



Berry Chapel Baptist Church

Father's Day, My Dad

By Steve Williams
Mitchell County

This month we celebrate Father's Day. I'd like to take the time to thank my dad for being a good father. Here are a few things I can say about my dad. He Loves me. He loved my mom and was good to her. He is an honest man, and he is also a Godly man. He loves his church, Sunday School, Bible Study, singing in the choir, and telling people how good God has been to him. He is proud to be a Gideon and hand out the Word of God and lift up pastors and their families in prayer every Saturday morning. He worked hard to provide for me and Mom and he loved his job at Charlotte Pipe Foundry for way over 30 years. He was proud of his country where he served in the Air Force, Army, and Army Reserves where he retired. He loves the United States of America and its flag, and he flies it proudly in his yard today. He's a good friend to me and he's a good friend to have on your side. I see him helping others a lot. He makes me laugh, and he also makes me cry when he shares how Good God has been to him. He loves life, he loves his friends and he loves his family and is proud of his grandkids and great-grandkids. I know that I can count on him, he has shown me this all of his life. He loves to eat and have a good time with family and friends. He takes time to visit others and tries to bring a little cheer to people at the nursing home and shut-ins in the community. He loves to go and even at 85 years of age, he is not slowing down much. I know he is not perfect, but he is my dad and a Christian that I am very proud of. I hope that I can be just a little of the man that my dad is. HAPPY FATHERS DAY.



Words of Wisdom

- Don't pay attention to the person who belittles you. He's trying to cut you down to his size.
- Want a good spouse? Be one.
- The Lord uses those Christians who stay cool in a hot place, sweet in a sour

- place, and straight in a crooked place.
- Obstacles are those terrible things you see when you take your eyes off the Lord.
 - You can't climb the ladder of success with your hand in your pocket.

Focus on Father

- Many fathers are finding out that a pat on the back helps to develop character if given often enough, early enough, and low enough.
- The family tree is worth Bragging about if it consistently produces good timber and not just nuts.
- A Child isn't likely to find a father in God unless he finds something of God in his father.
- Whether a man ends up with a nest egg or a goose egg depends on the chick he married.
- Every father teaches, some by what he says, more by what he does, but most by what he is.

Question of the Month;

If you aren't going all the way for God, why go at all?

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



By Doug Harrell
Mitchell County

As I sit down to write this article several things are running through my mind but the thing that seems most pressing is the role of the father in the family, the community, and society. I worry that too many fathers are not taking their responsibility as they should. Fathers are appointed several duties by the Holy Scriptures which too many have walked away from. The first and most important of those duties is to teach and train their children in the way they should go, the first being a relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

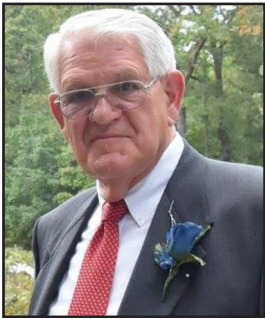
We fathers are called upon to be the spiritual leaders of the family, to be the ones that teach and lead in spiritual matters. We must do this by being true to the faith in our personal daily walk with the Lord. We must be taking the family to church, not sending them. We must love their mothers as Christ loved the church. We must commit to putting their mothers on a pedestal and honor them and expect the children to do the same. Not only expect, but demand, and yes, I mean demand, that they do the same thing. A family is a sacred unit in God’s plan for humanity and the critical fact is that the family be a man and a woman joined together in Holy Matrimony and that unity holds until death do they part.

As we go into Father’s Day this month, I am praying that the fathers in our nation will step up to the plate and be the role models for the boys in their families and an example of a husband that the girls can look for as they reach the age of looking for their own mates. The breakdown of future families is a direct reflection of the current family situation taking place in society. Marriage is a commitment of a man and a woman for a lifetime if we are to have families that are intact and solid in their mental, emotional, and spiritual lives. When I look at statistics, I truly shudder at what our nation’s children are facing today, the number of single families, families that are comprised of mine, theirs, ours, and others, too many times there is nothing but turmoil and trouble. Granted some exceptions have done a great job of raising children in this situation, but they are few and far between.

My prayer for anyone reading this today is that they understand first God’s plan for the family and the relationship that is laid out for each of us.

“Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.”
Ephesians 5:24-28 KJV

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



“Tolerating The Intolerable”

By Shawn Thomas
Angleton, Texas



A Christian parent asked their 15-year-old daughter: “What is a name that kids in your school do NOT want to be called? But the answer was very revealing: his daughter said, “The worst thing you can be called at our school, is ‘Intolerant.” That says so much about where we are as a society right now, doesn’t it; call me anything else, but don’t call me intolerant!

Toleration can be a good thing; but tolerating in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ what God has forbidden, is taking it too far. This is the message Jesus gave in Revelation 3 to the church at Thyatira: “The Church That Tolerated The Intolerable.”

As He did with most of the churches, Jesus initially commended the church at Thyatira for some things: their “*deeds, and love and faith and service,*” and so on. But then He says in:20 “*But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.*”

The word “tolerate” here means “permitting, allowing.” Jesus used it in Matthew 3, when He told John the Baptist, “*permit it at this time, to fulfill all righteousness.*” But what they were “tolerating” in Thyatira was the woman Jesus calls “Jezebel,” undoubtedly not her actual name, but comparing her wickedness to that of evil Jezebel of the Old Testament.

What was this woman doing that was so wicked? Jesus said, “*she calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bondservants astray.*” There were two aspects to this “Jezebel’s” heresy:

— false teaching: “*She teaches and leads My bondservants astray*” - including teaching on “*the deep things of Satan*” as:24 says!

— immoral practice: “acts of immorality.”

Many have speculated that the false teaching and practice in Thyatira had to do with the trade guilds that flourished there. They were known for their manufacture of purple cloth. But if you wanted to work, you had to be part of the trade guild, and when these tradesmen got together they would offer sacrifices to false gods and eat the meat from the sacrifice, and the worship often involved cult prostitution as well. This “prophetess” may have taught that these things were ok for Christians to participate in. But whatever form it took, this “Jezebel” taught that immorality was ok for Christians.

There have always been those throughout church history who have tried to excuse immorality in the church — and that continues today:

— A few years ago there was a singles church group that taught that it was ok to commit immorality as long as you weren’t married. (A pretty convenient teaching for a singles group!) But it was obviously contrary to the teaching of the New Testament.

— Many in America today are seeking to justify homosexual practice for professing Christians. They assert that what the Bible prohibits is just “homosexual prostitution,” NOT a “loving, committed gay relationship.” Others teach that if you condemn homosexuality because of Leviticus, then you can’t eat shrimp either, because they both are Old Testament commands. This is a very common argument today. But the New Testament later specifically declared all foods clean — so you CAN eat shrimp despite what Leviticus says! — but the Bible NEVER reverses its ban on homosexual practice. In fact, the NEW Testament in Romans, I Corinthians, and I Timothy, specifically teaches that homosexuality is STILL a sin and prohibited by God.

These are the same kinds of things this “Jezebel” taught in Thyatira: that immorality was ok for Christians. Jesus had harsh words against that in this letter. Tolerating in the church what God has prohibited is NOT a virtue!

Now, we should understand that there are things we may tolerate in our society as a whole, that we do not tolerate in our churches. A certain level of tolerance is necessary for us to have a pluralistic, democratic society as we have here in America. John Newton, the author of Amazing Grace, wrote: “I am glad of liberty to worship God according to my light, and therefore am willing that others should have the same liberty.” (Letters of John Newton, Josiah Bull, ed., p. 371). We have a pluralistic society in America, with people of many different beliefs. In order to facilitate that, we have to exercise a degree of tolerance towards those who disagree with us:

— You may be a Republican politically, and may strongly disagree on issues with someone who is a Democrat. But you don’t go out and shoot someone because they are a Democrat! You tolerate their right to exist in a pluralistic nation like America. In fact, as the old saying goes, I’ll disagree with you, but I’ll die for your right to disagree!

— In the same way, Christians strongly disagree with Muslim doctrines about God and Jesus, but we don’t go around burning down Muslim mosques. We tolerate their existence in our society.

— Likewise, we disagree with homosexual practice — but we don’t go out and beat up homosexuals we see in the street.

We tolerate these groups, just as we wish to be tolerated when WE are in the minority. Tolerance to a point is a good thing and is needed to have the kind of society we enjoy in the United States of America today.

But tolerance in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an entirely different thing. The church is not a pluralistic democracy. The church is the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, and His word is our rule of faith and practice. We are not free to believe and practice anything we desire in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ:

— A person can support abortion in our society today. But in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, His word says He knits us together in our mother’s womb, and the life of the unborn child is precious.

— A person is free in America today to believe that Allah is the one God, and Mohammed is His prophet. But you are NOT free to believe that in the church of the

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Spruce Pine
First Baptist
Welcomes
Dr. Don Wilton
& His wife
Karyn

Dr. Don Wilton
(Dr. Billy Graham’s Pastor)
is coming to
Spruce Pine Sunday
July 30 2023 Sunday
Morning at First Baptist @
11am And Sunday Night
At The Tri County
Tabernacle @ 6:00 pm

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

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

Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church
2187 Jamestown Road
Morganton, NC
828-584-8212

Pastor Steve Bietz

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

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

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

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

Plumtree 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 10:30 am
Life Groups Tuesday-Thursday evenings, 7:00 pm
Youth & Children's Ministry Wed. evenings, 7:00 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 & Orchestra, Adult Bible Study, Youth Discipleship, Preschool & Children's TeamKid

Mount Carmel Baptist Church
195 Gouges Creek Rd.
Spruce Pine NC 28777

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www.mcfamilyforchrist.org

Sunday School - 10am
Sunday Worship - 11am and 6pm
Mid-week Service - Wednesdays at 6:30pm
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First Baptist Church of Spruce Pine
125 Tappan Street
Spruce Pine, NC 28777
828-765-9411
www.sprucepinefbc.com
www.spfbc.blogspot.com

Dr. Rocky Branch Senior Pastor

Sunday School - 9:30 am
Sunday Worship - 10:45 am
Sunday Evening - 6:00 pm
Wednesday Evening - 6:30 pm
Knowing God, Seeing God, Serving God, Submitting to God!

Pine Branch Baptist Church
48 Church Road
Spruce Pine, NC 28777
Phone: (828) 765-9101
www.pinebranchbaptist.org
Email: info@pinebranchbaptist.org

Rev. Bruce Cannon, Interim Pastor

Sunday School • 9:45-10:45am
Worship Service • 11:00am
Sunday Evening • 6:30pm
Wednesday Evening • 6:30pm
Growing Together in Christ

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

Pastor - Steve Williams

Sunday School 9:45 AM
Worship Service 11:00 AM
Sunday Evening Care Meal/Ministry - 5:30 PM
Wednesday Evening Service 7:00 PM
Where Everybody is Somebody And Jesus Christ is Lord!

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

Pastor Richard Schilling

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

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

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

Reverend Bruce Cannon

Sunday School 9:00 AM
Worship Service 10:00 AM
Discipleship 6:00 PM
Evening Worship 6:00 PM
Wednesday Worship 6:30 PM
"For God so loved the world, he gave his only Son..."

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

Elder Mike Cloy
opc mikecloy@gmail.com

Sunday School 10:00 AM
Worship Service 11:00 AM
Fellowship Meal Following Worship
Thursday Bible Study & Prayer 6:30pm
Come Celebrate the Glory of God in Reverent Worship Ps. 96:3; John 17:1



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By Bruce Cannon
Mitchell County

“O, that the woke crowd would go to sleep and the asleep would wake up.” I am constantly amazed at the news events of the day! When I think I have heard it all, something new is reported. Dr. David Jeremiah wrote a book on the subject in 2011 entitled “I Never Thought I’d See the Day!.” He subtitled it, “Culture at the Crossroads.” In the book, Dr. Jeremiah detailed the current events of that day and how they were so shocking. May I say that we have moved a long way from that level of morality and decency in these past 12 years?

Think of some of the current events of 2023 and how they show clearly a decadent and depraved society:

- * Our armed forces are considering using “drag queens” to boost the number of Americans enlisting.
- * Drag queens are being allowed access to younger children in public schools and libraries.
- * We are desperately trying to slow down the problem of children/youth changing their gender.
- * Legislation in the U.S. that would sanction basically any type of marriage was approved by Thom Tillis and Richard Burr; our conservative senators from North Carolina resulting in their being sanctioned in so many N.C. counties.

I could literally go on and on with the very disturbing things, but you get the picture. We are seeing the pieces of evidence of a nation that turned away from God years ago through the decisions being made today in our courts, our senates and houses, and in our White House. When the leaders of our land do not have the foundation of the Word of God, the decisions they make are most likely going to fit the current view of the world and not of the Word of God! Thereby doing so, we are continuing to move further and further away from God. The further away we move, the less likely we are going to have His blessings and the more likely we will experience His judgment!

What we are seeing today reminds me of the days of Israel after the kingdom was divided. Time and again the Scriptures teach that succeeding kings would do “more evil in the sight of God than the ones who reigned before them.” Israel spiraled away from God and He, the Lord, allowed the enemy to judge them.

What is our hope? If you buy into this article and agree with me, and I pray you do, you believe we are in desperate need of God. We cannot keep going in the current direction without running headlong into calamity! The Bible says of the character of God that He is “the same yesterday, and today and forever.” If He judged evil over the past existence of man, He will do so today. Let me share a few examples:

- * The Flood in Noah’s Day was because man’s mind was evil continually.
- * In Lot’s day God sent down fire upon Sodom and Gomorrah (for the same type of evils we see today!).
- * In 722 BC Assyria defeated Israel and took possession of their share of the Promised Land.
- * In 605 BC Babylon defeated Judah, took so many captive, and destroyed Solomon’s Temple.
- * In 70 AD Rome slaughtered almost a million Jews and tore down the 2nd Temple because of sin.

What evidence are we seeing today that shows His turning His back on America? They are plentiful; aren’t they? How we need to wake up, pray up and beg Him for mercy! What depends on it? His power, His blessings, His protection and so much more! The America our children and grandchildren will have to live in is being determined today by the stands we, as His people, are taking!

Pray fervently and continuously! Stand in the gap! Live the life necessary for the Lord to hear and answer your prayers. I am sure there are many burdened as you and I are but don’t negate the importance of your prayer and your faith. America needs you!

Bruce Cannon is the retired 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.



Defeat the Lies That Torment Your Soul

By Joyce Meyer



Deception is a dangerous problem and something Jesus warned us about in the Bible. In Matthew 24:4, He said, “Be careful that no one misleads you [deceiving you and leading you into error]” (AMPC). There are other places in Scripture where we’re warned to watch out and be alert because we have an enemy who is trying to deceive us.

When you’re deceived, you believe a lie. This is dangerous because when you believe a lie, even though it’s not true, it becomes your reality.

For example, I used to believe I would always have a second-rate life because my father had sexually abused me throughout my childhood and I was “damaged goods.” This lie made me insecure, bitter, hard to get along with, and absolutely miserable.

But when I discovered the truth in God’s Word, that He would heal my soul and pay me back for the shame of my youth, I had hope that I could move forward in His plans and purposes for my life. I began growing in my relationship with Jesus, learning how to trust Him to restore my mind and emotions—my heart—and how to live according to the wisdom in His Word.

Breaking Free from the Torment in My Soul

A major key to overcoming the wrong mindsets I’d lived with for many years was learning to obey God’s command to walk in love and forgive everyone who had hurt me. Luke 6:27-28 says, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (NIV). And Romans 12:21 urges us, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” I realize that choosing forgiveness is one of the most difficult things God asks us to do, especially if we believe that whoever hurt us is in the wrong and doesn’t deserve to be forgiven. But staying mad won’t help you either; the truth is it actually causes you more hurt and misery if you refuse to get past the offense.

I remember the day I was praying for God to show me someone I could help and He spoke to my heart about my parents. At the time, they were older and needed help with the activities of their daily life. I felt that God wanted me to move them close to where my husband, Dave, and I lived and take care of them until they died.

At first, I resisted this idea because there was nothing in me that wanted to see them, much less spend money on them and meet their needs. But I told Dave what I was thinking, and he said if God was telling me to do this, we should do it. It wasn’t what I wanted to hear, but he was right, so we moved them into a house near us and took care of them until they died.

This was one of the hardest things I’ve ever done, but I can honestly say now that it is one of the greatest decisions I’ve ever made. God honored my obedience and gave me the grace to do the right thing, and before he passed away, my dad asked me to forgive him and he accepted Christ as his Savior.

The reward of forgiveness has far outweighed the pain I lived with for so many years. It has literally changed my life, and I firmly believe it was one of the hardest punches I could ever throw at the enemy!

Choose the Truth

Whatever your challenge may be today—the pain of injustice, fear of the unknown, sickness, a broken relationship, or any other hardship—I want to encourage you to trust God and focus on the truth of His Word. Remember that He loves you unconditionally, and He is always with you. He is on your side as you go through the difficulties you face and He has your best interest at heart at all times. God is close to you when you’re hurting the most, and He will fight your battles as you trust and obey Him.

Spend some time studying scriptures that will help you overcome any lies that have kept you from the peace and joy God wants you to have through your life in Christ. Scriptures like Psalm 34:18 and 147:3, Romans 8:1-2 and 37-39, Romans 12:1-2 and 21, and John 10:10 are good places to start.

Also, our team at Joyce Meyer Ministries is here for you, to pray for you and encourage you during the difficult, painful seasons of your life. You can contact us online at www.joycemeyer.org. Remember that we love you, and most importantly, God loves you. That’s the most amazing truth of all!

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





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By Terry Cheek
McDowell County



Romans 2:1-3 “I Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things. 2 We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. 3 Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?”

Studying this article, I discovered the story of a brilliant Christian apologist who argued so well during debates with his opponents that he reduced them to ashes, and afterward, it was said, he would dust off the spot where his adversaries had stood. That apologist reminded me of Paul in Romans chapter 2. Paul has just finished giving an indictment on all people. How long will he continue with the law and our sins before he gives us some relief? Jonathan Edwards preached one of his stirring sermons on the judgment of God and the threat of eternal damnation in hell, someone in attendance cried out, “But, Mr. Edwards, is there no mercy with God?” Edwards reminded the people that they had to wait till the following Sunday before they got that part of the message. The same is true here as we begin Romans chapter 2. If we hope to get that good news now, our hopes are in vain, because the apostle is not finished with the bad news yet. Before we get to the gospel, we must be brought before the holy standard of God’s law so that we might be convicted of our need for the gospel. Paul continues his indictment of our sinfulness: Therefore, you have no excuse, O man (v. 1). In light of all that he has just spread out before us of man’s rejection and suppression of God’s self-revelation, which everybody knows with clarity, and in light of God’s eternal power, deity, and holiness, the sins people practice is worthy of death. Yet, people not only continue to practice these sins, but they encourage others to do so. Therefore, man is without excuse in the presence of God.

Hypocrisy? Every one of you who judges, for any reason you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things (v. 1). The sin of hypocrisy is in view here. Paul is chastising his kinsmen for their judgmental attitude toward the Gentiles. He is basically saying, “Who do you think you are? You condemn the Gentiles yet practice the very same things they do.” That is the essence of hypocrisy. It is a particular threat to any preacher or teacher who dares to stand and correct sinners because he is also a sinner and risks the liability of condemning others for doing the very things that he does. Even though these words are addressed specifically to Jews, there is a universal application of the text. What was true for Israel is true for us today—if we condemn other people for doing the very things that we do, then, by our condemning them, we are showing our awareness of the wrongness of certain activities, and we are in effect condemning ourselves. Be sure to understand there is a difference between the sin of judging and the reality of calling out sin and God’s promise to judge it.

However, we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things (v. 2). R.C. Sproul said “We see judgments made and verdicts rendered in courtrooms, and we ask, “Was justice really done here, or was this simply a show of a titanic struggle between able attorneys, and to the victor go the spoils?” Somewhere, amid the argument between prosecution and defense, justice can and has become lost. People are persuaded by clever arguments; as a result, justice is not always served in the courtroom or in the decisions we make in our community and church and even in our family. The one thing we can be confident in is that the just judgment of God is always according to the truth. That is what Paul is saying when he writes that the judgment of God is according to the truth. Nobody can stand before the judgment seat of God with the complaint, “That’s not fair.” Our consciences tell us that every last person, at some point, will be held accountable before his Creator—believer and nonbeliever alike. Even though the believer passes from condemnation, he will still have to stand before God and be judged, and that judgment will harbor no secrets. It will be perfect and accurate because it will be according to the truth.

Every time we read biblical descriptions of judgment before the presence of God, we see the human response is always silent. Every mouth is stopped. Debate is futile. The discussion is over when God renders His verdict, for we know that His judgment will be according to the truth. And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God? (v. 3). The deepest hope harbored in the hearts of corrupt humanity is that somehow, we will escape. As W.C. Fields lay in his hospital room on his death bed, a friend came to see him and was shocked to find Fields reading the Bible. Fields was not known for his devotion to God. When Fields’s friend asked him why he was reading the Bible, Fields replied, “I’m looking for loopholes.” Everyone thinks there is going to be a loophole, a way of escape from an omniscient, holy, righteous God, but there is no way to escape the judgment save through the way that the holy God has given to the world, which is the way of the cross. We do not want that way; we want to find a way to escape, yet there is none. With the image of the Cross, I will conclude June’s article. I urge you to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as your savior. Christians we cannot be too close to God’s word or hold to the Cross too tightly. Until we meet again in person or in print may God bless you is my prayer.

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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.

Freedom Life To Extend To Yancey County

By Kiesa Kay
Yancey County

“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy; I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” John 10:10

Leaving incarceration often means leaving with no job, nowhere to go, no home, and no friends. Freedom includes the tough task of figuring out how to create a new life.

“You have to learn how to create a life that you don’t want to escape from,” said Cassie Burleson, a grateful believer in Jesus. She gives all the glory to God for her recovery. As a mother, wife, daughter, and friend, she touches lives and leads others to restore faith. She advocates for Celebrate Recovery and shares that program with women in the county jail, and now she’s an advocate for Freedom Life.

“I still remember the first day I felt free. In prison, I felt free for the first time, free of the drugs and the despair,” said Cassie Burleson, a member of the executive committee. “I heard the Lord whisper that now I had a second chance.”

Freedom Life, a faith-based organization that helps people who have faced or are facing incarceration, eases the transition into the community by providing life direction development, fellowship, and faith opportunities.

In moments of worry, all alone, the voice of God can rise into the stillness: *“Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.”* Deuteronomy 31:6

Freedom Life supplies events, mentoring, and practical daily support. The organization began in 2012 in McDowell County and now plans to extend ministry to Yancey County and Avery County. Danny Hampton, executive director of Freedom Life, worked more than 20 years in church pastoral ministry and was a prison chaplain at the Marion Correctional Institution in McDowell County.

“Freedom Life gives a second chance at life and assists with spiritual needs, housing, vehicles, and jobs while holding the individuals accountable,” said Yancey County Sheriff Shane Hilliard. “It’s another tool we can utilize to help our citizens battling with addiction. Freedom Life will help everybody.”

Practical obstacles can feel overwhelming. Many justice-involved individuals struggle with drug problems, and in the carceral setting, it can take six, twelve, or eighteen months for the mind to clear from contamination from drugs, Burleson said. There’s diarrhea, shaking, and aching. And after all, when the time comes to return to community life, sometimes it’s hard to know how to create a life without drugs.

“There needs to be someone who can help when your brain lies to you, and it isn’t enough to advocate for abstaining,” Burleson said. “It is the most selfless love, to help people get what they need, instead of giving them what they want.”

Freedom Life plans outreach that includes a youth program for children with incarcerated family members, and a pre-release plan so that people can have driver’s licenses, Social Security cards, a place to live, and jobs when they walk out of incarceration, said Lauren Wright, executive administrator. They work with people who have been incarcerated within the last two years.

“God has called us to do this,” Wright said. “We only have thirty volunteers now, down from 150 before Covid. We help with transportation, making doctor’s appointments, and getting them to rehabilitation. We get them to where they need to go and help them navigate how to get car insurance.”

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another-and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” Hebrews 10:24-25

Almost half of all Americans have a family member who’s been behind bars, according to a study by FWD.us and Cornell University, and one in seven Americans have a family member who’s been incarcerated for more than a year. Families lose time together, and they also find themselves with all kinds of court fees, bail, and fines to pay.

“I have watched as Freedom Life has connected not only with individuals but with their families,” stated McDowell County Sheriff Ricky T. Buchanan. “This ministry has shown that it takes more than just an individual. It takes a community to partner together to really make a sustainable difference. Sometimes it takes a plan and a dedicated partner to hold one accountable, but people can change. I do not doubt that Freedom Life will be a great community partner to Yancey County the way they have been to McDowell.”

“If I had not had my family and my church, I would not be alive today,” Cassie Burleson says. “I emerged a great believer in Jesus. Every day I pray. I looked into the mirror and did not recognize myself, but I heard the Lord say quietly, ‘This is your chance.’”

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” Philippians 4:13.

Kiesa Kay, poet, and playwright, writes and plays fiddle at her cabin with a panoramic view of the Black Mountains.



Repetition Soothes the Soul

By Marlene Houk
Burke County

Isaiah 40:1 *“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.”*

My friend, Michelle Medlock Adams, scattered repeated phrases throughout her little board book called, *How Much Does God Love You?*

During a conversation with my daughter, an elementary teacher, she helped me connect the repetition in Isaiah 40:1 and the repetition in children’s books with a simple yet profound social/ emotional principle.

In her job, my daughter interacts with about 100 children every day. Sometimes, adverse childhood experiences blindsides these children. (And, many of us, like them, wade through traumatic tragedies at least once in our lives.) How do teachers access trauma-informed resources?

Educational leaders encourage teachers to learn trauma-informed strategies, and books about the trauma-informed classroom abound. When I researched the books available on Amazon, there were 12 pages of book titles. Also helpful are the school counselor, behavior specialist, social worker, and exceptional children’s teachers to help the classroom teacher recognize emotional issues and offer support to their students.

In addition to school specialists, blogs (internet articles) shed much light on understanding why traumatized children behave in certain ways when they need security and reassurance.

Jamie Finn, who blogs at, <http://www.fosterthefamilyblog.com>, answers questions about being trauma-informed. A follower asked her: Do children ask questions they know the answers to for attachment?

The answer is yes because their need to form healthy attachments includes felt needs for security and safety.

My jaw dropped. Isaiah 40:1 immediately came to mind. God repeats Himself when assuring His people. The idea of repetition presents a practical yet powerful way to reassure others of God’s truths to hold us steady in the storms of life.

When life falls apart everyone needs reassurance that God will comfort us. Even though we’ve heard the truth a myriad of times, our souls find security and safety in repetition.

Verses like the following underscore this principle.

1. Psalm 23:4 *“...thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”*
2. Psalm 119:50 *“This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me.”*
3. Matthew 9:22 *“...Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole.”*
4. 2 Corinthians 1:3 *“...Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;”*

I thought of how many times God repeats the truth in the Bible and how He comforts us with these repetitions.

When we answer the same question over and over we are actually using a trauma-informed method that comforts the person we’re talking to.

I encourage you to try this when you’re answering someone upset. They may already know the Bible verses about Jesus being the light in their world or Jesus who is the way, the truth and the life. They (and we) just need to hear the truth again to be comforted.

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



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Avery County

Community Good Friday Service at Banner Elk Presbyterian Church

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

McDowell County

Join us at Nebo First Baptist Church for a royally fun time at Vacation Bible School. We're lowering the drawbridge to the castle. Grab your armor and prepare for fun as you learn to stand strong in the battle of truth. June 19 – 23, 2023, 6:15 pm – 8:30 pm Meal 5:45 pm – 6:15 pm address: 5360 US Highway 70E, Nebo, NC 28761 Phone: 828-442-7552

Mitchell County

Bakersville Events:
June 3rd – Troutacular – Riverside Park 6:00 am – 12 pm Bakersville Creek Walk
June 16-June 18 Friday 12:00 pm – Sunday 12:00 pm Rhododendron Festival Bakersville
Spruce Pine Events:
June 3rd – Troutacular – Riverside Park 6:00 am – 12 pm
June 10th – Alien Festival (Oak Avenue) - 9:00 am – 7:00 Downtown
June 23rd – Movies in the Park (Central Park)

Pine Branch Baptist Church!
Twists and Turns – Following Jesus Changes the Game Psalm 25:4
VBS NEWS RELEASE
Spin the spinner, beat the clock, skip ahead, level up, and play to win! Twists & Turns™ is a fantastical celebration of games of all kinds. From classic tabletop games to strategy games to video games and more, kids will play their way through VBS in fun locations such as the Bible Study Game Room, Wild Card Crafts, Multi-player Missions, and more ! But more importantly, they'll see Jesus through the eyes of one of His closest friends and discover that trusting Jesus as Savior and following Him changes the game entirely!
It's Vacation Bible School time at Pine Branch Baptist Church
Kids age 3 through grade 12 (PreK - Youth) are invited to attend June 4th through 8th, from 5:30 -8:30 pm nightly. Youth will experience special activities planned just for them. This week of fun, food, and exciting learning opportunities is free of charge and open to everyone.
REGISTER NOW at myvbs.org/pbbc! You may also call 828-577-0060 or visit www.pinebranchbaptist.org for more information.

Yancey County

Camp Funshine is a summer day camp for people of all ages with developmental disabilities. There is no cost to campers! To ensure campers remain safe and are able to get the most out of their experience, each camper must be accompanied by an adult family member or assistant. We enjoy food, music, games, fishing and rafting for the first three days, the fourth day we celebrate our closing ceremony with BBQ and fireworks! Join us June 19-21 9am-3pm and June 22 3pm-10pm at Toe River Campground!

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By Cody T. McCain
Burke County



In the early morning hours of January 20, 2019, I had a very profound and prophetic dream. I normally write my dreams down in my personal journal but on this occasion, I felt a press to publicly share what I believe the Spirit of God is trying to say to the Body of Christ in this hour. This is the first time I have publicly spoken about this dream, although it took place four years ago, I believe it proves to be very relevant for this current time!

I dreamed that my wife and I visited a church for their morning service. At this church, they kept focusing on “building and adding on” to their current edifice, even taking part in the service to walk the congregation outside to see cleared land. I became angry at this point and said to my wife, “Let’s go!” The dream then transitioned to a large church, which looked like a church I have visited before. During this service, a lot of elements were directed towards “entertainment and singing” rather than a focus on Scripture. At a point during the service, a gentleman called some of the former leaders of that ministry to the stage to honor them. One leader – whom I know personally – stood out to me among the other leaders because he had a very hurt and disappointed look on his face. It was as if what he was seeing greatly vexed his spirit. This time, my wife became angry and said to me, “I ain’t got time for this!” Another transition within the dream took place, this time I was standing on a platform in front of a large crowd, proclaiming the Gospel message. I began to tell the crowd about how the church’s focus has become materialism, entertainment, and “feel-good” messages rather than the truth of Scripture. While I was speaking, many (not some, but MANY) of those in the audience began to get up and leave. As they were leaving, I said to them, “Although you may get up and leave, you are still held accountable for this word!” There were only a handful of people left in the crowd and I made an appeal to them saying, “How many of you can say that if you were to die today that you would go to Heaven?” I asked them to raise their hands, and if their hands were raised, I asked them to come down. A small crowd of about 30-40 people came down to receive salvation, many of them crying and praising God. I had other individuals who were present gather the people in small groups to minister to them and to pray with them the prayer of salvation. As I began to pray with my group, I woke up from my dream still praying!

I believe the message of this dream is crystal clear. The scripture declares in 2 Timothy 4:3-4, “*For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths.*” The Body of Christ has placed too much of her focus on building buildings, but not building and edifying people. A focus upon entertainment, events, and even songs that stir and motivate our emotions rather than glorify Christ; and sadly, a desire and appetite for “hyper-grace” motivational messages that hinge upon achievement, advancement, blessings, and prosperity rather than the unadulterated truth of the Gospel, which challenges us to become like Christ, by taking up our crosses and following Him daily! Many within the Body become angry and offended when the truth of the Word (in proper context as revealed by the Holy Spirit) is presented to them! The truth of God’s Word convicts our hearts of sin, exposes us to the unconditional love of Jesus, brings about healing, transformation, and deliverance from the yokes of bondage, and compels us to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others. The truth of God’s Word properly balances the desire for achievement, advancement, and prosperity according to God’s divine purpose and plan for our lives (which is to ultimately reach the lost)! The truth of God’s Word tears down religious traditions and practices and challenges us to conform to the principles of the Kingdom of God that Jesus has established within our hearts! However, there is a remnant as 1 Kings 19:18 says, “...*who have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.*” Some will hunger for the truth of God’s Word and be transformed by its power to become true disciples of Jesus Christ!

Father in the name of Jesus, I pray that you would cause Holy Spirit to rise within your people, to transform us to the likeness of your dear Son so that we would no longer show the world a fragmented Jesus, but rather the Jesus revealed by holy scripture. In Jesus’ name, I pray...Amen!

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

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And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Ephesians 6:4

By Andrew Goins
Watauga County

What is the relationship between this unhurried Christian life and the baptized imagination that enables us to experience our particular and peculiar places as bethels? Watching and waiting. We watch the world around us, with eyes wide open to the world we inhabit to develop the habit of not merely seeing but perceiving heaven on earth.

A hurried life is declaring war on time itself. It is trying to outpace time by getting things done and done quickly. But time marches forward, beating the drum of tic, toc, tic, toc, like an alarm clock waking us up to fears of failure, fears of living inefficiently and thus ineffectively. The lie believed is that "I am what I do." If I am what I do, I must do and do so efficiently. The church has believed this lie in becoming programmatic. The programmatic church is a parasitical church that sucks the nutrients from the rest of the Body. It believes people encounter God by doing and doing, not being. The parasite of programs slithers like a snake whispering the lie of justification by works. "You are what you do," it says. "You can become like God if you do more," it says. The American church believes this lie, and imbibes this lie by "plugging people in." This is how the church has waged a war against time that leaves Christians anxious, beaten up, and burnt out. We have raced time, but now we are out of breath.

So Jesus says "*Blessed are those who are out of breath, for theirs is the kingdom of God.*" There is good news in that Jesus has come to give us mouth-to-mouth CPR. To breathe in us again. To restore our spirit by giving us His Spirit. This is what the church needs. We need to feel our loss of breath in the deep depths of the harrowing hell of hurry. We need to repent. We have had our eyes fixed on justification by works for so long. We need to slow down. We need to stop. We need to rest.

N.T. Wright writes "If the Spirit is the one who brings God's future forward into the present, worshiping in the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead means standing in the overlap between heaven and earth and also at the place where past, present, and future are mysteriously held together."

We need to breathe deep the Spirit of God that raised Jesus from the dead so that we can see the heaven-earth-ness of now as the future and past piercing this present moment as we harken heaven and herald the resurrection life through the Spirit of God. How do we stand in the overlap between heaven and earth? We wait and watch.

Watching requires waiting. It requires waving the white flag of surrender on the war we have waged on time. We announce the kingdom by renouncing hurry. Rather than race time, we must inhabit time. We speak about time as though it is something we own. "I spend my time...I use my time...I have free time" as though time could be haggled, bartered, or possessed. We cannot possess time. Time possesses us. The poet Malcomb Guite uses the phrase "timelessness resounding into time." This encapsulates what the Christian life is about. The future and past pierce this moment which is a movement simultaneously within and toward eternity. How do we get in on this movement of eternity that is both now and not yet? By running the pace of the kingdom. It is a slow pace. Before Jesus announces the kingdom in pithy parables, he says

"You will be ever hearing but never understanding, you will be ever seeing but never perceiving."

We are after "listening creation into speech" as kingdom people. This requires us to listen to understand, which requires pondering. Slowly turning over each word that worms its way into our souls. Words that whittle us like wood to kindle wonder with the kindling of worry burned, buried, and carried to our roots to nourish our bones and branches, sap and marrow. The listening that Jesus is inviting us into is a listening that requires slowing down and pondering in such a way as to allow each word to seep into our soul and settle our soul by turning our worldview upside down (right side up) to view the kingdom. To view the kingdom requires a different kind of seeing. It requires perceiving. Perceiving the pied goodness that covers creation as the waters cover the seas. It requires a waiting that leads us into watching. This perception is what it means to be filled with the Spirit and stand in the overlap between heaven and earth. This perception is also what it means to stand at the place where "past, present, and future are mysteriously held together."

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



Lord Jesus Christ. Our confession is "Jesus is Lord" and "there is no other name under heaven, given among men, by which we must be saved." Muslim teaching is not tolerated in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

— Similarly, a person is free to have whatever relationships our nation's law allows — but one is NOT free to live immorally in the church of Jesus Christ. Followers of Jesus are bound by His word, which says sexuality is to be confined within the boundaries of marriage, and between a man and a woman. To believe and practice outside that standard is not acceptable in the church. To teach and to practice what God has prohibited in the church, is to tolerate the intolerable.

The Apostle Paul wrote to the church in I Corinthians 5 and said: "*It is actually reported that there is immorality among you, and immorality of such a kind as does not exist even among the Gentiles, that someone has his father's wife. (:2) You have become arrogant and have not mourned instead, so that the one who had done this deed would be removed from your midst.*"

The Corinthians actually boasted (:6) about how "tolerant" they were: "Why, we're so tolerant we have people living in blatant immorality among us!" Paul says this boasting is not good! He said in:2 you should remove these people from your midst. You can't blatantly break God's moral commands and still be a member in good standing of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Tolerating the intolerable in the church is not a virtue. It is a sin against God. Jesus says in Revelation 2 that He will not overlook those things, but He will powerfully judge them.

Now, let's be clear: there is a difference between forgiving a sin someone has repented of and tolerating a sin when someone has no intention of repenting of it. As Christians, we should be VERY gracious to anyone who knows they have sinned and who is seeking to repent of it. Who among us has not sinned? The Bible says: "*All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*" None of us are saved by how good we are. We are all only saved by the grace of God in Christ Jesus and His death on the cross for us. So as Christians, we should be the FIRST people to forgive anyone, and we should be the LAST people to ever look down on anyone who has sinned. The first step to even becoming a Christian is to admit our sin! So we can't look down on sinners!

But this is entirely different than tolerating, and even approving, blatant, immoral behavior from which a person has no intention of repenting.

And this is just what many today are demanding: that Christians accept their immoral, unbiblical behavior just as it is, in the church — and not only tolerate it, but also approve of it, and consider them to be Christians in good standing. This is exactly what Jesus says in Revelation 2 that we must never do in His church, or we will become exactly the kind of "Jezebel" that He will judge. Allowing blatant, unbiblical immorality and teaching in the church, is to tolerate the intolerable.

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

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His Artwork in His Nature

By Nancy Malik
Avery County



At the beginning of this new millennium, it was a joy to teach Creation Science in both my church, for ages 5-high school, and at the large Christian School where I was a kindergarten teacher for several years. Teaching Creation Science to over 300 students at my school and 20+ at my church put me on a journey that I still enjoy today. A radio program in the county and writing for two local newspapers let me reflect on His Word and His goodness to us all. In the very beginning of the Bible, God lays out his plans for us. The beauty of His order begins with;...” In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth!” He gave us seven days weeks from the first chapter of Genesis. Each of the first six days was significant in His progression of creating the heavens and the earth. In all of His creation, there is beauty. I call His artwork, because of the weaving in and out of the skies and universe, the planets, a sun, and a moon, all to keep us in loving control! Yom is the Hebrew word for a twenty-four day. It always has been and will be until the new heaven and the new earth.

His artwork is evident everywhere from the deserts to the highest mountains, in the lakes, rivers, seas, and outer limits of the universe. The stars have a very interesting pattern as twelve houses in the sky travel around the earth. There are many constellations and we have eight planets that circle the sun with us and a tiny one that is considered a swarf planet-Pluto. In the northern hemisphere, these twelve houses have stars that are the story of our world. The lion, called Leo, represents the Lord, a group called Virgo for the Virgin Mary, and Capricorn is called The Goat, mentioned in The Old Testament as a scapegoat. Ursa Major is also called The Bear of The Big Dipper.

The six-sided snowflake is never duplicated. Each one has its own design within those six sides. Can you imagine all the snowflakes sent from God’s warehouse to the earth for millennia? Other interesting natural occurrences in His Artwork include Star Fish. Their five arms stretched out resemble the basic star pattern used when creating a simple star.

The seas have other representations of His pattern and design. Baby’s Foor, is a small, off-white, with light pink in the middle of it. There is a tiny pale foot shape in it as well. They are so fun to find among the beaches of the Gulf of Mexico. Whale kind each have a different blow from the top of their heads to designate what they are! Sand Dollars are a 4” wide lazy circle, white, that when carefully broken open has 5 small-like shapes inside. They are separate, not stuck together. The pattern is obvious in all of his Creations. No matter what part of the world you live in, they will be found because He loves giving us His presents!

Rocks are mentioned in the Bible. In Job, God shares His love of His jewels hidden inside the earth. Crystals, including diamonds, amethyst, and rubies are just a few examples of the jewels beneath the earth that God loves. Rocks are so unusual as well. When my husband and I first moved here, we found heart-shaped rocks all over our property. Some were very large; most were less than an inch wide. Children delighted in them. What a present to receive from our Lord when moving into a new place.

Trees are very informative. When sliced to create a circle, there are rings found inside most of them. The rings can be added up for age, drought, and fire can also be written within their history. In the West, some trees are still alive that were growing since the time of Jesus. The Slash Pine of southern Florida has new growth every Easter in the shape of a cross on the tops of the trees.

Our climate determines our weather. When the sun has big solar flares, directed by God, we get hotter weather. When they die down, it gets cooler. This is in His hands! The tides of the world and the streams of the world help keep it on its axis.

Of all of these pieces of artwork, that He would create a man and a woman to have children and look to Him for their walk, is a mystery and a love story! His artwork for us, is His Creation, His Nature! Aren’t you glad?

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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Eternal Life

By Ryan Bridgeo
Avery County



The most famous verse in the Bible is probably John 3:16. We see this verse posted on billboards and signs at large sporting events. But many people, even in the church, do not understand what it really means.

John 3:16 says, “*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*”

Many have been taught that the reason Jesus came to this earth was to die for their sins so that they could go to heaven after they die. This is true; He did die for our sins, and believers will go to heaven when they die. But this is only part of the story and only part of the verse. It also says: whoever believes in Him should not perish but have [or receive] everlasting life [bracketed words added]. Some translations say “eternal life.”

What does this mean? Does this mean that if we receive Christ, we will never die? Obviously, we know this is not the case. Even the great Apostle Paul died a physical death. Besides that, Hebrews 9:27 says, “*And it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment ...*” Unless we experience the rapture of the church, we will all die eventually.

So, what does “everlasting life” or “eternal life” mean? If you remember, in the Garden of Eden before Adam and Eve sinned, they were eternal, meaning they would live forever. They would still be around today if it was not for the fall. There was no such thing as death. Death was not a part of God’s original design and plan. God told Adam that if he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would surely die. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they stopped being eternal. Death entered them, and they started to die physically. It took many years, but they gradually died. Eternal life was gone. Adam and Eve actually experienced two deaths. They physically died over time, and they spiritually died instantly. When they ate from the wrong tree, sin, and death entered the world and would impact every person who would ever live.

Not only did Adam and Eve die physically and spiritually, but they gave their dominion and authority over the earth to the devil. When they ate, all authority they had received from God was transferred to the devil. We can see this in Luke 4:5-6, “*Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, “All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish ...”* All authority that belonged to Adam and Eve was delivered over to Satan when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and obeyed the devil.

Now, if you remember, the Tree of Life was another tree in the Garden of Eden. The Tree of Life is a type of Christ. When God removed Adam and Eve from the Garden, He placed an angel to block the way back to the Garden and eternal life. This was actually an act of mercy because God did not want them to eat from the Tree of Life and live forever in their fallen, sinful condition. Death was, in fact, an act of mercy until sin could be officially taken care of.

John 3:16 reintroduces the thought of everlasting life that has been forgotten about since the days in the Garden. But what is everlasting life, and when does it begin? Does it begin after we receive Christ or after we die? To answer this question, let’s first define “eternal life.” Jesus said in John 17:3, “*And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*” Eternal life is not living forever on this earth, or even in heaven. Real eternal life is knowing the only true God and His Son, Jesus Christ. This is not a “knowing” like you would know of a famous person or having intellectual knowledge of something. This is knowing in the way Adam knew his wife (see Genesis 4:1). This is an intimate knowledge of Father God and Jesus Christ. We now have the privilege of intimately knowing God.

So, when does eternal life begin? Is it after we go to heaven or right now? According to John 3:16, when we believe in Christ, we receive eternal life. Eternal life is knowing God. Since Jesus paid the penalty for sin, those who have faith in Him for their salvation have eternal life. Life begins the moment we place our faith in Christ. We read in 1 John 5:11-12, “*And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.*”

Praise the Lord! Christ died not only to forgive us of our sins but to bring us back to the Tree of Life, back to the place of intimate fellowship and relationship with Him, back to the original place where there is no death but only life in Him.

Ryan Bridgeo can be reached at 828-765-6919. For more information you can visit the church website at www.plumtreechurch.com or email pastor@plumtreechurch.com

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The Taste That Takes You Back

My Reward I'll Eat It If I Want To

By Dr. James L. Snyder
Ocala, Florida



One day last week, I was up early working in my office as I normally do. I happened to pause what I was doing for a moment and smelled this wonderful aroma.

I got up from my desk and walked out into the kitchen and the closer I got the stronger that aroma was.

When I got to the kitchen there was The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage baking cookies. Oh, how delicious those cookies smelled. I smiled and just stared at all those cookies in the kitchen. There were molasses and peanut butter cookies, two of my favorites.

As I was looking at them, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage said to me rather sternly, "These cookies are not for you, they are for my friends. Do not eat them."

She saw me staring at those cookies and said, "Did you hear me?" Looking at me she said, "If you are a good boy today I will allow you to eat one cookie. Just one."

What is her definition of "a good boy" and most importantly, how did she define "one cookie?" I don't think it's fair that I should be put in such a situation.

After all, it's really not my fault. It is the fault of The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage who makes cookies so delicious that I cannot refuse them. I sat for a moment at my desk and tried to think of anything bad I did that morning and I couldn't think of one thing. Therefore, with the evidence on the table, I have been a good boy today.

The next thing I had to deal with was the word "one." What does that word mean?

Looking at the cookies in the kitchen there were only two cookies: one was molasses and the other was peanut butter. So, in my understanding of the situation the word "one" means that I have to choose between the molasses cookie and the peanut butter cookie.

So, according to my rationality, when I pick "one" cookie I can eat as many of them as I want to. I just can't eat the other one or I will be eating two cookies. Going to the kitchen I made up my mind that the "one" cookie will be the peanut butter cookie. Oh, how I love her peanut butter cookies.

Picking out five cookies I joyfully skipped back to my office to enjoy these scrumptious treats. I earned these treats and therefore I'm going to eat them with a great deal of satisfaction. I am unanimous in that.

I had finished those cookies and was working at my desk when I heard the front door open and expected it was The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage. I then heard her voice, "Did you eat all these cookies? When I told you to eat only one?"

Now I have some "splainin'" to do.

A Bible verse came to mind that refreshed my concerning rewards. 2 John 1:8, "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward."

There are times when I convince myself that I deserve a certain reward. All I need to do is twist certain words to my benefit thinking I deserve something when in fact I am not being honest.

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

Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. Psalms 103:13

"He's a Good Good Father"

By Mary-Kathryn Laws
Avery County



Father's Day can be hard for many people for various reasons. Some never had a dad in their life. Some don't have the best relationship with their father. Some fathers walked out and left.

My intention is not to dishonor or shame any fathers out there, but we have to be careful not to see God the same way we see our earthly fathers. There are so many ways God is different from your dad.

This article is for those that were blessed to have an amazing dad, the ones who had a dad but he wasn't exactly what you needed, the ones whose dads were nonexistent in their lives, and those that may have a dad that falls somewhere in the middle.

Some of you may have a dad with unpredictable behavior. You never know if today will be a good day or a bad day. The Bible says that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is a never changing God.

Some of you may not have ever learned anything from your father or maybe the things you did learn were not good. God is the ultimate teacher. He is all-knowing and knows everything that we need to know. He gave us the Bible which is essentially a roadmap for our lives. He uses the Bible and His Spirit to teach us new things every day.

Some of you may have had a dad that just gave up on you. You may have messed up and it just seemed like your dad never forgave you for what you may have done. God knows we are going to mess up, yet He still has His arms wide open waiting for us with forgiveness.

The point is... our earthly fathers are all human. They made mistakes and will continue to make many more. Our Heavenly Father, on the other hand, will never leave you nor forsake you. He wants to have a relationship with His children. He is always there to listen to us and be there for us.

It's time to stop comparing God to your earthly relationships. God is not the earthly father that you have grown up with, whether you had a positive or negative influence in your life. God your father is so much more and will never fail you. So this Father's Day if you're feeling down seeing all those Father's Day posts, remember that God your Heavenly Father will never disap-point you.

Whether your dad is the best dad ever, MIA, or somewhere in the middle, we must understand that even the best dads are just a mere glimpse of the goodness of God. He is so much more.

If you get nothing else from this article. Know this, God is a good father. He is the best Father. You are forever loved by Him. He is forever there for you. You are never alone. You are wanted. Jesus paid the ultimate sacrifice to ensure that we are all wanted by God.

Happy Father's Day! He is a good good Father!

"And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." 2 Corinthians 6:18

Mary-Kathryn Laws is a follower of Jesus Christ. She is a volunteer at Anne Ministries which offers pregnancy support and recovery support services in Avery County. She is very involved in the new moms support group at the ministry. She is a wife, young mother, daughter, sister, teacher, and friend. Mary-Kathryn and her family attend Emmanuel Baptist Church in Newland. She is the daughter of Director Chastity Ogburn at Anne Ministries. For more information about Anne Ministries please visit www.anneministries.com or email anneministries@gmail.com. Like us on Facebook!



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Obedient Heart Fellowship

Worthless Words

By Jim Huskins
McDowell County



For most of our history, the foundations of the American education system were straightforward. We learned to add, subtract, multiply, and divide. We were encouraged to think clearly and logically. We were exposed to fundamental concepts in several sciences including biology, physics, and mechanics. We were introduced to world history with special emphasis on American history. Most importantly, we were expected to master proper use of the English language. The goal of this educational paradigm was to produce “good citizens.”

We have no shared understanding of “citizenship.” Those still interested in the concept refer to behaviors including voting, paying taxes, donating blood, displaying the flag, and reciting the pledge of allegiance. One of the classic expectations of a “good citizen” is willingness and ability to be a net contributor to society. Teddy Roosevelt spoke of “pulling one’s own weight” while “respecting the rights of others.”

Actions are important, but with the perspective of age, I more than ever view citizenship—good or bad—as the inevitable expression of core convictions. People who think life is meaningless, or that they are owed reparation because they belong to a particular group, or that God or “fate” has cheated them, are not likely to devote themselves to the notion of “the greater good.” On the other hand, those who are grateful for their existence and grounded in what we have long understood to be “morality” will probably behave in ways that support strong families and communities. For at least 1500 years, the building blocks of both morality and sound social structure in Western Civilization have been gleaned from Judeo/Christian tradition.

But times change. Nothing I have said to this point any longer applies to “American life.” Over the course of an astonishingly few years, traditional educational goals, traditional morality, and long accepted standards of citizenship have been discarded. In their place we find a revolting mishmash of perverse, self indulgence; idolatrous, pagan worship practice; repudiation of constitutional liberties and responsibilities; and the aggrandizement of hatred. I am not alone in believing that this wholesale erasure of every value which long defined what it means to be an American is rooted in “spiritual wickedness in high places.” We are face to face with the unmistakable agenda of one who was long ago labeled the “father of lies.”

My opinion on “how” our society has been so quickly corrupted is less widely supported. I am convinced that we fell to the rapid onslaught of depravity partly because we failed to achieve one of those traditional, educational goals. We did not devote ourselves to mastering proper use of the English language.

In proper English, words have meaning. Those skilled in the language will always be able to define “man” or “woman.” They will recognize the value of “innocence of youth.” They will understand essential concepts such as “freedom of speech” and “right to bear arms.” They will know that people who do not share their opinions are not necessarily “racists.” Those who use the language properly will never claim that certain ideas or political candidates should be suppressed because they would be “bad for democracy.” Proper use of the language promotes public discourse. Wholesale censorship replaces language skill with universal suspicion.

Proper English facilitates the awareness that unnecessary words obscure or subvert effective communication. I was taught by masters of the language that any word which does not expand or clarify one’s point should be dropped. As example, I offer one of the most common sentence structures in modern English: “What I’m gonna do is I’m gonna paint the house.” To what purpose is the phrase, “what I’m gonna do is?” Those words are redundant and obfuscating. The sentence should read, “I’m going to paint the house.”

One of the earliest and best examples of unnecessary words used to dismantle effective communication is found early in the Bible. In Genesis 2:16-17 God says to Adam, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” A few verses later we read, “But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’” The serpent established his argument on half truths. He twisted God’s words in ways which caused doubt and led to disobedience.

Adam and Eve did not cease breathing the moment they disobeyed, but they embraced the inevitable conclusion of entropy. They learned the difference between good and evil, but that knowledge came at an unimaginable and unpayable cost. We should not be surprised that the father of lies is still a liar. He told Eve exactly what it took to make her suspect that she was missing out on something important. He tells each of us those same lies. He is the master of using worthless words to encourage worthless actions.

Through His Holy Word, God always tells us exactly what we need to know. Exodus 31:13 is a prime example. The Hebrew text says, “Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths for this is a sign between you and me throughout your generations.” Many modern believers prefer to follow manmade traditions rather than God’s clear teaching. They obscure God’s Word with worthless words including “just for the Jews” or “nailed to the cross” or “the Lord’s day.” Similarly, Jesus told us in Matthew 5:17 that He came to demonstrate perfect obedience to the Law and the Prophets. Many believers insist that He said He came to abolish the Law.

Worthless words are only useful for hiding truth or promoting lies. Anyone who is interested in recognizing and proclaiming truth should learn the subtleties of proper English. Not all of us need to be students of Hebrew or Greek, but every believer should learn to recognize word fraud.

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Jim Huskins is pastor of Obedient Heart Fellowship.

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POEM

Seeking
By Regina McIntosh
Yancey County

God has so made our heart that nothing can ever fill it but
God Himself ~ Charles Spurgeon

I searched for happiness on shores of romance
There were only passing fancies there,
I needed another chance...
To find the truth, the way through the dark,
The life that was joyful – for this is what I sought

I searched for inspiration on a trembling muse
There were only gentle vibrations there,
I needed to find the whispers...
The stirrings of a gentling, a feeling breathing...
With wonders beyond imagining – hues of pleasure

I searched for beautiful on the tears that poured out
There in dew, the rain, the intimacy dripping
I needed to know the sensation...
Coloring my dreams in splendors rising, risking
The music in skies – erasing every doubt, each sorrow

I searched for remarkable on the wings of each season
There were whimsical winds, dancing leaves,
I needed to feel the astonishment...
Grace smiling through the spring sonnets, forests
Alive with the tenderness – keeping soft reflections

I searched for light on the stardust moments, nightly
There were glistening memories there,
I needed to believe, have faith...
Assurance that heaven is real and I can truly see
The wonder beyond the tear stained clouds, glowing

I searched for serenity on the gusts of freedom’s flow
There amid the clusters of psalms, prayers,
I needed to understand peace...
Promising me the miracles of grace that saves,
Bleeding through the walls I’ve built around my heart

I searched for truth on the laughing sparks shimmering
There with all the fires of love growing,
I needed to listen to His wisdoms...
Revealing the way through the past, the darkness
Into the redeeming promises, the deliverance, the gospel

When I finally knew Him, the way that I could have
All those many moments before, when I ignored
The beautiful, the wonderful, the joyful...
There in His presence, the way to see past the fears
Into the life that is forever, always... eternally I’m His!



Regina McIntosh is a heart who loves Jesus. She is a poet and writer from the mountains of WNC. She has written two books of Inspirational Christian poetry - *A Light In The Darkness* and *Gift Of Grace*. All of her books can be found on Amazon.com, Barnes & Noble or Christianbooks.com. She is currently working on devotional books that will be published soon. Her words can be found on her website at <https://reginariddle.wixsite.com/reginamcintosh/blog>



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

Crossword Solution

M	A	S	T		D	A	T	E	S		L	A	N	D
A	B	L	E	M	I	S	H		P	O	O	R	E	R
J	O	E	L		S	H	A	D	Y		R	E	B	A
O	N	E		W	H	A	T			A	D	D	O	N
R	E	P	L	I	E	D		F	A	S	T			K
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B	E	R	Y	L		W	A	R	E	S		E	L	I
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S			A	R	E	A		A	R	E	G	L	A	D
H	A	D	I	D			U	N	I	T		E	R	E
A	M	O	S		W	A	N	T	S		A	P	I	N
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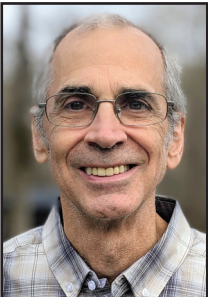
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A Jealous God?

By Thomas Thorne
McDowell County



In Exodus chapter 20 we read of God divinely revealing the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai. In verses 4-6, the third commandment is stated, “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments” (English Standard Version).

In common usage, jealous is not a virtue and God being jealous is a concept that is difficult for some. The Hebrew word used for jealous in this instance is ka-nah. This Hebrew word is translated as simply “jealous.” Logos Bible software adds a “sense” to the definition of this word as, “fiercely protective and unaccepting of disloyalty.”

Looking at the English language definition of the word jealous we have, “1. Hostile toward a rival or one believed to enjoy an advantage, 2. Intolerant of rivalry or unfaithfulness, 3. Disposed to suspect rivalry or unfaithfulness, 4. Vigilant in guarding a possession” (Webster’s Dictionary).

God is jealous in that He is intolerant of rivalry – there is no true rival to God. God commands our complete loyalty as there is no competitor. He is also jealous in that He is vigilant in guarding a possession – that possession being His chosen people. God has great energy and enthusiasm toward mankind worshiping Him only, not fake, phony, or impure idols of any kind. God is enthusiastic about us doing right!

To paraphrase verse 5 (1st half), “You shall not worship them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, vigilant in guarding my people, fiercely protective of them. I have great energy and enthusiasm in pursuit of their righteous behavior and salvation, and that they worship me only.”

God, thank you for being a jealous God. Thank you for giving us a set of instructions that lead to peace and happiness in the pages of the Bible. Thank you for giving us insight into your truth. Thank you for your grace and mercy. Thank you that you will protect us from the evil one. Thank you for sharing your Holy Spirit with us so that we can have the power to do right and resist evil. Thank you for being vigilant in guarding your possession – your people.

Second Half of Exodus 20:5

Another question some have with this verse arises with its second half, “Visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

At first glance, this sentence sounds kind of harsh and to be in contradiction with other passages in the Bible such as Ezekiel 18:20 which says, “The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father; nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.” The seeming discrepancy here will be the subject of next month’s writing.

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

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

Mount Carmel Baptist Church

“Leading The Way”

By Toby Crowder
Mitchell County

Deuteronomy 6:7 “And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up.”

This month we will celebrate Father’s Day; a time to remember and celebrate all that our fathers are, and all that they contribute to our lives. If you did not grow up with a father in the home, then perhaps you had a male role model such as a special uncle or grandfather, or someone who set an example for you to follow. This godly influence is needed now more than ever in our society. We are in desperate need of young fathers who will set an example for their families and lead the way for them to follow. In our text above, we find that Moses had already received the commandments from God in the previous chapter and had given the children of Israel instructions in v.32-33 to walk in the ways of the Lord. Now in chapter six, Moses not only exhorts the people to hear and obey God but also to pass these truths along to their children. These men of Israel were not only to tell but to be an example and show their children the ways of God. It was their job to lead the way!

We notice the word “diligently” in the verse above and understand that if we are going to lead the way for our families, it will involve a CHALLENGE. Moses lets them know that they are to teach them diligently... conscientiously, thoroughly, attentively, carefully, and persistently. This was not to be done half-heartedly or recklessly but was to be treated as a matter of importance! We should take time and seriously consider how much diligence we are using when we teach our children about the ways of the Lord. After all, we are earnest about many other things that we teach them such as sports... school... friendships... jobs... education... hobbies, and other interests. But do we promote this same diligence to the Word of God? Can our children quote and apply Scripture and use it to distinguish right from wrong? This world is teaching them 24/7... about themselves, family, the government, Creation, and their definition of God. They are certainly being diligent... but are we? This is not something that we can take lightly or minimize the importance of in our daily lives. Moses knew that there would be a challenge for these families in seeking and following the Lord and that they would need someone to lead the way... and we still need that today!

Not only is there a CHALLENGE involved, but there should be a CONSISTENCY involved in leading the way for our families. Moses exhorted them to lead the way in the house and the “way”, and to do so when awake and even when asleep. The first two verses of this passage name the commands, statutes, and judgments of God as being the subject of this training so that they might fear the Lord and have a full and long life. Most parents will agree that leading the way consistently is a true challenge! When we speak of consistency, it does not mean that every parent will parent the same way, but rather have the same goal in what we are teaching our children and leading them in the ways of God.

In what ways are you teaching and leading your children? Proverbs 22:6 reminds us to “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” This simple verse reminds us that there is only one way that we should be leading our children and families, and that is the way to salvation. The training of a child should be “upward”, and we should always do things that will point them toward the things of God. Beyond telling them what is right and wrong...we need to show them. This example that they put forth was to be continuous and eternal. Their lives were meant to be a legacy to tell their children. Fathers... men... parents... are we setting a challenging and consistent pattern of godliness for our children to follow... Are we leading the way?

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



Covy Rock Free Will Baptist Church- Green Mtn, NC

Question: Can you tell everyone about when Jesus died on the cross?



Sloane Peterson, age 4
“Jesus had to carry the cross. He died. They put nails in His fingers. They covered the rock up and then He came out.”



Kimber McCourry, age 5
“On the cross they put nails in His hands and feet. He died and arose in three years- no three days.”



Haven Alexander, age 5
“He was hung on the cross. He got nailed on the cross. They put him in a tunnel. But He got out.”



Boyd Self, age 7
“They did 39 whips and put Him in jail. They made Him carry the cross. Then the soldiers said all king needs a crown so they made a crown with thorns and shoved it on His head. They were going to break His legs so He couldn’t push up to get air. He said “Let this be over” and He died.”



Kimber Carroll, age 10
“He was crucified on the cross by the Romans. It went dark when He died and the world shook. He died for our sins.”



Dorci Self, age 4
“They put Him on the cross and they put the nails right here. In three days, He arise. Then the angel came down and arised the tomb like magic.”

And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse. Malachi 4:6

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"Hey Daddy," The Perfect Love Of A Child

By Steve Henry
Burke County



1 John 4:18 *"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, because fear has torment. He who fears has not been perfected in love."*
Hebrews 10:14 *"For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified."*

Some of the Greek and Hebrew definitions of the words "perfect, perfection, and perfected" are "to complete, complete, to set out for a definite point or goal, to bear or carry".

His goal has always been to make us complete, or one with Him and the Father, and He was willing to bear our griefs and carry our sorrows (Isaiah 53:4-5) as a way to make us complete in Him. You can't get any more perfect (complete) than God. Adam and Eve initially started in a perfect state finding their completion in the One that created them in His own image (Genesis 1:26). They lost that perfection when they disobeyed God and passed that same incomplete image down to all mankind, but God had a plan in place already for our redemption and restoration to that perfect state when we turn to Him in simple child-like faith and receive His Son as our Savior (Revelation 13:8).

The definition of "creature" in 2nd Corinthians 5:17 means "original formation" and also "(through the idea of the proprietorship of the manufacturer); to fabricate, that is, found (form originally): - create, Creator, make."

Praise God, He recreates us into the image of His Son, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah! I'm far from perfect but I discovered the perfect love of my Heavenly Father when, in simple childlike faith, I received His precious Son as my Savior and when I did He perfected me forever. We are perfect in our Daddy's eyes!

Five times in John 17:21-23 He uses the word "one." Just hours before Judas betrayed Him Jesus was praying for us that we might be one, that we might be made perfect with Him and the Father.

God the Father gave His One and only Son that we might be made one with them, no more separation because of our sin but a sweet oneness, completion with Almighty God. When our Savior died He won back for us what Satan stole from Adam and Eve, their completeness with the Father.

Should we give Him our best? Absolutely, or better yet we should follow His instruction in Romans 12:1 and give Him ourselves and allow Him to bring out His very best through us (Galatians 2:20).

I've heard it said, "We should strive for perfection, we will never attain it, but we should strive for it." Misguided thinking like that can lead us into the bondage of perfectionism that can rob us of the freedom that has already been won for us. Perfectionism creates the "paralysis of analysis," and can destroy our closest relationships. His Word commands us to "be perfect," (Matthew 5:48) not strive for it, He then fulfills His own command to us by declaring us "perfected forever" the moment we receive His Son as our Savior (Hebrews 10:14). He does for us what we cannot do for ourselves, so why not learn to rest in Him and allow Him to accomplish through us what His heart desires for us (Galatians 2:20).

One hot summer day while my son and I were trout fishing our Father taught me a valuable lesson about resting in Him. The day started out with comfortable temperatures but as the day progressed so did the heat as it rose well into the nineties. We found a still pool of water away from the current of the river and when we simply laid down it met the need for relief from the heat that we so desperately needed. Then I realized, we were already standing in the source of our relief, all we had to do was lie down in it and enjoy the refreshing rest from the heat. Jesus so lovingly tells us in Matthew 11:28-30 if we find ourselves laboring, striving, just come to Him and He will give us rest. He is our source, when we have Him we have everything we need.

Try to live perfectly and endure all the frustration that brings to ourselves and others, or receive the promise that we are "perfected forever" and live in the wonder and the grace of the One that declared that promise over us, realizing how deeply He loves us.

My dear friend Rick told me he thought the "perfect love" mentioned in this scripture was all about that simple faith and love of a child. Our children love us

unconditionally and aren't afraid to approach us about anything. As I considered that I realized that type of faith is so rooted in the love of Almighty God that we should not hesitate to approach Him about anything and believe that He will meet any need that we bring to Him, a faith that recognizes that our Daddy can do anything, and so can we (Philippians 4:13 *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me"*).

Many years ago, while playing with my son and his friends in our yard, I decided to participate in a ramp jumping contest the boys had started. They built the ramp out of a cinder block and a piece of plywood and were jumping their bicycles over it. I made the tragic mistake of saying "I can do that," so I straddled that twenty-inch bicycle with my six-foot-three frame, and off I went. I peddled up to my neighbor's drive, and even told my neighbor and her sister-in-law "Watch this," (we males never get over trying to impress the ladies). I quickly formulated what I thought was a good plan that in my mind consisted of building up all the speed I could, hitting the ramp dead center, sailing over it, and landing. I was standing up on the pedals of that bike and the last thing I remember before the ambulance came was hitting the ramp dead center. The next thing to hit was the front tire, and subsequently the right side of my forehead. After the impact, I slid on the right side of my face in the pea gravel that our street was made of.

Later on in the ER, the doctor picked gravel out of my wounds for thirty minutes before he could stitch me up and while he was working on me he said "Mr. Henry, if you decide to have plastic surgery you might want to get it done in the next six months." I thought to myself "What kind of mess have I made of myself."

Becky even told me that in the dim light of the hospital room, I looked like Freddie Krueger. If you can imagine raw hamburger meat that is what the right side of my face looked like.

When I got home the next day our pastor came by to check on me and I told him I wouldn't be attending church on Sunday for fear of scaring the kids. He told the congregation that he saw me and it scared him.

My daughter Jessica was about four at the time and when she came home from her grandparents the next day I asked Becky to prepare her for what she was about to see. When Jess came into the room she looked at me and in the sweet tone of a four-year-old she said "Hey Daddy," and crawled up in my arms as if nothing was wrong or out of the ordinary. She just loved her Daddy and wanted to be with him. Joy flooded this Daddy's heart when he realized his little girl was not afraid of him, no matter how he looked.

I share this story for those of you that didn't have that loving relationship with your earthly father, for those of you that are still tormented by excessive punishment that was inflicted upon you, and maybe are projecting the image of that scary, imperfect father onto your heavenly Father, a Father that just wants to show you His unconditional love and grace. Please, let me encourage you to study the scriptures to discover who He really is and allow Him to perfect your love for Him until you can crawl up in His lap like a little child, and permit Him to lavish His love on you. It will make His day and yours too.

Here are a couple of scriptures that will help you on your journey.

Matthew 11:28-30 *"Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke on you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest to your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."*

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

Steve Henry has been a lifelong resident of Burke County. God blessed me with an incredible lady that I have been married to for 43 years. He has blessed me with two wonderful children and two beautiful granddaughters.

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The Spirit Of Kindness

By Christy Lowman
Burke County



According to Oxford Languages Dictionary, kindness is being friendly, generous, or considerate. Kindness is one of the fruits of the spirit. Did you know there is an animal that shows extreme kindness? This animal is kind to the senior citizens that live in its group, called a pod. They also take care of the injured, sick, and young in their group. Most of the time their pod consists of members of their family of no more than fifteen. Most of all, they are kind to those that are not in their family. They love to play with each other and even people. This compassionate animal has been known to rescue humans from sharks and has helped stranded or lost whales get back to sea. Of course, you should still take precautions around this animal or any animal because they are wild and can still hurt you. Do you know what this animal is?

Dolphins! Dolphins rank second place as the friendliest, most caring, and most intelligent animal. The first place is humans.

Did you know that dolphins are mammals like us? Do you know what a mammal is? A mammal is an animal that has a spine, is warm-blooded, has hair, gives live births, and feeds their babies with milk. Yes, even dolphins have a few wild hairs on their face that quickly fall out when they are born.

Dolphins are incredible swimmers. They can reach speeds of 20mph and are able to dive to 1000 feet. Our lungs have only one layer of capillaries for holding oxygen while dolphins have two layers. Their lungs enable them to hold their breath underwater for as much as 15 minutes.



On average, a person can hold their breath underwater for up to 2 minutes. However, Budimir Sobat holds the world record at a whopping 24 minutes and 37 seconds!

Dolphins are team players. They will work together when hunting for food. Sometimes they will even pair up with other pods to capture a meal.

Baby dolphins are usually two to seven feet long and will stay with their mother or grandmother for up to six years.

Most dolphins are gray or dark gray and have smooth rubbery skin. Except for killer whales which are black and white. Yes, killer whales are in the dolphin family.

The epidermis layer of skin is very thick and constantly peels off just like ours. This layer is up to 20 times thicker than other animals. Even though their skin is so thick it is very delicate and easily damaged. But thankfully it heals very quickly from injury. Dolphins do not have sweat glands like we do.

Dolphins are carnivores and eat fish, squid, octopus, crustaceans, cephalopods, and other marine life. They have two stomachs. One is used for food digestion and the other one is used for food storage. Their teeth are only used for catching their food. They then swallow it whole.

The average length of a dolphin is 8 ft however the smallest dolphin is three feet long while the largest dolphin is 30 feet long.

The average lifespan of these gentle creatures is 17 years, but some have lived up to 50.

Dolphins have large brains. When they sleep only half of their brain sleeps. The other half stays awake. This keeps them breathing and safe while they are asleep.

We can learn from these kindhearted creatures. What are some examples of kindness you have shown to others?

It is important that we also take care of the injured, sick, widowed, orphans, and senior citizens in our life or community. In fact, God wants us to do these things. He also wants us to take care of the needy and poor.

If there was one word to describe Jesus it would be He was kind. Can you think of examples of how Jesus was kind to others? Jesus purposely sought out the less fortunate, even when he was exhausted. When Jesus was on the cross, he prayed to God and asked Him to forgive and spare the lives of the people who had hurt Him, and who were going to ultimately kill Him. Jesus was the perfect example of kindness when He was here, and He still shows kindness today! No matter what you have done or are going to do, He will forgive you. All you must do is repent. In His eyes, all sin is the same.

Father, we thank you so much for your continued kindness and mercy. Thank you for the fruits of the spirit. We thank you for being the perfect example of kindness and how we should treat others. Kindness was so important to you that you even made animals that excel at it. I pray that we all remember that it is very important to be kind to everyone, even our enemies. I also pray that we will remember to take care of others, especially our elderly, and those who are less fortunate. In Jesus's name, I pray, Amen.

"Be Kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God has forgiven you." Ephesians 4:32

"The Lord is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his work." Psalm 145:17

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

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Stretching And Connecting With Others

By Christopher L. Scott
Moses Lake, Washington



Last year our church had its first-ever “Harvest Party” event on October 31. After announcing the event a few times during our church service, a couple of people expressed concern that we were doing a church event on October 31st. They were afraid we were endorsing Halloween and celebrating that holiday.

I appreciated people sharing their concerns with me because it meant I had poorly communicated the purpose of us starting that annual event. As a result, I started telling those people and our church that we were doing a Harvest Party on October 31st as a way to engage our community. It was a way to have families come to our church so we could get to know those living nearby our church. While it often is hard to invite people to attend our church, doing an event on October 31st where we organize games and give away candy to kids was a way to have people come to our church.

The apostle Paul modeled this “engagement” of the community around him as described in 1 Corinthians 9:19-22, “For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I may win more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, so that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law though not being myself under the Law, so that I might win those who are under the Law; to those who are without law, as without law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might win those who are without law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak; I have become all things to all men, so that I may by all means save some.” (NASB)

The apostle Paul traveled more than 3,000 miles by foot and boat to share the gospel with anyone he could get an audience with. He went to Jewish synagogues, he went out to people on the river (Acts 16), and he discussed religion with the philosophers (Acts 17).



Paul used people’s cultures and backgrounds as an entry point to talk with them about the gospel. He used their history and culture to draw those people into a relationship with God. And that same principle that Paul used for ministry can be used by us today. We can take national holidays or local events and use them as entry points to draw people close to God.

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 Revelation

By Caron Cline
Burke County

On June 18th, we will celebrate fathers for their vital role of protector, provider, and encourager during our formative years. Sadly, this special day produces negative and painful emotions for those whose fathers have neglected their God-ordained role, resulting in adults who subconsciously struggle with insecurities stemming from the loss of their Father's blessing. Satan uses those insecurities to deceive many Christians into believing that the heavenly Father is a God of judgment, unforgiving and unloving; a God who cannot be trusted with their hearts, unapproachable and uncomprehensive. The New Testament offers God's Son, Jesus Christ, as One who is full of compassion and grace. Those who choose to reject the God of the Old Testament find comfort in the Son. This distortion of the truth comes directly from the devil, for God sent His Son into the world to reveal His unconditional love for all mankind. Jesus made it clear when He told Philip, 'If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father'. In John 5:19, Jesus also stated plainly: *"Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner"*. John 14:31 says *"So that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me"*. The compassion in Jesus' voice when a leper fell at His feet, begging to be made clean, was the compassion of His heavenly Father. The Lord readily professed His willingness to heal this social outcast. One day, Jesus and the disciples, along with a rather large crowd, were walking toward the city of Nain. As they neared the city gate, a funeral procession was passing by; the deceased, the only son of a widow. The mercy of the heavenly Father moved the Son to stop the procession, touch the coffin, and raise this young man from the dead. On another occasion, Jesus and the disciples sailed to the country of the Gerasene. Immediately, a man possessed by multiple demons appeared. He was a tortured individual who wore no clothing and lived among the tombs; a dead man walking. Through Jesus, the heavenly Father released His grace and delivered this man from the power of the devil. Immediately, he was clothed, restored mentally, and sent forward as a witness to the incredible power of a loving Father over the forces of darkness. During the last week of Jesus' earthly life, He was leaving Jericho for a final trek to Jerusalem for the Passover. A blind beggar named Bartimaeus was sitting by the road. Hearing that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by, this man began to cry out, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!' Although Bartimaeus was physically blind, he recognized Jesus as the fulfillment of the promise made to King David by God. 1 Chronicles 17:27 says, *"And now it has pleased You (God) to bless the house of Your servant, that it may continue forever before You; for You, O Lord, have blessed, and it is blessed forever"*. Jesus heard Bartimaeus' cry for mercy and called him forward. Realizing that his greatest need was the restoration of his sight, the heart of the heavenly Father moved the Son to open Bartimaeus' eyes once again. Every good and perfect gift of compassion, grace, mercy, and kindness seen in the ministry of Jesus came down from the Father of lights. Even from the cross, Jesus' words of redemption, 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do', were a direct reflection of His Father's desire to forgive even the worst of offenses. The entire ministry of Jesus is a revelation of the God of the Universe, the One who loved the world so deeply that He was willing to send His Son, in His own image, so that we might not perish, but have everlasting life. Our God has promised that nothing can separate us from His love; a love that is unconditional and unending. We are eternally secure!

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.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16



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Facing Fear In Marriage

By Glenda Ward
McDowell County



“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:” Psalm 139:23

When we cannot understand ourselves or comprehend our feelings, God invites us to take our internal struggles to Him and ask Him for insight. He understands what we do not and knows what to do when we don’t. For better or for worse, Marriage. Will you get out of your marriage all you hoped it would be? If you wake up one day and realize the reason you got married has forever been taken away from you, can your marriage survive that? Yes, with faith, it can.

We live in a world where physical, relational, financial, emotional, and health-related situations are inevitable. When any one of these or other circumstances arise in a marriage it can take time to accept the situation. Usually, one spouse will deny it while the other worries and is preoccupied with the reality of the situation. This stems from the fear of the outcome. Fear unaddressed can cause any number of secondary emotions. Facing issues like these in marriage takes a high degree of learning to adjust to meet the needs of the couple, focusing on the ‘how’ of personalized learning. It is an active process in which spouses define themselves to each other. It requires the risk of being open to growth and being honest not only with your spouse but also with yourself. It is a way of thinking and learning in your relationship taking in the content of the issue, its impact within the marriage, defining your fears, how to process the situation in reality, being accountable for actions, and learning to survive the environment within the marriage. This is being able to set appropriate personal boundaries and the process of development from the simple relationship to the more complex issues arising in marriage without feeling guilt or shame. You must be willing to understand and bear your spouse’s frustration and disappointments without making it about you – even though it feels like it has everything to do with you.

Couples need to deal with their fears openly because fear unaddressed becomes a relational sore in a marriage. Facing your fears in marriage and talking about those fears is helping your spouse understand you so the two of you can face your situations and disappointments together. Denying your fears doesn’t make them go away! Take a reality check; if you need some encouragement, draw on Spiritual resources. This is a key principle for facing the moment when your marriage dreams seem beyond reach. One spouse needs to face reality in situations that affect the marriage and one spouse will need to embrace their hope and faith.

Christian transformation: *“And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”* (Romans 12:2). Many people accept Jesus Christ as their Savior and never learn how to live a life that honors Him. In full trust and worship, we commit to obeying Him, knowing that the Lord knows how to best lead you – no matter what the circumstances. Transformation begins with our thinking and with consciences that are committed to listening to and obeying God. We do not merely try hard to sin less. Our minds are renewed as we study His Word, and our hearts are changed as we submit to Him. We learn to depend upon Him, observe His commands, and trust Him to mold us into people who discover how awesome it is to live in the center of God’s Will because it is life at its very best – and there is nothing in this world that compares to it.

To face your own disappointments, you need to be enlightened. You need the courage of David to pray: *“Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting”* (Psalm 139:23-24). You need to seek the truth, not just believe the truth, because God needs to show you what lies hidden. In life’s disappointments, if faced with the proper attitude, couples will be prompted into reevaluating who they are, who their spouse is, what God offers, and what they actually need to grasp reality and redirect the situation of circumstances of the marriage into something good and becoming a witness to God’s truths in life. The Christian practice of surrender is the humble acknowledgment that life is about conceding to and accepting God’s agenda and Will over your own. After you reset your own expectations, you need to reset the expectations you have for your marriage. To get to the place of surrender, you need divine intervention: God’s Grace.

If you want to be strong, you must glory in your weakness. Brokenness is God’s requirement for maximum usefulness. This is because it is when you are truly helpless and without resources that you must count on God’s provision. His power enables you to triumph, and all the glory belongs to Him. If you want to drive the pride from your character, embrace the hardships and struggles that God allows into your life. The Lord’s loving-kindness is more than sufficient to help you when you’re at your weakest. This is where pride cannot survive – and you are genuinely able to receive God’s Grace. (Reference 2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

God cares for those who trust in Him. *“The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him”* (Nahum 1:7).

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

“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!..” 1 John 3:1

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Freedom Life Ministries Reentry Intensive Program Success Story

By Jim Smith
McDowell County

Freedom Life Ministries (FLM)—a faith-based, rural organization in Marion, North Carolina—is supporting re-entry initiatives and helping individuals who are involved with the justice system successfully reintegrate into their communities. Reverend Danny Hampton, Executive Director of FLM and chaplain for the Marion Correctional Institution State Prison, works with a large population of individuals who are incarcerated, as well as those referred by probation and parole officers. In collaboration with local organizations and agencies, FLM provides evidence-based programming to individuals preparing for reentry. The program’s objectives are to provide necessities (e.g., food, clothing, housing resources), support services, mentorship, and life skills to prevent recidivism.

Unfortunately, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Rev. Hampton no longer had access to the jails or prisons. Similarly, recruiting recently reentered participants into the community also proved challenging because probation and parole offices were limited in operational capacity and suffered staffing shortages due to COVID-19. Despite these challenges, program leaders worked with their Second Chance Act technical assistance coach to find solutions to increase enrollment and ensure participants could access resources and support services. For example, FLM collaborated with the Sheriff’s Department in McDowell County to meet virtually with pre-release residents within the jail. Staff also kept their doors open to meet face-to-face with community participants while observing COVID-19 safety protocols. FLM’s willingness to adapt program implementation helped them achieve program objectives and impact the lives of participants in McDowell County positively. “Never lose sight of why you do what you do. Program participants are not just numbers—they are people who matter ... The program process should never determine participant value and potential; the value and potential of the participant should determine the program process.”

—REVEREND DANNY HAMPTON, FREEDOM LIFE MINISTRIES

Three years after entering the Freedom Life Reentry Intensive Program upon release from prison, Arvin Hicks serves as a Registered Certified Alcohol & Drug Counselor Treatment Accountability for Safer Communities Care Manager with Insight Human Services, a service organization connected with the North Carolina Department of Adult Corrections.

“I cannot express how thankful I am for the many ways Freedom Life helped me rebuild my life as I came back into society. From how they cared for my needs, to their instruction, accountability, and mentoring, my life is different today because of the Freedom Life Reentry Intensive Program. I thank God for Freedom Life.”

—ARVIN HICKS

Lessons Learned

FLM staff believe a strong, faith-based orientation bolsters the belief that the lives of men and women impacted by the justice system matter deeply. Grounded in their faith, FLM staff is committed to doing everything possible to support the men and women who are involved in the justice system, despite obstacles like COVID-19.

What worked?

- Treating participants with value, respect, and individuality, and having a systematic process for identifying individual needs and effective case planning
- Building consistency and flexibility into program engagement
- Balancing goals with flexibility during program implementation
- Planning, in collaboration with the Second Chance Act technical assistance coach, around community engagement and adapting curricula
- Connecting program participants to community resources to create a robust community networking and support process
- Implementing Motivational Interviewing with prerelease individuals, resulting in an immediate, significant increase in program enrollment and engagement among those referred from probation and parole officers

What did not work?

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, FLM could not recruit and train the full number of mentors needed to be effective in providing participant support, which hindered program potential. Case managers were required to play a dual role of case manager and mentor, which created stress on the case managers and program process and impacted their effectiveness.

What’s next?

FLM will continue to work with local agencies, organizations, and stakeholders to coordinate reentry services. FLM has grown substantially in financial capacity and sustainability. The program currently has multiple funding streams and is continuing to cultivate new financial growth, sustainability, and capacity. It plans to expand the pre-release jail engagement to include additional counties and fund a community liaison to help bridge gaps, engage, and more effectively serve Black and Latinx populations and increase outcomes related to racial equity within reentry.

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



Humor

By Buddy Freeman
Madison County



An older gentleman went to an optician to get his eyes tested for glasses. The optician placed the card in front of the man and asked, “Can you read this plainly?” The man, “No.” Then the optician brought the card closer and said, “Can you read this plainly?” The man said, “No.” So the optician put the card right in front of the man’s eyes and said, “Surely you can read this now.” The old man said, “No, I never learned to read.”

I hate exercising. I have this philosophy: “Why should I punish my feet and legs for what my mouth did?”

My friends keep telling me I need to join a health club. Not me, I don’t see why they call them Health Clubs. They should be called torture chambers. I mean if you get within a city block of one of those places you can hear people screaming in there. They have machines that will hurt you.

Will Rogers said, “You know horses are smarter than people. You never heard of a horse going broke betting on people.”

A drunk walked into a gym where he saw a fighter shadowboxing. He watched the boxer dance around and throw punches in the air. In a few moments, the drunk yelled, “You might as well stop fighting. The other boxer has gone home.”

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

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

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Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

Be-attitudes: Peacemakers.

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



During the Korean conflict, a chaplain crawled through enemy fire to care for a seriously wounded soldier. The chaplain dampened his handkerchief, wiped the man’s face, gave him water, held his hand, talked, prayed, and waited with him until the medics arrived. “Sir,” the soldier asked, “Are you a follower of Jesus?” “I try,” replied the chaplain, “but sometimes I fail.” After a few silent moments, the soldier said, “I’m not a Christian, but if following Jesus makes you do what you’ve done for me, then I want to follow Him too.”

There are a lot of problems in this world, wouldn’t you agree? Wars are raging and have been raging since the dawn of mankind. Fear, hatred, hostility, ill will, and ill feelings abound! Nations stand against nations and family members against one another. People bow up against anyone and everyone who disagrees with them or makes them feel threatened. And it really doesn’t matter who is in the White House or controls Congress—the political fighting never ceases. War, conflict, hatred, and hostilities continue over and over with never an end in sight. Even church members find themselves pitted one against another. And perhaps that is one of the greatest tragedies—for the Word of God insists that followers of Christ must *“not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth”* (1 John 3:18) and that the world will know us by our love.

In such a world of conflict, no one comes out unscathed. All experience the trauma and the wounds of conflict and war. Sin, selfishness, and pride produce such pain and devastation. Truly, all are left with gaping and serious wounds. And amid such horror and travesty—our world needs some peacemakers. Our world, our nation, our community, and God’s church needs some of Jesus’ kids who are willing to crawl through whatever threat or danger exists to wipe the face of a wounded stranger, give him/her water, talk with, pray with, and stay with them until help comes. *“My help comes from the Lord,”* David wrote in Psalm 121:2, *“Who made the heaven and the earth.”*

None of the world’s problems are new, of course! Our fallen world has been shattered under the weight of sin—and that has produced hatred, animosity, and contempt. The world’s solution to the conflict is usually to remove the source or the cause of the problem. But the world’s only real solution is God’s offer of Jesus! Jesus offered the only solution to mankind’s mortal threat of death. He came and died! He left His home in glory and took upon Himself the flesh of humanity. He lived as fully God and fully man—and then He gave His life as a sacrifice or ransom for our sins. He rose victoriously alive from a brutal, horrifying physical

death. And when He did, He proved Almighty and Eternal God’s power over both sin and death. Having secured your forgiveness and redemption, Jesus offered you and me new life—new life in Christ.

Jesus declared (Matthew 5:9), *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”* Do you hear the Savior’s call? To a world broken and shattered by evil and hatred, Jesus calls forth His children to be peacemakers. Peacemaking can only truly be successful when we place our eyes on the Lord—for apart from God, peacemaking doesn’t work! Apart from God, nothing works! N.T. Write said, “When God wants to create peace, He doesn’t send tanks, He sends the meek.” Rick Love (Peace Catalysts: Resolving Conflict in our Families, Organizations, and Communities) noted that unfortunately, “Well-meaning Christians sometimes push back on such a statement by quoting Jesus’ statement from Matthew 10:34-36. Jesus said, *“Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to turn a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a person’s enemies will be the members of his household.”*

We must be careful not to misinterpret and then misuse Jesus’ words here! Jesus doesn’t bring evil and conflict into the earth! Mankind brought this upon themselves through sin. Christ, the sinless One, did not come to cause harm or create evil, pain, suffering, or wounds! He didn’t bring a sword to the battle—He brought Himself! He came to bring eternal life and salvation. So, what the Lord is actually declaring here was that His actual coming (incarnation) into this world would create the kind of an effect where “a man would turn against his father, a daughter against her mother,” etc. Amid that kind of carnage, the Lord came to bring peace to a world that was devoid of peace. He came to bring love to people who were empty of love, care, or compassion.

Please don’t miss the rest of Jesus’ message from Matthew 10:37-42, which holds the key to understanding His plan for bringing peace. To paraphrase: our Savior warned humanity, *“Unless you take up your cross and follow Me, unless you lose your life for My sake, and unless you are willing to humble yourself and give a cup of cold water to the dregs of society or even to the littlest ones, you will not taste of the great rewards of heaven.”* Herein is the command! Deny self, follow Me! Deny self, follow My way! Deny self and live out my love before all men. The Psalmist urged on behalf of God, *“Seek peace and pursue it”* (Psalms 34). Robert Kopp claims, *“But seeking peace apart from God is absolute lunacy. And that’s what is happening in our homes, churches, communities, country, and world.”* He continues, *“We aren’t seeking peace through God. We’re pursuing peace but we’re not doing it the right way: through Him!”*

Consider these two important spiritual truths about peacemaking: (1) peacemaking without God doesn’t work, and (2) Jesus calls all of us to the work of reconciliation and peacemaking. And when we do it His way, it works!

What does peacemaking look like? First, it is undergirded by the love of Christ. We celebrate the grace and mercy of God alive in us in Christ—and we live as new creatures.

Secondly, we dedicate ourselves to living out the character of Christ in our lives. Our perspective becomes the perspective of Christ Jesus. And His perspective was always driven by love and a desire for redemption, reconciliation, and peace.

Thirdly, we choose Christ’s way! We choose to live at peace with all men, as much as possible. That includes speaking the truth to brothers and sisters out of love. The motivation for peacemaking is always love. And the desired outcome of peacemaking is to bring another closer to Christ. It is never to tear down or cast someone aside. It has been suggested that the pillars of peacemaking include: taking responsibility, lovingly reproving, accepting reproof, asking for forgiveness, and forgiving others. You see, the love of Christ alive in you and me makes that seemingly impossible task possible in Jesus. Peacemakers are a rare breed! They are those who strive to keep the peace and make peace amid strife and division—all because they love the Lord Jesus. Today, choose to be a peacemaker and live as children of God.

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

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Snow Hill Baptist Church

Why Do You Attend Church? No Regrets Family

By Dean Honeycutt
Mitchell County



My mom took me to Vacation Bible school soon after I was born. Church has been an important part of my life. Our children were in church very early in life as well. Because I am a pastor my children attended church more than I did as a child. Pastor’s children are “drugged.” They are drug to every church event. (Lol) We are grateful our adult children are all active in the church. I trust they attend church because they love the Lord.

Growing up I attended church because my mom made me go to church. I never really questioned why I went to church. After I was saved, I understood why the church was important and necessary. In western North Carolina there are many churches, but are these churches full and on fire for the Lord?

It is a good idea to ask ourselves why do I attend church. People attend church for many reasons. Some people attend church because they think that is what is expected of them or out of obligation. For example, they go to church because their parents or friends attend church, their dad is the pastor, or their mom is a Sunday school teacher. Others attend church to maintain a social status or acceptance. For example, they attend church because people they associate with also attend church and this benefits them in some way. Others may attend because they feel they are gaining merit with God. And for others, they attend church because they love the Lord.

People attend church for various reasons, but why should we attend church? We should attend church because we are in union with Jesus Christ who loves the church and gave Himself for it. Just as Eve was of the body of Adam and the bride of Adam. The redeemed are the body of Christ and the bride of Christ the second Adam. The Church is the body and bride of Christ. Ephesians 5:24-32

24 “Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; 26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. 28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. 29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: 30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. 31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. 32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.”

Just as I am faithful to my wife, I am faithful to my church. A spouse does not randomly come home once or twice a month. They live in their home. A Christian’s life is in union with the church. Our faithfulness to our local church is a testimony to our relationship with Christ.

I do not need to ask my wife to come home, nor do I have to encourage her to be faithful. She just is. Jesus does not need me, but I am thankful He loves me and would think of me and Pam enough to join Himself to us and unite us with Him. Praise God, He loves me this much to purchase me with His precious blood, therefore, being in covenant with Him.

Being a church member or having your name on a church role does not save you. One is saved by repenting of their sin and trusting in Jesus Christ entering a union with Him. Why do you attend church? Have you ever thought about it? Knowing that our relationship with Christ is like a marriage union would Jesus have any concerns about how, where, and when we spend time with Him?

Love in the Mighty name of Jesus.

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

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He Came for Me

By Tammy Hopson
Mitchell County



Seated high up in the stadium sat a six-year-old girl in a yellow sundress. She stirred, somewhat impatiently, waiting to hear the man that had come to speak to her and the other 73,999 people inside the great arena that evening in May. The little girl's mother sat close by and had heard that the great crusade was coming to Seattle and both were excited to attend. The little girl understood that the man was coming to speak about God and His great love for the whole world.

A large stage sat far below in the middle of the ground floor. The girl and her mother faced the stage from several floors up. The program began with opening prayers and music but before long the announcer introduced the Reverend Billy Graham. The Reverend took center stage and began to speak about the love of God, the forgiveness of sin, and the necessity to be "Born Again". The little girl sat wide-eyed and captivated amongst the large crowd. When the preacher was finished, he invited all who were willing to come down to the stage to pray the prayer of salvation.

The little girl fidgeted in her seat, "Do you want to go down?" asked her mother. Loudly the evangelist called out again "Come down and we will pray with you." "God loves you!" The little girl felt her legs begin to move. Soon she found herself slowly stepping down each tall step until she finally reached the ground floor. She walked up to the throng of people. A kind blonde woman who was a staffed counselor with the crusade quickly came and asked the girl if she wanted to pray. The little girl gently nodded.

The carpeted floor felt so rough on her knees as she bent down and lowered her little head. The woman led her in a short prayer. Out of her young mouth flowed a soft confession of belief as she asked Jesus to come into her heart. When she whispered "amen" her heart swelled with happiness and her little legs climbed up the huge steps and back to her smiling mother.

As you might have guessed, that little girl was me. I was saved one evening in 1976 at a Billy Graham Crusade held at the Seattle Kingdome. Because I was so young some would say that I came to God early in life, but in my heart, I know without a doubt that He came for me first. He came for me through my mother's words who spoke about His love for me. He came to find me the night of this crusade to draw me to Himself through the faithfulness of another. He planned and orchestrated the events long before I knew I was even coming. And I know without a doubt that although 73,999 other people were there that night if none of them had gone forward to become His child, my Father still would have come just for me. That's how deep His love is. My birthday is this month and I love to celebrate it all month long, but for all of eternity, I will be celebrating being born again on that day in May. Because June is also Father's Day it is a perfect time to share my salvation story with you! For if this night had not happened to me, I wouldn't know my Heavenly Father.

He knew the night He was coming for me and He knew I would take those steps and walk to Him when He called. AND since then and in different ways He has come to my daughters, my sons, my granddaughters, and grandsons! I am so grateful that He came for me and them! Through this testimony, and to all the mothers and fathers I want to say, suffer your little children to come, point them to the Father, and believe in your heart that when the time is right all that the Father has, will come and when your children's little legs begin to fidget and they slowly take those huge steps towards our Father, smile and know that He was there already, He has been calling and He came for them.

Tammy Hopson has been a Mitchell County resident since 1992 and lives in Red Hill with her family. She is a mother of six children and grandmother of 14. She has been a member of Hoyle Memorial Christian Fellowship in Lawndale, NC since 1992 and helps lead The HMCF Youth Group. tammylynnhopson@gmail.com



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Spilling the TEA

By Carolyn Wallace
Kingsport, Tennessee

“Let your conversations be always full of grace, seasoned with salt so that you may know how to answer everyone.” Colossians 4:6

Sandpaper or Pearl

A tiny grain of sand can be a huge irritant! Spend time at the beach, and you have sand in your shoes, clothes, eyes, and sometimes when biting on your food...oops, the grit of sand; is ever present, ever irritating.

What about sandpaper people? Not pleasant to be around; grates against the nerve; grumbles; complains; makes you want to turn and walk the other way! Do you know a sandpaper person? Are you one; am I? The conversation begins and the sandpaper person is interrupting, always right, needs to be the center of attention, loud, obnoxious...an irritant!

Let's consider a lesson from a small creature in God's amazing creation, the oyster. An irritating grain of sand invades its way into the oyster's environment. Immediately, the oyster begins dealing gently with the invasive grain as it is enclosed layer by layer with mother of pearl or nacre. Over time, the tiny irritating grain of sand becomes a beautiful, smooth, sought-after pearl.

Sandpaper personalities can be covered in prayer, kind words, patience, and love, and with God's grace, become pearl-like in nature. Even if this sandpaper personality does not change in our eyes or our ears, we can grow in patience and wisdom, becoming more Christ-like in how we interact with all God's children. Parasites of bitterness, resentment, and aggravation, invading our attitude when we encounter sandpaper personalities, can change into smooth beautiful pearls of kindness, patience, and wisdom with God's help. His guidance can soften our hearts and bring to light our own sandpaper characteristics.

“Coral and quartz are not worth mentioning...the price of wisdom is beyond pearls.” Job 28:18

Pray for that sandpaper personality in your life; ask God to grant wisdom, words of kindness, and the all-important gift of patience. Seeking God's guidance through prayer and Bible study can help soften those sandpaper characteristics and relationships can strengthen.

May our conversations be “full of grace.”



2023 Volunteer Of The Year

By Lori Fletcher
Burke County



Burke United Christian Ministries (BUCM), a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving people living in poverty in Burke County, is proud to announce Terry King as the recipient of the prestigious “Volunteer of the Year” award. This annual award recognizes individuals who have demonstrated exceptional dedication and made significant contributions to the betterment of our community through BUCM.

Mr. King has been a dedicated volunteer serving in various roles at BUCM for three years. Weekly, he travels around the county to pick up donated clothing from blue collection bins placed by the ministry. Terry provides critical support to our homeless neighbors who are clients of BUCM's Matthew 25 Center by driving people to medical appointments, the social security office, and the DMV. Terry is a designated buyer for BUCM and assists in purchasing and picking up food from the Second Harvest Food Bank as well as volunteering in the warehouse and thrift store weekly.



Terry King

Terry is no stranger to having a servant's heart; in addition to his work at BUCM, he also volunteers for the Disabled American Veterans Association and provides transportation to the Veterans' Affairs Medical Center in Black Mountain and the Veterans' Affairs Clinic in Hickory. King also proudly served in the United States Air Force in Vietnam and is a member of the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars. He and his wife, Susan, are members of Summit Community Church in Morganton. They have four beautiful children and five grandchildren they cherish.

Anyone interested in volunteering at Burke United Christian Ministries is welcome to call 828-433-8075 or check out our website at www.bucm.net for more information and an application.

Lori Fletcher is the Volunteer Coordinator for Burke United Christian Ministries. She retired from Burke County Public Schools prior to joining the ministry.

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Pause . . . and Consider

Once Upon A Time

By Ken and Jan Merop
Cleveland, Tennessee



That's the way good fairy tales always start . . . once upon a time.

With those four words, intrigue is born. The storyteller embarks on a journey with his reader to tell a suspenseful, enthralling tale, wring out tears of distress or joy and sowing seeds of hope while engaging the reader's imagination.

Have we lost the art of good storytelling?

Children are so saturated with moving images that seem to fly from their thumbs or with special effects that leap off the T.V. screen, that books are not holding the interest of the young as they used to.

However, I still find that children love to snuggle with a loving adult and hear a story. Sometimes we can read the story. Other times it's more exciting just to tell it.

Like a story, I heard given to youngsters at a church service.

Rather than read about God delivering the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, this pastor regaled the children with action and suspense. He had them make a mean face when speaking of the pharaoh. He had them show amazement when God parted the Red Sea. And, several times throughout the story, he reminded them that God always wins.

"If God always wins," he asked, "whose side do you want to be on?"

"God's!" they all exclaimed.

But, the whole point of stories is to come to a satisfying conclusion.

In fairy tales, that happens with the words, "They lived happily ever after."

In life, happily ever after isn't always the case. Except . . .

When I read the Bible, God's love, power, grace, mercy, and holiness permeate the Scripture. God knows how to work all things together for good to those who love him and are called according to his purpose.

Therefore, "happily ever after" can be part of our lives. Psalm 23: 1-4 & 6b, NKJV, sums it up perfectly: *"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me . . . and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."*

Once upon a time . . . Jesus came, lived a perfect life, died in my place, rose again from the dead, and ascended into heaven. He will come again to receive all believers and we will live . . . happily ever after. Selah

PASTORAL PORTRAYAL

*Come stroll the perimeter of this meadow.
In this rural setting, imagine a shepherd with his sheep.
How peaceful and nourishing a place to
"lie down in green pastures."
Walk it again in the opposite direction
And restore body and soul.
"The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want . . .
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life and I will dwell
in the house of the Lord forever."
Psalm 23: 1 and 6*



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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Mine Creek Baptist Church

Let Kids Be Kids

By Chris Rathbone
Mitchell County

Summer is upon us already. For many, it seemed like it couldn't get here quickly enough. The school will be over by the time you read this article. The last couple of weeks have been filled with end-of-year testing, some class parties, and activities. The playground here in Bakersville has been filled with children from the schools celebrating the end of the year. The fire dept set up a water slide for the kids to play on. As I did some yard work here at the house the sounds of laughter, giggles, talking, yelling, and just playing together filled the air. For me, it brought back many memories.

As a boy growing up here in these mountains, I really looked forward to summer. The classroom setting for me wasn't exactly something enjoyable. My favorite subject was recess when the weather permitted us classmates to go outside and play. From the playground filled with equipment to play on in elementary school to the many kickball, baseball, football, basketball games, etc. in middle school, those were the times I looked forward to the most. (Sorry teachers, I was all boy!) While there were some subjects along the way that I may have excelled at, just being a kid was my favorite.

Summer itself allowed us kids to make many lifelong memories. Fishing was a favorite for me. Myself, my neighbor Donald, my cousin Jody, and sometimes a few other boys would get up early and go fish Crabtree Creek pretty much all day. We'd pack some PB&J sandwiches, a Mountain Dew, and a Little Debbie oatmeal creme pie and hit the creek. There were some days we would catch a few and others we got skunked.

On other days we rode bikes throughout the Estatoe community while acting out the CHiPs tv show. There were forts we built in the laurel thickets where we fought many battles against our imaginary foes. Basketball was played on dirt courts with an old basketball rim nailed to the side of a building. Slingshots were cut from a forked tree with a strip from an inner tube used as the rubber for shooting at cans or critters. Teams were divided up for backyard or driveway ballgames. Matchbox and Hotwheel cars were played with in the dirt for hours on end. We explored the woods to find rock cliffs and grapevines to swing on. The hot temperatures of summer were relieved by wading the branches and creeks barefooted. We caught lizards, frogs, and the occasional snake. If the weather was good, we pretty well played outside from daylight to dark. Mom, many a time, had to threaten to give me a whooping (Y'all know what a whooping is, don't you?) just to get me to come in for a bath. The biggest worry we had in those days was whether or not we were gonna get to play outside together.

You might be asking yourself why in the world I'm writing about this kind of stuff. You see, all those kids I heard laughing and playing brought to mind the innocence of childhood. Most kids just want to be kids, play with their friends, and be loved by their families. That is really all a child should be experiencing in life. This old lost world and Satan are doing everything they can to strip babies of their childhood by pushing some of the most ungodly and wicked stuff imaginable on them. The goal of Satan is to get to your child as young as possible to rob them of the abundant life Jesus wants to give them. Parents, pray for your children, fight the good fight of faith for your children, and teach them about their Creator, Jesus our Savior, and the plan He has for their lives. Take them outside and just let them be kids. Let them play, laugh, and make friends. Take them to church and teach them how to worship Jesus. Tell them every day they are loved by you and by Jesus. Let them wade the creeks, play in the dirt, walk in the rain, climb trees, throw rocks, catch a fish, shoot a bb gun, or whatever else will leave a lifetime memory.

They'll be grown before you know it and the innocence of childhood will be replaced by the responsibilities of being an adult. The point I'm trying to get across is this: Take every chance you get to just LET YOUR KID BE A KID!

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

"If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth."
John 14:15-17





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Pipes On The Parkway Comes To The Orchard

By Kate Groff
Mitchell County

The Orchard at Altapass is pleased to welcome the inaugural Pipes on the Parkway Day on Sunday, June 4th, from 10 am to 5 pm. The day will recognize the Scots-Irish heritage of the Appalachians. At noon, Gordon Warburton, the Pipe Major of the Grandfather Mountain Highlanders, the host band of the Grandfather Games, will begin the first day of the season’s music at the Orchard. He’ll be marching in step with his bagpipes echoing through the fields. Following a short presentation, the Dollar Brothers step up at 1 pm to continue with heritage bluegrass, also rooted in Scots-Irish heritage. Then from 3 to 4:30, folks can kick up their heels and perhaps sing along with the good ol’ country to rock to clogging tunes and waltzes with Rewind Goodtimz.

Through a grant from the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina—Fund for Mitchell County and a partnership with the Mitchell County Historical Society, visitors will learn about the “Great Migration” from Ireland to the Americas, this region, in the late 1700s, in a new exhibit. “With Pipes on the Parkway, we recognize the thousands of immigrants who left their homelands for a better life and made their mark on the Appalachians of Western North Carolina,” said Beth Hilton, executive director. “Across our region, you’ll find families with surnames that harken back to those early times in these mountains. 2023 is just the beginning. We hope to grow this event over the years and have it be the welcoming of heritage music every first Sunday in June.”

In addition to the music and the exhibition, woodworker Steve Duncan will show his intricately hand-carved walking sticks, themed for the event—Scottish Highlander, Leprechaun, and mythical Celtic. The Historical Society will on the premises to discuss their work in preserving the region’s heritage. And, all are urged to donate a non-perishable food item to Neighbors Feeding Neighbors, a local community food bank that will be set up.

Orchard hours are 10 am to 5 pm, Saturday/Sunday, through May 28th; then through October, Wednesday-Sunday. The Orchard welcomes you to experience the heritage of the people, their music, and their idioms, and learn about their struggles and triumphs. For more information, please visit the website, altapassorchard.org. For updates, please visit our Facebook page. And to stay in the loop, email marketing@altapassorchard.org and write, “I want to sign up for the monthly e-newsletter.”

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



"Murmur Not!"

By Art Dmytriye
Yancey County



One day, when the Great Teacher of Galilee was speaking, He said to the multitudes: "*Murmur not among yourselves.*" (John 6:43 KJV). These words of Jesus are so much needed today! Murmuring, complaining, grumbling. If we want, we can always find something to complain about. Apostle Paul said to Philippians: "*Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world...*" (Philippians 2:14–15 KJV).

All Scripture clearly instructs us to not complain or murmur. Our murmuring shows our disapproval of God's work in us. According to Ephesians 2:10: "*We are His workmanship.*" By our murmuring, we refuse to reflect on God's work, and God's character is not revealed in our lives. When you think of Jesus Christ, He never murmured and grumbled about anything. Even though, humanly speaking, He had many "reasons" to do that. Why don't we follow His example? Also, when we murmur, it discourages others. Murmuring and complaining are contagious - it does not stop with one person. It spreads all over and it has no mercy!

So, how does God look at the problem of complaining?

There are lots of negative examples in the Bible about complaining and murmuring. The Holy Book always condemns this kind of behavior. For instance, in the book of Exodus, chapter 16, we can read how much damage murmuring can do and how offensive it is to God. Right after the children of Israel experienced their great deliverance from the slavery of Egypt, and saw the amazing miracles of God, they began to murmur. The Bible says: "*... the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness...*" (Exodus 16:2 KJV). The whole congregation! It was very offensive to God. The Lord by His great mercy did not destroy them all. He was showing them miracle after miracle revealing His great Character of mercy and love.

Even though, the Lord mercifully dealt with His people, not everyone appreciated it. According to Numbers 13 and 14, Moses by the commandment of the Lord, sent twelve men (one from each tribe) to spy on the land. As a result, ten of them returned with complaining and murmuring, while two of them had courage and faith. Based on the report of ten spies the whole congregation began to murmur and the Lord had to intervene. Eventually, all who murmured in the wilderness died there, except two courageous persons of that generation - Joshua and Caleb. They inherited the Promised Land.

Dear reader, is there something in this life that you feel to complain about? Perhaps, it is something related to your family, politics, religion, or this whole world. Please, let it go! Do not let complaining and murmuring ruin you! The Lord wants to save and deliver you so that you will spend Eternity with Him. Take this promise of Philippians 4:4–7 KJV:

"Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Amen!

Pr. Art Dmytriye 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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Sudoku

Solution on page 14

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

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John Trumbull

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.

Most people do not recognize his name, though they are familiar with his paintings. John Trumbull was born in Lebanon, Connecticut, on June 6, 1756. He was the sixth and youngest child of Jonathan and Faith Robinson, a family considered American royalty. After graduating from Harvard in 1773, John worked as a teacher and a topographer.

John sketched American and British military fortifications that gave George Washington's Continental Army critically needed details. In appreciation, Trumbull was commissioned as an officer in the Army and assigned to General Washington as an aide-de-camp. Trumbull later resigned from the Army to study art and painting. This decision took him to England to study at the Royal Academy of Arts with Benjamin West.

Over the next decade, John traveled to and from America and Europe. During a trip to London in 1780, Trumbull was jailed as a political prisoner for revenge because British spy Major John André was hanged in Tappan, New York. Trumbull was paroled after eight months and continued painting. He was appointed commissioner to John Jay for implementing the Treaty of Amity Commerce and Navigation, commonly known as Jay's Treaty.

Congress commissioned John to paint murals for the new federal government. After being shown as a traveling exhibit, these now-famous pictures have remained on the walls of the Capitol's Rotunda. The Declaration of Independence painting is actually "the presentation of a draft of it to Congress" in June 1776.

Other pictures Trumbull created for the Capitol are of General Burgoyne, Lord Cornwallis, and General Washington Resigning his Commission. Trumbull's portrait of Alexander Hamilton is on the ten-dollar bill. John's most famous representation is the signing of the Declaration of Independence on the two-dollar bill, among other banknotes.

Because of discrepancies, John's group paintings received petty criticism. The variations are because his paintings are montage composites describing pivotal events in American History before the camera's advent. Nevertheless, Trumbull's works in the Capitol captivate all viewers and crystallize their memory with "the most cherished [artwork] ever painted by an American artist."

Though blind in one eye from a childhood accident, John Trumbull was a peerless and devoted patriot. Turnbull applied his artistic gift by documenting the birth of modern democracy! His legacy continues in the Capitol, Yale, and other notable locations.

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 FoundationForward.com to learn more about our existing settings. Vance and Mary Jo Patterson are the benefactors and originators of Foundation Forward, a 501(c)(3) education non-profit.

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. In addition, 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.



God's Gift to the Animals

By Kurt Bomar
Avery County

When I do devotions with a new group of children I love to talk about animals and the gifts that God gave to them.

If you stop and think about it—God gives each and every animal a special gift for survival. I like to ask the children to name an animal and I would then tell them what special gifts God gave them. It would usually go something like this:

Tigers (they always seem to start with Tigers): That's easy. They have big claws and sharp teeth and can see well at night.

Horses: They can run really fast

Grasshoppers: They can hop long distances very quickly.

Moles: They can hide underground (unfortunately)

Rabbits: They don't have much of a defense mechanism, but they are fast, and they can breed prolifically ensuring the survival of the species.

Butterflies: Many are disguised to look like other ones that don't taste good to birds.

Goats: they can traverse much rockier terrain than their pursuers.

Even a mosquito that can be easily be swatted, can multiply so rapidly that we can't keep up with them.

On and on the suggestions would come and I haven't been stumped yet. It's a fun game to play with your kids.

But then I would tell them that there is one animal that God didn't give any gift of survival and it doesn't reproduce particularly fast. In fact, this animal should have gone extinct many years ago.

It's not big enough to intimidate its predators, it doesn't have sharp teeth, it can't run fast, it doesn't have a good warning system for its friends, It doesn't have good eyesight and it's not even smart enough to know when it's in danger. It's not even brave enough to protect its young. Do you know what it is?

It's a sheep. This poor animal is constantly ready to be served up on a platter to any number of predators.

So how did God compensate this poor creature destined for extinction? He gave it a Shepard.

Without shepherds, every Sheep in the World would be gone in one generation. And here's the spiritual application.

It's interesting that of all the animals in the world, Jesus likens his children to sheep. That ought to make us think. What do we sheep try to do? We try to sharpen our teeth, run faster or get courage. Instead, we should realize that just like sheep, we were intentionally designed not to be able to make it on our own.

What we need to remember is that we have a shepherd who can protect us in all situations and that the secret to our survival is to just stay close to Jesus!

Selah (think about it)

Walnut Grove Church walnutgrovechurchnc.org Come join us Sundays at 11:00



Kurt Bomar is pastor of Walnut Grove Church.

HAPPY FATHER'S DAY!



This month I am focusing on Budgets and how important they are for a comfortable retirement. If you want to see how your budget matches your retirement income, schedule an appointment on my website. If you are interested in education watch some of my webinars.

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Mitchell Baptist Association

National Day of Prayer

By Monica Kritz
Mitchell County



All praise be to GOD for the 2023 National Day of Prayer observance in Mitchell County! This year, it was no accident that the Downtown Worship was the day before (on May 3), while the prayer gathering was on May 4 at Riverside Park in Spruce Pine! The two events went hand-in-hand. The speakers and prayers and music were all in “one accord” ...GOD’s Hand was evident.

The purpose of the National Day of Prayer is “to pray for the well-being of America and those in leadership on all levels of national, church, and educational areas of influence.” At the 12:00 noon service, we were honored to have Tri-County Christian School join us, as they do every year. The students led in the Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag and sang the encouraging song, “You Keep Hope Alive”. Alexis Buchanan, a graduate of Tri-County Christian School, sang “More Than Anything”. Last year, Alexis volunteered to be a part of our prayer gathering again for this year, and we appreciate her faithfulness to use her talent for The LORD. Our many heartfelt thanks go to this school, which is such an asset to our community. They are making an impact on our community by reaching future generations. Our Mayor of Spruce Pine, Darla Harding, shared this special time and read the 2023 National Prayer, which was read in every state in our nation. Darla clearly was very touched and moved by this inspired prayer, and we appreciate her service to our town and county.

The main focus of this day is prayer. As we gathered, we felt the common need to truly pray, joining our hearts together...not just to listen and observe, but to reach out to GOD for help on behalf of our beloved nation, state, and town/county. Seven major areas of influence make up the foundation of a nation: military, government, education, church, family, business, and media. Seven different leaders in our area led a prayer for each of the areas of influence. I want to personally praise GOD for putting this together! Each of these speakers did not hesitate to accept the opportunity to pray, and many of them responded with, “I’d be honored!” With so many having the same response, I knew GOD was working and making all of the plans! Afterward, I heard similar exclamations, “It was like these speakers were hand-picked!” I said, “They were! GOD did it!”

Jason Kritz, pastor of Crabtree Chapel Baptist Church made the closing comments with an encouraging message and led in a time of prayer. Even after our prayer time had ended, people lingered at the park and continued talking and praying for one another. There was such a sweet, sweet spirit present at the park, and we give GOD all of the glory for such an amazing event! The attendance numbered around 100 people.

At the 6:30 p.m. gathering, our Mayor, Darla Harding, was in attendance and read the 2023 Nation Prayer. This was followed by 7 area leaders praying for the 7 areas of influence in our nation. Also, we had a special time of prayer for Associational Missions Director, Preacher Mike Brown, who is recovering from health issues. Our special guest speaker for the evening was Caleb Forbes, who sang several songs that The LORD has given him to write, accompanying himself on the guitar. Caleb is an answer to prayer, having faced many struggles and many battles in his young life, and he shared how GOD has redeemed him and is continuing to work in his heart and life. This testimony was so powerful that people were moved to tears, some sharing how they had not cried any tears for years. Walton Shepherd came to the microphone because he was so touched by Caleb’s testimony and the power of GOD, and he encouraged Caleb to tell his story everywhere he can! What a blessing! Pastor Jason Kritz again blessed us with Scripture and a message for today’s world.

Please, please, please continue to pray for our nation, our state, our county, town, and communities...don’t stop now! GOD is moving! Revivals are occurring all over America, and revival can occur in each of our hearts today! Please go out and spread The Good News of GOD’s love and forgiveness...spread His love and His light everywhere you go!



Mrs. Monica Henley-Kritz is 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.



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The 7 Most Important Budget Areas In Retirement.

By Steve Gaito
McDowell County



Retirement can be one of the most rewarding stages of life, but it can also be a time of financial uncertainty. When you retire, you no longer have a steady stream of income from your job, and you may be living off your savings or a fixed income. To make the most of your retirement, it is important to clearly understand your expenses and budget accordingly. In this article, we will discuss the 7 most important budget areas in retirement.

1. Housing One of the largest expenses in retirement is often housing. Whether you own your home outright or are still paying a mortgage, you will need to budget for expenses like property taxes, insurance, utilities, and maintenance. Downsizing to a smaller home or moving to a more affordable area can help reduce these costs.
2. Healthcare As you age, healthcare expenses are likely to increase. You must budget for insurance premiums, deductibles, copays, and prescription drug costs. Long-term care costs, such as assisted living or nursing home care, can also be a significant expense in retirement.
3. Transportation While you may no longer have a daily commute, transportation expenses can still add up in retirement. You may need to budget for things like car maintenance, gas, and insurance. Public transportation, carpooling, or downsizing to one car can help reduce these costs.
4. Food While food expenses may not be as significant as some of the other expenses on this list, they can still add up. You may need to budget for things like groceries, dining out, and entertainment. Planning meals ahead of time, shopping sales, and eating at home more often can help keep food costs under control.
5. Travel Many retirees have a desire to travel and see the world. While travel can be a wonderful experience, it can also be expensive. You may need to budget for things like airfare, lodging, meals, and activities. Traveling during off-peak seasons or using rewards points can help reduce these costs.
6. Leisure and hobbies Retirement is a time to pursue hobbies and interests that you may not have had time for while working. However, these hobbies and activities can come with a cost. You may need to budget for things like equipment, supplies, and membership fees. Finding affordable hobbies or exploring free activities can help keep these costs in check.
7. Taxes While you may no longer be paying income tax regularly, you will still need to budget for other taxes in retirement. You may need to pay taxes on Social Security benefits, retirement account withdrawals, and property taxes. Consulting with a tax professional can help you understand your tax obligations in retirement.

In conclusion, budgeting is essential for a successful retirement. By understanding your expenses and budgeting accordingly, you can ensure that you have the financial resources to enjoy your retirement years. The 7 budget areas outlined in this article are a good starting point for creating a retirement budget that works for you. If you want to see how your budget matches up with your retirement income, call me to schedule an appointment. Retirement is about income, not assets and your budget is the starting point to figure out how much income you need and when you will need it.

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

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Evergreen Baptist Church

One Or The Other

By John McCoury
Roan Mountain, Tennessee

This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are; *“Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.”* 1 John 3:10 Someone has said that people may be divided into two classes, the righteous and the unrighteous, and the classifying is always done by the righteous! Certainly, humanity is indeed divided into two classes—not three, as we often fondly imagine. We would like to think there are the children of the devil, the children of God, and then a vast group in between who are morally neutral, neither devilish nor godly. But God says No, there are not three classes. Nor is there one class. There are many today who would have us believe that all people everywhere are, by their natural birth, children of God. But the Bible never sustains that idea for even a moment. These words of John are the echo of the words of the Lord Jesus Himself when He said to certain Pharisees of His day, *“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire”* (John 8:44). This is what the phrase children of the devil means. It does not mean that the devil created them, but it means that they reflect the nature and characteristics of the devil. All of this is in harmony with the scriptural view of humanity. People, the Bible says, are vessels. They do not have power in themselves, nor do they have life in themselves. They are made to contain life. They are made to hold someone, designed to contain and express the life of another. In the original intention of God, that life was to be the life of God Himself. People were made for God. The philosopher said there is in every person a God-shaped vacuum that only God can fill. We were made for God. But because of humanity’s fall in the garden, people today are no longer containing and expressing the life of God but are expressing the perverted, twisted life of the devil. Every one of us was born into the family of the devil. We were born children of the devil because we are part of the fallen race of Adam. The tendency and proclivity toward sin, that twisted perversion, is passed along to us from our forefathers, along with the color of our eyes and all other physical features. We are born with a bent toward evil. You need to live with only a few babies to see this demonstrated. How utterly self-centered babies are! In their thinking, everything exists for them. The whole world is there only to serve their particular need, and that, in essence, is the expression of the life of the devil. It is only by new birth that we become children of God. This is why Jesus said to that cultured, honored, respected leader of his own day, Nicodemus, who came to him by night. *“No one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again”* (John 3:3) All your knowledge, your education, your morality, or your religion is of no value here. Unless you are born again, you are still part and parcel of the family and kingdom of Satan. The whole thrust of the gospel is always in this direction. It is to deliver people from the kingdom of Satan and to bring them into the kingdom of God Lord, grant that I may see my own life, see where I am heading, see the forces that are gripping me, mastering me, whether they are of God or Satan How piercing, stunning, and incredible is today’s passage of Scripture that is presented to us! What is the whole thrust behind God’s gospel message to the world?

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

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YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

NC Senate District 47



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

In a major win for life, the North Carolina General Assembly passed legislation to protect the unborn by limiting most abortion procedures to 12 weeks of pregnancy. State law previously allowed abortions for any reason up to the 20th week of pregnancy.

Governor Roy Cooper vetoed the bill. Thankfully, the legislature now has Republican supermajorities in both chambers and was able to override the veto, allowing the bill to become law.

Senate Bill 20, the Care for Women, Children, and Families Act, is an omnibus bill dealing with many major issues facing the state today. Although the abortion law changes got the majority of the press coverage, the bill also includes increased funding for childcare centers, paid parental leave for state employees, increased penalties for domestic violence or attacking a pregnant woman, and more.

North Carolina was empowered to tighten its restrictions on abortion following the Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization decision from the U.S. Supreme Court last June which overthrew the previous precedent of Roe v. Wade.

The abortion regulations in Senate Bill 20 are far from the "extreme bans" that many opponents of the bill claim. The bill allows exceptions up to the 20-week point in cases of rape or incest, and up to 24 weeks for certain fetal anomalies that would limit the life of the baby. There is no limit on abortions when the life of the mother is at risk. It also regulates abortion clinics under the same regulations as other centers that perform surgeries.

This bill is a thoughtful compromise that takes a stand for life while also providing reasonable parameters for extraordinary circumstances.

One question that Gov. Cooper and legislative Democrats have yet to answer is what restrictions on abortion, if any, would they support. They claim that Senate Bill 20 goes too far, but refuse to provide a public statement on what they would do instead. Do they support abortion for any reason up to the moment of birth? Voters deserve an answer.

NC Commissioner of Labor



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

Summer is around the corner, and I am looking forward to warmer weather and time spent with my family since my daughter is graduating from high school this year. The month of June is packed with different events and the continuation of our Safety Awards Banquet season.

Safety Awards Banquet season will be finishing up this month. During May, I attended seven safety awards banquets. We have nine banquets on the calendar for June, with several happening in the western part of the state. For more information about our safety awards program and how you can get your business involved next year, please contact Kiley Willard at 919-707-7855 or Kiley.Willard@labor.nc.gov.

On May 4, I had the opportunity to tour the GE Hitachi Nuclear Facility in Wilmington. It was a unique opportunity to see firsthand what this company does for our state, nation, and other countries around the world.

On May 12, I spoke at the Eastern Carolina Safety and Health Conference in Greenville. It was a great opportunity to talk about the importance of safety and health in the workplace and the N.C. Department of Labor's role in ensuring safety and health in workplaces across the state.

On May 22, I traveled to the Outer Banks to present the Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program (SHARP) award to Cape Hatteras Electric Co-op. It was an honor to meet the men and women employed by this company and present them with this award for exceptional workplace safety standards.

Trench Safety Stand-Down Week is June 19 – 23. The goal of the event is to reach out to the many workers who work in and around trenches and excavations to provide them with information about current excavation requirements and safety procedures for working in trenches. This event was first held in 2016 by the National Utility Contractors Association (NUCA), with federal OSHA joining as a partner a year later.

Don't forget that Father's Day is on June 18 this year. Please take the opportunity to wish the special men in your life a Happy Father's Day and thank them for all that they do.

NC House District 86



Rep. Hugh Blackwell
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USE OF MARIJUANA MEDICALLY IS QUESTIONABLE

Now pending in the North Carolina legislature is legislation to legalize the use of marijuana as a medicine. The NC Senate has passed such legislation. It currently awaits consideration in the NC House of Representatives. The bill, if finally approved, would authorize marijuana prescriptions across the state for "medical" purposes. For a number of reasons, I am skeptical that such authorization would be wise. I suspect that significant numbers of other House members share my concern.

A beginning and major problem is that there appears to be no such thing as "medical" marijuana as far as many doctors, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and numerous studies are concerned. By that, I mean that marijuana has never received the sort of scientific testing necessary to be considered medicine. Moreover, if legalized in North Carolina, it would be the only prescription drug in North Carolina that has not been FDA-approved. Furthermore, appropriate testing and trials have not been carried out to verify that marijuana is an effective treatment for particular conditions. At present, I would say that the lack of studies testing specific dosages of the drug against specific illnesses for specific lengths of time, with beneficial outcomes versus identified, adverse side effects, makes legalization ill-advised.

Given the lack of testing to define precisely for whom and for what conditions marijuana can be effectively and appropriately used, we could end up with it being over-prescribed and over-used either for the well-known "highs" it can provide or just out of desperation on the part of particular individuals who have been unable to find effective medication for their particular conditions. The potential for misuse is a particularly pointed problem for marijuana because there is substantial evidence that it may initiate or worsen mental illnesses such as psychotic, personality, and substance-abuse disorders. The lack of creditable testing and the known potential for abuse and disorders are almost certainly a principal reason that marijuana distribution, possession, and use continue to be illegal under federal law.

I am highly sympathetic to those who have chronic conditions for which they sincerely seek to find effective relief. However, I believe the best recourse at present is for them to persist in seeking legal medical treatment. Once appropriate tests, some presently being conducted, have run their course, and if they demonstrate benefits outweighing adverse consequences, then would be the time to reconsider things.

God Bless America

YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

NC Senate District 46



Sen. Warren Daniel
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919-715-7823

On the night of May 16th, Republicans in the North Carolina Senate voted to override Governor Roy Cooper's veto of Senate Bill 20 – The Care for Women, Children, and Families Act, placing into law a bill that will save thousands of unborn lives every year and provide resources and support for women and families facing unplanned and crisis pregnancies. A primary provision of the bill will reduce the legal timeframe for most abortions in North Carolina from 20 weeks of gestation to 12 weeks. The 46-page bill contains a myriad of other important provisions and will go into effect on July 1st. After more than an hour of debate Tuesday night, the North Carolina House followed the Senate and voted to override the governor's veto. The Senate passed the override with a 30-20 vote. The House vote was 72-48, a three-fifths majority which was needed in both chambers to override the veto. All Republicans in both chambers voted for the override while all Democrats were opposed.

Additionally in May, Lydia Daniel, Senator Daniel's wife, had the privilege of attending the 2023 North Carolina Peace Officers' Memorial Day ceremony at The Shepherd's Church in Cary. The event commemorates those law enforcement officers who have given their lives in the line of duty while serving the citizens of North Carolina. Families of the eleven fallen officers, current officers, retirees, and members of the public were present. The ceremony included guest speakers AG Josh Stein and NC Supreme Court Chief Justice Paul Newby, other notable dignitaries, a 21-gun salute, choral tribute, and a caisson team. Senator Daniel and several of his Senate colleagues purchased the NC flags and flag display cases presented to the families of our fallen heroes.



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Fellowship Presbyterian Welcomes New Pastor

By Dave Tabor
Avery County

After saying goodbye to pastor Lonnie Barnes who retired after years of faithful ministry, Fellowship Presbyterian church welcomed Rev. Cooper Starnes as their new senior pastor in April. Cooper is a North Carolina native who hails from nearby Morganton. Both Cooper and his wife, Hannah, have undergraduate degrees from the University of North Carolina, and Cooper completed his theological studies at Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte. Cooper and Hannah have two adorable young children (so far!). Before coming to Fellowship Presbyterian, Cooper served as an assistant pastor at Hazelwood Presbyterian Church in Waynesville, NC for 2 years.



Rev. Cooper and Hannah Starnes

As Cooper begins his first senior pastor position, he expresses his overall goal for his ministry in Avery County this way: "I am most looking forward to serving the people of Avery County with the Gospel. Fellowship Presbyterian Church is true to its name. The people here love to fellowship with one another around the worship of Christ. I want to encourage that community to delve deeply and faithfully into the Word of God. True fellowship and unity can only come from God. Therefore, my prayer is that as we seek to know him better through Scripture, that He would strengthen our unity, and, Lord willing, increase our numbers as well."

Although Cooper and Hannah have not been here long, they have already formed some strong impressions of the area; "the thing that has most surprised us in our short time here is the genuine kindness and love of the people at Fellowship, both for one another and Christ. We have had a wonderful welcome and feel that Crossnore is already our home. It is a joy to see strangers who are kind and even excited to see our kids. Believe it or not, some communities are not happy to have kids around. We have really enjoyed our time at the gym, Mike's Coffee in Newland, and Miracle Grounds in Crossnore. Even the driving here is wonderful. We get to see Grandfather and Roan Mountain almost daily"

Cooper realizes that even wonderful areas have great needs: "We have already discovered that this is a wonderful area with some great people. But because there are people here, that means there are also problems and needs that only the Gospel of Jesus Christ can address. We want to serve by addressing the needs according to the resources we have." Cooper loves leading small groups and Bible studies, answering questions about the reformed faith and Christianity in general, and playing ultimate frisbee. He says "I am always happy to speak with anyone about any of these things (especially while throwing a disc around or working out)."

Fellowship Presbyterian church, a congregation of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) denomination, is located between Newland and Crossnore at 1336 Walt Clark Road, Newland NC 28657. In addition to Sunday School for children & adults, Sunday worship, and Wednesday night prayer and Bible study, Fellowship also has men's and women's ministries that meet regularly. Consult the Fellowship Presbyterian website at fellowshippca.com for more information about the church or to listen to Cooper's sermons.

Dave Taber retired last year after 32 years as a software engineer with IBM and 10 years as an accountant with churches and Christian organizations. Dave and his wife Carol now live year-round in Newland.

Your Children are in Danger

By Todd Abraham
Athens, Tennessee



Just because we live in a digital world with all this super cool technology does not change the word of God which is His standard. And not all these cruddy, new-fangled translations that are good for nothing but to kindle a fire. And if you claim to be a Christian, you are bound to be obedient to the word of God whether you understand it or not and even if you believe in all these ridiculous new translations. Too bold for you? Not as bold as I am about to get.

As a Christian parent, you are under strict instructions to bring your children up properly according to the commandments of God's Word! It doesn't matter if the world turns out like some futuristic Star Wars movie set. God's standards do NOT change; ever. And until your children reach the age of accountability, they are your responsibility. And if they live with you until they are 40, you are still responsible to manage your house in a Godly manner when it pertains to them. To reiterate, IF you claim to be a Christian, God does not accept any excuses about you, as a parent, failing to uphold His standard when it comes to your children.

Smartphones have flooded the world to where over two-thirds of the world's population has them. That is mind-numbing alone statistically. And we all know how stupid we were as children, especially as teenagers, and I am including myself fully in this. We know, as parents, that even the best children are going to succumb to wicked influences. The devil is going to see to it. So if you are putting these wicked devices into the hands of your impressionable children, God IS going to hold you accountable for it! Seems redundant to me but I've shared in numerous installments of Todd's Techy Tips how the human mind isn't fully developed until between ages 25 to 30. And just because the whole world is doing it is all the more reason for you NOT to do it. True Christians are supposed to live separate from worldly ways; period. That is one of the strongest parts of our testimony to open the door for us to witness to a lost soul. God never intended for children's minds to be bombarded by self-indulgent things, overwhelming volumes of useless information, and certainly not by the sinister, wicked things kids can access on smartphones. You can leave the 'filters' excuse at the door.

I didn't allow my son to have a smartphone until he was 18 years old. In fact, it was the subject of a panel in The Adventures of Wesley Doodle about how he was recording some funny event on the 1960s flip phone I gave him LOL. Now he is his own man and what he does, he is accountable to God for that. He still lives with me and I strive to hold him to the standards of God's Word as I feel led by the Lord to do. And he is a Christian. Please understand that I am in no way trying to tell you how to raise your children or what to do. I am merely relaying, as a vessel, what God laid on my heart to write to you, parents. I believe it was my dad who told me once, "If the whole world goes and jumps off a cliff, are you going to follow them?" So my question to you is, "If the whole world chooses to go to Hell, are you going to jump in the flames with them?" I know that the selection of basic phones is severely limited but they are still readily available and cheaper than any smartphone. So that your children have a form of emergency communication. Especially after they start driving.

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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What Are You Looking At?

By Dennis Love
McDowell County

Read slowly the words of Psalm 121:1-8. *“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help comes from the LORD which made heaven and earth. He will not suffer your foot to be moved, He that keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He that keeps Israel shall neither slumber or sleep. The LORD is your keeper: the LORD is your shade upon your right hand. The sun shall not smite you by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD shall preserve you from all evil: He shall preserve your soul. The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.”*

Don’t you just love sitting and looking at the mountains? I recently removed a lot of small trees from the front of my house just to give me a birds-eye view of the mountains. If you have a house with a view of the mountains, then most people envy you. Those hills are big and beautiful. They take your breath away, and I now love sitting on my front porch and taking in the majesty of the mountains. David said that he too loved looking at the hills surrounding Jerusalem. The word “hills” means mountains, or that which is far above us. David knew that his help came from a source that was far above the beauty of his natural eyes. The hills or the beautiful mountains simply reminded David that his help came from a source far above those mountains. The mountains simply reminded David of his great God who is far above us.

Did you know if you put a buzzard in a six-foot square pen, and you left the top of the pen completely open, the buzzard would never attempt to fly out of that pen? Although the entire top of the pen is open, the buzzard will remain a prisoner in that pen. For a buzzard to fly, he needs a running start of about ten to twelve feet. Without this, a buzzard won’t even attempt to escape.

Did you know if you drop a bumblebee into an open jar, he will stay there until he dies? He will never put forth the effort to look up and fly out from the top of the jar. Instead, the bumblebee will persistently buzz around the sides of the jar, and the bottom of the jar, hopelessly looking for a way out. Both the buzzard and the bee will be bound because neither of them will try to escape by simply looking straight up.

Very often in the Christian life, we too are held captive, because we fail to look straight up. Our circumstances and situations surround us and suffocate us. Many times, we look all around us, searching for a way out, when our way out is looking straight up. When life boxes you in or when your circumstances seem to have you bound, look straight up and see your Savior. So, the next time you find yourself looking up at the high ridges and peaks of the mountains, remember that the mountains remind us of the One who is far above us.

I think I will go and sit on my front porch for a while. Hope you will join me today and in the days to come because our help comes from the One who is far above those beautiful and majestic mountains.

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



But As For Me And My House...

By Steve Bietz
Burke County

There is the story of a little girl's first day at school. The teacher was making out her registration card. She asked the girl to give her father's name. The little girl said, "His name is Daddy." The teacher said, "Yes, I know he is your daddy, but what name does your mother call him?" The little girl looked at the teacher somewhat surprised and said, "She doesn't call him any names, she likes him."

This month we celebrate Father's Day, but in over 40% of families in America, there is no father present. One out of four children born today are born in fatherless homes. I can't help but be reminded of a speech that Joshua spoke to the Israelites that included this thought. *"But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."* (Joshua 24:15)

In the 1963 Broadway musical, Bye Bye Birdie, there is a song that addresses the generational gap. The song was entitled, "What's The Matter With Kids Today." It was sung by the father in the musical as he struggles with communicating with the teens in his house. There is a great need today for Godly fathers. There always has been and always will be such a need. During a visit to the children's Bible class, a pastor asked the students, "Do you love God?" They nodded that they did love God. Then he asked, "Why do you love God?" After a moment a young student replied: "I guess it just runs in the family."

I think of the man, Joseph, who dominates the storyline from Genesis chapter 37 to the last chapter of the Book of Genesis. I especially like these words by Ellen White in her book simply entitled: 'Education.' She would write, "In his childhood, Joseph had been taught the love and fear of God.

Often in his father's tent, under the Syrian stars, he had been told the story of the night vision at Bethel, of the ladder from heaven to earth, and the descending angels. By communion with God and of great truths handed down from father to son, Joseph had gained strength of mind and firmness of principle." I like that thought, "handed down from father to son."

What do fathers pass down to their children today? What picture of God do dads show their families?

A teacher asked some preschool children to draw a picture of God. Toward the end of class the children were excited to show their work. They came up with rainbows and men with big hands. Finally, there was a youngster that showed her picture of God. It was unclear to the teacher what the young child meant because she had drawn a picture of a man with a suit and tie. The young girl added, "I don't know what God looks like," she said, "so I drew my daddy instead."

I hope and pray that dads will have that kind of legacy that is shared by their families. A family that might not know exactly how to draw God, but they have seen God in their dads.

It is a legacy that the Israelite leader named Joshua would have appreciated. *"But for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."*

Steve Bietz, Pastor, Morganton Seventh day Adventist Church.



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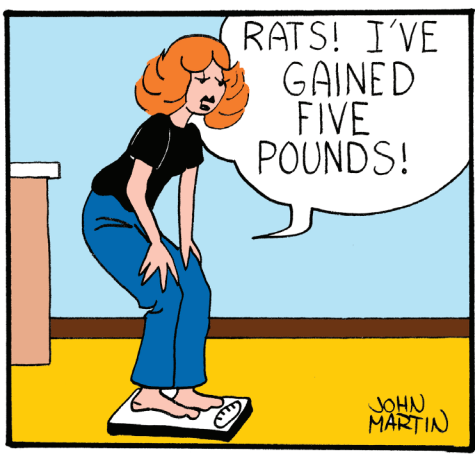


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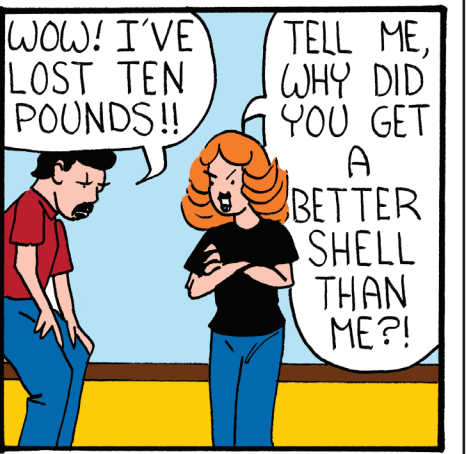
Thou Shalt Laugh

By John Martin



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The Sword of the Spirit

By Dr. Tom Walker
McDowell County



Eph 6:17 says, “*And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*” In this study, we are going to focus on the words, “*The sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God.*”

For English-speaking people, the Word of God is the King James Version of the Bible. Its source is the Textus Receptus or the Received Text. That Greek Text was widely used in the seven churches of Asia Minor. The purpose of this study is not to give all the many reasons why I make the statement in the opening sentence of this paragraph. That study would be too long to include in this study on Christian warfare.

We are going to look at three different avenues of study in this article. We are going to see the value of the sword, the involvement of the Spirit, and the indispensability of the Word of God.

The Value of the Sword

“the sword”

Today a literal sword is considered a primitive weapon in these days of assault rifles and other sophisticated weaponry. Its history goes back as far as 3300 B.C.

In early Bible days, they fought with swords, spears, and bows. The word sword is mentioned 424 times in our King James Bible. Since it is mentioned so many times, it was a very important weapon in the early Bible days.

A sword was a piercing or cutting weapon, with which a warrior might stab or slash an enemy. Some swords were designed to pierce, others to slash. All swords had two parts, a handle or hilt, and a blade. The blade was usually straight, but one unusual variation was the sickle sword. This weapon featured a curved blade with a sharp edge on the outside. Swords were the basic weapon of a Hebrew soldier. The Biblical phrase that identified a man as a soldier was that he “*drew the sword*” (2 Kings 3:26).

It was used for defense. Today many people carry small pistols that are compact and easily hidden for defensive purposes. If someone attacks you, you need some way to defend yourself. It would look odd today for you to walk around carrying a long sword from a scabbard on your belt. In Bible days the best weaponry they had was the sword. We have an enemy called Satan from which we need to defend ourselves. Jesus used the Word of God in the wilderness temptation to overcome Satan. Three times Jesus said, “It is written” in handling the onslaught of the Devil. Since it worked for Jesus, it will work for us as well. He demonstrated what we are to do when tempted by Satan. Just use the Word of God as a means of defense.

It was used for offense. I just completed teaching a 24-week course on Bible Geography. One thing is obvious all through history. A man was seldom ever satisfied with what he had regarding land, territory, and power. Warriors had to go on offense with swords and spears to conquer another nation’s territories, taking many lives while using the sword.

It was used with two edges. Most swords have two edges. If it was sharpened on both sides, it could penetrate and cut at every contact point and with every movement a warrior may make. If a blade is sharpened on individual sides, it can be thrust more quickly and deeply. It can cut much more easily after being sharpened on both sides.

Double-edged swords are also more effective at penetrating through armor than single-edged swords. However, this is more of a side benefit from the fact that double-edged swords are better for thrusting attacks. During the Middle Ages, European warriors would use thrusting attacks with double-edged swords to penetrate through their enemies’ armor.

A third benefit of the double-edged design is that it prevented a warrior’s enemy from grabbing the blade. With a single-edged sword, an enemy could potentially grab the dull edge of the blade. This isn’t possible with double-edged swords, however. With both edges featuring razor-like sharpness, there’s no safe edge to grab. If an enemy attempted to grab a double-edged sword, he would likely sustain a serious cut.

The Involvement of the Spirit

“the sword of the Spirit”

The sword we use finds its origin in the Spirit of God. 2 Peter 1:21 says, “*For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*”

The word “moved” (phero) is an extremely interesting word. It is translated into several words in our KJV Bible: bring, bear, carry, and other ways. The word “carry” is a very good way to express how we were given our Bible. It suggests normally either force or speed. It can be used as a gust of wind or of persons being carried in a ship over the sea.

The men who penned down the Bible did not just sit down one day and decide they were going to write just another book and call it the Bible. Holy men of God, chosen by God, were carried along and inspired to write the Bible. The wind of the Spirit moved upon their minds and hearts and carried them along to give us the Bible we have today.

The Spirit inspired it. There is another important verse found in 2 Timothy 3:16. It says, “*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.*” The word “*inspiration*” means “*God-breathed or the breath of God.*”

God’s words were given through men superintended by the Holy Spirit so that their writings are without error. This fact was virtually taken for granted by the Jews. Then Paul asserted the “usefulness” of the Word. For each aspect of

Timothy’s ministry, whatever it might be—doctrine (instructing believers in God’s truths), reproving those in sin (cf. 1 Tim. 5:20; 2 Tim. 4:2), correcting those in error (cf. 2 Tim. 2:25; 4:2), and instructing (paideian, lit., “child-training”) in righteousness (guiding new believers in God’s ways)—for all of these and more the written Word of God is profitable. With it, the man of God (one who must provide spiritual leadership to others) is complete, capable, and proficient in the sense of being able to meet all demands.

The Spirit does not contradict it. He works in harmony with and does not contradict the Word He inspired. A fellow who claimed to be a Christian years ago told me the Lord led him to drive a beer delivery truck for a living. In light of what the Bible says about alcohol, I could not understand that to be true. Habakkuk 2:15 says, “*Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that puttest thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!*” How could the Spirit of God direct someone to do something contrary to the Bible? He will not and cannot.

The Holy Ghost works with it. Before a person is saved, he hears the Word of God. Then, the Spirit of God goes to work. The Spirit uses the Word of God to bring conviction to the sinner. There must be a convincing of sin before a person can be saved.

When the Holy Ghost convicts of sin, He skillfully uses the Word of God to bring about salvation. The Spirit of God using the Word of God can bring the sinner to the point of salvation from sin.

The Indispensability of the Word of God

“the Word of God”

There is power in the Bible. Hebrews 4:12 says, “*For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.*”

The Bible pierces. It reaches the innermost heart and judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart as well. It can distinguish in man what is spiritual and what is merely soulish or natural. The inner life of a believer is often a mixture of emotions, some being spiritual and others being merely human. It takes the penetrating, discerning agent of the Word of God, to expose what is spiritual and what is of the flesh.

It is quick. God’s word of promise is not a lifeless letter and is not just paper and ink. His Word and His promises are living. They are a living reality. It is always alive and active. It is always working and quickening its message to the human heart. It is living and full of life to the believer.

The Word of God makes dead sinners living Christians; it makes souls dead in trespasses and sins alive unto God. The Bible conveys life and spirit to the repentant, believing sinner. 1 Peter 1:23 states, “*Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever.*”

It is powerful. It has great power as it is administered by the Holy Ghost to the life of a child of God. It has the power to convict, convert, comfort, and condemn. That is why God called preachers to preach the word; it is so unparallel and powerful in its operation.

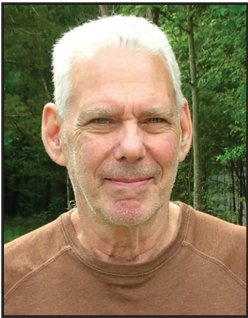
It is sharp. The Bible pierces. It reaches the innermost heart and judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart as well. It can distinguish in man what is spiritual in man and what is merely soulish or natural. The inner life of a believer is often a mixture of emotions, some being spiritual and others being merely human. It takes the penetrating, discerning agent of the Word of God, to expose what is spiritual and what is of the flesh. It has two edges, signifying how thorough it is in its operation.

Since we have the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God available to us in our daily battles, let’s utilize it to drive back and resist the forces of Satan.

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

Eternal Torture or Eternal Annihilation for the Unsav

By Robert Garner
Rutherford County



So convinced of my previous position, now un-sealed proves superstition. A common worldwide delusion, “O LORD, let me never be put to confusion”, Psalm 71:1. The universe of all cultures, including myself, have been deceived by The Mythology of Plato, (Mith-Fairytale-Ology–the study of Greek gods by academics). Hade’s kinship god Zeus defeats his father’s generation of gods and rules the underworld domain of eternal torture for the unsaved soul.

The scriptures proclaim “for His mercy endureth forever”. This combination of words occurs 254 times in the KJV bible. Will God keep the unsaved soul alive burning in torment, in the lake of fire, suffering the flames of hell fire forever, eternal torture? No, absolutely not! What about loving your enemies, and doing good to them that hate you? Proverbs 21:27, “the sacrifice of the wicked is abomination [disgusting]; how much more when he [mankind] bringeth it with a wicked mind?”

Mixing the myth of fairytale gods in Greek mythology, without the metaphorical truth parables as found in God’s Word, the Bible traps the Christian into spiritual superstition. 1 Timothy 1:4, “neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith, so do!”

Read the following verse very slowly, perhaps several times. Notice, destroy the soul comes first! Mathew 10:28, “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” [Gehenna H1067grave, everlasting punishment]. Ezekiel 18:20, the soul that sinneth, it shall die.

1 Co 15:24-26, “The Father, when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. He shall reign, till He hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy destroyed is death”.

Ecclesiastes 9:5 & 6; “for the living know that they will die: but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion forever in anything that is done under the sun.” Psa. 6:5 “for in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who will give thee thanks?” Psa. 115:17; “the dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down to silence.” Job speaking about death; 3:17, “there the wicked cease from trouble, and there the weary be at rest. But man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he? As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up: so man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more; they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep”; Job 14:10-12.

Mathew 10:28, “fear him which is able to destroy both body and soul in hell”. We cannot now redefine the word destroy to imply something else. Destroy/destruction is found in over 300 verses in the KJV bible. Christians must trust in the faith of Christ to avoid the destruction of both their body and soul in their earthly grave. “Only through Jesus Christ our Saviour, not by works of our righteousness, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost”, Titus 3:5,6.

2 Thessalonians 1:9, “who shall be punished with everlasting destruction.” 1Thessalonians 5:3, “when they shall say peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them.” 2 Peter 3:16, “some things hard to be understood, they are unlearned and unstable wrest, [torture language falsely], as they do also other scriptures, unto their own destruction.” 1 Timothy 6:9, “foolish and hurtful lusts, drown men in destruction and perdition” [destruction of eternal life].

Visit Bible Ministries International (supported by listeners without advertisements). Providing forty years of trustworthy non-denominational faithful KJV Biblical study research. The doctrine of Annihilation, as created by the LORD Jehovah, destroys the false belief of eternal torture/torment for the unsaved. An eight-part video study Annihilation - Part 1 - YouTube

From Bible Ministries International, www.bmius.org “That which is “Abhorring” (shamed to eternal contempt) “to Repulse”. Abhorring Strongs #H1860 to repulse, an object of aversion, abhorring, contempt. Besides Genesis 42:38 and Genesis 44:31, there is only one other verse in the entire Old Testament that contains these two Hebrew words, “death” (H4191) and “the grave” (H7585) together, and that is found in 1 Samuel 2:6, which underscores God’s power and to kill and to resurrect on a physical level, as well as spiritually during the day of salvation”.

1 Samuel 2:6; “The LORD killeth [myuth; H4191] and maketh alive: he bring down [yarad; H3381] to the grave, [sheowl; H7585] and bringeth up [alah; H5927].”

Some might look at Samuel 2:6 and say, “You see, this matches what we find in Daniel 12:2, when God (brings up, or awakes) the non-elect who have previously died”.

Daniel 12:2; “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

Those who hold to this concept argue that whatever is left of these individuals will be reconstituted by God so that they can “stand for judgment”, and then upon hearing the guilty verdict, will be confined to the “lake of fire” for eternity. The term, “contempt” only appears again in Isaiah 66:24, as, “and they shall be an abhorring”.

Isaiah 66:24; “And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh.”

The abhorring shame and contempt that these individuals are under is the fact that they remain perpetually under the sentence of God’s wrath for eternity, even though

they are annihilated both in body and soul. Mathew 10:28 “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell [Gehenna H1067grave, everlasting punishment]”. (End) Bible Ministries International.

The faulty eternal torture doctrine of mankind’s unsaved soul is of great offense to God Almighty. Again, God gets blamed for something he never considered to happen in His creation. The worship of the god of Baal and Molech, caused the children of Israel to pass through the fire (Jeremiah 32:35); “[God proclaims] neither came it into my mind”.

The Unbiblical doctrine of Purgatory, a place of sin cleansing, is not found in the Bible. During man’s lifetime on earth, the elect of God must be drawn (John 6:44) by the Father to Jesus Christ. Only Christ can regenerate a man’s soul to salvation. Upon the death of the elect of God, their soul instantly goes to heaven to be with the Father and the Son. They will receive a future new perfect sinless body, and be part of the new heaven and earth creation.

The unsaved sinner who bears their own sin, the unrighteous of God, will remain lifeless for eternity in their grave. Their corpse will decompose and deteriorate. An earthly sleep metaphor, it’s forever 2:00 O’clock in the morning. “They shall not awake nor be raised out of their sleep”.

At the second coming of Christ, the earth and everything in it, all dead souls and dead bodies in the grave, will be burned up. Complete annihilation, eternally forgotten, everlasting destruction, “in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; the second death”, Revelations 21:8.

Many times, atheists ask Christians, why does your merciful loving God torture un-saved persons with unquenchable everlasting fire? Now you have the answer. God Almighty does not torture the unsaved sinner! Unquenchable fire symbolically represents eternal everlasting punishment for the unsaved. Mat. 25:31-46, “And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal”. Heb 12:29, “God is a consuming (Strongs G138 destroy) fire”. The total destruction of body and soul in the grave for eternity will never cease.

As a tourist, you can take a hike to the plateau summit of Mount Sodom in Israel overlooking the dead sea. The area has many salt pits; remember Lot’s wife, Gen. 19:26? The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah did get destroyed with brimstone and fire, but they are not still burning with “eternal fire”. KJV Jude 1:7, notice “set forth as an example” is a reminder of God’s judgment to the wicked, a never to cease verdict of everlasting punishment. Jude 1:7; “Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance [Strongs # G1349 condemnation] of eternal fire”.

Eternal Annihilation or Eternal Life? Nothing is more important than what God Almighty will do with man’s soul! Proverbs 1:5,” A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels.” Eze. 33:11, “LORD GOD saith, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked”. Psalm 22:29, “none can keep alive his own soul”.

Next Month (Part 2). Eternal Torture or Eternal Annihilation for the Unsav

Jesus spoke in parables; “their worm dieth not”; the parable of the rich man’s “great gulf fix” Luke 16:26.

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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HOSPITAL STAYS

PART B

DOCTOR VISITS

PART C

MEDICARE ADVANTAGE

PART D

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

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Crossword

Crossword 277
ACROSS
1 The ____ is not held secure, the sail is not spread (Isa 33:23)
5 he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of ____ (2 Sam 6:19)
9 Then God said, "Let the ____ produce vegetation (Gen 1:11)
13 whatsoever hath _____, that shall ye not offer (1,7) (Lev 22:20) KJV
14 But if he be ____ than thy estimation, then he shall present (Lev 27:8) KJV
15 The twenty ninth book of the Old Testament.
16 The _____ trees cover him with their shadow (Job 40:22)
17 Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur and ____ the five kings of Midian (Num 31:8)
18 I came near unto ____ of them that stood by (Daniel 7:16)
19 ____ man can live and not see death? (Ps 89:48)
20 they which went up also from Telhahasha, Cherub, ____ (Neh 7:61) KJV
21 They ____, "The Lord needs it." (Luke 19:34)
23 I hold ____ to your statutes, O LORD (Ps 119:31)
25 "You ____ were with Jesus of Galilee," she said (Matt 26:69)
26 know that you have no authority to ____ taxes (Ezra 7:24)
29 topaz, and the diamond, the ____, the onyx (Ezek 28:13)
32 their sailors came alongside to trade for your ____ (Ezek 27:9)
34 saying, ____, Eli, lama sabachthani (Matt 27:46)
36 you must cancel any debt your brother ____ you (Deut 15:3)
38 ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you ____ (Matt 11:28) KJV
39 the hour cometh, ____, is now come, (John 16:32) KJV
40 from the hand of the wicked, from the ____ of evil (Ps 71:4)
43 lies down, like a lioness who ____ to rouse him? (Gen 49:9)
44 a vine, and brought forth branches, and shot forth ____ (Ezek 17:6) KJV
46 Saul and Abner son of Ner had ____ down (1 Sam 26:5)
49 he entered the temple ____ and began driving out those who were (Luke 19:45)
50 We _____ whenever we are weak but you are strong (3,4) (2 Cor 13:9)
54 in ____, Zeboim and Neballat (Neh 11:34)
57 The body is a ____, though it is made up of many parts (1 Cor 12:12)

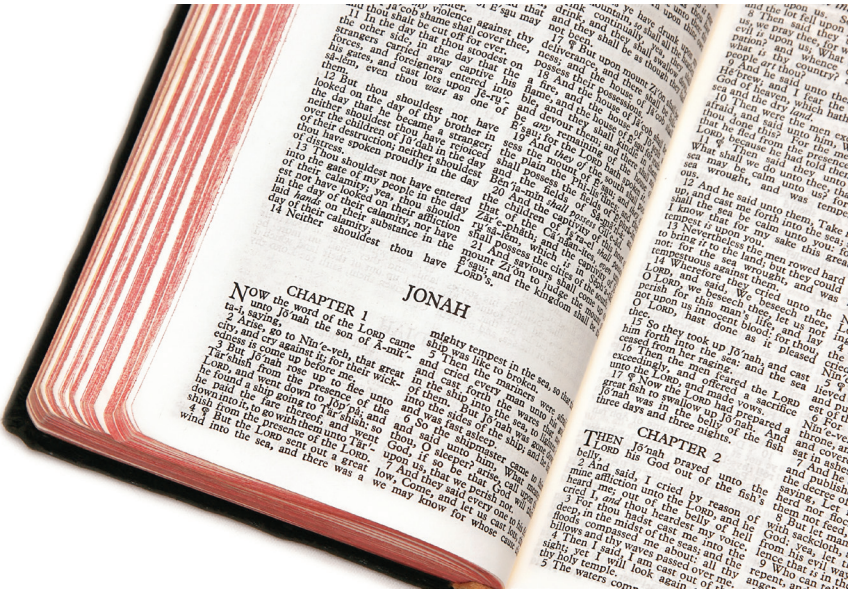
58 Sir, come down ____ my child die (John 4:49) KJV
59 30th book of the Old Testament
60 If anyone ____ to be first, he must be the very last (Mark 9:35)
61 will men take _____ of it to hang any vessel thereon (1,3) (Ezek 15:3) KJV
62 rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, ____, slander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

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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



The Soldier, Athlete, and Farmer

By Timothy W. Tron
Burke County
2 Timothy 2:3-7



Caelan stood still, holding one handle of the plow with one hand while wiping the sweat from his brow with the back of the other that held his hat. The mule stood before him, her tail twitching at the few flies that tormented her backside. The soil beneath the plow’s blade was deep, rich topsoil, remnants of the glaciers that had pushed the fertile ground so many millennia before now. This part of southern Indiana, just north of the Ohio and east of the Wabash Rivers, was some of the richest farmland in the Midwest. It was where Caelan wanted to settle down and start a family, but the war had changed that. Here it was the spring of 1864 already. Inside, he needed stability, something that would give him a sense of permanence and peace. From his youth, he knew working in the dirt often did just that, so he returned home hoping to regain something of the past – anything to cover up the memories of those many battlefields of death.

The furrows behind him were like black ribbons in the otherwise dull landscape. “Progress,” he thought to himself. He put his wide-brimmed hat back on, threw the leather leads over his shoulder, and said in a low voice, “Giddy up, Daisy.” Instantly, the mule obeyed, and the plow jolted into action, the silver blade catching the dark soil and began turning over the old winter grow beneath the surface. Slowly Caelan could feel the past, like the dried leaves of another season, turn beneath the blade. The sod of death flowed like endless loaves of bread beneath him as he straddled it, walking carefully to avoid falling while keeping his eyes on the tree line before him. His gaze seemed to go beyond that immediate border.

Caelan joined the army to support his newfound country and to show that he was a good American. Having recently immigrated from Europe with his two older brothers from the Alpine regions, he found himself serving their country as so many of his family before him. Yet, they were assured this was different. This civil war, they were told, was in defense of freedom, tyranny, and from the oppression of a lesser people group. Yet, this wasn’t the same as his ancestors, who fought for their right to worship God. This was something of a dispute that was difficult to understand. Fighting to serve God was easy to comprehend for Caelan, but this war had felt much different. His brothers were too old to serve, so they stayed behind with their wives, raising their families. It didn’t seem fair in some sense. Caelan had yet to marry. He only had this small plot of land and his cabin. He sometimes felt alone, even though his brother’s farms were nearby. His solitude just made him lean more on God. But the more he prayed, the more he felt abandoned. In a way, the war gave him a momentary escape from the reality of being alone – the camaraderie, the sense of purpose. Yet, there he was on the front lines facing an enemy he could barely understand, let alone the reason for their secession from the Union, for which he fought.

Across the field, his eyes peered for a target. In his sights, he could make out a form. His eyesight was so sharp that he could easily take down the man within the open iron bars of his scope, but now, Caelan peered into the woods beyond his cleared ground. He didn’t see the trees. Instead, he saw men ready to die, following the rules of their commanders. In war, you are trained not to think but to act. If you don’t, you won’t survive.

About that time, the tip of the plow hit a stone, abruptly stopping his forward progress. It shook Caelan out of the trance, suddenly realizing he had gone beyond the length of the small field. Daisy stood in the tall weeds, her head down, reaching for a mouthful of succulent grass. She was happy they stopped. But, suddenly, her ears perked at a noise before them, her head immediately lifting in alarm. She gave a quick snort. Caelan, already aware, instinctively reached for his sidearm but realized he had left it by the edge of the barn across the field. A feeling of being vulnerable washed over him. His heart began to pound in his chest.

“Could he make it to the gun before the enemy appeared?” He shook his head and tried to get control of his mind. Speaking within, he tried to calm himself, “The war is over for you. Get over it. You were discharged because of the mortal injury that you miraculously survived. God has a plan for you. You’re not going to die.” Before another thought would come, he knelt with one hand on the plow, the other still holding onto the mule’s reins, and began praying. “Lord, from the beginning as a young man when we trained as athletes to when we trained in the military, everything was done to serve you, not men. Yet, this fear, those memories of death that trouble my soul. God, reach down and calm my soul. Abide within me so that I may live again. Make me whole. This much I pray, Amen.” Yet, he couldn’t shake the feeling in the bones of the warrior within. He quickly unhitched Daisy from the plow and turned her, preparing to make their way back across the field. Before they had gone halfway, a trio of riders emerged from the woods. His fears were not unfounded. They wore long coats of gray. The emblems on their hats sent shivers down Caelan’s spine. Now his mind raced, “Why were they here? What were they doing this far North? Was this a scouting party, or were these deserters? Why now?” Thankfully, the soldiers didn’t ride up to Caelan at first but paused, looking at the small farm as if debating amongst themselves. Caelan couldn’t move as fast as he once did. The lead ball had passed through his upper leg, breaking his femur and barely missing his femoral artery. He should have died that day on the battlefield at Gettysburg, but thanks to the quick actions of the medic and field doctor, his life was spared. They marveled that such an injury was survivable, let alone that he was able to keep his leg. Caelan knew God had saved him, so he was happy to come away with the limp that now slowed his progress across the field. He had barely made it to the edge of the field when the men came riding intentionally toward him, moving across the freshly plowed rows, their horses kicking up little tufts of soft

soil as sprays of water on the shore. Caelan put Daisy just inside the barn next to a pile of hay and reached down for his Colt, slipping it into the backside of his pants hidden beneath his vest. He then turned and faced the oncoming men.

Their horses halted abruptly just within a few yards of Caelan. The late morning sun was in their faces, giving away the youth beneath the scraggly unkempt beards. They wore the insignia of Confederate Cavalrymen, yet their rank was inconsistent with what one would expect of a scouting party – one a captain, one a lieutenant, and one a corporal. Each uniform was bloodied and torn. Instantly, Caelan recognized unsavory behaviors unbecoming of men of their station. The hair stood up on the nape of his neck. They moved their horses in an increasing arc before him as if preparing for something they had already done before; something practiced and evil. “You the owner of this here peace of land?” The older one in the captain’s uniform seated on the horse in the middle of the three-spoke first.

“Who wants to know,” Caelan answered, his eyes watching every motion of the men before him. The one on the far right, the supposed lieutenant, had already pulled his cape back over his shoulder to free up his gun arm, his hand resting on the hilt of his weapon.

On Caelan’s far left, the corporal answered before the captain could respond, “We ain’t gotta take no crap from this yank,” he said, looking at the man in the middle. “Shut up, Levi,” the lieutenant shouted, “Your mouth always gotta be runnin’ when it should be still.”

Meanwhile, the man in the middle had not left his glare on Caelan since he arrived. Inside, part of Caelan wanted to die. He was ready to be over the torment of war, the nightmares of men dying, and their cries lingering in his ears. Perhaps these men were here to do just that – take him out of this world and his suffering.

“Well, you see,” the captain began to answer, ignoring the other two, “We’re the ones asking the questions today, yank.” He leaned forward with one elbow on the saddle horn spitting out a wad of tobacco juice on the ground, “You see, we asked if you were the owner, and seeing as you don’t want to answer, then we’ll just assume yous ain’t. And if memory serves me correctly, then that means we can just take up here as it is now our place as much as it is yours, if it is yours at all, seeing as you don’t wanna answer my question.” The other two laughed.

The lieutenant was tired of waiting and pulled his sidearm, “Get down on your knees with your hands behind your back.” The corporal had dismounted and swiftly moved toward Caelan, who had yet to respond. Inside, he was fighting the urge to pull his weapon. He wanted to fight, but then he had resolved to walk away from war, from killing, to serve God fully. But how could he serve anyone if he was dead? About that time, the butt of the corporal’s gun crashed against the back of his skull, momentarily blinding him as he fell to his knees. “Now, put your damn hands behind your head before I git tired of this mess and just blow your brains out.” He patted down Caelan and found the gun tucked in the back of his pants, removing it and throwing it a few feet away in the grass.

“Now, you stupid damned Yank, I’m only going to ask you one more time, is this your place, and if so, are you alone? You’re wearing my patience thin.”

Caelan’s head was pounding now. He could feel a warm trickle of blood oozing from the wound the corporal’s blow had left. He knew his answer would only save him time in the short run, that is if he lied and said no. Meanwhile, he really didn’t care if he lived or died. But again, the thought returned of “How could he serve God as a dead man?”

“No, I’m not alone,” he hesitantly answered. Then, he silently began praying, “God, you allowed me to live through all those battles, through all that death. Surely, this is not how or why it is to end. God, if it is your will, then I am ready, but Lord, if it’s not, then give me a sign, something to show me that you want me to fight. Anything God.”

“I’ll go check inside,” the corporal said, running into the Caelan’s small cabin. “If you’re lying, we’re gonna know right quick,” the lieutenant said with a smile. Bursting out of the cabin’s front door, the corporal came, laughing, holding Caelan’s Union blue coat up. “Well, well, well, looky what we got here, boys. We got us a tried and true Yankee soldier.”

“Anybody in there, Levi,” the captain interjected.

“Nope, this ol’ boy’s just another sad sack of lonely horse crap.”

The lieutenant smiled.

He could hear the corporal walking up behind him. His footsteps were sure and bold. The click of the hammer pulling back on his gun was undoubtedly the last thing he would know. But before he felt the bullet pass through his skull, he heard the sweet, tender voice of his brother’s little angelic daughter, Sarah call out, “Uncle Caelan?”

There by the edge of the barn, stood the little seven-year-old. Her blond curls hung about the shoulders of her calico dress.

The corporal paused.

Caelan’s mind raced. “Was this the answer? Did God send little Sarah to tell him to defend himself, to live for more than just himself? Why would God put this child in danger? Now, he had to act, for her life was in the balance, not just his.”

“Grab the damn kid before she goes and tells someone else,” the captain yelled at the corporal.

Levi was about to give chase, but before he could take a step, Caelan, from his knees, pulled the hunting knife from his boot and drove it into the top of the boot of the corporal. Levi screamed, reaching down for his boot, his foot momentarily grounded by the blade. The lieutenant fired, missing Caelan and hitting the corporal in the leg. As he did, Caelan spun, grabbed the corporal’s gun hand from behind, and brought it up, shooting the lieutenant from his mount before he could get off another round.

Sarah raced off, screaming at the top of her lungs, but the captain had already

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pulled his revolver and shot. By then, Caelan had the corporal in a choke hold, his hand controlling the corporal's gun hand, using the confused criminal as a shield. The captain's shot penetrated Levi's heart, killing him instantly. Caelan pulled the revolver from the dead man's grasp as the captain fired again, grazing Caelan's cheek with his next shot. Caelan returned fire from his knees, hitting the captain in the chest with two shots before the corporal's gun jammed.

The captain's horse stood still as he fell forward, still mounted but not yet dead. His gun arm hung down beside his leg, still holding his weapon. Blood dripped from the cold steel making a tiny pool of crimson on the dark sod.

Caelan began looking for his own Colt where the corporal had tossed it. He frantically scoured the grass on his hands and knees, waving his arms in sweeping motions. Finally, his hand found the solid form of the revolver when he heard the shot ring out. The feeling of the slug tearing through his side was a searing pain that was too familiar. He felt his breath give out as he pulled the weapon to his side and looked up. The captain was sitting up again, blood oozing from his mouth as he smiled a grizzly smirk. "You thought you killed me, you damn Yank. But I ain't dead yet, but you're about to be," he said, trying to lift the weapon in his hand. The loss of blood slowed his response just long enough for Caelan to pull the trigger of his own gun as the captain pulled his.

The shots rang out.

Another searing pain and his breath was gone.

The sound of horse hooves racing toward him was all he could remember. Then the blue sky above went black.

The sound of voices was the first thing that came to him before he could open his eyes. Slowly, he lifted the eyelids that had been shut for days. At first, in the brilliant, blinding whiteness of the room, he first thought he had gone to glory, for everything was white, the clothes, the sheets. Then, as Caelan slowly became aware of the images before him, he realized they weren't angels but people, most of them in hospital uniforms. Nearby, his brother Conrad sat with his daughter Sarah upon his lap; their smiles said it all.

"Brother, I'm so happy to see you are still with us. We thought we had lost you once and for all."

Caelan tried to sit up, but the bandages across his body told why the pain was still there. "You should be dead," the doctor standing nearby said as they looked on. We rarely see an injury of your kind, a bullet wound so near the heart that anyone survives."

"Yet, you have," Conrad cut in before the doctor could continue. "It is truly a work of God Almighty."

Caelan smiled in return.

Then one of the other men standing at the foot of his bed spoke up. "Yes, and we are grateful for what you have done."

"Caelan," said the doctor, "I want you to meet the Sheriff of the Southern Indian Region, John Carson, and Brigadier General, James B. McPherson, commander of the Union forces under General Tecumseh Sherman."

"Our pleasure to meet you, Caelan," they both said in unison.

"You're a hero, Uncle Caelan," Sarah gleefully chimed in.

"Yes, she's right," Sheriff Carson answered. "You managed to kill three of the most dangerous criminals we have ever known. We had been tracking them for months. They had left a trail of death and destruction across a three-state area, masquerading as Confederate Cavalrymen."

The general continued, "Caelan, you managed to take them out single-handedly. A feat we can only be in awe of, seeing as they had been surrounded more than once by some of our best soldiers, only to shoot their way out."

"You have done the impossible," the sheriff answered.

"I'll agree to that, too," the doctor seconded.

Everyone in the room laughed at the last.

"Well, thank you all," Caelan finally spoke. Looking over at Sarah, he smiled. Then a roll of memory, like thunder falling off the mountainside, returned to him. All those years of training, the injury on the battlefield that sent him home early, and being there when those criminals rode up; it was all part of God's plan. If he hadn't been there, little Sarah might not have survived. The trail of death would have continued at the hands of those evil men. He finally realized God had saved him for a time such as this. His smile broadened a little further as he continued, "But from what I can recall, Sheriff, it was God that made it possible. You see, He was just answering my prayers. And for that, all I can say is, "Thanks be to God."

And all God's people said, "Amen."

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