



BLUE RIDGE CHRISTIAN NEWS



Something to Think About

No Reservation, No Retreat, No Regrets

By Dennis Love
McDowell County



I would think that all of us are familiar with Borden Dairy Products, and the famous Elsie the Cow on the front of their milk cartons. What we are not familiar with is the son of the man who founded Borden Dairy Products. Borden Dairy was founded by Gail Borden in the mid-1800s. He had a son named William (Bill) Borden. In 1904, Bill Borden graduated from a Chicago High School. For his High School graduation present, his parents gave their young 16-year-old son a trip around the world. As the young man traveled through Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, he felt a growing burden for the world's hurting people. While in China, he met a missionary who led him to Christ, and that missionary gave young Bill a Bible. Bill wrote the words "No Reservation" in his Bible. No reservation simply means "Completely or Without Limitation."

Think about it-----As a young 16-year-old Christian, Bill the millionaire had given himself, completely and without limitations, to the Lordship of Jesus in his life. As a young man, Bill realized that he must always be about his Father's business. Not his earthly father's business, but his heavenly Father's business!

When Bill returned to America from his travels around the world, he entered college and graduated from Yale University. Upon his graduation, he was offered the position of vice president of his father's growing dairy company. He turned down the offer. He also turned down other high-paying job offers to be a missionary to China instead. It was at this time in his life that he wrote these words in his Bible, "No Retreat." Young Bill held fast to Romans 8 which says, "If God be for us, who can be against us," thus no retreat. Bill was hoping to work with Chinese Muslims once he arrived in China, so his first stop on his way to China was Egypt to study Arabic so he could communicate with the Chinese Muslims. While in Egypt, young Bill contracted spinal meningitis. Within a month, young William (Bill) Borden was dead.

When the news of Bill's death was cabled back to the United States, the story was carried by nearly every American newspaper. William (Bill) Borden's death was not wasted from God's perspective. Young Bill Borden not only gave away his wealth, but he also gave away himself, and that is what our Lord has called each of us to do. Jesus said in Luke 9:23, that a real follower of His must be will-

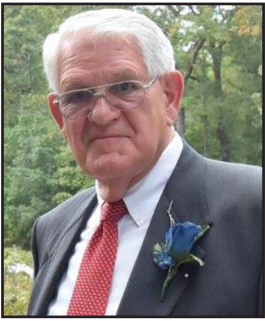
ing to deny himself and take up his cross and follow Him. The Greek word deny means "to utterly disown and abstain." Young William (Bill) Borden understood what it meant to take up his cross. As a matter of fact, he understood it so well that when his body was returned to America from Egypt, inside the coffin, Bill was holding his Bible. When his father opened it, he saw his son's final entry in his Bible. Before his death, William (Bill) Borden wrote, "No Regrets." Young William (Bill) Borden served Jesus with no reservation, no retreat, and no regrets. Does this not look like a math equation to you?
NO RESERVATION + NO RETREAT = NO REGRETS.

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



By Doug Harrell
Mitchell County

If you are old enough you may remember the song by The Rolling Stones, Satisfaction:
I can't get no, oh, no, no, no, hey, hey, hey
That's what I say
I can't get no satisfaction, I can't get no satisfaction
'Cause I try and I try and I try and I try
I can't get no, I can't get no



Most of us go through life struggling to get satisfaction. We look for ways to bring joy into our lives, ways to erase our hurt and pain, ways to ease our spinning thoughts and fears. We tend to feel our inadequate capabilities don't measure up to the task before us. We are afraid to get out of our comfort zones. Try as we might, we can't get no satisfaction in our lives. Two things must come into focus if we are to overcome this longing for true satisfaction in our lives, belief, and faith.

"Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses. And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation. Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness." Psalms 107:5-9 KJV

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith, we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear." Hebrews 11:1-3 KJV

We must have a sincere hope for a better today, a better tomorrow and a better life in general. If we have hope, a genuine desire with the expectation of fulfillment, and we build that hope upon His righteousness and promises we will reach that goal of satisfaction. Nothing else in this old world will do it. So many times, we look for excitement and satisfaction in the things of this world. The excitement (supposed) of an affair with what we might think is greener grass on the other side of the fence, the enhancement, and (we think) of our personality when we have a few drinks. We think the big house and the fancy car might give it to us. That does not happen. The Lord wants us to be happy and have satisfaction, but we usually mess up big time when we take our eyes off the instructions and directions for the good life.

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." 1 John 2:15-16 KJV

The song "My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less" says it this way:

“My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness
My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
But wholly lean on Jesus name
On Christ the solid rock I stand
All other ground is sinking sand
All other ground is sinking sand”

Build your hope on Jesus because all other things will give you no satisfaction. Only by the blood of Jesus can we attain that hope and eternal satisfaction that comes from knowing and accepting Him as our only true path. He leads us toward our righteousness through His sacrifice that was given so that we could have the blessed assurance that all is well with our souls.

To God be the glory.

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)

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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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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
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Spruce Pine NC 28777

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

Dr. Rocky Branch
Senior Pastor

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

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God, Submitting to God!*

Pine Branch Baptist Church

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

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

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Berry Chapel Baptist Church

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

Pastor - Steve Williams

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

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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,
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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

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Obedient Heart Fellowship

Does Sabbath Matter?

By Jim Huskins

For more than thirty years, Rick Warren, of Saddleback Church in California, has exerted phenomenal influence on American culture and politics. Many believers turn to him for insight on controversial, Biblical topics such as Sabbath.

Warren’s YouTube video entitled “Learn How to Slow Down” includes the following quotes: “Rest and relaxation are so important in your life that God put them in the big ten right up there with don’t murder.” “He says, ‘Every week, you take a day off.’” “That’s called the Sabbath, it means a day of rest.” Nothing wrong so far, but then Pastor Warren departs from scripture, “It doesn’t matter which day you take off as long as it is weekly.” Most Christians share this unScriptural opinion. The Bible challenges Rick Warren’s Sabbath teaching on at least two points.

First is the timing of the Sabbath. Sabbath is the Seventh Day of the week. Genesis 2:3 says, “*So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.*” Exodus 20:10 says, “*But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God.*” Every believer should conduct a word search on “Sabbath” and “Sabbaths.” Not a single verse of Scripture claims that Sabbath was moved or altered or revoked. The alteration of the Sabbath was orchestrated by Roman political and religious leaders in the Fourth Century. God’s Word says that Sabbath has always been and always will be the Seventh Day of the week.

Second, and more importantly, the Bible challenges Pastor Warren’s teaching on the purpose of the Sabbath. Rick Warren says we need to take a day off each week to rest our bodies. Rest is one of the reasons that God made the Sabbath, but it is a secondary purpose. Replacement Theologians quote Mark 2:27, “*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*” Their spin is that Jesus’ statement diminishes the significance of the Sabbath. The implication is that Sabbath is something akin to a toy given to a child. The child then owns the toy and can choose to play with it or not. This is not what the Bible says. To better understand the purpose of the Sabbath, we need to consider part of Exodus Chapter 31. My exposition is indebted to the work of Hebrew scholar, Tom Bradford.

The context is Israel’s charge to build the Wilderness Tabernacle. This is some of the most significant work in history, and God knew they would be tempted to work constantly. Exodus 31:13 is a potent teaching. Most English translations say something like “however,” or “nevertheless,” or “you shall” keep my Sabbaths. The Hebrew word is “akh.” The ESV translates it accurately: “Above all, you shall keep my Sabbaths.” Above all is not a phrase one chooses to convey the concept of “insignificant” or “optional.” Nothing is more important to God than us keeping Sabbath. His rationale for this insistence has two components.

First, Sabbath is necessary because it is an essential component of Creation. Sabbath honors the conclusion of God’s creative work. God ordained a day to celebrate the completion of His creation. He blessed us by allowing us to partake in that same celebration by ceasing our own creative activity and observing a day of rest.

Second, again, more importantly, Sabbath is necessary because it makes us holy. At Sinai, God told Israel to observe Sabbath because they were set apart for Him. They were to rest from the normal activity so that other people would see their example and do the same. God commanded Moses to put Sabbath above everything. He said this observance would be a covenant forever. We live in a time when most believers claim that Paul overrode God and declared Sabbath to be an obsolete and worthless observance. The Bible says that Sabbath was made to impart God’s holiness to us.

The last words of Exodus 31:13 are powerful. Most translations say I, the LORD “sanctify” or “consecrate” you. The most literal translation is, “I YHVH make you holy.” The Hebrew word is kadash. It means to be sanctified or set apart. God says that when we keep Sabbath we become fit for His purpose. The significance of this concept cannot be overstated.

The beginning of verse 14 works in conjunction with the end of verse 13. Most English translations say, “You shall keep Sabbath because it is holy for you.” This word translated “holy” is kodesh. Not the same as the word translated “holy” in verse 13. Kodesh means “holiness.” The Hebrew text does not say, “I want you to keep Sabbath because it is a holy day.” It says, “Keeping the Sabbath clothes you in a state of holiness before me.” When we keep Sabbath, the holiness of the Sabbath is transmitted to us. We are made holy.

Scripture teaches that we cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven unless we are righteous according to God’s standards. We also learn that we can’t attain that state of righteousness through our own efforts. Through faith in Jesus, we are clothed in His righteousness. The concept of transferred righteousness is powerfully foreshadowed in Exodus 31:13-14.

The same passage gives us marvelous insight into understanding what Jesus said about Sabbath in Mark 2:27. “*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*” Sabbath would be holy even if man had never been created. On the other hand, Sabbath had to be created to convey holiness to man. Sabbath was not created to give us a nice option should we choose to observe it. Sabbath was made for man because man desperately needs holiness.

Sabbath is the seventh day of each week. It is more about our holiness than our rest. We do not have the option of ignoring Sabbath or observing it whenever we want. We can no more redefine Sabbath than we can choose our own definition of Messiah.

Jim Huskins is pastor of Obedient Heart Fellowship.



Evergreen Church

The Wonder of Forgiveness

By John McCoury
Roan Mountain, Tennessee



We are all sinners. We all need forgiveness. “*Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean,*” David prayed. “*Wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice*” (Ps. 51:7–8). This psalm shows how God views sin, as well as the joy we experience at His forgiveness. When our sins are forgiven, we are relieved of their weight. “*As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us*” (Ps. 103:12).

John teaches that, as believers, we walk in the light. But that doesn’t mean we’ll never sin. In fact, we definitely will sin (v. 8). Again, this fact is framed as a conditional for emphasis: “*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves.*” Yes, we’ve been saved from the power of sin, but no, we’re not perfect yet. What should we do when we sin? Confess and repent (v. 9). Those who walk in the light don’t simply admit their sin to God. We grieve over it and turn forcefully away from it, hating our sin as He does. When we do so, God is “faithful and just” and forgives us—” faithful” because His love is unconditional, and “just” because Christ has already paid the price. When God forgives, He not only chooses to forget the sin (Isa. 43:25) but also purifies and cleanses us as part of His work of sanctification. To declare we never need forgiveness would be to call God a liar (v. 10). Notice the repetition of the word “if” in these three verses. It’s a certainty that we will occasionally stumble and fall. To claim perfection shows that “His word is not in us” and that we’re not really part of His family.

The forgiveness we first received in Christ is the same forgiveness available to us today, whenever we sin. Thank God for this and make confession a daily part of your time with Him. Holy Father, thank You for Your unfailing forgiveness and love. Diminish our pleasure in wrongdoing and make us grieve over our sins. In all ways, help us turn away from evil and pursue good.

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

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Back in the Saddle NMBC Youth Rally '23, April 11-16, 2023 Ridgecrest Conference Center, Friday night at 7:00 pm BRO Kenny Baldwin; Saturday morning at 9:30 am Pastor Tony Shirley; Saturday night at 3:30 pm BRO Charlie Clark III For more information concerning the NMBC Youth Rally please contact our church office at 828-652-7729

Avery County

The Church Strengthening Team of the Avery Baptist Association is hosting a night of Praise & Worship on Sunday, March 12 at 6 PM at Powdermill Baptist Church, 268 Powder Mill Creek Rd., Newland, NC. Anyone is welcome to sing and/or share a testimony. Everyone is invited! Come and bring a friend

Pleasant Hill Baptist in the Frank Community of Avery County will begin hosting our weekly Masters Club Youth Group starting this evening and will be every Wednesday 6:45-8

Burke County

Drexel Memorial Baptist Church Women of The Word invite you to our annual Women's conference. With guest speakers Connie Richards and Sunshine Miester. Saturday April 22nd, 9:30 am to 1 pm.

To register go to <https://www.drexelmemorial.org/events/women-of-the-word-conference/2023-04-22>

Questions about the conference? Call Gail @ 828-390-7574 Or call 828-437-7200

McDowell County

McDowell County Youth Rally '23. East McDowell Middle School. March 7-9, 6:00-8:00 nightly

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Spirit Filled Preaching – Tuesday night, Pastor Tony Shirley; Wednesday night, Pastor Tom Walker; Thursday night, Pastor Greg withrow

Mitchell County

Berry Chapel Baptist Church will be presenting the 36th annual presentation of, The Living Lord's Supper, Easter drama on Friday, April 7th and Saturday, April 8th at 7:00 pm. Altapass Hwy, Spruce Pine, NC 28777

Reflect 2023, Cross Street Commerce Center, 31 Cross Street, Spruce Pine, NC Friday, April 7, 2023 at 6:00 pm. Join us on Good Friday to sing about the goodness of God! This is a free community event. Hosted by Western Carolina Church.

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Bear Creek Baptist Church

By Bruce Cannon
Mitchell County

“In like a lion, out like a lamb,” so goes the proverbial expression. Everyone hopes for much-improving weather as we go through March. And, while I also hope that to be true, that expression reminds me of two of the names of our God. He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Lamb of God.

Both names are equally precious to us. The name, “Lion”, speaks of His regal character. The name, “Lamb,” speaks of His being the Savior of the world. Both names are used in Revelation 5:5,6, “*And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. 6 And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.*”

When I think of a lion my mind conjures up an image of a male African lion. This animal is over 400 pounds and 4 feet tall at the shoulder. It is equipped with enormous fangs and incredibly powerful necks, forelimbs, and claws that allow them to hunt, on average, the largest prey of any land animal. He is referred to as the “king of the jungle” and has no natural enemies.

What a perfect description of our God! Powerful; no enemies can stand before Him! He is our champion, our shield, our hiding place, our mighty fortress, our cleft in the rock, our hiding place. Under His wings and in His shadow we can abide. The picture of a mother hen and her chicks is also used in the Scriptures to speak of His protection. He can turn away all the fiery darts of the wicked one. He can heal all our diseases. He can save our souls, no matter what we have done, and declare us righteous before His presence. Praise the Lord!

As the Lamb of God He is tender, kind, compassionate, and loving. He was willing to go to the Cross for us. He shed His blood to wash away all our sins. Isaiah wrote in 53:7, “*He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.*” He had all authority and all power yet He chose to not use it. He allowed Himself, who knew no sin, to die for those who had no hope...me and you!

What precious names are these: Lion and Lamb! Two names bring great hope and peace to our hearts because we know that we need both. We need a Lion to fight our battles and win them because we can’t on our own. We need a Lamb to be our sacrifice for sin so the righteous demands of God can be met for us to be able to go to Heaven.

In like a lion, out like a lamb. March, thank you for that by your blusteriness and calm you remind us of our God. Lord, thank you for being our Lion and our Lamb! We praise You for Your protecting power and your shielding help on our behalf. We also praise You for being our sacrifice. We couldn’t save ourselves but you so wonderfully and graciously provided the payment for us. Thank you! In Jesus’ sweet Name, Amen!

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.

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.



Lakeview Missionary Church

Keeping God’s Temple Clean (non-fiction)
By Christopher L. Scott
Moses Lake, Wash.



I spent the week thinking about how to make the Sunday church service an environment where we could praise God and enjoy fellowship together. This meant recruiting greeters to work outside to welcome people, printing a bulletin for each person to have along with teaching notes for the sermon, ensuring the air conditioning worked well and having someone clean the church facility before everyone arrived on Sunday. The environment for people to come and worship God was prepared.

But someone else had been working all week to destroy it. He probably didn’t intend to do this, but he was good at it. And he did it almost every week. Carl would arrive at church, enter the door, and immediately look for me. All week he had been thinking about an issue or problem with the church. When he arrived at church he wanted to talk with me, the associate pastor of our church in California, about what was wrong with our church and what I needed to do to fix it (or what I had already failed to do to fix it).

A morning intended for praise for our Lord quickly became a morning focused on criticizing the associate pastor. The result was an awkward conflict that was publicly seen often in front of others.

Carl had a habit—and he was good at it—of destroying the atmosphere of love for one another and praise of God at church. This was one of the scenarios Paul warns the believers about in the city of Corinth: “*Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.*” (1 Corinthians 3:16-17, NASB)

These two verses describe how God’s people and the church are the temple of God. In 1 Corinthians 6:19 Paul describes the individual as being the temple of God, but that is not the intended meaning here in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17. This is because “you” in verse 16 is plural in the Greek and the passage starts in verse 10 describing the building of God’s church as a group of people, not one person.

But what does this mean for us? If we find ourselves being that man that causes trouble to God’s church we need to accept that things won’t always be the way they should be. Churches are not perfect even if we try our best to make them that way. This means we need to accept that our churches and the people working in them are flawed.

If we find ourselves troubled by someone, let go. Each Sunday we need to “let go.” Don’t fight. Don’t cause a scene. Just be kind and let it go.

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



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The Unwanted Weed

By Christy Lowman
Burke County

I had every intention of writing about an animal this month but God showed me that He wanted me to write about something else instead.

We have been having warm weather the past few days here. Yesterday, I walked out onto our brand-new patio we installed last year and saw the teeniest, tiniest weed growing in the crack between two bricks. When I saw it, I was so disappointed. I could not believe it was there. The last thing I wanted was a weed growing on my patio. I thought that since there was a layer of roughly two inches of sand, then bricks on top of that, tightly woven together, and finally a layer of polymer sand to fill in the cracks, there would be no weeds. This top layer of sand is hard like concrete once it is set. So, I was shocked to see a weed had burst through and was thriving in a hairlike fracture of a crack.

I debated pulling it up or getting the weed killer out then I had a Jesus moment. I realized how much Jesus and His followers are like weeds.

As we draw nearer to the return of Jesus more and more people are going to dislike Christians. As Satan continues to feed hatred into the hearts of nonbelievers, the more they are going to want to get rid of us. Just like we want to get rid of weeds when they grow in unwanted places. Christians all over the world are already experiencing this. Some are persecuted, murdered, thrown out of their homes, and turned into slaves because they are simply followers of Jesus Christ. We are fortunate that in America we haven’t had to deal with it to that extent yet.

The good news is, weeds will always continue to survive. There will always be weeds. Jesus will always survive regardless of the darkest, gloomiest day. Remember the day when Jesus was crucified? When He died, the sky turned dark, the earth trembled and Satan thought he had won. But Jesus was not dead! Hell could not contain Him! He went to hell and burst the gates wide open and took the keys!!! Jesus will always be alive! That’s the best news ever!

Just like a single weed, Jesus living in one believer’s heart will grow and spread into Jesus living in multiple hearts! Because if Jesus lives in you, you will want to share it and shout it on the mountain tops regardless of the cost. You can’t hide Jesus; everyone will notice He lives inside of you! He will spread to others like wildfire because you cannot kill Jesus, just like you can not kill weeds. His flame is everlasting and can not be put out! Just like this tiny unwanted weed I have growing will continue to live. I can stomp it, poison it, pull it up, but it will continue to come back.

If you find yourself around people who don’t like you because you are a Christian, don’t fret, Jesus is with you and He is all you need. He will give you the strength and bravery to hold your head high and do our ultimate job here on earth which is to live Christlike, and spread the good news of Christ to everyone regardless of what happens to us. It’s okay if no one likes us, if we aren’t popular, if we don’t have any friends, or if someone considers us a weed and wants to get rid of us. The only thing that matters is what Jesus thinks about us and that we are doing God’s work. Don’t ever forget sometimes the ugliest of weeds have the prettiest flowers.

Dear Lord, please let us walk among the unbelievers boldly as we tell them about you. Help us depend solely on You to take care of all of our needs. Help us not to fall into peer pressure because we are called to be leaders, not followers. Help us be strong and courageous for whatever is to come our way. In Jesus’s name, I pray, Amen.

“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” Matthew 7:13 ESV

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



Humor

By Buddy Freeman
Madison County



Message on a T-shirt: “I dream of a better world when chickens can cross the road without their motives being questioned.”

Sign in the vestry of a New England church: “Will the last person to leave please see that the perpetual light is extinguished?”

Never say in an interview for a job, “I’m a LOYAL employee, so please don’t let my current boss know I’m looking for a job.”

A little boy in church for the first time watched as the ushers passed around the offering plates. When they came near his pew, the boy said loudly: “Don’t pay for me, Daddy. I’m under five.”

“I sure am happy to see you, grandma,” the little boy said to his grandmother, his mother’s mother. “Now maybe Daddy will do the trick he has been promising us.” “What trick is that?” the grandmother asked. “I heard him tell Mommy that he would climb the walls if you came to visit,” the boy replied.

In Sunday School a boy answered a question on marriage by saying, “ In Christianity, people can have only one wife or husband and they call it monotony.”

A little girl had been warned not to say anything about the new minister’s big nose. He was coming over for dinner. When the doorbell rang, she opened the door and said, “Oh, how do you do, Mr. Nose?”

The anxious young preacher asked his wife on the way home, “Did they like my sermon?” His wife said, “I think they did. At least, they were all nodding.”

A church member “asked the Pastor how did you get that cut on your face?” The pastor said, “I was thinking about my sermon this morning and wasn’t concentrating on what I was doing so I cut myself while shaving.” “The member said, “That’s too bad! Next time you better concentrate on your shaving and cut your sermon.”

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

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Funny Farm

The Rest of The Story

By: Farmer Doug



I cannot help but belly laugh when I read these episodes of Clint on the farm and remember back to the day it took place. That watering tank is still working and still has to be cleaned out quite often but the electric fence has been replaced by a 4-strand barbed wire fence that has a gate where Clint decided to become an electrified wire clutcher. I remember my disbelief when I looked back and he was standing there shaking like a leaf holding the wire with this weird look on his face. I knew that it would not kill him but thought he had lost his ever-loving mind! His story tells it all and is totally funny. Enjoy the read and don't hold on to electric fences!

A close-up photograph of a man with a friendly smile, wearing a light-colored straw hat with a dark band and blue denim overalls over a grey t-shirt. He is standing outdoors in front of a brick wall.

Clint's Chronicles on the Funny Farm – January 2011

By Clint Pollard

Many of you have written, emailed or called about this column. It seems that you find delight in my many foibles, misadventures and near –misses with danger. Also, some have questioned my veracity – that would be TRUTH telling – regarding these tales. A couple things you should know: The Lord undoubtedly protects me from myself and the myriad monsters and events that seek to snuff me out; and these stories are absolutely true (not to say I don't exaggerate a teeny tiny bit ☺)

Now get a load of this:

Pride Comes Before Electrocution!

It was another warm and DRY day at Harrell Hill Farms. I understand, now, why farmers are obsessed with the weather. I was asking God to open the heavens and pour moisture on our parched farmland. Hay ain't growin', 'maters are wiltin', 'tater patch looks like a forest fire aftermath...the soil is groaning for water. Babbling creeks and free flowing streams which had cascaded only weeks before now have slowed to a mere trickle.

This day my friend Doug Harrell has drug me all over the mountainous terrain, spraying some kind of dastardly weed killer on the fence line. He's learned not to trust me on the tractor in the presence of other human beings so he drives, dragging me and 10,000 feet of yellow hose in his wake. I am trudging through the valley, pulling 5 miles of hose pipe, spraying this modern day nuclear waste on a gazillion miles of pig weed. (By the way, one day I will ask the Lord how come He made pig weed...it's ugly; it chokes edible plants, and has thorns the size of horseshoe nails...that just ain't right!) Anyway, I'm cautiously running behind the tractor trying to avoid falling into a groundhog cavern. For I know there is an underground monster wanting to drag me to the center of the earth's core and devour my flesh!

Having dumped our load of herbicide it's time to repair the watering holes for the cows. I guess they are called watering holes, although they are more like watering tanks. They really aren't tanks either, they are really cement donuts which rise out of the earth and fill with water from who knows where. I mean there is no water on the gardens, no water in the creeks, and here I am looking at a round concrete hicky-doo full of life saving water...go figure. Man, so much to learn on this farm!

Anyway, A.D. Harrell – “Daddy D” to his family – has told Doug we need to unstop these fountains, geysers, watering holes...whatever in the heck they are. Seems mud and debris are interfering with the flow. So off we go to do whatever a farmer does to unstop the cow spring!

Well, there's an electric fence around the pastures to keep the bovine in and others out. Weeks ago, I was shown where to connect and disconnect the power making entry safe. If you care, the power comes out of a little out-building, sort of an ancient haunted shed type structure beside Daddy D's home. My first foray to the shed I fully expected a two-headed snake, a gigantic spider or at least a swarm of bees to assault my personage. Although I do recall the spider webs appearing like a Johns-Manville fiberglass factory. Thankfully not a single behemoth approached me, and Doug told me always to remember to disconnect the power before touching the wire. Duh! What kind of moron does he think I am?

As we neared the cow watering spigot I thought I saw Doug take the wire in his hands to steady his vault over the fence. You need to know that Doug and Daddy D are my heroes, in many regards, but I especially long to be a farmer like them. And, Doug and I have long had a competitive “thing” between us, whether playing golf, picking beans or eating cake. One always hopes to outperform the other. Back to the fence...

Following in Doug's footsteps, I grabbed hold of the barbed wire, with both hands, preparing to carefully lift my right leg over. BAM...BANG...%\$#@!...lightening raced through my fingertips, tingled through my wrists – continued up my arms, neck and head, spilling down into my back and belly, exiting through my feet. Heck I don't know – it's not a constant shock, it's a SLOW electrocution technique. I felt like an electric eel, did the hokey pokey, wriggling and dancing to the rhythm of pulsing electricity. Nearby Doug had "that look", as if he was suspended in time and space, unsure he was seeing what he was seeing.

Meanwhile, I'm clinging to this fence for dear life – smoke emanating from inside my wet gloves (Okay, not exactly pouring out but so it seemed). Yet I thought, "If Doug Harrell can hold this wire I CAN TOO. I will not give up." And I did...and I did...and I did. My hair standing on end...each appendage covered in goose bumps as body hair rose to the heavens...smoke coming from my ears...

I was convulsing to the passage of intermittent electricity. I wore a hunted look, a sickly grin as I was not about to fail what I thought was another test of my farmer mettle.

Doug finally approached and said, “Uh, what are you doing?” At that moment, I lost my will to continue this insanity...I don’t care if Doug had held this fence for longer than I...time to surrender. Periodic bursts of electricity passing through Farmer Clint’s body cannot add to life expectancy...I would simply lose this challenge!

Pouncing over with both legs, I released the wicked barbed wire at last. I gazed at Doug with newfound admiration and inquired, "How did you do that? I mean, didn't it hurt you?" Confused he asked, "How did I do what?" Perplexed and annoyed I continued, "Hold onto that wire so long...it's HOT!"

As I've come to expect, Doug just smiled at me – that kind of smile that implies, “Oh goodness where did I find this guy” – and said, “Clint, the fence is hot. I went under the wire, not over it.”

I burst into laughter, the kind that shakes your belly and innards...still smoldering from the prehistoric torture fence. Now I was upset so I asked Doug, “Why did you let me do that – I could have been killed?” With a twinkle of mischief in his eyes and wonder in his mind he replied, “Well, I don’t know about that. It’s not likely you would be killed. But I’ve learned that when you mess up it’s with gusto...and by the time I catch what you’re doing it’s too late to save you.” I grunted and we moved on to help Daddy D unplug the cow fountain.

Tapping on Doug's shoulder, I pronounced with utmost confidence, "Bet you can't hold a hot fence as long as me." "Yeah, you win that one, Clint," he said, as he walked away chuckling and shaking his head.

I thought about my misplaced pride and how trying to outdo another, much less a friend, is not what God wants from me. Improper display of pride is shocking – get it, shocking! (That’s funny I don’t care who ya are!)

Regardless of my incompetence as Farmer Clint, I know that the Lord stood there with me - although He likely kept His distance while I held the hot wire. Yet, once again, miraculously I had cheated death on the funny farm.

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Scriptures Affect Our Attitude
Our Personal Responsibility To GOD

By Glenda Ward
McDowell County



In Romans 12:1-16 Paul gives us guidance for living a re-deemed life in a fallen world. By the mercies of God, we are to present ourselves as a living sacrifice, that is our reason-able service to God. Many people accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and never learn how to live a life that honors our Heavenly Father. Paul encourages us to turn ourselves over to God each day and ask Him to use us for His glory. We are not to be conformed to this world but should experience a progressive trans-formation of life by the renewing of our minds. The mind is changed by prayer, reading of Scripture, and reflection on God’s Word; by worship, and meditation on God’s acts as the Holy Spirit works in us. God wants us to be new people with renewed minds We are transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we can live to honor and obey God our Father. Since God only wants what is best for us, we should joyfully volunteer ourselves for His service. Our refusal to conform to this world’s values must be firmly founded in our minds. Then only when the Holy Spirit renews, reeducates, and redirects our minds are we truly transformed. (Reference Romans 12:1-2).

The key to an honest and accurate evaluation of ourselves is knowing our iden-tity in Christ. Apart from Him, we aren’t capable of very much by eternal stan-dards. Christians are to work together under the authority of Jesus Christ. (Refer-ence 1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Ephesians 4:1-16). As part of a renewed mind, the Christian is to think wisely about themself and what their function is to be in the body of Christ (the church, see 1 Corinthians 12:12-28).

If we think too much about our worth in the eyes of others, we miss our true

value in God’s eyes. (Reference 12:3). Christians are to be humble and to use what God has given for the good of the body (the church). (Based on Romans 12:3; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10; Ephesians 4:11; 1Peter 4:10). It is when we discover how awesome it is to live in the center of God’s Will that we discover it is life at its very best – and there is nothing in this world that compares to it. (Reference Romans 12:2-3).

Christians are all members, being many, form one body in Christ, and every one member one of another. “So, we being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, if it is prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith” (Romans 12:5-6). Christians are given gifts to use for the good of others. The New Testament lists at least 17 kinds of gifts. We should love and support each other with love and gladness and we are to work together under the authority of Jesus Christ. (Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Ephesians 4:1-16).

For us to use God’s given gifts effectively:

- Realize all our gifts and abilities come from God.
- Understand not all have the same God-given gifts and talents.
- Know who you are and what you do best in your Christian faith.
- Dedicate your gifts to God’s service, not personal success.
- Be willing to use your God-given gifts, holding nothing back from God’s ser-vice.

Our purpose is to be faithful and seek ways to serve what God has given us and realize that our gifts can’t do the work of the church alone. (Reference Romans 12:6-8). God gives us gifts so we can help build up His church.

Be thankful for the gifts God has given to others – gifts that are completely different from ours. As Christians let your strengths balance other Christian’s weaknesses and be grateful for the abilities of others to make up for your deficien-cies. Together we can build a church. No individual can express love to a whole community, but the body of Christ (the church) does. We are all weak in some areas and strong in others. (Reference Romans 14:1). In areas of strength, we should not fear being defiled by the world. We should go and serve God. In areas of weakness, we need to be cautious. If we have a strong faith and shelter it, we are not doing Christ’s work in the world. If we have a weak faith but expose it, we are being extremely foolish.

Each person is accountable, “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God”. (Romans 14:12). We are to be strong in our faith and sensitive to others’ needs. “Let us not therefore judge one another anymore: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way” (Romans 14:13). We need to constantly monitor the effect of our behavior on others. Accept one another without judging. For the Kingdom of God is righ-teousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. “For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another” (Romans 14:18-19).

“For whatsoever things were written afore time were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus, That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God” (Romans 15:4-6). Our service entails the dedication of the total person to living for God’s honor. As servants of Christ, we are doing the Will of God from the heart.

Manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit with. (Reference 1 Corinthians 12:7). Knowledge of Scripture Affects Our Attitude toward the pres-ent day and the future. The more we know about what God has done in years past, the greater our confidence in what He will do in days to come. We should read and study our Bibles diligently to increase our trust that God’s Will is best for us. (Reference Romans 15:4).

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 Pro-grams & Bulletins, VBS Material, Christmas and Easter Programs; all material based on the KJV of the Bible. Also testing the field in tributes, individual memo-rial writings, etc.

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"A Charcoal Fire"

By Russell McKinney
Mitchell County

"Now the slaves and the officers were standing there, having made a charcoal fire, for it was cold and they were warming themselves; and Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself." (John 18:18, N.A.S.V.)

On the night of Christ's arrest, Peter denied even knowing Him. To make matters worse, Peter spoke three such denials, just as Jesus had foretold he would. And where did Peter speak those three denials? He spoke them while he was warming himself in front of a fire in the outer courtyard of the home of Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest. At the time, Jesus was being tried by Caiaphas and the other members of the Jewish Sanhedrin inside the house.

John's gospel uses a highly specific Greek word, anthrakia, to describe that fire by which Peter warmed himself. Some Bible translations translate anthrakia as "a fire of coals" but other translations more precisely render it "a charcoal fire." So, Peter denied Jesus three times while standing before a charcoal fire.

Now let's fast forward to a morning more than a week after Christ's resurrection. Peter and some of the rest of the chosen 12 have made their way north from Jerusalem to Galilee. They have done so in obedience to Christ's word that He will meet them there (Matthew 26:32; 28:7; Mark 16:7). While they are waiting for the resurrected Jesus to appear to them, the group acquires a small fishing boat and goes fishing one night on the Sea of Galilee (John 21:1-3). But they fish all night and catch nothing.

The next day, just as the morning sun is beginning to illuminate the scene, the group looks toward shore and sees a figure standing on the beach. The figure shouts to them, "Have you caught any fish?" Bluntly, the answer is sent back, "No." Then the figure shouts, "Cast your net on the right side of the boat, and you will catch some fish." The word of advice is followed, and the net brings up 153 large fish. Such a haul would normally tear a net, but this net handles the job with no problem.

It's at this point that Peter figures out who the man on the beach is. After all, Peter has had this same type of experience once before in his fishing career (Luke 5:1-11). Impulsively, he jumps into the water and swims the 100 yards to shore ahead of his friends, who are left to bring in the boat and the fish. And when they all get to the beach, what do they find? They find that Jesus has built a fire and is cooking Himself some fish. The men then accept Christ's invitation to a breakfast of fish and bread and proceed to cook some of the fish they've just caught.

Once breakfast is done, Jesus asks Peter three times, "Simon (Peter's name before Jesus had renamed him), son of John, do you love Me?" And three times Peter gives the response, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love you." There you go, Peter. Consider your three denials forgiven and yourself restored to the ministry.

You say, "Boy, what a great story." Yes, it is, and it gets even better. Do you remember that fire that Jesus had going on the beach that morning? Guess what kind of fire it was. It was a charcoal fire. As a matter of fact, the only two times where that specific Greek word, anthrakia, is used in the entire New Testament are John 18:18 (the scene of Peter's denials) and John 21:9 (the scene of Peter's restoration). Therefore, don't be surprised if Jesus restores you following a failure or a setback by somehow reproducing the exact same situation in your life. It worked for Peter, and it will work for you, too.

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



Saved by Grace

By Art Dmytriyeu
Yancey County

Have you ever heard or read the verse from the Scriptures: "... by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God"? (Ephesians 2:8 KJV). It is a famous verse about the process of salvation. There are several steps in the experience of salvation, and this whole process will not be possible without Jesus Christ.

In infinite love and mercy, God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might be made the righteousness of God. Led by the Holy Spirit we sense our need, acknowledge our sinfulness, repent of our transgressions, and exercise faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord, Substitute, and Example. This saving faith comes through the divine power of the Word and is the gift of God's grace. Through Christ, we are justified, adopted as God's sons and daughters, and delivered from the lordship of sin. Through the Spirit we are born again and sanctified; the Spirit renews our minds, writes God's law of love in our hearts, and we are given the power to live a holy life. Abiding in Him we become partakers of the divine nature and have the assurance of salvation now and in the judgment. As much as God wants us to be saved, He will not force salvation on us. We have to ask Him. We have to want to be saved. God is respectful of our choice, even if it is a choices against Him.

One of the greatest ways to illustrate it is in the story of a prodigal son written in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 15:11-32. The whole chapter 15 is about lost to be found. It is true that *"the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."* (Luke 19:10 KJV), but what about the ones who run away from God? The story of a prodigal son portrays how God will deal with every sinner that repents. So, there is hope in Christ with God. God's grace extends to every person. Grace, the unmerited favor of an almighty God, is a free gift given to anyone who asks. Grace saves us. We can be so thankful for this amazing gift! However, let us never forget the important element in this process - repentance. In fact, repentance is the first step in our salvation experience. While we may not recognize it, God is constantly at work in our lives. Through the Holy Spirit, God appeals to our hearts. Even when we feel far away from Him, His love is working to call us to Himself. He will leave no means untried to bring us salvation.

Jesus meets us where we are, and delights in saving us from our lost condition. There is no path too dark for Him to travel to save us. There is no life too sinful that His grace and forgiveness cannot remake us. Jesus died on the Cross for the sins of the whole world. He redeemed us. His great invitation still remains: *"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."* (Matthew 11:28-29 KJV).

Dear reader, the Lord Jesus speaks through the Book of Revelation: *"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."* (Revelation 3:20 KJV). Will you open the door and let Jesus take control of your life today?

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>



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By Cristy Gupton
Burke County



When trying to refer to something that’s somewhat simple, we often use the phrase, “It doesn’t take an act of Congress”. Meaning, we should be able to manage this alone without the interference of the government. But, there’s a big issue that Congress actually had to take up on our behalf and it’s causing a huge ruckus. That issue is transparency in healthcare.

Why is it that we have clear and transparent pricing in nearly every aspect of our economy except healthcare? It’s probably easier to figure out what we owe in taxes every year than it is to determine how to read EOBs and hospital bills. I’m sure a smart person once said that they make it difficult to understand simply because they are trying to hide behind the manufactured complexity. Well, in case you missed it, an actual act of Congress was passed in 2021 to tackle this pressing issue. That law was the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021. You know, the massive omnibus bill at the end of the year that’s meant to fund the government? Well, some folks who were fed up with opaque healthcare pricing decided to slip language into that law and it took many in healthcare by surprise.

There were basically two parts to the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 of interest to the healthcare industry. First, was the No Surprises Act, which prevents hospitals from generating out-of-network charges from various providers who might happen to treat you at their hospital when the hospital itself is considered “in-network”. Secondly, was a handful of transparency rules. Those are the ones ruffling feathers across the country but here in Western North Carolina, we’re feeling the pain more than most. What makes us so unfortunate? A little company called Hospital Corporation of America or HCA for short. You probably caught the sarcasm there didn’t you? HCA is not little at all. They are the largest healthcare employer in America. What does HCA have to do with the transparency rules that are now the law of the land? Absolutely nothing! Oops, I let more sarcasm slip out. They have nothing to do with transparency because they are one of the hospital systems that is thumbing their nose at the transparency laws, and they couldn’t care less that you might need to know how much your upcoming procedure might cost. Yep, they’re flat-out ignoring their legal requirement to transparently post their pricing so that local patients can make good decisions about where to receive affordable care.

But the transparency laws are not exclusive to hospitals. These new requirements are forcing almost every aspect of the provider side of the healthcare business to come clean with their charges. That means payers, providers, and the intermediaries that hold the once-secret or “proprietary” data that you need to see. Who else is required to play ball in this new transparent environment? Employers and the insurance agents, brokers, and consultants who sell healthcare coverage to them. Yes, Sir! You heard me right. If you are an employer and you sponsor a health plan for your employees, you are legally required to evaluate what your insurance broker is making off of your health, dental, and vision plans. You see, employers who sponsor these plans are considered “fiduciaries”. That’s the same exact word that’s used in retirement plans. So, if employers sponsor retirement plans they are governed by a federal law called ERISA or the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974. I bet that’s kind of surprising that something that was passed that long ago for retirement plans is just now circling back to the same fiduciaries who sponsor health plans. But it’s true.

So, the long-held secret commissions and bonuses, trips and overrides, etc. are supposed to be disclosed to the employers who sponsor those plans. They must evaluate the fees and revenues earned by the brokers, just like stock brokers and financial advisors have had to disclose for years now. It’s time for the insurance industry to get with the program. It’s the law.

Around 2016, I had a major change in my career path. I was working for a large employee benefits consulting firm, and they were being acquired by an even larger consulting firm. I decided to leave and start my own small business, essentially doing the same thing but on a much smaller scale. I knew I needed some infrastructure so I joined a trade group called Health Rosetta. My eyes were opened to a new transparent way of doing business and I was first exposed to the idea that disclosing my compensation was the only way to be totally honest with my clients. I agreed and remembered that being totally transparent was the way Christ would have conducted His business affairs if he were in the same position. I have to remember every day that the job I’ve committed to doing for my clients is my version of ministry. So, being completely transparent about how and what I’m paid is what Christ requires of me. Now employers all over America are required to at least be aware of what their insurance broker is earning from their benefit plans.

An age-old saying goes, “sunlight is the best disinfectant”. If shedding a little light on how your healthcare dollars are being spent is something being denied to you as an employer who sponsors a health plan, then it’s required of you to do something about it. And there’s no better candidate for the job. Employers are often seen as their employee’s advocate, the one who fights for what’s right on their behalf. Kind of like how Christ took up the cross and bore the burdens of his followers.

Cristy Gupton is an employee benefits advisor based in WNC. She’s vetted by Health Rosetta and Mitigate Partners, two industry groups dedicated to transparency in healthcare. She holds a bachelor’s degree in Public Health from UNC-Chapel Hill and a Master’s degree in Health Benefits Design and Health Informatics from University of Lynchburg. Learn more at www.custombenefits.work.

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50,000 babies saved:
How pro-life can go beyond pro-birth

By Jim Denison

It is estimated that roughly 50,000 more babies will be born each year as a result of the decision to overturn Roe v. Wade last July.

For those who oppose abortion, every one of those lives is a cause for celebration. For those who think differently, that's 50,000 women who will be forced to carry, and often raise, a baby that they didn't want.



But while there are many stories of women who are grateful once the child arrives, most who feel inclined to get an abortion do so because their lives were difficult before adding a baby to the mix. Fortunately, an increasing number of people are taking steps to help make sure that being pro-life means more than just being pro-birth.

And, as Adam Macinnis profiles for Christianity Today, Christians are often at the forefront of such efforts.

Learning to cope with being uncomfortable

Embrace Grace is one such example of a Christian group that "supports single parents and women facing unplanned pregnancies." Betty Hodge started a chapter at her church in 2019 because, as someone who had also faced an unplanned pregnancy and pressure to abort a baby, she can empathize with women who find themselves in a similar position.

She credits the support of her family for helping her to choose life for her child and now works to provide similar support for the women to whom she ministers.

As Macinnis notes, Mississippi—where Hodge lives and works—has "the highest rate of preterm births—over 30 percent more than the national average," as well as "the highest infant mortality rate in the US, with nearly 9 of every 1,000 babies dying. And for the infants who live to be toddlers, 28 percent will live in poverty."

There are understandable reasons that Mississippi often finds itself in the crosshairs of pro-choice advocates looking to justify their position by highlighting the additional dangers faced by women denied the chance to abort their babies. However, those increased risks also mean increased opportunities for those willing to step in and help.

Another ministry in the area attempting to meet those needs is Her PLAN. Anja Baker is the coordinator for the Mississippi chapter, and her team partners with 140 churches and organizations that are ready to offer support and help to mothers in need, with more partners still being added. As she describes, "We're going to take a state like Mississippi . . . and we're going to make it the champion of hope and life, hospitality and generosity."

As Hodge cautions, however, such work can get uncomfortable at times: "You have to be ready for the f-bomb to come out of a mouth. You've got to be ready for someone to come in here in a short, short skirt."

But learning to cope with being uncomfortable can be an essential first step to serving the parents as well as their children. And to be sure, helping both is crucial.

"Kids are unwell"

As Kate Woodsome writes for The Washington Post, "Kids are unwell. Worse than ever recorded, according to two new reports tracing depression and suicidal thoughts and behaviors in teens. . . . But if we want to make any lasting difference, it is us, the adults, who need an intervention."

Woodsome goes on to describe how "American kids are unwell because American society is unwell. The systems and social media making teenagers sad, angry, and afraid today were shaped in part by adults who grew up sad, angry, and afraid themselves."

Working to break that generational cycle of pain is an essential part of being pro-life as well.

The CDC reports that "preventing adverse experiences in childhood could reduce the number of adults with depression by as much as 44 percent." As such, we see that one of the best ways to serve a child is to serve his or her parents. By working to help parents create an environment in which their children can feel safe and provided for, we can interrupt that cycle of pain and help kids avoid the trauma that so often defined their parents' lives.

So how can the church help?

We can start by valuing people the same way God does.

The difference between a burden and a treasure

At a recent conference, pastor Chris Legg made the point that the only difference between a burden and a treasure is the value assigned to the object in question.

A fifty-pound piece of iron, for example, would be considered a burden to anyone who had to carry it. But what if it were fifty pounds of gold instead? To what extent would you gladly burden yourself to carry as many blocks as possible?

As Legg points out, the weight didn't change, and the block would be difficult to carry in either case. However, your perspective changed because your assessment of the object's worth changed.

How we choose to relate to the people God brings into our lives is similar in many ways.

Even in the best of times, other people can be difficult to work with, take us out of our comfort zone, and generally hinder the way we might prefer to live. But if we can come to see them as God does—as a treasure worth every bit of the exhaustion and exasperation they might require of us—then ministering to them as the Lord intends can become a source of joy rather than sacrifice and purpose rather than pain.

And if we can help parents to see their children, both in the womb and after they're born, in the same light, then perhaps we can help to break the cycle of trauma and distress that is so often passed down from one generation to the next.

Treating every person God has created as a treasure of inestimable worth is what it should mean to be pro-life.

Are you?

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. Copyrighted and printed by permission from Denison Forum.



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3	6	7	8	1	4	5	9	2
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Lessons From Jericho

By Kurt Bomar
Avery County



Israel had been wandering around in the desert for 40 years. Finally, it was time to enter the promised land. They crossed the Jordan river and what did they see? The impressive city of Jericho. They could not take over the land without first taking this imposing fortress.

As His people marched around the walls of Jericho, God prepared them in several ways for what they would face in the future. I want to share with you a few lessons I learned from this battle of Jericho that applied to the Israelites and also to us today.

1. First, He gave them a realization of the impossibility of their situation. The first time they circled the city, the walls must have looked huge. And each successive time they went around they must have looked bigger yet. There might be a huge wall between you and a family member, or fellow believer. Sometimes God will have you go around it again and again until you finally say, “I can’t manipulate this situation. I can’t solve this problem. I can’t do anything about this, Lord. Only you can solve this.” “The Lord was thus showing them and us that.... Zech 4:6 *“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the LORD Almighty.*”

2. Second, as His people circled the walls of Jericho, God taught them the importance of Patience. Heb 6:12 *“We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.”* Faith and patience are needed to obtain His promises. Oftentimes we have faith, and that’s great, but God wants us to have patience too.

3. Third, as His people circled the walls of Jericho, God taught them discipline. His job was to work, theirs was to be absolutely silent. If I can’t control my tongue, I won’t conquer the enemy. My tongue will get me in big trouble and so will yours. Jas 3:5-6 *“Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. 6 The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.”* Therefore, it is the wise man who silently- without complaint or opinion- gives God time and room to work.

4. Finally, God’s strategy for conquering Jericho not only served to prepare His people for their future but He was also doing something else and you don’t see it until you look deep into the text. God was providing a witness to the people of Jericho. As proof, let’s go back 400 years. While His people were in Egypt, God gave the inhabitants of Canaan (that would include the citizens of Jericho) 400 years to repent as God told Abraham in Gen. 15. Then He gave them 40 more years while His people wandered in the wilderness. Now He gives them six more days as they watched His children walk in devotion and order. They could have repented as Rahab did. It is not God’s will that any should perish. Sometimes sinners repent, as the Assyrians did when Jonah preached to them, sometimes they don’t as was the case here. But God gave them a chance.

What will impress people around you? Seeing you walk patiently and quietly, neither panicking nor complaining, but simply walking under the authority of your Captain no matter how impossible your situation may seem. When others see the way your home, marriage, and life are being ordered in this march toward Heaven it will be a witness to them as they face their own Jerichos.

Kurt Bomar is pastor of Walnut Grove Church.

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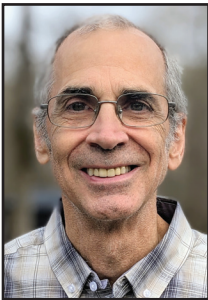
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For The Love of God (Part 2)

By Thomas Thorne
McDowell County



Psalm 19:14 is one of the classic verses of the Bible. “*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer*” (Psalm 19:14 ESV). Let’s take a deeper look at key phrases in the original Hebrew of this verse and see if we can gain additional insight into these words of David.

The first key phrase is “words of my mouth” (Hebrew - im-ray pee). “Words” can be translated as either “word” or “speech.”¹ David is here referring to our speech, regardless of the circumstances.

The second key phrase is “meditation of my heart.” This is from the Hebrew ve-heg-yone lib-bee. The noun “meditation” (heg-yone) can have several meanings such as: “talk, planning, thinking, meditation, playing, music.”

Likewise, the word for “my heart” (lib-bee) can also have several definitions. “Heart” in the Bible can refer to “mind, character, disposition, loyalty, concern, intention,” or “purpose.”

“Be acceptable” is le-ratson in Hebrew. This phrase also means “for goodwill, favor, acceptance, pleasure” or “liking.” This phrase “be acceptable in your sight,” could also be translated as “for your liking” or “let them be pleasing.” So, let’s take a look at what we have so far:

- Let the words of my mouth, all of my talking and speaking ...
- and the meditation, planning, talk, music, and even thinking of my:
 - mind
 - character
 - disposition
 - inclination
 - loyalty
 - concern
 - intention
 - purpose
- Let all of these be for pleasure, goodwill, acceptance, liking and favor ...

Next is the phrase “in your sight,” (Hebrew - le-fa-neh-ka) which indicates “in your presence/face, in front of you, before you,” or “in your sight,” O LORD (Hebrew YHVH). And “LORD/YHVH,” we know refers to the eternal God, the creator of the universe, and our master.

We need to realize what is being said here. David is asking God to let everything he says and does be to God’s liking and pleasure and to build favor – to let all these things be as if they were being done face to face, right in front of God. David is asking that all of his thoughts and actions be righteous and just, so that none of them need to be hidden.

And near the end of the verse, “my rock” is from the Hebrew tzoo-ree. This is defined as “(my) large rock, boulder; a figure of God, as support and defense of His people.”

When we think of a boulder, we normally don’t think of an offensive weapon. Although, a large rock used as something to hide behind, to provide protection from darts or arrows is something to be considered. A rock or boulder therefore would have been a defensive tool.

Jesus will provide this defensive mechanism on our behalf if we ask and let it happen. The evil thoughts and inclinations that come can be thwarted. The last phrase is, “and our redeemer” (ve-go-eh-lee). To redeem means to “recover ownership of by paying a specified sum (or debt).” Jesus is our redeemer. His payment of our debt to God allows us to be forgiven of our sins, and to have life, abundant life, and eternal life.

So, we have gone through a lot of definitions. Here is my attempt to put this together in one paragraph.

Let the words of my mouth and the thoughts and meditations that I dwell on, the plans that I make, the speech that I use, my music, even the fun times I have, and the games that I play – my mind, my character, my disposition, my inclinations, my loyalties, my concerns, my intentions, my aims, and my purposes; let all of these be for the pleasure, goodwill, acceptance, liking, and favor of you– before you, in front of you, in your sight, and even face to face, O LORD, YHVH, my master, my rock, my boulder, my champion in the fight against the enemy, and my redeemer, the One who has bought me back from being a slave to sin, the one who has offered me forgiveness, life, abundant life, and eternal life.

Conclusion

The love of God, as we are told by Jesus, involves doing what he told us to do. All of our actions should be done with complete honor and respect to His name, reputation, and authority (Exodus 20:7). Likewise, everything we think and do should be for the favor, liking, and pleasure of God (Psalm 19:14). Shalom.

1 Definitions throughout this article are from A Concise Dictionary of the Hebrew and Aramaic Language, William H. Holladay, Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, MI, 1988.

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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Marching On

By Caron Cline
Burke County

The month of March contains several noteworthy holidays and events, but the word ‘march’ always reminds me of The Battle Hymn of the Republic, especially the line: ‘His truth is marching on’. This powerful song was written about 7 months into the Civil War. Julia Ward Howell was a well-known poet and while visiting Washington, DC, heard Union troops singing a popular marching song called ‘John Brown’s Body’. Howell was challenged by a local minister to compose new words for the tune and by early the next morning, the words had come quickly and seemingly, supernaturally. Howell testified that she realized something of importance had happened. She sold the words to the Battle Hymn of the Republic to Atlantic Monthly for a mere \$5.00. The words paint a portrait of a powerful God Whose truth is always marching on despite the deception of mankind. However, His truth must be carried forward by individuals willing to take a risk for the cause of Christ. The Civil War brought a division in this nation like none other, a division that even turned brother against brother. Why? Basically, because people focused on their own opinions, beliefs, and understanding rather than on God’s truth. As Romans 3:4 states: “Let God be true, and every human being a liar. As it is written: ‘So that You (God) may be proved right when You speak and prevail when You judge’”. The United States of America was a nation that stood on truth, as defined by the Word of God. The formation, growth, and protection of our country are nothing short of miraculous. For most of our history, Judeo-Christian values were the nation’s foundation. Unfortunately, the last 50-plus years have seen a decline in those long-held truths among our citizens. Relative truth has replaced absolute truth, and God’s word reveals that ‘doing what is right in our own eyes’ will result in oppression and calamity. America stands in dire need of a revival of God’s truth, carried and distributed through grace and love, by God’s people. Psalm 68 declares that God is sovereign over anything and everything attempting to destroy our nation. When He arises, His enemies will scatter and will soon perish, but the righteous who march with Him will be glad and sing praises to His Name. Followers of Jesus Christ are called to be faithful soldiers who resist becoming entangled with civilian affairs. Our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places, therefore, we must march forward with the good news of God’s grace. The power of the gospel will transform individuals, which, in turn, will transform nations. Addiction, poverty, terrorism, immigration issues, etc. will be defeated as God’s truth marches on.

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.



In Memory of Joy Baldwin
Madison County

The Cry
I heard the cry from out the world,
Oh God deliver me
From death’s dark dungeon was the cry
We’re dying don’t you see?

For some, it was their first time
When calling out to God
And others, tho He knew their name,
They’d spoken not a word.

God’s warriors falling on their knees
In daily faithful prayer
With confidence did seek their God
They knew that He was there.

Oh, friend please don’t delay your cry,
Pray God to save your soul
You need Him more than ever
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The Bible is God’s letter
Jesus died for me and you
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A Grateful Girl

Asbury College Revival: Don't Pass Us By

By Patti Jensen
Mitchell County

What began with 15 college students in their normal daily chapel time, has grown to, as I write this, over 130 hours non-stop, and hundreds of people from all across the country and even one person from Singapore, traveling to Wilmore Kentucky (a town of 6,000 people) to just be in the room where God is moving.

Some are calling it a revival. Some are cynics saying that it isn't really a true revival. But there's no question that with only a piano and a box drum, they are worshipping, praying, repenting, and loving on one another, both friend and stranger.

I'm not sure if there is a standard definition for revival, but Jennie Allen said it most concisely when she said revival is Prayer, Worship, and Repentance, and that's exactly what the students (and now faculty, staff, and hundreds from the around the country) are doing on a little college campus in Kentucky.

These 20-something age students are going after Jesus with abandon. They are putting words into action as they demonstrate "Jesus Don't Pass Us By." They are a part of a generation, "Gen Z", that the world in many cases deems lazy, all about protests and riots and fighting back. They are disregarded as a generation that will never be able to lead our country or our world out of the mess we have gotten into.

But there is a growing population of 20-something people who are on fire for the Lord. Who are pursuing Him and hungry for His Word, and His presence. They want to seek Him above all else and are boldly taking that fire to their college campuses, their homes, apartments, coffee shops, and their second home... social media. In a TikTok world that is known for lewd, demeaning, and trivial videos, the Asbury College Revival has now gone viral! What? As of February 16th, posts with the hashtag #AsburyRevival have generated 34.5 million views on TikTok. Who would have EVER imagined that?

They are worshipping Him with abandon, not caring who is watching or what they might say. They are studying his Word, and hungry to have God use them for His Kingdom.

They are in so many ways crying out to God and saying "Don't Pass Us By". In that small chapel, which looks like so many of our "main street" churches in our communities that sit silently 5 days out of the week, they have been worshipping and praying and filling the altar for 130+ hours nonstop.

The accounts from those who have witnessed this revival, say that it all began with a simple chapel service followed by a time of worship and a call for those who wanted prayer. Students began to sing, worship, and go to the altar...then friends joined others who were praying at the altar. The worship music continued. The praying continued. Others on campus heard the music long after chapel should have been over, and wandered over in curiosity to see what was happening. And they stayed. Then others came. And they stayed. The worship leader continued to play and sing for 10 hours straight. At that time others stepped onto the stage to relieve them. Not professional musicians. Just students who stood on the chapel stage and led simple worship songs.

If you are a Christian, and that doesn't move your heart while convicting it at the same time, I might suggest some prayer time is needed. As adults, we become so comfortable in our church "schedule". Sunday and Wednesday....that's when we worship the Lord. That's it. And we really like what happens and the people we know inside our four walls just like it is. That guy with the tattoos covering his face? Nope... not really comfortable with him coming in. And frankly, most aren't really comfortable taking Jesus out to him either.

WHAT ARE WE DOING? If we knew for a fact that Jesus was coming back next year, what would we be doing? Would we be flinging open the doors of our churches and opening the altar day and night? Would we worship with abandon? Would we repent and call out all of the things we love more than God? Would we pray for the guy with tattoos covering his face, for our family members that don't know the Lord, for the person at work that gets on our nerves? Would we share God and what He has done for us all over our social media so that He goes "viral" throughout social media? Would we look for every chance we could find to serve others and show them the love of Christ?

Or would we instead still start to get a little perturbed when the preacher goes past 12 noon on Sunday morning? Would we give the side eye to the lady at church who raises her hands in worship? Would we fuss a little when we walk out of church about the choir/praise band not singing the songs we like or know or for being too loud? Would we still roll our eyes about that "one person" at church who we don't think should be a leader/teacher/volunteer?

Dear Lord....let the young people at Asbury College be our turning point. Let what You are doing there spread throughout this nation, and this world begins in our own hearts. Right here.

Lord, please Don't Pass Us By.

Patti Jensen is a contributor to Blue Ridge Christian News. She lives in Spruce Pine, NC with her husband Jack. She has two daughters and sons in law and three grandchildren who call her Lovie.

1 John 4:18 - 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.



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It's All Good in God

By Stephen R. Clark
Lansdale, Pa.



For the past few years, my mantra has been, “*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*” This is what Paul wrote in Romans 8:28 (NIV).

Every time I’m in an uncomfortable or annoying or tough situation, I try to let this verse play over and over in my head and parse through it.

- I know I love God, even if imperfectly.
- I know He has called me; this has been affirmed countless times.
- I know He has a purpose for me, even if I’m not always clear on what that is.

So, whatever is happening to or around me, my all-knowing, all-loving, always-perfect God intends it for my ultimate good. This is true even when I can’t see it.

What I’ve been experiencing as I let this one truth soak into my soul is lessening stress and anxiety.

Long ago I came to the awareness that nothing touches my life that doesn’t first pass through my heavenly Father’s hands and that He will never let anything touch me that I can’t handle.


So, whatever touches me is all good. Eventually.

Knowing this, and experiencing it more and more, allows me to relax. I can walk calmly through whatever is thrown onto my life path and He will make sure it doesn’t destroy me.

And if it does? As Paul writes a little later in Romans, “*If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord*” (14:8, NIV).



It’s all good, either way.

Stephen R. Clark is a writer who lives in Lansdale, PA with his wife, BethAnn, and their two rescue cats, Watson and Sherlock. His website is www.StephenRayClark.com. He is a member of the Evangelical Press Association and a regular contributor to the Christian Freelance Writers Network blog (<https://christianfreelance-writersnetwork.wordpress.com/>).




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By Terry Cheek
McDowell County



March will see us close out chapter one of Romans. Paul continues his focus on the wrath of God against unrighteousness. Let’s open God’s word to Romans 1:26-32.

Romans 1:26-32 *“For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. (27) Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. (28) And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; (29) being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, (30) backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, (31) undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; (32) who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them”*

God has a specific plan for our life. Some, if not most, of that plan is laid out in scripture. For each of us, God’s plan begins with obedience to His law. Not because He says to but because we know it is the right thing to do, and our heart testifies to its truth. The very best we can do will come up short. But understand this. Romans 3:23 tells us everyone has sinned. Romans 6:23 tells us the penalty for our sin is death. Romans 5:8 testifies that Jesus Christ died to forgive sin. And, Romans 10:8-10 inerrantly says to be forgiven for our sins, we must believe and confess that Jesus is Lord. Salvation comes by Grace through Faith only by Jesus Christ.

Our text this month is a continuation of a judicial text. It is one you will not hear preached on television, and sadly it is only preached in churches sincere to God’s Word. I would like to share two things that should be said about Romans 1:26-32. First, Paul addresses the radical corruption of the human race. He sees the sin of homosexual behavior as representing the radical nature of our fall. It is seen here not simply as a sin, nor even as a serious sin or a gross sin, but as the clearest expression of the depths of our perversity against God’s word. Second, As Paul introduces the sin of homosexual behavior, he first mentions females. Throughout human history, man has been the gender that seems most brutish, most without conscience and godliness. The woman has been understood as the fairer sex. Still, when Paul wants to describe the depth of the fall of the human race, he says that even women exchanged the natural use for what is contra naturum, against nature, not simply against culture or social convention. In other words, those who become involved in homosexual practices are not only sinning against God but against the nature of things. Today’s debate about whether homosexual behavior is chosen, acquired, or inherently genetic can be answered in this text. The Word of God says homosexual behavior is not natural. It is against nature as God has created it. When men and women engage in this behavior, there are divinely appointed consequences. A price will be paid when people go that far to defy the law of God. The word due has all but disappeared from our culture and vocabulary, but it has a very rich history in ethics. It goes back to the Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle and down through Western civilization, from which justice has been defined not only within the church but also outside the church as giving people what is due them. When people act against God’s law and the law of nature, God gives them their due. Homosexuality is only one sin Paul describes in this section. If we read Paul’s entire list without feeling the pangs of conviction, we are psychopaths.

Paul describes in verse twenty-eight a mind that does not give any attention whatsoever to things that are true, pure, lovely, and just. From Philippians 4:8, we read, *“Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”* A debased mind is one where the thoughts are filled with impurities, desires of the flesh, lust, jealousy, and hatred against people. Such a mind is in love with the lie and flees from the truth. Our basic nature as fallen humans does not want to receive the knowledge of God, and when it does penetrate the mind, we do not want to keep it there. We see God’s use of judicial abandonment again. It is as if He is saying, “If you want a mind fixed on debauchery, you can have it.” Human beings rarely have a taste for and a love of hearing the Word of God. Suppose we have any affection in our hearts to hear the things of God. In that case, it is only possible because the Holy Spirit has already rescued us from the condition Paul describes, which is basic to all humanity. If we have the desire to learn the things of God, then something has happened to plant that desire in our hearts. It is frightening to learn at one time, we had the mind of a reprobate and did not want the knowledge of God.

Because they did not want to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind to do those things which are not fitting, being filled with all unrighteousness (vv. 28–29). Just ask people whether they believe man is basically good, and the majority will answer yes. Due to the influence of humanism on our culture, people believe that man is basically good and simple, occasionally makes mistakes. Such thinking leads people to the conclusion they do not need Jesus. However, there is nothing we need more than Jesus. We entertain our imaginations if we say that we are basically good. The people who need to hear

the gospel, just like I was at one time, are not merely tainted by unrighteousness; they are filled with unrighteousness, just as I was. That is how Paul describes us in our natural condition. No one is mildly affected by an error, bad habits, or mistakes; man is saturated with unrighteousness.

Unrighteousness is a general term, while Paul wants to get more specific, so he elaborates on the kinds of unrighteousness that fill us as fallen creatures. First is sexual immorality. Elsewhere the apostle writes, in Ephesians 5:3, *“But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints;”*. Polls have reported that fornication and adultery among born-again Christians are not measurably different from that of the unconverted. Truly regenerate Christians do commit these sins, but it should be a radical exception to Christian behavior, not a generally accepted practice. Today people get their behavior cues not from what God says is acceptable but from culture. Some argue that condemning immoral behavior is old-fashioned. Still, that sort of thinking is why we have Christian parents giving their daughters birth-control pills, sending the message that sexual immorality is okay. Paul, however, puts sexual immorality at the top of the list of our corruption. Make no mistake. Sex is a beautiful thing. God designed it and gave it to His people, but He gave a context for it—marriage—, and He is jealous that it be reserved for that context. To sexual immorality, Paul continues with wickedness and covetousness. Covetousness is the sign of someone who does not want God in his thinking. When we covet someone else’s property, prestige, or job, we are saying, “God is not just giving it to that person but not giving it to me.” The minute we are envious and jealous of another, we have removed God from our thinking. Have you heard of the phenomenon called the “emergent church”? One of the gurus of the emergent church boasted that in the last ten years of his preaching, he had never once mentioned the word sin. He has not wanted to destroy people’s identity, self-worth, or ego. I may have mentioned the word sin more times in this study than that man has in his entire lifetime. You cannot read a page of Scripture without dealing with sin. John Calvin had one of the highest views of human beings of any theologian in history, as far as I know. Some think otherwise in light of all Calvin said about man’s total depravity, but the reason Calvin took sin so seriously is that He took people so seriously. The reason God takes sin so seriously is not that He is a bully or a killjoy who does not want us to have any fun. God takes sin seriously because He knows how destructive sin is to this world, our family, and our friends. God has a better idea of what humans are to experience, and in His ultimate plan of redemption, He will banish sin from His world altogether. Paul’s list grows maliciousness, full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and evil-mindedness; they are whisperers. People whisper plans because they cannot speak them aloud. Even in a fallen world, our plans are often so evil that others will reject them, so we whisper. Paul also includes backbiters on the list. Have people talked behind our backs? Have people slandered us? All of us probably scream yes.

The other side of that coin says we must consider how many we have slandered and talked to behind their back. This is not a problem only for the lost. As humans, we are prone to this sort of behavior. Next on Paul’s list are haters of God. Who will admit to that—to hating God? He also adds violent, proud, boasters, and inventors of evil things. As if there were not enough temptations and sins to arouse our vile passions, we like to think up new ones. Years ago, Random House commissioned a book series on the literary classics. Rod Serling from The Twilight Zone was commissioned to write the critical introduction to Augustine’s classic, Confessions. Serling went on to say he did not understand how Confessions had come to be regarded as a classic because Augustine goes into great detail about the remorse he felt as the result of stealing pears from an orchard years before. He had no comprehension of what Augustine had experienced. Sterling went on to say, when I was a kid, I used to go to Nick Green’s orchard and watch Nick harvest rows of grapes. I moved along the rows with a big paper bag, stealing his grapes. I could afford to go to the store and buy the grapes, but it was more fun to steal them. I also stole pears and apples from Nick’s trees. Once, I was caught raiding a neighbor’s garden, pulling up every onion from the onion patch, which made no sense because I did not like onions. I am still paying the price for that; I understand why Augustine was so remorseful. Paul continues by adding to his list of disobedient parents. When young people are disobedient to their parents, they are revealing their natural condition. Paul also includes those who are undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, and unmerciful. Despite the scope of his list, it is only partial. It is merely representative of our corruption. If Paul had listed all the sins that the Bible spells out, he could have filled the entire epistle and then some. He gives us a representation that should be enough to stop every mouth and convict every conscience. I’m sure some will say none of this ever applied to me. But, if we are honest with ourselves, we will know the truth. If we were to write down this list and compare it against today’s newspaper, we would see everything Paul mentions and then some. The worst indictment is not found in this list of crimes against God. It is found at the end of the chapter: those who practice such things deserve death. Paul says that fallen human beings not only do these things, and they know better. God has planted in the mind of every creature made in His image a conscience that can discern the difference between good and evil. People seemingly without a conscience are called sociopaths or psychopaths; they are sick. A normal person—a fallen person whose normal behavior is the abnormality of sin—knows that people who do these things are worthy of death.

It gets worse. Those who do those things also approve of those who practice them. There is honor among thieves. Misery loves company. If we can entice others to join us in our sins, we can eliminate the taboos rather than repent of our guilt. Many have sought and seek today to establish a new ethic. If we are not

continued on page 21

It's Too Late

By Todd Abraham
Athens, Tennessee



For many people today, as far as salvation is concerned, it's too late! God's already turned them over to a reprobate mind. The world we live in, if you haven't noticed, is covered in gross spiritual darkness. Technology, especially smartphones, has most hypnotized. They live for that next alert, notification, e-mail, text, and so on. They wake up and check their phone first thing. The last thing they do before they close their eyes is check their phone. Afraid they are going to miss something. Their minds are consumed with carnal things that God never intended to consume our minds with. Many of you reading this are idolaters of your smartphones but don't dare to own up to it. I suppose you think God is going to excuse you somehow, but not so friend.

Think of the vast amount of Christians who are missing God, all the while thinking they are right with God because they believe that heinous doctrine of "once saved, always saved". I'm in no way a prophet of God but I feel like the prophets. I'm sure in the sense that God has had me warning the readers of Heartbeat Christian News for years about the dangers of smartphones and technology, but no one seemingly is listening. The only hope you have, the ones who are smartphone idolaters, is that God will give you a window of grace and severe judgment that will be enough to break you from it and allow for a space of repentance. But you are still going to have to pay for the idolatry because God forgives but He doesn't remove the correction.

Have you considered how most people can't even do the simplest tasks without checking that little idol? Things we take for granted like walking, driving, spending time with family, watching TV, hanging out with friends, and, worst of all, CHURCH! Most parents now have all but abandoned their responsibilities as parents because of these wicked little devices. Moms neglect their babies and toddlers, ignoring their children while eating out, and endangering their own lives and that of their family by driving distracted. Dads, I'm not omitting you. Many of you are just as guilty. One of the worst effects is just how much time during your average day is consumed by these phones.

Here's a challenge for anyone reading this. I challenge you to take one whole hour of silence with all digital devices turned completely off. During this hour, take a pen and notepad and write down how much time you spend on your smartphone. It must be one entire hour and, if anyone distracts you at all, you have to start over. If any of you have the gumption to do this, please call/text me at (423) 381-0925 and let me know the results. Or you can e-mail me at todd@hbcnews-monthly.com. If I get one person to respond, honestly, I will be very surprised. As I've written before, it's God Almighty that put it on my heart to write this article every month for years and always gives me the material for it. And yet, I have NEVER heard of one person who has contacted me and said they ditched their smartphone and went back to a basic phone. Which tells me one thing. For many of you, it's too late.

Let me be bold here. If you tell me you can't do your work without a smartphone, you are a liar! If you tell me you can't live without it period, you are a liar. Ironically, society recognizes addictions such as alcohol, drugs, and cigarettes but very few admit that smartphones are an addiction. But God does! Also, you know what else I've never had to happen? I've never had one preacher, except my pastors, contact me and let me know just how dead on this article is.

In closing, I will confess something personally to add to the weight of the importance of this article. I took a part-time job last year and had to get an iPad connected cellularly to do the job. God chastened me sorely until I got rid of it. Even after I disconnected the cellular part, He still beat me. You either live what you preach or get out of the pulpit!

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.

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FEMA Grant Offers Safety for Seniors

By Carol Layton, NCBAM Communications Director

Volunteers working through NC Baptist Aging Ministry (NCBAM) will now have access to grant-funded smoke alarms for seniors.

On the heels of a \$40,000 FEMA Fire Prevention Safety Grant, NCBAM was recently awarded an additional \$78,000 for smoke alarms and other safety devices for seniors.



NCBAM's senior ministry director, Dr. Sandy Gregory, says the safety grant speaks to the heart of NCBAM's work. "These grants will greatly enhance what we can do through our "Priority #1: Prevention" outreach. Fall and fire prevention are integral to our mission of providing "help for the journey" to older adults. Sadly, seniors are more than twice as likely to die in house fires. We've seen too many houses with no working alarms – some yellowed or even crumbling with age, or with batteries removed. We're thrilled to have access to these funds. We need teams of people who can partner with us to bless their communities."

Alarms will be available statewide to groups willing to be trained in installation. Groups can ensure all their senior church members have working alarms or can canvass their communities as a missional outreach.

The grant-funded alarms are state-of-the-art and come with a 10-year sealed-in lithium battery, a loud 85-decibel alarm, and a "near-expiration" chirp. NCBAM also has carbon-monoxide alarms for homes that burn fossil fuels as well as alarms for deaf/hard-of-hearing individuals.

Dr. Michael C. Blackwell, president/CEO of Baptist Children's Homes of NC, founded the Baptist Aging Ministry in 2009. "Church volunteers have always been willing to go the extra mile to serve seniors in need. With their help, NCBAM served 4,801 clients in 2022. These grant funds will greatly expand what NCBAM and volunteers can accomplish in service to seniors."

If you or your church would like to partner with NCBAM in smoke alarm installations, contact the NCBAM Call Center at 877.506.2226 or ncbam@bchfamily.org

If you are 65+, live in North Carolina, and have a need that would help you to maintain your safety and independence, please contact the NCBAM Call Center at 877.506.2226.

NCBAM's Priority #1: Prevention programs include fall and fire prevention, home modifications for safety, medication management, disaster preparedness, and home invasion prevention.

Seniors have 2.2 times the risk of dying in a house fire. This intergenerational mission team installed smoke alarms during a recent Camp BAM.

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

convinced that Paul is describing how human beings function, we should watch television for the next three months, listen to all the language, and see the lust and immorality. I recall listening on television about a Supreme Court justice nominee. On the program was a woman from one of the organizations that favor abortion. She was concerned that the nominee would take away women's reproductive rights—the right to kill their unborn baby and to be involved sexually with no concern for the consequences. Rights have been redefined by our culture to mean that everybody has a right to do what they want with impunity. God does not give us that right, but our culture, influenced by Satan, seeks to lessen people's guilt to gain allies in the revolt against heaven. Thank God that Romans does not end here. The gospel, the good news, is coming. People who do not care about the good news might care if they digest the bad news first and realize what our Savior has done, what He has saved us from, what He has saved us for, and what He has saved us to. We are saved to be conformed to His image, to love the things He loves, and to hate the things He hates.

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 Expositional Commentary. Ligonier Ministries. Kindle Edition.

Phillips, John. Exploring Romans: An expository commentary. Kregel publishers Life Application Study Bible: King James Version. Tyndale eSword Bible software

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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The Two Roads Of Life

By Steve Bietz
Burke County



Every March 26th, we celebrate one of the greatest American poets of the twentieth century. Robert Frost was born in San Francisco on March 26th, 1874. Frequently honored during his lifetime, Frost is the only poet to receive four Pulitzer Prizes for Poetry.

While in college, I took a literature class and Frost's poem entitled, "The Road Not Taken" was one of the literary works that the class was required to analyze. One finds several themes in this well-known poem with its short four stanzas with five lines each. One sees indecisiveness, regret, risk, and nonconformity, to name a few as we watch the traveler choose one of the two roads.

In the greatest sermon ever shared, Jesus offers up a choice of roads. We find the two roads toward the end of the sermon on the mount in the Gospel of Matthew. *"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."* Matthew 7:13,14

The Bible claims that this fork in the road is approached by every person that has ever walked on earth.

I appreciate the beautiful sentiment that is verified by the pen of Issac Watts as he tries to capture the Lord's thoughts:

"Broad is the road that leads to death,
And thousands walk together there;
But wisdom shows a narrow path,
With here and there a traveler."

Obviously, the example of life must not be taken from the multitude. I'm not saying that the majority is always wrong, but in the case of the two roads that Jesus presents, the majority have made a terrible mistake.

We see in the Gospel of John, Jesus attempting to prepare the disciples for the upcoming drama of His arrest and crucifixion. With an encouraging tone, Jesus says: *"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwellings; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know."* John 14:1-4 Thomas speaks up and asks the Lord: "How can we know the way," and Christ responds: *"I am the way, the truth, and the life."*

Indeed the road to the Kingdom of Heaven is a path of self-sacrifice, self-denial, and a discipline of life that the majority will not choose. But having the Lord Jesus Christ walking beside us makes choosing the road to the Kingdom of Heaven a joyous highway. The best road is the one where we have our Redeemer Friend traveling by our side every step of the way.

Steve Bietz, Pastor, Morganton Seventh day Adventist Church.

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Family of God Fellowship

Ugly Isn't For Sissies

By James L. Snyder
Ocala, Florida



Over the years of marital bliss, we’ve not had many disagreements. She likes broccoli. I like Apple Fritters. We’ve never been able to come to any agreement with that. But, outside of that, everything has been rather smooth.

There’s one controversy that has plagued our house for the last few years, and there doesn’t seem to be any solution. There are some problems with no solutions, and I guess this is one of them. The controversy I have is about my bathroom mirror; each of us has our bathroom with our own mirror. My mirror has some very significant issues with it.

For several years I have suggested that we replace my old mirror with a new one.

Once, I even suggested I would be glad to pay for the new mirror out of my Apple Fritter account, which was a mistake.

When I said that she looked at me with a long pause and then said, “You have an account for Apple Fritters?”

I knew I was in trouble for that; I guess I kissed my Apple Fritter account good-bye.

The controversy I had is that my old mirror portrays me as some old guy. I find it rather frustrating because I have some pictures of myself, and I don’t look old at all.

As we discussed this, she said, “My mirror portrays me as I really am.” She smiled one of her sarcastic smiles at me.

“Let me,” I said, “go and look in your mirror to see if what you’re telling me is really true.”

I entered her bathroom and was surprised as I looked in her mirror and saw some old guy looking back at me.

Immediately I went out and said, “Hey, who’s that old guy in your bathroom?” She laughed and said, “I think it’s you, but all I ever see is some old lady.”

“I am not that old,” I demanded.

I then went and got our family photo album, brought it back, opened it up, pointed to a picture, and said, “See, that’s me.”

She looked at the picture, then back at me laughingly, and said, “Yes, that’s you when you were in high school.”

I flipped a few pages and said, “There I am.”

“That’s our wedding picture,” she said with a smile.

By that time, I was just a little bit frustrated. If I look at those pictures and then look in the mirror, I do not see any resemblance whatsoever. How can that old rascal in the mirror be me?

The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage could see that I was just a little bit discouraged. After all, pictures don’t lie, but I think mirrors do.

“Don’t you realize that as we grow and get older, our looks change?”

Looking at her, I was shaking my head and unwilling to reach her level of understanding.

“But,” I complained, “I’m not that old looking, am I?”

Then she handed me a more recent photograph. It was me holding my granddaughter on the day of her birth. I looked at it as though I was looking at it for the first time. When I first looked at it, I didn’t see myself; rather, I saw my great-granddaughter.

After looking at it for a few moments, I sat back in my chair and sighed deeply.

“So, I am an old man.”

“Well, my dear, you’re not young anymore.”

I stared at her for a few moments and then said, “Tell me, why do you look so good, and I look so old?”

“Because you’re not looking in my bathroom mirror.”

“Maybe,” I said, “we could change bathroom mirrors?”

She started laughing and a few moments later, I joined her in laughing.

This was the first time I ever seriously looked at myself.

In the morning, when I go to the bathroom to comb my hair, shave, and brush my teeth, I ignore what’s in the mirror. Maybe I ought to.

Thinking about this for a bit, I had a thought. Does it really matter how old a person looks? After all, the only cure for not getting old is dying.

I’ve noted lately that some of these Hollywood stars get facelifts, tummy tucks, and all sorts of changes to their body. I wonder if they do that for themselves or for the public that’s looking.

Does it really matter how a person looks?

I believe the next time I’m in my bathroom, I’m going to have a little chat with that old guy in the mirror. I will say, “I don’t care how old you look. You don’t scare me.” I had to rehearse that line a dozen times to get it right. I’m not sure I can trust that old guy in the mirror.

Of course, one of the great benefits is that I don’t have to see how I look throughout the day. The people on the other side of my glasses have that to handle.

I have learned to appreciate what God said to Samuel in, 1 Samuel 16:7, “*But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.*”

God does not judge me by my outward appearance, but by my heart. If my heart isn’t right with God nothing else really matters.

Dr. James L. Snyder is pastor of the Family of God Fellowship, 1471 Pine Road, Ocala, FL 34472. He lives with his wife in Silver Springs Shores. Call him at 352-687-4240 or e-mail jamesnsnyder2@att.net. The church web site is www.whatafel-lowship.com

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Exciting Times
By Nancy Malik
Avery County



Exciting events are happening in Israel at such a time as this! The Jewish leaders of Jerusalem and the county have everything ready to put up a new temple on the Temple Mount. Everything is ready including a perfectly red heifer. In fact, there are quite a few just in case. They have no blemish and were appointed as a significant sacrifice when the New Temple is built on the Temple Mount. For over 2000 years, people all over the world have been awaiting the return of our Savior, Jesus Christ. The Temple being rebuilt is a starter for a ticking clock that will last for seven years.

March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb. Jesus, born as a baby, was called The Lion of Judah; mighty in power. Jesus, the lamb, is kind and gentle. Aren't those amazing metaphors for our Savior? But our remembrance of His death and Resurrection can start with cold winds and weather, unless you live in Florida and other warm spots on Earth, and then as it gets closer to Resurrection Day, it could get warmer. Jesus came as a tiny baby to lead us to His truth. A sad day was beheld during His crucifixion. But there were so many miracles happening during that trying time. Storms, enormous temple curtains ripping in half, and dead people walking throughout Jerusalem. Then, He was laid in a tomb for three days. He Arose and was seen for forty days by hundreds of people. His life and death and resurrection are for those of us who have read or told the Good News, believe it, and asked to be a part of His kingdom. His body, now, here on earth is all of us who belong to Him. There has been and still is so much work to be done. Here in Avery County, many people are involved in many wonderful outreach programs, many of which are Christian oriented. God Bless You if you are one of the many. There are eight churches in the county. Each body has a special work to do not only for its members but for Avery County at large. What a blessing.

President Netanyahu of Israel was just voted in for the 6th time last month. He began this role in 1949 as he led the Israeli people into independence. He and his brother fought for the idea of Israel becoming an independent nation. Under their guidance, it did just that, with God's leading. Now he is again leading this nation with God leading him. He knows the Lord personally.

Millions of tourists come from all over the world to see the land of Jesus' birth and lately many have decided to make it a permanent home. The prophecy said they would return. I love a TV show on Trinity Broadcasting Network called Drive Through History. Dave takes us on amazing journeys throughout Israel and other nations mentioned in the Bible. To see where He worked, lived, taught, and then the spread of the Good News in all directions from that tiny country teaches a lot about the Savior. Billions of people live on earth today and most of those do not know who Jesus is and what He did for us. But in these end times, isolated people groups are being given dreams and visions telling them about The Lord and sharing that with others.

Wycliffe Bible Translators have made Bibles for almost all the countries of the world. Papua New Guinea had presented itself as a problem due to 3,000 tribes that did not use the same language. Within the past couple of years, the translators found a common denominator that showed them the languages so they can talk to each other.

I thank Jesus for all of the Christian missionaries over the past two millennia. Our planet still has not reached every people group. But if you ever get to tour Samaritan's Purse in Boone and you can go to the building where Operation Christian Child does its work every year, you will see a map. On that world map, there is an Operation Christian Child sticker on the countries that have received those God-filled boxes with His truth! Every country, yes, everyone, has received boxes that proclaim the truth. Not every child yet, but if Jesus carries, that is the hope!

He is coming soon. The signs are everywhere. Will you answer His call, if you haven't already? He loves you so much, He died for you so that your and my sins are covered by His blood. That's the truth and eternal life with Him is the Big Present! May God shed His grace upon each one of us to do His work while still here. It is life-changing and life-altering. Amen!

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



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Mitchell Baptist Association

National Day of Prayer
By Monica Kritz
Mitchell County

Thursday, May 4, 2023
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Scripture: James 5:16b "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

Mark this date on your calendar and save it. Make plans to attend and join with others in our county to pray for our nation. We are also joining people who are praying all across our nation...what a privilege!

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

John 3:16 - For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

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Alive, Active, Powerful

By Ken and Jan Merop
Cleveland, Tennessee



A blank page sits in front of me right now. I pray and contemplate what to write.

Sometimes ideas pop up like crocuses through the snow-encrusted ground; or, like fish readily biting at the surface when food is tossed to them. Other times, however, ideas seem to snuggle down and bury themselves in a rock or crevice.

I must dig out, dust off and examine closely for a sparkle to glimmer across my mind.

Lately, it's been more of the hidden gems than the popping of colorful blossoms. Yet this less invigorating form of writing reaps the rewards of discovery that provides nourishment. Dead seeds will be brought to life. Colorful ideas will germinate and grow.

It's not just about writing. It's about life.

Have you been in that place where your life is like a blank page? I think we've all experienced that. I know I have.

We're used to being busy; productive. Then it seems many of the things that have kept us actively engaged are being stripped away for one reason or another. Change is in the air; but, it's not tangible and leaves us wondering what's up. Recently I found myself in that place. Lethargy was beginning to take hold. I was sighing too often. Truthfully, I didn't know what to do about it.

Then it occurred to me that I needed to dig into God's Word. I craved his nourishment like a crying, hungry child seeking to be satisfied.

I hadn't neglected my quiet time. But, I needed input and direction. So, I looked through past studies I'd done. When I found *Believing God* by Beth Moore, I knew the Lord was answering my heart's cry.

Before I even began the study, I personalized Psalm 121...a Psalm I had memorized as a child...and one I had been returning to frequently. It had been influential at another momentous time in my life. Reading verse 1, NKJV, "*I will lift up my eyes to the hills – from whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth,*" was the direction I sought.

Then changing "you" to "my," I affirmed that God wouldn't let my foot be moved; He would keep me and not slumber; the Lord is my keeper and preserver. Bolstered by God's word, I stepped expectantly into the study. It was time to have present, active, continual faith in God because He is alive and active in me. I leaned into his power knowing nothing is impossible with God. Selah

Awakening

*Sometimes when we least expect it,
a blossom of thought and inspiration
comes forth from a rocky surface.*

Much like this flower.

*Pushing forth all by itself,
it awakens hope and promise.*

*"And so, Lord, where do I put my hope?
My only hope is in you."*

Psalm 39:7



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.



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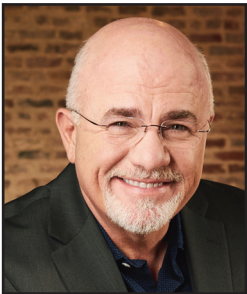
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By Dave Ramsey

Dear Dave,

My parents are both in their seventies. They have been healthy and active all their lives, but despite them both having good jobs they neglected to plan and save for retirement. Is it my responsibility now to provide them with financial help in their old age? Reagan



Dear Reagan,

It sounds like you might be a little irritated that your parents haven't been responsible with their money. The way you described the circumstances, it's understandable—to a point. But in my mind, there's a bigger question when it comes to helping your folks. How big is the burden?

Let me ask you a few things. Do you have the money to help? Now, can you provide this help without your own family suffering or going without it? If both answers are yes, I think your question may be a little more about your own aggravation with your folks than any ethical or moral obligation.

A few years ago I spoke with a guy who was in really good shape financially. He made over \$1 million a year, and he had plenty set aside in savings and retirement accounts. His father was in poor health and had never handled his money wisely. The son asked me if he should help out his dad by giving him some money every month.

In my mind, there's no question the right answer was yes. And that's what I told him. If you're making millions, but don't want to help out your sick dad, there's something wrong with you. Something is missing inside you that money just won't fix. However, if you and your family are barely getting by—let's say you bring home \$3,000 a month—you're not morally required to help a parent who was irresponsible with money their entire life.

I'm not sure what your situation is, Reagan, but I hope you'll look at things with a little grace and reason. It's a tough situation to be in because it sounds like your heart is being pulled in different directions. My advice, above all else, is to pray about it. And, if you have a spouse, talk to them about everything, and make sure the two of you are in agreement on what should be done before moving forward.

God bless you, friend. -Dave

Dear Dave,

I'm single, and I make \$35,000 a year. Next year, my salary and bonuses should be around \$50,000. I have a little over \$30,000 in debt right now, including student loans, and I'm not sure how I'll be able to keep up with bills and everything else right now if I have to save \$1,000 for a starter emergency fund like you recommend. Can I get by with a starter emergency fund of \$500? Jonas

Dear Jonas,

I really think you're making this whole thing sound a lot harder than it really is. The key is making and living on a budget, and that's not rocket science. It's a simple, written planning process where you give a name and a job to every dollar you make before the month begins.

Food, shelter, clothing, transportation and utilities are necessities, so they come first. After that, make sure you're current on your debts. Once all that is out of the way, put every spare dollar you can into your emergency fund. If you do this with a sense of urgency, and limit spending to necessities, you'll be surprised by how fast it will happen. And you'll love the newfound sense of security.

The truth is you really need a starter emergency fund of \$1,000 if you're at a point in life where student loans and other debts are in the picture. That may seem like an impossible goal right now, but it should be your first priority. And a written, monthly budget will go a long way toward helping you achieve that goal.

You can do this, Jonas! — Dave

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

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John Laurens

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.

John Laurens grew up having an impetuous personality becoming an extraordinary patriot and soldier. John was born on October 28, 1754, in Charleston, South Carolina, to Henry and Eleanor. Henry was a wealthy farmer and businessman involved in the slave trade, which John detested.

John was home-schooled until his mother died in 1770. Henry then sent John and his brothers to Switzerland to receive a world-class education. Next, while studying law in England, John read Paine’s Common Sense, igniting his interest in the cause for independence. Finally, disappointing his father, John quit law school and returned home to enter the American revolution.

Upon joining the Continental Army, Henry ensured that John was assigned to a safe duty station. Ranked as a lieutenant colonel, John was chosen for Washington’s inner circle as an aide-de-camp. Nonetheless, John soon volunteered to serve by fighting the British. He desired to command troops to make a difference in battles and liberate enslaved people in return for their military service.

As a field commander, Laurens proved himself time and again. During battles such as Germantown, Monmouth, Brandywine, etc., John placed himself in peril for the sake of others and kept the British at bay. As a result of taking tremendous risks, Laurens got wounded several times. These behaviors earned him a reputation as a hero and propelled his interest in manumission campaigns against slavery and discrimination. Even though John’s efforts failed, he tried to “arm slaves and grant them freedom in return for their [military] service” throughout the War. Near the end of the Revolutionary War, John was shot and killed during a minor skirmish on August 27, 1782, at the Combahee River, Chehaw Neck, South Carolina. This tragedy occurred while Colonel Laurens was sick with malaria and patrolling with his troops.

John Laurens is known for many valiant acts: A dual with General Charles Lee, gallantry in battles, survival as a POW, and obtaining foreign financial war support. Yet, his most significant and noblest goal was to end slavery and injustice. As a pure American patriot, Laurens’ legacy continues in Laurens County, South Carolina, and other cantons—named in his honor.

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

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

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



By Miguel Cruz
Yancey County

In this month’s temple maintenance, we will discuss how to protect yourself from cognitive decline, and prevent anxiety. And avoiding shoulder surgery. Ultra-processed foods (UPF) are tied to a faster rate of cognitive decline.

Examples of UPF’s are soft drinks, chips, chocolate, and candy. Ice cream, sweet breakfast cereals, packaged soups, chicken nuggets (yes even chicken nuggets, I know you thought they were healthy) hot dogs, processed meats, and fries. Multiple studies have been done and published in medical journals, this particular study was published on December 5, 2022, in JAMA Neurology and presented at the Alzheimer’s association international conference.

I know I keep talking about this but we are bombarded by so much advertising trying to convince us that these things are healthy and it is nothing more than slick advertising. Personally, I feel that we should ban advertising sweet cereals to our children on TV just like they did with cigarettes.

On the positive side, a group of substances called “Flavanols” can preserve our memory and cognition.

Flavanols can be found in onions, kale, lettuce, tomatoes, apples, grapes, berries, tea, and wine.

The research, which was published online, on November 22 in Neurology found that those eating the equivalent flavanols found in 1 cup of leafy greens per day had the least cognitive decline over a 7-year period. So you don’t need much. Can a common artificial sweetener fuel anxiety?

Aspartame can indeed fuel anxiety in even a small dose according to a 12/2/22 study published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Other studies have also linked artificial sweeteners to heart disease and stroke. I have been talking about artificial sweeteners for 30 years, there has been research uncovering their dangers way back then but apparently not making the headlines enough to make a difference against all the money being made on artificial sweeteners under the veil that they are healthy. NOT SO!

Personally, we use stevia in our house, made from a plant and so far nothing bad about it has been found.

Changing things up a bit let's talk about Shoulder Pain. Shoulder pain is quite common accounting for 4.5 million doctor visits yearly. After a round of medications including steroid injections that only temporarily helps, then physical therapy and/or chiropractic which may help for a while. People often turn to surgery, thinking it may FIX the problem.

Multiple studies published in medical journals have found that shoulder surgeries aimed at the removal of bone spurs and soft tissue had no better result than a placebo surgery where incisions were made but nothing was actually done.

A better choice is low-level laser therapy also known as photo Biomodulation therapy. It’s what we use at our office and the research proves the long-range benefits of reduced pain and increased mobility. Many doctors are also referring their patients with shoulder problems for acupuncture which shows promising results. Keep in mind that if you have completely torn a ligament, tendon, or muscle, then surgery may be your only option. But if you're dealing with shoulder bursitis, inflammation, tendonitis, or a partial tear, then don’t think that surgery is the only option, we see these conditions daily and they get long-lasting relief, find a doctor that can offer you laser therapy or acupuncture along with rehabilitative exercises to get you back moving again.

By the way, we have shoulder stretching videos available on our website free of charge, go to cruzlifecenter.com, click on the video, and scroll down to the self-help section to find the shoulder stretches.



Sudoku

Solution on page 14

7	4	5		6				
			3				7	9
	3	9				4		
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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.



By Jim Smith

Freedom Life is looking forward to a great year with many community collaboration projects. The best way for the community to understand a person reentering the community from incarceration – is by understanding each person and their story! I will have to admit, I was rather closed-minded from the bubble I lived in for many years. Being employed full-time in community-style churches, my only true understanding of reentry work was the little I saw that came thru our churches. The churches I served in had tremendous hearts, but there was still a stigma of, “let’s help them and move them on their way”. Since being at Freedom Life, I have come to realize that I personally missed out on many opportunities to integrate reentry community members into my church for the lack of education and understanding of what was really going on. We want our churches and communities to be safe and clean but what we have done is a band-aid in our process and pass those members that are struggling on to the next community or ministry. Freedom Life has some of the most wonderful clients that are going thru reentry. Through interviewing and getting to know so many of them, in so many ways - they ARE exceptional church and community members.

One of the most important resources a reentry client needs is a church and community willing to stand with them. A strong group of Christian men held “Jon” accountable, helped him along, and refused to let him fall back into his old habits.

"Before I went to prison, people all around me were drug dealers and killers," Jon says. "When I came home from prison, I was in the church mostly. My friends were engineers, lawyers, construction workers—my environment was totally different."

Jon's church family could see past his criminal record and acknowledge his God-given potential. And it made a huge difference in how Jon thrived in his second chance at life.

Today, Jon is the pastor of Chicago West Bible Church. In the years since his release, he's had his fair share of struggles. He can't count how many times his job applications were rejected—he stopped after 67. But even so, he's managed to pursue both his education and his career as a minister.

He recognizes how his reentry got off on the right foot because he had people who cared about him—but not every returning citizen is so fortunate. Because of this, Jon works hard to advocate for the needs and rights of the formerly incarcerated.

And he believes the Church today should lead the way, particularly when it comes to hospitality. "The Gospel is relational, and it's uncomfortable because it means you've got to see all my mess" "I often say [to Christians] that if you're not letting a man or woman sit at your [dinner] table, you're really short-changing the process," Jon says. "There were people who accepted me into their homes, and there was a plate for me at their dinner table whenever I wanted it," he explains. Jon adds, "I had never seen a godly family before. I had never seen a man lead his family in prayer. I had never seen a guy act like an idiot and then have to go and ask his wife for forgiveness! But I learned all of that because I was around people enough that I was able to see their [lives]."

"The Gospel is all [relational]," Jon says. "And it's uncomfortable because it means you've got to see all my mess—you've got to give access to my heart in very vulnerable ways, but that's what men and women who are coming home from prison need."

This story is amazing. At Freedom Life, we have clients that are successful at many local businesses and factories. Many are serving at churches in recovery ministries, as Sunday school teachers, outreach volunteers, and even as peer support teammates in the community.

One method I have chosen to use this year is by starting a community choir. Many churches no longer have choirs or choral programs. This spring we will start the Freedom Life Community Choir, made up of anyone wanting to sing in our communities. There will be 4 rehearsals at FBC Marion's Fellowship Hall culminating in a concert on May 20. You need to attend at least 3 rehearsals. Tracks and pdfs will be available by contacting jsmith@freedomlifeministries.org The location of the concert is to be determined after we see the participation and size needs. We will be rehearsing several styles of music together from contempo-



rary, evangelical, and gospel.

At each rehearsal, we will also hear the stories of a couple of reentry clients from Freedom Life. They will be sharing how God is moving in their life, and I am sure your heartstrings will get connected. Consider bringing your choir if you are a choral leader. If you are a person that likes to sing and make a joyful noise, please join us. There are no auditions, just have a heart for worship! Everyone is welcome. Song selections include: What a Beautiful Name, My Help, I Call You Faithful and many others.

Jon's story was taken from www.prisonfellowship.org

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

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“You Got To Fight For Right To Party”

- No Regrets Family
By Dean Honeycutt
Mitchell County



It is very sad today that there are very few Christian role models. I was saddened to see the drunkenness and the amount of alcohol that was present at the Kansas City Chiefs super bowl parade. One player was taken away in a wheelchair because he was so drunk. Beer and liquor were openly displayed at the parade. Pictures and videos of drunk football players are surfacing on many social media outlets. And young fans are watching the attitude and actions of their heroes. Why many Americans glamorize drunkenness is disheartening seeing alcohol abuse is so dangerous. It takes life and ruins families. And it is like we give the NFL and its teams a pass when they win a super bowl.

At one moment the NFL organization, its teams, and many Americans are gathered in prayer asking God to heal Buffalo Bills Damar Hamlin after suffering cardiac arrest during a game. Seeking the favor and grace of a holy God who disdains drunkenness. And the next fans and players are condoning drunkenness as a way or rite of passage because of a super bowl win. One well-admired Chief player said after the win, “you got to fight for your right to party.” Is God pleased with us when we ask for His help but ignore what He says is best for us?

I am not saying every athlete celebrates by drinking alcohol after a victory. There are many Christian athletes and performers out there. But rarely do they get recognized for following Jesus. Many of them may fear speaking out about their faith because of criticism. Children are confused and do not have a proper understanding of God. God in whom we are instructed to fear. The Word of God will keep you from sin or sin will keep you from the Word of God. So many times, media professionals claim they are praying for something that has happened like a school shooting, without ever acknowledging the sinfulness that is in the world today. Americans commit unholy acts because we are unholy and depraved in sin. Who is the one person we should emulate or want to be like? Well of course it is Jesus. Just as the scriptures teach us. “For even hereunto were you called because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.” (First Peter 2:21) A disciple follows Jesus Christ and observes His teaching.

Role models are people we want to be like. When I was growing up a role model was usually someone who lived a good moral life. For example, the person may have been a Christian athlete. They were by no means perfect, but they conducted their life in a good way. Many fathers are role models to their children. Though my dad had many great qualities he was not someone I wanted to pattern my life after because he was an alcoholic. But all children look to adults for direction in life and examples for behavior.

As a young person matures, they will pattern their life after role models. Young people are very impressionable because they are trying to figure out how they fit into society and who they want to identify with. So, we see young boys acting like football stars, and young ladies singing into microphones like their favorite female vocalist. I was reminded of the song 19 Somethin by Mark Wills “I was Roger Stauback in my back yard” and every boy wanted to be Evel Knievel and jump his bike over two or three hot wheels.

So, Christian mom and dad, we have our work cut out for us. We find ourselves at times competing against the world and its role models. Thankfully we have the upper hand because greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world. Something that is helped our children is giving them opportunities to be around older adults who share our faith. Most of these times have been associated with church events. These older role models encourage our children and set examples of how Christians should conduct their life. We enrolled our son who loved basketball in a Crossfire basketball camp. The camp is conducted by two very strong evangelical Christians who combine basketball and the Gospel. My son really enjoyed these camps and had high regard for their leaders. They became role models for him.

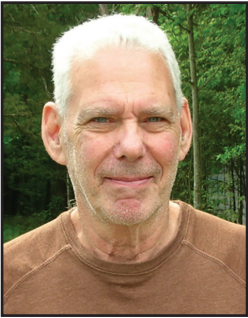
Of course, our greatest role model is Jesus, and when my children act like Him it does our hearts good.

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



Who Or What Is Your Authority?

By Robert Garner
Rutherford County



Dear Christians, always ask questions about God’s word, study the scriptures and seek answers. Be informed, engaged, and tuned in. Who or what is your authority? To edify, 1 Th 5:11, is the act of building up, teaching, and promoting all Christians in wisdom, grace, and virtue. This is the only purpose for writing these articles. Should you want answers regarding searching the scripture references to any questions put forth, my contact email is below. Psalm 26:7, *“That I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all thy wonderous works”*. Bible Studies are available for individuals, and groups; questions by email are always answered for your edification.

Let’s first look at one easy example of a (question), and the way to search the scriptures for the (answer) to find the truth. Paul is writing to all the brethren in the country of Macedonia, KJV 1Timothy 3:15, *“But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth”*.

In the verse above, what is “the pillar and ground of the truth”? * Answer at the end of this article.

Hopefully, we all need to realize the reasons for making biblical corrections when errors are discovered with the doctrines of men. We seek the truth, and understand lies of delusion could come upon anyone; (2 Th. 2:11) *“God could send [someone] a strong delusion, that they should believe a lie”*. KJV 2 Timothy 3:16, *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”*. Proverbs 23:23, *“Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding”*.

Making observations of study groups between the sciences of men, as compared to the word of God among theological groups, can result in some parallels of un-changeable conclusions which need correction.

Should a Christian biblical scripture researcher attempt to change the scientific communities’ conclusions about astronomy, evolution, and archeology, they will be ignored. Biblical creation by God Almighty, who spoke the universe into existence is mostly regarded as a fable by the majority of universities. The Word of God is completely unrelated to their academic circles of investigation. Of course, there is a scarce number of biblical investigators whose focus is the Word of God, the Bible, to further their astronomy, archeology, and biblical studies; regarding God’s progressive revelation, review, and correction.

Many theologians refuse to make the necessary correction or deal with the challenges facing the Christian corporate church doctrines within their theological canons of study. Numerous church leaders think there is no progressive revelation of God’s word. What they know in their ministries circles are inscribed in their church doctrines of cement; unchangeable, in that nothing more can be learned from God’s word. Ephesians 1:17, *“That the God of our LORD Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation [Strong’s G602, things before unknown] in the knowledge of him”*. Two kinds of cement can be studied in the world of today, new cement and cracked cement. Eph.3:3-5 *“past ages revelations unknown, but now revealed”*.

For example; many Christian leaders believe we are in the end times as the words spoken by Daniel 12:9,10 *“are sealed up”*, until the time of the end. *“And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end”*. Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried, but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand. Daniel 2:47, *“Your God is a God of gods, a Lord of kings, a revealer of secrets”*.

Since we are in the end times, and these end times facts are very obvious according to the correct comparison studies of the scriptures. What words in the bible scriptures have been sealed up? What words which have been unsealed will the wise servants of God understand, yet none of the wicked will understand? Are the Christian leaders unwise, not understanding God’s word that has been unsealed? What words have been unsealed? These teaching are rarely if ever, included in various ministries' congregational sermons and radio broadcasts.

What is the abomination spoken about in Mathew 24:15 & 16? *“When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken about by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, [whoso readeth, let him understand]; Then let him which be in Judaea flee into the mountains. Who or what is Judaea’s (spiritual reference of the world today), and where and what are the mountains? What is the desolation that stands in the holy place? Where is the holy place? Do some who read these scriptures have understanding, and some do not have the wisdom to know?”*

What exactly is the trial of a Christian’s Faith by fire? How is the Christian tried as silver is tried, and proven? 1 Peter 1:7,” *that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”* Psalm 66:10, *“For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried.”*

Who is the third part of God’s people that go through the fire and call on the name of the LORD? Zechariah 13:9, *“And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and try them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, it is my people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God.”*

Who are the other people not included in the third part of Zechariah 13:9? Do Christian ministries explain to their church members how to detect a false

prophet? What will a false prophet say to deceive many? Certainly, this must be primary teaching from the pulpit, how to recognize the teaching and deception of a false prophet? Mathew 24:11, *“And many false prophets shall rise, and deceive many”*. 2 Corinthians 11:14,15 *“Satan transformed angel of light & ministers of righteousness”*? Mathew 24:4, *“Take heed that no man deceive you”*?

Throughout the country, many churches with large capacity buildings have only a few cars attending services on the Sabbath day. Many are closed, with church buildings for sale. Spiritually speaking, *“have their foundations been destroyed”, where is the “repairer of the breach”? Has their membership “turned away their foot from the sabbath, finding their own pleasure, speaking their own words”? “Do they no longer delight themselves in the LORD”*? Isaiah 58: 12,13,14.

Who’s at fault for all the problems in the corporate churches? Could it be the church members who no longer want to hear the word of the LORD? Perhaps it’s those who bring the word of the LORD? Are there too many tares in the church compared to the wheat? Has the time of 1 Peter 4:17 begun? *“For the time has come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God”*?

Two time periods of judgment are upon the world, 1 Peter 4:17 above, *“Judgment begins at the house of God”*, (a prolonged judgment period, which has begun); and the final future judgment day of Christ’s return. God is in complete control, every day, every hour, every second, as He has always been, since His creation. 2 Peter 3:8, *“But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day”*?

When we study the word of God for answers to all the questions I’ve purposed, we find the answers; as we “search the scriptures daily”. Jesus speaks about being hated by all men for my name’s sake. Mark 13:13, *“And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved”*. Is there a fear of losing church membership, or being unpopular, for speaking uncomfortable scripture truths? Fear is a badge of reward by being fear-less, as we speak the truth. Mathew 10:26, *“fear them not therefore, for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known”*.

Who is “her” we come out of? Revelation 18:4, *“And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not her plagues”*. Isa 3:12, *“As for my people, children are their oppressors, [demanding pressure H5065] and women rule over them. O my people, they which lead thee cause thee to err, and destroy the way of thy path”*. Mark 13:19, *“For in those days shall be affliction [G2347 oppression distress], such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time [G3568 present time, now], neither shall be”*.

Who or What is Your Authority? The answer to the question *, KJV 1Timothy 3:15, *“But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of truth”*. In the verse above, what is “the pillar and ground of truth”? *“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, The Truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me”*. John 14:6.

Your comments 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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YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

NC Senate District 47



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

Last month, the North Carolina Senate passed the Parents' Bill of Rights. I co-sponsored this bill which empowers parents and strengthens the relationship between families and K-12 public schools. The bill, Senate Bill 49, compiles parental rights from other places in state law into a cohesive "Bill of Rights" style legislation and adds clarifying language for how those rights play out in the real world. These rights include things like directing the education and moral upbringing of their children and making health care decisions for their children, among others.

The bill also clearly lays out the parameters of parental rights as it relates to K-12 public schools. It provides a clear path for parents to access their child's educational materials, and to have full transparency about what their children are learning in the classroom. The bill prohibits the topics of gender identity, sexuality, or sexual activity from being incorporated as part of the curriculum for kindergarten through fourth grade. The bill also specifies that parents must give written consent for their children to participate in surveys that collect personal information.

When the COVID-19 pandemic brought the classroom into people's homes, some parents and families were concerned by some of the lessons and activities to which their children were being exposed. The Parents' Bill of Rights protects families from overreach by government-run schools. The bill passed the Senate along a party-line vote of 29 to 18 and now heads to the House.

Another business of the legislative session is now well underway. The most substantial task will be assembling the state budget for the next two-year biennium. The state House of Representatives will pass the first version of the budget, then the Senate will pass a version, then the two bodies will reconcile into a final budget to send to the governor.

Due to redistricting before the 2022 election, the Senate districts have shifted since the last legislative biennium. Following the 2020 census, each state Senate district represents approximately 208,788 constituents. I represent Senate District 47, which now comprises nine counties: Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Caldwell (partial), Haywood (partial), Madison, Mitchell, Watauga, and Yancey. Rutherford, Polk, and McDowell counties were previously included in District 47. McDowell is now in District 46, represented by Senator Warren Daniel, and Rutherford and Polk are now in District 48, represented by Senator Tim Moffitt.

As always, please share your thoughts with me on issues related to the state government by emailing me at ralph.hise@ncleg.gov or calling me at 919-733-3460.

NC Commissioner of Labor



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

February was a busy month for the N.C. Department of Labor (NCDOL), and it's hard to believe we're already two months into this new year.

I had the opportunity at the beginning of February to participate in my first Gold Star Grower awards luncheon at the McKimmon Center in Raleigh. This program recognizes growers who provide farmworker housing that meets and exceeds all of the requirements of the Migrant Housing Act of North Carolina. Congratulations to all the award recipients for their hard work and for ensuring the workers who come to North Carolina have a comfortable place to call home while they are here.

On Feb. 8, I attended a Safety and Health Achievement and Recognition Program (SHARP) renewal ceremony at SANS Technical Fibers LLC in Stoneville. The SHARP program is administered through our Consultative Services Bureau and is designed for small and mid-size employers that have established, implemented, and maintained exceptional workplace safety standards. I commend SANS Technical Fibers LLC for its commitment to the safety and health of its workers.

I was a speaker at this year's 2023 Labor Legislative Conference put on by N.C. AFL-CIO. It was a great opportunity to meet with and connect with others that are involved with working to keep North Carolinians safe and healthy on the job.

I was a guest on the Do Politics Better podcast, hosted by Brian Lewis and Skye David of New Frame Inc. to discuss my decision to not run for reelection and what is next for me.

The end of March will kick off our Safety Awards Banquet season. I will travel to 30 banquets across the state over the next four months, and I look forward to meeting those of you who qualified for one of our workplace safety awards. Several of these banquets are scheduled in the western part of the state and I invite you to visit our website in the coming weeks to find details about the dates and locations of these banquets.

I hope everyone stays safe and healthy and that you have a blessed March. Spring is just around the corner!

NC House District 86



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

Two New Health-Related Offerings in North Carolina

North Carolina recently launched the new '9-8-8' Mental Health Crisis Hotline. 9-8-8 can be dialed anywhere across America if you or someone you know should experience a mental health or potential suicide crisis. Previously, 9-1-1 was the number to call. However, because law enforcement and emergency responders are not always equipped to help with mental health distress or those perhaps considering suicide, the new 9-8-8 hotline will now provide access specifically to mental health professionals. North Carolina has been participating in the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline—800-273-TALK. By calling that number, a person is routed to his or her local crisis center. Now, however, by calling 9-8-8, the caller will connect to the local crisis center to talk with a trained crisis counselor. If the situation cannot be de-escalated by phone, a mental health crisis team is to respond.

9-8-8 is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and, in most cases, an operator is expected to pick up in less than 10 seconds. The call operators are all trained crisis counselors who can provide callers with support, understanding, and mental health resources. Most of us by now have 9-1-1 committed to memory. Hopefully, we can quickly take advantage of the new 9-8-8 and, in doing so, make a real difference to those who may need the services provided by crisis counselors and teams.

In addition to joining the national 9-8-8 initiative just described, North Carolina has a new, unique health offering, especially for veterans. Continuing the legislature's efforts to meet the needs of military veterans living in the state, North Carolina now provides a no-cost therapy for veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or Traumatic Brain Injury. The treatment is known as Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy (HBOT). It is reported to have shown very positive results. With HBOT treatment, a patient is enclosed in a chamber where pressure is increased to 2+ times normal atmospheric pressure while pure oxygen is pumped in. The increased pressure has been found to reduce brain inflammation while the oxygen magnifies the body's own healing mechanisms. Visit hbotforvets.com. At that site, a veteran can have a screening evaluation and set up any appropriate appointment.

God Bless America

YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

NC Senate District 46



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

The 2023 session of the NCGA is well underway, and a lot is happening in Raleigh. First off, the General Assembly received positive news about our state revenues. A joint revenue forecast released in late February by our legislative staff and the Office of State Budget and Management predicts FY 2022-23 tax collections will surpass 2022 budgeted revenue by \$3.25 billion (10.7%). This confirms that North Carolina’s tax policies, put in place by the Republican-led General Assembly, are fueling economic growth as the surplus is a significant increase over the current fiscal year’s budget. Senate leaders will continue to prioritize responsible spending, addressing our state’s workforce needs, and providing additional tax relief to our citizens. Next, three important pieces of 2nd Amendment legislation were passed out of the NC Senate in mid-February. SB40 Pistol Purchase Permit Repeal does nothing to change the federal requirements for purchasing a firearm. This bill does remove a tool that some local sheriffs have been using to keep, or at least discourage, law-abiding citizens from exercising their 2nd Amendment rights. SB 41 Protect Religious Meeting Places provides those who attend religious services the peace of mind that they can freely and safely worship no matter where they are located. Currently, churches may allow congregants to conceal carry on church property. However, if the church has educational buildings attached to it, current law does not allow conceal carry on that property regardless of building use or time of day. SB 41 seeks to close that loophole to allow conceal carry on such property, during times the school areas are not in use for official school functions. This bill also expands when a law enforcement official may conceal carry on certain properties. SB 57 will fund a Safe Storage educational campaign (state law already requires safe storage). I am also glad to share that your NC Senate passed SB 49, Parents’ Bill of Rights, in early February. The legislation affirms parental rights in education and creates a new benchmark for transparency in public schools. This bill supports a strong partnership between parents and educators, prioritizes the safety of students, and strengthens parents’ rights to know what is being taught in their child’s classrooms. It fosters cooperation between parents and educators by increasing transparency and communication in schools, sets standards for age-appropriate instruction for our youngest students, and prevents schools from withholding information relevant to a child’s well-being. Despite the obvious benefits and support from the public, every single Senate Democrat cast a NO vote. Republicans remain dedicated to fighting for parental involvement in education, including school choice. The bill now goes to the N.C. House of Representatives for consideration. I again thank you for allowing me the privilege of serving you, the citizens of Burke, McDowell, and Buncombe Counties. If I may be of assistance, please do not hesitate to contact my Raleigh office staff.



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Stewards of Salvation

By Cody T. McCain
Burke County

I would like to begin this article by telling you a story. Around the middle of last year, our three-year-old son CJ saw a particular type of truck that he wanted at a funeral home where I assist in Asheville. The casket company that we use – which is Batesville Casket Company – makes miniature versions of their trucks used to deliver caskets to funeral homes across the country. CJ saw this toy truck and from that very day, he desired to have his very own. Not a week went by and I didn’t hear CJ ask me, “Daddy, can I have a Batesville truck?” My response was always, “We’ll see” to which CJ would add, “Maybe for Christmas?!” I began the search for a Batesville truck for CJ and found one on E-bay; what I did not expect was the surprising cost for this truck, a staggering \$74 plus tax and shipping (bringing the total to around \$85). Never would I have imagined that a small toy would cost so much! Nevertheless, I overcame the sticker shock and ordered this Batesville truck to arrive in time for Christmas. On Christmas day, as soon as CJ opened the box containing the truck, his entire face became illuminated and joy filled his heart as he excitedly exclaimed, “A Batesville truck!” It filled my heart with joy to see our child happy with his gift and he immediately began to play with it. CJ, being the energetic and playful child that he is surely gave the Batesville truck a run for my money! After just two weeks of having the truck, it was all but nearly DESTROYED. Most of the wheels from the truck and two trailers had broken off, the small rubber tires were removed, and even the axles were bent or completely came apart! I was so upset and disappointed, what was I thinking? I spent almost \$90 on a toy for a three-year-old to destroy in two weeks! I made up my mind after this discovery that I would not spend that much money on a toy for CJ until he is old enough to properly play with it.

It wasn’t until sometime after this that Holy Spirit gave me a profound revelation when looking at this situation. Our Heavenly Father also gave us a costly gift; He gave of His only begotten Son which cost EVERYTHING! He has given us the gift of Jesus Christ which – as CJ did with the Batesville truck – we received with great joy and excitement at the inception of our Christian walk. However, somewhere along the way, we have become less than good stewards of our great salvation! How much does this grieve and hurt the heart of our Father?! Yes, we are convinced that we can never work for nor earn our salvation, as Ephesians 2:8-9 declares, “*For it is by grace you have been saved through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works so no man can boast.*” We are called however to work OUT our salvation with holy reverent fear (Philippians 2:12) which implies STEWARDSHIP. When we fail to apply the basic principles of having a personal devotional life with God (prayer, study of and meditation upon scripture, fasting, worship), a connection and fellowship with other members of the Body of Christ – where iron can sharpen iron (Proverbs 27:17) – nor any works that accompany a lifestyle of repentance (Acts 26:20), then we will find ourselves slowly becoming spiritual sluggards when it comes to the precious gift of salvation. Unlike me, God hasn’t decided that out of his disappointment and hurt with how we handle His gift He will not invest any more into helping us! Oh the greatness and infinite nature of the grace of our God! God yet invites us to yield to Him, that He would cause us to “grow up into the head that is Christ” (Ephesians 4:15). He already knew how we would mismanage and mishandle this gift, yet He never regretted paying such a high cost (much different from where I regretted paying for that toy!) to bring us into fellowship with Himself! The grace, kindness, and patience of our God should motivate us to become better stewards of the great gift we’ve been given. Romans 2:4 declares it is the KINDNESS of God that leads us to repentance! Let us not take God’s kindness for granted but rather express our thankfulness to Him through faithful stewardship of this great gift!

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.



Anne Ministries

Rejoicing in Hope
By Chastity Ogburn
Avery County

“Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;” Romans 12:12 Each day we wake up and we don’t know what lies ahead of us. We face the unknown. What does this day have for me? God has given us some encouraging words from His written word that gives us much hope. The Bible is God’s instruction book to help us navigate life here on earth. My daughter, Mary Kathryn wrote the verse Romans 12:12 on our board at the ministry the other day. What a timely message from the Lord it was. I was thinking of some things going on in our lives and instead of getting overwhelmed and discouraged, God was encouraging me through His word. I thought to myself, “This verse is exactly what the Lord wants me to do.”

First, God wants me to be joyful in hope, meaning that whatever is going on around me, or wherever I am at the time, and whatever I am facing, I will constantly look ahead. As a follower of Christ, we are never without hope. Jesus is our Hope. We can lay all our hope and trust in Him.

Second, God wants me to be patient in hard times. This is a difficult one for me. I am not a very patient person. Just ask my husband and he can testify to my impatience. God has taught me through by being patient and waiting on Him, I get His very best. His ways are so much better than my ways. God sees the big picture. God has a plan and purpose in our times of trouble or doubt. He wants us to surrender and patiently wait on Him. When we are patient, we grow in our faith and trust in Him.

The last part of this verse says God wants me to be faithful in my prayers. I want to see God show up so I must be faithful in my prayer life. I am to be continuing always in my prayers and to keep on praying even when it seems like nothing is happening. Prayer is talking to the Lord. Prayer is a relationship and connection to the one who created us. God wants us to share everything with Him and trust Him to work everything out according to His will and plan. Now, on this same whiteboard that week my youngest daughter, Piper, added something in her own writing and it was just so powerful and wonderful to see. My eyes caught it one day as I looked up at the board. We always write the names of the volunteers serving that day at the ministry and she had written our names and she also wrote the name Jesus along with our names.

I sat there thanking Jesus that my Piper wrote His name on the board. My seven-year-old little girl knows that Jesus is the one we look to. We can’t do ministry or life without Him. Anne Ministries belongs to the Lord and we invite His presence to always be with us. He is our hope, our peace, and the one we can trust to lead, guide, and direct us. We can be patient in times of trouble or distress because He is always with us and He has a plan. We can always and continually go to Him in prayer. Instantly we can call on His name and pray. We can trust God has the answers as we go to Him in prayer. He will faithfully answer them in His time and according to His will.

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 or email anneministries@gmail.com



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

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POEM

By Regina McIntosh
Yancey County

Collecting

She collects dolls,
Babies, she calls them,
Little darlings, children – honey
Like a mother, she touches them,
Piecing together clothing for infants, toddlers –
Girls and boys who might
Tell her she is better than she believes
In her heart, where she can see
The darkness, the doubt, the dreadful
Things that make her, despite her best intentions,
Still human – still human after all is said
And done, she is still only human

He collects trinkets, cars,
Toys that once thrilled some child,
Eager little inventions
Bold flames on their sides,
Burgundy and yellow, cobalt blue
Reflecting the joy on his face
When he sees a new car, a new bauble
Some small joy that blazes
With inspirations that amaze him,
Enriching his collection, his assortment
Grows, like the leaves in spring,
Beneath a noonday sun, who sweetens
Even the grief with the belief
That this is fantastic, all this greed
For these jewels he believes
Are far more beautiful than others see

My aunt collects plants,
Everywhere in her house, sitting
On shelves, lining the window
Seals, green – like gentle promises,
Every shape and color of green,
Growing, nurtured by the sun, the
Watering she does every week –
After she plucks the drier leaves and
Tucks them away in the trash,
Where they can't see
The way she talks to the remnant,
Fading beneath her words
Peaceful and dreaming of a world
Where sun and rain erase
Even the shadows that create
Whispers of grace surrounding
Hands who grow more than weeds,
These floras know the rich,
Vibrant touch of her faithful, cultivating

Darkness collects stars
Shimmering, toasting the universe
With breathless miracles,
Hues of beautiful covering the night
Bringing wishes to the heart,
Inspiring music in the thoughts,
Using the nocturnal – the dusty dusk,
To silence the fears, wash away
Lost tears so that there is
Reverence for the One who created
Such wonder, such joy –
Peace beyond the soul's expectations
As the darkness continues
To hold the moon at its heart,



Promising the glimmering rumors
From the legends in the sky
To surprise love with a song, like a psalm
Meant for the One who we know
As God, the love who lights
Day and night with His embrace,
The kiss of insight, grace that desires
Only to listen to our prayers, heal
And destroy every fear, every tear
With love that is forever near

Of every collection, every collector
Knows, deep down inside,
The only collection that truly matters,
The only compilation that is designed
To bring life from death...
Is the collection of souls that we know
Come to life because He is alive
And He shows the way to eternal life
With the One who made us all,
The heart and soul, the moon and stars
With love that decides when
To collect us all – together,
so, we can live with Him, forever!

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

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Thou Shalt
Laugh

By John Martin

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“What Can Wash Away My Sin?”

By Shawn Thomas
Angleton, Texas

In Revelation 1:3 the Apostle John, writing to Christians says that Jesus “*released us from our sins by His blood.*” This is one of the great blessings of being a Christian: we have been “released from our sins by His blood.” The Bible word “released” here means to “loose, dissolve, destroy.”

God says our sin is like a STAIN on our life. Jeremiah 2:22 says: “*The stain of your iniquity is before Me, declares the Lord GOD.*” Sin stains us before God. And nothing we can do can take it out. The first part of that verse says: “*Although you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your iniquity is before Me.*” Nothing we can do can remove it.

In Shakespeare’s classic play “Macbeth,” Lady Macbeth convinces her husband to kill King Duncan so that they can reign together on Duncan’s throne. But after the murder, she has no peace. Her subjects observe her walking at night, crying “Out, out spot” from her hands, which she knows are stained with the king’s blood. She keeps washing her hands, but then she looks at them and says, “Yet here’s a spot! ... Will these hands ne’er be clean? ... Here’s the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh!”

What Shakespeare portrayed so dramatically in Macbeth, is something very real in our human experience. We have all been stained by sin. Maybe not murder, like Lady Macbeth, but we have all sinned. We have all broken God’s commandments, and we all carry the stains of sin. A stain in a garment often ruins it. In the same way, many feel like a sin stain on their soul has ruined their life! But the Bible tells us here that wIth Jesus, your sins can be “loosed, dissolved, destroyed”!

Just the other day I came home from church and noticed I had a stain on my shirt from our breakfast snack in Sunday school. I told my wife Cheryl and she said; to take it to the utility room and spray it with Spray and Wash; it’s in the cabinet right over the washer. So I took my shirt in there, sprayed the Spray and Wash on that stain — and I could see it dissolve right before my eyes! It’s an amazing thing!

But there are SOME stains that even Spray and Wash can’t remove. I got a bad greasy stain on one of my favorite blue dress shirts, and I showed it to Cheryl. She took it right into “emergency surgery,” put stain remover on it, and did everything she could — but that stain would not come out. There is nothing for me to do now but cast that shirt into the rag pile. I can’t wear it anywhere nice with a big stain right middle of it! It’ll just have to be cast aside.

And the sad thing is, that’s what happens to many PEOPLE, isn’t it? People see some folks and think: “Oh, they’ve got stains of SIN in their life; they’ll just have to be cast aside.” And too often we DO cast aside PEOPLE the way a person would cast aside an old shirt; they’re “stained;” they’re “no good.” Or we may even think it of OURSELVES: “I am no good; I am stained with sin. I need to be cast aside.”

But thank God for Jesus! He sees past the stain, to the PERSON. He sees past your stain to YOU! He loves even the person who has been stained with sin. He loves YOU, stained with sin as you are.

But not only does He LOVE us in our sins, but He also does something more: He RELEASES us from our sins. And how does He do that? Not with “Spray and Wash” or some other human formula. The Bible says He did it with His own blood. The Bible teaches that the blood of Jesus washes us from our sins: — I Peter 1:18-19 says “*You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver and gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.*” The Bible says you can’t buy the cleansing of the stain of your sin with silver or gold — no amount of money can do it — only the blood of Jesus, which was shed on the cross. “What can wash away my sin? NOTHING — BUT the blood of Jesus”!

— I John 1:7b says “*the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin.*” WHAT sin does the scripture say there His blood will cleanse us from? “ALL” sin! Spray and Wash may cleanse your garments from SOME stains; but not all; it couldn’t save my blue shirt. But if you will bring your sin to the blood of Jesus, He will cleanse you from ALL sin! There is not a single sin you have committed which cannot be forgiven if you will only bring it to the blood of Jesus. He will cleanse you from “ALL unrighteousness.” From “ALL sin”!

The important thing is: to make sure that you do bring it to Him. Don’t just sit there and think, “Well, my life is ruined; I’ve sinned; I’m stained; I just have to be cast aside now.” NO! That is where the devil wants you to keep you. He hates you; he’s the one who got you into this in the first place; he tempted you to sin — and now he accuses you once you have!

But Jesus LOVES you. Can you grasp that today? JESUS. LOVES. YOU. And what He wants more than anything else, is to “release you from your sins by His blood.” So take heart: you say you’ve sinned? YES, we all have. But there is not one of us whom Jesus does not love, and there is no one of us whose sin Jesus will not RELEASE and wash away if you will bring it to Him. Just make sure that you DO bring it to Him! Don’t hold back; don’t let the devil lie to you and convince you that He won’t do it for you; or that He won’t do it for YOUR particular sin. Believe that Jesus will do what He promised He would, and bring it to Him. If you will, then He who loves you will release you from your sins, by His blood, just like Revelation 1:5 says! If you have never done it before, bring your sins to Jesus, right now!

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

When We Choose Faith

By Toby Crowder
Mitchell County

“*By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.*” – Heb 11:24-26

Many of us rise every day and go to work with the motivation of getting a paycheck and it is that reward that keeps us going even on the days that we do not feel like it. Certainly, there are many other incentives in life, but we often persevere because we have a goal in mind. We are reading today of Moses, who denied the pleasures of sin “for a season” and instead chose a life of faith. This was not a careless decision that he made, but one of great purpose. Do we ever consider what really happens when we choose faith?

Even though there is much written in Scripture about faith, the eleventh chapter of Hebrews is often referred to as the “faith” chapter of the Bible. Hebrews 11:1, says that “*...faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*” Matthew Henry says of faith: “It is a firm persuasion and expectation, that God will perform all he has promised to us in Christ.” This verse tells us that faith is the substance of our hope; it is what the elders looked to and hoped for. We absolutely cannot undermine the importance of this subject of faith! Also remember, that it is by faith that we are saved: Eph 2:8-9 “*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.*” A life of faith in God is a choice, and by choosing faith, we are also choosing some other things, which we see evidenced in the life of Moses.


By choosing faith, we are also accepting the CHANGE that it will bring to our life. You will find that when Moses chose to follow God, he was living what we may call a “charmed life.” Moses had a lot going for him including the privilege of riches and being the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, yet in choosing a life of faith, He CHOSE for this to change. Have you ever genuinely considered what changes your faith has made in your life? What does your faith make you want to do for God? If our faith does not bring about change and produce a desire to walk as He walked, then our efforts are in vain. 2 Cor 5:17 says “*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*” Moses’s choice of faith changed his life drastically and by choosing faith, (and choosing Christ) we are also choosing change in our life.

The Bible also tells us that Moses chose to SUFFER AFFLICTION, rather than the fleeting pleasures that sin brings. This choice does not seem natural to us because our flesh seeks and chooses pleasure. While it may seem that we do not intentionally choose the suffering or trials that life brings, many times God allows affliction into our lives to grow our faith. Warren Wiersbe explained it this way: “Our faith is not really tested until God asks us to bear what seems unbearable, do what seems unreasonable, and expect what seems impossible.” We all face affliction and trials during our lifetime, yet we persevere and grow in our faith.

Even though a life of faith may experience change and affliction, notice the VICTORY that Moses’ faith brought to him. We see in v.26 that he esteemed “*the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt*” and learn that Moses understood what many of us have failed to comprehend; that the reward of faith was not in the present but in God's future! The reward that he claimed by faith was far greater than any earthly treasures or sinful pleasures. Therein lies the simple reminder for the child of God, that by choosing faith, (and choosing Christ) there may be change...and affliction... but also eternal victory!

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 or mtcarmelsprucepine@gmail.com


Isaiah 61:11 - For as the earth bringeth forth her bud, and as the garden causeth the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.



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Marlene’s Meditations

Look Above
By Marlene Houk
Burke County

I’m researching and writing about the 135th woman in the Bible, Mary Magdalene. As I’m writing about her, I see pictures from my friends in Israel as they walk through her hometown, Magdala, along the Sea of Galilee.

Their pictures helped me understand her story, told in all four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Her dramatic incidents told in these books, include her hometown, Magdala. She survived demon possession there, but throughout the books, the negative label of her past sticks with her by including Magdalene in all but two mentions of her name. But a miracle happened, probably in Capernaum which is close by, and Jesus dramatically freed her from a prison of hopelessness and evil. She follows her Savior for the rest of His earthly ministry, encountering world-shattering events. One of these episodes—the crucifixion of Jesus—tilted her mind, body, and soul. Jesus had lifted her out of a dark and sinister pit of confusion and despair to the warm and nurturing light of His world. She had served along with His disciples for at least two years. And now, she was confused, desperate to find answers and devastated by His death.

The arrest, trial, and crucifixion of her beloved Savior must have shocked her with its cruelty and political agenda. As she watched, Jesus died an agonizing death on a heartless Roman cross. Did Mary Magdalene hear the veil in the temple some several hundred feet away as it ripped in two? (Matthew 27:51) What did she feel when the skies darkened for three hours in the middle of the day? (Matthew 27:45) Would the earthquake have frightened her as rocks crashed and split? (Matthew 27:51) Did she gasp at the grating of wood or brick as coffins and stones moved and dead saints walked again? (Matthew 27:52-53) She must have been rooted to the spot where she stood, trying to absorb the enormity of it all. The chaos in Mary Magdalene’s life as she stumbled through one crisis after another in three short days would have devastated me.

Early Monday morning, when she visited the empty tomb with her friends, carrying simple herbs and ointments for cleaning and honoring Jesus’ body, her world tilted again. Jesus’ empty tomb transfixed her. As she reverted to her mindset of life before Jesus, perhaps her practical nature supposed that the simplest explanation was possible. Robbers (or disciples) had stolen His body and left her bereft of even final simple acts of love—or a place to honor her beloved Redeemer. So, she sat by the empty tomb, grieving her loss.

Like Mary Magdalene, we discover the difficulty of looking above our human thoughts when our world topples. Mourning the absence of a loved one, choosing to risk and losing everything, or realizing betrayal along with many other crises, stops us in our tracks. We tend to think literally rather than spiritually. And so we weep for what is lost.

Practicing looking above circumstances as we navigate life might be better done in times of peace or lesser events that don’t clog our minds with emotions. Hebrews 12:2 provides a clue. *“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”* Jesus looked beyond death to being reunited with His Father and living in joy again.

Reactions to life’s ups and downs are normal. But, eventually, we can explore life from God’s viewpoint once again. We find wonderfully captivating truths such as Psalm 56:3, Isaiah 41:13, or 2 Samuel 22:33 in the Bible to carry us through tough times. Loving His Word helps us to look above while we wade through earthly storms below.

Enjoying worship songs and fellowshiping with God’s people empower us to rise above our circumstances. Even delightful or confusing times offer us opportunities to walk through doors of truth as we look above and see them through God’s viewpoint.

Although Mary Magdalene wept at Jesus’ empty tomb, her sorrow turned to joy when He spoke to her. (John 20:18) His presence turned her despair into delight and catapulted her into joy. She ran to share her life-changing news with her friends—the other disciples.

Let’s run along the same trail as Mary Magdalene—racing to others with the good news of His resurrection which empowers us to look above.

Marlene Houk is a regular contributor to Blue Ridge Christian News. Her passion is to delve deeply into the truths of Bible women and to discuss those in Bible Studies called Backstage Pass to Bible Women. She and her husband discover joy, nurture, and challenge in their church. Her contact is marlenehouk@bellsouth.net Learn more about women in the Bible at Marlene’s website: www.MarleneHouk.com



Retirement Resource Management

Retirement Planning Has Changed, Have You?
By Steve Gaito
McDowell County

I recently heard that if you ask 50 Financial Advisors the best way to create your retirement plan you would get 50 different opinions. However, if you were to go to academia, the people that study the facts keep coming up with one way that is the best. So, what is the best way? I will get to that in just a moment. Let’s first look at the history of retirement planning. If you go back 30 years you see a very different environment. There were two primary sources of income for retirement. The first which is still true today is Social Security. The second was that there were pensions that provided the security that people relied on to provide income for life. This framework allowed people to have a consistent income that was very similar to what they were used to while working. When you combined the income from Social Security and pensions it covered between 70-100 percent of the pre-retirement income. In the 1980’ we saw the beginning of a shift from pensions to 401(k) plans and with that came the responsibility of creating your own plan. The investment world loved this because they are paid by assets under management and the larger the account the larger their income. Now don’t get me wrong. I believe that there is a place for having your money managed and a good investment advisor is a critical part of your retirement team. The challenge is that the skill set for planning for income in retirement is different from managing your investment portfolio. The bottom line is that a portfolio does not give the same security that a pension did. This may be the reason that so many people are anxious about running out of money in retirement. When you combine this with other factors like inflation, taxes, and health care it is easy to see why most are not confident about retirement.

This is the reason that so academia like the American College for Financial Planning, Wharton Business School, and many others agree that creating income that you cannot outlive is critical to retirement. They all agree that one of the greatest risks that everyone faces is longevity and creating income that you cannot outlive addresses this risk. This means that you take a part of your savings and use them to create this income. Logically this makes sense because most people save the money all through their working years to fund their retirement. The research also shows that simply replacing your bond allocation in traditional portfolios with an annuity will yield better performance with less risk. This is one of the biggest takeaways that I get from this research. It allows you to keep a 60/40, 50/50, or 40/60 portfolio depending on your risk tolerance and leverage the research to your advantage. It also lets you be more aggressive with the stock portion while minimizing the fixed-income side of the allocation.

I have just partnered with Tom Henga, who is an economist, writer, Retirement Income Expert, and much more to provide webinars on demand. These webinars detail the facts that the research supports and if you invest 45 minutes will change your view on retirement and allow you to enjoy retirement to the fullest with less stress. To take advantage of these webinars go to my website retirerm.com/events and sign up to watch them. I love the one Don’t Worry/Retire Happy as that is what I find most want to do in retirement. The reality is most would rather spend time traveling or with their grandchildren instead of having to delay enjoying this time because the market is down. It does not have to be that way and I can help. So, watch the webinar and give me a call. Let me help you take the stress out of retirement.

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



Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 - To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

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Crossword

Crossword 277

ACROSS

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

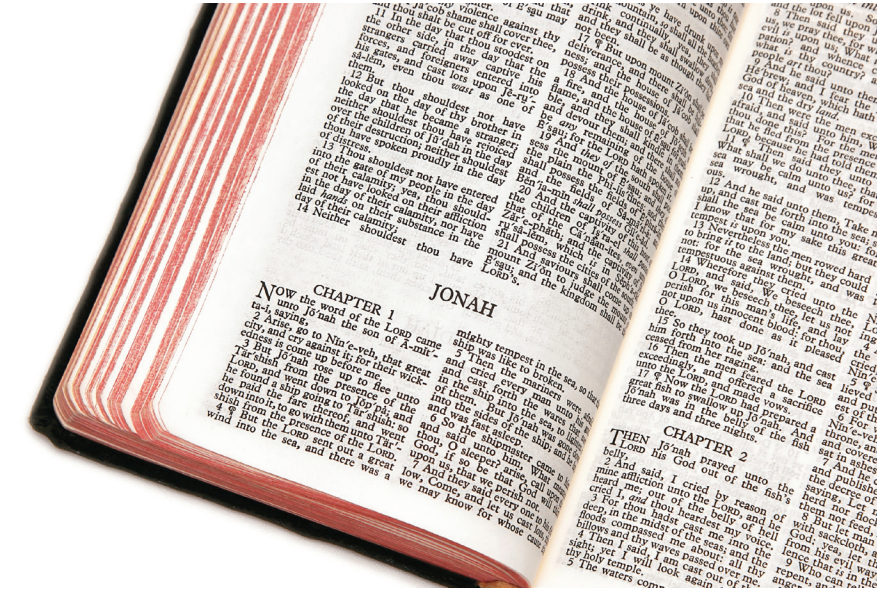
is made up of many parts (1 Cor 12:12)
58 Sir, come down ____ my child die (John 4:49) KJV
59 30th book of the Old Testament
60 If anyone ____ to be first, he must be the very last (Mark 9:35)
61 will men take _____ of it to hang any vessel thereon (1,3) (Ezek 15:3) KJV
62 rid yourselves of all such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

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____ (Acts 17:25)
29 "All these I have kept since I was a ____, " he said (Luke 18:21)
30 twenty he goats, two hundred ____, and twenty rams (Gen 32:14)
31 Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor ____ (Luke 12:24)
33 he was riding upon his ____, and his two servants were with him (Num 22:22)
35 seven of every kind of clean animal, a male and ____ mate (Gen 7:2)
37 I particularly ____ you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon (Heb 13:19)
38 "At midnight the cry ____ out: 'Here's the bridegroom!' (Matt 25:6)
40 ____ your sword upon your side, O mighty one (Ps 45:3)
41 gather your children together, _____ hen gathers her chicks (2,1) (Luke 13:34)
42 the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the ____ (Amos 9:13)

43 there was a continual ____ given him of the king (Jer 52:34) KJV
45 here were plentiful supplies of flour, fig cakes, ____ cakes (1 Chron 12:40)
47 wicked men have ____ among you (Deut 13:13)
48 In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to ____ (Ps 71:1)
51 Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the ____ (Matt 26:6)
52 angels hastened Lot, saying, ____, take thy wife (Gen 19:15) KJV
53 the ____ forest has been cut down (Zech 11:2)
55 As _____ man who casteth firebrands (1,3) (Prov 26:18) KJV
56 they will ____ out the bread by weight (Lev 26:26)
57 loose the bands of wickedness, to ____ the heavy burdens (Isa 58:6) KJV
60 she began to ____ his feet with her tears (Luke 7:38)
61 picnic pest (Prov 6:6)

Solution on page 14



Revelation Chapter 7: The Jewish Evangelists Who Will Win Countless People to Christ

By Mark Creech



Actor, filmmaker, and liberal activist Rob Reiner once said, “I think Jews are the smartest people in the world.” For once, I agree with him. My respect for the Jewish people is profound. President John Adams said of them: “The Hebrews have done more to civilize men than any other nation. If I were an atheist and believed in blind eternal fate, I should still believe that fate had ordained the Jews be the most essential instrument for civilizing the nations.” Adams’s estimate of the Jews is borne out in the promise God made to Abraham, the father of their race when he called them out as a people: “The Lord had said to Abram, ‘Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.’” We owe so much to the Jewish people. It was through them God revealed himself. Moreover, it was through them that the Messiah, the world’s Savior, Jesus Christ came. God indeed gave them their own land. He did make them into a mighty nation. But he forewarned them from the start if they forsook him and his commandments if they became idolatrous, they would be “vomited out of the land” (Leviticus 18:24-30). They also rejected their Redeemer, Christ, and had him crucified. Thus, they were scattered throughout the nations for centuries and brutally oppressed and persecuted. Nevertheless, they are remarkably resilient, which demonstrates in a special way that God is not finished with them. Dr. George Sweeting, former president and chancellor of Moody Bible Institute, has written: “A list of the persecution of the Jews since 1000 B.C. would be many pages long, but just as God promised Abraham, every nation that has persecuted the Israelites has passed from the world scene; every ruler who has oppressed them has been deposed; and every society that has abused them has fallen.” Sweeting also brings up another dynamic that shows the unique place of the Jewish people in God’s economy. He adds: “[T]hroughout all the years of dispersion, the Jews held the hope of returning to the land God promised to their Fathers. Every year, each Jewish family that observes the Passover feast ends the ritual with the words ‘Next year in Jerusalem.’ “Incredibly, centuries after the dispersion, the modern state of Israel officially came into being on May 15, 1948. In our lifetime, we are seeing the people of Israel return to their homeland from all the nations of the earth, just as the Scriptures prophesied. In the face of unbelievable odds, this tiny nation has grown in a few decades to become a dominant force in the Middle East. And with these events, the stage is being set for the ultimate fulfillment of God’s purpose for Israel, his people.” Revelation Chapter 7 appears as a parenthesis before the seventh seal of the scroll is opened. The Tribulation has been underway, but now four angels have been instructed to create a pause by holding back the winds of judgment temporarily. Then a fifth angel appears in the East. “And he shouted to those four angels, who had been given the power to harm land and sea, ‘Wait! Don’t harm the land or the sea or the trees until we have placed the seal of God on the foreheads of his servants.’ And I heard how many were marked with the seal of God—144,000 were sealed from all the tribes of Israel: from Judah 12,000 from Reuben 12,000 from Gad 12,000 from Asher 12,000 from Naphtali 12,000 from Manasseh 12,000 from Simeon 12,000 from Levi 12,000 from Issachar 12,000 from Zebulun 12,000 from Joseph 12,000 from Benjamin 12,000 After this, I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands. And they were shouting with a great roar, ‘Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!’ And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living beings. And they fell before the throne with their faces to the ground and worshiped God. They sang, ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and strength belong to our God forever and ever! Amen.’ Then one of the twenty-four elders asked me, “Who are these who are clothed in white? Where did they come from?” And I said to him, “Sir, you are the one who knows.” Then he said to me, ‘These are the ones who died in the great Tribulation. They have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and made them white. That is why they stand in front of God’s throne and serve him day and night in his Temple. And he who sits on the throne will give them shelter. They will never

again be hungry or thirsty; they will never be scorched by the heat of the sun. For the Lamb on the throne will be their Shepherd. He will lead them to springs of life-giving water. And God will wipe every tear from their eyes.” The identity of the one hundred and forty-four thousand in this text has been a matter of some theological controversy. Some scholars argue its language shouldn’t be taken literally but symbolically. They say these verses reference the church, the new Israel, and the church will go through the Tribulation. However, this approach to the passage hermeneutically seems to do violence to it. There isn’t any clear example of the church being called “Israel” in the New Testament. The apostle Paul also makes a clear distinction in Romans 11:25-26, saying: “I want you to understand this mystery, dear brothers and sisters so that you will not feel proud about yourselves. Some of the people of Israel have hard hearts, but this will last only until the full number of Gentiles comes to Christ. And so all Israel will be saved. As the Scriptures say, “The one who rescues will come from Jerusalem, and he will turn Israel away from ungodliness. And this is my covenant with them, that I will take away their sins.”” Formerly the pastor of the First Baptist Church, Dallas, and sometimes called the prince of preachers, the late W.A. Criswell asked: “What is wrong with taking the text as it is? What is wrong with understanding it as it is written? ‘I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel.’ That is what God said. Let us take the text as meaning just what he said. The hundred and forty-four thousand were all of the tribes of Israel.” Someone may argue, “Well, no one knows where the tribes of the children of Israel are anymore. It’s an absurd interpretation.” Are we to believe the One who will raise the dead from the earth’s elements – from the ground – from the ashes – from the waters – doesn’t know the location of the twelve tribes? Here we are told this one hundred and forty-four thousand are sealed by God. They are elected by God, redeemed, and marked as his own. It’s unclear what the seal is. Some contend the seal is the power of God’s Spirit. The apostle Paul told the Ephesians, “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30). However, this seems to be more of an outward sign than an inward one. The seal sets these Jews apart for protection during the wicked days of the Tribulation period. It’s a seal like the circumcision required of the Jews in the days of Moses and the mark above the door which made the angel of death pass over the Hebrews in Egypt. Furthermore, it’s in contrast to the 666 seal voluntarily accepted and placed on the right hand or foreheads of the doomed mentioned later in Revelation. Lastly, the passage connects a great multitude so massive they can’t be counted to the one hundred and forty-four thousand. They are people converted to Christ from all over the world during the Tribulation period, people who have suffered greatly for their faith, but are now dressed in white robes and safely worshipping in heaven. So, what do we have here? There seems to be only one reasonable conclusion. The one-hundred and forty-four thousand are Jews who turn to Christ, become incomparable evangelists who proclaim the Gospel and win countless souls to the Savior from their own nation and every other in the world. And God specially protects them with a seal to complete this mission. The passion of a Jew in right relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ is an amazing thing to witness. The disciples of Christ were Jews; although their number was small, they turned the world of their day right-side up for Christ with their testimony. The apostle Paul was a Jew, writing most of the New Testament, penning 13 books, and evangelizing much of the Mediterranean. A more modern-day example would be Richard Wurmbrand, author of Tortured for Christ. Wurmbrand was a hardened atheist before his conversion. But an old carpenter in Rumania prayed, “My God, I have served you on earth, and I wish to have my reward in heaven. But I wish my reward should be that I not die until I bring a Jew to Christ because Jesus was from the Jewish people.” One day, Wurmbrand was strangely and irresistibly drawn to a little village where out of 12,000 people, he was the only Jew. Discovering that Wurmbrand was a Jew, Wurmbrand said, “the old carpenter courted me as never a beautiful girl had been courted.” The older man prayed hours for Wurmbrand’s salvation and gave him a Bible to read. Wurmbrand finally gave his life to Christ and would become a central figure of the underground church in the Soviet Union, suffering tremendous persecution, yet bringing about the conversion of countless people to Christ. Shortly, there will be one-hundred and forty-four thousand Wurmbrands and innumerable people from every nation who will follow Christ after hearing their preaching. Dennis Prager, a conservative radio talk show host and author, as well as a Jew who is a graduate of the prestigious Yeshiva of Flatbush, has said: “When Jews left Judaism, they didn’t stop being religious. They simply swapped God-based Judaism for godless secular humanism and leftism. For left-wing Jews, Judaism is their ethnicity; leftism is their religion.” According to Revelation, all of this will change in the future. Being the brilliant people they are and empowered by the Spirit of God, the Jews will realize Jesus is their Messiah and convince much of the world of the same. I can hardly wait.

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

Sparks of Inspiration

By Tim Tron
Burke County

Closing my eyes in prayer, there was suddenly a shower of sparks flowing toward me in the darkness. Like those tiny bits of burning metal thrown from the blade against a grinder, floating, gliding, gently blowing into my face. Orange bits of light and little specks of fire bounced against my skin, non-threatening, only slightly tingling. The flow of glowing embers was as beautiful against the background of darkness as stars in the night sky. Turning to face the enigma, the flames only increased until it was a snowstorm of peppering happy light. Wanting to find the source, I began walking against the current, swimming upstream into the torrent of fire until the sparks turned into bubbles - floating in the water, their tingling continuing as they once were in the light. Then, without warning, my body surfaced, and I instinctively sucked in a lungful of air.

One spark floated after another.
The brilliant blue light drew my eyes while the sparks of metal fragments flew from the welder's torch. It was unlike anything I had ever seen before, blinding, powerful, and alluring, like the face of God. As a moth is drawn to the flame, my little body walked in a trance toward the man in the long mask, bent over, intently watching his work. He paused, flipped up the faceguard, and wiped the sweat from his forehead. The shower of sparks stopped. The brilliant light went out as the blue finger of a flame still roared from the metal instrument the man held in his hand. It was then my grandfather realized my proximity after glancing in my direction, and he yelled out a warning, "Don't look into the light. It'll blind you." Scared by his command, my eyes darted away toward the cow barn nearby. The blue light followed my vision, still burning into my view. Before I could turn back, the sound of the welding torch began again, and once more, the sparks flew from before my grandpa as metal turned to liquid and formed into the shape his mind had already decided upon. The red glow of the metal was only matched by the lion's mane of fire surrounding it. Promethean, raw, unassuming strength of will.

Later in life, the verse in Matthew would always make me think back to that day on the farm., "And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light." While even manufactured light can be harmful, God's very image, the potential to entirely change us, is so overwhelming that it can be life-altering. This image would never leave me.

And then one spark floated after another.
We were building our first house and farm in Chatham County. It had been raining for weeks, and we badly needed to burn the brush pile that had accumulated in the front of the home before the final inspection. We had tried repeatedly to light the soaked wood but to no avail. Fire after fire had failed. So, after help from some neighbors, we purposely waited until nightfall so as to not alarm the local volunteer fire department. That colossal mound of timber would have certainly created a massive plume of black smoke visible all the way to Goldston, the little town nearby. In preparation, we had spread several gallons of diesel fuel over the entirety of the mound of wood in preparation for the big bonfire. Then, with everyone ready and properly distanced, I poured a line of gasoline from the pile to where I stood, nearly 30 feet away.

I wasn't prepared for what happened next.
The match was struck and, with a quick motion, thrown onto the trail of gas that led to the pile. The flame ran like a little mouse into the bowels of the woodpile and disappeared. As a sleeping giant about to wake, the mound of wood inhaled. We could feel the hairs on our forearms and necks pull towards the sucking sound of the impact about to transpire. At first invisible wind, then an eerie quiet. And suddenly, a mighty burst of flames sent a small shockwave, knocking some forcibly backward as the column of light shot toward the sky. The fire licked the top of the nearby tree, some forty feet tall. We all stood there watching for a moment, not realizing that somewhere in my family's distant past, this would have been more than just a necessary evil. At the time, I never realized the significance of such an event was grounded in our family's ancestry so many centuries before. That meaning was



not merely the burning of a pile of wood but rather a spiritual journey unlike any other.

One spark floated after another.
Before the ancient Waldensians, lay the enormous brush pile, waiting, dormant. One match is all it would take to light it. They had waited until dark so the impact of the flame could be seen from the nearby mountain peaks. It was February 17th, 1848. King Carlos Alberto had finally, graciously, approved the proclamation, making the people of the Waldensian Valleys free and granting them their civil liberties, which they had been denied for centuries. It was the independence of not only something in writing but much more. The countless lives lost, the tragic tortures, burnings at the stake, and the ruthless killings would be no more – they could sleep at night knowing that there would never be the knock on the door again, seeking to destroy all they owned, and worse, all they believed.

The match was struck and, with a quick motion, thrown into the dry tender of the brush pile. Like a sleeping dragon about to wake, the mound of stacked timber inhaled. They could feel the wind pulling them towards the fortress of trees, making a sucking sound preceding the explosion of flames that was about to occur. Once more, the burst of flames sent a small shockwave, knocking everyone forcibly backward as the column of light shot toward the sky. As they watched, they could hear distant gunshots from the neighboring peaks. They turned to see a matching tower of light. Then one by one, the mountaintops became beacons of hope, sentinels of freedom. The Waldensian people were finally free. As they watched, the flames slowly subsided into a gentle roar that eventually consumed the ceremonial mound of wood.

Years later, attending an annual Waldensian Fabio Celebration in Valdese, North Carolina, the scene was repeated once more. It has been every year since that first celebration, 163 years ago. We all watched well into the night as the tiny sparks of light lifted skyward to join those that had gone on before. Something was comforting that night, a calming sense of completeness – full circle, if you will. Ironically, the symbol of freedom, the burning flame, was once the preferred tortuous death, burning at the stake. Yet, even though they suffered a horrible death, it was the light within that continued to shine. As Christ had lit their eternal flame, they could now never be extinguished.

One spark floated after another.
Gathered in the upper room, fearing for their lives, the disciples had all gathered for what they believed to be one last time. Their leader, their spiritual guide, Jesus was gone. "Had he truly been God?" "What were they to do without him?" He had told them to return to Jerusalem to wait, but now what? "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.." One spark floated after another.
From the vision of sparks flying to the face of God to flames of celebration to cloven tongues of fire, the Holy Spirit speaks to us and through us in many ways. Yet, when we take time to seek Him, we find he is always with us, regardless if we know it or not – comforting, assuring, and protecting. He's majesty, his might is too powerful for us to look upon, yet in this impressive supremacy, there is a gentle love, a love like none other, willing to give His only Son for our sins.

The next time you see the spark rise from the flame, remind yourself that you are not alone.
One spark floats after another.
Thanks be to God.

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