



BLUE RIDGE CHRISTIAN NEWS



Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

Service with a Smile

By Caron Cline
Burke County

Mother's Day is observed each year on the second Sunday in May to celebrate the sacrificial love and commitment shown by mothers toward their children. In my own experience, the word 'mother' is synonymous with 'servanthood'. I do not remember one morning during my childhood and adolescent years that my mother did not cook a large breakfast which included meat, eggs, toast, and cereal. She was convinced that proper nutrition was crucial for the brain to retain the information gained in the classroom. Every evening we also gathered around the table for a great Southern home-cooked meal. I generally took these meals for granted until I was old enough to realize that not everyone had the gift of cooking. Partaking in substandard cuisine left me longing for home. My mother was also willing to sacrifice her time in service to those outside the family. My dad was a pastor and for some time, visited the Caldwell County jail twice per week. On one particular visit, a man sentenced to a short stint in the jail asked my father if he would keep his four-year-old daughter until he was released. My parents did not know this man nor had they ever met his daughter, however, my mother graciously agreed to welcome this child into our home. The extra care and attention required by a neglected four-year-old must have been quite a sacrifice, especially since I was about 9 and my brother was two years younger. Yet, my parents lavished this little girl with love and grace. We have no idea where she is today, but I do not doubt that my mother made a difference in her life.

In 1976, my father was called to be the pastor of Pleasant Hill Baptist Church in Morganton, NC. This required a move; therefore, my mother chose to resign from public employment and partner in ministry with my father. Naturally, this meant less income for the family but it was never discussed in my presence. Many years later, my dad shared with me that for a few winters my mom sacrificed a warm coat so that my brother and I could have one. What a portrait of a selfless mother! We also lived next door to the church in the parsonage. People would pop in and



out throughout the week during those early years of ministry. My mother always had a made-from-scratch cake available to those who crossed our threshold. On top of that, I cannot count the times that my dad invited unexpected guests for Sunday lunch. Somehow my mom always

seemed to find enough food for everyone. Hospitality is definitely my mother's spiritual gift and she always offered selfless service with a smile! My mother is now 80 years of age, but in the last ten years, she has been involved with Jaime Torres Ministries, an organization focused on supporting prisoners and those bound by substance abuse. In fact, she inspired the formation of the ministry. This multi-generational and multi-cultural group affectionally refers to her as Mama Cline. Although her health has slowed her down in recent months, she is still a vital part of mothering an incredible group of people. Her greatest desire is to be healed for the express purpose of serving others. Many times, I have heard my mother echo the words of John, the beloved disciple, when he said, 'Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth'. (1 John 3:18) My mother, Meredith Cline, has not grown weary in doing good and someday she will reap an abundant reward!



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.

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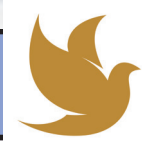
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“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace: that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation: that saith unto Zion. Thy God reigneth!”

Isaiah 52:7 KJV



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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

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Landis Orthodox Presbyterian Church

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

Elder Mike Cloy

opcmikecloy@gmail.com

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

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Worship Ps. 96:3; John 17:1*

Berry Chapel Baptist Church

280 Chapel St.
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www.berrychapelbaptist.com

Pastor - Steve Williams

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Service 7:00 PM

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Tuesday Night - 7 PM

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

2187 Jamestown Road
Morganton, NC
828-584-8212

Pastor Steve 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
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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
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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

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Newland Christian Church

2800 Millers Gap Highway
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www.newlandchristianchurch.com

Pastor - Phillip Greene

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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.
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www.burkemontbaptist.org

Sr. Pastor - Dr. Luke Lane

Sunday Services
8:30a - Early Worship
9:45a - Sunday School
11:00a - Worship
Wednesday Services
6:30p - Adult Choir & Orches-
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Sunday Worship - 10:45 am
Sunday Evening - 6:00 pm
Wednesday Evening - 6:30 pm

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48 Church Road
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The Inspiring Word

By Terry Cheek Th.D.
McDowell County



As spring unfolds to greet us with new life, you can begin with me a new series, an expository study of the book of Romans. Studying Romans will require a few things: time, patience, and persistence; for this writer and you, the reader. As a writer, I commit to you prayerful and dedicated attention to God’s word. As you read these articles, will you commit to pray with me for God to lead us through this work?

The church of Rome had been on Paul’s mind and heart for some time. He desired to visit the church, but circumstances prevented him. Paul’s epistle fills a conviction until he can make the trip in person. This epistle has been called by many scholars Paul’s finest work. Around the mid-first century, Rome was a hotbed of tension, culminating in political action from Emperor Claudius dictating the eviction of Jews from Rome. With the exception, the church remained well established and well respected as an example of faith and dedication. This powerful testimony made its way to Paul in Corinth. He was full of praise to God and encouragement to the church of Rome. However, Paul was also worried about worldly influence, temptation and deception. With some of the background set, the study of Paul’s epistle to the Romans can begin.

Understanding without a doubt that Paul wrote this letter is undeniable if you accept the Bible as God’s inerrant and inspired word. Paul begins with his roman name. In Romans 1:1, “1Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,” Paul uses potent words to begin this epistle; servant, apostle, separated, and gospel. These words point out who he is and his calling. There can be no denial of Paul’s authority by those reading this epistle.

To lay a strong foundation for this series, we need to look deeper at each one of these words. These are not just middle-English words. They convey a serious and authoritative basis for our study. Servant translates the Greek word 2doulos, which is used by Paul when talking about Christ’s relationship to the Father in Philippians 2:7 “3But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:” Servant expresses Paul’s commitment to Christ. At the same time, an apostle (Greek, 4Apostolos) establishes Paul’s authority as Christ’s appointee. This authority refers to preaching and founding, disciplining, and supervising churches. I will combine the final two words into a brief comment of understanding. Paul becomes separated from the world to proclaim the gospel. As a Pharisee, Paul had set his life apart with strict observance of Jewish law, ceremony, ritual, and custom. As a born-again Saint of God, Paul’s life work will become proclaiming and furthering the gospel. The Holy Spirit records Paul’s being set apart for God’s work in two places. Act 9:15 “5But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:” and also Galatians 1:15-17 “6But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me, but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.” I am going to stop my first article at this point. There is a tremendous weight and responsibility given to each Saint of God to realize how the first verse of Romans chapter one shapes our lives. Every Saint must see themselves as a servant set apart to carry the gospel by word and deed every day of our lives. Until next month, read this over and over again this article and prayerfully seek Paul’s passion in your life.

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

Works Cited

- 1 King James Bible (Thomas Nelson Publishers., 2011)
- 3 IBID
- 5 IBID
- 6 IBID
- 2 Strong’s exhaustive concordance of the Bible (Strong, Kohlenberger, Swanson, and Strong, 2005)
- 4 IBID

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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Breaking the Ice: Starting Gospel Conversations

By Rev. John B. Sorensen



Let’s face it. Beginning conversations, in general, can be difficult. They may even feel awkward or forced. We often don’t know how to begin and fear being rejected. Some of us may avoid starting conversations altogether – especially when it comes to starting conversations about faith.

The truth is, I get nervous every time I start to talk to someone about spiritual matters. But God did not call us to remain silent. He commissioned us to share the hope that we have in Christ Jesus (1 Peter 3:15). To do that, we must be willing to start a conversation.

But how do we break the ice and start those spiritual conversations with the people around us? Pray. First, begin praying for the people in your life and for those in your community who don’t know Jesus. Praying for others not only opens the door for God to move, but it also breaks our hearts for the lost. Then ask God to give you the confidence to speak when the time is right.

Pay attention. When our hearts are broken for the lost, we begin to notice opportunities all around us – people who are hurting, broken and looking for hope. As you engage with the people you already know and those in your community daily, a simple question like How are you really doing today? can spark a conversation. Listen as they share what they are dealing with. Often what they say will provide an open door for us to share the Gospel.

Dig deeper. Ask questions. Let people know that you care and are truly concerned with the situation they are facing. Don’t worry about what you will say next. Focus on the other person and their needs. You can begin to naturally shift the conversation to spiritual matters by asking questions like: How is your spiritual life? Or, if God were in your life more, do you think it would improve?

Share a story. Most people are willing to listen to you if you have shown the courtesy of listening to them. However, I still suggest asking permission first before sharing spiritual thoughts. Their agreement leaves the door wide open for you to share what God has done in your life. Keep it short. Don’t share your entire life’s story. Choose one story that is relevant to their situation, where you have personally seen God move. Not only does it open the door for a deeper conversation about faith, it often strengthens your connection with the person you are speaking to.

Not every conversation will lead to a full presentation of the Gospel, but many will. People are hungry. They are looking for answers, but most simply won’t ask. These opportunities are all around us. We just need to start the conversation.

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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Roan Mountain Baptist Church

"A Crossroad in Life"

By Russell McKinney
Mitchell County



The word “crossroad” probably brings up a certain mental image to you. I myself envision a dirt road out in the middle of nowhere that comes to a four-way intersection with three other dirt roads. The person who comes to such a place must make a decision. He can go straight, right, or left. For that matter, he can even turn around and go back if he is too afraid or too indecisive to choose. But make no mistake, he’s got to make some kind of move.

As we know, there are times when life brings us to a crossroads. One man who came to such a place was Lot, the nephew of Abraham (who was then known as Abram). The story is found in Genesis chapter 13.

Abraham and Lot lived alongside each other in the land of Canaan, and each of them was very wealthy. In particular, they both had large flocks and herds. This became a problem when their region could no longer support the combination of their flocks and herds. Strife arose between the herdsmen of the two camps, so much so that something had to be done about the situation.

That’s when Abraham lovingly asked Lot to separate from him. He said, “Please, let’s put a stop to this fighting over grazing and watering territory. It’s a big land. If you take the left, I will take the right, and if you take the right, I will take the left.” It was a simple and godly solution to a very real problem.

But here’s where Lot made two mistakes. Mistake #1: He didn’t humbly and graciously pass the choice back to Abraham. You see, not only was Abraham the elder, he was the one to whom God had prophetically given all of Canaan. Truth be told, if it wasn’t for Abraham, Lot wouldn’t have even been in Canaan. Mistake #2: Lot made his choice based solely on what looked good to him at the time. He looked down upon the plain of Jordan, which was well watered like a beautiful garden, and quickly said, “I’ll take that part of the land.” He didn’t pray about that decision. He didn’t seek God’s will about it. He just latched himself onto something that was appealing to his eyes.

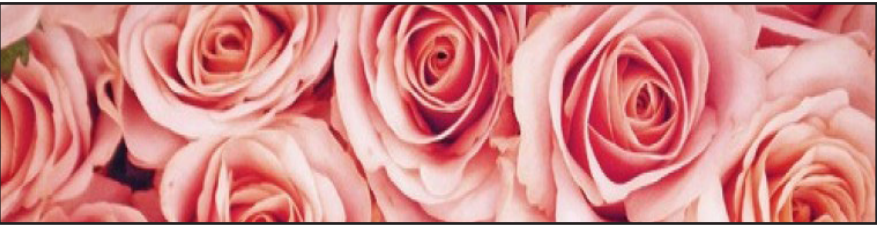
That old saying “all that glitters is not gold” hadn’t been invented yet, but it would have helped Lot to hear it. Sure, that vast plain of Jordan was desirable in appearance, being lush and fertile. That appearance, however, masked the fact that the plain was dotted with wicked cities. You’ve heard of Sodom and Gomorrah, haven’t you? Well, those twin cities were located squarely in the heart of that plain.

Not surprisingly, Lot, being the spiritually and morally weak person he was, soon came under the tempting influence of Sodom. He began by setting up his camp and staking down his tents near Sodom (Genesis 13:12). Later, he moved out of his tents and formally settled down in Sodom (Genesis 14:12). Finally, once he was settled there, he rose to a place of prominence and political prestige in the city. How do we know he rose to such a place? We know it because Genesis 19:1 speaks of him “sitting in the gate” of Sodom. Since ancient cities conducted their business at their gates, it was quite an earthly honor to hold what we might call a political seat at Sodom’s gate.

You say, “Okay, so where’s the downside? It sounds like Lot did well for himself.” Oh, there was plenty of downsides, enough to actually cancel out any upside that Lot’s choice brought him. First, Lot was living in Sodom when an enemy army came into town, looted it (Genesis 14:1-11), and carried Lot off with them as a prisoner of war (Genesis 14:12). That required Abraham to take 318 of his trained men and go and rescue him (Genesis 14:13-16). Second, Lot was still living in Sodom when God sent two angels to utterly destroy the city by way of fire and brimstone. Not only did Lot lose all of his possessions in that destruction, he also lost most of his family as well (Genesis 19:1-26). Third, with Sodom now a charred wasteland, Lot and his two surviving daughters ended up living in a cave in the mountains above the city of Zoar (Genesis 19:30). It was there that his life hit absolute rock bottom as he, on two consecutive nights, got drunk and had sexual relations with each of his daughters (Genesis 19:31-35). The products of those incestuous relationships were two sons who grew up to father the Moabites and the Ammonites, two of ancient Israel’s worst enemies (Genesis 19:36-38).

Do you see how Lot’s wrong choice back at life’s crossroads eventually brought catastrophe to his life? By failing to understand the dark vein that ran through what looked desirable to his eyes, he stupidly made the wrong choice at the crossroad and in so doing sent his life and the life of his family into a downward spiral. Beware, my friend, that you don’t make that same mistake. Even being a Christian isn’t enough to shield you from the results of going down the wrong road. Lot, after all, was a saved person in the sense of being an Old Testament believer (Second Peter 2:4-8). That’s why I implore you to pray serious prayers over your decisions and always seek God’s will rather than your own. He really does know the best path for you, and He will gladly share that knowledge with you if you will just slow down and ask Him.

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



Walnut Grove Church

Engage and Pursue!

By Kurt Bomar
Avery County



Have you ever prayed something like this, “Lord, I don’t know what you want me to do with my life but I am willing. Just show me what it is and I’ll do it. Open the door and I’ll walk through it”

I have. And I think it’s a wonderful prayer. But there can be a problem with it.... Complacency.

There is a tendency after uttering that prayer to sit back in our rocking chair and just wait. I can remember self-righteously thinking, “I don’t have to do anything now, I’ll just wait until I see this wide-open door in front of me with a flashing neon sign saying “this is your destiny, enter with confidence”.

While that can happen, I don’t think that’s the way God normally works. I think after we say that prayer, a better approach we can take was modeled by one of my heroes, Jonathan, son of Saul.

1 Sam. 14:8 Jonathan said, *"Come on, then; we will cross over toward them and let them see us. 9 If they say to us, 'Wait there until we come to you,' we will stay where we are and not go up to them. 10 But if they say, 'Come up to us,' we will climb up, because that will be our sign that the LORD has given them into our hands."*

What was he saying? “Lord, I’m available, if you want me to fight, I’ll fight. If you don’t that’s ok too. Just give me a sign.” That much is very similar to prayers you and I have prayed but note the difference: Where did they position themselves to hear from God?

11 *So both of them showed themselves to the Philistine outpost. "Look!" said the Philistines. "The Hebrews are crawling out of the holes they were hiding in."*

Notice they exposed themselves. They weren’t in the caves waiting on God, they were standing on the edge of a cliff in full view of the Philistines. I guess you could say they were pushing God—not to force Him for the answer they wanted. But they wanted an answer, and they placed themselves in a position to storm through the door in the event He opened it.

There is no telling how many opportunities we have missed, exciting adventures we never experienced, or lives we failed to invest in because we were in our caves waiting for God to open a door. A door we can’t even see from the cave. We need to be like a runner in his starting blocks ready to bolt through the door at the first glimpse of light as it cracks open.

What does that look like practically? It means we need to be willing to take a chance. We don’t often know if an opportunity is God-sent, or just coincidental. We need to expose ourselves and stand on the edge. Do something, give the door a push if necessary. In short, be brave and courageous and take a chance. What’s the worst that could happen? We might be taken advantage of or made to look like a fool. Is that really so bad? I think even then, our Father is proud of us for our motivation. But look at the potential reward. As Jonathan routed a stubborn enemy and inspired his country, we could be just action away from a life-changing moment. A moment that could change our destiny or the destiny of others.

The Lord has promised to close doors no man can open and to open doors no man can shut (Rev. 3:7), but you can’t see the door from inside the cave. Get out there and engage and pursue. Be like Jonathan!

Selah (think about it)



Kurt Bomar is pastor of Walnut Grove Church.

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By Doug Harrell
Mitchell County

“Her children arise up, and call her blessed; Her husband also, and he praiseth her.”
Proverbs 31:28 KJV



I was talking to my wife of almost 58 years, in fact, May 31 will be 58 years, and made the comment that I needed to write my Life Lessons for the month and was thinking about writing about marriage relationships and how critical they were to a long happy life. She suggested I write instead about Mother’s Day since that is coming up just after this paper hits the street and I agreed with her. Either one of those would be great topics, but I am going to follow her suggestion and focus on Mother’s Day.

I have been truly blessed to have a wife that has truly been a Biblical Mother in so many regards, nurturing, leading, teaching, and guiding the children through the years. I have seen her become a total mother bear when she felt like one of her children was being threatened unfairly. Usually, she is very mild-spoken and easy-going. We have had children that have had medical issues and spent months at a time at Duke hospital and you talk about an advocate, she was one. The doctors, even though she respected them, they did not intimidate her one bit, she willingly spoke up with her thoughts and opinions.

Over the years I have watched her Christian walk, the number of Bible Studies she has started and completed is amazing. Usually, at least two or three every year and she has passed that love for the scriptures on to the children, especially the girls. Her passion for working with the youth of the church was always foremost in her mind and she and I together spent years working with the youth groups in our various churches. Today, I see her literally spend hours at a time on the phone guiding and giving counsel to the children, boys and girls. Proverbs 31 is a chapter that describes her and others like her that I see.

The mother’s role in the development of the home and the children is such a critical role and in today’s society, I am sad to say, the addictions that are taking place have had a huge impact on our family structures. Women are facing the same addiction to alcohol and hard drugs that men are. Their bodies are being sold to pay for drugs and the sexual promiscuity abounds in many areas. We as a society need to love on and encourage our women, nurture them in our homes as they are growing up, and teach them conservative Christian values. The fathers are biblically to be the leaders of the family but the mothers are certainly the completers of the family, nothing can make a difference in the life of a child like a mother’s love for that child.

I want to encourage all of us to give thanks and encouragement to the mothers around us, to help those mothers that are struggling, to encourage them and their families to put a high priority on getting those children to church and exposing them to the Christian life and principles continually. Out here on the farm, I am blessed to see the examples of the love of the mother animals, watching the cows take care of their calves is amazing at times. The extent they will go to protect and feed those calves is at times breathtaking. I recently moved some cattle and one of the calves got left behind. That mother cow jumped the fence and walked all the way back to the barn, through the gate, waited for me to open it for her, and went and found that calf.

Let me finish this Life Lessons by saying thank you to all the godly mothers in our world, let us pray daily for them and the role that they play in the family and the lives of the children.

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

Humor

By Buddy Freeman
Madison County



Q: Why was the piano on the porch? A: Because it forgot its keys.

The somewhat crusty old missionary had been called back to the states for a visit and was getting tired of the endless round of dinners, parties, and teas in his honor. At one of the latter, the gushy women were pestering him for “stories of your adventures in the South Sea Islands.”

Recklessly, he told them, “Well, yes, once I discovered a whole tribe of women, very wild women, who had no tongues.
“No tongues!” cried Madam Chairman. “Heavens, how could they talk?”
“They couldn’t,” said he grimly. “That’s what made them wild.”

A married couple was arguing over who should make the coffee, the wife said that the Bible says that men should make the coffee. The husband asked, “Where does it say that?” The wife opened the Bible and said, “Right here in Hebrews!”

David’s new baby brother was crying very loudly so David asked his mom, “Where did he come from?” She said, “He came from heaven.” David said, “I can see why they threw him out!”

An accountant is having a hard time sleeping and goes to see his doctor. He says, “Doc, I just can’t get to sleep at night.” The Doctor asked, “Have you tried counting sheep?” The man says, “That’s the problem. I make a mistake and then spend three hours trying to find it.”

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

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Proverbs 31:26-27

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In your car, Take God with you wherever you go.

Just above your doorknobs, so your children know that His word opens the door to him.

In your child’s pocket as they leave for school, giving them the feeling/reminder that God is with them.

Taped to the back of your tv controller and on your computer screen.

Inside your cupboards, so it is a surprise each time you open the door.

In a bowl on the table to share when your children have a need or to offer their friends “One for the Road”.

Putting God’s word ON DISPLAY in the home is in fact a command. It is the second half of the greatest commandment; “Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, all of your mind, all of your strength. AND.... The four verses following the AND are God’s commands to parents. “And You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

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seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.
Matthew 6:33

given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature,
2 Peter 1:3

Cast your burden on the Lord and he will sustain you.
Psalm 55:22

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners
Isaiah 61:1

"I will never leave you nor forsake you."
Hebrews 13:5

He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."
John 3:16

Psalm 119:103
How sweet are your words to my taste
Sweeter than Honey

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us
1 John 1:9

those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.
Isaiah 40:31

God will wipe away every tear from their eyes;
Revelation 21:4

The LORD will watch over your coming and going, both now and forevermore.
Psalm 121:8

For I know the plans I have for you... plans to give you a hope and a future.
Jeremiah 29:14

His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness,
2 Peter 1:3

Cast your burden on the LORD, and he will sustain you;
Psalm 55:22

The Importance of Standing in an Evil Day

By Dr. Tom Walker
McDowell County



Our text verse for this study is found in Ephesians 6:13, which says, “Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”

We have already considered in our last study about the forces that are against us while we live in this world. Our three main enemies are the external (the world), the inward (our flesh), and the infernal enemy (the Devil). It is so important that we do not get discouraged or lose heart while we expend our lives for the Lord from day today.

The Christian life gets tough sometimes, but the hardest life to live is the life of the transgressor. The Bible says, “The way of the transgressor is hard” (Prov.13:15). The one who rebels against the commandments of God is the one who has a hard life. God gives us instruction for living to save us from some very damaging things that might occur to us in the future.

There is little doubt that we are in an evil day when we see so many people calling evil good and good evil. Evil came into this world through Satan himself, after he sought to receive the worship and adoration that only belongs to God. The following verses tell us where sin began. Isaiah 14:12-15 says, “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High, Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit.”

We do not know why God continues to allow evil to operate in this world. God could put an end to it instantly by whatever means He might choose. However, we do know all it involves, He has an individual plan for you and me and a plan for the universe as well. In the end, God will get maximum glory; He will make sure of it happening.

Why Should We Stand

Note the word “Wherefore.” It simply has the same idea as the word “therefore.” It goes back to a fact that was previously stated and what follows is based upon that fact. What does it point back to in the verse we are examining?

First, stand because of the “wiles” of the Devil. He is so wicked, so evil, so convincing, that we cannot let our guard down against him. Satan is called so many things in the Bible that reveals his very character. We do not have time to look in-depth at what all these titles mean, but here are a few of them.

Throughout the Bible, he is called Satan, which means an opponent or an adversary. Many other names are ascribed to him such as “roaring lion” seeking who he may devour. You can rest assured that Satan, the roaring lion, is up to no good at all. He is also called “the Devil.” That means a slanderer. He not only slanders God to man but also man to God.

In the Scriptures, he is also called “Belzebub” which means “lord of flies” or “lord of dung.” That title tells us about how vile he always is.

In Matthew 4:3 he is called a “tempter.” That designation is given to him because he sought to tempt the Lord Jesus in the areas of the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. We have to stand because the temptations of the devil so constantly come our way. It seems as though our tempter and adversary never give up.

In addition, the Devil is called a liar (John 8:44), the evil one (Matthew 13:19), and the enemy (Matt. 13:39). Many other titles are given to him in God’s Word.

Secondly, because of what we are wrestling or contending with from day to

day. Verse 12 reveals that our major enemies are unseen. They are called principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places. Flesh and blood, the seen are not as difficult to deal with as the unseen, fallen spirit world which we must face daily.

Thirdly, because we are living in an evil day (v.13). There is more than one word for “evil” in our Greek text. The word used in our verse in this study is translated to other places in our King James Version as bad, harm, lewd, malicious, and wicked. The two major words for “evil” are transliterated as “kakos” and “poneros.” Trench in his synonyms of the New Testament explains the difference in the following way: “The kakos(evil) may be content to perish in his own corruption, but the poneros(evil) is not content unless he is corrupting others and drawing them into his own destruction.” Our word for “evil” in verse 13 is poneros, which speaks of an evil that corrupts others and draws others into one’s own destruction.

When Should We Stand

It is important to not procrastinate or put off standing for the Lord and against evil. The word for “stand” is interesting. Some say it means to be set against something. When we examine the usage of the word for a stand, we discover it is translated as “resist” twice in our KJV. In Matthew 5:39 it is rendered “resist”-telling us that when others smite us to not resist but give them the other cheek.

We are to stand without delay. There are times when delaying what we know we ought to do puts us in great jeopardy. If you knew your house would suddenly blaze up in a roaring fire, you would not delay one second before removing yourself from its premises. Souls are at stake if we do not resist evil and live for God in this generation. People’s eternal destiny is at stake if we give in and give up in the spiritual battles, we face each day.

We are to stand in God’s strength while it is available. God would not ask us in His Word to stand against and resist evil if it were not possible to do so. If you have God in any situation, all things are possible. Since the honor of the family of God is at stake in the way we live, the Lord certainly desires to enable you to withstand and to stand. Acts 1:8 informs us---“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

We are to stand while God offers us armor. The Bible says we are to “put on” the whole or entire armor of God. The Bible does not leave us in the dark as to what to do that we might win in the daily battles of life against the forces that are against us. He has provided defensive armor and offensive weapons to keep us from retreating in the battles of life. To fail to use what God has provided for our success is a formula for failure.

The Results of Standing

We would be glad to do what Paul the Apostle is telling us if we realized the benefits that come by not being guilty of spiritual cowardice. The last part of verse 13 says, “having done all to stand.” That is a comprehensive and encompassing effort if a person does all that can be done to stand. Paul has reference to an all-out effort to stand for the Lord.

If you stand by resisting evil, God will be pleased. Jesus said of His Father, “I do always those things that please Him” (Jn.8:29). 2 Timothy 2:4 says, “No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.” It does not matter that much that we please others in life if at the same time we are not pleasing God. Saved people want to please the Lord.

If you stand by resisting evil, you can sleep well at night. We all have something called a conscience. Your conscience will either accuse you or excuse you concerning your actions and attitudes. It is best not to violate your conscience, because as you do it becomes more insensitive as time goes along. The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, his son in the ministry, in 1 Timothy 1:19 encouraging him by saying, “Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck.”

If you stand by resisting evil, others will be encouraged to do the same thing. Years ago, I was standing on the street of one of our major cities. I noticed a man standing up staring at a skyscraper. Others walked up and stood around him. Their heads immediately went up to try to see what he appeared to be seeing. I found out later he appeared he was looking at something in particular, but all he was doing was seeing how people would react to what he was doing. When others see you doing right, taking a stand for the Lord, it will encourage them to do the same thing.

Having done all to stand, just keep on standing for Christ and resisting evil.

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



May Is a Very Special Month Indeed

By Bruce Cannon
Mitchell County

What makes May a very special month? Two very important observances occur this month: Mother’s Day and Memorial Day. Both are very important in American life and should be embraced and celebrated by all!

First, May is the month where we are reminded that moms are special, to be honored, to be loved, spent time with, prayed for, and cherished. What a very special gift God gave the family when He placed His love deep in the heart of a mom. Even those moms who are not believers feel love, concern for, and feel very thankful for their children. But Christian moms, most especially those who walk close to the Lord, are very special!

When those moms love their children they do so with the full blessings of God: His wisdom, His power, His courage, and His strength. And, there is a huge difference! Those moms lead their children in the most important instruction in life.....how to know God, how to walk with God, how to please God, and how to be blessed by God. Those moms are extremely invaluable to a home, a nation, and a Church!

They are a guarantee that the next generation can be strong and face whatever storms and winds that blow. They have the peace of knowing that their children will be prepared to succeed in the things that truly matter in life!

The second special event is Memorial Day. And while I am a little concerned that our respect for moms is waning and the American family breaking down, I am deeply concerned about patriotism, the observance of Memorial Day, Veteran’s Day, and other patriotic remembrances or practices in the U. S. When will we get to the point in America where it will be politically incorrect to honor our war dead, to pledge our allegiance to the flag or to honor our veterans? With kneeling taking place during the national anthem, the Pledge of Allegiance being cast aside, the Anthem being pulled from many sporting and social events, and revisionists rewriting American history, I see it as a very strong possibility that Memorial Day and other patriotic practices will begin drawing ire from those who were not raised to respect our values.

America was founded as a Judeo-Christian nation. “In God We Trust” meant a lot to our earlier citizens. It first appeared on a two-cent coin in 1864. It is who we still are! Our hearts still break when we lose soldiers in battle. We still love our flag! It still blesses our hearts to see people reverent during the National Anthem or Pledge of Allegiance. It absolutely breaks my heart to see people disrespect either!

These two celebrations are two that MUST not be allowed to weaken or go by the wayside. Again, thank God for Moms! Love her, pray for her, celebrate her and honor her this Mother’s Day and every day. And, observe Memorial Day! Remember that there are so many families who have received the tragic news that a soldier had been killed OR that another soldier who faithfully served their country passed. We owe so much to those who were willing to leave home’s comfort and safety to fight for our freedom in all parts of our globe.

Thank God for Moms and thank God for our deceased, retired, and active military!



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.

Jesus And His Mom

By Steve Bietz
Burke County



This month, restaurants experience their busiest day of the year. In 2022 the date is Sunday, May 8th. We know it affectionately as Mother's Day. Mother's Day is also a big day for florists. Only Valentine's Day is a bigger day for florists with Mother's Day coming in second. Taking mom out to eat suggests that the plan is that for one meal, she will not need to cook or clean up. Something we have also learned, especially during Covid lockdowns, is that getting out of the house is a positive dynamic for our mental health. A key symptom of depression is difficulty getting out of the house. We know that having a strong network of family and friends can help us live longer.

I believe there is a strong connection between food and mood. And one does not need to be a biblical scholar to realize that the gospel writers share that Jesus enjoyed dining to the point that He understood the connection between the stomach and the brain. Of course, He did create us. Yet that does not entirely explain the dining phenomenon. Dining together at a restaurant for Mother's Day, anniversaries, birthdays, or other eventful occasions, tells me that spending money on experiences like eating out with mom is a greater joy than buying things. The experience of coming together around a table appears to take precedence over buying stuff. Purchasing and giving gifts is a good thing, but could it be that the sharing of our time is our most treasured gift.

I think Jesus would have enjoyed the Mother's Day experience. Again, the gospels, in particular, the Gospel of Mark, show us that Jesus always appears to be going to a meal, eating a meal, or finishing a meal. Jesus had some of his best quotes at the dining table, and great experiences.

Since we just finished with our Easter celebrations...which probably included some of those dining-together experiences, I can't help but consider Jesus and His mom, Mary, together on Golgotha. Jesus was on the cross, while His mom stood at the foot of her Son's cross. Though we know that Jesus came to this earth and became a human being because as God, He couldn't die. We know that from the foundation of the world, the Godhead had put a plan of salvation in place that would involve the death of a Savior. But Mary's understanding of all of this seems doubtful while she stood weeping at the foot of the cross as her Son was being executed most cruelly. Mary could not have ever anticipated, nor could any mom ever see coming, the experience that took place on Golgotha for a child.

Then Jesus sees His mom. No son would want his mom to experience this. What a moment. Jesus is unable to put His arms around His mom because his arms have been stretched out and nailed in place so that you and I might be redeemed. I don't know if Mary could reach up and touch her Son's feet. But Jesus, despite the extreme situation He is in, talks to His mom. With great honor and respect, Jesus gives her another son, the disciple John, who stood nearby.

Yes, I think the experience of Mother's Day and taking His mom out to eat would have been a real joy for Jesus. And this we do know, Christ is planning a banquet in the Heavenly Kingdom that will certainly dwarf any dining table we sit around on this sinful planet. If you have or had a Christian mom, I can pretty much guarantee that she prays or prayed for you. Moms hope and pray that we go to the foot of the cross and fall in love with Jesus. And if we fall in love with Jesus, that will be our mom's greatest Mother's Day experience of all.

Steve Bietz, Pastor, Morganton Seventh day Adventist Church.

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-H.O. Hirt, ERIE Founder*

Come And Bathe Our Nation In Prayer!

By Marlene Houk
Burke County



Colossians 2:6-7 *"Therefore, as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, overflowing with gratitude."*

On Thursday, May 5, the people who support the National Day of Prayer invite all to gather and pray for our nation. Thousands will join others to pray for seven parts of our beloved country's society during a brief hour at 12:00 noon. Leaders will pray for the church, education, media, government, business, the military, and our families.

The theme of National Day of Prayer this year is: Exalt the Lord. We exalt the Lord by praising Him for His power, love, and care for us. And we do this often by using a powerful tool that God offers to us—the tool of prayer.

By prayer, both little children and herculean men wield the same two-edged sword against our enemy, the devil. Through prayer, the icy cold chasms of hatred and prejudice move their mountains closer together. Because prayer bestows on us an Atlas-like strength, we feel compelled to conquer evil, vanquish hatred, and subdue our wild hearts. And through the mighty cleansing power of prayer, the waves of truth and love wash away regret and shame.

Prayer is, by definition, a:

Place we travel to a spiritual point that

Rules our hearts and minds with godly light,

Adding golden treasures to our trove of wisdom while

Yielding to the greatest power in the universe, the King of Kings!

Children delight in answered prayer. Years ago, my dainty, slender five-year-old stared, mesmerized, as I read from her Precious Moments prayer diary. Her eyes widened with wonder as she realized that a door leading to unknown worlds had opened in her heart. She had prayed that Jesus would help her find her baby doll's shoe, and it worked! Decades later, she works diligently as a prayer warrior, interceding for others and exalting the Savior. Over the years, the concerned prayers of a five-year-old blossomed into a field of treasure for herself and others. Prayer deepens our relationship with the King of Kings as we discover more about Him through the act of prayer.

We race toward the emergency room, some 20 miles down the dark, quiet interstate, my husband groaning pitifully in the passenger seat. "Please," I pray, "take the pain." Four words. Over and over. And he answered a distraught wife's prayer for relief from the kidney stone. Prayer brings sweet relief from the worries and anxieties when we lose control of life.

"What can I do?" my eighty-six-year-old mother says from her wheelchair, "There's plenty I exclaim. Pray, Praise, and Prepare to enjoy heavenly glories!" With prayer, she could climb Mount Everests back from defeat, plunge into refreshing living waters, and re-surface with renewed strength and purpose. Prayer enfolds old and young, mighty and dainty, lighting a way through the darkness of fear and the unknown. The discipline of prayer offers to change an attitude of the heart as well as extend to us the use of an accepted piece of armor to resist the enemy. To pray is to engage the services of angels as they attend to the minutia and the mountainous concerns of the Bride of Christ.

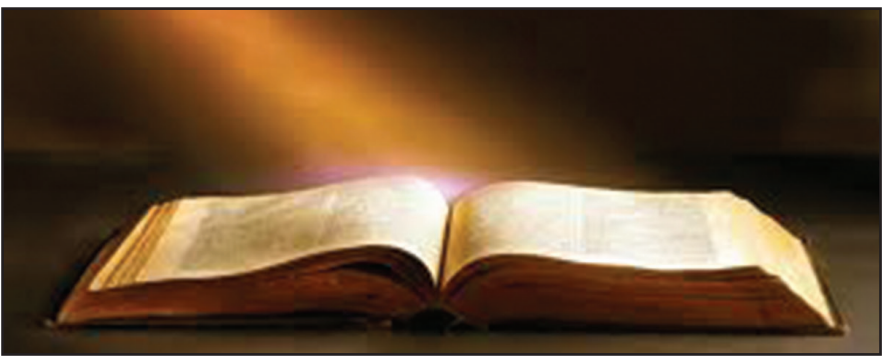
Prayer moves mountains, creates paths, annihilates giants with tiny spears of fear, and unfolds the panorama of a shining eternity with Him!

By it, nations can affect their destiny and change history's course through the channels of life. This is proven by our own United States. We are a nation rich in prayer and historically familiar with the breathtaking honor of approaching the King of Kings in His throne room. We are invited there, and the invitation lies regally upon the tables of our hearts. Respond as quickly as possible for it is a great honor to enter His presence!

Prayer is ensconced in the bedrock of our nation, liberally plastered on the walls of our stories, and recorded in our tomes. Our leaders have recognized its power and humbled themselves to participate in its empowering embrace.

Your invitation to the National Day of Prayer has been extended. Come pray with us for the well-being of America and for those in leadership next Thursday, May 5, 2022, at 12:00 Noon at the designated place in your county. Let's exalt the Lord Jesus Christ together!

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.Marlene-Houk.com



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Grand View Baptist Church

Salvation's Freeway

By Glenda Ward
McDowell County

“Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:” Romans 5:1

The Book of Romans is a carefully presented statement of FAITH as given to the apostle Paul by our Heavenly Father. The apostle Paul was intelligent, articulate, and committed to his calling. He presented the case of the Gospel clearly and forthrightly to believers. Paul felt a bond with the believers in Rome. They were his brothers and sisters in Christ whom he had never met, yet he loved them, and he longed to see them face-to-face. Paul sent them a letter, the Book of Romans, to introduce himself and to make a clear declaration of the faith. In this letter, Paul presents the facts of the Gospel (Romans 1:3). He builds an airtight case for the lostness of humanity and the necessity for God's intervention (Romans 1:18-3:20). Salvation is available to all, regardless of a person's identity, sin, or heritage. We are saved by grace (unearned, undeserved favor from God) through faith (complete trust) in Christ and His finished work. Through Him, we can stand before God justified, “not guilty” (Romans 3:21-5:21). Our freedom comes from being saved – freedom from the power of sin (Romans 6:1-23), freedom from the domination of the Law (Romans 7:1-25), freedom to become like Christ and to discover God's limitless love (Romans 8:1-39). It is explained how we fit into God's plan (Romans 9:1-12,12) and how we should live in complete submission to Christ: using our spiritual gifts to serve others (Romans 12:9-21), and to be good citizens (Romans 13:1-14).

Paul sets the foundations of the Christian faith. All people are sinful; Christ died to forgive sin; we are made right with God through faith; this begins a new life with a new relationship with God. If we read and study Romans carefully, we will never be at a loss to know what to believe. As we read through the Book, we can reexamine our commitment to Christ and reconfirm our relationships with other believers. The Christian life has practical implications that will affect how we choose to behave each day. It is not enough just to know the Gospel; we must let it transform our lives and let God impact every aspect of our lives.

Sin is refusing to do God's will. Since Adam's rebellion against God, our nature is to disobey Him. Sin causes us to want to live our own way rather than God's way. Because God is morally perfect, just, and fair, He is right to condemn sin. People sin by rebelling against God or by ignoring His Will. No matter how hard we try to live a good and moral life, we cannot earn salvation or remove our sin. Only Christ can do that by our salvation through faith in Him.

Salvation points out our need to be forgiven even though we don't deserve it. God in His kindness, through His gift to us, His only Son Jesus Christ forgives us our sins. He provides us the way to be saved. Christ's death paid the penalty for our sin. But for us to enter into a new relationship with God, we must believe that Jesus Christ died for us and that He forgives all our sins.

Growth as a believing Christian is by God's power. Believers are sanctified – made holy. We are set apart from sin, which enables us to become more like Christ. Because we are free from sin's control, we can grow in our relationship with Christ Jesus by trusting the Holy Spirit within us. We can overcome sin and temptation.

Sovereignty is overseen by God who cares about His people – past, present, and future. His ways of dealing with people are always fair and just. Because of God's mercy, anyone and all can be saved. But we must all respond to His mercy and accept His gracious gift of forgiveness to be saved. Because He is sovereign, we can let Him reign in our hearts.

Service is to give credit to God for His love, power, and perfection in all we try to do to serve Him properly. Serving Him in His Will unifies all believers enabling them to show love and sensitivity to others. By ourselves we cannot be fully Christlike – it takes the entire body of Christ to fully express Christ. Christians can be a symphony of service to God. Believers show experience in life through their new faith. We learn of the centrality of faith to becoming a Christian and living the Christian life. Apart from faith, we have no hope in life.

Grace, not works, is the basis of our Salvation. Human work can never save a person (Galatians 2:16). Faith is a gift God gives to those who believe in Jesus Christ because He is saving us (Ephesians 2:8). It is God's grace, not our faith, that saves. In God's mercy He gives us faith – a relationship with His Son that helps us become like Him. It is through the faith He gives that He carries us from death into life (John 5:24). We must accept God's gracious offer with Thanksgiving and allow Him to plant the seed of faith within us.

Salvation's Freeway:

- Everyone has sinned. (Romans 3:23)
- The penalty for our sin is death. (Romans 6:23)
- Jesus Christ died for sin. (Romans 5:8)
- To be forgiven for our sins, we must believe and confess that Jesus is Lord. Salvation comes through Jesus Christ. (Romans 10:8-10)

What Has God Done About Sin?

New Life – Sin's power is broken. (Romans 6:2-3); Your sin-loving nature is buried. (Romans 6:4); You are no longer under sin's control. (Romans 6:6); We can be certain that sin's power is broken.

New Nature – Now you share His new life. (Romans 6:5); Look upon your old self as dead; instead, be alive to God. (Romans 6:11); We can see ourselves as unresponsive to the old power and alive to the new.

New freedom – Do not let sin control you. (Romans 6:12); Give yourselves completely to God. Romans 6:13); are free. (Romans 6:14); You can choose your own master. (Romans 6:16); We can commit ourselves to obey Christ in perfect



freedom.

In the remaining chapters of Romans (12:1-16:27) Paul gives guidelines for living as a redeemed people in a fallen world. We are to give ourselves to Christ as living sacrifices, obey the government, love our neighbors, and take special care of those who are weak in the faith. We learn how to live our faith each day. *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”* (Romans 12:1-2). Only when the Holy Spirit renews, reeducates, and redirects our minds are we truly transformed.

We are to be a living sacrifice to God. “to God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ forever”. Amen (Romans 16:27).

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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3	9	4	8	5	6	1	7	2
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White Unto Harvest

By Jim Huskins
McDowell County



“Good judgment comes from experience, and experience comes from bad judgment.”

The truth of that old saying overwhelmed me recently as I mowed beside the road that fronts our homestead. My mower worked perfectly. It was satisfying work. About halfway through, I realized that I had been attempting and failing to accomplish good results with that mower for thirty-four years.

I was using an Austrian-style scythe that I bought in 1988. A good scythe is a marvelous tool for trimming, mowing lawns, making hay, and harvesting grain. My purchase was inspired by an essay in *The Gift of Good Land* by Wendell Berry and by David Tresemer’s *The Scythe Book*. I spent decades learning that a scythe is a complex tool that requires proper equipment, precise fit, and esoteric sharpening skills. Eventually, I realized that two writers I respected had steered me in several wrong directions.

Misdirection is nothing new. Jesus spent much of His ministry confronting it. The religious leaders of His day taught a form of worship mostly based on the opinions of men rather than the content of scripture. Those leaders were revered, and they misled many. Jesus railed against their self-centered religion to the point of calling them snakes.

One of His many conversations focused on false worship is found in John chapter four. Jesus violated a number of cultural taboos when He asked a Samaritan woman for a drink. He then used water as a metaphor to discuss her spiritual health. She wanted to avoid the sordid details of her personal life, so she attempted to steer the conversation toward the differences between Jewish and Samaritan worship. Jesus told her that God seeks those who will worship Him in spirit and truth. She knew from God’s Word that Messiah has all the answers. This is the only time in the Gospel accounts when Jesus states plainly that He is Messiah.

The result of this encounter was that a woman with a bad reputation became a missionary who led her entire village to the Savior. As residents of Sychar flocked to see the One with such miraculous ability, Jesus turned to His disciples and said, “*Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.*” (John 4:35b) His solution for this situation is found in Matthew 9:37-38, “*The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.*”

We have been misdirected by the notion that “following Christ” is about our health, our prosperity, and our happiness. Our call is to be “laborers in His harvest.” The job requires total devotion, the right tools, and skill in their use. What we need is not found in the doctrines and traditions of men. Those are what caused Jesus to refer to the theologians of His day as a brood of vipers. The tools for His harvest are found only in His Word.

I learned through decades of poor results from my good scythe that mere possession of an excellent tool is not enough. God’s harvest requires discipleship. A “disciple” of Jesus thinks and acts as He does. Jesus made it clear that the purpose of His life was to do the will of His Father. “*Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.*” (1 John 2:6) We cannot gather God’s harvest until we have been “harvested.” Jesus quoted Moses when He said to Satan, “*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.*” (Matthew 4:4) The doctrines and traditions of men say that most of God’s words were made irrelevant or “nailed to the cross.” Jesus says we live by “every word” that comes from God’s mouth. Who is more likely to be correct?

How can one know “every word that comes from the mouth of God” without reading His Word from the beginning? Any dependence on others to convey what God’s Word says will result in misdirection. Jesus tells us to love God with our entire being and to love our neighbors as ourselves. He did not tell us to have a “warm, gushy feeling” for God and our neighbors. He told us to live in a manner that places God’s requirements and our neighbor’s needs ahead of our own. The first five books of the Bible tell us how to do exactly that.

God’s harvest is dear to Him, and we can learn the skills necessary to do our part. After more than twenty years of frustration with my original scythe, and armed with a wealth of hard-won knowledge, I bought a new scythe that fit me and my needs. Since then, I’ve been able to properly maintain the tool and do good mowing. I was until recently, however, still frustrated with my original scythe.

Last year I mounted my old blade on a much better handle or snath. The new snath is a gorgeous, hand-made, steam-bent shaft of Northern Ash. It has two handles or grips placed to fit my height and arm length. This improved the scythe, but it still wasn’t right. The problem was that the mounting tang on the steel blade was set at the wrong angle for my height. The blade was hopelessly misdirected where it meets the grass. I had read that it is impossible to change that angle without damaging the blade. Recently I discovered a YouTube video showing how to heat the tang with a torch and change the angle. Now the old scythe mows perfectly.

The Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20 is the most important work ever assigned. The holy task of gathering and training members of the Kingdom of God is given to you and me, but we cannot disciple others until we have committed our lives to God’s every word.

Jim & Beverly Huskins are members of Obedient Heart Fellowship.

A Preacher's Musings About the Oscar Slap Flap

By Rev. Mark Creech

It seems everyone is talking about the Oscar slap flap. But not too many preachers have weighed in on the incident. Here's my wading into its treacherous waters with the hope of saying something helpful.

During the 94th Annual Academy Awards ceremony of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, comedian Chris Rock made a demeaning joke about actor Will Smith's wife, Jada Pinkett Smith. He referred to her as G.I Jane because of her short haircut. Smith took great offense at the joke, strode onto the stage, and slapped Rock.

The tragic scene bodes asking whether insult comedy is good for making people laugh. Audiences love this kind of humor. The late Don Rickles and Joan Rivers were insult comedy icons. Today's Lisa Lampanelli, Jeff Ross, Triumph - the Insult Comic Dog, and Adam Dice Clay are probably today's best-known comics for jesting at other people's expense. Successful late-night comedians and television political commentators have a field day mocking and roasting people on their programs regularly.

These comics are given a pass for disrespecting, disparaging, and humiliating individuals. People argue they should because they don't mean it. Yet we all know the way people actually feel is often said amusingly. So, who really knows if they mean it or not?

Now, if you do this sort of thing and direct it at a man's beloved wife, you might expect one day you'll get the bejeebers knocked out of you – and perhaps rightly so.

In Will Smith's case, he was defending his wife's honor – a wife suffering from an illness that causes unwanted hair loss – a condition that can be most humiliating for a woman. To demean her with a joke, purposely or not, before a Live international audience, was insensitive and beyond the pale.

No self-respecting man or husband worth his salt would let that slide. Christians, especially, should know that violence is a no-no – never something to be condoned or employed except as a last resort in self-defense or to protect one's family.

Nevertheless, this doesn't mean a man's masculinity should be emasculated, or husbands and fathers should be seen as harmless. They are the family's first line of defense. There is still a place for chivalry.

Violence may not be acceptable, but sometimes it may be understandable. And yes, though it should rarely and almost never be used, there may be an occasion when it's justifiable. Just remember, however, there's usually a stiff price for violence, justifiable or not.

Proverbs 29:18,19 reads, *"Like a madman shooting firebrands and arrows, so is the man who deceives his neighbor and says, 'I was only joking.'"*

Shooting and slinging verbal firebrands and arrows that can hurt emotionally, relationally, or spiritually, is not a laughing matter. Nor should the person who does this to the point of injury be granted immunity because it's supposed to be comedy or because the perpetrator says it was only a joke.

Then again, lest some think that Smith is altogether innocent here, note the blaring inconsistency this egregiously offended husband exercised. Smith slapped Chris Rock for a cheap shot at his wife, but it's well-known he and his wife, Jada, are in an Open Marriage. To Will and Jada, faithfulness in marriage shouldn't be "a prison." In other words, Smith hits Rock for base wit directed at his bride but accepts and defends her and her lover's adulterous behavior. Talk about straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel!

Someone might argue their arrangement is consensual, making it alright. Absolutely not! The Bible says, "the two shall become one flesh," which partly means marriage cannot provide God's intended benefits if a third party interferes with its sacred bond.

Protecting marital fidelity ought to be a fundamental priority, and apparently to Smith keeping his wife's name out of Rock's "f*#@%ing mouth" is what's important. Don't be fooled, this is no worthy form of love and trust by the Smiths that's equal to traditional marriage. Instead, it's something bazaar and grossly immoral!

Of course, most of Hollywood said they were outraged at Will striking Chris on the night of the Oscars. Yet strangely, only a while after the assault, the actor was rewarded with a standing ovation when given an Oscar for best actor.

Moreover, where was all this Hollywood outrage about violence never being acceptable when protestors with Black Lives Matter were battering innocent people in our nation's streets, and destroying public and private property worth millions of dollars?!!

Even sports legend Kareem Abdul-Jabbar interjected:

"With a single petulant blow, he [Smith] advocated violence, diminished women, insulted the entertainment industry, and perpetuated stereotypes about the Black community."

However, Abdul-Jabbar has often defended Black Lives Matter protestors. He told People Magazine they "had been pushed to the edge." In other words, the violence by some Blacks, as well as others at the time, was understandable. Their carnage and brutality to end the injustice of racism shouldn't be seen as advocating violence or insulting a civilized society, and certainly not perpetuating stereotypes of the Black community. Oh no, we need to understand what they did was acceptable!

If Abdul-Jabbar believes this, why was the violence of Will Smith unacceptable if he was trying to tip the scales of justice back toward his wife's favor?

Hate to say it, all of this smells exactly like what it is - rank hypocrisy.

There's still more.



Jim Carrey told CBS This Morning Smith's actions were sickening. He said if he were Chris Rock, "I would have announced this morning that I was suing Will for \$200 million because that video is going to be there forever."

Is this the same guy who delivered such a powerful speech on forgiveness before trial over his Irish girlfriend's death? Is this the same Jim Carrey who eloquently said:

"We have to somehow accept, not deny, but feel our suffering and feel our losses. And then we make one of two decisions: We either decide to go through the gate of resentment, which leads to vengeance, which leads to self-harm, which leads to harm to others. Or we go through the gate of forgiveness, which leads to grace."

If it is true that the arts help us see who we are, what happened at the Oscars demonstrates we are not glamorous and beautiful, but ugly and far removed from sound morality - a morality that values family as God directs, is not vulgar, tactless, rude, violent, sexually immoral, hypocritical, or rewarding of criminal conduct. It shows we are in desperate need of God's grace and forgiveness, and we must grant the same to others, even as Christ pours out grace and forgiveness to us.

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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George Read
By David Streater, Ph.D.
Burke County



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

George Read was born in September 1733, in Maryland and moved to Delaware with his parents while a child. At 15, Read graduated from the Philadelphia Academy and studied law in the office of John Moland. George was an honest attorney who quickly earned the respect of New Castle, Delaware citizens. He served as a Delaware tri-county Attorney General until he resigned in 1774, after being elected to the Continental Congress.

During the 1760s and 1770s, Read served in Delaware’s legislature and the Continental Congress. George advocated for a peaceful resolution with England and initially voted against the Declaration of Independence. However, after independence was affirmed, he stood with other colonists and signed the Declaration.

Delaware’s governor Mckinly was taken prisoner during the Revolution. On his way home to be the acting governor, Read was also captured. George convinced his captors he was an ordinary citizen, holding no office and unimportant. The British troops released him, allowing Read to serve as Delaware’s governor between late 1777 to March 1778.

During the Constitutional Convention, Read was a champion for the small New England states. At one point, he recommended to “do away with states altogether and unite them all into one society.” In the end, George signed the Constitution to advance the United States. He also signed the Constitution for John Dickinson, who left the convention due to illness, making him the only person to sign the Constitution twice.

From 1789 to 1793, Read served as a senator from Delaware. Then, George resigned to be the Chief Judge of Delaware, serving until his death at age 65. George Read was indeed a “small-state man” with visionary ideas for a grand nation!

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

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



The Day of Atonement
By John H. McCoury
Roan Mountain, Tennessee



“When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the tent of meeting, and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites — all their sins — and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the wilderness in the care of someone appointed for the task. The goat will carry all their sins on itself, to a remote place; and the man shall release it in the wilderness.” Leviticus 16:20-22

All the iniquities, all the transgressions, all the sins were placed upon the head of this goat. The goat is a picture of Jesus: He is represented as satisfying the heart of God for us and rendering God free to love us without any restraint at all by his justice. God's justice has been satisfied. He is free to forgive us at any time and to love us. Christ also bears the whole weight and load of our guilt, all that which the Devil tries to use as a basis upon which to ground his accusations against us. All this is to be sent back to him from whence it comes. When our Lord died He went into the wilderness of death like this goat and returned to Satan all the accusations which he has against any believer at any time.

This passage is teaching us what we are to do with these accusations. In Ephesians 6:16, Paul calls them the fiery darts of the wicked one, i.e., all those little suggestions to us that we really aren't accepted and loved by God. They tell us that He still has a reservation about us and that we still aren't able openly and boldly to come before His presence. These are all the haunting memories of our past shame, our feelings of unworthiness, our filthy thoughts, and the flashes of fear that come upon us. What are we to do with them? We are simply to put them right on the head of Jesus and say, Lord, take them back to Satan. They don't belong to me. They belong to Him. That is where they came from and I am sending them back.

Do you want to worship God? Well, how do you do it? Simply by believing that He has accepted you the way you are and has already dealt with everything that is wrong — everything — and is now ready to use you without any hesitation whatsoever. Say to the Lord, Here I am. I am counting on it. Thank you for it. What are you going to do through me today? What are you going to do this next moment in the relationship I am entering into with this person? How are you going to handle it? And your mind and heart can be at peace.

Father, thank you for this promise, and for the beauty of this ceremony which in Israel of old could only occur once a year, but which for me is to be momentary, daily, over and over again. I come boldly into your presence with joy, with a heart washed from an evil conscience, and with gladness and thanksgiving, not on my merit but on the merit of Another. How I give thanks for this and pray that it may be my experience, not only this moment but every day of my life!

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

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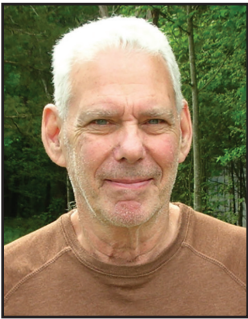
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Bible Briefs

Barna Christianity Poll

By Robert Garner
Rutherford County



Please Don't Shoot the Messenger, sad to see this research.

[Barna Poll researchers find many Americans believe in "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism"; MTD- or simply put, "Feel Good Fake Christianity". Pollster George Barna reported that "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism," or "watered-down, feel-good, fake Christianity" was widely prevalent in the United States.

Barna's research, titled the "American Worldview Inventory 2021," states that these beliefs were commonly found among teenagers in the early 2000s and that they remain pervasive in their adulthood. This makes MTD "the most popular worldview in the United States today." Based on the responses people gave during half-hour individual interviews 94 percent of Americans do not hold a biblical worldview.

According to the study, close to four out of ten adults (38%) were quoted as saying that they "are more likely to embrace elements of MTD" than other mainstream worldviews like biblical theism, secular humanism, postmodernism, nihilism, Marxism, and its offshoot Critical Theory. However, three out of four people who accept MTD continue to identify as Christians. Even so, 95 percent do not believe that obedience to God produces success, 91 percent do not believe that people are born into sin and need Jesus' redemption, 88 percent claim they get much of their moral guidance from sources other than the Bible, and 76 percent believe that "good people" go to Heaven because they are, well, "good."

Barna explained that this "distorted version of Christianity" regards God as a powerful but detached observer who remains uninvolved in human experience unless circumstances require Him to be the last resort. The report also states that 75% of those who express MTD beliefs do not believe God is the source of all truth, 74% believe in karma, 73% believe that having some religious faith is more important than just what faith is, and 71% believe the Bible isn't really an accurate communication from God.

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, according to the Arizona Christian University's Cultural Research Center's (CRC) "American Worldview Inventory 2021" was first defined by sociologists Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton in their 2005 book, "Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers," and requires few commitments from adherents, including:

- "Belief in a God who remains distant from people's lives"
 - "People are supposed to be good to each other (i.e., moral)"
 - "The universal purpose of life of being happy and feeling good about oneself"
 - "There are no absolute moral truths"
 - "God allows "good people" into Heaven"
 - "God places very limited demands on people"
- "Other errant beliefs possessed by a majority of adults who are substantially influenced by MTD include that they do not believe in the creation story, reject the existence of absolute moral truth, deny the existence of the Holy Spirit and believe it is possible to reach complete spiritual maturity in their lifetime," noted the CRC.

Hispanics (more than 40% of whom are Catholic) were the racial and ethnic group most aligned with MTD, with the majority of them (52%) drawing strongly or moderately from MTD perspectives.

The survey began in February and included 2,000 adults from a "nationally representative sample," with a 95 percent confidence interval estimating a maximum sampling error of approximately plus or minus 2 percentage points].

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

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

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A Switch in Time On My Behind

Dr. James L. Snyder
Ocala, Florida



Recently, I was reminded of my father’s passing 12 years ago. It’s funny how time quickly goes by, and then something happens to remind you of the past.

When I was growing up, spankings were normal. And, for someone like me, those spankings were quite regular. Today my father would be arrested for all the spankings he gave me while I was growing up. At that time, something was wrong if you didn’t get a spanking.

When I was in the fifth grade, my schoolteacher happened to have been my father’s schoolteacher. I’m afraid she wouldn’t pass today because she also believed in spankings, as did our elementary school principal.

I remember when we went to class right after some bill passed saying we could not pray in school. Our fifth-grade teacher stood before the class with the spanking stick bouncing it off her hand and said most arrogantly, “Let them come to my class and tell me I’m not allowed to pray.” I would not have wanted to be that person.

The home rule was simple; if I get a spanking at school, I get a spanking at home. That’s just how it was, and I had to learn to live with it.

Quite often, our schoolteacher, before the day began, would stand before the class with the spanking stick and remind everybody that she was in charge and if you didn’t do it her way, you would get the spanking stick. Sometimes we were sent to the principal’s office to get a spanking. I would rather go to the principal’s office than have my teacher spank me if the truth were known. He knew when to quit; she didn’t.

After a spanking at school, my father was informed about my spanking. When I got home, he was standing there, ready for me to come in, and escorted me to my bedroom, where he honored me with another spanking. He didn’t know what I got spanked for, and it didn’t matter to him. The spanking at school meant a spanking at home. That was the rule.

I tried to figure out ways to keep my father from knowing about the school spanking, but that was impossible because my teacher knew my father.

During that time, I did not have an advocate in the situation of home spankings, that is, until one day.

Growing up, I loved hunting, and usually, it would be for rabbits. That was the vogue in those days.

Because I loved hunting rabbits, I needed a dog. So I got a beagle and trained him to hunt rabbits with me. So we made a good team. We spent a lot of time together, so there was that deep bond between a young boy and his dog, almost like “Old Yeller.”

One day, as usual, I got into trouble. I can’t remember the trouble, but it’s not important now. What is important is that the trouble inspired my father to donate a high-class spanking to me.

I was outside near my dog pen and saw my father come toward me angrily waving his belt. I knew exactly what was in store for me, and there was no place to run. And if I did run, I would sooner or later have to come back home. So the best thing for me to do was to wait and take my punishment like a boy in trouble.

No way was I prepared for what was going to happen next.

As my father came closer, I could hear him yelling, and he was waving his belt in the air, and it would not be too long to get to me.

When he got to me, he continued yelling and began the spanking session. Even he wasn’t prepared for what was going to happen.

Suddenly, I heard my dog, Sparky, bark as I had never heard him bark before. He was chained to his pen, which would assume a great deal of safety from the dog. But not Sparky.

Before I could process it, I heard Sparky yell and lunge forward, and then I heard the chain break, and he was on his way to my father. I’m sure he wasn’t going to my father to give him a good friendly hug.

He lunged for my father, and my father turned and ran as fast as he could, but Sparky caught him several times and bit him.

My dilemma at the time was, do I laugh or cry? Nobody ever stood up for me through all my spanking sessions.

My father finally got into the garage and shut the door. Sparky turned around and came racing toward me. He wiggled and wagged when he got there and wanted me to pet him, which I did most graciously.

My father’s favorite Bible verse and he quoted it repeatedly in my presence, was, “*He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes*” (Proverbs 13:24).

I must say that he was very faithful to this verse of Scripture.

As a father, I was more into this verse, “*Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it*” (Proverbs 22:6).

I have tried to combine these two verses throughout my life. Each situation demands a lot of thought, and I’ve tried to give my thoughts a lot of room.

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 jamessnyder2@att.net. The church web site is www.whatafellowship.com

Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Isaiah 49:15

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Billy Graham Evangelistic

Chaplains Comfort War-Torn Hearts in Ukraine

By Cheri Stutzman

Carrying luggage. Helping a mother and crying child get on the next bus or train out of the battle-weary country. Praying with a distraught patient. Lifting a wheelchair down a flight of steps to shelter during an air raid.

That's what ministry looks like for Jonathan Dulin and Wil Rosado, two Billy Graham Rapid Response Team (BG-RRT) chaplains ministering in Lviv, Ukraine.

Since the start of the conflict, over 10 million individuals have fled their homes to escape the nightmare that overtook their country. Most are women and children.

Responding to the need, Billy Graham chaplains are ministering at a Samaritan's Purse emergency field hospital in Lviv, as well as a medical clinic located near a busy train station.

In addition, they've equipped 30-plus Ukrainian church leaders through the BG-RRT Sharing Hope in Crisis training. These leaders are joining them in the field—ministering to their own countrymen and women.

"People [are] reminded of the fact that God is there and the fact that He had not forgotten them, that their land is not forgotten," said Dulin. Pointing to the Cross

Every day when Billy Graham chaplains arrive at the train station, they glance over the arrivals and departure board. Much of their ministry is helping people get off one train and onto the next mode of transportation to the border.

As trains come and go, chaplains and Ukrainian church leaders are ready to respond. "Just standing there, you can already see who needs help immediately and you just build from there," said Dulin, who speaks Russian and can communicate with Ukrainians, despite the slight differences in language.

"They are rattled and they are hurt. We are there for them, and we can point them to the One who has the answers." —Chaplain Jonathan Dulin

It's as simple as seeing a mother struggling with her luggage, and lending a hand to help. "Even in the train station, people are coming to us, you know. They are

rattled and they are hurt. We are there for them, and we can point them to the One who has the answers," Dulin explained. Like one Ukrainian woman who had lost her way in her faith. As they heard her



Franklin Graham was in Ukraine over the weekend to visit the Samaritan's Purse emergency field hospital in Lviv where Billy Graham chaplains are serving. He took a moment to pray over the chaplains' work there.

story and encouraged her, the door opened to share the Gospel. "I prayed for her and she was reminded of the fact ... that yes she was saved, she believed in Jesus, but her whole world was torn apart. And she had lost what was up and what was down.

And we pointed her to the cross."

Finally Safe In front of the Samaritan's Purse medical clinic at a Lviv train station, Dulin met a woman, her two teenage daughters, and a cat.

In Russian, she shared her story.

"We are from Kharkiv. They bombed our apartment, and we do not know where to go," Dulin recalls her saying.

The family lived on the 9th floor of an apartment building in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city. Still held by Ukraine's forces, the city has been under fire since the early days of the war.

"They were trapped on the ninth floor with bullets and bombs flying over and they didn't know where to go," Dulin recounts. "Until the 21st day of the war, they lived underground where they would hear, 'Boom, boom, boom.'"

Her two daughters horrifically watched their best friend die when a bomb exploded outside their apartment and shattered the window.

Looking at the mother's face and hearing her story, Dulin couldn't help but hold back tears. "Just the raw emotion, the literal terror that was on her face," he said.

The three had lived in a war zone, not knowing if they would survive and watching their city be destroyed. Even though they had escaped, they still didn't feel safe.

The family didn't have anywhere to sleep and Dulin remembered the mother saying, "I'm just too tired to go to the Polish border."

A Ukrainian chaplain offered the family respite in his church, where they stayed for two days. Now the family has continued on their journey to Poland.

It's interactions like this that allow these chaplains to be the hands and feet of Jesus at a time when His hope is desperately needed.



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He Accepts Us Because He Knows Us

By Christopher L. Scott
Moses Lake, Wash.



I’ve done some horrible things in my life. I’ve lied to cover my reputation when I should have told the truth. I’ve refused to meet with people that felt I had wronged them and wanted to reconcile. I’ve ruined several people’s Father’s Day because of hurtful things I said to them.

But with all of the terrible things I’ve done, I can still approach God. He will always accept me when I approach His throne. The author of Hebrews tells us we can boldly approach God regardless of what we’ve done.

Hebrews 4:14 arrives at the main argument of the book: Christ is better. The author has already given us several examples of how Christ is better. He has said that Christ is better than the prophets (Hebrews 1:1-3), better than the angels (Hebrews 1:4-2:18), better than Moses (Hebrews 3:1-13), and Christ is better than the Levitical order of the priests (Hebrews 4:14-12:3).

In Hebrews 4:14-16 we learn, “*Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need*” (NASB).

Like us, Christ was flesh and blood. But unlike us, Christ was without sin (see Hebrews 7:26; 2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 John 3:5). He never responded wrongly to any temptations He felt. He was perfect and never made a mistake.

Yet in many ways, Christ was like us. He was flesh and blood like us. He ate and slept like us. He laughed and wept like us. Because of this, when we approach Him we find mercy and grace because He knows our troubles and struggles. He knows our temptations and trepidations.

This is what makes our God so special to us. He is not some Zen-like object of worship that we hope to attain on a level with someday. Instead, we enjoy a relationship with Him based on what we have in common.

At the end of Hebrews 4:16, it says, “*let us draw near*” to Jesus on His throne of grace. Another way to translate this phrase is “*let us keep coming to*” or as the paraphrase rendering of the Bible—The Message—puts it, “*Let’s walk right up to him and get what he is so ready to give.*”

Regardless of what we have done, we can always approach Christ. No matter how we mess up in life nothing can prevent us from approaching God. At His throne, we will find mercy and grace in our time of need. He is ready to give it – and we need it.

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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It’s Still The Cross

By Dennis Love
McDowell County



The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 1:18; “*For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God.*” The year was 1953. Billy Graham was preaching a crusade in Dallas, Texas. About 40,000 people were in attendance for each service. Usually, when Billy Graham would stand to preach and extend an invitation for people to come forward and receive Jesus as Lord and Savior, hundreds upon hundreds would respond. But one evening during this particular crusade, after Billy Graham had finished preaching, only a handful of people responded to his invitation to come forward and accept Christ. Billy Graham left the platform that night discouraged. A German businessman was at the crusade, and the man was a devout Christian. He walked up to Billy Graham, put his arm around him, and said; “Billy, do you know what was wrong tonight? You didn’t preach the cross!” The next night, Billy Graham preached on the cross, and the blood of Jesus that was shed on that cross for my sin and your sin, and when he extended the invitation a large host of people responded to receive Christ.

Please understand that in this world of high-speed internet, iPads, earbuds, fast food, fast cars, fast-talking politicians, and phony bologna people, IT’S STILL THE CROSS! In a world that tells you that ALL roads lead to Heaven, and it really doesn’t matter what denominational tag you wear, IT’S STILL THE CROSS! When preachers stop preaching a blood-stained cross for sinners to come to, that is when I’m going to find another preacher because IT’S STILL THE CROSS! I want to hear a preacher say, “If you want to go to Heaven when you die, you must first come to a blood-stained cross, and have your sins forgiven because IT’S STILL THE CROSS!” I want to hear a preacher say; “If you want to have victory over the world, victory over the flesh, and victory over the devil, you must regularly visit the cross because IT’S STILL THE CROSS!” I want to hear a preacher say, “If you grow cold and indifferent as a believer, take your Bible out into the woods and get alone with God and read the 27th chapter of Matthew, and wrap your arms once again around the cross, and see if the cross doesn’t warm you up spiritually because IT’S STILL THE CROSS!”

It’s still the cross that saves from sin. It’s still the cross that cleanses from within. It’s still the cross that produces thankfulness. It’s still the cross that produces giftedness. It’s still the cross that produces oneness within the church. It’s still the cross that places the power of God within you. And it’s still the cross that draws people personally to come to Jesus and be saved.

So take a moment today and thank God for the cross. Take a moment today and humble yourself before the cross, and see if the cross doesn’t warm you up on the inside spiritually. WHY? Because IT’S STILL THE CROSS. “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God.” The cross is so powerful that it makes crooked people go straight! It makes vile people pure! It makes drunk people sober! It makes weak people strong! It has the power to give you a faith lift! And it has the power to save you, to keep you saved, and to take you to Heaven when you die! WHY? Because IT’S STILL THE CROSS! Take a moment today and look to the cross, and then brag on that cross to someone you talk with today because IT’S STILL THE CROSS!

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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Least Powerful People

By Tracy Jessup



“Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account... Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” (Isaiah 53:1-3, 12)

24/7 Wall St. is a corporation in Delaware which runs a financial news and opinion company with content delivered over the Internet. According to their website, “the company’s articles are republished by many of the largest news sites and portals, including MSN MarketWatch, USA Today, AOL, and newspaper and broadcast sites across America.”

While there are numerous “best” lists put out by various media outlets, 24/7 Wall St. regularly published an article that comprised the least powerful people in the world. Their most recent list was from an August 7, 2017 article and included public figures such as Anthony Scaramucci, White House Communications Director who was fired by President Trump less than two weeks after his appointment, as well as Tiger Woods, golf superstar who “has been embroiled in controversy on and off since reports of his infidelity came to light in late 2009.” Obviously, Tiger’s inclusion on the list was before his incredible win at the Masters in 2019, which came after an eleven-year drought in major championships.

How do they go about identifying these individuals? “To identify the 50 least powerful people, 24/7 Wall St. compiled a list of many well-known individuals around the world who have recently experienced a precipitous loss in stature. Of these individuals, we selected those who fell the furthest from the greatest height.” Some of the people on the least powerful list were victims of circumstances. Others made poor business decisions. And some lost their influence because of moral failure. But none of them chose to become powerless.

Isaiah’s words have become the lens through which we view the sacrifice of Christ. The prophet’s description of Jesus, the Suffering Servant, seems to depict one who belongs on the all-time list of the least powerful people. But Jesus willingly chose to become powerless - to be “despised and rejected by others, a man of sorrows and acquainted with infirmity;... one from whom others hide their faces” and one regarded of no account.

Jesus chose to become powerless by humbling himself and being obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (cf. Philippians 2:8). Old Testament scholar Amanda Benckhuysen writes, “Even as the servant was humiliated for our transgressions, God allotted him a share with the great and the strong (53:12). This servant, whom the world counted as insignificant and of low estate changed the course of history and now, God has raised him to a position of glory and honor. And so yes, Jesus died. But on the third day, he rose again from the dead and now is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty” (“Commentary on Isaiah 52:13—53:12,” workingpreacher.org, 4/15/22).

Prayer: Lord, we thank you for Jesus, who looked death in the face and didn’t flinch and embraced the company of the lowest – taking on his own shoulders the sin of the many, and taking up the cause of all the black sheep (adapted from Isaiah 53:12, The Message).

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

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Six Earth Day Tweaks You Can Make to Your Shopping Habits

(StatePoint) Earth Day, celebrated on April 22, is a good time to consider making more sustainable tweaks to the way you shop.

With major companies leading the charge, it's easier than you might think. For example, Amazon co-founded and became the first signatory to The Climate Pledge in 2019. Now, more than 300 companies have signed the Pledge and committed to reaching net-zero carbon by 2040, working together and taking bold steps to decarbonize their businesses and fight climate change.

As part of the Pledge, Amazon is working to reduce carbon emissions across its own operations, from adding 100,000 electric delivery vehicles to its global delivery fleet and investing in renewable energy, to inventing machine learning algorithms to arrive at the best possible packaging choices for deliveries.

Here are six tips to shop more sustainably for yourself:

1. Browse wisely: When browsing Amazon, you can now shop from a selection of more than 300,000 products from more than 20,000 fan-favorite brands such as Honest Company, Columbia, and Burt's Bees designated as "Climate Pledge Friendly." This ensures these products have one or more of 39 certifications that help protect the natural world. A new private brand, Amazon Aware, now features thoughtfully-designed, affordable, everyday essentials across fashion, home, and beauty made from materials such as recycled polyester, organic cotton, and bio-based ingredients with certifications from the Climate Pledge Friendly program specific to product type.

2. Learn more about small brands: Brands, entrepreneurs, and startups are overcoming the challenges associated with launching new products. Amazon Launchpad, which supports businesses, is sharing unique stories from brands with more sustainable products, including South Korean vegan skincare line, Melixir, as well as GOODSAM, SHANTI BAR, and White Leaf Provisions at Amazon.com/Launchpad-Earth-Day.

3. Reuse: Discover and buy refurbished products that have been professionally inspected and tested to work and look like new. At Amazon Renewed, you can find great prices on pre-owned smartphones, laptops, tablets, desktops, and cameras, across top brands. Products are backed by a 90-day Amazon Renewed Guarantee. You can also look for items offered by Amazon Warehouse to find a quality pre-owned, used, and open-box items, all of which have passed a 20-point quality inspection and are backed by a 30-day return policy.

4. Donate: Shop at smile.amazon.com and AmazonSmile will donate a portion of your eligible purchases to the charity of your choice at no extra cost to you. Participating organizations include a wide range of environmental charities. Additionally, in celebration of Earth Month, U.S. customers can now say "Alexa, grow a tree" to donate \$1 to plant one tree through One Tree Planted, an environmental charity that supports reforestation around the world.

5. Don't trash it, trade it in: Did you know you can trade in certain devices, cell phones, and video games for an Amazon gift card? Through Amazon's Trade-In program, the devices are either restored and re-sold, or recycled, ensuring a more sustainable way to dispose of devices.

6. Recycle: Learn how to recycle packaging in your community by visiting the Amazon Second Chance page at amazon.com/amsc. Additionally, when your orders arrive, find details of how to recycle and dispose of packaging by clicking on the "Returns & Orders" section of your account. The website also features information on how to trade in and recycle products, and how to find open-box and refurbished devices.

For more sustainability stories and tips, visit amazon.com/earthday.

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Table Rock's Amy Zittel
Named Teacher of the Year

By Cheryl Shuffler
Burke County



Amy Zittel, an exceptional children's teacher at Table Rock Middle School, has been named the Burke County Public Schools 2022 Teacher of the Year. Zittel is in her 30th year of teaching and her second year with Burke County Public Schools and Table Rock Middle School. She affectionately calls her students her "littles," which rhymes with the pronunciation of her last name.

Burke County Public Schools Superintendent Dr. Mike Swan, Assistant Superintendent Dr. Karen Auton, and Interim Director of Secondary Education Debbie Jennings surprised Zittel with the announcement, balloons, and flowers on Thursday morning in her classroom at the school. Zittel will also receive a vehicle to drive for a year.

Swan said Zittel is well-deserving of the honor. He said, "All you have to do is step into Mrs. Zittel's classroom to instantly feel her passion for her students and her enthusiasm for what she does. Mrs. Zittel truly cares about her students and gives them the opportunities they need to succeed in and out of the classroom."

Originally from California, Zittel is a graduate of California State University Bakersfield. After moving to North Carolina to be closer to family, she spent a year teaching at West McDowell Middle School before taking on her current assignment at Table Rock.

Zittel said of receiving the honor, "I am very humbled and excited to have been chosen as Burke County Teacher of the Year. I have a passion for teaching and helping all students to succeed. I love my school family and students so much. I work with the absolute best administrators, counselors, teachers, teacher's aides, custodians, office staff, and parents. I could not do my job without their support of my daily goal, which is to inspire students every day to do their best in school but most importantly in their lives. From the bottom of my heart, thank you."

Zittel credits her mom, a former teacher's aid, for gifting her with a heart for special education students. She said, "I had spent many Augusts preparing mom's classroom for the year. I was raised around special education students and loved them."

Zittel said she thought she was prepared for her first years of teaching but soon realized "teaching is not a sprint, but a marathon." She said, "The wisdom and skills gained over a diverse career can not be conveyed in one year, or two years. The years of wisdom have improved my skills and sharpened my direction. I am proud of the mother, teacher, co-teacher, mental health professional, coach, life coach, counselor, and trusted friend I have become to my students. It has been a wonderful journey and there are still years to come."

Zittel advises new teachers to be patient, soak up the knowledge from others and hang in there. She said, "New teachers start with a good solid core and a heart of gold. Each year and class adds another layer of skin. Administrators, parents, and counselors will teach you lessons and add layers. It takes time. Give it time. Remember, sometimes onions stink and some years are better than others. Don't give up and just keep layering."

Across the hall from her classroom, Zittel has created a sensory room for her students. They call it "camp" and use it as a place to pile up on comfy pillows, jump on a mini-trampoline or take a break in a tent. It is also a place where she



continued on page 25

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July 29: Randy Clay Band - (Variety & Dance)

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Aug. 13 - *Saturday Music: The Catalinas (Beach)

Aug. 19: Cassette Rewind (Everything 80's)

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teaches them practical lessons, including a token economy system, on how to be contributing members of the community. Zittel also gets family and the community involved in her classroom through guest speakers and parent events. She said a positive that came out of COVID-19 for her and her students is communication and teamwork between her and her students' parents. She said, "The collaboration and the relationships we foster with our students are the backbones of the community. Simply put, students that trust us, learn for us. Students that trust us, respect adults in positions of authority. Students that trust us, learn social skills and grow up to be productive members of our community. Students that learn to trust adults can make more positive choices."

Table Rock Middle School Principal Rich Linens said, "Mrs. Zittel made an immediate impact in our school when she came here last year. She is a tireless advocate for her students, and they have grown and thrived under her classroom leadership. We are so fortunate to have her as a part of the Table Rock team."

Table Rock Middle School Assistant Principal Lori Westefield said, "Mrs. Zittel cares for her students and wants the best for them. She advocates for them every day and celebrates their successes. Table Rock is fortunate to have Mrs. Zittel."

The Burke County Board of Education will recognize Zittel and each schools' individual teacher of the year at Monday's board meeting.

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



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The Divine Hero
By Art Dmytriyeu
Yancey County

Today's world does not comprehend the gift from Heaven of the only-begotten child with no beginning or end. The Lord appointed the divine hero who's God and man simultaneously. God, the eternal Son, became incarnate in Jesus Christ. It is through Him: absolutely all things were created; the loving character of God is revealed and vindicated; the salvation of humankind is accomplished, and the world is judged. Eternal God, He became human, Jesus the Christ. Who is that person, and what should everyone need to know about Him? Let us overview the answer.

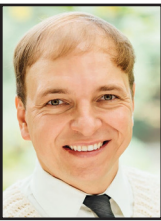
First, let's open the book of books and find out who God's Son is. According to the gospel of John: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men."* (John 1:1–4 KJV). The Bible identifies Jesus Christ as our Creator. Apostle Paul confirms it: *"By Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth"* (Colossians 1:16, NKJV).

Next, the Bible said that Christ came from Heaven to Earth to save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:21). He was in human flesh. God, His Father, and Mary, His mother, brought together divinity and humanity to save the human race. So, Jesus was fully God, yet fully man.

Jesus Christ became our savior and Lord - the Messiah. He lived and died to bring us salvation. He began His mission on Earth at His earthly father's carpenter shop. According to the Scripture, as He was growing, he was strong in Spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him. (Luke 2:40). When He was ready for the public ministry, He went to the Jordan River and was baptized by His cousin John. *"Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him."* (Matthew 3:13–15 KJV). Jesus was approved by His Father on the mission of salvation when the Spirit of God descended upon Him: *"Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased."* (Luke 3:21–22 KJV). So, Jesus Christ began to seek and save what was lost (Matthew 18:11).

After three and half years of ministry, He was crucified, risen from the grave, and intercedes for us in the Heavenly Sanctuary (Matthew 28:1-8; 1 John 2: 1-2). Also, He is coming back to the Earth again as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords to give to everyone according to their works. (Revelation 22:12-14).

Most importantly, God is Love. He loves you and wants to spend eternity with you! What is your response to the merciful Savior Who does not want you to perish but that you may have Eternal life?



Pr. Art Dmytriyeu 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>

By Steve Carter
Tupelo, Mississippi



After climbing on my bicycle “The Gideon,” and making sure my shoes were secure on the pedals, I pulled into a safe cruising place in the extended column of two hundred other cyclists. Following eighteen months of training in Mississippi’s sweltering heat and frigid cold, my skin tingled with eager anticipation. As Seattle, Washington disappeared from my mirror, I set my sights on Washington, D.C. Cruising on a paved trail that soon turned into city streets, before blending into county roads, my legs cranked off the miles into the Cascade Mountains. Over three thousand miles, and seven weeks of “good, bad, and ugly” were between me and the Lincoln Memorial. I alternated standing up on the pedals and sitting on my saddle while constantly changing gears and working the brakes as I steadily rode upward into my great adventure.

My inexperience at mountain bicycling soon reared its ugly head, when I tried to charge up a mountain as if it were a flat road. Picture this, about three miles into the climb, I’m hanging over the guard rail hoping I don’t pass out while my heart bounces around in my chest! Soon I heard multiple chains spinning fast and the hiss of tires on the wet road. While keeping my death grip on the guard rail, so I wouldn’t fall off the side of the mountain, I looked over my shoulder. This is where I learned about riding in a “paceline.” When riding in a paceline, the wind resistance on all but the lead cyclist is reduced. This makes forward progress much easier. Peddling in the lowest gear lowers the overall speed to about 3 mph but puts much less strain on the cyclist's legs and lungs. A tough lesson to learn while hanging over a guardrail trying not to throw up your breakfast!

Following this lesson in humility, God reminded me of the promise He made. “If I followed safety rules and didn’t do anything stupid, He would get me across the country in one piece.” Readers make note, that charging up a mountain is really close to stupid!

We camped that night in the schoolyard at Skykomish, Washington. After securing our bikes, those of us experienced in camping pitched in, pun intended, and helped cyclists struggling with tents just taken out of boxes. Soon a feeling of camaraderie started to grow as the riders shared their various experiences and the overall group became more confident and self-reliant. In camp, I got the sad news that one rider suffered a ride-ending injury when he crashed on loose gravel while barreling down a mountain much too steep for his skill level. Not wanting to meet the same fate, I made sure of keeping my speed below anything that would cause me to do a “gravity check.” That’s bicyclist lingo for sliding down the road face first!

A day or two after leaving Skykomish, many of us rode our first “century.” A century, to a long-distance cyclist, means riding 100 miles in a day. I can almost hear everyone gasp after reading that! But then, we all expected those long days, and everyone glowed like a streetlight from having finished it. After supper, some of the riders went to the fireworks display at nearby Grand Coulee Dam, but not me. I decided a good night’s sleep would be more valuable the next day than anything fireworks could offer.


Bicycling across the continental United States is not for the faint of heart. Despite the preparation put into this adventure, I still had much to learn while in the saddle. I found this trip to be the same as when God calls one of His disciples to a particular ministry, not the easiest thing in the world, but more than worth the effort.

When called, my overall knowledge of His Word was sorely lacking, so I graduated from Bible College and brought my education up to speed. He prepared me for service to Him, by “showing me the way” through several “life lessons” that were anything but easy! Now, besides helping “rookies” set up tents, I have developed the skills and empathy needed to help others fight the same temptations I have victory over.


Like Esther being born for “such a time as this,” the state of the world today needs Christians willing to shoulder the responsibility and step forth on faith like Isaiah and declare “Here am I. Send me.”

God will not ask of us more than we can do and following Him will avoid a ministry-ending trip over the handlebars of life, pun intended. The blessings of answering God’s call on our lives far outweigh any burdens placed on us because of it. Answer the call, the world is waiting for your leadership.

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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Rapping at Chamber Door

By Tim Tron
Burke County

C.S. Lewis once wrote, “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’ All that are in Hell choose it. Without that self-choice, there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek, find. To those who knock, it is opened.”

A long time ago, in what now seems like another life, I spent the summer of 1976 working in a trim shop in Evansville, Indiana, called Vessels. It was the kind of place where people would bring their cars to get their seat covers repaired or replaced with new ones. They also specialized in vinyl roofs and boat covers. It was my first job off the farm, where I had worked most of my teens. This would be the first job where I didn’t receive payment in cash but instead received a real paycheck. My stepdad was the foreman, which was more than comforting because I always had the feeling that someone was looking out for me. That was important because Vessels employed a pretty rough crowd - from Vietnam vets with PTSD to recovering drug addicts and everything in between.

New hires were paired with more experienced employees, so when they put me with Raphael, I didn’t know what to expect. He was a young black man, probably in his late twenties, shorter than me, but had massive biceps and forearms. Rafael kept his hair cut short, and he had a long scar on the side of his face that ran from his cheek to his jaw bone – its existence of which was never mentioned. Rumor was that he boxed on the side, mostly street, bare-knuckle events, and from the looks of it, could handle himself pretty well. Being just a new kid off the farm, it was a very daunting atmosphere. However, it was there that I learned to listen, imitate, and adapt, a trait that would serve me well for the rest of my life.

Raphael and I worked at a large, very worn table grounded to the concrete floor; he on one side, me on the other. There was no air conditioning, only fans that blew the hot summer air around, making for a sultry, fluorescent, dimly lit ambiance. The atmosphere was intoxicating, with odors of fresh vinyl and glue, both ingredients necessary for the work. Raphael and I used hog ring pliers to staple the new seat covers on the frames of the seats after we had removed the old, nasty, torn covers. It was a tedious job, but we were both thankful to have one for our own reasons, so we kept to ourselves mostly. Yet, as one does with anything that challenges your paradigm of life, you slowly learn about the person in the trench next to you, whether you want to or not.

Off and on, Raphael would slowly share glimpses of himself with me in odd ways. We didn’t speak much at first, mostly because he was always whistling. Those melodies he chose were something to which I could relate; old church hymns, songs that I had known all my young life. Yet, instead of my grandma Tron singing God’s praise through pursed lips, it was a young black man. Looking back, he probably knew those were something I could relate to – an unspoken welcome if you will. But my introduction to the world through Raphael didn’t stop there. He would often go into long recantations of literature. At first, they seemed to be mere ramblings of thought, but the more I listened, the more I realized that they were quotes from works of poetry. It wasn’t simply the words he spoke, but more than that, it amazed me at how much he had seemingly memorized. One day, after reciting another lengthy prose, I finally inquired about the piece he had just mentioned. Something about rapping at a door caught my ear.

“The Raven,” he replied, smiling through his thick shadowed mustache. A single gold tooth gleamed from the broad smile. The sweat glistened off of his dark, chiseled forearms.

“Can you teach it to me?”

“Sure, I guess we got plenty of time.” He finished the seat he had just tightened, sitting it up on the table across from me with a loud thump. “Let me get this in that Chevy out there, and we’ll get started.” He dashed off to the parking lot, returning shortly afterward, smiling more than ever. “Now, where do we begin?”

Raphael spent the remainder of the summer sharing various works of poets he liked to memorize with me, but Edgar Allan Poe was by far his favorite. Over and over again, he would work with me learning, line after line, until we could finally repeat them together. “The Raven” seemed to always be our “go-to” piece.

“Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore —
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
“ ‘Tis some visitor,” I muttered, “tapping at my chamber door —
Only this and nothing more.”

To each of us, there was something special about the words we shared. To Raphael, it was the heartache of the man in the tale. The most poignant section of the verse that always stuck with me was the rapping at the door on that bleak, dark night by the raven. In many ways, a broadsword and a door are the same, each having two sides. The blade’s two meanings are as opposing as night and day – one to save lives, the other to take lives.

Similarly, the door has a dual purpose, the inner and the outer. From each side, one can have a different perspective from the one standing on the other side. From whence you stand makes all the difference in the world. Alone, the man in the poem is distraught over his love, and one can surmise that he is slowly drifting into insanity. But who wouldn’t find a knock on the door of one’s house in the middle of the night a bit more compelling than just a curious tap? The same rapping upon the chamber door in the middle of the day is far easier to accept; the other is a sense of impending doom.



Yet, are we not to be prepared for the Lord’s return at any time? As Jesus told his disciples, “*For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.*” It is this proverbial rapping at our chamber door, deep into the night, which we most dread. For, it is not the known that beckons our fears, but the unknown. Likewise, unless we have the foresight to know who is on the opposite side of that last bastion of barrier between us and the world beyond, we cannot know to whom calls upon us.

Trepidation awaits if we allow it. Yet, when we truly know in our hearts that we can be called upon at any time, therein itself lies a comfort, erasing the mysticism of the unknown. “*Behold, I stand at the door; and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.*”

But there is the other side, the portion from which we are the ones to be the caller. It is when we seek God that we are requesting permission to enter into His presence. Before Jesus, only certain priests were allowed to enter into the holiest of holies, and then only at specific times of the year. When Christ shed His blood on the cross, the veil that separated the holiest of holies from the world was torn from top to bottom. It was then if we have requested permission that we were finally allowed to enter into God’s presence; a gift from God to those whom he loved enough to give the life of his only Son. “*Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. 13 And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.*”

But as clear as the Bible is on seeking Him. But sadly, many will never listen. Their own will, earthly desires, and self-purpose will prove stronger than their desire to know God. Jesus made it perfectly clear when asked about how many will be saved, “*Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. 27 But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. 28 There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.*”

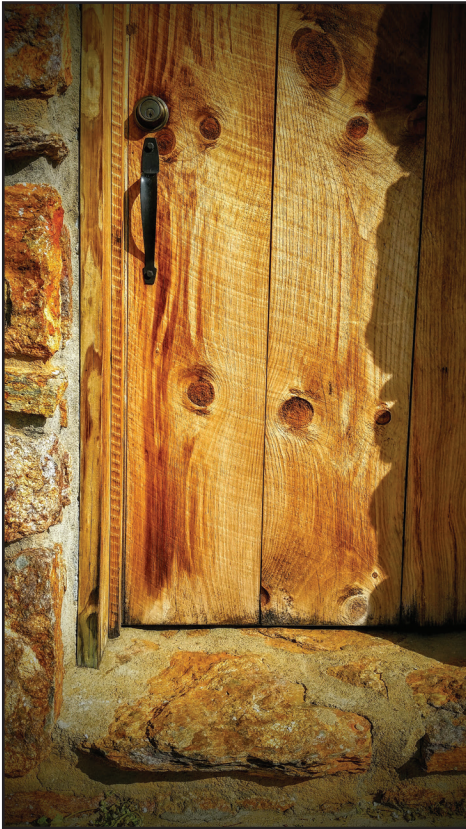
The summer of 76 eventually ended, and with it, my time at the trim shop. School was about to start up and my full-time summer job had concluded. I never saw Raphael again. It is sometimes odd to think of God working in us, even when we knew him the least. So often, in times of torment and persecution, when we go to God in prayer, we feel him with us, but oddly enough, it is the times we least expect him that he is with us the most. So, it was in my youth.

Time has passed, and like all memories, one wonders how the other acquaintances in their lives fared. God’s path for us is never expected, and through it, when we look back, was there for a purpose. Such is the case for me. For in the shade of the shop lights, in a hot July summer, a young white kid just off the farm and a street-savvy young black man formed a bond over the most unlikely of poets, sharing the words penned some 100 years before them both. Through it, I learned how others, unlike me in so many ways, had riches to share with me that would enhance my journey through life.

Even a secular poem can remind us to seek God, to knock upon his door. When we enter into His presence, we are then within him and He within us – inside God’s dwelling place. From there, we can then perceive the knock from within – the call to serve. So, when that gentle rapping comes at your door, don’t hesitate to open it. “*Many are the called, but few are chosen.*” So, when your time comes, be prepared to answer, “*Yes, Lord, it is I, take me.*”

Live your life so that when your judgment day comes, it won’t be your will that had been done, but rather His.

Yes, then you will know you are finally home.
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 //www.timothywtron.com/ or see more of his writings HERE.

By Nancy Malik
Avery County

Nine years ago in Western North Carolina, my family went to Fields of the Woods Bible Park as a part of our vacation. It was the first time for any of us to discover this beautiful country. We came from SW Florida, though we were Coloradoans that had been transplanted to help family. When we went to the top of Ten Commandments Hill, I went to the top and watched our, then, 4 grandchildren having fun rolling down the grassy slope. The late summer sunset was amazing with holy colors in the clouds. God told me as I sat there that He wanted us to move to North Carolina. I told my family, but they were not interested so we continued to live in SW Florida. Two friends asked me the next summer if I would go with them to a vacation home our family had stayed at the summer before. This time, at the park I went up to the top of Prayer Mountain and at the foot of the largest altar in the world at that time, God asked me to have a Day of Prayer for the Body of Christ there. I had met Nadia Abidini by paying to attend her Women’s Program that summer. Her husband had been made a prisoner in Iran and she had to cancel her program as she asked the UN to help him get released. All of us who had bought tickets for her event were asked to pray for the release of her Iranian Christian husband who had been jailed in Iran for 3 years by this time for planting churches and Christian camps there.

I told her that we would hold a prayer vigil at the Fields of the Woods Bible Park and asked her if she would ask for people to pray for the Body of Christ of America to come together. She held over 1000 prayer events on September 15, 2015. Gregg and I held on at Fields of the Woods. We didn’t advertise it but prayed for God to send those He wanted to climb 300 steps to a prayer altar in the woods and pray for whoever came and wanted prayer. Miraculously, over 100 people were drawn there for personal reasons and we and another couple in ministry prayed with them individually and also as groups. The most precious time was when four black women climbed those steps and with a huge family from Tennessee, we prayed for a coming together of Red and Yellow, Black and White, to come together for the Lord.

Saeed was released from Iranian Prison and came home. He had been hurt mentally by the Iranians and is recuperating to this day. The Body of Christ of the World for all His time has been growing by huge numbers with each generation and mass media. God loves all He created and wants them to know His love. Please pray for the Body of Christ and those still to come into it. Jesus is coming soon.

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



Sudoku

Solution on page 14

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

Blossoms and Songs in Unseen Places

By Ken and Jan Merop
Avery County



Have you ever gone caving or hiked a mile up a mountain? Though I’ve never gone caving ~ as in crawling into a hole in the side of a mountain and exploring ~ I have gone on guided tours of caves and found them fascinating.

Yet, it is still not my favorite adventure ~ being underground in the side of a mountain. However, caves hold beautiful, impressive secrets.

The darkness, dirt, and dank coolness must spell adventure and discovery for spelunkers. Without them, we wouldn’t know about the incredible stalactites and stalagmites that hang down and stick up in splendid, artistic formations.

It causes us to wonder. Why such beauty in virtually unseen places? Hiking for me is far more enjoyable.

I love being outdoors and breathing in the pristine air of the mountains. I delight in the openness and freedom I feel. Climbing to heights that open to unimaginably majestic vistas are sure rewards.

The mile-high hike was grueling. But there was much beauty along the way with a stream rippling alongside the steep path we were on. But, at the top, beauty beyond our hopes awaited.

A plateau of the clearest lake I’d ever seen fed by a thundering waterfall took our breath away. This same waterfall continuously fed the stream that had been splashing and dancing alongside us as we climbed.

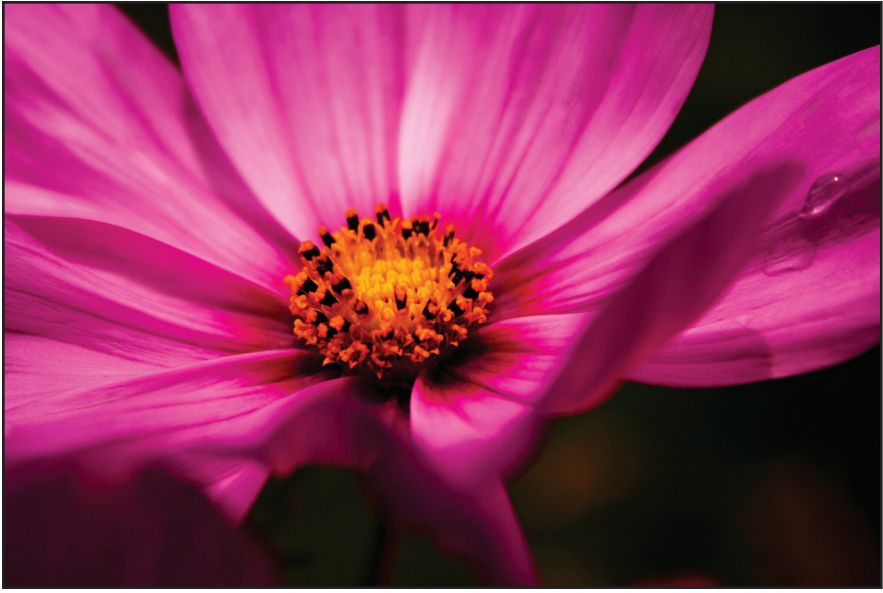
The highway below is not visible from this protected, circular environment. People drive by unaware of the hidden beauty. Yet, the music of the waterfall never stops singing whether anyone hears it or not.

God, the Creator of all things, places beauty in unseen places ~ because. He is inherently beautiful and whether we can see it or not, He creates it. And, then, should we happen upon it, we are blessed, inspired, and awed. His winsome artistry declares his glory – much like the night sky that is far denser with stars and planets than our natural eye can see.

Whether in the bosom of the earth or atop a mountain peak, the joy of it all is that we can never escape his presence. As Psalm 139: 7a-8a, in The Message, asks, “Is there anyplace I can go to avoid your Spirit? If I climb to the sky, you’re there! If I go underground, you’re there!”

His beauty is all-encompassing and He never sleeps. Whether we see Him in action or not, even unseen places declare his glory; and, we can declare with the Psalmist, “In Your presence is fullness of joy.” Selah

*Bloom where you’re planted
Rushing waters from the falls zoom by.
Songs of intensity fill the air.
Yet, this tiny bloom seems unaffected.
It has been assigned to bloom in that spot...
And so, it does...gently and gracefully.
Let’s bloom in the midst of our circumstances
so that others may know that joy equals strength.
“The joy of the Lord is your strength.”
Nehemiah 8: 10b*



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

Check out our new Website-www.brcnews.com
And find us on Facebook

Why Pray?

By Monica Kritz
Mitchell County



Why pray? The Bible says in 2 Timothy 3:13, “*But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.*” So...why pray? Continue reading, verse 14-15: “*But continue thou in the things which thou has learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*”

“But continue...”

There are 7 areas of influence in a nation. Let’s consider each of these.

1.) Government.

Dear LORD, thank You for giving order & organization to a nation. We pray for those in leadership, that they would follow You & Your Word. Give them wisdom. Help us, as citizens, to be faithful to vote & not take this freedom for granted. Forgive us where we have followed our own wisdom instead of Yours. In JESUS’ name, we pray, Amen.

2.) Military.

Dear LORD, thank You for Your protection. We depend on it. Thank You for our military. Be with them & guard them, as they guard our nation & give up many luxuries in order to serve America. In JESUS’ name, Amen.

3.) Media.

Dear LORD, thank You for good media, media that reports the truth. Help us to know & be able to discern the truth from lies. Lead us in this area. In JESUS’ name, Amen.

4.) Business.

Dear LORD, thank You for being a creative GOD. Be with our businesses. Use them for good. We ask for Your intervention of those being used for evil purposes. Help us, we pray. In JESUS’ name, Amen.

5.) Education.

Dear LORD, thank You for knowledge & wisdom. We ask for Your wisdom in the area of education. Protect our children from evil intentions. Help all educational leaders to see the need to be watchful over all students. May education be used for good. We ask in JESUS’ name, Amen.

6.) Church.

Dear LORD, thank You for creating the church, a body to be used to be salt & light in our culture. Forgive us when we have done a poor job. Revive Your church, & may we be busy sharing Your love & showing Your love every day. We pray in JESUS’ name, Amen.

7.) Family.

Dear LORD, thank You for the family, a foundation in our culture. May our world see families model Your example of love & forgiveness. Thank You for our families, our church families, & those who feel like family. Guide them. May they operate their homes on the principles of The Bible & prayer. We pray this in JESUS’ name, Amen.

National Day of Prayer
Thursday, May 5th
Riverside Park 12:00 noon & 6:30 p.m.

Please come. Invite your friends & family & church family. Let’s join our hearts together, as we lift up our nation to The LORD!

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.

Mothers

By Steve Williams
Mitchell County



May is the month that we honor our Mother. There is just something very special about mothers. If you don’t think so, just remember that 100% of every person on the earth has had a mother.

The thing I remember the most about my mom is her voice and the words that she shared. I remember being in the hospital and my mom was there standing beside my bed holding my hand and praying for me while I lay under an oxygen tent. I was very sick with pneumonia many times as a small child... She never left my side and kept telling me everything was going to be ok. I remember hearing her tell me how much she loved me all through my life, even though some of the years in my life I was not too lovable. I can hear her tell me when I was not living right that God saw what I was doing, and that it hurt Him. I remember coming in late at night and trying to sneak by her door without her hearing me and I would hear her praying and thanking God for bringing me home safely. Boy, she knew how to use her words to God and to Get my attention as I walked by her room. I will always remember her words of challenge that she spoke to me and that she also wrote in my Bible that she gave me. She said Steve, “Sin will keep you from this book and this book will keep you from sin.” Those words still echo in my ears today.

The two things I miss the most about my mother’s voice. One is asking her to pray for me and listen to how she would pray to God. It was just like they were sitting right across from each other while she lifted me up in prayer Second is her sharing her thankfulness to God and how God had helped our family through so much. One day I took my mom and dad to a place on top of Blue Rock Mt. called Quiet Reflection, and it was during the fall of the year. As I took her to the chapel and opened the door, and as she looked through the big pane glass windows, she started crying, lifting up her hands and just praising God for the beauty of what she was seeing and how great the God she served was. What she was seeing overwhelmed her and it really got to me. It just showed me just how much my mom love the Lord that day. Love is the greatest thing in the world from a mom, but a mother’s voice is the most divine. Her voice can soothe her crying child and even chase away a bully who is trying to hurt their child. I believe the greatest attention getter in the world, other than God, is the voice of a mother. Oh, how I can’t wait to hear the voice of my mom again.

Words Of Wisdom

- Moms are the people who know us the best and love us the most. N/A
- Silence is golden unless you have kids, Then silence is suspicious. N/A
- A mother is your best critic and yet your strongest supporter. N/A
- Motherhood is tough. If you want a wonderful little creature to love, you best get a puppy. N/A
- Only God Himself fully appreciates the influence of a Christian mother in the molding of character in her children. Billy Graham
- I don’t believe there are devils enough in hell to pull a boy or girl out of the arms of a godly mother. Billy Sunday

Something to think about:

- A wise woman told her husband who was complaining about how things looked around the house. She said, "We can’t all look good at the same time, It’s either me, The kids, or The house."

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

Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. Proverbs 31:25-30

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By Joe Sturz
Shenandoah, Virginia



Everything here on earth is temporary and is quickly passing away. This song is a great reminder for Christians that our real home is not here but in heaven. *"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven:"* (II Cor.5:1-2).

So here is a Gospel Song I love to sing that reminds me of this truth:

This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through,
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue;
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door,
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

Refrain:

O Lord, You know I have no friend like You,
If heaven's not my home, then, Lord, what will I do?
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door,
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.
They're all expecting me, and that's one thing I know—
My Savior pardoned me, and now I onward go;
I know He'll take me through though I am weak and poor,
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

I have a loving Savior up in glory-land,
I don't expect to stop until I with Him stand;
He's waiting now for me in heaven's open door,
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.
Just up in glory-land we'll live eternally,
The saints on every hand are shouting victory,
Their songs of sweetest praise drift back from heaven's shore,
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

Sources:

Author (attributed to): A.P. Carter
(no biographical information available about A.P. Carter.)
Arranger: Albert E. Brumley

Born: October 29, 1905, near Spiro, Oklahoma. Died: November 15, 1977, Springfield, Missouri. Buried: Fox Cemetery, Powell, Missouri. Brumley attended the Hartford Musical Institute in Hartford, Arkansas, and sang with the Hartford Quartet. He went on to teach at singing schools in the Ozarks and lived most of his life in Powell, Missouri. He worked for 34 years as a staff writer for the Hartford and Stamps/Baxter publishing companies, then founded the Albert E. Brumley & Sons Music Company and Country Gentlemen Music, and bought the Hartford Music Company. He wrote over 800 Gospel and other songs during his life; the Country Song Writers Hall of Fame inducted him in 1970. © The Cyber Hymnal™. Used by permission. (www.hymntime.com)...

Hymnary.org (https://hymnary.org/text/this_world_is_not_my_home_im_just_a)

So let us turn to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in loving trust and adoration (Psalm 16:1; Proverbs 3:5-6; John 14:1). Let us repent of all our sins and trust in His forgiveness that He paid for on the cross (I John 1:9), He rose again from the dead to secure a place for us in heaven (John 14:1-3; I Corinthians 15:4-5).

Brother Joe "with a home in heaven" Sturz Sunday, April 10, 2022, www.sturzchristiancounseling.com Facebook Group YouTube Sharing what the Lord has taught me through: His Word, 42 years of marriage before my beloved went to heaven, my mistakes, failures, and successes including 50+ years as a Biblical Counselor. See my short, daily Bible messages on my Facebook Timeline. Seeking to apply all of the Bible to all of life as a means to raise up kingdom builders for the Lord. If you would like to receive these messages by email then send a request to joe@sturzchristiancounseling.com

I became a Christian when I repented of my sins (I John 1:9) and trusted personally in Jesus Christ's suffering and dying on the cross in my place to take God's punishment for my sin (I Corinthians 15:1-4). And now I follow Him (John 8:31-32) in praying, reading, and obeying the Bible every day, belonging to a Bible-believing church, and sharing my faith with others (Acts 2:46-47).

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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Discover the Person You’re Meant to Be

By Joyce Meyer

Because I was sexually abused by my father throughout my childhood, I believed I was damaged goods and could only have a second-class life. I was so insecure and thought no one could really love me or accept me. I believed my worth was based on what I did; the only time I felt good about myself was when I worked hard and was productive.

But as I became serious about my relationship with God and began studying His Word more diligently, I discovered that my past didn’t have to determine who I am or what my future would be like. Learning about God’s love for me and who I am in Christ changed everything!

Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV) says, “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’” And John 10:10 says Jesus came that we “may have life, and have it to the full.”

If you have a poor self-image, you won’t be able to fulfill God’s plans or enjoy your life. Because you can’t live with His peace and know your true value to Him if you are insecure and have a low opinion of yourself.

Discovering who we are in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17) is the key to becoming who God created us to be and making a difference in this world. It’s the key to really understanding the truth that the less we think about ourselves, the happier we will be.

Die to Self and Find a Life Worth Living

I remember when God dealt with me about my selfish, self-centered, “What about me?!” attitude. He spoke to my heart one day and said, “You’re selfish. You’ve studied My Word about spiritual warfare, healing, having power and authority as a believer in Christ...but how much time have you studied about My love?”

It made me realize I would never be happy and have peace until I learned to love as Jesus loves.

When we know and experience God’s love, we can share it with others. Imagine what the world would be like if everyone who calls themselves a Christian would really love each other with His love. Think about it: There would be no gossip, no judgment or criticism, no exclusive attitudes that make others feel rejected, and people’s needs would be met much more than they are.

The truth is serving others is God’s ultimate plan for our lives. And Jesus gave us very real, practical examples of how to love others as He loves us by serving them.

Loving Others “to the Highest Degree”

John 13:1 says Jesus “loved them...to the highest degree” (AMPC). In the following verses, He demonstrates what it means to love others like this.

In those days, there were servants who washed people’s feet when they came to visit. It’s likely they were considered the lowliest servants in the household. Now Jesus, the Son of God Himself, got up from supper, took the servant’s towel, and proceeded to wash the disciples’ feet. His message to them was to love one another by being a servant because God wants His love to flow through us and touch other people’s lives.

Love is not just a feeling or a theory; it’s a decision we make and an action we take. It’s so important for us to study what the Bible teaches about God’s love so we can learn to love like Jesus—to be a servant who “washes feet” by helping others.

Loving Others Like Jesus Loves

Matthew 7:12 (NIV) says, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you....” Showing God’s love means investing in the lives of others by giving them support, encouraging them, and helping to meet their needs as we’re able to do so.

It’s easy to want to help people you like or those you want to impress, but when it comes to doing something for someone you don’t know or even your family, it can be a different story. We have to realize we’re naturally selfish, and we must make a conscious decision to think of others on purpose or we’ll miss many opportunities to serve them.

I want to encourage you to read John 13 and pay close attention to what Jesus did and what He said. Spend some time studying scriptures about God’s love and pray for Him to show you ways you can serve the people in your life. You’ll probably find it’s easier and more simple than you thought it would be to help make someone’s life better.

God wants us to enjoy our lives, and the key is to die to self, get over being the center of our world, and focus on helping someone every day. When you do this, you’ll discover you’re actually more secure, content, peaceful and happy than you’ve ever been in your life!

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.



Bring on Summer: The 2022 Valdese Family Friday Nights Concert Series Lineup is Here!

By Angi Morrissa
Burke County

Get ready for an unforgettable Summer in Valdese! The 2022 Summer Concert Series has been announced, along with some exciting updates regarding the construction of the new stage on Temple Field. This year’s lineup will feature a variety of different genres among talented groups- from the beach to rock, from country to beach. In addition to hosting fan favorites of seasons past, 2022’s lineup also welcomes a few newcomers to the Valdese FFN stage, including Southside Saints and the Randy Clay Band. The Annual Independence Day Celebration and the 47th Annual Waldensian Festival will be held in conjunction with the series, with those performances taking place at Main Stage Downtown, at the intersection of Rodoret St and Main. Festival Headliners include Cat5 Band and The Catalinas.


Initially moved from the town parking area along Main Street to allow more space for social distancing, the location change to Temple Field in 2021 completely reinvented the summer event, drawing a record number of attendees each Friday night. The larger space on the football field provided a much safer, a cooler area with ample room to spread out, picnic, enjoy games, etc. “The success of the 2021 season was truly more than we could have hoped for” states Morrissa Angi, Director of Community Affairs for Valdese. “We saw the event completely re-energized and it truly became FAMILY Friday Nights for not only our community but for visitors from all around. We are looking forward to making 2022 even better, especially with the addition of our permanent stage!”

Valdese Town Council approved the permanent location change for the event and stage construction in late 2021. Construction for the stage and dance floor is set to begin in early March and is to be completed by the Season Kick-Off on May 27th. The Town of Valdese would like to extend the deepest appreciation to our stage sponsors, Rostan Family Foundation, Historic Valdese Foundation, UNC-Health Blue Ridge, College Pines Health & Rehabilitation, Grace Heights Health & Rehabilitation, and Wright Way Dance. The twenty by thirty-foot stage will occupy the southwest corner of Temple Field behind the Old Rock School and will provide a deserving backdrop for the summer’s entertainment. Not only will the stage be much larger than the event has seen in the past it will also feature a rock façade, concrete dance floor, and metal roof structure. The concerts are free and a great, safe place for families to enjoy.

Family Friday Night attendees are also encouraged to take advantage of the Downtown charm Valdese offers its residents and visitors. Downtown Restaurants provide a wide variety of cuisines (Pizza, Burgers, Mexican, Sushi, Sandwiches, Ice Cream) and Main Street features several unique and spirited boutiques, offering something to pique the interest of every family member. Many downtown businesses offer special events on Friday nights ranging from cruise-ins to bingo.

For more information about the Family Friday Night Summer Concert series or a full event calendar for Valdese, go to visitvaldese.com or call 828-879-2129.

2022 Season Lineup:
Season Kickoff May 27th: THE TIM CLARK BAND - Variety
Friday, June 3rd-: LITTLE JOHNNY TRAILER TRASH - Country & Americana
Friday, June 10th: SOUTHSIDE SAINTS – Classic Rock
Friday, June 17th: THE SUPER 60’s- Everything 60’s
Friday, June 24th: FRACXURED - Classic Rock &Variety
Friday, July 1st: Independence Day Celebration Downtown: TOO MUCH SYLVIA - Variety
Friday, July 8th: SHELBY RAE MOORE – Blues & Rock
Friday, July 15th: MICHAEL COSNER - Country & Variety
Friday, July 22nd: SHAKEDOWN - Beach & Dance
Friday, July 29th: RANDY CLAY BAND - Variety & Dance
Friday, August 5th: NIGHT MOVE BAND -Beach & Dance
Friday, August 12th: 47th Annual Waldensian Festival Downtown - CAT 5 BAND- Beach & Dance
Saturday, August 13th: Festival Saturday - THE CATALINAS - Beach & Dance
Friday, August 19th: CASSETTE REWIND - Everything 80’s
Friday, August 26th: SKATERINK JUKEBOX - Variety & Dance
Season Finale-Friday, September 2nd: THE TONEZ - Beach & Variety



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YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

NC Senate District 47



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

It's no secret that folks are moving to North Carolina every day. Based on the latest U.S. census, North Carolina has seen its population grow 9.5% over the last ten years. This is the result of commonsense reforms Republicans have made in the General Assembly, like reforming our tax code and making smart, fiscally responsible investments in our state's infrastructure.

In fact, roughly 1.1 million people in North Carolina currently lack access to high-speed internet. I believe addressing this issue is vital in helping people improve their lives and boosting the economy in Western North Carolina. That is why I'm proud the budget we passed last fall included over \$1 billion for broadband expansion in our state. These funds include almost \$350 million for the NC GREAT Grant program which will be used for competitive grants to expand broadband availability in rural areas, \$400 million for the Completing Access to Broadband Fund to be used for additional broadband grants, \$90 million for the targeted Stopgap Solutions grants addressing local infrastructure needs and connecting unserved and underserved households, and \$15 million to improve broadband access for 25 of North Carolina's most rural community colleges.

On top of that, I have worked closely with county commissioners and county managers all over the High Country to address county funding needs at the state level. In last year's biennium appropriations budget, I was able to secure over \$120 million to address the needs of the six counties I currently represent. These projects included things like dam repairs, new law enforcement facilities, as well as water and sewer projects. As your state senator, having open and honest conversations with local leaders is critical in making sure help is going to the places it's needed most.

Having a balanced state budget that addresses these kinds of priorities is vital. There's still work to be done, but you can be sure I will continue to embrace policies and spending priorities that help businesses create jobs and revive our economy in western North Carolina.

As always, please share your thoughts with me on issues 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

Special Alert: Free Summer STEM Programs Offered by NCSSM

Do you know someone who next school year will be either middle school or high school? If so, I hope you will share this information with them. The new Morganton campus of the North Carolina School of Science and Math is offering free STEM summer programs for rising 7th through 12th graders in North Carolina's 18 westernmost counties. That specifically includes Burke County. The programs will run from July 17th through the 22nd. Programs will be divided into four sections: two for rising 7th through 9th graders and two for rising 10th through 12th grades.

STEM programs consist of coursework in the fields of either science, technology, engineering or math, or some combination of those. As many are aware, these particular areas of study are among those most needed for those who would pursue well-paying jobs in today's economy and even more so for jobs of the future.

Middle school students can choose between forensics and robotics. High school students are given the option of studying either exercise science or engineering. Only 15 students will be chosen for each of the four sections, a total of 60 students in all. It is understood that admission will be on a first-come, first-serve basis. So, time is of the essence in getting an application in for anyone wanting to attend. For more information on the particulars and to access the application for these programs, you may click on this link: <https://www.ncssm.edu/summer-programs/accelerator/dogwood-health-trust>

NC Commissioner of Labor



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

I hope you had a blessed Easter with your family and are enjoying the beautiful spring weather and longer days. My staff and I have been busy traveling the state and visiting communities and businesses.

On April 8, I visited The Quartz Corp.'s (TQC) newly renovated mining logistics facility in Yancey County. This marked my first official visit to this type of worksite, and I was incredibly impressed by the facility's operations and its commitment to safety. The tour highlighted the upgrades to safety technology that ensure safer working conditions. I am pleased to see companies like this thriving in the western part of our state, and I appreciate TQC's continued investment in the local economy and worker safety. TQC is a key supplier of high purity quartz sand for the solar, semiconductor, and fiber optics markets. The quartz is sourced from Spruce Pine where the unique geology offers the world's highest purity quartz deposits.

April 28, Workers' Memorial Day, is a time to remember and honor the men and women who have tragically lost their lives while on the job. One core mission of my department is to ensure the safety and welfare of all North Carolinians, with the ultimate goal of returning workers home to their families at the end of each day. While workplaces are much safer than in the past, I remain committed to helping businesses and workers further improve safety and health. This is the least we can do to honor North Carolinians who have died on the job.

The National Stand-Down to Prevent Falls in Construction is May 2-6. Sadly, fatalities caused by falls from elevation continue to be a leading cause of death for construction workers. A safety stand-down is a voluntary opportunity for employers to take a break with employees to focus on various hazards and the importance of fall prevention. Any interested employer is encouraged to participate. Find more information on the Occupational Safety and Health Division portion of our website – labor.nc.gov.

Safety Awards Banquet season is well underway, with eight already completed as of the end of April. We have nine on the calendar for May, including two in the western part of the state. The Statesville banquet is set for Wednesday, May 11 and the Shelby banquet follows on Thursday, May 12. Find more scheduling information on our website.

The month of May will close with the Memorial Day holiday weekend. While this weekend marks the unofficial start of summer, more importantly, it is a time to honor the men and women who died while serving in the United States military. I hope you have plans to enjoy the weekend at the beach, the lake, or by the grill in your backyard, but let us also take time to remember and appreciate the sacrifice of so many service members who died defending our country. Happy Memorial Day.

God Bless America

YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

NC 11th Congressional District



Rep. Madison Cawthorn
828-808-2148

I will never bow to the mob. Many despise the great work we're doing to represent Western North Carolina, but I promise, I will stay focused on the work that still needs to be done in Washington for my beautiful district.

My Legislation Forcing President Biden to Address Rising Gas Prices

I recently introduced a new piece of legislation titled the "He Did That Act" requiring President Biden to report to Congress the methods the executive branch has at its disposal to stabilize and reduce gas prices nationwide.

Between shutting down the Keystone XL Pipeline, green lighting Russia's Nord Stream 2, and pausing drilling licenses throughout the country, the Biden Administration has caused financial hardship for Americans everywhere. To provide relief, my new bill will demand that Biden seriously reevaluate his policy decisions and give the American people real answers on what can be done to give them relief at the pump.

Biden's energy policies have caused gas prices to explode throughout the country. His far-fetched, unrealistic, leftist agenda has caused the American people to suffer for too long. America needs energy independence now!

Southern Living Calls Lake Lure the South's 'Best Lake Town'

Southern Living recently ranked their top 10 lake towns in the South and Rutherford County's own Lake Lure took the top spot!

"More and more people are discovering the Lake Lure-Chimney Rock area, and appreciate its scenic natural beauty," said Don Cason, executive director of the Rutherford County Tourism Development Authority. "Being featured in Southern Living will expose even more people to Lake Lure, and encourage more visitors."

Lake Lure hot spots Lured Market & Grill, Lake Lure Inn and Spa, Rumbling Bald Resort, and the Lake Lure Adventure Company are all mentioned in the article.

"Publicity like this will expose more people to Lake Lure, and may encourage more people to visit Rutherford County this year," Cason added. "And among these many visitors, some will choose to relocate here. Positive publicity for this area can ultimately translate to economic growth."

The Capitol Has Reopened!

It has recently been announced that on Monday, March 28, 2022, public tours of the Capitol will resume with a limited number of Member-led, staff-led tours, and school groups. Since March 2020, the U.S. Capitol, and the Capitol Visitor Center (CVC) have been closed to tours.

When tours resume, access will be facilitated using a phased approach. Throughout the first phase, tours to the Capitol will be monitored by Visitor Services so that modifications can be made if recommended by the Attending Physician. Phase 2 of tour resumption is expected to begin at the end of May, with the opening of the CVC to a limited number of visitors.

If you are interested in booking a Capitol tour please contact my DC office at (202) 225-6401 or visit my website.

NC Senate District 46



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

Friends, I trust you have been enjoying the colors of spring that have finally arrived. I am uplifted by the immense beauty of God's creation and hope you are as well. This month I wanted to remind readers of the progress the NC General Assembly has made concerning the economy and tax policies over the last 11 years.

Since 2011, the Republican-led General Assembly has focused efforts on sunseting temporary taxes, reducing other taxes, creating a very low flat income tax rate, and substantially raising the standard income tax deduction. At the same time, a strong savings surplus was created to retain our state's AAA credit rating. Before 2011, the state had run out of money and faced a budget deficit of over \$3 billion even after the Democrat-led General Assembly had raised taxes by billions of dollars from 2003-to 2010. The strong savings reserve at the beginning of 2022 was the result of stabilizing broken programs like Medicaid and the Unemployment Trust Fund, along with resisting the urge to spend the annual surpluses. Through prudent budgeting, the state has been able to address the needs of North Carolina, without the reckless spending that was common prior to 2011. North Carolina has also been ranked as The Best State for Business three years in a row according to Forbes. North Carolina's job and population growth outpace competing states thanks to more than a decade of successful Republican reform. I am proud of the record of our majority conservative leadership in the General Assembly. More importantly, it has been an honor to be a part of a decade of historic reforms that have been called the Carolina Comeback, and have made North Carolina the best state to live, work, and raise a family. I pray that in the decade to come our state and our citizens will continue to prosper. As always, my staff and I continue to be available to assist you, the citizens of Avery, Burke, and Caldwell counties, with any state-level government issues that you may encounter. May God bless each and every one of you. We don't know what the future holds, but we know who holds the future.

NC House District 85



Rep. Dudley Green



Rep. John Bell
10th District

Representative Dudley Greene 85th District and Representative John Bell 10th District NC House Takes Important Steps to Support N.C. Law Enforcement, First Responders, and Firefighters

In this legislative session, the North Carolina House has passed numerous bills to support those who serve and protect our communities. From firefighters and paramedics to law enforcement and correctional officers, we have made it a priority to ensure that they have the resources and funding they need and deserve.

Now more than ever, we need to stand up for law enforcement officers. While some politicians push to defund the police, we are working to further support, train, and equip these brave men and women who put their lives on the line every day to keep us safe.

Sadly, one issue many law enforcement officers face today is mental health illness. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, nearly 1 in 4 police officers have thoughts of suicide at some point in their life.

That is why we passed into law, House Bill 436, which expands access to mental health resources for law enforcement officers by increasing and improving wellness training, support, and screenings.

Furthermore, many first responders experience horrible scenes and events which can lead to posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). House Bill 492 helps address that by allowing first responders, whether law enforcement officers, firefighters, 911 dispatchers, paramedics, or emergency medical technicians, to receive workers' compensation benefits for PTSD.

With so many first responders suffering from mental illness due to experiences at their job, making sure they receive compensation for both mental and physical injuries is critically important.

To that end, the state legislature created a new \$7.5 million assistance program in the budget to help firefighters diagnosed with work-related cancers. We also passed House Bill 355, which bans toxic firefighting foam that has been linked to cancer.

Firefighters have a 9 percent higher risk of being diagnosed with cancer and a 14 percent higher risk of dying from cancer than the general U.S. population. These provisions will provide additional protection for firefighters, as well as support should they face a cancer diagnosis due to their service.

With violence against police officers on the rise over the past few years, it is important we do more to protect those who keep our communities safe.

According to the FBI, there was a 51 percent increase in the number of police officers killed in the line of duty from January 2021 to September 2021. In 2020, over 60,100 law enforcement officers nationwide were assaulted while performing their duties. Many times, their equipment is also targeted and damaged.

That is why we approved House Bill 36 to increase the punishment for firing at an emergency vehicle and House Bill 761 to enhance penalties for breaking into a law enforcement vehicle. We also passed House Bill 418 to make it a crime to threaten to hurt, harm, or kill an officer.

Lastly, we approved House Bill 805 to impose stronger penalties for those who engage in violent protests. The First Amendment guarantees the right to peacefully protest — but that does not include rioting, looting, and destroying property.

As legislators, we have a duty to support those who are on the frontlines responding to emergencies and keeping our communities. Rest assured, we will continue to stand up for our North Carolina law enforcement officers, first responders, and firefighters.

Avery County

1st Annual Avery County Summer Fest
June 11 & 12, 2022
Location:
NC Cooperative Extension Center of Avery County
Home of the Avery County Fair
661 Vale Road
Newland, NC 28657
Hours:
Saturday & Sunday: 9 am – 5 pm

McDowell County

Volunteers Needed!
Bigfoot Festival volunteers are needed on Friday, May 13 from 1pm - 3pm and Saturday, May 14 from 7am - 10am on Main Street. Please contact Bob Boyette at 828-652-3551 or bboyette@marionnc.org if you are available to help. The City of Marion appreciates everyone who is able to pitch in and help make McDowell County's biggest festival go smoothly

Mitchell County

Spruce Pine
May 6th – Shriner Paper Sale
May 7th – Run for Holland
May 21 – Paint the Town (Central Park)
June 4th – Troutacular – Riverside Park

NOTES

By Jim Smith
McDowell County

Freedom Life and the McDowell community experiences many wonderful events surrounding the focus of the Second Chance Act – Reentry Month! What is the Second Chance Act? The Second Chance Act (SCA) supports state, local, and tribal governments and nonprofit organizations in their work to reduce recidivism and improve outcomes for people returning from state and federal prisons, local jails, and juvenile facilities. Passed with bipartisan support and signed into law on April 9, 2008, and reauthorized in 2018, SCA legislation authorizes federal grants for vital programs and systems reform aimed at improving the reentry process. Freedom Life is a recipient of an SCA grant – and we have a wonderful success rate. Our goal in reentry is to have programming and accountability to make sure our clients have all the tools and resources needed to not reoffend or be placed back into prison/jail.

Photos from a reentry simulation: Local human resources and community leaders went through a simulation of what our clients face when coming out of incarceration. They were “released” and given some monopoly money and had to go to different agencies to get back on their feet for food, clothing, transportation, and a job. It was an eye-opening experience.

Photos from a reentry celebration at Cross Memorial Church in Marion. Clients and community shared in their walk of reentry through cardboard Testimonies.

T-shirt Tuesday was another marketing initiative we took to bring awareness. We challenge the community to wear Shirts in support of Reentry each Tuesday of the Month!

One last point of encouragement – through donations in our community, Freedom Life made 150 Easter jail grocery bags to give to inmates and performed a concert of gospel music which included former inmates sharing stories of success by making better choices after incarceration.



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

Welcome Home

savings event

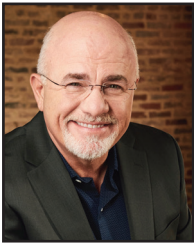
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claytonmorganton.com

By Dave Ramsey

Dear Dave,

My husband and I have paid off all our credit card debt, and we are following your Baby Steps plan. We still owe about \$40,000 on two cars, and our combined income is around \$150,000. Since we have a good income, we were thinking about finishing our emergency fund and contributing to our IRAs while we finish off the car payments. Under the circumstances, is this okay? Paola



Dear Paola,

I understand the temptation you guys are facing. But there’s a power in behavior modification on a short-term basis that supersedes the power of mathematics. Stick to the plan, and pay off the cars first.

When you’re still on Baby Step 2, you need to stop all saving and investing, and attack your debts with a vengeance. You’ve got a lot of money wrapped up in cars, and even with all the great work you two have done I know it’s probably still a little hard to see light at the end of the tunnel. Debts that large can be intimidating.

But I’m afraid you’ll lose focus and intensity when it comes to getting out of debt if you worry about your emergency fund and setting aside for retirement too soon. I’ve seen that happen to lots of people, and when it does it can end up taking several years to get rid of all that debt.

You guys have made great progress, and you’re making good money. If you stay gazelle-intense about getting out of debt, those car payments can be history in about a year and a half. Think about how fast you can get that emergency fund in place then, and how much money you’ll have freed up to retire.

Now is the time to roll up your sleeves, get mad about all that stupid debt and knock it out once and for all. You can do this, Paola!

Dear Dave,

Our son is in high school, and he has a part-time job. He makes good grades, and we have always tried to teach him how to save and handle money according to your advice. He has even managed to set aside a few thousand dollars for college. My wife and I were talking the other night, and I brought up the idea of charging him a small amount for rent, maybe just \$20 or \$25 a month, to help him be even better prepared for the real world. What do you think about this? Keith

Dear Keith,

I appreciate the fact that you’re looking for teachable moments. But making a high school kid pay rent? No, that’s a little over the top.

Listen, you and your wife are already way ahead of a lot of parents. Teaching him financial responsibility and the importance of education are great things. It sounds like your son is a bright, motivated young man, too.

I talk to adults all the time who are decades older but still don’t grasp the concepts of maturity and responsibility like this kid does already. With the kind of start you’re giving him, I think he’s going to grow up to be a very successful adult. Keep up the good work, and let that young man know how proud you both are of him! — Dave

Dear Dave,

I own a small business. How much should I have in a business emergency fund when my annual sales are around \$100,000? Currently, I have two months of expenses set aside. Theresa

Dear Theresa,

Generally, I like the idea of small businesses having about six months of expenses on hand. That kind of cushion usually eliminates the need for borrowing money. It also provides peace of mind. And if you’ve been an entrepreneur very long, you know that’s an invaluable thing.

Having a personal emergency fund set aside is a little different than having one in place for your business. When it comes to personal finance, I recommend having three to six months of expenses set aside. The basic idea is the same, though. A fully-funded emergency fund gives you an option—besides debt—when unexpected things happen! — 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.



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Republican for NC Senate District 46
(McDowell, Burke, Buncombe)

Paid For By Warren Daniel For NC Senate

Mt. Carmel Baptist Church

“A Wise Builder”

By Toby Crowder
Mitchell County

Prov 14:1 *“Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands.”*

“Clean your room... Don’t Touch that... Eat your vegetables... Get ready for church... Stop fighting with your sister!” Most of us have heard these commands or something similar throughout our lives. These, of course, are a reminder of things that we may have heard our mothers say as we reflect upon and celebrate Mother’s Day. I believe it was Abraham Lincoln who rightly said, “No one is poor who had a godly mother” and I think those of us who were blessed with a godly mother would agree wholeheartedly! But the simple commands listed above, and others that our mothers say to us, whether we realize it or not, are not simply commands, orders, or suggestions... they were building blocks. The writer of the Proverbs reminds us of the godly wisdom that is required to build a godly home.

Even though this is a small verse, it contains a powerful meaning when we consider the woman who builds her home. The verse says every wise woman.... this speaks to all; not only the wise but those who desire to be. We gain wisdom from experience, and often by example. We are blessed to have several young mothers in the church that I pastor, and we are also blessed to have some godly grandmothers and mature Christian ladies who serve as an example for the younger generation. Wisdom is something that comes with age, and as the younger mothers strive to build their homes, the older ones display and offer the wisdom of their experiences. Thank God for this wisdom and for those who are willing both to share and accept it.

The verse states that this wise woman is a builder: she displays wisdom in her dealings with her family and others as she builds. This type of wisdom does not come from the world... it will not be found on a daily talk show on TV or scrolling through a list of social media posts. Simple wisdom is something that God will give to each of us if we are serious about building with wisdom:

Jas 1:5 *“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”*

Psalm 111:10 *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever.”*

Prov 24:3 *“Through wisdom is an house builded; and by understanding it is established:”*

A wise mother realizes the source of wisdom and builds upon this knowledge: Over 200 years ago a lady named Suzanna Wesley reared 19 children. She was devoted to the task and had 16 rules which are worth mentioning here today: “Teach a child to pray as soon as he can speak; Require all to be still during Family Worship; Give them nothing they cry for, and only that which they ask for politely; To prevent lying, punish no fault which is first confessed and repented; Never allow a sinful act to go unpunished; Never punish a child twice for a single offense; Commend and reward good behavior; Any attempt to please, even if poorly performed should be commended; Preserve property rights, even in smallest matters; Strictly observe all promises; Require no daughter to work before she can read well; Teach children to fear the Lord.” While this is certainly not an exhaustive list, it is evident that Ms. Wesley was a devoted mother, a wise woman who was resolved to build her house upon God’s wisdom.

We also see the advantage of this wisdom in the family of young Timothy, as Paul writes to him in 2 Timothy 1:5 *“When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.”* It is evident all through Scripture that when a mother’s faith is scripturally sound... they will build well with godly wisdom. In closing, I want to thank God that I was raised by a godly mother and was also blessed with a wife who strives to be a godly mother to our children. To these, and every mother reading these words, thank you for building well! Happy Mother’s Day!

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



The Orchard at Altapass

Orchard At Altapass To Open May 7

By Kate Groff
Mitchell County

The 2022 season of the Orchard at Altapass begins Saturday, May 7, at 10 AM. To some, it seems as if it never closed, as work continued throughout the winter months. Thanks to grants from the Community Foundation of North Carolina–The Fund for Mitchell County, the Blue Ridge National Heritage Area, and generous contributions, the Orchard’s Olin Hefner Pavilion now has a wheelchair-accessible ramp connecting it to the red barn, an additional 12’x48’ of floor space, railings around, and transparent, roll-up vinyl curtains enclosing three sides. An anonymous donation roofed the new space and will add a floor to ceiling, side to side glass doors across the back; visitors will no longer have to endure wind, rain, and dust from the road. However, all will still be able to experience the aromatic and visual enchantment of the fields. And, of course, dance the afternoons away on a new plywood dance floor, which was made possible through donations to the Bryce Percival Memorial Fund.

But the update doesn’t stop there. Last fall, a dedicated group of volunteers worked each week to “rebuild” co-founder Judy Carson’s dream of a butterfly garden. Renamed the People’s Pollinator Garden at almost twice the size, the ground is now percolating with tiny blooms and trees leafing out. This year, the Orchard received a grant from The Fund for Mitchell County to purchase interpretive signage and a map that leads one up the path and through the garden.

Finally, what would the Orchard be without its apples and trails? Late last fall, we “walked” and renumbered the trails (10), marked them with colored flags, and created a map. Thanks to a grant from the McDowell Tourism Authority, visitors will be able to pick up a map in the store that will guide them through the Orchard. It will include difficulty ratings, mileage (almost 11 miles total), and the apples that they’ll pass.

This season will highlight a year of renewal, including the return of the Apple Core Grill that will open Saturdays and Sundays from 11 to 3. Two innovative chefs have joined the Orchard family, promising an applely array of all things delicious, monthly specials, and great mid-day fare. During the week, folks can still enjoy a bowl of hot apple pie with icy cold ice cream. “Heyrides” will also return on weekends—happily due to a successful GoFundMe campaign for necessary wagon repair.

Those who watched the orchard grow on the train project layout will see more this year as the Toe River Model Railroaders return to enlarge the vista to include the Overmountain men saga and reenactment (that will return this season). And there’ll probably be more “tiny” trees to plant.

Four hundred more apple “big” trees were grafted in the early spring and now fill pots in the nursery area. Another 600 were planted in the ground. And continuing the success of the past two year’s Adopt-a-Tree Project, 22 trees are up for adoption in 2022.

Musician William Ritter will open the season of free traditional music on that first Saturday. Invited musicians perform on Saturday and Sunday from 3:00 to 4:30 throughout the season. We thank those who have supported our mission to bring heritage music to the people, reflect our collective culture, and perform in this new venue. It’s still free to all audiences.

“As everyone on that first day of the Orchard at Altapass over 25 years ago, we remain steadfast to ‘Save the Good Stuff,’” offered Beth Hilton, executive director. “It’s important, as stated in our mission, to preserve, protect, and educate. From the music to the monarchs, the garden to the green trees, the Orchard’s beginning through today, we are dedicated to helping folks appreciate Appalachian heritage and culture, the land beneath, and the fragile ecosystem that keeps it all going.”

Hours are 10 AM to 5 PM, Saturday-Sunday, May 7th-31st; Wednesday-Sunday, June through October 31. For information about adopting an heirloom tree, email information@altapassorchard.org. Spend an hour or an afternoon. There’s not a rotten apple in the bunch. Be prepared to enjoy the people, music, art, and natural beauty of the Blue Ridge Mountains in North Carolina. People friendly. Pet friendly. Easy to get to, hard to leave. The Orchard at Altapass is located at 1025 Orchard Road, mm 328.3 just north of Spruce Pine on the Blue Ridge Parkway. For more information, visit altapassorchard.org.



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

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Mine Creek Baptist Church

Pass It On

By Chris Rathbone
Mitchell County

Jesus really loves children! Let me write that again and you read it again: JESUS REALLY LOVES CHILDREN! Matter of fact, when even His disciples tried to keep them from “bothering” Jesus, they were rebuked by Him. “*But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God.*” Mark 10:14. I’ve always pictured children around Jesus whenever the crowds would gather to see and hear Him. Mark goes on to write in 10:14 “*And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.*” For a child to follow after someone to the point of pushing through the adults in the crowds just to be close to Jesus, they must have really been drawn to Jesus.

The next time you’re at a family gathering, pay attention to whom children are drawn. One thing is for sure, it won’t be the old hateful grump in the crowd! They will be drawn to the one who acknowledges them. The person who is willing to get down and talk to them face to face. They’ll be drawn to the one who asks them questions about things children love to do. Children know the ones who will play the games with them. Is there anything better than a child running to you and putting their little arms around you just because they know you care about them?

This must have been how children felt about Jesus. Certainly, they were excited to see or hear Jesus. He would have looked at them, smiled at them, talked to them, hugged them, and shown them, unconditional love. Children get to know people better than we often realize and they are not drawn to the old hateful grumps in the crowd, they are drawn to the ones who show them, love. Some of y’all are thinking right now, “Children don’t seem to have much to do with me.” There may be a reason!

Jesus says in that same chapter in Mark 10:15 “*Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.*” Jesus even uses the example of a child to how we must receive and believe in Him and His kingdom, as a little child! Completely trusting, believing without doubt or wavering, receiving and embracing His gift of salvation without pride or arrogance, just simply receiving and believing like a trusting child.

Jesus taught in Matthew 18:1-6 “*At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.*”

Jesus gives a grave warning in those verses. First, we must humble ourselves and simply receive His kingdom and offer of salvation like a trusting, believing, accepting child with no pride or confidence in ourselves. Secondly, we must not offend or hinder a little child who believes in Jesus. If anything, as parents, as family, as friends, as pastors, and as church families, we must point the children God has placed in our lives to Jesus! It is our responsibility to lead our children to a saving relationship in Christ. For if we don’t, you better believe the world will lead them straight to a devil’s hell. The eternity of our children is at stake! We have to do anything and everything we can to point children to Jesus! Pass it on church, Pass it on!

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



Snow Hill Baptist Church No Regrets

I am an Adult Child of an Alcoholic Parent

By Dean Honeycutt
Mitchell County

As my dad was passing from this life, he made the statement if I could just go back and change my life, I would do things differently. My father was an alcoholic and he had realized at the end of his life that he had many regrets. Regrets about the way he treated my mom and my siblings. Regrets about ruining holidays. Regrets about things he had said and actions he had taken. Dad had a lot of guilt stored up in his mind from the suffering that the abuse of alcohol had brought to his family.

Though I have forgiven my dad and have worked through a lot of emotional pain, the emotional scars of growing up with an alcoholic parent are difficult. Many adult children of alcoholics (ACOAs) suffer dysfunctions in their adult lives due to the stress of growing up with one or two addicted parents. The severity of these scars would depend on the severity of the alcohol abuse in the family and the adult child’s ability to deal with these problems or get help dealing with these problems.

Some of the common traits of ACOA’s are low self-esteem, fear of anger, guilt, depression, anxiety, and becoming an alcoholic themselves. I have found that many people who grew up with an alcoholic parent do not want to become their parent. They do not want to experience the same heartache they grew up in. They want to be different. They do not want dysfunctions in their family. The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism has found “that some children suffer negative consequences due to parental alcoholism, a larger proportion of COAs function well and do not develop serious problems.” (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism; No. 9 ph. 288; July 1990; Children of Alcoholics: Are they Different?)

For me, my relationship with Jesus Christ and the openness with my wife and children about my dad, and the communication I continue to have with my siblings about our childhood under alcoholism have helped me tremendously. That is why I am starting a support group to meet with others who grew up with an alcoholic parent and parents who have children that are addicted to drugs or alcohol. This will be a time to share our experiences, pray, and encourage one another. This first meeting will be at Snow Hill Baptist Church Sunday evening 6:00 May 22. The second meeting June 26.

You are invited to come to share your story, listen to others share their story, and encourage one another. God’s word will be used to help us and strengthen us. This is not an Al-Anon group. This is a group of people coming together to love and encourage one another in the name of Jesus.

God bless you, Pastor Dean.

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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Crossword

Crossword 278

ACROSS

1 Esther also was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to ____ (Est 2:8)

6 Like a woman in childbirth, I cry out, I ____ and pant (Isa 42:14)

10 we spend our years as a ____ that is told (Ps 90:9) KJV

14 I saw ____ completely surrounding the temple area (1,4) (Ezek 40:5)

15 the sons of Eliphaz were Teman, ____, Zepho (Gen 36:11)

16 Tell the Israelites to bring you ____ heifer without defect (1,3) (Num 19:2)

17 You have made for yourself other gods, idols made of ____ (1 Kings 14:9)

18 A sword is upon the liars; and they shall ____ (Jer 50:36) KJV

19 catch them in their net, and gather them in their ____ (Hab 1:15)

20 and they ____ fig leaves together (Gen 3:7)

22 Zacchaeus climbed up one of these trees to see Jesus (Luke 19:4-5) KJV

25 I had rebuilt the wall and not a ____ was left in it (Neh 6:1)

27 But you, O LORD, sit enthroned forever; your ____ endures (Ps 102:12)

28 listen to me and no longer ____ my holy name (Ezek 20:39)

32 one beka ____ person, that is, half a shekel (Ex 38:26)

34 her ____ provoked her till she wept and would not eat (1 Sam 1:7)

35 the joy of the godless ____ but a moment (Job 20:5)

38 Babylon is taken, ____ is confounded (Jer 50:2)

40 The LORD will ____ the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty (Deut 28:12)

41 Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have ____ (Matt 8:20)

42 He ____ them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few (Luke 10:1-2)

43 Abner son of ____, the commander of Saul's army (2 Sam 2:8)

44 Sarah's Egyptian handmaid (Gen 25:12)

45 the ____ forest has been cut down (Zech 11:2)

46 Can you make a ____ of him like a bird (Job 41:5)

47 ____ must be blameless, the husband of but one wife (2,5) (Titus 1:6)

49 in God I trust; I will not be ____ (Ps 56:4)

52 a spider's trap (Isa 59:5)

53 punish all the nations; show no mercy to wicked ____ (Ps 59:5)

55 came into the world to save

sinner of whom I am the ____ (1 Tim 1:15)

59 whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ____ (Prov 1:33)

60 write it before them in a table, and ____ it in a book (Isaiah 30:8)

62 Joshua spared ____ the prostitute, with her family (Josh 6:25)

64 fifth book of the New Testament

65 Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth ____ (Josh 7:2)

66 As an ____ pleasing to the LORD (Num 29:2)

67 I will give him ____ from all his enemies (1 Chr 22:9)

68 took unto them certain ____ fellows of (Acts 17:5) KJV

69 from the ____ of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water (Deut 29:11) KJV

DOWN

1 Shem, and ____, and Japheth, the sons of Noah (Gen 7:13)

2 female sheep (Gen 32:14)

3 for wide is the ____, and broad is the way (Matt 7:13)

4 Israel, who pursued ____ of righteousness (1,3) (Rom 9:31)

5 unlawful (Ex.22:9)

6 The ____ of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers (2 Cor 4:4)

7 30th book of the Old Testament

8 the ____ shall cry to his fellow; the screech owl also shall rest there (Isa 34:14) KJV

9 I meditate on your ____ and consider your ways (Ps 119:15)

10 He also built up ____ in the desert (2 Chron 8:4)

11 Men will go there with bow and ____ (Isa 7:24)

12 Our people must ____ to devote themselves to doing what is good (Titus 3:14)

13 She came up behind him and touched the ____ of his cloak (Luke 8:44)

21 fifth son of Jacob (Gen.30:6)

23 for your little ____, and for your wives (Gen 45:19)

24 handkerchiefs and ____ that had touched him were taken to the sick (Acts 19:12)

26 Two sons were born to Eber: One was named ____ (Gen 10:25)

29 As soon as the grain is ____, he puts the sickle to it (Mark 4:29)

30 and gave them power ____ unclean spirits (Mark 6:7)

31 I remind you to ____ into flame the gift of God (2 Tim 1:6)

33 the teachers of the law and the ____ mocked him

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8	9		10	11	12	13
14						15					16			
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67					68					69				
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(Matt 27:41-42)

36 In the third year of ____ king of Judah (IKing 15:33)

37 Ye shall no more give the people ____ to make brick (Exodus 5:7) KJV

38 keep the unity of the Spirit through the ____ of peace (Eph 4:3)

39 Above all ____, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life (Prov 4:23)

41 of or relating to a nation such as Israel or Judah

42 exiles who lived at ____ Abib near the Kebar River (Ezek 3:15)

44 seedtime and harvest, and cold and ____, and summer (Gen 8:22)

45 ____, a prophetess, was leading Israel at that time (Judg 4:4)

46 Every high ____ is selected from among men and is appointed (Heb 5:1)

48 A ____ command I give you: Love one another (John 13:34)

49 Do you not know that in ____ all the runners run (1,4)

(1 Cor 9:24)

50 The ____ of the fourth, and tenth months will become joyful (Zech 8:19)

51 Jesus entered the temple area and ____ out all who were (Matt 21:12)

53 Like a lion I will devour them; a wild animal will ____ them (Hos 13:8)

54 Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil ____ (Gen 25:34)

56 it is a ____ thing that the king requireth (Dan 2:11) KJV

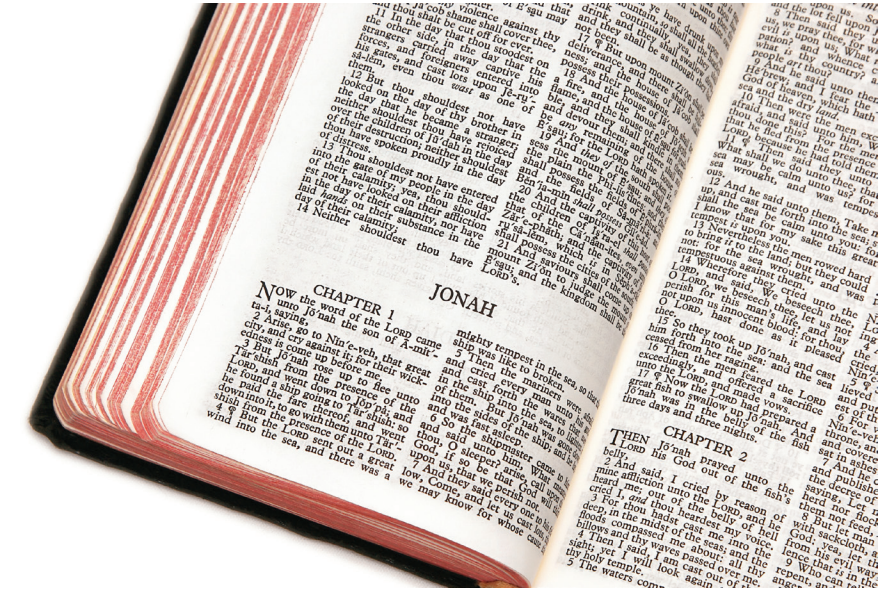
57 ____ proper respect to everyone (1 Peter 2:17)

58 the tongue can no man ____; it is an unruly evil (James 3:8)

61 he that endureth to the ____ shall be saved (Matt 10:22) KJV

63 have them shut the doors and ____ them (Neh 7:3)

Solution on page 14



Mark 14:32-42 “Grace That Is Greater Than Our Inexcusable Sin”

By Shawn Thomas
Angleton, Texas



C.S. Lewis once wrote, “To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.” That is a great statement, and very convicting regarding our attitude and practice towards others — but it all depends on whether we really understand what it means that “God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.”

We see an example of that in Mark 14, where Jesus takes Peter, James, and John with Him to pray in Gethsemane. These three men were brought into the “inner ring” of Jesus’ fellowship, to go in where no one else would ever have the opportunity to go: into one of the most crucial moments in all of history: with Jesus as He would wrestle with the horrors of the cross, and bear in His body the sins of all the world.

There was no invitation like the one they had been given.
There is no opportunity like that which had been presented to them.
There is perhaps no bigger moment in all of history to be a part of, than this. But what did they DO with this incomparable invitation? Verse 40 says: “*He came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy; and they did not know what to answer Him.*” These guys had been given this amazing opportunity to go into the “inner ring” with Jesus, but they fell asleep — not only once, but again and again. What could be their excuse? And it even says: “*they did not know what to answer Him.*”

That says SO much, doesn’t it? “They did not know what to answer Him.” What they had done was so embarrassing; it was SUCH a letdown in light of the amazing privilege Jesus had extended to them; it was SO shameful — that they just didn’t have anything to say!

It’s like after Job had complained against God, and was confronted by the Lord, all he could say was: “Behold, I am insignificant; what can I reply to you? I lay my hand on my mouth.” (40:4) Job was basically like Jesus’ disciples here in Mark 10: all he could do was I cover his mouth with his hand. There were no excuses. He had nothing left to say.

There are times like that, aren’t there, when it’s so bad, there’s nothing left to say:

- when you can’t say you didn’t know, because you did.
- when you can’t say you weren’t warned, because you were.
- when you’ve used up all your “chances”
- when you’ve used up all your “excuses”
- when there is literally nothing left to say but just to stand there in your total shame and humiliation. What you’ve done is inexcusable.

I once pastored a guy who was caught in a certain sin. He knew better; he had been warned about it; he didn’t have any excuse. And when he was caught in it, there was just nothing he could say. He just hung his head in shame. Like these disciples, he just “did not know what to answer.” What he had done was inexcusable.

And maybe at some point, you’ve felt that way yourself:

- How many times have you told the Lord you wouldn’t do that sin anymore — but you did it yet again?
- How many times have you said, “Now THIS week I am really going to read my Bible,” but you didn’t do it again?
- How many times have you said, “I am really going to be a bold witness for the Lord now” but another week went by and just like Peter, you denied the Lord three times — or maybe even more?
- How many times can you bring that same sin back to Him?
- How many times is He going to forgive you for that?
- How many “second chances” is He really going to give you?

There comes a time when you don’t have any excuses anymore, and just like His disciples you “just don’t know what to answer Him.” It is just an inexcusable sin.

The fact is, we’ve all been there.

So what do we do with our “inexcusable sins”? Give up in despair?

No, for in the very next verse Jesus says: “*The hour has come; behold the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going ...*”. Where were they going? Jesus was going to the cross, where He would die for these very “inexcusable failures” of Peter, James, and John — and OURS!

See, this is exactly why Jesus came: to die on the cross and pay for our “inexcusable failures.”

— Romans 5:8 says: “*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet SINNERS Christ died for us.*” Jesus didn’t come to die for us because we were good; He came to die for us precisely because we were hopeless sinners.

— Paul said in I Timothy 1:15, “*Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*”

— In Mark 2:17 “Jesus said to them, “*It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.*”

God’s word makes it very clear: Jesus came just because we ARE such inexcusable sinners, but thank God His grace is infinitely greater than our sin. His disciples were “inexcusable failures” — but that is just why He was here! Because although we are “inexcusable sinners,” He has “immeasurable grace” which is far greater than all our sins!

Most of us — even of God’s people — have far too small a conception of just how immeasurable the grace and mercy of God really is.

Psalm 103:11-14 says: “*As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. Just as a Father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.*” God is SO understanding; SO compassionate; SO gracious towards us. His grace towards us is higher than the heavens are above the earth!

The Apostle Paul put it this way in Romans 5:20: “*Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.*” In other words, however “big” your sin is — God’s grace is BIGGER!

Think of it like this: how big do you picture your sin as being?

- You might say, “Oh man, pastor, my sin is great. I feel like my sin is like this 2-story big brick building standing right in front of me, just keeping me from God.”
- Or maybe you’d say, “No, MY sin is worse than that; my sin is like a whole warehouse; a whole Wal-Mart wouldn’t hold it all.” It’s huge!
- Or maybe there’s someone here who would say, “Pastor, you don’t know what all I’ve done; if you heard it, you’d be shocked. MY sin would be like the Empire State building; it’s too big; there’s no getting over it.”

Now listen: I am not minimizing your sin. ALL of our sins are great because our sins are committed against a holy God, who is a consuming fire. Do not downplay your sin. It IS great. But the good news is: that although your sin is great — the grace of God is greater!

- The grace of God is higher than the heavens are above the earth
- The grace of God is wider than the biggest canyon that divides you and God
- The grace of God is deeper than the deepest, darkest, sin you ever committed

The grace of God is so great, the Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 3, I pray that your eyes may be opened and that you may be able to understand the height and the depth and the length and the breadth — he says, I pray that you will understand how great God’s love and grace towards you are:

His grace is higher than the heavens! His grace is deeper than the ocean! I don’t think most of us really understand just how deep the ocean is. The Mariana Trench, in the Pacific Ocean, is so deep we can’t even explore it all. Its KNOWN depth is over 36,000 feet — that’s about SEVEN MILES! You can literally take anything on the surface of the earth, and cast it into the Mariana Trench, and it would be totally immersed in miles of water: you can throw a house in there, and it would be swallowed up; you could throw a Wal-Mart in there (if you could throw one!) and it wouldn’t make a dent in it. You could stand the Empire State Building up at the bottom of it and it would be entirely covered up. You could take the largest thing on the face of the whole earth: Mount Everest, and cast it into the Mariana Trench, and it would be covered up by over a mile of ocean. It is vast; it is beyond what most of us can even begin to comprehend.

And the vastness of that ocean is a picture of God’s grace! His grace is immeasurable. It is higher than the heavens. It is deeper than the ocean. Picture your greatest sin — that one you feel so bad about: as big as a house; as big as a Walmart; as big as Mt. Everest — a picture that sin cast into the depths of God’s grace, where it will be swallowed up, and covered over, and seen no more!

I pray for all of us the prayer of Paul in Ephesian 3, that our eyes would be opened to begin to fathom the immeasurable grace of God. Whatever your sin is, realize His grace is higher; His grace is wider; His grace is deeper; His grace is stronger. His grace is immeasurably greater than any of your sins.

A wise, old pastor friend of mine once wrote: “A young Christian needs to be wary of judging the failures of other Christians too harshly. An older Christian needs to be careful not to judge his many failures too harshly; both minimize the grace of God.”

I love that statement: don’t minimize the grace of God. Don’t think you’re beyond His forgiveness and grace. And don’t fear that someone you know is beyond His forgiveness and grace. His grace is greater than you’ll ever understand. “Where sin abounds, grace more than abounds.” However deep that sin is, God’s grace is deeper. It is immeasurable.

When we are like those hapless disciples in Mark 14, and we “have no answer” for our “inexcusable failures” — then we need to remember what God’s word says here. When we are at our worst, when we are “inexcusable failures” — that is exactly why He got up to go to the cross. When our mouths are closed in shame, and we “have no answer” for our “inexcusable failures” — then HE HIMSELF IS THE ANSWER. His “grace that is greater than all our sin.”

Shawn Thomas is a Southern Baptist pastor for almost 35 years, I currently serve as Senior Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Angleton, Texas.



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