



# BLUE RIDGE CHRISTIAN NEWS



## Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

### What's Your Focus?

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



Here we go again! The second round of threats, pressures, and fear from a devastating monster called coronavirus—this time a potentially deadly variant. As a pastor, I mostly keep my opinions to myself, choosing to stay outside of the sheer force of the emotional winds and waves that accompany many modern social and political issues. Many of those modern issues tear through families, communities, churches, and nations—creating division, mistrust, anger, and hatred. As a pastoral counselor, I have learned a valuable lesson about helping people—my opinion belongs to me and not those whom I am trying to help. So, I usually am short on advice and big on guiding them to find their own solutions out of the context of their own experiences and family of origin underpinnings. Of course, all real and lasting solutions to whatever threat or conflict that we are facing can only come from the wisdom and love of Almighty and gracious God. God's precious Word leads us through the storms of life.

Speaking of storms, few of us have ever experienced the devastating effects of a hurricane. Several years ago while our family was on furlough from the mission field here in the area, we experienced the remnants of a hurricane. You may remember when Hugo came through knocking down trees and power lines and cutting power for weeks. The results of huge storms like that can be devastating, particularly along coastal areas. But, as we have seen, its impact can be far-reaching. The primary hazards are from storm surge flooding, inland flooding from heavy rains, destructive winds, tornadoes, and high surf and rip currents. The majority of the damage usually comes from the leading edge of the hurricane. And then there is an eerie calm as the eye of the storm passes over. But, inevitably, the back edge arrives and more destruction ensues.

Perhaps, that's where we find ourselves as we face the formidable threat of the virus. What is called for is wisdom and decisive action on our parts. But in whatever we face as followers of Christ, I would like to remind you that it is imperative that God's children keep their focus on what is important.

The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans 14:7-8, *"For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's."* Paul wasn't attempting to make an assessment or a judgment of the behavior of humanity—he was, rather, echoing the very nature of our existence—We live, we breathe, we walk and talk for Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior!

Maybe someone forgot to tell you what your journey as a Christian is all about. Or perhaps you signed on thinking that you could lounge around, soak in God's blessings, and continue to live your life your own way or do your own thing just as you have always done it. Or maybe you weren't serious about following Jesus or of surrendering yourself totally to the Lord. If you are a Christian, a believer and follower of Christ; if you have been saved and have been adopted as a child of God, and therefore, have received the gift of the Holy Spirit—then, you have

signed on to one of the most exciting and, at times, even one of the most dangerous jobs that there ever was or will be.

The Word of God declares that the purpose and intention of the life of one who has sold themselves out to God is this: first, we must not—we cannot live for ourselves! Secondly, we must live for the One who died to save us!

If you find yourself consumed with life, overtaken by fear, anger, and aloneness, having becoming bogged down with your own personal problems or pursuits; then, may I suggest that what you are experiencing is not an issue of your salvation or your faith or lack thereof; but rather, it is an issue of your focus and your purpose. You could be focusing upon any number of things: relationships, politics, social causes, etc. You could be pursuing anything and everything—except the right thing! Paul brings home the truth without beating around the bush. He declares, *"Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's!"*

Perhaps you find yourself focusing upon measuring up to someone else's standards. I've got good news for you—your salvation is about God showcasing His mercy. It is not about you—it is about Him!

Or maybe you are pursuing love at any cost. Our fruitless pursuits of love from other sources is really an abandonment of our relationship with the Lord. The good news is that no matter what else you pursue, where you go, or how far you walk away—God is always faithful, loving, and redeeming. He continues to pursue you with everlasting love. So, your pursuit of love is not about you; it is about Him! Perhaps you think that your security and success are about you. It is not about you! Your Security and Success is about Him.

Finally, is your focus on gaining significance? It is truly inherent as human beings that we seek after significance. We want to know if we are important. But the problem comes when we get caught up in the trap of spending all of our energies seeking after a sign or constant affirmation that says that we are, indeed, unique or special beings. In doing so, we are actually seeking after a message—and we want that message to say, "You are somebody!" We want that message to say, "Look at Me!"

Max Lucado illustrates this with a story about a little-known company (It's Not About Me, p. 132). He writes, "Have you ever heard of a company named BBDO? Probably not! They would be pleased. Why? Because they do not exist to make their own name known; they exist to make another's name known. Since 1935, you and I have heard the phrase, "M'm! M'm! Good! M'm! M'm! Good!" (Campbell's Soup catch-phrase). What this company does for clients, we exist to do for Christ."

Your message is not about you! Your message is about Him! Aren't you tired of life being about you? Aren't you fed up with all of your energies, all your focus, and all of your pursuits being about you and your stuff? I hope and trust that you are! For then, you will desperately want your life to be about the Lord Jesus. You will focus your attention upon His Word and obediently live your life to reflect HIS GLORY? Blessings to you as you focus upon and pursue Him.

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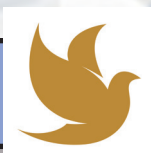
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*“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace: that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation: that saith unto Zion. Thy God reigneth!”*

Isaiah 52:7 KJV



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# Church Directory



## Bear Creek Baptist Church

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

### Reverend Bruce Cannon

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

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

## Landis Orthodox Presbyterian Church

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

### Elder Mike Cloy

[opcmikecloy@gmail.com](mailto:opcmikecloy@gmail.com)

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

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

## Berry Chapel Baptist Church

280 Chapel St.  
Spruce Pine, NC 28777  
828-765-6590  
[www.berrychapelbaptist.com](http://www.berrychapelbaptist.com)

### Pastor - Steve Williams

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

Where Everybody is Somebody  
And Jesus Christ is Lord!

## The Rock Church

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

### Pastor - Billy Chapman

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

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## Grassy Creek Baptist Church

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

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

## Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church

2187 Jamestown Road  
Morganton, NC  
828-584-8212

### Pastor Steve Beitz

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

## Altapass Baptist Church

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

### Dr. Marcus R. Benfield

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

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Bible Believing Church"

## Plumtree Presbyterian Church

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

### Pastor Ryan Bridgeo

[pastor@plumtreechurch.com](mailto:pastor@plumtreechurch.com)

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

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

## Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

2396 Enola Road  
Morganton, NC 28655  
(828) 437-4082

[www.pleasanthillbc.church](http://www.pleasanthillbc.church)

### Senior Pastor Dr. Jack Hodges

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

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

## Newland Christian Church

2800 Millers Gap Highway  
Newland, NC 28657  
Phone (828) 260-1404  
[www.newlandchristianchurch.com](http://www.newlandchristianchurch.com)

### Pastor - Phillip Greene

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

"A Local Congregation of Christ's Church"

## Burkemont Baptist Church

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

For more information,  
please visit  
[www.burkemontbaptist.org](http://www.burkemontbaptist.org)

### Dr. Luke A. Lane

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

## Mount Carmel Baptist Church

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## First Baptist Church of Spruce Pine

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

### Dr. Rocky Branch Senior Pastor

Sunday School - 9:30 am  
Sunday Worship - 10:45 am  
Sunday Evening - 6:00 pm  
Wednesday Evening - 6:30 pm

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God, Submitting to God!*

## Pine Branch Baptist Church

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

### Reverend Bobby Joe Greene

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

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## Marion Seventh-day Adventist Church

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

### Pastor Tim Sheridan

Sabbath (Saturday)  
Bible Study - 9:15 am  
Sabbath Worship - 10:50 am  
Reaching the World with the Everlasting  
Gospel of Jesus Christ!  
[www.marionnc.adventistchurch.org](http://www.marionnc.adventistchurch.org)

## Spruce Pine United Methodist Church

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

### Pastor Richard Schilling

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Big Tech Censorship Sets The Stage For The Rise Of The Antichrist

By Britt Gillette

"For the essence of prophecy is to give a clear witness for Jesus." Revelation 19:10 (NLT)

In an August 2019 article titled "Silicon Valley Censorship and the Coming Global Police State," I wrote the following: "If you love freedom and liberty, recent actions from high tech companies should have you worried. In pursuit of profit, the mega-companies of Silicon Valley have created products that invade user privacy. And they easily cave to the demands of totalitarian governments." Unfortunately, recent events reveal the United States is now among those totalitarian governments.

On July 15, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki announced White House officials were "meeting with social media platforms" and had "increased disinformation research and tracking." She said the administration is "flagging problematic posts from Facebook that spread disinformation" and working to "connect doctors and medical professionals who are popular with their audiences with accurate information" to "boost trusted content." If you don't believe me, watch her press conference here. <https://www.newsweek.com/biden-administrations-admission-theyre-flagging-content-facebook-sparks-furor-1610257>

This is a blatant violation of every American's First Amendment right to freedom of speech. Who determines what is or isn't "disinformation?" In her words, the government does. And who determines what is or isn't "accurate information" or "trusted content?" Again, in the eyes of the Biden Administration, it's government. They are the arbiters of "correct" speech. It's their job to "protect" you from the evils of errant thoughts.

As if this weren't bad enough, the U.S. Surgeon General followed up with his own lecture on the dangers of free thought and how the biggest threat to our health and safety is our stubborn unwillingness to agree with him. According to Dr. Vivek Murthy, "We live in a world where misinformation poses an imminent and insidious threat to our nation's health. Health misinformation is false, inaccurate, or misleading information about health according to the best evidence of the time. And while it often appears innocuous on social media apps, on retail sites, or search engines, the truth is that misinformation takes away our freedom to make informed decisions about our health and the health of our loved ones."

Stop right there, and read that again. According to the Surgeon General, "misinformation takes away our freedom." No, sir. That's not true. Government suppression of free speech takes away our freedom – the exact government censorship of speech you're advocating.

He goes on, "Modern technology companies have enabled misinformation to poison our information environment with little accountability to their users. They've allowed people who intentionally spread misinformation - what we call disinformation - to have extraordinary reach. They've designed product features such as like buttons that reward us for sharing emotionally charged content, not accurate content, and their algorithms tend to give us more of what we click on, pulling us deeper and deeper into a well of misinformation."

Any freedom-loving individual should find these statements both chilling and frightening. If the Surgeon General thinks disinformation has invaded the public discourse, he's free to combat that disinformation with facts and persuasive arguments. The government has no right to censor its critics. Again, if you find all this hard to believe, watch the Surgeon General's comments for yourself by clicking here. <https://news.yahoo.com/surgeon-general-lost-10-family-184736772.html>

According to the White House and the Surgeon General, freedom of speech is such a dire threat, social media platforms should collude with the government to delete any posts or content the Biden White House deems "disinformation." Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and other social media platforms are more than happy to comply, and their crackdown on the evils of free speech doesn't end with public postings.

According to Politico, "Biden allied groups, including the Democratic National Committee, are also planning to engage fact-checkers more aggressively and work with SMS carriers to dispel misinformation about vaccines that is sent over social media and text messages." This means government authorities might "fact-check" future private text messages between you and your friends. Imagine being in the middle of a phone call with a friend, and the government cuts off your call because the two of you are discussing "disinformation." Most people would be outraged. Yet, that's exactly what the government is doing with this social media disinformation censorship campaign.

Free Speech is Under Assault

People have warned about this assault on free speech for years. For instance, in July 2020, over 100 writers, academics, and political and cultural activists published an open letter in Harper's Magazine on the topic of justice and open debate. The signatories were a diverse list of well-known celebrities, including J.K. Rowling, Margaret Atwood, Noam Chomsky, Salman Rushdie, Malcolm Gladwell, and Gloria Steinem. In their letter, the authors pointed out "the free exchange of information and ideas, the lifeblood of a liberal society, is daily becoming more constricted." They wrote the letter because the current cancel culture narrows "the boundaries of what can be said without the threat of reprisal."

College campuses used to be open forums for free speech and radical ideas. Today, they're ground zero for the assault on free speech – a place where totalitarians silence all dissent. This dictatorial impulse is spreading from the college campus to the public discourse, leading to censorship both online and offline – from social media platforms to local school board meetings. The willingness of so many people to suppress free speech foreshadows the rise of a dictatorial

state. Widespread support for canceled culture and the demonization of opposing points of view set the stage for an oppressive government willing to use violence to enforce its edicts. Ironically, many of the people who claim to be anti-fascist are the exact same people who support social media censorship of any ideas they don't like.

Canceling People

All this is a threat to the very foundations of human freedom and liberty. In an age when social media dominates public discourse, access to these platforms is vital to get a message out. Don't believe me? Try getting your message out to a large audience without using Facebook, Twitter, Google, Apple, Amazon, YouTube, or Netflix. It's nearly impossible. If they can de-platform the sitting President of the United States (which they did to Donald Trump), then they can de-platform you as well.

We're living in a world where the largest technology firms have more power than most totalitarian governments had in bygone eras. Since the police power of government rules over these Big Tech companies, that means governments around the world are now more powerful than they've ever been. The power and reach of Big Tech are global in nature, and they've shown their willingness to use this power to silence you.

In recent months, Big Tech has canceled people and organizations deemed as dangerous or not sufficiently "woke." YouTube channels have been demonetized or shut down. Twitter and Facebook accounts have been suspended. Websites have been dropped by their hosting companies, and businesses have been frozen out of using PayPal, Visa, and MasterCard. If large corporations "cancel" you and refuse to provide you with basic services, how can you operate in the modern world? You can't. At least, not as effectively. They have the power to cancel people.

What the Bible Says

So what does the Bible say about all of this? The Bible says a time is coming when a global dictator will rule the world (Revelation 13:7). He will succeed in everything he does (Daniel 8:24). His power will be so great no one will be able to oppose him (Revelation 13:4). His control over the earth will be so complete, he'll regulate the purchase and sale of everything (Revelation 13:17). For most of human history, this was impossible. As this is written, it's probably still impossible. But that window of impossibility is closing fast. As technology continues to advance, every aspect of human life becomes reliant on and intertwined with digital payments and the Internet. If access to those utilities is cut off, an individual's ability to participate in modern-day society is also cut off.

This sets the stage for the Antichrist to control all buy/sell transactions on the planet (Revelation 13:17) and to determine at his whim who can or cannot participate in modern society. This is precisely the type of power Big Tech firms are consolidating today. The Surgeon General claims this is bad because "Modern technology companies have enabled misinformation to poison our information environment with little accountability to their users." He's wrong. What Big Tech is doing is enabling governments to limit, censor, and trample the rights and liberties of their citizens with little accountability to the ones they aim to rule. This is the road to dictatorship, and I have no doubt Big Tech will be a willing participant in the establishment of the ultimate dictatorship – the Antichrist's global police state.

All this is yet another indication of the times in which we live. Jesus said when you see all these events take place, look up (Luke 21:28). So use what little time is left to spread the Gospel because Jesus is coming soon!

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# Burke United Christian Ministries

## Side by Side a World Champion

By Alice Horton  
Burke County



*“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.” –Ephesians 3:20*

Daily, before the doors open at Burke United Christian Ministries, Chad Curley, maintenance man for Burke Charitable Properties is fast at work ensuring the floors are shining in the soup kitchen and the showers are hot, clean, and ready for neighbors who are in need. Although you work side by side with someone daily you often do not know their story. Recently the staff here learned that we were in the midst of a world champion. Chad



is a four-time gold medal world champion powerlifter and is a nine-year Special Olympics Competitor. In the 1994 Watauga Democrat Chad's coach Treadaway stated "You can tell him to do something and he'll do it, no matter how hard it hurts, and he's a great listener. You don't have to tell him the same thing twice." This continues to ring true today!

At the top of his powerlifting career Chad could:

- Deadlift 400 pounds
- Squat 420 pounds
- Bench press 280

As it states in Ephesians 3 Chad has been given the ability to do immeasurably more....through the one that gives us all strength. During this season of celebrating Olympians around the world, I hope that we will look for the champions all around us.

*Alice Horton is the Executive Director of Burke United Christian Ministries. She is a graduate of Appalachian State University and has worked in the nonprofit field for the last 20 years. If you are interested in learning more about Burke United Christian Ministries or volunteering. Please call us at 828-433-8075.*

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# Retirement Resource Management

## Getting More Out of Your Retirement

By Steve Gaito  
McDowell County



I am a CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER TM practitioner, which means I always put my client’s needs first. It also means that I am always looking to get more for you out of what you have. Recently I have been hosting events to help people understand the impact taxes and long-term care have on current assets and the assets left behind for a spouse or estate. For most of my life, I have worked in the financial services industry. I started by setting up retirement plans to help people save for retirement. I have managed money. I taught both advisors and clients how to get the most out of Social Security and now have morphed into helping people strategically allocate their resources to get all they can out of what they have saved. I must say I have never had this much fun in my career. What most people do not realize is that there is an efficient way to organize your retirement resources to make them last longer. This is knowing when, what, and how to take distributions from your assets. To illustrate this, I would like to share some examples from the cases I have worked on recently.

One of the couples I worked with had done a good job saving and had no debt. They believed that they had sufficient assets to last a lifetime. After evaluating their situation, it was clear that they did not realize the impact that taxes and inflation had on their savings. Their savings would run out when they were 88 years old and would have to rely on Social Security for income. By reallocation some of their assets and creating a more tax-efficient withdrawal strategy we were able to extend the assets to age 95 and have both an estate benefit and extra income once the assets were depleted.

Another couple had not considered the impact a long-term care event would have on their assets. Without a long-term care event, they had adequate assets to live to age 100, but if either of them had a long-term care event the surviving spouse would have to live on just Social Security. This is not what either wanted to do. By understanding how to use Long-term care insurance we were able to minimize the risk and provide assets to age 95.

The third couple had plenty of income and more than likely would not need all of it for income. Given that the government debt has exploded and in their case most of their money that was in retirement accounts and subject to taxes, I was able to create a plan that provided tax-free income later in life and the ability to pass along money to heirs’ income tax-free. I also created a strategic plan for distributions to draw down retirement assets now while taxes are low to have fewer taxes later when they would not have any control over the distributions.

I am considering providing retirement workshops in the Marion area in the near future to share my expertise, but if you would like to know more go to my website and take advantage of the free books and other resources. You can also schedule an appointment and come to my office for a free initial consultation.

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.

# Mine Creek Baptist Church

## Fight! Fight! Fight!

By Chris Rathbone  
Mitchell County



We have a common enemy. An enemy that works day and night to prevail over the church, to destroy the testimony of Christians, to break up homes, wreck marriages, and ruin the lives of any he comes across. His name is Satan, that old devil who tried to exalt himself above God but was cast out of heaven. Peter warned: *“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”* 1 Peter 5:8. His end goal is to keep the unbeliever from being saved, to keep the Christian believer from being effective in their walk with Jesus. There is such a battle raging that Paul exhorted Christians in Ephesians 6:10-18: *“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints;”*

This enemy that we have is subtle and cunning (Gen. 3:1). He is constantly scheming and planning on how to prevail against you and me and we must not be ignorant of his devices and schemes (2 Corin. 2:11). He wages his war against the church and this world in the spiritual realm through influence through lying. Jesus described him in John 8:44 like this: *“He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar and the father of it.”* Satan’s go-to weapon is lies. He uses lies to influence, to twist, to deceive, to cast doubt, and turn as many people as he can away from the truth of the Gospel of Christ.

The enemy started his attack on man, the crown of God’s creation, there in the garden of Eden. His tactics began by first casting doubt on God’s word. God had specifically said that if Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil they would die (Gen. 2:16). What did Satan tell Eve? *“Ye shall not surely die.”* (3:1) He wanted her to doubt the truth of what God had surely spoken. Next, he influenced her to question God’s authority over her life in verse 5: *“For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall as gods, knowing good and evil.”* The temptation he placed in front of her wasn’t to fall down but to exalt oneself to be as God. To supplant His authority over her life and take that authority upon herself. Once Satan influenced her to doubt God’s word and rebel against God’s authority over her life, the trap had been set. Gen. 3:6 *“And the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat.”* As the saying goes, the rest is history, but the battle the enemy is waging is still going on today.

Satan is raging in our world today. He is using spiritual wickedness in high places to influence and turn away mankind from God’s truth. We must, as children of God, put on God's armor and fight! We can bloody the devil’s nose when we read, believe, and obey God’s word. We give him a gut punch when we bow ourselves and submit to God’s authority over our lives. For He is our Creator, our Savior, our Lord, and is worthy of our submission. Last, of all, we give the knockout blow when we walk in fellowship with Jesus every single day. Satan has no chance of influencing us when we are walking closely with God through Jesus daily!

Rise up children of God and put on God’s armor! Fight the good fight of faith and be a good soldier of Christ! These are wicked and evil days in which we are living. These are days when the enemy of our souls is working diligently to turn people away from the truth. These are not days in which the church backs down, but days in which we raise the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God gives the old devil the death blow! Fight, children, fight! Fight for truth, fight for the gospel, fight for your marriage, fight for your children and grandchildren! Stand and fight as a soldier of Christ! Fight! Fight! Fight!

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

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# High Country Prison Ministry

By Jody Griffin  
Avery and Mitchell County

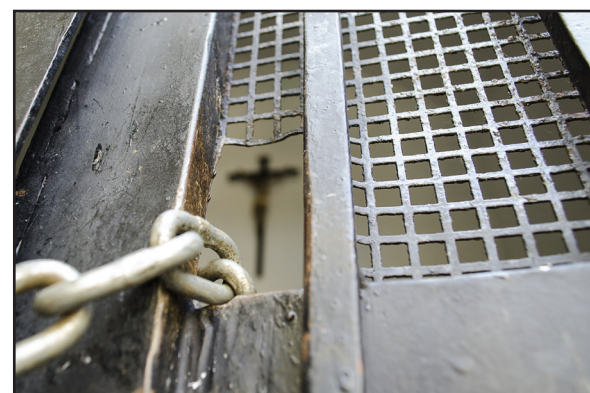


*"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed. And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31-32)*

Prison walls cannot keep the Promise of God from those contained within them. COVID 19 nor any of the resulting variants can prevent God's Word from being read, preached, and taught. The Chaplain has the privilege of procuring and distributing Bibles to offenders who request them and, oh, what a joy it is to do so! The Chaplain is also responsible for providing religious activities and support through corporate worship, Bible study, and spiritual growth opportunities. Admittedly, Covid protocols have made such opportunities more challenging, BUT...

There are creative ways to bring God's Word inside the walls of the prison without ever stepping foot inside the gates. One such way is through the efforts of Rock of Ages Ministries, who like all volunteers who have been unable to visit inside the prisons went to God in prayer, asking the Lord to make a way for them to bless those inside.

The result...God's Miraculous Provision of His Word through radio broadcasts available to those inside via a limited frequency! These men have faithfully preached via this technique from a remote location, making it possible for men in prison to listen on their own radios to hear the magnificent message of God's Mercy and Grace given as a free gift to all willing to repent and receive it! God has used this ministry to encourage, challenge to restore, renew, and revive the hearts of men!



Other ministries like Kairos and Yokefellows have made posters of encouragement for men to lift the spirits of those who are cut off from contact with their families and provided on occasion a token of blessing in the form of a small treat to every man housed here.

Men serving sentences here are reporting how thankful they are "that God cannot be stopped" and that "there are people out there who care so much that they will find a way to serve us!"

The determined efforts of those who will not be deterred in ministering/caring/serving the incarcerated are a testimony to the relentless pursuit of God for every person. In the face of obstacles and challenges, these servants of the Living God are set on delivering the Word of God through written, spoken, and demonstrated means.

So, do NOT be fooled by what many say is impossible! The Living Word of God has found and will continue to find a way into the hearts of humanity and no barrier or boundary will ever be able to stop it! As long as there are people who hear God's call to serve and then will let nothing stop them from fulfilling that call, the Word of God will be available. The Truth will be known! The Truth will set you free! Thanks, Be to God!

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



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By Doug Harrell  
Mitchell County

I just got off texting with a local physician that I respect about treatment for COVID and was told that the prescribed treatment was no treatment. This particular doctor was having to prescribe medication including ivermectin and others by doing it for some other reason. I have seen literally dozens of highly acclaimed medical professionals that have given testimony after testimony on this and that several treatments have tremendous success in treating the virus.

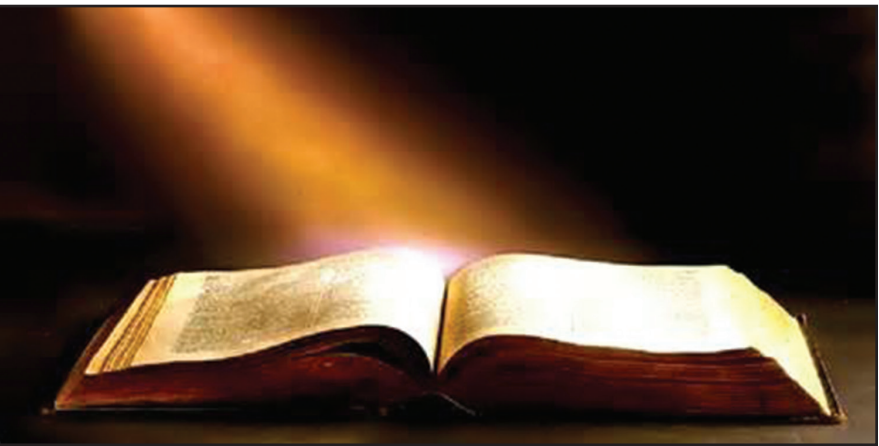
Now I don't have any medical expertise and am not a doctor, not even a registered cow doctor even though I treat a lot of cattle, but I truly believe that we as a people and a nation are being sold down the road by the powers of evil that surround us today. There is such a push to have everyone vaccinated and having proof that you must show to do anything. That scares me to death. This vaccine passport that the world is trying to shove down our throats is so intrusive that it reminds me of the biblical mark of the beast. It appears that the ultimate goal is to be able to track each of us and bar us from being able to do anything without this so-called, stamp of approval. If we all have our barcode that we have to sign before we do anything then someone has total control over us and we are no longer a free person or a free nation. We are all subjected to the rule of the ruler, whoever that might be.

I had a call from a dear sweet girl that is a college student this morning asking me to pray for her because the school was trying to mandate that if she was to participate, she must be vaccinated. Now I think that it should be anyone's right to do that if they wish. I do get flu vaccines and others, but it is illegal to ask me when I go to board a plane or ship or go to the grocery store if I have had my shots. We, as citizens of this great nation, must stand upon our constitution and protect our freedoms as never before in my lifetime. Many want constant monitoring by the government. In fact, just yesterday I saw a survey that shows that 65% of the people in one of our political parties want and is in favor of total governmental monitoring, amazing!

Just yesterday I received a message from our Lt. Governor outlining indoctrination literature that was seeking to teach our children that wrong was right and right was wrong. Things that were totally against anything and everything that God's word says. It appears that gone are the days that school was to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic but seeking to transform our children into a lifestyle that will bring nothing but sadness and dismay over all their years. We are blessed here in the mountains that we still have a very large number of teachers that are grounded in faith and belief, that are still focused on doing what is right for our children but make no mistake, many are not of that mindset nationwide.

My life lesson for this is that if we don't stand for something, we will fall for anything. Determine today to be a better father, mother, brother, sister, or friend to those around you. Be brave in proclaiming God's goodness and grace, be not ashamed of being a Christian, and letting those around you know that there is no doubt that you are.

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



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Grace in Context

By Jim Huskins  
McDowell County

After thirty years of pulpit ministry, my wife and I realized that all of God's word is truth, and all of it is still in force. Four years ago, most of our Christian friends dropped us when we began suggesting that the first five books of the Bible are the still-valid instructions for how God wants His people to live. Some were offended when we stopped observing the pagan worship rituals which have been foisted on the world as "Christian" holidays. Most were incensed when we pointed out that the Fourth Commandment was never revoked in Scripture and that God expects His people to rest and worship on the Seventh Day of the week. We were ridiculed when we stopped eating any meat that the Bible specifically declares to be unclean.

But the most common criticism we have faced is that we do not understand grace. Most Christians apparently believe that "grace" is some magic potion that Jesus brought to earth for the first time. Even worse, they think that once we repeat some unBiblical "sinners prayer" and get sprinkled with "fairy dust grace," then Jesus is obligated to save us in the end regardless of how we live in the meanwhile. This is not what the Bible teaches.

Grace has existed from the beginning. Grace allowed Adam and Eve to live following their sin. Grace allowed Noah and his family to survive the flood. Grace spared Jonah's life for three days in the belly of a fish. Grace kept King David alive and in power following his commission of adultery and murder. Grace allowed the Kingdom of Judah to return and rebuild following seventy years of well-deserved captivity. Grace is as old as humanity, and the conditions under which grace is applied have never changed. One of the best passages for putting grace in context is Psalm 103.

This entire chapter is about Grace. "Bless YHVH, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy Name. Bless YHVH, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: He forgives all your iniquity. He heals all your diseases. He redeems your life from the Pit. He crowns you with lovingkindness and compassions. He satisfies your years with good things, so that your youth is renewed like an eagle. YHVH executes justice—judgments for all who are oppressed. He made His ways known to Moses, His deeds to the children of Israel. YHVH is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and plentiful in mercy. He will not always accuse, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not treated us according to our sins, or repaid us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His mercy for those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so YHVH has compassion on those who fear Him. For He knows our frame. He remembers that we are but dust. As for man, his days are like grass—he flourishes like a flower of the field, but when the wind blows over it, it is gone, and its place is no longer known. But the mercy of YHVH is from everlasting to everlasting on those who revere Him, His righteousness to children's children."

These are the first seventeen verses of Psalm 103. Most of us have heard this passage. We rightfully celebrate its assurance that God is loving and forgiving. We treasure hearing these words woven into funerals. Many believers turn to this Psalm during dark moments of self-doubt, when satan whispers into our ears that God could not possibly love us, not after all we have done. This is all well and good. The problem is that we stop reading after verse 17.

The final four verses of Psalm 103 are a benediction calling us to "Bless YHVH." Between this marvelous sermon on grace and its powerful benediction is one of the most ignored verses in Scripture. Psalm 103:18 gives the everlasting context of grace, "to those who keep His covenant, who remember to observe His instructions."

Salvation is a free gift by grace through faith. Because of our Western mindset, we think that "faith" is merely giving intellectual assent to some stated proposition. Saving faith can only be understood through the Hebrew word, emunah. It means "to believe and obey." James expressed it this way: "Show me your faith without works, and I will show you faith by my works." (James 2:18). The "works" he references are acts of obedience to God's instructions for living found in the Torah. If we believe, our lives will be characterized by obedience.

We will all be judged, not on what we say that we believe, but on how we have lived. Psalm 62:12, Proverbs 11:31, Proverbs 24:12, 1 Corinthians 3:8, 1 Corinthians 4:5, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Colossians 3:25, 1 Peter 1:17, and Revelation 20:12 all underscore what Paul says in Romans 2:6-8, "He will pay back each person according to his deeds. To those who by perseverance in doing good are seeking glory, honor, and immortality—eternal life. But to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—wrath, and fury."

Jesus died so that we need not die. How then shall we live? God's grace is marvelous, but it is only available in proper context. That context is obedience. 1 John 2:3-4 says that the only evidence of us being in a saving relationship with Jesus is that we keep His commandments.

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

Jim & Beverly Huskins are members of Obedient Heart Fellowship.





# Gardner Webb

## Loyalty and Devotion

By Tracy Jessup

*“So Jesus asked the twelve, ‘Do you also wish to go away?’ Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.’” (John 6:67-69)*

In their book *Known*, Dick and Ruth Foth share a touching account of loyalty and devotion:

“Edinburgh, Scotland, is famous for a story of a dog and its owner that express devotion and tenacity in equal measure. The story began in 1850 when John Gray came to the city to be a gardener. Unable to find work, he joined the police force as a night watchman. To keep him company through the long nights, he would take his small Skye terrier named Bobby with him on his rounds. They became part of the living landscape of the city night after night for years.

John later contracted tuberculosis and died in the winter of 1858; he was buried in Greyfriars Kirkyard. What happened next became a legend in the city. Bobby, the Skye terrier, would not leave his master's grave. Except for accepting midday meals from the kind people in the area, Bobby stayed there day and night with his master. The caretaker tried on many occasions to evict the dog but to no avail. Finally, he provided the little dog with shelter by the grave.

When the city passed an ordinance that all unlicensed dogs would be destroyed, the Lord Provost of Edinburgh, William Chambers, purchased a license for Bobby and had a collar engraved for the little dog. Until his death fourteen years later, the citizens cared for Bobby while he guarded his master's body. If you walk to Greyfriars Kirkyard today, you can't miss the statue that stands across the street. It is a sculpture of Bobby with these words inscribed on the base:

Greyfriars Bobby - died 14th January 1872 - aged 16 years. Let his loyalty and devotion be a lesson to us all" (pp. 168-169).

Today's passage comes on the heels of Jesus saying to his disciples, "*Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.*" (John 6:53). The difficulty for many who heard Jesus' teaching was not so much understanding the symbolism but accepting the demand of Jesus for participation in his death as the means to sharing in his life. Indeed, the only way to life is through Jesus' death.

Jesus knew some profess allegiance to him, but when following Jesus gets hard, they turn and walk away. The ones who wanted to make Jesus king did just that when they realized His kingdom was not of this world. But Peter, speaking for the other disciples when asked to clarify their position, reaffirms their loyalty and devotion to Christ. *“Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God”* (John 6:67-68).

Bruce Milne writes, “Being a true believer will involve going the way of the cross...Among others things, that will mean remaining true to Jesus when He and His word are dismissed. Being a true believer will mean following him loyally when His truth is hard to understand and even harder to apply...” (The Message of John, p. 115). Whether we are beginning a new school year, a new church year, or simply a new day, may the Spirit enable us to “believe” and “know” so that we will be unwavering in our loyalty and devotion to Christ.

Prayer: Lord, we commit ourselves to you, confident that you are the Holy One of God – the only one who has the words of real life, eternal life.

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



# Roan Mt. Baptist Church

## "God's Four Answers to Prayer Requests"

By Russell McKinney

*Mitchell County*

Preachers love to come up with pithy little outlines to describe how God answers prayer requests. So, I thought I'd share a couple of such examples. Each of these has been passed around so much that I'm not sure who originally came up with it. The outline for example #1 is: "No," "Slow," "Grow," and "Go." Similarly, the outline for example #2 is: "Denied," "Delay," "Different," and "Direct."

First, there is the answer “No.” This answer can be associated with the word “Denied.” It is God saying to you, “Your request is not My will and so I’m refusing to grant it.” Anytime you receive such an answer, your job is to trust in God’s wisdom and love for you and drop the request. Don’t make the mistake of trying to badger, con, or whine Him into changing His mind and granting it.

Second, there is the answer “Slow.” This answer can be associated with the word “Delay.” It is God saying to you, “I’m going to grant your request, but there will be a delay in the granting because you must wait for My timing.” While this answer is better than a “No,” it can actually be more difficult than a flat-out rejection. This is especially true if the waiting that God has in mind will entail months, years, or even decades.

Third, there is the answer “Grow.” This answer can be associated with the word “Different.” It is God saying to you, “I’m going to grant your request, but I’m going to grow your understanding of Me and My work by granting the request in a different way than the simplistic, straight-forward one that you have in mind.” God typically employs this answer when we word our request vaguely. For example, there is a difference between saying, “God, please meet my financial need” and saying, “God, please meet my financial need by burdening my Uncle Joe to give me \$500.” It’s been my experience that God almost always declines my highly specific requests but usually grants my vague ones in ways that cause me, in the end, to marvel at how He granted them.

Fourth, there is the answer “Go.” This answer can be associated with the word “Direct.” It is God saying to you, “Go your way, assured in the knowledge that I’ve already granted your request in a very direct, straightforward way.” When Abraham sent his servant to Mesopotamia to find a wife for Abraham’s son Isaac, the servant came to the Mesopotamian city of Nahor and stopped by the well that was located just outside the city (Genesis 24:1-11). There, the servant prayed and made a highly specific request regarding the young woman whom He was seeking (24:12-14). (I guess the servant hadn’t read what I just said about God almost always declining my specific requests.) And how did God answer the servant’s request? Even before the servant had finished praying, the girl that God had in mind to marry Isaac was already walking toward that servant (24:15). As soon as the servant saw her, he broke into a run to strike up a conversation with her (24:16). That’s what you call an incredibly direct answer to a prayer request.

In closing, let me say that while you probably haven't utilized these four potential headings to classify God's answers to your prayer requests, I guess that you have experienced each type of answer at some point in your life. As a matter of fact, the chances are high that you are living out at least one of them right now. The key is to figure out which answer God is giving you and how He is working that answer out in your life. That isn't always easy to do, and I'll admit that it doesn't always fit neatly into a prepackaged sermon outline. But God will help you sort through it all if you will let Him, and He will use His answer to funnel you into His will for your life. To quote yet another pithy line that preachers love, "Prayer isn't you getting your will done in heaven; it is God getting His will done upon the earth." Think about that the next time you are praying, and always trust God to do the right thing by you, even if what He considers the right thing doesn't match up with your version of it.

*Russell Mckinney lives in the English Woods area of Spruce Pine and serves as the pastor of Roan Mountain Baptist Church in Bakersville*





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Lucky Stars Of September

By Steve Bietz  
Burke County



I know almost next to nothing about the Zodiac signs and the daily checking of a person's horoscope. As far as I'm concerned, horoscopes rank mighty low on my list of things to look at each day. I suspect I have not peaked at a horoscope in 30 - 40 years...that is until today as I write this article for the readers of Blue Ridge Christian News. It appears that most of September is dedicated to those whose The Zodiac sign is known as Virgo. So you Virgo's out there, here is your horoscope.

"If you have in mind to buy new toys, best to wait and shop around. Expect a delay in an event that is planned and someone will back out of an arrangement this month just when everything was sorted. Conjugal life will be blissful. Health prospects are encouraging." Well, now I remember why I don't look at my horoscope.

The American Federation of Astrologers claims that 70 million Americans check their horoscopes every day. Astrology is either an ancient and valuable system of understanding the natural world and our place in it with roots in early Mesopotamia, China, Egypt, and Greece, or complete rubbish. It just depends on whom you ask on what they might think about their so-called, lucky stars. As I looked at the horoscope for Virgo birthdays for September, I did see where one could call a phone number that will cost you .95 cents a minute for personal forecasts as you search for meaning and guidance.

There is a much better source for such information than the arrangement of the stars in September. According to Paul, "the sacred writings" found in the Bible "are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." "All scripture," he indicates, "is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:15-17 RSV). And Peter claims that the Bible is as "a light that shines in a dark place" (2 Peter 1:19), while the Psalmist proclaims that the Bible "is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119: 105). What do you know, not one word about my lucky star guidance?

But though it does not say anything about the signs of the Zodiac, the Bible does provide answers to our most basic and most essential questions. The Bible answers the meaning of life and what happens to a man when he dies. The Bible tells us where this world came from and what the future holds. The Bible tells us how sin arose and how it is being dealt with. And the Bible provides principles by which to live our daily lives.

Yes, you can go to any newspaper, other than Blue Ridge Christian News, and check your horoscope and see if your stars will be lucky this month of September. I don't recommend that path. Instead, go to the Word of God for your daily dose of information and see in scripture the voice of your Heavenly Father as He gives you meaning and joy in your life. And you will have a peace that surpasses all understanding. ( Philippians 4:7) So on the one hand we have a star alignment that is supposed to guide us in life, or we have the Holy Bible with council from the Almighty, all-knowing God. I hope and pray that the right choice is just too obvious to miss.

Steve Bietz, Pastor, Morganton Seventh day Adventist Church.

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Founding Fathers and Influencing Citizens.  
How They Served Our Country—Matthew Thornton

By David Streater, PhD  
Burke County



This is an American history educational moment of those who made a difference during the Revolutionary War era and how they served our Country.

Matthew Thornton was born in 1714 in Ireland. His family initially arrived in Maine in 1718, and soon after settled in Massachusetts. In 1740, Thornton earned his medical degree in Leicester, Massachusetts, and moved to New Hampshire to be a surgeon. Being a reputable medical doctor, he was appointed as a physician to the New Hampshire militia during King George's War (1745-1748).

In addition to becoming a substantial landowner and respected surgeon, Dr. Thornton held various political positions. While president of the Londonderry Provincial Assembly and a member of the Committee of Safety he created New Hampshire's constitution. This was significant because New Hampshire was the first state to have a constitution during the initial hostilities with Britain.

Thornton's platform was to criticize England's unjust actions against America. He was elected in 1776 to the Continental Congress and therefore could sign the Declaration of Independence. Matthew was one of the last 56 Founders to sign. A year later, Thornton returned to New Hampshire to serve as a legislator and a judge until he was 75.

Matthew died at age 89 in 1803 in Newburyport, Massachusetts while visiting his daughter. His epithet reads, "An Honest Man". Thornton, New Hampshire is named in his honor.

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 information and complementary 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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Heaven

By Nancy Malik  
Avery County

Just saying or thinking of this word can bring images of beauty, peace, perfection, and God.

Heaven is our next home eternally if we have accepted Jesus' sacrifice and rising again so we can have eternal security.

Four years ago this month, my husband was in his fourth year of a heavy battle with cancer. He had a procedure before his 6th major surgery out of seven. It was very rough. After the procedure, he was in a very cold recovery room. He asked a nurse if I could come into the room though I wasn't supposed to be in there. She let me go into him. Gregg grabbed my hand and told me during the procedure he had gone to heaven. The colors were beyond description. He said people talked to him with kindness though he couldn't see their faces. He knew Jesus was there and asked to stay there. Jesus told him that he was not ready to come home. Jesus told him there were some things Gregg had left to do before he came home to stay.

Gregg's next 6 months were full of peace and a servant's heart as he shared the love of Jesus in a deeply passionate way to whoever came to visit including the hospice nurses. They loved coming to have "church" with Gregg. He had been a missionary pastor and teaching and preaching from his hospital bed in our living room was such a blessing for him and them.

Gregg talked until two hours before he passed. As he was going home there was no distress and he breathed his last breath he had a beautiful smile on his face. It was obvious he saw Jesus and went to be with Him. My children and their mates were on the phone during his last time on earth. We sang praise songs and many prayers during this incredible time of his going home. Many people have been comforted by this testimony. There are thousands upon thousands of beautiful stories of people leaving earth and going to heaven.

My heart desires that if you are concerned at all about where you will go when you die, that you are someone who knows Jesus, The Truth, deeply so when its time there will be a smile on your face.



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

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The Tremendous Need For Earnest Prayer

By Bruce Cannon  
Mitchell County



There are so many reasons the Church needs to earnestly pray. First, a careful study of people living around our Churches reveals that an overwhelming percentage do not attend Church. It is estimated in some western North Carolina areas the percentage of people that do not attend can range as high as 75%. When one looks at the attendance trends of all denominations it is noted that most congregations have gotten significantly smaller in size over the past decades.

A second reason for prayer concerns the rise of activities the Bible refers to as "iniquity". In Matthew 24:12 the Scriptures state that in the latter days "*iniquity shall abound.*" This simply is a "catch-all" category for the actions we are seeing so prevalent today such as drug use, the breakdown of the home, the lack of a work ethic, criminal activities and so forth.

A striking similarity is easily seen in that the smaller and weaker the Church gets, the greater influence iniquity will have over society. It is the voice of the Church empowered by the Spirit of God that holds evil in check. And if the Church is frail, evil will abound.

And while all of these things are true and seemingly leave us without hope, the truth could not be further from that. God has always used the dark times to draw a remnant of believers to prayer, faithfulness, concern, and so forth. Someone has said that the darker the night, the brighter the light shines. Jesus in Matthew 5:14-16 said, "*Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.*"

It is time for the Church to be filled with passion for her Lord and perform extravagant displays of lavish love. What better place to exhibit boundless zeal and holy passion than in the place of prayer?

Read these great Scriptures concerning prayer and take to heart the promises made:

John 15:7 – "*If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.*"

Luke 11:9 – "*And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*"

Psalms 34:17 – "*The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.*"

The psalmist asks in Psalm 43:5, "*Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.*"

It's not time to be discouraged, defeated, or depressed! It's time to be filled with hope because the God of the universe will hear our prayers and will answer. It's time to let our light shine!

Pray with me that this present darkness will give way to a glorious time of revival and movement of the Lord as our King hears our prayers will send a great revival in our land AND as we get ever nearer the coming of the Lord for His Church.

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

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# The Inspiring Word

By Terry Cheek  
McDowell County

John Walvoord had this to say about the gospel of Matthew.

1 “Matthew includes five major discourses in his gospel. Each of the five ends with a similar phrase, i““ And when Jesus had finished...’ (Matt. 7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). The five discourses are as follows: • The Sermon on the Mount—the main principles of Christ’s teaching (Matt. 5–7) • The “missionary instructions” to the Twelve (Matt. 10) • The discourse on the mysteries of the kingdom—a response to rejection (Matt. 13) • The “community instructions” to the disciples (Matt. 18) • The Olivet Discourse—the end time preceding the second coming (Matt. 24–25).”

Back in 2018, I completed a series of articles that appeared in the Blue Ridge Christian News from the Sermon on the Mount. The time has come to revisit the discourses of Christ. With that said let’s settle in for a new series on the “missionary Instructions” given by Christ to His twelve and learn how they apply to every saint of God.

We begin by seeing Christ call His disciples by name. This may look like a simple naming of people by Christ. I see more, Christ knows His own, He has called them, saved them, trained them, and equipped them for His service. Now He calls them by name. Notice from God’s word Matthew 10:1-4,

2“21 And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease. 2 Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter; and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; 3 Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; 4 Simon the Cananite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.”

Why missionary instructions? First, we like the disciples have been called to fulfill the great commission. To do this we must understand how we are prepared theologically, doctrinally, and spiritually to go about the Lord’s work daily. I fear we have become distracted by social, political, and financial issues taking place in our nation and the world. I’m not saying we should not be aware of, understand, and be involved with them. However, if they become such a distraction that we set aside our commission from Christ, we have become sidelined concerning the Lord’s work.

Second, through the exposition of Matthew chapter 10, I hope to awaken or reawaken our zeal to serve the Lord as His disciples to spread the gospel around the corner and the world.

Notice from Matthew chapter 10 verse one how Christ prepared them, He gave them power!

3“1 And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease.”

Power translates the Greek word exousia which is defined through the Blue Letter Bible as; “the power of authority (influence) and right (privilege).” This power was specific, unclean spirits, sickness, and disease. A word of warning, Jesus’ words here are for these disciples and their task. I intend for us to learn that just as Jesus called, prepared, and equipped these twelve He will do likewise for us.

A disciple of Christ, those who are genuinely born again according to the inerrant word of God, will be called to represent Him and carry the gospel. To do this the Lord will provide the power that is necessary for the task ahead. Take a moment and let that sink in. The Saints of God are saved to glorify God and that includes being a disciple of Christ and sharing the gospel. But how do we accomplish this? Being a disciple and presenting the gospel isn’t within our ability. Discipleship is the Grace of God imputed to us through the blood of Jesus Christ. Just as Adam’s sin was imputed to us at birth, Jesus’ righteousness was imputed to us the moment we accepted His invitation to be born again. It is through that righteousness we obtain Grace and through that Grace, we find Faith in Christ. From all of this, we have everything we need to accurately proclaim the gospel, as a personal witness of its life-changing eternal impact. Saints, we should be prayed up and prepared for the Lord’s service. Whether it is in the pulpit, in the community, or the workplace. May we grasp discipleship the way our Lord intended it to be.

Until we meet again, in person or print may God Bless you is my prayer.  
1 Walvoord, John F.; Dyer, Charles H.. Matthew (The John Walvoord Prophecy Commentaries) (p. 70). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.  
2 MacArthur, John. NKJV, The MacArthur Study Bible (pp. 5706-5707). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.  
3 IBID

Terry Cheek 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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“Something To Think About” -  
A Man Named Shamgar Judges 3:31

By Dennis Love  
McDowell County



If you were just reading the third chapter of Judges and you came to v31, you would probably pass over it and not give it much thought, because very little is said. Shamgar was Israel’s third Judge and Judges 3:31 says; “*Shamgar the son of Anath, slew of the Philistines 600 men with an ox goad and he also delivered Israel.*” The name Shamgar means “sword.” He was like a sword in the hand of God, as God used him to destroy the enemies of Israel. And the one thing we know for sure about Shamgar is that he was a farmer because he carried with him an ox goad. An ox goad was not a weapon. It was a tool that farmers used. It was a unique tool. It was a pole about 8 to 10 feet in length and about 2 inches in diameter. One end of the pole had a long iron point. This was used to encourage the oxen he was driving to move where he wanted them to move. The other end of the ox goad was shaped like a shovel. It was a metal blade used to clean the wet clay and the roots off the plow being pulled by the oxen. And another thing we know about Shamgar is the fact that he lived during a time in Israel when if they didn’t have a leader, they would not follow the commands of the Lord. They were pulled by their old natures to follow the ways of their enemies.

One of the lessons we can take away from Shamgar is that God tends to use people who are already busy. When God called Shamgar, he called a man who

was already busy. He was busy taking care of his family and feeding his family. And when the enemy came, God chose to use him and the tool he had in his hand. God doesn’t use lazy people. When He looks at the church and places His hand on people to use them, He always chooses to use those who are already actively engaged in His work. When the Philistines came, Shamgar stood his ground and he fought. He didn’t have any weapons of war, so what did he use? He used his ox goad. He turned a farming tool into a weapon. The sharp iron point could be used as a spear and the metal blade on the other end could have been used as an ax. He could have used the length of his pole to block swords coming at him. He simply took what he had and used it to secure victory for his people and safety for his family. And notice this. Throughout his life, he killed 600 Philistine raiders. Now he didn’t do this at one time. He did it over the course of his life when they would send groups in to raid the villages. He simply stood his ground and fought while others fled because Shamgar knew some things were worth fighting for. He was fighting for his home, his family, his freedom, and his land. He was fighting for his right to worship his God. AND can I remind you that while we are to be workers, we must also be warriors! God has an army and if you are saved you have been enlisted in His army. And we are at war today if you haven’t noticed. We are at war with the Canaanites of our land. We are at war with Satan. They want to oppress us. They want to invade us and take away everything we value and stand for. We are at war today and some things are worth fighting for. And if we don’t stand and protect them the enemy can move in and take them away from us and destroy them. Shamgar refused to run. He stood and fought to protect the things in his life worth fighting for. What things am I talking about?

The first thing worth fighting for is: The Home Your marriage, your spouse, your children, and your grandchildren are worth fighting for and even dying for. We should fight for their salvation and fight for their righteousness because the foundations of the home are being destroyed right before our very eyes. We should fight even to the death if necessary to protect them from the world and Satan because both of them are throwing everything they’ve got at them as we speak.

The second thing worth fighting for is: The Church We would have no church today unless we had things like the Word of God, and Preaching, and Teaching, and Worship, and our Doctrines, and our separation from the world. And we must fight for these things today because they are under attack, and unless we fight for them, we could lose them. We need to be ready to fight and even die for the things that we hold so near and dear, and the things that are true and right.

Then the third thing worth fighting for is: The Lost The lost don’t know God and they don’t even care about God. So, they need someone to stand in the gap for them so that they can hear about Jesus. They need people praying for them. The lost need people who will stand up for them and fight for them. Did you know that somebody fought for you or you wouldn’t be saved today and you wouldn’t be in the church today? If nobody comes to your mind, how about Jesus? Jesus certainly fought for each of us! He went through Hell for us! He died for us! The least we can do is stand and fight for others. Notice also we are told in v31 that Shamgar “delivered Israel.” This guy stood and fought when everybody else ran away. This guy made a difference in the lives of those he fought for. Let me encourage your church to stay in this battle for the sake of those around us. If we can pass down a pure Gospel, and a holy church to the next generation, then we have been successful. So, we need to stay in this fight. All around us today, people are laying aside their ox goads and running away in fear of the enemy. Can I encourage you to simply stay in the fight? Can I encourage you to keep on preaching and teaching and living for Jesus? We are too near home to quit now! We are almost home folks. Be like Shamgar and stay in the fight until Jesus comes. Shamgar delivered Israel. He was a winner because he stayed in the fight. Understand that we cannot lose for winning, so why not fight the good fight. Why not stand up to the world and the devil. I grant you when you do, God will honor His Word and He will honor you too! We cannot allow Hollywood to take over our homes and our families. We cannot allow the cancel culture to take over the church and the basic tenets of our faith. Way too many people are depending on us, no matter how small we may seem to be to fight for them, and fight we must. Now I’m not talking about literally fighting people with ox goads. I’m talking about fighting them with the Word of God, and fighting them with love, and fighting them with our faithfulness, and fighting them with boldness to stand up for what we believe is true and right! Let’s live and be like Shamgar!

*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.*

Crossword Solution

M	A	R	A		T	H	E	E		S	H	R	E	D
A	S	O	N		H	I	L	L		L	E	A	V	E
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3	5	8	6	1	7	2	9	4
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4	1	9	3	7	5	6	8	2
7	6	3	4	2	8	1	5	9
5	9	4	7	6	1	8	2	3
8	3	6	2	5	9	7	4	1
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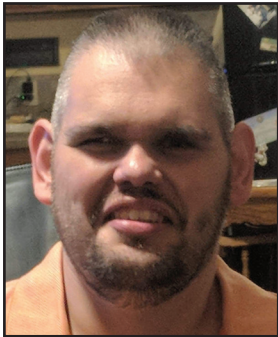
# Taking Spiritual Inventory

By David Valls  
Mitchell County

The Lord gave me a thought about taking inventory. Retail stores often do this to see what they have and what they need. As believers, we must do the same when it comes to our walk with God. The Bible says let a man examine himself whether he be in the faith. Self-examination is one of the things all Christians struggle with the most... because let's face it, nobody likes to be wrong or have it revealed to them that they are wrong. But as the old saying goes, honesty is the best policy. We must be truthful with God and with ourselves about where we are so that we can get to the place God wants us to be. As I said before, taking inventory shows what you have or don't have... what you need or don't need. To see what you need, you must first assess what you have. And then from there, we can see what we need to add. But to make room for what need, we must get rid of the things that God does not want in our lives. The book of Hebrews tells us to "lay aside every weight and the sin that does so easily beset us and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." We look unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith. If a runner is carrying unnecessary weight, it hinders his ability to run efficiently. The less dead weight he is carrying, the lighter his load, which means he can focus all his energy on running the race. That is the reason we must allow God to free us of anything that holds us back and that takes a little self checkup! David said, "Search me o God and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts and see if there be any wicked way in me." We all have the potential for wicked things to creep into our lives. Apart from Christ, we all are wicked, because the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked saved or unsaved. We are all flesh... and the flesh by its very nature is wicked, which is why we must be transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit. It requires honesty and willingness to look deep within ourselves and ask God to remove obstacles that hinder our walk him, and replace them with the things he wants in our lives in order to please Him and glorify him.

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.

Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. John 4:35



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## God's Transformation

By Christopher L. Scott  
Moses Lake, Washington



I became a Christian at age twenty-three. Before that, I had enjoyed large quantities of beer and other non-Christian activities that often accompany drunkenness.

But when I became a Christian I started studying my Bible, regularly attending church, and spent time with other Christians. Those activities started to change my thinking and behavior. I didn't realize it at first, but my mind was being transformed by God.

Paul told the believers in Rome, "*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect*" (Romans 12:2, NASB).

The instruction to "not be conformed to this world" is something all Christians must resist. The world's entertainment, advertisements, and sports all direct our attention anywhere other than God. (I'm not saying those things are terrible and that we shouldn't participate in them, but they often direct our attention away from God.)

Instead, Paul tells us to "*be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*" The word "transformed" here is a continual process of change from the inside out. The same Greek word is used in Matthew 17:2 when Jesus took Peter, James, and John to a mountain and Jesus "was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light." Paul tells us we need to be completely changed and in effect be reprogrammed to think and act differently.

The best way I know to "be transformed" is by memorizing Scripture. It can be hard to memorize Scripture if there is no context for it or need, therefore to successfully memorize Scripture you must incorporate it into your life. For example, I struggle with not feeling important and valuable as a pastor at our church. When people don't respect me or don't include me in the important ministries of our church I feel discouraged and not valuable. I have been trying to memorize Ephesians 1:4-7. Every time I feel discouraged and not important I recite those verses as a reminder that my worth comes from God, not from how others treat me or from the ministry I do as a pastor.

Scripture memory can help us with various situations we face. Perhaps you know you need to reconcile a relationship with someone but find it difficult to restore the relationship. Consider memorizing Romans 12:18. Or you feel that you are being spiritually attacked, then you need to memorize Ephesians 6:12. If there are people you find yourself constantly judging and you want to stop, then memorize Philippians 3:9. Maybe you want to talk to people about God, but you aren't sure how to share the Gospel, then memorize Romans 10:9-10.

Are we being "conformed" or "transformed"? I hope and pray we can memorize Scripture and be transformed because it is the "will of God . . . which is good and acceptable and perfect."

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

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What’s In A Name

By Lynn Church  
Avery County

Oftentimes folks inquire about why our store is named Three Nails Hardware. At first, the questions caught us off guard because we thought it would be very evident the reason for the name. In time, we began to cherish the question because it gives us a chance to share what God has done for us, as believers, and what He can do for anyone who will accept His free gift of salvation.

Our store's namesake is what we believe to be the most important hardware in the history of mankind, the three nails from Calvary. God's word tells us that Jesus, God's only son, who was sinless and blameless, took our place on the cross at Calvary. History tells us that three nails were used to attach Jesus to the wooden cross. Some will debate the number of nails, but the most important point is that our Lord and Savior allowed the nails to be used because of His love for you and me. It wasn't nails that held him to the cross, it was His great love. Romans 5:6-8 says this: *"For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."* It didn't end on the cross. Jesus died and was buried, but on the third day, He arose! His resurrection is the cornerstone of our faith and the power of His salvation. *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."* 1 Peter 1:31

It is our objective, as a business and individuals, to represent the Name of Christ well in everything we do. We strive to offer quality products at a fair price while always being truthful and upright in our business dealings. It is our prayer that we would never bring reproach upon His name. Any success that we have as a business, we give credit to God and His blessings upon us, as we try to be obedient to Him.

The question then turns to your name. Is your name written in the Lambs Book of Life; have you accepted the free gift of salvation? Please know that God loves you!

*"For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."* John 3:16 Here's why we all need salvation... Sin has separated us from God. Romans 3:23 tells us *"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."* Sin is an offense against God and it carries a serious penalty. Romans 6:23 says *"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."* To accept Jesus' payment for your sin, simply repent of your sins, call on His name and ask Him to forgive your sins and save you. Romans 10:9-13 says *"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon Him. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."* It would be our great honor and privilege to talk with you more about our name, your name, and God's love, and His plan of salvation for all.



The Holy Spirit:  
Your Ultimate Power Source

By Joyce Meyer



If you’ve ever heard me share my testimony of how I was abused by my father throughout my childhood, you know I’ve gone through some really difficult times. In fact, some things were so painful, I wondered if I would survive them. That’s why one of my greatest desires is to help others know how to trust God and lean on Him so they can overcome their struggles too.

There’s a huge difference between a Christian who just tries to make it on their own and one who really relies on the Holy Spirit to enable them to do whatever they need to do. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to take His place here on the earth. He can be everywhere, all the time, and because He lives in us as born-again believers, He is always with us.

In John 15:26 (AMP), Jesus told His disciples, *“When the Helper (Comforter, Advocate, Intercessor—Counselor; Strengtheners, Standby) comes...the Spirit of Truth who comes from the Father, He will testify and bear witness about Me.”* It’s so amazing to realize that the Holy Spirit is always with us and He’s the Strengtheners we need to get through every problem we have to face. Victors or Grasshoppers?

In Numbers 13, the Israelites were facing a big problem. They were just outside the land of Canaan, which is the Promised Land God led them to after they wandered for 40 years in the wilderness. Moses sent 12 spies to scout out the land, and when they returned, 10 of them had a bad report, and two had a good report.

The spies told Moses, *“We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey.... But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large....”* (vs. 27-28 NIV). But Caleb said, *“We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it”* (v. 30). In verses 32 and 33, the 10 spies *“spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land which they had explored. They said, ‘The land...devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. ... We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.’”*

For the Israelites to possess their Promised Land, they were going to have to dispossess the current occupants—the giants. God had not cleared out all of their adversaries because He wanted to teach them how to trust Him and lean on Him for the strength they needed to overcome their enemies.

Caleb acted in faith because he had his eyes on God, but the spies who brought the “bad report” couldn’t see themselves as anything but grasshoppers facing giants because they weren’t trusting God.

You Can Face Your Giants

We all have giants—problems in life that we have to overcome. I don’t like them any more than anybody else does, but I’ve discovered that we learn more about how to trust God when we go through difficulties than we do in other seasons of our lives. The truth is when we don’t have anyone but God to get us through something, He can use it to make us stronger in Him, and then He can use us to do greater things than we ever imagined we could do.

God doesn’t want us to live weak, wimpy, helpless, pathetic, barely-get-by lives. That’s why He sent the Holy Spirit to be our *“Helper (Comforter, Advocate, Intercessor—Counselor; Strengtheners, Standby).”* Acts 1:8 says, *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*

The Holy Spirit is with you all the time, and His power gives you the ability to be a witness for Christ. This means that in Christ, you have the power to be the kind of person in this world who represents Him as a light in a dark place...who has peace amid the storm...who has the power not to worry when you have a huge problem and hope even when it looks like there is no hope at all.

I want to encourage you to take the time to get to know God for yourself. Spend time with Him in prayer and through studying His Word. Wait on the Lord and receive the strength He has for you today (Isaiah 40:31). Put your focus on Him and pray, “God, I trust You. Please strengthen me today to do whatever I need to do, through Christ. I give you my will and want to know what Your will is for me. I need Your strength, wisdom, and guidance in every area of my life. I believe You will work out all things for my good (Romans 8:28). You are my strength and I won’t give up!”

Joyce Meyer is a New York Times bestselling author and founder of Joyce Meyer Ministries, Inc. She hosts the Enjoying Everyday Life radio and TV programs, which air on hundreds of stations worldwide. For more information, visit [www.joycemeyer.org](http://www.joycemeyer.org).





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**Dying Beside Him**

By Jimmy Laughridge  
McDowell County

In Luke’s account of the crucifixion, we see two others that are to die beside Christ, one on the right and one on the left. They were criminals, who were getting their just reward. Both criminals, in Mark’s account, railed against Christ, saying, “Are you not the Christ, save Yourself and us.” But sometime during the event one criminal recognized he was getting his just recompense for the deeds he had done.

The criminal that railed on Christ seems to have believed that Christ was who He said He was. “Are you not the Christ,” he asked, but he was angry that Christ seemed to be powerless in helping either Himself or the criminals off the crosses.

The other also seemed to believe that Jesus was the Christ. At a moment in time, by the Spirit, he became aware of his depravity, his failures, and his need. He needed a Savior. Seeing that need, he rebuked the other criminal by saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same condemnation? And we justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds.” Then he looked at Jesus and said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

“Remember me.” This criminal didn’t have an opportunity to do the things that are important in the Christian faith and point to the salvation of man, like being baptized and taking the Lord’s Supper.

This criminal saw himself as he was, a sinner. A sinner who was in need. He was dying beside his Savior and the Savior of the world. This criminal simply asked Christ to “remember” him. And Christ said, “Today, you will be with me in paradise.”

Imagine meeting God in the flesh as He was dying for you, being in the presence of the Holy Spirit, and having Him touch your heart. Imagine meeting your Savior face to face.

That day a criminal died beside his Savior and entered heaven with his Savior. This is the hope for those who are still alive today.

If you would like to know more about Landis OPC, you can learn more about us on our web page located at [landisopc.org](http://landisopc.org). You can also contact Elder Mike Cloy at [opcMikecloy@gmail.com](mailto:opcMikecloy@gmail.com).

Jimmy Laughridge is a member of Landis OPC.

*Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest. Luke 10:2*

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# Mt. Carmel Baptist Church

## The Relevancy Of The Cross

By Toby Crowder  
Mitchell County

John 12:32-33 *“And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die.”*

Many of the writers in this publication are Pastors; men who stand regularly and try to connect with their congregation in a real and meaningful way. They desire to see sinners come to Christ and for those who are saved to grow in grace and knowledge (2 Pet 3:18.) We recognize that in this day, our listeners desire to hear something relevant; something that will “make a difference” in the day and time in which we live. If you were to look in a modern dictionary at the word relevant, you would find this definition: “having a significant and demonstrable bearing on the matter at hand; having social relevance.” Sadly, many church members have heard the message of the Cross so many times that they do not consider it relevant, or needful in this day, but can I assure you from the Word of God that the message of the Cross of Christ is still relevant and powerful in this day and time!

The Cross serves as a powerful and relevant reminder to us of several things. By it, we learn the awfulness of sin. It was our sin that separated us from God and demanded payment on a Roman cross. We live in a society today that refuses to acknowledge sin in almost any form. A broad definition of sin is any thought, word, or deed that falls short of God's standard of holiness. Sin can also be defined as an act of disobedience to the will of God, the absence of righteousness, or a nature of enmity towards God. It is our inborn strife against God and His authority. Regardless of how it is that we understand sin, we must understand that the effects of sin are being seen all over our world and have great consequences. As devastating as these consequences are, the greatest and most awful effect of sin is that it separates us from God, and if we die lost in our sins, we will spend an eternity in Hell and forever separated from God. This is RELEVANT! Consider carefully your standing with God... Have you been saved from YOUR sin?

The Cross is also a reminder to us of God's affection for sinful man! Jesus came as a ransom... He was the propitiation for our sins... He came to abolish sin. In v.31, John lets us know that from this event on, Satan had no power over us... nor did death. If we take even a casual glance at the world around us, we certainly have to admit that sin is relevant in this day! Even though the world, in general, denies it as a problem, our sin means that we cannot approach God as we are. The wages of sin is death... it always has been and always will be. *“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”* (Rom 3:23). Yet even as we realize the relevancy of that statement, we also learn from the pen of Paul that *“While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”* (Rom 5:8) ... Thanks be to God, for His divine affection for sinful man!

Finally, The Cross revealed that God did not intend for Satan and sin to have victory... He provided an answer! Here we see the relevancy of this answer. Jesus said in v. 32, that through His death He would draw all men unto Him. Jesus made a similar statement to Nicodemus earlier in John's Gospel John 3:14-15 *“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.”* Jesus is making a twofold statement to Nicodemus but is focusing on the cross and what must take place at Calvary to pay the debt of sin. Through Christ's death on the cross and resurrection from the grave, we are the recipients of this eternal life!

Are you looking for something relevant in this day and time? Are you looking for something “having a significant and demonstrable bearing on the matter at hand?” I encourage you to consider the glorious and relevant Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!

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](http://MCfamily-forChrist.org) or [mtcarmelsprucepine@gmail.com](mailto:mtcarmelsprucepine@gmail.com)



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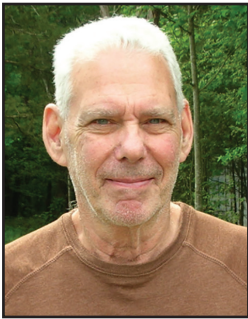
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The Antichrist

By Robert Garner  
Rutherford County



Written almost 2000 years ago; “and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come, and even now already is it in the world;” 1 John 4:3.

Many Christian groups have been incorrectly trained that the antichrist must first come before the return of Jesus Christ will occur. Also, is the incorrect idea that the antichrist is a human person living on earth who is possibly a leader of some great nation. This human antichrist will rise to fame, and be exposed to the world just before the return of Christ Jesus is a false end-time doctrine.

Various worldly distractions undermine the ability of many Christians to learn basic “milk of the word” biblical principles. Church leaders must also bear much of the confusion about the milk of the word teaching which develops in their membership. Hebrews 5:13; “For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.”

Depressed nations of the world whose people have limited access to the Biblical Scriptures, or no access at all, have valid reasons for Biblical error. Feeding sheep with the Word of God assists our fellow Christian brothers and sisters to discern both good and evil; Hebrews 5:14 “But strong meat belongeth to them that are full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” “Feed My sheep” John 21:16, is a metaphor pertaining to spiritual food, the gospel, not McDonald's.

The word antichrist appears only 5 times in the KJV Bible. Below are the verses we need to look at regarding who or what the antichrist is. The First Epistle of John written by him, the son of Zebedee, was recorded about 75 years after Christ's ascension, first century A.D. we find the following.

“Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time;” 1 John 2:18.

Almost 2000 years ago John writes under the power of the Holy Ghost, “even now are there many antichrists”; whereby we know that it is the last time; 1 John 2:18.

“Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son;” 1 John 2:22.

For centuries various societies of the world have denied the Father the Son and the Holy Ghost. These three are one; 1 John 5:7 “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father; the Word [Jesus, the Word made flesh: John 1:14] and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.”

Again written almost 2000 years ago in 1 John 4:3, “whereof ye have heard that it should come, “and even now already is it in the world”.

2John 1:7 “for many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and antichrist.”

A deceiver who does not preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ is an antichrist. Galatians 1:9 “As we said before, so say I now again [Paul speaking], if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.”

Jesus is speaking to the Scribes and Pharisees in John 8:44 regarding who is a liar? “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.”

Satan the devil, and his hosts of demon spirits have been here since the Garden of Eden, from the beginning. Satan and his followers of men are antichrists.

Finally, we need to look at the Greek; än-tē'-khrē-stos, Strong's # G 500.

Who or what is an Antichrist?

Definition of the antichrist from Strong's Concordance below;

John, the only writer in the New Testament who uses antichrist five times. He employs it from the corrupt power and influence hostile to Christian interests. Especially that which is at work in false teachers who have come from the bosom of the church and are engaged in disseminating error.

Satan and his followers are antichrists.

Your comments are always appreciated. Contact email; valleygravel@outlook.com

My name is Robert W. Garner, my wife and I live in Union Mills, Rutherford County, NC. I'm a Christian Bible study researcher/writer/coach allied with other Biblical Scripture investigators unaffiliated with any church denominations. Our Scripture research spans 600 years of Christian Bible languages which include English, Hebrew, and Greek. As God Almighty commands in 1 Corinthians 2:13 we search the scriptures; “not in the words which man's wisdom teaches, but what the Holy Ghost teaches; comparing spiritual with spiritual”; which is a scripture with scripture.



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What's In Your Wallet?

By Patricia Jackson  
McDowell County



There are numerous credit card marketing slogans we frequently hear. A popular one is the Capital One Credit Card "What's in Your Wallet"? The TD Bank Credit Card promises to "Help build up credit. Rewards earned are points you can redeem for cash or gifts back. Everyday spending can add up to big rewards". The Belk Rewards Credit Card "Gets even better over time – The more you spend, the sweeter the rewards are." We all like rewards cards that promise gifts, cash, or merchandise discounts. We will only receive the rewards or benefits from a credit card if we use the card.

Merriam-Webster defines Rewards as something given in return for good or evil done or received, or that is offered or given for some service or attainment. A reward is most often a benefit.

In Daniel Ch. 2, King Nebuchadnezzar dreamed a dream and wanted the magicians, astrologers, sorcerers, or Chaldeans to interpret the dream. In V. 6, he promised them gifts, rewards, and great honor. However, he had forgotten the dream. Unless they could tell him, the dream and interpret it, they would be cut in pieces, and their houses made a dunghill. They assured the King that no man on earth could shew the King's dream. The King became furious and decreed that all wise men be slain, as well as Daniel and his fellows.

When Daniel heard of the King's request, he asked the King for time to allow him to interpret the dream. He told the King, "*There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets and make known to the King what shall be in the latter days.*"

After Daniel interrupted the dream, the King fell upon his face and worshipped Daniel. Daniel's life was spared; he received an oblation (religious offering) and sweet odors (perfume). Daniel and his friends were promoted to high office, a reward or benefit recognizing a victory accomplished through their prayers.

Hebrews 11:6 tells us "*That he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*" The rewards we receive in Heaven are not like the rewards we earn here on earth. Any reward we gain in Heaven will be precious to us because it is directly the result of our relationship with God and how we served him. God is looking for opportunities to reward us for what we do on this earth. He rewards patience, hard work, obedience, faithfulness, and many other things. Psalm 68:19 tells us "*The Lord daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our Salvation.*"

The word "Reward" is found seventy-eight times in the KJV Bible. Matthew 5:12 tells us to "*rejoice and be exceedingly glad; for great is your reward in Heaven for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you*". 1 Corinthians 3:14 states, "*If any man's work abides which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.*"

The Bible tells us five specific crowns will be presented as rewards to believers when they appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10).

1) Crown of Life (James 1:12 & Rev. 2:10) "*Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.*" It is bestowed upon those who persevere under trials. Jesus references this crown when he tells the Church in Smyrna not to be afraid for what they will suffer but be faithful even to the point of death.

2) Incorruptible or Imperishable Crown (1 Corinthians 9:25) Refers to the Corinthians who held foot races. The prize was a perishable wreath, and only one would receive it, but we are imperishable. Those who compete in a race usually exercise self-control in more things.

3) Crown of Righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8) Is promised to those who fight a good fight, finish the course and keep the faith.

4) Crown of Glory is discussed in 1 Peter 5:4 "*Feed the flock of God, and when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away*".

5) Crown of rejoicing – (1 Thessalonians 2:19) "*For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy*". This crown is also referred to as the Soul Winners Crown." The apostle Paul tells us in Philippians 4:4 to "*rejoice always in the Lord*" for all the bountiful blessings our gracious God has showered upon us." As Christians, we have more in this life to rejoice about than anyone else. Luke tells us there is rejoicing even now in Heaven (Luke 15:7). The crown of rejoicing will be our reward where "*God will wipe away every tear . . . there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away*" (Revelation 21:4).

In Psalm 116:12, the writer asks, "*What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits towards me*"? The answer is found in the following two verses: "*I will take the cup of salvation; call upon the name of the Lord, and I will pay my vows unto the Lord*". The cards in our wallets are only for earthly reward. We should "*lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.*" (Matthew 6:20).

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

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The Final Test  
By Joy Baldwin  
Madison County

*A little girl was sad each day; she sat there all alone.  
The children all made fun of her; she wanted to go home.  
They made her cry and hate the day, to speak she was not free.  
At home they loved her as she was; that's where she longed to be.*

*Then one day she met the Lord; He told her of His gift.  
He loved her so He gave His life; it gave her heart a lift.  
T'was then she realized her worth more than gold.  
Creator of the universe had chosen her, she was told.*

*You'll be the one that I will trust with many precious things.  
And when you come to live's hard road, you'll walk beside The King.  
Jesus whispered to her soul that what YOU think of you,  
Is what you really do become, I've made your life anew.*

*Competing now in high school, she's run among the best.  
Remembering what was in her heart has stood the final test.  
New teaching with authority, steady voice with head held high,  
Her students were awed by wisdom as she looked them in the eye.*

*Lessons learned from childhood and the book above the rest,  
With the Bible as your roadmap, you will pass the final test.  
She read a note from the parents who responded to her call.  
"You're a blessing to our children, Signed, your old classmates, one and all."*



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By Monica Kirtz  
Mitchell County



It was the evening of Tuesday, August 10th, and it looked like the rain may interfere with our prayer gathering at Riverside Park. Previously scheduled for 7:00 p.m., the prayer time was looking doubtful...yet, I felt no leading from The Holy Spirit to cancel or delay. That is our walk of faith...we don't "look" with our eyes. We felt steady to go forward. The worst thing that could happen is that we would have to turn around and drive back home. So why not? Let's go and see what happens. At 6:55 p.m., the sky cleared up, and the weather was absolutely beautiful...a gift from Our Heavenly FATHER!

This evening was about our students and a new school year. We want to encourage them and pray for them...all of them, from Head Start to college, whether it is Christian schools, public schools, or homeschools. The children and youth are facing issues this year that are different from any other year. And they really need our prayers, as well as all of the teachers, bus drivers, lunchroom workers, and administrations.

GOD is our help.

GOD is our only hope.

We are reminded of Daniel of The Bible. When Daniel was a youth, he was carried away into captivity by an evil nation. He had many chances to walk away from GOD and follow wickedness. But do you know what made all of the difference in Daniel's life? Daniel 1:8 says, "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself..."! Daniel made up his mind that he was going to stay with GOD...no matter what! And because Daniel did walk with GOD every day, he was successful, and GOD took care of him! Franklin Graham wrote that we must make up our minds "not to accept the false narrative of a secular, atheistic culture. We have to make the Word of God our absolute source of truth". He said we must spend time in prayer with GOD every day, as Daniel did. (Decision magazine July/August 2021)

So, children...parents...every morning, make up your mind that you are going to walk with GOD that day. Begin your day with prayer and read The Bible together before you go out the door. Read it at night before you go to bed. Determine to do this every day. Ask The LORD to fight your battles. Exodus 14:14 says, "The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace."

Anne Graham Lotz tells the story of the famous author, Robert Louis Stevenson. When Robert was a child, and it was his bedtime, his nanny went to put him to bed. Robert was looking out of his bedroom window, even though it was dark. As she entered the room, she spoke, but he kept staring into the darkness. When she asked him what he was looking at, she suddenly saw "the lamplighter walking down the street, lighting the street lamps. Little Robert responded, 'Look, Nanny. I'm watching as that man puts holes in the darkness.'" This is a beautiful picture of what Christians are to be in this dark world...we need to put holes in the darkness! GOD has called us to be "salt" and "light" in this world. These students have a lot of influence over each other...and if they are strong in GOD and their faith in JESUS CHRIST, they can have a good and positive influence over their classmates...and not be led astray.

One of the best verses to carry with you into the new school year came from JESUS Himself...Matthew 10:16. JESUS said, "I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

A special thank you to Fritz and Joy Young for the beautiful, Spirit-led music and to Jason Kritz for leading the prayer, and to all those who took the time to attend.

PRAY!!! And put holes in the darkness!

Mrs. Monica Henley-Kritz County Coordinator for the National Day of Prayer  
Associational Prayer Coordinator Monica is a member of Crabtree Chapel Baptist Church, where Jason is the pastor.

**But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Matthew 13:23**

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The Mirrors of God

By Marlene Houk  
Burke County

I love science experiments, especially when they have spiritual significance. Info.glass.com defines an infinity mirror as two mirrors “positioned parallel or nearly parallel to each other. This construction creates a series of increasingly smaller reflections that seemingly retreat to what appears to be infinity.” The result brightens, enlarges, and opens up a room when decorating. You can build an infinity mirror by holding a mirror that faces another mirror. (I held a hand one and aimed it at my bathroom mirror.) Look closely inside the mirror’s reflection and notice the cascading images of mirrors that stretch to infinity. Creating an infinity mirror reminds me of a spiritual principle in the book of Esther in the Bible.

Like the infinity mirror, the book of Esther in the Bible reflects God over and over. But the odd fact remains: the word, God, is not mentioned in the ten chapters. The absence of the word, God, caused many of the early canonical leadership to dismiss it as unworthy of being included in the Bible. However, its pages, like the facing mirrors, infinitely reflect the evidence of God’s presence and His powerful plan for His people. The spiritual analogies in Esther are like the mirror in the mirror, reflecting the presence of God among His people to such an extent that it is difficult to reject the book as uninspired. Esther’s story reaches far beyond the walls of her palace and her brief life and stuns us with her spiritual brilliance as she offers her wisdom.

One of those reflecting mirrors is found in the frequency of certain words in her book. For example, the word queen/s is mentioned fifty-four times in the KJV version of the Bible, and half of those times occur in Esther. Like reflecting mirrors, the word, queen/s reminds me of the King of Kings and our status as His Bride, the church. Isaiah 61:10 says, “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.” The LORD, high in majesty, bequeaths to us the royal robes of righteousness when we accept His Son as our Savior from sin. He lovingly drapes His garment of salvation around our world-weary shoulders. We are destined for royalty the moment we say yes to His beloved Son, for He is the King of Kings. (See Revelation 19:7-8.)

There are also mirrors of caution in the book of Esther that reflect warnings from God. Surging emotions, rampant deceit, and a lack of character break the dams of intelligence and wisdom as they bring the Persian nation to the brink of collapse. The drama of ungodly people surrounding Esther helps us see our need for self-control, personal integrity, and godly attributes. (See Proverbs 25:28, Psalm 51:10, and 2 Peter 1:5-8.)

The hall of mirrors in Esther has a unique section—favor, and blessings that reflect over and over that God cherishes His people. When Esther found favor in King Ahasuerus’ heart, she illustrates that we are favored in God’s sight. Psalm 5:12 says, “For thou Lord, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield.” Indeed, he held out his golden scepter to grant her an audience with Him. As prayer ushers us into the presence of our King, the shouts of our enemies dim and fear fades into His glory. Like Esther, when the Son holds out His scepter of righteousness to us, we can know that we are favored. (See Hebrews 1:8.)

Many other mirrors of spiritual analogy line the halls of Esther’s palace with powerful messages to us today, reminding us again of God’s presence in our lives. Reading Esther’s story through the perspective of an infinity mirror, we can see God’s care and commitment in multiple ways for Queen Esther and His people, the Jews.

Can you tilt your life at such an angle that you see reflections of God’s grace and goodness over and over in your life?

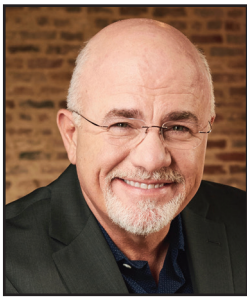
Marlene Houk is a regular contributor to Blue Ridge Christian News. Her passion is to delve deeply into the truths of Bible women and to discuss those in Bible Studies called Backstage Pass to Bible Women. She and her husband discover joy, nurture, and challenge in their church. Her contact is marlenehouk@bellsouth.net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



By Dave Ramsey

Work first, play later

Dear Dave,  
I brought about \$15,000 in student loan debt into our marriage. I’m 26, my wife is 27, and we’ve been married a little over a year. During that time, our parents have helped us out with financial gifts occasionally. Whenever this happens, my wife and I get into an argument. She likes to use the cash they give us to have fun, but I think we should use it to pay down debt and get our finances in order. What is your opinion? - Kent



Dear Kent,  
If your parents didn’t specify what the money is for, then it’s up to you guys to decide together how it will be used. In my mind, the fun needs to be put on hold for a while.

You’ve already told me you have at least \$15,000 in debt. If there’s more debt in the picture, I’d advise listing all your debts, and begin knocking them out from smallest to largest using the debt snowball system. Debt is a risk, and as long as it’s around it’s eating up your largest wealth-building tool—your income.

I’m sure your wife is a good, smart lady. But it’s time she started being a little more mature when it comes to financial matters. Let her know how important this is to you and why it’s so important to your future as a couple. You two should be working together and getting your financial house in order as a team.

I recommend treating the money from your parents just like a paycheck. That means including it in a written, monthly budget, and taking care of bills, debt, and any other financial responsibilities you have first. Trust me, there’ll be plenty of time for fun later. The amount of student loan debt you have isn’t astronomical, but it does need to be cleaned up as fast as possible.

Once that’s taken care of, you’ll be able to really concentrate on saving and investing—and yes, some fun along the way! —Dave

Honesty matters

Dear Dave,  
My wife and I are in our late 20s, and we’re on Baby Step 6. Recently, my mom reached out to me for help. She has a car lease that ends next month, and she asked to borrow \$2,000 so she can pay it off. It’s a weird situation because my parents keep separate accounts and don’t combine their finances. My mom also asked me not to tell my wife about all this. What’s your advice? Daniel

Dear Daniel,  
I don’t do anything I can’t tell my wife about—ever. If I’m in a meeting, and someone tells me what’s said in that room has to stay in that room, that I can’t talk to anyone else about it under any circumstances, I’ll get up and leave. In my mind, keeping things from my wife is against the law.

Your mom is out of control to even think about asking you to do this, and you need to have a serious talk with her. Let her know you love her, but she has no right to ask this of you, and it’s not something you’d do. Let her know, too, that she’s never to ask for anything like this again.

If she needs \$2,000, she should be talking to her husband about the idea. They should be living with combined finances anyway. So, it sounds like they’ve got issues to straighten out between themselves.

It’s time folks started laying their cards on the table and stopped sneaking around. That’s no way for a husband and wife to live, and your mom has no business trying to drag you into all of it behind everyone’s back! —Dave

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

And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. Galatians 6:9



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The Conscience Bears Witness  
By Rev. Mark Creech

Now and then, we read in the news about some fellow who has a fit of conscience and confesses to a cold case crime.

A 2012 story in HuffPost reported that James Washington from Nashville, Tennessee, already incarcerated for unrelated crimes, suffered a heart attack and thought he would die. So, Washington confessed to a correctional officer that he had murdered a woman seventeen years earlier. Later, the officer testified in court that Washington told him he had beaten the woman to death and needed to get it off his conscience.

In 2018, Glenn Adams walked into the Cowlitz County Hall of Justice in Kelso, Washington State, to confess to a 32-year-old murder case. Adams had strangled a man in his hotel room and robbed him of \$400. Adams said the motive for his confession was that he wanted to "right the wrong he had done."

In 2019, a "guilty conscience" compelled John Shadrix to confess to a case that had gone cold for more than fifteen years. Shadrix committed a drug-related double murder and placed the dead bodies of his victims in the back of a burning car in 2002.

You may have never thought of it this way, but the human conscience is evidence for the existence of God, and an absolute universal moral code to which everyone is accountable.

In his classic book, World Aflame, the late renowned evangelist, Dr. Billy Gra-



ham wrote:  
"God has revealed himself in the conscience. Conscience has been described as the light of the soul. What causes this warning light to go on inside me when I do wrong?"  
"Conscience is our gentlest counselor and teacher, our most faithful friend, and sometimes our worst enemy. There are no punishments or rewards comparable to those of the conscience. The Scripture says: 'Man's conscience is the lamp of the eternal' (Proverbs 20:27, Moffatt). In other words, conscience is God's lamp within man's breast. In his Critiques of Pure Reason, Immanuel Kant said there were just two things that filled him with awe – the starry heavens and conscience in the breast of man.

"The conscience in its varying degrees of sensitivity bears a witness to God. Its very existence within us is a reflection of God in the soul of man."  
Apologist, Alex McFarland, addresses the conscience and its evidence for the existence of God ever further in his book, The Ten Most Common Objections Against Christianity.  
McFarland points to Lewis's The Abolition of Man, in which Lewis, the famous British author, and lay theologian, documents the amazing similarities that bind every civilization. He writes:

"Among these commonalities are the notions that you shouldn't murder, steal, sleep with your neighbor's wife, and so forth. On the flip side, all cultures esteemed telling the truth, being kind, acting selflessly, and so forth. In every case – from the Phoenicians to the Egyptians to the Greeks to the Romans to twenty-first-century civilization – humans share vehement reactions against injustice: theft, looting, rape, murder, pillaging, and the like. Meanwhile, they all innately affirmed heroism, altruism, and self-denial.

"Lewis's study proves that different people groups and cultures, though having no contact with each other, nevertheless had similar moral codes and ethical structures by which they lived. That's not to say that humans always do what is morally right; Lewis and others assert that all cultures intuitively know what is right. "Since human knowledge of moral law appears to be ubiquitous, and since different cultures, all seem to know moral truth – whether civilized or primitive, urban or rural – the source of moral knowledge must be absolute, rather than subjective. In other words, morality isn't just social mores (a 'cultural accident' as evolutionists would assert) but is intrinsic and from an outside source (i.e., God)."

Centuries ago, the apostle Paul wrote about this phenomenon in Romans 2:14-15, saying, "So, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, instinctively do what the law demands, they are a law to themselves even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts. Their consciences testify in support of this, and their competing thoughts either accuse or excuse them."

You know something else intrinsic in people everywhere – a sense of guilt, the fear of judgment, and the need for atonement.

Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse once told a story about a boat trip he took in the middle of Africa on a river. On the boat with Dr. Barnhouse and the nationals was a chicken. Barnhouse said he thought the fowl was probably for their dinner. However, Barnhouse said they rowed the boat to shore, made a crude altar, and sacrificed the chicken before they approached treacherous waters they knew could lead to their deaths. He said he realized then that even without a Bible or a missionary to teach them, those natives knew in their hearts and consciences that they were guilty, feared judgment, and a sacrifice was necessary to save them.

Conscience is not a perfect guide to direct us. God has given us much more. He has given us his Word, the Bible, and His Son, Jesus Christ, who shed his blood on the Cross as an atonement for our sins.

Perhaps you are feeling the weight of a guilty conscience. Perhaps the thought of where you will go after you die often crosses your mind with some fear and trepidation. Conscience reflects our need for a right relationship with God.

Jesus said, "I am the [only] Way [to God] and the [real] Truth and the [real] Life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (Amplified Bible).

Have you ever really investigated Christ's claims? Your conscience bears witness to God's existence and your need to know him personally.

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

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# Morganton Baptist Church

## A Focused Ministry

By Dan Qurollo  
Burke County

We live in a world filled with constant distractions. In fact, many people have become so accustomed to all the various sounds that they cannot stand silence! Furthermore, it seems as though the distractions abound. We are witnessing alarming events within our own country and even in countries around the world. If we are not careful, good things can become a distraction. The Word of God is clear that we have been given a ministry that demands a focused effort.

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:1, *“Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not.”* As believers, we have been given a ministry of reconciliation by which we announce to the world the good news that Jesus Christ has paid the price for sin. We are to urge individuals to turn to Him in repentance and thereby receive eternal life. However, the challenges are often great. But when we recognize the nature of the ministry to which we have been called, we must conclude with Paul, *“we faint not.”* In other words, we cannot allow ourselves to grow weary or disheartened because we do not see the results we desire to see.

Instead, we must renounce *“the hidden things of dishonesty”* (4:2) and realize that *“if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost”* (4:3). Satan would love to get us discouraged by circumstances that are beyond our control. Lest we think that we are unique in our trials, Paul reminded us, *“8 We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;”* (2 Cor. 4:8-9).

As believers, we must not grow discouraged but must instead look beyond *“our light affliction, which is but for a moment”* and see *“a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory”* (2 Cor. 4:17). We must remain focused on the task at hand.

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



# First Baptist of Marshall

## Humor

By Buddy Freeman  
Madison County



For more than a year a little old woman who lived on the wrong side of the tracks had been trying to join a fashionable downtown church. The pastor was not eager to have a seedy-looking person in faded, out-of-style clothes sitting in a pew next to his rich members. When she called the fifth time to discuss membership, he put her off the fifth time.

“I tell you what,” said he unctuously, “you just go home tonight and have a talk with God about it. Later you can tell me what He said.”

The poor woman went her way. Weeks moved into months, and the pastor saw no more of her, and his conscience did hurt a little. Then one day he encountered her scrubbing floors in an office building and felt compelled to inquire. “Did you have your little talk with God, Mrs. Washington?” he asked.

“Oh my yes,” she said, “I talked to God, as you said.”

“Ah, and what answer did He give you?”

“Well, parson,” she pushed back a wisp of stringy hair with a sudsy hand, “God said for me not to get discouraged, but to keep trying. He said that He Himself had been trying to get into your church for 20 years, with no more success than I have had.”

One home had a new cook. When the maid had served the cook’s first culinary offering, she was asked what the family thought about it.

“I’m not sure,” said the maid. “They said nothing about your food, but they prayed before they ate.”

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

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Life's Journey With A Purpose  
The Smile Of God Is The Goal Of Our Life

By Glenda Ward  
McDowell County



Because of His love God had already decided that through Jesus Christ, He would make us His children – this was His pleasure and purpose.

*“According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him, in love Having predestinated us unto the adoption of sons (children) by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His Will, To the praise of the glory of His grace, through which He hath made us accepted in the Beloved”* (Ephesians 1:4-6).

Bringing pleasure to God is called worship. The Lord is pleased with those who worship Him and trust His love: (Reference Psalms 147:11). One of the greatest gifts God has given to us is the ability to enjoy pleasure. We don’t stop and think about God having emotions and pleasure. He feels things very deeply (Reference Psalms 35:27). Worship is a universal urge, hard-wired by God into the fiber of our being, an inbuilt need to connect with God. When we worship, we bring pleasure to God. Our reason to worship is to bring glory and pleasure to our Creator. God’s heart is touched by our passion and commitment.

Worship is not a part of your life; think about it; IT IS YOUR LIFE! We are told to worship Him continually and to praise Him from sunrise to sunset (Reference Psalms 113:3). It is possible to do everything to the Glory of God by doing everything as if you were doing it for Jesus and by carrying on a continual conversation with Him while you are working at it. Whatever we do we are to work at it with all our heart, as working for the Lord (Reference Colossians 3:23). This is the key to a lifestyle of worship. Everything we do we should be doing for the Lord, performing it with an awareness of His presence. By constantly thinking of Our Lord, we are abiding in His love. This is what real worship is.

- The Smile of God is the Goal of Our Life
- Our first purpose of our life is to please God. Our most important task is to discover how to do that. These five acts of worship make God smile.
- God Smiles when we love Him Supremely
  - God Smiles when we trust Him Completely
  - God Smiles when we obey Him Wholeheartedly
  - God Smiles when we praise and Thank Him Continually
  - God Smiles when we Use Our Abilities

We are to, in conversation with God, figure out what will please Him, then do it. *“Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord”* (Ephesians 5:10). It is important to avoid evil pleasures. Paul instructs us to rebuke and expose them, for our silence is interpreted as approval. God needs people who take a stand for what is right. We as Christians must lovingly speak out for what is true and right. In Noah’s day, the entire world was morally corrupt. Everyone lived for their own pleasure, not God’s. God was grieved so much that He regretted making man. God became so disgusted with the human race that He considered wiping out all things He had created. *“And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of His heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth Me that I have made them.”* (Genesis 6:5-7). However, there

was one man who made God Smile, and that one man was Noah. The Bible says, *“But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord”* (Genesis 6:8). This does not mean that Noah was perfect in his generation. It does not mean that he did not sin (the Bible records one of his sins in Genesis 9:20). It does mean however that Noah wholeheartedly loved and obeyed God. For a lifetime he walked in faith, a living example in his generation. Like Noah, we live in a world filled with evil. As we examine ourselves are we influencing others or being influenced by them.

Noah brought pleasure to God. From his life, we learn the five acts of worship as listed above that make God smile. *“Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God”* (Genesis 6:9). Noah consistently followed God’s Will and enjoyed a close relationship with Him. God wants most from us: a relationship with Him. Our creator wants to fellowship with us. God made the human race to love Him, He longs for us to love Him back. He longs for us to know Him and spend time with Him (Reference Hosea 6:4). In this verse, God points out Israel’s profession of loyalty, like a mist, evaporated easily and had no substance. Many people find it easy and comfortable to maintain the appearance of being committed, but their loyalty is not deep and sincere. If you profess loyalty to God, back it up with your actions. Love God Supremely.

Noah pleased God because he trusted God completely, even when it didn’t make sense. It was by faith Noah built a ship in the middle of dry land. He was warned about something he couldn’t see and acted on what he was told (Reference Hebrews 11:7). Trusting God completely means having faith that He knows what is best for your life. You expect Him to keep His promises, help you with problems, and do the impossible when necessary. The Bible says, *“The Lord taketh pleasure in them that fear Him, in those that hope in His mercy”* (Psalms 147:11). Without faith, it is impossible to please God. Trust God Completely.

Saving the animal population from a worldwide flood required great attention to logistics and details. Everything had to be done just as God prescribed it. He gave very detailed instructions as to the size, shape, and materials of the ark as well as the different numbers of animals to be brought on board. Noah prepared an ark for the saving of his house; by which he became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. The Bible tells us of Noah’s response: in Genesis 6:22 and also in Hebrews 11:7. God’s command seemed foolish, but Noah obeyed. Noah’s obedience to God made him appear strange to the people around him and made him stand out. As we obey God, let’s not be surprised if others consider us different. Your obedience makes their disobedience stand out. And we are to remember, if God asks you to do something, He will give you the necessary strength to carry out those tasks. Noah obeyed completely and he obeyed exactly (in the way and time God wanted it done). That is Wholehearted; meaning doing whatever God asks without reservation or hesitation. You don’t procrastinate and say, I’ll pray about it. You do it without delay. Understanding can wait, but obedience can’t. We are to obey God gladly (Reference Psalms 100:2). God smiles when we Obey Him Wholeheartedly.

God smiles when we praise and thank Him continually when we express our adoration and gratitude to Him. Noah’s life brought pleasure to God because he lived with a heart of praise and thanksgiving. Noah’s first act after surviving the Flood was to express his thanks to God by offering a sacrifice (Reference Genesis 8:20). Because of Jesus’ sacrifice, we don’t offer animal sacrifices as Noah did. Instead, we are told to offer God “the sacrifice of praise” and “the sacrifice of thanksgiving” (Reference Hebrews 13:15 and Psalms 116:17). We praise God for who He is, and we thank God for what He has done. When we offer praise and thanksgiving to God an amazing thing happens; when we give God enjoyment, our own hearts are filled with joy! (Reference Psalms 68:3). Praise and Thank Him Continually.

The Bible tells us that the steps of the Godly are directed by the Lord. He delights in every detail of their lives. *“The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and He delighteth in his way”* (Psalms 37:23). Every human activity, except sin, can be done for God’s pleasure if you do it with an attitude of praise. God especially enjoys watching us use the talents and abilities He has given us. God intentionally gifted us differently for His enjoyment. The Bible says, *“He fashioneth their hearts alike; He considereth all their works”* (Psalms 33:15). He has shaped each person in turn; now He watches everything we do. You don’t bring glory or pleasure to God by hiding your abilities or by trying to be someone else. You bring Him enjoyment by being you. God knows what we are made of. He bears in mind that we are dust. What God looks at is the attitude of your heart: Is pleasing God your deepest desire? *“Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him”* (2 Corinthians 5:9). This was Paul’s life goal. More than anything else, we should want to please God our Heavenly Father, whether in our home here or there. When you live in light of eternity, your focus changes from how much pleasure am I getting out of life; to how much pleasure is God getting out of my life. God is looking for people like Noah willing to live for the pleasure of God. *“The Lord look down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God”* (Psalms 14:2). There is nothing God won’t do for the person totally absorbed with this goal. God smiles when we use our abilities.

*“The Lord taketh pleasure in them, that fear Him, in those that hope in His mercy”* (Psalms 147:11). God is pleased with those who worship Him and trust His love. In what areas of your life do you need to trust Him most?

*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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Walking in the Ways of the Lord

By Dr. Tom Walker  
McDowell County



Ps 119:1-5 says, “*Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord. Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart. They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways. Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently. O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!*”

The phrase “way of the Lord” is mentioned sixteen times in the Word of God. The plural form “ways of the Lord” is mentioned six times in the Bible. Since it is mentioned so many times it must be of great importance.

Men have their ways and means but God’s ways are always the best. Here is what God says about his ways in Isaiah 55:7-9: “*Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.*” God generally thinks differently than we do. I believe that is fairly easy to explain why that is so. God is eternal and has all knowledge and all wisdom. There is no past, present, or future with God for in His sovereignty He sees it all at one time.

You and I only see clearly the present moment and are so limited in our knowledge when we compare ourselves and our thinking to God. In addition, we are influenced in our thinking by an old nature that we did not rid ourselves of when we were saved. The old nature with its tendencies seems to taint how we see things in life.

When you compare the fact that God has no sin tendency and that He possesses all knowledge and wisdom, we can understand why His thoughts are higher than our thoughts and His ways are higher than our ways.

From our text, we can see several factors involved in walking in the ways of the Lord. We must be convinced from the very beginning of our consideration that God’s way is always the best, even if our old nature wants to question the ways of the Lord.

Let’s see what is involved in walking in the ways of the Lord from our text.

**It Involves Purity**  
**“undefiled in the way” “do no iniquity”**

The ways of the Lord always involve purity. We must remember that God is infinitely holy. Many theologians have called holiness the chief attribute or characteristic of God. That is proven in God giving his Son, the Lord Jesus to die for the sinner. God could not let the sinner go free unless a price was paid for his redemption. Somehow man has to become holy to go to Heaven. How does God bring that about? When a sinner repents and believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, the righteousness of God is imputed to his account. Here is a proof verse that substantiates that truth. 2 Corinthians 5:21 clearly says: “*For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.*” Since God is holy and man is unrighteous in a state of sin and iniquity, people had to be recognized as holy to go to Heaven. What happens when we exert saving faith. Positionally, we become perfect in the eyes of God through the sacrifice of His darling Son when our faith rests in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Hebrew word for “undefiled” means to be “sound, wholesome, innocent and having integrity”. In the King James translation of the Bible, this same word is translated 44 times as “without blemish”, 18 times as “perfect”, 8 times as “upright”, and 6 times as “without spot.” If you are walking in the ways of the Lord, you are living an upright life that is not plagued with worldliness and carnality. When people can rightly point a finger at your life and point out places where you have allowed sin to be a part of your daily walk, you are failing to walk in the ways of the Lord. We do not owe this world system around us anything, but we do owe the Lord everything.

The word “iniquity” is interesting. If we see how a word is translated in its various ways in the King James Version, it reveals a great deal about the meaning of a word. This particular word is translated as “iniquity” 36 times, “wickedness” 7 times, “unrighteousness” 3 times, and “unjust” 2 times. The broad usage of that word and the various ways it is translated gives us a good picture of what is involved in iniquity. One thing is sure, whatever iniquity is it can translate into the idea of wickedness.

There is no debate or question that walking in the ways of the Lord involves being undefiled in our living. That means avoiding and refusing wickedness. We are tempted by evil because we have a depraved nature. God’s people need to learn to say “No” to all that is ungodly which tempts us along life’s pathway. It is not a sin to be tempted, but it is a sin when we give in to the enticement to sin and fall prey to it.

**It Involves Practice**  
**“keep His testimonies” “keep thy precepts” “keep thy statutes”**

It is not enough to be a hearer of the Word of God but a doer of it. James 1:22-24 exhorts us-- “*But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.*”

There are three very important words I need to bring to your attention. Those words are testimonies, precepts, and statutes. However you may try to make a distinction between those three terms, it is certain they all refer to the contents of the Bible. If you are going to walk in the ways of the Lord, then you cannot ignore the Word of God. Doing what the Bible tells you to do should be of the utmost

importance in your life. Obeying the word of God is a definite sign of conversion. Jesus said, “*If ye love me keep my commandments*” (John 14:15). It is through our obedience to the Lord’s commands that we prove our love for Him. It is one thing to say we love Him, and another to prove we love Him by doing what He says for us to do. Here is an interesting quote from Dr. Vance Havner: “When and to whom did our Lord say that He would make Himself real? Not in ecstatic visions or in some great meeting—but to them that love Him and keep His commandments (John 14:21). It is on the ordinary, everyday road of obedience that we really get acquainted with the Lord.” God does reveal Himself to his obedient children

**Pursuit**  
**“Seek Him with the whole heart”**

Jeremiah 29:13 promises us that if we seek God with “with the whole heart” we will find Him. I believe to seek the Lord with all our heart means to seek a close relationship with the Lord. It involves seeking the Lord’s will above your own. It is seeking God’s guidance and His wisdom.

God loves us more than anything else He created, so we are to love Him back and love Him more than anything or anyone else.

Paul put it this way in Philippians 3:10---“*That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.*”

God would not ask us to walk in His ways if it were an impossibility. Through the inward strength, God provides through His Spirit, we can walk in the ways of God.

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

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Step Out in Faith

By Rev. John B. Sorensen

God is looking for people who have faith. Faith is the main feature of the Christian life. Without it, we cannot be saved, and through it, we experience God’s power to be witnesses. But here’s the thing: there are several kinds of faith that people confuse for true saving faith.

The first is what we call head knowledge. We can understand that God loves us and that our sin prevents us from having a relationship with Him. We can acknowledge that He sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin so that we can experience a relationship with God.

Many people know about God. They believe He exists. They may even go to church and read the Bible. But merely knowing about God is not enough. James 2:19 reminds us that even the demons believe that God exists. There must be more.

The second is temporary faith. People can trust God for a lot of things. They have faith that He will heal them, that He will provide for them financially, or that He will cause something to happen. But these are all temporary. They require a faith that is also temporary. Once the need is met, faith is no longer necessary. Again, that is not the kind of faith that saves us for eternity.

True saving faith only happens when we put our trust in Jesus Christ alone for our eternal life. That kind of faith is a decision (a step of faith) to transfer our trust from anything we can do to earn our way to Heaven to what Jesus has done for us on the cross. “Believe [trust] in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31, NIV). That is saving faith.

Eternal life is so much more than just a ticket to Heaven. We can experience eternal life every day here on earth. The same saving faith gives us hope, it gives us peace, and it gives us a purpose – to share that hope with others.

Every day, we walk in that same faith, and every time we share the Gospel – the Good News of what Jesus did for us on the cross – we step out in faith. We have faith that God has heard our prayers for those who are lost, we have faith He is already at work in people’s lives before we speak with them, and we have faith that the Holy Spirit will go with us and give us the words to say.

“Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1, NIV). The amazing thing is, when we see someone decide to put their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, our faith grows as well.

Are you ready to step out in faith?

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.



Hold on Tightly

By Ken and Jan Merop  
Avery County

The first night alone in the house with my one-year-old son took more courage than I had. Once I knew all the doors were secure and my son was asleep in his crib, I retreated to my bedroom. The separation had occurred and divorce was on the horizon.

My edgy nerves and roller-coaster emotions vied for control.

I had gently held and rocked my son...carefully placing him in his crib while drowsy, but not asleep. Checking on him several times, his peaceful countenance and gentle breathing calmed me...even though worry for his and my future threatened to suffocate me.

Once in bed with mountains of pillows at my back, I picked up my Bible and devotional book and prayed in between readings. And then God’s word spoke to me and covered me like a cozy comforter.

Joshua 1: 9, NKJV even now wraps me in God’s everlasting arms. “Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.”

A while ago, I learned that the Hebrew meaning for strong is ‘sound legs;’ for courageous... ‘having a secure grasp.’

I needed to stand strong in the face of opposition while holding on tightly to God’s promises, plans, purposes, and values.

With all that was going on, I needed to cling to those promises even if my shaky legs hadn’t found their soundness just yet. I took hold of Jesus’ hand that had promised in John 10 that I was the Good Shepherd’s little lamb...and that once in his mighty hand “no one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand. I and My Father are one.”

In today’s upside-down world with definitions of words and values changing as fast as the blink of an eye, it is important to be reminded of God’s words to Joshua.

God gave Moses’s mantle of leadership to him and, a mighty warrior that he was, his knees must have been shaking as he yielded to the Lord’s command. The Lord instructed Joshua to cling to Scripture and meditate upon it day and night. Not just as some calming influence, but “that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it.”

These words apply to us as well in the times in which we live. Listen to the Lord through his word and do as it says. Be courageous because he is with us wherever we are and wherever we go.

So, hold on tightly to his hand. Selah



The Door

A solid door forbidding entrance? That depends.  
Its rugged sturdiness keeps intruders out  
and families safe inside.  
But those who hold a key in their hands  
gain entrance with ease.  
Our faith is that key that unlocks salvation’s door.  
Jesus knocks at the door of our hearts. Will we let Him in?

“Behold, I stand at the door and knock.  
If anyone hears My voice and opens the door,  
I will come into him and dine with him, and he with Me”  
Revelation 3: 20, NKJV



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.

Sudoku

Solution on page 14

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



# Berry Chapel Baptist Church

By Steve Williams  
Mitchell County

There was a man who went into the priesthood. As he went in he was told that he could only speak 2 words every 5 years. So after the 1st 5years, his two words were “BAD FOOD”. So he continued another 5 years and he was allowed to speak another 2 words, he said “HARD BED”. Then he continued for another five years and again he was allowed to speak 2 more words, This time he said: “I QUIT”. The priest said you might as well, all you’ve done is whine since you’ve been here. I doubt very seriously that any of us could go 5 days without whining little alone 5 years. Amen

Complaining just seems to come naturally. Think about it. If you are a parent did you have to teach your children how to complain to you? Did you have to teach your child to say “That’s Not Fair”? “I Don’t Like That” “You Gave Him A Bigger Piece Than Me” “I Don’t Want To Go To Bed, I’m Not Sleepy”. Did you have to teach them to complain? No, you didn’t. It comes naturally. As you look in the Bible you will see that complaining came naturally to them also. If you look in the book of Exodus and read about the children of Israel they were always complaining about something. As they left Egypt to start the journey to the promised land it wasn’t long till it started. In Chapter 16 of Exodus, they started whining about food. They were hungry and wanted food. And I know being hungry is a real need and problem. But we see that God told Moses that He would rain down bread from heaven and they could gather the Manna and they would have food to eat. God met their need but it wasn’t long till they were whining because they wanted meat, and again God gave them quail to eat. Next, we see Pharaoh come after them to bring them back to Egypt. They become scared. They were looking for a place to run to. But they were camped right up against the Red Sea and there was no place to go to get away from Pharaoh. They whined again, they cried out to Moses and said: “*Because there are no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness.*” Oh, how they whined. But the Bible tells us that Moses told the people to stand still and see the salvation of the Lord. Moses raised his rod and God divided the water and they opened up and the children of Israel walked across on dry ground. Then we see that the Egyptian’s follow after them, the waters that were being held back let go and drowned all of them. Again God had met their need.

See whining says a lot about the whiner. A person who whines is a person who is not filled with the spirit of God because they are walking in the flesh. And a person who whines is a self-centered person who is out of the will of God. Whining is wanting your will to be done not God’s. Whining is wanting your way to be done instead of God’s way being done. Please understand something. There has never been a problem solved by whining. And when you get to heaven they are not going to be giving out awards for whining. And most whiners are not going to quit whining because they think they have a valued complaint to whine about. These people did not have any reason to complain. God had delivered them out of Egypt, He had fed them manna and quail, protected them from the Egyptians, gave them water when they were thirsty, and watched over them in the day by a cloud and by night a cloud of fire. And the same goes for you if you are a child of God’s. He has delivered us from ourselves, He has covered us with His blood, and saved us from our sins. God did not need their whining but He needs their Worship and Praise and I believe that goes for us also. None of us have a right to whine. Whining was not the attitude of our Lord Jesus Christ while He was here on this earth, and it should not be the attitude of God’s people. Whining is contagious, and I don’t want any of you to be contaminated or contaminate someone else. What we need to see and understand is this. That this whole generation died in the wilderness because of their whining & disobedience. It is time to stop Whining and thank God for all that He has blessed us with. Amen


### Words Of Wisdom

- You don't make progress by standing on the sidelines, whining and complaining. You make progress by implementing ideas. N/A
- People won't have time for you if you are always whining. N/A
- The best thing is to accept the circumstances, not take them personally, deal with them, stop whining, and give everything your best. N/A
- Complaining not only ruins everybody else's day, but it also ruins the complainer's day, too. The more we complain, the more unhappy we get. N/A
- Be grateful for what you have and stop complaining - it bores everybody else, does you no good, and doesn't solve any problems. N/A

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

*Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. Romans 14:1-23*







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



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The Miraculous Plant

By Christy Lowman  
Burke County

Since Fall is right around the corner, I wanted to talk about my absolute favorite fruit to grow. Can you guess what it is? Pumpkins! I remember as a little girl, my dad used to take me to a pumpkin patch every year to pick out my favorite pumpkin. Then when I got married my husband would take me to a pumpkin patch in Nebraska. We would ride on a hayride to the patch and again I would get to pick my favorite pumpkin right off the vine. I always said when we moved back here, "I am going to have a pumpkin patch for kids to come to pick pumpkins out of." So maybe one day, I will, and you can come and visit me!

Well, this year, my family planted 2 rows of pumpkins and not a single one came up. I was disappointed because my absolutely-totally favorite thing to grow is pumpkins. Then a couple of months later a miraculous plant popped up in the middle of our yard thru a tiny hole in a piece of lattice panel we had bought to put up under our deck. This miraculous plant was a pumpkin! I was ecstatic!

This plant reminded me of how God uses us to tell others about Jesus. We "plant seeds" so to speak. These seeds may not grow the first time or maybe not even the next few times they are planted. But eventually, when the time is right, God will water the seeds that we have planted and that person will become a believer. In my case, the pumpkin seeds I planted didn't come up at all but in return I had one come up from one we had accidentally dropped last Fall when my kids carved pumpkins for Halloween. It laid dormant for months then it came up all on its own. So even when you don't think people are listening and watching they are. You are planting seeds when you aren't even trying to. That's why it's so important to always try to act like Jesus would.

So eventually, if we keep telling others about Jesus, and then maybe another person tells them (it might take some time) but eventually, they are going to want to get to know Jesus personally too! So keep planting those seeds in others, and when the time is right God will make them into plants!

*"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."* Mark 16:15 KJV

Dear Lord, help us tell everybody we see about You. Sometimes it's hard, we might get shy or nervous but instead, we ask You, Lord, to make us bold and courageous when we talk about You. Dear Lord, please help us to act like Jesus would around others, (when they are watching and when they are not). Help them only see You when they are looking at us! In Jesus's name, I pray. Amen.

Christy Lowman is a Christian author and illustrator that lives in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains with her husband and two children. She enjoys writing and illustrating books for all ages. Some of her short stories are published with Guideposts and HCI.. Christy gives all the glory to God in everything she does. A portion of every book sold from the Small Bible Character Series will be donated to battle human trafficking. You can buy her books at [https://www.amazon.com/s/ref=dp\\_byline\\_sr\\_book\\_1?ie=UTF8&field-author=Christy+Lowman&search-alias=books&text=Christy+Lowman&sort=relevancerank](https://www.amazon.com/s/ref=dp_byline_sr_book_1?ie=UTF8&field-author=Christy+Lowman&search-alias=books&text=Christy+Lowman&sort=relevancerank). You can reach her at <https://www.facebook.com/authorChristyLowman/> or [christyssoaps@yahoo.com](mailto:christyssoaps@yahoo.com).



The Completeness and Personal Of Jesus

By John McCoury  
Roan Mountain, Tennessee

*"Jesus answered I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* John 14:6

Jesus made this statement to the disciples to bring to their attention something that they knew but hadn't realized they knew. He said to them, You know the place where I am going. And Thomas said to Him, Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way? Jesus said that they did know. But they didn't know that they knew. Jesus said I am the way and the truth and the life. That's what I meant, Thomas. You know me; therefore, you know the way. For I am the way. This unique claim of Jesus reveals the grandeur of His character and being! There is the inclusiveness of this statement--it all relates to the Father. I am the way to the Father, He says. If you come to know Jesus, He will bring you to God.

When I began my Christian life as a boy, my awareness of the one with whom I was dealing was the Lord Jesus. How I loved the hymns about the cross and work of Christ, and I loved to think about Him as the Savior. But gradually the Father has come into focus. More frequently my thoughts are drawn to the fatherhood of God, and I revel in the glory of that relationship. Jesus says that He is the way to the Father. All the knowledge of God that we humans hunger for is revealed in the words of Jesus about the Father. He unveils the Father's heart--His power, His wisdom, and His love. This fully meets human needs. He is the way, so that the human will may choose it; He is the truth, so that the mind may comprehend it; He is the life so that the human heart can experience it. Thus, to know Christ involves the whole person and leads to the full experience of the fullness of God. But note also the exclusiveness of His claim: No one comes to the Father except through me. Occasionally someone will say, You Christians are so narrow. Why do you insist that Jesus is the only way you can come to God? Other religions are striving to know the same God, and other religions are more tolerant. That is true; we are narrow. On that point Jesus Himself was narrow, and we dare not go beyond what He said, because truth itself is narrow. The telephone company is narrow. If you want to call someone, the phone company insists that you use a certain series of numbers in exactly the proper sequence, and it leaves absolutely no room for you to play around. It is utterly narrow-minded on that point! Truth is that way. Jesus is the fulfillment of His own word: *"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."* (Matthew 7:13-14). Others may teach about God. They may say that they teach the truth and seek the life. But only Jesus says I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life. Lord Jesus, You are the way to the Father. Thank You for showing me that, and thank You for inviting me to share in the fullness of His truth and life. Is there more than one way to come to God? What do you think we must do to find God?



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



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Lean on Him

By Tim Tron  
Burke County

Driving in the predawn hours along the winding road that leads through the mountains, the cold gray light of dawn ages everything. Outbuildings and barns appear centuries old, if not close to it in reality. Then the aged fence row, that corner where the rusted barbed-wire is intertwined with honeysuckle vines, comes into view. The wood of the posts, rough-hewn from trees long forgotten, now cracks long furrowed brows of age, leaning one against the other for bracing or sheer moral support. To the passerby, the entirety of the corner is a jumble of vines, rusty wire, and weathered wood. But if one were to stop and breathe in the scene, they would find something much more profound. Having sweated and bled over many a length of ancient wire such as this in my farming days, corners like this one were all too familiar. There, in that forgotten end of the pasture, a strength from nature's own would begin to recompense into another form – honeysuckle and briars would interweave themselves into that ancient wood making a formidable foe, one relying upon the other for support. In this scene of decay and unfettered growth, one could find a sense of need, a feeling of caring for those that need us to be there for them, day in and day out.

As the campus begins to breathe new life, students returning with parents in tow, each seeking a new future, there again is that feeling – a dependency of need, one for the other. Yet, beyond that wild vine growing unabated, there is the aged support. We can all look in the mirror and realize we aren't the spring chicken we once were. Those lines, those furrowed brows tell a story of worry and woe, some far greater than others. Although they show signs of wear, even if there is strength in their core, the façade is one that we cannot deny. No amount of makeup or plastic surgery can dismiss the truth. Time does not lie. So, as the youth's vibrancy evolves from a sleeping landscape into a living being, those with memories of yore become the support for those entering this new world.

In the eyes of the young, thoughts of gray hair and being old are only distant shores, places to cross in some far-off future. For now, they are immortal in their youthful minds. To mention the mere thought of eternity or mortality becomes simply a nuance, a fairytale from whence more exuberant adventure stories can evolve. For in their gaming worlds, you might die, but you quickly regenerate, return to life once again through some superpower. Unlike those weathered locust posts on our fence line, whose demise is slow but perpetual, the young adult only knows of a never-ending repeating cycle of death and regeneration in their make-believe worlds of social media and online games. Their bodies try to mimic this feat, with some pushing the boundaries beyond what is mortal. In the end, their fate can be predicted by those who recognize such patterns of ill-advised decisions. Yet, for one to believe, one must almost always find out first-hand.

As Jesus spoke to his disciples, they listened and heard every word. Yet, again, for one to believe, sometimes a person must feel the pain of reality before learning sinks in. But like those unruly briars, those disciples' paths were not retaining the preaching of the Christ, but rather, went off into directions that were inconsequential, of no use. It wasn't until that day when their leader finally hung on an aged, weathered cross, its furrows deep from years of persisting in the elements, now filling with the blood of Christ. Like the veins of a new being, the wood comes alive as the slain Savior above slowly dies a painful death. His life ebbs as the tree now part of an unbelievable, unfathomable, cataclysmic event unfolds before the eyes of the multitude of haters. Those who persecuted Jesus could not understand how God could come to earth in the flesh as a man. God incarnate was against their law. They despised him from the beginning and sought to take his life only because he spoke the truth. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not."

As those disciples watched in horror as their Savior, the Son of God, died on the cross, they felt their support slowly eroding, being torn from their grasp. It was too late to turn back and rescind any doubts. It was too late to take back those moments when they questioned his deity. As the bracing of that ancient corner of the pasture was being ripped out, those sweet-smelling vines shredded from the grasp of that olden wood; likewise, their hearts wept bitter tears of pain as his leaving was becoming a reality.

In the darkest, coldest, bitter nights on a college campus in the lonely corner of a dormitory, often near the latter stages of a semester, students begin to realize how they had mistaken that loving support of their parents or caretakers. Those helpful suggestions from that caring professor come back to haunt them as they face the magnitude of their decisions. Suddenly gone are all those bravado moments of fleeting joy, the inescapable memories of ridiculous expectations of what they thought they were in the light of what they really would become. Those pleasures of the flesh have vanished, and with them, their supposed friends.

So too, those disciples began to retrace all the words which Jesus had said to them. Those many parables and warnings of his imminent death suddenly roared back like a tidal wave of humility and soul-sucking regret until they ran from the scene of Golgotha. Their hearts were breaking as their chests pounded from lack of oxygen, racing down the mountain hoping to flee all that had transpired. But too soon, as do those students who come to college for all the wrong reasons, all find that there is a day of reckoning.

But Jesus told his followers that even though he would leave them, he would send a comforter. *"And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever."*



As those students often forget, when they leave home, they sometimes try to leave everything, including all they had been taught in growing up, there is an answer to their darkness. Like those disciples that ran and hid, there would be an answer. Although it wouldn't be there the following day, the answer would begin to manifest itself three days later when Christ would arise from the dead. However, it wasn't until he ascended to heaven that what he had predicted came true. For there in that upper room in Jerusalem where they hid from authorities, they finally received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Christ had finally been glorified, the mission had been completed, and now, the Comforter had been sent to be with them until their dying days.

Likewise, those who find darkness overpowering their world don't have to give up. While their academic or perceived future may have to be redirected or cut short, it is not the end. Those dark, lonely nights when the realization hits home, it is then that we pray somewhere, somehow, they either remember those lessons learned from their childhood in Sunday School, or that somehow, they have heard there is hope in Christ Jesus. Although it may seem as if life is over when those grades begin to slip and those grandiose aspirations begin to fade, all is not lost. There is something much more precious in life that awaits if only we seek it. For God doesn't make us love him but instead wants us to choose him. It is our option, not our mandate. We can carry on living our lives trying to make it on our own, but in the end, we can never work our way into heaven. It is by God's grace that we don't receive what we are due, an eternity in hell. It is by His saving Grace, through the sacrifice of the blood of the pure lamb of God, his only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, that we can have the hope of life eternal.

For now, the fence row sits in the shadow of the mountain. That corner continues to stand as the ivy and honeysuckle continue to weave their network of hope around those ancient weathered beams of support. Like the threads of our existence, that rusted wire slowly erodes, but together, wire, wood, and vine continue to withstand the forces of this world as long as possible. We become like that aged, weathered fence post. While our own strength declines, the vines, like God's hands, wrap around us and renew our vigor. "He must increase that I may decrease," declared John the Baptist. Let us learn to lean on him all the more.

The bend of the fence row stood long before my time and will likely continue to do so long after I'm gone. We are only here for a brief moment in time when compared to eternity. It is up to us to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. For as old as the story may be, its truth is more vital today than ever before, for it is not of our own hopes and desires but comes from the ultimate woven being, God, the Father, and the Holy Spirit.

Seek God, search him with all your heart, and you will find Him. Knock, and the door shall be opened. For it is by His saving grace that we have the hope of life eternal.

Thanks be to God.

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





# YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

## NC Senate District 47



Sen. Ralph Hise  
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919-733-3460

In mid-August, the North Carolina state Senate rejected the House's two-year budget proposal. Now, both the House and the Senate will enter formal negotiations to decide how to fund our state's top priorities.

Some of those major decisions we have to make include broadband expansion, flood mitigation and prevention, wastewater and stormwater projects, critical infrastructure funding, capital projects for our universities and community colleges, and the amount we reserve in the State's rainy day fund.

On top of that, the state of North Carolina took in record tax receipts last year during a global pandemic when many businesses and individuals were hit financially. I believe the State should be returning those over collections back to the taxpayers, which is why the Senate budget also proposed to lower the State personal income tax rate from 5.25% to 3.99% by 2026.

In June, Senate Leader Phil Berger said, "A decade of responsible budgets and growth-oriented tax policy has North Carolina in the best fiscal shape in a generation. This surplus came largely out of the pockets of North Carolina citizens and they deserve to see some of it returned to them."

I absolutely agree. The State has budgeted responsibly since Republicans have been in charge and I believe we should be returning excess tax revenue back to the taxpayers. Unfortunately, the House's budget doesn't go far enough in this regard, only cutting the personal income tax rate to 4.99%.

Now, however, the General Assembly will go into a joint Conference Committee between both chambers to rectify the differences in our budget proposals. Gov. Roy Cooper, who will have to sign off on any deal we reach, has already said he wants to participate in negotiations. While the Governor has been critical of both budget proposals and of our tax package as a whole, you can be sure I will continue fighting for a tax code that fosters economic growth and lets you keep more of your hard-earned paycheck.

Senator Ralph Hise serves as the Deputy President Pro Tempore in the North Carolina Senate representing Mitchell, Madison, McDowell, Polk, Rutherford, and Yancey counties.

## NC House District 86



Rep. Hugh Blackwell  
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Hugh.Blackwell@ncleg.net

Amid the controversy surrounding the COVID vaccine, you should know that the NC House and Senate both gave final approval to a bill requiring written parental permission for children under 18 to be given a vaccine by a healthcare provider if the vaccine is only authorized by the federal Food and Drug Administration under emergency use. At present, this provision would apply to coronavirus vaccines. We will learn in the next few days if Governor Cooper will sign the bill so that it can become law rather than being vetoed by him.

On the state budget front, on August 11, the NC House passed its version of a two-year budget. Earlier, the NC Senate separately passed its own budget version. Both budget versions now will go to a joint conference to hammer out differences and produce a single budget to submit to the Governor, hoping that he will sign it. Governor Cooper vetoed the last two budgets we sent him. I believe the new budget that we send him will contain much good for improving education, internet connectivity, healthcare, and infrastructure, across North Carolina, as well as in responding appropriately to continuing coronavirus challenges. I surely hope we will not find ourselves faced with yet another veto.

Also, of interest to many of you, in the House budget, we continue the legislature's decade-long commitment to keeping North Carolina on a fiscally responsible course. The House budget, while including substantial increases to meet spending needs across the state, continues to reduce the state tax burden on NC citizens. For example, the House budget proposes the North Carolina personal income tax rate go down again, this time from 5.25% to 4.99%. In addition, yet again, the standard deduction is increased from \$21,500 to \$25,500 for married couples filing jointly and for single filers, the standard deduction is raised from \$10,750 to \$12,750. All in all, I think it is a good balance between meeting state needs and lowering taxes that in turn has spurred our state's economy towards recovery and continued growth.

## NC House District 85



NC Commissioner of Labor  
Josh Dobson  
1-800-625-2267

I hope you're having a wonderful summer, enjoying the longer days and perhaps some time away. Along with summer fun comes hot and humid weather. Please remember to stay safe in the heat and be aware of the signs and symptoms of heat stress. For more information about heat illness awareness and prevention, including training programs offered by our Education, Training, and Technical Assistance Bureau, see the contact information at the end of this column.

Last month, the N.C. Department of Labor (NCDOL) adopted verbatim the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration's COVID-19 Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) for Healthcare. The ETS became effective in North Carolina on July 21, 2021. I encourage you to contact my department for more information about the ETS or visit our website to locate helpful resources for employers and workers.

In June, I had the privilege of visiting two long-time Carolina Star Sites in Columbus County. International Paper's Cape Fear Woodyard has been a Star site since 1998, while West Frasier has participated in the program since 2003. Earlier this year, I also had the chance to visit American Emergency Vehicles in Ashe County, which is another longtime Carolina Star Site. I really enjoyed touring the facilities, meeting staff, and learning more about the worksites. The Carolina Star is the highest safety recognition achievement awarded by the department.

Over the next several months, my calendar is full of safety award banquets and county fairs. I'm excited to personally recognize the numerous businesses that qualified for awards this year. See our website for the complete banquet schedule. I'm also eager to visit many of our community fairs which kick off in August and run through early November. Our Elevator and Amusement Device Bureau inspectors work tirelessly throughout the fall to ensure rides at the fairs are safe for everyone.

For more information about the events above, or anything else related to NCDOL, please visit our website at [www.labor.nc.gov](http://www.labor.nc.gov) or call our toll-free phone number, 800-625-2267.

Enjoy the remaining days of summer and stay safe and cool!

*God Bless America*



# YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

## NC House District 11



Rep. Madison Cawthorn  
828-808-2148

I wanted to provide a little more insight on what my team and I have been up to in both Washington D.C. and NC-11. From Washington:

This week, my team and I were busier than ever. Over the last seven days, my office proposed several pieces of legislation, introduced a resolution condemning antisemitism, and sent letters to leaders across our government stressing accountability. We are proud to showcase our commitment to having your voices heard.

Just this week, I introduced the “No Fly for Illegals Act” onto the House Floor in direct response to the growing crisis at our southern border and the influx of calls we have received from you expressing your concerns. This bill would cease all use of federal funds from being used to compensate an airline for transporting an alien for the purpose of the alien’s entry into or relocation within, the United States if the presence of such alien in the United States is unlawful.

Many among you also expressed deep concerns regarding the door-to-door vaccine initiative heralded by the Biden Administration and the repercussions this bill might have on your privacy rights. As a response, I was proud to introduce the “Don’t Knock on my Door Act”. This bill prohibits our taxpayer dollars from being used to go door-to-door or to a place of work to solicit the vaccine. I am a firm believer that your vaccination status is your business and yours alone.

One of my main priorities as your representative has been to advocate for the many veterans that reside in our district and have so faithfully served our country. In keeping with this, I am proud to share that I co-sponsored the “Veterans in Parks Act” which provides veterans and Gold Star families “free lifetime access to national parks and public federal lands and give active-duty military free annual passes.” To our brave veterans, I say this -though we may not all understand what you have undergone, we are here to support your mental and physical wellbeing.

I was also pleased to further support our veterans by introducing the “Military Spouse Tax Act”. This bill allows the spouse of a service member to keep their home domicile for state income tax purposes if they choose. I believe this legislation will help secure financial stability for our military families while eliminating red tape. I want our military families and spouses to know that their own sacrifices are seen and honored.

In addition to supporting those who serve in our armed forces, I will continue to back our men and women in blue. This past week, I was honored to co-sponsor the Empowering Law Enforcement Act. This bill would grant state and local law enforcement “inherent immigration enforcement authority to investigate, identify, apprehend, arrest, detain or transfer a migrant that has entered the U.S. illegally”. The crisis at our southern border is no longer contained to that region, it is not abating, and it is not receiving the attention it desperately needs. As a result, our communities need all the support they can receive.

It is no secret that our nation has seen an uptick in violent, Anti-Semitic rhetoric over the last year. In response to a pressing conversation I had with leaders of the Jewish community in NC-11, I was proud to put forth a Resolution before the House against the “malignant and metastasizing ideology of anti-Semitism.” As I have stated previously, there is no place for hate in America, especially not hatred based on one’s faith or ethnicity. It is our duty as Americans to strive for peaceful unity and appreciate our Jewish neighbors and friends.

This week, my team and I were glad to be able to join many of my colleagues in expressing our deep concern over several instances of government overreach, irresponsibility, and lack of sufficient action.

This administration has made it abundantly clear that blatant censorship is not only permissible but encouraged, especially as it relates to conservative voices. As a result, I was proud to come alongside several of my colleagues in writing directly to President Biden, regarding his administration’s coordination with Big Tech and its direct attempts to pressure private companies into censoring free speech. Our First Amendment rights are under attack from those who are under the impression that disagreement inherently implies a malevolent attempt at sowing misinformation. This is not the case, and I will continue to push back against this narrative.

Additionally, I was proud to join Congressman Fred Keller in writing to the National Institute for Health demanding an answer for the agency’s use of taxpayer dollars invested in foreign animal research, especially as it relates to projects which have placed our nation’s national security and health at risk. The taxpayers deserve transparency and information on where their money is going and how it is being spent.

In response to a lack of clarity from Secretary Mayorkas’ Department of Homeland Security, I led a letter this past week urging that he make public critical SEVP data from 2020, as has been done in years past. This data provides critical insight into foreign nationals and their employment within our country under the OPT (Optional Practical Training) program. Without this information, we will continue to see fraudulent employment continue to abuse our generous immigration system, an issue which, if it remains unchecked, will only continue to pose a threat to our national security.

I was also proud to join my Republican colleagues in the NC delegation in writing, once again, to Secretary of State Antony Blinken. As I mentioned in my last newsletter, I know many of you within the district are experiencing exaggerated wait times with passport issues, renewals, and VISA applications. This backlog is not acceptable and is causing unnecessary disruptions for many. I hear your calls, and I am continuing to push that these delays be properly addressed.

## NC Senate District 46



Sen. Warren Daniel  
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919-715-7823

I hope everyone has had a good summer. I know that there have been some recent challenges in our area with weather events, causing road and property damage, and I appreciate the efforts of those who have been involved in the challenges of repair, rescue, and recovery. If you have specific concerns about storm damages, please let

my office know about them.

This month, I wanted to highlight some important bills that have recently passed the General Assembly and were vetoed by Governor Cooper, as well as a couple of bills that I expect to be on the Governor’s desk soon. First, HB453, the Human Life Nondiscrimination Act/No Eugenics, was a pro-life bill that would make it illegal to perform an abortion based on the race of the unborn child. Current law prohibits sex-selection abortions, and this bill would have added race as a prohibited category. Unfortunately, Governor Cooper is deeply opposed to any bill that protects unborn lives from abortionists and has vetoed the bill.

Another bill that died on the Governor’s desk was a bill I have worked on for several sessions, Protect Religious Meeting Places SB43. This bill would authorize churches that also operate private schools to allow their members, or their security team, to carry concealed handguns during church services to protect the congregation. Currently, this practice is allowed in churches without school facilities. S43 would’ve allowed concealed carry in all churches, so long as no school activities were being held, and only with the permission of the church leadership. Governor Cooper vetoed the bill, essentially claiming that any legislation that involves guns and uses the word “school” must be bad.

Now for a couple of bills that should be on the Governor’s desk soon. The first, HB324, Ensuring Dignity & Nondiscrimination/ Schools received bipartisan support in the House and was passed on August 26 by the Senate. The bill intends to ensure that no race or sex is being promoted as inherently superior to another race or sex in our public schools. The bill is in response to the concerns of many thousands of parents across our state who are concerned about the Critical Race Theory ideology that is popping up across the state. Lt. Gov. Robinson, North Carolina’s first black lieutenant governor, has been leading the charge against CRT, and in favor of HB324.

Finally, my office continues to receive calls about hospital patient visitation issues and SB191, the No Patient Left Alone Act. This bill would require hospitals, adult care homes, and hospice homes to follow all federal visitation and patient rights guidelines or face financial penalties. The General Assembly is in the final stages of passing this bill, and I expect it to be on the Governor’s desk by Labor Day.

These are just a few highlights of the important bills that the General Assembly has been working on. If other issues are important to you, please don’t hesitate to contact my office.



Praying for Healings

By Kurt Bomar  
Avery County

Have you ever been around someone who had a bad headache and you said “let me pray for you brother/sister?” Then we say “Lord I claim healing for my friend, I plead the blood of Jesus over him, and in His name, I command the headache to go away”. That’s an easy prayer. What’s the worst that can happen? The headache doesn’t go away. So what?



Now, what if they have stage four-pancreatic cancer. Do we pray the same prayer for healing? I think our prayer would sound more like “Lord, if it’s your will, please heal my friend of his cancer, nevertheless, your will be done” Does that sound familiar? Why do we pray so boldly when the malady is minor, and so timidly when it’s severe? It’s simple, we’re afraid that if they aren’t healed we’ll look bad.

This brings to mind Chron. 19:11 “ *Be of good courage, and let us behave ourselves valiantly for our people, and for the cities of our God: and let the LORD do that which is good in his sight.* ”

These men were armed, trained to do battle- but they realized the results would have to be left to the Lord. They did what they could, but realized only the Lord could bring about ultimate victory.

We need to have the same attitude when we pray for the sick. I fear our reluctance to pray for the sick because we’re worried that they won’t be healed can be a missed opportunity for God to do a mighty miracle.

If you say to someone “let me pray for you” and you pray the prayer of faith and seek the Lord, you will have done what you can do and what we are encouraged to do in the Scriptures. We simply trust in God and “let the Lord do that which is good in his sight”. The truth of the matter is that they will always be healed, either supernaturally now, or upon their entrance into Heaven.

If they are healed, Great! It’s a cause for celebration. If they are not, it is still pleasing in the sight of the Lord, and a bold prayer will always be appreciated by the person for whom you pray.

Pray for each other, dear saints. And don’t let fear quench your desire or your aggressiveness in prayer.

Selah (think about it)

Kurt Bomar is pastor of Walnut Grove Church.

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Be Alarmed!

By Angie Gryder Gregg, NCBAM West Regional Director



How old are your smoke alarms?  
We know we are supposed to check our smoke alarms every month by pushing the test button and we know to replace the battery every year. But did you know that most alarms have a life span of only 8-10 years? After this time, the entire unit should be replaced. Most alarms have the date of manufacture inside the unit. If you cannot find the date, replace it. Smoke alarms do not come in shades of yellow so if yours is yellow, it’s most likely well over 10 years old.

Through a FEMA Fire and Safety Prevention grant, NC Baptist Aging Ministry (BAM) can provide free smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms for homes of adults 65+. (Call NCBAM at 877.506.2226 if you need smoke alarms.) The Smoke Alarm Ministry is a great way for churches to keep senior adults safe and build relationships to share the Gospel.

June of this year, 15 youths and volunteers from the French Broad Baptist Church participated in a Smoke Alarm Ministry. The event was designed to install smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms in senior adults’ homes that were lacking proper systems. The church partnered with the Mills River Volunteer Fire Department. The church youth-created teams with youth leaders and fire department personnel and knocked on senior adults’ homes asking if they needed their alarms checked. During the visit, the teams would test existing alarms, install alarms where there were none, replace alarms that were over 10 years old and invite the resident to church.

That day, 58 alarms were installed. “We would never be able to reach as many homes as we did without this partnership,” said Firefighter Jeanne Woods with the Mills River Fire Dept.

That day 32 homes of senior adults were visited and shown God’s love. One team was welcomed by a 98-year-old war veteran. He chatted it up with the team and although he needed new smoke alarms, he needed company and listening ears even more. It was such a loving example of how God used the Smoke Alarm Ministry to open doors far beyond needs for just smoke alarms.

“Your community will know that you are Jesus’ disciples by how you have a love for one another” (John 13:35).

In preparation for Fire Prevention Month, NCBAM is providing virtual training to explain the Smoke Alarm Ministry, provide necessary training, and share how to obtain free alarms on Tuesday, Sept 21 at 10-11 am. Churches desiring to use the Smoke Alarm Ministry as an opportunity to serve can sign up for the free virtual training at ncbam.org/events.

Angie Gryder Gregg is the Central Western Director with NC Baptist Aging Ministry. She came to NCBAM after serving 30 years in the Fire Service with Blowing Rock Fire Dept, and NC Office of State Fire Marshal.

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# Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

## The Feast of Trumpets

By Caron Cline  
Burke County

In the book of Leviticus, God established 7 yearly feasts for Israel to celebrate. These 7 are grouped by 4 and 3. The first four feasts are Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, and Pentecost. We know that Jesus Christ, the Messiah, has already fulfilled those feasts. Jesus came into the world as the Passover Lamb who would be the perfect sacrifice for our sins. All who place their faith in Him as Lord and Savior are covered by His blood forever. Jesus was without sin, or leaven, therefore, He was an acceptable sacrifice to God for the sins of the world. Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day which was the Feast of First Fruits. 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 promises that *‘Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep’*. The Feast of Pentecost is the last of the first four feasts and was the day that the Holy Spirit filled those who were waiting for the power to come upon them, as Jesus had commanded. The coming of the Holy Spirit was a direct fulfillment of Jesus’ promise to His followers shortly before His arrest and crucifixion. He promised that when He departed and returned to heaven, His Father would send the Holy Spirit to be in them and with them. These four feasts have been fulfilled through the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ.

The last three feasts, Feast of Trumpets, The Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles, have yet to be fulfilled prophetically. This brings us to the Feast of Trumpets, the next feast on the prophetic calendar which is a celebration of the end of the agricultural year. The feast will be observed this year from sundown on September 6 until sundown on September 8 and is always announced by the sounding of trumpets, or shofars. Many scholars associate the Feast of Trumpets with the Rapture of the Church based on Paul’s description in 1 Thessalonians 4. A day is coming when *‘Jesus will step out from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ will rise. Immediately, those who are alive and remain will also be caught up (raptured) with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air’*. Remember, this feast is a celebration of the end of the agricultural year. For over 2000 years, Jesus’ commission to go into all the world and preach the gospel has continued. The seed of God’s word has been sown in the fields of many hearts. Sadly, some seed has fallen on hard paths, some on rocky paths, and some among thorns. The seed is always perfect and our only responsibility is to sow that seed in the lives of as many people as possible. In Matthew 24:14 Jesus stated emphatically: *“This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come”*. The Lord desires that none perish but that all come to the knowledge of the Savior. However, only those who receive the Seed of the Word and bear fruit will be saved. Prophecy is being fulfilled daily and the signs of the seasons point to the soon return of Christ. The time of sowing will be over; the agricultural season will end. Could it be in 2021? Who knows? But, at the appointed time, the trumpet will sound ...’ and so we will be with the Lord forever! Encourage one another with these words!’

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.



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And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. John 4:36



Patience is a Virtue

By Christy Young  
Mitchell County



On any given day, we will encounter frustrating people and situations. Sometimes at work, home, and even church. Oftentimes we feel like lashing out, but God wants us to stay calm and patient. Patience is a hard act to develop and does not happen overnight (unfortunately). 1 Thessalonians 5:14 says, *“Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.”* God urges us to be tolerant, kind, and bear each other’s burdens. In today’s society, it is very hard to react with patience and kindness. We are living in a world that is in complete turmoil and intolerant of each other’s values and convictions. Patience is one of the spiritual fruits and can calm or delay adversity around us. Instead of allowing frustrating people to stir us up, we need to react peacefully and patiently therefore, shining the presence of God in our situations. Our thoughts, our emotions, and our speech should be reflective of God. Our mind (thoughts) should dwell upon the promises of our Heavenly Father and the gift of salvation freely granted to us. His spirit will help keep our perspective and heart right. Emotions (negative feelings) will often guide our reactions. When we are emotionally drained and discouraged we tend to act on impulse rather than patience. In those situations, we must pause and ask the Holy Spirit to guide our actions and reactions. Our speech (tongue) can be our most dangerous weapon. Psalms 64:3 says, *“Who whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words.”* Having self-control and being slow and patient to speak can be great attributes. Our words and actions define us as Christians. Strive to be unprovoked and ask God to speak His words through you (in His time) and refrain from getting in the flesh. Proverbs 15:18, *“A wrathful man stirreth up strife, but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife.”* I confess that the past month has been challenging. I am struggling to be patient and understand God’s will in my life. It is easy to get frustrated and let your thoughts and emotions guide you into a dark and unfavorable place. Nevertheless, I realize that God has ordained me to live through this appointed time and allowed me to face the circumstances of my surroundings. My prayer is that I can be patient, seek His wisdom, and be pleasing to my Savior, Jesus Christ. Let us all strive to be patient and obedient to the calling that the Lord has upon our lives. Philippians 1:6 says, *“Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”* Patience is a virtue that carries a lot of WAIT!

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

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Continental Makes A Donation  
For High Schools Tech Programs

By Cheryl Shuffler  
Burke County



When Burke County TSA (Technical Student Associations) students next compete at the state level they will do so under the corporate sponsorship of Continental. Continental has donated \$3,900 to support high school engineering students and TSA, which is active at Patton, East Burke, and Freedom high schools.

While the TSAs are growing in popularity in the high schools, Patton’s TSA has been successful in regional and state competitions, including the 42nd Annual NCTSA State Conference in April and Regionals in March.

Patton’s chapter won the Small CAP New Chapter of the Year award at state this year and Patton teacher Clay Nelson received the Youth Educator Award. Last year an all-girls team placed first in the state in Biotechnology Design and another all-girls team placed third place in Board Game Design. Following this year’s second-place finish in 3D CAD Engineering, Hailey S. will go on to compete nationally.

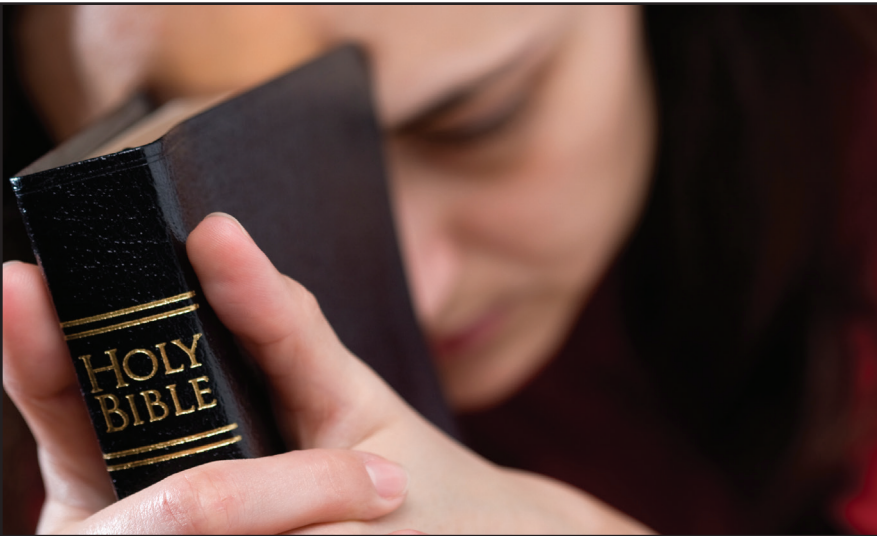
This year’s competitions were held virtually but future competitions are expected to be face-to-face and state competitions require a two-night stay in Raleigh. While CTE funding covers transportation costs of students to and from competitions and costs for the teacher advisors, other funding has to come from parents or creative fundraisers. Continental’s support will lift the burden on families and hopefully make it possible for more students to compete.

Burke County Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Mike Swan said, “The enthusiasm and accomplishments at these events are crucial to growing STEM students into STEM career adults. Continental’s financial support is immeasurable. We are grateful to call Continental the corporate sponsor of TSA.”

In addition to Continental, Leviton and Case Farms sponsor Patton’s TSA.



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



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# A Pastor's View

## "4 Things That Won't Save You — and 1 That Will!"

By Shawn Thomas  
Angleton, Texas



In olden times, they believed in “bleeding” a person to get the illness out of them. Of course, that often had the opposite effect and made the person much worse. Sometimes when I’m reading I’ll encounter a scenario where a doctor is going to “bleed” someone, and I want to say: “Don’t do that! That won’t save them!”

The same thing is true in the spiritual world. You see people do certain things they think will make them right with God and get them to heaven, but you want to say, “Don’t do that! That won’t save you!” That is basically what Paul does in Philippians 3. He lists some “good works” and attainments in his life — things that many people in his generation thought would save them — but that he knew would NOT get them to heaven. Basically, he lists there “Four things that won’t save you” — and one that will!

I. First he says: Your Religious Rituals won’t save you.

Paul said in 5 he was “*circumcised the 8th day*”. Circumcision was the great Jewish ritual. But Paul included circumcision in this list of things that would NOT save. But circumcision is just one example; the PRINCIPLE is that no religious ritual will save us:

— Islam has “5 pillars” of the faith: rituals they believe will help them attain Paradise.

— Many Christians put their trust in “rituals”: baptism, the Lord’s Supper, confirmation; even the “informal Baptist ritual” of “going down to the front” of the church at the invitation! Some of these are legitimate and Biblical, but if we put our trust that these rituals will save us, we will be disappointed. NO outward ritual that we can perform on our physical body can save us. Salvation is of the HEART. Outward, physical religious rituals cannot save.

II: Your Background & Heritage Won’t Save You

Paul said he was “of the nation of Israel” — but he said that didn’t save him. And our background and heritage will not save us, either — whatever it is!

A documentary showed how they were trying to discover the location of the Lost Ark of the Covenant. In the process, the narrator visited many villages and churches in Ethiopia. At one church he was asked: “Are you a Christian?” (only Christians could enter). The narrator said, “Of course I’m a Christian; I’m British!” I couldn’t believe what I was hearing! Being British doesn’t make you a Christian!

And neither does being an American! Jesus said, “*You must be born again.*” Each person must individually repent of their personal sins, and put their trust in Jesus as their Lord & Savior, to be saved. It doesn’t matter what your nationality or your family background is. It must be personal.

Even as a pastor, my faith won’t save my children or grandchildren. Each person must put their own faith in Jesus to be saved.

I hope you realize that your heritage will not save YOU either. You may be a red-blooded, flag-waving, gun-toting, Trump-voting, Lone Star Texan American whose ancestors were all pastors and deacons — but all that does not make YOU a Christian in your heart! You must put YOUR OWN faith in Jesus as YOUR Lord & Savior. Your background and religious heritage won’t save you!

III: Your Religious Works Won’t Save You

Paul says, “*As to the Law, (he was) A Pharisee ...*”. The Pharisees were a religious group that believed their works would save them. But Romans 3:20 says: “*by the works of the Law, NO flesh will be justified in His sight.*” Good works and religious deeds cannot save you.

This may be the most misunderstood thing about salvation. Most people think, and most religions teach, that good works will make one right with God.

J. Edwin Orr was a military chaplain, and he spoke with a man who said he thought that if we just always did our best, that was good enough to save us. Orr said to him: “Very well, if doing your best is all that is required for your salvation, do you always do your best?” The man admitted he did NOT. “Then,” (Orr said) “you are disqualified, according to you!” (J. Edwin Orr, *The Faith That Persuades*, p. 98)

See, that’s the problem; that’s why so many people are worried about dying. That’s why so many people are always anxious about their salvation. Because we all know deep down in our hearts that we can never do enough to cover our sins and earn a place in heaven. The Bible confirms that: your religious works can’t save you.

IV. Your Sincere Intentions Won’t Save You

Paul said, “as to zeal, a persecutor of the church.” “Zeal” here means “eagerness, enthusiasm.” You can be very zealous about your religion — but that won’t save you either.

Paul said in Romans 10:2: “*For I testify about them that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.*” These folks were zealous — but their zeal was misplaced. They were “sincere,” but they were sincerely wrong!

Many today say something like, “*I think as long as you’re sincere in your religion, you’ll be ok.*” But the Bible says that’s not true. Jesus said in John 14:6 “I am the way, the truth, the life, and no one comes to the Father except through Me.” The Bible clearly teaches that there is ONE way of salvation, and that way is through Jesus. Any other way is false. The wrong medicine that you take with all sincerity is still the wrong medicine, and it will NOT save you. And the wrong religion you practice with all sincerity will not save you either. Your sincere intentions will not save you.

V. So those 4 things won’t save you

Paul said, But ONE thing will: “Christ.” God made us all to know Him and to live with Him in heaven forever, but we sinned against Him. And all our rituals, heritage, work, and zeal can’t atone for our sins. Only ONE thing can: the blood that Jesus shed on the cross for us. The Bible says we are saved by repenting of our sins and putting our faith in Jesus, and what He did, alone. Jesus alone is enough.

A book, “Final Chapters” describes how many famous authors died. One was Oscar Wilde, who was involved in immorality, homosexuality, prostitution, drugs, and he died young. But a priest claims he was called to Wilde’s bedside as he lay dying, and that Wilde had a “bedside conversion” at the end. I don’t know if Wilde did that or not, but IF he did — then Oscar Wilde was saved, and this day, like the thief on the cross, despite his profligate and profane life, he is in Paradise!

Someone may say, “Really? This man who lived such a life, but on his death bed repents, with no works; rituals; nothing — he just gets Christ and is saved?! Could that possibly be right?”

See, this is the whole thing. And let me re-emphasize: I DO NOT KNOW if Oscar Wilde truly did this in his heart or not. But if he did truly repent of his sins and trusted Jesus as his Savior, he didn’t need baptism; he didn’t need rituals; he didn’t need a whole life of good works — all he needed was faith in Jesus to be saved!

And if you can’t understand how Oscar Wilde could be saved without any of those things, then I wonder if you really understand how YOU are saved either. Because if you are saved, it is not because you have any of those things; it is through faith in Jesus Christ and Jesus ALONE! JESUS IS ALL YOU NEED TO BE SAVED!

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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# Crossword

Crossword 270 and Solution  
ACROSS  
1 Call me not Naomi, call me \_\_\_\_: for the Almighty (Ruth 1:20)  
5 Thou art my beloved Son; in \_\_\_\_ I am well pleased (Luke 3:22) KJV  
9 and came and \_\_\_\_ them into the pot of pottage (2 Kings 4:39) KJV  
14 bring forth \_\_\_\_, and thou shalt call his name JESUS (1,3) (Matt 1:21) KJV  
15 Who may ascend the \_\_\_\_ of the LORD? (Ps 24:3)  
16 Let love and faithfulness never \_\_\_\_ you (Prov 3:3)  
17 \_\_\_\_ me, O LORD, in thy righteousness (Ps 5:8) KJV  
18 with their tongues they have \_\_\_\_ deceit (Romans 3:13)  
19 when he had \_\_\_\_, his spirit came again to him (1 Sam 30:12)  
20 the king of Assyria sent \_\_\_\_ to king Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:17) KJV  
22 graveyard  
24 he that endureth to the \_\_\_\_ shall be saved (Matt 10:22) KJV  
25 You hypocrites, why are you trying to \_\_\_\_ me? (Matt 22:18)  
26 King Hezekiah was famous for making a \_\_\_\_ for water (2 Kings 20:20)  
29 not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or \_\_\_\_ by what he hears (Isa 11:3)  
34 by violating the \_\_\_\_ on taking devoted things (1 Chr 2:7)  
35 Like men condemned to die in the \_\_\_\_ (1 Cor 4:9)  
38 Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is \_\_\_\_ (Mark 16:6)  
39 first month of Hebrew calendar (Ex.23:15)  
41 they dropped four anchors from the \_\_\_\_ and prayed (Acts 27:29-30)  
43 thy people Israel be as the \_\_\_\_ of the sea (Isaiah 10:22)  
44 Cry \_\_\_\_, spare not, lift up thy voice (Isa 58:1) KJV  
46 I saw something like a large \_\_\_\_ being let down from heaven (Acts 11:5)  
48 ancient mode of transportation  
49 Jacob gave Esau some bread and some \_\_\_\_ stew (Gen 25:34)  
51 You were bought at \_\_\_\_ do not become slaves of men (1,5) (1 Cor 7:23)  
53 abbr. for the first book of the N.T.  
56 They profess that they know God; but in works they deny \_\_\_\_ (Titus 1:16)  
58 the \_\_\_\_ must be fined

whatever the woman's husband demands (Exod 21:22)  
62 know that you have no authority to \_\_\_\_ taxes (Ezra 7:24)  
65 thy brother was dead, and is \_\_\_\_ again (Luke 15:32) KJV  
66 that anointing is \_\_\_\_, not counterfeit (1 John 2:27)  
68 Send me, therefore, \_\_\_\_ skilled to work in gold (1,3) (2 Chron 2:7)  
69 his enemy came and sowed \_\_\_\_ among the wheat (Matt 13:25)  
70 during the time of King Herod, \_\_\_\_ from the east came to Jerusalem (Matt 2:1)  
71 He will direct the blows of his battering \_\_\_\_ against your walls (Ezek 26:8-9)  
72 Paul and Silas were praying and singing \_\_\_\_ to God (Acts 16:25)  
73 there shall come forth a rod out of the \_\_\_\_ of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1)  
74 the woman saw that the fruit of the \_\_\_\_ was good for food (Gen 3:6)  
DOWN  
1 we found out that the island was called \_\_\_\_ (Acts 28:1)  
2 was what looked like \_\_\_\_ of glass, clear as crystal (1,3) (Rev 4:6)  
3 The young lions \_\_\_\_ after their prey (Ps 104:21)  
4 red dragon with seven heads \_\_\_\_ horns (3,3) (Rev 12:3)  
5 God's voice \_\_\_\_ in marvelous ways (Job 37:5)  
6 in the shadow of \_\_\_\_ hand He hid me (Isa 49:2)  
7 they will gather his \_\_\_\_ from the four winds (Matt 24:31)  
8 It was said unto her, The \_\_\_\_ shall serve the younger (Romans 9:12)  
9 Wake up, O \_\_\_\_, rise from the dead (Eph 5:14)  
10 cold and \_\_\_\_, and summer and winter (Gen 8:22)  
11 The price for his release is to be based on the \_\_\_\_ paid to a hired man (Lev 25:50)  
12 said unto the king, Let the king live for \_\_\_\_ (Neh 2:3)  
13 an outstanding miracle, and we cannot \_\_\_\_ it (Acts 4:16)  
21 a prophetess, \_\_\_\_, the daughter of Phanuel (Luke 2:36)  
23 He hath a devil, and is \_\_\_\_; why hear ye him? (John 10:20) KJV  
26 the crumbs which fell from the rich man's \_\_\_\_ (Luke 16:21)  
27 But he had no \_\_\_\_ with her until she gave birth (Matt.1:25)  
28 if he \_\_\_\_ them loose, they devastate the land (Job 12:15)  
30 and God gave unto them Saul the son of \_\_\_\_ (Acts 13:21) KJV  
31 Son of Abraham (Gen 21:3)  
32 the \_\_\_\_ forest has been cut

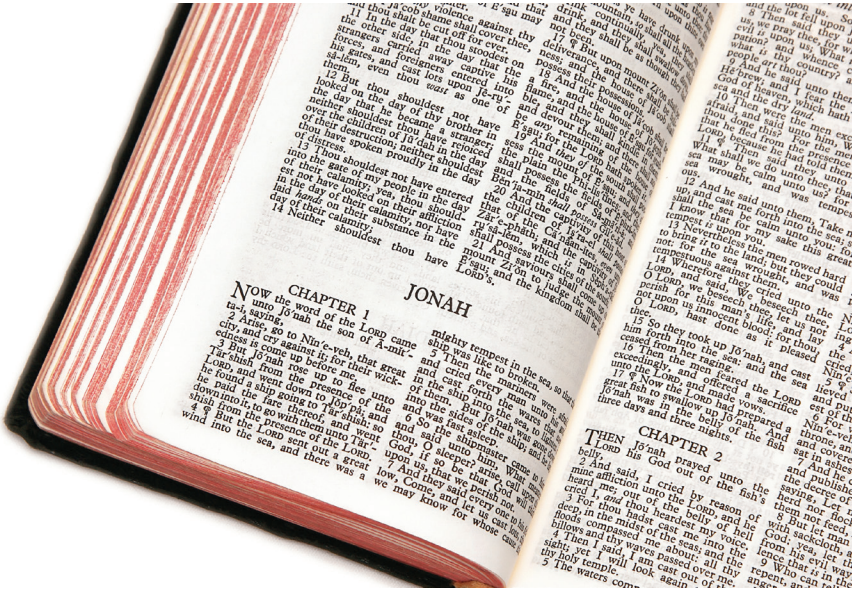
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down (Zech 11:2)  
33 she came from the \_\_\_\_ of the earth to listen to Solomon's (Luke 11:31)  
34 Tear down your father's altar to \_\_\_\_ and cut down the Asherah (Judg 6:25)  
36 abbr. for the 16th book of the O.T  
37 a Levite who lived in a remote \_\_\_\_ in the hill country of Ephraim (Judg 19:1)  
40 "Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep." \_\_\_\_ they laughed at him (Matt 9:24)  
42 The \_\_\_\_ were on the earth in those days (Gen 6:4)  
45 and behold trouble and darkness, \_\_\_\_ of anguish (Isa 8:22) KJV  
47 Cut down the tree and \_\_\_\_ off its branches (Dan 4:14)  
50 young boy (John 6:9) KJV  
52 so that I may \_\_\_\_ to you some spiritual gift (Rom 1:11)  
54 had always been on friendly \_\_\_\_ with David (1 Kings 5:1)  
55 live with your wives, and \_\_\_\_ them with respect (1 Peter 3:7)  
57 endow her with wisdom or

give her a share of good \_\_\_\_ (Job 39:17)  
58 I charge you under \_\_\_\_ by the living God (Matt 26:63)  
59 And he shall \_\_\_\_ the burnt offering (Lev 1:6) KJV  
60 the plans of the LORD stand \_\_\_\_ forever (Ps 33:11)  
61 \_\_\_\_ though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death (Ps 23:4)  
63 the sons of Eliphaz were Teman, \_\_\_\_, Zepho (Gen 36:11)  
64 to another faith by the \_\_\_\_ Spirit, to another gifts of healing (1 Cor 12:9)  
67 I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own \_\_\_\_ (Gal 1:14)

Solution on page 14





# Snow Hill Baptist Church

## When I do not Know What to do

By Dean Honeycutt  
Mitchell County

Just about everywhere you go people are looking for guidance. The COVID -19 pandemic has added a lot of decisions to everyday living. For example, do I need to wear a mask, should I be vaccinated, should I home-school, should I avoid crowds, and should I start taking zinc and vitamin D? This is only a small list of the many questions people are asking today. On top of all these questions, we do not seem to have any answers or where to turn for help.

Everyone has an opinion on what to do. And doctors and the CDC do not always agree with what other experts are saying. With all this information overload where can we find help?

We often feel like Solomon who said “life is vanity and a vexation of spirit.” When talking with people I often hear them say, “I do not know what to believe anymore.” When we do not know what to believe or how to make confident daily decisions life can be difficult and frustrating.

James said we can ask God for wisdom. James 1:5 (KJV 1900) “5 *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*”

The wisdom of God is what we need. And if I were deciding, I would want the wisdom of God. But the wisdom of God seems elusive. The Book of proverbs written by the wisest man said this about wisdom: Proverbs 2:1–9 (KJV 1900)

*“1 My son, if thou wilt receive my words,  
And hide my commandments with thee;  
2 So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom,  
And apply thine heart to understanding;  
3 Yea, if thou criest after knowledge,  
And liftest up thy voice for understanding;  
4 If thou seekest her as silver,  
And searchest for her as for hid treasures;  
5 Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD,  
And find the knowledge of God.  
6 For the LORD giveth wisdom:  
Out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.  
7 He layeth up sound wisdom for the righteous:  
He is a buckler to them that walk uprightly.  
8 He keepeth the paths of judgment,  
And preserveth the way of his saints.  
9 Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment,  
And equity; yea, every good path.”*

Notice the Bible says the Lord gives wisdom. But to whom does the Lord give wisdom? The Bible says the Lord gives wisdom to the righteous. The righteous is the one who applies the practical application of God’s word to their life. The one who walks in obedience to God will understand the fear of the Lord.

So, wisdom is the practical application of God’s Word in my life and my obedience to him. I cannot have wisdom apart from the fear of the Lord and obedience to God’s word. The fear of the Lord is my submission to Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior.

As obedient Christians, at times we cannot see the wisdom of God playing out in our lives, but it is there. When we apply God’s word to our life and follow him faithfully the wisdom of God is present with us. Did David understand everything that was going on in his life when he was fleeing from Saul? Did Noah understand all that God was doing when he was building the Ark? Did Paul or any of the Apostles understand all that God was doing in their lives when they were persecuted, jailed, or in distress? The answer to these questions is no. However, one thing they all had in common is faith and trust in God.

I can assure you that all these men were guided by God’s wisdom. Looking back over life we will see God’s wisdom. God’s wisdom does not mean life will be without ups and downs, just as life had ups and downs for the heroes of faith in Hebrews chapter 11. God’s wisdom will guide us and help us, God will establish our path in life. Proverbs 3:5–6 (KJV 1900)

*“5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart;  
And lean not unto thine own understanding.  
6 In all thy ways acknowledge him,  
And he shall direct thy paths.”*

When seeking guidance for an important decision read God’s word and ask God for clarity and peace. Move forward in faith observing where God may be at work to move you forward or to take you in a different direction.

Be encouraged today. God is in control and on the throne. God’s wisdom is in us and for us.

Live life “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.

Check out our new Website-www.brcnews.com  
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# The Orchard at Altapass

## Honey Comes To The Orchard At Altapass

By Kate Groff  
Mitchell County

The Orchard at Altapass is happy to acknowledge they are dripping in sweet goodness and proud of it. Last year, the Deer Park® Brand sponsored Blue Ridge Parkway Association awarded the Orchard a grant that enabled the purchase of an additional six honeybee hives. This year, the Orchard is reaping the rewards and putting their honey on the shelves. Field manager and beekeeper Jon Jirka processed the honey from the hives and bottled 8-, 12-, and 16-ounce jars of unfiltered, raw, one hundred percent pure honey. Quantities are limited; this will be the first of only two honey pullings for the season. “Not only do we look for the additional bees increasing the number of apples per tree, but honey production is in line with our mission to preserve and protect the land and its ecosystem. This spring, we expanded our Monarch butterfly habitat, and just recently, we have begun work on the butterfly garden renovation,” said Beth Hilton, executive director. “The money generated from the sale of our honey will help fund future bee experiences for kids as part of our expanding youth education program. And it is delicious.”

The Orchard is open 10 to 5, Wednesday-Sunday through October. Located at 1025 Orchard Road in Spruce Pine (mm 328.3 on the Blue Ridge Parkway), it is a non-profit, small-batch, heirloom apple orchard, music, and educational venue. For more information, please visit [www.altapassorchard.org](http://www.altapassorchard.org).



Kate Groff is the Programs Coordinator for the Toe River Arts Council.

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