



BLUE RIDGE CHRISTIAN NEWS



Morganton Seventh Day Adventist

Stone Solver

By Steve Bietz
Burke County



Sundown was staring them in the face. Happens now and then. Trying to race the sun and get what we need to finish before sundown. Try and try to keep up with the sun but it's sinking. The ladies had been in the funeral procession to the cemetery and now they realize that their task of preparing the body of Jesus for burial was not going to be finished before sundown. The Sabbath was approaching quickly. Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea had accomplished a great kindness by just getting Jesus off the cross and to the tomb before the sunset. So we see the ladies discussing options to come back and finish. They decide to rendezvous at sunup on Sunday morning. As the ladies begin to walk away from the tomb, they watch as a heavy large stone is positioned in front of the opening to the tomb. See you Sunday.

True to their word, the ladies keep their Sunday morning appointment and are making their way back to the gravesite. We are not told which lady thought of it first, but Oh No...The Stone! We read about it in Mark 16:1-3. *"Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome brought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they said among themselves, 'Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?'"* Ah yes, a stone problem that needs a stone solver. We can't get past the stone.

Admittedly, we all have a stone problem. As I sit here and count them, I find that I have 14 keys on my keychain. With those keys, I can open a good many doors. I have keys to my house, my cars, my safety deposit box, and several to my Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church and our Silver Creek School and gym. I even have a key on my keychain that I have no idea what door it opens, but I'm afraid to remove it thinking I may find out some day and wish I had that key. One key you and I cannot find on our keychain is the key to the grave. We need a Stone Solver for that particular lock.

The ladies are fretting about the stone that they had witnessed being pushed in front of the tomb opening. Who can solve their stone dilemma? Little did the ladies know that the key to death and the grave is on the keyring of Jesus Christ. That is what we see as John relates to us what he sees in vision while incarcerated on the Island of Patmos. In that vision, John describes seeing a remarkable Being with feet like brass, hair as white as wool even as white as snow. And the Being had eyes like flames of fire and out of His mouth, John saw a sharp double-edged sword. I think I would have responded just like John for he tells us that he fell at this Being's feet as if he were dead. And John would write that this obviously Holy Being was One like the Son of Man. That term, Son of Man, was a name that Jesus had often labeled Himself with while He was here on earth as one of us. And then in Revelation 1:18, we see a marvelous picture of a keychain. *"I am He that lives and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys to the grave and death."* Now that's a keychain!

The ladies come to the grave and must have been astonished, as they see that their stone problem had been solved.

He Is Risen! We need a Stone Solver because we do not have the key to the grave on our keychain. But how glorious a thought it is, to know that our Lord and Redeemer, Jesus Christ, has just such a key. As we enjoy Easter, we can have such wonderful confidence that there is a Stone Solver. The stone in front of His grave could not hold Him, and on that Day Of Resurrection, Jesus will take His Key and solve our stone problem as well.

Steve Bietz, Pastor, Morganton Seventh day Adventist Church.



Humor
By Buddy Freeman
Madison County



The rookie police officer noticed a group of people loitering on a street corner. Wanting to impress his supervisor, he pulled out his bull horn and yelled, "Everyone, break it up! Go back to your homes immediately!" One by one, the group dispensed, all looking puzzled and angry. "So how did I do?" the rookie asked his supervisor. The veteran officer replied, "Not bad considering this is a bus stop."

Mistake in the church bulletin. "Please join the choir and sin to the glory of God."

A little girl asked her mother, "How did the human race appear?" The mother said, "God made Adam and Eve and they had children. That evening, the girl asked her father the same question. He answered many years ago there were monkeys, from which the human race evolved. The confused little girl returned to her mother and said, "Mom, you said that God created us, but Daddy said that we evolved from monkeys." The mother said, "Dear, I told you about my side of the family, and your father told you about his side of the family."

The boys were trying to outdo each other. The first said, "My uncle's a doctor. I can be sick for nothing!" The second youngster shot back, "Big Deal! My uncle is a preacher. I can be good for nothing!"

St. Peter looked at the new arrival skeptically; he'd had no advance knowledge of his coming. "How did you get here?" he asked. "Flu."

"Mommy," asked little Judy, "did you ever see a cross-eyed bear?" "Why no Judy," chuckled her mother. "Why do you ask?" "Well in Sunday school this morning, we sang about 'the consecrated cross-eyed bear.'"

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



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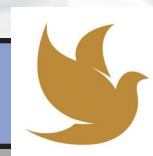
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“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace: that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation: that saith unto Zion. Thy God reigneth!”

Isaiah 52:7 KJV



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Church Directory



Bear Creek Baptist Church

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

Reverend Bruce Cannon

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

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

Landis Orthodox Presbyterian Church

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

Elder Mike Cloy

opcsmikecloy@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

Pastor - Steve Williams

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

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The Rock Church

4806 US 64
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www.trcmorganton.com

Pastor - Billy Chapman

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

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

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

Altapass Baptist Church

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

Pastor Ryan Bridgeo

pastor@plumtreechurch.com

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

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

Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

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

Senior Pastor Dr. Jack Hodges

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

Pastor - Phillip Greene

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

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Burkemont Baptist Church

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

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Dr. Luke A. Lane

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

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

Dr. Rocky Branch Senior Pastor

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

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Pine Branch Baptist Church

48 Church Road
Spruce Pine, NC 28777
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Reverend Bobby Joe Greene

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Spruce Pine United Methodist Church

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

Pastor Richard Schilling

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

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Grand View Baptist

Signature Struggles Life's Uncertainties

By Glenda Ward
McDowell County



"Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time:"
"Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you."
1 Peter 5:6-7

Our own struggle. Most everyone has something they are struggling with in life. Our own Signature Struggle is the choice, habit, or escape we keep going back to even though we know better. We are likely to give in to our struggles because we are tired and have become stressed or overwhelmed, not because we want to, but when we face fear, loss of, or disruptions to our everyday life of normal, we have the confusion of trying to figure out what the new normal is going to be. In reality, we want to feel better and live life in what we think would be the everyday norm. And our signature struggle tries to convince us this is where the solution lies to what we think should be normal for us ...our life, our future. But we know deep down this is an empty compromise.

Invisible pain. In one way or another, we all have it. Whether it is pain from a chronic illness, relational baggage, fresh grief, or trauma from many sources, we are all marked by pieces of our stories unseen to others. When I give into my signature struggle, my mind echoes: How can God use you when you keep going back to what you can't change? It makes me feel like a failure. What is the use in trying?

We are not to give the enemy that victory. Instead, we are to embrace the grace that God has given us, that is what transforms us, that which brings us out of hiding in that messed up struggle that life itself has dealt to us. Embrace the grace that gives us the courage to keep trying. It is the superpower that defeats our struggles. God can use the places where we have experienced the most hurt, pain, and shame to bring Him glory. In our weakness, His strength is ever so present. If you have given in to a messed-up Signature Struggle, let me resound, to myself as well: We are still loved. Who we are in Christ, hasn't changed. We will rise above our earthly mess-up if we humble ourselves and accept God's mercy and grace. God moves before us with power. Be still in Him. Follow His leading direction in daily living. The battle is not ours, but God's. As believers, we never have to worry about how to engage our conflicts, because they all belong to God. And in being His have already won. Our responsibility is to obey His directions whatever He instructs us to do and trust in Him to show us His triumph way in which we should live. Praise to God paves the way for a deep relationship with God and victory in our circumstances. When we begin to exalt Him, we become aware of how completely able He is to help us.

It doesn't matter if God's commands don't make sense – obey them anyway. The Lord has already won our battles for us, and His interest in involving us is to build our faith. That is why He will often command us to do things that seem unreasonable – to see if we will trust Him. (Reference 2 Chronicles 20:15; 20:20). Our lack of understanding and clarity is evidence that God is beyond anything we can ask or imagine. When we see no clear answer or direction, that is OK. God has the answer. God is the answer to all our struggles, circumstances, doubts, and questions. He is close; He is watching; He is caring. His knowledge is too wondrous and His sovereignty too great for us to fully grasp, but God invites us into a larger deeper faith. We learn to trust God in the face of life's uncertainties. Faith proves to our hearts the very thing we are unsure of, and amid difficulties and uncertainty, this is what we need. Those characteristics that we don't understand in our minds and leave us at a loss to understand – are precisely the reasons we can and must trust God.

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

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Burke County Public Schools

BCPS Annual Food Drive Yields 45,050

Pounds Of Nonperishables

By Chris Shuffler

Burke County



Burke County Public Schools wrapped up its eighth annual Superintendent's Souper Bowl Canned-Food Drive on Feb. 14. After taking a year off due to the pandemic last year, the district resumed its annual drive this year for local food pantries. District-wide, schools collected 45,050 pounds of food with five local charities benefiting from the food drive: Burke United Christian Ministries, Glen Alpine United Methodist Church, East Burke Christian Ministries, Abernethy Memorial United Methodist Church in Rutherford College, and East Burke High School's own food pantry.

The school system's food drive starts each year the week students return from Christmas break and runs until the week after the Super Bowl. Schools decorate their collection barrels and staff, students, and the community is invited to fill them with non-perishable food items.

Burke County Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Mike Swan said, "I am very impressed with the amount of food our schools collected. The schools had fun with the drive and kudos to our principals for finding creative ways to incentivize students and staff to donate. While Salem, Ray Childers, Mountain View, George Hildebran, and W.A. Young elementary schools were our top collectors, the real winners are the people of the community who depend on our local food pantries during times of food insecurity. This canned food drive started in 2014, and now I am so proud to be able to continue the legacy of this great cause."

Over the past eight years, the drive has collected 189,817 pounds of food for local food pantries.



Burke County Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Mike Swan and Board of Education Chair Wendi Craven delivered canned goods to Burke United Christian Ministries following the 8th annual Superintendent's Souper Bowl Canned Food Drive.

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

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The Forces That Are Against Us

By Dr. Tom Walker
McDowell County



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.”*

We have already considered our arch-enemy who is Satan himself. Now we move into the instrumentality through which he works. There is no indication that Satan is omnipresent (everywhere present) like God is, but he does have means through which to work in order to accomplish his evil purposes.

It is encouraging to know that even though we encounter battle after battle in life, victory can be experienced by those who know the Lord in the full pardon and forgiveness of sins. If a person lives in defeat, it is not because God has failed to give him resources to live a victorious Christian life.

There are opposing forces who would like nothing more than for God’s people to put up the white flag of surrender and be in a state of retreat. Though that be the desire of our enemies concerning us, we cannot surrender in the face of hostile forces.

Very few people like to be involved in a battle. If it is left up to us, we had rather experience peace and calm. However, the Bible calls us soldiers.

2 Timothy 2:3 says, *“Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.”* Soldiers are trained for battle. They all go through something we call boot camp. There they learn the basics of combat and learn offensive and defensive measures to fulfill their role as a good soldier.

William Barclay says, *“No soldier who is on active service entangles himself in ordinary civilian business; he lays aside such things, so that by good service he may please the commander who has enrolled him in his army.”*

According to 2 Timothy 2:3-4, three definite things are required of a good soldier.

1- A good soldier must endure hardness, which is a requirement to succeed in battle.

2- A good soldier must not be entangled with the affairs of everyday life.

3- A good soldier must please and obey his commander.

There are too many who have been called to be soldiers who are AWOL. Those letters stand for Absent Without Leave. That could definitely be called dereliction of duty. Many have left the front line of combat and have retreated into a comfort zone.

Our Struggle

Notice what it is. It is interesting to notice the Apostle Paul uses the word “wrestle.” This term is used to indicate the Christian’s struggle with the powers of evil. Normally when we think of wrestling, we think of a contest between two people in which each attempts to throw one another down on a mat and hold his opponent down until the count is over. The Apostle Paul probably thinks of the Greek games and the matches that took place in some of those events. The word “wrestle” speaks of a struggle, a fight, and combat.

We are in a war, in a struggle, and fight with the bastions of evil in this world.

Here is some insight on the word “wrestle.” It is present tense which gives reference to an ongoing wrestling event. While we are in this world, we are continually in conflict with the things Satan uses, remembering that the conflict Paul speaks about is not a temporal conflict.

Notice what it is not. It is not “against flesh and blood.” Too many times we make other people our enemies. Our real enemies are found in the unseen. If you have an earthly enemy, it should not be you making them your enemy, but rather they chose to make you an enemy.

Let’s see what Jesus says about our enemies. Jesus said in Matthew 5:44, *“But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.”* Again, I remind you that our enemies are found in the unseen spirit world. They do attempt to work through people to accomplish their ends, but the real enemies are the unseen forces that are behind them, influencing them and moving them to stand against God Himself and His people.

Warren Wiersbe says, *“We are wasting our time-fighting people when we ought to be fighting the devil who seeks to control people and make them oppose the work of God.”*

Our Unseen Enemies

As the Apostle Paul lists enemies in the verse before us, that is how we will approach and study them.

The first of the enemies are principalities. It seems certain the evil spirits are what is pointed to in this verse, they are chieftains or principle rulers. Colossians 2:15 says, *“And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.”* The powers Paul refers to in this verse are the evil spirits that are in the atmosphere around us. Since there is no way to calculate how many of them there are, we can rightly say they are made up of a part of the 1/3 of the angels that fell from Heaven, after they joined ranks with Lucifer.

Ephesians 1:20-21, *“Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.”* Another reference is given here to the powers that are mentioned in our text verse.

The Lord Jesus has defeated them through His substitutionary death and his glorious resurrection. Satan and all his cohorts will never ultimately win, no matter how vigorously they try.

Secondly, there are powers. The word translated “powers” here is translated several other ways in our King James Bibles. It is rendered as an authority, jurisdiction, liberty, right, and strength in other places. I fear that many who are in authority in this world are energized by Satan and his fallen angels. Many policies that are set by the powers that be are often against the principles of the word of God. For instance, abortion is the unnecessary taking of human life. God says, *“Thou shalt not kill”* (Exodus 20:13). Yet, many of the powers that be are for taking the life of innocent babies.

Another example is the condoning of lifestyles that are against the natural use of the body. God says in Leviticus 18:22 *“Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.”* In the same chapter down a few verses the Bible says in Leviticus 18:24-25, *“Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: and the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants.”*

God calls what happens in Leviticus 18:22 an abomination. In a Biblical sense, an abomination is anything that offends the spiritual, religious, or moral sense of a person and causes disgust, hatred, or loathing. Some of the abominations mentioned in the Bible are sexual transgressions (Lev.18), the adoption of dress of the opposite sex (Deut.22:5), and the practice of witchcraft, magic, and spiritism (Deut.18:9-12). It is unfortunate our government, the powers that be which are often influenced by unseen spiritual powers, do not see many things through the eyes of the Word of God.

Most of the Hebrew words translated “abomination” have the meaning of impure, filthy, and unclean. That suggests something is foul-smelling and objectionable to a holy and righteous God.

Third, we battle against the rulers of the darkness of this world. Satan is called the “god of this world” in 2 Corinthians 4:4. He blinds the minds of people who are unbelievers, to hinder the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ shining into their hearts. The present world system is moved and guided by evil personages and wicked principles. Satan rules over the dark domain, the world system that is all around. People who are without God, according to the Scriptures, are considered as being in darkness. Evil rulers affect many earthly rulers.

Fourthly, we battle against spiritual wickedness in high places. There are wicked spirits that move and operate between the earth and the stars. Dr. John Gill writes, *“This refers to the aerial heavens, where the power or posse of devils reside, and where they are above us, over our heads, overlooking us, and watching every advantage against us; and therefore we should have on our armor, and be in a readiness to engage them.”*

Our Reaction

Since all of this is true that we have considered thus far, it behooves us to resist evil power and wicked influences because of several things.

Realize the Lord is coming back (Jn.14:1-3). Since He is, we should not be ashamed of his coming because of being influenced by things that are evil.

Live a pure life. God says, *“Be ye holy for I am holy”* (1 Peter 1:16). We should not act and react as lost people who live around us. God tells us to *“touch not the unclean thing and I will receive you”* (2 Corinthians 6:17).

Stand against all Satan and his powers. They attempt to ruin your life but don’t allow them to succeed (2 Thess. 2:15). Evangelist Billy Sunday expressed it well. He said, *“Listen, I’m against sin. I’ll kick it as long as I’ve got a foot, I’ll fight it as long as I’ve got a fist, I’ll butt it as long as I’ve got a head, and I’ll bite it as long as I’ve got a tooth. And when I’m old, fistless, footless, and toothless, I’ll gum it till I go home to glory and it goes home to perdition.”*

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

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High County Prison Ministry

By Jody Griffin
Avery and Mitchell Counties



“To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.” (Isaiah 61:3)

God promises that in the darkest of times, the most difficult of circumstances when the world seems dark and terrifying, God offers the believing heart an opportunity to exchange grief for joy. This exchange is exemplified in the witness of Scripture describing the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Those who had followed Jesus, who had believed in His teaching and walked in His ways had been forced into the agonizing place of despair when they had heard Him draw His last breaths, utter His last words and the last signs of life leave His body. Jesus was dead. His work was over. His disciples left only with the echoes of His teaching in their hearts and minds...

Of course, that wasn't the end of the story! Rather the prophetic declaration of God's Provision for the world was that there would one day be an incredible exchange, a reversal of fortune that would testify to the Love and Care of Almighty God! Beauty for ashes, joy for mourning, praise for the lifting of the heavy-hearted. This is where the Word of God found the Chaplain today. Wrestling with the heaviness of heart brought on by somber 'anniversaries', specifically the tragic loss of life of some NCDPS 'family members' in recent years, one cannot help but pray with fervor for those whom one share the honor of serving in this context.

On this particular day, included in the Chaplain's prayers were the family members of those who have died in the line of duty in recent years. Thoughts of grieving loved ones and fellow employees brought heaviness of heart and tears to his eyes. So the prayers shifted to those who continue to serve, placing themselves in harm's way for the sake of the incarcerated, their families, and for the Peace of Christ that passes all understanding.

I pray the same for the many fine people I have had the privilege to share this journey with these past seven years I have had the honor to serve as Community Funded Chaplain at Avery Mitchell Correctional Institution. Your support and prayers have sustained this work through good times and challenging times. Your trust in me as God's servant in the position of Chaplain has allowed me to witness to the goodness of God often in the darkest moments.

This will be my last article as Chaplain at Avery Mitchell Correctional Institution as I have accepted a new opportunity to serve God by serving others. Many thanks to everyone who has supported and encouraged me in this role. But this is not the end of the story! The same God that brought me the gift of serving as Chaplain here will one day bring another Chaplain to this place. That Chaplain will need the same level of support and friendship that you all have shown me.

Please remember to pray and support the incarcerated, the staff, and the families whose lives are affected by incarceration each day. May God Bless you for your faithful support, and May the Lord raise up a new Chaplain to serve this community. Finally, may God's Grace abide within the gates and behind the walls and I will continue to pray for Protection, Peace and Potential to be found in every person who enters and exits the prison. To God Be the Glory. Amen.

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

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FREEDOM
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By Doug Harrell
Mitchell County



“Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seeds: lest the fruit of thy seed which thou hast sown, and the fruit of thy vineyard, be defiled.” Deuteronomy 22:9 KJV

I have always thought of April as being a month that we look forward to planting the first seeds or plants of the year. Time to have the soil prepared and ready to plant and look forward to a bountiful harvest as the Lord provides the rain and the sun that it will take to grow a good harvest. The verse that I shared at the beginning of this article is important if you want to grow a pure crop, one that is true to its original seed. Mixing the seed will produce a mixed crop that will not be pure in its origin and will not reproduce the pureness that you want.

This thought really leads me to what I wanted to talk about in this Life Lesson! What kinds of seeds are we planting in our lives daily? Are they pure seeds of faith and righteous living and speech, or are we sending out mixed signals to our family and all those around us? We are told in the Book of James that a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. We are either for or against something. Straddling the fence only gets us in all kinds of trouble. We are also told that we cannot love the things of this world and the things of the Lord at the same time. We will hate the one and love the other. I know that I am paraphrasing here but if we are to live a life that will teach our children and others around us to be responsible members of society, we must to the best of our ability, be consistent in all our actions. Our plowing a straight furrow in the field of life is more important than preaching a sermon, our doing and being is much more important than our talking.

In today’s world of “woke mentality,” we are losing all sense of right and wrong. We are allowing all kinds of things to take place that make absolutely no sense in real life. I am seeing all kinds of articles about biological males competing in women’s sporting events and the so-called feminists are not saying a word, how stupid is this. The skeletal make-up of the male and female are different and so is the muscular make-up. We are destroying our very society with this kind of thinking and yet a vast number of people feel that this is okay! I admit I cannot even fathom their thinking. When we don’t follow the laws of nature we will pay the consequences over time, and that time will come quickly.

As you read these words, think about your own mental stance today. What kind of seed are you allowing in your mind, are you sticking with pure, unadulterated seed, or are you allowing various seed thoughts that are conflicting with the laws of nature and the laws of morality that are given us through the word of God? Are you allowing the media and the world to influence you and color your view of right and wrong? Are you devoting time to make sure you and your family are planting seeds that will be harvestable in the future? These are serious times we are living in and the quality of our harvest is going to depend on the seeds of faith and truthfulness that we are planting each and every day of our lives.

“He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, Shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.” Psalm 126:6 KJV

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



Easter: The Reason We Have Hope

By Rev. John B. Sorensen



Two thousand years have passed since Jesus hung on the cross and opened the door for us to spend eternity with Him. Today, His death and resurrection continue to transform lives around the world for all eternity. He promises that when we put our trust in Him alone, we will spend eternity with God in Heaven. And therefore, we have hope.

Hope is never more present than it is at Easter. Every year, we are reminded about the pain and suffering that Jesus endured for us on the cross. *“While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”* (Romans 5:8b, NIV). We get to experience His joyous resurrection on Sunday morning – knowing that His resurrection proves He paid our way to Heaven (1 Corinthians 15:22, John 14:19).

This is the message of the Gospel. It is not just good news – it is the best news! Easter reminds us of the reason we have hope—and that is something to celebrate. But what do we do with that hope?

Good news is meant to be shared. I’ve had the privilege to watch the faces of thousands of people change when they realize that they can know for certain that they will spend eternity with Jesus in Heaven. Their eyes brighten, sometimes with tears, and they can’t wait to pray and invite Christ into their hearts. Many have waited a long time for someone to give them a reason to hope. As believers, we have that reason. Paul tells us to *“always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have”* (1 Peter 3:15, NIV). Not everyone will accept it, but many will. For that reason, we are called to share it.

How can you share the hope that you have in Jesus this Easter season? Tell others what Easter means to you. People are typically very open to having conversations about holidays throughout the year. As others share about Easter egg hunts for their children or the big Easter dinner they are planning to have with their family, we have an open door to share the true meaning of Easter and why we celebrate it every year.

Invite someone to join you. Even if someone has never stepped foot in a church, Easter Sunday may be the perfect time to invite them. The Easter story is the Gospel message. Many churches hold special services, plays, and musicals to present that message in a clear way. Invite them to join your family for dinner and share with them what Christ has done in your life personally. Everyone loves a story, and your story may be just the one they need to hear to know that they, too, can experience hope.

There are many opportunities to share the reason for our hope throughout the year, but Easter may be that perfect reason to share it with someone 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.

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No Shadow of Turning

By Jim Huskins
McDowell County



The best-known homily in history closes with a renowned simile. Jesus wraps up the Sermon on the Mount with the admonition to hear and obey His teaching (Matthew 7:24-27). He compares those who do so to a wise man who builds his house on a rock. Those who fail to hear and obey, He compares to a foolish man who built his house on sand. Our choice is between stability and transience.

We are by nature fickle and feckless. With a few artfully twisted sentences, the serpent convinced Adam and Eve to exchange the perfection of God's intimate presence and His garden of delight for the dubious accomplishment of knowing evil first hand. That epic tale is still being written. Famous chapters with names like Golden Calf, Delilah, Bathsheba, Jezebel, and Judas are seared into our collective consciousness. Accounts of the ways you and I have failed God are, thankfully, more obscure but no less dramatic. Like that famous sand foundation, we tend to distort with every spiritual wind or freshet.

Thankfully, the Bible insists that God never changes. Numbers 23:19 tells us that God is not man, that he does not lie or change His mind, and that He will fulfill His every promise. Psalm 102:27 says that He will be the same for eternity. Genesis 17:7 says that the covenant He made with Abraham is everlasting. Deuteronomy 7:9 says that God will keep covenant and maintain steadfast love with a thousand generations of those who love Him by keeping His commandments. 1 Chronicles 16:15 says the same. Isaiah 46:9-10 says that only God can declare the end from the beginning, that His counsel is unchanging, and that He will accomplish all His purpose. Matthew 24:35 says that heaven and earth are temporary, but God's Word is eternal. Hebrews 13:8 says that Messiah is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Titus 1:2 says that God never lies. Revelation 22:13 insists that Messiah is the beginning and the end. These references are too numerous to list. They are perhaps best summarized by Psalm 89:34, "I will not violate my covenant or alter the word that went forth from my lips." With God's absolute unchangeability established, how is it possible that many Christians are taught—and apparently have no trouble believing—that God changed?

God promised in Genesis seventeen that Abraham would be "exceedingly fruitful." He would father a "multitude of nations." In verses seven and eight, God says that His covenant with Abraham and his descendants will be "everlasting." He promises to give the land of Canaan to Abraham and his offspring as an "everlasting possession." The word translated "everlasting" is *olam*. It means "without end." Scripture is clear that God never changes and that His covenant with Abraham's descendants is everlasting. Why, then, do most churches teach that God broke His covenant with Abraham, that Abraham's descendants no longer play any role in God's plan, and that Israel no longer has a claim to the land of Canaan?

These false teachings form the core of "replacement theology." This noxious heresy teaches that Messiah did not come to earth to fulfill the many promises God made since the garden. We are told that Jesus took human form so that He could start a new religion that "replaced" the covenant made with Abraham and detailed at Sinai. We are told that God "violated His covenant and altered the word that went forth from His lips." This perspective makes God a liar and unworthy of trust. Replacement theology claims that He did what is impossible for Him to do—change.

Many churches accept these lies without acknowledging that they violate God's character. We are told that the "church" is now "spiritual" Israel. Every time the so-called new testament uses the term "Israel," it refers to the blood descendants of Abraham's grandson, Jacob. We are told that Jesus lived and died to save "Gentiles." He claimed that He was sent only to the "lost sheep of the House of Israel." (Matthew 15:24) We are told that "Christians" have no obligation to follow or even understand the first three-fourths of the Bible. Jesus said that the "Law and the Prophets" will be in full force for as long as heaven and earth remain. (Matthew 5:7-9) Revelation 14:12 defines God's people as those who "keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus." We are told that "Christians" need not follow God's instructions for living revealed through Moses. In Matthew 7:23, Jesus condemns "good church people" because they are "lawbreakers."

Jesus is the Word who was with God from the beginning. It is He who revealed and preserved that one, marvelous story which is the Bible. The story tells that Almighty God chose a man named Abraham to father a nation which God would fashion into his own holy possession. Abraham's family was separated from the rest of the world for a holy purpose. God made wonderful promises to Abraham, and He will fulfill them. The best part of this story is that we who were not born into Abraham's family can be adopted through faith. Jesus explained faith in His famous sermon. "Those who hear and obey my words are wise."

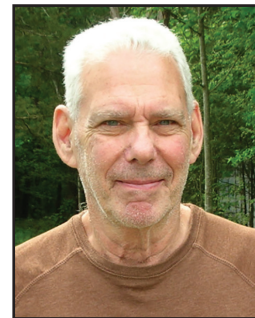
Israel learned the consequences of foolishness. They chose disobedience and were expelled from Canaan. The Bible is filled with God's promises to restore His family to The Land and establish them in perfect stability upon the Rock of Ages. You may have been taught otherwise, but He WILL keep His promises. "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."

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.

Temple Veil Rent in Twain

By Robert Garner
Rutherford County



Imagine three hours of darkness over all the land [earth-G1093] as an earthquake broke up the ground and fragmented the rocks. The graves were opened and bodies arose. Our glorious Savior of mankind, Jesus Christ the LORD, on the cross of crucifixion, cried with a loud voice to His Father in heaven. The Holy Spirit departed from Jesus as he "yielded up the ghost, and behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom", Matthew. 27:50, 51.

Jerusalem where the temple is located was known as the holy city. The temple contained the ark of the testimony, a wooden chest which contained the tablets of stone on which were written the Ten Commandments. The temple symbolized the Old Testament ceremonial laws which were observed by the congregations of Israel. Exodus 24:12, "and the LORD said unto Moses, come up to me in the mount [mountain], and be there: and I will give thee tablets of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou mayest teach them."

The temple building which contained the ark represented God Almighty. At the entrance to the temple was a veil [curtain] separating the court from the holy place. For ease of clarification let's call this veil curtain #1. A second veil curtain #2, separated the Holy place from what was known as the "Holy of Holies". Through the veil of curtain # 2 was the Holy of Holies; the most holy place in the temple where the ark was located covered by the mercy seat. Only a high priest could enter through the veil into the "Holy of Holies" once a year to make an atonement (to cover, pardon for obtaining forgiveness of sin).

The high priest would sprinkle the blood of a lamb on the mercy seat of the ark. The blood represented Christ's blood of being washed from our sins. Revelation 1:5, "and from Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood."

When the Holy Spirit departed from Jesus, God ripped the veil from top to bottom exposing the most holy place, the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies suddenly became a place that was no longer holy. That act by God of tearing the veil in twain opened the fellowship of God to anyone seeking his redemption and forgiveness of sin. The priestly duties in the temple ended forever. A priest was no longer needed to worship God Almighty. The death of Christ put an end to all of National Israel's ceremonial laws. The temple was no longer a holy building, Jerusalem was no longer the holy city. The era of National Israel ended as God's official representation of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Symbolically equal to the space within the veil, the Holy of Holies, embodies heaven as the house of God. Also, figuratively the body of Christ "through the veil" is figuratively Christ's flesh. Hebrews 10:20, "by a new and living way, which he [Christ] hath consecrated [to renew- dedicate] for us, through the veil, that is to say his flesh."

The coming of Christ Jesus began the development of the Christian church congregations. When Christ Jesus was crucified, and the veil was rent in two, the world entered into the era of the New Testament church age.

The Comforter is God the Holy Spirit which departed from Christ "when he yielded up the Ghost". After Christ had risen from the dead, before returning to his Father in heaven Christ speaks to his apostles in John 16:7 & 8; "Nevertheless I tell you a truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you.; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment."

At Pentecost in 33 A.D., 3000 souls were saved from eighteen different nations. Those saved individuals went back to their fatherlands and started the New Testament Christian Church of God. They were no longer identified with the temple in Jerusalem or the synagogues.

The church of the living God, all of those washed by the blood of Christ, Jews and Gentiles, people out of every nation, kindred, and tongue, are those identified with the Jerusalem above. Galatians 4:26 "but the Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all." The new holy city coming down from God is spiritually constructed with living stones (1 Peter 2:4) chosen by God and are precious. Revelations 21:1, 2, "and I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride for her husband."

In times past, Christ was hidden behind the veil written on tablets of stone, worshiped by ceremonial laws. Now the salvation of Jesus Christ is written on the fleshy tables of the heart. 2 Corinthians 3:3.

Happy Easter to all my brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus; Yes, He Has Risen!

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

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

Bear Creek Baptist Church

By Bruce Cannon
Mitchell County

“And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.” (Matthew 24:6,7)

Many of you, like me, have been glued to the news broadcasts over the past couple of weeks to see what Vladimir Putin and the armies of Russia have done to the residents of Ukraine. Our hearts are broken for these people. Thousands have died, countless homes and businesses have been destroyed, jobs lost and families separated perhaps, in at least so many cases, never to see each other again at least in this life.

What we are seeing unfold is exactly what the Lord said would happen just before He returned for His bride. We are living in what I believe are the very last days before His return. You believe that. I believe that as do so many others. How many sermons have I heard preached from men such as Dr. David Jeremiah, Dr. Jimmy Evans, Dr. J. D. Farag, Pastor Greg Laurie and so many others of this very fact...Jesus is coming!

Jesus said we would hear of wars and rumours of wars. We are! He said there would be pestilences and plagues. And there are! If COVID doesn't count as a plague or pestilence I don't know what would. And, neither COVID nor the invasion of Ukraine is the last of what we will see before He comes. They are only the beginning!

Jesus gave a dire warning in Luke 17:22 when He said, *“The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it.”* The “days” of which He speaks are two: the event known as the Rapture is the first with the second being the Second Coming of the Lord at the end of the Tribulation Period. We know those alive in the Tribulation will be so thankful when He comes because what we have seen in Ukraine over the past weeks is only a small portion of the war that will be taking place worldwide during the Tribulation Period. In Revelation, there are two instances in the Tribulation Period where catastrophic and worldwide war breaks out claiming the lives of billions. (Revelation 6:8 and 9:18) What terror will grip the heart during this awful time!

BUT, notice Luke 17:22 says that there are two “days” of His coming. The first of the two is the Rapture. And, notice that before this event we will also be wanting to see Him, but we will not. He is simply saying that things are going to get so bad before He takes the Church home to be with Him that we are going to be longing for His return.

How many more plagues will there be before we get to see our Lord? How many more wars? How many more poor decisions will our governments make? How much more difficult will times be before then? How high will gas prices go? How expensive will groceries get because of fuel prices? How much more will “iniquity abound”?

Yet, there is good news! *“And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.”* (Luke 21:28) Are you ready? Is your family? Soon and very soon we are going to see the King! Amen! Thank you, Jesus!

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.



Lakeview Missionary Church

God's Word Always Knows

By Christopher L. Scott
Moses Lake, Wash.



There was a saying in our house when I was growing up that my dad, sister, and I often quoted to each other: “Momma always knows.”

Moms have unparalleled intuition. Whether lying about grades we receive on a test, coming home after curfew, not being honest about who we are spending our time with, pretending to do homework when we are actually playing video games, or finding shortcuts to do our chores, moms always know.

Like my mom, God's Word always knows what is going on in our hearts, intentions, and feelings.

The author of Hebrews tells us, *“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do”* (Hebrews 4:12-13, NASB).

How does God's Word know this? As Christians, we believe God superintended authors to compose and record without error the words in the Bible. That inspiration of Scripture has its source in God who is everywhere and knows everything.

We call this his omniscience. God is all-knowing. He knows all actual and possible things, and God is everywhere. We call this God's omnipresence. He is everywhere and his word extends that omnipresence.

There are several things we should notice about God's inspired Word in verse twelve. It is “living and active.” This means it seeks out, is energetic, and it is powerful. It doesn't wait for us to go to it, instead, it seeks us out. God's Word is also “sharper than any two-edged sword.” You can't fool God's Word or lie to it. In that way, it is “piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” God's Word goes deep through us and it is quick to discern what is going on in our lives.

The Greek scholar, AT Robertson, says the picture painted here is of a surgeon who observes what's going on and instantly knows what to do. The surgeon, like God's Word, carries a bright and powerful light he uses to illuminate every dark crevice that might need work. And the surgeon carries a sharp knife for the removal of what he sees needs attention.

In verse thirteen the author says *“there is no creature hidden from his sight.”* We cannot hide from God's Word. He concludes by saying, *“all things are open.”* Under God's microscope the smallest sin, doubt, trouble, or insecurity is revealed. When it says all things are “laid bare” it is using the picture of someone bending back the neck as the surgeon does the operating.

Like my momma who always knew what was going on, God's Word always knows what's going on with us.

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



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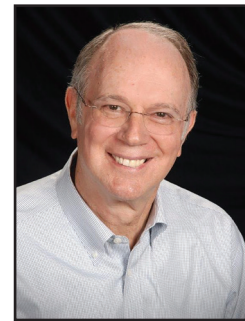
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-H.O. Hirt, ERIE Founder

The Importance of Sheer Silence

By Steve Brubaker
Burke County



How often when we think of “worship” do we think of “silence?” If you are like me, I tend to picture worshipping God as an active event – a time of verbal praise. However, over the years, I have realized worship does not always mean activity. In fact, I have learned that silence is equally important – and often, more so. I am convinced that God is honored and worshipped when I spend time with Him in silence.

Let us look at “silence” in scripture:

- Most of us will immediately think of Psalm 46:10, “*Be still (silent), and know that I am God.*” Our silence honors His holiness.
- Likewise, most of us are familiar with Habakkuk 2:20, “*The Lord is in His Holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him.*” Often used as a call to corporate worship.
- Jeremiah reminds us of the importance of silence in Lamentations 3:28, “*Let him sit alone in silence when it is laid on him.*” A call to obedience by sitting in silence.
- Of course, one of the most quoted Bible references about silence is Elijah’s encounter with God as he was hiding from Queen Jezebel after killing her 300 prophets of Baal. 1 Kings 19:11-13 (NKJV) “11 Then He said, “*Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord.*” And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; 12 and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. 13 So it was, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave...”

While we agree a “small still voice” is not silence...we often think that is how God speaks to us. Interestingly, Biblical scholars recognize this Biblical translation, here in the New King James Version, is inaccurate or at best, “lazy.” Other versions use, “whisper,” “gentle blowing,” etc., still less than accurate.

The original Hebrew is קול רגוע, pronounced phonetically in English as: «kol d'ma•ma da•ka». And the Hebrew word actually translates as “SHEER SILENCE.” Now I think there is a big difference between a “small still voice” and “sheer silence.” What did Elijah hear?! Nothing – it was absolute silence! That would make me take notice also. Most people react uncomfortably to silence. When the pastor says, “We’ll have a minute of silent prayer,” we typically make it about 13 seconds before we become uneasy.

Interestingly, the more complete Hebrew meaning is “a thin silence.” And those who sew will easily recognize the additional English meaning of “sheer.” My wife hangs “sheers” in the front window. So, while I tend to think of something “sheer” as enormous – the “sheer magnitude of the issue,” it also means “thin silence.” What is “thin silence?”

What I like about “thin silence” is it speaks to silencing two senses – auditory and visual. In the 21st century, I think we deal with as much “visual noise” as audible noise. And in many respects, today’s visual noise is probably more onerous, damaging, and dangerous than what we hear. There are far more biblical references to sins of seeing than those of hearing:

- “*The eye is the lamp of the body.*” (Matt 6:22, Luke 11:34)
- “*I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless.*” (Psalm 101:3)
- “*Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?*” (Matt 7:3)
- “*If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away.*” (Matt 5:29)

To achieve visual and auditory silence means I need to “unplug” from the variety of devices that bombard us. If I want to achieve sheer silence, I must turn off my mobile phone and shut off the television and computer. While I may appreciate the convenience of scripture on my iPhone, it is too easy for it to become a distraction – an old-school, printed Bible presents far fewer distractions.

Picture Elijah in a dark cave after witnessing a mighty wind, an earthquake, and a fire, and I suspect most of us would be as frightened as he was – but we need to reflect on his response. He went immediately to the mouth of the cave so the Lord could speak directly to him with specific instructions. And isn’t that what we all are seeking from God?

Of course, the perfect example of someone who always desired to hear from God, His Father, was Jesus. He sought solitary silence with His Father daily and often more than once per day. Let us learn from Jesus. He modeled the spiritual disciplines of Relax, Detach, and Listening.

I suggest it is in the solitude of sheer silence we are best able to follow Jesus’ example. There we can relax because it is just the two of us. We can detach from the world around us. And once relaxed and detached we are available to listen to what He has to say to us and only us.

In my March article, “Reflections on a Secret Place,” I wrote, “In 2011, I was blessed to hear “Mama Maggie Gobran,” founder of Egypt’s Stephen’s Children, and often referred to as the “Mother Teresa of Cairo,” speak.” She closed her message that morning by sharing her steps to help experience sheer silence, and she admitted, “It is not easy!” I agree, while it is relatively easy to find solitude and a quiet atmosphere, it is far more difficult to experience “sheer silence.” That morning I wrote down the steps she shared, and I still find them helpful:

- Silent your body – to listen to your words.
- Silent your tongue – to listen to your thoughts.
- Silent your thoughts – to listen to your heart beating.
- Silent your heart – to listen to your spirit.
- And silent your spirit – to listen to His Spirit.
- In silence, you leave many – to be with the One.

My prayer is you, too, can experience the Secret of Sheer Silence. Be blessed.

Steve Brubaker, and his wife, Myra, moved to Morganton in 2019 after retiring with 30 years at John Deere. Steve’s background includes several years in Youth Ministry, on staff, and as a volunteer. He also served as a lay pastor in western Colorado, where he grew up and worked 10 years in the family farm equipment business. He and Myra attend Alliance Bible Fellowship in Boone.

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Marlene's Meditations

Tiny Blooms of Hope

By Marlene Houk
Burke County



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

When we follow the LORD through His paths in the Bible, we discover a delightful corner tucked into the 13th book of the Old Testament where He pauses in leading us. He seems to say, "Let's rest a minute in the second chapter of First Chronicles, and I'll show you a lovely little spring garden blooming with hope. The tulips, jonquils, and hyacinths open their petals in an alcove of my Word that will enchant you in days to come when I seem far away."

First Chronicles chapter two is like a tiny garden, tucked away in the forest of His words, beckoning to all who wander the holy paths of Scripture. As we look closer at verses, details begin to emerge. God Who planted the garden creates significant but tiny details in each flower of hope. Glorious colors of the many buds of hope spring to life in this chapter among 1,189 chapters. The women of 1 Chronicles 2 gently display hope through their stories, each one unique and stunning. Wandering around, we gaze at the rare orchids of women who were the great, great, great (14 generations) earthly aunts of the Lord Jesus Christ, born 4,000 years before Him. We inhale the fragrance of their importance as being in the earthly royal line of Christ, King David's sisters. The petals of Abigail and Zeruah's lives in verse 16 wave gently in the Holy Spirit's breeze, and we realize that names are important to God.

Your name is important to God. The King of Kings names each one of us, counts the hairs on our heads, engraves our names on the palms of His hands, and treads our daily lives. Understanding dawns as we realize that we will never fade into insignificance in His heart for He sings over us (Zephaniah 3:17), and His thoughts toward us are constant (Psalm 40:5). He has prepared a place for us where we can be with Him for eternity (John 14), and He will never leave us (Hebrews 13:5)! The Lord weaves our stories into His plan for us as He places us at the crossroads of critical decisions. It is significant to note that God treats women individually, respectfully, and yet challenges them to fulfill His destiny for them. We influence others as we point them to the Lord.

And hope lifts her colorful head, slowly following the wind's trail as she looks toward the sky. The women in 1 Chronicles 2 gather around this rarest of flowers, imitating her by looking beyond their present circumstances toward the rainbow of God's promises. Their stories are made immortal as they help us grow above our troubles. And we too can look beyond the ugly stalks of sadness in our lives, knowing that God grows glorious colorful hope in our lives, causing our suffering to create survival guides for others.

Listed below are some of the varied ways in which these 14 women in 1 Chronicles 14 bring hope to us:

- 1) Some names are repeated. Ephrath/Ephratah .vs. 19, 50. Repetition is an important learning tool in the Bible. Like the repetition of their names, our lives show forth His glory as multiple delicate petals repeatedly point to Him.
- 2) In some verses, the woman's relationship is mentioned first, then her name. vs. 21 and vs 24 (Abiah), vs. 26 (Atarah where the relationship of a wife is mentioned first) Our Redeemer has carefully chosen roles and responsibilities for women that lift us above the common life and elevate our lives to a holy significance.
- 3) Some verses just mention the relationship. vs. 3 The Lord's ways and thoughts are high above ours, and we rest in His choices.
- 4) Sometimes, the feminine is only implied such as vs. 26 which uses the word, another, to suggest an additional wife. The economy of His words and yet the generosity of God's repetition attract our attention. Whether small or great, God is aware of every tiny detail of our lives, and we can rest in His wisdom.
- 5) Sometimes, as in verse 29, there is an extended explanation of the wife. It is especially important to follow the flow of words as they diminish and expand in a Scripture passage. Whether our lives seem small, or whether we're in the spotlight, God's messages to others through our stories are the most important part.

In all 14 women, hope wafts its perfume of significance, of purpose, and focus. Jesus brings eternal importance to our lives with His good plan for us (Jeremiah 29:11). He fills our daily lives with purpose and satisfies our longing to know Him. His beams of Sonlight warm our hearts with radiant hope!

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



We knew the Lord was calling us to foster but we didn't answer that call initially; with 3 kids already, we thought there was no way we could handle anything else on our plate. But God didn't let up and after many signs from Him, we finally got licensed. We got our feet wet gradually by doing respite care, then we jumped right in. Is it always roses? No. But there is always more laughing, more love and more fun! To us, foster care is about standing in the gap for a child. It means getting too attached to a child, opening yourself up to being vulnerable and to heartbreak. God created the family and it is sacred. Brokenness is part of foster care but God is all about restoring what is broken, and we want to be a part of that. Being a foster parent is about playing a role in God's redemptive work on earth, and what a privilege it is to be a part of something so beautiful! Foster with McDowell DSS call 828-652-3355.



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By Jim Smith
McDowell County



April is Second Chance Act Month, and for many of us – we call it Reentry month. What is reentry?

Reentry refers to the transition of offenders from prisons or jails back into the community.

Reentry programs are designed to assist incarcerated individuals with a successful transition to their community after they are released. Improving reentry is a critical component of President Obama's Strategy to reduce drug use and its consequences.

For nearly 30 years, the number of people in prison in the United States has steadily increased. At the end of March 2021, there were nearly 1.8 million people still incarcerated in the United States, down only 2 percent since June 2020—there was a 9 percent decrease in the prison population, but that was offset by a 13 percent increase in the jail population. The vast majority of prisoners will return to their communities at some point in their lives. Reentry activities and programming are conducted to prepare prisoners to return safely to the community and to live as law-abiding citizens.

Some ex-offenders do return to prison, however. The most recent study on recidivism found that within five years of release, three-quarters of ex-offenders released in 2020 had come back into contact with the criminal justice system, and more than half had returned to prison after either being found guilty of a new crime or for violating the terms of their release. When compared with the average American, ex-offenders are less educated, less likely to be gainfully employed, and more likely to have a history of mental illness or substance abuse, all of which are risk factors for recidivism.

There are three phases associated with offender reentry programs:

1. Programs that take place during incarceration, which serve to prepare offenders for their eventual release;
2. Programs that take place during offenders' release period, which seek to connect ex-offenders with services they may need;
3. Long-term programs that take place after ex-offenders permanently reintegrate into their communities, seek to provide offenders with support and supervision.

There are many types of offender reentry programs, and their range, scope, and methodology differ widely. Research in the offender reentry field suggests the best programs begin during incarceration and continue through the release and reintegration process. Despite the relative lack of highly rigorous research on some reentry programs, an emerging "what works" literature suggests that programs focusing on work training and placement, drug and mental health treatment, and housing assistance are effective.

At Freedom Life, our goal is: to help justice-involved individuals discover new and transformed life that expresses themselves in the ability to make positive and productive contributions to their families and their community, and also have the opportunity to learn how to walk in healthy authentic relationship with God.

At Freedom Life Ministries, commitment to Christ, His love, and His Word is an integral part of who we are. As we work with current and formerly incarcerated men and women, we seek to help them step into and sustain the commitment required for them to know the true potential of their lives and fulfillment of all the needs that God can meet amid all the challenges they face. We believe we have been called to be for justice-involved individuals what Christ was for us when it comes to living out what true commitment is, the cost that it requires, and the amazing new life capacity that it can bring.

The federal government's involvement in offender reentry programs typically occurs through grant funding, which is available through a wide array of federal programs at the Departments of Justice, Labor, Education, and Health and Human Services. Freedom Life receives several grants from these funding streams. However, these funds are many times just a small part of what is needed. Many organizations like Freedom Life, depending on community support of prayer, funds, support, volunteers, and involvement. We could not function without the support we receive from individuals, churches, businesses, and organizations.

This month we are challenging our community to help raise \$10,000 for Reentry and Second Chance Act month programming at Freedom Life. Each week we will update on social media to reflect how we are doing in this goal. You can give ANY amount by going to www.freedomlifeministries.org, and in the upper right corner, click DONATE NOW.

To celebrate Reentry month, here in McDowell County, you are invited to join us at Cross Memorial Baptist Church, Marion, NC on April 10th at 6 pm. There will be community agencies, along with a cake fellowship following the service. You will have an opportunity to participate by sharing your testimony in part of the service we call the Card Board Testimonies.

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



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The Laughing Bird

By Christy Lowman
Burke County



Phew, the last few months have been hard on our family. Our vehicles have needed repair several times. Our basement refrigerator stopped working suddenly and followed by our three-year-old kitchen refrigerator gasping its last breath. Then our two-year-old dishwasher stopped mid-cycle.

Then while we were at the store picking out a new refrigerator, someone ran over our beloved cat, Thomas. Our hearts were shattered. He was a very special cat, a one-of-a-kind.

Thomas was loved by all who knew him, especially our pup, Dug. They were best friends from the time they met. Dug still looks and calls for him every day.

All of our neighbors knew Thomas as well. He made a special point to visit and love on each of them every day.

We all go through hard times and grief from death. Have you had something sad or stressful happen in your life? Maybe you have been bullied at school? Had a family member died? Had someone you thought was a friend decide they no longer liked you?

The main thing I try to remind myself when I'm going through hard times are:

1. No matter what, do not let the Devil steal your JOY. This can be very hard to keep from happening especially when death is involved. But we don't want to let the Devil win; this is what he longs to do. He wants to make us miserable. He wants to cause something to get between us and God which will ultimately spoil our relationship with Him.
2. Praise God in the good times and the bad times. God is so worthy of praise no matter what. It's not right to only praise Him when our life is going well.
3. God is always with us no matter what we are going through. He will help us through everything and will not give us more than we can handle.
4. Things could always be worse. For example, I could not have a way to replace my refrigerator. Thomas could have been killed in a different, more painful way instead of instantly where he did not suffer. Or he could have died and we could have never found him, or known what happened to him. We could still be searching for him, worried sick.
5. There is always someone who is going through something harder, sadder, worse, or more stressful. Sometimes it's hard to imagine someone having a harder time in life, but every time I have stopped, looked around, and taken my focus off of me, I find someone who is having a harder time than I am. Someone who needs prayer and support as well.

If you haven't read the Book of Job in the Bible, you should make a point to do so. The devil did terrible things to Job to see if he would turn against God. But no matter what was thrown his way he would not do so! He is the perfect example for us to strive to live our life by.

I want to tell you about a bird that wakes up every morning very early laughing his head off. That is also how he ends his day when it gets dark.

He is the perfect reminder of how to not let the devil steal your Joy!

This bird is called the Laughing Kookaburra! It was also once called the Giant Kingfisher and sometimes still known as the Bushman's Alarm clock.

The laughing kookaburra is native to Australia. In the 2000 Olympics that were held in Sydney, Australia, this bird was one of their three mascots.

This Kookaburra, when full size, is seventeen inches long, and that includes its super long four-inch beak!

This bird is gray, with various shades of brown, and white. It is pretty ordinary-looking compared to other Kookaburras.

It belongs to the Kingfisher family and is the largest member. However, unlike Kingfishers, it hardly ever eats fish. Instead, its diet includes reptiles, venous snakes, rodents, and frogs. It is also known to kill baby ducks and chickens.

People who have seen this Kookaburra in action, say it will grab a three-foot, venomous snake by the back of the head and smash it on the ground to kill it. It will then carry the snake way up in the air and drop it to make its meat more tender. The Kookaburra will tenderize all of its prey before eating it.

Baby Kookaburras are given small venomous snakes to practice with so they can learn how to kill their prey.

I am thinking everyone needs a Kookaburra in their yard to keep snakes away! If you would like to see and hear a Laughing Kookaburra laugh, check out this video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8zE0BilgVo>

Personally, I think the Laughing Kookaburra sounds like a monkey, but one thing is for sure it is happy and its laugh is contagious! I want to learn to be that way every day as well!

Dear Lord, please help us learn to find joy in our life no matter what we are going through. Help us grow closer to you in all circumstances, even the ones the devil tries to use to separate us. Help us remember You are worthy of praise in the good and bad times. I pray we will learn to take the focus off of ourselves and to look for others that are hurting that we can minister to. In Jesus's name, I pray, Amen.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." Romans 15:13 ESV "So also

you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you." John 16:22 ESV

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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. You can reach her at <https://www.facebook.com/authorChristyLowman/> or christyssoaps@yahoo.com.

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Mine Creek Baptist Church

Checking the Blind Spots

By Chris Rathbone
Mitchell County

Several years ago while traveling Interstate 26 between Hendersonville and Asheville I witnessed a car accident. Thankfully no one was injured. However, the accident could have been avoided altogether had someone checked their blind spot.

Most of us know that when you are driving, especially on the interstate, there is a certain spot when other cars are passing us that they cannot be seen. You must either lean forward and check your mirror or glance over your shoulder to be certain it is safe to change lanes. Over the years, many of us have either witnessed someone moving over on another vehicle, someone moving over on us without seeing us, or we have changed lanes and almost hit someone we didn't see!

Fortunately, most of us learn this lesson with driving experience. After a few close calls, possibly even an accident, we learn pretty quickly that we must discipline ourselves to check that blind spot every single time. I taught both my sons that having the freedom and privilege of driving a car comes with great responsibility. It's not only our own lives we can put at risk, but also those who are passengers with us and other drivers on the road. So many accidents are caused by carelessness. Drivers are often distracted by phones, by passengers in the car with them, or in my case, looking for deer in a field sometimes (my wife fusses about that one). The point is, many could have been avoided and many turned out tragic and didn't have to, especially the accidents caused by not checking that blind spot. While no one is intentionally sneaking upon us to hide in that blind spot, spiritually speaking, there is an enemy that is always looking to hide in it!

The Bible says in 1 Peter 5:8-9 *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour; Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world."*

We as Christians have a formidable enemy, the devil. He is our adversary. He hates God's church and God's people and is constantly on the prowl like a hungry predator, just looking for an opportunity to devour someone who isn't paying attention! When a Christian becomes complacent, lazy, unconcerned, or in a place in life they shouldn't be, that's when he will sneak up in that blind spot and pounce!

Peter gives some advice though that helps us not become a victim of his tactics. Peter says *"Be sober, be vigilant"*. This means to be alert, watchful, self-disciplined, on your guard, and awake, paying attention to our spiritual surroundings. In other words, be sure you're checking those blind spots! He goes on to say *"Whom resist steadfast in the faith"*. We must resist the devil by being firm in our faith. If we are strong and steadfast in our faith in Christ, we will be sober and vigilant. This world that we live in is filled with temptation, trials, tribulations, struggles, etc. To be sure we aren't caught off guard by the devil in a weak moment, we must be firm, steadfast, and strong in our faith in Christ so we can resist and fight our enemy. These times in which we are living is no time to be undisciplined and lazy spiritually. We must be watchful and strong in our faith. That way, we won't be surprised by an attack we didn't see coming.

Whether you're driving or when you're striving to live this life for Jesus, be sure children of God, to check those blind spots!



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

Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

Just One Look

By Caron Cline
Burke County



As we approach Easter our hearts and minds are especially drawn to the sufferings of Christ on the cross and His triumphant victory over death. Sadly, many churches have taken their focus from the cross, yet without the cross, there would have been no sacrifice for sin. If there had been no sacrifice for sin, there would be no hope of salvation. Isaiah 53 paints a gruesome picture of the crucifixion of our Lord. *"He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed"*. 'Pierced through' means that He was wounded, profaned, and stained. 'Crushed' means that He was crumbled, bruised, and beaten to pieces. God the Father allowed all of our iniquity to fall upon the spotless, sinless Lamb of God. The cross was one of the most horrific instruments of execution and there Jesus poured out every last drop of blood to redeem and release mankind from Satan's stranglehold. When the Messiah's mission was accomplished, and the wrath of God satisfied, Jesus lifted up His voice and cried, 'It is finished!' According to Colossians 2:14, our Savior canceled out all the sin certificates attached to mankind by nailing them to the cross. Jesus truly humiliated Satan and all his fallen angelic hosts by shedding His blood as a ransom for sin. This is the power of the cross! Yet this power cannot be appropriated until one comes face to face with the fact that Jesus' sacrifice is not only for the whole world but is also individual and personal. The only place that man can find God is at the cross. Therefore, whoever desires a relationship with the Lord must first come to the foot of the cross, realize the horror of their sin, confess the need for a Savior and wholly surrender their life to Him. At that moment, the great exchange is completed; sin is rejected and righteousness is received. The believer is eternally declared dead to sin and alive to righteousness. Unfortunately, the flesh continues to rear its ugly head in rebellion. The negative attitudes, ungodly desires, prideful thoughts, angry outbursts, and other fleshly tendencies must be executed! Although the power of sin is broken, it is often necessary to return to the cross and behold the excruciating suffering of our Lord as He paid the price for those sins. Just one look at the cross should be sufficient to fuel our determination to crucify our flesh with its evil passions and desires. Not only did Jesus die for sin, but He was also raised to life on the third day, conquering death, hell, and the grave! After 40 days of intensive discipleship training, He ascended to the Father. Ten days later, the Father sent the Holy Spirit. Now all followers of Christ are infused with the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. Just one look at the empty tomb should be sufficient to fuel our determination to live an abundant, overcoming life. While the cross breaks the power of sin and death, the Spirit empowers believers to put on the new self which is created in righteousness and holiness of the truth. Indeed, the Kingdom of God is within us, guaranteeing the opportunity to live a life of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. During this season, may we meditate on the power of the cross? Have we truly been crucified with Christ? Are we still living according to the flesh? If so, return and repent! Receive the Resurrected Lord and experience His Resurrection power forevermore!

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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One Mouth Too Many Words

By Dr. James L. Snyder
Ocala, Florida



I read somewhere where the average woman speaks 20,000 words a day, and the average man speaks 7,000 words a day. I'm not sure if that's true because I never believe everything I read, particularly on my computer, unless I write it.

If this is true, who came up with it and how did they get to this conclusion? I can't remember any day in my life when I spoke 7,000 words. At least out loud. I probably thought that many words, but they didn't all touch my tongue.

The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage is a different story. As long as we have been married, I have never tried to count how many words she spoke on any single day. So keeping up is very difficult for someone like me. In its use.

Usually, when she has something to say she says it and it turns out to be true.

A friend of mine once told me that in his church many years ago, he had a woman he described as someone who never entertained an unspoken thought. I'm sure she was a delight to be around. I might know some people just like that.

If I, for example, spoke 7,000 words on any given day, I would be exhausted by the end of that day. So what in the world would I use those 7,000 words to say? And, to whom?

If I spoke 7,000 words a day, that would be about five words a minute for 24 hours. I'm not sure that's something I could ever do.

Most people have a lot to say, but what they say doesn't mean a lot. And, not just politicians.

My maternal grandfather was very selective when it came to speaking. It took him quite a while to get a sentence out, and he never used a word that wasn't necessary. I sometimes couldn't understand what he was saying, but he would never repeat himself. But when I asked him to repeat himself, he would just look at me and smile one of his grandfatherly smiles.

Having something to say is very important. The trouble is most of what people have to say isn't important.

There's the other side to this: sometimes what I say gets me into trouble. I may be meaning one thing, but the person listening may understand it entirely differently. This has been my trouble throughout the years.

When I'm silent, I rarely get into trouble. When I open my mouth and start speaking, I get into trouble. Sometimes speaking is automatic, and I don't realize what I'm saying out loud. Keeping my thoughts to myself has been a hard discipline for me throughout the years.

Recently, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage was coughing a little bit, and finally said to me, "My throat is very sore today."

Not realizing that my mouth was open and expelling words, I said, "That's strange because my ears are sore today."

Looking at me, I realized I had said that out loud. I said it out loud so that she could hear it, but I didn't want her to hear it. Her stare taught me a valuable lesson at that time.

I was now in trouble, and it was because of the words I said out loud.

After being married for over 50 years, you would think I would have mastered the skill of thinking but not speaking. I'm still working on that.

There is also the situation where you don't get enough words out.

The Pennsylvania Dutch have a saying, "Throw Papa down the stairs..." then they pause for a moment and finish it by saying, "... his hat."

If you don't get the last part of that sentence, you may end up throwing Papa down the stairs, which is not what that sentence is all about. I have trouble hearing the whole sentence at times, and because of that, I can't remember how many Papa's I've thrown down the stairs. (Sorry about that, Papa.)

I have noticed there doesn't seem to be a direct connection between my thoughts and my tongue. If only they could get together and stay on the same subject, I would not get into so much trouble.

So, when The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage is exercising her 20,000 words per day, I can only process 7,000 of those words. So the problem I face is, which words am I going to process?

I have trouble with my 7,000 words a day. I can't imagine how anybody of the opposite gender can manage 20,000 words a day every day of the week.

To choose the right words, I have to listen to the words that have been coming my way. I don't always get it right. I try, and I'm getting better at it, but I still fail.

While thinking about this I was reminded of a very important passage of Scripture. "27 He that hath knowledge spareth his words: and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit. 28 Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding" (Proverbs 17:27-28).

According to this, the more a person knows the less he speaks. This has been rather an important assessment of people. It's the people who are silent most of the time that probably know more than the people that are talking most of the time.

Dr. James L. Snyder is pastor of the Family of God Fellowship, 1471 Pine Road, Ocala, FL 34472. He lives with his wife in Silver Springs Shores. Call him at 352-687-4240 or e-mail jamesnyder2@att.net. The church web site is www.whatafel-lowship.com

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: John 11:25



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*We will eat at the Master's sweet table
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Let's sing a song and pray a prayer together
Get acquainted with our new family too.*

*We will drink new wine of His precious love
Laugh and dance around the golden throne
We'll eat manna and sweet honey from heaven
And find happiness we've never known.*

Two Dogs in a Fight

By Kurt Bomar
Avery County



There are two dogs in a fight. Which one will win? The answer is "the one you feed".

The name of the one dog is "flesh" and the other "spirit". They both live inside us, they are both very real, and the fighting never stops. Paul gives these dogs the names of Ishmael and Isaac (Gal. 4:24). Remember Ishmael mocked Isaac and had to be driven out of the household of Abraham. The question for us is "how do we drive Ishmael out of our lives (the flesh) to make room for Isaac (the Spirit)?"

We follow Paul's advice and "make no provision for the flesh" (Romans 13:14). That's what Abraham did to his son, Ishmael. He sent him packing. That must have been really hard to do but I believe it was done as a picture of what we must do. We must make the same hard choices. The Spirit of God will not abide in our hearts if we have made provisions for the flesh.

Gal 5:17 says: "For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want."

We must control that dog in the fight named flesh, we need to starve him. Day by day do whatever it takes to see he gets no nourishment. You are the gatekeeper to your soul, guard what you let in. Just like the children's song, "Be careful little eyes what you see..." we need to monitor what we see and hear as well as our other senses. If we make no provision for the flesh that formidable dog we now view as a pit bull will shrink to the size of a yapping Yorkie. (no offense to Yorkie owners!).

Take one step today to start starving the flesh!

Kurt Bomar is pastor of Walnut Grove Church.

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Medical Marijuana? Compassion? Balderdash! Our Youth Will Suffer.

By Rev. Mark Creech

Narconon Ojai, a center located in California which helps people overcome their addiction to alcohol and other drugs, tells Andy's story on their website.

Andy was a young man who was "a bright spot" among his friends and family because of his great sense of humor. But marijuana use would eventually eclipse his bright side with suicidal thoughts and repeated trips to treatment centers. Andy told his family that if he couldn't stop using marijuana, he wouldn't live. At 31, he took his own life one day by hanging himself. His suicide note read, "I want to die. My soul is already dead. Marijuana killed my soul + ruined my brain." Andy's mother found a medical marijuana card in his wallet.

One Colorado study showed nearly 74% of teenagers receiving addiction treatment in that state said they used medical marijuana, which was recommended by someone else.

Senate Bill 711 – N.C. Compassionate Care Act is the latest legislative proposal in the Tar Heel state to approve marijuana as a medicine.

Medical marijuana? Compassion? No one who has thoroughly studied this issue and understands it believes such balderdash.

Peter Hurst in Weeding Out the Cannabis Myths rightly charges:

"Medical marijuana is medical in name only, but nevertheless it has served a useful purpose for the pro-Cannabis cause by helping to launder the image of a drug linked to a range of differing harms... The very existence of 'medical marijuana' (whether it is clinically efficacious as a therapeutic or not) has helped to create the impression that Cannabis is a benign drug & in conjunction with several other factors – including the cultural lag in the realization that the rise in Cannabis potency over the last few decades has considerably increased the range/severity of harms associated with Cannabis use, not to mention widespread marketing, advertising & also the spread of deliberate misinformation – makes warnings of the dangers of Cannabis legislation seem less believable to many. Simply put, the mythic halo surrounding Cannabis, which creates the impression that it is benign (or at least non-malign,) obscures and obfuscates the reality that Cannabis is a potentially dangerous drug linked to a range of different harms..."

Back in August of last year, when SB 711 was considered by the Senate Healthcare Committee, Sen. Ralph Hise (R-Madison) astutely pointed out:

"This is not about patients and receiving treatment. This is about placing North Carolina on a path that will make it more acceptable to legalize marijuana."

Hise suggested that once the measure was passed, the list of qualifying illnesses would ultimately be broadened to the point almost everyone would be eligible.

Hise questioned the wisdom of the state embracing marijuana after years of trying to eradicate tobacco use when both are harmful carcinogens, and he pointed out the double standard of endorsing the use of a substance that doesn't have FDA approval while at the same time touting the need for the FDA to approve the Covid vaccines.

Hise was right, and it's not only the Covid situation that shows us something about the way things can go south when politics and medicine aren't kept separate. We've seen it even before.

In his book, *Going to Pot*, America's first drug czar under President H.W. Bush, William J. Bennett, warns about the serious dangers of "medicine by vote." Bennett says that in the 70s, Laetrile, which was made from apricot and peach pits, was promoted as a cure for cancer. The FDA never approved Laetrile, yet it was sought by many. In fact, some 20 U.S. states voted to approve its use, but to no real therapeutic avail, and several people died of cyanide poisoning as a result of its use.

What was done with Laetrile was undoubtedly done with good intentions, argues Bennett, just as many so-called medical marijuana proponents' intentions are also good. Nevertheless, what happened was still a terrible injustice because it gave people false hope. Furthermore, it created a distraction from pursuing scientifically researched standardized approved drugs to treat cancer.

Most are probably unaware that this author did some short-term missionary work in India during the 80s and 90s. It was a surprise for me to learn that an alternative medicine promoted in that country is touted for helping with as many as 70 to 80 incurable diseases, including cancer and diabetes. The people of India swear by it. Its use there has a long history of more than 5,000 years.

Limited research indicates this natural substance may have a limited positive effect on diabetes. Still, overall, health experts are not enthusiastic about its alleged curative properties for many diseases. In fact, a couple of years ago, 500 Indian scientists asked the Indian government to withdraw a call for research proposals on its efficacy as medicine, arguing that it was "unscientific."

The parallels are striking. The North Carolina medical marijuana bill still waiting for consideration by the full Senate lists several debilitating illnesses and conditions for which marijuana supposedly works as a treatment. Proponents zealously argue Cannabis has been positively used for thousands of years. The anecdotal evidence for its alleged curative properties is seemingly countless. Yet, the official positions of the nation's top medical associations and science community say smoked marijuana is not medicine, and its use can harm one's health.

So, declaring smoked marijuana to be medicine by legislative fiat, based on limited research and anecdotal evidence (as is the case with medical marijuana) while ignoring the experts' official statements, legitimizes marijuana use for similar reasons my friends in India give for drinking cow urine.



There is one significant difference, however. Drinking cow urine as a treatment for some ailment is not likely to destroy someone's life. On the other hand, marijuana masquerading as medicine and its ultimate legalization for recreational use, over time, will undoubtedly destroy much of our nation's youth, as well as many other lives.

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

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Hope & Help from
Addiction Through Christ

By Steve Carter
Tupelo, Mississippi



While trying to figure out the coffee pot at my new job, up walks a man grinning from ear to ear. While projecting a friendly demeanor, David Hutson, "Hut," introduced himself to me with an iron grip from a hand about the size of Montana. His infectious smile and booming voice, which endeared him to the entire planet, soon made us fast friends. We often worked together in our high-pressure job of taking X-Rays. Any human body parts, suspected of being broken, twisted too far, or clogged up were fair game. We dealt with convicts from federal prison, after they fell up some stairs, to drunks who just kissed a baseball bat.

Family took center stage in Hut's life, and it wasn't long after we met that the one thing a parent isn't prepared for hit Hut's household. Hut and Trudy's toddler daughter, Hillary, suddenly and unexpectedly died from a birth defect, rocking him to his core. Following the funeral Hut, and his wife Trudy, while devastated by the tragedy, soldered on with life. Despite the expected sadness, I detected a strengthening that could only be explained by the Comforter's presence in his life.

About six years after losing Hillary, a stick of dynamite named Henry blessed the Hutson household and that changed everything! While interviewing Hut for this article, he told me, his son Henry, turned out to be his "do-over". After being blessed with another child, I noticed in him additional strength and resolve. This "renewal" soon led to more involvement in church activities. One notable example included me playing drums and Hut singing bass in small rooms to a coliseum. That newfound strength also projected itself in the form of him taking Bible courses. This dedicated study confirmed the source of strength that lifted him through the darkness of his daughter's death.

Meanwhile, Hut's Daddy, a man who naturally commanded respect, started to show his age. Hut loved his Daddy, who got him through those "totally worthless" teen years, without sending him to a "deserted island somewhere." While hospitalized, where we both worked, Mr. Hutson simply "gave out" and slipped away when the angel came to pick him up one Sunday morning. The first thing that same day, my duties found me on the way to the Intensive Care Unit. I pushed my portable X-Ray machine into the elevator Hut and his sister, Mary was getting off. Mary's presence and their solemn expression told me; something had happened. Hut calmly said; "Daddy just passed on". Following hugs around, and despite the bad news, strength from these Christian warriors filled the air as they walked toward the exit.

Hut's Momma followed her husband into glory a few years later and this loss signaled the beginning of Hut's wife's, decline. David and Trudy had enjoyed a thirty-six-year marriage, when suddenly, she started showing multiple symptoms that seemed to be cured, only to return with a vengeance. For six long years, they battled through bad times of doctor office visits, running tests, hospital stays, and endless un-explained painful symptoms. They rejoiced in the good times, hoping a cure had been finally found, only to have their hopes dashed with more mysterious symptoms. Transfers between specialists and hospitals ultimately found Trudy being considered for an organ transplant. During this lengthy process, a trial that drew on the accumulated strength Hut had gained, his wife went into a comatose state. Just under a week later, surrounded by family, Trudy joined Hillary at the feet of Jesus.

I have known Hut for over thirty years. During this time, I watched him grow in Christ into the mighty warrior he is today. I believe much of his character and abilities come from the trials he had to overcome. During our interview process, he stated, "I gained enough strength from one crisis, to survive the next." In explanation of that statement, he added; "I would never have made it through losing Trudy if I had lost her right after Hillary died."

Hut is always quick to say; "I am nothing without God." He is doing well and will always have "something to hold onto" while finishing his time on planet earth. Faith tells him; soon enough, he will be rejoining the family whose separation is temporary, in a place where aging, pain, and suffering are no more.

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



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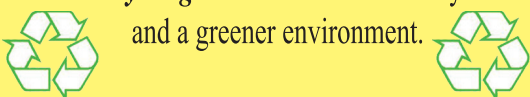


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By David Burleson
Burke County



By looking at the calendar, spring is here but we have had some days that make us wonder. We all know that late March and early April can bring a mixed bag of weather to our community. This year's winter has been kind to us as we have missed only three school days because of inclement weather.

Spring also brings our NDS Virtual Walk-A-Thon registration period. Registration will be from March 14 - April 8. Sponsorships will be taken March 14 - April 14. All information can be found at nds.school.org/giving/virtual-walk-a-thon.

You can complete the online registration form or download the registration form to complete and send to NDS. Sponsorship forms can also be downloaded from our website. We're excited to see how our Warriors will rally together, along with our community partners/sponsors, and achieve our goal of \$30,000 to help fund our ropes course, an additional GaGa Pit, an outdoor volleyball court, picnic tables, and additional benches for outdoor classrooms.

Our calendar committee and school board have worked very hard to develop the school calendar for 2022-2023. The recommended calendar has been approved and adopted by our school board at their February meeting. The 2022-2023 calendar is very similar to this year's calendar. One notable exception is the absence of remote learning days. The students at New Dimensions will head back to school on Thursday, September 1, and the scheduled last day for students is Friday, May 26. Our calendar allows for a two-week Christmas break and a six-day break at Easter. With the calendar flexibility allowed charter schools, we can increase the amount of time per day and reduce the number of school days per year.

There are several exciting events planned for our New Dimensions family this Spring. Here are just a few of them:

- Friday, April 15 to Friday, April 22 – Easter Break for New Dimensions
- Monday, May 2 to Friday, March 6 – Teacher Appreciation Week
- Wednesday, May 4 to Friday, May 6 – Middle School Outer Banks Trip

Even though we are not finished with this school year yet, we are already planning our summer programs. Our goal is to provide our students who need a little extra help and support, with the opportunity to get that during the summer months through a reading camp if state funds are available. The Read to Achieve legislation requires additional support for students in third grade who are not proficient in reading. Students who fail to meet this requirement will have the opportunity to attend our reading camp. Students in all grades who need additional support in reading and/or math will also have the opportunity to attend. We will have an excellent staff in place and based on our previous summer camps, it will be a rewarding experience for our students. Our goal is for this to be supportive and helpful, not punitive in any way. We stand ready to answer any questions you might have about summer camp.

Coach Brooks is also planning his athletic camps for the first few weeks of June if possible. He is looking at other possible camps, so if you have any suggestions, please let him know. The YMCA is planning an exciting summer for our students who need childcare. Each week will have specific themes like STEM, water activities, outdoor activities, along with many other fun-filled events. Go online at www.ymcacv.org to register, or email hollien@ymcacv.org for questions, or more information.

Not only are we planning for summer activities but have also geared up for next school year by having our enrollment lottery on April 1. The staff of New Dimensions will be more than happy to provide individual tours of our school. Just give us a call (828-437-5753) or email us at dburleson@nds.school.org to schedule a tour.

We have lots going on this spring, and we certainly appreciate the support of everyone in the New Dimensions family who works collectively to meet the needs of each of our children that we serve. Thank you for making New Dimensions such a special and wonderful place for all of us.

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

April Fools' Day

By Dennis Love
McDowell County



Do you remember the last time someone pulled an April fools' joke or prank on you? Or maybe you remember the last time you pulled an April fools' joke or prank on someone else. Here are a few April fools' jokes you may want to consider:

- (1) What day do monkeys like best? The first of Ape---ril!
- (2) Why is everyone exhausted on April 1st? Because they just had a 31-day March!
- (3) What do you call a hammer bought on April 1st? An April tool!
- (4) What did summer say to spring? "I'm going to fall!"

These are short, sweet, and pretty corny, so you may want to bypass April Fools' Day and just let it remain a normal day. That's usually what I do!

April fools' jokes and pranks date back to the 1700s, and the holiday is also sometimes referred to as All Fools' Day. But long before the 1700's the Bible addresses a fool and says in Psalm 14:1; *"The fool has said in his heart, there is no God."*

I'm reminded of an atheist who was angry and debating with a believer. The atheist moaned, "It's just not fair. You Christians have all the good holidays!" Curiously, the Christian asked, "What do you mean?" The atheist said, "Well, you've got Easter, Mother's Day, and Father's Day. You celebrate God and country on July 4th. After that, you've got Thanksgiving and Christmas. Speaking for atheists everywhere, we want a holiday on the calendar that we can call our very own." Finally, the Christian bluntly answered, "I've got the perfect day on the calendar for you. How about April 1st?" *"The fool has said in his heart, there is no God,"* James tells us in James 2:19 that even the demons of hell believe and tremble to know that there is a God.

Many people will tell you that they don't believe in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. Many will tell you that they don't believe that a virgin conceived and gave birth to the sinless Son of God, who came to this earth to dwell among us. But those of us who are Christians, not only believe it, we embrace it with every ounce of our being, and we rejoice over the fact that the God we serve is alive and well and living within us through the Person and Power of the Holy Spirit. We can say without hesitation or reservation that we know our Redeemer lives and that makes us wise, not a fool. The Bible says in Proverbs 4:6-7; *"Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. Wisdom is supreme: therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding."*

Aren't you thankful that you are a wise person and you have the understanding that our God is alive and lives within us! We praise the Lord this month, because of God's glorious resurrection from the dead. However, the fool has said in his heart, there is no God. How sad to be a fool in the eyes of God, when one can become wise through simple child-like faith.

Dr. Dennis Love is the Associational Missions Strategist for the Blue Ridge Baptist Association in McDowell County. Dr. Love has been in full-time ministry work for 31 years. He and his wife Vicki have been married for almost 42 years, and they have lived in Marion for almost 8 years. They have two sons, four grandchildren and two step-grandchildren. He can be reached via email at: dlovebrba@yahoo.com

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How to Get More Mileage From Your Car

(StatePoint) With car supplies still not meeting today's demand, experts believe that prices are going to remain elevated on both new and used cars for the foreseeable future.

However, industry insiders say that you can reap more mileage from a vehicle by shopping carefully and by performing regular maintenance.

"Staying up-to-date on car maintenance is not only good for your wallet, it's safer for you, your passengers, and everyone else on the road. However, those with used cars should be particularly proactive about car care," says James "Ty" Goodin, director of service operations at Byrider, the nation's largest used car and finance network of dealerships.

According to industry projections, used cars still represent the majority of annual car sales, and market share is only expected to grow, so if you're driving a previously owned vehicle, you're in good company. You also have some support. In time for April, which is National Car Care Month, the experts at Byrider are offering the following tips to help you keep your used car on the road longer:

- Pay attention to any unusual noises, odors, or other warning signs that your vehicle needs maintenance. Brush up on what each symbol means on your dashboard and never ignore a warning light. This is your car communicating an issue that needs to be addressed.
- Take good care of the body of your vehicle. Wash your car regularly, inside and out.
- Work only with trusted mechanics. Using repair services that hire Automotive Service Excellence (ASE)-certified technicians can help ensure you get quality repairs using quality parts.
- Always gas up according to the manufacturer's recommendation. Use premium if the vehicle manufacturer suggests it.
- Likewise, use the proper oil per the recommendation of the manufacturer. According to AAA, most modern vehicles call for oil changes every 5,000-7000 miles, however, actual oil change intervals vary by the age and model of your car, along with other factors, such as the road conditions of where you drive most frequently.
- Use top-quality tires designed for the weather and road conditions in your region. Be sure they are inflated per the specifications listed in the owner's manual. Swap them out seasonally if needed.
- Opt for safety and reliability by purchasing a used vehicle only from a retailer that puts cars through a detailed inspection process. Streamline maintenance by seeking out dealers with an attached service department. "Ideally, the dealership can be a driver's go-to support," says Goodin.

In the case of Byrider, every car sold comes with a warranty or optional service agreement, as well as discounted parts, labor, and service. To learn more or find a Buy Here Pay Here dealership near you, visit byrider.com.



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How to Climb a Ladder

By Dean Honeycutt
Mitchell County



The kids would play ball or frisbee in the yard in front of the house. On occasion, the frisbee would land on the roof of the house and I would get the ladder to climb on the roof and retrieve the frisbee so my children could continue playing. My children have seen me on a ladder dozens of times. What may seem like an easy task for a grown man may be a challenge for a child.

One day while I was at work the kids were out in the yard playing frisbee and, as usual, the frisbee landed on the roof. Not wanting to wait until I got home, they convinced Pam they could get the frisbee on their own. We have seen dad do this and we can handle it. Two small children struggling with an extension ladder is not easy, but after seeing me do it so many times they were convinced they would soon have the frisbee in their hands. They had a plan. Melissa would hold the ladder and Tyler would climb the ladder get on the roof and get the frisbee.

Of course, this adventure is being told to me when I got home from work. After a few attempts, they finally manage to get the ladder on the roof. Tyler looks at the ladder suspiciously thinking something does not look right. But after some coaxing from big sister about being scared to climb the ladder off he goes taking each step with caution. About halfway up the ladder Tyler is now definitely convinced something is wrong. Instead of climbing up the ladder in a vertical posture, he is crawling up the ladder and his face and belly are facing the ground below. This does not look like the way dad climbs up a ladder. This whole time Pam is inside watching the fiasco just to see what they would do. Tyler knew that he should not be looking at the grass while climbing a ladder and made his way back to safety. By this time mom knows she must intervene and help them set up the ladder the correct way. After which my son climbs onto the roof and retrieves the frisbee.

There is a right way and a wrong way to go about things. My children tried to solve a problem on their own. They had the will and desire to retrieve the frisbee and they did not give up. I thank the Lord they had the desire to "take the bull by the horns" and with a little help from mom, they accomplished their goal. Success always feels good, and accomplishments bring confidence. Parents must set a Godly example before their children.

Like children, we often fail miserably even when we try to do things the right way. But we will never succeed unless we try. It is often said if I am not part of the solution then I am part of the problem. If I am not coming up with solutions or actions to solve a problem or make something work out for everyone involved, then my neglect or bad attitude becomes part of the problem. I want to give my children every opportunity to succeed and thrive in their Christian life. Sometimes they will get knocked down, but it is the wise parent who lifts their child up, dusts them off, and sets them back on the right path.

Not every adolescent or young adult is eager to have their parents' guidance and things done halfway will never bring complete satisfaction because the other half of the problem is not dealt with. The young adult keeps trying "to climb the ladder" the wrong way and things are not working out the way they had expected. Sometimes parents must have patience and allow their child to fail. Sometimes it is in our failures that we find our greatest success.

Parents are often eager to jump in and solve a problem for their child without first allowing the child to experience success or failure. Failure is okay if we can take that failure and turn it into something positive and productive. God does not like to see us fail, but sometimes we are allowed to fail so we can experience the grace and mercy of a loving Father. Like a loving parent, God will come along beside us and show us where we messed up and then place us back "on the ladder" to try again.

May the Lord bless you and encourage you as we help our children "climb the ladder". Each rung of the ladder is a step-in life and what is the goal? The goal is to stand before God one day as a child of God and hear those words "well done my good and faithful servant."

Pastor Dean Honeycutt shepherds Snow Hill Baptist Church in Bakersville, NC. He may be reached at 828-385-0213, snowhillbaptist@gmail.com, or visit their website at www.snowhillbaptist.com.

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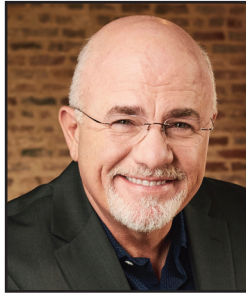
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By Dave Ramsey



Dear Dave: Do you think I should get a new hybrid car to save money on gas? A lot of my friends have done this, and with the rise in gas and oil prices lately, they're telling me I should, too. According to them, I'll save a ton of money, especially since I have a bigger car and a longer drive to work. What are your thoughts? — Daneen

Dear Daneen: I get lots of questions about these kinds of scenarios, and how it plays into people's budgets. Many folks wonder if it would be better to go out and get a new vehicle with better gas mileage. Well, do you really want to lose more money?

Let's say you drive a vehicle worth \$10,000 that gets 15 miles per gallon. There's a \$25,000 hybrid you're thinking about buying that gets 25 miles per gallon. That's a \$15,000 price difference just to get 10 more miles a gallon. If you drive 100 miles a week, that's about a \$10 difference a week. That would be about \$40 extra you're spending a month in gas if you are stuck with the current car. A monthly car payment is a whole lot more than that! In short, the math doesn't work. You'd have to drive to the moon and back to make it worthwhile.

There are a lot smarter things you can do to cut down on your fuel bill. Have you thought about trading for something smaller? If you're driving a gas guzzler, trade it in on another car worth no more than your current car's selling price. This means better fuel efficiency without a car payment. Carpooling is an option, too, even if you split the driving just a few days a week.

If you want to get a little more radical with the money-saving ideas, you could think about moving closer to work. Spend some time doing the calculations and looking at the specifics to see if it makes sense in your case. Finally, and this may be a last-ditch effort, you could consider changing jobs. No one's forcing you to work where you do, especially if you're spending a lot of time and money on the road just getting to and from your job. If you're really spending a ridiculous amount on gas each month, it might even be time to look into ideas you may have once had to start your own business.

But don't use better gas mileage, or bad advice from your friends, as a rationalization for buying a new car. It's just not worth it. — 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.

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. 1 Thessalonians 4:14



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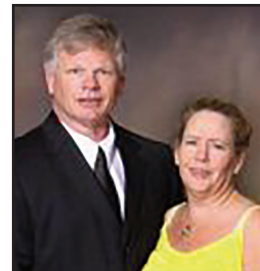
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The Inspiring Word

By Terry Cheek Th.D.
McDowell County



This month we conclude our verse-by-verse exposition of the fiftieth Psalm. Join me as we explore verses eight through twenty-three this month.

Gods perfect righteousness demands that sin be judged. This judgment leads to death. Notice Romans 6:23 *“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”* During the Old Testament days, a person could bring an animal as a substitute for themselves. The persons' faith in God was symbolized through the death of their animal sacrifice to take the place of their own death. However, people had become so accustomed to the ritual and ceremony of the sacrifice they had forgotten the significance of faith in their personal lives. The act of sacrifice showed they remembered their covenant to follow God wholeheartedly. But their hearts had drawn far from Him. From Psalm 50:8-23 we read; *“I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High: And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me. But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee. When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers. Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son. These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver. Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.”*

God opens by reminding His people that He doesn't accuse them of neglecting the outward duty of worship, it is the condition of their heart God sees as repulsive. This very thing the Lord Jesus Christ confronted the Pharisees of His day with. Remember Christ addressing the Pharisee's outward observance of washing hands, pots, pans, and utensils. How about their paying of tithes and the encouragement of children to dedicate portions of their income to the Temple and not care for their parents' needs.

God reminds His children that He has no personal need of their sacrifice. He created everything, and that same everything belongs to Him. The act of sacrifice was enacted for the benefit of man, not the benefit of God. It was an act of worship and it was required the worshiper sacrifice with a repentant heart seeking forgiveness for their sin and trespass.

God does not have needs like the pagan gods do. They require sacrifice to provide food. The one true God requires no food, He is spirit and not flesh.

He reminds His children to call upon Him. God is there for them if they come to Him properly. That is seeking forgiveness and atonement for their sins. God requires the same from His children today. We risk falling into the same pattern if we participate in religious activities such as tithing or church attendance out of habit or conformity. God desires our worship, our conviction to tithe and attend church from heartfelt love and obedience to Him by Grace and through Faith in Jesus Christ. God still desires righteousness, that righteousness comes today by believing and accepting Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior.

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

Works Cited:
The treasury of David; Charles Spurgeon
John Gill commentary on the Bible
e-Sword Bible software
Life Application Study Bible; KJV

Terry Cheek is the founder and broadcaster of The Inspiring Word media ministry. He and Lori are members of Blue Ridge Church of Marion N.C. You can contact Terry by email at theinspiringword@gmail.com.

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Mathletes Awarded At District Competition

By Jonelle Sigmon
Burke County

Top Burke County Public Schools math students used lots of brainpower at the Old Rock School on Wednesday as the district held its annual MathCounts Competition. Students competed in three different rounds: individual, team, and face-off.

The top-eight students from the individual round advanced to the face-off challenge on stage in front of an audience. As math problems popped up on the overhead screen, the students used pencil and paper to compute their answers as calculators were not allowed during this round. With buzzers in hand, the students rang in to give their answers to judges Dr. Ross Rumbaugh, director of testing and accountability; Dr. Christie Abernathy, director of advanced learning and innovation/principal of Burke Middle College; and Dr. Kristin Edwards, coordinator/principal, Burke Virtual Academy.

Bailey Heape from Oak Hill Elementary was awarded first place in the individual round. Mason Money from Forest Hill Elementary was runner-up. In school placements, Ray Childers Elementary School team took first place; Oak Hill Elementary placed second and W.A. Young came in third.

BCPS Superintendent Dr. Mike Swan said, "It was such a pleasure and honor seeing these students compete. They have truly worked so hard to get to this moment. A big shout out to the teachers and parents who helped them along the way. Math is not an easy subject for some, but each one of these students paved their way and did a great job. Congratulations to them all."



Pictured is Bailey Heape (left), of Oak Hill Elementary, and BCPS Superintendent Dr. Mike Swan. Heape was awarded first place in the MathCounts Competition.

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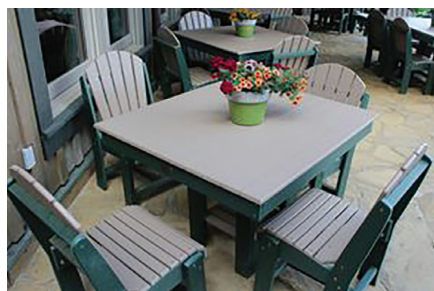
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"God-Given Skills for God's Kingdom Work"

By Shawn Thomas
Angleton, Texas



Jack Sorenson, the Texas artist, is known for his western paintings, including this one of Santa Claus riding a horse. W.F. Strong, in his book, *Stories From Texas*, tells us that Sorenson once said: "I've always been able to draw, sketch and paint anything I put my mind to. I didn't just discover it one day. I've always had it. God blessed me with a gift, and I try to honor that gift as best I can, in every painting." (p. 119)

Sorenson is not wrong. The artistic gift that he has, came from the Lord. We see that in Exodus chapters 31-38 where it repeatedly refers to Bezalel, a man to whom God had given skills in craftsmanship.

This passage shows us that God is the source of all the different skills that we possess, and we need to realize that we are responsible to Him for what we do with the gifts He has entrusted to us.

I. GOD is the source of all our skills.

In Exodus 31:2-3 God says: "*See, I have called by name Bezalel, the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. I have filled him with the Spirit of God in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship.*" The Lord says here that the skill that Bezalel had, was given by Him.

But God also said went on to say that not only did He give Bezalel this skill, but:6 also goes on to say: "*In the hearts of all who are skillful I have put skill.*" That is a very significant verse. God says there that every person who has a skill, HE has given it to them. "*In the hearts of all who are skillful, I have put skill.*" This means that there is no such thing as a "natural talent" or ability; there is no such thing as a "self-made man." Whatever gift or ability anyone has, God, says, it came from Him.

Once I spoke at a church and while I was there I met a young man who was adept at mechanical things and working with his hands. He said he felt like God had gifted him with this ability. I had just "happened" to read this chapter in Exodus in my quiet time that morning, so I shared this verse with him and told him that he was right. According to this scripture, every ability we have has been given to us by the Lord.

Now many of us are familiar with the concept of spiritual gifts. When are saved, we receive spiritual gifts from the Lord. This is part of the Gospel. God made us to love and serve Him, but we rebelled against Him and decided to serve ourselves instead. This is what SIN is. And the Bible says that "*all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" But despite our sin, God showed His "compassion" to us, and was "gracious" to us, as we talked about last week, which is the essence of His character, and sent Jesus to die on the cross and pay for our sins, so that we could be forgiven of our rebellion against Him, and return to Him as our Lord & God. When we turn back to Him, He forgives us of our sins, and sends His Holy Spirit into our lives, putting His "seal" on us as belonging to Him. And the New Testament repeatedly teaches that when the Holy Spirit comes into your life when you are saved, that He gives you a "spiritual gift" — a God-given ability to serve Him in the church: preaching, or teaching, or encouraging/counseling, or leading, deeds of mercy, and so on. We all have one of these gifts.

Now, throughout my generation there has been the attitude that these "spiritual gifts" are from the Lord, for service in the church, but then we've acted like we also have these "natural abilities" and talents that we just happen to have, that doesn't have anything to do with God or spiritual things. But what we need to understand is that it is not only "spiritual gifts," but EVERY gift and ability is from the Lord:

— Like Bezalel, if you are a craftsman, that is from the Lord.

— Like Jack Sorenson, if you can paint or draw, that's from the Lord.

— Like Eric Liddell, the Olympian in "Chariots of Fire," one of my favorite movies, if you can run fast, that is from the Lord.

One of the things the Bible shows us in this passage is that every gift and ability we have has been given to us by God.

C.S. Lewis said our talents are given to us by God when He created us. He said we have no more right to be proud of our abilities than we are the color of our hair. They were GIVEN to us. And He said the way to deal with the temptation to pride about our abilities is "NOT to depreciate the good things we are tempted to be proud of but to remember where it comes from." (C.S. Lewis, *Yours Jack*, p. 102)

Lewis is saying, you don't have to put on a "fake humility" when someone compliments you about some ability you have, and say, "Oh I am not very good" — when you KNOW you are! — instead, he says, just humbly remember where it came from. It came from GOD, not YOU! Don't cut down what God gave you. Just acknowledge that it came from Him.

The Bible shows us here that this is true of every talent, gift, and ability we have. It is all from the Lord. Thank Him for it. Tell others you know it came from Him. As the old song says, "Praise GOD from whom all blessings flow"! GOD is the source of all our skills.

II. WE are responsible to use our skills to further God's Kingdom.

In Exodus 36:1 the Lord added: "*Now Bezalel and Oholiab, and every skillful person in whom the Lord has put skill and understanding to know how to perform all the work in the construction of the sanctuary, shall perform in accordance with all that the Lord has commanded.*"

Those words, "shall perform" are key here. It's not enough that a person like Bezalel or Oholiab is given skill and understanding by God; He says they are then responsible to PERFORM what He asks of them, USE those God-given abilities He granted.

And this is true not only for Bezalel and Oholiab. This is our responsibility too. Whatever gift, talent, or ability God has given us, we are then to USE in the service He has set before us. We don't choose the gifts we are given by the Lord, but we ARE responsible for what we DO with them. History is replete with examples of people who were given great talents by God, but who did not "perform" in accordance with what they were given. Perhaps you are aware that you possess certain spiritual gifts; but the question is, how are you USING them?!

After the First World War, President Woodrow Wilson went to Europe for an international peace conference. Attending along with him was the Secret Service agent E.W. Starling, who faithfully served several presidents. Starling wrote of the conference: "From what I could gather a great was said and very little was done. On January 15 I wrote in my diary: 'As we were leaving ... it fell to my lot to put a lap robe on the President's knees, and be said to me in an undertone, 'I am glad to get away from them. It is nothing but a talk shop.'" (E.W. Starling and Thomas Sugrue, *Starling of the White House*, pp. 126-127)

President Wilson was frustrated because that international conference, which could have made a difference in the world, did not. All they did was talk. "It was nothing but a talk shop." But here's the thing: can the same thing be said of many of our churches? We talk about the gospel; we talk about missions; we talk about how Jesus is Lord; we talk about the importance of serving Him. But are we DOING it? Are we going? Are we serving? Are we sharing? Or are our churches just "talk shops"?

Each of us should apply this personally as well. Do we just talk in church about the gospel, or do we ever share it with anyone? Is missions something we say we "support," whatever that means — or are we personally really giving, praying, and going on a mission? Is God's Kingdom work something you are DOING personally, or is all this just a "talk shop"?

God can use whatever gifts He has given you, in His kingdom work. On a recent mission trip, the local missionaries said there were needs for people to teach English to high school students, those who can serve children at a special needs camp, businessmen to train local entrepreneurs in business practice, someone to help local teachers with budgets — even fishermen to fish at a local lake and build relationships with the local population! This shows us that there are SO many different gifts you can use to help share the gospel with the nations.

And it's not just about missions; it's the same in your local church too. For a church to function effectively, EVERY person must use the abilities God has given them to serve in some way: praying, serving in the nursery, giving, teaching, on and on. There's something you can do. Remember, God never intended for this church to be a "talk shop;" it's to be a WORK shop; where we are all using our gifts and abilities to serve God.

In fact, you are accountable to God for what you do with the skills He gave you. In Matthew 25 Jesus told a parable of the talents, where a master gives his slaves a talent, a measure of money, to invest until he returned. They each invested their money, but one slave was given only one talent, not as much as the others. So he thought he'd just bury it in the ground until the master returned. But when he did come back, the master rebuked that slave for not doing anything with what he had been given. He wasn't reprimanded because he only had one talent; he was reprimanded because he didn't do anything what he HAD been given.

And the same thing is true for us. You may say, I didn't get very much talent-wise from the Lord. I'm not a great soloist, or preacher, or teacher, or some of these gifts churches often value. You are not responsible to God for gifts and talents you did not receive. The question is: are you using what God DID give you in some way?

— So you can't preach; can you watch kids in the nursery?

— So you can't sing; can you help mow the grass?

— So you can't teach; can you visit a homebound person?

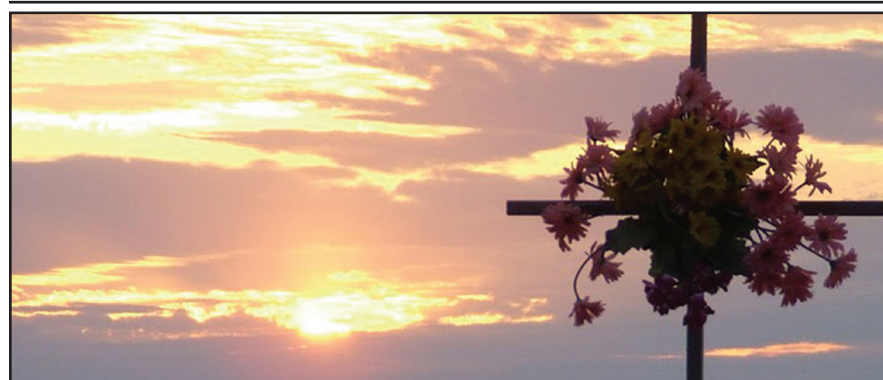
The question is not what CAN'T you do, but what CAN you do? You are not responsible to use a gift God didn't give you. What you ARE responsible for is what God DID give you. Use whatever He DID give you, to serve Him and help advance His kingdom here on earth. THAT is what you will be answerable to Him for one day, just like in Matthew 13. Did you bury the time and ability God gave you, or did you use it?

Every one of us should answer the question: "How will I use the gifts, skills, and time God has given me, to further His Kingdom here on earth?"

Remember: God doesn't want His church to be a "talk shop." He wants it to be a "workshop" for His kingdom.

And God doesn't want YOU to be a "talk shop" Christian, who talks a big game about things you aren't really DOING anything about. He wants you to USE whatever gift or talent or ability He has given you, to advance His kingdom here on earth.

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.



The Blood of Martyrs

By Tim Tron
Burke County

"For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake. And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." – Mt. 24:7-14

What you are about to read is based on a true story. The name of the mission and its members have been changed or omitted for safety's sake. May the Lord speak to you through this message.

The men walked with their families, wives, children, and the elderly. Some held hands with their loved ones. Others carried babes in arms, cherishing the last moments that would forever be etched into their hearts. As they approached the border crossing into Poland, they could see up ahead the checkpoints created to secure those passages to freedom, to safety, a place beyond the horror of war that they had just escaped. Yosef could feel the lump in his throat grow as he watched those with him become ever more anxious. Everyone knew that when they reached the border, Yosef would have to return to their village, leaving them, possibly forever.

Each able body man was asked to return from escorting their family to the border to fight for their country, their freedom, their life. Yosef was no different. He knew that he could not escape with the women and children, that he and the other survivors of his village would do all they could to defend their country, their homeland, and their faith. Standing up for what is right was easy back in their town when they still had a home. But now, the shelling and destruction forced them to abandon all they knew and loved. It seemed that all they had left of their former life was their faith, for everything else had been stripped away.

Yosef and his brother Caleb had both worked with missionaries from America, training to become evangelists in Ukraine. Their work was to seek out others and share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Although they had worked regular jobs during the day, their eventual goal was to become full-time evangelists traveling around their country and becoming missionaries in their own way. But weeks before Russia attacked Ukraine, the American mission teams were asked to leave for safety's sake. The missionary leaders and their families were as heartbroken as were their trainees, but everyone knew it was for the best. Besides, it would just be a precaution, and they would all be back together continuing their ministry before they knew it.

That was over a month ago. For Yosef, it seemed like an eternity.

It was Friday morning, the day before Sabbath, and Yosef could remember getting ready to go to work. The small hospital where he and his brother worked continued treating patients even though the attack on their country had begun. Yosef and Caleb were only orderlies, but due to the recent influx of war injuries, they were asked to help bandage and care for the less severe wounds. He was just about to go out the door when his daughter rushed up to him and begged him to come back and help her put on her boots for school. "Mommy's busy with little brother," she said, pointing to the back room of their small but modest home, "I need you to help me, Papa." Yosef knew his wife, Evette, was busy with their newborn son, so he was happy to oblige.

"It's okay, baby. Papa's got you covered."

She smiled as he knelt down to the ground, pulling the boots up as she pressed her little feet into the pink unicorn galoshes. Her hand rested on his back, and he could feel the tender touch of her sweet disposition, warming him through and through. When he finished, he lifted her up and gave her a big hug as she wrapped her little arms around his neck, returning the embrace.

"Now, I am off to do God's work. You be a good little girl and have fun at school. You hear me?"

"Yes, Papa," she smiled ear to ear, waving as he turned to walk out the door.

Across the street, near the newly constructed apartment complex, Caleb waited in his car. He and Yosef always rode together, and today was like any other. Although Caleb was always there, always on time, he hated being late. So, when he saw Yosef emerging a second time from the house, he waved toward him as if to say, "C'mon, we're going to be late."

Yosef smiled and waved back. It was all too funny. His brother could never relax, even when they were witnessing to others. He seemed to never be content with just learning the verses their mentors had asked them to memorize. No, Caleb had to push himself, learning entire chapters that contained those verses. He was always driven to give his all. It was just who he was. It was this thought of his dear brother that remained when the flash of light suddenly erupted before him.

Out of nowhere, a sound like thunder ripped through the air. The ground folded under itself as the rumble of the earth shook Yosef to his core. One minute, Yosef was waving at Caleb, the next, he was blown backward, his feet trailing behind him as he watched his body being lifted up by the force of the blast. All Yosef could see was the image of his brother, smiling and waving, and then it was as if the screen on the television had gone blank, and the silhouette of the ghostly image of Caleb remained. His brother's soul was burnt into his eyes.

Clouds of smoke, dust, and debris began raining down. The light was broken, and darkness had prevailed. Somewhere a dog barked as car alarms started blaring. Yosef didn't know how long he had been unconscious, nor where he was, when he



finally sat up. People ran before him in all directions. There was no sound in this landscape of destruction, just the images running through the fog of silence, interspersed with mouths that had no voice. Across the street, the entire structure of the apartment complex that once stood was now gone. The road beside it was a crater. The cars there were now either blown to pieces or burning embers. Yosef realized that Caleb would not be waiting anymore.

Painfully, he turned to look at his own house. The entire front of his home and all the others on their side of the street were caved in. People poured out, frantic, screaming, yet their lips were muted by the searing pain that shot through Yosef's head. It was as if the world had gone insane, and nothing made sense. Softly, and gently, from behind him, he felt the touch of a little hand. He turned to see his daughter, still wearing her little pink unicorn boots. Her eyes were rimmed with fear as tears fell down her rosy cheeks.

"Papa, papa," she sobbed. Yosef's hearing began to return like a wave of emotion as he reached for his baby girl wrapping her in his arms as she sat on his lap. Soon, Evette emerged with their son in her arms, weeping and crying. There they sat amid the rubble as the world around them spun out of control. It was then Yosef realized he only had one thing left he could do and began to pray. His heart poured out to the Lord as the tears fell down his face.

From that day forward, their lives were never the same. It seemed that each day, more lives were lost, more arbitrary destruction, none of it made sense. Finally, when the shelling became so dire, they realized to stay would mean certain death for everyone, so Yosef did what all the others in their village had decided, to take the women, children, and elderly to the border then return to fight, until the end.

Yet, each day, since they had begun their painful march to exile, they felt the hand of God on them, protecting them, delivering them from harm. Yosef knew that had he not listened to the voice of his daughter that fateful morning when Caleb was killed in the bombing that he too would have died. It was as if God had spared his life for a reason. God had spoken through a child to save his life. How much more could he do to return the favor? Each day, Yosef could feel the faith inside him growing. Evette seemed to sense it as well and encouraged him by reading from their tiny Bible she had brought along. The scriptures spoke to them more and more each day.

Reaching the crossing, Yosef turned and embraced Evette. He didn't want to let go, for he knew when he did, it would be the last time. "Yosef, you will make a difference. Don't forget who you are, and take this," she passed the little Bible into his palm as she leaned into him; close now, face to face, "You're going to need this more than ever before," she whispered as they kissed goodbye.

Down by his side, he could feel the tiny hands holding onto his pant leg. As he bent down, his heart began to melt. The tears filled his eyes, and he realized this would be their last time.

"Papa, you are going to do God's work, right," the little voice said, sincerely and without fear?

"Yes baby, yes, papa will..." and he stopped, choking back the flood of emotion.

He hugged one last time and turned to leave.

It was his time. This would be the end.

He would not look back.

The Bible in his hand reminded him that this was all that made sense. So, mustering every ounce of strength he could find in his weeping soul, Yosef silently began to pray. As his voice lifted up to the heavens, a tingling sensation began to rise from the earth, pouring through his legs, up through his spine, until it reached the top of his head. It was an energy that made him want to shout, Amen! It was a sense of urgency, a sense of purpose. It was something that finally made sense.

It was time to do God's work.

Unexpectedly, those strained, war-weary faces became the pulpit, their souls became the fields white ready to harvest, and his voice began speaking words of faith and encouragement. The voice of God began speaking through Yosef like a runaway freight train. He was a man on fire for the Lord. If he were to die, he would go out doing what he was meant to do. There was nothing to lose and everything to gain.

From the corner of his eye, as he made his way through the crowd, loving, praying and finally evangelizing like he always hoped he and his brother would do someday, the flash of a familiar color caught his eye. A tiny flame of hope. The diminutive form in the bright pink unicorn boots was waving her encouragement from the top of the steps of the train station.

Like a man in the middle of battle, he paused, and he returned the motion. The little face smiled and gave a thumbs-up gesture and turned to leave. His heart melted in two. In the pause of the moment, Yosef heard a voice from somewhere up above saying, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."

And onward he pressed...until the end.

Pray for Ukraine, Pray for the World.

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 You can visit his website at <http://www.timothywtron.com/> or see more of his writings [HERE](#).

The Father

By Art Dmytriyev
Yancey County



Most people in the world today think that life comes from a mother. Mothers are the ones who give birth to their children. However, can life come without a father? Save yourself lots of time and admit that a father has to be there. In fact, life as we know it came from the Father.

Here is the story.
"In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth..." (Genesis 1:1-3 KJV). Here we see God the Father, along with His Son (John 1:1-3), and the Holy Spirit created the Heavens and the Earth. God is the Creator and Sustainer of life. (Acts 17:28).

Another favorite verse is in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (KJV). This famous verse talks about God the Father's love toward us. However, some people may not be able to recognize God as their good Father due to their life experience when they did not have a good earthly father. This fact should not stop anyone from believing that there is a heavenly Father, Who loves us with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3). The Bible tells us that God is our Father—a good, perfect, loving Father. The most essential characteristic of our incredible Father is that He could not allow his children to perish without doing something to save them. Human fathers may fail us, but we have a Father in Heaven who loves us with perfect, never failing unconditional love. Let us see what more the Bible tells us about the Father. 1 John 3:1 KJV: "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God..." It's remarkable to think the God of the universe — the One who created all things — would call us His children. Yet, that's what the Bible tells us so! Our God is a Father to the fatherless also! (Psalm 68:5). Most importantly, God is the Father of Jesus! (Mark 14:36).

There are so many beautiful things about His character. He is love, just, merciful, all-powerful, patient, good, holy, never-changing, all-knowing, and ever-present! He will help you when you are: afraid, worried, need healing, need forgiveness, need wisdom, feel lonely, and when you are brokenhearted. Our awesome Father is coming soon to take His children home. He wants you to be part of His family too. He wants you there with Him. Father God cares for us, disciplines us, protects us, and loves us!

Dear reader, what do you think about our Dear Heavenly Father? Would you like to be accepted to the family of God by surrendering your life to Jesus Christ? Make your decision today, and may God Bless you! Matthew 11:28-30 KJV: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

Pr. Art Dmytriyev is originally from Siberia. He has traveled the world in Evangelism and pastoral ministry. He serves as a pastor in North Carolina, holds a Master of Divinity degree, and is currently a Doctor of Ministry candidate. More information at: <https://burnsvillenc.adventistchurch.org/pastors-blog>



Sudoku

Solution on page 14

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

A Whale And Resurrection

By Ken and Jan Merop
Avery County



"So the Lord spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land," so it says in Jonah 2:10, NKJV.

Phew! That would be an experience never to be forgotten. The vapors surrounding Jonah as he was expelled from the whale told a graphic story.

Imagine what it must have been like in the belly of the great fish that God had prepared to swallow Jonah? Think of all that the whale had eaten, the digestive juices at work, and the enclosed, suffocating cavity of this great fish. Then think about spending three days and three nights in there.

I wondered, why did God choose this particular avenue to get Jonah's attention? Perhaps the second first verse in Jonah 1 gives us the answer.

"Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before me."

The sins of the people were like a horrendous, sickening stench that he could stomach no longer. God called on Jonah as the instrument through whom he would work to take the truth of his word to Nineveh.

But Jonah didn't want to go. So, he fled by boat to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. Somehow in his desire to escape, he neglected to realize that he couldn't hide from God.

When Jonah's actions imperiled all on the boat, he told them to throw him overboard. And, it was then God rescued him in a most unlikely manner.

Just maybe God wanted Jonah to experience a stench that would resemble that which was afflicting his holy nostrils from Nineveh – to tangibly understand the foul rancidness of sin.

Though God couldn't stand what was happening in Nineveh, his compassion was extended. And, on this Resurrection Day, we are reminded of these two characteristics of God. His holiness that cannot regard sin; and his compassionate love that provided the remedy.

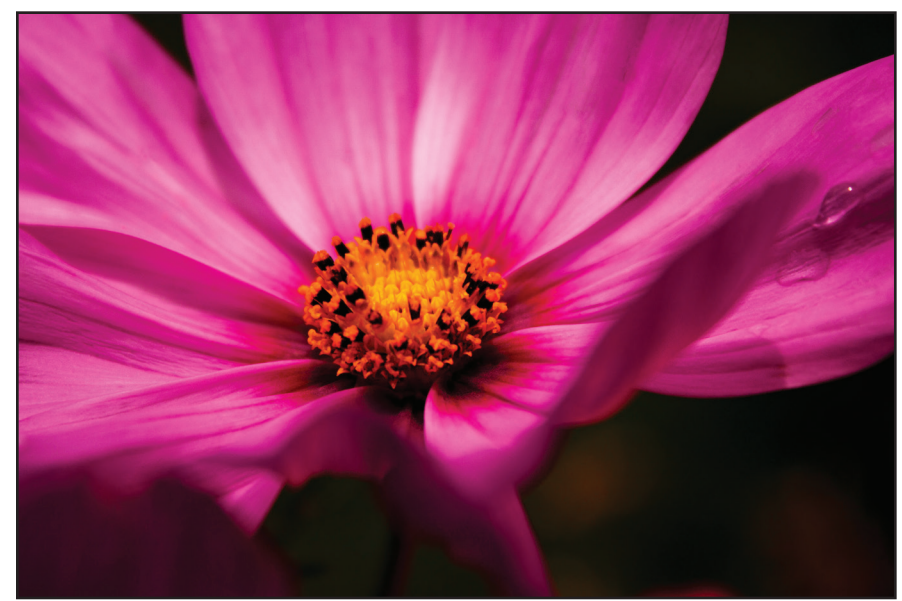
Some of the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day wanted a sign. But, Jesus – tired of the stench of their unbelief – said the only sign would be that of the prophet Jonah and his three-day/three-night entombment in the big fish. So, it would be for Jesus in the earth.

On that glorious resurrection day – out of the grave from which he had taken the sins of the world – he came ready to extend forgiveness adorned in compassionate love to all who would believe.

Jonah was given new life from his smelly tomb at God's command to the fish. Jesus Christ went into the grave clothed in mankind's putrid sin. He came forth like a new blossom in his resurrection body – the only perfect sacrifice to satisfy God's holiness and love. Selah

Bursting Forth

*Spring has sprung!
Bursting forth in glorious blooms and
punctuating the landscape with color and texture,
life is awakened.
The springtime of the soul is not unlike it.
Faith and hope no longer sleep, emerging vibrant, alive!
"Awake my soul!... I will praise you, O Lord...
For great is your love."
Psalm 57: 8a, 9a, 10a*



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 kenmeroppography.com.

Easter Resurrection

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



My wife, Shawn, and I had the privilege of serving the Lord as Southern Baptist missionaries in Gaza and in Nazareth, Israel for fifteen years. Although that was many years ago, we will never forget the times that we would travel to Jerusalem for the week surrounding Easter. We would join pilgrims from all over the world and walk the Palm Sunday walk from the Mount of Olives into the old city of Jerusalem. And then a week later, we would join upwards of 1200 believers from all corners of the globe and crowd into every nook and cranny of the Garden Tomb site to experience the Easter sunrise service. We would, of course, arrive in the early morning pre-dawn hours in the darkness and excitedly wait for the first rays of the sun to split the eastern sky. And when the morning dawned, we all saw exactly what Mary Magdalene, the other Mary, Peter, and John saw—the huge stone that Joseph of Arimathea and other disciples had used to seal the crucified Lord Jesus in the tomb was rolled away. And as the light of the morning sun filled the place and slowly crept into the open tomb, it illuminated the fact that His body was not there. You see, that once sealed grave was not opened to let Jesus out, but to let all adoring women, men, and children in! When we look into that rock-hewn tomb, we find, just as all who venture to draw near and look inside—that He is not there!—He has risen! He has risen indeed!

That day in Jerusalem as hundreds peered inside the tomb, a great shout of “alleluia” filled the air. “He is risen! He is risen indeed!” was shouted out in language after language. Tears of joy were streaming down each face and that great multitude of believers broke out in praise and adoration to the Risen Savior, Jesus Christ. From the time of those extraordinary Easter Sunday mornings, Shawn and I have never failed to repeat that wonderful declaration of faith. In Arabic, we say, “Huwa Qaam!” (هو قام) — “He is Risen!” And then, we reply, “Haqqan Qaam!” (حقا قام) — “He is risen indeed!”

Wherever you find yourself on Easter Sunday morning, Christians will repeat these phrases in their own languages, just as their families and ancestors have done year after year for generation after generation. It is an age-old affirmation of the most fundamental truth that sets Christianity apart from all other religions—Jesus rose from the grave. His death on the cross secured our salvation. By His death, we are reconciled to Him because He gave His life as a ransom, a propitiation for our sins. Paul declares in Romans 5:8, “*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*” And in Romans 5:9-10 he declared, “*Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies, were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.*” He has secured our salvation and reconciliation to God through faith. And His death secured our eternal destiny.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior declares and affirms it to be true! When Jesus rose out of that tomb early on that Easter morning, He testified for all time and for all humanity that He has defeated sin and death. And through His resurrection, our redemption is made complete. May the joy of Christ’s resurrection fill your hearts as you celebrate the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord.

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.

Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. John 6:54

"Easter's Surprise"

By Russell McKinney
Mitchell County



New Year’s Day is January 1st. Valentine’s Day is February 14th. Independence Day is July 4th. Halloween is October 31st. Christmas is December 25th. But Easter? Uh.....

Easter is that rare holiday that is unpredictable in regards to when it falls on the calendar. At least it’s unpredictable to anyone who doesn’t keep up with the moon. For the record, Easter falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon of the spring (vernal) equinox. That setup goes back to the Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325.

The thought process the Council of Nicaea used to arrive at that annual date was centered around the yearly Jewish Passover. That first full moon of the spring (vernal) equinox is also known as the Paschal (Passover) moon because that moon was the date of the Passover in the Jewish Calendar. Well, the Bible tells us that Jesus ate the Passover meal with His chosen 12 disciples the night before His crucifixion. That was the famous “last supper” in which He instituted The Lord’s Supper as part of the meal. Okay, since the Bible also tells us that He was crucified the next day, the following Sunday must have been resurrection Sunday, the Sunday we now call Easter.

Getting back to the lunar side of things, the word “equinox” means “equal night” and is a reference to the fact that the spring (vernal) equinox is the yearly date when night and day are nearly the exact same length all over the world. This means that Easter can fall anytime between March 22nd and April 25th. The last time it fell on March 22 was 1818, and the last time it fell on April 25th was 1943.

Of course, it doesn’t help that some parts of the world use the Gregorian calendar and other parts use the Julian calendar. Those calendars differ by thirteen days. This has created the concepts of a Western (Gregorian) Easter and an Eastern (Julian) Easter. Typically, Western Easter and Eastern Easter are one week apart, even though there are certain years where the holiday falls on the same Sunday.

The interesting thing about all this is that Easter basically becomes something of a surprise each year in that we common folks have to check the calendar to find out exactly when it falls. In this way, we are like the apostles and all the rest of Christ’s followers. That first Easter was certainly a surprise to them.

Even though Jesus had forewarned them that He was going to be put to death and then resurrect, they really didn’t believe any of it. Even when the part about Him being put to death occurred, they still didn’t believe that the other part would happen as well. Early on that glorious Sunday morning, however, the process of convincing them officially began. We might say that the empty tomb was Christ’s way of saying to all of them, “Surprise!”

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

Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also. John 14:19



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Get Free from the Burden of Stress

By Joyce Meyer



It seems that stress is the disease of the century. Products and programs to manage stress are a multibillion-dollar business, whether the “cure” is medicine, counseling, books, seminars, or classes. But I’ve discovered that God’s way of managing stress is the most effective way to live.

Jesus says in John 14:27 (AMP): *“Peace I leave with you; My [perfect] peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be afraid. [Let My perfect peace calm you in every circumstance and give you courage and strength for every challenge.]”*

I know what it’s like to live under the burden and pressure of stress, and I know what it’s like to have God’s peace. I can honestly say that I will do whatever I have to do to have God’s peace in my life because it is not God’s will for us to live with stress all the time.

It’s easy for us to feel like we can’t avoid being stressed out because it’s just the way the world is today. But the truth is just because stress is a disease of our culture, it doesn’t mean we have to adopt the ways of our culture and live the same way.

We have two options: We can continue to be stressed out until we fall apart, or we can learn how to receive the peace Christ gives in every circumstance, rather than letting stress get into us.

The Cure for Stress

For many years, I lived with constant stress. I was sexually abused by my father throughout my childhood. Then when I left home at the age of 18, I married the first man who came along because I was afraid no one else would want me, and that led to five years of misery. He ended up abandoning me.

By the time I was 23 and met Dave Meyer, I was a mess! I was worried, full of fear, insecure, and had a poor self-image. So I tried to find value in what I did and became a workaholic.

Over time, I developed physical problems, like frequent headaches and backaches, and had problems in many of my relationships because I was unhappy and hard to get along with. I finally came to the place where I decided that I would not live that way any longer. Whatever it took, I was going to have God’s peace and live a peaceful life!

James 1:21 says, *“...With a humble spirit receive the word [of God] which is implanted [actually rooted in your heart], which is able to save your souls.”* Although I was a Christian during this time of my life, I needed to “get saved” in my soul—my mind, will, and emotions. I needed to renew my mind with the Word of God so I could know the Truth and be set free from the root issues of my stress.

Here’s how it works: When we study God’s Word—reading it, meditating on it, getting it deep down in our hearts—it changes the way we think. This causes us to change the way we talk, which changes our attitudes, and then our behavior changes. At this point, the things around us—our circumstances—can’t control us anymore.

Get to the Root of Your Stress

Being set free from the pressure of stress begins with God’s Word, but we also have to understand that if things are going to change in our lives, we will have to take responsibility to change them with God’s help. So the first thing we need to do is pray and be willing to hear what He has to say about the real root of our problem.

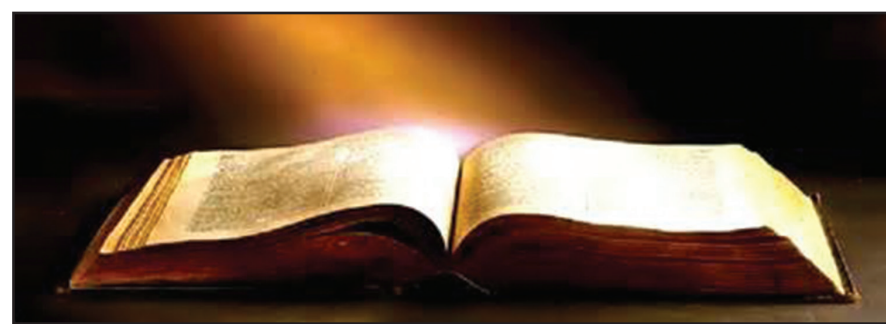
If you’re already doing your part, then be determined to trust God to fix things. But if you’re not walking in wisdom or you’re doing things a certain way just because that’s the way everybody else is doing it, then follow the direction He is speaking to your heart to make a change.

We must pray and obey! This means we commit not to live based on the culture around us but by the leading of the Holy Spirit, who lives in us as born-again believers in Christ. Our mindset should be: With God’s help, I’m ready to make a change. Then as we do what He shows us to do (or what He shows us not to do), we’ll be able to live in peace.

Pursue the peace Jesus is offering you today. It’s not the kind the world gives—the kind you have as long as your circumstances are the way you want them to be. The peace Jesus gives makes you calm and undisturbed on the inside, in your soul, no matter what’s going on around you.

Study other scriptures about peace, like Philippians 4:6-7, Colossians 3:15, and 1 Peter 3:11. Put your trust in God completely and enjoy the life Jesus died to give you. Through Christ, you can learn how to manage the stress of this world, instead of letting stress manage you!

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.



What IS Todd's Techy Tips?

By Todd Abraham
Athens, Tenn.



Let me start by saying how much I appreciate Brian Barrier for blessing me to publish this article every month in Blue Ridge Christian News! And since this is our 3rd installment, I felt the Lord to let you know just what is Todd's Techy Tips. By the name, you probably think it's about the latest, coolest things in the tech world. But that would be far from the truth. Before we dive into this digital dissemination, I must inform you that I am a very tech-savvy individual in so many ways. And everything that is done on the production side of publishing Heartbeat Christian News (www.HBCNewsMonthly.com) for my part is all computer-based. There are many good uses of technology but a greater portion is spiritually destructive.

Heartbeat Christian News has been in publication for almost 10 years now, praise God, and this article has been a staple article in every issue for nearly that whole time. Why? Because God laid it on my heart to warn His people about the very grave dangers of technology; especially smartphones! In addition to that, God not only blessed me to be very tech-savvy and knowledgeable but also with a very keen sense of observation and fairly good spiritual discernment.

Smartphones, very simply put, is the greatest form of freewill mind control ever known to the devil and those who serve him. They combine in one small device everything to keep the human mind enthralled for hours on end. They are the #1 idol in the world today and the greatest addiction facing mankind. If 3rd world countries weren't so poor, a vast majority of their citizens would have them also. Not to mention, the younger the individual, the greater the addiction is. Remember that the human mind isn't fully developed till a person is about 30 years old. So smartphones are one very effective way for the devil to steal a person's mind and expose them to things at early ages they should never see or hear. And common sense tells us that when freedom is gone and we witness the rise of the one-world government and the one-world church, smartphones will be the primary way they control and monitor society.

If that wasn't bad enough, they have made liars out of just about every Christian on this planet who has them when they say they can't live without them. That is a bold-faced lie and one God doesn't accept and will judge you for; period! I recently interviewed for a part-time job with a very digitally established, nationwide company and got hired. My new boss told me I was the first interviewee who answered no in eight months when he asked me if I owned a smartphone LOL. On a very sad note as well, I don't know of any preachers but one who doesn't also have one of these wicked little devices and so it goes. Now friend, before you go and get huffy with me, please understand that it is God Almighty who put it in my heart to write this article and God confirms the Word I preach with signs following. All the glory to Him forever for that.

What's worse is parents putting these heinous instruments into the hands of their underage and very impressionable children whose minds, and especially their souls, are not nor ever will be equipped to resist them becoming idols. I'm talking about elementary age on up. And if we as parents are being honest, we know that the teenage years are the most dangerous for bad influences on our children but practically every teenager I see has a smartphone. Proverbs 28:1 "The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion." You may think I'm bold but it's not me but the Spirit of God Who lives in me Who gives me this article every month. It even fascinates me how much in-depth information the Lord leads me to write it. I'll close with yet another bold statement. God doesn't tolerate willful disobedience or liars or idols. So the onus is on you who reads this article because now you have been warned and are without excuse!

My name is Todd Abraham. I'm an evangelist of the gospel of Jesus Christ and publisher of Heartbeat Christian News which has been in publication for 9 years now by the grace of God. You can read all about it at www.HBCNewsMonthly.com.

Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. Romans 6:4

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Press Release

Walking in Freedom Event Scheduled in Mars Hill Madison County

On April 9 at 7 pm near the campus of Mars Hill University, there will be a free, non-denominational evangelistic event targeting students of the region, but open to all. Grassroots Evangelism, a local group of intercessors, is coordinating the event.

Speakers for the Walking in Freedom event are Randy Shepherd of Crossfire Ministries and Don Sunshine of Don Sunshine Ministries of Johnson City, TN. The worship leader will be college student Dylan Greene. Grassroots spokesperson Kim Bava said, "we were hoping to have the event at Moore Auditorium on the MHU campus, but weren't able to secure the location. So we are grateful to Mars Hill Baptist Church, adjacent to the campus, for allowing us to use their sanctuary for the event. I know that's where we're meant to be." Bava went on to say, "We're inviting students from area colleges, high schools, and middle schools, but of course, everyone is welcome."



Jamie Johnson and Randy Shepherd, co-founders of Crossfire Ministries will be ministering at the Walking in Freedom event on April 9

For further information, contact Kim Bava at (828)335-4441.

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YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

NC Senate District 47



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

A little over ten years ago, North Carolina was in dire straits. We faced double-digit unemployment, out-of-control spending, and some of the highest tax rates in the Southeast under Democratic leadership in Raleigh. In 2011, Republicans assumed leadership of the General Assembly promising to balance the state budget, save and plan responsibly for the future, reduce the tax burden on North Carolinians, and strengthen our public schools. I am happy to report that ten years later we have kept those promises.

In fact, just this past year, in my role as Chairman of the Senate Appropriations/Base Budget Committee, Republicans were able to pass a balanced budget that grows the Rainy Day Fund to \$4.25 billion, sets aside \$6 billion in cash to fund infrastructure projects, and provides \$1 billion to expand broadband to some of our most rural areas. These investments are sound, basic strategic planning initiatives which will benefit our state far into the future.

On top of these strategic spending goals, our budget also updated our burdensome and outdated tax code. After the state of North Carolina collected a record amount of taxes during the pandemic, we aimed to lower the personal and corporate income tax rates, increase the standard deduction for individuals and families, broaden the sales tax base, and eliminate as many loopholes from our bloated tax code as possible. That is exactly what we accomplished in our budget. We cut the personal income tax rate from 5.25% to 3.99% by 2027, eliminated all state income tax on military pensions, phased out the corporate income tax starting with 2.25% in 2025 and dropping it to 0% by 2030, increased the zero-tax bracket to \$25,500, and increased the child tax deduction by \$500 per child. I truly believe these reforms will allow North Carolinians more flexibility to plan and save for their families while also making our state attractive to additional investment.

Lastly, our budget made significant investments in our public schools. My goal as Chairman of the Budget Committee was to ensure that our children and students had the resources available to succeed. We invested an additional \$1.5 billion in K-12 education, included a 5% pay raise for most state employees and an average 5% pay raise for teachers over the biennium, and increased the amount spent on school capital projects to \$2.6 billion over the next seven years. These are significant increases that will benefit children and teachers across the state. On top of this, we invested \$100 million in recurring funds for a new state-funded teacher salary supplement focused on low-wealth counties. Attracting well-qualified teachers is an obstacle many low-wealth counties face, and it is my hope this new fund will help them compete with many of the wealthier counties to attract well-qualified candidates to teach our children.

The bottom line is that we have kept our promises to North Carolina. Republicans have budgeted wisely, planned strategically, and invested soundly for our future. And as your State Senator, you can be sure I will continue to represent you with that same commitment every day.

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 or calling me at 919-733-3460.

NC House District 86



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

The Republican-led North Carolina legislature is often accused of underfunding public education, including teacher salaries. But, as former State Board of Education Chair, Phil Kirk, recently wrote in the Salisbury Post, the facts tell a different story. Kirk points out that the legislature has increased funding for public education every year since Republicans became the majority party in 2011. Indeed, the recently passed budget increases spending for K-12 public education by \$1.5 billion. The UNC system and our community college system each received more money than they originally requested.

Here are a few facts Kirk cites: When Republican Gov. McCrory took office in January of 2013, North Carolina teacher pay ranked 47th in the nation. Thereafter, Republican budgets saw that teacher pay rank rise to 29th in the country only to subsequently slip back to 33rd because of Governor Roy Cooper's budget veto. In the current budget, teacher salaries averaged increasing by 6.7%. On top of that increase, each teacher (except those already over \$70,000) received an additional \$2,800 bonus. On top of those increases, \$100 million was divided among 111 out of 115 state school districts for them to use to further increase teacher pay. Raises were also provided to support staff.

As Kirk notes, recognizing the importance of reading and the shortfall in many of our students' reading abilities, the legislature has appropriated millions of dollars for implementing the Science of Reading in every school. Record investments in science, technology, engineering, and math in K-12, community colleges, and the UNC system were approved. Funding for need-based scholarships increased, and more than \$2 billion was appropriated for capital needs across the UNC system. Although yearly tuition increases were the standard previously, for the last six years in a row UNC tuitions have been kept the same for each entering student for his or her four years of college.

As Mr. Kirk concludes, to say that the Republican legislature has not been robust in funding public education ignores reality. If you would like to read Mr. Kirk's full Salisbury Post article, email a request to hugh.blackwell@ncleg.gov. (Phil Kirk served as chair of the State Board of Education for 6 ½ years under Democrat Governors Hunt and Easley.)

NC Senate District 46



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

First of all, we are continuing to pray for the people of Ukraine. This is a critical time for people of faith to unite with one voice in asking the God we serve to lead and guide during these perilous times. The General Assembly recently wrapped up its long session for the 2021-22 biennium and will return to Raleigh in May for the 2022 short session. In between sessions, the General Assembly goes into "oversight" mode in which committees receive reports from agencies that give updates about how they are spending funds and carrying out the mandates of the people's representatives. Topics have included agriculture, education, Medicaid, healthcare, energy, and public safety. Oversight committees are important to ensure our state stays on its decade-long path of reducing the state debt, controlling spending, and ensuring strong fiscal health. State Treasurer Dale Folwell recently reported the state debt has been reduced by 73% over the last decade due to the prudent fiscal policies put in place over that same period by the Republican-controlled state legislature. That is great news for our state and I am honored to serve the citizens as we continue addressing priorities such as tax reform, election law reform, infrastructure, school choice, workforce training, and controlling spending. These are vital to keeping our state on the best path forward.



YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

NC 11th Congressional District



Rep. Madison Cawthorn
828-808-2148

I've had a busy couple of weeks working in Washington! I was proud to introduce three new pieces of legislation, speak on the House floor, interview with great patriots about my work in DC, and much more.

Remember if you are ever looking for more information on what I am up to follow me on Facebook, Twitter, Gettr, or Parler!

I recently introduced a new plan for the soon-to-be Republican majority. This contract with America will show how Republicans can change our country into the thriving city on the hill our founders imagined. My new contract with America will focus on advancing liberty and freedom for future Americans by returning our country to the Constitutional Republic that was intended. This legislation will put America first again and save future generations from the wrath of socialism. My plan has 10 pillars:

- Pillar 1 - Government Spending: My plan will reduce government spending by one-third by 2031. I am going to enact a balanced budget amendment and abolish the income tax by developing a replacement consumption or flat tax by 2026.
- Pillar 2 - Economy: I am going to expand opportunity zones across our nation and demand instant COVID compensation from communist China. I am going to promote our manufacturing and agriculture industry by incentivizing domestic production.
- Pillar 3 - Government Reform: I will abolish the U.S. Department of Education and establish English as the official language. I am going to review all federal agency spending to remove the pork and create less federal red tape. I will also impose term limits on Members of Congress and federal career employees.
- Pillar 4 - Health Care: Employer-sponsored health insurance will be protected from single-payer, government-run health care schemes, and patients with preexisting conditions will be protected. I am going to require medical price transparency and allow for individuals to shop for their own health insurance as well as choose their own doctors.
- Pillar 5 - Education: I am going to fight to pass a parent's bill of rights through Congress along with bringing back prayer in our schools. I am going to ensure that parents' rights are upheld and prevent taxpayer dollars from funding anti-American critical race theory.
- Pillar 6 - Culture and Family Unit: I am going to call for the prevention of federal funding for cities that have defunded their police and law enforcement. I am going to make 'political affiliation' protected from workplace discrimination and also prevent future weapons bans by abolishing the outdated National Firearms Act of 1934.
- Pillar 7 - Energy and Environment: I am going to incentivize the use of modular nuclear reactors and incorporate underutilized hydro-power into our energy grid. I am going to make sure that through the development of breakthrough technologies our nation has an "all of the above" energy strategy to ensure energy independence.
- Pillar 8 - Immigration: I am going to end the Democrats' irresponsible border policies, complete President Trump's border wall, and prohibit funding to sanctuary cities. I am going to focus on fighting the ongoing crisis of human trafficking at our southern border and formally recognize the independence and sovereignty of Taiwan.
- Pillar 9 - Technical Invasion: I am going to call for a massive upgrade on our nation's transportation and technological infrastructure by repairing structurally deficient bridges, creating a 21st-century highway system, and delivering broadband access to rural areas and other underserved communities. I am going to deregulate cryptocurrencies and work on incentivizing blockchain innovation.
- Pillar 10 - Defense and Veterans: I am going to call on the immediate return of war-making powers to Congress and position our military to dominate whether it be through the air, land, sea, or cyberspace. I am going to prioritize getting our veterans back to work and easing the transition from military back to civilian life through fellowship programs and creating economic opportunities for veterans.

Our country may be on a dangerous road with Biden at the helm now, but when Republicans are back in power next year these policies will lead to the prosperity of our country.

NC Commissioner of Labor



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

I hope you are having a wonderful start to Spring and enjoying warmer weather and longer days. As always, March was a busy month for the N.C. Department of Labor.

In early March, I had the pleasure of attending two Public Sector SHARP (Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program) ceremonies in Gaston County. On March 8, I attended the Town of Dallas's Aldermen Meeting to present the town's Public Works Department, Public Utilities Department, Water Treatment Plant, and Wastewater Treatment Plant with the SHARP recertification award. A week later, I attended Mount Holly's City Council meeting to present the city's Public Utilities Department, Street, and Solid Waste Department, Water Treatment Plant, and Wastewater Treatment Plant with the SHARP recertification award. Congratulations to the leadership and employees of the Town of Dallas and the City of Mount Holly for their long-term commitment to workplace safety and health.

On March 22, I visited Butterball's Mount Olive processing facility to present their leadership and safety team with the Carolina Star recertification award. Butterball has been participating in our Star program since 2008, and the Carolina Star is the highest award we can present to an employer. During the visit, we toured the 800,000 square foot facility which processes 55,000 turkeys per day. That's a hard number to wrap your mind around, but I was so impressed with the operation and the dedicated employees. If you eat turkey this week, more than likely it came from Butterball! A big thanks to these Butterball employees who play a role in ensuring that food gets to our table each day.

April kicks off with eight safety awards banquets beginning with Wilson on April 6. I'll be closer to the western part of the state on April 19 when I attend the Morganton banquet.

On April 8, I will visit The Quartz Corp.'s newly renovated mining facility in Yancey County. Our Mine and Quarry Bureau provides critical safety and health training to employees and contractors on mining sites throughout North Carolina. I'm looking forward to touring the Yancey County site and learning more about the company's production and operations. During this event, we will recognize William Gerring, our Mine and Quarry Bureau Chief, for his many years of dedicated service to the state. William retires on May 1 and will be missed by everyone in the department and the industry.

Stand Up 4 Grain Safety Week is April 4 – 8. A safety stand-up is an opportunity for employers to talk intentionally and directly to workers about hazards found in grain handling and storage environments. Any employer can participate, and I encourage you to visit standup4grainsafety.org for more information!

God Bless America

National Day of Prayer 2022

By Monica Kritz
Mitchell County

As we are getting ready for the National Day of Prayer 2022, we are excited about this year's theme of exalting The LORD! He is The One Who established this nation, and He is The One Who is worthy of all our praise! Bless His Name!!!

We are planning to gather again at Riverside Park, and what a privilege to be able to pray together, to speak The Name of JESUS together, to lift up our nation & each other to Our Heavenly FATHER! Please remember this is not about us. This is not about an agenda. This is not even about a denomination. This is about Christians coming together to pray for our nation...a nation we love...a nation under GOD...a nation in deep trouble. Psalm 81:13-14 says, "Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, ...I should have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries."

You may ask, "Why do I need to come & pray? Can't I pray at home?" Sure, you can. Those who are unable to come, we ask you to please pray wherever you are. But to those who can come, The Bible tells us in Hebrews 10:25, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." This is GOD's Word.

So, please come: Thursday, May 5th at Riverside Park
12:00 noon & 6:30 p.m.

Theme: Exalt The LORD Who has established us

Scripture: "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in Him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving."
Colossians 2:6-7

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



Silent Witness

By John McCoury
Roan Mountain, Tenn.



"He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth." Isaiah 53:7
Scripture preserves carefully the sinlessness of Jesus himself. He was without sin, but He bore the sins of others. That is why He did it in silence. He had no interest in defending himself, so He never spoke in His own defense. It is a striking thing that in the gospel accounts of the trials of Jesus he never spoke up on his own behalf or tried to escape the penalty. This amazed both Pilate and Caiaphas. When our Lord stood before the High Priest, He was silent until the High Priest put Him on oath to tell them who He was. When He stood before Pilate, He was silent until to remain silent was to deny His very Kingship. Then He spoke briefly, acknowledging who He was. When He was with the soldiers, they smote Him and spat on Him and put the crown of thorns on His head, yet He said not a word. Peter says, When they hurled insults at Him, He did not retaliate. (1 Peter 2:23). When he went before contemptuous, sneering Herod, He stood absolutely silent. He would not say one word to him. He was returned at last to Pilate because Herod could find nothing wrong with Him. It is very apparent to anyone reading the gospel accounts that the trials that Jesus went through were a farce. The Jewish trial before the High Priest was illegal. It was held at night, which was contrary to the law. Pilate several times admitted that he could find no wrong in him, and yet he pronounced upon him the sentence of death. How true are these words in v. 8, "by oppression and judgment he was taken away."

Remember that as the crowd was crying out, Crucify Him, crucify Him, they added these significant words, Let His blood be upon us and upon our children. Thereby they acknowledged who He was. But when at last the deed was done and He cried with a loud voice, "It is finished" (John 19:30), and His friends came to take Him down from the cross. No enemy hands touched His body after His death, only those who loved Him. As they removed His bloody body, the dear lips were silent, the wondrous voice was stilled, the light had gone from His eyes, and the great heartbeat was no more. But instead of throwing Him on a rubbish heap, as the authorities intended, they made His grave with the rich, just as Isaiah had predicted years before the event. Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man, offered to put the body of Jesus in his new tomb that had never been used. Someone has put that rather remarkably, He who came from a virgin womb must be laid in a virgin tomb. It is with awe and wonder, Lord, that I reflect upon all that you went through to secure the salvation of your people. Thank you, Lord. Jesus was silent before all His accusers since He had no sin to confess. He bore unimaginable punishment for our sin. How can we do less than confess our sins and worship the One who paid for our forgiveness?

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

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Morganton Baptist Church

The Dangers of Self-Sufficiency

By Dan Qurollo
Burke County

Our culture in America is an extremely materialistic culture. We are constantly seeking out things that are new, better, and faster. The advancements of technology have undoubtedly improved efficiency, though I am admittedly not sure that we are better overall. The materialistic mindset of our culture has crept into our churches today, creating the mindset that God's blessing can be measured exclusively by material possessions. This unbiblical concept of God's blessing fails to consider the immaterial blessings that far exceed the material and also creates an improper standard by which things are measured. To be clear, God also does bless in tangible ways, though not exclusively.



Shortly before Israel was to enter the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua, Moses gave them his final words before dying. These words are recorded for us in Deuteronomy where Moses repeatedly urged them to obey God and keep Him first.

It is in Deuteronomy 6:10-16 (paralleled in 8:10-20) that we find a warning given to the children of Israel. Moses knew that the land God promised them was a land of abundance. Moses knew that God would grant them a victory, for He had promised to do so. This passage indicates that they would enter a land in which they could dwell immediately. Houses will have already been built, cities will have already been developed, and fields and vineyards will have already been planted. Entering such abundance, Moses cautioned them, "Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage" (Deuteronomy 6:12). Moses recognized a danger we all face with God's blessing: the danger of self-sufficiency.

Moses recognized that the abundance of God's blessing could actually produce a sense of self-sufficiency by causing them to no longer be conscious of God, His deliverance, or even His blessing. When we become self-sufficient, we are no longer God-conscious. Our focus shifts from rejoicing in the person and work of God to finding ourselves complacent and secure in the things He has given us. It takes a determined effort to remain conscious of God at all times.

Deuteronomy 8:17 adds another danger of self-sufficiency by stating, "And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth." This is a natural result of not being God-conscious and fails to give God the praise for provision. Such a mindset regards provision as nothing short of hard work and saving; it tragically fails to consider God as the true source from whom all our blessings flow.

We are living in an extremely affluent culture, though times are indeed difficult. We must not allow our prosperity to cause us to become self-sufficient and thereby lose a mindset of God-consciousness. We dare not conclude that we are responsible for what we have, for God can take it away suddenly. Avoid the dangers of self-sufficiency.

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

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By Susan Larson, Co-leader

In the spring of 2021 COVID vaccines had been available for several months, but their distribution was uneven. Pharmacies and providers didn't know who had which vaccine. Some had none while others had an abundant supply that they were willing to share. It was in this spirit of cooperation that the Bring Summer Back Committee was born, initially coordinated by Blue Ridge Regional Hospital. Healthcare providers in Mitchell and Yancey counties began meeting in the early morning by Zoom in a kind of Swap Shop for vaccines. The hospital invited Mountain Community Health Partnership, the Mitchell and Yancey Health Departments, PATH, SEARCH, the YMCA, the two Boards of Education, and the Blue Ridge Partnership for Children to join them. Almost a year later the group has grown to over a dozen organizations, and is administered by SEARCH with the help of staff member Allison Edge, board member Ed Seel, and moderator Karin Rolett. And their range of activities has broadened well beyond supplying vaccines.



At about the same time The N.C. Department of Health and Human Services came out with a well-stocked toolkit called "Bring Summer Back" (BSB) to inform and influence targeted ages. Our local group named itself after this tool kit, which included posters, flyers, and other printable messages along with boxes of free materials such as masks, Frisbees, sunglasses, and informational flyers to raise COVID awareness. These were distributed by community groups and schools throughout the two counties. Working with Mountain Community Health Partnership, SEARCH adapted a flyer with local images, had it printed in English and Spanish, and delivered it to middle and high school students who were newly eligible to be vaccinated.

The BSB Committee followed up by posting that flyer on their own websites and Facebook pages. SEARCH created a half-page newspaper ad that showed three generations of two Yancey County families all getting vaccinated, and MCHP put together a multi-generational billboard featuring four members of one Mitchell County family who had proudly been vaccinated. Their picture became the centerpiece of a tent card placed in local restaurants. Committee members contacted churches, schools, and sports camps to host vaccine clinics. Hispanic groups were quite responsive to having vaccine clinics, especially when Spanish-speaking staff members from the YMCA and Asheville groups were involved. When it became apparent that the public needed to be able to find testing and vaccine sites, SEARCH volunteered to maintain an updated list with this information and to get it to the BSB participants. The list was also printed for distribution at summer fairs and festivals like the Rotary Bar-B-Que and Bluegrass Festival in Spruce Pine and the Mt. Mitchell Crafts Fair in Burnsville.

Another way of educating the public about COVID has been through videos and on the radio. Ellie Hoover, MCHP's new public media editor, has been film-

ing doctors answering questions about COVID. In videos with Dr. Chad Smoker and Dr. Liz Peverall, the doctors clearly address some of the issues that have been on peoples' minds about this strange and upsetting virus. Ed Seel interviewed and videoed Marilyn Woodby, who spoke frankly about contracting COVID before she was in the age group eligible for the vaccine and becoming a "long-hauler". Her message to anyone watching was clear. "In my humble opinion vaccines are what is going to save this country if indeed it survives this pandemic." All the videos can be seen on the SEARCH website: www.searchwnc.org.



A worker administered the COVID vaccine during an early drive-through clinic.

Since March of 2020 WKYK has generously provided air time and radio host Bruce Ikard to interview people about COVID-related topics on the program "M-Y Health Matters." In recent months these interviews have featured Dr. Steve Kimmel talking about vaccines for children and Dr. Philip Mitchell updating the public on the latest CDC guidance. Doctors talking about the virus have aimed to be informative and not judgmental, recognizing that even though some people are hesitant about getting vaccinated, they can take precautions to prevent infection.

For those unfortunate people who did contract COVID, Blue Ridge Regional Hospital was able to offer an infusion of monoclonal antibodies when they became available. While not a cure, during the Delta spike and up until the Omicron variant emerged, for those who qualified it was a way to lessen the severity of the virus. BRRH was an early leader in Western North Carolina to offer this and patients traveled from a distance to get the infusion. More recently Chris Day, the head of the pharmacy at BRRH, has also kept BSB informed about where the Merck and Pfizer oral antiviral pills could be obtained when they were approved in early 2022 for use for people who had contracted COVID.

The advent of these pills was welcome news when the Omicron variant hit and caused a shortage of hospital beds throughout the state. In the face of patient resistance to being vaccinated there was at least something that doctors could prescribe to people who met the criteria for the medications.

Another helpful tool came from the federal government in early 2022 in the form of highly effective test kits, available to every household. The Mountain Community Health Partnership ordered the maximum amount allocated to them (a truckload) and made them widely available, through the schools, churches, nonprofits, and the Mitchell and Yancey Health Departments, along with generous supplies of high-quality masks.

Members of the Bring Summer Back group recently asked themselves what they've accomplished to date and their answers suggest why people are willing to start their day with an 8:00 a.m. Zoom meeting every other week. They say that the information provided to the different health care agencies has helped counter vaccine disinformation. The meetings have been an effective way to coordinate the sharing of scarce resources and redirect them where they could do the most good. And on a personal level, participants say the meetings make them feel like they're "not in this fight by ourselves."

They also noted that Bring Summer Back was very successful in improving collaboration among all healthcare entities, including several non-profits that served children and families. And though the actions of the Bring Summer Back group may not have changed many people's minds about getting the COVID vaccine, the group agreed that if they were able to save one life, then they were successful. Our local Bring Summer Back group will continue to follow the evolution of the virus and how it impacts our local communities, hoping to build on what has been learned to help our communities to find ways to deal with such matters as the need for rehab services for people with Long Haul COVID and the effects of the pandemic on young people.

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

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Foundation Forward

Thaddeus Kosciuszko

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.

On February 4, 1746, Thaddeus Kosciuszko was born in eastern Poland. He studied in a Warsaw academy, then was a civil and military engineering student in Paris. When Thaddeus learned that the American Revolution needed engineers, he crossed the Atlantic, surviving a life-threatening voyage.

Shortly after arriving, Thaddeus read the Declaration of Independence and was overcome by patriotic emotions. Discovering that Jefferson was its leading author, he made a point of meeting him. This introduction began their lifelong friendship. In addition, Jefferson oversaw Kosciuszko's appointment as a colonial engineer to protect forts and waterways.

Kosciuszko built and improved defenses. His designs stopped Burgoyne and his troops at the Battle of Saratoga, leading to a turning point in the Revolution. He was also responsible for developing and defending forts and using cheveaux de frises (protruding spiked logs), to protect important sites and locations such as Philadelphia and West Point.

He also designed flat bottom boats for Nathaniel Greene and could carry them overland. Thad's boats and scouting maneuvers led to surmounting Cornwallis in the famous Race to the Dan River. Kosciuszko chose the Guilford, North Carolina, battleground to array defenses. Though Cornwallis technically defeated Greene there, Thad's strategies all but shattered Cornwallis' army, contributing to Cornwallis' surrender at Yorktown.

Returning to Europe, Kosciuszko led troops against Russia and Prussia. As the Polish commander-in-chief, Thaddeus offered perks to encourage citizens to join the military. The incentives angered the nobility, but Kosciuszko continued. As a result, he was wounded and became a prisoner of war. Eventually freed, Thad reunited with Jefferson and Washington.

Thad again returned to Europe to fight with Napoleon's army but soon realized that Napoleon was insincere. Returning to America, Kosciuszko received his military back pay and was given acreage in Columbus, Ohio.

Brigadier General Thaddeus Kosciuszko died in 1817 in Switzerland. Towns, streets, and buildings in America are named for him. Thad willed his military accounts to Jefferson. Perplexed by slavery in America, Thaddeus left instructions for his assets to pay for the freedom and education of the enslaved.

Washington revealed that Kosciuszko was a true patriot and involved in creating liberty. Jefferson described him as supporting freedom for all.

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 get in touch with 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.

Mitchell County Farm Bureau Women's Committee

Book Project

By Gloria Huskins
Mitchell County



Each year, Mitchell County Farm Bureau Board of Directors purchases the Ag Book of the Year to donate to our local public libraries and the libraries in our Elementary Schools. This year's book is "How to Grow a Monster" by Kiki Thorpe and discusses growing zucchinis.

To make this a fun activity for our children our Women's Committee members read the book to a class at each of the schools before donating to their libraries.

1. Sheila Speight reading to Brittany Carvers 1st grade class at Greenlee Elementary.
2. Sheila Speight and Sherry Bartlett presenting the book to Misty McGraw, Greenlee Librarian
3. Sherry Bartlett presented our book to the Spruce Pine Public Library Librarian Jessica Jackson while Sheila Speight and Gloria Huskins Look On
4. Sherry Bartlett reading Mr. Ethan Thomas' 2nd-grade class at Gouge Elementary School
5. Sheila Speight and Sherry Bartlett donated the book to Chad Calhoun, Principal of Gouge Elementary for their library.



6. Pictured is Sherry Bartlett presenting to Mindy Boyd, Assistant Librarian at Bakersville Public Library
March 3, 2022, was 1-3
March 9, 2022, was 4-6

Gloria Huskins is County Liaison/Licensed CSR at Mitchell County Farm Bureau and attends Altapass Baptist Church.

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Crossword

Crossword 277

ACROSS

- 1 The ___ is not held secure, the sail is not spread (Isa 33:23)
- 5 he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of ___ (2 Sam 6:19)
- 9 Then God said, "Let the ___ produce vegetation (Gen 1:11)
- 13 whatsoever hath ____, that shall ye not offer (1,7) (Lev 22:20) KJV
- 14 But if he be ___ than thy estimation, then he shall present (Lev 27:8) KJV
- 15 The twenty ninth book of the Old Testament.
- 16 The ___ trees cover him with their shadow (Job 40:22)
- 17 Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur and ___ the five kings of Midian (Num 31:8)
- 18 I came near unto ___ of them that stood by (Daniel 7:16)
- 19 ___ man can live and not see death? (Ps 89:48)
- 20 they which went up also from Telhahasha, Cherub, ___ (Neh 7:61) KJV
- 21 They ___, "The Lord needs it." (Luke 19:34)
- 23 I hold ___ to your statutes, O LORD (Ps 119:31)
- 25 "You ___ were with Jesus of Galilee," she said (Matt 26:69)
- 26 know that you have no authority to ___ taxes (Ezra 7:24)
- 29 topaz, and the diamond, the ___, the onyx (Ezek 28:13)
- 32 their sailors came alongside to trade for your ___ (Ezek 27:9)
- 34 saying, ___, Eli, lama sabachthani (Matt 27:46)
- 36 you must cancel any debt your brother ___ you (Deut 15:3)
- 38 ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you ___ (Matt 11:28) KJV
- 39 the hour cometh, ___, is now come, (John 16:32) KJV
- 40 from the hand of the wicked, from the ___ of evil (Ps 71:4)
- 43 lies down, like a lioness who ___ to rouse him? (Gen 49:9)
- 44 a vine, and brought forth branches, and shot forth ___ (Ezek 17:6) KJV
- 46 Saul and Abner son of Ner had ___ down (1 Sam 26:5)
- 49 he entered the temple ___ and began driving out those who were (Luke 19:45)
- 50 We ___ whenever we are weak but you are strong (3,4) (2 Cor 13:9)
- 54 in ___, Zeboim and Neballat (Neh 11:34)
- 57 The body is a ___, though it is made up of many parts (1 Cor 12:12)
- 58 Sir, come down ___ my

- child die (John 4:49) KJV
- 59 30th book of the Old Testament
- 60 If anyone ___ to be first, he must be the very last (Mark 9:35)
- 61 will men take ___ of it to hang any vessel thereon (1,3) (Ezek 15:3) KJV
- 62 rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, ___, slander (Col 3:8)
- 63 forthwith they sprung up, because they had no ___ of earth (Matt 13:5) KJV
- 64 You were in ___, the garden of God (Ezek 28:13)
- 65 the most upright worse than a ___ hedge (Mic 7:4)
- 66 Likewise every good ___ bears good fruit (Matt 7:17)
- Down**
- 1 You will overthrow every fortified city and every ___ town (2 Kings 3:19)
- 2 a gentle tongue can break ___ (1,4) (Prov 25:15)
- 3 Multitudes who ___ in the dust of the earth will awake (Dan 12:2)
- 4 exiles who lived at ___ Abib near the Kebar River (Ezek 3:15)
- 5 make its plates and ___ of pure gold (Ex 25:29)
- 6 The law is only ___ of the good things that are (1,6) (Heb 10:1)
- 7 let them also ___ love thy name be joyful in thee (Ps 5:11) KJV
- 8 David sent them to you to explore the city and ___ it out (2 Sam 10:3)
- 9 Teach me, O ___, ___ follow your decrees (4,2) (Ps 119:33)
- 10 there before me was a man riding ___ horse (1,3) (Zech 1:8)
- 11 Bel bows down, ___ stoops low; their idols (Isa 46:1)
- 12 by us who ate and ___ with him after he rose from the dead (Acts 10:41)
- 19 Therefore disaster ___ overtake him in an instant (Prov 6:15)
- 20 the poison of ___ is under their lips (Rom 3:13) KJV
- 22 The good shepherd ___ down his life for the sheep (John 10:11)
- 23 king of Tyre had furnished Solomon with cedar trees and ___ trees (1 King 9:11)
- 24 To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. ___ (Phil 4:20)
- 27 with the words of David, and of Asaph the ___ (2 Chr 29:30)
- 28 he himself gives all men life and breath and everything ___ (Acts 17:25)
- 29 "All these I have kept since I was a ___," he said (Luke 18:21)
- 30 twenty he goats, two hundred ___, and twenty rams (Gen 32:14)

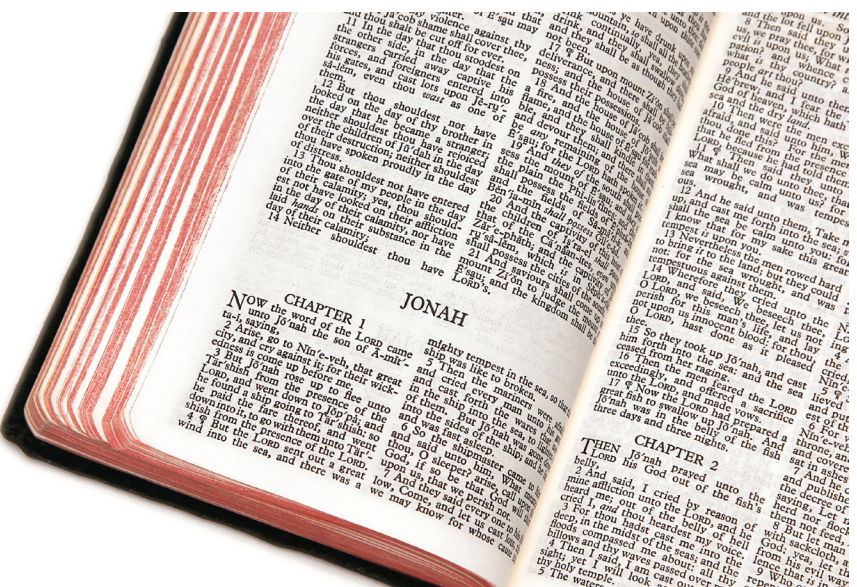
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- 31 Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor ___ (Luke 12:24)
- 33 he was riding upon his ___, and his two servants were with him (Num 22:22)
- 35 seven of every kind of clean animal, a male and ___ mate (Gen 7:2)
- 37 I particularly ___ you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon (Heb 13:19)
- 38 "At midnight the cry ___ out: 'Here's the bridegroom!' (Matt 25:6)
- 40 ___ your sword upon your side, O mighty one (Ps 45:3)
- 41 gather your children together, ___ hen gathers her chicks (2,1) (Luke 13:34)
- 42 the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the ___ (Amos 9:13)
- 43 there was a continual ___ given him of the king (Jer 52:34) KJV
- 45 here were plentiful sup-

- plies of flour, fig cakes, ___ cakes (1 Chron 12:40)
- 47 wicked men have ___ among you (Deut 13:13)
- 48 In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to ___ (Ps 71:1)
- 51 Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the ___ (Matt 26:6)
- 52 angels hastened Lot, saying, ___, take thy wife (Gen 19:15) KJV
- 53 the ___ forest has been cut down (Zech 11:2)
- 55 As ___ man who casteth firebrands (1,3) (Prov 26:18) KJV
- 56 they will ___ out the bread by weight (Lev 26:26)
- 57 loose the bands of wickedness, to ___ the heavy burdens (Isa 58:6) KJV
- 60 she began to ___ his feet with her tears (Luke 7:38)
- 61 picnic pest (Prov 6:6)

Solution on page 14



Wanting an Exit

By Tracy Jessup



“Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” (Isaiah 55:6-7)

In his book *The Examined Life: How We Lose and Find Ourselves*, psychoanalyst Stephen Grosz shares the story of how Marissa Panigrosso survived the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center. When the plane first hit the north tower, she was on the ninety-eighth floor of the south tower, talking to two of her co-workers. “She felt the explosion as much as she heard it. A blast of hot air hit her face as if an oven door had just been opened. A wave of anxiety swept through the office. Marissa Panigrosso didn’t pause to turn off her computer, or even to pick up her purse. She walked to the nearest emergency exit and left the building.

The two women she was talking to...did not leave...In fact, many people in Marissa Panigrosso’s office ignored the fire alarm, and also what they saw happening 131 feet away in the north tower. Some of them went into a meeting... In Marissa Panigrosso’s office, as in many of the other offices in the World Trade Center, people did not panic or rush to leave. ‘That struck me as very odd,’ Marissa said.”

Grosz continues, “What struck Marissa Panigrosso as odd is, in fact, the rule. Research has shown that when a fire alarm rings, people do not act immediately. They talk to each other, and they try to work out what is going on. They stand around. This should be obvious to anyone who has ever taken part in a fire drill. Instead of leaving the building, we wait. We wait for more clues – the smell of smoke, or advice from someone we trust. But there is also evidence that, even with more information, many of us still won’t make a move” (pp. 121-22).

Today’s passage issues a call for repentance and emphasizes the choices we face in the course of our lives. God issues an open invitation to be part of his redemptive purpose. This invitation – this hope – is extended even to the wicked and unrighteous. If we call upon the name of the Lord in repentance and return to God, God will freely forgive us and include us in the plans he has purposed all along. The question is this: Do we want an exit from every weight that slows us down and the sin that so easily trips us up (cf. Hebrews 12:1)?

Grosz states that he is not surprised at people standing around, unwilling to make a move. “We resist change. Committing ourselves to a small change, even one that is unmistakably in our best interest, is often more frightening than ignoring a dangerous situation... We want to know what new story we’re stepping into before we exit the old one. We don’t want an exit if we don’t know exactly where it is going to take us” (p. 123).

The season of Lent has a way of reminding us of aspects of our lives in which we need an exit. Rather than continuing to be stuck in our fears and complacency, we need to “seek the Lord” and “call on him,” taking the steps of repentance that lead to the exit, restoration, and renewal God offers to each of us.

Prayer: Lord, we seek you, cry out to you, and forsake our wicked ways. Thank you for being the exit from our sin, guilt, and shame.

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.



By Joe Sturz
Shenandoah, Virginia

The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord (Psalm 37:23-24) We plan our days but determine what will happen (Proverbs 16:9; 19:21). We pridefully assume we can control our time and often say to someone we will do such and such tomorrow or the next day as if we controlled our future (Proverbs 11:2). God says He is in control and we should not pridefully presume what we will do tomorrow (James 4:13-14).

So when we make commitments we should humbly qualify them by adding the qualification "if the Lord wills" we will do such and such (James 4:6,15). This is so because God's plan for our lives (Rom. 8:28; Eph. 1:11) often includes such unanticipated things as:

- delays caused by such things as sudden health issues and the hindrances of sinful people (Genesis 50:20; Psalm 22:8; Prov. 21:1),
- disasters, accidents, slowdowns, and break downs (Isaiah 45:7),
- interference by Satan that God allows and uses to further His own plan (Job 1:1-2:7; 42:1-17; Psalm 115:3; Proverbs 16:4; Luke 10:17-20; John 13:2,27; I Thess. 2:18).

So let us pray over our ideas and plans and humbly look to God to allow them to be fulfilled (Psalm 37:5). Let us qualify our plans for tomorrow to be qualified with the caution "Lord willing I will do such and such" (James 4:15). We have no guarantees for our future except for God's promises in His timing (II Cor. 1:20; II Peter 3:9;). That is why going into debt for depreciating items is very risky because we have no guarantee that our income will continue at present levels (Proverbs 22:7; Romans 13:8).

Brother Joe "Lord willing I will continue daily messages" Sturz Monday, March 14, 2022

To become a Christian you must believe in Jesus Christ the God-man (John 3:16) and the saving work He did shedding His blood on the Roman cross (I Corinthians 2:2; 15:3-4) as the only way to God and His heaven (John 14:6). Jesus suffered and died on the cross to take the holy God's just and fair punishment due to the sins of His people and remove their sinful guilt. Therefore satisfying the Holy God's justice and allowing Him to be merciful and forgive their sins without violating His justice. God raised His Son Jesus Christ from the dead on the third day showing His acceptance of His Son's sacrifice in their place and so secured for them a place in heaven (I Cor. 15:1-4, 12-24; Romans 4:25; 5:1).

Confess to God the Father and turn from your sins and accept His Son Jesus Christ's person and work for you personally and have His forgiveness (I John 1:9). Now you will want to Live in obedience to Him and His Word: active, serving, and accountable in a Bible-believing church from now on (John 8:31-32; Hebrews 10:22-26).

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Sharing what the Lord has taught me through His Word, 42 years of marriage, 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.

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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.

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