword.org)



Starting Deep Meaningful Conversations in 2021

By Rev. John B. Sorensen



After a year of quarantines and isolation, I think many of us long to connect with others in a deep and meaningful way. But doing this during COVID-19 has been difficult. I'm thankful for the technology we have to continue to keep in touch with others while social distancing. So how do we go deeper and really connect with others on a personal, emotional, and spiritual level when social restrictions are still in place?

Regardless of what policies are in place in your community, we can have those meaningful conversations at a distance or even over technology. We simply need to be intentional in starting them.

Look for opportunities to connect with others. Many of the people we know or interact with within the community are seeking something meaningful. Pray that God will lead you to someone around you who is ready to engage in conversation.

Listen with both your ears and your heart. Connecting with others is all about building relationships. Begin the conversation casually by talking about work, their family, or their favorite hobbies that they have missed during the pandemic. Build an easy-going rapport, but listen carefully for areas where someone might be struggling. Many people will open up when they feel that someone cares about what they are saying.

Ask questions that lead to a deeper spiritual conversation. While getting to know someone is wonderful, sharing the best news we have – that we can have hope in Jesus Christ – is even better. However, this shouldn't be forced. Ask questions to see where they are in their spiritual walk. While some may be closed to talking about spiritual matters, others will be open.

Here are a few questions you can ask to move from casual conversation to a deeper, more meaningful, spiritual conversation.

- Do you have a spiritual background? Or do you ever think about spiritual things?
- Do you think you have ever seen evidence of God in your life? Or have you ever seen God answer prayer?
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how fulfilling would you say your life is? If God were more a part of your life, would it move one way or the other?

Share your story. Your personal experience about what God has done in your life is powerful. It allows your friend to get to know you better, and it is a testimony of God's love and grace for all of us. Your story could be exactly what the person needs to take that next step towards Jesus.

Connecting with others doesn't have to be restricted to face-to-face conversations. If we pay attention and take the initiative, we can engage in meaningful conversations with others over the phone, on video chat, or standing six feet apart. Take that step and go deeper in 2021.

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](http://evangelismexplosion.org).

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Dr. James Dobson Family Institute

By Dr. James Dobson

Question: Dr. Dobson, I have seven grandchildren that I think are just wonderful, but I don't know how to talk to them when we are together. It has been a long time since I was young. How can I engage these kids in conversation and draw them to me? What should I talk to them about?

Answer: Children love to talk about fun things and funny things. They love to play games and solve puzzles and look at pictures. When you interject yourself into their world at these and other points of interest, and if you aren't cranky and demanding, they will open themselves to you. All you have to do is give them your time and attention. Then you won't be able to keep them off your lap!

Now, concerning what you should talk about with your grandchildren: One of the most important contributions you can make is to teach them about your family's early history, about the obstacles your family overcame, and what has made their stories unique. Education consultant and author Cheri Fuller applied the lyrics of an old African song to this responsibility. It included this line: "When an old person dies, it's as if a library burns down." You are the "library" for your grandchildren, being able to connect them with their past. It is your obligation and privilege, I believe, to give them a sense of identity within the family.

My great-grandmother helped raise me during my early years. When I was just three or four years old, I remember her telling me stories about her life on the frontier. She told me how she would sit in her log cabin at night and hear the mountain lions come down from the hillside looking for the pigs. She would describe fascinating experiences that helped me understand how different life was then. The time we spent together bonded us to one another. The stories she told me then are still vivid in my memory. They helped open my mind to a love of history, a subject that still fascinates me to this day.

I suggest you gather your grandkids around and start telling them stories about your past—of your courtship with their grandmother, what she looked like, and why you fell in love with her. Then tell them how you came to a relationship with Jesus Christ and what that did for you. I think you'll find your little ones will be eating out of your hand.

James Dobson, Jr. is an American evangelical Christian author, psychologist, and founder in 1977 of Focus on the Family

*And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe [and] to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: Deuteronomy 28:1-68*



Riches of God's Grace to Man's Soul

By Joe Sturz  
Shenandoah, Virginia



To the born-again Christian (John 3:3-8) whom God has tried and delivered (Psalms 7:8-10), strengthening graces (Romans 5:3-5) have been given in the form of:

- confirmed faith in Jesus Christ as His Lord and Savior (I Peter 1:6-7),
- comfort in trouble that enables us to comfort others in trouble (II Corinthians 1:4-5),
- deepening knowledge of his own sins (Psalm 51:5-10) and love for righteousness (Matthew 5:6),
- purging his soul of dead works (Psalm 51:7-15; Hebrews 9:14) to make way for true good works,
- increasing his capacity for the joys of heaven (Psalm 16:11; John 15:11) and appreciation for earthly beauty (Psalm 51:12-13),
- endearing him to many of God's promises he has claimed and seen God fulfill (I Kings 8:56; II Corinthians 1:18-22),
- increasing love for God and his neighbor (Luke 10:27; I John 4:7-21).

So let us continue, as Christians, to grow in being strengthened by God's grace (James 1:2-4, 12) as the power of the Holy Spirit works in us to produce: love, joy, peace, faith, long-suffering, self-control, meekness, gentleness, and goodness (Galatians 5:22-25).

"Father God, please make all who read this, Whom You have chosen for Yourself (John 17:1-2, 9-10), whether well off or have little to be able and willing to receive the gift of faith (Eph. 2:8-10). Let them receive the Holy Spirit's drawing power (John 3:6-8) to find freedom from their bondage to sin (Ephesians 2:1-6) through the sin payment Your Son Jesus Christ made on the cross (I Corinthians 15:3-4; Titus 3:5-7). Enable them to repent and confess their sin and receive Your forgiveness (I John 1:9) as they trust in Christ alone for salvation (Romans 10:9-10). Empower them to glorify You and be faithful to Your calling from now on."

"In Jesus Name" (John 16:23-24) "Amen."

Joe Sturz, a Christian counselor at Sturz Christian Counseling Service now living in Page County, [www.sturzchristiancounseling.com](http://www.sturzchristiancounseling.com) ministering to people with problems and sharing what the Lord has taught me through: His Word, my mistakes, failures and successes and 47+ years as a Biblical counselor applying all of the Bible to all of life in daily messages on Facebook and email.

Happy New Year



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# Billy Graham Evangelistic Association

## Will Graham Encourages Law Enforcement at Appreciation Dinner

By Lizzy Long

Will Graham addressed officers and their spouses at the first Law Enforcement Appreciation Dinner on December 14 at the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) headquarters in Charlotte, North Carolina.

“First and foremost, if there’s something I want you to know, it’s that the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association loves you. ... We appreciate what you do. You make our community safe, [and] you look out for us.”

Mentioning his father wished he could be there, Will Graham explained how Franklin Graham had been the driving force for this initiative after seeing the heavy toll placed on officers the past year.

Altogether, the Billy Graham Rapid Response Team hosted three Law Enforcement Appreciation Dinners in December. In 2021, the ministry plans to expand these events and others to cities that have faced civil unrest.

As officers entered BGEA headquarters, located just behind the Billy Graham Library, they caught a glimpse of Christmas at the Library, an annual Library event each December. They watched as horse-drawn carriages traveled down lit walkways and past brightly decorated trees.

Officers greeted one another before enjoying worship by musician Dennis Agajanian and the Tommy Coomes Band in the BGEA Dining Hall. They enjoyed prime rib and salmon before selecting red velvet cake or peppermint cheesecake for dessert.

“From the beginning [of the night], it gave me chills,” said Amanda Walters, a Charlotte-Mecklenburg police officer. She sat with her husband Andrew, a Huntersville (N.C.) police officer. Officers from her CMPD motorcycle unit filled three tables toward the back of the room.

“We just like to sit down and relax for once, and not be on duty while eating together,” continued Amanda, who said she used the special occasion to wear a dress for the second time this year. “Usually law enforcement is not mixed with religious events. I think it actually can plant a seed [of faith] in tight groups like the motorcycle unit. It opens the conversation. All we talk about is the rough things we see, and we kind of have a stiff sense of humor, [so] it’s just good to break our shield in a different way.”

The evening mood shifted from light-hearted talk and laughter to seriousness as Will Graham thanked the officers and shared the Gospel message.

“I feel like people need this really bad, people are thirsty for something positive,” Amanda said. She and her husband know firsthand the difficulties of serving in law enforcement, especially within two different departments.

“I feel like there’s more light shone on the negative side of law enforcement, like when there’s a bad cop that does something,” added Andrew, still dressed in uniform from his afternoon shift. “That gets more attention and press than the good stuff. It’s nice to be appreciated and attend an event where you feel welcomed and loved.”

Graham compared the role Pilate held to law enforcement today, sharing how they both are required to make decisions in real-time.

“This man was hated. He represented the law of Rome and had to enforce it,” Graham said.

One decision Pilate had put before him was the fate of Jesus. The Roman leader recognized Jesus was innocent but didn’t have the courage to take action and help Him. Instead, he washed his hands of the decision and turned Jesus over to the mob. Jesus ultimately was sent to die on the cross.

“Some of you here today lack the courage to take a stand for Jesus,” Graham said. “You have to make decisions on how to get home at night to see your spouse [and] children. You prepare yourself—put on a vest, gun, uniform.”

“You get everything ready but you’re not guaranteed to come home. Have you prepared for life after death?” Graham solemnly questioned.

“Without Jesus, you’ll never spend eternity in heaven,” Graham said. “You say, ‘Will, I thought you were here to cheer us up.’ No, I’m here to tell you the truth. ... [If] you do all of this preparation in your physical job but haven’t prepared for life after death, you’re gambling with eternity.”

The moment hit home for the Walterses.

Amanda’s motorcycle unit has been the escort for fallen Mount Holly police officer Tyler Herndon, who was fatally shot in the line of duty Friday, December 11. The Billy Graham Rapid Response Team, which deploys at a moment’s notice in natural or manmade disasters, offered a ministry of presence to the devastated suburb of Charlotte and its police department.

“A lot of times the only time you do feel appreciation is when an officer is killed—when people come out and show their support,” Andrew explained. He’s hoping events like Monday’s dinner will be an encouragement to more officers in the future—for multiple reasons.

“It’s people’s life after this life that’s hanging in the balance,” Andrew said. “People in our line of work have a higher chance of that coming to an end sooner. You want to make sure your heart is in the right place so if something tragic does happen, you’ll spend eternity where you want to be.”



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The Comforter

By Christy Lowman  
Burke County

What is the most colorful bird you will see in your back-yard? If you guessed cardinal, you are correct. Did you know they are usually the first bird you will see at your bird feeder in the morning and they are the last to visit it in the evening? They are granivorous birds, meaning they eat mostly seeds and nuts. God made their beaks perfectly just for this reason. Their beaks are coned shaped and will open seeds and nuts easily. Cardinals are also monogamous, meaning they mate for life. During their courtship, male cardinals will feed their mate by giving her a seed “beak to beak”. This looks like they are kissing. The females stay on the nest of usually three eggs. While she is incubating the eggs, the father will bring her food. After the babies are born, both parents will take care of the young until they are old enough to leave the nest.

Cardinals are also called Redbirds, Virginia Nightingale, and the Winter Red-bird. These songbirds are one of a few songbirds where both males and females can both sing. In fact, females have more elaborate songs than males. The normal lifespan of these beautiful birds is three years. However, one female lived to be fifteen years old. She holds the world record. Some people believe cardinals represent life, hope, and restoration. Some believe that when a cardinal visits it means angels are near. Cardinals also comfort people because they remind them of a lost one that has died.

If you have lost a loved one, I am truly sorry but please know that God will comfort you during this time if you will lean on Him. Only God can heal your broken heart. And if your loved one was saved, you will see them again in heaven. That’s why it is so important to tell others about Jesus so that when we all pass away we will spend eternity together in heaven if we are saved. Dear Lord, please comfort us when we are sad about losing a loved one. Help us lean on You during this difficult time. We rejoice in knowing that one day, we will all be reunited once again with You in heaven. In Jesus’s name, we pray, Amen.

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” (Revelation 21:4)



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Photo credit: Jonah Lowman

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](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](mailto:christyssoaps@yahoo.com).

New Christian Women’s Conference  
Scheduled for March 2021

By Patti Jensen  
Mitchell County

A fresh new kind of Christian women’s conference is scheduled for March 20, 2021, and women of all ages are invited to be a part of this new event! Have you ever felt the need to connect with other Christian women in your community? Have you ever had a prayer for a closer relationship with your friends and for ways to impact your community? Have you ever prayed for God to help you be more grateful even on the tough days? You are not alone! The Grateful Girl Gathering was born from prayers just like that...Praying for God to reveal how we could use our gifts and talents for Him to bless other women just like us! We are women of different ages and different churches who were seeking a unique event that could bring women together to worship, study God’s word, hear amazing speakers, and have fun! As women, we need all of those things right? We have planned a conference for you that is unlike any other conference we have seen. We will have great music and speakers, but also some DIY presentations, a fun boutique area, a delicious meal, and more surprises! This is the conference you won’t want to miss...and one you will want to invite friends to join you, but more importantly, an event to enjoy for those who aren’t in a church at this time.

Come experience this new women’s conference...catering to both your heart and your hobbies. Come celebrate with a sisterhood of women with a time of study, worship, encouragement, and fun! Being women we love to be together. We NEED to gather together. And we also love food and shopping and hobbies....So come experience a time of sisterhood and fellowship. Laugh together, sing together, be encouraged, enjoy great food together, and also take in a food demonstration, DIY spotlights, and more! We are gathering speakers from across a wide spectrum of locations, ages, and topics to come and speak truth, knowledge, inspiration, humor, and “real talk” for our real lives. You can learn all about our guest speakers on the conference website.

There will also be fun DIY breakout sessions with fun choices like gourmet picnic baskets and charcuterie boards, creating macramé crafts, and more. There will also be a special guest performer during our conference lunch! You can follow the conference on our social media pages during the year to be updated on new speakers, new session topics, fun “extra” conference goodies, and more! Follow along now at @AGratefulGirlGathering on Facebook and Instagram.

There are sponsorship opportunities for churches and businesses to support and bless this conference. Sponsorship information is located on the website. We want to thank our sponsors who have already joined us including Blue Ridge Christian News, Springmaid Mountain, and Cross Street Commerce Center. Register early and save your seat! Space will be limited at the conference and we don’t want you and your group to miss any of it! You will be able to pre-register to save your seat and be added to a special email list to receive updates leading up to the conference with info on speakers along with youtube clips of them, first looks at opportunities to order conference t-shirts, bags, and more! We can’t wait to see you and gather with you at the conference!



- There are so many ways to support this event!
1. Pray for the event, it’s planners and it’s plan. Pray for the women who will attend. Pray for the speakers.
  2. Share the news of this event with your church and your friends.
  3. Invite a friend to join you.
  4. Grab an event media image to post on your social media to share the news of this event. (Watch for event images coming soon)
  5. Sponsor tickets for others to attend.
  6. Become a Sponsor of this event. Visit our Sponsors Page to see how you, your church, or your business can support this event.
  7. Volunteer at the event! Reach out to us on the Contact Page if you are interested in being a volunteer for the Grateful Girl Gathering!

Registration is open at [www.agratefulgirlgathering.com](http://www.agratefulgirlgathering.com). We encourage everyone to register early since space will be limited. Reach out with any questions on the Contact Us page on the website. Contact Patti Jensen [pattijensen@bellsouth.net](mailto:pattijensen@bellsouth.net) 828-467-0173

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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By Jim Denison

Homeless man now feeds hundreds a day: Finding our empowering purpose through service

Anthony Delgado lived on the streets of Atlanta, Georgia, pan-handling to feed his drug addiction. One day, a man and woman told him he should go to the VA hospital. No one around him saw the couple, however. He started panhandling again but developed chest pain. A man stopped to help and gave him a token for a train ride to the hospital. When Delgado stepped onto the train, the man had vanished.

Delgado made it to the hospital, joined a rehab program, and got help from a pastor. He told the minister the story of the vanishing couple and the man who gave him the train token, and the pastor replied, "Believe it or not, there are angels."

Delgado got a job and then, after a church service about obedience, took bags of bread to the spot where he used to sleep on the streets. Within forty-five minutes, all the bread and pastries were gone. "As I was driving back, I started crying," he said. "Thank you, Father God, I found my purpose in life."

Now Delgado has seven employees, two buildings, seventeen freezers, and two trucks in the organization he founded, I Care Atlanta, Inc. His nonprofit feeds hundreds of people a day and also has a GED training center and financial planning center. During the holidays, they've been distributing new toys to kids and holding food drives.

Delgado told a reporter, "We all need to help each other. We're in a bad state right now. . . . Open your heart. Help your neighbor. Don't be selfish. This me, me, me attitude is not gonna get us anywhere. It's just not."

Grandmother shoots buck from the kitchen window: The courage to respond biblically to "the worst event this country will face"

"My kitchen is my deer stand. We take the screen off one of the windows every fall. I can see a pretty good ways from there." So says Virginia Luce, an eighty-year-old grandmother in East Texas who recently shot an eleven-point buck from her kitchen window.

The four-time cancer survivor retired just two months ago from a twenty-five-year career as a registered nurse. She was making lunch around noon on November 8 when she spotted the buck 175 yards away. After confirming its identity with her binoculars, she shot and killed him with her rifle. Her eighty-three-year-old husband then drove the tractor out and brought it back to the house.

"When I saw all those horns, I thought I was seeing things," Virginia said. "I got so excited about that deer that I can't even remember what I was fixing for lunch."

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](http://www.denisonforum.org). Copyrighted and printed by permission from Denison Forum.



Swan Named Assistant Superintendent of Burke County Public Schools

By Cheryl Shuffler  
Burke County

Dr. Mike Swan has been named assistant superintendent of Burke County Public Schools. The announcement came Monday, December 14, 2020, at the Burke County Board of Education meeting.

Burke County Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Larry Putnam said, "Join me in congratulating Dr. Swan as our new assistant superintendent. Dr. Swan comes into the position with 22 years of experience as an educator. He has a vast knowledge of education and leadership and has our students' needs and their best interests at heart."

Swan said, "I am excited to serve Burke County Public Schools as assistant superintendent, and I am grateful to Dr. Putnam and the board for giving me this opportunity. Burke County Public Schools is a great school district, and I am honored to work with talented and dedicated educators who put the success of our bright and promising students first. I am looking forward to continuing to help lead our district through the pandemic but also preparing for a return to normal on the other side of it."

Swan is originally from West Virginia and moved to Burke County in 1998 to teach fifth grade at Chesterfield Elementary School and then Ray Childers Elementary School. He served as assistant principal at Liberty Middle School, Heritage Middle School, and Freedom High School before becoming principal at Heritage and later at Freedom. In 2016 he was named Burke County Public Schools director of Student Services.

Swan has a bachelor's degree in elementary education from West Virginia University, a master's degree in school administration from Gardner-Webb University, and a doctorate in education leadership from Western Carolina University. Swan is married to Sara Swan, an instructional coach for Burke County Public Schools, and has a son, Walt, and a daughter, Hadley. Swan enjoys spending time with his family, hunting, and being on the lake.

Swan takes on the role previously held by Dr. David Fonseca, now the superintendent of Martin County Schools.

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



Happy New Year



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The Scary Lie

By Steve Beitz  
Burke County



Are you expecting the devil to tell you the truth? That is a scary thought as we begin this New Year. Are you expecting truth from the devil? I would hope we know better. I believe that Adam and Eve were warned about temptation. I am certain that God and His angels explained to the newly created couple about the fallen angel and those angels that fell from Heaven with him. God told Adam and Eve that they should stay clear from one tree. Just one. Moses, in the Genesis account, indeed includes that the first two human beings had been given all the information they needed to know that the smartest way to live was to not eat from the forbidden tree.

"Psst...up here." For the first time their eyes met, the first woman and the first serpent and in a ploy as old as Eden, he the devil in disguise, snared the soul of Eve in a conversation, and she was lost. She took the bait, jumped to the defense of her Creator, and got blindsided with the deception, disobeyed God, ate the fruit, persuaded her husband, and together they brought down an entire race.

You tell me, what is a heartbroken Creator to do? What every parent with a runaway child instinctively does; race out into the night to find him or her. In Genesis 3:9 we read that in the cool of the evening the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, where are you? And in the trembling the response of Adam and Eve, hiding among the trees and bushes, we were scared - we hear that tragic refrain of the serpent's earliest lie: God is somebody to be afraid of.

At Buddhist Temples, Shinto Shrines, Hindu Courtyards, Muslim Mosques, Jewish Synagogues, and Christian Churches, the site does not seem to matter. The lie is always the same. God is somebody to be afraid of. He is a scary Deity. That my friends is the scariest lie ever believed. So by the millions, the faithful of

earth perform their rituals, read their holy books, plead their prayers, and all with the hope of appeasing an angry, fearful God. Why? Because the enemy of good, blinded the minds of men so that they looked upon God with fear; they thought of Him as severe and unforgiving, as a being whose chief attribute is stern justice. That God is watching with a jealous eye to discern the errors and mistakes of men, that He may visit judgments upon them. Is there then no hope for us either? It was to remove this dark shadow, by revealing to the world the infinite love of God, that Jesus came to live among men. Do you want to know the Good News about the great lie that the devil tells us? We don't have to believe it. Someone named Jesus came to tell us the truth about our God. Jesus let it be known, that if you have seen me, Jesus, then you have seen the Father.

I pray that we don't expect the devil to tell us the truth. The scary lie is not scary at all when we know Jesus and the truth. I've read somewhere, I got a hunch so have you, that the truth shall set you free.

Steve Beitz, Pastor, Morganton Seventh day Adventist Church.



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# Search (Sustaining Essential and Rural Community Healthcare)

## Being a Nurse in the Time of COVID-19

By Victoria Loe Hicks, SEARCH  
Mitchell County

In this time of disruption and uncertainty, the pandemic brings poignant reminders of what we can celebrate. And nothing is more worth lifting than the care and dedication of the nurses among us who are working to save lives and ease the suffering.

That’s the theme of “An Infusion of Gratitude for Nurses,” a four-part series of radio portraits produced by SEARCH in partnership with WKYK/WTOE. The series is part of “M-Y Health Matters,” a weekly look at health care in the mountains, and it’s available in the “Close Up” section of [www.ourlocalcommunityonline.com](http://www.ourlocalcommunityonline.com).

The four nurses who share their experiences with host Bruce Ikard work and live in both Yancey and Mitchell counties. Between them, they have decades of experience, but they say that nothing in their careers challenged them or upended their lives like the pandemic. Still, to a person, they say they find ways to love their jobs.

“In every single, possible way we could be affected, we have been affected,” says Amber Grindstaff, a nurse in the Bakersville and Spruce Pine offices of Mountain Community Health Partnership.

“We’ve had nothing but changes,” echoes Carrie James, a nurse in the Emergency Department of Blue Ridge Regional Hospital.

One obvious change is having to wear protective gear: gowns, masks, gloves, face shields. It’s uncomfortable, but what really bothers them, the nurses say, is how the gear gets between them and their patients, making them into strange, almost scary figures.

Instead of a human being with a smile, James says, patients “sort of see this big, robot-like person coming at them.” In that way, “the PPE makes it feel like a barrier between us and patients.”

And that’s just one example of the way the virus isolates patients from their families, friends, and medical caregivers, the nurses told Ikard.

As a clinic supervisor for the Toe River Health District, part of Christy Duncan’s job is to call people who test positive and walk them through what they need to do to quarantine themselves and keep others from getting sick.

It’s a call very few people are prepared for, she says. “They are scared to death.”

Fortunately, most recover. In the most extreme cases, however, the forced isolation magnifies the physical ravages of the disease, forcing patients to fight for their lives without friends and family at their side.

Shannon Tipton, a nurse educator for Hospice and Home Care of the Blue Ridge, sees how that compounds the pain of facing life’s end. “People are dying alone, and it takes a toll on everyone.”

In the spring, Mitchell and Yancey’s counties were largely spared the virus’ ravages. But the recent surge has hit full force. At the health department, nurses work seven days a week to deliver the results of COVID tests and counsel those who test positive.

For Duncan, the flood of questions about how to cope with the pandemic is never-ending. “Pretty much my whole day is spent on COVID,” she said, although the health department continues to provide other clinical services.

She fields calls from businesses, schools, churches, and individuals ask-

ing about safety protocols and quarantine procedures. “Anywhere I go out in public, questions and people are calling and texting pretty much continuously,” she says. Even at the end of the day, the disease follows them home. James and Grindstaff both speak of feeling the need to shower and change clothes before interacting with their children. “It’s weird,” Grindstaff says.

On the other hand, she says, one thing that inspires her to keep going is the example she can set for her two daughters. “Just because things are tough, that doesn’t mean you give up,” she says. “You just have to work that much harder to figure things out.”

At Blue Ridge, James says, the bond nurses feel with their patients reinforces the will to keep fighting. “Our patients are our families, our neighbors, friends, people we might see every day or at the grocery store or church,” she says. “We just love working for our community.”

For Duncan, inspiration comes from knowing she can make a difference in the life of someone who’s just been told they have COVID. “To know you can be that reassuring, calming voice ... can give them that comfort,” is her greatest satisfaction, she says.

For the hospice staff, drawing on God’s strength and comfort gives them the strength to comfort others, Tipton says. “We do have a strong faith base that we rely on a lot. We pray a lot.”

For each nurse, Ikard had one last question: What can the public do to help support them?

Tipton and James had a single message: Follow the health guidelines put out by national and local health officials.

“Wear masks and stay six feet apart and wash your hands,” James stressed. “Those things really do work.”

Duncan and Grindstaff pleaded for patience, the recognition that doctors, nurses, and other caregivers are struggling with more work and, in many cases, less staff. Rather than be annoyed by delays or uncertainties, Grindstaff said, people can choose “to give us the grace to know that we’re just trying to figure things out and doing the best we can.”

Lastly, she said, a few simple words of appreciation can make all the difference. “‘We’re thinking about you. Thank you guys so much for what you’re doing.’ That means so much to us.”



Shannon Tipton



Amber Grindstaff



Bruce Ikard



Carrie James



Christy Duncan

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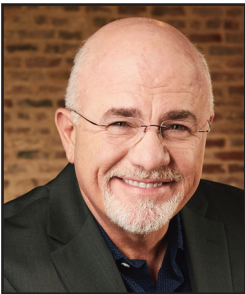
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By Dave Ramsey

**Keep your dignity, and work your way out**

Dear Dave,

My wife and I will both turn 30 next month. We have two young children, and we make a little over \$85,000 combined. The problem is we have about \$70,000 in debt. Some of it is credit card debt, but nearly \$50,000 is in two car loans. Her mom and dad have offered to let us move in with them, so we can save up money and start getting a better handle on our finances, but we're not sure how we feel about this. What's your advice? Justin



Dear Justin,

You've got a ridiculous amount of money wrapped up in those cars. I'd sell the stupid things, get into a couple of little beaters, and start living on a budget and paying down debt.

In your situation, the only scenario where I'd even consider taking the in-laws up on their offer is one where the stay is for a very short, agreed-upon period of time. They'd have to be absolutely wonderful people, too, and everyone involved would need to know their boundaries.

But you guys can get out of debt pretty fast if you'll just lose the cars. You could even save a little money on the side while you were paying down debt and buy a better car as soon as the debt was gone.

You might love your cars so much that you're unwilling to make the sacrifice. Not me. I'd rather keep my dignity intact, and work my way out of the mess I created! —Dave

**Playing the lottery robs you of your future**

Dear Dave,

I've been struggling financially for the past few months, so I've been playing the lottery once a week. To me, the chance to win millions is worth a few dollars a month, even if things are tight. Paula

Dear Paula,

You've told me you're having money troubles, and at the same time, you're throwing money out the window every week? Honestly, the small amount you're talking about doesn't make a difference. Even if it's just two or three bucks a week, that action represents a lot of financially irresponsible behavior in your life.

I'm going to be very blunt with you. The lottery is a tax on the poor and people who can't do the math. Your chances of winning are bleak at best. Did you know the odds of winning the Powerball jackpot are about 1 in 292,000,000? There are plenty of other very unusual things that are much more likely to happen to you than winning the lottery. Your chances of making a hole-in-one on the golf course are about 1 in 12,500. Even your odds of having quadruplets are around 1 in 11 million.

When times are tough and you're strapped for cash, the last thing you need to do is spend what little you have on gimmicks. My advice is to focus on working hard, living on a tight budget that cuts out all unnecessary expenses, and saving every penny you can. Unlike the lottery, this is a plan that works every time. When you start living on a budget and get out of debt, it provides a little bit of breathing room in your life. You might even feel like you got a raise!

Don't let your finances—and your dreams—be hijacked by the lottery. —Dave

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

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How to Test Your Faith

By Alan Griffin

“Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?” 2 Corinthians 13:5 NIV

What makes a true Christian you might ask? We should examine our lives to find out whether we are true believers or not. Doubting our salvation is not necessarily wrong. We all struggle with our Christian confidence at one time or another. Satan likes to sneak doubt into our minds, and we should immediately rebuke him and cast the thought aside. A Christian is not necessarily one who upholds to a moral standard or someone who reads their Bible daily. I know people who appear to be righteous in every way. Many live by a code I could never reach, and I have met Bible scholars who have doctorates in theology and are not even close to being saved. They are experts on a book they don’t believe in.

True Christians dwell in Christ, and Christ dwells within them. A true Christian is a person, that through their actions, there is evidence of a personal relationship with God. Our friends generally notice the change first. They tell us there is something different about us, which allows us to share Christ with them. We have an inner witness in the Holy Spirit who attests to our belief. We are a new creation with desires that are born in the heart of a new Christian. We have a longing to spend time with other Christians and a newfound passion for the word of God. We experience a turn of direction. We turn away from the things we know are wrong and turn towards God. Our attitude, behavior, and character change.

New Christians should examine themselves to help bring us in line with Biblical doctrine. However, being too critical of ourselves leads to depression. We must remind ourselves that we came to God to do for us what was impossible to do for ourselves. We trust in Jesus to do the saving and we do the believing. We grow in faith through Bible study, worship, and prayer. One of the worst things we can do is compare ourselves with other Christians. This is not self-examination but rather self-justification. On one end we look at other people’s lives and say, “They do this and they do that so it must be okay for me to do it too,” or we look at someone who has devoted their life to Christ and get discouraged because we can’t live up to their expectations. How does faith reflect in our lives? What should we do to grow in faith? Here are 5 simple steps to make sure you pass the test.

We are to confess our sins and seek forgiveness - We are to go to our Heavenly Father in prayer earnestly seeking forgiveness for our sins. My friend, your Father knows everything about you. You cannot hide anything from Him. He requires this time so that the two of you can have a personal relationship with each other. He paid a very high price so that we could communicate directly with Him. I discuss with Him the things I know I am struggling with. I don’t ask Him to forgive my sins, I thank Him for forgiving me because I know He already has.

We are to desire what is right - There are many here on earth doing what is wrong. It is very easy to fall into the crowd and go along. I find it challenging to do what is right. Striving to better ourselves is rewarding in many ways. It makes us more confident in our relationship with Christ. It builds the courage to share our testimony with others. We develop Christian character. We are more successful with our relationships with friends and family. “For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” Therefore “Come out from among them and be separate,” says the Lord. “Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.” “I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” (2 Cor. 6:16—7:1) (NKJV)

We are to submit ourselves to the Word of God - We are travelers in a world that is not our own. We are not from here. We do not live our life for evil desires. We need to surrender our lives, our thoughts, our emotions, and our possessions to God. Without Him, they aren't worth anything anyway. It is not how it seems. We need to surrender control of our lives to set ourselves free. We have to give ourselves away, to gain control through Jesus Christ. The more we submit ourselves to God the greater the blessings He bestows on us.

We are to love God and all others - We are to love our God with all our heart, with all our mind, and with all our soul. We are to love one another as we love ourselves. These are the two greatest commandments. If we do these two things everything else will fall in place.

We are to bear fruit - We are finally here! This is the test that most Christians fail. Those of us who fail the test still have major sin in our lives and generally, the sins where God is considering giving up on us are the sexual sins of homosexuality, sex out of wedlock, and adultery. People involved in these and other sins put God up on a shelf and bring Him down only when they need Him. They have not given themselves over to Him. They are expecting God to give Himself over to them. It never ever works that way. We go through all the motions. We get baptized. We join the church. We try to commit to lead a better life for ourselves and our family, but we don’t produce fruit, or as James tells us, “faith without works is dead.” But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-and shudder. You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? James 2:18-20 (NKJV)

We are to serve God in some sort of capacity. The Body of Christ has perhaps 22 spiritual gifts. Combine those with the diversity of mankind and you have untold billions of spiritual combinations. Each person serves Christ in their own special way. We all have a ministry in Christ. We just don’t go to the church on Sunday and listen to the minister. We are ministers, every single one of us. If you aren’t,



you have failed the test of faith. You can’t just sit back in a pew and let other people do all the work. God requires a service from you. The least of which is that every single person you come in contact with personally, it is your responsibility to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

“You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.” James 2:24 (NKJV) Listen to me very carefully. We are justified by faith through our works. Faith comes from hearing, reading, and studying the Bible. This is the only way the Holy Spirit can have a work inside of us. Through this relationship with the Holy Spirit, we learn our spiritual gifts and what our ministry is to others. One goes hand in hand with the other. Pray to God to reveal your gifts and ministry. I promise you when you combine the two, God blesses you wholly, mightily.

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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# Morganton Baptist Church

## The Heart of the Matter

By Dan Qurollo  
Burke County

One of the areas that challenge us as believers is that of compassion. Far too often, we approach matters such as these haphazardly and will little effort. This mindset reflects a greater problem and demonstrates that we are not right with God. Rather than being haphazard in our compassion, we must instead strive to be intentional. We must realize that our relationships with others flow directly out of our relationship with God. Therefore, our focus must first be on our relationship with God. Relationships with others will never be right if we are not first right in our relationship with God.

We often substitute our relationship with God with many other things. For example, individuals often point to a service that is performed for God as a means to describe their relationship with God. While service does naturally flow from a love for God, it is possible to allow service to God to take the place of a relationship with God. This mindset of pointing to our service to God can assume a variety of roles. It can include church attendance or tithing. It can include being involved in certain ministries of the church or in teaching a class. It can even include preaching.

But God is first and foremost interested in our hearts. We cannot claim to love God if we do not take the time to spend with Him. We cannot claim to love God if we are unwilling to obey Him. Our relationship with God is such that demands time and energy.

Tragically, we often fail to remember that God does not judge us as a man. Because we fail to consider this, we often do things that make us look good on the outside while neglecting our own hearts. When it comes to man's assessment of things, we look good. But God judges the heart. It is not our service that God desires first and foremost; it is our heart.

In order for us to become intentional in our compassion, we must first become devoted to our God. We must love Him above all else and commit to doing only those things that please Him. Only then can we have a heart that is truly right in His sight.



Pastor Dan Qurollo is pastor Morganton Baptist Church. Check us out on our website [www.morgantonbaptist.net](http://www.morgantonbaptist.net) or find us on Facebook and YouTube.

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# First Baptist of Marshall

## Humor - Laughter is Healthy for You

By Buddy Freeman  
Madison County



A shoplifter wrote a letter to a department store and said, "I've just become a Christian and I can't sleep at night because I feel guilty. So here's \$ 100.00 that I owe you." Then he signs his name, and in a little postscript at the bottom, he adds, "If I still can't sleep, I'll send you the rest."

A woman leaving the worship service said to the minister, "I enjoyed the sermon." The pastor said, "Don't thank me, thank the Lord." The lady replied, "It wasn't that good."

When a nightclub opened on Main Street, the only church in that small town organized an all-night prayer meeting. The members asked God to burn down the club. Within a few minutes, lightning struck the club, and it burned to the ground. The owner sued the church, which denied responsibility. After hearing both sides, the Judge said, "It seems that wherever the guilt may lie, the nightclub owner believes in prayer, while the church doesn't."

When I and my wife went into Belk's Store we saw a little boy standing beside the escalators as the steps were coming down. He was looking at each step. I went over to him to see if he had a problem. He said, "No, I am just waiting on my chewing gum to come back down."

A preacher was visiting a family when the children rushed in with a cardboard box. "Mom", they shouted, "We trapped the rat!" The mother asked, "Is it dead?" They said, "Yep, we beat it until." Suddenly he noticed the preacher's disapproving gaze. One boy dropped his voice to a whisper and said, "Until the Lord called him home."

Dr Buddy Freeman is the former pastor of the First Baptist Church of Marshall, NC.



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The Key to Living with Confidence

By Joyce Meyer



God has a great plan for each person’s life, and He wants us to enjoy every day of our lives. But we can’t do it if we live in fear and lack confidence. Confidence is the belief that you’re able to do what you need to do or what you want to do. God gives us confidence, but we need to know how to access it by faith.

God-given confidence is actually the grace of God. We usually hear grace defined as God’s undeserved favor or God doing something for you that you don’t deserve. But it’s really more than that.

It was life-changing for me to learn that grace is also God’s power, freely given to me, to enable me to do with ease what I could never do on my own with any amount of struggle or effort.

Think about this for a minute. Everyone who accepts Christ as their Savior is taught that we’re saved by grace through faith. Ephesians 2:8 (NIV) says, “*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.*”

But the same way we are saved is the way we are supposed to live. In other words, once we are born again, God wants us to do everything in life by grace through faith.

This has been one of the greatest revelations of my life. I remember how exciting it was to realize that God is not just there to help us when we have an emergency. God wants to be involved in every single thing we do daily.

There’s nothing you’re involved in that God doesn’t care about, and He wants you to pray and ask Him to help you with every detail of your life. He doesn’t want you to live striving in your own effort to do anything. God wants to be your close, personal, intimate friend.

I was a Christian for years before I learned how to access God’s grace—His power—to live my everyday life. First, I had to get an understanding that once I was saved, God didn’t expect me to live right by my own strength.

Just as I couldn’t “earn” salvation through my own works or effort, I also couldn’t really change my heart or behavior in my own strength. Jesus says in John 15:4 (NIV), “*No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neith can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.*”

Every day we need to come to God and tell Him, “God, I can do nothing without You. Nothing in my life is going to work without You. Apart from You, there is nothing good in me. My confidence is in You. I need You all the time. I believe You and trust You, Lord.”

When we humble ourselves before God and ask Him for help, we can access His grace through faith.

To help you do that, I want to share three things that commonly short-circuit our faith, cutting off our access to God’s power: complaining, self-pity, and pride.

- Complaining is a negative attitude that keeps us from being thankful for all God has done, what He’s doing, and what He will do. It is a sin we need to repent of, and then be determined to thank God in all things, at all times. His grace and blessings always outweigh the things we think are wrong in our life.
- Self-pity is simply a “poor me” attitude. It is a form of idolatry because it causes you to focus on yourself and think, “What about me?” We can’t be pitiful and powerful at the same time, so let’s decide to give up all self-pity.
- Pride takes credit for what God has done and steals His glory. It makes us independent of God, and we can’t bear good fruit apart from Christ.

Before I learned how to live my life by God’s grace, I was a mess. I was a nagging wife, manipulative, and controlling. And I wasn’t satisfied living like that. Then God helped me by opening my eyes to see that I couldn’t really change until I started taking His Word seriously, trusting Him to change me.

When I made a firm decision to pray and study the Word in areas where I was weak, then God’s grace gave me the power I needed to overcome the wrong things. And I keep going forward in my journey with God the same way today. God has all the power you need to do anything you need to do. He loves you and wants to give you His power to live your everyday life with joy. Trust His wisdom and goodness, and you’ll live with God-given confidence!

Joyce Meyer is a New York Times bestselling author and founder of Joyce Meyer Ministries, Inc. She has authored more than 100 books, including *Battlefield of the Mind* and *Overload: How to Unplug, Unwind and Unleash Yourself from the Pressure of Stress* (Hachette). She hosts the *Enjoying Everyday Life* radio and TV programs, which air on hundreds of stations worldwide. For more information, visit [www.joycemeyer.org](http://www.joycemeyer.org).



Joy to the World, the Lord has Come!

By Nancy Malik  
Avery County



Happy New Year to the believers of the Blue Ridge Mountains! A fitting song for the New Year, " Joy to the World" is a Christmas Carol sung by millions for almost three centuries. Sir Issac Watts used Psalm 98, Psalm 96:11-12, and Genesis 3:17-18 to pen these precious words of the birth of our King! He wrote it in 1719 as a church hymn, but Handel used it in his "Messiah" and so gave it a score! It has been sung as a Christmas favorite since it was introduced.

Many have had COVID in the Blue Ridge and a few have died. This virus changed the world and expectations. As I write this article, we are still awaiting who will be the next President. Even as we await the final outcome and....even if...as the three young Jewish men told Nebuchadnezzar as they said they would not bow down to his statue; we rejoice that He is on the throne and Heaven is so near!

COVID made its debut last spring and seems very strategic in the 2020 elections having to use mail-in ballots, which were only used before for military personnel. This method was used all over the country and in several key states, the counting has been under scrutiny. Let us keep our eyes on God and His ways and His plans for us, the USA, and the world. His word is full of scripture for... such a time as this. "*Be strong and courageous.*" "*Let not your heart be troubled*" "*Rejoice for the Holy Spirit who He has given to us.*" The Bible is full of encouraging words from our Lord. Thank God daily for the good things you have and see in your life. Rejoice in the beautiful winter in the High Country! Churches are the 'body of Christ'. Support churches in these hard times and, if necessary, come together in house churches. Pray for revival everywhere! Follow Phillip Greene on WECR, 1130am for godly news, godly messages, and great Southern Gospel music! 'Adventures in Creation at both 8:10 am and 12:50 pm, M-F, is my way of sharing God's incredibly majestic Blue Ridge Mountains and its special people. It is a wonder to live in the Bible belt with the highest of heights and lowest of heights east of the Mississippi. This fall, Avery County was full of traffic as many people came to view the beautiful fall colors! This is a gift from God every autumn in this High Country!

Be blessed, dear Ones, of this precious place of winter, sparkling frost, snow, and rest. Stay warm and cozy in your home drinking hot chocolate or hot tea. Relax, read a good book, and daily, read your Bible. It is wise, true, and gives life! Pray for peace and Christ's return. Love your neighbor, pray for your enemy and when someone asks for your coat; give Him your cloak as well. Jesus loves us so much; He died for us!

Happy New Year in the Lord!

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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January 2021 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 27



Sigogglin

By Michael Cloy  
McDowell County

Do you remember growing up in the Blue Ridge Foothills and hearing the word "Sigogglin?" The word seems to have originated from the Irish/Scottish heritage brought to the mountains of Appalachia. Sigogglin means anything that is unusually crooked; skewed or out of balance; not built correctly. Sigogglin is used to describe a crooked fence, an unevenly paved winding road through the mountains, or a door that is not square to the door frame. The word sigogglin can even take on a greater meaning to describe anything that appears not to make sense. Sigogglin is a word that says a lot without having to say a lot of words to describe what you mean, which is what I just did.

Do you know the meaning of the word sigogglin is in the Bible? Yep, it is in the Bible. Take, for example, the word crooked. In Ecclesiastes 1:15, we read, *"What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be numbered."* The meaning of crooked in this verse translates well with the word sigogglin. The author of Ecclesiastes is saying that humanity is not able by all its wisdom to make straight the crooked or sigogglin path of life. However, God declares in Isaiah 42:16, *"I will bring the blind by a way they did not know; I will lead them in paths they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight. These things I will do for them, and not forsake them."* Only God can make man's sigogglin paths straight. Thanks be to God the Father that he sent his Son, Jesus Christ, by giving us the gift of his Son's righteousness and taking on our sigogglin, our crookedness, our unrighteousness upon Himself.

Knowing the straight-way of God is very important to Landis Orthodox Presbyterian Church. It is so essential that our denomination in 1936 established its name by placing the word orthodox in front of Presbyterian. Orthodox takes the Greek word of the New Testament for "correct or straight" ("ortho") and for "doctrine" ("dox") to declare straight teaching in its name. Said another way, the word orthodox is the opposite of sigogglin. Therefore, Landis OPC is all about worshiping the Triune God who, by his Word, straightens out our sigogglin lives by preaching and teaching straight doctrine. Like sigogglin, the word orthodox is a word that says a lot. We invite you to join us in worship and come to know the straight teaching of God at Landis Orthodox Presbyterian Church as found in and Luke 3:4-6," As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying: *"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the LORD; make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."*

Mike Cloy is an Ordained Ruling Elder on the Session of Landis, OPC. You can contact him at [opcmikecloy@gmail.com](mailto:opcmikecloy@gmail.com)



Small Enough

By Ken and Jan Merop  
Avery County

A tiny babe is placed into our arms...totally dependent upon us for nourishment, tenderness, care, and love. As the years' progress, so does that attitude of independence. Even though they really still need us, the terrible twos are not empty of what the name portends. I recall watching our then two-year-old granddaughter haughtily walk away from her parents after being told "no" for the umpteenth time. She sashayed her little hips and pounded her tiny feet as she 'told them!' Her parents could hardly contain the laughter bubbling up...yet, had to maintain a straight face with her. I've watched her develop and know God has a great purpose for this budding leader.

She is confident and strong...balanced by joyful affection and compassion that will bring others together to serve alongside her. She's a work in progress. But I have every confidence that with her enthusiasm, love for life, and concern for others she will be a force to be reckoned with because her heart already belongs to the Lord. As she grows up physically, emotionally, and spiritually embracing all the fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5:22...self-control will help her remain small enough...that is, humble and trusting...leading with a servant's heart. In the Bible, we read about a time when Jesus was interacting with the people. No one was ever turned away and he made himself available to all who came to him. Though he welcomed everyone, he lived at a time when certain people were not welcomed or revered. Children were among them.

Therefore, when some parents brought their little children to Jesus with the hope he would touch them, bless them...maybe even cuddle them on his lap...their hopes was dashed by the disciples. *"They scolded the parents for bothering him,"* says Luke 18:16 NLT. It was as if they said, "Look, these are just children. They are not worthy of the Master's time," as they shooed them away. But Jesus...

He saw what was going on and called out to welcome them instead. He told his disciples, *"Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children."* So, it begs the question, "What characteristics of a child do we need to embrace as Kingdom people? How about trust, faith, joy, love, forgiveness, and enthusiasm for the things of God. What about a measure of innocence? Perhaps it is the innocence of a child that persists to forgive even those who neglected them. No matter how old we are, let's be small enough. Selah



Small Enough?

*The Chickadee seems to be sizing up  
the entrance to her new home.  
Will she fit inside along with her babies?  
Think about it.  
We have a heavenly home awaiting us.  
Our entrance depends upon our faith in Jesus Christ.  
When we are small enough to humble ourselves  
and come to Him,  
He gives us the key of faith to open the door to eternity.  
"For by grace you have been saved through faith,  
and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God."  
Ephesians 2: 8*

Sudoku

Solution on page 14

	9				4	3		
						6		
7	4	5	2					9
5				1				
		2	5		8	9		
				2				3
3					1	5	6	7
		1						
		9	8				3	



Ken and Jan love residing in the mountains of Avery County. Visit Jan's new blog [@pauseandconsider.net](http://@pauseandconsider.net), Journeying with Jan. Ken's photos can be seen at [kenmeropphotography.com](http://kenmeropphotography.com).

*And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. Revelation 21:4*



Social Media and Kids:  
What Parents Can Do to Ensure Safe Use

(StatePoint) The negative effects of social media have been much discussed as of late, thanks to the recently released documentary on Netflix, “The Social Dilemma.”

The documentary argues that while platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook have at times been used to facilitate social movements and meaningful change, they can also make people more anxious, polarized, and inclined to believe misinformation. What’s more, according to the documentary, these apps are structured to make their users obsessed with them.

As many parents know, children can be susceptible to the most common pitfalls of social media, but there are some key steps that they can take to help ensure that children’s usage remains balanced, healthy, and safe:

- **Sorting fact from fiction:** Information about the world is often delivered via social media tools. Unfortunately, much of that content is actually misinformation. Parents can help stem the tide of “fake news” by teaching kids how to sort fact from fiction and pointing them in the direction of trusted sources of information.
- **Privacy measures:** An enormous amount of data is gathered by social media companies. Parents should teach kids to be wary of sharing private information and opinions online. They can also add privacy settings to children’s profiles to ensure they are connected only to their friends and family.
- **Social media and feelings:** Social media usage can be an emotional roller coaster. Parents should consider having a conversation with children about the way social media makes them feel. As part of this discussion, parents can remind kids that while “likes” and nice comments may make them feel good, it’s important not to rely too heavily on social media for emotional validation or real connection with friends. Unfortunately, cyberbullies and online “trolls” are active social media users, too, making social media apps a sometimes unfriendly place.
- **Monitoring usage:** New tools are helping parents seamlessly monitor social media usage and protect kids from unsafe content. In fact, over 1.2 million families use the screen time management solution, OurPact. The app, which allows parents to block or limit app access automatically, gives families the flexibility to set schedules for usage around recurring activities like school and bedtime, keeping access well-balanced. Parents can even view screenshots of kids’ digital activity. Available at the iOS App Store and Google Play Store, parents can also sign up for an account at [www.ourpact.com](http://www.ourpact.com).

While the ever-evolving social media landscape can make it difficult for adults to keep up with the way their children are interacting with these platforms, parents can help protect their kids by communicating regularly and by using new tools.



Bruce Springsteen and New Songs

By Tracy Jessup



*“Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the faithful. For the Lord takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with victory.” --- Psalm 149:1, 4*

The concert film “Western Stars” recently opened in theaters nationwide. Based on Bruce Springsteen’s first studio album in five years, “Western Stars” is the only opportunity in which fans can see him playing all thirteen songs on the album. A band and a full orchestra accompany his performance under the cathedral ceiling of his historic nearly 100-year-old barn. “Touching on themes of love and loss, loneliness and family and the inexorable passage of time, the documentary film evokes the American West...weaving archival footage and Springsteen’s personal narration with a song to tell the story of Western Stars” (Movie Details, AMC app).

Springsteen published a 500-page memoir, *Born to Run*, in 2016. In a story for *Vanity Fair* coinciding with the book’s release, David Kamp wrote about Springsteen’s issues with his father, Doug.

“One of the book’s most moving passages occurs a few days before the 1990 birth of Springsteen and [Patti] Scialfa’s first child, their son Evan. As was his impulsive want Doug embarked on an impromptu road trip, driving 400 miles south to Bruce’s house in Los Angeles from San Mateo, where he and Adele had made their home. Over beers at 11 A.M., Doug, uncharacteristically, made a small peace offering to his son. “Bruce, you’ve been very good to us,” he said. And then, after a pause: “And I wasn’t very good to you.”

“That was it,” Springsteen writes. “It was all that I needed, all that was necessary.”

I asked him if he ever heard the words “I love you” from his father.

“No,” he said, a little pained. “The best you could get was ‘Love you, Pops.’ [Switching to his father’s gruff voice.] ‘Eh, me, too.’ Even after he had a stroke and he’d be crying, he’d still go, ‘Me, too.’ You’d hear his voice breaking up, but he couldn’t get out the words” (October 2016).

Psalm 149 calls on God’s people to sing a new song to the Lord. Images of singing, gladness, rejoicing, dancing, and playing musical instruments express different ways in which our praise is offered to God. Verse 4 proclaims the primary reasons for our praise. The Lord “takes pleasure in his people” and the Lord “adorns the humble with victory.” God not only has told us that he loves us, but he has demonstrated his love in innumerable ways. We have not done anything to deserve God’s love and pleasure, but through Christ, God has reconciled us to himself. He has set his affection on those who recognize their utter helplessness and their need for salvation.

Hans Wiersma writes, “In Jesus, the Lord God has indeed done - and continues to do - new things: finding the lost, redeeming the worthless, forgiving the sinner, feeding the hungry, healing the sick, freeing the bound, raising the dead. Such new things deserve a new song” ([workingpreacher.org](http://workingpreacher.org), 11/7/10).

Prayer: Lord, thank you for your love and for teaching us how to sing the latest God-song, a praise-song to you (adapted from Psalm 40:3 The Message).

*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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Buck Stove

By Brian Barrier  
Mitchell County

In 1971, Robert Bailey and Alvin Barrier opened a small country store called Minpro Supply in the town of Spruce Pine, North Carolina. They sold gasoline, refurbished appliances, and bologna sandwiches made by Robert’s mother. In 1975, Mr. Carol Buckner of Asheville, North Carolina approached the two men about selling a new wood-burning stove that he had built, which included a three-speed motor. Buckner was searching for an outfit that could manufacture the stove, which he called the “Regular Buck”, as well as set up a dealer network for its sales. He had created the stove in the midst of the national energy crisis when people were desperately looking for heating alternatives to gas and oil. Buckner made Bailey and Barrier an offer: if they could not sell the stove within 30 days, he would buy it back from them, no strings attached.

Bailey and Barrier used the stove as a floor model, and within two weeks, the partners had so many orders, they realized that they should pursue the future in dealing with Buck Stoves. They became the first official Buck Stove Dealer and began assisting in manufacturing operations as well. Within two or three months, they had sold 200 stoves. They transformed their store into a manufacturing facility, selling the stoves faster than they could get them off of the finishing line. Robert’s sister, Betty Bailey Carswell, even learned how to weld to help keep production moving. They set a goal of producing 30 stoves a week, but the demand was so high they quickly fell behind.

To this day, Robert continues to lead the New Buck Corporation. The company has grown tremendously over the decades and continues to grow today. In 2008 Buck Stove moved into a much larger facility across town. This 300,000 square foot, 80-acre facility not only allowed the company to expand with a more spacious work environment, warehouse, and showroom. This move also allowed the company the space for additions of newer, more sophisticated manufacturing technologies and machinery. Machines such as state of the art laser cutting tables and an on-site powder coating operation now adorn the facility. With the addition of this modern equipment, Buck Stove began to expand its product line to include outdoor grills and fire pits. These products are made with modern designs and classic clean lines reflecting the same quality and craftsmanship unique to Buck Stove. In 2011, after experiencing such great response from customers in regards to the outdoor products, Buck Stove once again decided to expand the outdoor line to include outdoor patio furniture. Their furniture is made from non-porous recycled plastic and is also manufactured in the Spruce Pine facility, providing their customers with a full line of outdoor living products combining durability, style, and comfort all in one beautiful package. Buck Stove, once again providing customers with the same quality and craftsmanship they have come to appreciate.

Today, Buck Stove manufactures wood stoves, coal stoves, gas log sets, mantels, outdoor living furniture, height-adjustable desks, and even tiny houses!

Robert also has tremendous respect and a heart to serve our military. Buck Stove manufactures several personalized items to honor active duty as well as veterans of the United States military. The Freedom Lantern is a beautiful example of the care and commitment Robert has for our service members and it is the perfect gift for a military loved one.

I have some personal observations I would like to share with our readers. When you walk into the Buck Stove facility, you will always find the Bible – open. When you meet and speak to Robert, you will quickly learn he is a quiet, humble man with a great passion for Jesus, his family, his church, his employees, his community, and the United States of America. Our community can be proud to know these good people are providing solid jobs and quality products – all right here in the small town of Spruce Pine.

You can visit Buck Stove at 200 Ethan Allen Drive, Spruce Pine, NC 28777. Give them a call 828-765-6144 or visit them online at [www.buckstove.com](http://www.buckstove.com).

Brian Barrier is a life-long resident of Burke County, U.S. Army Veteran, a member of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church and Publisher of the Blue Ridge Christian News.



Promises of The Star

by Marlene Houk  
Burke County



My widened eyes absorbed the striking beauty of an unusual Christmas gift, one I would treasure always. A golden star, rising twelve inches graced my Christmas scene, and twenty-six golden points radiated outward and upward. Glowing within the shiny tips, crimson beads dotted the landscape of every spire, reminding me of Scriptural truths in the verses about stars. These truths, like the star that led the wise men, can lead us in the New Year.

My friend, Barb, vibrant with 90 years of priceless wisdom, had offered this precious ornament. Its presence has become a spiritual heirloom, pointing me to powerful truths.

Stars stun us with their power and beauty. And the Bible carries that idea infinitely further when Scripture calls our Savior a Star. When we accept the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin by faith in His death and resurrection, Jesus becomes our Star.

Numbers 24:17 affirms this gift: *“I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.”*

Look at the abundant promises in the verse above that mentions the word, star.

1. We will behold Him.
2. The promise of His second coming is as certain as His first coming.
3. Jesus will conquer and punish our enemies.
4. Jesus is the Star of Jacob and like stars, full of power, beauty, and presence.
5. The betrayal of people we trusted, who outwardly align with Christ but practice evil will not deter Jesus’s rule of righteousness.

One of my favorite verses that contain the word, star, rests in Daniel 12:3, pointing firmly to God’s promise for those who serve Him. Daniel declares this truth: *“And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever.”*

Two promises from Daniel are also connected to stars:

6. Daniel says that when we are wise, we become bright pointers to the world, much like the Christmas star that led men considered wise by the world but needing spiritual wisdom.
7. When we have a mindset, a first reaction, a perspective of turning others to righteousness, we will shine like bright stars forever. Turning others to righteousness includes gently reminding our heartbroken friend of 2 Samuel 22:33; leading the conversation around to Christ; offering a comforting smile to the clerk who is being harassed by another customer. Our small deeds shine in the darkness of human frailty. And, as partakers of Christ’s wisdom, we may offer testimonies to His powerful transforming truths in our lives.

Our Star causes great joy, a shining orb, brilliantly glowing within our spirits. And this joy has tremendous power to light the world. When we seek our Star, joy bursts forth to others and upward in worship to Him.

Matthew, the Gospel book whose words gleam with the majesty of Christ as King, tells the story of the wise men when they saw God’s star. Matthew says in chapter two, verse ten, “When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.” And the joy of the Star of Jacob beams within us today.

8. When we see Him in all of His glory, we can enter into His joy that transcends earthly joy, diffuses many sorrows, and clears up the fog of the future.

The New Testament tells us of the possibilities of intimate and ongoing connection with The Star whose light banishes darkness, replacing our fear and worry with the dawning of joy. Peter reassures us in his second book: *“We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.”* (2 Peter 1:19)

- Look at the following promises that glow from this verse:
9. We can claim an intimate relationship with our Day Star, our Savior.
  10. This same Day Star sheds light in gloomy hearts, refreshing, healing, warming.
  11. As we grow in grace and knowledge He arises like a bright sunshiny day in wintertime, filling our hearts with an eternal focus.
  12. As light pierces and dispels darkness, so our Lord illuminates the dark corners of our days and draws us to His resplendent love.

Jesus is our Star as Revelation 22:16 declares, *“I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.”*

Each point of my friend’s precious gift to me spoke with laser intensity, lifting me above the mundane of everyday chores and the pit troubles. Like the shepherds that returned to their same life in Luke 2:20, yet bursting with praise and worship to Jesus Christ, I choose to live these promises and worship the King of Kings! Happy New Year and may you be like the shepherds, transformed by His presence in you!



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](mailto:marlenehouk@bellsouth.net) Learn more about women in the Bible at Marlene's website: [www.MarleneHouk.com](http://www.MarleneHouk.com)



'Churches Should Suspend Services During Pandemic.' I Respectfully Dissent!

By Dr. Mark Creech

For the last few months, I've been on the telephone with hundreds of pastors, asking them how their churches are navigating the Coronavirus Crisis. The stories of low attendance are disturbing, despite churches employing health protocols to keep people as safe as possible. Many are saying that their churches are now in jeopardy of failing.

Now Christian geneticist and U.S. National Institutes of Health Director, Francis Collins, advises that churches ought to postpone in-person services due to the virus until the summer of 2021 when most Americans have received a vaccine. Collins says churches should either go remote or virtual.

I respectfully dissent!

There's a mental health crisis occurring in conjunction with the pandemic. Drug and alcohol abuse are exceedingly high. Suicides are through the roof. More than ever, the doors of the church should be open, with services provided regularly. People need a place that they can go to find spiritual counsel, comfort, and hope.

Years ago, I heard an old faithful preacher advising a woman who said she could go to church just as well by radio and television as she could by attending church services. He wisely responded, "Lady, going to the church via television is about like kissing your boyfriend over the telephone. It just ain't the same."

In one of the great passages of exhortation in the Book of Hebrews, the readers are strongly admonished, "...not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near" (10:25 RSV).

Just as the government coerced lockdowns to kill businesses during the pandemic and closed church doors it seriously injures churches and their mission. Church attendance for so many is habitual, and getting out of the habit can be devastating to one's spiritual life. Someone put it this way: "We first make our habits, and then our habits make us."

I don't doubt the reality of the virus. I recently spoke at the Memorial Service of a close friend who died of COVID 19. Nevertheless, our government's response and the way many church leaders have acquiesced to closing church doors and canceling services has been beyond the pale. Moreover, too many professing Christians, who could attend church services, are staying at home for fear of catching the virus.

Is this the proper response for a people who should be facing death with the assurance of eternal life?

Think of the early Christians who often met in hiding, knowing they might be put to a torturous death if they were caught meeting together for worship.

And we are afraid of a virus in which ninety-nine percent of the people who get it recover, and less than one percent die from it?

Think of the apostles of Christ, all of which, except John, died horrendous deaths for the practice of their faith. Andrew was crucified on an X-shaped Cross. Matthew was impaled to the earth by spears and then beheaded. Bartholomew was flayed to death by a whip and torn to shreds. Thomas died from a stabbing. Philip was impaled by iron hooks in his ankles and hung upside down to die. James, Jesus' brother, is thought to have been beheaded by King Herod near Palestine. Jude was crucified. Matthias was stoned and then beheaded. Death hung over them every day like a Damocles sword for the practice of their religion. And we're avoiding church because of a virus from which the overwhelming majority of people recover?

Brian Kingslake, in Out of This World, addresses the question of why going to a church building or a specific gathering place best serves our faith. He eloquently writes:

"The whole subject of the relationship between the externals and the internals of religion is very interesting. Just as the stone walls and locked doors of a church building protect the altar Bible, the Communion vessels and the rich carpets of the sanctuary (and, I may add, the tape recorder and P.A. system) so the externals of religion can protect and preserve the more precious worship of the heart. The fact that we discipline ourselves to attend service in a certain building at a definite hour, and take part in a certain ritual that has evolved during the ages, can help to preserve and protect our spiritual consciousness. To depend entirely on one's spiritual vitality is beyond the capacity of most of us. Structure can get in the way, but without any structure, there is a tendency for our thoughts to dissipate and degenerate into trivia and superficial or sentimental nothingness. We need to get together with our friends from time to time to 'fill our tanks at the filling station,' so to speak, to recharge our flat batteries."

I suggest this can't be effectively done by setting up your laptop, iPad, or smartphone and watching church staff online.

I'm not saying the church is brick and mortar. The church is God's people. I'm not saying the stained glass windows confer the forgiveness of sins or the gift of eternal life. I'm not saying the pipe organ with its exquisite music is what brings the sinner to repentance. It's not the choir singing while gorgeously robed, or the hymns sung by the congregation, or the lighting of candles, or even the powerful message from the pastor that define what it means to be a Christian.

Neither do I mean to say we should throw caution to the wind. What I am saying, however, is that our churches should be open with proper health protocols, including taking temperatures, wearing masks, hand washing stations, etc. And if your health is not already seriously compromised by your age or a serious underlying health condition, you need to be in church!

Yes, you need to be in church, even during this pandemic.



Reverend Dr. Mark Creech is Executive Director of the NC Christian Action League. You may contact him at [rev.markcreech@christianactionleague.org](mailto:rev.markcreech@christianactionleague.org) or 919-787-0606

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# Your Government Page

## NC Senate District 47



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

In addition to Republicans maintaining a majority in both the North Carolina General Assembly and Council of State in the November 2020 election, all contested judicial races for the North Carolina Supreme Court and Court of Appeals were won by Republicans. Senior Associate Supreme Court Justice Paul Newby ran against Chief Justice Cheri Beasley for her seat and ultimately won by 401 votes, after fruitless recounts initiated by Beasley to maintain her seat. On December 12, 39 days after the election, Beasley finally acknowledged her loss and conceded the election to Newby. In addition to Newby, two other Republicans – NC Court of Appeals Judge Philip Berger, Jr. and former state senator and attorney Tamara Barringer – won seats on the NC Supreme Court, changing the balance on the Court from one Republican, six Democrats to three Republicans, four Democrats. All three Justice-elects to the NC Supreme Court are constitutional conservatives and have pledged to refrain from legislating from the bench. This is a significant gain for our state as our current governor, Roy Cooper, has reflexively turned to our state's courts time and again to change laws passed by the legislature in his effort to "sue until blue" and move forward his liberal agenda.

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

## NC Senate District 46



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

Happy New Year! The year 2020 is now behind us, and what a tumultuous year it was. With the onset of the COVID-19 virus that originated in China and inflicted sickness, death, financial, and many other types of hardships on nations and people groups around the world, our country and our state will continue to deal with both the physical and economic damage that has been done here in America. I hope that each of you experienced a peaceful and blessed Christmas holiday filled with family, fellowship, and laughter. But all of us are aware of and know friends, family members, and/or acquaintances for whom these past holidays were marred by tragedy or loneliness. And to some of them, the scars of their loss will be present for years to come. As we move forward into a new year, I am reminded of how fragile life is, and how quickly our time on earth passes. James 4:13 says, "you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away." It is hard to believe that it has been ten years since the people of Burke and Caldwell counties afforded me the opportunity to serve you in the NC Senate. As I look back on the past ten years, I am thankful for all the wonderful people that I have been able to meet and work with in Raleigh and across our state. Even more rewarding has been the opportunity to serve (at different times) the people of Avery, Burke, Caldwell, and Cleveland counties, and to work with the local elected leaders of those counties and their cities and towns. As 2021 begins, Lydia and I still consider it an honor to work with you and for you. We hope and pray that this year we will be able to move beyond this virus in the hopes of returning to the days when we could go to church, a ball game, a concert, or just out to dinner and not be concerned with mandates from Raleigh or signs on the door telling us what we must do to enter. (Remember when all it said was, "No shirt, no shoes, no service!") We hope that the coming year will be better than the last and that it will bring renewed friendships, peace, and joy to each of you.

As I write this, the 2020 "Christmas Star" is shining above us with the brilliant alignment of Saturn and Jupiter in the night sky, the first time this has occurred since the 13th century! May it be a reminder to all of us that we will never know what the future holds, but we can know and be comforted by the God who created us all, and who holds the future.

## NC House District 86



Rep. Hugh Blackwell  
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[Hugh.Blackwell@ncleg.net](mailto:Hugh.Blackwell@ncleg.net)

Thanks to the urgency introduced by "Operation Warp Speed," we appear to be at a turning point in our battle against COVID-19. Operation Warp Speed is the private-public partnership instituted by President Trump that mobilized the finest research minds in the private and public sectors to develop one or more vaccines that disable the COVID-19 virus. Because of Operation Warp Speed, scientists were able to discover and develop vaccines with unprecedented speed while still adhering to the highest levels of safety required in the United States. The vaccine will be free to all. UNC-Chapel Hill, Duke University, and private research teams in the Research Triangle Park have been major contributors in deciphering the workings of the COVID-19 virus and developing therapies.

In October, North Carolina submitted to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) a plan for how the vaccine will be allocated in our state. As soon as the Food and Drug Administration okays the use of one or more vaccines, the CDC will issue final distribution guidance to the state. There are to be four phases of distribution. The timeline for distribution after Phase 1A is uncertain. As the availability of vaccine becomes more certain, distribution timelines will come into focus.

- Phase 1A: Healthcare workers and medical first responders who face a high risk of exposure to the virus. Staff in long-term care settings are also included in this priority group. (Est. population: 140K-161K people)
- Phase 1B: Residents in long-term care settings, people with two or more chronic illnesses, also known as comorbidities, who live inside and outside of congregate living settings such as jails, prisons, and migrant camps -- including residents of such locations who are over the age of 65, front line workers with two or more comorbidities, and staff in congregate living settings. (Est. population: 587K-790K people)
- Phase 2: All other residents in congregate living facilities, firefighters and police officers, food packaging, preparation, and processing workers, manufacturing workers, construction workers, transportation workers, some retail and grocery store workers, child care workers, adults with chronic conditions, people over the age of 65, and staff in K-12 schools and colleges/universities. (Est. population: 1.18M-1.57M people)
- Phase 3: Energy/telecom workers, water/waste/energy operators, all other retail workers, religious leaders, and other membership associations, students in K-12 and colleges/universities (Est. population: 574K-767K people)
- Phase 4: Everyone else not identified in Phases 1-3 (Est. population: 3.6M-4M people)



*God Bless America*



Dementia Related Psychosis:  
Four Caregiver Facts You Need to Know

(StatePoint) Approximately 2.4 million people or 30 percent of people living with dementia in the U.S. may experience hallucinations and delusions associated with dementia-related psychosis. These symptoms might include seeing something that isn't there or believing something that isn't true and can be frequent, persistent, and recur over time.

According to advocates, improving the management of these troubling symptoms starts with recognizing and understanding what patients are experiencing. To learn more, UsAgainstAlzheimer's, the Lewy Body Dementia Association (LBDA), and Acadia Pharmaceuticals surveyed patients and their caregivers. Findings highlighted important, infrequently discussed, considerations for caregivers:

1. Symptoms can happen frequently: The most common symptoms of dementia-related psychosis reported by surveyed patients were visual hallucinations (89 percent), auditory hallucinations (54 percent), and distortion of senses (54 percent) and such symptoms can happen frequently. In patients who reported recent visual hallucinations, 61 percent indicated they occurred at least weekly. Also, the majority of care partners (77 percent) reported paranoid delusions as occurring at least weekly.

"Given their potential frequency, being prepared to recognize, report, and manage these symptoms is critical," says Theresa Frangiosa of UsAgainstAlzheimer's, one of the survey authors. "My mom experienced these kinds of symptoms associated with her Alzheimer's disease and in talking with other caregivers, many people think this could never happen to their family until it does."

2. Dementia-related hallucinations and delusions greatly impact a patient's overall health and quality of life: Most surveyed patients said their activities of daily living (75 percent), sleep (63 percent), family life (56 percent), and safety (about 56 percent) were affected by dementia-related hallucinations and delusions. Care partners reported that symptoms make it difficult for their loved ones to know what is real and what is not real, contributing to their anxiety, and impacting their personal relationships.

Jo Anne, 70, from Maryland, was surprised by her husband's hallucinations. "Before Ed was diagnosed with Lewy body dementia, he would tell me that he saw mice or insects in the house so, of course, I'd go check! When these experiences increased in frequency, I knew that we needed to talk to his doctor about why he was having persistent hallucinations."

Research shows that this kind of neuropsychiatric symptoms may pose challenges. For example, studies show that the presence of psychosis in Alzheimer's patients was also associated with 1.5 times increased likelihood of death.

3. Care partners are affected too: Dementia-related hallucinations and delusions are symptoms that can be associated with all forms of dementia such as Lewy body dementia, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease dementia, vascular dementia, and frontotemporal dementia. Unfortunately, caregivers of people with dementia compared to non-caregivers can experience high rates of emotional and physical stress as well as depression, an increased likelihood of comorbid conditions, hospitalizations, and doctor visits. In fact, caregiver burden is associated with increased desire to place people with dementia in long-term care.

4. Getting help as early as possible is key: Living with dementia-related hallucinations and delusions takes a toll on both patients and caregivers. That's why advocates urge caregivers to get educated about what to expect from dementia-related psychosis and find support.

"If you see your loved one exhibiting new symptoms, then take the initiative to tell their health care provider, who can offer advice on how to cope," urges Frangiosa.

For more information, visit [usagainstalzhaimers.org](http://usagainstalzhaimers.org). UsAgainstAlzheimer's is an advocacy and research-focused organization pushing for expanding treatments and research for Alzheimer's disease. Additional education is available from LBDA at [www.lbda.org](http://www.lbda.org).

While the symptoms of dementia-related psychosis can be hard to recognize at first, reporting symptoms is the first step to finding support.

By David Burleson  
Burke County



January is School Board Appreciation Month, and the New Dimensions Charter School wants to say, "thank you" to all our board members who do so much for our school. New Dimensions is represented by eleven dedicated board members who devote countless hours to make sure our students are served in the best way possible. Chair Regina Rhodes, Vice-Chair Kristen Rodriguez, Secretary Shanna Wall, Treasurer David Martin, Pamela Harrison, Tracy Jones, Dorie Evans, Jamie Smith, Casey Kinard, Chris Beam, and Brad Buchanan are true advocates for the students of New Dimensions, developing policies and making decisions that help shape the future of our school. Our school board oversees more than 384 students, 48 employees, and an annual budget of over \$3,000,000. I am proud to work with our board, and I congratulate them on their excellent leadership and vision for the students of New Dimensions.

I also want to remind our school community of the new anonymous tip line, Say Something, that our middle school students and staff currently have available to them. New Dimensions joins schools around the nation as users of this program. Say Something is a school safety program for students – developed by Sandy Hook Promise – that enables students to anonymously report tips about school safety concerns via a mobile app along with a phone call. The tips will be received by school administrators and law enforcement, who will respond appropriately based on the type of tip.

We want to be sure our students have a voice when it comes to feeling safe at school, and that's why we are a part of this program. This app gives students the ability to remain anonymous while reporting instances of bullying or fighting involving themselves or others, or if they've seen a weapon at school, with assurances that their tip will be seen and investigated. The Say Something mobile app allows users (who can include students, teachers, and parents) to provide tips in categories that include bullying, illegal drug and alcohol use, fighting, weapons, and a report category for all other types of tips. Students can submit digital photos or videos along with text information from their cell phones directly to the school administrative team and school resource officer. The app allows students, if they choose, to bookmark a tip so that they can follow-up on the status of their tip, or anonymously text back and forth with administrators to provide additional information. Additionally, if a student has a suicide or mental health concern, they can reach out to trained professionals by using the app. The app is available for download from the Android Marketplace and the Apple App Store.

The Center for Safer Schools, created in March 2013 as part of the N.C. Department of Public Safety, worked with Sandy Hook Promise in response to a concern noted by students, teachers, administrators, and law enforcement during community forums, of a need for a standardized method for students to report safety issues to school administrators, teachers, and school resource officers.

• Why it exists  
Over 160,000 school children miss school each day in the United States out of fear of being bullied. Being able to report their fears is paramount in reducing these absences. Over 90 percent of students say they would use an anonymous reporting tool if they had one available. This is also important because over 80 percent of school shooters tell someone before they act. An anonymous reporting tool could help prevent school shootings and other safety concerns on school campuses.

In 2013, one of the first activities of the North Carolina Center for Safer Schools (NCCFSS) was to tour the state and hold community forums at several schools. These forums included meeting with students, teachers, administrators, and law enforcement in the afternoon followed by an open community forum in the evening. One of the concerns that arose from these meetings was that students needed a truly anonymous, standardized method to report their concerns to school administrators, school resource officers (SROs), and teachers. The NCCFSS heard this call for help and began developing a plan to find and implement an anonymous reporting application for students that could also be available for their parents and teachers. Say Something is a tangible anonymous application for smartphones that has been developed with the needs of North Carolina's school children in mind.

Continuing the safety theme, New Dimensions is fortunate to partner with the City of Morganton to place a school resource officer at our school. Officer Casey Kinard will celebrate his first anniversary as the New Dimensions SRO this month. Officer Kinard is the lead person on the Say Something anonymous tip app. Our students, staff, parents, and visitors are in very capable hands. New Dimensions has installed security cameras throughout our building and grounds. These cameras are making a safe school even safer.

Open enrollment at New Dimensions begins on Monday, January 4, and ends on Wednesday, March 31 at 4 p.m. Applications for the upcoming year will be posted on our website and will be available at the school beginning on January 4. Virtual tours will be developed and posted in January. Just give us a call (828-437-5753) or email us at [dburleson@ndschoool.org](mailto:dburleson@ndschoool.org) if you have questions about our school.

At the end of the enrollment period, it will be determined if there are more applications than spaces available for each grade. If the number of applicants for a particular grade does not exceed the number of available spaces for that grade level, all students who have applied by the deadline will be accepted. If the number of applicants for a particular grade level exceeds available spaces for that grade level, a lottery system will determine admission eligibility. Students who are not offered enrollment will be placed on a waitlist. After all spaces for a grade level are filled, the lottery will continue until all applying students have been assigned a priority number on the waitlist. The waitlist will not carry into the next school year.

The support of our community and the shared desire to keep our students safe is greatly appreciated.

David Burleson is the Director of the New Dimensions Charter School in Burke County.



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Don’t Live to Regret It

By Timothy W. Tron  
Burke County



An old cliché came to me this morning through the words of a song, "You'll live to regret it..."

Many will look back on 2020 and realize it was more than the year of unprecedented events, but sadly for many, will become a year of regret. Then there is the introspective thought, “How many things have we passed through in this life to only live long enough to regret them?”

Meriam-Webster defines regret as the following: re·gret | \ ri-'gret \ 1a: to mourn the loss or death of, b: to miss very much, sorrow aroused by circumstances beyond one's control or power to repair, an expression of distressing emotion (such as sorrow).

The longer I ponder on this line, the more corollary aspects of it come into play. For it can mean more than not having appreciated someone or something; can it not? Life is a never-ending journey of choices, and with them, we often face missing an opportunity, albeit good or bad. Like a fork in the road, there is always more than one path that we may take. As the saying goes, the one less traveled is often the one that will enrich our soul all the more. I once had a phrase back in my youth when my ambitions were to pursue the lusts of the flesh, that I was the "Unluckiest, lucky man alive." In other words, God was watching over me even when I wasn't seeking him. As much as I tried to run from him, I soon found out there was no place to hide. My life was as the psalmist wrote, *"Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me."*

Time and time again, when my path should have led to utter destruction, there was another miraculous occurrence that delivered me safely out of the jaws of the lion. In those many narrow escapes of a poor choice, it was as if I could feel the prayers of my family's spiritual leaders blanketing me when I was woefully unworthy. They would pray that those early teachings they had sown would someday blossom. Thankfully, those seeds of faith my elders had planted in me took root, and once they began to germinate, God's plan for me began to come to fruition. But it would take many years and many knocks upon my proverbial door before my hard head would allow him in.

As Christians, is not our pathway more judicious than those who wander like ships tossed upon the sea? *"Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass."* While we might ponder those many missed opportunities, we should not live in regret. For there was and always is a purpose in the next step we take. While it may seem as if a choice were a mistake when the longer journey reveals the road traveled, when we look back over the dawn of time, we can almost, if not always, see how that passage through which we endured was one in which there could not have been a more perfect plan provided. These are the moments, when we allow them, that magnify the essence of God. *"And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass."*

Take, for instance, just a couple of nights ago, a decision to remain in Boone and run a couple of errands before heading down the mountain cost me in time but could have cost me much more.

Why do I say this? Allow me to explain.

My own "plan," if you will, was to leave work a little early and run while the snow was still falling. Besides the novelty of running in the snow, there was the hope that I would be able to capture images for future use in devotional postings to social media. The trails that crisscross the Moses Cone Memorial park offer a never-ending vista of God's creation. With each changing season, so do those familiar spots where the camera's eye catches one's attention.

The run was challenging in that the bitterly cold wind bit into my exposed flesh. But as is most often the case, as I continued quoting scriptures, the pain of the outer body diminished until the point it was only a mild nuisance. Thankfully, there were several good scenes from which to choose. The falling snow's pace was merely a flurry at best by the end of the run, so it didn't seem unwise to go ahead and stop by a local store to pick up another Christmas gift. While I was in the spirit of getting things done, I also decided to go ahead and run to Lowe's for a couple of things on my list. While in the store, hunger began to gnaw at my insides. One who has trained long enough or worked in a physical capacity for an extended time knows the difference between a little hunger pang and one of greater magnitude, for that latter one was one that hit me while picking up those supplies. Seeing that there was a greater need than a want, I decided to go ahead and grab an early supper as well. The hot soup and sandwich hit the spot as I sat in the parking lot of Chik-Fil-A and dined alone. Outside the car, the flurries continued as the last vestiges of light faded from the sky. Street lights seemed hazy in the falling snow, but there was nothing at this point that created any sense of dread. The thermometer on the car's display read 23 degrees.

Driving out of Boone and eventually into Blowing Rock, there was still nothing to indicate that this was nothing more than a beautiful end to a snowy day on the mountain. Christmas lights were already hung in several stores and homes. Their ambiance warming the soul within as my car drove past. Then, as the curve past the last light in Blowing Rock began to fall behind me, there ahead were the seemingly endless line of red tail-lights. An unending line of cars wrapped around the curve ahead and far below the mountain.

There would be no usual drive home that night.

Later, I would find out that a tractor-trailer had jack-knifed one of the icy curves. With it, several cars were also wrecked and maligned across the roadway. So, for the remainder of the evening, for over an hour or so, there I sat.

Looking back, my first thoughts were of regret for having stopped and run those errands. As the evening wore on, sitting there in my little car, thoughts of thanks began to percolate into my head. Earlier that morning, I had stopped for gas; the car was on full. The heater was working well, even though outside it was a frigid 23 degrees; I was warm and dry. My body had forced me to eat supper early, so I was fed. The longer I sat, the more I realized how lucky it was that my drive home was paused in the manner it was, for my fate could have been much different; either crashed or worse, injured – to the point of death.



The night following, Pastor Greer led us through the study of Romans 10 and, in so doing, mentioned the Roman Road to salvation. The term is often used to describe the scriptures in the book of Romans, which are often used to lead someone to Christ. Along this virtual road, one can find eternal salvation if they so choose to make the drive. As some choices in life afford one the ability to know the result ahead of time, and so it is when one takes this route – the Roman road. Eternal life, one in which you would inevitably be able to live long enough to see if there were any regrets, would ironically allow you also to know that there couldn't have genuinely been any regrets, for the path you took was the one in which God would have planned.

However, if we live being regretful, is this not as bad or worse than not forgiving? Worse yet, think of what the utmost regret might be? If you think of life in terms of eternity, then you are on the right track. In this vein of thought, one would have to say that the utmost remorse would undoubtedly be dying without choosing the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. This choice would culminate after one's physical life on earth has ended only to wake up in hell, realizing that, and eternally regretting not having believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

There is no going back.

For in the gospel of Luke, the account of the rich man that died and was suddenly thrust into the midst of hell paints a vivid picture of someone who realized too late that he had made the wrong choices. *"There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented...Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."*

While it may not be evident to some, the Lazarus in this story is not the same one that Jesus raised from the dead. Yet, the name "Lazarus" is appropriately used in this passage, for in the Hebrew tongue, it translates to, "God has helped." As the beggar Lazarus suffered his earthly life, God knew his heart. Those Pharisees to whom Jesus spoke had hearts hardened like the rich man. They knew the writings of Moses, they knew the law, and they knew the prophets' teachings, yet they could not be persuaded. And the last sentence, as in typical Godly-poetic-justice, Jesus says, "though one rose from the dead." Here he analogizes the Lazarus I this story with the one to whom he raised from the dead. Though the beggar Lazarus had died, he was alive in eternity, as though he had risen from the dead.

Lazarus had no regrets, for his reward was everlasting life, unlike the rich man who now felt the full weight of his errors. Wanting to prevent his own family from the same fate, he begged for Abraham to send Lazarus, for him to return from the dead and go to his house to warn his brothers not to fall to the same fate. Like him, Abraham responded that they already knew the answers, but they too were hardened to the truth.

Friend, be not so consumed with your knowledge that you miss the truth of this story. As Jesus told the Pharisees, "Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye find eternal life. For they are they which speak of me." In other words, the answer is in Christ. Seek him, and you will find eternal life.

Let the only regrets in your life be those of the past; whereby, you didn't spend enough time with loved ones, or you didn't appreciate those who prayed over you, or that you didn't stop and pause long enough along the journey to appreciate all that God has done for you. Yes, let those regrets be of the past. Going forward, willingly receive Christ in your life and leave all your future regrets behind.

You only have one earthly life to live. Make it count.

Thanks be to God.

*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*



God’s Concern About our Walk

by Dr. Tom Walker  
McDowell County



Leviticus 23 is consumed with the walk of God’s people. Our next series of articles will deal with the walk of God’s born-again believers.

v.3 *“If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them;*

v. 12 *And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people.*

v. 21 *And if ye walk contrary unto me, and will not hearken unto me; I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins.*

v. 23 *And if ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me;*

v. 24 *Then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins.*

v. 27 *And if ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary unto me;*

v. 28 *Then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins.”*

The Bible uses the word “walk” many times. In fact, it is mentioned 212 times in the Word of God, while “walked” is used 122 times in the Holy Scriptures. If something is mentioned that often, it must be a very important matter to carefully consider.

To what does the word “walk” generally refer? It speaks inwardly of our attitude and outwardly to our conduct. It has reference to our deportment, our behavior, our ways, our manners, our actions, and our deeds.

It is certain that how we walk will affect God’s reactions to us. The Lord responds in blessing or correction toward us, depending upon how we respond to His commands. The Bible teaches the wayward Christian in action or attitude will have to deal with a response from Almighty God.

Think about the following verses from the Book of Hebrews: Hebrews 12:5-11

*“ And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:*

*6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*

*7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?*

*8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.*

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

*10 For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.*

*11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”*

When we stray spiritually, the Lord responds to all of His children in chastisement or correction. What parent could rightly claim he or she loves their children when their wrong behavior goes unproved? One sure sign that one is not a believer is that when we do wrong no chastisement comes (Heb.12:8).

Our attitude and actions determine whether we will receive correction or blessing. God would rather bless us that He had to chastise us, but He will do to us what we need to be done because of His infinite love for us.

Observe with me some important points to consider.

**The Promises for the Right Kind of Walk**

God said in v.3 *“If ye walk in my statutes and keep my commandments and do them.”* Then He promises to bless if they would walk before Him as they should. What did God promise them?

He promised that rain would come in due season (v.4a). The human body depends on water as well as vegetation and crops. Rain is an essential part of human needs. No one wants to go through a severe drought.

Also, God promised the land would yield her increase (v.4b). God would bless them with a greater amount of fruit to consume and the land would become increasingly productive.

Also, God said the trees would yield their fruit (v.4c). In comparison, those who obey God and do as He says, are the ones who bear the most spiritual fruit in their lives from day-to-day.

Promises did not stop with the first three promises. God also said, “threshing shall reach unto the vintage.” God promises to bless the grain they would harvest and that the grape harvest would continue unto planting time (v.5a).

God also told them “Ye shall eat your bread to the full and dwell in your land safely” (v.5b).

His promises did not stop there; He went further. God promised they would have peace in their land (v. 6a). This means that if they would walk closely to Him, the Lord would deal with their enemies, and they could have peace. In v.6 God promises protection to the degree they could overcome their enemies. Look at how the Lord describes their victory over their enemies. Leviticus 26:7-8 says: *“And ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. And five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight: and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword.”*

Other blessings are promised in this section of Scripture that we do not have writing space to elaborate upon. Look those over and you will conclude that it pays to walk following God and not contrary to God.

Those people who live in a different way than what the Bible prescribes cannot expect the blessing of God upon their lives and their nation. Obedience brings

blessing. Israel had a difficult time learning that lesson.

**The Problems with a Contrary Walk**

In Leviticus 26 there are two verses where God rebukes them for walking a “contrary” walk. It points to a hostile encounter or a non-compliant, self-seeking way of life. If a person is contrary concerning God, it means they are moving in the opposite direction than the Lord is.

Idolatry is a revelation of a contrary walk. The Lord told Israel, “Thou shalt have no other God’s before Me.” God will not accept rivals for our affection for Him in our lives. How foolish that some of the Israelites worshiped objects that could not hear, speak, or respond to their requests. Anything that becomes more important to us than God becomes an idol to us.

Rebellion is a revelation of a contrary walk. It is a revolt or open resistance to God governing our lives. In fact, rebellion against God is seen in such a negative light that it is compared with the sin of witchcraft (I Sam.15:23). The opposite of rebellion is submission or putting yourself under the authority of another.

What happened to Israel when they walked contrary to the laws God had given them to follow?

First, God appointed terror and consumption (v.16). They would have difficult lives if they went against God’s will for their lives. They would greatly suffer for their revolting and resistance.

Then, God said they would have sorrow of heart (v.16b). The only way to be happy in life is to obey and submit to the leadership of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

Also, God said they would sow their seed in vain (v.16c). God would allow their enemies to eat the food the Israelites would plant for their own families.

God would set His face against them (v.17). It would be revealed that God would allow the enemies that hated His people to reign over them and many would-be slain by the enemies of Israel.

Also, the Lord would break the pride of their power (v.19). They would lose their pride of heart. As explained in the next few verses of our chapter, the land would not give forth its crops and the trees of the land would not yield their fruits.

It is a serious matter when we think and walk contrary to the will of God for our lives.

**The Privileges of a Cooperative Walk**

The Bible is full of words of blessings to all of those who walk in harmony with the Lord.

First, there is fellowship. In Leviticus 26:12 God says, *“And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people.”* That sounds to me like One who wants to fellowship with His people. Sin hinders sharing in common with the Lord.

There will be deliverance. In Leviticus 26:13 God reminds those who are not contrary to him that, *“ I am the Lord your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that ye should not be their bondmen; and I have broken the bands of your yoke, and made you go upright.”* He delivers those who fear Him.

There will be awe. When we co-operate with and obey the Lord, a sense of awe will be experienced as we learn more about who God is. Several times walking with God is accompanied by fear (Deut.8:6; 13:14; Ne. 5:9). Godly fear results in departing from evil.

We are wise if we go with God and do not struggle against Him. Choose to bless over correction every time.

*Tom Walker is President of Foothills Baptist Bible College and Pastor of Zion Hill Baptist Church in Marion, NC.*



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Prayer – Persistence Rewarded

By Glenda Ward  
McDowell County



There comes a time in life when our soul senses the glory of the Divine Being. We pray to God that we might enjoy Him, by praying in a manner with a new sort of affection. In this New Year Pray to enjoy a sense of the glory and grace of God and a new sense of God's plan for your guided future. It is our responsibility to pray with persistence to our Heavenly Father. Psalms 125:1-2

God promises that His people will live in peaceful dwellings – homes in which one can experience peace. Open your minds so God's truth can enter in. God will keep you in perfect peace, to those whose mind is stayed on Him: because you trusteth in Him (Reference Isaiah 26:3). *"And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance forever. And my people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places,"* (Isaiah 32:17-18) because you trusteth in Him. For the secret of the peace of God – read Philippians 4:4-9.

Pray for PURITY of Heart

*"Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God"* (Matthew 5: 8). Pray to God for Purity of Heart to cleanse your way. Pray to stay pure in heart by taking heed to God's Word. (Read Psalms 119:9-11). Pray for your loved ones to be sanctified so that they may know, reflect, and experience God.

Pray for Purpose and God's Plan

Pray for the Purpose that you and your loved ones will grow in maturity in worship, discipleship, and ministry. Pray for the knowledge to obey the Will of God in your life and in the life of your loved ones. (Read 1 Colossians 1:19). Pray it would be said that favor is found in God's eyes and fulfilled with Purpose in the generation thereof.

Pray – Asking God to Prosper your family

Ask God to abundantly bless the life, health, witness, and resources for your family to Prosper in His Will. He that seeks God and His Will – God will make him to Prosper. Pray for their testimony as they walk in the truth of God's promise. (Reference 2 Chronicles 26:5; Psalms 118:25; 3 John 2).

Pray for Provision

*"Give us this Day our Daily Bread"* (Matthew 6:11). Ask God to provide the relationships, opportunities, and environment needed for the health, maturity, and development of your family. Seek encouragement to pray. (Reference Luke 11:2). *"The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; and they that dwell therein. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his Salvation"* (Reference Matthew 7:7-11; Psalms 24:1,5,6). This is the generation of them that seek God, that seek His face. Amen.

Pray for the Promise of God's Spirit

Ask God to pour out His Spirit – the outpouring of His Spirit upon sons and daughters. Ask for the manifestation of the Lord in their lives. We are to pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit on our children and that it will continue for many generations. (Reference Joel 2:28-29). We can do nothing and hope that our children learn how to talk to God!

Claim God's PROTECTION from evil

Ask God to be your Protector from evil, that of Satan's attacks and schemes. Ask Protection from any physical, mental, and emotional harm. (Reference Matthew 6:13). *"Lest Satan should get an advantage of us:"* seek Protection from all harm, *"for we are not ignorant of his devices"* (2Corinthians 2:11).

Pray in 2021: Lift up a shield of protection for your family, to bless those you love, keeping in mind Persistence will be rewarded.

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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# Foundation Forward

## Foundation Fathers and How They Served Our Country—Benjamin Rush

By David Streater, PhD  
*Burke County*



Benjamin Rush was born on Christmas Eve, 1745 in Byberry, Pennsylvania, and was only five when his father died. Being a prodigy, Benjamin left home at 12 to attend Princeton College. He graduated a year later and pursued a career in medicine after considering the ministry and the law.

Rush continued his education, earning his medical degree in 1768 from the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. While in Europe, Dr. Rush met and became a lifelong friend of Benjamin Franklin.

Dr. Rush returned to Philadelphia in 1769 and opened a medical practice focusing on the indigent and those with mental illness. Not only did Benjamin treat all socio-economic classes; he lent his medical knowledge to establishing veterinary medicine. Due to his overarching care for the mentally ill, he earned the title, Father of American Psychiatry.

Dr. Rush was a faithful patriot who strongly advocated independence before being sent to Congress. He and other delegates signed the Declaration of Independence on July 20th, though each knew it could be their death warrant. As a Founding Father and during the Revolutionary War, Dr. Rush was the Surgeon General of the Continental Army. He was nearly captured while treating the battle wounded.

After the war, Dr. Rush worked to end slavery and supported public education. In addition to being a patriot and physician, he established two universities, was an author, lecturer, evangelist, social reformer, and Treasurer of the United States Mint.

When he died on April 19, 1813, Dr. Rush and his wife, Julia Stockton, had 13 children. Dr. Benjamin Rush was not only a patriotic Founding Father; he left many notable legacies, and the world a better place.

Please visit your Charters of Freedom setting in most western North Carolina counties. A Charter of Freedom setting consists of the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. They are on permanent display analogous the Charters of Freedom in the National Archives, Washington, DC. Please visit our website ([ChartersofFreedom.com](http://ChartersofFreedom.com)) to learn more about our existing settings.

Teachers are encouraged to contact Dr. Streater for information and complementary student education materials to enhance experiential field trips to a Charter of Freedom settings. Everyone is welcome and urged to obtain a personalized engraved legacy paver for placement at their Charters of Freedom setting. Please contact Dr. Streater ([david.streater@gmail.com](mailto:david.streater@gmail.com)) for an engraved legacy paver and free educational materials.

*Dr. David Streater is the director of education for Foundation Forward. He is a retired college instructor and administrator, and a retired probation and parole officer/administrator. David is a criminologist who has an acute history interest, served in the Navy, and is a resident of Burke County, NC.*

*There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. 1 John 4:18*

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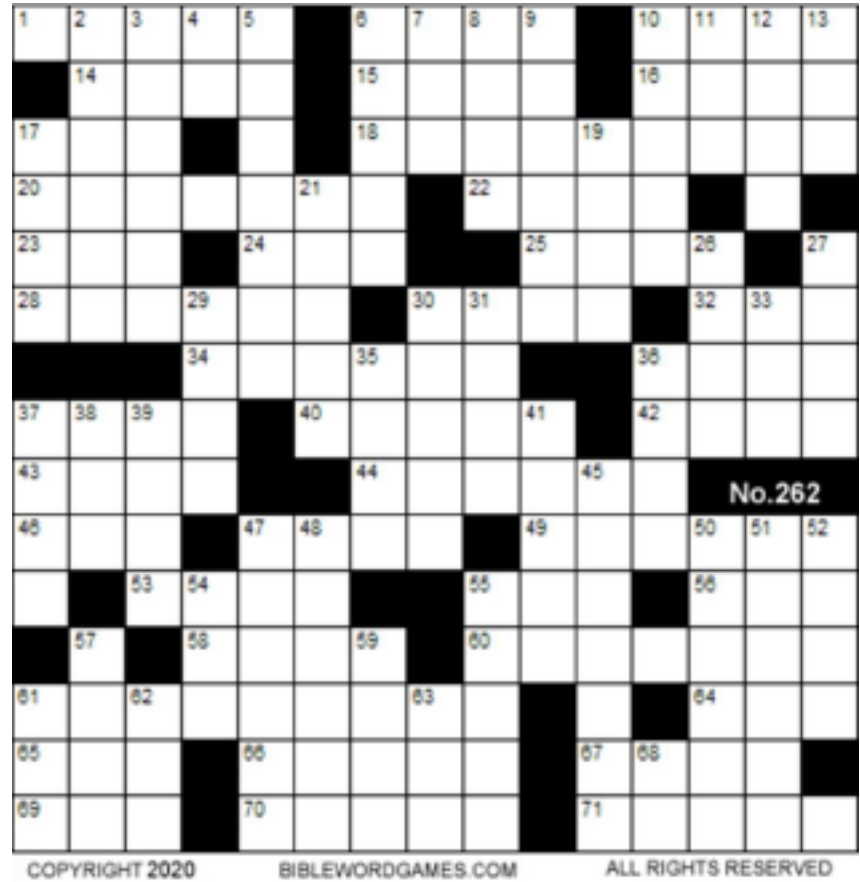
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# Crossword

Crossword 262 and Solution  
ACROSS  
1 Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to \_\_\_\_ (Ex 2:5)  
6 and drink with him after he \_\_\_\_ from the dead (Acts 10:41)  
10 to give notice of the \_\_\_\_ when the days of purification (Acts 21:26)  
14 He will pitch his royal tents between the \_\_\_\_ at the beautiful holy (Dan1:45)  
15 son of Seth (Gen 4:26) KJV  
16 \_\_\_\_ honors his father, and a servant his master (1,3) (Mal 1:6)  
17 as soon as \_\_\_\_ heard that Jesus was coming (John 11:20)  
18 Then the man led me \_\_\_\_ into the outer court (Ezek 42:1)  
20 To what can I \_\_\_\_ this generation? (Matt 11:16)  
22 Sharper \_\_\_\_ any double-edged sword (Heb 4:12)  
23 The precepts of the LORD \_\_\_\_ right, giving joy to the heart (Ps 19:8)  
24 church bench  
25 Or \_\_\_\_ let them come to me for refuge (Isa 27:5)  
28 To \_\_\_\_ them that were under the law (Gal 4:5)  
30 killed some twenty men in an area of about half an \_\_\_\_ (1 Sam 14:14)  
32 the hour cometh, \_\_\_\_, is now come, that ye shall be (John 16:32) KJV  
34 Ye made also \_\_\_\_ between the two walls for the (1,5) (Isa 22:11) KJV  
36 who claim to be \_\_\_\_ though they are not (Rev 3:9)  
37 Peter followed him \_\_\_\_ off unto the high priest's palace (Matt 26:58)  
40 The people have become hungry and \_\_\_\_ and thirsty (2 Sam 17:29)  
42 The merchant \_\_\_\_ dishonest scales; he loves to defraud (Hos 12:7)  
43 everyone \_\_\_\_ of God overcomes the world (1 John 5:4)  
44 a righteous man will receive a righteous man's \_\_\_\_ (Matt 10:41)  
46 Thou \_\_\_\_ the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt 16:16) KJV  
47 Go, post a lookout and have him report what he \_\_\_\_ (Isa 21:6)  
49 spoken of through the prophet Daniel, let the \_\_\_\_ understand (Matt 24:15)  
53 They were stoned, they were \_\_\_\_ asunder, were tempted (Heb 11:37) KJV  
55 seventh letter of the Greek alphabet  
56 Abimelech took an \_\_\_\_ in his hand, and cut down a bough (Judg 9:48) KJV  
58 censers, sprinkling bowls, \_\_\_\_,

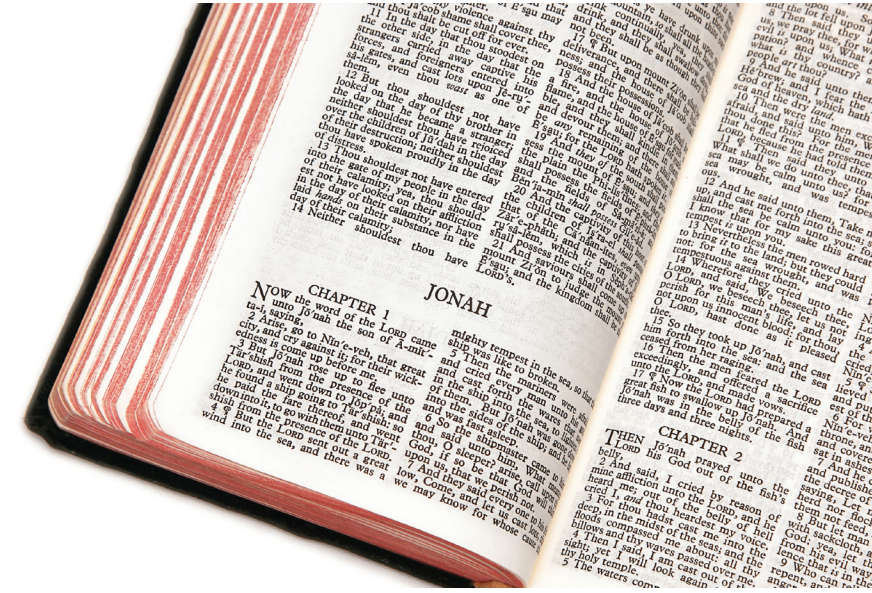
lampstands (Jer 52:19)  
60 upward slopes or grades (as in a road)  
61 command certain men not to teach false \_\_\_\_ any longer (1 Tim 1:3)  
64 Finish your outdoor work and \_\_\_\_ your fields ready (Prov 24:27)  
65 It \_\_\_\_ good land which the LORD our God doth (2,1) (Deut 1:25) KJV  
66 the LORD \_\_\_\_ the sea back with a strong east wind (Exod 14:21)  
67 the first garden (Gen 2:15-16)  
69 Abner son of \_\_\_\_, the commander of Saul's army (2 Sam 2:8)  
70 They \_\_\_\_ fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves (Gen 3:7)  
71 appointed priests from all \_\_\_\_ of people (1 Kings 12:31)  
DOWN  
2 When Jesus stepped \_\_\_\_, he was met by a demonpossessed (Luke 8:27)  
3 Their land \_\_\_\_ with frogs, which went up into the bedrooms (Ps 105:30)  
4 " \_\_\_\_ ! What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? (Luke 4:34)  
5 and they \_\_\_\_ into the land of Armenia (Isa 37:38) KJV  
6 they will \_\_\_\_ the ruined cities that have been devastated (Isa 61:4)  
7 Eber, Misham, Shemed who built \_\_\_\_ and Lod (1 Chron 8:12)  
8 "You know the man and the \_\_\_\_ of things he says," (2 Kings 9:11)  
9 the king was attracted to \_\_\_\_ more than to any of the other women (Est 2:17)  
10 a light shining in a dark place, until the day \_\_\_\_ (2 Peter 1:19)  
11 If ye have faith \_\_\_\_ grain of mustard seed (2,1) (Matt 17:20) KJV  
12 neither shall ye eat any flesh that is \_\_\_\_ of beasts (Exodus 22:31) KJV  
13 To this \_\_\_\_ I labor, struggling with all his energy (Col. 1:29)  
17 it is only a \_\_\_\_ from the boil (Lev 13:23)  
19 lest he \_\_\_\_ thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee (Luke 12:58) KJV  
21 Whosoever sins ye \_\_\_\_, they are remitted unto them (John 20:23) KJV  
26 on the third day Abraham lifted up his \_\_\_\_, and saw (Gen 22:4)  
27 Heaven and earth will \_\_\_\_ away, but my words (Matt 24:35)  
29 to settle down and \_\_\_\_ the bread they eat (II Th 3:12)  
30 ten \_\_\_\_ of vineyard shall yield one bath (Isa 5:10) KJV  
31 shall ye not eat of them that



\_\_\_\_ the cud (Lev 11:4) KJV  
33 one \_\_\_\_ lamb of the first year (Num 6:14)  
35 brothers, never \_\_\_\_ of doing what is right (2 Thes 3:13)  
36 the Lion of the tribe of \_\_\_\_, the Root of David, hath prevailed (Rev 5:5) KJV  
37 Like \_\_\_\_ tooth or a lame (1,3) (Prov 25:19)  
38 Keep me safe, O God, \_\_\_\_ in you I take refuge (Ps 16:1)  
39 Many of them also which used curious \_\_\_\_ brought their books (Acts 19:19)  
41 and made \_\_\_\_ and shields in abundance (2 Chron 32:5) KJV  
45 his pride \_\_\_\_ to the heavens and his head touches the clouds (Job 20:6)  
47 the shields and the \_\_\_\_, the weapons of war (Ps 76:3)  
48 a census should be taken of the \_\_\_\_ Roman world. (Luke 2:1)  
50 A prudent man sees \_\_\_\_ and takes refuge (Prov 22:3)  
51 there are divisions among you, and to some \_\_\_\_ I believe it (1 Cor 11:18)  
52 ye that labour and are heavy

laden, and I will give you \_\_\_\_ (Matt 11:28) KJV  
54 A man finds joy in giving an \_\_\_\_ reply (Prov 15:23)  
55 For I mean not that other men be \_\_\_\_, and ye burdened (2 Cor 8:13) KJV  
57 do not \_\_\_\_ heart when he rebukes you (Heb 12:5)  
59 appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as \_\_\_\_ (Matt 28:3)  
61 The LORD will destroy Babylon; he will silence her noisy \_\_\_\_ (Jer 51:55)  
62 slaughtering them along the way to a point below Beth \_\_\_\_ (1 Sam 7:11)  
63 as the serpent beguiled \_\_\_\_ through his subtilty (2 Cor 11:3)  
68 when you give to the needy, \_\_\_\_ not announce it with trumpets (Matt 6:2)

*Solution on page 14*







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