



# BLUE RIDGE CHRISTIAN NEWS

## Happy Valentines Day

### Pause . . . and Consider

**A Love Song**  
By Jan Merop  
Cleveland, Tennessee

February is known for its emphasis on love. Not just Valentine’s Day . . . but embracing the goodness, kindness, and self-sacrifice that accompanies loving attitudes.

For me and my husband, Ken, it is also the month when we sealed our love through our marriage vows 41 years ago. So, February is special to us.

One of the blessings of our relationship has been the harmony of our voices. We both sang in choirs and did solos as well. But when we met and fell in love, our passion for Christian music produced harmony . . . an answer to a tender whispered prayer of mine.

I had been longing for a loving, God-honoring partner after having gone through a divorce and being a single Mom for seven years. So, when God brought Ken into my life and answered my prayer of “If only he could sing,” we embraced the Lord’s signature on our marriage.

Through the years, music and singing together have been an enormous blessing. But I also have learned that it is important to hear the music in another person’s soul.

That’s not always easy to discern even in close relationships. And that is where listening, quieting your own soul, and not looking only at your own interests come in.

A husband is to be a good student of his wife . . . studying her and knowing her so that he can help her to be all she can be. A wife is to respect her husband as they are “heirs together of the grace of life.” With that respectful demeanor, a wife also comes to know her husband more intimately.

Knowing takes on the idea of a deeper understanding of their soul’s song . . . that which makes them who they are.

1 Peter 3: 7 NKJV says, “*Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.*”

I have heard on a couple of occasions that love is learning the song in someone’s heart and singing it for them when they need it most . . . or singing it back to



that one when he or she has forgotten the words.

It can happen. Trauma in one’s life, the death of a child, illness, vocational losses, or any number of things. Suddenly, that song that makes you . . . ‘you’ . . . is buried in fogginess and not distinguishable.

That’s when love jumps in and sings it back to you. And you are revitalized and the harmony returns.

Therefore, love so that the music never ends. Selah

**Blushing Promise**

*Like the bride who has saved her first kiss for her groom,  
These petite, finely etched roses seem to be blushing with promise.  
Each exquisite, perfectly painted flower  
is a classic work of art whispering pledges of hope.  
“Do not stir up nor awaken love until it pleases.”  
Song of Solomon 2: 7b*



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).



By Doug Harrell  
Mitchell County

As I write this article I am thinking about the fact that this year in May we will be celebrating our 59th wedding anniversary. Since February is Valentine's day, month romance tends to be on our minds. The stores are filled with candy, cards, flowers, and all kinds of mementos celebrating love. One of the things that come to mind is that love is much more than all the flowery goodies out there. Love is even much more than a tingly feeling all over the body and the brain, love is a decision as well. The feeling is great but as the years go by that feeling can be eroded by all kinds of situations that come along. Life continues to happen and, folks, it is not all a bed of roses. We don't always go tip-toeing through the tulips as the song goes. We need only go to the Bible to see what love really is.

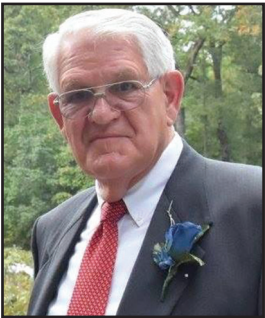
*"And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away."* 1 Corinthians 13:2-8 KJV

Love for our mate is so critical in today's world that we see approximately 50% of all marriages ending in divorce. This has such a horrendous impact on our families in so many ways. The children that go through this experience times of struggle for the rest of their lives. The vast majority of all crime and suicide comes from this group of children. God created marriage to be between one man and one woman to last until death do us part. A strong marriage is fundamental to the health of society. The family unit is the most important piece of our entire society. The glue that really holds most marriages together is a strong faith in God, a common desire to serve God and follow His teachings. If a couple has this bond with the Lord, worships together, and prays together, their odds of making it to the end increase. The Biblical pattern of marriage and chastity is a proven pattern that is far more successful than the current idea of let's live together awhile and see if we like it. If we do then we will get married. This process all too often leads to a dead-end street with divorce at the end of the road.

If you are a young person thinking about marriage, and that fits almost all young adults, be praying that the Lord will guide you in your selection. Your ideal place to find the right mate is to get in church yourself and find others in the same environment, those committed to the Lord and the beliefs that are founded in His holy word.

After 59 years of marriage it can still be such a blessing and it can continue to be exciting and refreshing as well. Today we are blessed with 22 grandchildren and 23 great-grandchildren and are expecting many more greats in the future. Grab your mate, tell them thank you for putting up with me, and recommit to the phrase, till death do we part! You will at some point look back at all the hard times and just say thank you Lord that we stuck it out until the end.

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



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)

BLUE RIDGE CHRISTIAN NEWS

The Blue Ridge Christian News  
is moving to 152 Summit Ave., Spruce Pine, NC



Contents

In Every Issue

Life Lessons - p. 2  
Your Government - p. 32-33

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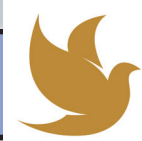
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“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace: that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation: that saith unto Zion. Thy God reigneth!”

Isaiah 52:7 KJV



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## Church Directory



### 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 &  
Children's TeamKid

### Mount Carmel Baptist Church

195 Gouges Creek Rd.  
Spruce Pine NC 28777

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loved!  
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www.mcfamilyforchrist.org

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

*"A Family Focused On Christ"*

### 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**

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

A Bible-believing Fellowship  
Loving God and Loving People

### Berry Chapel Baptist Church

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

**Pastor - Steve Williams**

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

Where Everybody is Somebody  
And Jesus Christ is Lord!

### 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*



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By Terry Cheek  
McDowell County

Moving forward through Romans, we leave the Bible's doctrine of Justification and move to God's wrath. A considerable leap indeed. Paul challenges the Church to not only understand God's wrath but to use it as encouragement in their walk with God and sharing the gospel with the unsaved. Let's look at our scripture this month, from the book of Romans chapter one, verses eighteen through twenty-five.

18 "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; 19 Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed [it] unto them. 20 For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, [even] his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: 21 Because that, when they knew God, they glorified [him] not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22 Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. 24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: 25 Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen." [Rom 1:18-25 KJV]

God doesn't hide the fact of his wrath. After studying the doctrine of God's righteousness, we find ourselves face-to-face with the study of unrighteousness. Think of this. No one can fully appreciate the righteousness of God until we realize and understand our unrighteousness before him. The gospel is an announcement to all people as universally under the indictment of God and exposed to His wrath. Sadly, people today are not concerned about the gospel. I believe that is because we do not understand the law of God. R.C. Sproul has this to say.

If people were sensitive to the manifestation of God's anger toward them, they would be so moved by enlightened self-interest that they would flee as fast as they could to hear the gospel, but their necks have become so hardened, their hearts so calcified, that they have no fear of God.

Many preachers and teachers today tell people that God loves them unconditionally, leading people to falsely believe that God has no wrath against sin and the unrepentant sinner. On the contrary, our scripture tells us that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven. If God wrote this through Paul and gave it to us through His word, why would we feel it didn't apply today?

The Greek word Paul uses for "wrath" is orgai. The English word that derives from orgai is an orgy. When we think of an orgy, we think of participation in unbridled sexual behavior and eroticism with reckless abandon. Our scripture is not exclusively talking about sexual sin. It vividly describes unrighteousness and what it does when left in an unrepentant condition. Too often, this scripture is used to pick apart sins, and I am sure there is a time and place for that.

The context of the passage is the condition of the soul. Understanding the wrath of God is a shock and awe to the soul, a wake-up call if nothing else. Has the gospel been planted in your heart? Is the Holy Spirit moving gracefully in your heart? Examine yourself under the word of God and accept his grace today. Accept the gospel. Accept Christ as your LORD and savior. Christian, and I am speaking to the truly repentant born-again Christians. We too must examine ourselves daily to avoid unrighteousness in our lives. We are saved sinners, nothing more. Let's not allow unrighteousness to slip into our lives and stain the testimony of Christ's gospel. We, too, must understand how the wrath of God applies to us. My time has come and gone. Until we meet again, in print or person, may God bless you is my prayer.

Sproul, R.C.. Romans: An Expository Commentary (p. 22). Ligonier Ministries. Kindle Edition.  
Terry Cheek is the founder and broadcaster of The Inspiring Word media ministry. He and Lori are members of Blue Ridge Church of Marion N.C. You can contact Terry by email at theinspiringword@gmail.com.



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By Joe Sturz  
Shenandoah, Va.



I have been down with a cold but am finally getting going again. This hymn is my commitment to the Lord.

1 Perhaps my dear Shepherd may lead into meadows  
Where greenest the grasses may grow;  
Perhaps he may lead me in deserts and shadows:  
Wherever he leads me I'll go.

Refrain:

And now, on my ear sweetest music is falling,  
A voice oh, so gentle and low,  
The voice of my Shepherd at this moment is calling:  
Wherever he leads me I'll go. [Refrain]  
2 Perhaps my good Shepherd may guard while I'm resting  
Beside where the still waters flow;  
Perhaps the mad billows my soul must be breasting:  
Wherever he leads me I'll go. [Refrain]  
3 Perhaps I'll have sunshine, I may have a disaster,  
The future I care not to know;  
I'll trust everything to the care of the Master,  
Wherever he leads me I'll go. [Refrain]" (William C. Martin)

[https://hymnary.org/text/perhaps\\_my\\_dear\\_shepherd\\_may\\_lead](https://hymnary.org/text/perhaps_my_dear_shepherd_may_lead)  
Brother Joe "wherever He leads I will follow" Sturz Sunday, January 15, 2023  
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I became a Christian and began following Jesus Christ when I heard and accepted for myself that He died on the cross to pay for the sins of those that believe in Him and rose again from the dead to secure for them eternal life (I Corinthians 15:1-58).

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



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# Morganton Seventh Day Adventist

## Watchfulness

By Steve Bietz  
Burke County

These days, since the powers that be have extended the NFL regular season, the most-watched event of the year falls in the month of February. February 12th to be exact. We know it as the Super Bowl. And attached to each year's Super Bowl is the roman numeral that we use to count them. This year it is Super Bowl LVII. If you want to go in person to the Super Bowl this year, which is being played in Glendale, Arizona, you will need to shell out close to \$5000.00 a seat. A VIP seat would cost you close to \$80,000.00.

Of course, most of us stay home or gather with friends and have a Super Bowl party to watch it on our big-screen televisions.

I suppose the majority watch the Super Bowl for the game itself. Many watch the Super Bowl to see the Halftime Show. I'm told the Halftime Show performer is Rihanna this year. Still, others tune into the Super Bowl to watch the commercials. I see that the price of a 30-second commercial is 6.5 million for this year's Super Bowl. When the entire spectacle is over, I guess we rate the commercials to see if the advertisers got their money's worth or if they should hire a new ad agency for next year. I suspect if you shell out those kinds of dollars for a 30-second commercial, you would hope for a close-scoring game so that your television audience will not stop watching at halftime if the score is too lopsided. Although we like to watch the Super Bowl for various reasons, we seem to not be good watchers much of the rest of the time.

In the Bible, Jesus shares an illustration about watchfulness. *"It is like a man going to a far country, who left his house and gave authority to his servants, and to each his work, and commanded the doorkeeper to watch. Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house is coming--in the evening, at midnight, at the crowing of the rooster; or in the morning--lest, coming suddenly, he finds you sleeping. And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!"* Mark 13: 34-37 Watchfulness is a constant admonition of scripture. Evidently, we are pretty good at watching Super Bowls but not so good at watching ourselves. The job to conquer self and constantly cooperate with the Holy Spirit is a 24/7 vigil. To watch our steps, our mouths, our eyes, and our thoughts, that we may be winning the struggle and allowing God to work in us His purpose, should be our desire. The religion of Christ transforms the heart. It makes the worldly-minded man and woman, heavenly-minded. Jesus reminds us that we are to be branches of the Living Vine, but that it will require our watchfulness in our battle with ourselves. I hear that three-part call: Watch, Pray, and Work. These three words remind me of a hymn and its first verse: "Watch ye saints, with eyelids waking; Lo! the powers of earth are shaking; Keep your lamps all trimmed and burning, Ready for your Lord's returning."

I suppose what makes it challenging to watch ourselves is that it is just so daily. May you and I keep a watchful eye on our own hearts as we live for Christ and as He prepares us to be ready for when He returns.

Steve Bietz, Pastor, Morganton Seventh day Adventist Church.



# Snow Hill Baptist Church No Regrets

## Reflections Of A Dad On The Downhill Side

By Dean Honeycutt  
Mitchell County

Pam and I have been married for 31 years and have trained five children as best we could. Where has the time gone? Life is genuinely like a vapor here for just a little while and then gone. As I think back over the years, I reflect more on my failures than I do my successes as a husband and parent. Really all other things in life matter little compared to being a godly father and loving husband. Success in my occupation matters little if I have not trained my children to follow the Lord and loved my wife as Christ loves His Church.

God has truly blessed us tremendously. I thank God every day for my wonderful wife and children. God brought us together. I grew up in Texas after my dad's job transferred him from the mountains to the Panhandle of Texas. But the Lord would bring me back east and I met Pam at Mars Hill College. I always wanted to marry a mountain girl. Lol. Men if you have a wife that loves the Lord you are truly blessed, I do not know where I would be without the support and love of my caring wife.

I have found over the years that dating my wife has never really stopped. Granted I am not very romantic but spending time with Pam is just as sweet today as it was on our first date. Yes, I am trying to get brownie points and hopefully, she reads this article. I need all the help I can get. Lol. Christ loves His church and gave Himself for it. So, Christ spends a lot of time loving His church. I should spend a lot of time with my wife. Time is not going to stop for me, and I am not promised tomorrow, so I need to spend time with my wife and the people I love. I think about my grandparents. They wanted to travel when my grandfather retired. They got to go on a couple of trips, but my grandfather got Alzheimer's and the traveling had to stop. Time is short and as husbands and fathers, we need to major on our wives and children and minor on our occupations and personal interest. Do not put off tomorrow what needs to be done today.

Christ gave himself to the church. He forfeited His life for the life of the Church. As a husband and father, I forfeit my personal interest for the benefit of my family. I am still learning. As I wrote earlier, I have failed in many areas. I think back over the years and could have spent more time with my children and doing their hobbies. Though a lot of Saturdays were spent on the soccer field or at a cow show, I still wonder if that was enough. My kids would probably say that it was, but I am on the downhill side now and reflecting on what really matters. What little sacrifices I make in my own interest will reap benefits in the love and nurture of my wife and children.

What matters is my relationship with Christ. If this relationship is not where it needs to be then my relationship with my family will suffer. What matters is my wife and children, and grandchildren. What matters is sharing the Gospel of Christ with my family and others. I do not take people to heaven; however, I do have a responsibility to share Jesus with all people. Christ gave himself for the church, so others may belong to the Body of Christ. Had Christ not given Himself I could never belong to the Bridegroom. We must love what God loves, and God loves His Church. When I love my wife and family, and I love others, then I will love myself, and be confident in who I am in Christ. I thank God for His love; I feel at times I do not deserve God's love. My wife is a picture of God's love for me. She loves me despite all my failures and disappointments. But thank God, He loves me and my family. God loves you and God cares about you. Discipline yourself in the things God loves, and then you can love yourself and love your family.

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



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Creator God looked down that day  
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Something to Think About

What Is Love?

By Dennis Love  
McDowell County



You have probably seen the Shriners Children's commercials on TV. Shriners Children's is a network of non-profit medical facilities across North America. Children with orthopedic conditions, burns, spinal cord injuries, cleft lip, and palate are eligible for care and receive all services in a family-centered environment, regardless of the patient's ability to pay. Care for children is usually provided until age 18, although in some cases, it may be extended to age 21. The hospitals are owned and operated by Shriners International whose members are known as Shriners. The current advertising campaign for the healthcare system features the tagline, "Love to the Rescue." Give and you will receive a free "Love to the Rescue" blanket.

One very heart-touching commercial asked a very specific question to young children with various health-related conditions. That question is, "What is Love?" These children reply with numerous answers which go as follows.

- Love is calling the Love Doctor.
- Love is somebody that likes or likes someone.
- Love is when you make people laugh.
- Love is being able to stand.
- Love is dancing.
- Love is being independent.
- Love is a new smile.
- Love is a new prosthetic leg.
- Love is jumping up.
- Love is candy.
- Love is puppies.
- Love is playing checkers with my mom.

Then the commercial concludes by saying you can call or go online to send your love to the rescue. It's a heart-moving commercial but it really doesn't answer the question, "What is Love?" The answer to this question is found in John 3:16. "*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.*" We use the word love in so many ways today. "I love my wife." "I love my family." "I love peanut butter and jelly sandwiches." "I love to hunt." "I love football." However, the word "Loved" used here indicates love to the highest degree. It's a love that never ceases. What God says in Jeremiah 31:3 helps us get a glimpse into this love. There He says, "*Yea, I have loved you with an everlasting love. . .*" The Hebrew word for "everlasting" means "beyond a vanishing point." In other words, God's love for us is out of sight! You don't need to call or go online to send your love to the rescue. The love to the rescue has already been sent to you. All you need to do is believe it and receive it. And once you do, then you can answer the question, "What is Love?"

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)

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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.



Could It Be?  
By Christy Lowman  
Burke County

Could it be? Could it be? After seven long months has Chip and Dell's long-lost brother finally returned? He was eight weeks old the last time we saw him.

There is a black and gray striped cat with spots, about the same size, just a tad smaller than Chip and Dell that has appeared at my neighbors.



I meowed and he came out from underneath the truck meowing back. He walked up to me, pretty close, then got spooked and ran back under the truck just like he did when he was a kitten. We have not seen him since the day we caught Chip when Chip had to go to the vet to have a bot fly larvae removed from under his skin. I have always wondered and fretted over what had happened to their little brother. Seeing him, yes we are 99 percent sure it is him, once again reminded me of the story Jesus told about the prodigal son. If you have never heard of this story you can find it in your Bible in the book of Luke 15:11-32.

The short version of the story is basically this: A man had 2 sons. The younger son decided he didn't want to wait until his father died to get his inheritance so he asked him for it while he was still alive. His father agreed and gave it to him. The son left home, had his fortune turned into money, and went to a foreign country. He blew all of his inheritance partying and hanging out with friends. When he had no more money left his friends abandoned him. At the same time, the country went through a severe famine. He became a citizen of a foreign country and his job was to feed and tend the pigs. He wanted to go home but was afraid of being turned away. He decided to take the chance anyway and see if he could be a servant of his fathers because he would be taken care of as a servant better than how he was being taken care of here. He went home. When his father saw him he was excited and welcomed his son home with open arms. He had his servant drape his son in the finest robe and put a ring on his finger. They also celebrated with a fine meal.



When the older brother came home from working the fields and found out his brother was back. He was not happy to see him. He did not think his brother deserved a welcome home party and he would not go in the house and participate. He did not understand why his father was so willing to welcome his brother back and forget all that he had done. The older brother was a little jealous that the father was having this big party for his brother when he had never offered even a small party for him and his friends and he had stayed with his father his whole life and worked his fields for him. The father told him to be glad that his younger brother who had been lost was now found and that all he had was going to belong to him when he died not his younger brother.

I wonder how Chip and Dell would react once they saw their long-lost brother after all of this time. Would they be happy to see him? Would they resent him? Would they even recognize him? I would like to think they would embrace him and love him and welcome him back home. That is how I hope I would act if I was in this situation. I hope and pray I would react like the father with open arms and not like the older brother who wasn't happy to see his younger brother come back home.

The father displayed the love that Christ gives us. When we walk away from God he always welcomes us back with open arms, no matter what.

How do you think you would react in a similar situation?

John 6:37, NIV "All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away."

Dear Lord, we praise You and thank You so much for never giving up on us. Thank You for allowing us to return to You no matter what we have done or how far we have gone. Dear Lord, please help us not to stumble, help us to only make minimum mistakes in life. I pray we will draw near to you and stay close to You, allowing You to direct our path. In Jesus's name, I pray, Amen.

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

Search The Word For Your Personal Message!  
By Kurt Bomar  
Avery County



The Bible has several messages that at first glance seem to be contradictory. For instance, Proverbs tells us to consider the ant and work hard to prepare for an unknown future. At the same time, Jesus tells us in the sermon on the mount not to worry about what we are to eat or drink, and that our heavenly Father knows what we need and will provide for us. Paul tells us that "I have become all things to all men so that I might win some to the Lord". Yet James says that "anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world, becomes an enemy of God".

We are told to fully plan ahead before starting a business venture to make sure we can complete it. Yet we are also told not to say "we're going to do this or that tomorrow" but rather say "if it's the Lord's will...".

Why the apparent contradictions? I believe it's because there is more than one personality type that God is trying to reach. Anybody that has raised more than one child knows that with some you have to wallop them to get their attention and others only take a raised eyebrow.

So what about you? Are you by nature a lazy person? Then you need to focus on the ants. Are you just the opposite, a workaholic? Then you need to consider the lilies and stop trying to do it all yourself. Rest in the Lord.

Most importantly, when it comes to our salvation, those of us who take it too cavalierly need to read the verses that give us a kick in the seat of the pants (Jas. 1:21, 2:24). Others who are always worrying that God is mad at them or that they have committed the unpardonable sin need to focus on the scriptures that show God's unconditional love for his children regardless of our failures (Rom. 5:15-17 and the Psalms).

Remember God desires to comfort the afflicted as well as to afflict the comfortable. Know who you are and look for God's message to you!

Pastor Kurt Bomar, Walnut Grove Church; [walnutgrovechurchnc.org](http://walnutgrovechurchnc.org); Come join us Sundays at 11:00

Kurt Bomar is pastor of Walnut Grove Church.

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# Mt. Carmel Baptist Church

## The Bank Of Time

By Toby Crowder  
Mitchell County

*“Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.”* – James 4:14-15

A new car... a dream vacation... a swimming pool? Or how about something more sensible, like paying off the mortgage or those pesky student loans? Let’s be honest, how many of us have had visions about what we may do with an unexpected financial wind-fall? According to Nexstar Media, Massachusetts residents had the highest per capita spending on lottery tickets and scratch-offs in 2020 with average individual spending of \$805.30. Now, before you stop reading... this is not an article about gambling or finances, but hopefully, the example above has prepared our minds to consider something much more important than money. At best, your odds of winning the lottery are about 1 in 14 million, yet we receive something greater than this every day and, sadly, often take it very much for granted. How would you react if your bank deposited \$1,440 each day into your account and the only stipulation was that you couldn’t transfer the balance from day to day? No saving... no investing... no donating to others, and at the end of each day, we lose what is not spent. Are you ready to sign up?

If so, then let me introduce you to the bank of time. Time is the raw material of everything in life. Without it, we can do nothing, and yet with it, we can do everything. Each new day gives us 1,440 minutes to “spend” as we see fit. Everyone receives the same amount of time and, regardless of what we have been taught, no one can take those minutes from us. In using this currency, we eat, sleep, laugh, cry, and make our living and our life. Regardless of how we divide and spend those minutes, we shall never have any more or any less. Thankfully, Scripture is rich with wisdom about how to be successful stewards of our gift of time.

James is writing to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad and in verse 14, he asks a question that should be asked universally. People from the beginning of time have pondered the question, “What is life?” and yet, it is already answered for us Scripturally. James, in a broad sense, defines our life for us. He calls it a vapor... or a mist; something that is here for a little time and then gone. Even as I write these words, there is fog outside, but it will likely be gone in a few short hours. As we consider our life, and the brevity of time that we are given we should be conscious of how we spend each given moment.

James is writing to those who are in danger of living a life without including God and that audience still exists today! Many live their entire lives and let it pass without ever including God in their time, money, or their talents. How is the body of Christ supposed to thrive without these things? James reminds us to acknowledge God's will – “If the Lord will.” How many times are we guilty of forgetting that God is the grantor of our time, and we are only stewards? We make plans, and goals...and often leave God out of these. James teaches us how to accomplish God's will for our lives by recognizing both the gift and the brevity of time, and living our lives according to His will, and not our own.

In these last days, we should be even more attentive to the things of God and His place in our lives. A wise man once said, “We worship our work, work at our play, and play at our worship” and this appears to hold true in this New Year. What is your life like? You may feel that only you can answer that..., but it has already been answered by God. It is a vapor; the duration is short. We must do God's will... and the danger is that we will live our lives without including Him. May God help us be faithful stewards of this wonderful gift of time!

*Toby Crowder serves as Pastor of Mt. Carmel Baptist Church in Spruce Pine. He and his wife Leslie have been married for 28 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)*



# Bear Creek Baptist Church

By Bruce Cannon  
Mitchell County

*“Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”* (Luke 12:32)

February is known as the month for love, though every day should be a day for love. And, we should take every opportunity to express love both to God and to man. The Apostle John wrote that we love because He (the Lord) first loved us. (I John 4:19) He, the Lord, placed within the heart of man the desire to love and be loved.

There are so many Scriptures that speak about love. Luke 12:32 states that the Father takes great delight in giving gifts to His children. James wrote, *“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”* (1:17) Every gift the Lord gives is a “good” gift. Why does God give so many gifts? He loves us!

Love is a fruit of the Spirit. It is a by-product of an intimate walk with the Lord! It is no coincidence that the Apostle Paul listed love as the first of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22,23. By doing so he was saying that if love is not being borne fully and powerfully by the believer, none of the other fruits will be either. We will not bear peace, joy, patience, or any of the other fruits if love is not first and foremost in our lives. And, our love must be directed toward the Lord first; not our children, spouses, or anyone else. The Lord taught us that in so many Scriptures. Let me share a few. In Matthew 22:37 He taught, *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.”* In Deuteronomy 10:12 Moses taught, *“...what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul.”* Having the Lord first place in our lives and loving Him as best as we can anchors our walk in Him and enables us to bear the fruits listed above!

The Lord gives us so many tangible gifts, but it’s the many intangible ones that really bless us and enable us to bless others. He gives peace which passeth all understanding (Phil. 4:7). He gives joy unspeakable (1 Peter 1:8). He, as stated above, gives the ability to love and be loved. He gives abundant grace.

These are the gifts that we must share with others. They are also gifts that when given come back to us in an abundant manner. When we give love, it comes back to us and further increases our love and ability to love. When we demonstrate peace we can help others experience peace. When we show forth joy we can help others have joy which further increases our own.

Take the month of February and give these wonderful gifts to others. Give them what God has so freely given us. And as you are doing so, make sure you do not forget the ones closest to you. Make sure you give abundant love, peace, and joy to them as well. They will greatly love you back for doing so you’re your life will be so rich and rewarding!

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



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Imperfect People Following A Perfect God

By Christopher L. Scott  
Moses Lake, Washington



Life is messy. And as believers, it’s a relief to say those words, and admit that is how the world is. (As a pastor I can admit that church work is messy too!)

More people would visit our church services on Sundays or try out our Bible studies during the week if we admitted that life is messy. If they knew that they could come as they are and not have to be perfect, they would more likely visit us. If they knew they didn’t have to present the perfect image or let everyone know they have it all together, then they would be more likely to become part of our faith communities.

The apostle Paul had arrived in the city of Corinth after a discouraging experience in Athens (Acts 17:15-33). He was also probably anxious about the believers he had just left in the city of Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-14). When he arrived in the city of Corinth he saw sin, wickedness, prostitution, and drunkenness. Paul’s arrival in Corinth only added to his anxiety that started in Athens and Thessalonica.

Paul wrote about this messy life to the believers in Corinth, *“And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power; so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.”* 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 (NASB)

In these five verses I believe Paul gives us three principles we can follow that will help people (both inside and outside the church) understand that we don’t have everything figured out.

First, share our story. Tell others about what we’ve been through; about the good and bad decisions we’ve made, as well as what we have learned through the process.

Second, know Scripture. Through our story, we see how God has worked in our lives and provided for us. Including Scripture shows others how God was working through us and our circumstances.

Third, let God do His work. There is only so much that we can do and control in our lives. At some point can release control of our circumstances and our desired outcomes. Instead of trying to create what we want, we can let God work in our lives.

For us to minister to others we don’t need to brag about “how clean our lives have become because of Christ.” We can instead show others how “God still accepts us when we are messed up” because life is messy.

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



Onesimus

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.

During the American Revolutionary War, George Washington fought two enemies: The British and smallpox. British troops were reasonably healthy due to herd immunity and voluntary inoculation. Herd immunity included the Redcoats sailing in close quarters from Europe. Nonetheless, when the British resigned from Boston in 1776, it was partially due to the smallpox epidemic.

America was suffering from smallpox, a gruesome and life-threatening contagious disease. It caused excruciating misery manifesting as bumps, crusty blisters, high temperature, blindness, and likely death.

The dawn of relief came from Onesimus, an enslaved African, and Reverend Cotton Mather, a Puritan minister. Onesimus explained to Rev. Mather that while still in Africa, he underwent variolation. Variolation is a simple procedure of transferring diseased matter, via a thread, from a smallpox-infected individual to a small incision on a healthy person’s body.

Rev. Mather asked questions about variolation and learned it was also practiced in Turkey, China, and elsewhere. A physician, Zabdiel Boylston, was intrigued with Onesimus’ and Mather’s information and conducted his own medical treatment inquiry. Dr. Boylston learned that people who were not variolated were almost six times more likely to die from smallpox. Thus, Dr. Boylston inoculated two servants and his six-year-old son, which produced positive results. During the following year, Dr. Boylston inoculated 242 people, and only six died from smallpox.

These results led George Washington to order all recruits to be inoculated immediately upon enlisting into the Continental Army, along with being issued their uniforms and equipment. This mandatory procedure continues in the military and elsewhere.

Undoubtedly, the prosocial and pioneering actions of Mathers, Washington, and mainly Onesimus, helped save a generation and beyond, eventually eradicating smallpox. Onesimus’ achievement was historically ignored for decades. Yet, in 2016, he was celebrated as one of the most outstanding ‘Bostonians of All Time’ by Boston Magazine.

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



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## Grand View Baptist

### The Impact Of God's Love

### Jesus Modeled Perfect Love On The Cross

By Glenda Ward

McDowell County



No other can match the supremacy of Christ's holiness. Jesus is uniquely distinct from all creation. He is set apart! He is not one of us. Our world today has a lot to say about love. It is preached to us to love more. But let me interject here; heaven forbid we are not to love in the wrong aspects of LOVE! Since Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden tree, we were all born separated from God our Creator because of sin. But God didn't abandon us. Look at John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that who so ever believed on Him shall not perish but have everlasting life." Jesus modeled for us what real love is. He is the only One who has ever perfectly displayed what real love looks like. To understand the LOVE of God and who we are – compared to Him; Reference Romans 3:23-26. We are justified freely. Declared not guilty. When God forgives our sins, all charges are removed from His record. Our record is wiped clean as though our sins never happened. Christ is our sacrifice of atonement. God declares Christ's death as an appropriate, designated sacrifice for our sins. He stands in our place, paid the penalty of death, and completely satisfies God's demands for forgiving our sins. His sacrifice on the cross brings to those who accept Him; pardon, deliverance and freedom. Paul shows that God forgave all human sin at the cross of Jesus.

God didn't abandon the world by turning away from our perfectly made creation. God loved the world in this way: He gave His only Son so that everyone who believes in Him and follows His teachings will not perish but have eternal life. God loved us so much that He made a way for us to be with Him in His eternal glory. This is done through the death of His own Son on the cross. To fully understand the impact of God's love and what Jesus Christ did for us on the cross let's look at Isaiah chapter six verse one where we see a glimpse of God's absolute holiness. Isaiah's lofty view of our Lord gives us a sense of God's greatness, mystery, and power. Isaiah sees our Lord sitting upon a throne and the whole earth is filled with God's glory.

Scripture in the Bible specifically records Isaiah's calling. People in that day and time needed hope, they needed assurance that God was with them and had not abandoned them. It is during this time of national insecurity that the Lord asks, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us" and Isaiah responds, "Here am I, send me" (Isaiah 6:8).

In contrast, to king Uzziah's pride in the presence of God almighty, Isaiah humbles himself before the throne, and the seraphim (angels) attend in repentance and acknowledge his sinfulness. Isaiah's sins are then purged taking away his iniquity. (Read this full account in Isaiah 6:1-11). This is a clear picture of the atoning sacrifice of our Savior Jesus Christ. We are purged and made clean with the precious blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross at Calvary.

The throne and the One seated upon it were magnificent and the robe He wore was special because of its train. Kings wore scarlet robes with a train attached because it symbolized strength and security. When the king of one country conquered the king of another country, the conquering king would have some part of that king's robe sewn onto his own robe. Picture Isaiah's vision of our Lord's massive train in Isaiah 1:1.

At a time when believers had given up on God, God makes a promise that His Son is coming to earth in the flesh – Jesus Christ. What Isaiah anticipated to come in God's timing: we look back on – the Birth of Jesus Christ the Baby in the manger. Isaiah prophesied the Messiah would provide a way to have our sins forgiven and that has now been fulfilled. Reference Isaiah chapter 9.

Does God ask who will go for me and make a way for sinful men to be saved? And Jesus the Son of God 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 pain and suffering of the flesh in agonizing torment, and I will forsake you in your darkest hour. You will pay a sin debt and satisfy my wrath against all sin. Jesus removes His royal robe in exchange for grave clothes. God spoke His Word and sent Jesus into the world. God's Word always brings about life; just as in Genesis chapter 1.

Jesus modeled perfect love when He went to the cross for us. We can get the work of Christ applied to our own lives. We are saved by grace through faith, not from our works. It is God's gift. We are saved through faith in Christ Jesus alone. We need only to ask His forgiveness. As we move into the New Year, we can feel secure even though our world appears in turmoil. We must focus on the fact that our powerful God is in control of all. Jesus our Savior is the One True King who can free us from our sins. When we commit our lives to Christ Jesus, we can experience His forgiveness and have security that even if our circumstances don't turn out the way WE want them, they will turn out the way God has planned for our good and His glory!

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.

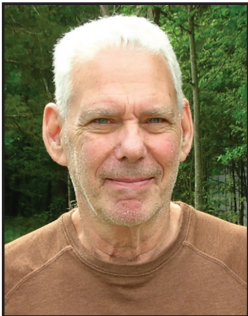
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Bible Briefs

Old Man or Peculiar Person?

By Robert Garner  
Rutherford County



How marvelous and merciful is our LORD that turns the Old Man into a Peculiar Person. The symbolic state of being an “Old Man” can be a reference to young men and women too, who can spiritually be an “Old Man”. Many Christians regret not putting on the “new man” at a younger age. (KJV) Ephesians 4:22-24, *“That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness”*.

In private conversations with trusted Christian brothers and sisters, numerous Christians will confess at one time in their lives, they were a slave to sin. The agreement comes forth by all that being a slave to sin, best defines the nature of the old man. See BRCN “The Pit”.

In many countries, the elderly are highly respected individuals within the community. Elders are sought out for their years of experience in various subjects. Unfortunately, however, as we age it can become more difficult to make necessary corrections; “bad habits die hard”. Proverbs 19:20, *“Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end”*. Job 32:9, *“Great men are not always wise: neither do the aged understand judgment”*. Proverbs 15:10, *“Correction is grievous unto him that forsaketh the way: he that hateth reproof shall die”*.

God Almighty takes over with His conversion of the Old Man which requires instruction for all of us who were once old men. God proclaims, Titus 2:2-7, *“aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. Aged women likewise, be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given too much wine, teachers of good things. That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children. To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded. In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, [honor purity] gravity, sincerity.”*

Romans 6:6, *“Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin”*.

A very interesting mystery can take place in our former old man disorder. Things that can be known of God are written on the heart of every old man.

A friend of mine is a major university professor of mathematics. His god is the science of numbers, enough said! He hikes the high peaks of the Rocky Mountains. With a beautiful blue-sky horizon, a windless and cloudless day on one summer’s climb, he reached the summit of a 7000-footer. Pondering his success of the ascent on top of the mountain, within minutes he broke down and cried like a baby; to this day he can’t explain the reason he wept so freely.

Romans 1:20, *“For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse”*.

What’s this “Peculiar Person” all about after God removes our old man? Sounds like some strange odd kind of change. Well, if you’re a peculiar person, *“then you shall be a (possession-property), a peculiar treasure”* to the LORD, above all other people and nations on earth; chosen by the LORD as sinners that shall be (converted, turned back) to Him, see Psa. 51:13.

*“The LORD hath avouched (Strong’s # H559 spoken) to you this day, to say you are his peculiar people, as He has promised you, that you should keep all his commandments”*. Titus 2:14, *“Who gave himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works”*.

Finally, my brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus, rejoice in your putting off of the Old Man, as now you’ve become a Peculiar Person. 1 Peter 2:9, *“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”*

*“Both young man, and maidens; old men, and children”*. Psalm 148:12,13, *“Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven.”*

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

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





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Sudoku Solution

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

Crossword Solution

H	O	L	D	S		S	C	A	B		S	A	L	E
A	V	E	R	T		A	L	S	O		P	L	A	Y
R	E	F	E	R		L	O	S	T		A	I	D	E
E	N	T	W	I	N	E	S		T	W	I	N	E	D
M				N	A	M	E		L	I	N	E	N	
	C	A	R	G	O		S	P	E	D				S
M	A	R	A		M	E	T	E		T	R	I	B	E
A	R	A	M	A	I	C		A	S	H	A	D	O	W
T	E	M	P	T		H	E	L	P		I	L	L	S
E				A	S	O	N		O	I	L	E	D	
	S	P	E	L	T		Q	U	I	T	No.276			E
S	E	L	L	E	R		U	N	L	O	A	D	E	D
A	L	A	D		A	S	I	D	E		B	R	A	G
M	E	N	E		P	U	R	E	R		B	A	S	E
E	D	E	R		S	E	E	R	S		A	G	E	S

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Anne Ministries

By Chastity Osburn  
Avery County

Deuteronomy 30:19 “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:”



God’s plan is for life, friend. How precious and beautiful is life and the life of an unborn child? We are fearfully and wonderfully made by our God. January is Sanctity of Human Life Month and many churches will observe January 22, 2023, as Sanctity of Human Life Sunday. This day is an opportunity for churches and pastors to focus on the value of all human life and that life is a sacred precious gift from God. Every unborn child is precious to God and created for a purpose, Psalm 139 tells us this so beautifully from the Bible. I love Psalm 139:16 where David writes that our days ordained for us are written before any of them came to be. God had a purpose and plan for our lives before we were ever born. God thought of you and me before we were ever conceived. How exciting is that!! This year will be the 39th year our nation has observed the sanctity of human life. This year we are celebrating the overturning of Roe v. Wade. Over 63 million lives have been lost to abortion since 1973. It is the leading cause of death. Our society refuses to recognize it. After 50 years since abortion was made legal in the United States, many lives have been saved since the overturn in June of 2022, however, we still need to pray for the ending of abortion. Pray that hearts and lives are changed to choose life. North Carolina continues to make abortion legal and many from surrounding states travel to our state to obtain an abortion. Chemical abortion is on the rise and continues even in states where abortion is illegal. We need to pray that our nation will see the sacredness and value of all human life. God creates all life. He is the only giver and taker of life. There are many ways for individuals and churches to get involved. Celebrating Sanctity of Human Life Sunday is one way to protect unborn lives. A day to bring awareness by sharing the truth about abortion and its devastating effects. Many lives and families have been affected by abortion. Statistics are 1 in 4 women by the age of 45 will have had at least one abortion. Many women and men are hurting from a past abortion. Sanctity of Human Life Sunday is a perfect opportunity also to extend grace and forgiveness to those that are suffering from the guilt and shame of a past abortion. God forgives those that have had an abortion. Post Abortive women and men are in our churches and need to hear the message of God’s grace. The enemy uses abortion to keep many bound and Christ came to free the sinner as it is written in the verses of Isaiah 61:1-3. What can you do? Pray for the ending of abortion in our state, and nation. Pray for mothers to choose life for their babies and know that there is hope. Pray that they will be guided to the help and support that is available to them. Support your local pregnancy centers and ministries. Pro-life ministries are at the frontlines and they need prayers, financial support, donations, and volunteers to help them continue the work that God has called them to do. It is my prayer that we will walk into the new year with a thankful heart for life and take every opportunity to stand, support, and defend all life.

Blessings in the New Year.

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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# Obedient Heart Fellowship

## Law Keepers or . . . ?

By Jim Huskins  
McDowell County

Is God’s Law an impossible burden? Is it too difficult to follow? The Church has taught this idea for so long that no one recalls a counter perspective. The “impossible law doctrine” is based on popular misinterpretations of some of Paul’s teachings and a few passages in Acts. One supposed proof text is Peter’s comments to the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:10: *“Why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?”*

The group whose demands provoked this Council insisted that keeping the law is necessary for salvation. The leaders of the Mother Church in Jerusalem affirmed that salvation is a gift of God by grace through faith. Speaking on behalf of the Council, Peter makes it clear that keeping the law is not required for salvation. It is absurd, however, to conclude that Peter refers to Torah as an impossible burden.

To do so would be to claim that God delivered His Chosen People from slavery in Egypt and immediately placed them under a different sort of bondage. Psalm 19:7 says that Torah is perfect and restorative. The same chapter also describes Torah as: sure, right, pure, and clean. Romans 7:12 says, *“The law (Torah) is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.”* The longest chapter in the Bible, Psalm 119, is an extended hymn of praise for the benefits of the Torah. Nowhere does the Bible claim that Torah is a burden. The Church takes the position that Jesus died so that believers could be “delivered” from what they view as an insurmountable barrier between God and man.

What Peter condemned before the Jerusalem Council was the man-made regulations Jewish leaders had long imposed on people wanting to lead Godly lives. Jesus addressed these made-up rules in Mark 7:8, *“You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.”* The Judaizers of Acts 15 wanted more than for followers of Jesus to be law keepers. They also wanted believers to comply with the vast body of Jewish tradition contained in the Mishnah and the Talmud. Peter and the other leaders of the Jerusalem Church opposed this foolishness.

The rest of the findings of the Jerusalem Council were articulated by James the brother of Jesus. He gives the famous four requirements in Acts 15:20. New Believers should abstain from all forms of idol worship. They should avoid sexual immorality. They should not consume meat from any animal that had been strangled. They should not consume blood.

Christians are taught that these are the only aspects of the law that God expects His followers to keep. If that is the case, then murder, slander, bribery, human trafficking, theft, and a host of other actions that the Bible defines as “sin” are acceptable. This is ridiculous. In a culture steeped in pagan worship—which included ritual sacrifice and temple prostitution—these four items were a starting point for new believers. All four requirements are from The Law.

v The only way to conclude that Acts 15 is a rejection of The Law is to stop reading at verse 20. Verse 21 says, *“For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues.”* After giving new converts the starting point for their conversion from paganism to following God, James tells those new believers that they need to be in Synagogue every Sabbath so they can learn the rest of the Law of Moses. That is the way to lead lives that please God. Both Peter and James teach in their Epistles that followers of Jesus should be law keepers.

So does Paul. Everyone who teaches that Christians are exempt from keeping God’s Law loves to quote the Book of Galatians. The problem is that they cite only parts of the book. In Galatians 5:19-21, Paul presents a list of actions that he calls *“works of the flesh.”* Each of these behaviors is a violation of the Torah. Paul states that people who do these things, *“will not inherit the kingdom of God.”* Paul can’t abolish The Law early in Galatians and insist later that violations of The Law will keep believers out of the Kingdom. Paul taught believers to be law keepers. Acts 21:24, Acts 25:8, and Acts 28:17 all insist that Paul was a law keeper all of his life.

b bb The most significant encouragement for keeping God’s Law is the teaching and example of Jesus. He calls us from sin to righteousness. 1 John 3:4 says that sin is breaking the law. Righteousness is presented in Scripture as a core attribute of the Holy God. He can do no wrong. He gave us His Law to show us how we can reflect His life. Deuteronomy 6:25 presents this summary, *“And it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to do all this commandment before the LORD our God, as he has commanded us.”* Jesus said that blessings accrue to those who *“hunger and thirst after righteousness.”*

b b Every believer is convinced that Jesus is not talking about them in Matthew 7:21-23. He prophesies that many will approach Him on Judgment Day insisting that they are due eternal life because they lived “religious lives.” They prophesied and cast out demons and did mighty works in His name. He responds that they should instead have done the will of His Father. That will is that we live according to God’s instructions—The Law. His final word is, “Depart from me you law breakers.”

The choice is ours. Salvation is by grace through faith. Living for Christ, however, comes with responsibility. We either cultivate a hunger and thirst for righteousness, or we willfully violate God’s Law. All of us are either law keepers, or we are lawbreakers.

Jim Huskins is pastor of Obedient Heart Fellowship.



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February 2023 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 15



# First Baptist of Marshall

## Humor

By Buddy Freeman  
Madison County

I told Gayla I wanted an antique for my birthday. So she got my birth certificate framed and gave it to me.

Teacher: Did your father help you with your homework?  
Kid: No, he did it all by himself!

A pastor sent invitations to dozens of couples in the church inviting them to attend a Friday night marriage class. One husband wrote saying “My wife and I are looking forward to the weekly sessions. Sounds like a great way to reflect on God’s intentions for such a scared unity.” He meant “sacred unity,” of course.

Eve: Adam, do you love me? Adam: Who else?

The back-country missionary had walked many miles alone. Finally, he put up for the night in an isolated farm home. The family was honored to have him, but shortly before dawn the daughter of the house came into his room, shook him awake, and said, “Please to git up, sir. Ma she wants the sheet for a tablecloth.”

A preacher said to a farmer, “Do you belong to the Christian family?” “No,” he said, “I think they live two farms down.” “No, I mean are your lost?” “No, I’ve been here thirty years.” “I mean, are you ready for Judgment Day?” “When is it?” “Could be today or tomorrow.” “Well, when you find out for sure when it is, you let me know. My wife will probably want to go both days!”

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

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

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# NC Baptist Aging

## North Carolina Baptist Aging Ministry Receives Fire Prevention and Safety Grant

By Carol Layton

North Carolina Baptist Aging Ministry (NCBAM) has been awarded a \$78,000 Fire Prevention and Safety Grant from the Department of Homeland Security / FEMA.

NCBAM will use grant funds to enhance its Priority #1: Prevention outreach to make aging adults safer in their homes. These grant-funded alarms come with a 10-year sealed-in lithium battery, a loud 85 decibel alarm, and an end-of-life chirp. Working smoke alarms save lives!

Trained volunteers will install long life, battery-powered smoke alarms, at no charge, in the homes of individuals 65+ who do not have working alarms and replace alarms that are more than 10 years old. In addition, the ministry will have carbon-monoxide alarms to provide in homes with appliances that burn fossil fuels as well as a limited number of Lifetone alarms for deaf/hard-of-hearing individuals.

Churches or other community groups wishing to participate may contact NCBAM at 877.506.2226. Training is provided.

NCBAM has been connecting volunteers with aging adults in need since 2009. Its mission is to help aging adults maintain their independence and quality of life. NCBAM is a ministry of Baptist Children’s Home of North Carolina.

Carol Layton is the Director of Communications and Administration for NCBAM at Baptist Children's Homes of North Carolina

*John 15:13 - Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*

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# Family of God Fellowship

## Where Is the Gracious Mistress Of The Parsonage?

By Dr. James L. Snyder  
Ocala, Florida



Our family's Christmas this year was the best one yet. But, of course, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage says that every year. I completely agree with her this year.

Our great-granddaughter served as the focal point of our Christmas this year. She assumed that position because she was born two weeks before Christmas. What a gift.

This is our second great-grandchild. The first one is in Ohio, and we don't get to see him very often. But this new great-granddaughter is only seven minutes from our house. I was to realize what a difference that would be.

My granddaughter's mother and grandmother are now there to support this precious little great-granddaughter.

The time our granddaughter's mother can spend with her granddaughter is limited because of her work schedule.

The great-grandmother, the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage, is free to visit the great-granddaughter whenever she pleases. Her "free" does have a cost, and I would soon find out that cost.

Every time we visit, I have to pull the great-grandmother away. I'm not entirely sure how this great-granddaughter will affect her when she's a few months old and then a few years old because she's only a few weeks old now. So I need to get ready for that.

The previous week was an interesting one.

The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage came to my office on Monday morning as I was working and said, "I'm going to visit my great-granddaughter, and I prepared lunch in the refrigerator for you in case I don't get back in time."

She sped off and drove to the great-granddaughter's house without waiting for any response from me.

It was a relatively quiet morning. I stopped to check the time and realized it was time to eat. When I entered the kitchen, it was completely dark and quiet. I then recalled her mentioning going to the great-granddaughter's house.

My lunch was in the refrigerator, just as she had predicted. So I took the lunch plate out of the fridge and sat in my chair to eat my meal. I then returned to the kitchen with my empty plate and entered my office to continue working on my day's project.

Because I had not heard any sounds coming from the other rooms of the house. I decided to check on the infamous great-grandmother. She wasn't anywhere in sight. I hoped she didn't have an accident because I didn't know where she could be. That started to worry me. She's never been known to leave the house for an extended period without sending me a text or making a phone call. Did she have a problem of some sort?

I was ready to text her on my cell phone when I heard her pull into the driveway. Then, as she entered the door, she said, "I forgot what time it was. I was having so much fun...." Then she began story after story of time with her great-granddaughter that day.

When I woke up the following morning, her side of the bed was vacant. I assumed she awoke early to prepare breakfast. There was no one in the kitchen when I went there.

Looking around, I noticed a note on the refrigerator, "My great-granddaughter needed me this morning, so I dropped everything to go and help her. Make your own breakfast." Making a meal was simple because I'm not much of a breakfast hound dog. So coffee was the main component of my breakfast, and there was plenty of it.

When I stopped midway through the morning while working in my office, I heard no noise coming from the other parts of the house. Unless there was an emergency involving the great-granddaughter, I assumed my wife should have returned home by this point.

I started to worry about the welfare of that tiny infant. Why would The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage be so preoccupied with her if nothing was wrong? When lunchtime arrived, I made my lunch. There's nothing better than a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for lunch and a hot cup of coffee. So I returned to my desk after lunch to pick up on my work.

I paused and listened for a while after lunch, but there was only silence. I was starting to worry a little bit. Was the great-granddaughter ill, or did the great-grandmother get into some accident returning home?

Where is The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage?

Then I heard her drive into the driveway, exit the car, and enter the house. Then, I asked, "Is the great-granddaughter having any problems?" "Oh, the great-granddaughter is doing great," she said, beaming one of those smiles in my direction. "I spent the entire day with her and had a great time." She then began a series of stories about herself and her great-granddaughter, giggling while she told me various details about that young baby.

After a few weeks, whenever I ask myself, "Where is The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage?" I only have to think about that great-granddaughter. That's where she is.

I believe Solomon in the Old Testament had it right when he said, "Children's children are the crown of old men, and the glory of children are their fathers." (Proverbs 17:6).

Children are truly a blessing from God. But grandchildren and great-grandchildren are beyond a blessing. It is God's reward He gives to those faithful parents. Dr. James L. Snyder is pastor of the Family of God Fellowship, Ocala, FL 34483, where he lives with the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage. Telephone 1-352-

216-3025, e-mail [jamessnyder51@gmail.com](mailto:jamessnyder51@gmail.com). The website is [www.jamessnyderministries.com](http://www.jamessnyderministries.com).

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Daughter Organized Fundraiser for  
Mom To Get a Wheelchair Accessible Van  
By Misty Roberts  
Burke County

Misty Roberts has organized a fundraiser to raise money for a wheelchair-accessible van for her mom, Lynn Roberts of Morganton at <https://www.gofundme.com/f/wheelchair-accessible-van-for-lynn-roberts>.

Lynn has lived in Morganton since 1985. She is the daughter of the late Landon and Martha Burris of Waynesville. She graduated from Tuscola High School in Waynesville in 1969.

Lynn contracted polio as a kid and had numerous surgeries as a kid. Unfortunately, as she got older, her legs got worse and now she is in a wheelchair full-time.

The past year has been very difficult for Lynn because her husband, Gary was diagnosed with esophageal cancer in February 2022. Gary has been her rock and a great helper for many years, but now he is in the fight of his life against cancer.

Lynn rarely goes anywhere now because it is so difficult to get in a car. She has missed out on many things. She almost did not make it to an important family reunion in August. Misty shared this, “We really need a wheelchair-accessible van with a power ramp. It would make things so much easier. Even used wheelchair vans are expensive. I would love to bless her with a reliable van with less than 100,000 miles.”

Misty also shared this, “My mom is one of the most generous and selfless people you will find. She thinks other people's needs are more important than hers. I would love to meet this important need in her life.”

You can help by raising money for a wheelchair-accessible van for Lynn through <https://www.gofundme.com/f/wheelchair-accessible-van-for-lynn-roberts>. If you prefer to write a check, you can write a check payable to Misty Roberts and put in the “for” line at the bottom of the check: Van for Lynn , and mail it to P.O. Box 652, Hazelwood, NC 28738.



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Encounter of Love

By Tim Tron  
*Burke County*



The rain was falling in ice-cold sheets. February weather can be the harshest in the mountains; rain is so cold it should be snow. The wipers on Derrick’s car could barely keep up. The occasional shower of sleet only made his view worse. The memory of the fight he and his wife Heather had earlier that morning kept running through his mind. Her refusal to match his anger only enraged him more. Church just wasn’t working for him lately; it wasn’t sinking in. The harder he tried to understand the sermons, the greater became his disconnect. Earlier that morning, Heather simply asked if he had time to read his Bible. It felt like she had stabbed him in the back. How could she question his faith?

He slammed the door when he left, the echoes still lingering in his mind. Tormented, he pushed the pedal on the accelerator, throwing himself through the curves of the tortuous backroads until they hurt. He had an interview in Louisville for a lucrative position that could take his career to the next level. He only needed to get there in time for the meeting tomorrow morning. Unable to leave home until later in the day, he figured he would take a shortcut through the mountains. That would give him plenty of time to check in at the hotel and still have time to visit the bar before bedtime. After all, he deserved it!

Darkness descends upon the mountain valleys much faster. In the winter months, one cannot tell 7:00 pm from midnight. So it was, as Derrick’s car wound through those hidden roads deep within the recesses of the Blue ridge, his GPS soon lost connectivity. Then, without warning, the dashboard lit up - low air pressure, front passenger tire. Shortly after that, the unmistakable sound of a flat tire began thumping. Barely enough room to pull over, he found himself sitting on the side of a narrow mountain road. Aside from his headlights shining into a sheet of water falling from the sky, there was nothing but pitch-black darkness. Slamming his fist against the dash, he cursed loudly, “God d\*##%it, son-of-a-b\*##&h.” With only a sweatshirt hoodie for protection, he angrily threw open the car door and stepped out into the deluge. “Why God,” he screamed, looking up to the pitch-black sky as water poured onto his face, running down his bearded chin, its icy fingers finding their way into the warm spots along his spine. The news wasn’t any better when he opened the trunk. The donut spare was nearly flat. After several minutes of knuckle-banging, slipping in-mud delays, he had replaced the flat tire with the poor excuse for a spare. Drenched to his core, he was back in the car seat but badly needed to find someplace to stop to get air before he was totally stranded. Inching along, after rounding several hairpin turns, he saw a pale light ahead. The wipers were losing ground rapidly, so he could barely make out the sign as he pulled in front of the ancient wood-shingled building. “R.C. Sharpe’s Store,” the weathered sign read. Next to the front porch, he could barely make out a hose hanging from a hook with the words hand-painted on a sign above it, “air.” Jumping out of the car and running to the hose, he tested the valve, but nothing. “Damn it.” A dim light shone through the porch’s dusty windows – a faint flicker of hope. Leaping up on the porch, he was finally out of the drenching ice bath. Shaking himself off, he started to open the door but froze. He swore he could hear the faint sound of an ancient stringed instrument playing. From his Appalachian Studies class, he had learned about the autoharp but had never heard one played in person. Slowly, grinning to himself, “Here goes nothing,” he grabbed the cast iron door handle and pushed. The door opened with a creak, and he cautiously stepped inside. Lightning flashed, and for an instant, everything went gray. He blinked, the thunder roared, shaking the earth, and then the color returned to the scene before him. The music immediately stopped. From the back of the store, he could hear a radio click on, and some unknown country song began to play.

Derrick had never been in an actual working country store outside of those tourist stores up in Boone. Immediately he noticed the smell of cheese, tobacco, and wood smoke, the latter coming from the pot belly stove sitting in the middle of the store. The rusty old pipe extended upward through the ceiling, lined with beadboard wood. On each side of the store were shelves against each wall, with long wooden counters in front of them, all filled with home goods and an abundance of supplies one might need to run a mountain farm. Antique wires hung down from the ceiling, holding light bulbs that appeared as old as the building itself. The sound of an AM radio station was playing an old song he had never heard, but the melody pleased his mind, “Lord, I hope this day is good. I’m feelin’ empty and misunderstood. I should be thankful, Lord, I know I should. But Lord, I hope this day....”

“Come on in, I’ll be right wit ya,” came a strained voice from the back corner. Derrick looked to see its source. In the far-right corner sat a thin elderly, white-haired gentleman. He was bent over yellowed papers on a desk, lit by a lamp that barely illuminated his writing surface. About him, on the wall hung a calendar, the kind that provided the signs for planting and some feed store ad at the top. Next to it hung a tweed jacket and a matching fedora, neatly placed. He appeared to be doing the books late into the evening.

Derrick moved closer to the warmth of the stove. The heat felt good, radiating into his bones. In the background, the radio continued, “Lord, have you forgotten me. I’ve been prayin’ to you faithfully. I’m not sayin’ I’m a righteous man. But Lord, I hope you understand.”

“Go ahead, take that there jacket off, and hang it on the chair by the stove. You’ll get warm quicker that way.”

Derrick looked back toward the old man, but he hadn’t seen him look up yet

from his papers, which he thought was odd since he somehow knew he was soaked. He did as the man had said and laid his hoodie over the back of a straight-back chair sitting nearby. He heard the creak of an old office chair as the old man got up and began shuffling towards him while the singer kept singing, “I don’t need fortune, and I don’t

need fame. Send down the thunder, Lord, send down the rain. But when you’re plannin’ just how it will be. Plan a good day for me.” Derrick realized the song was somehow intentional – was it about him? Chill bumps ran up his muscular arms. His thought was interrupted when the old man called, “Howdy, I’d ask how ya’s doing, but I’ve seen bullfrogs drier’n you,” he said, half chuckling to himself. He wore an old ball cap slightly cocked off to one side and wire-rim glasses. One of his clean-shaven cheeks had a slight bulge indicating a chew of tobacco at rest. “Yea, my car got a flat, and the spare is about flat too. I saw your lights and thought I’d see if you had any air. I tried the hose outside, but it didn’t sound like it was working.”

“Oh yeah, I’ll have to turn the compressor on for ya. It might take a spell, but it’ll do the trick,” he said, grinning broadly. “What’s your name?”

“Derrick, what’s yours?”

“They call me Reno,” he said with another broad smile.

“Reno, like the place out in Nevada?”

“Yeah, something like that,” his head shaking in agreement.

Something warm, something inviting about the old guy, made Derrick feel at ease. He felt it the moment he stepped inside, but at first, it was like that chill; it took time to warm him through. Meanwhile, the song finished in the background softly ending with, “Lord, I hope this day is good. I’m feelin’ empty and misunderstood. I should be thankful, Lord, I know I should. But Lord, I hope this day is good.”

“You travelin’ a long ways are ye,” he said, squinting as he looked at Derrick, starting to chew a little more on his cud.

“Yeah, I’ve got an interview tomorrow,” Derrick told him about himself and how he had been climbing the corporate ladder since graduating college. He shared how he made a lot more money each time he left one company and went to another. He was happy to boast about his accomplishments. With each revelation, Reno’s eyebrows would raise, showing his impression. “Hey, making money’s what it’s all about, ain’t it?”

The radio was now playing an old Tom T. Hall song as the lyrics drifted into their conversation, “Ain’t but three things in this world that’s worth a solitary dime, But old dogs and children, and watermelon wine.”

Reno didn’t laugh with him but drew up his mouth in a pucker as if he wanted to say something but didn’t. “Well, you know what I mean,” he quickly tried to correct course, “you want to do right by your family so you can provide for them and all.”

Reno nodded but wasn’t smiling broadly, only a slight grimace now shown on his face.

“Derrick, you look like you could use a slice of cheese and a drink. Why don’t you sit in that other chair next to the stove, I’ll get that compressor going, and we chew the fat until you dry out a spell. Sound good to you?”

“Ah, ah, I guess, ...but my tire?”

“Oh, we’ll get to that. Don’t you fret.”

The song continued as Reno stepped away, “Old dogs care about you even when you make mistakes. God bless little children while they’re still too young to hate. When he moved away, I found my pen and copied down that line ‘Bout old dogs and children, and watermelon wine.”

The old man came back shortly, took a large circular wooden crate out of the cooler, and sat it on the well-worn counter. He removed the lid, pulled out a block of cheese, and placed it on a cutting wheel. He sliced off a couple of chunks, laying each slice on a piece of wax paper, and then handed one to Derrick. “Go over to the cooler yonder and grab yourself a cold drink,” he said as he pointed to the ancient Pepsi cooler on the opposite side of the store. Before long, they were both seated, munching on cheese and drinking ice-cold sodas.

“You ever have a dog long enough for it to grow old,” Reno said, leaning back in his chair and taking another bite of cheese.

“No, not really.”

“It’s a painful thing to have to say goodbye to a good dog,” the old man’s eyes turned downward as he spoke as if he were looking somewhere into the past. “They become like family after a while.” The song’s last lines echoed again into their words, “That night I dreamed in peaceful sleep of shady summertime. Of old dogs and children and watermelon wine.”

Derrick sat feeling the warmth of the stove working on him. It seemed to permeate beyond his core and somehow began numbing the uneasiness and stress from the previous drive. What comforted him, even more, was that Reno spoke in a soft-spoken southern drawl that alone kept your attention.

“You got a wife,” he said, pointing to Derrick’s ring.

*continued on page 34*





# Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

## Love Remembers

By Caron Cline  
Burke County



February is designated as the love month. Shortly after Christmas, retailers begin displaying stuffed animals, boxes of candy, sappy cards, and a variety of other items for Valentine's Day. Tangibly expressing our love for others is honorable and rewarding, yet pales in comparison with God's expression of love toward His creation. In the New Testament, 'agape', the Greek word translated as 'love', is used approximately 115 times. Agape is a selfless, sacrificial love based on choice rather than obligation or desire. Our Heavenly Father loves with an everlasting, gracious love, and continuously remembers our weaknesses and needs. That love compels Him beyond remembrance and onward toward deliverance. The children of Israel were in bondage in Egypt for over 400 years with no end in sight. Many generations surely prayed, cried, and begged their God for deliverance. Finally, we read this in Exodus 2:24, "So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob". The word 'remember' means 'brought to mind; the time for action'. A man named Moses had unknowingly been prepared for this moment and their prayers were answered. Love always remembers. Many years later, after entering the Promised Land and becoming the most powerful nation in the known world, idolatry ensnared the people of God. The prophet Isaiah was anointed by the Lord to warn the people of God of coming judgment for these sins. Their stubborn disobedience would result in suffering and captivity. Yet, even amid their punishment, God would never forget His people. Isaiah 49:15-16 is a beautiful reminder: "Can a woman forget her nursing child and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, but I will not forget you. Behold, I have inscribed you on the palms of My Hands". Love always remembers. In the fullness of time, because of the complete and hopeless depravity of mankind, God sent His Son to be the Savior of the world. The sacrificial love expressed by the Father in the offering of His Son for the sins of the world is unfathomable. Paul expressed it best in Romans 5:8. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us". Just before Jesus' crucifixion, He instituted the Lord's Supper, taking bread, blessing it, declaring that it was His body, and instructing His disciples to eat. Next, the Lord took the cup, gave thanks, declared the wine to be His blood of the New Covenant, and instructed the men to drink. Remembering our Lord's sacrifice is the main purpose of the Lord's Supper. Love always remembers. The Father understood that His children were not equipped to bear the excruciating burden of sin. Therefore, for all who receive Jesus as Lord and Savior, that burden is completely removed. God promises in Hebrews 8:12 "...I will remember their sins no more". Love always remembers to choose to forget. As we remember the all-consuming love of our Father, may we offer ourselves as living sacrifices in His service. Now is the acceptable time to surrender completely to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit. Our spiritual act of worship is in the offering of our body as a temple for the Spirit, Who is now allowed to live the life of Christ through us. Now is the time to express this selfless, sacrificial love to others through acts of kindness, generosity, and forgiveness. Remember, love always remembers, and love always worships.

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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# Berry Chapel Baptist Church

## What's Love Got to Do with It

By Steve Williams  
Mitchell County



What's Happened To The Church? That question is asked a lot today throughout all our Churches. We live in a day where the church seems to have little or no effect on this world we are living in. People say the Church has lost its power. Others say the church has lost its burden for the lost. Some say the church has become comfortable. Some even say the church has lost its vision. And still, others say the church has lost its commitment. Do you remember what the church used to be like? Do you remember how the church played such an important role in the lives of believers and how even non-believers respected the church's values? Now people laugh at the church and Christians could care less?

See, there's a war been waging for thousands of years, Satan has been attacking the church and heart of believers as hard as he can. Satan has convinced many believers today it is not important to Pray, Read God's Word, or even believe what the Word of God says. Satan convinced many that the church is not important. Satan has distorted man's thinking, by getting him to be more focused on himself and the desires of his heart than God and what God wants. How has he done this you may ask? Simple, Satan has been able to get Christians and the Churches they are serving, to fail to see and remember what God is seeking, and what God is expecting from each of us. I hate to say it, but if Christians today don't make a drastic change and turn back and remember what God expects from them, we are headed for disaster. (If we're not already on our way)

So, preacher, what is it Going to take to get on track? What's it going to take to get Christians and Church Jump started again? It's simple, it's elementary, and it's a 4 letter word. A lot of people say it but few fail to show it. LOVE.

- The reason the church has lost its Power is that it has lost its first love for God.
- The reason the church has lost its Burden for the lost is that it has lost its first love for God.
- The reason the church has become Comfortable is that it has lost its first love for God.
- The reason the church has lost its Vision is that it lost its first love for God.

Many people try to say what's happened to the church is people have just failed to be committed to God. Well, I'm here to tell you, I've even been one to say that before: but God has shown me, that Commitment is not it. The reason I say that is because if your Truly Love God You Will Be Committed! People don't Love God today the way they think they do. I just think they Like Him.

The the problem with Christians and the Church today is not our Commitment, but it is our Love toward an Almighty God. Remember I said a War has been waging for thousands of years. This War is a War about Love. God's Love for mankind has never changed. But man's Love for God has surely changed. All we have to do is just look around and we can see how man's love toward God has changed. People's priorities have changed. It's now if I have time to go to church, If I have time to serve God, or If I have time to do what God wants me to do. That's not Love, that is self-centeredness and we have been overtaken by it.

So what do we do to take care of the problem? How can we turn the tide in this war? We are going to have to fall in love with God once again. Let's see what the Bible tells us Matthew 22:37-40 *"Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."* See that is what Love has to do with it, EVERYTHING. True Love for God is the only thing that is going to change this world that we are living in. We as Christians have to fall in Love with God whole heartedly and not with ourselves.

### Words of Wisdom

- You can't blame gravity on falling in love or out of love. N/A
- Faith makes all things possible... love makes all things easy. Dwight L. Moody
- Love doesn't make the world go 'round. Love is what makes the ride worth-while. Franklin P. Jones
- The love we give away is the only love we keep. Elbert Hubbard
- God proved His love on the Cross. When Christ hung, bled, and died, it was God saying to the world, 'I love you.' Billy Graham

The Bible says in 1 Cor 13:4-7 *"Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not [a]puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, [b]thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."*

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

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POEM

By Regina McIntosh  
Yancey County



PRAYING WONDERS

Silent thoughts, secrets  
Held long and hard, like favorite  
Toys, squeezed tight by a small  
Child's hands, embraced  
As tenderly as the whisper  
Sent to ears by lips  
Who love as sweetly, as gently  
As the praying wonders  
Stirred by a truth  
Brilliant as the blue  
In a sunlit sky, the music  
Enthused by a heart who is  
Bruised by starlight's glistening  
Beauty, passionate and proof  
That God still holds everything  
Together, in strong hands  
Where even the seasons know  
His authority rules, controls  
Every breath, each caress, even  
The senses who cause hearts  
To feel and to care, to listen to...

Passion and wisdoms brought to life  
By dew trickling silently  
Against the bare petal of a faded  
Rose who seems like a flyer  
Announcing the rousing hopes  
Abandoned by doubt,  
Comforting spirits with reflections  
And memories brought to life  
On the thoughts of one who knows  
Every prayer is an expression of courage

Who sends the King of Kings,  
The maker of dreams  
The promise I believe in...

A prayer, both wonderful and trusting,  
Wishful and rusting from the  
Days it has spent in the dark sea's  
depths  
Where salty tears and pestiferous fears  
Try to calm the music we will  
Dance to, the melody that springs  
To life, in silhouettes of light,  
Shadows of grace and embers burning  
Away every doubt with a faith  
That remembers the heart, the soul...

They know what it means to feel peace  
Because God's love is like a flood of joy  
Erasing the darkness with feelings  
So alive they touch so deeply,  
So completely, like they'll forever be...

A part of this mystery called love,  
This wonder, a hope, a prayer  
Astonishing even the wildness of  
A heart who is genuine, authentically...  
God's child, His creation – the one  
Who yearns to be with Him forever,  
Eternally blessed by His presence!

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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# Notes From the Shire

## Events That Have Made a Difference

By Nancy Malik  
Avery County



A few years ago, I heard of a new class starting at the church I was attending. Current Events is a class led by a pastor with a vision to align The Word with what is happening in the world and even into the heavens.

When we first started attending this group, we were taught about earthquakes around the world. An amateur watcher for them was seeing about one per year. But as our leader continued to communicate with him, the quakes started increasing to a huge number. Watching the news shows multiple quakes happening around the earth, often!

We have a Green Agenda around the world to cut emissions that are causing travesty in our upper atmospheres. But as many scientists have explained, car and cow emissions do not rise but stay low to the ground. With that, solar flares (on the sun) are going to the extreme. incredibly high ones and far-reaching; ie, hot, or low which brings us colder weather. Though these things affect our world, they do not cause the problems that many people feel are hurting us. The sun is in God’s charge. But styrofoam has spread across the world’s oceans and is now huge floating islands with few solutions for what to do with all of it. A couple of young men have been getting others to collect the foam out of ocean currents for decades. Seeing trash on the Avery County roads has been disheartening. I would gladly get off the road to pick some up, but our roads have had more traffic lately than anyone remembers, so the hazards are huge. Overharvesting of any of God’s creations has caused multiple losses of plants and animals that will never be seen again. Noxious weeds have appeared as our precious Blue Ridge has suffered higher temps than normal these past few years, including all four seasons.

A major pandemic began a few years ago that has taken the lives of many. People died from it and others have been hurt or died from the vaccines meant to help. My sister and my niece both passed away last year after taking the vax boosters. Almost everyone I know has been impacted by it, worldwide.

For Christians and Jewish people, Israel and Jerusalem are of top importance according to the Bible and its prophecies. The temple mount is a topic of controversy among three religions; Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Islam has many mosques in Jerusalem and Israel. Christianity and Judaism are the main attraction within the word of God from Genesis to Revelations, the Beginning, and The End, but three religions vie for the land.

I am thankful for pastors and friends who have had the blessed opportunity to go to the land of Abraham through Christ and beyond. These pastors and teachers are so good about sharing their knowledge concerning this incredible place on earth. If you look at a world map, it is easy to find Israel between Europe, Africa, and Asia on the Mediterranean Sea. God has kept its truths in many miraculous ways including the Dead Sea Scrolls that confirm scripture with more caves and artifacts being found to continue its confirmation of The Word!

With this incredible time of mass communications, many have fallen away from church and faith. As believers in His Name, we must reach out to those who have no idea who Jesus really is, or His Father or The Holy Spirit. With Avery County preaching the gospel to many, there are more coming here for a safe haven who have never gone to church. If you walk His walk and talk His talk ask the Spirit to intercede for you. Invite a stranger or a neighbor to church, or out for a cup of coffee. Yes, most people here are related to each other, somehow. But we can always make new friends! With so many people coming to this county for a Safe Place, let’s hand out the Truth in His name. In 2018, the last Singing on the Mountain was sung. Tommy Burleson, who I had never heard of before, went to the podium to start the message. As he stood up to his over 7-foot height, he said,” Avery County, come out of your church buildings and be the Body of Christ.”

That is the way I remember it. It changed my life as a wife with a sick husband called to this Safe Place, where my husband was given a year, his final one, to enjoy our little piece of heaven, on a creek, in a meadow. Here he went to meet Jesus with a smile on his face! What Tommy said was so important. Many churches here are proclaiming the message with revivals, singing gatherings, and fellowship. Tommy’s word and this county are here, “...for such a time as this...! Those were Queen Esther’s words and they fit so well into this Safe Place.

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

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# Roan Mountain Baptist Church

## "Lord, Send Us Rattlesnakes"

By Russell McKinney  
Mitchell County



Once upon a time, there was a family of backslidden church members. The family consisted of a father and three sons. They had all once been very active in church but lately had fallen away completely.

Many people visited the family and asked them to come back to church. That list of visitors included not only the pastor but also the deacons. Unfortunately, however, all the visiting, counseling, encouraging and rebuking produced no effect upon either the father or any of the three sons.

One day when the sons were working in the field, a big rattlesnake raised and bit the middle son. The boy became very sick, and the doctor was called. The doctor did what he could, but the prognosis was not good. He said, "About all we can do now is pray for this young man."

Those words sent the father into enough panic to call the pastor. The pastor immediately went out to the home and was informed of the desperate situation. The father said, "Please, pastor, we need you to pray." The pastor said, "Very well" and then started his prayer.

He prayed, "Oh wise and all-knowing Father, we thank Thee for Thou hast sent this rattlesnake to bite this young man to bring him to his senses. He has not been inside the church house for a long time now, and it is doubtful that he has in all that time felt the need for prayer. Now we trust that this will prove a valuable lesson to him and that it will lead to genuine repentance."

As the father and the other two sons listened to the pastor's prayer, they were surprised by the bluntness of it. What they didn't know was that the pastor was about to get even blunter. He continued praying, saying, "And now, Father, wilt thou send another snake to bite the older son, another to bite the younger son, and another BIG ONE to bite this father. We have all been doing everything we know for some time now to restore them to the fellowship of the church, but it's been to no avail. It seems, therefore, that all of our combined efforts could not do what this snake has done. We thus conclude that the only thing left that will do this family any good is rattlesnakes. So, Lord, send us bigger and better rattlesnakes! In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen."

People often ask, "Why does God allow His people to suffer?" Well, sometimes He does it as a form of chastisement. As the Psalmist says in Psalm 119:67, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word." Likewise, Hebrews 12:8 says that if we are without chastisement, we are not true children of God.

No loving, right-thinking parent enjoys disciplining a child. We'd much rather see our kids display obedience. But the plain truth is, sometimes kids disobey, and that disobedience must bring painful consequences. If it doesn't, what's the incentive for obedience? God understands this better than we do, and that's why He is in the business of disciplining His children.

Tell me, are you at a loss as to how to pray for a wayward Christian? Is there someone close to you who is legitimately saved but just as legitimately backslidden? If you have such a person in your life, do you love them enough to pray for God to send some "rattlesnake" to afflict them? We're talking about the final card in the deck here, a "last straw" request, tough love administered to a sizable degree. Nevertheless, such chastisement is necessary in extreme cases. You see, as unsettling as it is for us to contemplate, sometimes it takes a "rattlesnake" to get a person's attention and bring them back to God.

*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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# Evergreen Church

By John McCoury  
Roan Mountain, Tennessee

John 15:13 “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend.”

Ten Points of Salvation in one Precious Verse. John 3. 16.

1. The SOURCE of Salvation, - - - For God
2. The SUPERLATIVENESS of Salvation, - so loved
3. The SUBJECTS of Salvation, - - - the world,
4. The SPONTANEITY of Salvation, - that He gave
5. The SECURER of Salvation, - His only begotten SON,
6. The SCOPE of Salvation, - - - that whosoever
7. The SIMPLICITY of Salvation, - - believeth in Him
8. The SOLACE of Salvation, - - should not perish,
9. The SURENESS of Salvation, - - - but have
10. The STABILITY of Salvation, - - Everlasting Life God’s Great Love.



FOR GOD SO  
*loved*  
THE WORLD  
THAT HE GAVE  
HIS ONLY *son*  
BEGOTTEN  
THAT WHOSOEVER  
*believes*  
*in Him*  
SHOULD ~~NOT~~ PERISH  
BUT HAVE  
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LIFE.  
JOHN 3: 16

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

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# Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

## Be-attitudes: Mercy

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



Many of us have been captivated and moved to tears throughout each episode of the life of Christ movie series entitled, The Chosen. Each episode has given us an intimate look at Jesus as He calls together a band of disciples who will be the foundation for both the beginning of the church and the spread of the gospel. The third season has just begun and the first episode begins with the “Sermon on the mount.” Jesus’ amazing sermon began with what we have come to call “The Beatitudes.” I have already shared several articles following the “blessed are” declarations that Jesus made that day to a huge crowd that had gathered on a little hillside up from the Sea of Galilee. Jesus, speaking of the Kingdom of God, declared that blessed are those who: are poor in spirit; mourn, are gentle, and hunger and thirst after righteousness. The fifth “blessed” statement that He made was, “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy*” (Matthew 5:7)

When Jesus spoke these words to the multitude, there was no doubt that He could see in His heart and mind’s-eye that moment in the not-so-distant future when His final act of mercy would allow God’s redemption to take place. Christ’s willing sacrifice on Calvary’s cross was a supreme act of mercy!

I invite you to see mercy through the image of the Son of God, who came to offer broken, sinful, and separated mankind God’s supreme gift of mercy. He came to suffer and die! He took upon Himself all of the sins of humanity and became the suffering servant of whom Isaiah prophesied in Isaiah 53:3-7, “*He was despised and abandoned by men, A man of great pain and familiar with sickness; And like one from whom people hide their faces, He was despised, and we had no regard for Him. However, it was our sicknesses that He Himself bore, And our pains that He carried; Yet we ourselves assumed that He had been afflicted, Struck down by God, and humiliated. But He was pierced for our offenses, He was crushed for our wrongdoings [inequities]; The punishment for our well-being was laid upon Him, And by His wounds we are healed. All of us, like sheep, have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the Lord has caused the wrongdoing of us all To fall on Him. He was oppressed and afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth.*”

In dying as the suffering servant, Jesus’ sacrificial death appeased Holy God’s demand for righteousness and set you and me free from the penalty of sin. That’s called mercy! In other words, God didn’t give us what we truly deserved! He accepted Jesus’ sacrificial death as our propitiation or replacement for the guilt of our sins.

I am quite certain that when Jesus opened His mouth and declared, “*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy,*” He had the agony of the cross on His mind. For it was the mercy of the Lord which drove Jesus to offer Himself for your sins and mine! It was God’s great grace driven by love that moved Him to offer His life a ransom for yours!

Again, mercy is when God doesn’t give us what we do deserve! We do deserve death—for every one of us has sinned and turned away from God. We deserve eternal punishment because our sins have separated us from our loving Creator. We deserve nothing! God’s mercy, however, gives us everything! May His grace and mercy be poured out upon you today!

*Dr. Jack R. Hodges, Jr. is the Senior Pastor at Pleasant Hill Baptist Church in Morganton, Burke County. He has served as a pastor, a biblical counselor and a International Mission Board missionary.*

**Hebrews 4:16 - Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.**



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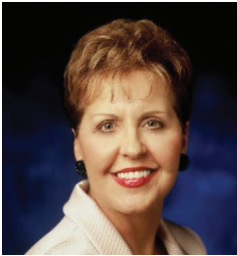
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Enjoying Everyday Life

The Folly of Fickle Feelings  
By Joyce Meyer



Some people in this world are extremely reliable. You can count on them for just about anything and somehow, they'll always come through. However, I've found that many people are not very reliable.

Maybe you know someone who is a nice person, but if you ask them to do something, you're just not sure if they're going to follow through. In other words, they're unreliable.

I've discovered that feelings are a lot like unreliable people—we can't depend on them to be what we want or need them to be all the time. Not only that, they aren't necessarily interested in what's best for us. And they always want to have their way.

Feelings get us excited about going shopping when we really don't have any money to spend. They entice us to eat cheesecake when we're trying to avoid extra calories and lead us to stay up late working or watching TV when we need to get up early the next day. Then after the damage is done, we have to deal with the consequences.

Our feelings are fickle—they change like the wind. Yet it's amazing how much we let them have their way in our lives. But as believers in Christ, we have something much better and more dependable to follow than our feelings—and that's the Word of God.

Conquering Confusion with the Truth

When we feel strongly about something in our hearts, it's not always easy for us to determine whether or not we're really in agreement with God (see Jeremiah 17:9). Thankfully, God's Word doesn't leave us lost in confusion.

Hebrews 4:12 says that the Word of God is *"sharper than any two-edged sword...exposing and judging the very thoughts and intentions of the heart"* (AMP).

So, if we really want to rise above our feelings, we must let the Word of God be the final deciding factor in our decisions. There will be times when we can't find a verse for the specific issue we're dealing with. But we can always pray and ask God for wisdom (see James 1:5).

In the meantime, we need to trust Him, be patient, and keep on praying. Remember that God is always available to help us live beyond our feelings and do what pleases Him.

Set Your Mind to Do What's Right

The first step toward managing our emotions is found in Colossians 3:2. It says, *"Set your mind and keep focused habitually on the things above...not on things that are on the earth...."*

There are many things in this world that could easily affect our minds and emotions—and we need to learn how to rise above them all. When negative thoughts are building up and trying to take control of your emotions, take a few minutes to set your mind on God and His Word.

It also helps to speak positively about whatever is bothering you. Here are a few examples to give you an idea of what I'm talking about: "My family may not be everything I'd like them to be, but I am thankful I have a family. My house is not as nice as I would like it to be, but it's still a nice place to live. I don't see how I'm going to get through this painful situation, but Jesus is with me and He will help me overcome it!"

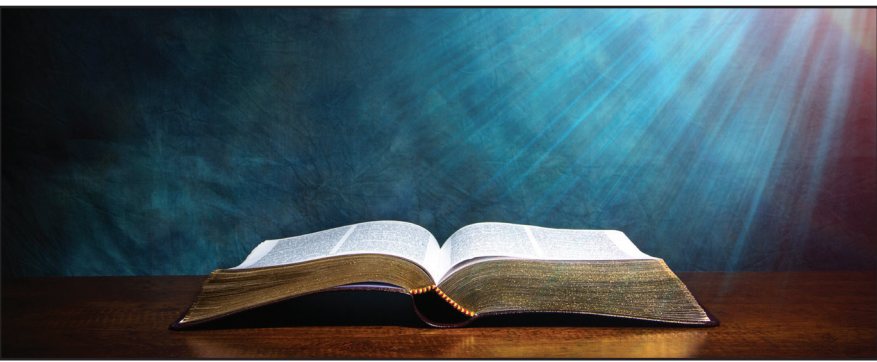
How to Win a Spiritual Tug-of-War

Sometimes we want to ask God to instantly change our circumstances when we're struggling. But the truth is until we learn to be content in every situation we face, we will continue to be tested.

Jeremiah 17:10 says, *"I, the Lord, search and examine the mind, I test the heart, to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds."* There are a few different "buttons" the devil knows he can push to get an emotional reaction out of me, so I make a point to prepare myself before that happens with the Word. I love Psalm 94:12-13. It says, *"Blessed [with wisdom and prosperity] is the man whom You discipline and instruct O Lord, and whom You teach from Your law, that You may grant him [power to calm himself and find] peace in the days of adversity...."*

You see, the more we discipline ourselves to say no to our feelings and yes to the wisdom of God, the easier it becomes to defeat them in a spiritual tug-of-war. I want to encourage you to consistently take time to focus on what the Bible says. It will empower you to control those unreliable emotions and do what is 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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1 Corinthians 13:13 - And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.



By Miguel Cruz  
Yancey County

The CDC is distributing 3.2 BILLION dollars to state and local health departments with the goal of “strengthening public health initiatives”. Apparently, the public has been disappointed with how the whole pandemic issue has been handled and according to a Pew Research Survey in 2020, only 52% of Americans felt that health officials were doing an adequate job. Dr. Walensky of the CDC said that an overhaul of the CDC was needed to modernize the agency and rehabilitate its reputation.

It seems the majority of that money will be going to just that. Not a single mention was made of funding efforts to educate the American public about good nutrition and healthy lifestyles or other risk factors for preventing serious health issues. There are no plans for promoting regular physical activity, controlling high blood pressure, quitting smoking and vaping, or reducing obesity, all of which are proven strategies for improved health outcomes. These are the things that I would call “Temple Maintenance”.

My wife and I were discussing on our date night recently how we have seen a surge of patients with shingles. Shortly after that conversation, I ran across a research study done in Germany that found statistical evidence for an association between the COVID vaccine and Shingles. The study involved over 18 million people across 19 countries and found that the vaccinated group had a 20% chance of coming down with shingles. The COVID virus itself is known to cause shingles but the unvaccinated group had only an 11% chance of having shingles. The shingles were most prevalent with those getting the messenger RNA technology. Shingles come from a herpes virus that lies dormant in our bodies until it is reactivated. People over 60 are more likely to get it. About 20% of those who recover may suffer from what is called post-Herpetic neuralgia which is a painful condition lasting from months to years. Those are the ones we end up seeing because it usually responds very well to laser therapy which we offer at our clinic.

There is a lot of good research behind “cold” therapy being good for our heart and circulatory system. Recently during our recent cold spell, I put it to the test by doing a polar plunge in the Toe river. The ice was 6-8 inches deep in sections and the water was 31 degrees, quite refreshing to say the least. Although I can’t say that I saw any improvement in my heart or circulation after that, it wasn’t all that bad, and felt good after warming up by a nice fire I had prepared. While I don’t necessarily recommend you jump into a cold river regularly, you can end your tub or bath by regularly getting under a cold shower for a few seconds. Once you get used to it you will definitely feel more energized during the day.

That’s all for now, God Bless

*Dr. Miguel Cruz is in practice along with his wife of 35 years, Lesia Cruz who is a certified Integrative Nutritionist. They own Cruz Life Center in Burnsville NC. Dr. Cruz is a licensed Chiropractor since 1981. When asked what he does for a living he explains that he helps people get out of pain and improve their overall health without the use of drugs or surgery. Something everyone seems to want but nobody seems to know how to get there. Dr. Cruz accepted Jesus Christ in the summer of 1979 while in chiropractic school. He has since dedicated his life towards helping people grow in physical health and spiritual health.*

**1 John 4:7 - Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.**

Sudoku

Solution on page 14

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

For The Love of God (Part 1)

By Thomas Thorne  
McDowell County

Jesus said in John 14:15, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” Then Jesus also went on to explain throughout his ministry Matthew 5 is a prime example, that to love God involves our thoughts and actions.

When the Hebrew language is explored two verses explain the way we love beautifully: Exodus 20:7- actions, and Psalm 19:14 - thoughts. The Hebrew text shows a deeper meaning than what has been translated into English and these two verses complement the teachings of Jesus regarding thought and action.

Exodus 20:7: “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain” (Exod. 20:7 ESV).

My initial thought when reading this verse is not to swear using God’s name, although I maintain that the Hebrew language goes much farther than this. The first point to mention is that there is more than one “negative particle” in Hebrew. A “negative particle” is a word that makes part of a sentence or an entire sentence negative. Throughout the ten commandments there is one negative particle used, the word lo, which refers to a “permanent prohibition.” Never to use “the LORD’s name in vain.”

In my opinion, the Hebrew text here contains three keywords. These three words translated into English are.

- 1. Take
- 2. Name
- 3. Vain

The first word above, “take,” comes from the Hebrew tisa, which comes from the root verb nasa. This verb means, “to lift, lift up, raise high, carry, bear, support, take (A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the O.T., William Holladay used throughout for definitions).

The second keyword is “name.” This comes from the Hebrew shame, which is a noun meaning “name, reputation, authority, standing, renown.”

And the third keyword in Exodus 20:7 is vain. This noun comes from the Hebrew LaShav. The Hebrew root word here is shav, which refers to being “worthless, vain” or “emptiness.” The la prefix provides the word “in” (in vain).

Now, before we proceed let me say that “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain” is a great translation. I am not saying it is wrong. But what I would like us to do is to think of a couple of possible alternate translations for these three “keywords” to see if this adds to our understanding. Please don’t feel that I am adding to or taking away from scripture, I am just helping in our understanding of the scripture.

First, let’s consider alternate meanings (as defined above) for the Hebrew la shav – translated as “in vain:”

- You shall not take the name of YHVH-the LORD your God as worthless
- You shall not take the name of YHVH-the LORD your God as empty

Now let’s add alternate meanings for the Hebrew noun shame – translated as “name:”

- You shall not take the reputation of YHVH-the LORD your God as worthless
- You shall not take the reputation of YHVH-the LORD your God as emptiness
- You shall not take the authority of YHVH-the LORD your God as worthless
- You shall not take the authority of YHVH-the LORD your God as emptiness

Now think of alternate definitions for the Hebrew verb tisa – translated as “take:”

- You shall not lift up the name of YHVH-the LORD your God as worthless or emptiness
- You shall not lift up the reputation of YHVH-the LORD your God as worthless or emptiness
- You shall not lift up the authority of YHVH-the LORD your God as worthless or emptiness
- You shall not carry/bear the name of YHVH-the LORD your God as worthless or emptiness

By taking into consideration the additional meanings of the Hebrew definitions for the three words ti-sa (to take, lift-up, carry, bear), la-shav (in vain, emptiness, worthless), and shame (name, reputation, authority), much broader applications to the third commandment can be appreciated than is commonly thought of.

This speaks of action – being sure that what we do is with complete respect for God as our Supreme Creator and not treating Him or carrying His name or His word as vain, empty, or worthless.

The third commandment, “Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain” is rich in meaning. I feel that any of these definitions discussed can apply. In our next lesson, we will examine Psalm 19:14 and show how the Hebrew text adds additional dimensions to our thought process.

*My name is Tom Thorne. My wife (Amy) and I moved to Marion from Denver, NC almost a year and a half ago. Amy and I are fellowship leaders of a small congregation of Believers called "Servants of the Most High God." Tom can be reached at servantsotmhg@gmail.com*

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Strings of the Soul

By Tim Tron  
Burke County

In a corner of the Spiritual Retreat is an instrument wall – a place where my stringed instruments hang from hooks made specifically for each type of instrument. They are kept there for ease of access, for one never knows when the “mood” might strike when that feeling of creativity and inspiration combine into a single thread wanting to intertwine into a melody.

While these pieces of wood and wire are built to make beautiful music, my budget for said devices has never been of the highest priority. That being said, they are worth far more in sentimental value than anything else. One does one’s best to maintain them, but with time, things age and dry out. So, it was the other day that that “mood” had struck, and as the fiddle was taken down, it quickly became apparent that the strings had loosened. With a violin, that is to be expected. Of all the instruments, it is held together by opposing forces. The tension of the strings holds up the bridge, which is supported from within by the sound post. If one of these components weakens and gives out, the entire function of the device is compromised. In this alone, there is a lesson, but for another day.

So, as I looked over the old “Ole Bull,” it was quickly discovered that all but one string was significantly out of tune. Working through the pattern J.W. Parsons taught me so long ago, I began to tighten each of the four strings. When it came to the “G” string, the lowest of the four, the tuning peg made an odd sound as it was being turned. The wooden peg began to crack and disintegrate as it was turned, literally crumbling in my fingertips – it was gone, useless to hold a string taunt. Distraught but not overwhelmed, my original song of inspiration had long ago escaped my thoughts. Now, there was a new challenge. What songs could be played on only three strings? From there, the fiddle and I walked down memory lane, discovering what could and could not be found in the limited number of wire strands. My fingertips were forced to find comforting notes in places they had seldom touched. It wasn’t pretty.

This morning, as my mind reflected upon yesterday’s encounter, it occurred to me how life and aging emulate the strings on my old violin.

The aging aspect comes from the memory of that entry-level Electrical Engineering class I took back at the University of Florida so many years ago. Dr. O’Malley, a tall, thin, white-haired elderly gentleman, then well past retirement age, walked in and began the first day’s intro quite unlike any that I had heard heretofore. “You will start today with 100 points,” he told the class looking over his wire glasses at a lecture hall full of beginning students. “From this point on, you will only lose points. It is up to you how many you lose. You will never gain them back,” he continued. In his eyes, you could almost tell there was more he wanted to say. Something about time, about life, lived. His words really hit hard. It was a thought that was truthful yet profound, and like it, life in the natural world was so much a parallel.

Many times in this journey, we find we are faced with a potential game-ending dilemma – either give up or adapt. Sometimes these are forces that are not of our doing. Illness, age, or accidents, to name a few, can take away our ability to function as we once were capable. Like that fiddle with now only three strings, we learn that if we are to go on, we must learn new ways to play that old song. Those finger positions on the strings that were once foreign, we are now forced to learn. A broken arm or hand of your favored limb makes writing almost impossible. But almost always, those who suffer learn to adapt and begin writing, albeit barely legible at first, and overcome their setback.

Likewise, when we step out of our comfort zone in faith and go to places or mission fields that we once thought foreign, they test our ability to adapt and grow. Jesus never told his disciples to stay put in Capernaum and make each other feel good. No, he told them to go out and spread the good news. “*and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick.*” He told them: “*Take nothing for the journey--no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town.*” It was painful. Not only were they trying to cope with the thought of not bringing any bedding and food, but they also had to remember what they had, in some cases, only recently learned. Jesus knew this would test them, but in the end, it would force them to grow stronger in their faith. Scripture tells us that through life’s trials, we will only become stronger and persevere, “*My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*” ...*But we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope....*”

There are those who, once they’ve learned to play beautifully on just the three strings in life, suddenly find that another string is taken away, leaving only two. It is then, the more challenged we become, the more we must not lean on our own understanding. Many give in to the feeling of being overwhelmed. They never knew Jesus as their Savior, so life, when it becomes unbearable, feels hopelessly lost. They seek answers in the life around them, but nothing can ease that emptiness and despair that is part of this world – no bottle is deep enough, no drug strong enough, and no emotional escape capable of breaking that spiral of pain and death. Only when the distraught and lost truly seek God is when they find hope.

Eventually, in some cases, those broken strings are restored. After the soul that had learned to dance upon the instrument with fewer strings finds a restored octave or more, their appreciation for what once was becomes all the more remarkable. So, it is with those who are reborn in Christ Jesus – their apprecia-



tion for things of God’s creation is from a new perspective. Their soul is restored. They learned in that absence, in that trial, through the fires of tribulation how much more they were capable. Their strength and faith are renewed. They become a new creature. “*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*” What was once uncomfortable or unknown becomes possible because something caused us to lean not on our own understanding.

Many return from mission fields, whether abroad or local, and find something about the world around them is not the same. Call it an awakening or a new awareness. Either way, when we learn to seek Him, we too find these peeling away layer after layer of blindness to what we once could not see. We can understand something about God a little more. With each step, we learn. With each blunder or mistake, we grow. During those painful endeavors, we sometimes feel like we will not survive. It is then we grow the most.

When the mood strikes, seek that thing that allows you to revel in your soul’s ability to thank God. When you find a string missing in your daily walk, press on toward the mark and let it not hinder your pursuit of the way, the truth, and the life.

Thanks be to God.



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

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Redeemed!

By Marlene Houk  
Burke County



Genesis 3:3 *"But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die."*

Psalms 103:4 *"Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;"*

Gazing at the fleecy robe nestled in the giveaway bag, I remembered the coziness that enveloped me on a rainy wintry day. I retrieved the buffalo plaid and draped the garment around a hanger.

Restored. Recovered. Redeemed. What thrilling words that gather defeat and fling it to the farthest corners of the universe. Like my recovered robe, we, as Christians, are rescued, released, delivered, and retrieved from our failures. No longer a slave to our own minds or the whims of others, we dance to the pulse of His love, throwing back our heads and laughing with the sheer joy of freedom. Christ is our Redeemer, for *"in him we live, and move, and have our being"* according to Acts 17:28. He redeems us from destruction as Psalm 103:4 shouts triumphantly. Even more stunning, He allows our redemption to brim with gold the negatives of our lives.

How does God encircle our troubles with gold? He infuses our pain with a purpose, diluting the hurt (Jeremiah 29:11). He reminds us of our identity with Him, thwarting the theft of our self-worth from vindictive attacks by declaring the truth that destroys their lies (Exodus 15:21). And He frees us from sin when we turn to Him. Naming us a precious jewel to any who would dare malign us, He claims us unreservedly as the apple of His eye (Zachariah 2:8).

To be redeemed embodies freedom's thrill, the heart-racing surge of being snatched from the jaws of evil, and the breathtaking passion of discovering Him. Psalm 103:4 declares that God snatches our lives from destruction. By definition, "lives" includes our actions, character, innermost thoughts, passions, words, and influences that define us. When God restores these things, He crafts an heirloom tapestry of our lives that reveals the beauty of His grace and love. When God upcycles our mistakes, He creates a masterpiece of His grace and mercy, bringing immense value to our lives.

God even repurposes our words. During Eve's conversation with the devil in Genesis chapter 3:3, she added a word to God's instructions about not eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. She said that God had told them not to TOUCH the fruit when, in fact, He did not instruct them so. Her distortion darkened God's words and may have allowed the devil to accuse God of being unreasonable according to Dr. C. Wieland, Managing Director of Creation Ministries International on his website: [www.creation.com](http://www.creation.com). Whatever the reason, Jesus, in His love and mercy, took her word, touched, stained with sin, and redeemed it in the New Testament. He included three stories in His divine Word, using the word, touch, and redeeming the word with marvelous miracles. Three women whose stories of miraculous healing are told for all eternity involve the use of touch.

1. Peter's Mother-In-Law was sick, and Jesus touched her hand according to Matthew 8:14-15.
2. The woman with the issue of blood touched the hem of His garment according to Luke 8:43-48.
3. And, Jesus laid his hands on the crippled woman in Luke 13:10-17.

How amazing that God decided to redeem the tiny word, touch, in divine stories of healed women! God redeems our poor choices even when we twist His truths to fit our own agendas. God turns our desire for control, inherited from Eve, as we, like her, choose, the wrong words, twist the truth, and trample God's plan for us. He takes our words and changes them into words of beauty and love, awash with His majesty and power. And we walk in the light of the power of redemption.

My robe lost its unhappy memory as I redeemed its purpose from a giveaway to a place of greatness in my wardrobe. So our Savior restores us from the dust of defeat, anoints us with His love and mercy, and transforms our failures into spiritual fruit.

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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# Trees Tell Tales

By Andrew Goins  
Watauga County

Observation of God’s work leads to a cosmic conversation, between heaven and the earth—God and us. A conversation where awe and abdication are wed in beholding a Creator God who paints self-portraits on mountains and mirror-like lakes.

Read the scriptures of creation! God speaks in the snow, rain, river, and sand. See the "trees clapping their hands" and the "hills skip like lambs" as the rocks cry out "Hosanna, hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" For creation cries, where our boredom dies in the deep sighs of breath breathed in, and out. Out and in—for in new life we breathe again. We rise again, keenly observing the visible whirling world, spinning upward and outward, spitting out ‘Word,’ God’s Word. Jesus the Word.

Take it in. Breathe it in. Inhale its goodness. Psalm 19 begins with a similar exclamation.

*“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands”*

The Psalmist has his Ph.D. in the hermeneutics of creation. He is an expert in the exegesis of hummingbirds humming, and trees budding and bursting with beauty. He is an intellectual of the night. A scholar of the sun. *"Learn the liturgy of the morning,"* he says *"and join the vigil with the stars, saints, and angels, praying Maranatha in the womb of the pregnant night."*

Psalm 19 implores us to pay attention. Take it in. Breathe it in. Inhale its goodness. Interestingly, the Psalm ends with *“May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock, and my Redeemer."* The French author Anthelme Brillat-Savarin writes “tell me what you eat, and I will tell you what you are.” We become what we bite. We are fashioned into what we devour. We are conformed to what we consume. For example, porn feeds lust, so that lust thrives. Paradoxically, porn starves lust, so that lust clamors and claws, like a baneful beast screaming “feed me!” Junk food whets the appetite for empty calories that demand more empty calories. Soon you will find your belly full and your body famished.

*“A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.” ~Luke 6:45*

Stock the shelves of your heart with ridged rocks, where God has left His fingerprints like a criminal wanting to be caught. Fill the shelves of your heart with the silent sound of revelation. Sunset revelation. Moon rising revelation. Rain-storm revelation.

*“They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.”~Psalm 19:3-4*

The Hebrew word for voice, (Kole, קֹל) is used for the first time in Genesis 3:8. *“Then the man and his wife heard the sound (Kole, קֹל) of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden”*

It is here that we are struck with the silent sound of God walking in the garden. You must first pay attention. You must first listen. Do not hide. Be dis-covered, naked, and exposed, so that you may discover the heart of God.

Adam and Eve ran and hid. They were clothed in naked shame. They buried themselves in the bushes of life on their terms. You and I hide every day. We hide from God by living hurried lives. We distance ourselves from God by living distracted lives. Bustling lives bury us in the ground of busy business because we do not take the kingdom of God seriously. We live in a whirling world. A waring world vying for our attention. We think we are consumers, but in reality, we are being consumed by sin. So, we spit out sin with our words, proving ourselves quite fluent in grunts and grumbles, and a few curses sprinkled in here and there. Maybe you are more fluent in letting the proverbial punch line (as in line meant to punch) fly into your spouse, parent, or child. Stop speaking. Stop running. Stop hiding. Let the sacred silence purify your heart, preparing you for the “Kole” of God.

God is always speaking. The “Kole” of God is always filling up this wild and wonderful world.

Stop. Be still. Silent. Listen. Pay attention.

Run from God by living a crowded life; a busy life, and you will believe you are god. Gorge yourself in the glory of God. Fatten yourself on fields fashioned with forget-me-nots, and you will find yourself wrapped up in gospel goodness crying out with the rocks “Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”

*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*



# Seventh Day Adventist Burnsville

## Let It Go!

By Art Dmytriyeu  
Yancey County



The story has been told among the alpinists in the Mountain area of Crimea, Russian Federation. There was a day when alpinists of Crimea were going to claim the top of the local rough mountain. One alpinist with the approach of darkness was almost successful in reaching his goal for that day, as all of a sudden, he slid into the dark cave. He got hanging on the rope between heaven and earth. Because of the sunset time and the thick darkness of the cave, he could not determine the distance away from the ground. According to his audio-recording device, he heard the voice telling him: "Cut the rope and let it go!". It was repeated in his head several times. With deeper panic and awful fear, he was responding: "I can't". Several days later, when the rescue team found his body, it was hanging only 36 inches from the ground!

The Bible speaks a lot against fear. Here are only a few passages that express God's Voice toward His children. Isaiah 41:10 KJV: *"Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."* 1 John 4:18 KJV: *"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love."* Luke 12:32 KJV: *"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."*

Today, in a world of darkness and gloom, we are enslaved by the fear of death (Hebrews 2:15). People do anything to escape doom. Lots of humans by attempting to reach their goal, fall into the deep dark cave of their life. They are still hanging in that darkness. Like that alpinist, they are hanging between heaven and earth, and only a few are willing to cut that rope and let it go.

We thank the Lord that there is a voice in the darkness of life constantly appealing to everyone today: *"This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left."* (Isaiah 30:21 KJV). Jesus Christ who is the source of life says: *"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."* (Matthew 11:28 KJV). Jesus said: *"I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."* (John 8:12 KJV). So, by letting it go and obeying His voice, we will avoid darkness altogether!

Dear friend, what is holding you? Are you hanging on the cord of your fears and worries of uncertainty in the future? How long do you think you can last? The darkness coming to the whole world. The Bible says in Isaiah 60:2 KJV: *"For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people"*, but in the same verse, God gives us hope: *"but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee."* Jesus is the source of life, in Him, there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). Cut that robe! Let it go! Submit His Voice! Please, do not delay any longer. He will rescue and deliver you from the trouble that comes upon the whole world. When you hear His voice do not harden your heart but surrender yourself to the Lord!

*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>*

**Isaiah 41:10 - Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.**

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# YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

## NC Senate District 47



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

The 2023-2024 legislative biennium of the North Carolina General Assembly opened on January 11th, and I was honored to be sworn in for a seventh term to represent my constituents in the 47th District. The 47th District comprises the following counties: Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Caldwell (partial), Haywood (partial), Madison, Mitchell, Watauga, and Yancey.

I was also honored to be elected by my peers in the Senate and sworn in by state Supreme Court Justice Tamara Barringer to serve my third term as Deputy President Pro Tempore of the Senate. In my capacity as Deputy President Pro Tempore, I stand in for the President Pro Tempore, Phil Berger (R-Rockingham), when needed, to direct Senate business and proceedings during the session. The President Pro Tempore and Deputy President Pro Tempore serve as ex officio voting members of all Senate committees and subcommittees.

In addition, I have been appointed to the following Senate committees: Appropriations/Base Budget (Chair), Finance, Health Care, Pensions and Retirement and Aging, Redistricting and Elections (Chair), Rules and Operations of the Senate, and Select Committee on Nominations.

As legislative work gets underway this year, I look forward to keeping our state on the sound fiscal path we have maintained over the past decade. Conservative fiscal leadership turned the state's financial health around in 2011 when Republican legislative majorities inherited a \$2.5 billion budget deficit and a ranking of 46th on the Tax Foundation's State Business Tax Climate Index. Today, we have a sound budget with more than \$4 billion in the state's rainy day fund. Our Business Tax Climate ranking has climbed to the top 10 states for business taxes, and, over the past three years, North Carolina has held the number one spot on both CNBC's Top State for Business 2022 and Forbes Best States for Business.

Fiscal recklessness from the previous Democrat majority set North Carolina up for failure during the 2008 recession. As we face the possibility of another recessionary economic period in 2023, North Carolina is much better prepared to withstand the storm than the last time we found ourselves in this position.

However, the work is far from over. In his address to the Senate on the opening day of the session, President Pro Tempore Berger put it this way: "All of the accolades we collect now aren't guaranteed in the future. Presently, we're the best state in which to live, work and do business. But the wrong policy decisions could change that status at any moment. To stay on top, we must continue to make the right decisions and do the hard work to maintain and improve the opportunities that currently exist.

"We must further reduce taxes. We must continue to keep regulations in check and roll back those that are unnecessary and create impediments to growth and job creation. We must effectively address critical infrastructure needs like roads, water and sewer, and broadband. We must continue to demand world-class educational opportunities for our students. We've made incredible strides, but there is always more to be done."

Senator Berger said it well. I look forward to working with my colleagues in the General Assembly this legislative biennium to advance policies that maximize freedom and promote prosperity for all North Carolinians.

As always, please share your thoughts with me on issues 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

January 2 marked two years on the job for me as Labor Commissioner. I have really enjoyed my time traveling across the state, meeting employees and employers, seeing the work our N.C. Department of Labor (NCDOL) employees do each and every day, and getting the opportunity to visit different communities and worksites. We live and work in an amazing state that continues to grow in population and industry.

Our Gold Star Grower awards luncheon will take place for the first time since the start of the pandemic on Feb. 2, 2023. I am excited to attend this event, as it will be my first time attending since becoming Labor Commissioner. The Gold Star Grower Program is administered through the NCDOL's Agricultural Safety and Health (ASH) Bureau of the Occupational Safety and Health Division. This program recognizes growers who provide farmworker housing that meets and exceeds all of the requirements of the Migrant Housing Act of North Carolina. I want to congratulate the growers – many of whom live in western North Carolina – who qualified for Gold Star status and will receive their award at the luncheon in Raleigh.

Safety Award season is almost upon us! As a reminder, the deadline for safety award applications is Feb. 15, 2023. Many of you are dedicated and long-term participants in the Safety Awards program and I encourage all employers to apply for this award. Information about participation, including the application, can be found on our website or you can call Kiley Willard, safety awards coordinator, at 919-707-7855. I look forward to seeing you at one of our banquets scheduled for this spring or summer!

I hope everyone stays safe and has a blessed February!

## NC House District 86



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

### Make Your Plans for Lake James State Park

Following up on my previous article on the "Year of the Trail" in North Carolina, I want to highlight Lake James State Park and its collection of trails, many camping amenities, boat slips, boat rentals, and now, binding this all together, a brand-new visitors center about to open.

While awaiting final safety inspections, the new visitors center is completed and will soon welcome travelers from all over. Located atop a hill and overlooking the lake, the facility is set to include informational exhibits on local species of plants and animals, classrooms for visiting students, an amphitheater, and a gift shop. Educational opportunities are designed right into the visitor's center and offer fascinating exhibits and information for all ages. Getting our citizens excited about nature and our state's great outdoors is a priority of mine. I hope you'll take advantage for yourselves, your families, and your friends. After all, the park itself is located right here in Burke and McDowell Counties in our western area of the state.

Walking down from the new visitors center and past Paddy's Creek campground, you will encounter something else new, the Cove Bridge. It spans 240 feet connecting the Paddy's Creek area to the Long Arm Peninsula. The bridge's unique design really sets it apart. This new bridge is available to bikers as well as hikers, but not cars or trucks. The bridge provides access to Fonta Flora State Trail, a beautiful trail running for twenty miles all around the lake. It also marks the beginning of the South Wimba Trail which connects to about a dozen shorter trails within the park.

The new Visitors Center and the new Cove Bridge should make Lake James State Park even more of a hub and magnet, sending a clear message about how special the park really is. For updates or to learn more about Lake James State Park, go to this website: [www.ncparks.gov/state-parks/lake-james-state-park](http://www.ncparks.gov/state-parks/lake-james-state-park)

# God Bless America



# YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

## NC Senate District 46



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

On January 11, the General Assembly met for the first time in the '23-'24 biennium. As of January 1, I began representing the fine people of Burke, McDowell, and the eastern part of Buncombe counties. This is my 7th term serving citizens in North Carolina as a state Senator. Business conducted on the 11th included the ceremonial opening, reciting the oath of office, the election of constitutional officers, and voting on the Senate Rules governing the actions of the Senate. It is always an exciting day for legislators and their families and friends that have the opportunity to attend. In addition, President Pro Tempore Phil Berger announced committee assignments for the biennium. This year I was appointed to serve on nine committees: Appropriations on Justice and Public Safety (Co-Chair), Judiciary (Co-Chair), Redistricting and Elections (Co-Chair), Rules and Operations of the Senate (Vice-Chair), Appropriations/Base Budget, Finance, Transportation, Select Committee on Nominations, and Joint Commission on Governmental Operations. I am very much looking forward to serving on these committees and to pushing forward policies that will continue to make our state and district a great place to live.

We are excited to announce that my office is considering applications for the 2023 Senate Page Program. 10-12th graders in Burke, McDowell, or eastern Buncombe counties who are interested in serving as a Senate Page in 2023 should send me an email. I will use your email address to send you a personalized link to the online application. The selection process for this program is highly competitive, as each Senator has a limited allotment of students.

Please visit [www.ncleg.gov/Senate/PageProgram](http://www.ncleg.gov/Senate/PageProgram) for more information. As always, if I may be of assistance to you, please contact my Raleigh office via phone or email. It is a pleasure to serve you in the state Senate.



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The Digital Dump – Waste!

By Todd Abraham  
Athens, Tennessee

Time is the most precious resource we have as human beings. Psalm 90:12 “*So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*” So many mighty men of God testified in the bible about how fleeting life is. And God does not like waste. But what is one of the greatest, if not the most significant, end results of technology? It is a waste; wasted time. To reiterate, God does NOT like waste. Two verses in the New Testament, Ephesians 5:16 and Colossians 4:5, both instruct us to redeem the time. Many say when asked what they are doing, “Oh I'm just killing time.” But my pastor clarified it most properly, “Time is killing you.”

Technology has created the greatest waste in history in the form of wasted time. And almost equally bad is the resulting idolatry. Smartphones are the greatest culprit in addition to social media sites and worst of all, online gaming. My very first video game in the 70s was the Atari 2600 which is where I learned to play Chess surprisingly. Wasn't long after, we saw handheld games, the Nintendo, the mall arcades, and so on. But fast forward to today with the advent of modern graphics and super advanced coding and now we have a prevalent evil in our midst. On a side note, did you know one of the tactics of the communist agenda to take over the world was the free flow of money? According to a recent survey, the average person spends nearly 7 hours per day online. Also, as I have mentioned before and research has proven, smartphone users stay in a constant state of distraction. God forbid you should turn off notifications for any social media site or similar online platform. Because if you do, nearly every time you visit those sites, they are nagging you to turn them back on. The devil knows that a distracted mind is stomping grounds for him.

Technology has captured the minds of the world in every developed nation! It is the greatest form of free will and mind control ever known to man. The powers that be who are controlled by the devil have found the ideal way to get rich and destroy your soul simultaneously. Find me another preacher that YOU know or have even heard of who is exposing this sinister weapon of Satan for what it is! And, again, it's not me but what God has emphatically impressed in my heart to preach against. And confirmed it to me with signs following and strong chastening. Friend, I strive to live what I preach and preach what I live. These aren't just words on a page to generate more interest for Heartbeat Christian News or to make me out to be somebody. The name of this article, Todd's Techy Tips, was given to me by God and the fact that it is catchy, well praise be to Him for that.

Just remember, we all are going to give a full account of our lives on the day of judgment! Even for every idle word we've spoken. And you know, your conscience bears witness if your smartphone and/or technology is an idol to you whether you or honest with yourself or not. If it is, what is the solution? For starters, pray for someone you love who is addicted to it for their deliverance because we reap what we sow. Getting someone you know without doubt can touch God on your behalf in prayer for deliverance. The word of God means the original KJV because He sent His Word to heal us. Faith! It wearies me sometimes to seem redundant but hear this again. Smartphones and technology is the method the devil is going to use to control the world. It's not going to get better but worse. With freedom being taken away at an alarming rate, without the use of the Constitution, this should give you great spiritual concern! We've all heard the old and familiar phrase, “The devil is in the details.” My friend that is NOT true. The devil wants you to omit and forget the details. God is the One Who requires every detail. Matthew 5:18 “*For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.*”

*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).*



"Yeah," he smiled broadly. The ball was back in his court now, and he was more than happy to brag about his beautiful wife, Heather, but before he could start, Reno continued.

"I had a wife once."  
Derrick bit his lip and took another sip of his drink to cover his impertinence. "Cancer took her too soon," he turned and looked at a faded black-and-white picture sitting on one of the many shelves nearby.

"If I had just one more day with her, it would be a dream," he said, still turned as if talking to her through the photo. Then turning back, facing Derrick again, "But I know that where she is, for her to come back here would be akin to Lazarus rising from the dead. You know he didn't want to leave Heaven, nor would she. It's selfish to think that way. Sometimes we have to think about life being more than about us." Reno paused, finishing off his drink, and sat it down. He reached down, grabbed another piece of firewood, opened the stove door, tossed it in, then looked back at the young man and smiled. The AM station had now switched to the evening gospel show, and another unfamiliar tune came drifting into Derrick's ear, "Shackled by a heavy burden, 'Neath a load of guilt and shame. Then the hand of Jesus touched me, And now I am no longer the same."

"You know, the good book tells us, ‘That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love.’ Do you love her, Derrick?"

"Well, hell yeah, of course, I do." His thoughts quickly darted back to their argument that morning. Deep inside, he wanted to take back his words. But, like so many times, he had a way of saying things that hurt people. He liked to tell himself that he was honest to a fault. The thought began to convict him, joining the other worries in his life. Once again, he felt like he was being crushed. Heather couldn't understand, but somehow, here with this stranger who seemed to know his thoughts, something was changing. Even the music seemed to be listening. "Do you know that it also tells us, *"When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things."* You know what that means?"

Derrick felt uneasy all of a sudden. It was like Reno could somehow read his thoughts. It was almost as if he knew about the fight that morning. "Yeah, I think so," he said, rubbing the back of his neck, starting to feel as if there was more than this being just a chance encounter.

"You took that girl away from her family, and you became one flesh. You are now responsible for her, and that face you see in the mirror every day, that person that you show the rest of the world, is how she is seen. You gettin' what I'm sayin'?"

"Yes, yes,... I'm with you."  
"There is only One who can take away your burdens, my son. There is only one that can make you whole. You gotta quit trying to do it all on your own."

Derrick's eyes began to water. His head began to swim. The stove felt like it was glowing red. The hoodie was now steaming, and he could feel something come over him, like a tidal wave, washing against the shore, erasing the clutter, the debris in his life. The Gaithers added the final push with the song's last lines, "He touched me, Oh He touched me, And oh the joy that floods my soul! Something happened, and now I know He touched me and made me whole." He was so convicted about that morning that he wanted to scream. Softly, Reno touched him on the shoulder and said, "Give it to God, son. Give it ALL to the LORD!"

He pressed a small piece of paper into Derrick's hand. Then, through the tears, he read, "Love – 1st Cor. 13...."  
The damn burst and tears ran down his cheeks. Something inside him had changed. He didn't know how long they sat there with him, crying, sharing, and being comforted by Reno's encouraging and loving words. Time passed. The rain stopped. Before long, there was an orange glow in the windows. "Oh man, I've got to get going." Derrick realized he had let the night slip by.

"What time's your interview?"  
"It's at nine AM."  
"You'll be fine; the Lord's got this."

About that time, Derrick's cell phone rang. He answered, and it was the company where he was to interview. Unfortunately, they had something come up and needed to postpone the meeting until that afternoon. They apologized profusely and asked if it wouldn't be a problem, then they talked further about specifics. When he hung up, he looked up to find Reno already outside. The spare tire had been replaced and put away, and the original tire was back on. It was as if it had never happened.

"What the heck," Derrick said, not realizing he had uttered a string of profanities for a change.

"Oh, you just had a nail in it. I pulled it out and plugged her for ya. Nothin' to it," he said, smiling again like when they first met. Something about the sunrise made Reno seem younger like he had dropped twenty years in the blink of an eye. "Well, what do I owe you?"

"You don't owe me a dime. But you need to run on now and make that meeting. That little lady back home is countin' on ya. Don't let her down," and he paused, but the seriousness returned, "But Derrick, more importantly,"

"Yes, sir."  
"Remember when I said give it ALL to Him?"  
"Yes, sir."  
"I meant every word of it. Serve only Him, and he will change your life."  
They shook hands, and for a minute, he felt as if he could hug the old guy. But instead, he stepped in the car and pulled away as he saw Reno waving goodbye sitting on the old school bus bench on the store's front porch.

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By Dave Ramsey

Our deceased neighbor left us his home, car, and money in his handwritten will. What do we do?

Dear Dave,

Our next-door neighbor was an older single man with no family, and my wife and I always tried to look out for him and help with things. He died recently, and in his will, he left us his home, his car, and the money he had in his bank account. The will was handwritten, and it said the house was worth around \$350,000, with \$150,000 left on the mortgage. The car is worth about \$10,000. Officials at our county office building said the money in the bank account wouldn't have to go into probate since I was listed as the beneficiary, and I was given a check for that amount. We've just never handled anything like this before, and my wife and I were hoping you would help us navigate things. Steven

Dear Steven,

There are a couple hundred thousand dollars in equity involved here. The fact that the will is handwritten doesn't necessarily invalidate it, but it does increase the possibility of encountering some bumps down the road.

I'm not a lawyer, so the first thing I'd do is talk to a couple of probate attorneys in your county. Find out what they'd charge to handle things. I wouldn't spend thousands of dollars to get this done, but I would pay \$500, maybe \$1,000, to let someone who knows what they're doing handle things. If your county affairs people are right and everything's straightforward, it's not a lot of legal work for an attorney.

On top of that, if the attorney you work with knows folks at the courthouse and is familiar with how things work there, then it's kind of like traffic court, you know? It's almost automatic. I mean, we're only talking about three assets here — a bank account that's already been handed off, a car, and a house that's mortgaged. For me, it'd be worth a little money to have someone on my side who knows the path through the woods.

I'm sorry to hear your friend and neighbor passed on, Steven. But I hope I've been able to help. — Dave

Our attorney said we should file bankruptcy on a \$3,000 loan my husband co-signed 4 years ago

Dear Dave,

My husband co-signed a loan for an old girlfriend four years ago. Apparently, she hasn't made a payment in almost two years, and a collection agency called him last week wanting the balance of \$3,000. We make about \$80,000 a year combined, and an attorney we spoke with recommended we file bankruptcy. Is this really the best thing to do? Scarlett

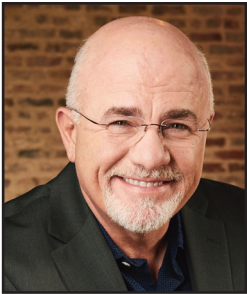
Dear Scarlett,

If you have the money, and you can pay it off without putting yourself in a bind financially, do it. That's the right thing to do, both morally and legally. If you don't have that kind of cash on hand, try haggling with them. See if they'll agree to settle for \$1,500. At this point, they might even take less. But if they go for the idea, do not give them electronic access to your bank account. Make sure you get the agreement in writing, too, before sending them a penny.

Here's the deal. This collector bought the loan for pennies on the dollar. It's an old debt, and that means the expectation for collection is very low. At the same time, your husband did co-sign for the loan. They'll probably threaten to sue and whatnot, but my guess is you can work something out. It might take two or three weeks — and a little patience — but that's a small price to pay if it saves you a bunch of money.

Oh, and the attorney you talked to? He doesn't sound very bright. A bankruptcy stays on your record for years. Trashing your financial life over \$3,000 would be stupid. Good luck, Scarlett!

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



Drexel's Gravel Named Regional Principal Of The Year

By Cheryl Shuffler  
Burke County



Drexel Elementary School Principal Jessie Gravel has been named Regional Principal of the Year for the Northwest Regional Education Service Alliance (NWRESA). The surprise announcement came during a student assembly at Drexel Elementary School, where Gravel has been the principal since 2019. Announcing in front of an excited crowd of students, staff, and Gravel's family members was Dr. Patrick Greene, the current Wells Fargo North Carolina Principal of the Year. Among those joining him were last year's NWRESA Principal of the Year Dr. Heather Melton-Freeman, NWRESA Regional Education Facilitator, and Dr. Mike Swan, Superintendent of Burke County Public Schools.

Gravel thanked Drexel students and staff following the announcement. She said, "I am truly honored and shocked. Thank you so much. Drexel's success is because of the incredibly hard-working men and women that come here every single day for the betterment of the lives of all these children right here. And I'm so grateful to be able to come to work and see you each day and laugh with you, cry with you, smile with you, so thank you."

Gravel will go on to represent the region in the 2023 state principal of the year process that involves eight other regional principals of the year. The regional selection procedure includes an evaluation of candidates through a portfolio review and an interview. The state is divided into eight geographical regions and NC Charter Schools are clustered together to form the ninth region of the state. The state selection process continues with each regional finalist being interviewed and his/her portfolio reviewed by a state selection committee. The culmination of Wells Fargo Principal of the Year Program is a ceremony in Raleigh in May. Regional winners are asked to chair the regional selection committees tasked with finding their successor at the end of their term.

A 2005 graduate of East Burke High School, Gravel completed her bachelor's of arts in French from UNC-Chapel Hill and started her teaching career at Randolph IB Middle School in Charlotte. She was an NC Principal Fellow at UNC-Charlotte and is currently working on her doctorate at Western Carolina University. Gravel is the daughter of Brady and Karen Linkous and followed in the footsteps of her mother, who was a teacher at Valdese Elementary School. She is married to Jack Gravel and they have three sons, Luke, Graham, and Mac.

Swan said, "We are excited to have Mrs. Gravel represent Burke County Public Schools and the Northwest Region as Principal of the Year. While Mrs. Gravel was very surprised by this announcement today, it comes as no surprise to us. Mrs. Gravel's compassion for students, drive to see them succeed and be innovative, and can-do spirit is evident, making her a great leader at Drexel and in our district. We wish her the best in the next step of this process."

Burke County Public Schools' last Regional Principal of the Year was recently retired Director of Exceptional Children Shane Mace when he was principal of East Burke Middle School in 2014.

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

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**Thou Shalt Laugh**

By John Martin

IT'S BEEN SNOWING FOR 3 DAYS NOW!

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THIS IS THE DAY THAT THE LORD HAS MADE. WE WILL REJOICE AND BE GLAD IN IT.

DO YOU GET THE FEELING GOD LOVES SNOW?



Revelation Chapter 6: The Rider Death on a Corpse-Colored Horse, with Hell Following After Him

By Mark Creech

Recorded in the book of Exodus is the true story of how God judged Egypt and set the Hebrews free from slavery. God sent disaster and pestilence. The land was plagued with frogs, gnats, and flies. The livestock died of disease. Egyptians were covered with boils. A hailstorm killed people and animals, as well as destroyed their crops. Swarming locusts destroyed all the vegetation throughout the land. Darkness was sent so thick the people said they could feel it. Finally came the death of every firstborn son in Egypt. With each terrible catastrophe, Pharaoh was allowed several opportunities to acknowledge God and repent. However, the Bible says he hardened his heart and spurned each chance he was given. Melody Rossi, in May I Walk You Home? has written:

“It is heartbreaking to watch someone we love suffer from illness. Sometimes it raises difficult questions for us and can even make us feel angry with, or abandoned by, God. Though we can’t always know why he chooses a certain path for us, we can trust him based on what we know of his character. If the situation seems unbearable, [we should] reflect on what these hardships are purchasing... No matter how deep the suffering, the cost is nothing compared to the joy that will be experienced if your loved ones come to know Jesus through this ordeal.” In Revelation chapter 6, the apostle John is permitted to see how God intends to wrap up human history. The apostle has seen Christ given a scroll with seven seals, the title deed to the earth. Each seal broken on the scroll reveals an action God plans to take.

When the first seal was broken, John saw a rider on a white horse representing a great world leader who would deceive the nations. When the second seal was broken, John saw a rider on a red horse who was given the power to take peace from the earth. When the third seal was broken, John saw a black horse rider carrying a pair of scales, bringing great famine. When the fourth seal was broken, this is what John said he witnessed:

*“When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the fourth living being say, ‘Come!’ I looked up and saw a horse whose color was pale green. Its rider was named Death, and his companion was the Grave. These two were given authority over one-fourth of the earth, to kill with the sword and famine and disease and wild animals.”* (Revelation 6:7-8)

This rider is on a pale, or what might be deemed a ‘livid,’ greenish horse – a horse the same color as a corpse. Its rider is named “Death,” and “Hell” or the “Grave” follows him. Behind Death, the Grave acts like a street sweeper that follows behind the carnage, sweeping masses of souls who have died without knowing Christ into the pit of Hell.

The rider on the corpse-colored horse rides throughout the earth and destroys one-fourth of the world’s population with war, famine, pestilence (disease), and wild beasts. This event is more significant and intense than anything this world has ever experienced. Millions, even billions, will die from disaster and disease. Interestingly, when the late Dr. H.A. Ironside wrote his classic Lectures on the Revelation and described the fourth horseman, he said it was a picture of “pestilence,” which “always follows war and famine.” Then he added, “We have known something of that in this last year, but the complete fulfillment awaits a not far-distant day.”

What was Ironside referencing? A footnote in his lectures says, “The reader will understand” [his lectures on Revelation] were “delivered during the armistice year, and while the influenza plague was still in progress.”

Here’s what the National Archives and Records Administration says about that particular worldwide pestilence, the influenza epidemic:

“The influenza epidemic that swept the world in 1918 killed an estimated 50 million people. One-fifth of the world’s population was attacked by this deadly virus. Within months, it had killed more people than any other illness in recorded history.

“The plague emerged in two phases. In late spring of 1918, the first phase, known as the ‘three-day fever,’ appeared without warning. Few deaths were reported. Victims recovered after a few days. When the disease surfaced again that fall, it was far more severe. Scientists, doctors, and health officials could not identify this disease which was striking so fast and so viciously, eluding treatment and defying control. Some victims died within hours of their first symptoms. Others succumbed after a few days; their lungs filled with fluid, and they suffocated to death.

“The plague did not discriminate. It was rampant in urban and rural areas, from the densely populated East coast to the remotest parts of Alaska. Young adults, usually unaffected by these types of infectious diseases, were among the hardest hit groups, along with the elderly and young children. The flu afflicted over 25 percent of the U.S. population. In one year, the average life expectancy in the United States dropped by 12 years.”

Of course, like Ironside, we have known something of this kind of pestilence, most recently. The Coronavirus worldwide epidemic is an ongoing crisis. According to the World Health Organization, the most current statistics show the virus has been contracted by nearly 652 million people and killed over 6.5 million globally. But the epidemic hasn’t just affected world health; it’s also demonstrated the fragility of our entire system of public health, food production, delivery, and labor. The social disruption has had the means to destroy millions of enterprises and exacerbate the problem of extreme poverty. Lockdowns have presented their



own serious challenges, preventing people from earning wages and, therefore, being unable to purchase food or forced to buy less food or nutritious food. This is to say nothing about the profound negative impact of the epidemic on mental and emotional health worldwide.

Something that has puzzled Bible scholars is John’s account of the fourth horsemen’s authority to kill “wild animals.” Dying by the sword, famine, and disease are easy enough to understand, but what is meant when the Scriptures prophetically describe a period of mass death by “the beasts of the earth,” as some translations render it, or by “wild animals”?

It isn’t easy to nail this down, but it could be referring precisely to what it says. Perhaps there is such chaos at this point societal controls are primarily broken down, and God puts it into the heart of predatory animals ferociously hungry to hunt and kill humanity. We might be looking at something akin to a real-life scenario of Alfred Hitchcock’s movie, “The Birds,” except it would probably include other animals, too.

Perhaps what’s being foretold is a future when humankind, which has been such a poor steward of the planet and corrupted it so severely by sin, the animal world rebels against its master in the same way man has rebelled against his master, God. Animals are permitted with divine authority to slaughter people everywhere.

It could be, however, that what is being conveyed is something more natural such as disease-carrying vermin like the rat. Science says rats carry as many as 35 different diseases. The fleas from rats spread the bubonic plague during the 14th Century, killing anywhere from 75 to 200 million people.

It should be remembered the Coronavirus has allegedly been connected to horseshoe bats in China. Zoonotic diseases are illnesses that can be transferred from animals to humans, but they are rare.

Still, another possibility is that the text or the phrase “wild animals” describes bestial persons who rise under the power of the anti-Christ to plague the nations. It might be that they use biochemical warfare.

These scenarios are admittedly conjecture but not necessarily beyond the realm of possibility. Much of life’s experiences seem to make such circumstances entirely plausible. Moreover, nothing is impossible with God. He can do whatever he desires.

Now let’s revert to the subject matter or theme of the first two paragraphs of this commentary.

In his marvelous book, Approaching Hoofbeats, the late Dr. Billy Graham provides a word of clarity regarding all of this. He asks, “Why would God allow such suffering to take place?” He continues:

“John’s vision is consistent with ancient biblical pictures describing what happens when God sends his wrath upon men who disobey him. William Barclay, the late great Scottish professor at Glasgow University, warned that ‘at the back of it all there is the permanent truth that no man and no nation can escape the consequences of their sin.’ And Lynn Howard Hough explains that Death, here, does not bring meaningless destruction ‘but destruction which serves the purposes of the justice of God. [Death] is part of the divine administration. A fourth of the earth feels his power that the rest may see and have the opportunity to repent’...It was not God’s intent that any should perish, but man defiantly refused God’s plan, the consequence of his disobedience being that he followed the way of death. Now, as the rider on the pale horse, Death is only taking his due...Still, in this vision, God reaches out in love. He [God] demonstrated his great love by giving his Son to die on the Cross – the most horrible death a person can die. God hopes that through this evidence of love and this warning of the fourth horseman before the final judgment, the rest of the world might see the wages of sin, turn from their sinfulness, seek God’s forgiveness, and be saved from the jaws of Hell.”

An old saying often quoted by Christians of yesteryear claims, “Sometimes God has to knock you flat on your back to get you to look up.” It’s very true. It’s then we are often humbled and feel the need for him.

Calamity, tragedy, catastrophe, wars, famine, and disease are sometimes how God troubles the waters to push our boats safely to shore. In these situations, there can be an opportunity for reconciliation with him. And, “[n]o matter how deep the suffering, the cost is nothing compared to the joy that will be experienced if” we “come to know Jesus through” the “ordeal.”

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# A Renewed Commitment

By Cody T. McCain  
Burke County



As we embark upon the journey of a new year, it is often customary to enter with a list – whether a physical list or a mental list – of new goals or commitments. Some prefer to make new year’s resolutions – something I am not a fan of doing because they normally flow out of pure human willpower – that on average by the end of January are usually broken! However, how often do we seriously consider a renewed commitment to our relationship with the Lord Jesus? I am not referring to an increase in superficial religious antics that have the appearance of commitment, those things the scripture calls in 2 Timothy 3:5 a “*form of godliness*”! I am referring to a renewed, intentional, and heart-driven commitment to Jesus. Some of us may feel that we are “okay” in our walk with God. After all, we do our duties, endeavor to be “good people”, treat everyone right, and not engage in obvious vices and sins. Yet, when we look at the condition of our hearts – the inner man – just how committed are we in our relationship with Jesus Christ? Perhaps one of the most powerful prayers found in Scripture is often a very neglected one, found in Psalm 139:23-24 – “*Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*” How many of you know that when Holy Spirit searches our hearts that He will highlight things within us that we may not have realized existed? Much like how a CT scan can reveal serious asymptomatic conditions, Holy Spirit reveals conditions within us that are often a ticking time bomb! The gauge and standard by which we are to assess the condition of our hearts are the Word of God. Holy Spirit searches our hearts and reveals the deep and hidden areas and will simultaneously bring His Word to our remembrance concerning those things!

This brings us to a verse found in the second chapter of Jeremiah and the thirteenth verse; this verse states, “*For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.*” To give a little background on Jeremiah’s ministry, he began his prophetic assignment during the reign of King Josiah. If you know your Bible, you know that King Josiah was a righteous king, who did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. Most notably, his reign is marked by major reforms in the worship of the people of Israel after the book of the law – which scholars note as the book of Deuteronomy – was found by the high priest in the house of the Lord. Josiah tore down the idols that the people of Israel constructed to idol gods and reinstituted worship prescribed by the Law of Moses. Although Josiah set himself to seek the Lord with his whole heart, his reforms did not capture the HEARTS of the people he governed. The people of Israel only had an external response to God’s principles, but not from the heart. In other words, they said “Amen” with their lips but not with their hearts, much like we do today! Therefore, the basis of Jeremiah’s ministry was a call for Israel to repent. In the first verse of scripture read into your hearing, Jeremiah is issuing a “covenant lawsuit” to the people of Israel as he charges them with two evils: forsaking the living fountain and building broken cisterns. Looking at the first clause, the word “for-sake” in the original Hebrew language means to depart from, or to let LOOSE. A departing from the ways of God isn’t an abrupt departure, the result of a gradual “loosening” of our devotion. Someone once said, “Collapse in a Christian’s life is seldom a huge blowout, but rather a slow leak.” Let’s look at the comparison Jeremiah makes with the living fountain versus a cistern. The living fountain (a metaphor for the LORD) is divine, a cistern during Biblical times was man-made as workers were required to dig deep pits into the earth. The living fountain is self-sustaining, but a cistern requires regular maintenance and inspection as there was always a danger of its walls drying up, forming cracks, and allowing water to leak out (which is why Jeremiah called them “broken cisterns”); frequently the walls of cisterns had to be plastered to add a protective layer against leakage. The water of the living fountain is never stagnant, water in cisterns can become stagnant over time. The living fountain is self-producing, with cisterns, one had to wait on the rain to fill them. The living fountain has a limitless supply, cisterns water supply was limited! Overall, the cistern metaphor here represents man’s departure from God and using his own efforts to provide for and do for himself in a manner inferior to the ways of God! How often do we take it upon ourselves to

do things that we haven’t been led by God to do, resulting in unnecessary labor and sweat to maintain it?! Just like Israel, we will formulate idols that reflect our own nature and desires rather than the nature and desire of our Savior!

Now we come to another verse found in chapter three and verse fourteen of Jeremiah, where the Lord – through Jeremiah – issues a call to Israel with these words: “*Turn, O backsliding, children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion.*” The nature of this call is perhaps one of the most significant calls the Lord made to Israel to repent due to the way He reveals Himself to them. In this verse I want us to look at three specific points: (1) God’s call to Israel as a FATHER, (2) God’s affirmation to Israel as a HUSBAND, and (3) God’s promise to Israel concerning their future. In the first clause of this verse in the KJV the text states, “*Turn O backsliding Children...*” The call to turn in the Hebrew signifies a desire to RESTORE, REPAIR, AND REFRESH. Repentance is two-fold, it involves the exercise of our will to turn back to God and it also involves our Father restoring, repairing, and refreshing us! Looking further at the term “backsliding”, we normally associate this with a believer that suddenly reverts to some sort of worldly behavior, practice, or belief. Again, I reiterate what I mentioned earlier...collapse is seldom a blowout but a slow leak. Backsliding is more than what we’ve labeled it in church! Looking at two other translations of this verse, the word backsliding is translated as “FAITHLESS”. Why is this? The Hebrew word shobawb here specifically refers to rebellion in the HEART. Anything that arises in our hearts that divides our fellowship with God leads us OUTSIDE of the FAITH OF JESUS CHRIST! The scripture declares in Hebrews 3:12, “*See to it brothers that none of you has a sinful, UNBELIEVING heart that turns away from the living God.*” When we allow conditions of the heart to go unhealed and “un-delivered” by God, we have already entered a backslidden state. It is just a matter of time until we have turned away! Romans 14:23 also records very simply, “*For whatsoever is not from faith is sin.*” Notice I said that issues of the heart can move us outside of the faith OF Jesus Christ, I did not say faith IN Jesus Christ...there is a difference. We have placed faith IN Jesus Christ when we professed Him as our Lord and Savior. Because of this, we are called to operate in the FAITH OF JESUS CHRIST which is a SACRIFICIAL WALK! The apostle Paul stated in Galatians 2:20, “*I live by the faith OF the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up...*” As Father, He wants to restore, repair, and refresh us because it is He and He alone who created us in His image, placed us in the earth and gave us an assignment. As a Husband in this verse, the LORD affirms his everlasting COVENANT with them. This is the same way the Lord deals with us as believers, being that we as the church are his bride and He is our husband. The word here for husband signifies LORDSHIP as well. In this portion of the verse, God reaffirms to Israel that He is and should be their only LORD because of his covenant. In our covenant with Him through the shed blood of Jesus, He is calling us to surrender to Him as our husband/Lord. Finally, Jeremiah shifts this verse to another aspect of who God is...a promise keeper. The final clause of this verse states, “*...I will bring you to Zion*” which contextually speaking refers to the gathering of the people of Israel in the promised land under Messianic rule, which we know will be the New Jerusalem under Jesus Christ! This is significant because, despite Israel’s current state of mind (and heart) in the text, the INTENTION and PLAN God has for His people has not and will not change! Even if we have entered a backslidden state, have become loose or lax in our walk, or have allowed heart issues to pull us out of fellowship with God and other believers, know that God’s mind concerning us does not change!

As we begin 2023, I encourage all of us to allow Holy Spirit to do a deep dive into our hearts. When He highlights certain things to us, let us endeavor to heed His call as a Father to restore us, submit to His Lordship as a Husband, and be encouraged, uplifted, and motivated to run this race with diligence by the awesome promises He’s made to us concerning our future!

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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February 2023 - Blue Ridge Christian News page 37



# Crossword

ACROSS

1 a man of understanding \_\_\_\_ his tongue (Prov 11:12)

6 shall have in the skin of his flesh a rising, a \_\_\_\_, or bright spot (Lev 13:2) KJV

10 sold your people for a pittance, gaining nothing from their \_\_\_\_ (Ps 44:12)

14 prevent (Jer 11:15)

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

16 the father of all who \_\_\_\_ the harp and flute (Gen 4:21)

17 I \_\_\_\_ to those whose sin does not lead to death (1 John 5:16)

18 My people have been \_\_\_\_ sheep; their shepherds have (Jer 50:6)

19 Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' \_\_\_\_ (Num 11:28)

20 it \_\_\_\_ its roots around a pile of rocks (Job 8:17)

22 make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine \_\_\_\_ linen (Ex 26:1) KJV

24 Let them praise the \_\_\_\_ of the LORD (Ps 148:5)

25 So Joseph bought some \_\_\_\_ cloth, took down the body (Mark 15:46)

26 they began to throw the \_\_\_\_ overboard (Acts 27:18)

29 The creatures \_\_\_\_ back and forth like flashes of lightning (Ezek 1:14)

32 "Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me \_\_\_\_ (Ruth 1:20)

33 your hands \_\_\_\_ out violence on the earth (Ps 58:2)

35 behold, the Lion of the \_\_\_\_ of Juda, the Root of David (Rev 5:5) KJV

39 the place of the Skull (which in \_\_\_\_ is called Golgotha) (John 19:17)

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

43 God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he \_\_\_\_ anyone (James 1:13)

44 But if you can do anything, take pity on us and \_\_\_\_ us (Mark 9:22)

46 Ailments (Ps 73:5)

47 Holy Ghost fell on them, \_\_\_\_ us at the beginning (2,2) (Acts 11:15) KJV

49 one loaf of bread, and one cake of \_\_\_\_ bread (Ex 29:23) KJV

51 wheat and barley, beans and lentils, millet and \_\_\_\_ (Ezek 4:9)

54 to give up, cease (1 Cor 16:13) KJV

57 Let not the buyer rejoice nor the \_\_\_\_ grieve (Ezek 7:12)

58 the man went to the house, and the camels were \_\_\_\_ (Gen 24:32)

62 Nevertheless \_\_\_\_ saw them, and told Absalom (1,3) (2 Sam 17:18) KJV

63 away from the truth and turn \_\_\_\_ to myths (2 Tim 4:4)

65 you rely on the law and \_\_\_\_ about your relationship to God (Rom 2:18)

66 the inscription that was written: \_\_\_\_, MENE, TEKEL, (Dan 5:25)

67 Her Nazarites were \_\_\_\_ than snow, they were whiter than (Lam 4:7) KJV

68 Its posts he made of silver, its \_\_\_\_ of gold (Song 3:10)

69 Edom southward were Kabzeel, and \_\_\_\_, and Jagur (Jos 15:21)

70 The \_\_\_\_ will be ashamed and the diviners disgraced (Mic 3:7)

71 he has appeared once for all at the end of the \_\_\_\_ (Heb 9:26)

Down

1 king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the \_\_\_\_ (Est 2:8)

2 ten women shall bake your bread in one \_\_\_\_ (Lev 26:26)

3 do not let your \_\_\_\_ hand know what your right hand is doing (Matt 6:3)

4 reached for his sword, \_\_\_\_ it out and struck the servant (Matt 26:51)

5 he will bend and \_\_\_\_ his bow (Ps 7:12)

6 Melchizedek king of \_\_\_\_ brought forth bread and wine (Gen 14:18)

7 You have taken from me my \_\_\_\_ friends and have made (Ps 88:8)

8 he was riding upon his \_\_\_\_, and his two servants were with him (Num 22:22)

9 she went, and filled the \_\_\_\_ with water, and gave (Gen 21:19) KJV

10 I plan to do so when I go to \_\_\_\_ (Rom 15:24)

11 The carpenter measures with \_\_\_\_ (1,4) (Isa 44:13)

12 He brought out Israel, \_\_\_\_ with silver and gold (Ps 105:37)

13 Leah was tender \_\_\_\_; but Rachel was beautiful (Gen 29:17) KJV

21 So \_\_\_\_ returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth (Ruth 1:22)

23 its total length will be 25,000 cubits and its \_\_\_\_ 10,000 cubits (Ezek 48:13)

26 and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take \_\_\_\_ of it (Gen 2:15)

27 Also a bullock and \_\_\_\_ for peace offerings (1,3) (Lev 9:4)

28 They built a siege \_\_\_\_ up to the city (2 Sam 20:15)

30 the roar of rushing waters

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and like a loud \_\_\_\_ of thunder (Rev 14:2)

31 No one \_\_\_\_ a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment (Matt 9:16)

32 no one of these shall fail, none shall want her \_\_\_\_ (Isa 34:16)

34 Their calls will \_\_\_\_ through the windows (Zeph 2:14)

36 those who \_\_\_\_ against me use my name as a curse (Ps 102:8)

37 keep away from every brother who is \_\_\_\_ (2 Thess 3:6)

38 Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very \_\_\_\_ (2 Cor 3:12)

40 we spend our years as \_\_\_\_ that is told (1,4) (Ps 90:9) KJV

42 The \_\_\_\_ are come upon all high places (Jer 12:12) KJV

45 ask about, look into a matter

48 Make a yoke out of \_\_\_\_ and crossbars and put it on (Jer 27:2)

50 What have \_\_\_\_ do any more with idols? (1,2)

(Hosea 14:8)

51 The sons of Nadab: \_\_\_\_ and Appaim (1 Chron 2:30)

52 branches from poplar, almond and \_\_\_\_ trees and made (Gen 30:37)

53 An \_\_\_\_ must be blameless, the husband of but one wife (Titus 1:6)

55 the holy city shall they tread \_\_\_\_ foot forty and two months. (Rev 11:2)

56 Priests must not shave their heads or shave off the \_\_\_\_ of their beards (Lev 21:5)

57 to another faith by the \_\_\_\_ Spirit, to another gifts of healing (1 Cor 12:9)

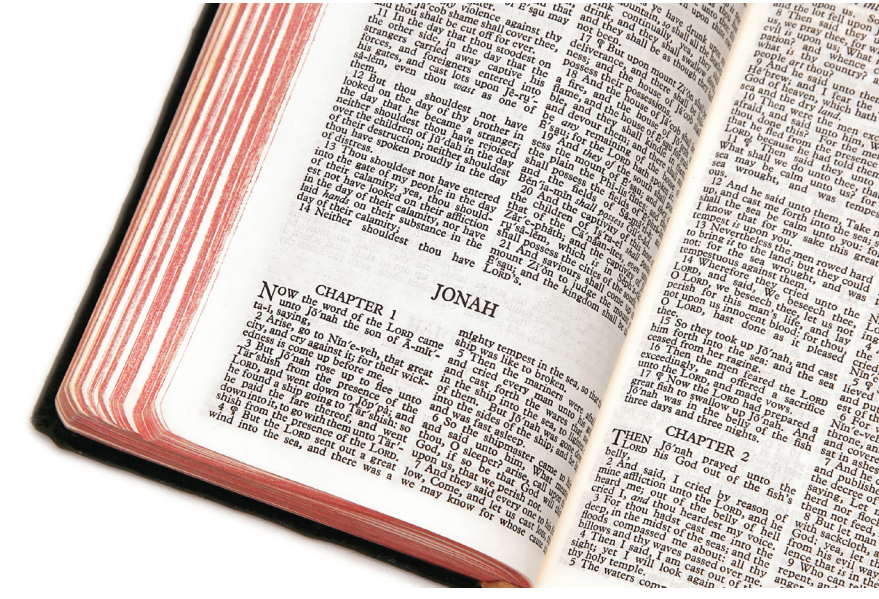
59 received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, \_\_\_\_, Father. (Rom 8:15) KJV

60 catch them in their net, and gather them in their \_\_\_\_ (Hab 1:15)

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

64 if someone wants to \_\_\_\_ you and take your tunic (Matt 5:40)

Solution on page 14





“Youth Pastor, Teacher Among 46 Arrested In North Texas Prostitution Sting”

By Jim Denison

My local newspaper, the Dallas Morning News, broke the story reported by this headline yesterday. According to authorities, the men had arranged online to meet at hotels in our area intending to pay for sex.

Officials have not divulged the names of those arrested. The article reports that a high school teacher, a football coach, and an operations director of a large hospital network were among those arrested. However, the paper chose to headline its coverage by reporting that a “youth pastor” was arrested.

When I saw the headline, my first thought was that the paper focused on a church leader in a way that is unfair to my faith. Why not lead with the hospital administrator or someone else? I assumed that this will only fuel anti-Christian animosity in our secularized culture.

Then I had to reconsider my reaction. If a youth pastor has indeed been engaged in prostitution and sex trafficking, this is heinous beyond description. Is this a one-time crime? Has he been abusing youth in his church? Consider the pain and grief his youth group, their parents, their congregation, and their pastor must be feeling.

The ancient Greek philosopher Anaximander (610–546 BC) made the first map of the known world. He depicted the city of Miletus at its center. That’s because he was living in Miletus at the time.

Wherever you are, you are the center of the world, so far as you can see. Therein lies my point today. “Prince Harry’s Pagan Progress”

A Wall Street Journal op-ed on Prince Harry’s memoir, Spare, describes his disclosures regarding his religion as “Prince Harry’s Pagan Progress.” It notes that Harry is not religious but he is “spiritual”: he tried therapy and self-medication with psychedelics; then, encouraged by his new girlfriend Meghan Markle, he took up yoga and visited a medium.

We can see Harry’s rejection of his childhood church tradition as a rejection of our faith. Or we can view him and the generation he represents as the op-ed writer does: “Solitary and syncretic, inward travelers with no direction home.” And we can do what we can to help them find the direction their souls are seeking.

Here’s the problem: most people who are spiritually lost don’t know—or believe—that they are truly lost. From their point of view, their map of the world is all the world there is.

It’s a simple fact that we don’t know what we don’t know. But this doesn’t make what we don’t know less relevant or even less dangerous for us.

“Zombie viruses” are being released by thawing permafrost in the Arctic—how real is the risk for public health? A “new wave of mobilization” by Russia may be on the way—will this heighten the risk of a new world war? Will artificial intelligence “steal your high-paying job”? Will ongoing protests and new sanctions against Iran’s government lead to welcome regime change or spark even greater aggression against Israel and the West?

If you didn’t know about these stories before you read about them just now, that fact makes their potential threat no less real. “Our heart is restless until it rests in you”

Christians are not immune from Anaximander’s self-centric map drawing. Even though we sing, “I once was lost, but now I’m found / Was blind but now I see,” we are not yet home. There is much we do not know that we do not know about our Lord and his purpose for our lives.

However, like lost people who do not know they are lost, we can think that because we are “found,” we know all we need to know. The truth is, like a newborn baby, those who are “born again” (John 3:3) have only begun the journey before them.

And when we walk our journey well, our changed lives attract the lost people we know to the One we follow.

Paul testified: “We all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18). “Beholding” translates a Greek verb meaning to “contemplate” as an ongoing action. When we spend such time in the glorious presence of God, we are “transformed” (literally metamorphosized) into “the same image” as the One we worship as we are “conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29).

Others see his image reflected in us: his love in our compassion, his strength in our courage, his truth in our witness. And even if they do not know what they do not know about the One whose image we reflect, St. Augustine’s prayer is nonetheless their story: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”

“The golden rule for your life and mine” Oswald Chambers noted: “The golden rule for your life and mine is this concentrated keeping of the life open towards God. Let everything else—work, clothes, food, everything on earth—go by the board, saving that one thing. The rush of other things always tends to obscure this concentration on God.”

Will you allow the “rush of other things” to obscure your concentration on your Lord today? Or will you behold his glory and be transformed into his image? You can draw your map around yourself, or you can draw it around Jesus—but you cannot do both. C. S. Lewis: “Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and



you will find him and with him everything else.” Will you “look for Christ” today?

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



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Later that morning, a few miles up the road, he found a little country diner. He had ordered his food and the waitress came back to refill his coffee when he began to tell her about the wonderful evening he had spent at R.C. Sharpe's store. She shook her head, not understanding. "What store is that?"

"The one just a few miles down the road."

"There's no store down that way that I know of."

"Are you from around here?"

"Why sure, but..."

An elderly man in the booth next to him wearing overalls and a ball cap turned slightly around and said, "Son, she don't know nothing about that old store cause it closed long before she was born. Reno was a fine man, but he's been dead almost fourteen years."

Derrick looked at the waitress, and she back at him. He felt his face go white. "You going to be ok," the young girl asked with a concerned look on her face?

"Ya, yes...I'll be ok, ....I think," he said. He paused, then turned to the booth next to him, "Thank you, sir, for sharing that."

"No problem," the old man said and turned back around, shaking his head in a confused manner. Then, feeling as if he had just seen a ghost, Derrick reached into his pocket to ensure he wasn't losing his mind and pulled out a tear-stained slip of yellowed paper.

"Love – 1st Cor. 13, love, ...your friend in Christ, ...R.C. Sharpe."

Just then, he heard the music playing in the diner's background, and he had to smile. The sound of that ancient instrument, the autoharp, was playing Amazing Grace, and Derrick realized at that moment he was forever changed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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


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

For I know the plans I have for you... plans to give you a hope and a future.  
Jeremiah 29:11

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

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

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