



# BLUE RIDGE CHRISTIAN NEWS



## High County Prison Ministry

By Jody Griffin  
Avery and Mitchell Counties

*“Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.” (Isaiah 43:19)*

A common expression spoken around the New Year goes something like this: ‘Out with the old, in with the new.’ 2022 brings an opportunity to witness the power of God to create newness. In the world of the incarcerated, there is no more important word than this! For the circumstances that we live and serve in are very simply not permanent. (No matter how one may feel...)

The promise delivered to the world in this verse of Holy Scripture is that the God Who spoke the world into being and is NOT limited in ability to continually do something new. The description of this ‘new’ thing suggests that when God does something ‘new’, it will be a surprise to those who see it and try to comprehend/understand it.

Imagine standing amid desert sands and suddenly a river begins to flow! Or, being lost in the middle of an overgrown forest with no idea of what direction to take to make your way out and then without warning, a way is made clear! Now THOSE things would be surprising!

This is the message the Chaplain seeks to convey to every person, every day! (And on occasion needs reminding himself.)

In reality, most humans allow the past to inform our present and to shape our future way more often than we trust in God’s Promise that new opportunities are heading our way.

Many believers have suffered the hard knocks of our own poor decisions and the resulting consequences. It’s easy to convince ourselves that ‘nothing ever changes.’ But such is NOT the case at all!

“Feeling stuck in your current situation



or that you have lost your way in life? The Promise of God is that a surprising new way is just ahead!”

It is likewise important to realize that this ‘new thing’ is a Blessing delivered in miraculous ways!

To embrace this prophetic declaration one must let go of nagging doubts that challenge faith. And perhaps one must also let go of the accompanying fear of change...fear that can keep us stuck because the tasks associated with change seem so overwhelming...

But when one decides to take God’s Promise to heart, then something new begins within!

Choose to believe in the Power of God to do something new today! The results just may surprise you!

Thank you so much for your continued support of this ministry! Every day brings new hope to those who live and work behind the gates and within the walls.

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



***Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. 2 Corinthians 5:17***



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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)

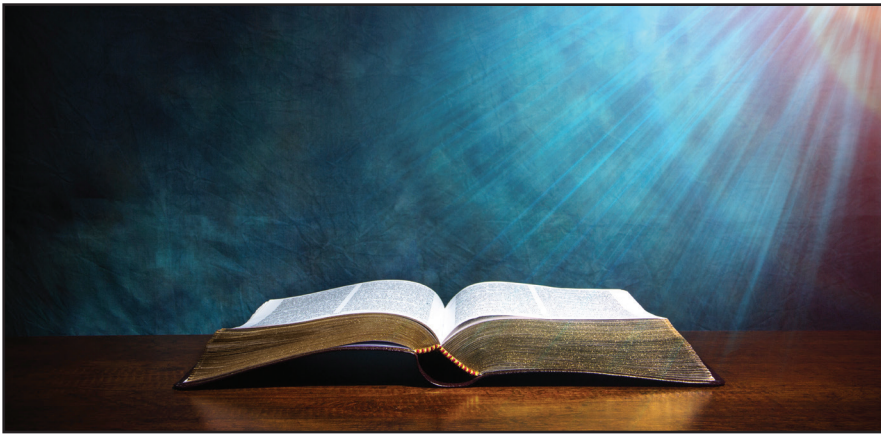
**The Holy Spirit**  
The Holy Spirit is the very Spirit of God, fully divine, manifested in the life of every believer from the moment of salvation. He is equal with the Father and the Son as God. He is present in the world to make men aware of their need for Jesus Christ. He provides the Christian 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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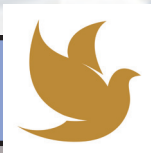
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*“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace: that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation: that saith unto Zion. Thy God reigneth!”*

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 Bietz

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 Rev. Tony Lominac - Associate Pastor

Sunday School - 10:00am  
Worship - 11:00am  
Sunday Evening - 6:00pm  
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

## 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

195 Gouges Creek Rd.  
Spruce Pine NC 28777

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Sunday School - 10am  
Sunday Worship - 11am and 6pm  
Mid-week Service - Wednesdays  
at 6:30pm

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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

*Knowing God, Seeing God, Serving  
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  
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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

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

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# Billy Graham Rapid Response Team

## A Mother's Perseverant Prayers Answered After Disastrous Twister

By Lizzy Long

As his home's windows blew in, Michael Kemp didn't know if his mom was OK.

Yelling for her across the house, the two met in the main hallway while a tornado tore through their historic neighborhood in Mayfield, Kentucky, on Friday, December 10. It was one of at least 30 twisters to touch down across the Central U.S. and killed at least 90 people, ranging in ages from two months old to 98 years old.

The next few minutes would be the most terrifying of the Kemps' lives.

"Mom, what are we going to do?" Michael asked, standing in his bathrobe in the pitch black of night.

"We're going to start praying," his mom, Janet, said.

And they didn't stop.

While the twister sent debris flying overhead, tearing down the exterior walls of the house and removing much of the roof, the Kemps laid flat on the laminate floor with their two small dogs and repeated the Lord's prayer (Matthew 6:5-13).

"That's all I knew to do," Janet recalled on Tuesday, December 14, as she talked with Greg and Vicki Fleitz, crisis-trained chaplains with the Billy Graham Rapid Response Team (BG-RRT). The team consists of more than 2,200 chaplains, and dozens have been deployed following the catastrophic storm system.

"[Faith] is sometimes all we have," Greg said gently.

Janet agreed.

"The good Lord brought me through it with my son. It happened so fast," she said before explaining this wasn't the first house she's lost.

In 2007, a house fire reduced her belongings to ashes.

"I prayed through that," Janet said.

Two years later, her husband died.

On Tuesday, Samaritan's Purse volunteers busily milled about the house searching for valuables and loading any salvageable furniture into a trailer, like a grandfather clock and bedroom set. Here, a Christmas angel lays among the debris. It's a reminder thousands won't have a home for the holidays after surviving a storm that hit just two weeks before Christmas.

"I prayed through that," she said again.

Then, she had to file bankruptcy and lost the home her late husband built for her.

"I prayed through that," Janet repeated.

For the past 12 years, the faithful woman has lived in the greenhouse near the old downtown district.

"I ain't stopped praying, honey," she said. "It's the first thing I do every morning. I have my coffee and say my prayers."

And what happened next is evidence.

Saved Twice in the Hallway

As Michael showed Greg where he took shelter in the hallway during the storm, the chaplain mentioned how fragile life is.

They were surrounded by shattered glass, shreds of insulation, and debris wedged into the bright-colored walls.

Right after the storm, Michael said it looked "like a bomb went off." Between the flashes of lightning, "You could see rubble everywhere," he continued.

"People were crying and screaming. [It was like ...] all kinds of hell."

And yet, Michael and his mom had only small cuts on their hands from the storm's treachery.

Greg asked the young adult if he hadn't made it through the twister, did he know where he'd spend eternity?

Despite his mother's faith, Michael wasn't sure. He'd pulled away from God due to issues with Christians and the church.

"Churches are full of sinners," Greg explained. "[Salvation is about] a relationship between you and God."

Pulling out a Steps to Peace With God booklet, the chaplain shared several Scripture verses with Michael, including 1 John 5:12 which states, "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life."

In the same hallway that Michael had survived the storm four days before, he wanted to be saved once again. But this time it was for eternity.

"Never doubt His love for you," Greg assured Michael, who attested God had "been dropping pretty big hints" in his life to get his attention. "He knows I'm hardheaded," Michael explained.

A few minutes later, Greg and Vicki gathered alongside a sea of orange-shirted Samaritan's Purse volunteers to pray over the Kemp family before heading out. After asking for Michael's permission, Greg openly shared that the young man decided to follow Christ, resulting in smiles and cheers from the volunteers.

But no smile was bigger than the one on Janet's face.

"You accepted Christ?" Janet mouthed to her son.

He nodded. "You don't know how long I've been praying for this," his mother said. "Now both my kids are saved!"



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By Jim Smith  
McDowell County

Freedom Life held its second annual Fireside event at Grace Community Church in Marion, North Carolina. This year's event was "in person" as well as virtual. At the event, Danny Hampton, Executive Director, interviewed two of Freedom Life's current clients. Both shared their stories of recovery and how they are on the road to success. We also had Brenda, the new afternoon DJ at 106.9 the Light FM, be part of the program and share her story of recovery. It was a beautiful night and special music was shared by Miss Willette Y. McIntosh, David Grant, Kim Brown, all staff, and board members at Freedom Life. Heart Cry, the music department of Freedom Life, shared in a song featuring, "Let me tell you about my Jesus" and "Oh Holy Night". This was Freedom Life's year-end fundraising event geared toward giving Tuesday. If you would like to give to Freedom Life with your year in donation, you can do so by going to [www.freedomlifeministries.org](http://www.freedomlifeministries.org) and clicking on donate. You can also go on Freedom Life's Facebook page to watch the Fireside event if you missed it. Freedom Life has seen tremendous growth this past year in expansion, not only locally, but beginning regionally. Freedom Life relies on grants and donations to keep work going. We would encourage you to go online and read about what opportunities Freedom Life offers our community. Every community is impacted by drug use, incarceration, addiction, and sometimes just plain old bad choices. Freedom Life walks beside individuals who have faced these circumstances to help them achieve a bright future for them and they share that they do not have to walk alone.

This coming year Freedom Life will be participating and hosting several great events this year, so please keep up on our Facebook page and website here at the Blue Ridge Christian News.

*Jim Smith is an area Worship Arts Director, He is the Development Director at Freedom Life Ministries, and run a production company [wjscreativegroup.com](http://wjscreativegroup.com)*



Spend A Year With The One Year

By Kurt Bomar  
Avery County



I have written on this before, but it bears repeating. As we head into another year, let me give you a wonderful suggestion for a gift that will be of immense value to your loved ones by the end of the year.

Consider buying and reading a "One Year Bible". It is the whole Bible broken down into bite-size portions. Every day there is a section from the OT, NT, Psalms, and Proverbs. By spending 15 minutes a day you will read the whole Bible in a year!

But don't stop there. Consider dedicating the Bible to your child, grandchild, or loved one and focus on them as you read it. Then, when you have read your passage for each day, underline or highlight a verse for that day that may have meaning or relevance to your loved one and write a note in the margin for them. Perhaps a word of encouragement, appreciation, warning, or just a memory.

I have done this for my five children and the Lord always gave me something—every time, every day.

If you do this, you can leave a legacy to your children/grandchildren that they will cherish more than any physical gift you leave behind.

You can start your journaling on whatever day of the year you get the Bible. But if you start early enough, by around Christmas time 2022 you will be able to hand them a present that they will treasure forever; a book that proves you thought about them every single day for a whole year. What would you give if your parents did that for you? This can be the start of a wonderful family tradition.

*Kurt Bomar is pastor of Walnut Grove Church.*



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Jesus is the Lighthouse

By Alex Cummings  
Burke County

Psalm 46:1-3 reads “*God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not fear when earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea. Let the oceans roar and foam. Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge*”.

It’s no secret that we are living in turbulent time. Simply turn on the news to see the political divide, the natural disasters, grumbings of war, and a global pandemic that has swept over the world. All too often, people see this and may crumble and turn away from their faith rather than dive deeper into the promises that God has made to us.

Simply look to Psalm 27:1 “*The LORD is my light and my salvation-so why should I be afraid? The LORD is my fortress, protecting me from danger, so why should I tremble?*”

Even faced with literal death and uncertainty, Daniel stood steadfast in his faith when told he could no longer pray to God for 30 days. Daniel continued to pray daily and was thrown into the lion’s den for his disobedience. When morning came, the king rushed to the den to find Daniel still alive and he said (Daniel 6:22) “*My God sent his angel to shut the lions’ mouths so that they would not hurt me, for I have been found innocent in his sight. And I have not wronged you, Your Majesty*”.

In Genesis 7:13 God says to Noah “I have decided to destroy all living creatures, for they have filled the earth with violence. Yes, I will wipe them all out along with the earth!” Then Genesis 7:17-18 reads “*Look! I am about to cover the earth with a flood that will destroy every living thing that breathes. Everything on earth will die. But I will confirm my covenant with you. So enter the boat – you and your wife and your sons and their wives.*”

Now take a moment to sit back and put yourself into each situation and think how you would feel. How you would react? What is going through your mind at the very moment you’re thrown into the lions’ den? What is going through your mind when God says he is going to destroy all living creatures?

All too often, people would tremble, crumble, possibly even faint under the magnitude of this, or worse yet, they would turn away from their faith and possibly blame God for their current situation. Instead, in these instances, you should completely turn yourself over to God as your guiding light and protector.

In John 8:12, Jesus states “*I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.*”

Here Jesus is declaring his divine identity and declaring his purpose as the light of the world as the sole spiritual truth to humans. Even when we are in the deepest, darkest abyss, Jesus will shine a light to guide us to his truth.

Psalms 119:105 “*Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path*”.

Alex Cummings is an NC transplant from the northern woods of Upstate NY and has lived in NC for the last 13 years with the love of his life, Krista, and two beautiful daughters. The Cummings Clan resides in beautiful Morganton, NC, and attends Pleasant Hill Baptist Church. Alex is the marketing manager for a SaaS technology company - HPA, A Cognizant Company.



Battle Plan

By Christy Young  
Mitchell County

When we think about armor, we often get an image of a mighty warrior on the battlefield equipped with gear to protect them from the enemy. The Bible teaches us that we are also in battle, a spiritual battle. Ephesians 6:12 says, “*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*”. I think we all can agree that we are facing a battle in these present times, as we have never experienced. Just as soldiers protect themselves, we as Christians need to protect ourselves from the spiritual battle that we face. God’s word teaches us that we must have a battle plan and have our armor in place to be victorious. Ephesians 6:14 says “*Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness.*” By faith, I must put on the belt of truth. I know that God is a sovereign God that knows everything about me. He knows my strengths and my weaknesses and will deliver me from my enemy. The truth is that I am a child of the King and nothing can separate me from His love and mercy. He has a purpose for my life. I will not allow the enemy to rob me of God’s truth and purpose for my life. I want to put on the breastplate of righteousness to guard my heart against anything that may be impure and separate me from communion with God. I must guard my heart and emotions to defeat the enemy and uplift the name of Jesus. Ephesians 6:15, “*And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.*” We must be available to go where God guides us. Although it may be uncomfortable, we as God’s children must be obedient to His calling. Slow down and ask God to guide you to the places that you can encourage and shine the light of His presence. Ephesians 6:16, “*Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked*”. My faith is found only in Christ Jesus. With God, I can do all things. Declare victory, because regardless of the circumstances ahead we have the promise that the battle is won and the victory is His. Protect your mind with the helmet of salvation. Satan wants to bombard your mind with lies, evil thoughts, doubt, and fear. With the protection of the helmet and saturated with the goodness of God we can overcome the negative thoughts that the adversary tempts us with. He has also given us a sword, His Holy Word. A roadmap, a gift, a weapon so powerful that it can defeat Satan’s strongest attack. God’s word gives us comfort, teaches us hope, and defends us during battle. Each day that God allows us to live, this world becomes eviler. Nevertheless, I have hope and a battle plan. I choose to follow God and equip myself with the armor that He has provided. Although the world may think I am peculiar, I rejoice knowing that I serve a Savior that has promised to deliver me home soon. I am chosen! He has allowed me and you to represent Him to a lost and dying world. My prayer is that others may see Jesus in me and have the desire to accept Him as their savior too. We as Christians have a job, to spread the word and win souls before the return of Christ. As we celebrate the birth of Jesus this Christmas, let us remember that the babe was sent here to fulfill a purpose. He will return to receive His children. Let us work until Jesus comes winning souls and ministering to the lost. If we devote our lives to serving Christ, Satan will attack. But God has given us the armor to protect ourselves and preserver. What a wonderful gift that God has given us, salvation. What is your battle plan? Are you willing to prepare yourself for battle and seek God’s purpose for you?



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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Press Release

CONTACT: Chasity Poteat Rice, chasity@c2life.org  
Burke County

Organization Celebrates First Graduating Class of Pilot Lifestyle Medicine Program

Morganton, NC (Dec. 15, 2021) -- C2Life, was founded by 2021 Governor’s Volunteer Service Award recipient, Chasity Poteat Rice of Morganton, NC. Recently, C2Life hosted its first graduation of qualified participants from its pilot lifestyle medicine program, Food is Medicine-Burke.

The graduation celebrated the success of the 17 Burke County participants of the inaugural Food Is Medicine-Burke program. The medically-supervised program spans nine weeks and measures the effects of plant-based nutrition on chronic disease and overall health.

Participants were previously diagnosed with any combination of diabetes, hypertension, and high cholesterol, represented a diversity of age, race, social-economic levels, and health history, and were “sick and tired of being sick and tired,” Rice said.

The program centers around established pillars of health, including lifestyle education, plant-based nutrition, nutrition education, and community support. Participants received daily education videos and participated in weekly Zoom meetings and completed lab tests. Rice coordinated weekly walks on the Morganton Greenway, meditation and yoga workshops hosted on the Labyrinth at Grace Episcopal Church, and Breathe Yoga & Pilates. Additionally, participants had the opportunity to experience hands-on cooking skills at the C2Life kitchen and gained confidence in properly reading nutrition labels and shopping smarter during grocery store tours hosted at Food Matters Market & Cafe.

“Our goal is to eliminate chronic disease and end hunger caused by poor nutrition,” Rice said. “We created C2Life with the inspiration of getting healthy, nutritiously delicious meals and education into low socioeconomic communities. The Food is Medicine-Burke program is our first step toward measuring that effort.”

Rice said the partnership with Dr. Brian Asbill of Ruckus Health, Asheville, NC, has been amazing. Dr. Asbill is caring, approachable, and is committed to bringing health and wellness to others through education and in 2017, became the first certified physician to hold the diplomate status with the American College of Lifestyle Medicine.

“Lifestyle medicine is focused on educating people about the importance of optimal nutrition, exercise, stress management, sleep, substance use, and social connection and then translating that knowledge into behavior change so that people can live longer and better”, says Dr. Asbill. “Ruckus Health really is all about helping people to rediscover their innate ability to live in balance and thrive and C2Life shares that bigger vision”.

Rice said the measured lab results were impressive. On average, blood pressure dropped to a normal average of 121/77 from stage 1 hypertension. Of the eight diabetic or pre-diabetic participants, six measured normal levels of blood sugar while both diabetics were successful in lowering their A1C scores with one participant improving from 9.4 to 7.0. Total cholesterol decreased 11% and inflammation markers dropped 15%. Although Food is Medicine-Burke isn't a weight loss program, participants did experience an average waist circumference reduction by three inches and recorded an average weight loss of 9.7 pounds during the nine-week program.

The achievements went beyond lab results. Graduates from the Food is Medicine-Burke program reported unanticipated benefits such as better sleep, less joint pain, the ability to quit smoking, and the confidence to embark on new journeys, such as enrolling in career and technical training.

C2Life partnered with Ruckus Health, the Good Samaritan Clinic, Burke Health Network, Burke United Christian Ministries, Roots Hummus, Food Matters Market & Cafe, Breathe Yoga & Pilates, Western Piedmont Community College, and Grace Episcopal Church. “One of my favorite quotes is an African Proverb, ‘go fast, go alone - go far, go together’ said Rice, I am very thankful for our coaches who volunteered their time and to our community partners who gave of their time and leveraged their relationships to make this pilot program a success.”

Spirits were high on November 22, when the first graduating class gathered at the Morganton Community House to celebrate their success. Rice and Asbill, awarded certificates and special recognitions to participants and coaches.

“The group of people surrounding me on this journey has really helped me drastically when making better eating choices. Especially when my family doesn't follow the same journey,” said one of the graduates, Juan Carolos D., after the ceremony.

“The good habits that we’ve learned have been phenomenal....The way I feel really impacts my physical presence. This program has done wonders for how I feel about myself,” said another participant, Zach R.

Asbill and Rice concluded the ceremony by stressing that this was a commencement, not graduation. They hope that the 17 participants have just begun their journey in plant-based nutrition. The second Food is Medicine-Burke program is planned to launch in February 2022.

In June 2021, Rice was recognized for her dedication to the community with a 2021 Governor’s Volunteer Service Award. She is a former executive director of the Burke County United Way (2015-18) and has served in leadership positions at Burke Hospice and Palliative Care. She serves on the board of directors for Burke United Christian Ministries and Burke Education Foundation Inc.

Founded in 2018, by Chasity Poteat Rice and joined a year later by Karen Teed, a 30-year entrepreneur in the catering and restaurant industry of Charlotte,

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By Doug Harrell  
Mitchell County

Facing new adventures can bring excitement, worry, anxiety, and a host of other reactions to our minds. Most of the time when we think about a New Year we are just kinda ho-hum with the thought, just another day! Maybe we should look at it differently like we are putting the old behind us and looking at a new start. In reality, every day is a new day with fresh opportunities ahead. We need to learn from the days past but be aware that each sunrise brings a new dawning in our lives.

One of life’s greatest tragedies is that we tend to let our past control and color our expectations of the new day. The devil desires to remind us daily of our failures and mistakes, keep us in the wallow of self-doubt and despair. We have just gone through the Christmas celebrations and all that goes with that. We have celebrated the birth of the Christ Child, The Prince of Peace, the one that erased our past as far as the east is from the west. Why should we let the past hold us back? It should train us, not stop us from moving forward.

We hear all kinds of talk about New Years Resolutions and maybe this is the year to really be serious about that. Maybe we need to take a day and just really think about our lives and where we have been and where we are headed. As you have all probably heard the old saying, the height of stupidity is to keep doing the same thing and expect different results. If we are to have changed in our lives we must first change the inputs into our minds and our actions must change accordingly. Maybe this is the year that you decide to be more of the person that you have always wanted to be. Maybe a better father, mother, mate, or child. Maybe your focus needs to change to looking to the higher power of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

I just received a message as I was writing this telling me that a dear friend had just died and wanting me to help with the funeral. This hits me right between the eyes as to how important it is for each of us to have our lives in order at all times. We never know the day or the time that the Lord may call us home and, hopefully, each of you reading this article has an understanding of this and has a relationship with the Lord that is strong. Jesus told us that in this world we would have trouble and trials but that through Him, we would overcome those trials and tribulations. Isaiah 9:6 *“For unto us a child is born, unto us a child is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulders: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace”*. Only belief and faith in Jesus Christ can give us hope in times of trials and tribulations.

We have just gone through almost two years of fear and isolation because of the virus and all the things associated with that, afraid to visit family, go to church to worship, and continue with anything non-essential. It has seemed to me that we did not fear going to Walmart or other big box stores, they were full anytime you went there but the churches were empty for much of the time. Maybe this is a year that you will make a personal decision that worship and giving thanks are as essential as feeding your body from the neck down, maybe we need to focus 2022 on feeding ourselves from the neck up and put the spirit of the living God into our hearts and minds. Decide to take to heart the words of the angels to the shepherds, fear not, for unto you this day is born in the city of David a Savior that is Christ the Lord! Look back on the Christmas you have just gone through and let those words guide you into this New Year.

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



The Keeper of the Spring  
By Russell McKinney  
Mitchell County

In a little hamlet, the town council held a meeting to discuss how to cut expenses. They studied the budget more seriously than ever and noticed an item that had previously escaped their attention. It was a small fee that was paid each month to someone called “The Keeper of the Spring.”

As the council members tried to figure out who “The Keeper of the Spring” was and why he was paid a fee each month, only one member could even offer a clue. He said, “I think there is an old man who lives near the top of the mountain, and he cleans out all the springs and creeks that flow down to the river that fills the reservoir that provides the town’s drinking water.”

The other council members didn’t dispute the answer, but they certainly didn’t see the need to keep paying the fee. One said, “We’ve never even seen this man.” Another said, “That’s right, so how can we be sure that he’s doing his job?” A third added, “If he was an old man, he might even be dead by now.” So, the council voted unanimously to stop paying “The Keeper of the Spring” and sent a letter of dismissal to the mountaintop address to which the fee had always been sent.

A few months later the town’s citizens began to notice that their drinking water wasn’t as clear and sparkling as it once was. No fuss was raised, though, because it wasn’t that big a deal. More months passed and they noticed that the water’s color was now different. Still, there didn’t seem to be any cause for alarm. Then more months passed and some of the citizens started getting sick. Finally, a full-fledged epidemic broke out and some of the citizens lost their lives.

Panic now ruled the streets, and the town council voted unanimously to have a team do a thorough investigation to discover the cause of the epidemic. You can guess how the report came back: a polluted, unsafe water supply. Obviously, the town council had failed to realize just how important “The Keeper of the Spring” was. Even though they hadn’t known it, he was the true secret to the town’s livelihood and happiness.

Going into this new year let me encourage you to realize that Jesus Christ is “The Keeper of the Spring” for you. As long as your relationship and fellowship with Him are right, there will be purity and vitality to your life and you will know the joy, comfort, and inner peace that are only found through Him. But if you foolishly choose to ignore Him and try to operate without Him, at some point you will have to deal with the costly fallout from your choice. Jesus doesn’t want that for you, and you wouldn’t want it for yourself if you had enough sense to know it. Therefore, let me encourage you to build your life around Jesus this year and let Him be “The Keeper of the Spring” for you. If you’ll do that, you can rest assured that He will keep the issues of your life flowing clear and pure.

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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Victim or Victor?

By Marlene Houk  
Burke County



Each year, the Christmas story told so magnificently in the Bible in Luke chapters one and two offers lavish treasures. Perhaps angels anticipate our unwrapping rich spiritual truths as we mine for gold and gems in the verses. Breath-taking brilliant jewels of truth shine into the New Year—offering rich moorings with which to anchor my life. This year, the majestic jewel of a victor, in contrast to the black obsidian of the victim, caught my attention.

Often, we think of Mary as a victim of her circumstances: unwed, exiled, and uneducated. She coped with the potential attack by entrenched religious zealots and bore the stigma of pregnancy without the benefit of marriage. The iron band of Roman government utterly dominated her people, the Israelites. We sing songs that ask questions about how much she knew. But our perspectives may change when we consider another viewpoint.

Recently, I listened to a sermon by a well-educated and experienced preacher who shared a thought-provoking approach to the reason Mary visited Elizabeth in Luke 1. He startled me with two questions in his sermon, and I unwrapped a powerful gem of truth. He informed us that after Gabriel’s announcement to Mary of Jesus’ birth, she traveled about eighty miles, (a 3-4 day journey) to visit her cousin Elizabeth. She was going south to the hill country of Judea but Bethlehem was in that area. The preacher posed this question: was she researching what the same journey would be like at full-term, nine months from then? He also asked: did Joseph use the decree by Caesar Augustus to fulfill prophecy rather than being forced to Bethlehem for taxation? If so, that makes Joseph and Mary savvy and strategic partners with the Lord in changing history and fulfilling God’s plan for them. They were far from victims of their circumstances; they were victors! And therein lies the message. When we think we’re the victim, we’re actually the victor!

At times, thinking of ourselves as victors is difficult. Sometimes, frustration blurs our goals. And our challenge shifts from meeting goals to overcoming obstacles. This reminds me of the old saying. “It’s hard to remember that your initial objective was to drain the swamp when you’re up to your ears in alligators.” Often, life turns worse. Being fired by a misogynist, betrayed by a husband, or blindsided by death may shackle us with a victim mentality. But, as Christians, God tucks jewels of hope within His stories like Mary’s to help us transform our thinking from victim to victor.

Our weakness in forgetting our victor status may be the reason God so often reminds us in His Word about our true status as His children. Romans 8:37 reminds us that “we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.” And Acts 1:8 shines light into our despondent hearts with the words, “*But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.*” One of my favorites is 1 John 5:4, “*For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.*” The Bible reveals treasures that empower us to turn from victim to victor.

As 2022 shines brightly upon our horizons, may we remind ourselves that we are victors and not victims. May we focus on the Lord, setting our face, like Mary, stalwartly toward eternity, knowing that we are victorious in Christ!

Mary was able to trust God in big ways. By setting her face like a flint towards the Lord, Takeaways:

1. When we focus on the Word of God, as Mary did, we can fulfill His plan for us in the New Year.
2. We are the Victors, not the Victims.
3. “Go ahead, underestimate Me, this’ll be fun.” I’ve learned, in 58 years of walking with Christ, that 9 times out of 10 I’ve underestimated the Lord of Hosts.

Like the timelessness of pearls and diamonds, one facet of Mary’s story remains—her status as the victor rather than the victim. Mary seemed to have a focus that recognized her precarious position as an unwed mother but remembered the angel Gabriel’s, words. She kept them at the forefront of her mind and focused on her end goal—obeying God tenaciously.

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](http://www.MarleneHouk.com)

Spirit Guided Travel

By Steve Carter  
Tupelo, Mississippi



“The quickest way to an ambulance ride is for strangers to bicycle together on roads no one in the group has ever ridden.” This sage advice coupled with my personal experience of riding in groups, (most of it bad,) prompted me to habitually ride solo. As a pre-teen, riding with friends led to hitting a telephone pole while showing off to girls. Soon afterward, I received another “reality check” by getting knocked over by a car. My attention had been focused on my riding buddy when suddenly, the bumper meets the leg, and I hit the pavement. “Kissing that car,” gave me a whole new appreciation for safety in general and bicycling awareness-in-particular.

As a young adult, my bicycling continued by commuting to work, with my overall physical fitness improving because of it. Several years later my first 150-mile weekend birthed a love of intra-state cycling, a passion that endures to this day.

My desire to see America up close and personal eventually led to a three-thousand-mile cross-country bicycle adventure. I traveled with a mixed lot of mostly middle-aged folks. The majority were safety conscious, but as in any crowd, there were enough dim wits to make things dangerous for everyone. Speeding closely by a startled cyclist with no warning, following too closely when in a group, coupled with general “horseplay,” soon had me pulling away and riding alone for safety’s sake.

I routinely kept as far to the right as the teeth-rattling “rumble strips” allowed. Despite continual cautionary advice to the group, accidents mounted, the worse of which caused one woman to leave the ride with a fractured pelvis. From the camp full of bandaged arms and wrecked bicycles, I gained a whole new appreciation of the Holy Spirit and His attempt at guiding hardheaded people.

With our ride nearly over, and exhaustion taking a toll, two other “like-minded” men and I decided to travel together for company and to look out for each other. Wendall, a “New Englander” and Roger from Ohio proved to be competent and accident-free cyclists in the previous twenty-five hundred miles. Our riding styles complemented one another, and this bolstered my confidence in finishing the trip without injury to man or machine.

The early morning of the ride’s last day started with an extended blast from one of the support truck’s horns. This brought the camp awake and started a mix of revelry and riding that was a long way from safe. While first heading toward the finish of our great adventure, the three of us heard Wendall’s rear tire go flat. Like the well-experienced team we were, while Wendall sprinted to the equipment truck to get a new tire, Roger and I flipped his bike, pulled off the old tire, and started inflating a new tube before he could run there and back. On the road again in less than five minutes, we habitually separated ourselves from the pack and headed to the finish line. Things went smoothly enough for around thirty miles until I spotted a sunflower field in full bloom, where I wanted to stop for a photo op. I called for my friends to pull over, which Wendall did. Roger however decided to ride ahead rather than wait and with a feeling of foreboding we snapped the picture and took off in hot pursuit.

While topping a hill, a group of riders gathered around someone on the ground suddenly loomed in front of us. In a flash of panic, it became obvious Roger had wrecked. After bailing off our bikes, we charged up to see him pretty much out of it while the welcome sound of an ambulance closed in. It turned out, the injuries, while needing surgery, were not life-threatening and our friend was out of the hospital in a few days.

In hindsight, the accident was caused by numerous things. Wendall and I should have forgone stopping and stuck together. Going against conventional wisdom, Roger made a mistake falling in with a group of exhausted bikers on an inadequately marked road. By trusting ill-suited people to “watch his back”, Roger’s trip was cut short thirty miles from finishing. His misfortune didn’t sit well with Wendall and me, so we organized an abbreviated ride, which happened one year later, for the express purpose of peddling with Roger to the finish line. Whether struggling through any given day or peddling thousands of miles, we must make sure to travel with disciplined people strong in the faith. That way when trouble comes to our way help will be close at hand.

Steve Carter is entering his 5th decade of Christian ministry. Steve has peddled across the continental United States twice. Mr. Carter's email is: [Msroadkill@bellsouth.net](mailto:Msroadkill@bellsouth.net)

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By Joe Sturz  
Shenandoah, Virginia

God is always watching and sees to it that money and/or advancement gained under false pretenses is never profitable in the long run as we always reap what we sow in the end (Romans 12:17-19; Galatians 6:7-8; Revelation 21:8).

Some examples of dishonesty He judges are:

- cheating on your wife or husband by committing adultery (Exodus 20:14; Hebrews 13:40),
- buying or selling using false measures or false advertising (Prov.11:1;12:22; 19:1; Ephesians 4:28),
- elected or appointed officials giving favors for bribes (Prov. 17:23; Psalm 26:10; Luke 16:10-13; I Timothy 6:10),
- cheating on school examinations by getting the answers to tests in advance or copying the answers of another person's paper (Luke 16:10- 13; II Cor. 4:2),
- lying about your income to get benefits from government programs or pay less taxes (Proverbs 10:2; Colossians 3:9).

God honors and prospers those that are honest and trustworthy in their dealings with others (Romans 12:17). A reputation for honesty is of great value (Prov. 21:1). So let us have the fear of the Lord (Proverbs 1:7). Who sees all (Hebrews 4:13) and will demand an accounting of all personal activities and practices on the great Judgment Day (Revelation 20:11-15). He will punish all unrepentant dishonest persons (Revelation 21:8).

Let us establish our good name by being honest in repenting of our sin (I John 1:9) and trusting in Jesus Christ's work on the cross for our Salvation (Romans 10:8-11; I Corinthians 15:1-4). Providing things honest in the sight of all men (Proverbs 11:3; Romans 12:17) and not bringing reproach on His Holy Name (I Thessalonians 5:14-24).

Brother Joe "dealing honestly" Sturz for Saturday, December 11, 2021. I am praying to God the Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, that those that read this will repent of their sin, receive His forgiveness (I John 1:9), and trust in Christ (Romans 10:9-10, and receive the Holy Spirit's power to change their ways (Acts 1:8; Romans 8:11) and live for Him, if they have not done so already.

So let us repent of our sin and trust in Christ alone for salvation. Then confess Christ (Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:9-10) by getting baptized (Acts 2:38; Matthew 28:19) and join a Bible-believing church (Hebrews 10:25; Matthew 18:20) read the Bible daily (Acts 17:11 and pray (Ephesians 6:18) and share your faith with others (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 1:8).

www.sturzchristiancounseling.com. Sharing what the Lord has taught me through: His Word, 42 years of marriage before my beloved went to heaven, my mistakes, failures, and successes including 50+ years as a Biblical counselor. See my short, daily Bible messages on my Facebook Timeline and Sturz Christian Counseling Group. Seeking to apply all of the Bible to all of life as a means to raise kingdom builders for the Lord. Ideas have consequences (Galatians 6:7) so I seek to sow the truths of God's Word to reform my town, country, and the whole world (Matthew 28:18-20).

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

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: 2 Peter 1:3-10



Another Crooked Year

By Steve Bietz  
Burke County



"There was a crooked man, and he went a crooked mile, He found a crooked sixpence against a crooked stile; He bought a crooked cat, which caught a crooked mouse, And they all lived together in a little crooked house."

Historians are not exactly sure just who should get credit for the poem. Originally, it was a political satire condemning the alliance between Scotland and England in the 1600's. A pun, if you will, toward crooked politicians from both countries trying to get along despite their animosity towards one another. We can hardly deny that our world today has really gotten "crooked." Not just politicians, but from top to bottom. Everywhere we look, things are out of whack.

The author of the gospel that bears his name, Luke, tells of an incident about someone who was crooked. Crooked in the sense that she could not stand up straight. Of the 4 gospel writers, only Luke tells about a woman that could not straighten up. It happened one Sabbath as Jesus was supplying the message for the day of worship. "And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up." (Luke 13:11)

According to my mother, I was always standing crooked when I was a boy. She was always telling me to "stand up straight" or "straighten up" but here is a woman that went way beyond a slouching ten-year-old. We cannot be sure what her issue was but from the original Greek language, we see that she was "bent double." For eighteen years this woman had some chronic curvature of the spine, some spinal deformity that crippled her to the point that Luke, a physician himself, gave us a snapshot of a disease that had horribly interfered with the woman's joint and body movement. She was crooked!

I like that the woman, despite her crippledness, still came to church. Which is where she comes in contact with Jesus. "But when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity. And He laid hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God." (Luke 13:12,13)

Although we may not be able to ascertain the exact malady that this woman had which had made her crooked, Jesus does tell us who caused it. "So ought this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound, think of it, for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?" (Luke 13:16) Jesus blames Satan the Devil. By extension, Jesus tells us that Satan causes pandemics, Satan causes cancer, Satan causes heartaches, Satan causes pain, Satan causes death.

We live on a crooked planet that desperately needs to be put straight. And so it is that we have experienced 2021, another crooked year on a crooked planet. Praise God that there is a pre-planned answer that the Godhead put in place before the foundation of the world; an answer for mankind so that he can be loosed from Satan's clutches and we can escape our crooked lives.

In Isaiah chapter 40, we see that there is an individual who will come and "the crooked places shall be made straight." (Isaiah 40:4) That person is Jesus Christ! We have just finished celebrating the first advent of Jesus when He was born. But a day is soon to come when Our Lord and Savior will return and He will make all the crookedness that we are...straight. I cannot tell you if that will be in 2022, or 2023, or another year. But we do know that the only answer for our crooked years on this crooked sinful planet, is the second coming of Jesus. May it be our prayer that in 2022, we draw ever closer to our Lord as we wait for Him to return when He will make everything straight.

Steve Bietz, Pastor, Morganton Seventh day Adventist Church.



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# Community Nature Walk Memorial

## Haley Johnson Blazes a Trail for the Lord

By Kiesa Kay  
Yancey County



If life is measured in love, then Haley Johnson truly lives forever, not only through the love others feel for her, but for the love she gave, and the way she led so many people to the love of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. By the tender age of 29, this mother of one already had spoken to hundreds of people, sharing her testimony of troubles and triumphs. She listened, cared, and shared the Gospel.

Like her brother, Luke Johnson said, “Haley was a beautiful soul lost too soon.”

In the last year of her life, Haley initiated the idea of a nature trail on the grounds of the church where she grew up, South Estatoe Baptist Church in Burnsville, NC. The trail would be a place of peace, where people could walk in natural beauty and reflect on God’s gifts to the earth. The church has decided to create that trail and dedicate it in her honor.

“Haley wanted to start the community outreach walking track for others to be able to get healthy, spiritually, mentally, and physically, and to be together to support one another,” said her parents, Robin and Barry Johnson.

Through her personal outreach ministry geared toward women in recovery, Haley inspired true and lasting change. She spoke not only to church groups and at nonprofit gatherings, but also in intimate one-on-one conversations that shook people to the core, helping them to feel heard and understood sometimes for the very first time. She helped others to believe in themselves and to find community.

At her funeral, the Rev. Ben Cole helped the mourners find laughter through tears, as he shared anecdotes showing Haley’s joy in life. She saw that he wanted to preach, and she helped him reach that goal. She had the gift of seeing the goodness in others, strengthening and believing in them.

Shelley Streett Laws said, “Haley’s life challenges us to give more time, give more attention, give more laughter, give more encouragement give more hope, and give Jesus to all God puts in our path. We may never know the difference we make. I’m sure Haley had no idea how far the ripples of her love went.”

Some of those ripples will continue with the creation of Haley’s Trail. Contributions for the trail can be made to South Estatoe Baptist Church, 32 South Estatoe Baptist Church Road, Burnsville, NC 28714.



Kiesa Kay, poet, and playwright, is featured on the literary maps of both Kansas and North Carolina. Her plays have been produced in five states.



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2022 What Will You Hold For The Believer?

By Bruce Cannon  
Mitchell County



As this article is read the New Year will most likely have already come. The previous year will have passed and we will be facing many challenges and opportunities ahead. I am so thankful that while we do not know what tomorrow holds, we know who holds tomorrow. In the very inspirational New Year’s poem entitled His Unfailing Presence, the author (unknown) speaks to the many uncertainties and challenges we know we will face in 2022:

**“Another year I enter Its history unknown;  
Oh, how my feet would tremble To tread its paths alone!**

**But I have heard a whisper, I know I shall be blest;  
"My presence shall go with thee, And I will give thee rest."**

**What will the New Year bring me? I may not, must not know;  
Will it be love and rapture, Or loneliness and woe?**

**Hush! Hush! I hear His whisper; I surely shall be blest;  
"My presence shall go with thee, And I will give thee rest."**

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

There are several facts and truths that we must hold onto in 2022: Our world is constantly changing. Leonard Sweet, a Christian futurist, made the following comment, “If you were born before the year 1960 the world you were born in no longer exists.” He is referring to those values once held dear which has been cast aside by so many, so quickly. Things such as absolute truth, strong work ethics, integrity, honesty, respect for authority, and so forth are some of those things of which he speaks. How sad that the values you and I were raised to respect and adhere to are for the most part gone!

The Word of God is absolutely true and speaks to the plights we are currently facing. Nothing catches the Lord off guard. The New Testament writers, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, spoke 2000 years ago telling what we would be experiencing today! Listen at a few of the prophecies:

Matthew 24:7 *“For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.”* Notice that pestilences are plural. We have not seen our last pandemic. There most likely will be many more COVID-type diseases ahead!

Matthew 24:12 *“And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.”* The word “iniquity” is defined as lawlessness. Look at the streets of America in 2021. 2022 will be worse according to this verse.

2 Timothy 3:1-4 *“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. 2For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, 4Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;”*

These verses prophesy our immediate future. Neither you nor I can face any of this in our power! We must have His unfailing presence, unlimited power, and unconditional love to see us through.

Lastly, and a truth I am so thankful for, Jesus is coming soon! *“Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.”* Praise the Lord! He is coming back for us! Will 2022 be the year of Christ’s return? I am very surprised that 2021 was not the year of His return! Get ready! Soon and very soon we are going to see the King! Amen!

Happy New Year everyone! How can we have a Happy New Year in the light of what the Lord laid on my heart to write this month? There are several very important things we must do to ensure it!

- 1) Draw Near The Lord. Get rid of known sin. Confess it and repent of it honestly.
- 2) Get in the Word! Don’t just casually read it. Study it. Memorize it. Meditate on it.
- 3) Get into a Bible-believing, Bible-preaching church. Be faithful to it. Jesus commanded it!
- 4) Be careful what you allow into your mind. Paul tells us in Philippians 4:6-9 that the peace of God comes to those who think on those things which are lovely, of a good report and full of virtue. The garbage of tv, music, and the world will NEVER bring peace.
- 5) Surround yourself with godly souls who can comfort and hold you accountable for godly living.

Do these few things and see that the peace of God which passeth all understanding will guard over your heart, your thought life, and your daily being. You will indeed have a Happy New Year!

*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.*



NC. The women joined forces with a greater mission in mind, to provide healthy nutritious meals to all. “Our mantra is, ‘Live Better. Give Better.’ said Rice. “With every C2Life meal purchased, we will donate a nutrient-rich meal to feed someone in the U.S. who is food insecure or chronically ill due to poor nutrition. We believe health starts at the end of your fork and we are committed to improving the health of our communities.”

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Sudoku Solution

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



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Unshakable Hope

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



As a new year has dawned, the sun rises to find this country and the world still struggling with the devastating effects of a pandemic. This month is the second anniversary of the advent of the coronavirus. Much fear and confusion have been spoken and written throughout these past two years. Only one thing remains the same: Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior. The Apostle Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 2:3-10 to remind those who follow after God that there is only One who has the power to save—sovereign God Himself. Only One gives comfort through His eternal promises. Only One can offer hope for a lost and hopeless individual and world. God’s grace, mercy, forgiveness, and promises are found in One person—the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul wrote in verses 9-10, “Indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead, who rescued us from so great a danger of death, and will rescue us, He on whom we have set our hope. And He will yet deliver us...”

In Christ, we have set our hope! By placing our faith in Christ, we have been given hope—an unshakable hope. Hope, of course, is usually defined as “a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen.” Indeed, the feeling of hope arises every time we, who cannot see or know the future, fix our gaze upon something beyond ourselves out there in the future. Having done that often and continuously, and having experienced the squashing of hope over and over, humanity has so often found themselves giving in to despair or any number of the lies of the enemy of God. How often do we find ourselves not hoping at all? That’s exactly where the deceiver wants to take us! But in God, we place our hope!

As an action verb, “hope” is an expression of “wanting something good to happen;” namely our expressed and desired outcomes for the future. There is an anticipation, an expectation, and an optimistic want or desire placed upon that outcome for which we have hoped. Hope, it appears, is when we wish for something or the desired outcome.

But for a follower of Christ, hope is much more than just a wish or a feeling. In the Word of God, hope is a constant theme that is found. And it is expressed throughout the stories of difficulty or failure; desperation or despair. The Word of God teaches us the wonderful truth that hope is the invitation of a loving God. He reaches out to His broken, alienated, and lost creation and invites us to seek after Him. And when we seek after Him, we will find Him. God calls out to us and summons us to hope in Him! Our Savior and Redeemer plead for you to place your hope in Him. In other words, He asks you and me to diligently search for and seek after what we cannot see with human eyes. He is inviting us to hope or look by faith for His answer to sin; His offering of forgiveness; His gift of salvation, peace, joy, and comfort. And all of which we are seeking after and hoping for is found in Jesus.

Let me mention that both the Hebrew and Greek words for “hope” used in the Bible carry the deep meaning of “trust.” To hope is to trust! That’s not wishful thinking! That’s solid trust and belief in the One, true God; in His faithfulness and promises; and in His love and sovereignty. We may then say that when one has never trusted in the Lord, then that person has no real hope! But when one places their faith and trust in Christ, then we have hope. And so, any hope that you have for 2022 is really tied to your response as a believer to the promises of God! For, I “hope” you see, your hope and trust in Christ Jesus sets the stage for the remarkable outpouring of God’s Spirit.

Paul reminded his brothers and sisters in Christ that the Holy Spirit is the source of our hope, for His power causes hope to abound. He wrote in Romans 15:13, “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

Here is the good news for 2022—Our God is the God of hope! The truth is, while everything and everyone claims that designation for themselves, they cannot deliver! But God can and will accomplish and complete His promises—for He is eternal and His promises are unconditional! Faith and hope will allow you to see this and live this year in the blessed promises of eternal and loving God. May the God of all hope bless you and keep you and may His face shine upon you and give you peace and joy.

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.



A New Leaf

By Christy Lowman  
Burke County

This month I thought we would talk about a really cool insect. One that is so organized, and sophisticated that their colony is the second most complex society on the whole earth. Ours is ranked number one.

This colony is also farmers who grow a certain kind of fungus for their larvae to eat.

They are known as Leaf Cutter ants. They cut off leaf pieces and haul them in their mouths to their home where they use the leaves to grow fungi in their garden for their offspring to eat. Is that cool or what?

The adult ants only drink sap from the leaves for food. They work so quickly they can clear more than one tree of its leaves in less than a day! A nightmare for people who grow trees and plants for a living in the areas where leaf cutters live! Leaf cutters live in Northern Texas, South America, and Central America.

These dark red ants have a lifespan of ten to fifteen years. They are like butterflies in the fact that they go through metamorphous stages. They hatch from eggs as lava, then go through a pupa stage. They eventually reach the ant stage about 40-50 days later.

Their body structure is like other ants except for the back of the thorax has three rows of spines that look like teeth. This is so they can move things easier.

Leaf cutters belong to the ant group called Atta ants. They are also able to excrete a liquid when they find a superb food source which lets the others know to come and help gather it.

Each ant has its own special role in the colony. The largest ants, called Majors are the protectors, guardians, and heavy lifters. They also clear paths of debris so the others can get to their food source.

The second-largest ants are called Mediae. They do the majority of the cutting and carrying of leaves for the colony.

The third-smallest, the Minors protect the food and the forging path. They get to ride on the tops of the leaf pieces as they are being transported back to the nest. They do this to protect the ant that is carrying the leaf from parasitic flies. These Minors drink leaf sap on the way back home as well as inspect the health of the leaf making sure there is not a foreign fungus already growing on them. If there is, they will rid the leaf of the fungus.

The smallest ants are called Minims who work solely at home. They tend to the fungus garden and the larvae. Some of them work only as garbage collectors. Removing decayed plant matter from the garden. Once deemed a garbage collector, these ants are no longer permitted to interact with the queen or tend to the fungus garden to prevent the spread of disease. They will be garbage collectors for the rest of their life.

The name of the fungus these ants cultivate is known as Leucocoprineae. The ants care in great detail about the fungi they grow. If the leaves they bring the fungus to eat don't agree with them, they will throw them out and feed them something else. They also release an antibacterial substance from the bacterium that grows on their bodies to protect the fungus from infection. The relationship the ants have with the fungus is called symbiotic, meaning they do something to help each other survive.

Speaking of leaves, have you ever heard of turning over a new leaf? Which means changing something about yourself or something you do? One of the most common times to do this is the beginning of each New Year. Most people make New Year's resolutions in hopes to change something or better themselves. Do you make new goals for the new year? I certainly do. It's a time I think about the past year and how it went and then I think about the things I would like to improve about myself and set new goals to try to achieve within the next year. It is okay if you don't meet each goal, sometimes that happens too. But it gives you a sense of things to improve and try to meet. I love the fact, that God knew we needed a reset button, a fresh new start, or to turn a new leaf so to speak. He cares so much about us not only did He give us a New Year to do this, but He also gave us a fresh start each new day when we wake up! He is graceful and forgives us of our many mistakes and gives us infinite fresh starts each day, each time we ask for forgiveness, each new year. Sometimes something happens where the day is just horrible and I can't wait to go to bed and have a fresh start the next day! To me, this is one of the best gifts He could ever give us.

Dear Lord, we thank you for caring for us so much that you give us infinite fresh starts and the chance to turn new leaves when we ask for them. I pray that each one of us will seek the plans You have for us and that we will trust our lives to You. In Jesus's name, I pray, Amen.

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."* Jeremiah 29:11

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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).



Hallelujah

By Robby and Jenny McMakin  
Mitchell County

*"Hallelujah! Salvation and glory, splendor and majesty, power, dominion and might belong to our GOD; Hallelujah! For the LORD our GOD, the Almighty, the omnipotent, the ruler of all reigns. Let us rejoice and shout for joy! Let us give HIM glory and honor."* -Revelation 19:1,6-7

Today is the day to start praising GOD. Praise in the good, praise in the bad, praise for friends and family, praise for enemies, praise how HOLY SPIRIT has led, praise how HOLY SPIRIT is leading, praise for brothers and sisters in CHRIST, praise for those who will be drawn into JESUS'S arms this year, praise for what GOD has given, praise for things not given, praise, and keep praising.

*"Blessed, praised, adored, and thanked are You, O LORD GOD our Father, forever and ever. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and on the earth; Yours is the dominion and kingdom, O LORD, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all. In your hand is power and might; and it is in Your hand to make great and to give strength to everyone. Now therefore, our GOD, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name."* -1Chronicles 29:10-13

Prayers are praise to GOD. Start prayers with thankfulness and giving JESUS all the glory. Remember who provides all, who created everything, and gives us life. GOD deserves all the honor, adoration, exultation, and worship. It is HIS greatness, HIS power, HIS majesty, HIS victory, and HIS glory forever and ever.

*"Our Father who is in Heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Yours is the kingdom, and the power, and the Glory forever. Amen."* -Matthew 6:9-13

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# Mt. Carmel Baptist Church

## Who Will God Use in 2022?

By Toby Crowder  
Mitchell County

*“Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother, Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” – 1 Cor 1:1-3*

Here we are at the beginning of another New Year... and many will resolve to do things like lose weight, exercise, or fulfill “bucket list” items. As fun and challenging as these things can be, how often do we consider including God in our plans for the coming year? While none of us want to be unfruitful... or unfaithful... it seems that commitment is sometimes difficult to find. It does not take very long in studying the Bible to find that God has always used His people to help accomplish His plans. It is crucial for us, as the church, to realize the importance of answering this question.

In our scripture above, Paul is addressing the church at Corinth... and it was full of problems. There were divisions, fornication, and even litigation, as well as several other issues that he would address in this letter. Even though Paul had much to say to this church before he began his letter... he saluted them. This salutation reminded them of who he was, but also reminded them of who (and whose) they were. With that in mind, consider with me this thought... “Who will God use in 2022?”

I believe that God will use the REDEEMED. Notice that instead of signing letters at the end, as we do, Paul immediately identified himself. Here Paul reminds them of his calling for he is an apostle of God...through God's will! This was not what Paul had planned for his life. It was not his will... it was God's. Not only does he remind them of his purpose, but he reminds them in v.2 that they are the church of God! They are sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be saints! There was work there for them in the church, and this is who God would use. He addressed them as “the church which is at Corinth.” This word for church is ecclesia... “the set apart.” Regardless of where we are serving, we are the redeemed, the saved, the blood-bought; and that is who God uses both in Paul's day as well as our day.

Second, notice that He will use the RIGHTEOUS. Even though this was a church that had its share of problems, (which Paul would address later in his letter), their position in Him is secure... “*sanctified in Christ Jesus.*” There is no other way to be sanctified or to achieve righteousness. It is only by being sanctified in Christ Jesus that these were to be called the saints of God. At salvation, our standing changes before God, and our position changes from guilty to justified. While justification is an act, sanctification is a process, and we grow in His grace and knowledge (2 Pet 3:18) as we serve Him.

Finally, I believe that God will use the RESOLVED. Resolve means to: make a decision, or to “settle an argument.” Notice in v.3 that Paul salutes them with Grace and Peace from the Father and also from the Lord, Jesus Christ. Grace was the Gentile greeting of the time, and Peace was its Jewish equivalent. By using these together, Paul was reminding them that they were all ONE in Christ! They were those, regardless of origin, who claimed Him as Lord. Many say that we claim Him as Lord... But do we recognize Him as such? Are we resolved to know Him as Lord and allow that Lordship to guide us as we serve together?

While the apostle Paul had a unique calling, the same God that called him to be faithful enables us to do likewise as we serve Him. Who will God use in 2022? In Christ Jesus, we are the REDEEMED and the RIGHTEOUS ... But will we also be resolved? Who will God use this year... will it be you?

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



# Berry Chapel Baptist Church

By Steve Williams  
Mitchell County

Happy New Year, but you better wake up! Let me tell you something about the birth of our nation. The date is 4/18/1775. The British brought their troops into Old Boston by night when everyone was asleep. They were going to take small boats and go across the Charles River and attack Concord and Lexington. The British had their plans. Everyone was asleep but one man and his name was Paul Revere. When he saw what was going on, he got on his horse and went from village to village, house to house, CRYING Out-Wake Up, Wake Up, the British are coming, the British are coming! He Sounded The Alarm, he knocked on doors went out in the streets telling the people to wake up. Candles were lit and men began to put their clothes on, grab their muskets and run out the door. These men were called minutemen because they were ready in a minute. They were ready to defend their Honor, Country, Home, and Children because the British were coming. Paul Revere sent out a call and that call was "WAKE UP THE BRITISH ARE COMING." Today there is another war, a spiritual war, and somebody today needs to be a modern-day Paul Revere to tell the people to Wake Up that the Enemy is Coming, the Enemy is Coming or should I say that the enemy is here.

The sad thing is today the church is Asleep snuggled up in her pew with the covers pulled up over her head in the dark. See the church needs to wake up before it's too late. The Bible says in Romans 13:11-14 “*And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. 12 The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. 13 Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. 14 But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.*” That's what the Apostle Paul is talking about here. This is a wake-up call, THE ALARM HAS BEEN SOUNDED. The Late Great Vance Havner said “Anarchy is in the World. Apostasy is in the Church. Apathy is in the Pew!” Look at the World, Look at America, we are in a moral Free Fall. I'm amazed at how fast we are falling. We used to have TV shows such as Andy Griffith, Leave It to Beaver, Father Knows Best, and Touched by an Angel. Compare that to the TV shows we have today.

There is Anarchy is in the World and America. Christians are being shut down and told to shut up about their belief. But the Liberals on the other hand are telling Christians that we are Haters, Bigots, and Narrow Minded. They tell Christians they need to be more tolerant of the sins of the world. Let people live the way they want to and get off their backs. Did you know right now that there are more than 90,000 sights where you can pick up PORN? Look at all the Killing, Smash and Grab Robberies, Bulling, Stabbings, Shootings, etc...! Plus, we see the U.S.A government leaders Zoom meetings at the White House with International Gangsters and Murders, like (China, Russia, and many European nations), saying it's for the Economy's sake. I say Hogwash!!

There is Also Apostasy In The Church! George Barner who polls churches said that 62% of church people polled said that there is no such thing as Absolute Truth. If that is true, How can we know that the Bible is TRUE? How can we know what to believe if this were true? It's a shame but in our churches all across the land, there are Pastors, Priest, and Bishops saying that they don't believe that the Bible is true, They don't believe in all the miracles, the Birth, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

There is Apathy In The Pew: Where is the Excitement? What are people doing? It's bad and sad to say but most people who call themselves Christians are yawning and rolling over and going back to sleep. As Paul is saying here it is High Time To Awake Out of this Sleep! High time means TIME IS HERE and Far Spent means LATER THAN YOU THINK. I believe Jesus is at the threshold-ready to return, The trumpet Is about to sound. And it's only by the almighty hand of God that keep the flood gates of Hell from overrunning our world right now. So Christian wake up and get with the program this New Year.



## Words of Wisdom for the New Year:

- The vision must be followed by the venture. It is not enough to stare up the steps - we must step up the stairs. Vance Havner
- Courage is contagious. When a brave man takes a stand, the spines of others are often stiffened. Billy Graham
- Our society strives to avoid any possibility of offending anyone - except God. Billy Graham
- The most terrifying words in the English language are: I'm from the government and I'm here to help. Ronald Reagan
- The government's first duty is to protect the people, not run their lives. Ronald Reagan

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

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The Sky's Not the Limit

By Tim Tron  
Burke County

Walking in a bleak and forsaken landscape, there seemed little to brighten the spirit within. It appeared the societal oppression had finally reached my soul. Alongside my pathway, the river ran a confluence of grayness, passing over rocks and eddies of congestion. Dark voids formed pools of contention. The sound of rushing water was the same as in the brilliant days of springtime, yet there were no blooms, no sunshine vistas – the world felt trapped in an eternal abyss of despair.

Daylight was quickly fading from the sky above. My thoughts turned to contemplate my return route and which way I should go. It was of little use to take the high ground since the sun was already nearly past the horizon. A blissful sunset was out of the question. Feeling a sudden urge, like a gentle nudge from on high, I decided to return home the way I had come, back through the darkness of the forest, a welcome cover to my demeanor. Turning around to retrace my steps, it was at that moment that the scene before me nearly took my breath away. The words from above suddenly filled my heart, *“I know the thoughts I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you an expected end.”*

There before me was a brilliant orange, fiery sunset in the backdrop of a forlorn winter sky. The glory of the LORD was above and reflected in the waters of the secretive Johns River below. Suddenly, that seemingly dead, distant landscape had come alive, a breathing, living being – a reflection of His almighty omnipotence. As the radiance of that fading image smiled across my face, a reminder of thankfulness began to warm my heart. The words of John’s testimony from Patmos echoed in my mind, *“And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”*

We face a new year, and for many, they do so with much heaviness in their hearts. There has been much death and darkness in our world. In a time when it seemed like we could finally leave a recent train-wreck of history behind us, there seems to be no end to the calamities through which we must traverse. Looking ahead, we may only see forests like the bones of the dead underneath dark, foreboding skies. Yet, if we turn around and look, even against an aghast bleak sky, there is still something for which we can be thankful – something that we must realize was Godly; a blazing sunset to remind us that God was and is still with us through it all.

The beginning of a new year is often a time to make resolutions, but maybe we should try something different this year. Perhaps, we should instead think about looking back to the blessings with which we have been bestowed, no matter how small.

Sometimes self-reflection is more rewarding than one might anticipate. We often get so lost in the struggle to make it to the next day we fail to realize what we have accomplished. Sometimes we are reminded of self-reflection in the oddest circumstances.

I was recently walking with a colleague on campus and discussing the state of things. The conversation turned toward recent advances in technology. He asked if I had heard about the latest telescope that was about to be sent into orbit, the James Webb telescope. He told me how it would be so powerful that it could see back through time to the beginnings of the universe. Researching his statement revealed this from NASA’s website, “The James Webb Space Telescope’s revolutionary technology will study every phase of cosmic history—from within our solar system to the most distant observable galaxies in the early universe.”

When I hear about science trying to “look back in time” to find evidence of the “beginning” it somewhat irritates me. My frustration comes from the fact that many people who do not believe in God will do anything to try to prove that creation began with some miraculous spark of combustion out of nothing. Now, don’t get me wrong. I’m not saying my colleague is or is not a believer - that is yet to be seen. But rather, the lengths to which governments will spend taxpayer monies to research the creation in the name of science are sometimes laughable. It was in this vein of thought that the first thing that blurted out of my mouth when my colleague mentioned this incredible scientific breakthrough was, “What if someone on earth is looking through the lens of the orbiting telescope and sees in the distance another eyeball looking back at them?”

“You mean like another being, like an alien looking at us?”  
“Not quite.” My mind was thinking more of God, but at that moment, I couldn’t bring myself to say it out loud.

“Or maybe you mean like us looking back in time at ourselves,” he said with a hint of mysticism in his voice, “Like through a wrinkle in time?”

“Perhaps,” I replied, but my thoughts had already begun to turn to how amused God must be at our incessant desire to disprove his existence by hoping to look back to the beginning of time. Under my breath, I mouthed the first lines of the gospel of John to ward off any more insolence, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.”*

You see, by the sheer virtue of light, we were given life. Through humanity’s self-absorption, thinking that we can grow wiser than our creator, we can miss the mark. The answers to life, to from the beginning to the end, the alpha to the omega, are all handed to us by the one who we seek to find – God our creator.



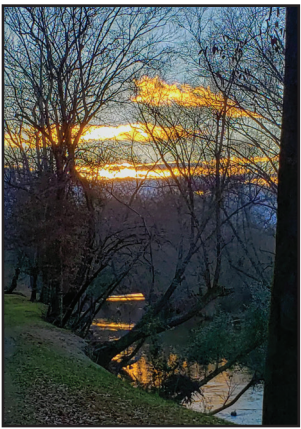
Then my mind returned to the words of my colleague, “Us looking back at ourselves....”  
It was then that the sunset on that dreary evening made sense. We didn’t need a state-of-the-art orbiting telescope to see it. We don’t need an international space agency to define the beginning of time to know who we are. The great Northern Irish mathematician, bioethicist, and Christian apologist, John Lennox writes, *“To the majority of those who have reflected deeply and written about the origin and nature of the universe, it has seemed that it points beyond itself to a source which is non-physical and of great intelligence and power.”*

When we seek what we cannot find, we lose our way. But when we seek Him, as the scriptures had said, if we knock, the door shall be opened. When we realize that all we need is merely for our asking, if only we ask, then the concept of realization of our existence begins to make sense. *“Behold, I stand at the door; and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”* And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.”

If you can find nothing else in this past year for which to give thanks, believe that there is at least one thing that was there all along. You may not have turned around and caught a glimpse of that setting sun, but then again, you had to turn from your ways before it could be seen. Once our time on earth is done, there won’t be any more opportunities to make restitution with God. Judgment day is at hand, and all will stand before the Lord. *“But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.”*

Are you ready for eternity?  
Seek not things of this world, but seek that which gives life eternal, the salvation that comes only from Jesus Christ.  
Thanks be to God.

Timothy W. Tron lives in Collettsville, NC. with his family. He is currently the Systems Administrator for the Computer Science Department at App. State. Timothy is the former Director of the Trail of Faith in Valdese, where he still volunteers and helps with tours. He is the author of a new Christian series, “Children of the Light”, with the first book being, “Bruecke to Heaven”, revised as “Bridge 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 is currently acting as the Faculty/Staff Liaison for the Ratio Christi campus ministry at App. State. He can be reached at [trontw@appstate.edu](mailto:trontw@appstate.edu) You can visit his website at <http://www.timothywtron.com/> or see more of his writings [HERE](#).



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Relationships: The Heart of the Matter

By Dan Quorllo  
Burke County



As we begin a new year, many are looking at areas of life to improve. Some of those areas may be time management, priorities, exercise, or other health matters. One of the most common areas of focus is how to improve our relationships with others, whether that be with a spouse, family, coworker, or any other relationship. Often, people desire things to be better but struggle with where they should even begin. In some cases, things have gotten so bad that they have simply given up on even hoping it will ever change. How do we change or improve these relationships? Where do we even begin?

We must realize that all our relationships with others flow directly out of our relationship with God. Therefore, our focus must first be on our relationship with God. Relationships with others will never be right if we are not first right in our relationship with God. Therefore, we must begin by truly developing a personal relationship with God.

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

But God is first and foremost interested in our hearts. We cannot claim to love God if we do not take the time to spend with Him. We cannot claim to love God if we are unwilling to obey Him. Our relationship with God is such that its development demands time and energy. If we wish to develop a relationship with Him, we must spend time with Him in His Word and prayer. The only limits to are those we place ourselves.

Tragically, we often fail to remember that God does not judge us as a man. Because we fail to consider this, we often do things that make us look good on the outside while neglecting our own hearts. When it comes to man's assessment of things, we look good; however, God judges the heart. It is not our service that God desires first and foremost; it is our heart. Only when we have a heart that is truly right with God can we expect our relationships with others to be what they need to be. Do you desire better relationships? Then determine to address the heart of the matter and develop your relationship with God through consistent, focused Bible study and prayer.

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



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The Source of Our Power

By Dr. Tom Walker  
McDowell County



Ephesians 6:10 tells us, “*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.*”

We are beginning a series on Battling Through Life. It is sure that we are engaged in warfare since we have been saved. We have an internal enemy called the flesh, an external enemy we call the world (evil system around us), and an infernal enemy called the Devil. All three attempt to defeat us every day of our lives but we cannot allow them to defeat us.

They are all three formidable foes, but we are well able to overcome them, not in ourselves, but in the assistance the Lord will give to us.

Because of the flesh, our fallen Adamic nature, we are weak, but through the Lord we can be strong, facing our enemies victoriously. Our enemies are three-fold: the world (the evil system around us), the flesh (our fallen natures), and Satan himself.

The Christian life is not an easy life; however, it is the way of the transgressor that is hard and difficult. Proverbs 13:15 says, “*The way of the transgressor is hard.*” Who is the transgressor? A transgressor is someone who violates a law or a command. When people go against the commands of God given in His Holy Word, they become transgressors. We are told that way is a very hard one to endure.

The Christian life is warfare, a battle between the new nature one receives at conversion and the old nature with which a person is born with at the time of physical birth. There is a battle between the two. It is evident in the life of the Apostle Paul when he wrote in Romans 7:15-25, “*For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwell-eth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.*”

We will either follow the law of God or the flesh (the old Adamic nature). That choice will result in success or failure, in life or death, or victory or defeat. How we fare in the spiritual battle we face in life will be determined by whether we cater to the flesh (the old nature) or the new nature. We partook of and received a new spiritual nature when we were saved (2 Peter 1:4).

The three foes we face are the evil world system around us, the flesh or old nature within us, and the Devil, who is our external foe. They are all formidable opponents but they are enemies that can be defeated through the power of God within us.

We need some brave Christian soldiers who will stand up and be counted in these days of compromise and apostasy. It is no time to retreat in this spiritual battle!

Our Companions  
“My brethren”

How extremely important our companions, our fellow saints, and soldiers are in the spiritual battle that is fiercely raging. Can you imagine going to war and fighting a major battle all alone? The enemy has many warriors, thus it gives us comfort to know that some want to stand for the Lord and serve Him as we do. We have Christian friends who help us as we seek to war good warfare for our Lord.

As a brother in Christ, we are to do several things regarding our brethren and fellow soldiers. Let’s think about a few of those responsibilities.

We are to exhort. Hebrews 10:25 says, “*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.*” Since we sense the near second coming of our Lord, we should be exhorting one another. The word for exhort is the Greek N.T. word is parakalew originates from two words. The word para and kalew. The first-word para means nigh unto or near to, while kalew means to call nigh or by your side.

We are called upon to be by each other’s side as we travel through this world that is unfriendly to the dedicated, devoted saints of God. The local church should be a haven for the people of God. “Exhorting” is a present participle that indicates it is an action that is to be continuing going on; it suggests continuing action.

We are to encourage. In Deuteronomy 3:28, the children of Israel were told to encourage their leaders, “*encourage thou him.*” So many people are discouraged because of the direction our nation has taken. Since that is true of so many people, we need to assemble to encourage one another. Webster says to encourage is, “To give courage to; to give or increase the confidence of success; to inspire with courage, spirit, or strength of mind; to embolden; to animate; to incite; to inspire. How long has it been since you gave some words of encouragement to your pastor, family members, co-workers, neighbors, and others? Someone needs the encouragement you can give to them.

We are to be examples. Those who are in the local church should be a proper example for others to follow in the matter of godly living. Titus 2:7 says, “*Show-*

*ing thyself a pattern of good works...*” Younger believers should be able to live as an older saint of God and as a result, have the approval of God. I am grateful for every older, godly example the Lord has placed in my pathway through my lifetime.

Our Confidence  
“Be strong in the Lord”

Human strength will fail us in giving an all-out effort to be a good soldier of Jesus Christ. Jesus states in Mark 14:38, “*Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.*” Our Lord said, “*the flesh is weak.*” We must look beyond ourselves to find stamina and strength for the battle.

His strength is an unrivaled strength. The Lord is referred to in the Bible as the Almighty. Fifty-seven times in the Scriptures the Lord is called “the Almighty.” That simply means the Lord has all power. God said to Jacob, “*I am God Almighty.*” There is no doubt in my mind that nothing is too difficult for Him to solve. Since He is Almighty we do not have to worry about anything as long as our trust and confidence is in Him. There is an Old Testament verse that says, “*Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there anything too hard for me?*” (Jer.32:27).

His strength is an undergirding strength. Deuteronomy 33:27 reminds us that, “*The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them.*” When the arms that are beneath, holding up God’s children are described, they are called “everlasting arms.” You can do whatever you are called upon by God to do because of the strength of God’s arms durable, lasting, powerful arms.

His strength is an undeniable strength. Since the Lord divided the Red Sea, making a way for Israel to cross on dry ground (Ex.14:16), it is obvious we cannot rightly deny the strength the Lord possesses. There are so many feats of what God’s strength has accomplished, you cannot deny after observing the clear evidence of God’s ability as revealed in the Scriptures.

Our Conquering  
“In the power of His might”

Our might alone is insignificant, but it is a different story when it comes to the power and might of God. The only way we can conquer is through the “power of His might.” The word “might” (iscuz) is used of force. “Power” is the Greek New Testament word (kratei). It is translated in other places in the King James Version as dominion, might, and strength.

His might enables us to serve. The Apostle Paul said, “*I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me*” (Phil.4:13). Through Christ, we can do what we never thought was possible for us to do. In my early years, I would never have thought I would have been a preacher of the Gospel, a Bible College president, a pastor, a radio preacher, and a writer. But, it is amazing what God can do with little when He is in it. I have done what I have done through the power of Christ that has enabled me to honor Him in many ways.

His might enables us to sing. In Psalms 59:16 the Psalmist wrote: “*I will sing of thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning: for thou hast been my defense and refuge in the day of my trouble.*” Because of God’s power and might that continually works on our behalf, we can sing when others wonder how it could be possible in our circumstances. We are not to worry because we have an Almighty God who can handle whatever would quench our song.

His might enables us to suffer. Moses made an important decision in his life when he chose—“*to suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.*” What moved Moses to make that choice? He was not worried about suffering because he believed God would enable Him to suffer for Him. If the Apostle Paul could suffer all he did gracefully (2 Corinthians 11:24-28), then God can surely enable us to do the same.

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

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The Empty Nest - No Regrets Family

By Dean Honeycutt  
Mitchell County



I want to write a word of encouragement to all the parents who are becoming empty nesters. “Empty nest” is that part of life where your grown children are one by one, moving out of the home. Bedrooms are empty, no toys scattered on the floor, no late-night conversations, or those times when you have gone to bed and your child comes in late opens your bedroom door to tell you they are home. Dad and mom can now rest knowing all the family is safe in the nest.

But as time goes by the nest becomes empty. Children grow up so fast and before you know it, they are moving out of the home to go to college, start a job in a new location, or get married. Pam and I have always had children around. Of course, we did not train our children to remain at home, but as they move out and the house becomes a little quieter it is sad.

Every night without fail I have opened bedroom doors and told my children “Goodnight, I love you; and I hope you sleep good.” Even when they are asleep, I will whisper these words. So, Pam and I miss moments like this and when they move out it is difficult, to say the least.

It seems like Pam has managed this a little better than I. It may be that I have some regrets that I did not spend enough time with my children. The Lord allowed Pam to stay at home with our children, which proved to be a tremendous blessing to our family. So, looking back maybe I could have spent a little more time playing with dolls, riding bikes, or fishing together.

James Dobson, author and popular family counselor, discussed “a recent study asked four hundred parents of college freshmen to report their feelings when their son or daughter left home. Surprisingly to some, the fathers took it harder than the mothers. And one of the chief explanations was regret. Fathers had been so busy—working so hard—that they suddenly realized it was too late to build a relationship with the then-grown child.” (Fathers and the Empty Nest; James Dobson; July 15, 2016).

I would like to offer a few suggestions that I am trying to work through myself. First, if your children are at home, spend time with them. That work will be there tomorrow, and the lawn that needs mowing can wait. Go out and throw that baseball, sit down, and read that book, take that teenage girl shopping and out to eat. Show her how a young man should treat her. Value the trivial things saying goodnight, I love you, dinner conversations, and prayers together.

Second, provide opportunities for family gatherings. My wife does an excellent job with this. She will prepare a meal and invite everyone over to eat. When we all get together, we relive great memories and childhood adventures. Siblings laugh about who did what and “remember that time when we” and then proceed to tell a story that brings back wonderful memories. We like to take small vacations together. The larger the family gets the more difficult it becomes, but with careful planning and communication, we can usually make it happen.

Third, do not forget the “baby” of the family. If the youngest child is still at home, remember things are hard for them as well. The youngest sibling was used to brother and sis being around and things are different for them as well. That youngest child needs your encouragement and affirmation. They will want to grow up fast because siblings are out of the home and living independently, but that youngest child needs your special attention.

Fourth, you and your spouse had spent much of your time with your children. Now that they are “out of the nest” what do you do? You need to continue to build that relationship with your spouse. You now have time to make plans and do things together as a couple. Create hobbies that you can do together. Pam and I like to go on jeep rides. And now that we are becoming “empty nesters” we can make plans to travel together and go places we have always wanted to visit. The bottom line is the two that are in the nest need one another and they need to foster that relationship that honors God and is a blessing to their grown children.

Our nest is not empty, other nests are being built which have become part of the family. Grandchildren are “grand,” and Pam and I get to help with that new nest. Son in-laws and daughter-in-laws are wonderful and are becoming wonderful additions to our family. So, at the end of the day, Pam and I can smile and say, “God has been good to our family.”

Many blessings to you and Happy New Year.

Pastor Dean Honeycutt shepherds Snow Hill Baptist Church in Bakersville, NC. He may be reached at 828-385-0213, [snowhillbaptist@gmail.com](mailto:snowhillbaptist@gmail.com), or visit their website at [www.snowhillbaptist.com](http://www.snowhillbaptist.com).



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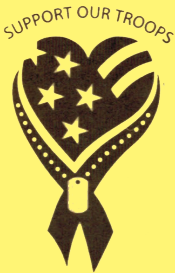
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Prepare Your Heart To Hear From God

By Glenda Ward  
McDowell County

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” John 10:27

We don’t know when God will speak directly to us, but we should prepare our hearts so that we are ready to listen at any time. We need to spiritually tune in to God’s communication. So how can we tune our heart spiritually to hear more of God’s voice more clearly? When our hearts and mind are not in the right place we hear incorrectly. We end up hearing what our hearts want to hear instead of what is really being told or instructed to us. We can be sure that what we think is truly God’s Will and directly from God.

Put God First – At times we feel unworthy to pray, we feel we don’t know Him well enough, that He won’t bother with us, Or that we don’t have the skills it takes to pray correctly. Other times, we are angry at what we see as injustices and hurts. These are all common feelings to us all.

We need to remember that God is much bigger than all our insecurities and doubts. Even though you may be unworthy and don’t know Him as intimately as you should, even if you don’t know what to say... That is how big God’s love is! God is like a father, tender and compassionate to his children, although not all children have a tender and compassionate father. But you can receive God’s love in your heart by the means of and through the Holy Spirit (Reference Romans 5:5). Pray to God to help you overcome these feelings, so you can hear from Him with a heart that is focused directly on Him, and not on you. Read Psalm Chapter 139. Put God First.

A Cleansed Heart – At times, the guilt of some sin may weigh us down. The Bible tells us that God does not listen to our prayers when we sin (Reference John 9:31). The only way to approach God’s throne is to humbly ask for His forgiveness in the name of Jesus Christ. We should also ask the Holy Spirit to examine our hearts and convict us of any sin to which we need to confess or resolve (Reference John 16:7-8). Unless Jesus did what He came to do, there would be no Gospel, He could not remove our sins. If He did not go back to the Father the Holy Spirit would not come to us. Christ’s presence on earth was limited to one place at a time. His leaving meant He could be present to the whole world through the Holy Spirit.

Three important tasks of the Holy Spirit are (1) conviction of sin and calling it to repentance. (2) Showing the standard of God’s righteousness to anyone who believes. (3) Demonstrating Christ’s judgment over Satan. According to Jesus, not believing in Him is sin. (Reference: John 16:9).

Your prayers are to be pleasing to God, confessing your sin, and asking the Holy Spirit to cleanse you by the blood of the Lamb. Approach God’s throne and listen with a cleansed heart.

A Peaceful Heart – We are to keep our minds very still and our Spirits open to hearing from our Heavenly Father. Find a time and a place where you can remove all distractions. Block off a time in your day for a dedicated “appointment” with God. “Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth” (Psalm 46:10). Set aside the world around you, so you can hear from God with a peaceful heart.

A Trusting Heart – If we approach God’s throne with our own agendas, we may miss hearing from God. If we will really listen, God will often tell or show something much bigger than what we can imagine or even plan. He may reveal Himself in ways we don’t expect. Or He may remain quiet until His time is right to reveal His thoughts or plans to us. God is not limited to our views. Read Isaiah 55:8-9. Put aside your own expectations and ideas. God has the best intentions for you, so choose to listen to God with a trusting heart.

A Ready Heart – God is most pleased when we, His children, respond to His voice once He has spoken. Don’t make excuses when God reveals His Will and thoughts to you. Stories are recorded in the Bible of men, women, and children of God. Our book will be made and read by God Himself! Don’t be guilty of not responding to God positively when He speaks. (Read 2 Corinthians 5:10). Relinquish your self-centered attitudes at your footstool of prayer so you can hear from God with a ready heart.

God wants to communicate with His children. Christians hear from God in ways they don’t expect and are blessed by being obedient to God’s instruction and what they hear. God speaks to us through the Holy Spirit when reading Scripture from the Bible, a thought of someone that prompts us to pray for them, through people working around us, we are reminded to love the person but hate their sin and pray for them. We need to seek God’s Will directly from God, not someone else.

Being quiet and focusing on our Savior can change the landscape of our hearts. “Be still, and know that I am God.” Nothing frees our hearts like taking a few minutes to humble ourselves, confess our sins, and ask God to cleanse us. One of the most intriguing miracles of the New Testament is Jesus making His home in our hearts. Open the door of your heart. Draw near to Him for fellowship. “Be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,” Your roots will grow down into God’s love and keep you strong. (Reference: Ephesians 3:16-17).

There are ways to tend our hearts all year long. Let’s make this our New Year’s pledge to God.


Pour out your heart to God and tell Him how you feel. Read Psalm 34:18. You may be bearing a weary heart or maybe a long, draining year has robbed you of your strength. Whatever the case, stop a few minutes with the Shepherd of your soul to reflect on this: Read Psalm 23:2-3. Whether your heart needs to be




quieted, cleansed, healed, or renewed, God will meet that need as you draw near to Him. Set aside a few minutes each day to prepare your heart for Jesus.  
Have a Blessed, Spirit-filled New Year in 2022 from Pastor Charles Dicks and everyone at Grand View Baptist Church.

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.

Remember ye not the former things, neither consider the things of old.  
Isaiah 43:18-19




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How They Served Our Country—John Adams

By David Streater, Ph.D.  
Burke County, NC



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

John Adams was born in 1735, outside Boston, and graduated from Harvard College in 1755. He became an attorney as he did not like teaching school. Then, Samuel Adams convinced John to become a politician opposing England’s oppression and taxation on the colonists.

While Adams was a Continental Congressman, he persuaded Thomas Jefferson to author the Declaration of Independence. Adams related that, unlike himself, Jefferson was a great writer, personable, and popular. Being confrontational, Adams was known as a “principled radical.” An example is Adams successfully defending British soldiers who shot into a crowd during the Boston Massacre; this made him disliked for doing the right thing.

Due to his sarcastic personality, Adams was not only a successful defense attorney and statesman, but he also had an exceptional ability to understand and resolve complex problems. These traits served Adams well in his high-level positions after the Revolution, including being the Vice-President of the United States and the second President of the United States. As President, John dealt with serious international relations and immigration issues.

Of all his accomplishments, Adams greatly cherished his off-and-on friendship with Thomas Jefferson, and more so, his life-long love affair with his wife, Abigail. Ironically, Adams and Jefferson died within hours of each other on July 4, 1826, the 50th anniversary of the United States Declaration of Independence. 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 (FoundationForward.com) to learn more about our existing settings.

All 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 local Charters of Freedom setting. Please contact Dr. Streater (david.streater@gmail.com) for 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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Seeing Wonders In 2022 - Joshua 3:5

By Dennis Love  
McDowell County



In the third chapter of Joshua, Israel is about to cross over the Jordan River and enter into the land of Canaan. Forty years earlier, Joshua and Caleb had assured the Jews that they were well able to go into the land and possess it. However, the people said; “we are not able.” Only a few said we can take this land if we will take God at His Word. The majority said; “we are not able!” Sadly, they went with the majority and wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Now, as we come to the third chapter of Joshua, the children of Israel are about to enter a new land with sights they had never seen before. So, Joshua tells them in v5, “*Tomorrow, the Lord is going to do wonders among you.*” Joshua 3:5 says; “*And Joshua said unto the people; sanctify yourselves: for tomorrow the Lord will do wonders among you.*” It is my prayer that 2022 will be a year of wonders for you! God promised His people that He would do wonders among them. I believe that promise is still good for His people today. I want this New Year to be a year of wonders for you and the church. In the Christian life, we are either an overcomer, or we are being overcome. In the Christian life, we are either a victor or a victim. Were you an overcomer in 2021, or were you overcome? Were you a victor in 2021, or were you a victim? Did you move forward in your Christian life in 2021, or did you move backward? As we enter into a New Year, please understand this Biblical truth. God did not save us to make statues out of us, and to put us on exhibition. He saved us to make soldiers out of us, and to move us forward by faith to claim our rich inheritance in Jesus Christ. Moses said it well in Deuteronomy 6:23; “*He brought us out....that He might bring us in.*” God brought His people out of the bondage of Egypt so that He could bring them into Canaan so that they could begin experiencing new wonders and new blessings day by day. God has brought us too out of the bondage of sin. WHY? He has brought us out....that He might bring us in! He has brought us out of the bondage of sin so that we might experience new wonders and new blessings day by day. Did you hear about the patrolman who pulled over a car that was weaving all over the highway? He discovered that the driver was a preacher. He immediately detected a certain smell in the car. “Preacher, what’s in that bottle on your seat beside you?” “That’s water, officer.” “Well, could I see it please?” He took the bottle and smelled it and said; “Preacher, this is not water, it's wine.” The preacher began shouting, “Praise the Lord! Glory to God in the Highest, He’s done it again!” I’m ready to see Him do the wonder of turning people’s wine into water! If He turned water into wine, then He can also turn someone’s wine into water. I’m ready to see Him do the wonder of filling His house to overflowing once again! I’m ready to see Him do the wonder of getting His people excited over worship! I’m ready to see Him do the wonder of getting His people up and moving forward once again! I’m ready to see Him do the wonder of moving His people to GET UP, GET OUT, and GET BEHIND the blood-stained banner of the Lord Jesus Christ, and begin possessing the land that is spiritually ours. 2022 can be a year of wonders if we will simply take God at His Word. WE NEED TO SEE SOME WONDERS AGAIN. Let’s make this New Year a year of wonders!

*Dr. Dennis Love has been in full-time ministry work for 31 years. He recently retired as the Senior Pastor at Glenwood Baptist Church in Marion. He and his wife Vicki have been married for 41 years, and they have lived in Marion for almost eight years. They have two sons and four grandchildren and two step-grandchildren*



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By Jim Denison

Could a massive new bird flu outbreak become a deadly 2022 pandemic?

There is much I should be writing about today. For example, a massive new bird flu outbreak in Israel is raising fears of another global pandemic if the virus, which causes 50 percent mortality in humans, is becoming more infectious to us. "There could be a mutation that also infects people and turns into a massive disaster," an Israeli expert warns.

Meanwhile, the global pandemic we are already facing continues to dominate the news. The omicron variant is fueling a massive surge in COVID-19 cases in the US. Flight disruptions are continuing; cities around the world are canceling New Year's Eve celebrations as hospitalizations rise with an increase in hospitalized children as well.

Why, then, would I devote today's Daily Article to a person many of you may not know beyond his name and his most famous achievement?

The death of Archbishop Desmond Tutu made global headlines Sunday evening. I mentioned his death in yesterday's Daily Article with deep gratitude for his fight against apartheid. However, I need to say much more about his life and his beliefs, since the former was so winsome while the latter has become both popular and deeply problematic in our culture.

When I heard Desmond Tutu speak  
Let's begin with the positive.

Desmond Tutu was born in 1931 in South Africa. A brilliant student, he obtained an honors degree from Kings College in London with a focus on Hebrew, completed a Master's degree with a focus on Islam, and studied Arabic and Greek in Jerusalem. He rose through Anglican leadership ranks to become general secretary of the South African Council of Churches, working courageously in this capacity against apartheid and receiving the 1984 Nobel Peace Prize as a result.

He was appointed Archbishop of Cape Town in 1986, serving in this role until his retirement in 1996. He remained active in social and international affairs for many years afterward.

Upon hearing of the archbishop's death, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, called Tutu a "pioneer" and said his death was "a great loss." The present Archbishop of Cape Town, Thabo Makgoba, stated: "He wanted every human being on Earth to experience the freedom, the peace, and the joy that all of us could enjoy if we truly respected one another as people created in the image of God."

While Desmond Tutu was a man of fearless courage, he couched that courage in genuine humility, winsome graciousness, and quick wit. I heard him speak in Dallas many years ago and still remember his kindness and gentle humor. I have never heard of a more likable speaker.

Church officials in South Africa are planning a weeklong send-off for the archbishop that will include a lying in state ceremony, an ecumenical service, and a requiem mass.

"I would not worship a God who is homophobic"

In 2013, Archbishop Tutu stated while campaigning for gay rights: "I would refuse to go to a homophobic heaven. No, I would say sorry, I mean I would much rather go to the other place. I would not worship a God who is homophobic." In 2015, his daughter Mpho Tutu married a woman in the Netherlands. Tutu attended and blessed the proceedings despite Anglican opposition to same-sex marriage.

In his 2010 book, *Made for Goodness: And Why this Makes All the Difference*, Tutu wrote: "The reality of heaven cannot tolerate the existence of hell. Even our worst enemies are God's beloved children. What kind of God could endure the sight of God's own children screaming in eternal pain?" He predicted that all people "will be drawn into heaven by the love of God. The power of evil will ultimately become unattractive, and we will yield to the beauty of heaven."

You can see how a person who experienced the horrors of apartheid might campaign so passionately for the value of every human and question the belief that any person could be separated eternally from God. In this sense, Desmond Tutu was a theologian for our times.

Our culture's insistence on tolerance of all people and their sexual "rights" has become all-consuming. For anyone to suggest that some of these "rights" are immoral is to be homophobic. The claim that Christ is the only way to heaven and



that those who reject Him will be separated from Him in hell is branded as intolerant in the extreme.

The danger of tolerance

It is therefore alluring to embrace humanity as the archbishop did, with good-natured acceptance of all people as they are. Unsurprisingly, many are rejecting biblical orthodoxy in their claim to be "spiritual but not religious" while others are "changing their minds" about some of the essential doctrines of historic Christianity.

But is it possible for tolerance to harm the objects of tolerance? Can good parents tolerate that which injures their child? Could good friends allow their friends to persist in behavior that is injurious to them?

As cultural commentator Mary Eberstadt has clearly and powerfully documented, the rise of secularism and the so-called sexual revolution has produced six decades of "unprecedented rates of divorce, cohabitation, abortion, and fatherlessness."

She adds: "The modern diminutions of family and faith exact a civilizational toll. It's hard to believe we are better off in a world where many men will never know the joy and spiritual deepening of fatherhood; where many women reach middle age without ever having held a baby, let alone having loved and nurtured one from birth to adulthood; and where growing swaths of the population will never encounter many of the greatest treasures of the human patrimony—i.e., the art and literature and philosophy of Judeo-Christianity."


*Jim Denison Ph.D speaks and writes on cultural and contemporary issues. His daily column is distributed to more than 113,000 subscribers in 208 countries. See more on the website [www.denisonforum.org](http://www.denisonforum.org). Copyrighted and printed by permission from Denison Forum.*



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# Lakeview Missionary Church

## There’s No One Better

By Christopher L. Scott  
*Moses Lake, Washington*

I grew up in a small town and there weren’t a lot of things for kids to do. One of the activities my Dad signed me up for was karate. He had been going for a few months and enjoyed it because of the good exercise, character building, and peace of mind that he could defend himself.

My Dad taught me an important lesson while I was in karate: there’s always someone better than you. In karate, you might work hard to advance up the levels and earn higher “degrees” of belts (green, orange, black, etc.). However, a core teaching of karate is humility and respect because no matter how good you think you are, there is always someone out there better than you. In other words, there’s always someone else that can hurt you and defeat you.

But when it comes to Christ, He is the best. There is no one better, more perfect, or more amazing. No one can claim to be God-like Him. There is no one better than Jesus.

The author of Hebrews tells us that God “*spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways*” (Hebrews 1:1, NASB). The fathers that He’s talking about here are the revered and respected forefathers of the Israelites of the Old Testament. The prophets describe the many parts of Israel’s history such as their laws, institutions, ceremonies, kings, judges, and priests. Bible teacher and author J. Vernon McGee comments on Hebrews 1:1-2, “*Christ is superior to all the Old Testament writers, because the revelation is filled up in Him. He fulfills all of the Old Testament, and He Himself gives God’s final word to man.*”

The author continues saying that Christ is the “*heir of all things . . . made the world*” and is the “*radiance*” of God’s “*glory and the exact representation of His nature*” that He “*upholds all things by the word of His power*” and that Christ “*made purification of sins*” (Hebrews 1:2-3).

Just like I was taught in karate, there is always someone better, and He is Christ!

The author of Hebrews finishes his opening remarks of his letter saying that Jesus is “*much better than the angels*” (Hebrews 1:4). The author begins this argument that Jesus is “better than” and continues throughout the rest of the thirteen chapters of this magnificent book. Hebrews describes how Jesus is better than the prophets (Hebrews 1:1-4), the angels (Hebrews 1:5-2:18), Moses (Hebrews 3:1-6), Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:1-3), the priests (Hebrews 9:1-10), and the Old Testament legendary saints (Hebrews 11:3-40).

Like my Dad taught me many years ago, there is always someone better. But when it comes to our Christian faith, no one is better than Jesus.

*Christopher L. Scott, a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, is a pastor and freelance writer. Learn more about his writing ministry at [ChristopherLynnScott.com](http://ChristopherLynnScott.com).*



# Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

## In His Presence

By Caron Cline  
*Burke County*

As a new year arrives, most spend a few moments reflecting on those goals or desires from the previous year that were long forgotten by the end of the first quarter. Now is the time to renew those resolutions with a fresh commitment to follow through. Unfortunately, most goals focus entirely on weight loss, completion of projects at home or work, and regular exercise. While all are worthy pursuits, spiritual goals are the most crucial and transforming. The most important resolution for a believer is an intentional pursuit of intimacy with God the Father. He desires that we come expectantly and alone into the secret place of His presence so that He might reveal Himself and His character more fully. He desires that we quiet ourselves before Him, soaking in His presence and listening for His Voice. If we choose to spend time in the secret place, His power will fall upon us. In Acts 1:4, Jesus commanded His disciples not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for what the Father had promised. Acts 2:1 says that these people were waiting together, in one place, on the Day of Pentecost. Suddenly, the Holy Spirit was manifested through the sound of a mighty wind and tongues of fire. Every believer witnessed this supernatural event and each one was filled with the power of the Spirit. Jesus had promised this gift previously and in Acts 1:5, He said, “*John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now*”. We receive the Holy Spirit at the moment of our conversion, but the fullness of the Spirit only happens as we soak in His Presence, one on one with the One who called us as His special possession. We must ask for His filling; we must hunger and thirst for righteousness; we must position ourselves for an ever-continuing transformation that moves us from glory to glory.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 “*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit*”. Paul has been speaking about the fact that there is a veil over the minds of unbelievers. Once a person turns to Jesus for salvation, that veil is taken away and with its removal, the spirit of that individual, once dead in trespasses and sins, is resurrected to new life. Freedom has come and along with it the ability to understand spiritual things; supernatural things; freedom to enter into the Holy of Holies and experience the Presence of God. Intimacy is God’s desire for every child and it is in the secret place where we become vulnerable, or naked, before our Father. The Holy Spirit will bring to our minds the issues, secret sins, and fears that hinder our relationship with Him, but it is up to us whether or not we will agree with His assessment and repent. We will not be released nor have victory over those issues until we allow Him to cleanse us. We must surrender everything, including our own will, that hinders our worship. Only then will we behold Him to become like Him. We live in defeat when we refuse to spend time alone with God. As we enter the secret place, the Holy Spirit also reminds us of God’s Promises toward us; He reminds us of the needs in our world, our nation, our city, our church, our family; He reveals our spiritual gifts and how to use them; He comforts us in times of distress; He reveals God’s will for our lives. The Holy Spirit will reveal the secrets of the Kingdom of God; the mysteries of heaven. He will never leave us or forsake us. We can be confident that every promise of God is Yes and Amen through Christ. Last, but not least, the Holy Spirit within us is the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. In His presence, we are infused with the confidence of our eternal destiny; our future inheritance in heaven. Do you want to experience the power of the Presence of God?

Position yourself! Get into the secret place and open your spirit, soul, and body to all that your Father desires to bestow upon you. Release anything that hinders the complete filling of the Spirit. Spending time alone at the feet of Jesus will guarantee a life that moves from glory to glory; a life that will never be the same!

*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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# First Baptist of Marshall

## Humor

By Buddy Freeman  
Madison County

At our church, they call it the “mite” box, because you might put something in it, or you might not.

I got so excited when my son joined the cross-country team. But then I learned they don’t cross the country and they’re back home in just a few hours.

Did you hear about the two antennas that got married? The wedding was terrible, but the reception was great.

Q: What do you call a woman who always knows where her husband is? A: A widow.

Teacher (on phone): You say Michael has a cold and can’t come to school today? To whom am I speaking? Voice: This is my father.

Mom: I thought you said you were running away with the circus. Daughter: I did, but the police made me bring it back.

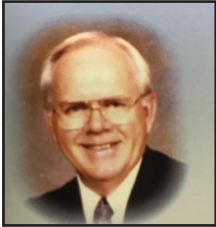
Teenager’s dad: Have her back by 8:15. Daughter’s boyfriend: The middle of August? Great!

John and his wife had several stressful years of financial difficulties. So one evening she was touched to see him gazing at the diamond wedding ring that symbolized their marriage. “With this ring…” she began romantically. “ We could pay off MasterCard,” he responded.

“Daddy, I want to ask you a question.” Said Bobby after his first day in Sunday School. “Yes, Bobby, what is it?” “ The teacher was reading the Bible to us all about the children of Israel building the temple, the children of Israel crossing the Red Sea, the children of Israel making sacrifices. Didn’t the grown-ups do anything?”

“Before I married Alice dear, I was her pumpkin pie, Her precious peach and honey boy: The apple of her eye. But after years of married life, This thought I pause to utter. Those fancy names are now all gone, I’m just her bread and butter.”

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



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The Last Time...

By Chris Rathbone  
Michell County

Lord willing by the time you read this article it will be 2022. At the end of every year that passes, we always think to ourselves how quickly it went by. In a conversation just the other day I told someone that it seemed like we just started 2021 and here we are in December! Time has a way of passing by us quickly and all we can do is be amazed that somehow we didn't realize it.

A preacher friend of mine told me about a conversation he had with one of his elderly church members. He made mention of what a long life this man had lived, of how he had seen so many changes in his lifetime. "You've lived a long time brother," he said. The elderly man looked at him and spoke gently, "It seems like just the other day I was a boy. A boy running and playing with my friends, young and carefree." The shame of it all is that by the time we all realize it, the time has already passed and there is nothing we can do to get it back.

The last couple of years has been a real challenge for my family, especially my parents. Mom is in a nursing facility full time. Dad is still at home but wants mom to be home so bad. It's one of those situations that we wish were different but can't change. The visitation has been up and down because of covid and other issues. Dad is lonely at home. He is dealing with his own health issues while being so worried about Mom. Again, a situation we would like to be different but can't change. The elderly years bring so many health issues that are common for all. Trying to make decisions, navigate the system to get them the care they need, etc, puts a lot of stress on those who are trying to help. I've prayed, cried, and lost sleep while thinking about all the challenges that my parents and family are facing. And we aren't alone in this situation either. Everyone will be faced with this at one time or another.

Just this week in our community, families have lost loved ones. Some in accidents, some to a sickness they have been battling for a while, some to a sudden health issue such as a stroke or heart attack, etc. Death is no respecter of persons. It can come upon anyone at any time, regardless of age or health condition. You don't have to be old to die and youth is not a guaranteed deterrent to death. At any given moment everything can change. Something can happen. Something that is out of our control. And when this happens, this unexpected event that we know is possible, we somehow convince ourselves it is a long way off. We see it happening to others, but try to put it out of our minds that it could happen to us or the ones we love.

I realize I've rambled a bit in this article but I want to make a point. The time we think we have here is not as long as we believe. "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." James 4:14 In a blink of an eye, 20 years are gone. In what seems like days, we are in our 40s. Before we even realize it our kids are grown and gone. One day, if we live, we will be like the elderly gentleman, thinking it was just the other day we were carefree children playing with our friends.

My rambling is for us all to realize how we need to make the time count. As I dropped my dad off at his house the other day, I watched him go up on the porch and disappear through the door. It suddenly dawned on me that one day while doing that, it would be the last time. For all of us, it could be the last family gathering, the last holiday together, the last goodbye hug or kiss, the last time to say "I love you."

If you are reading this, you have an opportunity. An opportunity to redeem the time you are given and not waste it. You can change priorities to make the most of what you have been given daily. We can put off those things that really aren't gonna mean anything in eternity and focus on what matters the most; Jesus, our family, our friends. If we are gonna resolve to do anything in this new year, let's resolve to do just that. For we never know when the last time will be the last time.

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



By Terry Cheek Th.D.  
McDowell County



By the Lord's amazing Grace, we find ourselves at the beginning of another New Year! 2022 is in front of us and once again we are asking the question; what will I do with it? By the way, it's a healthy question to ask. There is a lot to be said about making plans, commitments, promises, and even the popular resolutions for the coming year. There is, even more, to say about keeping them. Keeping any plan, commitment, promise or resolution requires that we embrace with our heart what is necessary to fulfill the expectations placed upon our lives. Let's talk about that for a little while.

Every year we make promises with the fullest intention of keeping them. Maybe we're going to drop a few pounds or quit smoking or get away from immorality. Maybe we're going to get back in church or quit drinking or doing drugs. Too often you keep falling short, year in and year out. With it comes the feeling of being a failure. You let yourself down, maybe even your family, friends, or spouse. Why? Why do you fail? I have the answer, I also have some words of encouragement for you, please keep reading!

First, understand that you do not have what it takes to overcome the pitfalls of life. The pitfalls of life come from sin and within each one of us is a sin nature. Maybe you have never heard of that. Simply put we are born separated from God because of the sin of Adam and Eve. We are told in Romans 3:10 "As it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one:" and again in Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God;" we cannot within ourselves overcome the sin nature within us.

Second, there is a consequence or penalty that comes with sin. Every one of us is headed for this penalty. Notice with me Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Sin has the death penalty. This death penalty is eternal death, a death beyond our heart-beat. That isn't very good news to begin a New Year with, is it? If we stopped right there, we could find no hope and have no confidence moving into 2017, but the Bible continues so let's continue in it! God has a gift. Payment for the penalty (consequence) of sin, a payment that doesn't mean eternal death. God offers eternal life as a substitute for eternal death.

Third, the eternal life that God offers was provided by Jesus Christ! Jesus paid the penalty for our sin. Romans 5:8 "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Commendeth is an old English word that simply means God shows or displays, in this case, His love. Even while we are living with a sinful nature embedded in our lives and having no hope, Jesus died for us! He did this to prevent you from dying an eternal death. All the pleasures you may find in sin; for example, drinking, drugs, immorality, greed, lying, cheating. They are short-lived pleasure, short-lived because the end is death. It's important to understand, we are not sinners because we sin, we sin because we are sinners! Jesus is the salvation of sinners.

Fourth, how does Jesus remedy our sinful nature? I'm glad you ask! Your Bible tells you in Romans 10:9-10 "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. (10) For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Simply put, confess, and believe! Confess that Jesus and only Jesus can save you. There is no other person who can take the place of Jesus Christ as your savior. You must be willing to confess that. To confess Jesus as your savior you must believe that God did raise Jesus from the dead. That's right, it's no fairy tale. Jesus' resurrection is a reality you must accept by faith, then by that same faith confess Jesus as the only forgiveness of sin, your sin!

This miracle is called being born again! Having this new life in Jesus Christ gives you His presence daily. That's right, Christ lives within you. In that fact is the strength you need to fulfill your New Year resolutions. Whatever they may be with Jesus in your life they will be the right decisions made with the presence of godly strength and you will have the faith to let God lead you to success His way in 2022! Until we meet again in print or person may God keep you firmly in His grip!

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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In Memory of Joy Baldwin  
Madison County

*Silent Night  
A Christmas Poem (a true story)*

*An old man toiled with rugged hands  
To dig a ditch that day  
Unaware his heart would change  
As he began to pray.*

*The children singing “Silent Night”  
Their sweet sound filled the air  
When it reached the old man’s ears  
He listened with all care.*

*The words and music spoke to him  
That Jesus was a child  
The Spirit gently touched his heart  
“Holy infant so tender and mild”*

*The old man tired and weary  
Began to weep with joy  
“Thank you Father for this child  
Your precious baby boy.*

*Until today I could not see  
Nor did I understand  
The boundless love You had for me  
Ere since the world began.*

*God’s love unveiled through song  
This night has set me free  
My heart rejoices now to know  
You gave your son for me”*

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: 2 Peter 1:3-10

Witnessing Begins with Prayer  
By Rev. John B. Sorensen



Who would you like to see give their lives to Jesus this year? A family member? A friend? Or perhaps the people you work with or those who live in your community? Whoever they are, you can be a part of introducing them to Christ by committing to pray for them every day.

We often say, at EE, that witnessing without prayer is presumption. The truth is, we cannot effectively share Jesus with others unless we begin with prayer. Prayer invites the Holy Spirit to go with us and lead the conversation. He’s the One who gives us the words to say. He’s the One who speaks to and ultimately changes hearts. Without Him, we go alone.

There’s no time better to begin praying for someone than today. You can even begin right now.

Make a list. Write down the names of people you would like to see give their hearts to Christ. Be specific. Don’t just write “my family” or “my neighborhood.” List them by name. If you only know their first name, that’s okay. Write that down. God knows who they are.

Post it. Put it somewhere visible where you will see it. You don’t have to put it somewhere where your whole family will see it, but don’t hide it in the back of your Bible either. Post it where you will see every single day as a reminder to pray.

Make time to pray. Set aside a specific time each day to pray for the people on your list. Pray for them by name. Ask the Holy Spirit to work in their hearts and send believers to share the Gospel with them. Pray that God will use you! Ask Him to open doors for you to share your testimony and even introduce them to Jesus.

Look for opportunities. As you pray, look for doors that God may be opening. We often don’t notice the opportunities that God is giving us to share our faith because we simply aren’t paying attention.

Continue to pray. Prayer doesn’t stop when a Gospel conversation begins. Continue praying before, during, and after the conversation. People rarely come to faith in Jesus Christ in a single moment in time. It’s a process. It takes time. Be patient and continue to meet with the people you share with, even after they commit.

Prayer is critical in sharing our faith with others. Not only does prayer change the hearts of the people we know around us, but it also changes our hearts as well. It draws us closer to God. It helps us see the world through His eyes and heart. And, it increases our passion to reach the lost with the Good News. So, who will you start praying for today?

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



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#MOUNTAINTIMEISTHEBESTTIME



Raspberries and Copper Coins

By Tracy Jessup

*“Then he called his disciples and said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For all of them have contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on.’”* (Mark 12:43-44)

The New England Holocaust Memorial was built to pay tribute to the six million killed and to honor the survivors. Located on Boston’s historic Freedom Trail, the memorial “is designed around six luminous glass towers, each reaching 54 feet high, and each lit internally from top to bottom. The number six has many meanings here: the millions of Jews killed in the Holocaust; the names of the six main death camps; a row of memorial candles; and the six years, 1939-1945, during which the infamous ‘Final Solution,’ the most deadly phase of the Holocaust, took place. In addition, millions of numbers are etched in the glass, representing the infamous tattoos inflicted on many of the victims’ arms.”

In each tower, superimposed on the troubling lists of numbers, are brief personal statements made by selected death camp survivors. One was from Gerda Weissman Klein who was deported from Germany as a teenager and later married the U.S. Army soldier who led the troops that rescued her. “Ilse, a childhood friend of mine, once found a raspberry in the camp and carried it in her pocket all day to present to me that night on a leaf. Imagine a world in which your entire possession is one raspberry and you give it to your friend.”

The context of today’s passage is that of a warning Jesus gives to “beware of the scribes” (v. 38a). Why this warning? Because of their desire to be noticed and held in high esteem (they “like to walk around in long robes, and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to have the best seats in the synagogues and places of honor at banquets!... and for the sake of appearance say long prayers”). The scribes also made it a practice to exploit others, particularly widows (“They devour widows’ houses...”).

Many commentators have noted that the widow, who in her poverty gave her all, may represent the many widows whose houses have been devoured. With this in mind, Jesus simply is continuing his condemnation of the scribes, who instead of caring for widows as the law directed them to do are taking advantage of them. While this most likely is an accurate observation, it must not be overlooked that Jesus does in fact commend the sacrificial action of the widow. “For all of them [many rich people] have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had...”

John Ortberg writes, “The Lord of the Gift is very wise. He knew exactly what he was doing when he created you. He is well-pleased that you exist. He has entrusted to you everything you need to fulfill the purpose for which you were created. At the end of the day, God will not ask...What did you do with what you didn’t have? Though, he will ask, What did you do with what you had? (If You Want to Walk on Water, You’ve Got to Get Out of the Boat, p. 43).

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the generosity seen in raspberries and copper coins, and for the example of Jesus, who thought he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, so that by His poverty we might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9).

*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.*



Don’t Shepherd Yourself

By Ken and Jan Merop  
Avery County

Self-help books abound. It seems everyone has his or her own interpretation of how to promote or improve oneself. But which is right? Wouldn’t it be wonderful if there was one book that had proven itself over time? Wouldn’t it be helpful to know people who actually testify to and exemplify life-change through following what it says in the book?

I know a man who continually points to a particular book, the people of the book, and, especially, the author of the book as the reason his life has turned around completely – for the better. And I have known many others to say the same.

It all has to do with who a person decides to follow. Who will be his shepherd? I once heard it said that if you have the wrong shepherd, you will always be in want. And if you are always in want, there is no fulfillment, satisfaction, or rest. But, with the right shepherd to guide, lead and direct one’s life, there is no want. In Psalm 23: 1, NKJV, we read, *“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.”* The Lord God Almighty, the Creator of all, the Savior who came to personally give to all who believe in his salvation from eternal death and life eternal with him – this is the Lord who is my shepherd. Therefore, I shall not want. He, who holds the universe and my next breath in his hands “...makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside still waters; He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake; ...though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me; You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” says the rest of Psalm 23.

So, if in the Bible I can meet the Author and have him become my personal Savior and Lord ~ my Shepherd ~ then I have found all I need. Looking at each phrase in Psalm 23 we see rest, refreshment, renewal, right living, safekeeping, and courage, never be alone, consolation, provision, blessing, abundance, now and for eternity with God.

No other book can compare.  
No other shepherd will do. Selah



*Pastoral Portrayal*  
*Come stroll the perimeter of this meadow.*  
*In this rural setting, imagine a shepherd with his sheep.*  
*How peaceful and nourishing a place to*  
*“lie down in green pastures.”*  
*Walk it again in the opposite direction*  
*And restore body and soul.*  
*“The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want...*  
*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me*  
*all the days of my life and I will dwell*  
*in the house of the Lord forever.”*  
*Psalm 23: 1and 6*

Sudoku

Solution on page 14

9	4						8	
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*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.*

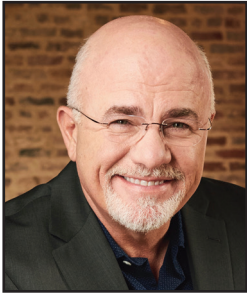
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Dave Says

By Dave Ramsey

It’s always a we thing

Dear Dave,  
My husband recently approached me with an idea for our money. He wants us to set up an account where we both put 10 percent of our income for discretionary spending. My husband makes more money than I do, and because of this, he says it is fair that he would be able to spend more than I would. How do you feel about this?  
Liz



Dear Liz,  
I’m sure deep down he’s a decent guy and he loves you very much. But he’s looking at this all wrong. Right now, he’s being pretty immature and selfish about the whole situation. It’s a bad plan.  
Let’s look at this from another angle. There are lots of families where only one person works outside the home and generates an income. Would it be fair, then, to say only the person making money is allowed a little cash to spend for fun once in a while? Of course, not.  
When two people are married, they are pronounced “as one.” That means even if you only have one person with an income, it becomes our income. If you have kids, they become our kids. See where I’m going with this? Marriage is not a me thing, it’s a we thing. Always. — Dave

Before or after?

Dear Dave,  
When it comes to paying off credit cards and getting out of debt, I’ve heard you talk about cutting up the cards and closing the accounts. Should I pay off the balances before or after I close the accounts?  
Adrian

Dear Adrian,  
I like the idea of cutting up the cards and closing the accounts first. Sometimes credit card companies will respond to this by jacking up the interest rates or doing other shady things, but the point is to get them out of your life as quickly as possible and stop using the stupid things.  
Personal finance is 80 percent behavior. Ridding yourself of credit cards, and getting credit card debt out of your life for good, is a great first step in learning to behave with your money. You don’t build wealth or save money by using credit cards, no matter what anyone says. If you’re naïve enough to think you’re going to play around with a multi-billion-dollar industry and beat them at their own game, you’re sadly mistaken.  
The only way to win against credit card companies is by refusing to play their game! — 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.



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It's Later Than It's Ever Been Before

By Dr. Mark Creech



America's beloved comedian, the late Milton Berle, once told this story:

"The Emersons lived down the block from the church. At two in the morning one time, the church bells went crazy. Instead of ringing twice to denote the hour, they kept ringing. They finally stopped at the hundredth ring. Mr. Emerson nudged his wife. 'We'd better get up dear,' he said. 'It's later than it's ever been before.'"

Berle's words were said in jest. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which they possess a harsh reality. Here it is, and we're already on the threshold of 2022. If the truth is told, it's later than it's ever been before.

Benjamin Franklin used to say there was nothing more precious than time.

"If time be of all things the most precious, wasting time must be, as Poor Richard says, the greatest Prodigality; since, as he elsewhere tells us, lost time is never found again," said Franklin.

The world, unlike ever before, seems to be swiftly moving toward an ultimate end. Jesus warned, "*As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man*" (Matthew 24:37).

What was it like during the days of Noah, before the flood of God's judgment came and destroyed the world?

In The Genesis Record, Henry Morris shared the following characteristics of that era, which is so much like our own. It's not that these types of things haven't happened throughout history, but not until lately have they happened simultaneously and with the same intensity as in Noah's day.

- Rapid advances in technology (Genesis. 4:22)
- Grossly materialistic attitudes and interests (Luke 17:28)
- Uniformitarian philosophies (Hebrews 11:7)
- Inordinate devotion to pleasure and comfort (Genesis 4:21)
- No concern for God in either belief or conduct (II Peter 2:5; Jude 15)
- Disregard for the sacredness of the marriage relation (Matthew 24:38).
- Rejection of the inspired Word of God (I Peter 3:19)
- Widespread violence (Genesis 6:11, 13)
- Corruption throughout society (Genesis 6:12)
- Preoccupation with illicit sex activity (Genesis 4:19; 6:2)
- Widespread words and thoughts of blasphemy (Jude 15)
- Promulgation of systems and movements of abnormal depravity (Genesis 6:15, 12)

"These conditions prevailed in the days of Noah and they are all rapidly growing again today," says Morris. "There is good reason, therefore, to believe that these present times are those which immediately precede the return of the Lord Jesus Christ."

But what if the coming again of Christ is still years, decades, even centuries away? Although this seems highly unlikely, even so, there still isn't much time to prepare for eternity.

In his epistle, James speaks of the brevity of life, saying, "What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (James 4:14).

We may deny it. We may easily dismiss it. However, one thing is sure: each of us is quickly running out of time.

In Field of Hope, Brett Butler, a former Major League Baseball centerfielder for the L.A. Dodgers and current outfield coach for the Miami Marlins, tells about sharing his faith in Christ with a fellow ballplayer.

"It's time to get your life in order," Brett told his friend. "You should turn your life over to Christ."

The ballplayer responded he knew that Brett was right, but added, "Brett, I'm only thirty-one years old. I've got my whole life in front of me. Maybe I'll do that later. I'm going to enjoy life first."

A few months later, Brett heard about a boating accident that took the life of two ballplayers. One of them was the one with whom he had shared the Gospel. The same person who had put off that decision and said, "I've got my whole life in front of me. Maybe, I'll do that later."

It's almost always later than we think.

In If the Dead Could Speak, Paul Powell talks about an insurance company that produced an intriguing commercial that pictured a couple in their easy chairs, talking. It's Christmas time, and the wife asks the husband, "Honey, have you taken care of our insurance yet?"

The husband responds, "No, but I'll do it after Christmas."

The next scene shows the same two people in the same room. A view through the window shows the flowers and trees blooming. So, it's obviously Springtime. The wife asks, "Honey, have you taken care of our insurance yet?"

"No," he answers, "I'll take care of it just as soon as I pay our income tax."

The next scene shows the same people in the same room a third time. This time the setting is Summer. The wife again addresses her husband, "Honey, have you taken care of the insurance yet?"

"No," he responds, "I'll take care of it as soon as we get back from vacation."

The final scene shows the same room and chairs except now; only the wife is there. The husband's chair is empty. The husband has died. Through the window, the snow can be seen falling. And then a voice says, "You may not run out of excuses, but you will run out of time."

There is no good excuse for not turning to Christ. The year 2022 is upon us, and time is running out. It's high time to make matters right with God. When it's high time, there's no time to spare. The Scriptures admonish, "Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation." (2 Corinthians 6:2). Now is the only time promised to any of us.

Won't you turn away from your sins and receive Christ by faith as your Savior and Lord today? When you're out of time, you're out. And it's later than it's ever been before.

Happy New Year!

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

# New Dimensions School

By David Burleson  
*Burke County*



January is School Board Appreciation Month, and the New Dimensions Charter School wants to say, “thank you” to all our board members who do so much for our school. New Dimensions is represented by eleven dedicated board members who devote countless hours to make sure our students are served in the best way possible. Chair Regina Rhodes, Vice-Chair Jamie Smith, Secretary Shanna Wall, Treasurer David Martin, Pamela Harrison, Tracy Jones, Dorie Evans, Casey Kinard (ex-officio member), Chris Beam, Laura Gratton, and Isaac Crouch are true advocates for the students of New Dimensions, developing policies and making decisions that help shape the future of our school. Our school board oversees more than 470 students, 67 employees, and an annual budget of over \$4,000,000. I am proud to work with our board, and I congratulate them on their excellent leadership and vision for the students of New Dimensions.

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

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

Open enrollment at New Dimensions begins on Monday, January 3, and ends on Thursday, March 31 at 4 p.m. Applications for the upcoming year will be posted on our website and will be available at the school beginning on January 3. Virtual tours will be developed and posted in January. Just give us a call (828-437-5753) or email me at [dburleson@ndschoool.org](mailto:dburleson@ndschoool.org) if you have questions about our school.

At the end of the enrollment period, it will be determined if there are more applications than spaces available for each grade. If the number of applicants for a particular grade does not exceed the number of available spaces for that grade level, all students who have applied by the deadline will be accepted. If the number of applicants for a particular grade level exceeds available spaces for that grade level, a lottery system will determine admission eligibility. The lottery for New Dimensions will be held on Friday, April 1. The time will be determined. Students who are not offered enrollment will be placed on a waitlist. After all spaces for a grade level are filled, the lottery will continue until all applying students have been assigned a priority number on the wait list. The wait list will not carry into the next school year.

As parents and guardians, the decision about where our children go to school is an important one. With the availability of charter schools, parents and guardians have more choices about their child’s education than ever before. To make the most appropriate decision for our children, it is important to have all the facts. Here are some important facts about New Dimensions.

New Dimensions is a North Carolina Public Charter School. Many of you may still wonder “What is a public charter school and how are they different from the traditional public schools?”. Charter schools are public schools of choice that are authorized by the State Board of Education and operated by independent, non-profit boards of directors. State and local tax dollars are the primary funding sources for charter schools, which have open enrollment and cannot discriminate in admissions, associate with any religion or religious group, or charge tuition. Charter schools operate with freedom from many of the regulations that govern district schools, but charter schools are held accountable through the State assessment and accountability system.

What makes New Dimensions special?

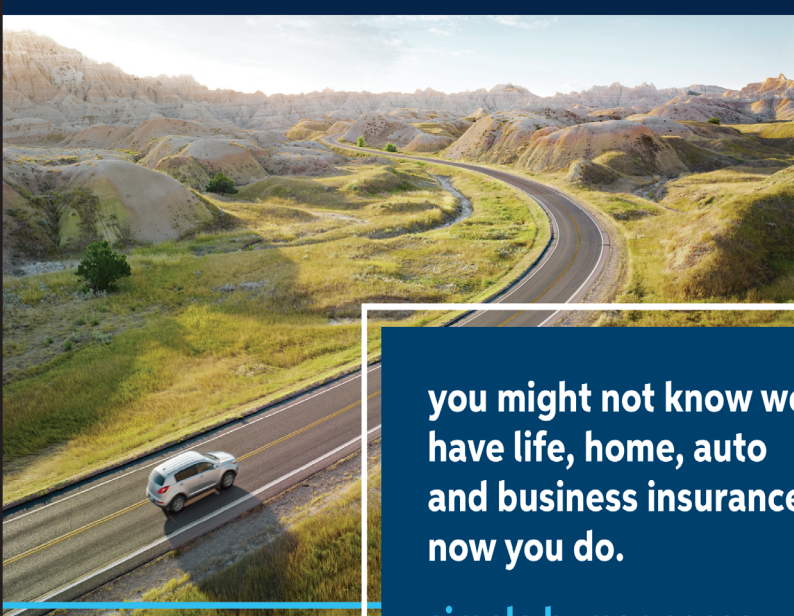
- Established in 2001, New Dimensions today enrolls approximately 480 K-8 students. Our school provides parents the choice to have their child(ren) in the same school from kindergarten through eighth grade.
- New Dimensions relocated to the former Shadowline manufacturing facility on 29 beautiful acres bordering the Catawba River in 2011.
- New Dimensions offers small class sizes and the strong Core Knowledge Curriculum and Eureka Math Curriculum. The teacher-to-student ratio in K-5 is 1 to 16 and in middle school is 1 to 25. All kindergarten and first-grade classes have a full-time teaching assistant and one teacher assistant is available in each of the other grade levels.
- The best staff found anywhere!

- Music, Art, Computers/Technology, Spanish, STEM, and Physical Education are offered kindergarten through fifth grade further enriching our curriculum and developing a broad base of knowledge.
- New Dimensions empowers students to make positive choices about themselves, each other, and our environment, producing Respectful, Responsible, Safe, Kind, and Good Learners.
- Quality communication between teachers and families boosts each students’ success.
- The uniform policy enacted by our board of education creates a positive environment where the focus is on learning.
- SRO Casey Kinard is a vital, full-time member of the Warrior Family and teaches DARE to all fifth graders along with electives classes for middle school students.
- SRO Kinard has also implemented and monitors the online Say Something Anonymous Reporting Program which is available to our Warrior Family.
- A state-of-the-art camera system is installed to provide 24-hour coverage, inside and outside of the school.
- New Dimensions partners with Blue Ridge Health Care to provide a full-time school nurse.
- Middle School electives include Band, Chorus, Spanish Language, Music Appreciation, Art, Art History, PE 1: Adventure Education, PE 2: Team Sports, PE 3: Personal and Lifetime Fitness, DARE, Pre-Health Occupations 1, Pre-Health Occupations, Creative Writing, Drama, STEM (Science, Tech, Engineering, Math), Spanish Culture, and Youth Leadership.
- New Dimensions is partnering with the Burke County Chamber of Commerce to provide engaging speakers and leadership opportunities from our community in our new Flex Friday program.
- Athletics include Indoor/Outdoor Soccer, Baseball, Basketball, Cheerleading, Archery, Cross Country, and Flag Football.

We are excited about the future of New Dimensions and look forward to working with our Warrior Families and community to support all of our students.

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





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# YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

## NC Senate District 47



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

A poll conducted by the Center for Excellence in Polling revealed that the vast majority of likely voters surveyed oppose the use of private money from individuals, corporations, and special interest groups in the operation of elections. During the 2020 election, Mark Zuckerberg and his wife donated \$350 million to the Center for Technology and Civic Life intending to help manage elections across the country. Carolina Journal recently reported that \$4.3 million of these “Zuckerbucks” went to 34 North Carolina cities and counties, in addition to a \$1 million grant to the state board of elections.

To address the problem of outside money influencing elections in our state, I sponsored SB 725 - Prohibit Private Money in Elections Admin. This bill would have prohibited the State Board of Elections, county boards of elections, and county boards of commissioners from accepting private monetary donations, directly or indirectly, for conducting elections or employing individuals temporarily. This bill passed the Senate and the House in November and was presented to Gov. Roy Cooper on December 1. However, Gov. Cooper vetoed this common-sense measure on December 9.

I believe one of the most fundamental roles of government is to ensure elections are carried out effectively and securely, and that a cornerstone of our system of government – counting votes – isn’t being run by outside interests. You can be sure that I will continue to look for reasonable, sound solutions to ensure voters have every confidence in our elections. Voters deserve to know that their elections are being administered fairly and securely, without the interference of outside money. Out-of-state billionaires should not be able to come in and finance aspects of our elections systems.

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

## NC Commissioner of Labor



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

The month of December was packed with activities and events around the state. We visited with several companies to celebrate workplace safety accomplishments and were also able to spread the Christmas spirit with fun festivities and a toy drive.

The Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program (SHARP) is designed for small and mid-size employers that have established, implemented, and maintained exceptional workplace safety standards. SHARP is run by our Consultative Services Bureau and is one of the most elite safety awards presented by our department. Last month, I had the honor of visiting two SHARP-certified companies. Daniels and Daniels Construction Co., headquartered in Goldsboro, has participated in SHARP since 2016. I visited with the company to celebrate the completion of two SHARP construction projects – elementary schools in Onslow County. The following week, I visited Highland Brewing Company in Asheville to celebrate their initial SHARP award. Highland Brewing is the first brewery in North Carolina to achieve the SHARP status. These companies should be congratulated for their extra efforts in ensuring their employees go home safely every day.

For the 23rd consecutive year, NCDOL hosted a toy drive in December benefiting the Marine Toys for Tots Foundation. The effort grows each year, and our regional offices in Raleigh, Charlotte, Asheville, Winston-Salem, and Wilmington participate by donating toys and financial contributions. This year’s collection event was the most successful ever, as we collected 1,296 toys and raised \$5,985 in additional monetary donations. It warms my heart to witness the generosity of our employees and to think of the hundreds of children who wake up on Christmas morning with new toys under the tree.

January 2 marks my one-year anniversary as Labor Commissioner. It is hard to believe how quickly this year went by, but it certainly was a year of learning, traveling the state, and meeting many great folks. I am thankful for your support and encouragement and look forward to the new opportunities 2022 holds for all of us.

May your 2022 be filled with blessings and joy.

## NC Senate District 46



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

Happy New Year! I hope that each of you has experienced a peaceful and blessed Christmas holiday filled with family, fellowship, and remembrance of all our blessings. As we move forward into a new year, I am reminded of how quickly it seems that time passes. It was twelve years ago, in late 2009, that Lydia and I decided together that I would seek to represent the citizens of Burke County in the NC Senate. As I look back on the past eleven years, I am thankful for all the wonderful people that I have had the opportunity to meet and work with in Raleigh, both in the House and Senate and across state government. Even more rewarding has been the opportunity during those years to serve (at different times) those living in Avery, Burke, Caldwell, and Cleveland counties, and to work with the local elected leaders of those counties and their municipalities. I truly consider it an honor to have worked with you and for you to improve our communities. As 2022 begins, it appears that the new 46th Senate District will be comprised of Burke, McDowell, and the rural portions of Buncombe County. I hope that the coming year will bring new and renewed friendships, cooperation, and bipartisanship across all levels of our state and local governments as we face new challenges and opportunities that are sure to come. I leave you with this thought: You’re at the beginning of a new year. What plans do you have for yourself in the year to come? And how will you choose your goals for this year? This is a good verse to guide you in answering those questions: *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.”* (Proverbs 3: 5-6). If we can understand and apply God’s definition of the word “ALL” in this passage, we will be on the right path. I hope that God will bless your plans in 2022.



*God Bless America*

# YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

## NC 11th Congressional District



Rep. Madison Cawthorn  
828-808-2148

The House of Representatives just finished its last full week of votes for the year. After my first year of serving Western North Carolina, my team and I are proud of the work we have done for the district. We have passed language expanding broadband, defending our veterans, and expanding educational opportunities throughout the country. There are still mountains of work to conquer next year and beyond and I appreciate every last one of you for following me throughout my congressional journey.

The NDAA is a series of United States federal laws specifying the annual budget for the United States Department of Defense, ensuring our troops have the training, equipment, and resources they need to carry out their missions. As you are aware, the U.S. is in global competition with China and Russia. It is imperative that we fund our military accordingly. The interconnected nature of our competition with these countries must drive how the U.S. government resources, modernize, and transform its tools to maintain leadership on the world stage.

The National Defense Authorization Act is supposed to be a largely bipartisan piece of legislation. Uniting behind the defense of the United States, Republicans and Democrats often come together on the House floor to pass this legislation into law. However, this year, the original draft of the NDAA included egregious provisions like red flag laws, draft our daughters' language, and dishonorable discharges for military members who refuse to take the COVID vaccine. It was disappointing that Democrats would choose to inject their agenda items into a bill that normally passes with large bipartisan support. However, after speaking with Republicans in the Senate, I along with many of my colleagues knew the language would be stripped out of the legislation once the House passed the bill to the other chamber. Voting for the bill to go to the Senate was not an endorsement of those radical priorities – it was a legislative procedure to allow for those provisions to be removed. Once that language was stripped out, it would return to the House of Representatives for final consideration.

There were several good provisions in the NDAA too, provisions that would be left in the bill when it returned to the House of Representatives for final passage. These provisions included a pay raise for our troops, a ban on dishonorable discharges for service members who choose not to take the COVID vaccine, and funding for the National Guard to defeat the immigration crisis on our southern border. It also included over 20 provisions to hold the Biden Administration accountable for its disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan.

I made a promise that I would fight to ensure the egregious language was removed from the final bill while keeping intact the good provisions that benefited our extraordinary servicemembers and built up our military.

This past week, I voted for the final passage on the NDAA. This final version of the bill funds our military, gives troops a raise, bans dishonorable discharges over vaccine mandates, and has NO red flag law language, NO draft our daughters language, and NO funding for purging patriots in the military. Promises made, promises kept. All language in the NDAA that included red flag laws, drafting American women into the Armed Forces and dishonorable discharges over vaccine mandates were removed from the final text of the bill.

## NC House District 86



Rep. Hugh Blackwell  
919-733-5805  
Hugh.Blackwell@ncleg.net

The 2020 elections shook the confidence of many in the integrity of America's voting system. From voter fraud to private money donations to targeted local elections boards, to foreign and big tech influence through social media and cyber spyware, it seems clear that "One person, one vote," a concept so essential to our democracy, is at risk. That is all the more true when one person casting one vote is understood as one "eligible" voter casting one "legal" vote. In response to these concerns, Republicans in North Carolina's legislature passed legislation to make North Carolina's election process more sound and secure. Unfortunately, Democratic Governor Cooper is opposed.

Sadly, Governor Cooper vetoed two election bills approved by the Republican-led legislature that would have helped strengthen the integrity of North Carolina's election process. For starters, the governor vetoed Senate Bill 362 that would have made mail-in ballots more secure. That bill provided that mailed or absentee ballots, other than military or overseas ballots, must be in the hands of county boards of elections no later than the time polls close on election day. Without this legislation in place, mail-in ballots can be received up to three days after the election and still be counted. Such a time lag keeps an election in limbo and allows more time for fraudulent activities intended to change the outcome of the election after preliminary totals become known on election night. In other words, those who would commit fraud know how many more votes they need for their candidate to win even though behind in the election-night totals. Cooper obviously prefers to keep the election open for more votes to come in later than everyone else's.

Governor Cooper also vetoed a second bill that would have prohibited the State Board of Elections, county boards of elections, and county commissioners from accepting private monetary donations to run elections. In 2020, for example, according to the NC State Board of Elections, just over 7 million dollars was distributed to a select 30 of our 100 local boards of elections by a California group that had received \$250 million from a Zuckerberg foundation to distribute to select local boards of elections nationwide. This California group chose the 30 counties to receive its funding. Can you imagine the outrage if a Republican-allied group had pumped \$7 million into its chosen North Carolina counties for the 2020 elections? Surely, we should all agree that it is completely wrong to allow private money funding to county boards of elections targeted by the private donor for conducting a particular election. North Carolinians should not fear that private donors, by such huge sums, are attempting to determine election outcomes in our state. Again, sadly, Governor Cooper's veto says that he is okay with such money being used to influence our elections.

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A Healthy Homemade Soup to Jumpstart the New Year

(StatePoint) When sweater weather arrives, there’s nothing quite as comforting as a pot of something savory and delicious simmering on the stove.

As you turn to hearty soups this winter, having the right seasonal staples means you’ll be well on your way to having piping hot meals on the table, quickly and hassle-free.

Keep your pantry and fridge stocked with essential ingredients like onions, carrots, and celery, along with a collection of earthy, zesty spices and versatile, all-purpose seasonings. You’ll also need a rich and all-natural stock handy, such as Kitchen Basics Unsalted Chicken Stock. Simmered all day with chicken, vegetables, and McCormick herbs and spices, this deeply flavored stock can bring a burst of savory warmth to countless dishes. It’s low on sodium so it’s a good-for-you start to many delicious meals beyond soup, like rice, sauces, and more.

To help you embrace the colder weather, try a recipe for a hearty classic loaded

with tender veggies, chicken, egg noodles, and robust flavor that puts this stock -- aka “liquid gold” -- front-and-center. Yep, you guessed it, Savory Homemade Chicken Noodle Soup. Nostalgic and nourishing, all you need is 10 minutes of prep time and 20 minutes of cooking on your stovetop.

Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 cup chopped yellow onion
- 1 cup chopped carrots
- 1 cup chopped celery
- 2 tablespoons McCormick Garlic, Herb and Black Pepper and Sea Salt All Purpose Seasoning
- 1/2 teaspoon McCormick Ground Turmeric
- 1 pound boneless skinless chicken breast
- 2 cartons (32 ounces each) Kitchen Basics Unsalted Chicken Stock
- 2 cups uncooked medium egg noodles
- 1/2 cup frozen peas

Instructions:

1. Heat oil in a large saucepan on medium heat until shimmering. Add onion, carrots, and celery; cook and stir 3 minutes or until softened. Stir in seasoning and turmeric; cook 30 seconds until fragrant. Add chicken and stock. Bring to boil. Reduce heat; simmer, covered, 15 to 20 minutes until chicken is cooked through and tender.

2. Transfer chicken to medium bowl; shred using two forks. Set aside. Stir noodles into broth; cook 6 minutes or until tender. Return shredded chicken to saucepan. Gently stir in peas. Sprinkle with parsley to serve, if desired.

For more great ways to warm up this season, visit [mccormick.com/kitchen-basics](http://mccormick.com/kitchen-basics).

During the short, dark days of winter, healthy soups like this will feed your body and warm your soul.





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# Enjoying Everyday Life

## Finding Joy in Your Everyday Life

By Joyce Meyer

John 10:10 has been one of my favorite scriptures for many years. It says: “*The thief comes only in order to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have and enjoy life, and have it in abundance (to the full, till it overflows)*” (AMPC). This verse clearly shows us that God wants us to enjoy our lives—in abundance, to the full, until we’re overflowing with joy!

I remember when God gave me the revelation that it’s His will for me to enjoy my life. It was life-changing because I used to be a miserable person who was emotionally unstable and couldn’t be happy unless I got my way most of the time. Because of the abuse, I had experienced throughout childhood, I was insecure, angry, and didn’t trust anyone. But once I started seriously studying God’s Word, I came to realize that He didn’t want me to live this way. I could be healed and whole in my mind and emotions, and I could learn how to really enjoy my everyday life.

Now, when I say God wanted me to enjoy my everyday life, I’m talking about doing ordinary life with calm delight and a smile on my face (see John 15:11). It’s about not dreading the daily responsibilities you have to do whether you like it or not, things like cleaning the house, mowing the grass, going to work, and the list goes on and on. And it’s not a “working for the weekend” mentality or an attitude that says “I’ll be happy when...I get to go on vacation” or “the kids are back in school” or “I get that promotion” and so on.

It seems today that most people believe they have to wait for their circumstances to change before they can enjoy life. But the truth is you can make the decision to enjoy your ordinary life and make it extraordinary, regardless of your circumstances.

### Doing Life with God

One of the ways you can take ordinary life and make it extraordinary is to learn to do every single thing you do with and for God. We make a mistake when we separate our sacred life from our secular life. We can be just as close to God in the grocery store as we are at church. And He wants us to do everything we need to do WITH Him.

It actually adds an edge of excitement when we let God be involved in everything we do. He’s everywhere, all the time, and He’s just as interested in the routine, mundane tasks of our lives as He is in the more “spiritual” things we do.

It’s amazing to realize that God wants to have fellowship with us—He wants to spend each day with us. Don’t just settle for seeking Him once a week at church or when you’re in a desperate situation. Decide that you are going to enjoy your everyday relationship with God!

### The Truth About Real Joy

The abundant life Christ offers goes deeper in our hearts than the way we feel about things. It’s an amazing thing when we learn how to have the peace and joy only God can give in every area of our lives, instead of the type of enjoyment that’s just based on emotional excitement.

The joy of the Lord is much greater than simply feeling happy. It brings peace and contentment to your soul, even when your circumstances are difficult and don’t make any sense. Nehemiah 8:10 says, “*The joy of the Lord is your strength.*”

This kind of joy makes the Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday routine enjoyable. And since most of life is Monday through Friday, we need to enjoy it!

### The World Can’t Give It to You

In John 15:11 (NIV), Jesus says, “*I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*” The Amplified translation says “*that your joy and gladness may be of full measure and complete and overflowing.*” In the ten verses leading up to this one, Jesus is talking about abiding in Him, because that’s the key to living with His joy.

Abiding means “to live, dwell and remain in”; it’s not just visiting once a week at church. It’s having a personal relationship with Christ, being one with Him, and doing life together. The truth is apart from Jesus, we can do nothing of real value, but with Him, we can bear much good fruit (John 15:5).

God wants to abide with you every day, throughout the day. He doesn’t just want you to seek Him when you go to church or when you’re desperate. He desires to have a personal relationship with you, so you can experience His presence in everything you do. That’s when your everyday life is really enjoyable!

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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East Burke Band Wins first in Battle of the Bands

By Jonelle Sigmon  
Burke County

The East Burke High School Marching Cavaliers recently participated in the Novant Health's Thanksgiving Day Parade in uptown Charlotte. Out of numerous bands around the state, EBHS was awarded first place in their performance in the Battle of the Bands competition.

Jonathan Berry, East Burke High School's band director said, "It's been great to get back to normal, as normal as we can be anyway, and spend some time together doing what we love to do. The pandemic has been incredibly hard on the Arts and Arts classes in public schools. The dedication and talent of the band and chorus students in BCPS have been missing for a long time now for the sake of safety. It's wonderful to be able to return to performances where our students can showcase their talents to moms, dads, families, and as in this event, to hundreds of thousands of people in person and on TV, and let them see the awesome talent that lives in our kids here in Burke County."

Justin Holloway, the current drum major for the EBHS band said, "Last year was an extremely tough year for everyone, from COVID-19 related passings to quarantines. It was something no one had ever experienced before and brought a lot of changes to everyone's lives. This year has brought a sense of normalcy to our lives with marching competitions and parades returning. The Thanksgiving Parade was an amazing time for our band and allowed us to feel normal once again. It was an amazing honor to march and compete with the other bands in the Novant Healthcare Parade and an even bigger honor to win the battle of the bands."

Scarlett Lynn, a senior band member said, "We are all very grateful that we were able to get together to practice and perform normally this year. I am especially grateful for the opportunity to have another normal high school experience before I graduate. I think this parade was a great way to bring joy back into the lives of the community as well as the bands who participated. It was definitely a morale booster."

Morgan McPeters, a senior band member said, "It's my senior year; I am so thankful for my band and band friends. The experience of marching in the Charlotte Thanksgiving parade was an awesome way to kick off the holiday season. The crowd was huge and really seemed to love our Christmas music. Winning the 'Battle of the Bands' helps make up for everything we missed out on last year."

Superintendent Dr. Mike Swan, said, "What a great way to represent Burke County Public Schools music programs. These students have practiced hard and it has paid off. Congratulations to all of you and keep up the good work!"



A New Year

By Nancy Malik  
Avery County



2022 is a year that will be very different from 2019-2021. A worldwide pandemic overwhelmingly changed the world. Jesus tells us to watch for signs of His return. The world recently seems to be following His word to the T. This week, as I write this, Mayfield, Kentucky is experiencing the aftermath of multiple tornados. The ring of fire that surrounds the mostly northern Pacific Ocean is very active and the Los Palmas Islands in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Spain have hundreds of subterranean volcanoes going on as well.

The sun has periods of enormous solar flares that affect our weather with heat. They also are now dropping low and that creates colder, more extreme weather as well. Our emissions do not affect our weather, God does. Wars and rumors of wars are rampant, especially in Israel and Iran. Russia, China, and many mid-eastern countries are preparing to move. Do No Fear! I am not saying this for fear-mongering but for the blessed hope of a God who loved us to His death on a cross so we can live forever. We do need to be praying for His return as the prophetic verses of the Bible for Jesus' swift return should help us take notice.

I am blessed with hearing multiple pastors warn of the events of the future that are drawing near. Are you ready? Do you fear worldwide events, including a global pandemic? Jesus has this and has us and we can rest in His reassurance. So do not be afraid, Body of Christ!

An amazing man of God, Martin Luther King, Jr, will be honored on his birthday on the third Monday of each January. He was born on January 15th, 1929. When God created mankind, He created man and woman as the beginning of the human race. Our skin color and features were supplied from our own families depending on the area of the world they come from. Though I am "white", there appears to be Native American and negro in my DNA. I love it. We are all the human race and made in His image. You cannot beat that!

January also has a special day of remembrance with The Walk of Life. Chasity Ingrahm led a Walk of Life last January 20th here on Newland Square. Many of us came out in support of letting our children be given the gift of life. Washington, DC was closed down at this time. So many groups did local events because walking the walk in DC was not possible. Many people attended this walk and the numbers were huge for this tiny populated community. In less than a year, a beautiful facility has been opened to welcome the needy, the hurt and lost, and anyone in need of help and prayer. Besides help and prayer, there are diapers and clothing available for those who are in need. Also, if you can, donations of these items or financial help are greatly appreciated by this precious ministry in Newland. Helping a family through countless issues to keep a baby is a great goal!

The smallest county of the 100 counties of North Carolina is a powerhouse of Godly people. Help ministries, at least 80 ministries are available for those in need. Thank you Jesus for those whose lives are involved in meeting the needs of others. These are God's heroes, like the Hall of the Faithful in the book of Hebrews, the love of Christ is greatly felt here.

Many businesses are managed by Godly people. Brenda Kay's Floral and Gift Shop, behind the beautiful town pool, is full of silk floral arrangements, and material for seamstresses, of which there are many from here and far away, who visit her shop. Three Nails and Back Alley Pickers are a few others of note. Avery County has a huge number of believers living here. That is what makes the difference for a small county that has a huge believing population. Christmas trees are being sent all over the world as a symbol of the evergreen life of a Christian that was started by Martin Luther over 500 years ago and four amazing seasons.

God has called Avery County his Safe Place. Many have told me they have heard that also.

Thank you, Jesus, for your loving care for the Body of Christ around the world, including here in your Special Place, Avery County. Amen.

Nancy Malik moved to Avery County six years ago. The past few years have been a journey of learning how to be a widow and loving the county the Lord led them to on an amazing journey for The Safe Place for the ends times many years ago. She has a precocious black cat, Midi, who always lets her know when something exciting is happening outside. She prays for the readers of the Blue Ridge Christian News to be blessed by God's goodness.

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Psalm 23:5 “The Ruts of Righteousness”

By Shawn Thomas  
Angleton, Texas



Steve Jobs, the founder of the Apple computer company, was not a Christian, as some of you may know, but there are really powerful lessons, both good and bad, from his life that we can profit from. One thing he said that was very thought-provoking: that in the first half of your life, you make your habits — then in the second part of your life, your habits make YOU!

Psalm 23 is one of the best-loved passages in the Bible, as it talks about how the Lord shepherds us. But verse 5 of the Psalm has an interesting turn of phrase that can challenge us as we begin a new year this month. David says there that the Lord “*leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.*” That is a very familiar phrase to many of us, but it also has a deep meaning to it.

The word “paths” here, according to the venerable Brown/Driver/Briggs Hebrew lexicon, means “wagon tracks”, the place where the wagons have gone before, leaving their hard, beaten-down path — we might well call them “ruts”! Many of us have been on an old dirt country road, where there were just “ruts” worn in the dirt from the cars driving on it over and over.

We often speak of “being in a rut” as a bad thing — and it can be, for sure. But the Bible shows us here that there are also some good “ruts” we can be in. When David says: “He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake,” he’s talking about “good ruts.” Let’s think about some of the good “ruts of righteousness” for a few minutes:

I. it’s good to be in the “rut” of sound doctrine.

Paul repeatedly tells Timothy in II Timothy that he needs to stay in “the ruts” of the sound doctrine he has been taught:

— He says in 1:13 “*Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me ...*”. He tells him in the next verse: “*Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you.*”

He says, Timothy, the doctrine you have received is a treasure. Keep it.

He tells him that repeatedly in this book: he says in 3:14, “*You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings ...*” (the Bible) and he goes on to say, “*All scripture is inspired by God ...*”.

So he keeps telling him: “Retain” those doctrinal standards I taught you. “Continue” in the scriptural teachings I gave you. He’s telling Timothy, STAY in “the wagon tracks,” the “ruts” of righteousness in your doctrine.

And that’s a good word for us today, too. We must stay in the “ruts” of the true, Biblical doctrine we have been taught. As I mentioned before, our society values “creativity” and “innovation,” and Americans especially want what is “newest and best”: the newest and best phone; the newest and best car, and so on. But when it comes to Biblical doctrine, what is new is NOT best! There’s an old saying: if you come up with some “new insight” from the Bible, after 2000 years of people reading it and studying it and teaching it, you can be pretty sure that the new insight you have, is a WRONG insight!

I remember years ago when televangelist Benny Hinn made a big splash on a religious tv show, saying that God had told him that not only was there a Trinity, consisting of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but he said, “there are actually nine of them”: that each member of the Trinity also had a trinity — and then he proudly said something like: “I bet you haven’t heard that before!” NO; no one had ever heard that before — because it was WRONG! The Bible doesn’t teach that at all, and what he claimed was a “divine revelation” was actually a heresy. (And to his credit, in later years I understand he was confronted about this, and he corrected his error.)

But this is just an example: when it comes to theology, “new” is not good. I understand we like new things: new songs, new movies, new books, and so on — and sometimes it can be tempting for us to want something new in our Bible teaching and doctrine as well. Something may sound “new and exciting” to you when you hear it — but be careful of that. New is not good when it comes to theology. Stay in “the wagon tracks of righteousness,” in “the ruts of righteousness” when it comes to your doctrine.

II. It’s good to be in some “ruts” for daily prayer and Bible study.

— Jesus said in Matthew 4:4 that “*man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.*” We need God’s word more than we do our daily food.

— Colossians 4:2 says “*Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it.*”

Getting into God’s word and prayer every day is one of THE most important habits we can get into in our lives. We need to get in that “rut” and STAY in it! God will speak to us if we will present ourselves before Him in His word; He will fill us with His Holy Spirit and pour out His power and answer prayers if we will pray — but He won’t do these things if we do not. We’ve got to get in, and stay in, the “ruts of righteousness” in God’s word and prayer.

My wife Cheryl has one of THE most consistent Bible reading and prayer times of anybody I have ever known. And our kids have seen that. One day when he was very young, our son Michael toddled into the living room where I was sitting, and for some reason pointed to the blue chair in the living room and said “That’s where Mama reads her Bible.” He knew that was her habit, her routine, her “rut” — a GOOD rut!

One of THE best “ruts” you can be in is the “rut” of meeting God every day in His word and prayer. Make sure you stay in that “rut” in 2022!

III. There are many OTHER “ruts of righteousness”:

A. It’s good to be in the “rut” of going to church.

Hebrews 10:25 says we are not to forsake our assembling together, as is the habit of some. That verse says that some people have gotten into the “habit,” the “rut” of not attending worship with other believers.

We’re seeing that in America today. I read one survey some time ago that said that the decline in church attendance is not because so many fewer people are attending — in fact, it said the total number of people who attend church is roughly the same as it has always been. But it said the difference is that the people who DO attend church, are attending less regularly than they used to. Maybe they used to go 3 or 4 times a month, but now it is only 1 or 2. Add that up over millions of people and that’s a lot of empty spaces in churches. And of course, COVID over the past couple of years has complicated that too.

And I understand taking reasonable precautions; we’ve said repeatedly we need to let people make the decisions they feel led by God to make in their response to COVID, and don’t judge others about it. But IN all that, let’s be sure we don’t get out of the “rut” of going to church. And I’m afraid that HAS happened, all over the country.

It is so important that we stay in that “rut” of going to church. We need it personally, and those we worship with need it from us a well. Hebrews 10:25 goes on to say, don’t forsake your assembling like some do, “but ENCOURAGE one another” — it says you need to go to church, both to be encouraged — AND to encourage other people. It’s not just about YOU: it encourages OTHER people when they see you there in church. And consequently, it can DIScourage other people when they do NOT see you there. It’s just such an important “rut” to be in, of attending church regularly. I hope we will all make it our goal to be in the “good rut” of going to church every Sunday morning.

B. It’s good to be in a “rut” of tithing and giving to the Lord.

Proverbs 3:9 says “*Honor the LORD from your wealth, And from the first of all your produce.*” Taking the first 10% of what God gives you, and giving that back to Him, is a really good “rut” to be in.

One of our sons is in his first year in a new job, and he is in the process of learning to budget and spend his money. I was thrilled the other day when he called to check in with Cheryl & me (which is another good “rut of righteousness” for kids to be in by the way!), and along the way, he mentioned that he had set an automatic payment to be made to his church from his paycheck every month. I was excited to hear that. It is so easy NOT to give to the Lord, so it is great if you can get into a “good rut” in it, whether it is an automatic payment like he did, or just the habit of making out your first check every month to the Lord to show that He is first, or however you want to do it. But there is a great blessing in being in the “rut” of tithing and giving to the Lord.

C. It’s good to be in the “rut” of family time

Ephesians 5 says, “*Husbands, love your wives.*” Someone said you spell love, “T.I.M.E.” Quality time means time. One of the best things Cheryl & I committed to when we first began ministry was to set aside Fridays to spend together. Sometimes people will say something like, “I know Friday is your day off Bro. Shawn,” and Cheryl will say, “Uh-uh, it’s not his day off, it’s his FAMILY day.” I don’t go off and play golf by myself on Fridays, we go and do something and spend time together that day. We need that.

But this isn’t just for pastors. Every marriage needs this. You need to keep “dating” your spouse. You need to have regular, consistent time that you spend together.

Let me say this: in all my years as a pastor, in talking with various couples about difficulties in their marriages, I have never yet talked to a single couple who was having problems, who said that they had set aside a regular time to date or spend together. I think that says a lot. Get in the “rut” of spending time regularly with your spouse. It’s one the best “ruts” you can be in.

And we could go on and on with examples and applications. There are lots of “good ruts” we can get in. Ask God’s Spirit to show you some of the “good ruts” you need to get into this year.

IV. Getting BACK into a “rut of righteousness”

But let me add this: what happens if you DO get out of a good rut? What should you do? Get back in! You were in that “rut” once and you got out of it — well with God’s help you can get back in it again too. God’s Spirit will help you do that.

Several years back I started translating a verse in Psalms every day from the Hebrew Bible, just one verse, but I did it every day, and over time this took me about a third of the way through the Book of Psalms. I remember I even said something about it to someone: “This is one of the best habits I ever got into!”, and it was.

But you know — and this is another good lesson for us — it only takes ONE day that you miss, to begin to stop a habit. And then you add just another day, then just another day — and soon you don’t have that habit anymore. You’re “out of the rut.” And that’s what happened to me with translating those Psalms. I don’t even know when it happened, but I do remember that one day I looked up and thought: “Hey, I’m not translating a verse in Hebrew from Psalms every day anymore!” I couldn’t recall the particular moment it happened, but one day it did — and then it became the next and the next, and I got out of the “rut” and routine of doing it, and I was out of that really good “rut” for probably a couple of years I guess. Then this last year I thought: “You know, translating those verses in Psalms was one of the best things I ever did. I need to get back to doing that again.” And so one day last year I started it up again. And I am enjoying it so much every day; it is so rich. But the thing is, I had gotten OUT of that “rut of righteousness,” but

continued on page 39

# Crossword

Crossword274

ACROSS

1 I will measure into their \_\_\_\_ the full payment for (Isa 65:7)

5 I am your servant and \_\_\_\_ . Come up and save me (2 Kings 16:7)

10 The law of the wise \_\_\_\_ fountain of life (2,1) (Prov 13:14)

13 \_\_\_\_ son brings grief to his father (1,7) (Prov 17:25)

14 Every thing that openeth the \_\_\_\_ in all flesh (Num 18:15) KJV

15 The law of his God is in his heart; his feet do not \_\_\_\_ (Ps 37:31)

16 \_\_\_\_, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida (John 1:44)

17 I came near unto \_\_\_\_ of them that stood by (Daniel 7:16)

18 as a \_\_\_\_ gathers her chicks under her wings (Matt 23:37)

19 I will make Jerusalem a \_\_\_\_ of ruins (Jer 9:11)

20 A bird on the \_\_\_\_ may report what you say (Eccl 10:20)

22 they beat one, killed another, and stoned \_\_\_\_ (1,5) (Matt 21:35-36)

24 ship with the figurehead of the \_\_\_\_ gods Castor and Pollux (Acts 28:11)

28 Forgive us our debts, as we \_\_\_\_ have forgiven our debtors (Matt 6:12)

29 As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were \_\_\_\_ (Ex 17:11)

32 each gate made of a single \_\_\_\_ (Rev 21:21)

35 They do nothing \_\_\_\_; they walk in his ways (Ps 119:3)

37 Therefore I will praise \_\_\_\_ among the nations, O LORD (Ps 18:49)

38 Go, I wish you well; keep \_\_\_\_ and well fed (James 2:16)

40 Sir, your \_\_\_\_ has earned ten more (Luke 19:16)

41 In the third year of \_\_\_\_ king of Judah (IKing 15:33)

42 He also said, "Bring me the \_\_\_\_ you are wearing" (Ruth 3:15)

45 The sons of Japheth: \_\_\_\_, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal (Gen 10:2)

46 Reprover, scolder (Hos 5:2) KJV

48 son of Seth (Gen 5:6) KJV

50 Sell me some property for a burial \_\_\_\_ here (Gen 23:4)

51 the Israelites were to live in \_\_\_\_ during the feast of the seventh month (Neh 8:14)

54 familiar spirits, and unto wizards that \_\_\_\_, and that mutter (Isa 8:19) KJV

56 you will not get out until

you have \_\_\_\_ the last penny (Matt 5:26)

57 Eye hath not seen, nor \_\_\_\_ heard (1 Cor 2:9) KJV

59 and do count them but dung, that I may \_\_\_\_ Christ (Phil 3:8)

60 the sacrifices of \_\_\_\_ are offered to demons (1 Cor 10:20)

62 appointed unto men \_\_\_\_ to die, but after this the judgment (Heb 9:27)

63 \_\_\_\_, Simon Peter's brother (John 1:40)

64 male roe deers (1 Kings 4:23)

65 He who testifies to these things says, "\_\_\_\_, I am coming soon." (Rev 22:20)

66 He will \_\_\_\_ the afflicted among the people (Ps 72:4)

67 to see if you would stand the \_\_\_\_ and be obedient (2 Cor 2:9)

Down

1 The LORD Almighty will \_\_\_\_ them with a whip (Isa 10:26)

2 Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog? \_\_\_\_? (1,4) (1 Sam 24:14)

3 I am suffering even to the \_\_\_\_ of being chained like a criminal (2 Tim 2:9)

4 Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a \_\_\_\_ (John 13:26)

5 You snakes! You brood of \_\_\_\_! How will you escape (Matt 23:33)

6 The law is only \_\_\_\_ of the good things that are (1,6) (Heb 10:1)

7 where they decided to run the \_\_\_\_ aground (Acts 27:39)

8 Moses said unto God, Who \_\_\_\_ , that I should go unto (2,1) (Exod 3:11)

9 the heron after her kind, and the \_\_\_\_, and the bat (Lev 11:19) KJV

10 the brass, the \_\_\_\_, the tin, and the lead (Num 31:22)

11 I will \_\_\_\_ to the LORD, for he has been good to me (Ps 13:6)

12 his hand fetcheth a stroke with the \_\_\_\_ to cut down the tree (Deut 19:5) KJV

19 Who may ascend the \_\_\_\_ of the LORD? (Ps 24:3)

21 and brought him to an \_\_\_\_, and took care of him (Luke 10:34)

23 They will neither \_\_\_\_ nor destroy on all my holy mountain (Isa 11:9)

24 \_\_\_\_ are better than one (Eccles 4:9)

25 Do not get drunk on \_\_\_\_, which leads to debauchery (Eph 5:18)

26 Set \_\_\_\_ over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch (1,5) (Ps 141:3)

27 Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly \_\_\_\_ (Job 5:7)

30 They left \_\_\_\_ and camped at Dibon Gad. (Num 33:45)

31 he shall open, and \_\_\_\_ shall shut (Isaiah 22:22)

33 Men at \_\_\_\_ have contempt for misfortune (Job 12:5)

34 \_\_\_\_ and Dumah, and Eshean (Joshua 15:52)

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36 the pure gold lampstand with its \_\_\_\_ of lamps and all (Exod 39:37)

39 If the iron be blunt, and he do not \_\_\_\_ the edge (Eccl 10:10) KJV

40 My shield is God \_\_\_\_ High, who saves the upright in heart (Ps 7:10)

42 the mountains \_\_\_\_ like rams, the hills like lambs (Ps 114:4)

43 Their feet \_\_\_\_ swift to shed blood (Romans 3:15)

44 the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of \_\_\_\_ (Ps 29:5)

45 Why have you repaid \_\_\_\_ with evil? (Gen 44:4)

47 But we know that the law is good, if a man \_\_\_\_ it lawfully (1 Tim 1:8)

49 these sayings were \_\_\_\_ abroad throughout all the hill (Luke 1:65) KJV

52 Jesus unto him, Get thee \_\_\_\_, Satan (Matt 4:10) KJV

53 Fill the men's \_\_\_\_ with as

much food as they can carry (Gen 44:1)

54 fetch olive branches, and \_\_\_\_ branches, and myrtle (Neh 8:15)

55 He makes clouds rise from the \_\_\_\_ of the earth (Ps 135:7)

56 and she shall shave her head, and \_\_\_\_ her nails (Deut 21:12) KJV

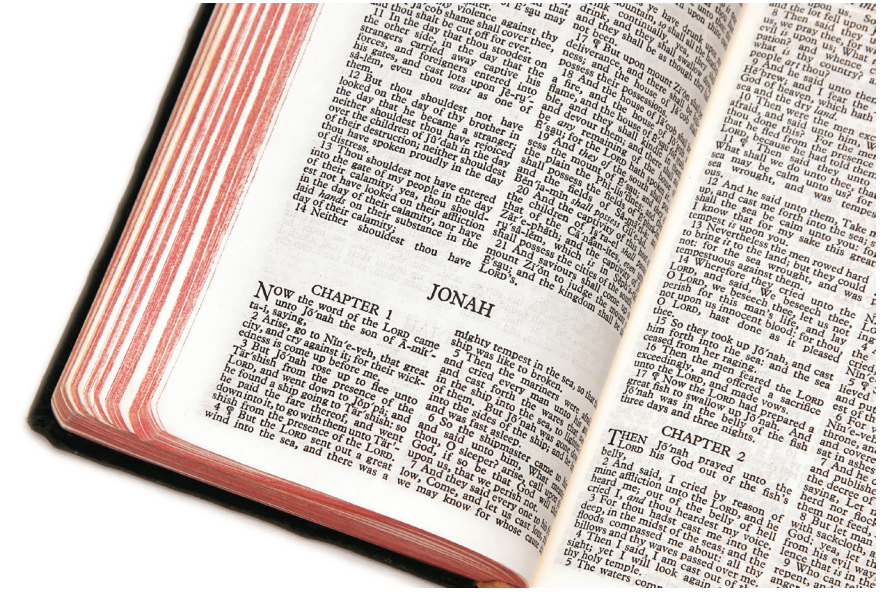
58 ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you \_\_\_\_ (Matt 11:28) KJV

59 As for God, his \_\_\_\_ is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless (Ps 18:30)

61 let all the inhabitants of the world stand in \_\_\_\_ of him (Ps 33:8)

62 Bring \_\_\_\_ every kind of living creature that is with you (Gen 8:17)

Solution on page 14



The New Order

By Jim Huskins  
McDowell County



Most of us have been taught to ignore the instructions for living God delivered to His people through Moses. One of the results of this self-imposed ignorance is that we attempt to interpret the last fourth of the Bible—Matthew–Revelation—in a vacuum. It is impossible to understand the part many call the “new testament” without knowing the patterns and procedures established in Torah.

Christians tend to think of the Temple rituals and sacrifices as “Jewish” worship. “Judah,” the source of the word “Jew,” was one of Twelve Tribes of Israel. The Levitical Priesthood led worship for all Israelites. Priests had to be members of the Tribe of Levi and the Clan of Aaron. Any direct descendant of Aaron could serve as priest, but the High Priesthood was intended to pass from father to son in unbroken line beginning with Aaron.

Decades before the incarnation, Rome turned the High Priesthood into a political appointment. Both of the men mentioned as holders of that office in the Gospel accounts, Annas and Caiaphas, were Roman appointees. Political appointment always results in political obligation. These men were not charged with leading in worship or fulfilling their Torah-specified role of mediating between sinful mankind and Holy God. Their job was to maintain political stability. As long as they did so, Rome allowed them to use both the priesthood and the Temple for personal profit.

The Bible does not state that John the Immerser was the legitimate High Priest at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, but he held appropriate credentials. He was of the tribe of Levi. Both his parents were direct descendants of Aaron. He was so significant to God’s plan that his birth was announced by the Angel Gabriel. Gabriel also foretold that John would minister in the power and spirit of Elijah. (Luke 1:17) Elijah was the undisputed head of the priests. In contrast to Rome’s appointed High Priests, John was both righteous and filled with God’s Spirit from the womb. The strongest Biblical evidence that John was the true High Priest is the fact that Jesus asked him to perform a necessary High Priestly duty.

Since few modern Christians understand the role of immersion in the salvation process, most also fail to recognize the significance of Jesus’ baptism. The Bible does not teach that water immersion is optional or merely symbolic. Instead, it makes an ironclad case that water immersion is required. In Mark 16:16, Jesus says that whoever believes and is immersed will be saved. In Acts 2:38, Peter states that water immersion is necessary for the forgiveness of sins and receiving the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 22:16, Ananias urged Paul to immediately be immersed to wash away his sins. In Romans 6:3-4, Paul states that through immersion we are joined to Christ and to His death. In Galatians 3:27, Paul says that only those who have been immersed into Christ are joined to Him. In 1 Peter 3:21, the Apostle states flatly that immersion saves us. Every conversion detailed in Acts includes immediate baptism. Numerous, man-made doctrines claim that water immersion is not required for salvation, but they ignore clear, Biblical teaching.

Jesus did not need forgiveness. He was immersed because He is our pattern. We who claim to love and serve Him must follow His example in all things. 1 John 3:6 says, “Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.” John protested when Jesus requested baptism. Jesus responded that His immersion was necessary to “fulfill all righteousness” (Matthew 3:15). It is no accident that the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus immediately after His immersion. This is God’s pattern.

In addition to showing us what we should do, Jesus’ immersion had a second purpose.

The Book of Hebrews is focused on the corruption of the Levitical Priesthood. Part of the glorious message of that book is that we now have a High Priest who can “sympathize with our weaknesses” because He “has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:14-15). The High Priesthood was a crucial office established in Torah. He alone could enter the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement to sprinkle the blood of an animal sacrifice on the Ark of the Covenant. This action foreshadowed the work of Messiah in offering His own blood—the only perfect sacrifice—on our behalf. Because of His “obedience unto death,” Jesus qualified as a new type of High Priest, not following the line of Aaron, but in the order of Melchizedek. Discussion of that Order requires separate treatment.

Before Aaron became High Priest, Moses served as the mediator between God and Man. Leviticus chapter eight details the process by which Aaron and his sons were ordained to the priesthood. Verse six says, “And Moses brought Aaron and his sons and washed them with water.” From that time, the serving High Priest washed those who were being installed as priests. By immersing Jesus, John fulfilled this High Priestly role.

One of the clear lessons of Scripture is those sinful humans cannot approach Holy God without a mediator. Jesus now administers a High Priesthood that can never be corrupted. Under His leadership, every believer is a priest with direct access to Messiah. This is true “freedom in Christ.” That freedom, however, does not convey a license to sin so that “grace may abound.” He calls us to “hunger and thirst after righteousness” and to offer our bodies as “living sacrifices.” If we love Him, we will yearn to follow His commandments (John 14:15). Those commandments are found in Genesis through Deuteronomy.

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.

then I committed to getting back INTO it again.

Is there a “good rut” you used to be in, but you’re not in it anymore? Maybe God is telling you it’s time to get back in!

Would you ask yourself these two questions today:

1) What is a “good rut” I need to get into in 2022 — maybe Bible reading or praying or going to church — whatever God lays on your heart.

2) Then ask Him to show you if there is a “good rut” you need to get BACK into in 2022 — maybe something that you “used” to do, but somehow you stopped.

Let’s seek God for “the ruts of righteousness” He wants to lead us in, this year.

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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