



# BLUE RIDGE CHRISTIAN NEWS



## Bear Creek Baptist Church

### Why I Love Christmas So Much

By Bruce Cannon  
Mitchell County



I love Christmas! I love the general goodwill among people during this time of the year. I love that families get together to share a meal, share gifts and show love to each other. I love the sacred Christmas music that fills the sanctuaries around the world this time of the year. I love the decorated trees, the manager displays and so much more. Imagine: we do all of this because of a Baby born 2000 years ago. We do it to celebrate His birth. But, we also do it and remember that, as He came once, He will come again!

The word “Parousia” is a Greek word that means “. . . present presence, a being present, a coming to a place; presence, coming or arrival.” That perfectly describes what happened in a stable in Bethlehem. Jesus came to man. He became physically present. He came to a place that was hopelessly lost so He could redeem mankind from their sins.

Look into the manger. What do you see? Love! Sacrifice! The King of all Kings!

Remember! This is the greatest Personage by far with no comparison! What God required as a payment for sin, Jesus provided through His becoming flesh.

Imagine the sacrifice. What a sacrifice! He who was Omnipotent became completely helpless. He who was Omnipresent was found in the womb of the virgin Mary and was born in a stable. There was no room for Him in the homes and in almost all of the hearts of men at that time. He who was the recipient of the praise of angels would receive the condemnation and criticisms of men while here. Yet, He had to come here. He will always be true to His character; He never changes. That is what the Immutability of God means! God would not be God had He not offered salvation for man. He is perfect love and perfectly loves. John wrote in 1 John 4:10: “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Paul said of God’s love in Romans 5:8: “*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*”

Why do I love Christmas? For all of these reasons, yes! But for one more reason: Jesus is coming back! Christmas reminds me that He is coming again. There is going to be another “Parousia”. As He was ascending to the Father after

His resurrection, the angels said to the ones who were present, “*Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.*” (Acts 1:11)

And this next Coming of the Lord will be SO much different than His first coming. He came as a Lamb in Bethlehem; He will come as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah the next time. He came to show us how to live for the first time and to die for sin. The next time He comes He will establish His kingdom on earth and will rule and reign for 1000 years. Satan and every demon will be bound at that time and be cast into a bottomless pit. The lion will lie down beside the lamb; swords will be beaten into plowshares and what was announced at His birth will finally be realized: “*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men.*” (Luke 2:14) He is the only Prince of Peace and the only One who can bring and hold peace.

Why do I love Christmas? For all of these reasons, yes! But there is yet one more reason. I love Christmas because His birth made it possible for you and me to go to Heaven one day. Whether that be by our personal homegoing, which is referred to as death, or by the Rapture of the saints doesn’t matter! We are going to Heaven one day! The birth of Jesus made that possible. Hallelujah! You and I, once lost sinners, because we accepted the amazing gift of salvation, and inherit the joys, beauty, and glory of Heaven. His death and resurrection took the sting away from death and made it a tool that allows us to lay our earthly body down and go to our eternal home. Praise the Lord.

Now you know why I love Christmas! For all of these reasons and so many more!

Merry Christmas from my home to yours!

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*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.*



***Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Isaiah 7:14***



"Your Response To Christmas"

By Shawn Thomas  
Angleton, Texas



A kindergartener in England once commented on the wise men’s visit to Jesus: he said they brought Him gold "but Legos would have been better"!

Matthew 2 doesn’t tell us how many “wise men” (magi) there were. But it does show us three distinct responses people then had to the birth of Jesus, which people still have today. Which one of these reflects YOUR response to Christmas?

I. The Intellectual Response

:4 says when Herod heard about Jesus’ birth, he asked the Jewish religious leaders where the Messiah was to be born. *"They said to him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet ...'"* These men knew this prophecy. Many Pharisees had the entire Law memorized. They KNEW the right answers — but that didn’t mean that they responded rightly to the birth of Jesus. There is NO indication they ever went to Bethlehem to worship Him. Knowing the right answers was as far as it went.

Many “lifelong church members” today fall short in this same way. It's easy to think you’re right with God because you know some “right answers” about the Bible. But James 2 says even demons know there is one God — but they aren’t saved by that knowledge.

Knowing mere facts alone won’t save you. Just because you can quote John 3:16 doesn't mean you are saved. Just because you know this Christmas story doesn't mean you are going to heaven. You can "know" all the right things and still be lost. It's been said many people will miss heaven by 18 inches -- the distance from the head to the heart! The most important question for you today is not "do you know the right things about the birth of Jesus", but have you personally repented of your sins and trusted Jesus’ death on the cross to save YOU? — and are you now worshipping and serving Him? Make sure that you have more than just a mere "intellectual response" to Jesus this Christmas.

II. Herod’s Hypocritical Response

In:8 King Herod said, *"Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him."* He made it sound like he really wanted to worship Jesus. But in reality, he had something very sinister in mind. :16 relates how later, Herod killed all the male children in and around Bethlehem. He had a selfish end in mind: to solidify his hold on the throne. His outward “worship” was hypocritical.

We can be like Herod today, and put up a facade of “worship,” when we’re actually more concerned with our own personal “agendas” than really worshipping God.

Cheryl & I were once at a party where we met a politician. I asked where he went to church. He told me, and then said: “You have to go to church to get elected to anything in this town.” That spoke volumes! He wasn’t as concerned about going to church to worship, as he was to get votes!

Ask yourself: "Why am I really in church?": to worship Jesus -- or for some personal agenda, such as to cultivate votes or business customers? Make sure you don’t have the "hypocritical response" of Herod.

III. The Worshipful Response of the Magi

We don’t know much about the magi, but one thing we DO know: they truly came to worship Jesus. We see several pieces of evidence of that:

A. JOY:10 says: *“When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy”* — literally “MEGA joy”! Joy is from the heart, which is essential for true worship. Jesus said in John 4, *“Those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”*

Think about something you really enjoy: your grandkids, football, hunting, etc. No one has to "make" you do these things; you "delight" in them. That’s how genuine religion is. When you truly love God, worship is NOT something you "have" to do; it is something you WANT to do. Real worship must begin in the heart. Are you just “going through the motions” at church, or worshipping from your heart?

B. HUMILITY Verse 11 continues: *“And they fell to the ground and worshipped Him.”* The Bible's word for “worship” literally means to bow down and “kiss

*continued on page 24*

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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# Contents

## In Every Issue

Life Lessons - p. 9

Your Government - p. 32

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

Isaiah 52:7 KJV



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## Church Directory

### The Rock Church

4806 US 64  
Morganton, NC 28655  
Phone: 828-334-3193  
www.trcmorganton.com

**Pastor - Micah Narlock**

Sunday Morning – 10 AM  
Sunday Night – 6:30 PM  
Tuesday Night – 7 PM

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### Grassy Creek Baptist Church

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

Disciple Life 9:45 AM  
Sunday Worship 10:55AM  
GCBC Kids 5:30 PM  
Wednesday Service 7:00 PM  
Youth 7:00 PM  
*"That the world may know Christ"*

### Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church

2187 Jamestown Road  
Morganton, NC  
828-584-8212

**Pastor Steve Bietz**

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

### Altapass Baptist Church

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

**Dr. Marcus R. Benfield**  
**Rev. Tony Lominac -**  
**Associate Pastor**

Sunday School - 10:00am  
Worship -11:00am  
Sunday Evening - 6:00pm  
Sunday Youth Program - 7:00pm  
1st & 3rd Sunday  
(Conductors for Christ ages 5-11)  
2nd & 4th Sunday  
(Teen Discovery ages 12-18)  
Wednesday - 7:00pm

### Plumtree Presbyterian Church

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

**Pastor Ryan Bridgeo**  
pastor@plumtreechurch.com

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

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

### Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

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

www.pleasanthillbc.church

**Senior Pastor**  
**Dr. Jack Hodges**

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

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

### Newland Christian Church

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

**Pastor - Phillip Greene**

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

*"A Local Congregation of Christ's Church"*

### Burkemont Baptist Church

4668 Burkemont Rd.  
Morganton, NC 28655  
828-437-2357  
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-  
tra, Adult Bible Study, Youth  
Discipleship, Preschool &  
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Spruce Pine NC 28777

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Sunday Worship – 11am and 6pm  
Mid-week Service - Wednesdays  
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### First Baptist Church of Spruce Pine

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

**Dr. Rocky Branch**  
**Senior Pastor**

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

*Knowing God, Seeing God, Serving  
God, Submitting to God!*

### Pine Branch Baptist Church

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

**Reverend Bobby Joe Greene**

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Worship Service • 10:45am  
Sunday Evening • 6:30pm

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### Bridge Worship Center Church

5530 Chestnut Drive, Hickory, NC 28602  
828-443-0821  
rev.kbarnett@gmail.com

**Sr. PASTOR/EVANGELIST**  
**KEITH BARNETT**

Sunday Morning Prayer: 10:00 Am  
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Thursday Evening Service: 6:30 Pm

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### Spruce Pine United Methodist Church

11090 Hwy. 226 South  
Spruce Pine, NC 28777  
sprucepineumc@gmail.com  
828-765-7446

**Pastor Richard Schilling**

Sunday Worship - 9:00am  
Sunday School - 10:00am  
Sunday Worship - 11:00am  
Choir Wednesday - 7:00pm

The mission of Spruce Pine United  
Methodist Church is to be a beacon on  
a hill spreading the Good News of Jesus  
Christ through: Worship, Fellowship,  
Education, and Nurturing Service

### Bear Creek Baptist Church

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

**Reverend Bruce Cannon**

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

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

### Landis Orthodox Presbyterian Church

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

**Elder Mike Cloy**  
opc mikecloy@gmail.com

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

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

### Berry Chapel Baptist Church

280 Chapel St.  
Spruce Pine, NC 28777  
828-765-6590  
www.berrychapelbaptist.com

**Pastor - Steve Williams**

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

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# Marlene’s Meditations

## Anger’s Achilles’s Heel

By Marlene Houk  
Burke County



The air crackled with his fury as she quickly swung herself off the animal and knelt. His stare stabbed her calm, almost cracking her resolve to speak. Their swords drawn, his soldiers hesitated, stunned by the beautiful woman, alone, talking softly to their leader. They could see the tension slide away from his shoulders as she lay prone on the rocky ground, completely vulnerable. Their swords jostling against their sides, they edged closer, listening to her quiet words as she filled their ears with her musical lilt. The miracle happening before them halted them in their tracks, horses snorting softly, the surrounding breeze and swaying green grasses slowly registering in their minds. They were frankly nervous because their leader raged out of control, and they had never experienced his anger at this level.

Curious, their gazes turned to her donkeys munching tender shoots close by. Abigail’s servants had slipped the mounds of food from their backs, and the soldiers’ mouths watered at the prospect of the preliminary gift that would curb their stark hunger.

Each soldier hoped for the best—food for their bellies and peace. They listened carefully, watching the interplay and praying for a solution to the standoff.

Her words slipped around his anger and gradually returned him to rational thinking as she reminded him of his royal destiny.

Diverting anger requires humility, wisdom, and quiet gentleness. In the story above, told in 1 Samuel 25, we discover how Abigail helps the future King David to avoid a fatal mistake while angry. David asked Abigail’s husband, Nabal, for any food he could spare for his hungry soldiers in reciprocity for guarding Nabal’s 3,000 sheep. Nabal responded by insulting David’s young men, treating them churlishly, and sneering at their kindness and generosity. His narcissistic cruelty enraged David, who promised to kill Nabal and all his men. Abigail’s servant told her about the crisis, and she hastily instructed them to pack several donkeys with a token supply of food—what David had requested. She rushed to meet David and his 400 soldiers as he raced to Nabal’s encampment for revenge.

Why did David swear to kill dozens of men rather than simply take the food that was rightfully his? David’s 600 trained men probably outnumbered Nabal’s untrained servants. But, anger out of control demands more, doesn’t it? David could have polluted the water or scared the sheep and made them run. He could have burned the wool or stolen it. David could also have Negotiations with the shepherds directly was an option. He could have lured Nabal’s servants away or asked Abigail to intervene, but he reacted to Nabal’s goading.

Abigail influenced David to change his beliefs about Nabal’s rejection, thus enabling him to look beyond Nabal’s evil and return to cognitive tasks. According to famed researcher Albert Ellis, “You don’t get frustrated because of events, you get frustrated because of your beliefs.” When Abigail helped David to look beyond Nabal’s evil, she changed his beliefs about the crisis. She helped David to look beyond Nabal’s temporary thwarting and dismissal of his anointing to a time when God’s will would prevail. She demonstrated the truth of what modern behavioral research has discovered.

“Research suggests it is because both cognitive tasks and emotional responses make use of the same limited mental resources. That is, the resources that are used to perform a cognitive task are no longer available for emotional processes. Accordingly, people can rid themselves of unwanted feelings by engaging in a cognitive activity, such as doing math equations or playing a game of Tetris.” How did Abigail redirect David’s thinking to cognitive tasks? She asked him to accept her gifts, a practical cognitive task. (1 Samuel 25:27) She asked him to remember her, not Nabal, a task requiring brain power. (1 Samuel 25:31) And she reminded him to continue to work with the Lord in His plan to make David’s house a “sure” house, choosing action over emotive reaction. (1 Samuel 25:28) Abigail used behavioral science eons before it was defined by modern-day scientists. She enabled David to look beyond his anger and reengage his mental resources, thus limiting his emotional responses. Abigail abolished anger’s Achilles’s

heel, demonstrating that our brains cannot concentrate on intense emotion and cognitive tasks at the same time. She averted a bloody annihilation, saving many lives. David lived out her advice, shooting the arrow directly into his Achilles’ heel of anger by following her practical advice. Did he learn valuable life lessons from her that his Psalms express?

How do we apply Abigail’s advice to our situations? Like David, when we are consumed by anger at someone’s malicious goading, we can recognize God’s gifts of daily provision, godly counsel, and His Word. We need to practically look for ways to serve the Lord that leave little time for unbridled emotion to grab a foothold in our spirits.

I experienced a need to vent vindictively recently and then found myself creating a chocolate éclair cake for a meal. The simple mundane tasks of measuring, mixing, and creating delight offered a pause in the battle for control which allowed me to thank God for His gifts to me. Try Abigail’s secret to hitting anger’s Achilles’s heel; it works!

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](mailto:marlenehouk@bellsouth.net). Learn more about women in the Bible at Marlene's website: [www.MarleneHouk.com](http://www.MarleneHouk.com)

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December 2022 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 5



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Marion Aglow Explores  
Revelation Through Dreams

By Marion Stephan  
McDowell County



Dreams, says ordained minister and author Mary Byrd Gordon, can be influenced by our natural minds, pains in our bodies, or tiredness. "I have had some of my dreams affected by spring pollen, but all those are just temporary things that are going to pass." However, "the things of the dreams from the Spirit of the Lord" are "going to be constant."

Gordon, the author of *Dreams and Revelations* (2015), was speaking at the November 12 fellowship of the Marion Aglow Lighthouse, at His Place Worship Center in Marion.

Our dreams can be warfare dreams, occurring "when the enemy is trying to harass or afflict us," she pointed out. However, even if we dream an alarming dream, "it doesn't mean that it's from the enemy. It may be a warning dream," requiring that we "pray and prepare for what is coming."

Pharoah's dreams in Genesis 41, for example, "were warnings so that he could prepare for what was ahead." Similar warnings in our lives can help us "make wise choices with the resources that we have."

Gordan related two scriptural dreams she had dreamed in 1989; both helped her deal with the grief that would occur in her life. The first dream depicted God's deliverance of the Hebrews when they were trapped between the Red Sea and the Egyptian chariots. "*Moses is crying out, and the Lord says, 'Why are you crying out to me? Raise your staff, part the water, and come on out.'*"

In a dream immediately following this dream, "*the Spirit of God revealed to me that when I came through a point of a great sea of grief that He would part the waters and He would take me through.*" The dream "was a promise from God for my future, and . . . would happen when a time came when I had a close family member or someone who died." A few years later, her father died "and the Lord did take me through."

The second scriptural dream painted a picture of the shipwreck that occurred when Paul, as a prisoner, was on a ship bound for Rome. When a storm began tearing the ship apart, those who could swim were told to swim for shore, while those who could not swim floated to shore on planks. Through the dream, God told her "*that He was going to take me through life, even though I had not had the greatest stamina . . . . If I needed to rest on a board I would rest on a board . . . .*"

In the scriptures, Gordan said, houses, tents, grass, branches, and loaves of bread can represent people or groups of people (CK. Isaiah 51:12 and Judges 17).

*continued on page 22*



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# Seventh Day Adventist Burnsville

## Give Thanks to the Lord!

By Art Dmytriyev  
*Yancey County*

*“Let us give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good, and his mercy endureth forever.”* Very many Bible verses speak about it. What kind of a Thanksgiving shall we keep — one to ourselves, bestowing all our benefits upon ourselves and receiving the attentions of others, but bringing no thanksgiving offering to God? This is idolatry of the most offensive character in the sight of a jealous God. Everything should be avoided that would tend to draw our hearts’ worship from God. Let not any more Thanksgiving days be observed to please and gratify the appetite, and glorify the self. We have a reason for coming into the courts of the Lord with offerings of gratitude that he has preserved our lives for another year.

God has spared our lives till this day; now how shall we keep it, with feasting and gluttony? Is this a true thanksgiving to God? No; we are to render thanks and thank offerings for the mercies bestowed upon us every day during the past year. How should we keep Thanksgiving? *“When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbors; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind; and thou shalt be blessed, for they cannot recompense thee; for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.”* (Luke 14:12-14 KJV). This is the kind of feast God instructs us to give. How many will follow these specific directions of God's word by calling the poor to their homes with words of sympathy and the spirit of beneficence, and thus make such a feast as will be pleasing to God? Satan has sought to destroy the true purpose and design of Thanksgiving, to turn away from God the honor due him, and to center it upon ourselves.

Now is the time when God should be praised for his goodness and bountiful gifts to the children of men. You may say, “What has the Lord done for us?”—Much in every way. Here are your children. They are clothed, and they have fuel, food, and shelter. You should not only praise God, but you should come into his courts with a thank-offering. How many of us have trained ourselves to bring an offering to him? God help you to open your hearts to suffering humanity; for they are the purchase of high heaven. Christ identifies his interests with those of his needy, suffering children; and the neglect has done to them is registered in the books of heaven as done to Christ in the person of his saints. (Please, read Matthew 25:31-46).

When you take heed to the word of God and follow its instructions to the letter, you will enjoy blessings from the God of Jacob. Hear what Isaiah says: “... *deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy reward.*” (Isaiah 58:7-8 KJV). Your souls shall be like a watered garden, whose waters fail not. “*Then shalt thou call, and the Lord shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am.*” (Isaiah 58:9 KJV). Do you want to hear that voice respond to your call, saying, “Here I am?” Then go to work in God's way. Get rid of your selfishness and heartlessness, and pray to God to give you a loving, tender, sympathizing heart. Then when you call you may hear his voice answer, “Here I am.”

Happy Thanksgiving Everyone!

*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>*



# Morganton Seventh Day Adventist

## The Christmas Downgrade

By Steve Bietz  
*Burke County*

Do you love upgrades? Sometimes I question if I should upgrade my phone, computer, etc. I barely figure out my so-called 'smart devices and then the powers that be make the devices smarter. But generally speaking, we are usually ok with upgrades. A couple of times as I have traveled, I have been given an upgrade on a car rental. To be able to get something better for the same price is always a great, well, upgrade.

Maybe the best upgrade I ever received was a move from economy class (coach), to first class on a flight from New York to Atlanta. It was a business trip and another sales rep and I arrived at the counter at just the perfect moment to learn that the airline had overbooked the economy class and would the both of us mind upgrading to first class on our flight to Atlanta. Needless to say, we both jumped at the opportunity to fly first class for the price of a coach ticket. It was the only time in my life, up to this point anyway, that I have flown first class.

The seat configuration difference alone is a drastic change. The 'seat pitch' is what the airline industry refers to as the distance between rows of seats i.e., one seat behind the other. In economy class, the seat pitch distance average is 31 inches. If you haven't noticed, that is tight and basically means no personal space whatsoever. Upgrade to business class and the average seat pitch jumps up to 55 inches. But an upgrade to first class gets you on average, 70 inches between the rows of seats. Yes, my flight that afternoon from New York to Atlanta was a wonderful experience because of the upgrade I was given.

We know the event by the word, incarnation. Our word incarnation comes from a Latin word meaning 'to make flesh.' More often than not we use the word to describe what the Son of God did for the human race. He became flesh. In Paul's letter to the church at Philippi, he writes: "*Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God. But made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant, and coming in the likeness of men.*" (Phillippians 2:6,7)

This is amazing because the content that makes God the Being that He falls into two basic categories. First, there is the Character of God or His Nature we might say. And then there are the abilities and powers that go along with that status of God. The Phillips Translation of the Bible does something fascinating here. It renders the idea of "no reputation" as "He laid aside His divine privileges and prerogatives." In other words, God is choosing, by the incarnation, to downgrade or to put into remission or into an inactive state, certain powers that are native to equality to God.

We usually put God's powers into three categories, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. He is an all-powerful, all-knowing, and present everywhere at the same time God. And according to the scriptures, Jesus downgraded and laid aside, on our behalf, these powers so that He could experience the cross. You see God as God cannot die. He cannot die in His Godness. He is not going to die of a heart attack or cancer. He cannot die of old age. So the Son of God becomes a human being so that he can taste death. We read in the Book of Hebrews this very thought. *"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man."* (Hebrews 2:9)

Every Christmas, as well as the rest of the year, we ask ourselves in amazement and say, "really, would God, did God, really accept such a downgrade?" He 'emptied' himself. And His death was not a first-class death, not even a business-class death, but the economy death, death by crucifixion. Jesus became 'nothing' so that we might have everything. The Lord's Christmas downgrade supplies us with eternal life. Eternal life, now that's what I call an upgrade!



*Steve Bietz, Pastor, Morganton Seventh day Adventist Church.*



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By Joe Sturz  
Shenandoah, Va.

God the Holy Spirit works in Christians to make us more like Jesus Christ (II Cor. 5:18) as we grow in grace (II Peter 3:14,18). The Holy Spirit works:  
--love, joy, and peace in us to overcome the anger, depression, and fears amid our turmoil, trials, and tribulations (Romans 5:3-5; Galatians 5:22),  
--longsuffering in us while suffering and persecution (Matthew 5:10-12; Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 4:1-3),  
--gentleness, goodness, and faith in us that helps us deal with the violence, wickedness, and unbelief around us (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 5:22; II Tim. 2-24-26; Titus 3:2),  
--meekness and self-control in the struggles we have with our unruly sinful nature that clings so closely to us and wars against the Spirit (Rom. 7:23-8:14; Gal. 5:17, 22-23).

So let us seek to have the Holy Spirit do His perfect work within us to make us more like Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 9:8; Galatians 5:22-25; Philippians 1:6; 2:12-13; James 1:4-8).

To show you are a Christian you must truly repent of your sin (I John 1:9) and accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior (Romans 10:9-10). You must believe the Gospel that Jesus died on the cross to take the punishment due our sins and rose again from the dead to secure eternal life in heaven for those that have changed life and follow Him (I Corinthians 15:1-58).

If this message encouraged you in following the Lord feel free to share it with others.



Joe Sturz, a Christian counselor at Sturz Christian Counseling Service now living in Page County, [www.sturzachristiancounseling.com](http://www.sturzachristiancounseling.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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Pondering John 3:16  
By Dennis Love  
McDowell County



As we ponder the birth of Jesus during the month of December, we would all be greatly benefited by pondering John 3:16. Herschel Hobbs called this verse, “The Gospel in Superlatives.” Martin Luther said it was, “The Bible in Miniature.” A.T. Robertson referred to it as, “The Little Gospel.” Others have called it, “The Mount Everest of Holy Scripture.” The one I like the best is, “The Gospel in a Nutshell.”

F.W. Boreham called it everybody’s text. Here is a verse so profound, all the scholars of all ages could never plumb its depths. Yet, this is a verse so simple, a small child can understand its meaning. Perhaps more people have come to faith in Christ by this verse than any other.

Ponder this----“*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*” This verse addresses a number of “isms” in our world that could be put to rest if we would simply ponder them.

“For God” addresses ATHEISM, which says there is no God.  
“So Loved” addresses FATALISM, which says God is an impersonal force.  
“The World” addresses NATIONALISM, which says God loves only one people group.

“That He Gave” addresses MATERIALISM, which says it is more blessed to receive than to give.

“His Only Begotten Son” addresses MUHAMMADISM, which says God did not have a Son.

“That Whosoever Believes” addresses CALVINISM, which says Christ died only for the elect.

“In Him” addresses PLURALISM, which says all religions are equally the same.  
“Should Not Perish” addresses ANNIHILATIONISM, which says there is no hell.  
“But Have Everlasting Life” addresses ARMINIANISM, which says God gives only conditional life.

I am in the camp of one “ism” and it is called BIBLICISM, which is wrapped up in this one verse if we would simply ponder it.

This is a verse that you cannot exhaust. The great evangelist D.L. Moody met a young preacher in England named Henry Moorhead. Moody told young Moorhead that if he ever came to America that he wanted him to preach at his church in Chicago. One day Moody received a telegram from Moorhead saying, “I have landed in New York, and I will be coming to preach for you.” Moody was scheduled to be out of town and responded to the telegram telling the young preacher that he was welcome to come and preach one night at his church. When Moody returned, he was surprised to learn that Moorhead had preached several nights with large crowds and many coming to faith in Christ. Moody’s wife said to him, “He’s a better preacher than you. He preaches that God loves people.” And he was told that Moorhead had preached every night from John 3:16. Now, here’s where this story gets really interesting. Moorhead started preaching at the age of 16. He died an untimely death at 33. His text for every sermon was John 3:16. The messages were different, but the text was the same. Surely, no preacher in a lifetime could ever exhaust this text. Take some time during this month and ponder it for yourself!

*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](mailto:dlovebrba@yahoo.com)*



**Hey y’all, we are Steven and Jennifer Painter. We started out as some of those folks who saw a sad story on the news about a child who had been neglected or abused and said, “why did this have to happen? We would have gladly taken that child and loved him/her!” Yet we didn’t make a move to actually BECOME that family because “it was never the right time” or “we don’t know where to start”. But really, when IS it the right time? Answer: now. How do we get started? Answer: just make the call! There are children NOW who need someone to bridge that gap. Contact McDowell DSS to learn more. 828-652-3355.**



By Doug Harrell  
Mitchell County

As I head into my 79th Christmas here on this old earth my thoughts go back through the years, memories that flood my mind. I think about those early childhood days when we went out in the field across from the house and cut a cedar tree or a white pine that faintly resembled a Christmas tree, brought it home, and nailed a board on the bottom so it would stand up. We would pop popcorn and string it on a thread. Mother would find some tinsel and we would have a few store-bought ornaments. We thought that the trees were beautiful. For months before Christmas, we children would pore over the Sears Catalog looking at the things we would love to have for Christmas. As the catalog got older it would end up in the outhouse and we would continue looking at it there until the pages were gone.

The things I also remember are the carols we would sing at church, as well as the Christmas plays at school and church. The week of Christmas we would have little groups going around singing Christmas carols in the neighborhoods or communities. I would say that at least 90% of the folks in the community were in a church somewhere, which was the norm. In school there were no happy holidays, it was Merry Christmas. The story of the nativity was read, discussed, and talked about. The Christmas Play was a big event for all the parents and grandparents to come to watch. The place would be full with standing room only and to have a role in the play was a big deal.

I am well aware that I am being nostalgic about these memories. The yearly shopping trip to Johnson City and the trip to Graham's Hardware in Bakersville to get some Christmas candy was such a big deal! My oh my, how the times have changed over the years. We are flooded with Black Friday and online Monday and anything else that will keep us focused on the things we must have for ourselves and must buy for the kids, grandkids, and in our case, great-grandkids. While I don't have a problem with all the mass hype of commercialism, I sure long to see a return to putting the real reason for the season back up in front. Rocking around the Christmas Tree is fine, but how about more Silent Night, more We Three Kings, and more Oh Holy Night out front and on display?

For many years my mother, and then my wife Barbara, would bake a birthday cake, Jesus' birthday cake. We would talk about the fact that we celebrate Christmas because this was the day that Jesus was born of a virgin birth and that our salvation and our faith had their beginning in that little town of Bethlehem. The night that the shepherds came to seek out the Christ Child by following the star of Bethlehem, they gathered in the stable because Joseph and Mary could not find a room in the inn.

I want to wish each of you reading this a wonderful and glorious Christmas and a Blessed and Happy New Year. As you go into the season, be mindful of the reason. Make sure that you honor our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and that you teach these things to all your children and friends that you hold dear to your heart. Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night!

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



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POEM

By Edith Biddix  
McDowell County

WHAT CHRISTMAS IS

*Christmas is not just putting up lights that glow;  
but about a forgiving Savior, we all need to know.*

*Christmas is not just decorating a special tree,  
but honoring a King, who loves you and me.*

*Christmas is the greatest story ever told;  
in Bethlehem many years ago.*

*In a manger a baby lay; who would die on a  
cross one day.*

*Shed His blood, buried in a tomb, and rise again.  
If we believe in Him, He will save us from our sins.*

*Let us all remember Jesus is the reason for this holy  
season!*

Miss Biddix has been writing for many years. She has published poetry in books and papers. Miss Biddix is an Evangelist.



Todd's Techy Tips

Contrary

By Todd Abraham  
Athens, Tennessee



1 John 2:16 *"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."* Everything to do with technology is contrary to the word of God almost without exception. Technology feeds the carnal mind insatiably and keeps the human mind engulfed in a nonstop safari of new adventures. It stokes, like a fire, all the things the above scripture refers to as being of the world and not of God. But it doesn't mean God condones it or that the world is a better place because of it.

The major effect of the digital revolution is getting people's minds focused solely on carnality and things, things, and more things. It overloads the senses with endless wandering. Call it digital hypnosis. It pulls families apart, corrupts children, takes parents' attention away from their children, acts as a crutch for parents teaching their children, and brings temptation right in the secrecy of your alone space. It gives the powers that be the ability to observe, track, statisticize and alter the behavior of the world population. It speeds up the exposure of illicit things to teenagers and even younger when their minds aren't even equipped to know how to process the information. It multiplies greed and pride and sensuality and perversion like nothing before in history. It makes sinning against God easier than it's ever been due to the reduction in effort to commit such things. It propagates lies with the greatest of ease because the information overload is so vast that the average person chooses to believe what they see not knowing where to begin to verify it.

It keeps the carnal mind in a state of distraction constantly urging the individual to keep it close so they don't 'miss' anything. It makes liars out of almost every human who has access to it insisting they can't live without it. It breaks up marriages and puts our children in imminent danger from those who know how to manipulate them to isolate them to harm them. With the vast amount of research I have done on technology, smartphones, and their overall impact, I have determined by the wisdom that God has given me that the world was a much better place without it. The #1 culprit is smartphones because of their portability. Because of parents who, without any fear of God or even seeking God for approval, allow their children to own these things. Their minds are so underdeveloped and the devil being keenly aware of this fact, goes to work quickly through peer pressure and the fact that most children are intellectually smart enough to dive into debauchery quickly. They haven't been taught enough nor can they have been to know what they ought to say no to. And once they've seen something, it cannot be unseen.

If all that wasn't bad enough, everyone now almost seems to want to be the star of their own reality digital series. This speaks heavily to all three facets of what 1 John 2:16 teaches us. It goes hand in hand with greed which the bible teaches us that the love of money is the root of all evil. The devil is using this to groom the population of the world for complete free will and mind control. To reiterate, technology is the opposite of what the word of God teaches us about selflessness, meekness, putting others before ourselves, standing still and seeing the salvation of God, singleness of mind, not rushing into things, waiting on the Lord, and so on.

If you are a parent who has given one of these wicked devices to your underage children, God IS holding you accountable! You will pay for it. For most of the world today in any developed nation, technology, predominantly smartphones, is the chief idol and religion they worship and serve. The world is once again covered in gross darkness like in the days of Noah with one exception. This is after the arrival of Jesus Christ. You best read about the wrath of the Lamb! Repent, Jesus is coming.

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



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The Twelve Days of Christmas

By Nancy Malik  
Avery County



Over two hundred and fifty years ago, a song was created in a dangerous time when reading the Bible was not allowed by the king. But parents would not be stopped and it is from their loving ingenuity, this godly song was sung, so their children could remember the 12 tenants of Christianity.

On the first day of Christmas, my true love gave to me A Partridge in a pear tree- Jesus, like a mother hen

On the second day of Christmas, my true love gave to me 2 Turtles Doves- Old and New testaments

On the third day of Christmas, my true love gave to me 3 French Hens- Trinity: Faith Hope and Love

On the fourth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me 4 Calling Birds- four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John)

On the fifth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me 5 Golden Rings- first 5 books of the Old Testament

On the sixth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me 6 Geese a laying- 6 days of creation

On the seventh day of Christmas, my true love gave to me 7 Swans a swim- ming- days of week of creation 1} heavens 2} sky, seas 3} land, plant 4} sun, moon and stars 5} fish, birds 6} land, man and animals 7} rest

8 Maids a milking- eight beatitudes Blessed are the...

9 On the ninth day of Christmas, my true love gave to me 9 Ladies Dancing - Nine fruits of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control

10 Lords a Leaping- 10 commandments: 1. God is first in life 2. No idol wor- ship 3. God's name is not misused 4. Sabbath Day= rest 5. Honor Father and Mother 6. Do not kill 7. Be true to your mate 8. Do not steal 9. Do not lie 10. Do not take what does not belong to you

11 Pipers Piping- 11 faithful disciples

12 Drummers Drumming-12 pts of Apostle's Creed

1. Believe in God the Father

2. Believe in Jesus Christ, His only son

3. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary

4. Suffered under Pontius Pilot, crucified, died, and buried

5. Descended into hell, 3rd day rose again

6. Ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God, the Father Al- mighty

7. He will come again to judge the living and the dead

8. Believe in Holy Spirit

9. Holy Church and communion of Saints

10. and Forgiveness of sins

Children learned the tenants of the song to the truth of The Word, The Bible. The Word of Truth was been taught in the song so the children would not for- get. It was done in secret and yet this powerful song of truth, created in secret and lasted through ages of over 250 years is still sung today, all over the world! Amen

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

The Great Light

By John McCoury  
Roan Mountain, Tennessee



*“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulders, and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”* Isaiah 9:6

What a remarkable picture! It hardly needs any exposition. Suddenly, after a great time of trouble, the nation will realize that this glorious King, their Messiah, once came as a little child: to us a child is born. He, who was for eternity the Son of God was given to them as a little Baby in Bethlehem. They recognize at last, after centuries of rejection, that this One rightly deserves divine titles. This is Immanuel, God with us. The four titles Isaiah lists represent that: Wonderful Counselor. Did anyone ever fulfill that more fully than Jesus? He unveils to us secrets about ourselves and counsels us on how to avoid the heart- aches and problems that otherwise would beset us, showing the way to deliver- ance from the taint and pollution of sin. Mighty God. That unquestionably divine title can only describe God. He is the Mighty One, and in 10:21 the same term is used of God unmistakably. The next title is more than simply Everlasting Father. It is actually the Father of Eternity. This is surely a reference to the fact that Jesus alone can give eternal life. He is its father for it originates with him. *“As many as believe in him, to them gave he the power to become the sons of God.”* (John 1:12) No one contests the last title, Prince of Peace. He stated himself, *“My peace I give unto you,”* (John 14:27). Of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end. This phrase captures the universal character of the Messiah's reign and its extension at last to the whole created universe The key, of course, is in these words, to us a child is born, to us a son is given. Even though these events, both in Isaiah and in the gospels, took place thousands of years ago, when a nation (or an individual) first comes into personal contact with the Lord of Glory it seems as though he is the recipient for the first time of this wonderful gift. That is why we describe that we found the Lord, and how he came to us because it is so real in our own experience. It is to us that he came, he is born. He is God with us, to strengthen and guide us, to meet our needs, and to solve our problems. A woman told me of her struggle with a sense of being abandoned, left without guidance, and needing his presence. And thankfully I could point her back to these marvelous promises. The Lord IS with us.

Father, thank you for not just sending but giving your son to us. He is the most wonderful gift of all! Are we experiencing the life-changing reality of God With Us in the Presence of His Son? Do we seek first His counsel, His peace, and His power as our Everlasting Father?

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

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And the angel said to them,  
“Fear not, for behold, I bring  
you good news of great joy that  
will be for all the people. For  
unto you is born this day in the  
city of David a Savior, who is  
Christ the Lord.  
~Luke 2:10-11

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## Obedient Heart Fellowship

### Ring of Truth

By Jim Huskins  
McDowell County



My home county produces world-class drinking water. McDowell County water has been shipped around the globe. Excellent springs and pristine wells abound. Yet, for reasons that I cannot grasp, most of the people I know purchase bottled drinking water. It makes no sense. Local municipal water tastes like chlorine, but everyone who lives in this county could find someone who would be happy to share from a good well or spring.

Each week, my wife and I provide water for our Sabbath fellowship meals. Everyone loves our excellent well. Good water contributes to a good life. Long before bottled water and effective filters, I learned about good water through its absence. The fetid slime from the drinking fountains in my dorm at St. Louis Christian College caused me to realize that McDowell County water has the “ring of truth.”

Those three words dog my consciousness and challenge every new insight. Emotional connection to any proposition is no guarantor of validity, but one who is devoted to seeking truth arguably becomes sensitized to its presence. Unfortunately, many Christians are unable to distinguish between the “ring of truth” and the “ring of familiarity.”

Our culture teaches that truth is relative. Politicians and celebrities say that everyone should proclaim “their” truth. This perspective values feelings and opinions over facts. In contrast, the Bible insists—and some of us still believe—that the Word of God is absolute truth. Truth stands undiminished by opinion, unfazed by rejection.

Because of the influence of our satan-driven culture, many who claim to follow Jesus assert that Scripture must be interpreted in light of what is popular. 2 Corinthians 5:10 is one of many verses that state that everyone will be judged according to God’s standards of righteousness. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.” Our choice is to either devote our best efforts to live in ways that honor God, or we must twist His Word to accommodate cultural fashion. Which approach has the ring of truth?

The Bible still claims that Holy God cannot abide by the presence of sin. Sin destroyed the face-to-face relationship that the first humans enjoyed with their Creator. Sin caused Adam and Eve to be banished from paradise, barred from the tree of life, and engulfed by the entropy that led to their death and decay. Every evil action is the result of sin. Sin nailed the Holy Son of God to a Roman cross. Unforgiven sin will cause the majority of humanity to die and be separated from God for eternity. Sin is the curse that confronts us.

Why is it that so few churches seem to be interested in sin? Many congregations offer programs to help mitigate the practice and consequences of certain sins such as chemical addiction and spouse abuse. Only a few churches appear to be calling their membership to strive to lead sinless lives. On the contrary, many Christian groups teach that once a person is “saved,” they can live in any manner they choose, and God is somehow obligated to overlook habitual sin. That is not what the Bible teaches.

“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.” (Galatians 6:7) “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” (Romans 6:1-2) “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23) Many churches appear to believe that their primary job is providing outstanding entertainment. The Bible teaches that “church work” is defined by the Great Commission. Which of those perspectives has the ring of truth?

One of the most misunderstood concepts in Scripture involves the Fourth Commandment. “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.” (Exodus 20:8) Protestant churches almost universally teach that Sabbath was replaced with something they call the Lord’s Day. Few Christians know or care that Sunday worship was forced on the Church in the Fourth Century by Constantine 1 of Rome. His singular goal was to make Christianity more palatable to a culture steeped in sun god worship. This practice was carried on and enforced at the pain of death by the Roman Papacy. Unfortunately, the eventual Protestant rejection of the Roman system was only partial.

Jesus and His Apostles kept the Sabbath. So did the early Church. Not a single scripture claims that Sabbath was altered, revoked, or moved. Instead, the Bible says that Sabbath is dear to God’s heart. Sabbath is the Seventh day and God expects us to observe it regardless of what is happening in our lives. Exodus 31:13 is properly translated by the ESV, “Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths.” The Church teaches that Sabbath does not matter. The Bible says we must keep Sabbath before we do anything else. Where does the ring of truth lie in this debate?

Another unfortunate legacy of the Roman church is Christianity’s obsession with pagan worship rituals. The Bible teaches from beginning to end that God hates paganism. Nonetheless, Christians cling to events at the winter solstice and spring equinox which venerate the sun deity and the fertility goddess of ancient Babylon. Every good encyclopedia tells the origins of the “holiday traditions.” The Church loves the pagan holidays because they are “traditional.” God refuses to be worshipped in the same way pagans worship their gods. Where lies the truth in this debate?

I learned about good water by being deprived of it. Amos 8:11-12 teaches that a time is coming when the Word of God will not be available. Perhaps the best way to prepare for that “drought” is to forget everything we’ve been taught, open the Bible to page one, and drink deeply.

Jim Huskins is pastor of Obedient Heart Fellowship.

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Christmas – A Radiant Light

By Glenda Ward  
McDowell County

The people of Israel were waiting for the Messiah, a leader who had been promised centuries before by prophets. They believed this leader would rescue them from their Roman oppressors and establish a new Kingdom. They believed the coming Messiah would be their King and would rule the world with justice. However, many people overlooked prophecies that also spoke of this King as a suffering servant. Few recognized Baby Jesus as the Messiah (the ‘anointed One’). How could this humble carpenter’s son from Nazareth be their King? But Jesus was, from the time of His birth, the King of all the earth! Moreover, it was not in God’s plan to send Jesus to be an earthly King but a heavenly King. Matthew begins his book in the Bible by showing Jesus Christ was a descendant of David. His Kingdom would be much greater than David’s because it would never end.

Loving-kindness are descriptive words and actions designed to enrich the life of another person/other people. The birth of Jesus Christ definitely qualifies as an act of love and kindness. God’s gift to lost and dying worldly people. These words were spoken to Joseph in a dream by the angel of the Lord “*Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife:*” ... “*And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins*” (Matthew 1:20-21). These are truly works of love and kindness from our Heavenly Father. This reveals an important truth about Jesus – He is both God and man. God took on the limitations of humanity so He could live and die for the salvation of all who would believe in Him. The birth of Jesus is a supernatural event beyond human logic or reasoning. Because of this, God sent angels to help certain people understand the significance of what was happening. (Reference Matthew 2:13, 19; Luke 1:11, 26; 2:9).

The name JESUS means “Savior”. Jesus came to earth that Christmas morning to save us because we can’t save ourselves from sin’s consequences. We can’t eliminate the sinful nature present in all of us. Only Jesus can do that. He came to be our Savior from the power and penalty of sin. Jesus came to us as an infant baby born in a wayward stable. He was God in the flesh and literally lived among us. Through the Holy Spirit God is present today in the life of every believer. We will never develop loving kindness as a way of life without the power of the Holy Spirit, however, we must cooperate with the Holy Spirit within us for God to use us. Kind words and kind actions can be life-changing! This develops over time as we open our hearts to become more Christ-like. We must consciously learn to keep kind words and actions as our agenda every day. When we do, we will have the help of the Holy Spirit to lead and guide us in radiating Light.

In today’s time, it seems peace is nowhere to be found and the nights are anything but silent. We may ask, “Lord, what do You want me to do about all that is going on in our lives in this world?” Can one person or family make a difference? Meditating on this, I hear a quiet whisper from within say: “the only way to get rid of darkness is to radiate more light.” Then Matthew 5:14: “*Ye are the light of the world. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*” (Matthew 5:14). Jesus Christ wants to shine through us as the Holy Spirit leads and directs. It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that we can radiantly shine this Christmas Season and throughout the coming New Year. We shine when we are kind by simply treating those we interact with in a considerate way; we can brighten someone’s day and way of life. Jesus said, “*A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if you have love one to another*” (John 13:35). We also radiate more Light when we are real within ourself.

One of my favorite Thanksgiving/Christmas decorations is a mosaic candle holder. When a candle is placed inside, all the broken pieces multiply and spread a radiant Light making it a beautiful masterpiece. The seemingly imperfect places in our lives can do the same. We don’t need to have it all together. We just need to say, “Jesus, please use all of me for your glory.” When we are real within ourselves others are drawn to us and that allows us to brighten their lives with encouragement. Every thoughtful word or act is a spark that can spread farther than we might ever realize. But most importantly we shine because we keep Jesus Christ first. No matter what anyone may say, Jesus Christ is still the reason for the season – and the reason for the ‘LIGHT’ within us.

Our Savior knows there will always be darkness with heartbreaking news headlines. They existed the starry Christmas night when Jesus was born in Bethlehem and will continue until He comes again. He also knows that because of what He did on the cross and through His resurrection, the darkness has already been defeated. We need to only accept His Light and Shine radiantly for Him. Every time we see Christmas lights this Christmas Season, let us remember this invitation and celebrate: “*Arise, shine, for thy LIGHT is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee*” (Isaiah 60:1). Also read (Isaiah 60: Verse 2). Darkness upon this earth will NOT last forever. God’s Light and Glory will win in the end. Thus, we will



win if we follow Him to the end.  
We can all make this world a little brighter wherever we are today and every day. Delight in both the simplicity of the Christmas story of Jesus Christ and how His birth and life teachings can change your life forever.  
Jesus Christ truly is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament.  
Read the full account of the Birth and Infancy of Jesus Christ:  
• Matthew Chapter 1 thru Chapter 2, Verse 23  
• Luke Chapter 1 thru Chapter 2, Verse 40

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

Crossword Solution

L	A	P	S		V	A	S	S	A	L		I	S	A
A	F	O	O	L	I	S	H		M	A	T	R	I	X
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Kids Corner

Reindeer or Caribou  
By Christy Lowman  
Burke County



What do you think of when you hear the word reindeer? Christmas, hot chocolate, Santa, snow, perhaps? Reindeer live in both North America and Europe however in North America they are called caribou. Domesticated caribou are called reindeer too.

Reindeer are really cool animals. They spend forty percent of their time in snowy, cold areas. God equipped them with unique traits to help them survive these conditions. For example, they have thick fur, and each individual hair is hollow which traps in heat to help keep them warm. They are the only deer species that have fur that covers their nose all the way to the bottoms of their feet. Their hairy hooves help them be able to travel in the snow and ice. Their divided hooves shrink and become hard in the winter for better travel. In the summer, the hooves turn soft and get larger to help navigate the softer ground.

The blood in the veins in their nose warms the air the reindeer breathes before it gets into its lungs. They have a super sense of smell that helps them sniff out lichen and other food under the snow. Their nose identifies predators and guides them on their migratory path. The reindeer’s keen sense of smell helps them the most to survive.

Reindeer are herd animals. Sometimes a herd can have up to 500,000 reindeer! Reindeer choose to travel into the blowing wind to help them be able to pick up on surrounding scents. While their sense of sight and hearing are not the best, they can see ultraviolet light. This light also helps them identify predators and food.

Some types of reindeer make a clicking sound when they walk. This helps them be able to hear each other so they can stay together in blizzard-like conditions. Reindeer can also swim and run up to 48 mph. Some travel up to three thousand miles each year.

These deer have the largest and heaviest antlers of all deer. Males and females both grow antlers unlike the deer around here. Males’ antlers grow up to 51 inches long while females grow up to 20 inches long. The males start growing their antlers in February and drop them in November. Females start growing their antlers in May and shed theirs the following May when they give birth.



Many people use reindeer for travel, to race, to help haul heavy things, and for meat, and milk. The reindeer’s milk is considered “super milk” because it is 22 percent butterfat and 10 percent protein. The reindeer’s milk is very rich compared to cow’s milk which is only 4 percent fat.

Unfortunately, you only get 2 cups of milk from a reindeer a day instead of a gallon or so from a cow. Some people make sweet cheese from reindeer milk. Reindeer are unique, interesting animals. I had the pleasure of meeting some at a petting zoo once. Maybe one of these days I will get a chance to taste some of their sweet cheese!

December is a very busy month for many. Often our minds get occupied with presents, Santa, more presents, reindeer, and many other things. I encourage you to focus your mind on the real reason we celebrate Christmas, which is Jesus’ birth. If Jesus had not been born we would not have had a savior to save us from going to hell. We would all be lost and life would be meaningless. The miracle of Jesus’s birth and His story is the most important thing of all!

Also if you are able, please help other children and families that are in need this Christmas. They might not be getting a present or might need a warm meal. This has been a very hard year for many. Help them see the love of Jesus through you! Dear Lord, help us keep our hearts and mind on You this holiday season. Please show us who we can help this Christmas. We pray they will see Your love through us! Amen.

“For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6 NLT  
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<https://www.treehugger.com/things-you-didnt-know-about-reindeer-4864068>

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



# Snow Hill Baptist Church

## From the Royal Robe to Swaddling Clothes No Regrets

By Dean Honeycutt  
Michell County

It is 740 BC Uzziah has reigned as King of Judah for fifty-two years. He is a successful king who brought security and prosperity to Judah. He started following the Lord, but because of the success he has had, and the popularity he has gained, pride overtakes him. He becomes so arrogant that he goes into the Temple to burn incense which is restricted to only the priests the sons of Aaron. While in the Temple in disobedience God strikes him with leprosy. Uzziah is isolated in a home and dies a lonely man. Like Uzziah, it is easy, if we are not careful, to turn the blessings of God in our lives and take the credit for ourselves resulting in the sin of pride and arrogance.

It is during this time of anxiety and political unrest that God calls the prophet Isaiah to deliver God’s message of hope to a remnant of believers. *“In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple.”* Isaiah 6:1 This is significant because Isaiah sees God’s Son clothed in a royal robe, the King of kings and the Lord of lords, sitting upon a throne seven hundred plus years before the birth of Christ. Jesus’ name Immanuel means God with us. Jesus will reign as King on earth just as Isaiah had seen and witnessed. This experience with Christ brought comfort to Isaiah and he in turn was to comfort God’s people.

In contrast to Uzziah’s pride in the presence of God almighty, Isaiah humbles himself before the throne in repentance and acknowledges his sinfulness. Christ then purges Isaiah’s sin taking away his iniquity with a live coal from the altar of sacrifice touching Isaiah’s lips. This is a clear picture of the atoning sacrifice of our Savior Jesus Christ. That we are purged and made clean with the precious blood of Christ.

I am fascinated that the Bible specifically records Isaiah’s calling and experience with God *“in the year King Uzziah died.”* The people of God needed hope. They needed assurance that God was with them, and He had not abandoned them. It is during this time of national insecurity that God asks, *“who will go for us”* and Isaiah responds, *“here am I, send me.”*

Are we willing to go for God? During our time of hopelessness and insecurity are we trusting the Lord and pointing people to the one who sits on the throne? Many people rely on man and man’s solutions to our problems and national unrest. I recently heard a liberal say in speaking of current conditions in America, *“it seems that things are upside down.”* What is wrong is now right, and what was once right is now wrong. We are *“upside down.”* We can not see clearly because of our sins and our pride and the only hope for us is Jesus. Sin is an abomination to God and God will judge us for our pride and ungodliness.

But thank the Lord, God took on flesh and came to earth. Isaiah brought a message of hope to the *“house of David.”* Isaiah 7:13–14 *“And he said, Hear ye now, O house of David; Is it a small thing for you to weary men, but will ye weary my God also? Therefore, the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, And shall call his name Immanuel.”* At a time when believers had given up on God, God makes a promise that His Son is coming to earth and will be born of the virgin Mary.

The *“house of David”* is the remnant of believers. All believers past, present, and future can trust God’s Word and God’s Son Jesus Christ. What Isaiah anticipated to come in God’s timing; we look back on the birth of Jesus the baby in the manger.

If we could just imagine a scene in heaven determined before the foundation of the world. God sees into eternity the plight and disease of a man wallowing in our sin and depravation. We have no hope and are doomed to despair and darkness. And God asks who will go for me and make a way for sinful man to be saved. And Jesus the Son says I will go send me. The father continues Son you will have to take on human flesh and die a sacrificial death; you will experience the pain and suffering of the flesh, and I will forsake you in your darkest hour. You will pay a sin debt and satisfy my wrath against sin. Royalty, the King of kings and the Lord of lords comes to earth wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. God removes the royal robe in exchange for grave clothes. Thank God for Christmas.

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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# Walnut Grove Church

## Can't Buy Me Love

By Kurt Bomar  
Avery County

Song of Solomon 8:7 *“Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot sweep it away. (But) If one were to give all the wealth of one's house for love, it would be utterly scorned.”*

Remember back in the 60s when the Beatles (the great philosophers of their day) told us that you just can't buy love?

We all get that and am sure we agree as well.

Why is it then that we try to buy love from God? What I mean is, don't we often think, “The Lord must really love me today because I had my devotions for an hour! I'm really going to be blessed today. After all, I earned it.” Perhaps we expect blessings because we did a good deed for some unfortunate person or maybe we just said “no” to a temptation. Conversely, when we sin, we think God doesn't love us as much.

The good news/bad news (depending on how you look at it) is that that kind of love is useless because it is based on your works instead of His grace. Don't try to buy the Lord's love.

Here's the really good news. God loves you just as much when you miss your devotions, you lose your temper, or you fall yet again to temptation. (I'll prove that later).

So why, some might ask, do we even try to do the right things if it doesn't make a difference? I didn't say it didn't make a difference, I said it won't affect how much God loves you.

All you have to look at to prove this is your relationship with your children. Do you love them any more when they clean their room, do their homework, or mow the grass? We don't love our children based upon their works, but rather because they are OUR'S! They can't earn our love, it's already there.

So why should they mow the grass or help with the dishes? In a healthy relationship, it's because of appreciation. They love their parents and they want to please them and spend time with them.

The blessing of daily devotions and good works is that WE are changed by them. We get a clearer understanding of the depth of the love that our Lord has for us and we just want to be around Him all the more.

Paul said it so clearly: Rom 8:38 *“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*

I can't earn that kind of love, but I sure like basking in it.

Selah (think about it)



Kurt Bomar is pastor of Walnut Grove Church.

# Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

## Christmas Memories

By Caron Cline  
Burke County

I love all things Christmas and I think this gene passed from my mother to me. Growing up, our home was filled with the sights, sounds, and smells associated with Christmas; from Gene Autry singing Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer to Elvis Presley moaning about having a Blue Christmas. The Christmas tree was covered in colored lights, icicle garland, and those so easily broken round ornaments we were commanded not to touch. But the aroma of baking from the kitchen, which seemed to permeate every room in the house, was my favorite part. Nothing smells better than gingerbread men and chocolate chip cookies baking in the oven. My parents were very intentional about teaching us the true meaning of Christmas but we celebrated everything from Santa Claus coming down the chimney to Jesus being born in a stable and placed in a manger because there was no room in the inn. One of our traditions on Christmas eve was to place a glass of milk and a plate of cookies near the tree for Santa. Early the next morning, my brother and I would race to the living room to see our gifts, and also to see if Santa ate the snack we had left. Sure enough, the milk and the cookies were gone. It was only after I was a teenager that it dawned on me that Santa evidently washed the glass and the plate after eating because they were completely clean. My mother was not one to allow anyone to leave dirty dishes, not even Santa. We would then run to our parents' room, jump on the bed, and insist that they get up to see what Santa had left. It took years to realize that they had been up half the night putting together race tracks, train sets, and bicycles. We never expected much at Christmas and were only encouraged to ask for one or two gifts that we really wanted, but they were always under the tree along with other surprises. Each year, my mother filled a stocking with small things such as candy, fruit and nuts, and other fun items. As the years passed, my mother continued to decorate the tree with the numerous ornaments she had collected and allowed no one to assist. She would sometimes stay up until 2:00 am placing each one in just the perfect place. Can you say, 'OCD'? She also insisted on filling a stocking for my brother and me, long after we were adults. This will be our first Christmas without our mom because she will be spending it this year with Jesus. I don't know if there are trees or stockings or chocolate chip cookies in heaven but if there are, she will be decorating her tree with NO angelic assistance, filling stockings with interesting items, and baking her share of chocolate chip cookies. I can smell them from here!



Caron Cline is a follower of Jesus Christ who loves to teach the word of God. Her desire is to see every believer growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.



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# Radiating Life

By Andrew Goins  
Watauga County



God-whose center is nowhere and whose circumference is everywhere- expressed His infinity in His intimacy. Jesus clothed Himself in humanity to become the life and light of the world. Radiant life. Resurrected light. God pitched His tent among us. God dwells among us.

God tried to communicate His love, but “If communication is not what you say but what people hear, then what we [God] said was warped and wrenched into distancing prescriptions that had no heart.” ~Micheal Moynahan

God spoke into being creation, through His Word, Jesus the Christ. God spoke to Israel, but Israel warped and wrenched God’s Word. Big ideas. Philosophies. Abstractions. Concepts. God, in His suspicion of big ideas and philosophies, came as the light and life of the world, to bring peace to the world through disassembling.

“I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.” ~C.S. Lewis

Christ came to illuminate the world. The world was dark and dim. Chaotic and corrupt. Creation wronged, and the people wrung out like a dishrag that is dry of water and soap, unable to do the thing for which it was created. The dishrag was made for cleaning the kitchen that is creation. God is the cleaner/gardener, we are the dishrags/tools created for co-cleaning. When Christ came, we wronged creation and were ourselves wrung of God’s goodness implanted inside us. God came. Abided. Pitched His tent. Not as a big idea or intellectual idealism. God Himself came clothed in humanity to wet our dishrags again. God came to the world to inhabit our world.

“ Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.” Acts 2:2-4

Tongues of fire came to rest of each of them. Jesus came to set our hearts on fire to set the world on fire. This world is tender, and don’t worry, the Holy Spirit's fire is going before us like gasoline so that our fiery hearts can ignite! We are here to burn up the whole earth as Christ incarnates himself through us, the church, in His fiery love.

Shining and shimmering. Gleaming and glimmering. We are the people of God that shines brightly, like a city on a hill that cannot and will not be hidden. The fire within us is the resurrection light and radiant life of Jesus. The infinite nature of God will “flame out, like shining from shook foil” in us and through us. Like an explosion expanding what was, into what could be. Like an implosion; the God who has no circumference makes His center in us. The infinite imploding in the intimate friendship of Jesus and you!

God spoke His word in sending Jesus, the Word of God. Just as in Genesis 1, God’s word always brings about life. As Thomas Merton says“Space and time are the dance of the Lord in emptiness.” God’s speaking is the dancing. God dances in dark places so that His light and life might create cosmos (the greek word for order) out of chaos.

Mary, laboring in affliction and agony of love looks for a home to have her baby. People turn her down. They keep her out as a stubborn act of withholding. They are not merely denying a temporary home for a pregnant woman, but metaphorically keeping God’s word from their home. From their hearts. Two things. First, a way in which we receive God’s word is through generosity. Receiving and giving. Giving and receiving. It is the inhaling (receiving from God) and exhaling (giving to others) of the Christian life. We receive God’s word to us through inhabiting the life of Christianity. Giving generously because we have been given to. In keeping Mary, Joseph, and Jesus out, they stopped breathing. They refused to receive it. They died.

How does Mary receive God’s word? “I am the Lord’s servant...May your word to me be fulfilled.” ~Luke 1:38

In hearing God’s word to her. Receiving. How does Mary respond? In offering up the whole of herself. Heart, mind, soul, and strength.

I invite you to pray Mary’s prayer as an act of receiving from God. Opening up your body and soul to God, so that God can re-form your de-formed soul. So that God can transform your de-formed body. Pray this prayer as a rebellious refusal to withhold from God and others. Pray this prayer as a stubborn submission to an infinite and intimate God who has chosen your heart to make His home.

Andrew Goins is on staff for a campus ministry at Appalachian State University called Ratio Christi. He also works as a youth leader and worship leader at Arbor Dale Presbyterian Church in Banner Elk. Andrew is committed to simply and thoroughly loving his wife Bethany, growing in his bible nerdiness, delighting in good books (theology, poetry, and select fiction), music, photography, creation, and in gathering people together for bible studies, a shared meal, or making music



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Humor

By Buddy Freeman  
Madison County



A boy was on his way home when he saw the preacher coming toward him. The boy realized that it was Sunday and that he had been fishing during church time. As they drew closer together, the boy smiled and held up a string of catfish. “He said, “reverend, see what these catfish got for biting worms on a Sunday.”

A game warden yelled, “Hey, you are not allowed to fish here. The fisherman replied, “I am not fishing. I am teaching my worms to swim.”

A Christian farmer entered a restaurant in New York. When his meal was served he bowed his head and thanked God for his food. A group of rowdy boys at a nearby table was making fun of the farmer for praying. One of them taunted him in a loud voice where everybody could hear him and asked, “Hey, farmer, does everybody say a prayer before they eat where you live?” The farmer grinned and replied, “no, son, the pigs don’t.”

A boss yelled at one of his workers, “Dave, I have taught you everything I know and you still don’t know anything!”

“Some people are kind, polite, and sweet-spirited until you try to sit in their pew.”


A Minister to his son on Facebook: “Dear Son, hope you are well. The family here is fine, but we miss you a lot. Please turn off the computer and come down for dinner.”

A six-year-old girl praying, “Dear God, Thank you for my baby brother but what I have been praying for is a little puppy.” Sue

Doctor to a patient’s wife. “I really don’t like the looks of your husband.” The wife said, “I don’t either, but he is sure good to the grandchildren.”

A Pastor saw an older lady coming to rededicate her life. She said, “I want to lay my tongue upon the altar.” Everyone knew she was the town gossip. The Pastor said, “That’s fine, ma’am. But our altar is only six feet long.”


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



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A Christmas Prayer

By Timothy W. Tron  
Burke County



The small child lay pale and cold beneath the covers. The color all but washed from her face; she brought tears to her father's eyes as he sat patiently beside the bed holding her tiny little hand. She was the youngest of seven children that he and his dear wife had brought into this world. But this one, little Mary, was more precious than all the others. To see her suffer was almost more than he could bare. A few months earlier, the darkness descended upon his life when he lost his Molly in childbirth. Now, helpless to do anything, he watched the last part of Molly seemingly slipping from his grasp – a feeling of despair unlike any other.

One hand lay upon the infant's bed, while the other was across the well-worn pages of the family Bible on his lap. Michael could barely read, but the words that his fingers now caressed spoke into his heart, "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

Outside their meager cabin on the edge of Beech Mountain, the snow continued to fall. Only a couple of days before Christmas, it had been weeks since the temperature had dipped below freezing and remained. Michael Trivette's livelihood was working the timber. He was a lumberjack by trade, but since the ice had been on the trees, there had been no work. Without income, he was slowly watching the cupboard diminish. The other children, some old enough to help out, were all aware of their father's broken spirit. Doing their best, they continued the farm chores, but without the primary source of family sustenance, all were beginning to realize something had to be done. Patiently and with as much care as possible, the eldest son, Seth, came to his father's side. Gently putting his arm around him, he tried rousing him to no avail.

"Pa." There was no response. The empty green eyes stared back at him. He grabbed both shoulders, gently turning him so he could look into his eyes, and softly shook him as if trying to ease one back from a deep sleep.

"Pa, come back to us," the eyes blinked once, twice, and then again. Then, finally, a focus slowly returned, and his expression changed. Michael realized his son's concern and was now thankful that he was aware of his presence.

"I... I'm sorry, son, it's just that..." The words choked off deep in his throat as moisture gathered in his red, swollen eyes.

"It's okay. We all understand."

Michael's countenance fell, his head bowed down, facing the rough wood floor. By then, a couple more of Seth's sisters, two of the oldest, joined him by his side, Evelyn and Annabelle. They had their mother's auburn hair, which fell across their shoulders, one in braids, the other in natural ringlets. They nodded in agreement with their brother, smiling sheepishly, but crossed eyebrows implied a deep concern.

"You need to rest, Pa," Evelyn said, "We can take care of Mary. You haven't slept in days. We can't afford to lose you too." The last she said as she placed her hand upon his shoulder.

Realizing the gravity of her statement, Michael understood and, with their help, being weary from lack of sleep, made it to his bed. The last thing he remembered was seeing his eldest daughter pulling the covers up to his bearded chin and kissing him gently on the forehead. "Sleep well, pa, we love you," Annabelle said with a voice that beckoned from her mother. Then as he slept, she knelt beside his bed and prayed over him. "Dear God, we are but a poor, humble family. We ain't got much in this world, but God, we know our momma is up there with you looking down on us all. We miss her more than we could have ever imagined." There was a pause as the tears began to arise in her throat. Then, as the tiny bits of moisture ran down her rose-colored cheeks, the words continued, "We ask you, Father, to heal our little sister Mary. Pa can't stand to see her suffer, and we're afraid he will fall into the grave with her should she die. So, God, please heal her and give us back our pa, for we will all surely die without him." A hand touched her shoulder, and she looked up to see Seth standing over her, head also bowed in prayer.

"Go on, sis."

She turned back toward the bed and continued, "In Jesus Holy name we pray," Their voices spoke in unison, "Amen."

Later that night, by the light of a full moon, Eustace Sloop was awakened by a loud knock at his cabin door. The howling winds foretold of a coming storm, but the light from the window cast a brilliant blue radiance across the floor. It was not uncommon. Too often, someone with a grave illness would arrive at his door at the most uncommon hour. Eustace and his wife, Mary, had settled in this little mountain village only a year before. Word quickly spread of their welcoming demeanor, serving the community as healers and educators. Their door was always open. The bitter winds that blew outside only spoke of another desperate soul seeking his medical attention. Mary lay sound asleep. The noise had yet to wake her.

The knock came again before he could grab the nearest lantern and make his way to the door. "I'm on my way," he spoke softly, hoping not to wake his wife before it was necessary. As the door opened, the yellow lamp light fell upon the bundled-up figure of Seth Trivette, almost unrecognizable if it were not for his radiant red hair that fell from beneath his woodman's hat.

"Dr. Sloop, we need you badly. Baby Mary is dying."

"Come in, my boy, come in," Eustace said, gesturing the boy inside. The wind gusted, almost taking the light with it, as snow blew in, remnants of all which remained on the ground from previous storms. "Step into the kitchen area, and let's

get you a hot cup of coffee."

As Seth sat at the table, his hands shaking from the freezing temperatures outside, he told of how Mary had started to come down with the chills and then gone into a deep sleep. Listening intently to the boy's description, it was clear to Doc Sloop that the child needed his immediate care. "And Doc, don't think we ain't got the means to pay." At this, the boy pulled around the pack he had carried in with him and pulled out a bundle. The outer wrappings were burlap tied with cotton string bindings. He opened the package and revealed a beautifully hand-stitched quilt with a note attached that he gently lay upon the kitchen table before them. We ain't got no money, but this is the most valuable thing my family owns. It was the last quilt my momma sewed. She was going to give it to my pa this Christmas. He don't know nothing about it cause she died before she could give it to him. So us kids were keeping it a secret for him. But.. His voice trailed off as he choked back emotions. Eustace put his hand on the boy's shoulder as tears rose in the young man's eyes.

"Don't worry, my boy, don't you worry," he said as he draped his arm around the lad's strong, firm shoulders. Already at a young age, Seth was nearly a grown man. The struggles of the mountain folk made them hard people, and early on, they would be forced into adulthood long before their childhood had ended. "God will surely provide, but first, let's get you warmed up before we head out."

Hours later, in the dead of night, the fury of the winter storm was fully upon them. Closing the cabin door behind him, Doc Sloop had done all that was humanly possible. The rest was up to God.

The snow was coming down in sheets as he pulled up his overcoat around his neck. He knew the Elk River would be up, making it difficult, if not treacherous, to cross at this hour. The pale light from the cabin window barely penetrated the wall of white fury before him. To Eustace, Mary's advanced stage of pneumonia was evident. He had applied the salve, then bound her snugly in the crib where she lay. At such a tender age, no medicine was available to treat her condition safely. The antiserum was too risky for an infant. As a medically trained physician, he feared the worse. As he tried to prepare to step into the squall, the door opened behind him. Annabelle emerged.

"Doc, we want to thank you for coming out in such dreadful weather. We can't ever repay you for what you've done."

"I haven't done anything yet," he thought to himself. The whisper of his fear crept back into his mind. He knew only by God's will that little Mary would live or die. With all the strength to keep his voice from cracking from the emotion, he responded with, "My child, it is why I'm here."

"I wanted to pray for you before you leave."

"Sure," he paused, removing his wide-brimmed hat.

As Annabelle lifted Eustace in prayer, the lights from the lantern inside flickered. The wind calmed ever slightly, and as the doctor mounted his horse, barely visible in the gale of blinding whiteness, nobody on this side of Glory knew what would become of the deathly ill babe inside.

Just after midnight, in the wee hours of the morning, Mary Sloop realized Eustace had not come home. Outside in the darkness, the snow was already a foot or more. Bundled up, she made her way by lantern light to the barn to see if the horse was in the barn. To her surprise, the horse stood in the stall, with Eustace still mounted, sound asleep. His feet were still frozen in the stirrups. He had passed out from exhaustion. Lovingly and with as much care as possible, she freed him from his frozen prison and helped him inside. As she gently helped Eustace into the warm bed, his hand on her shoulder for balance, he whispered in a strained voice, "Mary, please...please pray for the little Trivette baby and the family. It doesn't look good for the child. But we know it's all in God's hands."

"No worries, my dear, I've already done the likes, and for you as well." He smiled at this, looking into her bright eyes.

"And here, I almost forgot. Get this note to Preacher McCrae as soon as possible. He will know what to do." Eustace pulled the small slip of folded paper from his shirt pocket, placing it in Mary's palm.

"Don't you fret. Now you lay yourself down and get some rest. These mountain folk need their good doctor. It's your turn to get some pampering. Besides, we got to take care of that frostbite. How will you perform surgery if you don't have any fingers to work with?"

He grinned broadly at this as she left the room, softly pulling the door behind her. She was so direct sometimes, but her truth was as light to his soul. The last thing he could see as his mind succumbed to the fatigue that overtook his body was the precious face of that tiny baby girl. Her countenance was so pure, so innocent. Eustace then realized it had been as if he had looked upon the face of an angel. The words to his favorite Psalm came to mind as he drifted off, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth..."

As the gray light of dawn was still finding its way into the deep crevices of the mountains the next day, Christmas morning, Michael Trivette was in a far distant land. The battle raged around him. Helplessly he watched; his brothers-in-arms lay about him. Their corpses lay as logs in the woods, fallen, grey and cold. He was on his knees, his body too weak to continue. The armored warrior stood before him, sword in hand, ready to make the last swing that would sever his head from his body. Just as the demon lifted its blade to make the momentous arc downward, it stopped. With the demon's helmet shield open, Michael could see the expression of surprise and fear written on his tormentor's face as the last vestiges of life passed from its lips. As the dark force fell to the ground, he could clearly see who had saved his life – standing before him was the image of his Lord and Savior. His face shone like radiance, too bright to look upon. With

*continued on page 21*



# Family of God Fellowship

## Who's the Clown Now?

By Dr. James L. Snyder  
Ocala, Florida



As a young person, I was fascinated with clowns. My first encounter was at a circus I attended with my family. The main character in the circus was the clown.

When I first saw those clowns, I was scared almost to death. I'd never seen anything as scary as those circus clowns.

That began my adventure with clowns, and every Saturday morning on television, I watched Bozo the Clown. I rarely missed an episode. But, of course, like most friends, I believed Bozo the Clown and all clowns were real. In fact, on Halloween, I usually dressed up as a clown and went door-to-door collecting "treats."

Imagine when I first realized that Bozo the Clown was not real. That was when I also discovered that Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny were not real. So you can imagine the distress I experienced.

As I got older, I grew out of that fascination with clowns and put it all behind me. That's the real purpose of growing up, to put things behind you that aren't real.

I didn't think of clowns very much until something happened recently in our house.

It was the day after Halloween, and The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage told me she was going to the bathroom and taking care of her hair, washing and dyeing it, and whatever else she did with it.

Looking back over my life, many things have come to me while drinking my coffee. Coffee is a very important aspect of my life, and I'm just now beginning to appreciate it.

As I was drinking my coffee a thought came to me, and I said to myself, "What if...."

I needed to put together a nice little plan.

I got ready for my plan, thought it through very carefully, and believed I had everything down where it needed to be (Or, so I thought). Then The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage came out of the bathroom and walking down the hallway, I saw her and said, "Oh my, you are wearing the funniest and scariest looking clown costume that I have ever seen." And I laughed a glorious, hahaha.

I continued staring at her with a ridiculous smile on my face. Unfortunately, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage did not return the smile.

Staring at me, she said, "What are you talking about?"

Still laughing, I said, "Don't you know that Halloween is over? You don't need a costume." And then I resumed my hysterical laughter.

I resumed my laughter, and she resumed her scowling.

That's the difference between my wife and me. I see something to laugh at, and she doesn't laugh at it.

When I quieted down a little bit, she cleared her throat and said, "So, you think I'm wearing a clown costume, do you?"

Without thinking, which is my usual MO, I resounded, "Yes, I do." I followed that up with more hilarious laughter.

"Are you sure," she said, "you want to stick with your story?"

How she said it caused me a great deal of pause. I began to think that maybe she did not think my comment was funny. Aren't all clown jokes funny?

My smile began to evaporate from my face, and a lightbulb in my head went on.

Then she said, "Seriously, do you want a clown to fix your supper tonight?"

Having no understanding of where that came from, I had to stop and try to process that thought. So what was she getting at?

"How about," she continued, "would you like a clown to be in the house while you're asleep tonight?"

Now I was getting nervous. So who's the clown now?

Where this was going to end, I did not know, but I did have a little bit of fear in that direction.

"I was just joking," I explained. "After all, yesterday was Halloween, and I just was joking about it." So I tried flashing a smile at her, but for some reason, it didn't flash.

I was beginning to understand why some people are afraid of clowns. I suddenly had an epiphany about something I had long ago forgotten. I now have resumed my fear of clowns.

Getting out of this situation is going to take the brainpower of Bozo the Clown.

Knowing The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage as I do, there will be a payback for this clown gaff. It may not be today, tomorrow, next week, or next month, but it will come when I least expect it.

Staring at me, she said, "I do not think clowns are funny."

After being a husband for over 50 years, I know that no payback is the worst payback. Every day I get out of bed, I expect a payback in some form. Whenever I see my wife stare at me with a mischievous smile on her face, I expect a payback. I wish she would get it over with and not keep me in suspense.

In the meantime, I happened to run across a passage in the Bible for my personal situation.

James 1:19 - 1:20, "19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear; slow to speak, slow to wrath: 20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God."

I must confess that too often I am slow to hear and quick to speak. After this incident, I'm really going to work on reversing my behavior.

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



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his outstretched arms, he beckoned Michael to rise. As he did, he felt a renewed strength surge through his body. A sense of peace so warm, so loving, it made his heart begin to weep.

Michael awoke with tears running down his cheeks as his second youngest, little Micah, tugged at his bed shirt.

“Pa Pa,” she said with a huge smile as her other brothers and sisters stood behind her. “Pa, Pa, come look. Jesus has come.”

Michael rose from the bed. No longer saddened, he felt renewed, even if it was just a dream. The children took him over to the crib of little Mary. There smiling, looking back up at them, was his precious baby girl. Reaching down, he picked her up, still wrapped in the blanket that Doc Sloop had wrapped her in. Crying in the embrace, a note silently slipped, almost unnoticed, from between the folds of the material and fell at Michael’s feet. “Look, Pa, a note fell out of the blanket,” little Micah exclaimed as she reached down, picked it up, and handed it to her pa.

“You got to read it to us, ...please?”

“What, what’s this,” Michael said, carrying Mary and the note over to the rocking chair beside the hearth. The fire felt warm already. Seth knelt, feeding more wood into it as he watched his pa pause, looking solemnly at the note.

He began reading “Dearest Michael.” The children watched, their hearts matching their father’s, his lips trembling as he slowly rocked the baby in his arms. Then, looking back at the note, he continued, “I know we don’t have much in this world but each other.” He stopped rocking and looked up at the ceiling. Then after a long pause continued, “I hope this quilt will keep us as warm together as our hearts are for each other until the end of time. Love your dearest, Molly.”

Michael looked up from the note at his young family. Tears streamed down his face, but he didn’t mind. He had suddenly realized the blanket wrapped around his little Mary was a gift around a gift, the beauty therein too precious to behold. The children, then knowing the time was right, gathered around their dear father and embraced as one. For a moment, the ice on the trees, the lack of food on the table, or even the loss of their momma seemed to hurt a little less. They could have remained in that huddle of love forever had it not been interrupted by the sound of a horse whinnying and hoofbeats tearing away.

Seth bounded toward the door, grabbed the rifle, and threw on his coat in almost one motion. He threw open the door and froze. A burst of cold air and snow blew in as he stood staring.

“What is it, son,” Michael said from beside the fireplace, having stood with Mary still in his arms.

For a long moment, he didn’t speak. Then when he could finally bring the words forth, they were cracked and muted with emotion. “There, there’s stuff all over the porch.”

“What stuff, son?” “Snow?”

They all hurried over to the now-ajar door and peeked out.

There, covering the entire porch, were crates and feed bags full of food, preserves, dried beans, pintos, taters, and more. In addition, a sizeable smoked ham hung from a rope around the beam on the porch, with a big red bow tied across it. A note hung from the ham with the words “Merry Christmas” written in big letters.

Michael looked down at Mary, the quilt, then back at the porch. There weren’t words to describe the moment. But he knew in his heart that somehow the Lord had provided. Before closing the door, he looked up to the heavens, smiled, and mouthed a silent, “Thank you, Jesus.”

As the little Trivette family drifted off to a peaceful sleep later that evening, their thoughts would turn to gratitude. None of them would ever forget the Christmas when God answered their prayers and gave them back little Mary and their Pa. Their mother’s quilt would become a treasured family heirloom. After everyone was put to bed, Michael lay just looking up at the ceiling for a long time, but his thoughts were far beyond those rough-hewn rafters. He couldn’t help but think God had been there for them through it all. He thought of dear Molly one more time, and before he slipped into a peaceful slumber, he softly spoke the words, “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.*

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Although a house often represents a person, Gordon shared two related dreams she had had in which a man actually represented a house.

In both dreams, she married a very old man and even decided to divorce him. After study and prayer, she realized that the dreams were actually a warning against the plans she and her husband, Frank, had to renovate their old home. The cost of renovation would have resulted in a great financial loss. After prayer, she and Frank canceled renovation plans and bought a new home that "was above anything that we were asking or thinking."

It is important to take care in discerning the meaning of dreams, Gordon cautioned. "There are things that are revealed to us in the Spirit that can easily be misunderstood, and we can discount that a dream is from the Lord." It's also important to grow in the area of understanding dreams. "It's a blessing if you have a few friends or your family that you can talk with" about your dreams.

Gordon related a story of a misunderstood dream that prophetic evangelist Bobby Conner related at the 2014 funeral of Bob Jones, his fellow evangelist, prophet, and friend. Conner had experienced a disturbing dream in which he had moved away from a crowd and seated himself on a loveseat. What appeared to be a dark-skinned teenage girl began pressing herself against him. A man whom Conner thought was a fellow ministry worker Michael Morgan kept pushing the young girl closer to Conner.

The next morning, Bob Jones phoned Conner. Jones knew about the dream without being told. "You are so dumb, boy," he told Conner. "That's not a teenage girl. That's the Jewish nation. The Lord is trying to get you away from the crowds and God is moving prophetically on the Jewish nation. And that's not Michael Morgan . . . It's Michael the Archangel that pushed you closer."

"I believe if we press in to know the Lord to honor him as holy and seek him, we might go to greater depth in our dreams," Gordon concluded. She encouraged listeners to keep a record of their dreams. "Keep a notebook or pad beside your bed and write and date what is in your dream, and that way you can ponder it." "In my dreams, I have been corrected. I have been directed. I have been called into ministry. I've been shown my future. I have experienced a sovereign intercession for the church."

The Marion Aglow Lighthouse meets the second Saturday of each month at 10 am, at His Place Worship Center, 1423 Highway 70 West, Marion, North Carolina, and on Facebook Live. For the December 10 meeting, Ruth Mangiacapre, a prophetic author, teacher, and preacher, will be speaking on "Releasing Prophetic Keys for the New Era."

Mangiacapre, the founder of Impact Ministry of the Triad and a leader in several prophetic ministries, notes that "prayer and intercession are core values for my life and ministry." Her first book, *Prophetic Journey*, was released in 2017, and she is at work on a second book. She has also been published on several prophetic websites, including "The Elijah List," "Spirit Fuel," and Lance Wallnau's "7m underground."

Additional information about the Lighthouse, including links to the Facebook Live meetings, are available at Marion Aglow's website and Facebook page: <https://aglownet.org/marionnc/> and <https://www.facebook.com/marionaglow2022/>, respectively.

*Marion Stephan is retired and is active in His Place Worship Center, Marion, North Carolina.*





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# Retirement Resource Management

## Down Market

By Steve Gaito  
McDowell County



I recently wrote a Case Study on the Impact on income of purchasing an annuity after the market decline. I thought I would share it as it is very timely right now.

This is a common concern, and many people think that purchasing an annuity when the market drops is not a wise decision. I specialize in income planning and want to see what impact it would have so I created this case to look at the impact of adding a more secure income to supplement a portfolio that has declined. The results surprised even me.

The client is a 70-year-old with \$1,500,000 in retirement assets and withdraws 4% each year to provide \$60,000 of income each year. There is a correction in the market and her portfolio is down 25%. She is considering purchasing an annuity and wants to know the impact it has on her income. Let's look at the numbers.

70 year old with \$1,500,000 portfolio living of 4% for income

Portfolio	\$	1,500,000
4% withdrawal	\$	60,000
25% market drop	\$	1,125,000
4% withdrawal	\$	45,000
Purchase annuity	\$	750,000
5.5% distribution*	\$	41,250
Portfolio	\$	375,000
4% withdrawal	\$	15,000
Total Income	\$	56,250

Portfolio drop down 25%  
Income drop with Portfolio only down 25%  
Adding annuity option Portfolio down 25%  
Income drop with Annuity option down 6.25%

\*Withdrawal rate for 70 year old on SILAC Denali Annuity is 5.5%

While the portfolio is still down 25% the income is only down 6.25% instead of 25% if she continues to rely on the portfolio for income. In a perfect world she should have addressed the income part earlier, but as you can see making changes even after the market correction can have a significant impact on her income. Each person is different, but most have the same need for consistent income in retirement.

Summary

In this case, the client has \$11,250 more income and it will take less time to recover when the market recovers as it only needs to make up the \$3,750 in income instead of the \$15,000 in income. It also provides stability of income going forward and creates less reliance on the market for the needed income. With fixed index annuities there is also the opportunity to see growth and account for inflation as well as possible long-term care benefits. For this example, purchasing the annuity even after the market has declined makes sense.

If you want to see the impact consistent income can have on your retirement give my office a call and schedule your free no-obligation consultation. Call or email Morgan at [morgan.wylie@retirerm.com](mailto:morgan.wylie@retirerm.com) or (828) 559-0299

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



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towards” the object of worship.

Real worship involves humbling ourselves before God. You can either keep your pride intact or worship God – but you can’t do both. Jesus said, “*No man can serve two masters*” – you can’t serve your pride, and worship God.

When’s the last time you humbled yourself in worship — the last time you got down on your knees, went to the altar, or raised your hands? These things aren’t “requirements,” but they are ways you can humble yourself. Genuine worship involves humbling yourself before your King!

C. Giving. :11b “*Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*” Thus began our tradition of giving Christmas presents. Giving is a basic part of worship. When you love someone, you want to give them gifts.

After one of the first times Cheryl & I went Christmas shopping for our grandbabies, Cheryl said, “If you want to get in the Christmas spirit, go shopping for kids in a toy store!” We bought little soccer balls, a toy laptop, and little metal pots & pans. Nobody made us do that; we WANTED to!

When you really love, you want to give. That’s why when we don’t give to God as we should, it’s an important spiritual indicator. If a person is not eager to give to the Lord, it’s one of the biggest giveaway signs that something is not right in their heart. Christianity is not all about money, as some assert, but the fact is that money really IS a “thermometer” that reveals your “spiritual temperature.” If that’s so, what’s your “temperature”? Giving is an integral part of genuine worship.

D. Obedience. :12 says, “*And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.*” This is perhaps the best sign of genuine worship: when the magi left Jesus, they DID what God instructed them to do! They were warned by Him in a dream not to return to Herod – and they didn’t! They obeyed the Lord.

Jesus said in Luke 6:46, “*Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord’, but do not DO what I say?*” Your obedience shows how much you really worship Him.

St. Augustine wrote: “A girl might say to her lover, ‘Don’t wear that sort of cloak’: he won’t. If she tells him in winter: ‘I like you best in your short tunic,’ he would rather shiver than offend her.” (Augustine, Brown, p. 243) Augustine’s point was, if we truly love someone, we’ll want to please them.

That’s how it is with the Lord too. If we really worship Him, then we’ll do what pleases Him. Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” What we do in church doesn’t show our love for God, as much as how well we obey Him after we leave! Obedience is one of the best signs of genuine worship.

Which of Matthew 2’s characters do YOU resemble the most:

- The religious leaders’ “intellectual” response?
- Herod’s hypocritical response?
- Or the magi’s heartfelt worship, evidenced by their humility, giving, and obedience?

What will YOUR response be to Jesus this Christmas?

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.



Mary Had a Little Lamb

By Toby Crowder  
Mitchell County



Luke 2:16-17 “*And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.*”

In Luke’s account of the Christmas story, the Bible tells us that the shepherds journeyed to Bethlehem to see this thing “*which the Lord hath made known unto us.*” (2:15) Also, we read that the angels announced joy to all people including the shepherds, who were social and religious outcasts in that day. How fitting it is that the first ones to hear about the birth of the Savior were these Shepherds who were probably watching over sheep that would eventually become temple sacrifices! While we remember the baby that came to Bethlehem’s manger, we must also remember that this child was the promised Messiah, who was later (John 1:29) proclaimed as the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world. In all the business and activity of the Christmas season, do we remember the Lamb of God that came as the greatest gift of all?

This Lamb was the PROMISED one. He was promised to Mary by an angel and had been prophesied about in the Old Testament. Truly, this Lamb was the promised Messiah...the anointed one. This promised Lamb was the hope of an entire nation, yet he was not born in a palace or a mansion, but in a manger in Bethlehem. This miracle in the stable was unexpected to these shepherds, yet they believed and rejoiced at His birth. The place and details of his birth were miraculous, but also that He was born of a virgin mother and conceived by the Holy Spirit. Matt 1:23 tells us “*Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.*” Truly God is with us, and He came into this world as the promised Lamb of God! Are we looking to the PROMISED Lamb?

Not only was He the PROMISED Lamb, but His miraculous birth was PROCLAIMED to the world. The Shepherds were the first to proclaim Christ's child. In Luke 2:10-11, the angels gave the joyful greeting “*Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.*” This promised Lamb of Mary would deliver His people from their sins and be their Savior! These shepherds knew and believed that this was the Christ, the Messiah of God, and they wasted no time in proclaiming the message of this Promised Lamb! May we each remember that there will be a day when every knee shall bow and confess that He is Lord. All the important figures of time and history, rich or poor, famous or unknown, saved or lost... will declare His Lordship. He is the PROCLAIMED Lamb of God now and forever more!

Finally, our hearts must turn to the PREVAILING Lamb. In Revelation, the word lamb is used to refer to Christ at least twenty-four times. It is so easy for us as Christians, to remember Mary’s baby, and even to make the transition to Him being the Lamb of God who came to die for the sins of man, but we forget that this Lamb has prevailed over death and sin and is worthy of all our praise! Revelation 5:12-13 gives us a beautiful image as the angels exalt this prevailing Lamb:

“*Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.*”

Many times, we only remember Jesus as Mary’s Lamb at Christmas, but may our hearts turn to Him as we worship the promised, proclaimed, and prevailing Lamb of God!

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



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Ready For Anything  
(Non-Fiction)

By Christopher L. Scott  
Moses Lake, Wash.



One of my friends recently lost her husband unexpectedly. Last year she and her husband retired from their jobs and moved to a new state. They left their family and friends in California to pursue a new retired life in Colorado where they didn't know anyone. But after ten months she is now a widow and alone in a new town.

Does she wonder why God would have moved her to Colorado to be alone? Is she able to continue? At times she has confessed she feels like she cannot. But she knows that God is with her and she's said she feels Him helping her every day.

The author of Hebrews reminds us, *"Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen."* (Hebrews 13:20-21, NASB)

When the author of Hebrews tells us that God will "equip you in every good thing to do His will" it reminds us that God gives us what we need to endure life. Through struggling marriages, disobedient children, layoffs from jobs, environmental disasters that damage our property, or when our family members pass away, God equips us to handle it. The word for "equip" here is the Greek word *katartisai* which was used by trainers to adjust parts of the body, "put into proper condition."

In other words, God will "equip" us to handle anything that comes our way. He'll adjust us so that we can endure what we are going through. Yes, it will feel like we can't handle it. And we probably couldn't handle it without God. But God will stick with us through it. He equips us in "every good thing to do His will." And He is "working in us that which is pleasing in His sight."

So when we do something that betrays our friend's trust and we wonder how we will earn his trust back, God will help us do what we need to do. When we make an error at work and it fumbles up a project and costs the company money, God will equip us to make it right. When we lose a family member and don't know how to go on, God will comfort us and walk with us each step of the way.

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



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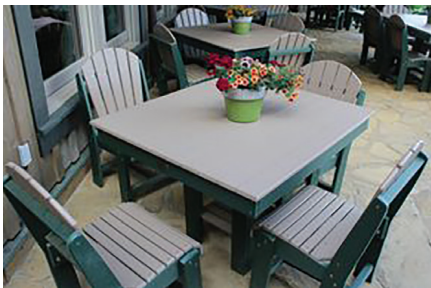
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Burke County

Valdese Christmas Parade - Saturday, Dec. 3 at 3:00 Main Street  
Morganton Christmas Parade – Tuesday, Dec. 6 at 6:00 – 8:00 pm  
Drexel Christmas Parade – Saturday, Dec. 10 at 3:00 pm Main Street

Old Colony Players –A Christmas Carol – Dec. 9,10,15,16 & 17 at 7:30 pm; Dec. 11 & 18 at 3:00 pm. Produced at the Old Rock School, 400 Main Street, Valdese, NC Tickets: Adults \$ 14, Seniors \$ 12, Students \$ 10 Preschool – Free Call 828-522-1150 for group tickets.

Mitchell County

Grassy Creek Baptist Church - There is a drive thru food pantry every 2nd Monday from 10am- 12pm at Grassy Creek Baptist Church

Neighbors Feeding Neighbors  
• Neighbors Feeding Neighbors will be having free community meals the first Monday of every month from 5PM-7PM  
• There will also be a free meal every Tuesday and Thursday from 12PM-5PM  
• There will be a free Christmas Meal on December 22 at 2 PM. Come out and enjoy a free meal and see Santa Claus!

Light Up Spruce Pine Christmas Market - Downtown Spruce Pine, Upper and Lower Street, Spruce Pine, NC 28777 Saturday, December 3, 2022, at 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM Downtown Spruce Pine Activities including Carriage Rides, Merchant Specials, Wreath and Tree Sales and more!

The Living Christmas Tree - Grassy Creek Baptist Church, 793 Old NC 226, Spruce Pine, NC 28777 Friday, December 2, 2022, at 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM Join Grassy Creek Baptist Church in watching them in the Living Christmas Tree. It will begin at 7PM Nightly. It will be December 2, 3 and 4th.

Breakfast with Santa - Bakersville Baptist Church, Crimson Laurel Way, Bakersville, NC 28705 Saturday, December 17, 2022, at 8:00 AM – 1:00 PM 3 times to have Breakfast with Santa this year. Registration is required. 8am, 9:45am, 11:30am.

The Journey to the Manager - Christmas is almost here. The real reason for the season though should never be forgotten. Matthew 1-2 and Luke 1-2 tell us the story of the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, as do prophecies in the Old Testament.

Once again, Mitchell County churches and volunteers will bring to life these Bible verses depicting Mary and Joseph’s Journey to the Manger. This fourth event promises to tell more of the story that Mary and Joseph experienced on their journey. More music and professional sound have been added.

The 11 scenes created by individuals, families and churches are listed below:

- Angel visits Gabriel
- Mary visits Elizabeth
- Announcing the Birth of John the Baptist
- Angel appears to Joseph
- Decree to participate in Census
- Betrothal of Mary and Joseph
- No room in the inn
- Shepherds prepare to follow the Star
- The birth of the Christ child
- Magi visit the Christ child
- The cross and then the empty tomb

Journey to the Manger comes alive again this year on December 10th from 6-9pm and December 11th from 6-9pm on the Bakersville Creekwalk. The Journey to the Manger begins at the Bakersville Fire Department. Churches may pre-register for group time on the 11th by sending a message to the Journey Facebook page.

For more information, you may visit the JourneytotheManger Mitchell Facebook page, or Christmas Neath the Roan website.

Yancey County

West Burnsville Baptist Church - is pleased to present NOEL, the 20th Annual West Burnsville Christmas Pageant, December 1 -4. After a two-year hiatus due to the pandemic, we are excited to once again use music and drama to proclaim the good news of Jesus from birth to Heaven. NOEL opens on Thursday, December 1, at 7 pm and continues Friday and Saturday at 7. Sunday, December 4, performances will be 10:30 am and 3 pm. All performances are free. Reservations may be made for large groups by calling (828) 682-3990. West Burnsville Baptist Church is located one mile west of the town square just off US 19E on West Burnsville Church Road.

Anne Ministries

By Chastity Ogburn  
Avery County



On December 22, it will be 12 years since the day we found out our precious Lexie Anne had gone to be with the Lord. I was so devastated and crushed the morning we found out she had no heartbeat. My husband and I had gone to Boone that morning for a regular prenatal doctor's visit. I was almost 20 weeks pregnant. It was close to Christmas with lots of excitement and we had family coming to visit. I had no idea anything was wrong. The doctor went to listen to the baby’s heartbeat. I knew something was strange when she seemed to be struggling to find it. There were no sounds. I became concerned but thought maybe our baby was just not in the right position. This had never happened before with our other children. We were moved to another room where a different doctor confirmed through ultrasound that our baby had passed. There was no life and no heartbeat. Devastation and loss hit us like a ton of bricks. We went over to the hospital and I was induced that morning. I delivered our lifeless baby girl that evening. I went from a heart full of joy to a heart full of sadness and loss that morning. I cried uncontrollably. I couldn’t make sense of it all. I had delivered 4 healthy babies before this pregnancy. Why God? A few days later after Christmas, we went to visit our family in Sanford. My mom gave me a Christmas decoration of Santa sitting in a chair holding a baby. She had bought it weeks before to give it to me for Christmas. I always place it on a table each Christmas in memory of our little girl. Psalm 147:3 says, “He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.” I had to give my broken heart to Jesus, dear friend. He is our only hope in such difficult times of hurt, pain, and loss. When there were no answers, I had to turn to God. Matthew 5:4 says, “Blessed are those who mourn: for they shall be comforted.” I found much comfort, hope, and healing resting in the arms of Jesus. I didn’t have all the answers, but our sovereign God did. Several years later in 2018, God revealed to me how He wanted Lexie Anne’s life to be honored through Anne Ministries. He had a purpose and a plan for her life when He created her. God is now taking this painful day to purpose in the life of the ministry. Anne Ministries reaches out to those that are hurting from pregnancy loss such as miscarriage, stillbirth, and infant loss. We offer one on one Bible study and group support to women and families grieving the loss of their babies. When I look at this Christmas decoration I think about my sweet Lexie Anne being held in the arms of Jesus. She is in His presence and she always has been from the moment the Lord took her home and one day... Yes, one glorious day, I have the hope and promise I will see her in our heavenly home! Thank you, Jesus!

Chastity Anne Ogburn is a follower of Jesus Christ. She is the founder and director of Anne Ministries offering pregnancy support and recovery services in Avery County. She is the author of “His Grace Covers All”, a memoir inspired by God. Chastity and her husband Jay attend Emmanuel Baptist Church in Newland. They have six children and two grandsons. For more information or to contact Chastity visit [anneministries.com](http://anneministries.com) or email [anneministries@gmail.com](mailto:anneministries@gmail.com)



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# Enjoying Everyday Life

## Simple, Practical Approaches to Your Best Life

By Joyce Meyer



It seems that so many people struggle to keep up with the demands of daily life and stay focused on achieving the best that God has for them. Distractions such as phone calls, text messages, traffic jams, a flat tire, a sick child, a family crisis, or any number of inconveniences can pop up suddenly. No matter how hard we try, circumstances often don't go the way we planned.

But there are ways to keep life simple so we can achieve our goals. I think it's healthy to stop periodically and take an inventory of our lives. It's important to ask, "Am I really living the life Christ died for me to have? Or am I settling for something less?"

Regardless of what's happened in the past or what obstacles seem to be in our way, God has a big, full life in store for each one of us. But it's up to us whether we're going to get the best out of life and make the most of our time, talents, relationships, and opportunities.

The book of Genesis contains a great lesson in this area. It shares the story of Abraham's father, Terah, who gathered his family, packed up everything, and set out for his ultimate destination—Canaan.

However, Genesis 11:31 tells us, "...Together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there" (NIV).

I wonder how many people start out to do one thing in life but settle somewhere along the way because they get tired or because it's convenient. It's not really what they want, but it's something they think they can "settle for."

Are there areas in your life where you have settled, or maybe just haven't made as much progress as you had hoped?

### Make a Commitment to Be More Than Mediocre

The Lord has called us to excellence, and we don't have to settle for mediocrity. The word mediocre literally means "to live halfway between success and failure." And that's where so many people live; they haven't completely failed, but they're also not where they really want to be.

This applies to every area of our lives. Maybe you've begun studying the Bible and you have a goal to really know God's Word and develop an intimate, close relationship with Him. If that's the case, don't settle for just reading a chapter a day to "put your time in"; stay determined to make it a priority because knowing God's Word is the key to truly knowing God.

Or maybe you have a goal to lose 20 pounds. If so, make a decision that you're not going to give up when it gets difficult. Even if you have a bad day and actually gain weight, be determined to bounce back the next day!

Sometimes we get used to the place where we are and forget there's something better. Life gets busy, complicated, or even comfortable, and we lose sight of the dreams and goals we used to have. That's when we need to stir ourselves up and become determined to attain every single part of God's plan for our lives. What If...

Let's take a few moments to play the "What If?" game:  
What if you decided to give God your all and seek Him with your whole heart?  
What if you demanded the best from yourself instead of settling for "just average"?

What if you stopped making excuses about why you can't accomplish your dreams and goals?

What if you changed the way you speak and refused to say anything negative?  
What if you started confronting problems instead of running away from them?  
What if you decided to stop procrastinating?

Can you imagine where you would be this time next year if you followed through with just one or two of these things?

### Give It Your All

The Bible is full of scriptures that encourage us to do our best. Second Timothy 2:15 says, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed..." (NIV).

I love that phrase "do your best." It may be easier to go halfway, but what if you decided to give your best in your marriage, at your job, or in any other area of your life?

Some of the greatest blessings in my life now are things that have required the most effort. Today, my husband, Dave, and I have the awesome privilege of sharing God's Word with millions of people through Joyce Meyer Ministries. Many times throughout the years it required tremendous sacrifice and the decision to keep moving forward when we felt like giving up.

I am so glad we didn't stop halfway when things got tough. The truth is if you will do what you can do, God will do His part and do what you can't do. It's simple—keep your focus on God, give Him your best, and He will give you His best for you!

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



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A Christmas Word

By Ken and Jan Merop  
Cleveland, Tennessee



Imagine the incredible power of the spoken word that flung the stars into space and called them by name. Just think of majestic mountains pushing up into enormous splendor by the word spoken in creation.

The oceans, streams, rivers, waterfalls...all came into being by the word of his mouth.

When considering the heavens and all the rest of creation, take it a step further and contemplate the One who gave it being – the Word.

The Bible clearly states it this way in John 1: 1-5, NIV, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.”*

The Christmas story is one of wonder, love, grace, and mercy. It is God reaching out to man to pull him out of the darkness into his glorious light.

Wonder. It surrounds the story of Christ’s birth – angels, stars, Magi, shepherds, a stable, a virgin, a newborn baby – yet divine and eternal. The prophecy about him said that he would be called Wonderful. That is, full of wonder.

Love. Why would God the Father allow God the Son to lay aside his glory and be born a tiny baby – helpless, powerless? Why would Jesus choose to come knowing his purpose was to die a horrible death on the cross for the sins of each and every one of us individually? What held him there? The nails? No. Love. “For God so loved...that he gave...”

Grace. Grace is God giving us what we don’t deserve. The sinful nature that Adam incurred in his disobedience and that we inherited could only be dealt a death blow by One who was sinless. That One is Jesus. Sin’s penalty is death. But through Jesus’ sacrifice, grace was extended and we get a life when we believe and receive his free gift. Giving us one way is a gracious gift.

Mercy. Mercy is God withholding what we do deserve. He looked upon our sinful condition that separated us from having a relationship with him and made a way for us to come to the Father.

Many words describe this beautiful season of the year. But it is only because the Word, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, is truly the reason for the season. He is the Christmas Word. Selah

A Melody of Love

*An angel’s sweet harp song  
amidst starlight’s glow...  
Evergreens and pinecones  
whisper be still, be slow...*

*Listen...  
the newborn Babe’s rhythmic heartbeat  
sings His melody of love.*

*“For there is born to you this day...a Savior,  
who is Christ the Lord.”*

Luke 2: 11



After six years in the mountains of Avery County, Ken and Jan Merop are now living in the hilly Tennessee countryside of Cleveland, TN...just outside of Chattanooga. Ken’s photos can be seen at [kenmeropphotography.com](http://kenmeropphotography.com).



POEM

In Memory of Joy Baldwin  
Madison County

SILENT NIGHT  
A Christmas Poem (a true story)

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

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

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

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

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

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



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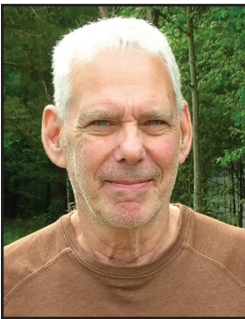


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**Joy Unspeakable**

By Robert Garner  
Rutherford County



“Joy Unspeakable”, is found in only one Bible Scrip-  
ture verse. 1Peter 1:8, “*Whom having not seen, ye love;  
in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye  
rejoice with Joy Unspeakable and full of glory*”.

Explaining the Spirit of God, with its human heart-  
touched emotion of “Joy Unspeakable”, experienced by  
many Christians is quite difficult. Perhaps this is near  
impossible (un-utterable) to clarify with the words of men. This is very different  
than the emotional joy we have for the love of individuals within our family.

Christians who have had this Joy Unspeakable miracle arise in their hearts,  
which is given by the Holy Spirit, will most likely have it happen during a per-  
sonal Bible Study of the Scriptures. John 14:26, “*But the Comforter, which is the  
Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things,  
and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said to you*”.

Joy Unspeakable erupts with a sudden weeping of tears. At the same time,  
along comes the perfect conviction of spiritual love, truth, and mercy; found only  
in Jesus Christ, our LORD, and Savior. This is Christ’s glorious wave of heart-  
inspired, Joy Unspeakable. These are tears of joy, a conviction of Christ’s perfect  
work of faith for the salvation of His elect people.

Our personal family tree of individuals within it, we love dearly. That symbolic  
family tree has broken branches for many of us. Christ’s Sword (His Word, the  
Gospel) brings various uncomfortable scripture truths. Mathew 10:36,37 “*and a  
man’s foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother  
more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than  
me is not worth of me*”.

We begin to see that “Joy Unspeakable”, the perfect love Jesus has for us, is  
on the highest plane of perfection, unattainable love by mankind. No reference  
or comparison to the love we have for our family members can compare. 1 John  
4:18, “*there is no fear in love; perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath tor-  
ment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love*”. (Summarizing Isaiah 55:8,9);  
The Lord saith, “*my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my  
ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, my ways and thoughts are higher  
than yours*”.

At various times, Jesus Christ reveals His glorious, Joy Unspeakable presence  
in our lives through His word in Scripture. Psalm 16:11, “*Thou wilt shew me the  
path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures  
for evermore*”.

We must always be alert to the deception of Satan who can give only short-term  
power, pride, glory, joy, and treasure of man-made earthly riches. Proverbs 10:7,  
“*the memory of the just is blessed: but the name of the wicked shall rot*”. Satan  
comes as a transformed angel of light, a false minister of righteousness (2 Co  
11:14,15), to confuse and corrupt the word of God.

Don’t be fooled that Joy Unspeakable, eternal treasures found only in God’s  
word, can be given by Satan. 1 Co 14:33, “*God Almighty is not the author of con-  
fusion*”. “*We have this treasure in earthen vessels (our body), that the excellency  
of the power may be of God, and not of us*”, 2 Corinthians 4:7. “*For where your  
treasure is, there will your heart be also*”, Luke 12:34.

Only the knowledge of God’s words, and searching the scriptures, make it  
somewhat possible for Christians to understand “Joy Unspeakable”. Isaiah 26:3,  
“*Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he  
trusteth in thee*”.

Reviewing part of the verse again 1 Peter 1:8, “*Whom having not seen, ye love,  
though now ye see him not, yet believing*”; how beautiful are the words of God in  
this verse! All of your hope for eternal life, given by the Spirit of God; conviction  
of salvation, sudden overwhelming tears of joy, the forgiveness of our sins, and  
the perfect belief of Christ’s love for you; all in one moment of un-seen spiritual  
time. “*Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God*”, 1Thessalonians 1:4.

Romans 8:24,25,26 “*For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not  
hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we  
see not, then do we with patience wait for it? Likewise, the Spirit also helpeth our  
infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit  
itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered*”.

1 John 4:19 = “*We Love Him, Because He First Loved Us*” = “Joy Unspeakable”

Your comments are always appreciated. Contact email; [valleygravel@outlook.com](mailto: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.





# Roan Mountain Baptist Church

## "Some Things to Remember This Christmas"

By Russell McKinney  
Mitchell County



An old legend tells that Satan and his demons once threw a Christmas party for themselves. As the party was ending and the demons were heading out to resume their worldwide activity, one demon jokingly said to Satan, "Merry Christmas, your majesty." To that, Satan replied, "Yes, help the world keep it merry because if they ever get serious about it we'll all be in trouble."

This world certainly does make it hard to get serious about Christmas. How can we keep our focus on the holiday's important things when we are bombarded at every turn with silly things? I've never heard it put any better than Keith Ogden, the pastor of Hill Street Baptist Church in Asheville, North Carolina, put it. He called the Christmas holiday a "mixture of the reasonable with the ridiculous" and said, "Christmas today is a mixture of the sacred with the secular, the holy with the common, the holiday with the holy day, the babe in a manger with the elf in a sleigh, the shepherds in the field, watching their sheep with reindeer that know how to fly."

And so, in these days leading up to Christmas, I think it would be good for us to identify a few things that we should remember this Christmas. These are things that will help us celebrate the birth of Christ in a manner that is pleasing to Him. There's nothing wrong with having Christmas, but we need to have it the right way.

The first thing we should remember is: Christmas is the celebration of Christ's birth. Christmas isn't about: Santa Claus, elves, reindeer, the grinch, Christmas trees, presents, eggnog, Jimmy Stewart, Bing Crosby, or Mariah Carey. It's about Jesus! You can't even spell the word "Christmas" without starting with the name "Christ." Christmas is the celebration of Christ's birth.

I once read about a family who celebrated Christmas each year by actually throwing a birthday party for Jesus. They would go so far as to set an extra chair at the table as a reminder of Christ's presence at the party. The mother would fix a cake, complete with candles, and the whole family would sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus. One year a visitor said to the family's five-year-old daughter, "Did you get everything you wanted for Christmas?" The little girl replied, "No, but then it's not my birthday." We need more of that attitude today.

A second thing we should remember is: It is more blessed to give than to receive. In Acts 20:35, Paul says to the pastors of Ephesus: *"I have shown you in every way, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"*

If your whole idea of Christmas centers around your receiving, you are missing the point of the holiday. What does John 3:16 say? *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."* You see, the baby Jesus lying in that manger on that night so long ago was a gift to the world. And God expects those of us who follow Jesus to be givers.

A third thing we should remember is: Even in our giving, we can cross the line into sin. Colossians 3:17 says: *"And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."* Did you know that Jesus wants to be the Lord of your Christmas shopping? He doesn't want you to buy anything contrary to His will. Even if an item is on clearance at a 90% discount, you'd better consult the Lord before buying it. Jesus doesn't mind you buying gifts for others, but He does want you to filter every purchase through His will.

What passes for discerning giving these days was on display at a Wal-Mart in Long Island, New York, a few years ago. In the early morning hours of the Friday after Thanksgiving, approximately 2,000 shoppers gathered outside the doors of the mall where the Wal-Mart was located. When a thirty-four-year-old male employee opened the store's doors, he was immediately knocked to the ground by the onrushing crowd. The force of the crowd was so great that a metal portion of the door frame was crumpled like an accordion. In all the chaos, no one cared that the employee couldn't get up, so they just kept stepping all over him. Even when some of the other employees tried to fight their way through the crowd to help their coworkers, they were knocked down and trampled upon as well. After the stampede was over, the worker was rushed to a nearby hospital where he was pronounced dead around 6:00 a.m. Tell me, do you think Jesus is pleased that such crazed shopping is associated with the season of His birth?

The fourth thing we should remember is: We should always do our part to live peaceably with others. A good text here is Romans 12:18, which says: *"If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."* Isn't it sad that Christmas oftentimes brings out the worst in people? This is especially true with families.

Family members get mad over the stupidest things at Christmastime. Wars break out over the holiday schedules of events! Dad wants the whole family to get together for a big meal on Christmas Eve, but his daughter-in-law would rather take the grandkids to a Christmas Eve candlelight service at her church. One grandma wants everybody at her place at one o'clock on Christmas day, but the other grandma wants everybody at her place at two o'clock. The wife's family always opened their presents on Christmas Eve, and that's how she wants to raise her kids, but her husband's family always opened their presents on Christmas day. Two of the grandkids are in one church's Christmas play but the other grandkid is in another church's play, and both plays start at seven o'clock on the Sunday night before Christmas. Decisions, decisions! To further complicate matters, if your family has been touched by divorce, you can multiply every holiday event by at least two.

During all of this family turmoil, you would do well to keep in mind what those angels said to those shepherds on the night of Christ's birth: "Peace on earth, goodwill to all men." You say, "But I wanted a pumpkin pie instead of a pecan pie." Get over it. "But I wanted Levis instead of Wranglers." Get over it. "But I wanted a real tree instead of an artificial one." Get over it. It's Christmas! We're supposed to be celebrating the fact that God took human flesh upon Himself and was born into this world as a baby so that He could grow up and die for our sins to allow us to spend all eternity with Him. It's not a time for arguing and petty bickering. It's not a time to demand your way and ignore the feelings of others. It's a time of doing your part to live peaceably with others. Here's a good saying that can help you this Christmas: "Blessed are the flexible for they will get along." Please put that one to use this season, and thank me later. And in the meantime, Merry Christmas!

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

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# Your Government Page

## NC Senate District 47



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

The 2022 mid-term election is behind us and the results overall show that North Carolina voters strongly favor successful Republican policies of lower taxes, balanced budgets, in-person academic-focused learning for students, and support for law enforcement.

In N.C. General Assembly, Republicans in the Senate and House each gained two seats. Senate Republicans won 30 seats and regained our supermajority – 30 of 50 senators. The House fell one short of regaining its supermajority, winning 71 seats when 72 were needed. However, there is always the possibility that one or more Democrats will side with the Republicans to override a veto.

While all incumbent Republican state senators who ran for reelection retained their seats, the caucus welcomed five new senators: Tim Moffitt of Henderson County, Eddie Settle of Wilkes County, Brad Overcash of Gaston County, Benton Sawrey of Johnston County, and former state senator Buck Newton of Wilson County.

In other races across the state, school boards gained a significant number of Republican seats with Republican winning 75% of seats in partisan elections. Clearly, voters are ready for the focus to return to high academic standards, along with transparency, parental involvement, and an abandonment of the disturbing woke ideologies of critical race theory and transgenderism pushed by leftist education unions.

One of the most closely watched judicial races this election was for the open seats on the N.C. Supreme Court. Republicans winning these two seats significantly changes the makeup of the N.C. Supreme from a 4-3 Democrat majority to a 5-2 Republican majority. This year, the Democrat majority court wrongly ruled that two constitutional amendments approved by voters in 2018, one for voter ID, and another for a state income tax cap, were unconstitutional because they were placed on the ballot by a racially gerrymandered legislature and so sent the case back to a lower court. Hopefully, voter ID will become a reality in the absence of an agenda-driven majority Democrat state Supreme Court.

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

## NC Commissioner of Labor



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

I hope everyone enjoyed the Thanksgiving holiday. I personally enjoy this holiday the most because of the time spent with family and the opportunity to reflect on all we have to be thankful for – not just on Thanksgiving Day but every day of the year.

The month of November has come and gone in the blink of an eye. I had the opportunity to visit the National Tree Care Industry (TCI) Expo in Charlotte to celebrate the signing of an agreement between the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Division of the N.C. Department of Labor (NCDOL) and the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA) to establish an alliance to promote safe and healthy working conditions in the workplace.

On Nov. 16, our department had its first Employee Recognition Banquet since 2019. The NCDOL hasn't been able to have a banquet because of the pandemic, so it was nice to finally be back together, in person, to celebrate the employees of the NCDOL and their service to the State of North Carolina.

On Nov. 29, I had the opportunity to attend a Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program (SHARP) presentation for United Methodist Retirement Homes Inc. dba Croasdaile Village in Durham. This program is designed for small and mid-size employers that have established, implemented, and maintained exceptional workplace safety standards. Congratulations!

We are very excited about our 24th annual Toys for Tots campaign. The objective of the program is to “bring the joy of Christmas to America’s needy children”. If you are in Raleigh on Dec. 14, please feel free to drop by the NCDOL from noon to 3 p.m. and drop off a new, unwrapped toy. If you are not able to join us, please be on the lookout for bins with the Toys for Tots logo throughout the state, and please donate!

May God bless you and your family during this season. Merry Christmas!

## NC House District 86



Rep. Hugh Blackwell  
919-733-5805  
[Hugh.Blackwell@ncleg.net](mailto:Hugh.Blackwell@ncleg.net)

### The Need for Transparency in What’s Being Taught in North Carolina Classrooms

Children across the nation are facing ever-increasing exposure to radical, politicized content in K-12 classrooms. From divisive racial theories to inappropriate sexual content, to political ideology designed to cause them to view America as a negative, evil force, our children seem clearly under attack from radical leftists who have gained an iron grip on so much of our educational establishment. At the same time, such concerns have become obvious, parents are most often left unaware of actual indoctrination being imposed on their children. Thus, we badly need, I believe, more information readily and easily available to parents on what is going on in classrooms.

In 2021, I introduced legislation designed to create more transparency for parents on actual classroom academics and instruction. The bill would have provided online information to parents on exactly what instruction and materials were given to their children in classrooms. By being able to review the actual class curriculum, textbooks, and materials, parents could have a clearer understanding of what students are being taught. In turn, those parents could make more informed decisions about their children’s participation in various instruction and could seek to better interact with their local schools, principals, and teachers in discussing the appropriateness of what actually occurs in a given classroom or with a given instructor. At the same time, every effort was included in the bill to make the process of providing needed information as easy as possible for classroom teachers.

Heightened awareness of what goes on in the classroom will allow parents to be more active and engaged with their children’s education. Parental involvement is a known, extremely positive factor in the success of students’ education. Academic transparency can help parents ensure that what is going on in our state’s classrooms is both appropriate and effective in providing our students with the education they deserve and need to become patriotic, well-adjusted, and capable citizens. Most teachers are dedicated to doing the right thing for our children. However, improving academic transparency can help expose those who are engaged in efforts to radically transform our nation by radically educating our young people. Unfortunately, my bill on academic transparency, while it passed the North Carolina House, did not make it through the state Senate. Come January, I plan to introduce a similar bill to protect our students and to recognize and advance parents’ rights to have a primary say in their children’s education.



# God Bless America



# Berry Chapel Baptist Church

By Steve Williams  
Mitchell County

Let’s make Jesus King this Christmas. A man on a street corner was heard saying. “Jesus is the only Somebody you can’t match!” How true. He was unique in His birth and business.

No earthly person is ever born King. He is born a prince. But Jesus was born a King. No one was ever King before Him, and there will never be a King Jesus the Second. Early in His life, an excited crowd wanted to make Him a King, but the mob cried “We’ll not have this Man to reign over us.” The day is coming when He will return to reign. In Psalm 22:28 “*For the Kingdom is the Lords, and He is the governor (King) among the nations.*”

Years ago there was a great Youth Conference in Liverpool. Students came from all over the world. Something prevented the delegates from the Christian University of Japan from coming, and they promised to send a cable. When it arrived it had only three words “Make Jesus King”. In some lives, He is only the threshold. In others, He is on the throne. Where is Jesus in your life? Make Jesus King this Christmas.



Words of Wisdom

- Never be afraid to give God your best and He will give you something better.
- Is your life empty this Christmas, why not put Jesus in it?
- Keeping Christmas is good, but sharing it with others is better.
- Let’s quit trying to use God and let God use us.

### “I Tried Again”

Failure doesn’t have to be Final.

A young man invented a wagon with sails. He said, “It will do well on land or sea,” but it tipped over and the occupants were thrown into the Gulf of Mexico. Then he set up a company to manufacture condensed milk. It failed, but Gail Borden didn’t give up. He tried again the next year and succeeded. On the tombstone of Gail Borden, the founder of the Borden Company, are the words he once wrote a friend, “I tried again and again and succeeded.”

What’s Your Goal?

The distance you travel isn’t as important as your direction.

Humor Christmas Divorce

An elderly man in Phoenix calls his son in New York and says, “I hate to ruin your day, but I have to tell you that your mother and I are divorcing; forty-five years of misery is enough.”

“Pop, what are you talking about,” the son screams.

“We can’t stand the sight of each other any longer,” his dad says.

“We’re sick and tired of each other, and I’m sick of talking about this, so you call your sister in Chicago and tell her.” And he hangs up.

Frantic, the son calls his sister, who explodes on the phone.

“Like heck, they’re getting a divorce, she shouts. I’ll take care of this.”

She calls Phoenix immediately and tells her dad not to do anything.

“You are NOT getting divorced! Don’t do a single thing until I get there. I’m calling my brother back and we’ll both be there tomorrow.

Until then don’t do a thing, DO YOU HEAR ME?” And she hangs up.

The old man hangs up his phone, smiles and turns to his wife, and says, “They’re coming home for Christmas, and paying their own way.”

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

*And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. Matthew 2:11*



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Radical Hospitality

By Aaron Israel  
Watauga County



Consider with me a story found in the Gospel of Luke. In this passage, Jesus is dining (along with several other guests) at the home of a "prominent Pharisee." At some point during the dinner party, Jesus says this to his host:

*"...when you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back, and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."* - Luke 14:12-14

Take a moment, and reflect on your life through the lens of what Jesus says here. How often do you practice hospitality? How often do you invite people into your home, into your life? And how often do you invite someone who isn't a friend, family member, or a well-respected member of your community?

When Jesus told the Pharisee to "invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind," he was describing people viewed as the most undesirable in society. The marginalized. The outsiders. When you host a dinner party, do you ever ask, who is the most undesirable person I could invite? I sure don't. Yet this is the radical hospitality that Jesus calls us to embody. To invite a stranger, a homeless person, a societal outcast, or maybe even a personal enemy into our home to break bread with us. Practicing this type of hospitality may seem daunting or even scary, but it is an essential part of what it means to participate in the upside-down kingdom of heaven that Jesus preached. It is hospitality that shows no favoritism, hospitality that affirms the full humanity and infinite value of those who society deems less than.

In her book "The Gospel Comes With a House-Key," Rosaria Butterfield describes Christian hospitality thusly:

"Radically ordinary hospitality is this: using your Christian home in a daily way that seeks to make strangers neighbors, and neighbors family of God."

Picture what it would look like if Jesus' followers everywhere began to take this seriously. Imagine if our homes were known in our neighborhoods as the homes where anyone and everyone is welcome. Homes where surprising friendships are formed and lives are changed - where a beautiful tapestry of love is woven through good food, laughter, and deep conversations.

If this vision is to become a reality, it starts with you and me, in our local communities. If you are reading this, I challenge you to take a step of faith this holiday season. Who is someone in need or neglected who you can invite into your home? But don't stop there...how can you incorporate radical hospitality into your weekly or even daily schedule? If you struggle to envision what this could look like, I recommend reading the book I quoted earlier in this article, "The Gospel Comes With A House-key".

Practicing the hospitality that Jesus asks of us is risky, but worth it. Scripture is clear: we cannot love people the way Jesus loves without risk. We must embrace the risk to follow him, and be transformed. If we embrace the risk, both our lives and others will be forever changed.

*"Continue in brotherly love. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it."* - Hebrews 13:1-2

Aaron Israel is a campus minister working with Ratio Christi at Appalachian State University. Aaron enjoys deep conversations, good books, music, adventure, and blessing others through creativity. He is committed to the vision of creating organic discipleship communities that bring together unlikely people.

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First Baptist Nebo

By Jackie Denton  
McDowell County



*I Wonder  
I wonder if Jesus ever looks down  
and shakes His head in despair.  
For He shed His blood to save us  
and so many just don't care.*

*Is it possible that He sheds a tear;  
Does He give a sigh of woe?  
Whenever He sees His children  
Abounding in sin to-and-fro.*

*Even though He knows all things,  
It must be hard to take.  
As He watches His children that He loves  
Heading toward that fiery lake.*

*Satan has a mighty hold on them,  
Oh, what will it take?  
For people to see how He suffered;  
And He did it for our sake.*

*He's there in the rustle of the wind  
And in the sound of thunder, as well.  
He wants to take you home with Him  
And save you from an eternal hell.*

*Don't just turn your back and walk away;  
Please heed the Master's call.  
Or He will say "Depart from me -  
I never knew you at all."*

Jackie Denton is a member of Nebo First Baptist Church. I have 3 daughters, (two living..one deceased), 4 grandchildren. I recently made a solo car trip to Washington state and back to see my first great-grandchild!! As we deal with all the things going on in the world ... just remember...God is in control.

*For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. Luke 2:11*



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The Shield of Faith

By Dr. Tom Walker  
McDowell County

Ephesians 6:16 says, "Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked."

No sensible person would fight a war without the right equipment. When our soldiers go into battle they have heavy equipment like tanks, aircraft, missiles, and ships. They also have smaller weapons that are weapons of war like an M-16 rifle, hand grenades, knives, and other means of offense and defense.

We are definitely in a war with the forces of evil and Satan. It is wise to fight to win if we are going to engage in conflict. Ephesians 6 tells us how to be winners in the struggle that we find ourselves spiritually. If we follow the directions set down in God's word we will prevail over the enemy.

In this study, we come upon the subject of faith. It is so important that we exercise our faith, that the Bible says, "Above all taking the shield of faith." The words "above all" stress the utmost importance of utilizing our faith in the spiritual battle in which we are involved from day to day.

Remember that Paul was in prison and under constant guard when writing to the Ephesian church. He was forced to stare at the soldier's armor day in and day out. He had an ideal picture of the defenses needed by the Christian believer to combat the forces of evil.

Charles Ryrie says the following about the shield of faith: "The shield in a Roman soldier's attire, made of wood, was about 2 1/2' wide and 4' long. It was overlaid with linen and leather, to absorb fiery arrows. Thus, it also protected the other pieces of the armor; hence Paul used the phrase, in addition to all this. "Of faith" is a genitive of content; the shield consists of faith. The idea, then, is that a Christian's resolute faith in the Lord can stop and extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one aimed at him."

Faith is so important in living successfully for the Lord from day to day. To fail to exercise faith is a plan to fail. Here is what the Scripture says about faith in 1 John 5:4 which says: "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."

Initial Faith is of the Utmost Importance

When one repents of his or her sins and puts their faith in Christ to save them from their sins, many wonderful things happen.

Our sins are forgiven through faith. Romans 3:25 says, "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God."

We are justified by our faith. To "justify" is to "declare as righteous" in the sight of God. Romans 5:1 declares, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Without faith, we would still be unrighteous and in our sins, facing all the undesirable consequences of them.

We have spiritual life through faith. John 20:31 tells us: "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name."

We have eternal life through faith. John 3:16 reminds us: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The best part of it all is that eternal life will be enjoyed in Heaven and not in Hell. Those who go to Hell will live there forever in torment and judgment.

We have spiritual light through faith. Here are a couple of Scriptures that underscore the giving of spiritual light through faith. We can see what we could not see before we exerted saving faith in Christ. John 12:36: "While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them." John 12:46: "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness." My faith is in Christ, so I am not living in a condition of darkness but one of light.

We have access to God through faith. Romans 5:2 substantiates this wonderful truth: "By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." Ephesians 3:12 stresses faith: "In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him."

Battling Faith is of the Utmost Importance

This is in line with the context of Ephesians 6. The main thrust of it all is warfare. Faith is not an option but rather a necessity to conquer our spiritual foes.

It might be wise to take a few moments to see what faith really is. It is defined



well in Hebrews 11:1: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

The keywords are "substance" and "evidence." First, the word "substance" is the Greek New Testament word "hupostasis" which speaks of assurance or confidence. Faith in Christ gives us confidence and assurance that God will keep all of the promises the Lord has made to Israel and his New Testament church.

The word "evidence" is the Greek word "elegchos" which has the idea of proof. We do not have to put everything in a test tube to believe it. Faith convinces us to embrace unseen hopes and realities. Through faith, we are convinced about what we cannot see without human eyes. The unseen is just as real to us as what we see with our eyes. Someone said, "It is our handle on what we cannot visualize." It makes real what we cannot see.

1 Timothy 1:18-19 promotes good warfare: "This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare; Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck."

1 Timothy 6:12 continues this promotion by stating the following: "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses."

It is great that we are called upon to worship the Lord and to love others but at the same time according to the preceding two verses we are to "war a good warfare" and to "fight the good fight of faith."

One who is a warrior in human warfare or the spiritual realm must have the right weapons. If we have them, it is then and only then that we can be victorious warriors, bringing glory and honor to our Savior.

Unwavering Faith is of the Utmost Importance

James 1:6-7 qualifies the importance of unwavering faith: "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord."

Keeping those two verses in mind, consider our text again. If we take the shield of faith, it is promise to us that: "Ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked."

Warren Wiersbe has an excellent summary of the fiery darts from Satan that we can extinguish if we have unwavering faith: "In Paul's day, arrows, dipped in some inflammable substance and ignited, were shot at the enemy. Satan shoots "fiery darts" at our hearts and minds: lies, blasphemous thoughts, hateful thoughts about others, doubts, and burning desires for sin. If we do not by faith quench these darts, they will light a fire within and we will disobey God. We never know when Satan will shoot a dart at us, so we must always walk by faith and use the shield of faith."

Do not allow anyone to convince you that faith is a non-essential matter in the Christian life. One old song God's church has sung for many years has the following lyrics: "Living by faith in Jesus above, trusting confiding in His great love, safe from all harm, in His sheltering arms, I'm living by faith and I feel no alarm."

I could give you many instances in my life when I wondered how I could ever overcome what I was facing. I look back over the many years God has allowed me to live and readily confess that faith has won me victory after victory, as I have lived on my Christian journey through this world of sin and unbelief.

Let faith be your defensive shield, your means of protection as you live for God from day to day. Remember that faith is the victory that overcomes the world.

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

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Thou Shalt Laugh

By John Martin

THAT WAS A GOOD CHRISTMAS SERVICE. GOD'S PRESENCE REALLY SHOWED UP!

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Christmas lights display at the Trail of Faith

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Main Street - Church St. to Morgan St.

### Bluegrass at the Rock: Sideline

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### OCP presents - A Christmas Carol

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Old Rock School - Dec. 9 at 6pm  
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By Jim Smith  
McDowell County



As 2022 comes to an end, we want to take a moment to thank you for all your kindness and support. Your frequent donations helped us give reentry families and individuals a new start. To this day for 2022, we have served over 250 clients across the McDowell region with not only life coaching, housing, and job placement they needed urgently but also hope and happiness.

Let me introduce you to Ashley and her two boys. Ashley started using substances at 14 years old. She would be around good people and then would shift to people that were a negative influence. This battle went on for several years. Ashley held things together for a good while and was able to begin a college journey. Soon after she lost her grandma and it pushed her back to substance abuse. As with most users, there comes a time to seek a bigger high. This led to her experimenting with hard drugs. During this phase of her life, she began her journey to "rock bottom." She lost her kids in a custody battle and soon after went to prison. While incarcerated, she began to reflect on her life choices and relationships. She realized that she needed to return to her walk in her Christian faith. God used Freedom Life to give Ashley the boost she needed to overcome her fears of rejection and failure. Ashley enrolled in the program, attended group meetings, life coaching, and counseling, and was housed in the Freedom Life women's transitional house. Fast forward many months later and Ashley is doing well and has both her boys in her life! She now has her own place to live as well as her own car. Her kids are involved in the community and sports. Ashley is working full-time at a restaurant. She would like to be a full-time peer support specialist in her life career, in moving toward that goal she is a mentor at the McDowell county jail. Ashley has just received her certification as a peer support specialist through Vaya Health and graduated from the Freedom Life Program on November 18th.



At Freedom Life, we see so many clients who want to return to help others. We believe there is a powerful movement happening when formerly incarcerated clients have a calling to help others out of the same trench. There is a calling and purpose in this powerful movement of recovery.

Hence, as we approach the joyous celebration of Christmas and New Year, we urge you to come forward and support more individuals and families that need the services we offer.

Freedom Life will be expanding our services into Avery and Yancey counties starting in January 2023. We are a 50103 nonprofit ministry and we cannot sustain our services without donations from individuals, businesses, and churches. Please reach out if you would like more information about Freedom Life. We will send you information and meet with you or your organization to share the vision and insight about all the amazing things God is allowing us to do.

We have a goal of \$15,000 to finish out our year. We received a matching challenge donation of \$5000 toward this goal. You can double your donation by helping us with this goal through this first \$5000 challenge. You can give by mailing a check, or going online and clicking donation in the top right corner.

Freedom Life Ministries, PO Box 1134 Marion, NC 28752 [www.freedom-lifeministries.org](http://www.freedom-lifeministries.org) 828-559-2224

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

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Mercy (Otis) Warren

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.

Mercy (Otis) Warren was born on September 14, 1728, in Barnstable, Massachusetts, and was the third of 13 children. Mercy and James Warren married in 1754 and had five sons. Mercy came from a family of wealth and prominence. Men in her nuclear and extended families were powerful in the justice, military, and political communities. In addition, her family connections gave Mercy singular access to relatives and others in influential positions.

Because of social and family mores during the Revolutionary War era, girls were not afforded an education. Nonetheless, Mercy's privileged social status allowed her to be tutored at home by her father, brothers, and others who were Harvard and Yale University, graduates. Mercy was taught critical thinking by her family's questioning the divine rights of royals and studying the philosophy of Locke, Hume, and Kant. She also developed a curiosity for civics, ancient history, and classical literature.

Mrs. Warren was clever and had a strong wit. Using her talents, she wrote plays, poems, and political discourse. Mercy's satirical sonnets and dramas were an open indictment of her political friends and foes. Even her confidants did not escape her opinions and censure. Because of her sharp wit and criticisms, Mercy ruined her husband's political career.

Mercy had a canny ability to write on topics that were characterized by reasoning and logic. She acquired her brother's political work after he was severely battered into submission by a British officer, causing permanent mental incapacity. Mrs. Warren's talents helped form the Committee of Correspondence that opposed Parliament. She also provided insight and purposes for establishing the United States Constitution and other government constructs. As was true of others, Mercy opposed the Constitution until various legal rights were addressed.

Many agreed with Mrs. Warren's views, ideas, and political beliefs, although others opposed them. Also, Mercy's outlook was recognized as the advent of women's rights and dubbed the "Conscience of the American Revolution." Mrs. Warren's last act of nationalism was in the early 1800s when she published a scholarly anthology, History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution.

At 86, Mercy died in her Plymouth, Massachusetts home on October 19, 1814. Mrs. Warren did not fight the Revolutionary War with guns and swords. Instead, Mercy Otis Warren was courageous and demonstrated American patriotism and devotion using her intellect and powerful writing.

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

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

By Regina McIntosh  
Yancey County



Christmas isn't about the gifts  
We give and receive  
Christmas isn't about the dinners  
Where we share our meals  
Christmas isn't about the festivities  
When we celebrate the special day

Christmas is about a Savior  
Who came to bring us peace  
Christmas is about a Redeemer  
Who lived to give us forgiveness

Christmas is about the King  
Who came down to shine His light  
Christmas is about the Deliverer  
Who came to restore our lives  
And bring us home to paradise  
He is the reason for this season  
He is the grace that lights our faith  
He is the wisdom and the truth  
He is the answer to our desires  
He is the kindness that truly cares  
He is the chance to believe and receive  
Salvation from the darkest place  
Christmas is the reflection of a star  
Who won our hopes, our lives, our hearts  
A star of Bethlehem – a star of joy  
Star of the night when Jesus was born  
Merry Christmas today and always!

Regina is a heart and soul who loves the Lord, her family, church, nature, camping, writing, and reading. Her poems have been published by Blue Mountain Arts and she has a recent book of Inspirational Christian Poetry available on Amazon – A Light in the Darkness by Regina McIntosh. Learn more about her by visiting her website at [www.reginamcintosh.com](http://www.reginamcintosh.com)

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# Crossword

Crossword274  
ACROSS  
1 I will measure into their \_\_\_\_ the full payment for (Isa 65:7)  
5 I am your servant and \_\_\_\_\_. Come up and save me (2 Kings 16:7)  
10 The law of the wise \_\_\_\_ fountain of life (2,1) (Prov 13:14)  
13 \_\_\_\_ son brings grief to his father (1,7) (Prov 17:25)  
14 Every thing that openeth the \_\_\_\_ in all flesh (Num 18:15) KJV  
15 The law of his God is in his heart; his feet do not \_\_\_\_ (Ps 37:31)  
16 \_\_\_\_, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida (John 1:44)  
17 I came near unto \_\_\_\_ of them that stood by (Daniel 7:16)  
18 as a \_\_\_\_ gathers her chicks under her wings (Matt 23:37)  
19 I will make Jerusalem a \_\_\_\_ of ruins (Jer 9:11)  
20 A bird on the \_\_\_\_ may report what you say (Eccl 10:20)  
22 they beat one, killed another, and stoned \_\_\_\_ (1,5) (Matt 21:35-36)  
24 ship with the figurehead of the \_\_\_\_ gods Castor and Pollux (Acts 28:11)  
28 Forgive us our debts, as we \_\_\_\_ have forgiven our debtors (Matt 6:12)  
29 As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were \_\_\_\_ (Ex 17:11)  
32 each gate made of a single \_\_\_\_ (Rev 21:21)  
35 They do nothing \_\_\_\_; they walk in his ways (Ps 119:3)  
37 Therefore I will praise \_\_\_\_ among the nations, O LORD (Ps 18:49)  
38 Go, I wish you well; keep \_\_\_\_ and well fed (James 2:16)  
40 Sir, your \_\_\_\_ has earned ten more (Luke 19:16)  
41 In the third year of \_\_\_\_ king of Judah (IKing 15:33)  
42 He also said, "Bring me the \_\_\_\_ you are wearing" (Ruth 3:15)  
45 The sons of Japheth: \_\_\_\_, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal (Gen 10:2)  
46 Reprover, scolder (Hos 5:2) KJV  
48 son of Seth (Gen 5:6) KJV  
50 Sell me some property for a burial \_\_\_\_ here (Gen 23:4)  
51 the Israelites were to live in \_\_\_\_ during the feast of the seventh month (Neh 8:14)  
54 familiar spirits, and unto wizards that \_\_\_\_, and that mutter (Isa 8:19) KJV  
56 you will not get out until you have \_\_\_\_ the last penny

(Matt 5:26)  
57 Eye hath not seen, nor \_\_\_\_ heard (1 Cor 2:9) KJV  
59 and do count them but dung, that I may \_\_\_\_ Christ (Phil 3:8)  
60 the sacrifices of \_\_\_\_ are offered to demons (1 Cor 10:20)  
62 appointed unto men \_\_\_\_ to die, but after this the judgment (Heb 9:27)  
63 \_\_\_\_, Simon Peter's brother (John 1:40)  
64 male roe deers (1 Kings 4:23)  
65 He who testifies to these things says, "\_\_\_\_, I am coming soon." (Rev 22:20)  
66 He will \_\_\_\_ the afflicted among the people (Ps 72:4)  
67 to see if you would stand the \_\_\_\_ and be obedient (2 Cor 2:9)  
Down  
1 The LORD Almighty will \_\_\_\_ them with a whip (Isa 10:26)  
2 Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog? \_\_\_\_? (1,4) (1 Sam 24:14)  
3 I am suffering even to the \_\_\_\_ of being chained like a criminal (2 Tim 2:9)  
4 Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a \_\_\_\_ (John 13:26)  
5 You snakes! You brood of \_\_\_\_! How will you escape (Matt 23:33)  
6 The law is only \_\_\_\_ of the good things that are (1,6) (Heb 10:1)  
7 where they decided to run the \_\_\_\_ aground (Acts 27:39)  
8 Moses said unto God, Who \_\_\_\_, that I should go unto (2,1) (Exod 3:11)  
9 the heron after her kind, and the \_\_\_\_, and the bat (Lev 11:19) KJV  
10 the brass, the \_\_\_\_, the tin, and the lead (Num 31:22)  
11 I will \_\_\_\_ to the LORD, for he has been good to me (Ps 13:6)  
12 his hand fetcheth a stroke with the \_\_\_\_ to cut down the tree (Deut 19:5) KJV  
19 Who may ascend the \_\_\_\_ of the LORD? (Ps 24:3)  
21 and brought him to an \_\_\_\_, and took care of him (Luke 10:34)  
23 They will neither \_\_\_\_ nor destroy on all my holy mountain (Isa 11:9)  
24 \_\_\_\_ are better than one (Eccles 4:9)  
25 Do not get drunk on \_\_\_\_, which leads to debauchery (Eph 5:18)  
26 Set \_\_\_\_ over my mouth, O LORD; keep watch (1,5) (Ps 141:3)  
27 Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly \_\_\_\_

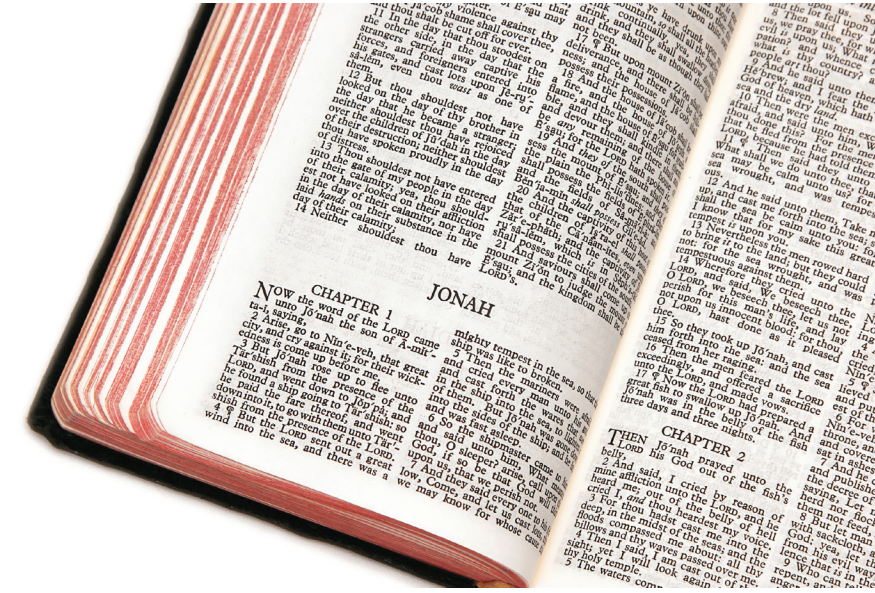
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(Job 5:7)  
30 They left \_\_\_\_ and camped at Dibon Gad. (Num 33:45)  
31 he shall open, and \_\_\_\_ shall shut (Isaiah 22:22)  
33 Men at \_\_\_\_ have contempt for misfortune (Job 12:5)  
34 \_\_\_\_ and Dumah, and Eshean (Joshua 15:52)  
36 the pure gold lampstand with its \_\_\_\_ of lamps and all (Exod 39:37)  
39 If the iron be blunt, and he do not \_\_\_\_ the edge (Eccl 10:10) KJV  
40 My shield is God \_\_\_\_ High, who saves the upright in heart (Ps 7:10)  
42 the mountains \_\_\_\_ like rams, the hills like lambs (Ps 114:4)  
43 Their feet \_\_\_\_ swift to shed blood (Romans 3:15)  
44 the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of \_\_\_\_ (Ps 29:5)  
45 Why have you repaid \_\_\_\_ with evil? (Gen 44:4)  
47 But we know that the law is good, if a man \_\_\_\_ it lawfully (1 Tim 1:8)  
49 these sayings were \_\_\_\_ abroad throughout all the

hill (Luke 1:65) KJV  
52 Jesus unto him, Get thee \_\_\_\_ , Satan (Matt 4:10) KJV  
53 Fill the men's \_\_\_\_ with as much food as they can carry (Gen 44:1)  
54 fetch olive branches, and \_\_\_\_ branches, and myrtle (Neh 8:15)  
55 He makes clouds rise from the \_\_\_\_ of the earth (Ps 135:7)  
56 and she shall shave her head, and \_\_\_\_ her nails (Deut 21:12) KJV  
58 ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you \_\_\_\_ (Matt 11:28) KJV  
59 As for God, his \_\_\_\_ is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless (Ps 18:30)  
61 let all the inhabitants of the world stand in \_\_\_\_ of him (Ps 33:8)  
62 Bring \_\_\_\_ every kind of living creature that is with you (Gen 8:17)

Solution on page 14





# The Church of Laodicea and Today’s Times

By Cody T. McCain  
*Burke County*

In the Gospel of Luke chapter 18, verses 1 through 8, Jesus teaches a parable concerning persistence in prayer. Verse one states, “*Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.*” The word translated “give up” here is the Greek verb ekkakeo which means: “*to be utterly spiritless, wearied out, exhausted, to lose courage.*” This same word was also used in 2 Thessalonians 3:13 when the apostle Paul admonished the church at Thessalonica to “...never tire of doing what is good.” This Greek verb is comprised of two additional words: ek, which means “out” or “from” and kakos which refers to “that which is evil in the sense of THINKING.” In other words, to “give up” first and foremost begins in our minds and our patterns of thinking. It is when our thinking begins to lean in the direction of what is wrong, of a bad nature, troublesome, injurious, or destructive (the only other word used for “evil” in Greek is poneros which refers to evil motives or intentions)! Daniel 7:25 has a connection to this principle of evil thinking believe it or not! This passage states – which is pointing to a time in the future where the antichrist would reign upon the earth – “He (the horn, representative of the antichrist) will speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people and try to change the set times and the laws. The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times, and half a time.” There are several things we should notice that this entity will utilize as tactics: (1) A hatred of God (“He will speak against the Most High), (2) Spiritual warfare (“...and oppress his holy people”), and (3) Have a huge degree of influence in government and legislation (“...and try to change the set times and the laws”). Although this entity of the antichrist has not yet been revealed to reign upon the earth, the spirit OF the antichrist is already at work in the earth (1 John 4:2-6). We see this spirit that has created a culture that hates God and rejects the things of God, wages spiritual warfare against the people of God (particularly in the MIND), and has tremendous influence in the governmental systems of not just this country, but across the world! It is this spirit that begins to oppress the THINKING of individuals (INCLUDING BELIEVERS), to direct their lives in an evil and GodLESS direction! Now jumping to verses 7 and 8 in Luke 18 which state, “*7 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? 8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?*” Now you may ask, “What do these verses have to do with what you’ve just said?” My answer: THESE VERSES GO HAND IN HAND!

There is a direct connection in verse 1 regarding our crying out to God (in prayer) and the Parousia or the coming of the Lord. The word “cry” signifies speaking in a strong voice that is aggressive and continual. What does this have to do with the return of our Lord? Although God promises swift justice when we continually cry out to Him, He also knows that the spirit of the antichrist described in Daniel 7:25 can cause the believer to FAINT and affect the FAITH of many! This proves to be a key aspect of today in that many cry out regarding justice for social ills and shortcomings of our legal system. Like the children of Israel, some have judged God as “unjust” (Ezekiel 18:25) and have since turned away from faith in Christ and to teachings that promote retaliation, ethnocentrism, and “self-love.” Faith just doesn’t refer to the belief in the existence of God, but a full confidence in His righteous character and a lifestyle demonstrative of such confidence! In this hour, the enemy will stop at nothing to hinder our crying out to God. Part of the departure from the faith in these last times isn’t only a turning away from God (thereby turning to an alternative), but also an ABANDONMENT of the PERSISTENCE of crying out in prayer, and subsequently the HOPE and FAITH of many! Christian author Bob Sorge once stated, “God loves it when we cry out to Him, day and night without ceasing. Why? Because He reckons unrelenting prayer to be an expression of faith. He sees it as a concrete representation of the confidence we have in His intervention. And if there’s anything that pleases God, its faith (Heb 11:6).” Adding to this very principle are the words from Romans 14:23, “...everything that does not come from faith is SIN!”

For the believer, we must realize that for the Church of Jesus Christ, this spirit seeks to infiltrate our ranks and create a Laodicean-like environment (yes Laodicean is a word in Webster’s Dictionary)! Most commonly we refer to the church of Laodicea in Revelation 3:14-22 as the “lukewarm church.” To provide a base here, when Jesus reprimanded the church regarding their spiritual state in verse 15 saying, “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!” he was NOT talking about being spiritually warm verses being spiritually cold (as commonly taught)! This is where we must investigate the historical context of the scripture text itself! The ancient city of Laodicea – located in present-day Turkey – was a city of great productivity. It was known for being a very wealthy city with a thriving financial sector, a textile industry, and even a medical school! In other words, it was very self-sufficient and on the cutting edge of finance, industry, and medicine (sound familiar????). However, the location of this city posed a problem for its water supply. As a result, water had to be piped in through the main aqueduct pipe (being there was no DIRECT source of water). To the north of Laodicea was the city of Hierapolis, known for its lush hot springs (warm water), while to the south was the city of Colossae known for its refreshingly cool water (cold water). By the time the water was drawn from the aqueduct pipe (fed from a spring known today as Baspinar), it had acquired a great deal of mineral content causing the aqueduct pipe to sometimes clog due to the build-up. The results? Lukewarm water that often-caused residents to experience a sour stomach, resulting in vomiting (hence



Jesus’ reference to spewing the church out of his mouth!). In Jesus’ rebuke of verse 15, he was imploring this church to NOT be conformed to the Laodicean culture, thereby diluting the influence of the Spirit. This compares to the church of today! We have situated ourselves NEAR the water supply (aka the power of the HOLY SPIRIT) but have not positioned ourselves for DIRECT and FULL ACCESS to the water supply! We have been guilty of using man-made controlled methods (just like an aqueduct) to “funnel in” the Holy Spirit rather than allowing Him a sovereign course! This has resulted in our works being found neither spiritually zealous (hot water) nor a source of true spiritual refreshment (cold water) because we have a watered-down revelation of the Father and the POWER of His Spirit! We find ourselves only NEAR the source when we neglect and undermine the FULL Gospel which teaches the importance of the baptism of the Holy Spirit with FIRE! Furthermore, this has led the church of today to conform to the culture of “Laodicea” by trusting in our material wealth, ingenuity, and even the prioritization of the physical above the spiritual! We have prioritized our racial and political cultures ABOVE the authority of God’s Kingdom! This my brothers and sisters is lukewarmness! Where lukewarmness abounds, the spirit of the antichrist is attracted and can produce a tremendous influence. Where lukewarmness abounds, there comes a gradual turning away from the person and character of Christ! Where lukewarmness abounds, the desire to WATCH as well as PRAY decreases, allowing us to succumb to demonic distractions, doctrines, and other various strongholds! When we allow the enemy to steal our “cry” of prayer, it isn’t long before our thinking begins to take a downward spiral towards the realm of the antichrist (literally AGAINST Christ: several key examples include believers who do not uphold the authority of scripture nor believe in corporate fellowship at a local assembly or deliberately choose to live immoral lifestyles!!!). The solution? We must REPENT of ways we have personally and corporately allowed this antichrist spirit to influence our thinking! Then, we must purpose as Ephesians 5:18 states to “*Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT.*” We must be baptized in the power of the Holy Ghost in this hour that we would have DIRECT access to the mind of God and the POWER of God, lest we buy into the distractions and deception that is so rampant! We must also purpose to become STUDENTS of God’s Word as never before! It isn’t enough to just have a casual reading of scripture as we would a piece of literature! We must study, meditate upon, speak, and apply the principles of God’s Word! Finally, we must purpose to pray without ceasing! I’m not talking about any kind of prayer! I am talking about prayer influenced by the Holy Spirit where we pray and declare the Word of God (which is the will of God) or even prayer that involves the prayer language given through the baptism of the Holy Spirit (see Romans 8:26, 1 Corinthians 14:4, Jude 1:20).

There is a wave of God’s glory that is about to hit this planet with the tangible presence and power of the Holy Ghost that will bring salvation, deliverance, transformation, and healing (physically and emotionally) and make DISCIPLES of all nations. I do want to emphasize this point: The individuals that God will use in this hour to usher in this wave are those considered “unknown” or “non-influential” in the eyes of culture! In other words, if you have been looking at individuals who have a major platform to usher in revival, I’d strongly encourage you to look again and hear out of the realm of the Spirit!!!

Father help us in this hour to take heed to what you are saying and simply be your ambassadors on the earth by operating in the ministry of reconciliation! In Jesus’ name...AMEN!

*Cody T. McCain Sr. is the owner, funeral director, and embalmer of McCain Funeral Home & Cremations, LLC located in Morganton. He, along with his wife Shaunda, have a passion to serve their community with the love, integrity, and excellence of Christ.*

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