



BLUE RIDGE CHRISTIAN NEWS



Foothills Baptist Bible College

Walk in Love
By Dr. Tom Walker
McDowell County

Ephesians 5:2 says we are to *“Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling savour.”*

“Walk in love” is a very important consideration for God’s people. It is possible for us to walk in this way because love is a product of the Spirit of God (Gal.5:22,23). If the Spirit of God dwells within you, what seems to be impossible can become possible. The Spirit comes to dwell in these human bodies when we receive Christ as our Lord and Savior. He indwells every believer. The Bible clearly says, *“If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His”* (Romans 8:9).

We have learned already that our walk is synonymous with our lifestyle or the way we live. You tell me how a person lives his or her life and I will tell you how He is walking.

The Command

When we go to the Greek text from which our King James Bible came, we discover the word for “walk” is in what we call the imperative mood. That simply means this is not a suggestion or just something good to do, it is a command, a necessity, and a must.

I learned when I was just a young boy that when my dad gave me a command, that is exactly what he expected me to do. Although I did receive a few spankings when I was young, he corrected me in other ways when I did not do what he told me to do.

For the Christian that is called chastisement. All who are saved receive it when our actions and attitudes are contrary to the commands and will of God for our lives.

When God orders us to do something, it is for our benefit and the good of others. The Bible says His commandments *“are not grievous”* (I John 5:3). The word *“grievous”* is translated two other ways in the KJV. One way is with the word *“heavy”* (Matt. 23:4) and the other is *“weightier”* (2 Cor. 10:10). Instead of doing His will being grievous, Jesus said, *“My yoke is easy and my burden is light”* (Matt.11:30).

Obedience is an essential mark of one who is redeemed (Acts 5:32; Rom.5:1; Rom.15:18; Rom. 16:25-26; Heb.5:9; I Pet.1:1-2). Jesus said, *“If ye love me, keep my commandments”* (Jn.14:15). If we love Christ, we manifest an obedient following to all of His orders. We are soldiers in His army so we must obey the Lord. Saints obey out of loving adoration not out of dread.

The Continuance

“Walk” in our text is in the present tense, which suggests it is to be an ongoing, uninterrupted matter. It is to be persistent and continual when it comes to God and others.



When we walk in love, we are allowing it to control us instead of hate, revenge, and bitterness. Although there are many obstacles along the pathway that face us as we seek to walk in love, we cannot let any hindrances get in our way as we endeavor to make progress spiritually.

Along with the new nature we receive when we were saved (2 Peter 1:4), we still possess an old nature that plagues us every waking moment of our lives (Rom.7:15-18). The only way to overcome its wayward and downward pull is through the Holy Spirit of God as He works through that divine nature we received when we were saved (Rom.8:9).

There is a great need for consistency in the daily lives of God’s people. When we are not consistent in revealing love, it lessens the effect of our witness to the lost. How can we rescue the lost when they do not see the love of Christ in us?

Whose love is it in which we are to walk? It is that same love that Jesus has for His born-again people, the church. When the Bible says, “God so loved”, it speaks of a love that is above and far superior to any other form of love.

The Comparison

The Bible says, *“Walk in love, as Christ hath loved us.”* The little word *“as”* ties the two preceding clauses together. Our walk should be demonstrative. It should manifest the same kind of love that Christ showed toward us, an unselfish love. It is the kind of love that desires the best for the object loved. Even though we still have our old Adamic natures, through God’s indwelling Spirit, we can manifest to others the same kind of love that Christ showed toward us. Calvary is the proof of that sacrificial love, in that Christ became something that He was never guilty of in all of His eternal existence; He was made to be sin for us (2 Cor.5:21) so that we might be made the righteousness of God in Christ.

What kind of love are you manifesting? Is it a selfish kind of love or a selfless kind of love? Is it one that looks after yourself or one that has a desire to look out for others? To manifest the right kind of love two things must be true. First, you must be a child of God to truly manifest the divine love of God. Secondly, you must be filled or controlled by the Holy Ghost (Eph.5:18).

The Compulsion

What should move us to show forth the love of Christ? The Bible says Christ, *“Hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God.”* Why do I want to offer my body for Him to show this world what the love of God is like? It is very simple and yet profound. Christ gave himself in two extreme ways that you and I could be saved and walk with God in love.

Our love walk is our response to Christ’s love for us. Two main words are used to describe what Christ in love gave to us; the words are *“offering”* and the word *“sacrifice.”* The idea of sacrifice to the Jewish and pagan minds of early New Testament days was the idea of a life given in another’s place, while the word *“offering”* refers to the Burnt Offering of the Old Testament. It was given to God not merely because of sin, but because a person wanted to glorify and honor God. In Christ giving himself as an offering to God, Christ was looking beyond our need

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to the responsibility of glorifying God. The truth of the matter is that Christ laid down His life for His enemies (Rom. 5:10). I wonder how many of us would lay down our lives for our friends, nevertheless for our enemies?

The Cooperation

As we walk in love, our lives become as a “sweet savor” unto the Lord. God regards us as the sweet aroma or fragrance to God among them who are saved and also among those who are lost.

When we consider Romans 12:1-2 and 1 Corinthians 6:19, it is clear that if we offer our bodies to the Lord and realize at the same time that the body of the saved person is the temple of the Spirit of God, we are in a spirit of cooperation with God.

As we understand those two facts, we will make sure and glorify God in these bodies wherein we live. When we cooperate with the Lord, we seek to avoid fornication, uncleanness, and covetousness.

The choice is ours as to how we will conduct our lives. We are wise to walk in the ways God tells us to walk because that will always bring blessing from the hand of the Lord.

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



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What We Believe

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

God

God is the Creator and Ruler of the universe. He has existed eternally in three persons and chooses to manifest Himself in these three ways: as God the Father, as God the Son, and as God the Holy Spirit. These three are co-equal and are one God.
(Genesis 1:1, 26-27; 3:22; Psalm 90:2; Matthew 28:19; 1 Peter 1:2; and 2 Corinthians 13:14)

Jesus

Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, who is fully God and fully human in His incarnation. He lived a sinless human life and offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all humanity by dying on a cross. He arose from the dead after three days to demonstrate His power over sin and death. He ascended to heaven and will return again to reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
(Matthew 1:22-23; Isaiah 9:6; John 1:1-5; 14:10-30; Hebrews 4:14-15; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Romans 1:3-4; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Timothy 6:14-15; Titus 2:13)

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the very Spirit of God, fully divine, manifested in the life of every believer from the moment of salvation. He is equal with the Father and the Son as God. He is present in the world to make men aware of their need for Jesus Christ. He provides the Christian with power for living, understanding of spiritual truth, and guidance in doing what is right. The Christian seeks to live under His daily control.
(2 Corinthians 3:17; John 16:7-13; 14:16-17; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 2:12; 3:16; Ephesians 1:13; Galatians 5:25; Ephesians 5:18)

The Bible

The Bible is the divinely inspired, authoritative, infallible, living and active Word of God to all men. It was written by human authors under the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is the ultimate source of truth for Christian beliefs and living. In it we find a guideline for right relationship with God and God's creation, and a blueprint for personal, emotional, and spiritual growth.
(2 Timothy 1:13; 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:2-21; Psalm 119:105, 160; 12:6; Proverbs 30:5)

Humanity

Humanity is designed and made by God in His image. We have been created as cognitive, moral, ethical, and physical beings and have been equipped by God for both relationship with Him and with one another. Both male and female are gifted by the Creator with characteristics which equip them for the purpose for which they have been created: relationship, dominion, and responsibility. Although God designed us to have fellowship with Him, we became alienated from God through disobedience. As a result, all human beings are born with a sinful nature and choose to sin against God. We are incapable of regaining a right relationship with God through our own efforts.
(Genesis 1:26-28; Psalm 8:3-6; Isaiah 53:6; 59:1-2; Romans 3:23; 5:22; Colossians 1:21; 2 Corinthians 5:17)

Eternity & Eternal Security

Our soul, the essence of our being, was created by God to exist forever. That forever is spent in one of two places: eternally present and in union with God because of His forgiveness and salvation or eternally separated from God because of sin and unbelief. At the moment that our physical body dies, those who are saved are immediately taken to heaven. Those who have rejected God's gift of salvation will spend eternity separated from God in hell. Because God gives man eternal life through Jesus Christ, the believer is secure in that salvation for eternity. Salvation is maintained by the grace and power of God, not by the self-effort of the Christian. It is the grace and eternal power of God that gives this security.
(John 3:16; 5:11-13, 10:29; 1 John 2:25; Romans 6:23; Revelation 20:15; 2 Timothy 1:12; Hebrews 7:25; 10:10-14; 1 Peter 1:3-5)

Salvation

Salvation is God's gift of redemption and reconciliation to Himself and is offered freely to all who accept, by faith alone, Jesus Christ as God's only son and receive Him as Lord and Savior. We can never make up for our sin with self-improvement or good works. It is only by trusting in Jesus Christ as God's offer of forgiveness that you can be saved from sin's penalty. Eternal life begins the moment you receive Jesus Christ into your life by faith.
(Romans 5:1; 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9; John 1:12; 14:6; Titus 3:5; Galatians 3:26)



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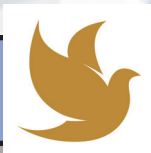
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“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace: that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation: that saith unto Zion. Thy God reigneth!”

Isaiah 52:7 KJV



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Church Directory



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Bakersville, NC 28705
www.bearcreekbaptist.com

Reverend Bruce Cannon

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

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

Landis Orthodox Presbyterian Church

4975 US 221
Marion NC 28972
(828)-756-7470
www.landischurch.org

Elder Mike Cloy

opcmikecloy@gmail.com

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

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Berry Chapel Baptist Church

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Pastor - Steve Williams

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Service 7:00 PM

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

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Sunday evening 6:30pm
Wednesday:
J.A.M. (Jesus and Me) 6:30pm
Mid-week worship 7:00pm
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Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church

2187 Jamestown Road
Morganton, NC
828-584-8212

Pastor Steve Beitz

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

Altapass Baptist Church

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

Dr. Marcus R. Benfield

Sunday School - 10:00am
Worship - 11:00am
Sunday Evening - 7:00pm
Sunday Youth Program - 7:00pm
1st & 3rd Sunday
(Conductors for Christ ages 5-11)
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Wednesday - 7:00pm

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Plumtree Presbyterian Church

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

Pastor Ryan Bridgeo

pastor@plumtreechurch.com

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

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

Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

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

Senior Pastor Dr. Jack Hodges

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

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

Great Hope Seventh-day Adventist Church

2907d US Hwy 70 E
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828-475-2040

Pastor Barry MaHorney

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

Burkemont Baptist Church

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Morganton, NC 28655
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For more information,
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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.
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First Baptist Church of Spruce Pine

125 Tappan Street
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www.sprucepinefbc.com
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

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Pine Branch Baptist Church

48 Church Road
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11090 Hwy. 226 South
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www.sprucepineumc.org
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
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Newland Christian Church

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

Pastor - Phillip Greene

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

"A Local Congregation of Christ's Church"

Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

An Encouraging Word: Lifted Up from Failure

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



“For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God...” So wrote the Apostle Paul in Romans 3:23, making clear that all of humanity has a sin problem. The Word of God declares that the only solution to our sin problem is *“the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe”* (Romans 3:22). For in believing and receiving Christ as our redeemer, we are *“justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith”* (Romans 3:24-25).

We all have tasted the awful taste of sin. And with it comes failure and defeat. But not every failure is a result of sin. Not every defeat comes on the heels of a sinful choice. Whatever the case or whether we have experienced a moral or ethical failure or a failure to achieve a pursued goal, if we are going, to be honest, then we must admit that there have been moments, times, days, or even months when we succumbed to temptation, frustration, fear, or other emotions and made a choice that failed. Some of those choices may have seemed like a good choice at the time, but later we realized that those choices set us up for nothing but failure. Job was a man who felt the weight of failure and loss. As a man after God’s own heart, he had worshipped and served the one and only true God, Elohim. Yahweh was his sword and shield; as well as his friend and companion. But when sudden and severe calamity struck, discouragement and failure hit him deep. His pain was great, his sorrow gut-wrenching. His world was torn apart, all that was left was to ask questions. Why God? Why me? Why now? Amid his sorrow and agony, Job exclaimed, *“My days are past, my plans are torn apart, Even the wishes of my heart”* (Job 17:11). Job shouted out his countless number of questions. Not at first, but later on as the pressure mounted and answers to the questions were slow to come, the questions began to pour out of his mouth. Job asked, *“Why?”*—just like we all do! As you read through the Book of Job, you will hear that one agonizing question over and over. Why?

At the end of the debates that go on throughout the book, Job comes to one conclusion—God is truly Sovereign in his life and is worthy of absolute worship and complete service. This powerful conclusion to which Job arrives comes through his recognition that because of God’s lovingkindness, he has received far more than he had before his trials.

In the book of Job, we find Satan leveling assault after assault at Job and his family. First, he attacks Job’s family. His sons and daughters were attacked and either slaughtered or were taken into captivity. His servants and possessions were taken or destroyed. Job’s sorrow and anguish rose up. And in Job 1:20-22, we read, *“Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped. He said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, And naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD. Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.”*

Satan’s second assault was against Job’s health. Satan was allowed to smite him with sore boils from the sole of his feet to the crown of his head. Imagine the pain and agony! As Job scraped the boils while he was sitting among the ashes of leftover fires, his wife tempted him, *“Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!”* (v. 9) She levels her own attack, **“Why are you insisting on remaining wholly committed to this God who just allowed everything valuable to be taken away from you?”** **“How could you even lift your aching hands and fall on your bleeding knees before such a God?”** It is interesting to note that the word that Job’s wife uses is a word that is best translated as “integrity” in the original Semitic languages of Hebrew and Aramaic. Through all the pain and loss, Job holds onto his integrity.

This word, “integrity,” is interesting. It comes from the root word “integer,” which means one undivided whole number. A Christian, who is a follower of Christ, is only whole and complete when every part of their being (body, soul, mind, emotions, etc.) are doing and saying the same thing; that is, Jesus is Lord of my life! When you find yourself giving in to temptation; when you yield and fall to the ways of the world so that you give in to the demands of your flesh and to your emotional and/or psychological needs; when you are shacking up with someone who is not your husband or wife; when you are having casual sex (anything but casual); when you are lying, cheating, stealing and living the life of sin and pleasure—while claiming that you are a Christian, then you are fooling yourself! But you are not fooling God (nor are you fooling others). The Lord knows—and others do too! You have placed yourself outside of God’s care and will suffer destructive consequences.

The Apostle Paul warned the believers in Corinth against dividing themselves up. He said such internal conflict ultimately takes the forms of fornication, idolatry, adultery, homosexuality, thievery, covetousness, drunkards, revilers, and swindlers. Please note that not one of these sinful lifestyles is more damning than another. They are all severe and worthy of judgment. But Paul reminded the believers in 1 Corinthians 5:1 that they had been washed, had been sanctified (made holy), and had been justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. They were charged with (and would be held responsible for) living their whole lives sold out and undivided FOR CHRIST. Their privilege was to be a people of integrity, undivided in their worship, in their devotion, and their service to the Lord. Every part of their lives was to point to the truth that Jesus was Lord of their life. Every aspect of your life must also point to that special relationship that you have with Christ—He is Lord of all of your life!

Job’s three friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) show up to offer their own opinions. But all that they can offer are oversimplified solutions to Job’s questions. Although they sound convincing, Job exposes them as shallow and inadequate to answer the mysteries of God’s actions.

A younger man, Elihu, has been listening in on the arguments. After hearing Job’s final argument, he steps in and challenges the reasons, solutions, and complaints that he has heard from all of these old men. “Listen, you old “geysers,” I’ve got the answer!” Elihu’s argument is that God is greater than man. Who are we to question Him or argue against His actions? Surely, God is causing and using this to *“bring back his soul from the pit”* (Job 33:29). Is that the answer? God is responsible for all of this? Absolutely not! Is God creating pain, sorrow, and loss for the sole purpose of saving us? Absolutely not! Thank goodness, God always has the final word!

God’s plan is and always has been to reach down and snatch His precious creation from the throngs of hell; to draw near when mankind is lost in pain, sorrow, fear, and hatred; and to allow His love and grace to be revealed. His name is Jesus! He is Almighty God, Prince of Peace, Everlasting Father. He is the great I Am and the Deliverer of our souls. God didn’t make the mess—we did! God didn’t cause the pain and suffering—the lies of the deceiver did! But then, God has an answer and a way!

All of a sudden, He answers Job out of the whirlwind. He reveals His power and wisdom as Creator and Preserver of the physical and animal world. He reveals His Sovereign authority and invites and challenges Job to know Him personally and worship Him completely.

Ultimately Job must learn to trust in the goodness and power of God. He can only accomplish this by enlarging his own concept and understanding of God. This righteous man of God must see his need to repent, to humble himself, and to acknowledge the greatness and majesty of the Lord. And the moment that he did, God restored Job’s worldly goods twofold.

I believe that this first story of the Bible serves as a foundation on which is built the rest of both the Old and New Testaments. The centerpiece of the story of God and of man is always man’s need for a redeemer and mediator. And it is the story of a good, gracious, and holy God who supplies a great Redeemer. As this book raises problems and questions, every one of them is answered perfectly and completely in Christ—who identifies with our sufferings.

What a glorious gift is this gift of reconciliation, forgiveness, and salvation in Christ. So, in these pandemic times, I implore you, as did Paul in Hebrews 4:16, to *“...draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”*

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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Open the Doors and See All the People

by Timothy W. Tron
Burke County

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." – Hebrews 10:25

Darkness was all around. The car's headlights could barely make out the tracks in the snow-covered roadway before me. I was heading home after having assisted in officiating a memorial service for a young lady. Another soul having passed too soon from this place. Her life had ended in tragedy, making it a difficult service to lead. Yet, even before the chill of the day's air had left my coat from the graveside, the message of another friend's passing reached my phone. Unlike the previous, his new home was certain. In this thought, my mind rejoiced in knowing that another brother had gone to be in that place that cannot be described in earthly terms.

As my drive home neared the mountains, the snowfall increased until, at one point, my car literally slid out of control for at least fifty yards or more. Thankfully, the tires never left the surface of the roadway. Unspoken prayer was answered once more. Afterward, my attention became ever more focused on driving carefully and slowly.

Oddly enough, without trying, a Sunday School rhyme of my youth began to play in my mind. As the lyric was spoken, we would act out the words with our hands. We would interlock our fingers together, palms facing upward, we would then turn them inward until our pointer-fingers touched and the heels of our thumbs pressed together. The rhyme went something like this, "Here is the church, look at the steeple, open the doors and see all the people." Our little pointer-fingers would wiggle at the sound of the steeple, the thumbs would part when the doors were reached, and then the wrists would turn so that the interlaced fingers were once more pointing upward. That was the moment when you made your fingers wiggle around as if the congregation was visiting, sharing, and rejoicing together as one. It often made me chuckle to see my fingers wiggling and thinking of the congregation doing the same.

Looking back, my thoughts on that dark, judicious drive home were not of the mourning of my friend's passing. They weren't memories of the fact that we would miss his jovial, sometimes prankful demeanor. Nor were they the fact that this would be another COVID death in the records of the state's annals of those that had succumbed to the pandemic. No, what was really troubling my soul was that my friend attended a church that had shuttered their doors because of COVID. There are all always seems to be a never-ending, creative, and thoughtful precipitous stream of reasons given when asked why a church would stop holding in-person services, but the most widely accepted excuse cited is, "Because we care about our elders and those have predisposed illnesses that make them susceptible, we are closing our doors to protect them." Sadly, my friend's church is not alone in this decision. Yet, neither of these practices adopted by "Caring" churches protected my friend. He had a stroke. He was 86. It happens. When he was finally recovering, he was taken to a rehab facility where it was certain that he had contracted the illness. He had lived a full life and had often told me he was ready to go on home. Well, my friend had made it, but then it was no fault or had not been prevented by the very church to which he had belonged. Before my friend left us, he had shared with me how he wished they would open back up because he missed those brothers and sisters who were like family to him. Sadly, my friend was never afforded that opportunity here on earth. In essence, his well-meaning church had somehow him. First Peter warns us of this, "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." In other words, God entrusted his people's care to those who would become the leaders of the church. It is their duty to feed the flock until the day the Lord returns. As a farmer, I can tell you that you can't ignore your animals, or they will die of starvation. Jesus told the Pharisees, *"I am the bread of life. He that believeth in my shall never hunger, he that believeth on me shall never thirst."*

Hebrews 10:25 says it clearly, *"Not forsaking the assembly of ourselves together, as the manner of some, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."*

In some cases, the church blames the state or local government authorities. In some instances, they are literally being forced to close by the threat of litigation. But in most cases, it was merely the threat of what "might" happen that shuttered many a sanctuary's entrances. While many shut their doors saying that it is Biblical to follow the rules, the Apostle Peter would have to disagree, *"But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye."* – Acts 4:19 *"Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men."* – Acts 5:29 In other words, man must live by God's direction and not that of any man, regardless if it breaks the law or decree that is insidious in nature toward Christians.

As the children's rhyme says, "open the doors and see all the people," we are meant to be together, gathering in one place. The Greek word for Gathering is episunago, which means to be in one place physically. It doesn't read episunagoge, which is the other meaning of Gathering, which so many like to say that this verse actually means. The latter form means to be together in spirit, 2 Thess. 2:1, *"Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming o our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,"* One could say that a Zoom meeting, or the prerecorded



online sermons we see so many conceding too, have become the way forward for so many congregations. Sadly, some say that because of the virus's ability to mutate, that this will never end. Does this mean that those churches that have closed their doors will remain closed forever? Does this mean that so many of those who have left the church out of fear will never return? And then the question that one must ask at a memorial service of someone that died due to a tragic event, "What is the greatest tragedy?" Yes, sadly, the greater tragedy, the effect of those well-meaning decisions by so many boards of elders, those deacon's members who had thought it best for the greater whole, to close their doors, were causing a greater tragedy to occur than the one they had conceived. You see, my friend, the greatest tragedy is not dying in a natural disaster, it is not dying in a horrific accident, nor dying of COVID – the greatest tragedy is dying without knowing Jesus Christ as your Savior.

Disease, persecution, or any other reason that beguiles humanity is, nor has ever been a reason to stop providing a service whereby the Word of God can be preached. The Bible states this clearly in many ways and many passages.

"Yea and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" – 2 Timothy 3:12-13

"Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also." – John 15:20

As I was recently allowed to attend another tour at the Trail of Faith, it was that dark, overcast evening, again with the threat of possible snow showers on the horizon, that I became intensely convicted of a thought that would not go away. It came to me while we were standing in the replica of the Barbi College. The original structure is in Pra Del Tor, located in the Waldensian valleys of the Cottien Alps, nestled in the northwest corner of Italy. The original structure is estimated to be well over 1,000 years old. There, the elders (known as Uncle – Barbi) would teach the younger students. They would commit the entire New Testament to memory while learning Hebrew, Latin, Greek. They would also learn how to heal, using ancient methods of homeopathic remedies and cures passed down from one generation to the next. Their education was not complete until they had memorized the entire New Testament. When it was sure that the student was ready, and most importantly, had received the Holy Ghost, they were then paired with an elder and would go out across Europe evangelizing the Word of God. It was against the law to own a Bible or even to have scripture in your procession. The penalty for being caught with either was death, following arduous, painful torture. The life expectancy of those early evangelists was 2-3 years.

It was there, standing in that dimly lit room of the Barbi College, gathered around a large single granite slate tabletop, that the feeling hit me. "We must open our church's doors and impart into those in attendance the dire warning that came out of the ancient Waldensian history – God's word can only survive in the hearts of men." The only safe place for God's word is not on a piece of paper, not on your Google Drive, nor stashed away in the cupboard of your kitchen – it is in your heart. Both the pastor leading the group and myself admitted to the group that although we had not spoken of it to one another, nor mentioned it at any other time, we both suddenly felt this conviction of purpose. We must impress upon our parishioners the impetus, the impending need to commit as much scripture to the heart, for the day is coming that it may all be taken away. But this is was not the only conviction that came through that still small voice. The other was that we are doing our congregations a great disservice by shuttering those church doors. It is the very nature of what we were meant to be in a church, what every church's goal for existing – saving lost souls. *"In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."* – 1 Corinthians 5:45

There are factual reports of an increase in deaths resulting from society's isolation due to COVID. It is these people, those that have been kept away from the very place they needed to be, that we are losing. Satan seeks to destroy and devour whom he will. It is with great joy that he sees those church doors closed. It is with great pleasure that he hears of another person dying, not having known Christ. It is with great satisfaction that Satan knows that those in most need cannot reach their sanctuary of hope because either their local government or, worse, their church leaders have eliminated their only path to salvation. Yes, the greatest tragedy is not the one that makes the nightly news, for it is one that is being fought every day, from one end of this planet to the next – saving the lost before it's too late.

Friends, let this passage be a warning. May you feel the quickening of the Holy Spirit. As we draw nearer to the end times, there should be a quickening in your own heart, one that makes you wake up gasping for breath in the dark of the night, for fear that you have not done enough for those in your life that need God's word.

"Say ye not that in four months, then cometh the harvest? But I say to you, lift your eyes unto the fields for they are white with harvest."

Here is the church, there is the steeple, open the doors and see all God's people. Thanks be to God.



Kingdom Life – Already and Not Yet

By Michael Cloy
McDowell County



In Matthew 5:3-11, Christ speaks of how we live in the present age of poverty of spirit (verse 3) and persecution (verse 10). Jesus summarizes life here on earth in verse 11 when he says we will be blessed when we are hated, persecuted, and have evil things done to us because we are Christians. Jesus reminds those who believe in him that we live in this present evil age (Matthew 16: 4) among many who hate him and Christians without cause. (10: 22, Luke 21: 17, John 15: 18 and 25). This is life in the Kingdom of God here on earth.

So, how are we to live lives pleasing to God, lives that honor him, lives that make our faith attractive to all men in this evil age? The Lord Jesus says it very plainly in the sermon. *“Blessed are those he has redeemed, for he says they are poor in spirit and mourn for their remaining sin; those who are meek and humble and do not think too highly of themselves.”* (5: 3-5). *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness”* (5: 6); *“who long for pure hearts”* (5: 8) *“as by God’s grace they seek first his Kingdom and righteousness. Blessed are those who seek to live at peace and strive for the best for all people”* (5:9), *“even with those who persecute them. Blessed are those who speak poorly about them, even falsely accusing them,”* (5: 11). This is life in the Kingdom of God here on earth as we anticipate living in the Kingdom in Heaven.

We can live our lives here on earth as pronounced in the Beatitudes because the Kingdom of God was inaugurated by Jesus’s first coming. We can also live lives as detailed in the Beatitudes because we currently live with Jesus in heaven (Eph 2:5). The Kingdom is here and now, and we live in it. The Kingdom is also coming in its fullness, and we long for it to arrive so we can physically be with Jesus, the King of the Kingdom (Rev 22:20).

Therefore, Kingdom life is to be lived as an *“already”* for sure reality. It is also to be lived in the anticipated tension of a *“not yet.”* When Jesus spoke on the Mount, he started and finished the Beatitudes by saying the Kingdom has arrived already when he says, *“theirs is”* (vs. 3 and 10). When he spoke in verses 4-9, he uses the words *“they shall,”* describing something that will be received in the future when the Kingdom of God is consummated upon Jesus’s return. This is the already and not yet tension of Kingdom life.

So, what are we to do as citizens of the already and not yet Kingdom of God? The answer is we are to do what we will do in the Kingdom in Heaven while living in God’s Kingdom on earth. We are to do what we were created to do in Genesis 1. We are to do what we were saved for by the King of the Kingdom. We worship God through Jesus, the King of the Kingdom. This is the essence of Kingdom life. We were created to worship, we were saved to worship, and we will worship in eternity. After all, Jesus commanded us to pray in Matthew 6:10, *“Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”* God’s will is for us to worship him on earth as we will in heaven. Kingdom life is all about the worship of God. The already and not yet tension of the Kingdom life is comforted and satisfied by God-honoring reverential worship.

At Landis Presbyterian, we seek to obey God’s will by living as Jesus described in the Beatitudes. Each Sunday, we gather to join in the worship that is always happening in the Kingdom in Heaven. We invite you to come worship and *“let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 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.”* Hebrews 10:24-25.

If you would like to know more about Landis OPC, you can see who we are in our welcome video found at vimeo.com/491464277. You can also contact Elder Mike Cloy at opcmmikecloy@gmail.com

Mike Cloy is an Ordained Ruling Elder on the Session of Landis, OPC. You can contact him at opcmmikecloy@gmail.com

To every [thing there is] a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: Ecclesiastes 3:1-22

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There once were thorns you know
A lovely Blue Bird was terribly plain
Flowing feathers he did not show.*

*The brilliant butterfly was once a worm
The great Eagle was a sight
Tho now they soar so gracefully
Tis different as day and night.*

*A young boy cried please help me Lord
And as the years passed by
He struggled through a lot of things
Now he's our poster, Oh My.*

*So don't give up on what you dream
For God's not through with you
He has a special plan ahead
If you will just follow Him through.*

Joyce (Joy) Harwood Baldwin
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Steps to Victory

By Caron Cline
Burke County

In 1995, the movie ‘Outbreak’ was released. This film was based on a fictional ebolavirus that found its way from another country to a small town in California. Government officials, as well as medical personnel, were forced to take drastic measures to stop the spread. 25 years ago, this was nothing more than an exciting science fiction movie! Surely, nothing similar could ever happen in the United States. Yet, here we are amid a seemingly never-ending pandemic. The dangers are real; government officials and medical personnel are constantly exploring various methods for stopping the spread of COVID-19. The average American has become paranoid and suspicious of every person within six feet. Truly, our nation is facing an unparalleled crisis. Storm clouds of frustration, fear, and anger hover over our land with the slightest spark-producing an explosive reaction. This reaction is understandable for those who do not have a relationship with Christ but is inexcusable for those called by His Name. The devil would have the people of God believe that we are victims of circumstances beyond our Father’s control. True believers have the supernatural resources to withstand the attacks of the enemy.

In 1 Samuel 30 David and a few hundred men are running from King Saul. This anointed man of God escaped to Philistine territory, gaining the trust of many of their warriors. When the Philistines waged war against the Israelites, David and his men followed. Considering David’s former reputation as a great warrior, his potential for siding with Israel was too risky so he was sent away. Upon returning to Ziklag, the men discovered that the village was burned and all their wives and children were taken captive. All the men began to mourn and weep in the face of such destruction and loss. David was held responsible and many began to threaten to stone him. In the face of such a monumental crisis, David chose to focus on the Lord. His reaction is a blueprint for moving from victimization to victory. The first step that David made was to strengthen himself in the Lord. (1 Samuel 30:6) How did he accomplish this feat? He began to remember once more God’s deliverance of the Hebrews from Egyptian bondage; the parting of the Red Sea; the drowning of the Egyptian army; the provision of manna in the wilderness; the destruction of Jericho; God’s protection from a bear and a lion and finally a Philistine giant named Goliath. We strengthen ourselves in the Lord as we remember and praise the Lord for all His wonderful works in our lives. A lifetime of love and mercy guarantees His future protection and provision. The second step that David made was to inquire of the Lord. (1 Samuel 30:8) Before doing anything, he sought the wisdom and perfect will of God. Should he pursue those who had destroyed his village and captured his family? Amid a crisis, rash decisions only worsen the situation. Choosing to trust in the Lord instead of our own understanding is the key to success. The third step David made was to listen to the Lord. (1 Samuel 30:9-10) The Lord’s answer was to pursue the band of raiders, for David and his men would surely overtake them and rescue all. Immediately, the men moved out based on the word of the Lord. The Bible contains the wisdom of God, the knowledge of God, and the promises of God. When the Lord speaks amid our crisis, we must take action without delay. After strengthening himself in the Lord, inquiring of and listening to the Lord, David and his men experienced the victory of the Lord. (1 Samuel 30:17-20) David destroyed the enemy and recovered all that had been lost. During times of crisis, Satan captures peace and joy; he severs relationships; he torches hope; he spreads discontent. We must remain sober, alert, and aware of his schemes. Following David’s steps to victory in difficult circumstances guarantees that all will be recovered and restored. Our God is faithful and He will do it!

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.



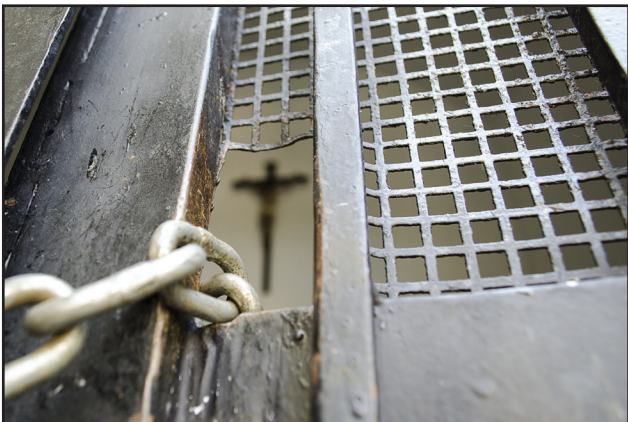
By Jody Griffin
Avery and Mitchell County

“Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.” (2 Corinthians 1:4-5, KJV)

Untold times over the past year or so, correctional chaplains have been called upon to provide care to the incarcerated as they have experienced the illness and death of loved ones. Whether or not those deaths were COVID-19 related, there have been limitations put in place to protect the incarcerated and institutional staff. These limitations have resulted in the inability of many incarcerated individuals to properly process their grief. Repeatedly chaplains have assured the grieving that the rules on the outside have been restrictive as well. Such assurance has offered little comfort... Witnessing such grief on a large scale has sharpened the chaplains’ focus. For this particular chaplain, the lessons have been many.

The above verses of Scripture speak hope amid these days of tribulation. When we allow God to bring us comfort in our travail, then we are equipped in that comfort to offer the comfort of God to those around us. And at that point, we are most human.

My heart overflows with thanksgiving for the compassion seen in the thoughtful treatment of offenders dealing with such a tragedy, even as that staff member may have privately suffered their own personal loss. If there is any comfort to be found in this horrific



reality known as COVID-19, it is the fact that we share in the anguish of others. Never mind the divisions that separate us, we are united in our suffering. Thank God for the wisdom of prison administrators who have granted some small tokens of relief in the form of connection with families and loved ones. Thank God for the institutional leaders who have spent sleepless nights formulating action plans for everyone’s safety. Thank God for chaplains who have encouraged their respective populations and staff. Thank God for the comfort found in Jesus Christ, because this comfort makes a true and lasting impact on everyone involved. Thank God for the faithful prayers and support of the incarcerated and those who are employed to oversee them. Thank God for your prayers and support are given to ensure an ongoing ministry presence with the gates and behind the walls. Thank God for the comfort found in knowing that though we may be separated from loved ones, friends, and families, we can find comfort in Christ Jesus. Thank God for those who read these words and who remember the marvelous Promise found in God’s Word. Thank God for signs of hope that the worst is or may soon be behind us. Thank God. Amen.

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



For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over [and] gone; Song of Solomon 2:11-12



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By Doug Harrell
Mitchell County

The thing that is really on my mind this morning is love, love for our children, our friends, our mates, our churches, our schools, our country and our very way of life.

I went to a meeting yesterday and the person at the reception desk was wearing a face mask the that this on it, “I miss America”! Oh wow, what a message! I know I am getting to be an old man and as the scripture tells us, old men will dream dreams.

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:” Acts 2:17 KJV

I guess there comes a time in our lives that we reflect on what once was, when we visualize the past and remember the way things used to be in our lives. We remember the hard times and the good times, the struggles that made us who we are. I remember the days as a child getting up at 4:30 every morning and heading to the barn to help milk the cows. I remember the cold hard morning and I remember the laughter between my dad, my brother, and myself as we worked. I remember putting the harness on the old mules, Jack and Jim. I can still see them in my mind's eye. The thing I remember most is the love and security I felt, the sense of accomplishment I felt at the end of the day when I looked back and saw what we had accomplished for that day. A sense of self-worth that comes from work, love, and laughter! I miss those days!

I miss an America where almost everyone I knew was in church when the doors opened, the America where if anyone in the community had a problem, everyone around pitched in and took care of the situation. An America where men were expected to be men and women were expected to be women, an America where if you were a man you were expected to open the door for a woman and treat her with love and respect. In today’s world, I have actually been told by some women that I will open my own door! I miss America!

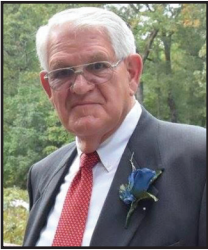
Maybe I don’t have the visions I once did as a young man, maybe I am becoming melancholy in my old age, but I miss the days when preachers did not fear preaching the word of God without being threatened with fines or prison for speaking God’s truths. I miss the days when we had pride in ourselves and were not looking for a handout, a free gift from the government, a day when the pioneer spirit in America was I will take care of myself and my family, thank you!

I guess I am being nostalgic this morning, but I do miss America I grew up in where teachers did not worry about reading scripture every morning in class, where every morning prayer was prayed over the PA system. A day when we had a Christmas play at school, a day where we had Easter vacation, not spring break. I know, I am dreaming the dreams of an old man this morning. I miss my America, land that I loved, land that I cherished and still cherish in my mind. I pray and am fighting back tears as I write, I pray for a return to the values I grew up with, that this great nation would continue to be one nation under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all. A nation that valued the unborn as well as the born, a nation where being a Christian was a good thing and you were not thought of as a domestic terrorist because you believed and honored the word of God.

“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

Lord, please heal our land!
To God be the glory.

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.



A Good Golf Swing
By Dean Honeycutt
Mitchell County

When I was growing up, I played a lot of sports. Sports kept me out of a lot of trouble. I played football, basketball, baseball, soccer, volleyball, and many more. If the sport had something to do with a ball, then I was ready to play. Every sport has fundamentals to learn and practice to be good at that sport. Through all the years of playing sports, the fundamentals do not change. There is one basic way to throw a football, a basic way to pass a basketball, a basic way to swing a golf club. If I know the fundamentals of a sport and practice those skills, then I can play that sport with some proficiency.

Church life and being a Christian are no different. I participate well in following Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord because of the fundamentals of the faith. Fundamentals are basic core truths. For example, a fundamental core truth of the Bible is “*God created them male and Female.*” The fundamental truth here is that a person’s gender is determined at conception. I believe this fundamental truth because God’s word is infallible, and I can trust what God says.

Another fundamental truth is “*God created the heaven and the earth.*” The core truth here is just as a builder builds a house, God created and built the heaven and earth and all that is in it and above it. God created heaven and earth, formed it, and filled it in six days. I believe this fundamental truth because God’s word teaches me this truth.

The Disciples followed Jesus well because Jesus taught his disciples the fundamental truth of Scripture. Jesus did this by example and by instruction. Jesus said in speaking with His followers “*you have heard that it has been said*” but, “*I say unto you.*” This is what you have heard but the truth is the fundamental things I am teaching you. So, Jesus affirmed the fundamental truth of scripture.

I am so thankful there is a fundamental movement back to the truth of God’s word. Secular science, public schools, state, and federal-run parks, and universities across our land often challenge and discredit the Bible. Why are some people so disturbed and often angry about God’s word? God’s word not only tells us correctly about our origins, but it talks about our sin and the sickness of our heart, and many people will not acknowledge the Bible that challenges and convicts them of what they know to be true, but often deny. So, they will attack the Bible and they will attack the fundamental truth of scripture. So, if a person can discredit the Bible, then they do not have to deal with the condition of their heart.

That is an easy way out for now, but one day all people will stand before God and give an account of their life. The Bible is an amazing historical, prophetic, and spiritual book written by forty human authors over a period of two thousand years as they were moved by the Holy Ghost to record exactly what God instructed them to write. The main story of the Bible is Jesus, Christ God’s only Son, who gave his sinless life dying on a cross as punishment and judgment for sin. Jesus took my place. His sacrifice death became my substitute for my guilty life. That is why John the Baptist said, “Behold the lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the World.” “Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me I once was lost but now I am found was blind but now I see.”

A golf swing is especially important to be a good golfer. Anyone can pick up a club and hit a golf ball. However, if you know the proper fundamental golf swing you can hit the ball a whole lot better. Just about every golfer has the same fundamental swing. The swing has been time-tested proven and practiced for an exceptionally long time. Anyone can hit a baseball. But a fundamental swing that every baseball player uses is the best way to hit the ball. Anyone can throw a basketball through the hoop. But the player who uses the fundamental way to make a shot will score more points than the person who just throws the ball toward the goal.

Anyone can say they are a Christian, but the one who holds, practices, and lives by the fundamental truth of God’s Word has been born again. Teach the fundamentals of faith to your children. When a schoolteacher, professor, friend, or even a religious leader contradicts the Word of God to your child correct that teaching with the truth. Remember the Word of God is sharper than a two-edged sword, not a history book, not google, no not even a professor in a liberal college. On Christ the solid rock we stand all other ground is sinking sand.

Live life 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.



First Baptist of Marshall

Humor

By Buddy Freeman
Madison County

Laughter is Healthy for You

He asked, “Do you belong to the Christian family?” The farmer replied, “No, I think they live two farms down the road.” The preacher asked, “No, I mean are you lost?” The farmer said, “No, I’ve lived here for 40 years.” The preacher said, “I mean are you ready for the Judgement Day?” The farmer asked, “When is it?” The preacher said, “Well it could be today or tomorrow.” The farmer replied, “Well when you find out for sure it is, you let me know. My wife will probably want to go both days.”

A doctor told a discharged patient, “You’re completely cured. I must tell you, it was your incredible will to survive that saved you.” The patient replied, “Thanks, Doc. Remember that when you write up my bill.”

Noah’s wife said to her husband, “Noah, you did a good job getting all these animals in the Ark. But I really think you should have put the termites in a jar.”

Here are some Paraprosookians: (Look in a dictionary)
“Where there is a will, I want to be in it.”

“You are never too old to learn something stupid.”

“Before you criticize a man, walk a mile in his shoes. Then you will be a mile away and he won’t have his shoes.”

“The TV evening news is when they begin with “Good Evening” and then proceed to tell you why it isn’t.”

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



Mt. Carmel Baptist Church

A Two-Way Conversation – Nineveh’s Message to God

By Pastor Toby Crowder
Mitchell County



Someone once said, “True communication is not a one-way street, it goes both ways.” While most Christians are somewhat familiar with the story of Jonah, and the message that God sent to Nineveh through him, do we ever pay attention to their response and realize that Nineveh also sent a message back to God?

While many are only familiar with the story of the great fish, and the miracle associated with God’s deliverance of Jonah, there is another miracle that often goes unnoticed; that of how God sent revival to a town that most would have considered unreachable. Nineveh was a wicked city; home to the Assyrians whose wickedness had “come up” before God (1:2) and God had a message for this people. It was a message of repentance lest they face His wrath and judgment.

In chapters 1 & 2 of Jonah, we see God’s commissioning of the prophet, Jonah’s disobedience, and how God used the great fish to bring His messenger under subjection. Chapter three begins with Jonah’s “recommissioning” and we see the message that he had for Nineveh in v. 4 “*And Jonah began to enter into the city a day’s journey, and he cried, and said Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.*” This was a very concise message to them regarding God’s judgment of their sin. Jonah got straight to the point!

The Ninevites were wicked, and God knew that. Yet even in their sin and wickedness, God offered them the chance to repent, just as He does with sinners today. As Jonah delivered this message of God’s judgment, he also exhorted them to fast and cry out to God. Verse 10 tells us “*And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.*” It was an amazing act of God’s mercy and grace that He did not overthrow Nineveh, but He saw their works and brought revival to the land.

The message that Jonah brought to them is evident as we read the Scripture, but remember that true communication is not a one-way street. Not only were the people of Nineveh receptive to the message, but they also made a sincere statement to God by their response. As a matter of fact, they did what most Christians are unwilling to do: They heeded and obeyed the message of God. What was the people’s response to God’s message? What was their answer to His proclamation? While we may not have a transcript of their exact words, we can see that they sent God a message by their actions: they listened, believed God, and repented! As a result of believing God’s message, they proclaimed a fast and dressed in sackcloth, both man and beast ... as a sign of mourning for their sins. Even the king laid aside his robe and joined the people in their efforts. They cried unto God and turned from their evil ways... and He heard from Heaven and healed their land! Call it what you will, but this is a compelling Biblical example of true repentance.

Though we live in a time where things change at a rapid pace, God’s recipe for revival and restoration has not changed! God’s message to those seeking restoration is still the same. 2 Chronicles 7:14 stands as true today as ever: “*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.*” This is God’s message to us these days, but what is our reply to Him? We are typically satisfied with simply confessing our sins to God, and then continuing in them; yet God commands that we turn from our wicked ways, just as we see in the example of the Ninevites.

Friend, we have the Word of God; God’s personal message to us! But true communication is not a monologue, it is not a one-way street. Nineveh sent God a message of brokenness and repentance and He honored it... what kind of message are we sending to him... personally... as a church... as a country? What will be your response to God’s great invitation?

Toby Crowder serves as Pastor of Mt. Carmel Baptist Church in Spruce Pine. He and his wife Leslie have been married for 26 years and have two daughters, Emilee, and Katy. He can be contacted via the church’s website MCfamily-forChrist.org or mtcarmelsprucepine@gmail.com



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Castor Oil and the Gospel

By Tracy Jessup

“[F]or an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel! ... I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.”
(1 Corinthians 9:16b, 22b)

In his book, Seismic Shifts, author Kevin Harney tells the following story:

It was a battle. A wrestling match. A test of wills. Every day, at exactly the same time, Margaret would go to the bathroom cabinet, open it, and take out a huge bottle of castor oil. Then she would head to the kitchen to get a tablespoon. At the sound of the drawer opening and the silverware rattling, Patches, her Yorkshire terrier, would run and hide - sometimes under the bed, at other times in the bathtub or behind Margaret’s recliner. Patches knew what was coming.

Someone had convinced Margaret that her beloved dog would have strong teeth, a beautiful coat, and long life if she gave him a spoonful of castor oil every day. So, as an act of love every 24 hours, she cornered Patches, pinned him down, pried open his mouth, and - as he whimpered, squirmed, and fought her with all his strength - poured a tablespoon of castor oil down his little doggie throat. Neither Patches nor Margaret enjoyed their daily wrestling match.

Then one day, in the middle of their battle royal, with one sideways kick, Patches sent the dreaded bottle of castor oil flying across the kitchen floor. It was a momentary victory for the canine, as Margaret let him go so she could run to the pantry and grab a towel to clean up the mess.

When Margaret got back, she was utterly shocked. Patches was licking up the spilled castor oil with a look of satisfaction only a dog can make. Margaret began to laugh uncontrollably. In one moment, it all made sense. Patches liked castor oil. He just hated being pinned down and having it poured down his throat (pp. 23-24).

Today’s passage reminds us that the gospel is to be lived and shared, not simply heard and enjoyed. It is a story that necessitates retelling. The Apostle Paul went out of his way to give those outside of the faith no reason to feel uninvited or unwanted. He acted towards others in ways that demonstrated respect for them as individuals created and loved by God. But he did this, not so much as an evangelistic strategy, but as a compulsion. The God who pursued Paul also was pursuing others, and Paul knew that how to communicate the gospel was not by pinning others down, prying their mouths open, and pouring it down their throats, but by love spilled out insincere action and truth alongside meaningful words (cf. 1 John 3:18).

New Testament theologian Frank Crouch writes, “A casual appreciation for God’s love for others removes from them any sense of urgency about those people; it lays no burden on them to meet those people, know their names, understand their lives” (workingpreacher.org, 2/8/15). An effective witness seeks to identify with others, assuming the role of a servant, and pouring ourselves out to point them to Christ.

Prayer: “Lord, remind us that we can keep our bearings in Christ and still enter into the world of a wide range of people – experiencing things from their point of view – to lead them into a God-saved life (adapted from The Message).



Walking with The Lord

By Estela C. Shackelford
Yancey County

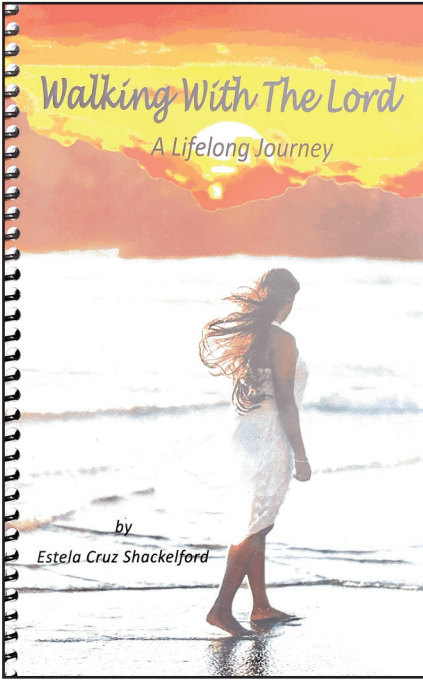
To my brothers and sisters in Christ,
Last year after arriving home from the First Baptist of Marion medical mission trip to Belize, I was asked by the Lord to write the stories of my lifelong journey with Him. A journey that takes you through my life from the age of 3, when He gave me His first gift of hearing Him audibly, to today now aged 72. It is a book filled with spiritual gifts, life-saving miracles, and God’s amazing grace and love for His children. The book tells not only ‘feel good’ stories but He also had me write the bad and ugly stories of a sinner like me. So many people see their own personal struggles with the same problems. This book certainly Glorifies Jesus' name and our heavenly Father.

I had 100 printed to see what the reaction would be and have been amazed and humbled by its popularity. Some of the comments have been; “it is easy to read”, “can’t put it down”, “gets you hooked with the first-page”. It only has 100 pages and will bless you, fill you with encouragement, and above all, you can see all of God’s attributes at work.

All profits from the book’s sales will be used for the Lord's work. My goal is to be able to have 500+ books to take on each of my mission trips to give to the people, and to continue spreading the stories, as God commanded, here and around the world to glorify His name!

The book is \$15.00 and can be purchased at One Of A Kind Art Gallery, (OOAK) in Micaville, NC. Telephone # (828) 675-0690. You can also purchase via their website. www.oakartgallery.com You may also contact me directly via email at, walkingwiththelordES@gmail.com for single and quantity purchases.

Thank you for your support!



Estela Cruz Shackelford., Born in Havana, Cuba. Came to the USA on July 5th, 1955 I was 6 yrs old. Throughout my life, I have lived in many countries and states and settled here in the mountains of North Carolina in 2006. I am a retired RN but I still enjoy my hobbies, hand-building potter, fiber arts, and many types of mixed media. These days I concentrate on my passion for Jesus and missions.



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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A Pastor's View

What We Can Learn From Tom Brady

By Shawn Thomas
Angleton, Texas



Tom Brady has received a lot of attention recently, and understandably so, as the Tampa Bay Bucs quarterback won his 7th Super Bowl, more than anyone else in history. And what is even more amazing, is that he did it at age 43, when most men are either sitting on the couch — or maybe in a broadcast booth! The Houston Chronicle had a revealing article about Tom Brady, which detailed how he takes health and fitness very seriously, which makes sense, as he's a pro athlete.

But the article indicated that what really sets Brady apart is the way he approaches sleep. In his 2017 book, The TB12 Method: How to Achieve a Lifetime of Sustained Peak Performance, Brady reveals some of his sleep practices. For one, he never allows Netflix to "play next episode" when it's time for bed. He actually does what all the experts recommend, and turns off all his devices and distractions 30 minutes before bed, and then goes to bed consistently at 9 p.m, and gets up at 6 a.m. each day. He sets the temperature in the room for 60-65 degrees each night as well.

Those are things that many of us could do — but then the article related some of Brady's more "esoteric" practices, like wearing \$200 infrared pajamas, and sleeping on diamond memory foam for optimal recovery. Some of that may be out of reach for many of us!

But to me, the real point is: Tom Brady is not who he is by "accident." He doesn't just "happen" to continue to be in great shape even at age 43. He has purposefully disciplined his life, including a commitment to go to bed and get up at the right time, specifically in order to put himself in the position to do what he has done — which is to be in the best physical condition he possibly can, to win championships. And it has obviously paid off!

Well, this article isn't about sports, and it's really not even about Tom Brady. It's about the importance of what we as Christians need to do, to discipline ourselves to seek God. In the 4th Beatitude, Jesus said *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied."* It is vital that God's people spend time with Him every day in His word and prayer until we are "satisfied" in Him. Unfortunately, too many Christians settle for just a little "snack" of one or two verses of scripture, or a quick page from a devotional book, and maybe a minute or two in prayer — which is basically a "starvation diet" — when what we really NEED is a "feast" with the Lord every day. We need enough time with Him in His word and prayer so that we "push ourselves away from the table" in a sense, "satisfied" with our time with Him. That's the goal — and I think that all of us would agree, that's a good goal to have.

But the question is, just HOW will that happen? This is where this relates to Tom Brady. Brady didn't end up as a 43-year-old in amazing condition just by "accident." He took some purposeful steps to make that happen. And in the same way, you and I will not end up with satisfying times in God's word and prayer just by accident either. We must plan for it; we have to prepare for it. Just as Tom Brady disciplined himself physically, so we must discipline ourselves spiritually in order to have the time with God that we so need.

David says in Psalm 63:1, *"O God, You are my God; I will seek You earnestly."* In Hebrew, that word "earnestly" literally means "early." David was serious about seeking God every day, so he disciplined himself to get up and seek God EARLY. We see this commitment all through Psalms. David said in Psalm 5:3 *"In the morning, O Lord, You will hear my voice; in the morning, I will order my prayer to You, and eagerly watch."* Again, David indicated that his commitment was to meet God early: "in the morning."

David was a man after God's own heart. He had such a close relationship with the Lord, and God used him in great ways, and he wrote psalms of prayer and praise that we still use today. But just like Tom Brady: all this did not just "happen" for David. It happened because like Tom Brady, David disciplined himself, to seek God every day, in His word and worship and prayer.

So: *"he who has ears, let him hear"*! If you want a closer relationship with God, it won't happen for you by just continuing to do the same things you have always been doing. It will take some changes; it will take some discipline. You have to believe that what you are doing to seek God, is as important (or more so!) than the physical discipline that Tom Brady and others are committed to. People boast about their "CrossFit" or marathon training and so on — and many of those things are good — but your greatest discipline should be focused on your time with God because HE is the most important thing there is. HE is *"the pearl of great price,"* and your time with Him is worth every discipline and sacrifice you can make.

This may mean several things to you on a practical level. For one, it probably means you will have to set your alarm earlier than what you do now. Most of us can't get up at the same routine time and still carve out 30 minutes or an hour to spend with the Lord in the morning. You will most likely have to discipline yourself to get up earlier. And since most of us can't "burn the candle at both ends," that means you will probably have to go to bed earlier too. In fact, going to bed early enough so that you can get up early, may actually be THE key to your walk with God. It's all part of the discipline. It may involve other disciplined preparations as well: having a certain place ready for your time with God: an office space, or chair in your living room, with a Bible, and a journal, and prayer list — whatever you need, all prepared and ready to go. It means having a plan for your Bible reading and having all your prayer requests organized —as well as a method to organize your prayer itself — as Jesus taught us in His Model Prayer.

The point is, you will not just "accidentally" become a more spiritual person, who knows the Lord more intimately. If it happens, it will happen because you have purposefully disciplined yourself to do it, like David did: *"O God, You are my God; I will seek You early."*

And then the thing is: as amazing as what Tom Brady has done physically in his sport — and I will admit, I admire what he has done; I was rooting for him to pull it off at age 43; it gives some of us older guys hope! But the truth is, in eternity, what we have done to discipline ourselves to meet God every day, will be of infinitely more value than anything that Tom Brady, or any athlete, ever did to discipline themselves for their sport. It just doesn't compare in value. Paul wrote in I Timothy 4:8, *"Bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life, AND for the life to come."* The Bible says that what we discipline ourselves to do in order to grow spiritually is more valuable than what any athlete does for their earthly reward — because our discipline will yield results that will last for ETERNITY!

But one thing we know: whatever we do, won't just "happen." It didn't just "happen" for Tom Brady — and it won't just "happen" for you, either. You have to plan to make it happen. You must decide specifically what you personally need to do to seek God better, and then take specific steps to discipline yourself and make it happen on a daily basis.

What do YOU need to do, starting today, to seek God better? Tom Brady is known on earth for his physical discipline; will you be known in heaven for the way you disciplined yourself to seek God? Will you be able to say as David did in Psalm 63: *"O God, You are my God; I will seek You early"?*

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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SEARCH (Sustaining Essential and Rural Community Healthcare)

Press Release - Yancey County Public Servants Risk and Protect Lives in Pandemic

By Susan Larson
Mitchell County

SEARCH has been honoring the remarkable work that local nurses and now frontline workers are doing in the face of the pandemic. The series is called “An Infusion of Gratitude” and live interviews conducted by Bruce Ikard can be found on WKYK’s Community Close-up page on the WKYK website as well as on the SEARCH Facebook page, SEARCHwnc.

COVID-19 has added an extra layer of concern and work to the jobs of three Yancey County Public Servants. Collectively they supervise over 75 employees who in turn are charged with protecting the people of Burnsville and Yancey County. The three are Deputy Sheriff Shane Hilliard in the Yancey County Sheriff’s Department, Emergency Management Services Director Clay Carroll, and Burnsville Fire Department Chief Niles Howell.

“It’s hard to social distance in a jail,” asserts Shane Hilliard, Chief Deputy in the Yancey County Sheriff’s Office. Hilliard’s work has taken on a new and unforeseen dimension since March. In an effort to make sure that newly arrested inmates don’t have COVID before they are placed with other inmates, they are automatically put in quarantine for 14 days. Because Yancey County only has two quarantine cells, it can be hard if they arrest more than that. “We have a small facility,” Hilliard observed.

Another major change is that the court is held virtually instead of in person. The inmate is tried from the booking cell. “Who would have thought that would ever happen?” said Hilliard. Inmates confer with their attorney during the hearing on a private telephone line. All trials by jury are being postponed, but recently with the new state court administration, some hearings are being held in person.

Deputy Hilliard has had to look out for the well-being of his employees in a new way. The room where they monitor activities in the jail is windowless without proper ventilation, a hot box for cross-employee contamination. The sheriff’s department worked with state epidemiologists to design a new airflow system that was safer for employees. The county had it installed, mitigating a situation last summer that saw several employees testing positive for COVID. Fortunately, Hilliard says, inmates were not affected by the outbreak.

As a supervisor in the Sheriff’s Office, Shane has had a hard time having enough employees for all the shifts throughout the week. His office complies with CDC guidelines so that when an employee tests positive, he has to be in quarantine, leaving holes in the overall schedule. That should change in the coming months as employees get the COVID vaccine. Hilliard himself has had both shots and others have, too. The Yancey County Health Department is making them available to them and Sheriff’s Department employees, some who were hesitant at first, are gradually accepting the offer.

Shane Hilliard has had to look out for his family in a new way, making sure he doesn’t bring the virus home to them. COVID has dramatically affected where his family goes now, Hilliard says. They had to cancel vacation plans in the spring when COVID hit. This summer his church has looked for places to meet outdoors and they’ve had church on football fields and in parking lots.

Hilliard wants people to know that this virus is definitely serious. He has seen firsthand how quickly it spreads. He fears that there is a lot of misinformation, but he knows that a person who has a runny nose and a few symptoms might have COVID and be at risk for spreading it throughout the county.

On behalf of the community, SEARCH is grateful to Chief Deputy Shane Hilliard and all local law enforcement personnel who are taking risks and battling new and unseen viral enemies, all in the line of duty.

As the primary leader of ambulance service in Yancey County for over 38 years Clay Carroll is used to facing precarious situations. But COVID-19 has surprised even him. During the first months of the pandemic, Yancey County looked like it was getting off easy with cases in the single digits. “It didn’t hit us real quick,” Carroll said, but that has completely changed. For a while, they were transporting 5-6 COVID cases a day though that number has recently dropped to 2-3. They treat everyone as though they might have COVID, regardless of the reason they need ambulance service. They will continue to do that, he says, until the community reaches 70% herd immunity.

A year ago when COVID began to take hold, Carroll advised his crew that they were essential workers. EMS was a business that had to keep functioning for the community and it has. However, it’s definitely more work for his 25 paramedics who keep the three EMS trucks operational 24/7. The cleaning regimen is especially rigorous. They use more supplies, and every truck must be fully equipped with PPE and other protective gear. Their diligence has paid off with only three cases among the employees. Fortunately, now EMS employees have now had both COVID vaccine shots.

The paramedics see first-hand the toll that COVID can take. “It affects everybody, young and old,” Carroll says. With parents ages 81 and 83 he’s well aware that the elderly are particularly vulnerable, but he also mentions 30-year olds in the hospital ICU as an example. “It hits the respiratory system the hardest,” he says. It’s important to keep his employees safe and virus-free so they’re not tak-



Shane Hilliard

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And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding: Daniel 2:21

Crossword Solution

F	L	O	W		W	O	R	L	D	S		S	E	E
R	E	M	I	T		P	A	I	R		T	H	A	N
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A	N	T	S		H	A	T	S		A	L	T	A	R
I	D	O	L		O	M	I	T		P	E	A	C	E
S	O	R	E		D	O	L	E		S	O	R	T	S
E	W	E		A	S	S	E	N	T		N	E	S	T

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Sudoku Solution

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

SEARCH (Sustaining Essential and Rural Community Healthcare)

continued from page 13

ing it home to their families or their community. There are on-site washers and dryers so that no one takes a contaminated uniform home.

Clay Carroll has spent his working years in emergency services. When Yancey County decided to run its own EMS, taking over from Mission Health in June of 2020, they tapped him to continue running it. Carroll says he’s “in it for the long haul.” He’s proud of the fact that half of his employees have 25 years or more with the department. They are, he declares, “my other family.”

With his passion for education, he developed the first Paramedic EMS service for Yancey County in 1990. He collaborates with Mayland Community College to offer the most up-to-date EMS continuing education and encourages all his employees to advance their careers through certifications and higher degree achievements. Required state training is now completely online and COVID has forced some changes in the way that Mayland delivers instruction as well, using a hybrid model, some on-line and some in-person.

Clay Carroll finds Yancey County the best place in the country to live, during a pandemic or anytime. “Everybody’s pitching in,” he says. At the vaccine clinics, he and other EMS employees have been administering the shots and helping out along with workers from the health department, MCHP, county government, and people from the community. It doesn’t require a pandemic to make this happen in Yancey County.

Niles Howell, Chief of the Burnsville Fire Department, is used to dealing with unseen reality such as a fire in walls or the presence of carbon monoxide. For him what is new and dangerous is COVID-19, which has changed the way he and his 28 volunteer firefighters go about the business of keeping people and property safe from fire. COVID is there and they have to deal with it, even though it is unseen.

It has affected the way Howell interacts with the public. In his job, there is a lot of interface with people and Howell’s natural inclination is to shake hands or give a pat on the back. He’s had to back off, which is especially difficult in situations where he has to talk to and console families affected by fires.

The Burnsville Fire Department typically hosts several school groups during the year, educating them about fire safety and showing students the different pieces of equipment they use to fight fires. Because of masking and social distancing, they’ve had to rethink how they group the children and how they present information.

The same is true for educating the firefighters. The State of North Carolina requires 36 hours of training for each firefighter per year, and much of what used to be in person is now virtual, which changes the experience considerably.

Chief Howell has had to make changes at home to keep his wife safe from the virus. Sheltering in place is hard, he says, not being able to participate fully in church or family activities.

For all the accommodations Chief Howell and his crew of 28 volunteer firefighters have had to make, there is, though, a silver lining. Despite COVID-19, construction has continued apace on the new Burnsville Fire Department Building, which Chief Howell projects will be completed by the end of 2021. Moving into that gives them all something to look forward to, along with the hoped-for end of the pandemic.

SEARCH is grateful to the many frontline workers in Yancey County and throughout the region who in their work risk their lives to keep us safe from both the seen and unseen realities.



Clay Carroll



Chief Miles Howell

Susan Larson is a co-leader of SEARCH. She resides in Mitchell County with her husband, retired physician Dr. David Larson.



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Ms. Bailey Receives State’s Highest Civilian Honor

By Anna Wilson
Burke County

Thinking the Burke County Chamber of Commerce had won a prestigious award, Kathy Bailey came to the Morganton Community House Wednesday afternoon to meet Chamber President and CEO Tonia Stephenson for a photoshoot.

Instead, the president and CEO of Carolinas HealthCare System Blue Ridge found herself in the spotlight as she was named to the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, the highest civilian honor available in North Carolina.



The surprise ceremony featured a video of the people behind Ms. Bailey getting the award – Morganton Mayor Ronnie Thompson, CHS Blue Ridge Board of Directors Chairman Mike Bridges; President and CEO Steve Lawler of the NC Healthcare Association; Chancellor Todd Roberts of the North Carolina School of Science and Math; and Stephenson. All five wrote letters to Gov. Roy Cooper supporting her nomination. In making the presentation on behalf of NC Gov. Roy Cooper, Mercer said, “Ms. Bailey has been a mentor to many, always willing to share her knowledge and expertise. She has been the model of courage and ethical leadership, especially during this pandemic. She is the calm in the storm, keeping us on the right path and pointed in the right direction. North Carolinas has a rich legacy of individuals dedicated to making their communities better and I’m proud to say Ms. Bailey will be among those,” he said.

The award, created by Gov. Terry Sanford in the spring of 1963, is designed to honor residents for "exemplary service and outstanding contributions to the state.” Ms. Bailey’s career in healthcare spans 42 years in her native state – from the sea to the mountains. She was the inaugural President of The Outer Banks Hospital in Nags Head, NC, which was the first hospital to be built from the ground up in North Carolina in more than 25 years. She served as president and the chief executive officer from 1999-2005. Then she moved west toward the mountains and began working as Chief Operating Officer for Blue Ridge HealthCare, where she was part of the massive renovation of Morganton and Valdese hospital campuses.

Ms. Bailey came up with CHS Blue Ridge’s unofficial motto “Friends and Neighbors Taking Care of Friends and Neighbors.” With an innate ability to empathize, she became a strong advocate for children, families, and patients. She set up one of the first Patient and Family Advisory Councils in North Carolina and she served as a board member and vice-chairman of the Burke County Department of Social Services.



She not only serves the state of North Carolina on many boards, but she also serves her local community. She has served as a board member of the American Red Cross Catawba Valley Chapter and Burke Development Incorporated. She was past chair of the Board for the Burke County Chamber of Commerce and currently serves on the board. She served as vice-chairman of the Healthy Burke Partnership Governing Board.

“It’s been an honor to work with you,” Stephenson said. “Over the past year amid such challenging times, you continue to lead with grace, dignity, and integrity, all of which are wonderful attributes for this award.”

Ms. Bailey earned and maintains Fellowship status from the American College of Healthcare Executives in 1998 and serves on the North Carolina Healthcare Association Board of Trustees. “Throughout your career, you have made a difference from Manteo to Morganton,” said Stephen Lawler, President, and CEO of North Carolina Healthcare Association. “You’ve made healthcare better.”

Nationally, she has represented North Carolina well being named one of the Top 130 Female Healthcare Executives by “Becker’s Hospital Review” for three consecutive years. She has also received the American Hospital Association’s (AHA) National Grassroots Champion Award which recognizes a hospital leader from each state who most effectively educates elected officials on the impact of major issues and broadens community support for hospitals.

Ms. Bailey, who grew up in Mt. Airy, received her Bachelor of Science Degree in Nursing from the University of North Carolina Greensboro in 1978 and worked as a frontline, registered nurse for five years before moving into healthcare management. A member of the Sigma Theta Tau International Nursing Honor Society, she still maintains her North Carolina RN status. She received her Master of Science degree in Public Health from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1989.

Mayor Thompson praised Ms. Bailey for her support of the city. “She is a leader, and she is committed to this community,” he said. “She is committed to her work with the chamber, the school system, her work with COVID, and the city – it all adds up. Thank you for your involvement and commitment to the community.”

Roberts praised Ms. Bailey’s leadership in helping make the NC School of Science and Math a reality in Morganton. “Her commitment and that of CHS Blue Ridge has been amazing including \$5 million to help fund the student wellness and activity center,” he said. “She is a great example of commitment to our com-

munity and our state.”

Bridges, who has been on the board since 1990 and was instrumental in hiring Ms. Bailey, said she was the perfect example of the type of person who deserves this award.

While most people attended the event virtually, a few people attended the event in person including some hospital senior leaders and Ms. Bailey’s husband, Don Bailey, and her mentor, Sandra Allen.

Anna Wilson is the Content Developer of Marketing & Business Development at Carolinas Healthcare System Blue Ridge.

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“Something To Think About” -

Don't Be Like A Donkey- Psalm 32:9a

By Dennis Love
McDowell County



David instructs us in Psalm 32:9a; “*To not be as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding.*” It’s interesting to study the Bible to see how often God uses animals to teach us spiritual truths. He says in Proverbs 6:6; “*Go to the ant and consider her ways.*” An ant is an example of hard work. Did you know that ants can lift fifty times their own weight? If I could do that I could lift 9,000 pounds. WOW, The Bible also instructs us to learn from the rabbit. Even though the rabbit is feeble, it will build his home in the rocks or the ground. The rabbit, being weak and defenseless against larger animals, must use wisdom in building his home in safe places. God holds up the rabbit in His Word for us as an example of wisdom. Jesus said; “*Behold the fowls of the air.*” Why? Because they teach us to trust God for our daily provisions. Jesus also advises us to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves in Matthew 10:16.

But here in Psalm 32:9, we are told NOT to be like the mule. The one trait that we commonly connect with a mule or a donkey is one of stubbornness. David is simply warning us against stubbornly refusing to obey the Lord.

One of my heroes is the late Amos Alonzo Stagg. He coached football at the University of Chicago until he was 70 years old. Then he moved to The College of the Pacific where he coached for another 14 years. He was then 84 years old. A guy named Eddie LeBaron, the first quarterback of the Dallas Cowboys, was the last All-American athlete to play under Coach Stagg. When Coach Stagg retired from The College of the Pacific, he joined his son’s coaching staff for another six years, until he was 90 years old. Then he coached one more year, as a junior college assistant, finally retiring at the age of 91.

Early in his life, Coach Stagg, a devout Presbyterian, felt called into the ministry, but feeling that he was unsuited for the pulpit, he went into coaching. He said, “My ministry is to the young men of America.” As a Christian, Coach Stagg never used profanity. The worst word he ever used was jackass. If a player messed up he would call him a jackass. If he really messed up he would call him a “double jackass.” If he did really, really badly, he called him a “triple jack-ass.” When there was extreme provocation he would call the unfortunate player “the king of all jackasses.” His players said he never left the practice field with humans on it. He always left the entire squad grazing.

Sarah Churchill told in her book Keep on Dancing that her father Winston once commented to her that we had, to a large extent, succeeded in the civilized world in erasing the lion and the tiger from the human soul. But we had not succeeded in removing the donkey.

What about you? All of us are occasionally accused of acting like a donkey. Sometimes the charges are justified. I know I’m guilty. How are we to respond to those charges? Someone put it like this: Solitary shots should be ignored, but when they come from several directions, it’s time to pay attention. If one person calls you a donkey, ignore them. If two call you a donkey, check for hoof-prints. If three call you a donkey, find a saddle! David’s warning to us is clear. “Don’t have a stubborn and rebellious spirit. Don’t force God to drive you and chasten you into doing what is right. In other words, it’s better to be an ant, a rabbit, a bird, a serpent, or a dove than to be a donkey! To me, that’s something for us all to think about!

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.

For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations. Isaiah 61:11



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Mental Agreement With The Truth
Luke 24:44-49

By Glenda Ward
McDowell County



Is there a particular sin you keep struggling with, repeatedly confessing, wondering why you can't overcome it?

Does it make you feel guilty and maybe worthless that you feel confessing your sin and repenting is a negative experience for you; feeling as if nothing has happened and perhaps in turn you doubt your salvation? You are not alone. The thing that is missing, the thing that will help you get out of this repetitive cycle is genuine repentance. In Romans 7:15 we see we need to fleshly understand what to do. Paul gives us three lessons that he learned in trying to deal with his sinful desires. (1) Knowledge of the rules is not the answer. God's Law makes people realize that they are sinners. Sin is real, and it is dangerous. But the Law doesn't get rid of the sin in our life. The temptation is still there, but we have a choice. God gives us a way out. Sin through Satan deceives people. As in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3), the serpent deceived Eve by taking her focus off the freedom she had and putting it on the one restriction God had made. The thing God said she couldn't have! Sin looks good to us precisely because God has said it is wrong. When we are tempted to rebel, we need to look at the Law of God from a wider perspective – in the light of God's grace and mercy. If we focus on His great love for us, we will understand that He only restricts us from actions and attitudes that ultimately will harm us. The Spirit gives victory over sin (Reference Galatians 5:17, Romans 8:2). (2) Self-determination (struggling in one's own strength does not succeed). People find themselves, just as Paul did, sinning in ways that aren't even attractive to them. (3) Becoming a Christian does not stamp out all sin and temptation from one's own life (Reference 7:22-25).

Being born again takes but a moment of faith, but becoming like Christ is a lifelong process. No one in this world is innocent; no one deserves to be saved – not the pagan who doesn't know God's Law, nor the people who know them and tries to keep them. We all must depend totally on the work of Christ. We must never underestimate the power of sin. The sin deep within us is our "Fleshly Nature". The "Flesh" refers to the principle and power of sin. This is our vulnerability to sin; it refers to everything within us that is more loyal to our old way of selfish living than to God. Any Christian struggling against sin or trying to please God by keeping rules and laws without the Spirit's help can never fight sin in their own strength. Satan is a crafty tempter, and we have an amazing ability to make excuses. Instead of trying to overcome sin with our human will-power, we must take hold of the tremendous power of Christ that is available to us. This is God's provision for victory over sin – He sends the Holy Spirit to live in us and to give us power. When we fall, and we all will, He lovingly reaches out to help us up.

The Word of God both celebrates His perfect nature and reveals to us our faults so that we can understand our need for His Grace. All of us can relate to ourselves succumbing to sin, even though we want to honor God. But until we stand in the presence of Jesus, we will all experience this battle. The only way to win is by dying to ourselves so that Christ can live through us and by submitting to the Spirit's overcoming power.

Merely confessing our sins may not bring us victory over a sin we keep struggling with. First John 1:9 assures us that if we confess our sins, God will forgive us. Jesus told His apostles to proclaim repentance for the forgiveness of sins in His name (Luke 24:17}. If we miss the significance of history's greatest event in our repentance because we are too focused on our disappointments and problems, we in fact will not recognize Jesus when He is walking beside us as described to us in Luke 24:13 of the two disciples from the village of Emmaus. We are to remember where we have fallen from God's grace and Truly repent. The thing that is missing, the thing that will help us get out of this repetitive cycle is genuine repentance, a mental agreement with the truth.

What is Repentance?

Repentance is a heartfelt sorrow for committed sin followed by the renouncing of sin and a sincere commitment to forsake it, then walk-in obedience to Christ. It is not just feeling remorse or guilt for the sin committed, it includes a sincere recognition that sin, any sin, is bad and absolutely against our almighty God. If you have Truly repented, the result is a changed life. We return to the Lord forsaking our sinful ways and thoughts (Isaiah 55:7). True repentance is essential for believers. God has predestined that we "become conformed to the image of His Son" (Romans 8:29). The indwelling Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin so we can confess and repent.

The way of Salvation is simple. Salvation is by faith not works. Some people believe all we have to do is believe in Jesus ...this leaves out the repentance and submitting to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, thinking this is not a part of their salvation. Others think that joining a church, being baptized, giving money, and doing good works are all that are necessary for salvation. What does Believing in Jesus Mean?

"Believing in Jesus" encompasses so much more than our mental agreement with God's Word ...this includes an acknowledgment that Jesus is the Son of God, that He died on the cross for our sins, and the recognition of our own sinfulness. Under the conviction of the Holy Spirit, we become sorrowful and desire a changed life. Believing in Jesus encompasses complete Trust in Him for our salvation, repentance from past sins, and surrender of our complete life to Him (Reference Luke 5:32; Peter 3:9). Understanding the Lordship of Christ is confusing for some people. They want to claim Him as their Savior but not as Lord! They desire His forgiveness and a guarantee of heaven, but they don't want to live

in His likeness, they don't want to follow God's instruction for living a Christian life. These people don't want to be told how to live their life! This approach is extremely selfish and contrary to the very identity of Christ-the Son of God. Those people who are truly repentant are willing to submit to Christ and let Him lead in a new direction.

A Changed Life

After salvation, we all begin as spiritual babies in Christ, but the Lord wants us to continually grow in Him, and repentance is a large part of this process. Although we don't understand at the moment of Salvation all that is involved at this point, but the Holy Spirit works within to convict us of sin, draw us to repentance, and guide us onto a new path of obedience. If we are genuinely saved, we will never be happy or satisfied living in sin. We are of a new nature through the Holy Spirit who indwells in us. When convicted of sin our first response should be to ask our Lord and Savior for forgiveness in sorrowful repentance.

Confession

Confession is to agree with God that the sin we commit is wrong. But repentance should always be a part of that confession. We are called to live a sanctified life set apart for God and His purposes. Confession and repentance are an important part of our sanctification. We deceive ourselves if we think we will never sin. This is where confession comes in. We are to confess our sins to God. God in return helps us to put away the sin and turn back to Him in obedience. The basic Truth is that all people are sinners by nature and by practice. At our conversion, which is our salvation, all our sins are forgiven – past, present, and future. Yet even after we become Christians, we still sin and we must confess those sins. This kind of confession is not to gain God's acceptance, but to remove the barrier to a fellowship that our sin has put between us and God. It is difficult for many people to admit to their sin and shortcomings, even to God. It takes humility and honesty to recognize our weaknesses, but we need not fear revealing our sins to God – He knows them already. He will not push us away, no matter what we have done. Instead, He will draw us to Himself. Confession is supposed to free us to enjoy fellowship with Christ, it should clear our conscience and lighten our cares. But in reality, some Christians do not understand how it works. They feel so guilty of the sin committed that they confess the same sins over and over. This is where True repentance comes in – believing that God wants to forgive them. God allowed His Son to die on the cross so He could pardon us of our sins. When we come to Christ accepting Him as our personal Savior, He forgives all the sins we have committed or will ever commit. We do not need to fear He will cast us out if we don't keep our life perfectly clean. However, God does expect us to confess our sins that we do commit not because we think failure to do so will cause us to lose our salvation – our relationship with Christ is secure. Instead, we confess so we can enjoy our relationship with Christ to the maximum in fellowship and joy with Him. True confession is a commitment not to continue in that sin. When you admit and confess your sin(s) and receive Christ's cleansing you are:

- Agreeing with God that your sin Truly was sin and that you are willing to turn from it.
- Ensuring that you don't conceal your sins from Him and from yourself.
- Recognize your tendency to sin and rely on God's power to overcome it.

The Holy Spirit has come upon you and one way the Holy Spirit helps Christians is by communicating Truth. Jesus is the Truth and the Holy Spirit guides believers to Him (John 16:13). Believe and enjoy a life with God now and in eternity. There is No Greater Joy!

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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Mine Creek Baptist Church

Always Be Ready - When God Ordains a Moment

By Chris Rathbone
Mitchell County

Sometimes while walking along in life, just when we least expect it, God ordains a moment. A time when we are just doing what we often do and the Lord puts us in a specific place, at a specific time, with a specific person we may not even know. These are moments that help bring us back to the purpose God has for each of us as Christians. That purpose is to know Him and to make Him known.

Life often distracts us. It's not that we allow it on purpose, but it just happens without us even realizing it. We all are living in such a busy time. Life has changed even since we were kids. All these modern conveniences that we have that are supposed to give us more time, we just fill up any extra time they give us with something else. And it's not always bad or sinful stuff, just busy stuff. People get so used to a certain schedule everyday life will even get a little too routine. Routine isn't all bad unless it gets to the point our routine is keeping us from seeing those times when God may be wanting us to break out of that routine to show us something else.

Doc said my blood pressure needed to come down. There's been a lot of stress with all that's been happening with my aging parents, all that is happening in our nation, trying to navigate through all this pandemic mess, etc, etc. Not to mention that Little Debbie had become a little too much of my daily diet plan. Doc said diet and exercise so I had to break up with Little Debbie and tell bacon bye for a while till hopefully, things get under control a little. Gabe and I started a little workout routine and I've been trying to hike a few miles every week. That's what led me to one of those moments that God jolted me out of my spiritual routine so to speak.

One morning I got up early to go on one of my hikes. The weather wasn't exactly the best for hiking but that routine got me up and out in the cold windy morning. On top of Roan Mountain, the sun was shining bright but it was deceiving, to say the least. The temperature was around 22 and the wind was blowing probably 30 mph. I bundled up and set out. Though it was a beautiful day to the eyes, it was rough on the body! There was plenty of snow on the ground and in a few spots, the snow had drifted to a couple of feet deep. I crested the top of the hill on Jane Bald and ran into an almost waist-deep drift. While struggling to get through, I heard a voice over the wind that seemed to be talking pretty loudly. Looking in that direction, a man was standing about 30 yards out the trail. I just assumed he was talking to other folks that were with him. Stumbling out of the deep drift of snow, I continued to where he was standing.

When I approached him I realized he was alone. I looked on out the trail and he and I were the only ones around. It struck me a little odd because for certain I heard him talking to someone, pretty loud too, for me to hear him over the gusty winds. We struck up a conversation talking about what a beautiful but cold day it was for a hike. He was dressed in heavily insulated camo clothing, a full head mask on where only his eyes were visible. I introduced myself and told him that I was a pastor of a local church in Mitchell County. He never did give me his name, but the moment I told him I was a pastor tears welled up and slowly leaked from the corner of his eyes. He was trying his best to hold them back but it was pretty noticeable. At that moment, the Lord gripped my heart, the Holy Ghost grabbed my attention, and said, "Oh boy, you're on holy ground!"

With all my heart I believe the voice I heard when I was making my way through that snowdrift was not him talking to another hiker, he was talking to God! He seemed to be wrestling with something in his heart that only he and the Lord knew about. He told me his parents raised him in church but he wasn't in church anymore. He told me he wasn't a Christian. I didn't have time to ask those things, he just simply volunteered that information without me saying a word. You see a person can believe in God, even believe what Jesus did on the cross for them, but that same person may have never surrendered to Jesus by faith, repented of sin, and been born again. But God was dealing with this 61-year-old man about something! Yes, he even told me his age, but not his name.

We stood there on that mountain and talked of the greatness of God. As we looked out over those glorious views I told him how awesome that the God who created all of this for us to enjoy, loves us, and desires for us to know Him. We talked of the peace that God gives us, how that coming to places like that helps us get away from all the chaos that is going on in the world. The presence of Jesus was there on that mountain top. Tears flowed the entire time we talked from this man's eyes. There was no 3 point sermon, we just talked, and after I said what I felt led to say, I continued on out the trail to the next rise. On my way back we met up again and we talk again. But this time it was different. Instead of tears in his eyes, there was peace. A peace that only God can give a man.

This man's name I do not know, his face I would not recognize, for it was covered except for his eyes. While I'm not sure exactly what he was wrestling with the Lord about, he seemed to have got an answer. All I was thinking about was getting that hike in for exercise. What are the odds that a preacher just happened to come across a man on top of a cold mountain, with no one else around, while he was struggling with the Lord over something. Reckon he was asking the Lord for a sign, a word, a reason, an answer? Probably so!

And without me even realizing what God was getting ready to do, here I came struggling through the snow and cold at just the moment God had ordained. Always be ready children, for we never know when God will ordain a moment for us to make Him known! Glory to God, what a privilege!

"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:"
1 Peter 3:15



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



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God Provides

By Joe Sturz
Shenandoah, Virginia

We must remember to bless and glorify God as the originator of all the good He provides us (Psalm 104:1-35) in His: --creation of nature's riches and bountiful free gifts (Psalm 104:10-13, 24), --providential care of our daily needs (Psalm 104:14-15), --common grace (undeserved favor) to all (Psalm 145:9) and special grace to His chosen people (Romans 8:28) in sending His only begotten son to save them from perishing in their sin (John 3:16), --a judgment that restrains and removes His enemies and those of His people (Psalm 76:10; 104:35; John 3:18; II Peter 2:9).

So let us not follow the Lord for His blessings but bless the Lord Himself out of gratitude for His many undeserved blessings (Psalm 104:33-34; Ephesians 2:1-18; I Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Brother Joe "becoming more grateful" Sturz February 8, 2021, www.sturzchristiancounseling.com On my website look through my "Workbook for Couples" that prepares singles for marriage as well. Sharing what the Lord has taught me as a Biblical counselor applying all of the Bible to all of life. Also, look for my daily Bible counseling messages on Facebook or receive them by request through your email at joe@sturzchristiancounseling.com to be put on my daily email list. Please feel free to use them in sharing with others.†

My Dad, Paul Sturz, often reminded me "Joe, always get the Gospel in." So the Good News of the Gospel is: Jesus suffered and died on the cross to pay the penalty for sin and was buried and raised on the third day and so gained a place in heaven for His people (I Corinthians 15:1-4; Rom 4:25; 5:1).

I am praying that those of you that read this will receive the Holy Spirit's power to change your ways (Titus 3:5-7), repent of your sin, receive His forgiveness (I John 1:9), and trust in Christ (Romans 10:9-10, and (Acts 1:8; Romans 8:11) live for Him if you have not done so already.

Note: I developed my outline from Spurgeon's comments on Psalm 104 in The Treasury of David by Charles H. Spurgeon, as abridged and language updated by Roy H. Clarke. This book is regarded by many as the best commentary ever written on the book of Psalms.

It is available at www.addall.com for new and used books.

Joe Sturz, a Christian counselor at Sturz Christian Counseling Service now living in Page County, 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.

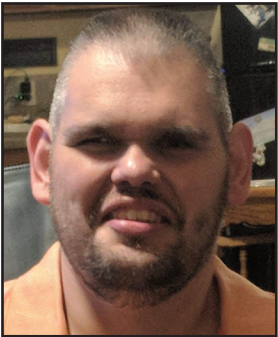


Choosing The Right Foundation

By David Valls
Mitchell County

Scripture uses many object lessons such as the teaching of comparison, with each having a different result. In this article, we will discuss two types of foundations, their builders, and the different results based upon the choice that each one made. Jesus said, “*whosoever heareth the sayings of mine and doeth the same will I liken unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock*”. The rains descended and the floods came, but notice that the house stood because it was founded upon a rock. Jesus then mentions a foolish man who built his house upon the sand. The rains descended, the floods came and the house fell and Great was the fall of it. Now how can we apply this to our lives? What exactly was Jesus teaching? The wise man who built upon the rock represents those who not only hear God's word but apply it to their lives. By doing this, they find themselves not just on any foundation, BUT ON THE ROCK WHICH IS NONE OTHER THAN THE LORD JESUS HIMSELF!! Compare that to the foolish man who built upon the sand. What happens to him when the storms came? The house fell! The foolish man represents those who reject the gospel of Christ. They profess themselves wise, but they become fools. They consider the preaching of the cross foolish, but to those who are saved, it is known to be the power of God! Which foundation will you choose? If you seek the Lord, you can be founded upon the rock of WHICH IS THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. He will always be with you no matter what storms may come your way. Even though they may rage all around you, as long as you are anchored on the rock, you will have a solid foundation. You and I will be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that bringeth forth fruit in due season... his leaf will never wither and whatsoever he doeth will prosper. In contrast, if you build upon the sand, then it's not a matter of if you will fall... it is a matter of when... and great will be that fall. “Whoever has the Son has life... whoever has not the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God abideth on him.” Without Christ, we can expect a total lack of spiritual stability with no protection when the storms of life come. No safe haven to turn to. So again the question becomes which will we choose? The choice is ours to make. Life everlasting, or eternal damnation. The most important choice we as humans will ever make. Choose wisely!

David Valls attends Middle District Freewill Baptist Church in Buladean. I am from Mitchell County. I have been the adult class Sunday school teacher for the past 13 years.



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Evil is Progressive

By Bruce Cannon
Mitchell County

How many of you have heard the expression, “I never thought I would see that.” Maybe you have even said it yourself. We are seeing and hearing things that we never thought we would see or hear. Yet, not only are bad things happening, they were prophesied in the Word and, barring the repentance of God’s people, will get continually worse.

Let me share a few verses:
Matthew 24:12 *“And because iniquity (sin, lawlessness) shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.”*
2 Timothy 3:1 *“This know also, that in the last days perilous (fiercely difficult) times shall come.”*
We are there! Many of our political and religious leaders today are standing against the teachings of the Word instead of upholding the Word. They are mocking the truths of the Bible and embracing teachings and ideologies that are in absolute contradiction to the Word of God!

Jonathan Cahn challenged our President in a video a couple of weeks ago by stating that he had raised his left hand to take an oath on the Bible when he was inaugurated and with his right hand is signing so much legislation contrary to the Bible’s teachings. God cannot, and will not, bless a nation that does this! He has to judge it!
In our own Mitchell County, and across the nation, we are seeing more and more pieces of evidence of people that have turned away from God. Alternate lifestyles, condemned by Paul in Romans, are being advocated and practiced. Children are being told it's ok to be gay, that God made them that way. Children are being encouraged to change their gender if they do not like who they are. Porn is protected under the Freedom of Speech when the Word of God is being censored. The unborn are still being aborted.

What’s the answer? The Redeemed of the Lord must say so! The Church must bear the Light of the World to a lost, depraved world. The Church must let her speech be with grace, seasoned with salt! We must stand on those principles we know to be in agreement with the Word and against those things that are not. We must have the power of God abiding and abounding in our lives.
The truth of 2 Chronicles 7:13,14 MUST be practiced: *“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; 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.”*
These are the Lord’s Words. This is His formula for forgiveness and blessing.
If you and I do not heed His instructions ALL IS LOST! There is literally NO HOPE! We cannot right this sinking ship on our own. We must have God’s help. What must we do?
Humble ourselves – realize we are in a desperate condition and cannot help ourselves. We have to have His help!

Pray – pray and keep on praying. Be like the widow who kept coming back to the judge over and over and over.
Seek His Face – simply means to seek His forgiveness. If the Old Testament Hebrew needed to seek His face, it was because the Lord had turned His back on His people because of their sin. They needed Him to turn back and look upon them again.
Turn From Their Wicked Ways – The Church must repent of her sins before the power of God can move upon the situation we find ourselves in. He won’t hear our prayer or rush to our aid with sin in our lives!
Listen to the promises if we will do these things: 1) hear from Heaven, 2) forgive their sin, and 3) heal their land. Amen! Please, Lord, forgive us. Have mercy upon us. Heal our land. Please Lord, deal with the sins of our nation and restore your righteousness in our land again. We are literally desperate for You! Amen!

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



By Melissa Taylor
Burke County

Proverbs 17:22 tells us, *“A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.”*
Medicine comes in many forms. Jesus gives us multiple examples of healing in His precious word. He touched those who were sick both physically and spiritual-ly. In the book of Matthew, we see Jesus touch the leper, and in the book of Mark lay hands on the blind man. We see again in Luke when He touches and heals the servant's ear. He TOUCHED those who were sick.
We have long recognized in medicine the healing power of a touch, and now, the medical community has taken it away with a vengeance. COVID-19 and the fear it has ingrained in our society have stripped so many of the intimacy of companionship. We have removed the ability to meet the sick and dying on one of the deepest levels of need. We watch as they suffer but from an established distance. We have taken away the power of love, of touch, of family. We have broken so many spirits and dried the bones. Thankfully, God's army is alive! It exists in the heart of so many amazing healthcare workers who have stepped up to TOUCH those who are hurting.

Healthcare workers and caregivers are WARRIORS! The medical community continually fights to find ways to offer that loving touch both physically and emotionally, despite the toll COVID-19 has taken on us. We have accepted the challenge and are ready to battle on your behalf. We hurt with you when you are alone. We hurt with you when you are afraid. We hurt with you when you are in crisis.....and we wouldn't have it any other way.
Our Father has taken many of these situations and moved His mighty hand. God's love shines through the therapist that brings a meal to the home therapy appointment. God's joy is shared when the medical office celebrates the patient's recovery from an extended illness. God's peace is evidenced when the EMT worker holds the hand of the worried family member and assures them everything is stable. God's patience overflows as the caregiver spends extra time loving on the combative dementia patient. God's kindness is overwhelming when the doctor allows two siblings to see their dying mother instead of the mandatory one. God's goodness lights up the face of the cancer patient and the entire oncology staff as the patient rings the bell for their last chemo treatment as their husband waits in the car. God's faithfulness is ever-present as He wraps His hand of protection around those subjected to COVID-19 every day. God's gentleness has been exemplified through the soft, comforting prayer of the bedside nurse with the father who is all alone. God's self-control is exercised in the heart of healthcare workers as we are many times worn and vulnerable, but we move forward with confidence and assurance. The fruits of the spirit are making a difference in our healthcare community.

The stories of medical generosity and goodness are exponential. God is allowing His light to shine in an increasingly dark world. Healthcare warriors stand firm and stand strong! Hebrews 11:1 tells us,
“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” In faith, we will continue to touch.
Sarah sat outside the window of the Alzheimer's unit as she did twice weekly. Her mother, Grace, was just on the other side of the pane. Sarah was fairly confident her mother was being cared for sufficiently over the past few months, but she longed to lay hands on her mother and check things out for herself. Sarah wished she could be there for her mother's “good days” when she spoke a few words or knowingly squeezed her hand. Margaret, the CNA, was with her mother today as usual and from what Sarah could see, today was a good day. Margaret was gentle and patient throughout the visit while also feeding her mother breakfast. Margaret had wiped away the crumbs and was re-positioning Grace when Sarah realized that wasn't what she was doing at all. She was holding her mother tightly in a warm hug. Margaret pointed to Sarah and said to Grace, “this is from your daughter.” Grace's eyes brightened and she feebly pulled Margaret closer, kissed her on the cheek, then looked out the window. Grace pointed a finger to her chest, then to her daughter Sarah and said, “from me to you.” Tears flowed down Sarah's face and she looked to see Margaret was overwhelmed with emotion too. Sarah left the visit that day watching Margaret brush her mother's hair, yes, it was a good day.

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Now or Later

By Steve Gaito
McDowell County



As we approach April 14th, National Tax filing date, I get quite a few questions on when and how to pay taxes. This is an important question that should be asked every day. When is the best time to pay taxes? I understand that most people like the refund on their tax returns, but if you think about it if you get a refund it means that you have lent the government your money tax free. Even given the currently low savings interest you would have benefited from just setting aside a few dollars from each paycheck and you would have more money at the end of the year and not have to wait for the government to send you back your money. I will get off my soapbox on that topic for now. What I really want to discuss is retirement savings. While working on my son's taxes one of the last questions asked in the online tax preparation software was do you want to save taxes by contributing to an IRA. This question struck me as odd as my son being a student with very little income and paying no income tax was asked if he wanted to save money to get no benefit now to pay a higher tax later when he takes the money out. For him it was an easy no, but what about others? When should you save in a tax deferred account like a 401(k) plan verses saving money in a tax-free plan like a ROTH IRA? Based on what America's Tax Expert Ed Slott said in a Financial Advisor publication by Karen Demasters that "Retirement plan investors should position their portfolios to pay taxes sooner, rather than later". The reason for this is that we are in some of the lowest tax brackets in history and with all the stimulus spending this is likely to not last for long. For those who are currently saving for retirement it means that you have to look at options for saving that are not impacted by the future increases in taxes. For those who are closer to retirement or have retired you have to see how much you can take out each year and stay in these lower brackets. This is too complicated to discuss the how in a short article, but I have software that helps with this analysis and can guide you on a tax efficient strategy. By utilizing ROTH conversions and other tax-free strategies paying your taxes now can help you avoid the risk associated with increasing rates in the future. I heard at a recent conference that by paying your taxes now you avoid having your retirement accounts up for a vote every two years.

I also have a couple of resources available to you if you would like. They are digital copies of two books.

For people over the age of 50 is the Book "The No-Compromise Retirement Plan" by Martin Ruby, FSA

For people currently saving or thinking about saving for retirement the book "The New Rules of Retirement Saving" also by Martin Ruby, FSA

I have met Martin and heard him speak on several occasions and for an actuary he is actually very easy to understand and makes great points on why you need to consider changing the way you look at retirement. To get your copy just email me at steve@retirerm.com and let me know which book you would like or if you want both and I will send you the link and password. I think once you read this book your eyes will be opened to thinking about when to pay the taxes you own on your retirement plans.

If you have any questions please feel free to give me a call or send me an email. I am happy to talk and help you understand the taxes in your retirement plans.

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

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Rhonda Gouge-Her Passion Is
Serving God Through Music

By Tim Gardner

The far Northern part of Western North Carolina that the Blue Ridge Christian News serves has a rich musical history that includes many talented musicians, singers, and contributors in other capacities. One such performer who has made music in this region special and helps keep its history alive and going strong is Rhonda Gouge.

The abilities God grants are designed specifically for each person. They are unique, helping to define one’s demeanor. Concerning musical talents, Rhonda is a lady who has been blessed with many gifts. She’s highly- accomplished in the profession and can play approximately a dozen instruments. Rhonda produces some outstanding guitar, banjo, fiddle, mandolin, piano, dobro, dulcimer, and autoharp music in Southern Gospel and Bluegrass genres. But her talent doesn’t stop there. Rhonda also has an endearing singing voice.

Born in McDowell County in 1955, Rhonda has lived most of her life in Mitchell County. She recalled: “I was exposed to music through my mother, Sena Mae, who sang in the Gospel Melody Quartet, and her family.” Rhonda’s mother was a shape-note singer and could play piano by ear. Her brothers and sisters were also musical. Rhonda became fascinated with the guitar while watching Arthur Smith and Fred Kirby perform on the Arthur Smith Show from WBTV in Charlotte, the only television channel her family’s antenna would receive when she was growing up.

At an early age, Rhonda asked for a rhythm guitar for Christmas, but her mother wanted Rhonda to first learn to play the piano. Eventually, her father, Everett, bought Rhonda a Roy Rogers guitar, which broke, and she focused on playing piano for a few years. She said the lessons helped her learn about musical keys and timing. Rhonda remained fascinated with a guitar, and in 1967 her father took her to the Western Auto store in Marion and bought her a guitar for Christmas. He told her if she learned to play it, he would buy her another musical instrument the next year, a promise he kept. An instructional pamphlet that accompanied the first guitar helped Rhonda figure out how to tune the instrument and play a couple of chords.

Rhonda also spent many days visiting “Red” Wilson, an Avery County native, expert fiddler, and North Carolina Folk Heritage Award recipient. Rhonda played guitar accompaniment to his old-time fiddle tunes. Red’s group, the Toe River Valley Boys, was one of her favorite Bluegrass bands. “When I first got a guitar and could put two or three chords together, I would go to Red’s house. He would take his old fiddle down and play his old-time tunes. I would play guitar with him. And he would always say, ‘That’s just wonderful.’ And he would tell me, ‘You’re going to be a fine musician.’ He was so very encouraging and good to me.”

Rhonda also began playing bass guitar in her church at age twelve, and a neighbor bought her a banjo for her eighteenth birthday. She learned to play it and also the mandolin. Besides learning to play the previously listed musical instruments, Rhonda also learned and became deft playing lead, electric, and steel guitars.

Rhonda’s interest in music kept growing, and others took notice. Friends started asking her for music lessons, and thus her teaching career was born. Rhonda worked for years on factory lines and for Red Wilson in a recording studio he owned. But Rhonda eventually started her own music studio (The Picking Parlor) in the Ledger Community of Mitchell County and teaches music. She keeps a regular waiting list for students interested in guitar, mandolin, banjo, bass, fiddle, and/or learning the rudiments of singing—shaped notes, harmony, blending, and its other technical aspects. She earned a master’s degree in Appalachian Studies, with a concentration in music and religion, and has become an acclaimed musical instructor.

Rhonda also has sung in and played musical instruments for several Southern Gospel groups--the Rebels Creek Quartet, Principles, and two she formed, the Bear Creek Ambassadors and Rhonda Gouge and Keeping Time. She has recorded on albums, 8-Tracks, cassettes, and/or compact discs with most of the singing groups in which she has traveled as well as a square dance album with Red Wilson in 1979. Additionally, her recording repertoire includes several solo projects of her own, another with Mitchell County resident and noted singer and musician Nathan Stewart and a vast amount of studio session work with other singers and singing groups.

Rhonda has a new recording that will be released this summer and will include various songs. She said it will be dedicated to her home church-Bear Creek Baptist Church in Ledger- and that part of the proceeds from its sales will be given to the church’s Family Life Center.

Rhonda currently sings (and of course plays music) at Bear Creek Baptist, of-



Rhonda Gouge



Picture by taken by Holli E. Greiner

ten as a soloist and sometimes in a trio with Kathy Khune and Sam McKinney.

Rhonda is available for concerts—as a soloist, as a trio with Kathy Khune and Sam McKinney, with another guitarist, and with some of her music students. To book her in any such musical fashion or for music lessons, call (828) 385-2295; email her (rgouge@ccvn.com); or contact her via her Facebook page.

Rhonda lists the True Gospel Quartet of Barnardsville, NC which consisted of Herman Burleson singing tenor; his wife, Lucille, singing alto and playing piano, S.B. Deaver, singing lead, and Kye English, singing bass for one of her all-time favorite Gospel groups. She said she also especially enjoys the Primitive Quartet from Candler, NC, and the McKameys, who are from Clinton, TN, and retired a couple of years ago.

Rhonda commented: “The True Gospel Quartet sang for many years and was outstanding with very close harmony and blend. Lucille Burleson had the absolute best and most beautiful alto singing voice and she is a very smooth piano player. I was fortunate to sing with Kye in the Principles. He is a great bass singer and the best at performing recitations.

“I also love the Primitives. They are excellent musicians and good singers. I’ve been friends with them for years. I also like the McKameys. They were so sincere and real in their Gospel music work.

“I’ve loved singing and playing musical instruments with every group with which I’ve traveled. All have had good singers and musicians and are good people. I also particularly liked singing with Janie Jarrett in the Rebels Creek Quartet. She is a wonderful singer, musician, and friend and is so much fun to be around.”

Rhonda then concluded: “I’m a blessed person—as much as anyone ever has been and a primary reason why is because of music. It’s my life, my ministry, and my deepest passion. It’s also a powerful way in which I can serve the Lord. I’m thankful for having the opportunities I’ve had in the musical profession and I’m excited about the possibility of experiencing more in the future. I’m as enthused about being active in music as much as I have been at any time during my career.”

In God’s parable of the talents, the point is clear: use the talents He’s given you and they will multiply. Rhonda Gouge continues to use them. And each note she plays sings or teaches others displays her dedication to the music she loves so much.



Picture by taken by Holli E. Greiner

Tim Gardner is a journalist and a life-long resident of the North Carolina Mountains. His feature stories, columns, and news and sports articles have appeared in various national, regional, local, and specialty publications. Tim has worked as a publicist for Martin Cook and the Inspirations Quartet as well as Associate Features Editor for Singing News magazine. He also served as the project assistant, wrote the foreword to, and named the What A Wonderful Time book, a history of the Inspirations. Additionally, Tim co-wrote the Legend and Legacy book, a history of the Weatherford Quartet.

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God’s Justice

By Christopher L. Scott
Exeter, California

It feels American to get what we deserve. This is our concept of “justice” and we want it enforced.

God wants it enforced too, except His idea of justice is different from ours. There is justice given to those who don’t know Him, but also a free gift is given to those who do know Him. The apostle Paul explains this justice in Romans 6:22-23, *“But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

Let’s take a look at three important parts of this passage from Paul.

First, Paul wrote, “you have been set free from sin.” This is a one-time act. Jesus freed us from sin when He died on the cross for us, which is good because those sins meant we would die. The truth of the gospel is what sets us free and saves us, *“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free”* (John 8:32). And in another place, *“Through Christ Jesus, the law of Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death”* (Romans 8:2).

Second, Paul also wrote that his readers “have become slaves of God.” While being set free from sin is a past one-time act, this phrase tells us we have a present condition as slaves of God.

According to Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary, a slave is “one that is completely subservient to a dominating influence.” And the Concise Oxford English Dictionary defines a slave as “a person who is legal property of another and is forced to obey them.”

Being a slave of God means we get the gift of eternal life and live freely. *“Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God’s slaves”* (1 Peter 2:16).

Third, Paul shared the “result is eternal life.” We get eternal life because we have accepted Christ’s death for us and we have been freed from sin. Unbelievers will be separated from God forever in hell (Luke 16:24-25; Romans 5:12; 7:13). But Christians receive eternal life, *“For you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls”* (1 Peter 1:9). Salvation will be eternal life with God in heaven (John 3:16, 36). This gift cannot be earned (Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5).

We believe in the concept of justice that people get what they deserve. But God has a different view of justice. He has freed us from slavery to sin (in which we deserved death) and we are now slaves to God. And because of that, we will get to spend eternity in heaven with Him.

1 All translations are from the NIV, 2011 revision.

Christopher L. Scott, a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, is a pastor and freelance writer. Learn more about his writing ministry at ChristopherLynnScott.com.



Crucified with Christ

By Jason Webb
Burke County

Galatians 2:20 is one of the most quoted single verses in scripture, and for good reason! It speaks of existing in a life lived solely in the presence of God! However, to fully understand the meaning behind this section of Paul’s theological musing following his discourse with Peter in chapter two, one must include verse 19, while also considering the historical background of Paul.

In chapter one, Paul explains that he was extreme in his adherence to Jewish traditions and teachings, intensely persecuting the church of God in his attempts to destroy it. These actions were pursuant to the teachings and laws Paul had lived by before his encounter with Jesus that resulted in his salvation. Knowing this information leads us to a deeper understanding of what Paul writes in verses 19 and 20. *“For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”* (NIV translation)

Because of his conversion experience and a newfound love for Christ, Paul could no longer live under the law of the Jewish traditions. Paul accepts and understands, as evidenced in his writings here in Galatians and the letter to the church at Corinth (specifically 2 Corinthians 5:17), that God’s grace can only be found in one place; which is in Christ Jesus and not in the law!

Matthew Henry writes that the law was added because of the transgressions of man in order to restrain them from the commission of sin. After Jesus paid the price for our sin, the law had been fulfilled, payment had been rendered in full, and a greater, more complete discovery of divine grace was made. This action allowed the law of Moses to begin to lead people to see their need for Jesus and His divine grace. Whereas the law was given to Moses by the ministry of angels and written by Moses as a mediator between God and man, the promise and its fulfillment of Christ was delivered by God! Therefore, as Moses was a mediator, the laws he established could not take precedent over the divine promise made by God through Christ Jesus.

Whereas Paul was a strict adherent to the law as a Jew, this viewpoint changed when he encountered Jesus. After his salvation experience, Paul realized the fulfillment of the promise in Jesus Christ had come to pass. Thus, as he writes in verse 20, he was spiritually crucified as to the law of Moses, yet received new life in Christ. His statement here reflects a conviction he shared with the church at Corinth in his second letter. We find this truth in chapter five, verse 17. *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”* (ESV translation)

Paul explains to the church that when someone accepts Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, the old version of who they were is gone. It has been replaced with a new and improved version of their spiritual self!

Paul states in verse 20 that the life he now lives in the body is one that is guided by his faith in Christ, not by anything else. Oh, that we would reflect this same passion and integrity in our lives! How often do we miss the mark by allowing ourselves to be concerned with things other than those of being kingdom builders, and edifying the body of Christ in all we do? We must turn our focus to living by our faith, as Paul so eloquently writes, a *“faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”*



Jason is the chaplain for the Morganton Department of Public Safety, and also serves as a deacon at Summit Community Church.



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New Building

By Jim Smith
McDowell County

Freedom Life leased office space in the original Marion City Hall building, located at 130 North Logan Street in Marion, February of 2014. Paige Gibson was the building owner and, through his heart for the community as well as for sharing God’s love to the community, offered the office space at a very reasonable rate that a young nonprofit with lots of vision but very little cash flow could afford. Freedom Life was entering into its second year of mission engagement and at that time believed it just needed a couple of offices and a waiting area. After a few months of renovation work made possible through partners and volunteers, Freedom Life moved into the newly renovated offices in August of 2014. At that time, Freedom Life consisted of one full-time staff position and one part-time staff position.

The original City Hall building, dedicated in 1936, has a great heritage for the City of Marion and McDowell County. At one time the building served as the offices for the original City of Marion School System. It also served as the base for the Marion City Administration Offices, the Marion Police Department, the Marion Fire Department, and the McDowell County Probation Department. As these different departments of Marion leadership began to obtain independent office buildings, the original City Hall building began to shift in its ownership and usage. After the building was no longer housing City or County departments, other businesses including a couple of restaurants occupied the building. When these restaurants no longer occupied the building, it was unoccupied for a brief season before Freedom Life began leasing and renovating it in 2014.

Since 2014, through the continued help of financial donors and volunteer support, as the staff and mission engagement capacity of Freedom Life began to grow so did the renovation work for the building. By the end of 2018, the entire first floor of the original City Hall building had been entirely renovated. Continued growth and expansion pushed the renovation work upstairs. In the summer of 2019, again through the work of volunteers and donors including from churches within McDowell County and as far south as Houston, Texas, pitched in helped to renovate two new offices upstairs.

It was at this point that the owner of the building, Paige Gibson, partnered with Freedom Life to prayerfully formulate a pathway for Freedom Life to gain ownership of the building. Paige said that when he first purchased the building, he had a vision that it be used as a ministry base to serve the community. After working with Freedom Life for five years he believed that the mission and ministry being accomplished is exactly what God had placed within his heart. After a little over a year of prayer and the raising very generous donor support, including from Paige Gibson and his wife Susan, on December 16th of 2020 (six years and 14 staff later from the original ministry move-in date of August 2014) Freedom Life gained ownership of the original City Hall building. God is good!

Major renovation work is now being planned to finish the upstairs area of the building. The renovations will include shower facilities for the homeless clients Freedom Life has the privilege to serve, as well as a family/children’s room, small confidential meeting rooms for mentoring clients, a large meeting room for group work, a kitchenette room, a production room, and additional offices for the continuing growth of Freedom Life staff.

Jim Smith is an area Worship Arts Director, He is the Development Director at Freedom Life Ministries, and runs a production company wjscreativegroup.com

Ask ye of the LORD rain in the time of the latter rain; [so] the LORD shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain, to every one grass in the field. Zechariah 10:1



By Terry Cheek
McDowell County

Charles Swindoll tells a story about himself taking a trip across the country alone. He was leaving California heading east. Having arrived at the state line with Arizona, Charles stopped at a roadside gas station to freshen up before moving on. While there he met a man, who struck up a conversation with him. During their chat, Charles mentioned he was going east. The stranger tried to impose a ride. Charles, not knowing the man, told him he was traveling alone. The man kept insisting but Charles kept denying his request. Charles finally got back to his car and noticed some items in the back seemed out of place. While driving down the road Charles's mind kept drifting to the back, asking himself if the stranger was hiding. He remembered having a large adjustable wrench under the seat. Slowly reaching under the seat to grasp it Charles held it tightly. Then stopping along the side of the road he opened the car door, started dragging everything out with the wrench held ready for a fight. But no one was there. Several cars had passed and witnessed his behavior, he repacked the car and drove on, humbled at how he had behaved in front of so many people out of anxiety, fear, and worry.

If we honestly examine the facts being played out in front of us daily and genuinely look for truth, we quickly see a nation being overcome with anxiety, fear, and worry. I’m not going to focus on politics, though it does play a role in the situation, I will say this, politics is one of many paths that fear, worry and anxiety can travel. Alongside politics sit our health, crime and violence, finances, and truly everything in this world can lead to anxiety, fear, and worry. I am reminded of a thought from Author Somers Roche, “Anxiety is a thin stream of fear, trickling through the mind. If encouraged, it cuts a channel into which all other thoughts are drained.”

Fear is mentioned 400 times in the King James Bible. The first mention is in Genesis 9:2 where we read “*And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered.*” Here God informs Noah that as the earth is replenished the relationship between animals and people will be different. Fear translates the Hebrew word which is a sense of fear or awe that causes separation or brings respect. Over this 400 times, fear is applied in many ways. Some of them are fear of the LORD, fear of other people or situations, fear of Satan, or fear of something we have created. When we consider the fear of the LORD one of my favorite verses is Proverbs 15:27 “*The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.*” Think about all your anxiety, fear, and worry as being the snares of death. A snare is a simple device. One used to capture and kill nuisance pests. Once caught in a snare there are only two ends. One is death the other is to be rescued or redeemed by someone having grace and mercy, the Lord Jesus Christ. When we read “The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life,” we read about grace and mercy.

Friend, we are always going to be tempted by anxiety, fear, and worry in this world. What we do with that temptation will determine how others, even the LORD see us. We can look like Charles Swindoll standing on the side of the road emptying our possessions looking for something we cannot see, or we can move forward with faith. Faith is strengthened by the temptation of anxiety, fear, and worry. Remember fear can cause separation or respect, it can separate you from God or build greater respect for God.

Until we meet again, in print or in person, may God bless you is my prayer.

Terry is the Executive Director and broadcaster of The Inspiring Word media ministry. You can contact Terry by email at theinspiringword@gmail.com Or by visiting www.theinspiringword.org



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Morganton Baptist Church

Consistent with the Gospel

By Dan Quorollo
Burke County

Early in the history of the church, believers were committed to the spread of the Gospel. Evangelism was never regarded as something in which only church leaders or a handful of individuals were to engage; rather, they determined as individuals to share the good news of what God had done in their own life. Their personal testimony and love for God compelled them to share the Gospel, regardless of the cost. For some, the sacrifice was their life.

One such individual was a man named Polycarp, a pastor in the city of Smyrna. He found himself standing before the proconsul who demanded that he recant his faith in Christ. He responded, *“Eighty and six years have I served Him, and He never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?”* The threats escalated to the point he was threatened with wild beasts, but he remained undaunted. They then threatened him with fire to which he answered: *“Thou threatenest me with fire which burneth for an hour; and after a little is extinguished, but art ignorant of the fire of the coming judgment and of eternal punishment.”* With that, he was sentenced to burn at the stake. But the fire would not burn him. Out of exasperation, they pierced him with a dagger. He was praised not primarily for his courage but because his death was *“altogether consistent with the Gospel of Christ.”*

The writer of Hebrews describes in detail those whom we often describe as the “Hall of Faith.” These were men and women who chose to believe in God despite the circumstances in which they found themselves. These individuals remained convinced that God would do that which He promised He would do, regardless of whether or not it was done in their lifetime. Therefore, they continued to trust Him. In some cases, individuals died for what they believed.

Their passion for Christ compelled them to remain courageous amid persecution. Even in the presence of the threats of pain and torture and the adverse circumstance, they all remained true and faithful. Even in their deaths, their lives were regarded as consistent with the message they sought to proclaim.

What about you? To date, we have not been asked to die for Him, but we have been asked to live for Him. When people observe your life, do they see a life consistent with the message you proclaim? Or is it a life filled with inconsistencies? Let’s determine to live lives consistent with the Gospel.

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



Marlene’s Meditations

Spiritual Style

By Marlene Houk
Burke County

“But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ,” Romans 13:14a

My black taffeta silk skirt swished importantly as I ascended the stage to receive my first-place award. Later, the mom of a four-year-old informed me that her daughter had requested a princess dress just like mine.

We revel in the cozy warmth of a fleecy robe or the bling of a rhinestone blouse. But clothes also influence our thoughts and decisions. What we wear may affect our (and others’) higher-order thinking skills.

Psychological scientists from California State University, Northridge, and Columbia University conducted a series of five experiments. Their conclusion states: “‘Specifically, as formal clothing is associated with enhanced social distance, we propose that wearing formal clothing will enhance abstract cognitive processing,’ the researchers write in the journal Social Psychological and Personality Science.” Abstract cognitive processing, the phrase mentioned in the article, is a higher-order thinking skill. This ability helps us to receive, process, store, and use information. We understand ideas such as freedom or insecurity, but they are not concrete objects. Higher-order reasoning skill helps us to refocus, understand complex ideas, analyze events, and solve problems.

I’m reminded of Queen Esther’s story in the Bible. Royal robes against the backdrop of sumptuous parties in a luxurious palace offer a stunning stage for the drama. Blue, green, purple, and gold blend the swirls of fear and evil into a brilliant testimony of God’s power as He rescues the Jews from ethnic cleansing through Esther.

Did God subtly prepare the Jews to use higher-order thinking skills? When they saw Mordecai in the king’s robes and golden crown during his parade around the city, their mouths hung open in astonishment. Their abstract cognitive processing would have been enabled, and higher-order thinking skills (listed above) activated. Specifically, they could analyze Haman’s evil plan, put it into perspective, and work together to solve their crisis.

They obeyed Mordecai as he later rallied them from deep despair to fast for Esther. God helped the Jews by influencing their thinking through the clothes that Mordecai wore. He empowered them to help destroy Haman’s plan of ethnic cleansing.

Clothes in the book of Esther reign with confidence and aplomb. Queen Esther appears before the king in her royal apparel. Just before her audience with the king, her cousin Mordecai suddenly uses sackcloth, clothing that echoes despair, which alarms Esther and motivates her appearance before the king. After the crisis is over, Mordecai wears royal apparel of blue and white, and purple. Experts and research in the psychology of color reveal that people tend to associate blue and white with intelligence, trust, efficiency, and tranquility, calmness, and poise, and purple with sophistication and wealth. The Lord painlessly enhanced the Jews’ abstract cognitive processing by showing them Mordecai in the king’s splendid clothing. They were ready to help Esther save them.

The opulence of an imperial and world-powerful court offers the perfect backdrop for Esther’s message to us. She teaches us to dress ourselves in royal apparel when we face our own weaknesses, the world, and our enemy every morning.

- Slip on the *“robe of righteousness”* bequeathed to you in Isaiah 61:10.
- Wear the *“garment of praise”* found in Isaiah 61:3.
- Don’t forget to slip on *“kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering”* hanging in Colossians 3:12.
- Add to your beauty *“a gentle and quiet spirit”* as described in 1 Peter 3:4.
- Display the beauty of the Lord by donning the noble uniform of honor found in the wardrobe of Proverbs 31:25.
- And, if your day is a spiritual workday, cover yourself with the imperial armor of God located in a special section called Ephesians 6:11-18.

Diagonal ruffles floated in dramatic swirls around my black formal silk skirt as I returned to my seat after winning first place for my Bible study. But I was more familiar with the work clothes of obedience. Long hours with my laptop in the presence of the Lord, searching for the right words, and researching Bible women taught me the value of spiritual work clothes. But the pleasure of wearing God’s glorious garments found in my spiritual wardrobe lasts for eternity.

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



It’s OK to Be Different

By Steve Williams
Mitchell County

It’s OK to be different. Paul even encourages us to be different in this world that we live in. Too many people today do not think that it is cool to be different. Sad to say but many people today desire to be like others, but God has called us to be different. The Bible says in Romans 12:1-2 *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.* Paul tells us that it is God’s will for us to be different than the world. I do not know who said this but it is great. “Don’t be afraid of being different, be afraid of being the same as everyone else.”

Our society is in dire need of change and for people willing to be different. And the people who are going to bring this change in this world are going to have to be different. Look at the Bible all the men that Jesus chose to follow Him were very different in the eyes of the world. They were unlearned fishermen, tax collector, and they were just everyday men nothing really outstanding about them. See these men were different and the world saw it and they turned the world upside down.

At one time the church used to be different. There was a time when people looked to the church to be different, but sadly, today people look at the Church as being incompetent, and irrelevant. The reason for this is because the people outside the church fail to see anything different inside the church. The Church has fallen into the world instead of separating itself from the world. Instead of transforming into something different, it has allowed itself to be conformed to the world. When people need help today with family problems, moral guidance, and other issues they are turning to self-help groups, support groups, and the government. Folks, why is that when 86% of Americans claim to be Christian and claim to believe in God? Why is it that the church has so little effect on our families, our culture, our communities, and the world that we are living in? Well, I think the problem is that we are trying to please everyone and not offend anyone. Churches and Christians will never make a difference or be different with that mindset. I read this the other day in a Christian magazine. An elderly man was traveling with a boy and a donkey. They travel to four different villages. The 1st Village: The man was leading the donkey and the boy was walking behind. The townspeople said the old man was a fool for not riding. So to please them he climbed up on the animal’s back. The 2nd Village: The townspeople said the old man was cruel to let the child walk while he enjoyed the ride. So to please them, he got off and set the boy on the animal’s back and continued on his way. The 3rd Village: The townspeople accused the child of being lazy for making the old man walk. A suggestion was made that they both ride. So the man climbed on and they set off again. The 4th Village: The townspeople were outraged at the cruelty to the donkey because he was made to carry two people. The frustrated man was last seen carrying the donkey down the road. Moral: If you try to please everyone you might wind up carrying a donkey and in the eyes of the world you may just look like a donkey too!

Micah Tyler got a song and the title is “I Want To Be Different” it says this:

I wanna be different,
I wanna be changed.
'Til all of me is gone,
And all that remains.
Is a fire so bright
The whole world can see
That there's something different
So come and be different
In me!

Words of Wisdom:

- Sunshine is delicious, rain is refreshing, wind braces us up, snow is exhilarating; there is really no such thing as bad weather, only different kinds of good weather. N/A
- Working hard and working smart sometimes can be two different things. Byron Dorgan
- You laugh at me because I'm different, I laugh at you because you're all the same. Jonathan Davis
- Insanity is doing the same thing the same way and expecting different results. N/A

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



Foundation Fathers and How They Served Our Country—Thomas Stone

By David Streater, PhD
Burke County

This is an American history educational moment about our Founding Fathers and how they served our Country.

In 1744, Elbridge Gerry was born the third of 12 children in Massachusetts, into a wealthy business family that was also active in politics. While 14, Elbridge entered Harvard, completing a master’s degree in 1762. His graduate thesis supported the American resistance to the British Stamp Act.

After college, Elbridge worked in his family’s business and was elected to the Massachusetts legislature. Being inclined to the rebellion, Gerry became more of a revolutionary after meeting and associating with Samuel Adams and John Hancock. Gerry further supported the Revolution effort by helping to purchase, store, and distribute military matériel.

After a Patriot’s meeting on April 18, 1775, Gerry and friends slept in a local Arlington tavern. During the night, British forces invaded the town, causing Gerry and allies to hide and avoid capture. This invasion was the opening Revolution event for Lexington and Concord. In September 1776, Gerry signed the Declaration of Independence, proclaiming that to be his life’s crowning achievement. Over the years, Gerry held many political positions and was part of noted historical events. Even though he was James Madison’s vice president, he is better known for lending his name to the terminology of Gerrymandering. This moniker came from Gerry drawing odd-shaped geopolitical boundaries, one in the shape of a salamander, to garner votes for his political party. The jargon of Gerrymander is still common political terminology.

Please visit your Charters of Freedom setting in most western North Carolina counties. A Charters of Freedom setting consists of the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. They are on permanent display analogous to the Charters of Freedom in the National Archives, Washington, DC. Please visit our website (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) 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.

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Love Life!
By Nancy Malik
Avery County



The world is a different place due to COVID 19. Yet there is still life being lived, daily.

God works in mysterious ways, His wonders to perform! I love that verse. My husband and I moved here in 2017 following God's direction. Once we knew Avery County was the location He had for us, we prayed for over 100 churches here. The beauty and the four seasons are a gift from above and the people are precious. God's heart for Avery County is for the churches to come together to meet the limitless needs of a small county. Covid shut down many churches, that will never open again. Tommy Burleson, at the 2018 Singing on the Mountain, asked the churches of Avery County to come out of their buildings and do God's work here together.

On January 20th, Avery County had a Prayer Walk for the March for Life that became a virtual walk in Washington, DC, and also at the Newland Town Square where over 60 people walked around the county square. After meeting the sponsor of that walk, Chastity Ogburn, we both knew that Avery County and the surrounding counties need pro-life accessibility for counseling women and men in tough times and pregnancy. As Chastity and I met and shared stories of our past, we realized that Avery County needs a safe place for the hard questions. Tommy had asked the churches of Avery County to do just that, come together. Chastity and I are asking the churches here to help support this much-needed ministry. Fear and shame cause many of us to make rash decisions and a place of loving concern and those willing to listen and help, in a safe atmosphere, is a gift.

This county is small, population-wise, and yet we still have issues much larger counties also have. Please consider asking your pastor if your church could help in the making of a safe place for tough decisions and answers of help and love can be found. We realize many would come here from other counties, as so many of our loved ones have gone to other counties for help in their pregnancy. Chastity began Anne Ministries in September of 2018 to minister to women who have gone through similar circumstances. She has three different Bible studies that help heal from the loss of a child, due to abortion, miscarriage, or stillbirth. If you would like to get in touch with Anne Ministries, contact can be made at 919-499-3083.

"You created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." Psalm 139: 13-16.

God has spoken through King David's song. Each life is a gift, created by God. Our world has become riddled with quick fixes and abortion can be just that. But it is a life created by God that we are taking and that precious one was knit together by God for a special purpose.

Please consider your part in this for Avery County. Ask your churches if they would help, or even you, yourself, might like to help or be helped! He is there for each one of us, even the unborn.

May God be glorified in this!

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. a2jfam@reagan.com

Sudoku

Solution on page 14

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

Hopefulness vs. Hopelessness
By Ken and Jam Merop
Avery County



Oh, how I hoped icy rain or snow wouldn't arrive on our wedding day back in February 1982 in New Jersey. A bitter winter had already been in full swing.

A friend had offered to escort me to the church in his antique car...and take Ken and me to our next destination. On our limited budget, his offer provided a classy ambiance without cost as we enfolded our two young families into one that day.

There was one stipulation. The car couldn't be brought out in icy rain or snow. So, we prayed and hoped.

Hope is a word that I love hanging my hat on. Just saying the word uplifts the spirits and puts a spring in one's step because of the promise and prospect of faith-based on conviction.

But for others, that word may not offer that response. Instead, a person may dissolve into tears because they do not see evidence of their expectations coming to be. Things look hopeless.

The Bible is a book full of hope. Its meaning is filled with anticipation, aspiration, and confidence. When I read of hope in the Bible, I take heart...especially if things are looking dim.

It's much like the word faith. Many people say they have faith. But, if that faith has no substance, it's shallow. In whom we place our faith matters greatly. So with hope.

I've been thinking about H O P E and how the letter 'H' can stand for Heavenly Sonshine. "O" can stand for Overflowing in my soul. "P" can equal Promises of God. And "E" can denote Eternal significance...every day.

"...We heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints, because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven..." says Colossians 1: 4 & 5, NKJV. That is Heavenly Sonshine at its best.

The beauty of it is described in Titus 1: 2, where it says, "In hope of eternal life which God who cannot lie, promised before time began..."

This hope belongs to every believer. It is what we bank our present and our future on because we know in Whom we have believed.

So, on that day almost 33 years ago, had icy rain or snow come (which it didn't!), we may have been disappointed not to use the antique car. But it would not have devastated our eternal hope. That is secure... *"Christ in you, the hope of glory."* (Colossians 1: 27).

The same is true now when everything seems upside down.

Hopefulness vs. hopelessness? Place your hope securely in Christ and live in 2021 with confidence. Selah

CLOUDS DESCENDING

*Not content to stay skyward,
these clouds fell amongst the mountains
creating an amazing panorama.
Sometimes the clouds of life fall upon us!
Might we consider that there's sweet rain
within to refresh us...a silver lining?*

*"Your mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens;
Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds."
Psalm 36: 5*



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

Ten Reasons for Family Devotions

By John McCoury
Roan Mountain, Tennessee



Let us begin by reading Psalm 19:9–11, especially verse 9 How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. I’d like to deal with a once-popular subject that has fallen on hard times—family devotions. This old phrase simply means praying together as a family. I believe we can still find a formula for having the “family altar” if we realize how important it is. I’d like to share ten reasons for family devotions.

1. Devotions Provide Communication with God. They are the easiest, best way for your family to get together and talk to God (see Ps. 25:4, 5). When we have family devotions, we’re communicating with God. Communication in business today is so important that 90% of U.S. companies provide communication skills training in the workplace. Subscribers to the Harvard Business Review rated the ability to communicate as more important than ambition, education, and the capacity for hard work. We teach our children how to communicate with their playmates. When do you teach them how to communicate with God? (see Ps. 119:145–152).

2. Devotions Satisfy Spiritual Thirst. We’re all thirsty for something (see Ps. 42:1, 2). we all have a God-shaped vacuum that only God can fill. That is true for our children, grandchildren, and spouse. Family devotions allow the opportunity to quench our spiritual thirst (see Ps. 84:2).

3. Devotions Advance Personal Spiritual Growth. Yes, I know we can grow with private devotions. praying with other members of the family helps all the family do the same (see 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:18). If you’re growing in God’s Word but your spouse isn’t, it makes for an unbalanced couple.

4. Family Devotions Bring Us Together. Sitting down and talking about spiritual things provides a safeguard against carnality in our homes (see 1 Corinthians 3:1–3). If you want to put a hedge against worldly activity in your family, the best way is to get together each day to discuss how we relate God’s Word to our lives in the world. It’s a tradition your child will treasure later in life.

5. Devotions Provide Insight for Daily Life. Take Proverbs 10:4, for example: “Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth”. Kids need to know that. The Book of Proverbs gives specific advice on how to treat a mean neighbor, what to do when your wife is mad at you, how to invest properly, when to speak and when to be silent, how to know when you’ve angered someone, and what to do about it. And that’s just one book.

6. Family Devotions Prevent Unstable Faith. It seems to me that some Christians who believe in God and come to church also believe in some of the wildest, wackiest things. They’ve mixed truth and error. They sing praise choruses at church yet hold beliefs that don’t square with Scripture. Family devotions counter that. A consistent time before the Lord enables us to grow.

7. Devotions Provide Daily Comfort and Encouragement. If I didn’t have a Bible, I don’t know what I’d do. If I didn’t have it open, I don’t know what I’d do. And if I didn’t have it open every day, I don’t know how I’d face life’s challenges (see Ps. 119:81).

8. Devotions Prepare Us to Share Our Faith. The more we’re in God’s Word, the more familiar with it we are.

9. Devotions Provide Daily Marching Orders. When you get into Scripture, you find things that tell you what God wants you to do each day (see Deut. 5:27 and Ps. 119:105). God’s will is revealed in His Word.

10. Family Devotions Show Respect for the Author of the Word of God the Bible. The greatest compliment to pay an author is to say, “I read your book.” I wonder what we’ll say to God when we meet Him face to face, and He asks, “Did you read My book?” (see Ps. 119:127, 128).

How do you start? Well, everybody does it differently. You can start by reading a chapter every night and take a moment to discuss it. Then think of prayer requests and pray about them, and it’s a simple thing. It doesn’t take long, but never allow anything to disrupt that time. If the phone rings, we let it ring. If the doorbell rings, don’t answer it. Remember when spending time with my family, and we’re spending time with God, there’s nothing fuller of life. Having family devotions is important!

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

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And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. Acts 1:7

Obedient Heart Fellowship

Resurrection Cures All

By Jim Huskins
McDowell County

Last month I claimed that when we die we return to dust and await the bodily resurrection. This view is in opposition to the popular notion that believers continue to exist as disembodied spirits in heaven. This month I will address several passages which appear to counter my position.

Genesis 5:24 tells us that Enoch did not die. God “took” him. Some believe that Enoch now exists as a conscious spirit in God’s presence. They cite Hebrews 11:5. “By faith IEnoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him.”

Since context is essential, we must also look at Hebrews 11:13. “These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.” The phrase, “These all died in faith” refers to that list of Bible characters commended for faithfulness. Enoch is included. The text is clear that everyone on the list died, including Enoch.

The Greek word used for “death” in verse five refers to succumbing to the process of disease. A different word for death in verse 13 refers to ceasing physical existence. Enoch died, but he apparently did not have to experience any normal decline in health.

2 Kings 2:11 tells of Elijah being picked up by a chariot of fire and taken into heaven. This Hebrew word for heaven has various meanings. It can mean “sky.” It can refer to the realm of the planets and stars, or “space.” It can also indicate the place where God dwells. In Elijah’s famous story, it almost certainly refers to the sky. Second Chronicles 21:12 tells us that Elijah sent a prophetic letter to King Jehoram. This was ten years after his chariot ride. Apparently, Elijah was relocated to some other place where he continued a form of the prophetic ministry until his death.

Those who promote conscious existence after death often cite Luke 23:42-43, “And he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ And he said to him, ‘Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.” This is the famous request of the thief on the cross. Again, context is essential.

The thief asks to be remembered when Jesus comes into his kingdom. Jesus answers him in that context. First Century Jews understood the Messianic Kingdom to be an earthly reign. This will begin when Jesus returns to defeat His enemies and institute the Millennium.

If Jesus meant what is typically understood, the thief had to follow Him to “Paradise” on the day of the crucifixion. Several scriptures, including 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 and Revelation 2:7, make it clear that “Paradise” is in Heaven. Jesus did not go to Heaven on the day of His crucifixion. John 20:15-17 recounts an exchange between Jesus and Mary Magdalene on Sunday following the crucifixion. Jesus says, “I have not yet ascended to the Father.” If Jesus did not enter Paradise on the day of the crucifixion, neither did the thief.

The key to understanding that exchange is simple: New Testament Greek does not include punctuation. When translating the Bible into English, periods and commas must be determined from context. Since the earliest English translators believed that people exist as conscious spirits following death, they framed Jesus’ answer this way: “I tell you, this day you shall be with me in Paradise.” What He actually said was, “I tell you this day, you shall be with me In Paradise.” This comma placement is critical.

Another oft-cited proof text for conscious existence after death is Jesus’ account of the rich man and Lazarus. Rather than a literal description of after-death existence, this is a parable intended to communicate specific lessons to the Jewish leaders who first heard it. When we study scripture, it is not always easy to distin-



guish between parables and literal accounts. For example, when Jesus said, “Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days,” His audience assumed that He was speaking of Herod’s Temple. John 2:20 says that He was speaking of His body. His own disciples misunderstood when He told them to “Be on guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.” They thought they were being reprimanded for failing to buy bread. They were with Him at the moment, but they did not always understand what He said. We are two thousand years removed. How likely is it that we could misunderstand?

The rich man and Lazarus must be viewed in the context of the rest of the Bible. Jesus says that parables are intentionally difficult to understand. See Matthew 13:13 and John 16:25. If the parable of the rich man and Lazarus is literally true, it presents a number of problems:

Jesus never says that the rich man is sinful or that Lazarus is righteous. A strictly literal interpretation of the story would require us to believe that all rich people are condemned and all poor people are saved.

If this parable is a literal description of the afterlife, then we must conclude that the saved will be able to view their loved ones being endlessly tormented.

If the parable is literal, then we are forced to believe that a single drop of water would bring some relief to one experiencing hell’s inferno.

Only by viewing this story as an allegory intended to teach larger spiritual truth can we avoid the many conundrums resulting from a literal interpretation.

For an in-depth discussion on this topic, watch the excellent YouTube series, Life After Death by 119 Ministries.

Obedient Heart Fellowship needs a place to meet in or near Marion. We meet on the Biblical Sabbath, Seventh Day. Our group is small and our needs are basic. Contact Jim at 828-460-7913 or lostranger@mindspring.com

Jim & Beverly Huskins are members of Obedient Heart Fellowship.



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Choose Life

By Phillip Greene
Avery County

To start, let me say - I am all for the right of a woman to choose, but hear me out before you cast judgment on this statement.

I believe that we have lost sight of the fight today. We must understand something that goes much deeper than just the surface arguments. Before I explain the opening comment...let me explain what life is.



Life is a precious gift from God. Humans are the only creation of the Almighty that He formed by hand and breathed the breath of life into. Created in His image, both male and female (Genesis 1:26-27). The Book of James tells us that our plans are feeble and that life is but a vapor or a mist (James 4:14), a here today, gone tomorrow mentality. Society has told us that “Life is what you make it” – but I would argue, what if you don’t get to make it?

All human life is important to the One who created it because it is His masterpiece. Created in the image of the Almighty, human life is special. We were created for a purpose, with a purpose. Rick Warren, in his best-selling book The Purpose Driven Life, opened the dialogue with four words...” It’s not about me.” At some point, we have to realize the truth of this statement. Somewhere along the way we have become selfish and decided that one life, in many cases our own, is more important than another. We have argued and violently battled over the right to say we are the best...at the dangerous cost of other lives. We have adopted a mentality of “if I can benefit, I don’t care who suffers” – and this has included the loss of millions of innocent lives.

The deepest of human desire is to live as we wish. Don’t believe me? Then explain the mottos carried by a society of “you only live once” or “living my best life.” We have become so focused on living the life we see as our best, that we are willing to sacrifice others without even knowing. Society has adopted a “whatever it takes” mentality. We have decided that death is sometimes just a stepping stone or a paver in the highway of life. We have determined that if someone has to suffer, or even die, for us to achieve the goals we feel are ours, so be it! We have lost our way!

Wait, what?

Yes. We are willing to destroy others to get where we wish. “But preacher, I don’t wish death on anyone!” – don’t you? Your actions tell a different story. What are you doing to ensure the sanctity of life? What are you doing to secure safety for everyone? What are you doing to ensure that your decisions have no collateral damage? Are you fighting injustice? All injustice? Are you protecting the innocent?

It is a lot to ponder.

God created you with a purpose. He knit you together in your mother’s womb. You are fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139). Don’t believe that life begins in the womb? He told Jeremiah that He knew him in the womb, before he was in the womb, that he had made plans for him to be a prophet to the nations... before any of that (Jeremiah 1:5). Why do we think it would be any different for us? He has known you before the world knew you. He knew the ones who were taken out as you climbed the ladder of success; He knows those who the world has never met. Life is sacred. It is the greatest of God’s creations. We are the greatest of His creations.

Choose Christ. Choose hope. Choose forgiveness. Choose Life!

As I said, I’m all for the right of a woman to choose what to do with her body. I am not, however, for the right to choose when another life is at stake. I am for the woman’s right to choose not to partake in the activities that might lead to finding herself in the situation where she makes a choice that takes the life of another. Again, Biblically speaking, it appears that all life begins at conception.

“For it was You who created my inward parts; You knit me together in my mother’s womb. I will praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wondrous, and I know this very well.” – Psalm 139:13-14

But what if she didn’t make the choice that got her there? Fair point, but, I would still argue that the life at stake deserves a voice. Will it hurt for her to live through this? Yes. Will it be worth it? I also believe the answer is yes.

I would encourage us to look at it that God creates all of us with a purpose... including those who are born because of these circumstances. All life is sacred. I would fight for the lives of the elderly, the disabled, and the marginal in the same way. All life is sacred and all life is worth something to the One who created it. This isn’t about the condemnation of those who have or even will make this choice, their life is important too...this is about the fact that God offers restoration and hope. God offers forgiveness for all who will not reject His gift.

Jesus came to save the world. Jesus came to offer hope. He didn’t come to condemn those in the world, he came to save us from worldly ways (John 3:16-17). Don’t you think that everyone deserves the same chance that you were afforded? Especially since that same provision was also made for them...at the same time, it was made for you? Thank God that no matter what you’ve done, you were worth His sacrifice; and, if we are created in His image, isn’t another life worth ours? No matter what it may mean for the so-called plans that we have?

“It isn’t about me.”

It truly isn’t about you or me. It is about Him. It is about preserving His image - the Creator of all life, the Alpha, the Omega, the Beginning, the End, the Author, and the Finisher of our faith. The One who knew us long before the world knew us and the One who knows those the world has never known. He has loved us from the start. He has loved us, despite us. He loves us, unconditionally.

Our choices should never take the life of another. From the womb to the tomb, all have a right to life that we as the church must protect. Protect the innocent and give them a voice; but, do not condemn those who have made or are facing this difficult decision, because they need love too. They are hurting, they need hope, they need to know that they are loved and can be forgiven. God’s grace can cover a multitude of sins. Including yours.

Invite them to “Come and See” that the Lord is good.

“Love one another as I have loved you.” - Jesus

Phillip Greene is the Station Manager/Program Director for WECR-AM Radio/Glory 1130.

Evangelism Explosion International

Opportunities Are All Around Us

By Rev. John B. Sorensen



Who do you want to see begin a relationship with God this year? Whether it is someone you know or a burden you have for people in your community, opportunities to share the Gospel are all around you. Sometimes, we just have to open our eyes.

Jesus connected with people every day. He began conversations intentionally, and they often lead to deeper discussions about faith. Now for some people, starting conversations comes easily and naturally. But for the rest of us, beginning conversations may be a bit more difficult.

Recognizing the opportunities around us is key. We don’t have to travel across the world to share the love of Jesus with someone. All around us, people are searching for genuine relationships. They want to connect with others. So what would happen if we tried to engage with just one person each day? Now, not every attempt will end with a long-lasting relationship or a spiritual dialogue. But some will. And as we engage in conversations, we have the opportunity to point them to the ultimate relationship with Jesus.

Pray for God to open your eyes to the opportunities around you. Ask Him to fill you with compassion for those who don’t know Him. Pray for open doors to share His love with people you know (and maybe people you don’t know yet). If we ask, He helps us step out of our comfort zones and begin that conversation.

Here are some tips to get you started:

Begin casually. Find a hook to start the conversation. Strike up a conversation about something they are wearing, shopping for, or a current event in the community. Get to know them. Look for common interests, but keep the focus on them – their thoughts, ideas, and framework for life. Make them feel comfortable. Don’t think about what to say next. Think about what to ask next.

Ask engaging questions. Invite them to share about their lives, values, and experiences. Find out what really goes on in their world, and listen. Be genuinely interested in what they have to say. Craft deeper questions around things they say that invite them to share their views about faith and God.

Encourage meaningful dialogue. Continue to exchange ideas and views that transition into the spiritual part of their experience. Be compassionate, not judgmental, even when you don’t agree. Look for opportunities to share the Good News about Jesus that flows naturally with the conversation. Remember to ask permission first before you share your story about God or begin a Gospel presentation.

As we begin conversations with the people around us, we often discover that people are more open than we think to talk about spiritual matters. Opportunities to share our faith are all around us. Pray that God will allow you to be a part of what He is doing in the lives of other people. Then, we simply need to step out in faith and begin those conversations.

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

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Your Government Page

NC Senate District 47



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

Out of a deep concern for North Carolina students who are being deprived of in-school, in-person instruction, I sponsored Senate Bill 37 – In-Person Learning Choices for Families. This bipartisan legislation gives school districts greater flexibility in choosing how to best operate in-person. It eliminates Plan C (all-virtual learning) and allows local school districts the choice of in-person learning under Plan A (minimal social distancing) or Plan B (moderate social distancing) or a combination of both for all K-12 students. Families may still opt for remote learning.

This bill directs schools to follow all requirements in Gov. Cooper’s StrongSchoolsNC Public Health Toolkit for in-person learning, in addition to allowing teachers and staff who self-identify as high-risk from COVID-19 to seek alternate accommodation to minimize their risk exposure. Beyond following the requirements of the Governor’s toolkit, the bill also allows teachers and staff to seek accommodation if they have a minor child under their direct care with an underlying condition that is identified as high-risk from COVID-19.

Included in the bill are references to multiple studies and reports that back up our own common sense that prolonged absences from school are not good for our children:

- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) outlined the dramatic increase in children's mental health visits to hospital emergency rooms from April to October of 2020 over the same time period in 2019, an increase of 24% for children ages 5–11 and 30% for children between the ages of 12–17.
- The CDC further found that with mitigation efforts, the COVID-19 transmission risk in schools appears low, showing that with the necessary precautions in place, schools can open during the pandemic and that there is little evidence that schools have contributed meaningfully to increased community transmission.
- The ABC Science Collaborative confirms the CDC's findings, as it reported no instances of child-to-adult transmission of COVID-19 were reported within schools during their examination of 11 open school districts in North Carolina serving 90,000 students during the first quarter of the 2020-2021 school year.
- High failure rates in remote learning classes among middle and high school students are being reported statewide.
- The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development found for every one-third of a school year lost, current students will suffer a 3% loss in income across their entire careers.
- A study in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that today's students' increased financial stress could be associated with a collective loss of 13.8 million years of life.
- Even last summer, experts at Harvard University warned that school closures are a disaster that some students may never recover from.

Senate Bill 37 was presented to Gov. Cooper on February 17th. At the time of this writing, the Governor had not signed the bill, and despite his statement that research conducted in North Carolina “tells us that in-person learning is working and students can be in classrooms safely, with the right safety protocols in place,” he had indicated that he might veto the bill. It is my hope, that as you are reading this the Governor has signed the bill without delay so our students across the state can return to school.

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

NC Senate District 46



Sen. Warren Daniel
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919-715-7823

The 2021 session of the NC General Assembly is now well underway, and a lot is happening in Raleigh.

First off, the General Assembly received VERY positive news about our state revenues. A joint revenue forecast released last month by our legislative staff and the Office of State Budget and Management predicts tax collections will exceed 2020 estimates by \$4.1 billion (17.6%). This is remarkable because last year, at the onset of the pandemic, there were grave concerns that state revenues would drop substantially, perhaps leading to future budget deficits. Tax reforms, balanced budgets, and a strong savings reserve by our Republican-led General Assembly over the past decade have placed our state in a strong position to weather this economic storm as well as several actual hurricanes. Our state over the past 6 years has experienced consistent revenue surpluses, as the state has maintained unanimous AAA credit ratings, and is currently ranked the #1 Best State for Business by Forbes and Site Selection Magazine, and was Business Facilities’ 2020 State of the Year.

On the public schools front, during the week of February 15, the NC House and Senate took decisive action to return students to the classroom for in-person learning by passing Senate Bill 37, entitled, “In-Person Learning Choice for Families.” The bill gives local school districts the choice between providing in-person learning under Plan A (minimal social distancing) or Plan B (moderate social distancing), or a mixture of both, for all K-12 students. Students with exceptional needs would be provided in-person learning under Plan A if parents choose that option. All families are still able to select remote learning under the plan if they choose to do so.

The bill directs schools to follow the requirements in the Strong Schools NC Public Health Toolkit for reopening, which was developed by the NC DHHS. For months we’ve heard from families and students who are clamoring to return to in-person learning. The science and data show that we can reopen schools safely. The evidence that school closures harm children is overwhelming. As far back as last summer, public health experts at Harvard University warned that school closures are “a disaster that some students may never recover from.”

Earlier this month the CDC concluded there is “little evidence that schools have contributed meaningfully to increased community transmission.” At the time of this article, SB37 was on Governor Cooper’s desk, and we are uncertain whether he will sign or veto the bill.

Finally, a little bit of good news on the Voter ID front. A court decision in early February by the US Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals denied the Plaintiffs’ petition asking all 15 Court of Appeals judges to review and reverse the favorable Voter ID decision we received in January.

The Plaintiffs in this case (people who want to get rid of Voter ID) filed their petition for en banc review to get the entire Fourth Circuit (15 judges) to review and overturn the 3-0 panel decision which vacated the District Court’s preliminary injunction of the Voter ID law. Unless Plaintiffs now take the extraordinary step of seeking review in the US Supreme Court, this case will head back to the Federal District Court in NC for trial this spring.

The Voter ID law is still enjoined (i.e., can’t be implemented yet) because of the parallel state lawsuit over the same Voter ID law. That state case is also scheduled for trial sometime this spring.

Next month I will feature some of the bills and issues that I am personally working on, including the preservation of volunteer fire departments, preventing cities from defunding their police departments, and allowing churches and private schools to better protect themselves from armed intruders.

I thank you for allowing me the privilege of serving you, the citizens of Avery, Burke, and Caldwell Counties. If I may be of assistance, please do not hesitate to contact my Raleigh office staff at 919-715-7823.



Enjoying Everyday Life

Refuse to Settle for Less Than God Has for You

By Joyce Meyer



Many years ago, when God gave me a revelation of His promise for my life in John 10:10, it was literally life-changing. The truth that Jesus came “*that they may have life, and have it to the full*” (NIV) gave me a determination to no longer settle for just barely getting by in my everyday life.

As I became more serious about my relationship with God and discovered how to really “do life” with Him, the more I experienced the peace and joy that only Jesus can give. And it made me passionate about helping others take hold of everything God has for their lives, too.

So many people are hurting, struggling to find joy, peace, and fulfillment. They’re missing out on the good plan God has for them because they don’t know that He wants them to have life in Christ “to the full” now, in this life. Sadly, many who get this realization often settle for less than God’s best because it requires determination and diligence to get there.

Hard Things Can Bring Good Results

These days, with all the modern technology we have, it’s easy to be lazy and expect to just glide through life. Some people don’t have the tenacity to press through challenges because so much of life is automated and convenient.

I remember when simply making a phone call required some effort. And when I first started studying the Bible and teaching, it was quite a job to put even one message together because we didn’t have the Internet to get all of our information from.

We like things to be easy, but when things are too easy, it isn’t necessarily good for us because we lack the perseverance and determination to press through them. When hard times and challenges come (and they will come), we will need to do some pressing or we’ll give up.

Never Give Up!

When I talk about “pressing,” what I mean is we have to press against the pressure that’s coming against us, holding us back from doing what God is leading us to do. For example, maybe you’ve experienced rejection, betrayal, abandonment, injustices, discouragement, or disappointment. You need to forgive someone, but it feels impossible to do it and move on. In His Word, God says, “*If you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins*” (Matthew 6:15 NIV). And in John 13:34, Jesus says, “*Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.*” Romans 12:21 clearly says, “*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*”

You may be thinking, “Joyce, it’s too hard. You don’t know what they did to me!” I understand. And I know it’s not easy to press through your pain and fear to do what God is showing you to do. It took time and determination for me to forgive my father for abusing me and my mother for knowing about it but not having the courage to get me out of that situation. But God helped me to do it, and ultimately, it set me free to move forward in His call on my life to minister to people all over the world.

Press Past Feelings and Put Your Trust in God

The key to getting your breakthrough is making a determined decision to press past the pain of feelings and do what you know you should do even while you’re hurting. In other words, you can’t wait until you feel like doing what is right.

God wants you to move forward in His plan for your life. But the only way you are going to do that is by starting now to do what you need to do, the things you’ve been putting off because you don’t feel like doing them. Choose to believe that by God’s grace and with His help, you can do what you know in your heart you should do, not just what feels good.

If you’re struggling with this, let me encourage you. Philippians 4:13 says, “*I can do all things [which He has called me to do] through Him who strengthens and empowers me [to fulfill His purpose...]*” (AMP). And 2 Peter 1:3 (NIV) says that God’s “*divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.*”

Whatever your challenge may be—getting out of debt, strengthening your marriage, pursuing a new job, getting in better physical health, etc.—God’s grace can empower you to do it. Ask Him to help you. Trust Him to be with you, and start taking steps of faith, doing what you know you can do today. Press on to the great things Jesus came to give you!

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.



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McDowell Technical Community College

MTCC Voices: Randy Hollifield:
A McDowell Tech Success Story.
A McDowell Tech Voice.
McDowell County

Every building at McDowell Tech seems to be a repository of fine jewels these days—filled with some of the greatest faculty and staff you’ll find at any community college in America. Each of them is bright, talented, caring, and student-focused.

Randy Hollifield is one of those persons. Hollifield is the college’s Cyber Crime Technology Instructor. “Randy is a true McDowell Tech success story,” said Dr. Brian S. Merritt, MTCC’s President. “He is a former student leader, an MTCC graduate with multiple degrees and certifications, and now he is transforming students' lives in the classroom.

“I fall asleep at night thinking about our students,” Merritt continued. “But, then my mind quickly shifts to our employees because our people make our programs what they are. We rely on great faculty like Randy to create quality learning experiences for our students.”

Seizing Opportunity by the Handfuls

Hollifield’s path to the head of the class was not an easy one. Sixteen years ago, Hollifield worked at a textile manufacturing facility that was downsizing and handing out “pink slips” right and left. Although he made it through the first few cuts, he knew that it was only a matter of time until he, too, would lose his job to foreign competition in the U.S. textile industry.

“Although I had been with the company for more than twenty-two years, I knew that I would eventually receive my “pink slip,” just as so many before me had,” said Hollifield. “Rather than wait around for the inevitable, I resigned in 2005 and took some classes at JobLink (now NCWorks) that made it possible for me to receive my High School Equivalency in May 2006.

“In the fall of that year, I began taking curriculum classes at McDowell Technical Community College with a declared major in Business Administration (which I changed to Computer Information Technology after my first semester at the college). My intentions at the time were to get an Associate’s degree and go back into the manufacturing field in an entry-level leadership position.

“However, things changed quite drastically over time as I continued my education, both at McDowell Tech and beyond,” Hollifield continued.

Over the next six years, from 2006 to 2012, Hollifield took advantage of as many educational opportunities as possible at McDowell Tech, racking up four degrees and/or diplomas: an A.A.S. (Associate of Applied Science) in Computer Information Technology, a diploma in Networking Technology, an A.A.S. in Web Technologies, and an A.A.S. in Business Administration.

“It’s kind of funny,” Hollifield stated. “I started out in 2006 declaring Business Administration as my major, changed to Computer Information Technology, but in the end, my third and final associate degree was in Business Administration. The breadth of my academic preparation and all of the experiences I enjoyed or endured (!) at McDowell Tech have made me a well-rounded individual and instructor, in my opinion. I would not change a thing if I had to do it all over again.”

Mr. Hollifield’s educational curiosity also found a practical, vocationally-oriented friend among the various certifications offered to students in many technical programs: certifications. All total, Hollifield studied, prepared for, took, passed, and received 8 professional certifications during those first six years at McDowell Tech: ATI (Assessment Technologies Institute) Academy Certified Proctor, CIW (Certified Internet Web Professional) Certified Instructor, CIW Certified Testing Center Proctor (PSL-901), North Carolina Career Readiness Certification, CIW Web Foundations Associate (IDO-510); CIW Network Technology Associate, CIW Site Development Associate, and CIW Internet Business Associate.

While he was studying for his degrees and certifications, Hollifield also began working a part-time job at the college in 2008 as a peer tutor and lab assistant. When they were available, Hollifield sought and received additional part-time positions as a computer lab associate in the Academic Resource Center, as a testing specialist in the Student Enrichment Center, as an associate in the MTCC library, and others. In 2010, he became a part-time instructor in the Business Technology Department.

“It was quite a change of pace from the fast-paced production environment I was accustomed to in textile manufacturing,” said Hollifield. “My previous supervisory experience, the information I learned while earning my first degree and diploma, along with on-the-job training, gave me a good working skillset for tutoring and assisting students in the computer lab.”

He also credits others at McDowell Tech for helping him achieve his goals, academically and vocationally. “Having support from various mentors, advisors, and instructors was very helpful throughout my entire experience as a student at the college. Moreover, being a part of the Student Government Association and president of the MTCC Computer Club for several years, and having the opportunity to develop that group’s first website, was very beneficial for my personal and professional growth.”

Launchpad to Success

Hollifield’s foundational studies at McDowell Tech quickly became the launchpad for higher-level academic work as he enrolled at Western Governors University, where he received his Bachelor of Science degree in Information Technology in 2015 and his Master of Science degree in Information Security and Assurance (MSISA) in 2017.

As he had done at McDowell Tech, Hollifield prepared for, took, passed, and received additional certifications while completing his bachelor’s and master’s degrees: EC-Council C|EH, EC-Council C|HFI, Cisco Certified Network Associ-



ate (CCNA), CIW Database Design Specialist, CompTIA Security+, CompTIA Project+, CompTIA Network+, and CIW JavaScript Specialist. Also, he is a Certiport proctor.

Economically, it was tough paying for graduate school and living expenses on part-time jobs he scrounged at McDowell Tech. Sometimes, he can’t believe how little he lived on during those years. “In 2016, my taxable income for the year was just \$8,993.79,” he said. ”Hard to believe, huh?”

In 2019, however, his perseverance paid off when he was hired as a full-time instructor at the college.

“It has been said that, ‘Good things come to those who wait,’ and I truly believe that,” he said. While he is not flush with money, by any stretch of the imagination, education has certainly changed his socio-economic status significantly. “It just took a little time,” he laughed.

Singing Praises!

Hollifield has a unique perspective on McDowell Tech, having been a student with multiple MTCC degrees, as well as a relatively new faculty member. Asked what he likes best about McDowell Tech, he quickly responded: “It’s the people! The employees, and the students. Working at McDowell Tech is like being part of a large family, and I wouldn’t trade it for anything. I love my job. I never have those ‘Sunday blues’ that I used to have with my previous employer.

“In my opinion,” he continued, “you’re not going to find a school with a more caring group of people anywhere. The instructors here really want the students to succeed, and they go out of their way to ensure that happens. With the instructor-to-student ratio being so low, students get a lot of one-on-one time that they would not likely find at a lot of larger colleges and universities.”

Hollifield also appreciates that MTCC administrators are innovative and proactive in looking for in-demand, technology-focused career paths with solid, long-term employment potential when evaluating new curricula. He offered the introduction of Cyber Crime Technology, the program in which he teaches, as an example of curriculum innovation.

“According to Bureau of Labor Statistics, the demand for cybersecurity talent continues to outstrip supply. Employment for Information security analysts is projected to grow 31 percent from 2019 to 2029, much faster than the average for all occupations. Demand for jobs in cybersecurity is expected to be very high, as these analysts will be needed to create innovative solutions to prevent hackers from stealing critical information or accessing unsecured networks. There are only 6 North Carolina Community Colleges in the entire state that offer this program,” he said.

Faculty Retention

Dr. Merritt looks at Hollifield and other highly qualified instructors at McDowell Tech and worries about how we will hang on to them long term. The competition to recruit and retain highly qualified faculty is often extreme. “NC Community Colleges rank 40th in the nation for public 2-year faculty salaries. If we want to retain great faculty like Randy, we hope our community college employees will receive the 5% salary increase in 2021 that many other State employees received in the last biennium,” he said.

“We need voices like Randy’s, faculty who have been where our students have been, who understand their problems, frustrations, financial difficulties, hopes, and dreams. More importantly, we need to recruit and retain faculty like Randy who knows how to motivate and inspire those students to persevere and be successful, as he has been.”

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Plumtree Church

Uganda Vision

By Pastor Ryan Bridgeo
Avery County

The need for clean water in Uganda is great. Many have become ill from drinking dirty water. Young children are required to walk up to 4.5 miles each way to get to the closest community well and sometimes these wells are not clean. Then they have to wait 30-60 minutes in line for their turn in line. Once their jerry can is full, they have to walk home with over 40 pounds of water on their heads.

I have a vision to bring clean water to the nation of Uganda. I know that sounds big, but we serve a big God.

The population of Uganda is roughly 45,431,603. With 93,065 square miles of land. If were to drill a well every 20 miles, that would be 4654 wells. If we drill every 10 miles, it would be 9307 wells. This would be approximately one well for every 4882 people.

Last year we were able to provide a well for the community of Milengeizo. Milengeizo is the center of 5 villages representing 5280 people. They had one well for everyone, and now they have two. Our cost was \$8250. At the dedication of the well, roughly 500-1000 people received the living water of Jesus Christ.

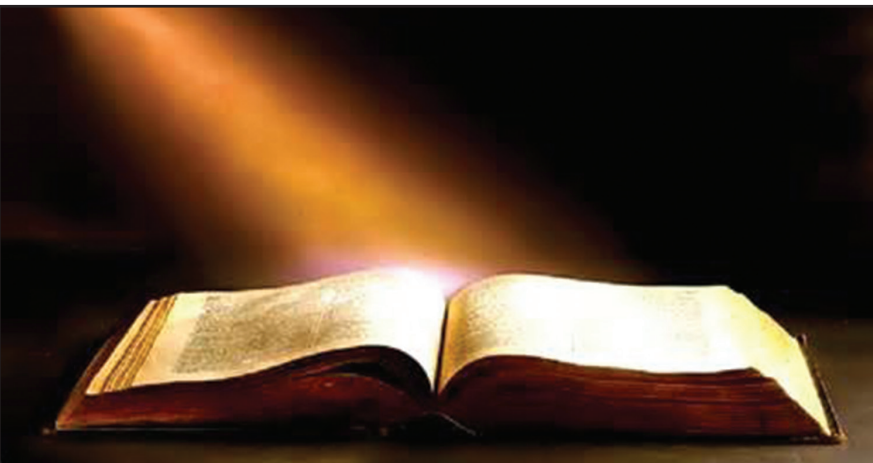
If we were to dig 9307 wells over the nation of Uganda at the same cost, it would be approximately \$76,782,750. This is actually a very small amount. Some athletes, movie stars, and business people make more than that in one year. If we can work together, we will accomplish this goal and do something great for the Lord and these beautiful people. Just imagine the harvest of souls from 9307 wells. If 500 people get saved at each location there would be 4,653,500 new souls in the Kingdom. And if 1000 people get saved at each location it would be 9,307,0000. What a beautiful harvest we will see. And these numbers are conservative. Some of the locations that need water have a much larger population.

On Monday, February 1st, 2021 we started well number two. When we receive another \$1900 we will begin well number three. Things are moving in the right direction and you can be a part of something great. Something to be proud of and something to tell your children about.

The late, great, Reinhard Bonnke heard God say, "All of Africa will be saved". We are doing our part to help fulfill this great prophecy. God is moving in Uganda and you can be a part of what He is doing.

May God bless you!

Pastor Ryan Bridgeo was born in Shelburne, Nova Scotia, Canada. He graduated in 1996 from Kingswood University in Sussex, New Brunswick and married his wife Holly that same year. Ryan and Holly moved to Crossnore, NC in 1998 working as house parents at Crossnore School Inc. for 6.5 years. Following their time at Crossnore, they served at Grace Covenant Church in Roanoke, VA, before moving to Plumtree, NC in 2006. They have 4 children, three boys, and one girl; Jordan, Taylor, Micah, and Lauren.



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For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: Isaiah 55:10-11

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March 2021 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 35

Better Than A Rubber Band

By Steve Bietz
Burke County



The month of March in our history books is a month of some interesting inventions. It was in March of 1933 that the Monopoly Board Game was invented. It was in March of 1876 that the telephone was invented. It was in March of 1886 that Coca-Cola was invented. And maybe the best of all, was in March of 1845, for that is when the rubber band was invented. On March 17th, 1845, the London industrialist Stephen Perry was granted the patent for the production of rubber bands.

Today there are so many ways that we use rubber bands. Yes of course rubber bands are a standard item in every office, but we have taken the rubber band to a host of other locations. There is hardly a spot in our daily lives that we do not need a rubber band.

I dated a girl while I was a freshman in high school who had rubber bands in her mouth. The rubber bands added additional pressure to her metal braces that were making her teeth line up nice and straight. I remember on a couple of occasions that a rubber band would let go and come flying out of her mouth and hit me in the face.

I remember getting a brand new baseball glove and my dad showing me how to eliminate the stiffness of that brand new glove. We rubbed it down with shaving cream and then wrapped a big rubber band around the glove so that it would open and shut properly.

I remember my mom used rubber bands as an Easter egg decorator. She would wrap rubber bands in different directions around the eggs before dunking them in egg dye. The eggs would have cool patterns on them.

I remember my mom when my little brother began to crawl around and have a real interest in getting into the cabinet under the kitchen sink, she would stretch a couple of rubber bands tightly between the cabinet knobs to lock them in place.

I could go on and on about how rubber bands have been used in my life and I'm sure that you could do the same thing.

One thing I never did with rubber bands is to do what Joel Waul from Lauderhill, Florida accomplished with rubber bands. His big ball of rubber bands is now owned by Ripley's Believe It Or Not. According to the Guinness World Record Book, it is the largest ball of rubber bands on the planet. It stands some 6 feet tall, weighs in at 9000 pounds, and consists of some 700,000 rubber bands. Yes, that cheap, reliable, strong rubber band seems to have no end to its usefulness. Of course, I'm not sure we needed a 9000-pound ball of rubber bands.

The biggest manufacturer of rubber bands is a company known as Alliance Rubber. The company was founded in Alliance, OH, in 1923. The company tag line caught my attention: "Holding Your World Together." That rubber band tagline reminds me that we have a God in Heaven who holds our world together, not with a rubber band, but with His Hand. In Isaiah 41:10 we read, "Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." Or how about Isaiah 49:15,16, where we read, "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will never forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me." Indeed, our God holds our world together. And every morning I hope we will each come to our Heavenly Father and ask Him to hold us in His Hands. He is so pleased when we ask Him to hold us in the palm of His hand. I pray that there is no other place that you and I would rather be than in our Father's Hands.

May we never forget that God holds our world together, much better than even a rubber band.

Steve Bietz, Pastor, Morganton Seventh day Adventist Church.

And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. Psalms 1:3

NCBAM Helps Older Adults Locate Vaccine Providers

By Carol Layton



Information and Referral Specialists at North Carolina Baptist Aging Ministry's (NCBAM) Call Center are available to help older adults 65+ locate COVID-19 vaccination providers, transportation assistance, and other community resources related to the pandemic. The NCBAM Call Center is open Monday through Friday, 9:00 am – 5:00 pm (877.506.2226).

Call Center Director Melanie Beeson explains, "The state does a good job of linking all its programs and resources on the Internet. But many older adults don't own computers or they are not skilled at navigating the web. We help by accessing the regularly updated resources provided by North Carolina's Department of Health and Human Services as well as other state programs that may be available in certain communities." For example, in addition to assisting callers locate vaccination providers and transportation assistance, NCBAM Call Center staff can advise callers how to connect with the state's COVID Support Services Program which is currently available in 29 counties to help people successfully quarantine.

NCBAM's Call Center also reaches out to Baptist churches to help with special needs in their communities. Recently, a 79-year-old Boone resident phoned the Call Center. Beeson explains, "His driveway was covered in snow the day before his vaccination appointment. We can't always find volunteers so quickly, but thankfully, an ASU student was able to clear the driveway and the man got his vaccination. We were all very grateful, and so was the caller. His wife made cookies for the student as thanks."

NCBAM's director, Dr. Sandy C. Gregory, maintains strong partnerships with North Carolina's Aging Services Network. Says Gregory, "More than a million North Carolinians are at highest risk for complications and death from COVID-19. Now more than ever, NCBAM wants to do everything possible to assist in meeting their needs and obtaining vaccinations."

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



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Crossword 264 and Solution

Across

1 Haggard from want and hunger, they ____ the parched land (Job 30:3)

5 Will your long-winded ____ never end? (Job 16:3)

10 by violating the ____ on taking devoted things (1 Chr 2:7)

11 some having ____ have turned aside unto vain jangling (1 Tim 1:6) KJV

14 the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth ____ (Rev 21:19)

16 keep a distance of about a thousand ____ between you and the ark (Josh 3:4)

18 collect the weeds and ____ them in bundles to be burned (Matt 13:30)

19 Josiah fought against Pharaoh ____ king of Egypt (Jer 46:2)

20 The lazy man does not ____ his game (Prov 12:27)

22 their feet rush into sin, they are swift to ____ blood (Prov 1:16)

23 the poison of ____ is under their lips (Romans 3:13)

24 I ____ those who cling to worthless idols (Ps 31:6)

26 that we may consider them and know their ____ outcome (Isa 41:22)

28 Greet Asyncritus, ____, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas (Rom 16:14)

31 For in him we live and ____ and have our being (Acts 17:28)

33 Send me, therefore, ____ skilled to work in gold (1,3) (2 Chron 2:7)

34 They will spring up like grass in ____ (1,6) (Isa 44:4)

36 like the roar of rushing waters and like loud ____ of thunder (Rev 19:6)

38 a great company of the heavenly ____ appeared with the angel (Luke 2:13)

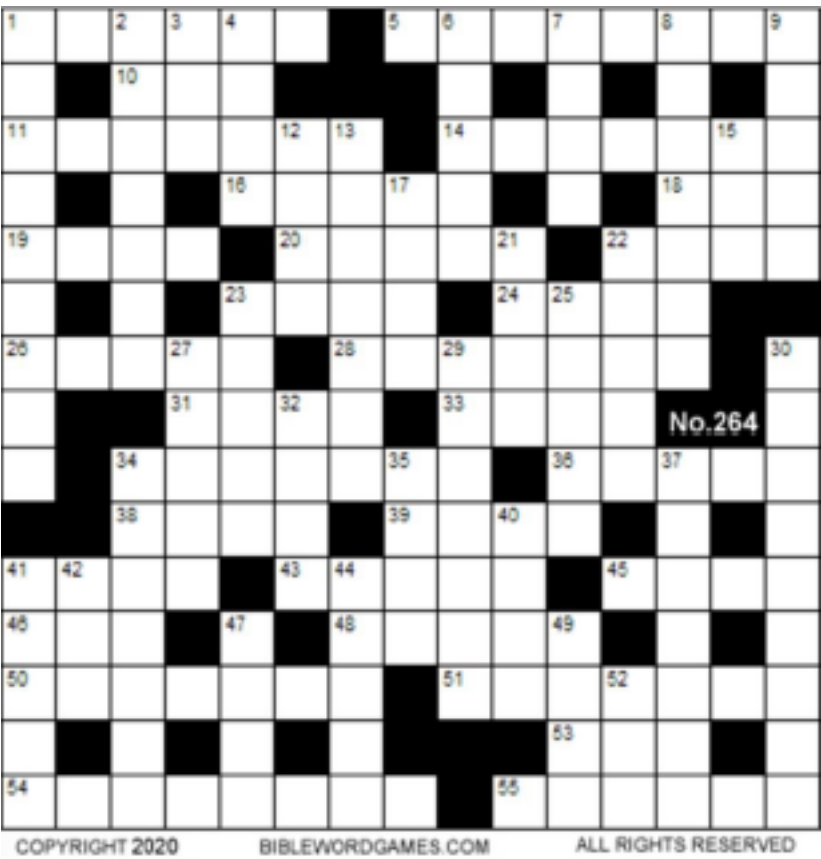
39 brood of vipers! Who warned you to ____ from the coming wrath? (Matt 3:7)

41 We all growl like bears; we ____ mournfully like doves (Isa 59:11)

43 as it ____ out the nations that were before you (Lev 18:28) KJV

45 the ____ and warrior, the

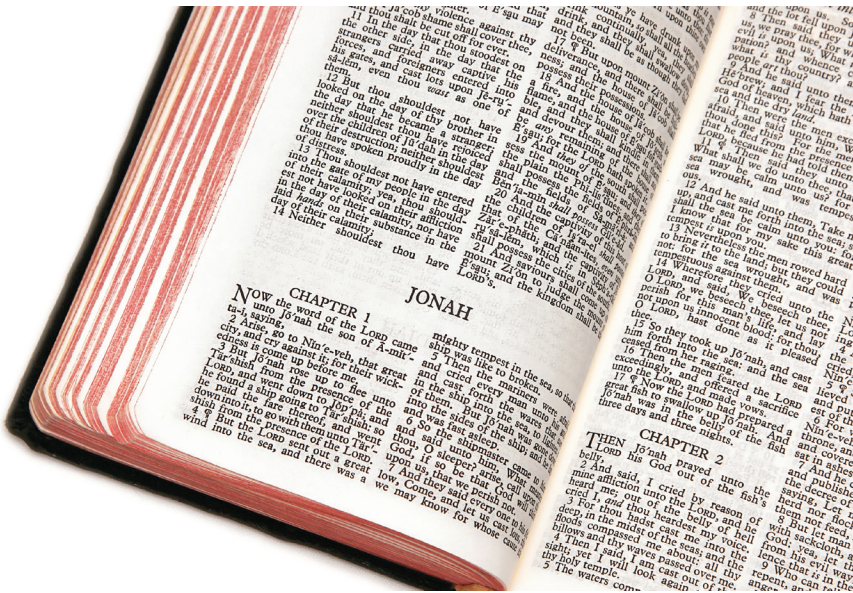
judge and prophet (Isa 3:2)
 46 by his right hand, and by the _____ of his strength
 (Isaiah 62:8)
 48 ten bulls, twenty she _____, and ten foals (Gen 32:15)
 (KJV
 50 I was afraid that in some way the _____ might have tempted you (1 Thess 3:5)
 51 people stood watching, and the rulers even _____ at him
 (Luke 23:35)
 53 twenty first letter of Greek alphabet
 54 Let death take my enemies by _____ (Ps 55:15)
 55 be as _____ as snakes and as innocent as doves
 (Matt 10:16)
 DOWN
 1 he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not _____
 (2 Tim 2:24)
 2 till ye be left as _____ upon the top of a mountain
 (1,6) (Isa 30:17) KJV
 3 and _____ every good piece of land with stones
 (2 Kings 3:19) KJV
 4 Do not _____ a violent man or choose any of his ways
 (Prov.3:31)
 6 the _____ is full, the fats overflow (Joel 3:13) KJV
 7 miracles to deceive _____ the elect if that were possible.
 (Matt 24:24)
 8 after the abominations of the _____, whom the LORD cast out (2 King 21:2)
 9 Don't I know that you have _____ with the son of Jesse
 (1 Sam 20:30)
 12 They will turn their _____ away from the truth
 (2 Tim 4:4)
 13 they _____ four anchors from the stern and prayed
 (Acts 27:29)
 15 They exchanged the truth of God for a _____
 (Rom 1:24-25)
 17 with an iron scepter; he will _____ them to pieces like pottery (Rev 2:27)
 21 Large crowds followed him, and he healed _____ there
 (Matt 19:2)
 22 _____ and wood idols that cannot see or hear
 (Rev 9:20)
 23 Fragrant with myrrh and _____ and cassia (Ps 45:8)
 25 the love of God (Gr.)
 27 send word to the kings of



Edom, Moab, ____, Tyre
(Jer 27:3)
29 the law is not made for a
righteous man, but for the
____ (1 Tim 1:9)KJV
30 Some of the teachers of
the
law ____, "Well said,
teacher!" (Luke 20:39)
32 for the winepress is full
and
the ____ overflow (Joel 3:13)
34 Jael, Heber's wife, picked
up
a tent peg and ____ ____ (1,6)
(Judg 4:21)
35 each ____ ____ will give an
account of himself to God
(2,2) (Rom 14:12)
37 Of them the proverbs ____
____: "A dog returns to its
vomit (3,3) (2 Peter 2:22)
40 God took the man, and

put
him into the garden of ____
(Gen 2:15)
41 buddies, pals (like David
and Jonathan)
42 King Solomon's mines had
a great deal of this
44 items, units
47 you have fallen from
heaven, O morning ____, son
of the dawn! (Isa 14:12)
49 Third son of Adam
(Gen 4:25)
52 struck the servant of the
high priest, cutting off his
right ____ (Luke 22:50)

Solution on page 14





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