



# BLUE RIDGE CHRISTIAN NEWS



## Mt. Carmel Baptist Church

### The Sacrifice Of Praise

By Toby Crowder  
Mitchell County

Hebrews 13:15 *“By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.”*

A few years ago, I became burdened over the lack of praise among God’s people in our worship services, for we truly have MUCH to praise Him for in our lives! I remember growing up with a generation of “shouters” who were not ashamed to praise God, and the story below is a (fictional) obituary that I wrote at the time for a message that I preached about the loss of such a generation. Will we, as God’s people, continue to offer Him the sacrifice of our PRAISE?

Sister Ima Shouter, no age given, of Anytown USA passed from existence recently. She was preceded by her relatives Brother Surrender, Aunt Faithful, and several other vital members of the church family. The exact cause of her death is unknown, but it is believed that pride, complacency, and indifference were contributing factors. She had been in a long period of declining health, but it was only noticed by a few who shared her convictions and her desires. Her presence will be greatly missed by many, yet sadly unnoticed by some.

Sister Shouter’s testimony began several years ago and for centuries she gave life and encouragement to the local church body. Her ancestry was evident in early Bible times and from the earliest recording of Scripture, she left her footprint in the lives of many dedicated Christians who were not ashamed of her presence. Her forerunners are seen in the pages of Scripture as early as Genesis 29 when Leah conceived and bore a son named Judah and said, *“Now will I praise the Lord.”* She may also have claimed kindred to the author of Psalm 32:11 who said, *“Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.”* Her influence is seen throughout Scripture and the effects of her contagious spirit has been felt as recently as the present generation. Her health had been failing for years though; mostly due to those tasked with caring for her wellness in the local church.

Those who were familiar with her knew her to be a breath of fresh air and an encouragement to every Pastor and church who was blessed to have her in their assembly. She never sought to be lifted up or magnify herself in any way, but only to bring honor and glory to the name of Jesus Christ. She was often heard saying “Glory to God” and “It’s all about Him” in reply to those who tried to pay her a compliment. Over the years, many tried to imitate her life and work, but any who really knew her would know that she may often be imitated but would never be duplicated. She loved her home and her family, and this was evident in her undy-



ing devotion to them and the house of God. She was a faithful church member and always had time to spend with a struggling soul or offer a word of encouragement when it was most needed. Her fervent prayer life was an example to other families and churches far and wide.

Several mothers, aunts, and grandmothers looked to her for wisdom, guidance, and advice but Sister Shouter never realized how broad her influence was felt because her subjects were too busy or too involved to let her know. Many Pastors, Deacons, and fathers counted on her prayers and her gentle encouragement through the years as they raised their families and crops, and served the Lord. She was never in the forefront or desirous of attention, but her shouts of praise filled many eyes with tears and many hearts with a song. To those that knew her best, it seemed that her life was one drawn-out song of praise to her Savior. Simply put... she praised him for everything.

She leaves behind countless loved ones who looked to her, and whose example will continue to make a difference in the lives of several generations. Her presence will especially be missed in the local church body. She desired that others would follow her lead and give her God the glory that He is due. She was not ashamed to praise Him, or to testify, or to offer a shout when the Spirit moved on her. Her price was far above rubies, and her absence will leave a void in the local church body. She desired that her life and testimony would spread to those who loved her and that they would carry on her legacy of praising and worshipping the One who was worthy. In place of flowers, Sister Shouter has asked that you offer the “sacrifice of praise” because after all.... It was never about her; it was all about Him!

*Toby Crowder serves as Pastor of Mt. Carmel Baptist Church in Spruce Pine. He and his wife Leslie have been married for 28 years and have two daughters, Emilee, and Katy. He can be contacted via the church’s website [MCfamily-forChrist.org](http://MCfamily-forChrist.org) or [mtcarmelsprucepine@gmail.com](mailto:mtcarmelsprucepine@gmail.com)*





What We Believe

Here are some of the essential elements of our faith at the Blue Ridge Christian News:

**God**  
God is the Creator and Ruler of the universe. He has existed eternally in three persons and chooses to manifest Himself in these three ways: as God the Father, as God the Son, and as God the Holy Spirit. These three are co-equal and are one God.  
(Genesis 1:1, 26-27; 3:22; Psalm 90:2; Matthew 28:19; 1 Peter 1:2; and 2 Corinthians 13:14)

**Jesus**  
Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, who is fully God and fully human in His incarnation. He lived a sinless human life and offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all humanity by dying on a cross. He arose from the dead after three days to demonstrate His power over sin and death. He ascended to heaven and will return again to reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.  
(Matthew 1:22-23; Isaiah 9:6; John 1:1-5; 14:10-30; Hebrews 4:14-15; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Romans 1:3-4; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Timothy 6:14-15; Titus 2:13)

**The Holy Spirit**  
The Holy Spirit is the very Spirit of God, fully divine, manifested in the life of every believer from the moment of salvation. He is equal with the Father and the Son as God. He is present in the world to make men aware of their need for Jesus Christ. He provides the Christian with power for living, understanding of spiritual truth, and guidance in doing what is right. The Christian seeks to live under His daily control.  
(2 Corinthians 3:17; John 16:7-13; 14:16-17; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 2:12; 3:16; Ephesians 1:13; Galatians 5:25; Ephesians 5:18)

**The Bible**  
The Bible is the divinely inspired, authoritative, infallible, living and active Word of God to all men. It was written by human authors under the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is the ultimate source of truth for Christian beliefs and living. In it we find a guideline for right relationship with God and God's creation, and a blueprint for personal, emotional, and spiritual growth.  
(2 Timothy 1:13; 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:2-21; Psalm 119:105, 160; 12:6; Proverbs 30:5)

**Humanity**  
Humanity is designed and made by God in His image. We have been created as cognitive, moral, ethical, and physical beings and have been equipped by God for both relationship with Him and with one another. Both male and female are gifted by the Creator with characteristics which equip them for the purpose for which they have been created: relationship, dominion, and responsibility. Although God designed us to have fellowship with Him, we became alienated from God through disobedience. As a result, all human beings are born with a sinful nature and choose to sin against God. We are incapable of regaining a right relationship with God through our own efforts.  
(Genesis 1:26-28; Psalm 8:3-6; Isaiah 53:6; 59:1-2; Romans 3:23; 5:22; Colossians 1:21; 2 Corinthians 5:17)

**Eternity & Eternal Security**  
Our soul, the essence of our being, was created by God to exist forever. That forever is spent in one of two places: eternally present and in union with God because of His forgiveness and salvation or eternally separated from God because of sin and unbelief. At the moment that our physical body dies, those who are saved are immediately taken to heaven. Those who have rejected God's gift of salvation will spend eternity separated from God in hell. Because God gives man eternal life through Jesus Christ, the believer is secure in that salvation for eternity. Salvation is maintained by the grace and power of God, not by the self-effort of the Christian. It is the grace and eternal power of God that gives this security.  
(John 3:16; 5:11-13, 10:29; 1 John 2:25; Romans 6:23; Revelation 20:15; 2 Timothy 1:12; Hebrews 7:25; 10:10-14; 1 Peter 1:3-5)

**Salvation**  
Salvation is God's gift of redemption and reconciliation to Himself and is offered freely to all who accept, by faith alone, Jesus Christ as God's only son and receive Him as Lord and Savior. We can never make up for our sin with self-improvement or good works. It is only by trusting in Jesus Christ as God's offer of forgiveness that you can be saved from sin's penalty. Eternal life begins the moment you receive Jesus Christ into your life by faith.  
(Romans 5:1; 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9; John 1:12; 14:6; Titus 3:5; Galatians 3:26)

Life Lessons

By Doug Harrell  
Mitchell County



For me, August has always been a big month. I have a birthday in August, eighty this year. School usually starts in August and that was the time that we began to look at harvesting the farm crops. As I think back on all the years and the events and changes that have taken place, I realize that the years are a continuing journey, if we are fortunate enough at this age to still be around. Today I was looking at some pictures that a classmate had posted of the girl's basketball team for 1961 and I thought back on those times. At least they were all biological females and there was no question of that at all. I am not sure that transgender was even a word that would have been recognized.

I don't claim to be able to see the future and am not into end-of-times prophecy. That said, when I read what the Bible has to say it sure seems that we must be drawing close to that time frame. When we read 2 Timothy 3, it seems as if we are reading a description of today's world for sure. At my age, I am fairly well set in my ways and am glad I have my wild oats days behind me rather than in front of me. The scary parts to me now are the future of my grandchildren and great-grandchildren, how they will be able to navigate the stage they will be walking on and be able to have some semblance of faith and a stable relationship in their lives. I realize more and more how important it is for those that are up in age to still be teaching and setting an example for them to follow.

I know that we all face challenges and trials every day of our lives and our descendants will be having the same valleys and mountains in their lives as well. May we strive to prepare them for the potholes in the road that they will be facing? I wrote a devotion about learning to look up in times of trouble. We need to be impressing that thought in the minds of our loved ones wherever they are and whenever we can. I am going to include that devotion in this month's Life Lessons.

What challenges are you facing today? I bet if you asked that question to a hundred people at least ninety of them would answer you. Some would be major situations, and others may be minor to some but huge to the one describing the challenge.

Life is always a series of ups and downs, valleys so deep and rivers so wide, mountains so high. The challenge is to face each step with an attitude of gratitude! Being able to stand up to the stress of life comes when you are looking up into the face of Jesus, not looking down at the ground with fear and anxiety! The story of Stephen really gives an example of that! While being stoned to death, Stephen was looking up.

*"But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, and cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."* Acts 7:55-59 KJV

As you think on these things today think about the words in the hymn "It Is Well With My Soul":  
When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,  
It is well, it is well with my soul.  
Refrain:  
It is well with my soul,  
It is well, it is well with my soul.  
As long as we keep our eyes focused on Jesus, it will be well with our souls. Keep looking up and giving thanks each day.  
As the children are headed back to the school rooms, really work on instilling in their hearts and minds the words of Jesus. Do everything in your power to make sure that they are grounded in the Christian Faith and that they have the words of Jesus planted firmly.

*"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: and thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: 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. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates."* Deuteronomy 6:4 -9 KJV

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



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

Isaiah 52:7 KJV



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## Church Directory



### Grassy Creek Baptist Church

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

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

### Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church

2187 Jamestown Road  
Morganton, NC  
828-584-8212

**Pastor Steve Bietz**

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

### Altapass Baptist Church

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

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

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

### Plumtree 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  
Healing Services 2nd Sunday of each month, 6:30 pm

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

### Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

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

www.pleasanthillbc.church

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

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

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

### Newland Christian Church

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

**Pastor - Phillip Greene**

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

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

### Burkemont Baptist Church

4668 Burkemont Rd.  
Morganton, NC 28655  
828-437-2357  
www.burkemontbaptist.org

**Sr. Pastor - Dr. Luke Lane**

Sunday Services  
8:30a - Early Worship  
9:45a - Sunday School  
11:00a - Worship  
Wednesday Services  
6:30p - Adult Choir & Orches-  
tra, Adult Bible Study, Youth  
Discipleship, Preschool &  
Children's TeamKid

### Mount Carmel Baptist Church

195 Gouges Creek Rd.  
Spruce Pine NC 28777

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loved!  
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www.mcfamilyforchrist.org

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

*"A Family Focused On Christ"*

### First Baptist Church of Spruce Pine

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

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

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

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

### Pine Branch Baptist Church

48 Church Road  
Spruce Pine, NC 28777  
Phone: (828) 765-9101  
www.pinebranchbaptist.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 Thomas Thorne  
McDowell County

In last month's article, we examined Exodus 34:5-7, where the LORD shows His glory and proclaims His name, "the LORD/YHWH." We read several descriptions of the name, reputation, and character of the LORD; including mercy, compassion, grace, patience, love, forgiveness, faithfulness, and truthfulness. We also saw in verse seven that the LORD will "by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children to the third and fourth generation."

At this point, we asked the question, "Does this sound cruel and is this verse (along with Exodus 20:5) in contradiction with 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?'" This question will be the subject of today's article.

From a superficial glance, this visitation of suffering upon children and children's children may seem to be in opposition to the mercy of God, although we find on further reflection that it is a great warning against human selfishness. This is actually a profound proclamation of wisdom and mercy God is sharing with us. I don't believe that God is telling us that He is going to punish our descendants down to the fourth generation for sins that we as great-grandparents have committed. However, we are being warned that problems can follow family lines for generations.

For instance, if a father is a habitual liar, his son or daughter may become one too, and then his grandson or granddaughter. It has been said many times that if a person is a child abuser, the chances are that one of his or her parents were as well. Sometimes it seems that the problem gets worse with the passing of generations. Alcoholism is another prime example.

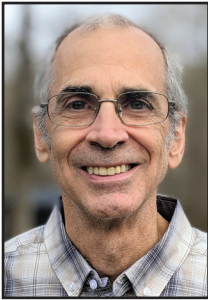
God is strongly admonishing the person who, knowing that his sin will involve his/her posterity in suffering, yet goes on with the sin! In reality, this is a great blessing God is giving us. He is warning us before we make a bad decision. Telling us, "Don't do it! Your kids will suffer too because after seeing the example of you, their parents, doing whatever it is, there is a good chance they will participate in this habit also, good or bad, and reap or suffer the results." Before we indulge in sinful acts, we need to look at the consequences and realize that these effects will very possibly not only involve ourselves, but our descendants as well. What we may think is an immediate thrill or excitement, our children and even our grandchildren may reap in pain. Our denial of the truth and disregard for God's wisdom might have been the root cause of generations of suffering!

After carefully considering these three verses, as we have, one of the questions that then arises is this, "Does God want to forgive more than he wants to punish?" Yes, He does! God certainly wants to forgive far more than He wants to punish or especially to condemn. The apostle Peter told us that "The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9 ESV).

The highest form of walking in the LORD's instructions is love. Love toward God and love toward fellow man is what Jesus called the great commandments (Matt. 22:36-40). Jesus told us in John 15:13 that the highest form of love is demonstrated by serving and being willing to lay down our life for a friend. This is what Jesus did. He came to earth to serve and to lay down His life for mankind. Some of the people He died for we certainly would not have called friends, but Jesus' love is on a much higher plain than ours. When He came the first time, He demonstrated the consummate example of love for all people. He laid down His life for us and wants everyone to repent so He can forgive them.

Baruch Ha Shem is a Hebrew expression that is literally translated as "Praise the Name." We can also say "Praise the Name, Reputation, and Authority [of the LORD]."

Tom Thorne and his wife Amy are fellowship coordinators for Avdai El Elyon/ Servants of the Most High God ministries. Tom can be reached at [servantsothmh@gmail.com](mailto:servantsothmh@gmail.com)



Back To School  
By Steve Bietz  
Burke County

For students, teachers, parents, and guardians across the nation, the arrival of August signals the end of summer vacation and the arrival of the back-to-school season. For many the month is filled with school supply shopping, schedule planning, and otherwise preparing for the academic year to come, so it's no surprise that August is also known as National Back to School Month.

We are told that 30 million households in America will spend money on school supplies this year totaling some 28 million dollars. That's a lot of paper and #2 pencils. In our age of such technological advancements, are #2 pencils still the preferred choice? And all those erasers that I was always pounding away on after school, usually for some acting-up activity I had been caught undertaking. All those erasers and chalk have gone out of style and have been replaced by smart boards. What do kids get to spend time after school for disciplinary reasons doing today without those erasers?

Parents are also shopping with their children for new school clothes. The four-week period includes the last two weeks of July and the first two weeks of August, which is the second biggest shopping season in America, after December.

Yes, Back-to-School is really a major operation for parents and their children as well as schools and faculty. I am so glad that we put extreme importance on trying to get our children educated. And I hope that if you have children under your care, finding a school is also a very important choice that you must make. Now don't get me wrong, I support our Constitution and the Separation of Church and State. But I also strongly feel that children should be taught the love of God. I also want children to have the opportunity, if the parents desire, to have their children taught about our Creator in the classroom. So I hope and pray that those who follow the wonderful information that the Blue Ridge Christian News publishes each month can also find a school to teach their children the love of our Creator.

I'm so blessed and honored to be the Pastor of the Morganton Seventh Day Adventist Church which owns and operates Silver Creek Adventist School. This is a school that teaches not only the important knowledge of science, math, history, music, etc but Silver Creek students from Kindergarten - 8th Grade are also taught that they have a God that loves them so dearly.

Yes, we must spend large sums of money on school supplies and clothes for our children so that they are ready for school. But the disciple Peter also wrote that we should grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 3:18)

I hope you have found a school for your children that follows Peter's advice. If you live in or not too far from Morganton NC, you can call the Principal of Silver Creek Adventist School at 828-391-0415 or go to the webpage at [silvercreekschool.net](http://silvercreekschool.net) and receive information about a Christian education where God is found in every classroom.

Steve Bietz, Pastor, Morganton Seventh day Adventist Church.



*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it. 1 Corinthians 10:13*



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## Something to Think About

### The Sting of a Yellow Jacket

By Dennis Love  
McDowell County



Summer is great except for the heat, humidity, chiggers, ants, and bees. I can handle the heat and the humidity because I can get out of it and run inside the house where it is cool. However, some of the pests of summer are inevitable. During the period of two short afternoons, I received six chigger bites, two black ant bites, and a sting from a yellow jacket. I have concluded that all three are of the devil. Chigger bites will drive you up the wall. You break out and they itch like crazy for days. Ant bites hurt like crazy too. If you have been attacked by the devil and bitten by a black ant, you know what I mean. They feel like a bee sting, but the bite of an ant will actually linger longer than a bee sting. And the sting of a yellow jacket is enough to make you cry.

I'm thankful that I'm not allergic to bee stings. We have a lot of summer left, and I have already been stung twice. If you escape the summer from a bee sting, you must be living very close to Jesus, or you just don't venture much outside. Recently I conducted the funeral of a man who was allergic to bee stings. He stepped out on his back deck and was stung twice. Once on the top of his head and the other on his stomach. He was stung by two small black wasps. I looked them up and they abound throughout North America. Within two minutes he was unable to speak and died several days later. He was 89 years old, and two stings from two small black wasps took his life. Two days after his funeral, I was stung by a yellow jacket. It hurt, but it didn't take my life. However, his death and my sting reminded me of the following verses of Scripture found in 1 Corinthians 15:55-58.

*"O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."*

Maybe one of the reasons we have bees, and we get stung from time to time, is to remind us that the sting of a bee can really hurt us, but the sting of death for a believer is not even felt. The sting of death is only felt by those who have never been born-again. On the cross, Jesus took the sting of death for each of us. He tells us in verse 55 that the sting of death is sin. In other words, the sting will only be felt by those who have never experienced freedom from the forgiveness of sin in Christ. Then he tells us in verse 56 that not even the Law has the power to (sting) or condemn someone who has been ushered into the presence of God.

The 89-year-old man who died from those two bee stings certainly felt the stings of those two bees, but he didn't feel the sting of death. I certainly felt the sting of that yellow jacket, and it hurt. But God reminded me that I will never experience the most powerful sting there is and that my friend is the sting of death for those who do not know Jesus as Lord and Savior. That's why we are instructed in verse 58 to be steadfast, unmovable, and always doing something for our Lord, for we know that what we do is not in vain.

*Dr. Dennis Love is the Associational Missions Strategist for the Blue Ridge Baptist Association in McDowell County. Dr. Love has been in full-time ministry work for 31 years. He and his wife Vicki have been married for almost 42 years, and they have lived in Marion for almost 8 years. They have two sons, four grandchildren and two step-grandchildren. He can be reached via email at: dlovebrba@yahoo.com*

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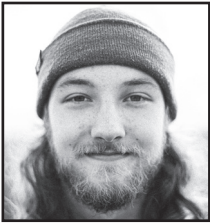
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# We Need a New Nameins

By Andrew Goins  
Watauga County



There are a plethora of names for someone who leads music at a church; worship leader, music minister, choirmaster, or director of music. I have never liked these titles. Each of these titles grate's against me. Worship leader is imprecise and theologically faulty. Music minister is too small of a title because I am not JUST ministering to people with music; I am leading a congregation in singing the "new song" of the future New Creation that seeps into this present moment as we harken and herald heaven in the ebb and flow of melody, in the thick and thinness of tone textured with words, murmurs, and mumblings that spring out of the contracting lungs and praising tongues of old men who rehearse the "better days" to feel relevant, and young men bumbling and fumbling in work trying to justify their existence and prove that they matter by "making a name for themselves." All of this worked out in the context of a congregation. To lead music at a church is a vocation that contains many nuances, and thus requires a nuanced and precise title.

The titles that I mentioned above are not only imprecise and too small, but they are not found anywhere in the Bible, except for Choirmaster. I contend that these titles are simply insufficient. I used to participate in a homeless ministry where I would walk around and talk to folks, listening to their stories, confessions, and professions. Many of these folks were Christians and memorized a conglomeration of bible verses, but there was one verse that I heard repeated the most, "*You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me.*" It was spouted off within the community as a felt fact. It was woven into a conversation without either conversationalist being able to quite articulate how it related to the previous sentence, but both conversationalists would moan and groan in agreement. I might ask "How long have you been in Asheville" and George might respond "I've been here long before you were born son, just like Jesus says '*You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me,*'" and a chorus of amens and hallelujah's, would rise up and ring out in congruence with the conversationalist. At first, I might stand there puzzled wondering what he meant and why it received a chorus of yes sirs and amens. Over time I learned this verse was completely in context and quoted quite properly anytime it was quoted. It was the context of the text of their lives. They found themselves in the story of the bible! "*The poor, that is us!*" they said. They felt it deeply and "*treasured these things and pondered them*" in their hearts. They identified themselves in history, and His-story which encapsulates their idiosyncratic stories at the individual and interior intersection of hurts and hopes, loves gone and loves forgone, begging and belonging, abandonment and absences, cultural judgment and disgust all wrapped up in the word "*poor*" where all of these competing experiences that shape who they are become exposed before a God who loves them and cares for them in their poorness.

Where are the worship leaders and music ministers in the story of the bible? I want us to read and say "The leaders of worship! Look! That is us!" If we are not in His-story, we are mere abstractions lacking rootedness and floating in airy aloofness that is a nice flourish for the twenty-first-century church, but nothing more than a supplementary, extraneous participant in the consumerist culture that craves noise and despises silence.

So where are we in His-story? Well, I am glad you asked. Resurrection and New Creation are intimately wed together in Exodus 14 and 15 as God rescues and Miriam dances and dally before God singing the "New Song" that flows out of God's action just as water flows downward; it is the nature of things. God commands the sons of Aaron, "*When you go into battle...a blast on the trumpets. Then you will be remembered by the Lord your God and rescued from your enemies,*" or "David would take up his lyre and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him." We are the Miriams, sons of Aaron, and David who harken and herald heaven and even become heaven's haven. A sacred space, a holy place where God dwells with His people.

Music plays a role in this. The music leader plays a role in this. We are in many places in the Bible, but the one I contend to be most obvious is in the life of a particular man. His name is Asaph. What are we leaders of music called? Children of Asaph.

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



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# Walnut Grove Church

## Empty Vessels

By Kurt Bomar  
Avery County

2 Kings 4:6 “When all the jars were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another one.” But he replied, “There is not a jar left.” Then the oil stopped flowing.”

To save a widow from bankruptcy, Elisha told her to gather empty vessels and that she would have an unending supply of oil to fill them. This touching story has a lesson that applies to us today.

There are three main characters: a destitute widow, a little oil, and some empty vessels. All three mean something.

The widow represents us. Even if you are not facing tough times today, I assure you, you will sometime in the future. That’s just the way life works. Bankruptcy in her day would allow for her two young sons to be sold into slavery. That means that the very fate of her family depended on her—and she had no answers. So, she wisely went to the man of God, Elisha for help. The man of God we go to today is Jesus. Even when we don’t see a solution, He has one for us.

The oil represents the Holy Spirit (this is seen all through the Bible). And the empty vessels represent those around us who are also in need of refreshment by the Holy Spirit.

So what happens? As long as she keeps using the oil to fill the empty vessels, it keeps flowing. I suggest to you that as long as we are using our unlimited “filling” of the Holy Spirit to refresh others, the oil will keep flowing.

So what do we need to do? We need to gather as many empty vessels around us as possible. If you feel dry today, could it be because you are focusing on yourself and your own problems and ignoring the empty vessels that are all around you?

When you become burdened for the lost souls of family members, friends, and those you otherwise come in contact with, I believe you will feel the “glug glug glug” of the Holy Spirit filling you. When you look to help those who are less fortunate than you by giving financially, don’t be surprised

to hear the “ka-ching” of financial blessings. When you turn off the TV and use that time to minister to those that are hurting (unwed mothers, those in prison, those who are disabled or aged, those struggling with drug addiction, and at-risk children) expect a new level of energy that replaces your current exhaustion of the day.

I believe that was the feeling Jesus felt after he ministered to the woman at the well when he told his disciples (who had just returned with a take-out meal) “I have food that you don’t know about.” He had been refreshed and filled with the Holy Spirit.

Use the pattern set forth by Jesus and this poor widow and the Holy Spirit will fill you and flow from you perpetually!

Selah (think about it)

Kurt Bomar is pastor of Walnut Grove Church.



# Obedient Heart Fellowship

## Roman Road?

By Jim Huskins  
McDowell County

The parallels between modern America and ancient Rome are striking. Both empires enjoyed military and cultural dominance—for a while. Both advanced engineering and infrastructure development to levels previously unknown. Both cultures eventually descended into moral chaos. Rome’s moral cataclysm led to its destruction.

One of Rome’s accomplishments was a marvelous network of roadways. At the peak of their power, Rome’s vast empire was served by more than fifty thousand miles of roads. That massive public works project is worthy of study. Sound engineering principles meant that all of Rome’s roads shared certain characteristics, but the topography of the Empire meant that construction details varied to suit conditions. Fourteen-foot, stone-paved roads traversed the valleys and rolling landscapes of Italy. Many miles of Alpine road were cut through bedrock. The vast marshes of France and Spain and England required countless piers and pylons. Barriers to deter drifting sand were erected along the periphery of the Sahara. Rome built thousands of bridges to cross everything from spring freshets to the mighty Danube. In every terrain, Roman engineers made appropriate adaptation.

One testament to their skill is the fact that an astounding percentage of Roman roads and bridges still exists. Some segments of the Via Romana have been in continuous use for two millennia. By comparison, most of the American Interstate System is less than sixty years old. These modern highways require constant maintenance and reconstruction. To be fair, our interstates might stand the test of time if their use was restricted to people walking, riding horses, and driving wagons.

Rome’s roadways played a crucial role in the spread of the Gospel. That advanced transportation system was both the result and the facilitator of a two-hundred-year period of relative world peace. The Pax Romana enabled people from County Cork to Cairo to Constantinople to feel safe enough to be able to consider startling new ideas. Is it possible that Almighty God loves us so much that he would sacrifice his Holy Son on our behalf? Would He adopt the people of the nations into His set apart family? Early followers of The Way fled persecution in Judea. They eventually carried such preposterous notions across the Empire.

One of those early believers came to faith through a miraculous encounter on a Roman road connecting Jerusalem and Damascus. From about A.D. 30 to A.D. 60, Saul of Tarsus traveled countless miles of Roman road as he passionately pursued his missionary work. He spent the last few years of his life as a prisoner in the great Mother City of the Empire. During that time he composed a number of brilliant, theological letters which educated and encouraged communities of believers. Those letters, and the many copies of them made and disseminated by their recipients, reached their destinations over Roman roads in the hands of the Roman postal service.

One of the letters Paul wrote before his imprisonment was addressed to a faith community located in the Roman capitol city. During modern times, some followers of Jesus have drawn from the Book of Romans an evangelism device which they call the “Romans Road.” Through focus on certain verses within the Book of Romans, the Romans Road is intended to clarify the issues of who needs salvation, why salvation is necessary, how God provides salvation, how one receives salvation, and the results of salvation.

The passages cited in Romans effectively communicate the following: Everyone needs salvation since all are sinners. The alternative to salvation is physical and spiritual death. Salvation is made possible through the sacrificial death of God’s Son. We may receive salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. The result of salvation is eternal peace with God. The problem with the so-called “Romans Road” is that it stops short of its destination.

Proponents of this evangelism technique never mention the purpose of salvation. Modern believers tend to think that salvation is all about us. We are saved so that we do not have to face the consequences of our sin. The Bible makes it clear that our salvation is to make us fit for service to God. “Serving” is an action verb. God expects us to “do stuff.” That “stuff” includes living in “righteousness.” Righteousness is obedience to God’s instructions for living. In John 14:15, Jesus says, “If you love me, keep My commandments.” Ephesians 2:10 says, “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works....” 1 John 2:6 says, “Whoever says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked.”

Because you and I were raised in a culture steeped in Greek thought, we believe that “faith” is a mere head game—a mental exercise that requires no action. Biblical faith is belief which leads to obedience. Crafters of the “Romans Road to Salvation” could easily have included obedience in their presentation. Romans 2:6-8 is one of many passages which make clear that everyone will be judged according to what we do in this life, not on what we claim to believe. Paul then nails his thesis in verse 13, “It is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.”

No one in history has been more misunderstood than Paul. Most believers claim that he nullified the law. God told Moses that His law is for all generations. We are taught that Paul believed the law was temporary. This would make God a liar, and it would be a direct contradiction of Jesus’ assertion that the Law and the Prophets will be in full effect for as long as heaven and earth remain.

Paul encountered Jesus while traveling the most modern of roadways. He could not have become the great Apostle to the Nations, however, had he not spent his entire life traveling what Jeremiah 6:16 calls “the ancient paths where the good way is.” That road is the way of faithful obedience.

Jim Huskins is pastor of Obedient Heart Fellowship.



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## Avery County

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## Burke County

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Mountain View Recreation Center

- Archery Class will be held August 8 – September 17 on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4-5 pm. The age range is 8 -12 years old. The cost is \$30 for city residents or \$40 for non-city residents.

Collett Street Recreation Center

- Tennis lessons will be held June 12 – June 23, June 26 – July 7, July 10 – July 21, July 24 – August 4, and August 7-18. The age range is 4 – 17 years old. The cost is \$30 for city residents and \$40 for non-city residents per two-week session. Lessons will be held Monday – Friday of the above weeks.

Morganton to Join International Music on the Porch Day

- Play Music on the Porch Day is a worldwide event based on a simple idea: What if for one day everything stopped... and we all just listened to the music? The event is set for Saturday, August 26th at various locations and times in Morganton.

- What began in 2014 as one man’s idea that music could help to bring people around the world together has spread to over 70 countries with over 1,100 porches and other locations participating. Morganton joined in on the fun in 2022 with seven porches. This year there are 18 porches on the schedule. We encourage people to pack a chair/blanket and refreshments and make a plan from the schedule. It will truly be a day of the Mo-town spirit of live music! Play Music on the Porch Day in Morganton is supported and promoted by the Morganton Cultural Arts Commission.

- In Morganton, we have 18 porches (up from 7 locations last year) and over 50 musicians participating in Play Music on the Porch Day; beginning at 8 am at the Morganton Farmers Market and ending with a concert on the Historic Burke County Courthouse Square amphitheater. Throughout the day there will be live music on porches all around Morganton and everyone is encouraged to walk around town and enjoy a day of music, friends, and community.

- Anyone can join in, to participate just go outside and play some music on the porch. Participants are encouraged to upload a video and add #playmusicontheporchday to the post on social media.

- To find more information on Morganton’s Play Music on the Porch Day visit the FB page: <https://fb.me/e/1h1CsHApF> or visit [www.playmusicontheporchday.com](http://www.playmusicontheporchday.com) and see the interactive map.

- From the Music on the Porch webpage:

- "Musicians from across the globe, regardless of their differences, are finding common ground through music. Play Music on the Porch Day knows that music is powerful and universal. It does not matter if you play an oud, a guitarrón, a nyckelharpa, or a guitar. When you pick up your instrument and start to play the world disappears and you get lost in the sounds. Music goes beyond words. It can transcend the most difficult barriers. It ties us together like a thread through our hearts."

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48th Annual Waldensian Festival: Festival Saturday, August 12, 9:00 am

Festival Saturday includes a lineup of day-long entertainment at Main Stage, from theatrical performances to gravity-defying juggling acts. Over 140 specialty vendors will line Main Street- selling one of kind goods and all your favorite street foods: funnel cakes, gyros, chicken on a stick, snow cones, turkey legs, and more! Saturday’s festivities will also feature a bocce tournament, the Waldensian Footrace, attraction tours, worship service, open art competition, free kids zone, and a special performance of the outdoor drama “From This Day Forward”. The Festival Finale will begin at 7:00 P.M. as country sensation, Ryan Perry takes the stage for the final performance of the weekend.

## McDowell County

North Carolina State Bluegrass Festival August 18  
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Evans Media presents the North Carolina State Bluegrass Festival taking place at Marion's Camping World, the former Tom Johnson's Camping facility. Bring your own chairs, tickets may be purchased in advance until July 17th. Returning are some of your favorite bluegrass performers including Rhonda Vincent, The Malpass Brothers, and more. For more information about performers, schedule or to purchase tickets, please visit <https://evansmediasource.com/events/north-carolina-state-bluegrass-festival/>

## Mitchell County

Spruce Pine Events:

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# Roan Mountain Baptist Church

## Why A Lion Tamer Uses a Chair

By Russell McKinney  
Mitchell County

*"O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles. Then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy: yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God, my God."* (Psalm 43:3-4, K.J.V.)

Most of us have watched the scene of a lion tamer using a chair and a whip to help keep a lion at bay. But have you ever wondered why a chair is used? It's because a chair has four legs, and that confuses the lion enough to keep it from attacking in earnest. The lion will jab at one leg of the chair and paw at another one, but he won't lunge forward in full attack because he's unsure of his target. If lion tamers used brooms or mops, we'd hear more stories about mauled lion tamers.

This tidbit from the field of lion taming illustrates a profound lesson from life: It's hard to do your best when your focus is all over the road. While diversity can be a wonderful thing in its proper place, it can actually become a hindrance that can cost you "your best" in a singular field as you settle for "pretty good" in a variety of fields. The truth is, you minimize your effectiveness when you spread your talents, abilities, and gifts too thin.

I've always loved our text passage because in it the unnamed Psalmist, most likely David, says, *"Upon the harp will I praise thee, O God, my God."* That thought begs the question to each of us, "What's your harp?" In other words, what is that one thing that you can do to the glory of God? What is your talent? What is your skill? What are you really good at? That is where your focus needs to be.

Of course, I realize that life forces us to play many roles. For example, if it was David who wrote Psalm 43, he certainly played more roles than just harp player. He was also a husband, a father, a son, a brother, a king, a soldier, a builder, a musician, and a writer of Psalms. Likewise, I myself play the role of husband, father, son, brother, pastor, radio preacher, and blogger. Still, I know deep down that if I poured 100% of myself into any one of these roles, I'd do a better job with it.

So, my purpose with this article is to get you, the reader, to examine your life and see if you've got too much going on these days. Ask yourself, "Do I need to simplify my life by eliminating some of the things I'm doing?" You see, doing more isn't necessarily better, especially if you are doing it in a half-baked way. That old saying, "Less is more" rings true if you do a better job with the "less." Unfortunately, we've got too many confused lions running around out there, people who can't strike an ideal lick because they can't narrow their focus enough to do it. But that doesn't have to be you, and it won't be if you will figure out what your best "harp" is and play it to the full extent of your ability.

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



# Marlene's Meditations

## Ordinary or Extraordinary?

By Marlene Houk  
Burke County

2 Corinthians 9:10: *"Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food. And multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness."*

During my childhood, shadows fascinated my imagination. I would try to step on them, form animals with the shadow of my fingers, and laugh at how tall my figure looked on the grass in the late afternoon sun.

When my daughter and I visited the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry, we discovered a delightful new take on ordinary shadows. Our experience created a long-held memory and cast a profound spiritual truth into our hearts.

In a drab, unattended corner of the vast museum, we reveled in this new game. In this section, no bells clanged. No uniformed attendants, awe-inspiring submarines, warplanes, or volcanoes interrupted us. We lingered in the quiet corner, mesmerized by technology that made ordinary balls and simple shadows take on a new dimension as they collaborated to entertain us.

We stepped in front of a common everyday screen, not expecting much. But as we watched, something extraordinary popped up on the white expanse. The light shining on the screen caused our shadows to appear, and the technology allowed the shadows of a thousand balls to tumble around the shapes we formed. The unusual interaction between the balls' shadows and our shadows caused the spheres to plop, cascade, and bounce. Mesmerized, we immersed ourselves in this new twist on the age-old game of shadows.

Hold your arms up in a wide triangle: see how many you catch! Laughing in surprise, we watched the dancing spheres fill the container made by our outstretched arms. The ping-pong-sized circles also plopped on our heads and toppled around our bodies, and we chuckled with delight at the extraordinary 21st-century version of an ordinary, timeless amusement.

Our captivating experience reminded me of how God led the Israelites—through Moses—from Egyptian bondage to the promised land of Canaan as recorded in Exodus. He imbued an ordinary cloud and common fire with extraordinary glory so that approximately 2.4 million Israelites could follow Him to their legacy.

How big and unusual would a cloud need to be to clearly show the way to their inheritance? How fierce and towering would a fire need to be to illuminate their path at night? One can only imagine the "technology" and "science" that God used to cause these two mundane facets of life—a cloud and a fire—to dominate the sky and miraculously guide God's people to the promised land.

As Christians, do we realize (like the cloud and fire), God instills our routine duties with the magnificence of His glory? As the new mother and father tenderly snuggle their tiny infant, they determine to raise him for the Lord. Through years of mundane tasks, he is trained *"in the nurture and admonition of the Lord"* (Ephesians 6:4). And God transforms those menial responsibilities into pillars of grace and godliness that burn brightly beyond mere mortality.

As a teacher mirrors Christ's love and patience with her students, Jesus gently reminds them for years to come of her godly nature. When blessings appear throughout her former students' lives, the cloud of their teacher's influence beckons them to God.

Because we surrender our wills to God, He fills our ordinary lives with the radiance of His glory which draws people to Him in extraordinary ways. Like the ubiquitous cloud and universal fire, Christ forms our simple smile of love into a huge cloud that gently enfolds the needy and comforts them with His love. Or, perhaps He takes our passion to serve Him and sparks a fiery intense pillar of fire to light the way for others to follow.

God transforms the ordinary in our lives into the extraordinary for His glory!

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



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# Farm Bureau Women's Committee "Rings In" the Cows for Scholarship Dollars

## Mitchell County

The Mitchell County Farm Bureau Women's Committee recently held its annual fundraiser during the North Carolina Rhododendron Crafts Fair on the Creek Walk. The purpose of the fundraiser is to combine fun with fundraising to provide a college scholarship to a Mitchell County student who plans to major in an agricultural-related field.

The Cow Patty Bingo Booth was unlike any other at the event and citizens won the "pooping contest." Fifty individuals bought tickets each day for a chance to win \$500 on the condition that the cow would choose his/her square on which to leave a cow patty. Bingo was then called and the winning square in the ring netted cash for the lucky winner.

Cow Patty Bingo was played on both Friday and Saturday of the festival and tickets were sold by members of the Women's Committee to people throughout the county before the event. A few tickets were sold at the booth. The winner of

Friday's Bingo was Amy Thomas, a teacher who participated in the Ag in the Classroom Workshop with fellow teachers. The cow knew what to do on Saturday to stay out of trouble and planted the cow patty in the middle of Sheriff Donald Street's square. Both Thomas and Street were caught on camera with their checks. Two farm-related baskets were created by the Women's Committee and raffled off. Winning the Friday Chicken-Themed Basket was Serena Rowe while Chuck Shelton picked up the Themed Donkey Basket on Saturday.

One of the most significant parts of the fundraiser was the invitation by businesses and individuals to contribute at different gift levels. Please note all the contributors on the banner who helped fund the scholarship and other events.

The Farm Bureau Women's Committee is a part of the North Carolina Farm Bureau. Its primary mission is to advocate for farmers and help provide agricultural education for adults and youth. The Mitchell County Women's Committee is one of the strongest in the district, according to Luke Beam, NC Farm Bureau Field Representative. Among its activities are reading agricultural-related books in Spruce Pine and Bakersville school classrooms each month, reading during story-times in the public libraries, and coordinating an agricultural workshop for teachers that includes tours and training. The committee also interviews and selects a graduating senior to receive the Farm Bureau Women's Committee Agricultural Scholarship valued at 2000.00 each year. Perhaps the most impactful events are the Agricultural Science Days held for elementary students. Over 200 children stayed after school at Deyton Elementary for the science fair. In the first year, more than 100 Gouge students participated. Principal Colby Calhoun has requested that the next Gouge Elementary day be conducted during school hours so that every student can participate. Chairing the Mitchell County Farm Bureau Women's Committee is Mrs. Barbara Harrell, and the staff representative is Ms. Gloria Huskins. They are backed by about 10 women who serve. If you'd like to join the committee, please contact Ms. Huskins at the Bakersville Farm Bureau Office.



## Evergreen Church

### Jesus the Only Way

By John McCoury  
Roan Mountain, Tenn.



Jesus answered "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:6 Jesus made this statement to the disciples to bring to their attention something that they knew but hadn't realized they knew. He said to them, "You know the place where I am going." And Thomas said to Him, Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way? Jesus said that they did know. But they didn't know that they knew. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life." That's what I meant, Thomas. You know me; therefore, you know the way. For I am the way. This unique claim of Jesus reveals the grandeur of His character and being! There is the inclusiveness of this statement--it all relates to the Father. I am the way to the Father, He says. If you come to know Jesus, He will bring you to God. I loved the hymns about the cross and the work of Christ, and I loved to think about Him as the Savior. But gradually the Father has come into focus. More frequently my thoughts are drawn to the fatherhood of God, and I revel in the glory of that relationship. Jesus says that He is the way to the Father. All the knowledge of God that we humans hunger for is revealed in the words of Jesus about the Father. He unveils the Father's heart--His power, His wisdom, and His love. This fully meets human needs. He is the way so that the human will choose it; He is the truth, so that the mind may comprehend it; He is the life so that the human heart can experience it. Thus, to know Christ involves the whole person and leads to the full experience of the fullness of God. But note also the exclusiveness of His claim: No one comes to the Father except through me. Occasionally someone will say, You Christians are so narrow. Why do you insist that Jesus is the only way you can come to God? Other religions are striving to know the same God and other religions are more tolerant. That is true; we are narrow. On that point Jesus Himself was narrow, and we dare not go beyond what He said, because truth itself is narrow. The telephone company is narrow. If you want to call someone, the phone company insists that you use a certain series of numbers in exactly the proper sequence, and it leaves absolutely no room for you to play around. It is utterly narrow-minded on that point! Truth is that way. Jesus is the fulfillment of His own word: "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it" (Matthew 7:13-14). Others may teach about God. They may say that they teach the truth and seek life. But only Jesus says "I am the way. I am the truth. I am the life." Lord Jesus, You are the way to the Father. Thank You for showing me that, and thank You for inviting me to share in the fullness of His truth and life. Is there more than one way to come to God? What do you think we must do to find God?

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

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Repentance

By Ryan Bridgeo  
Avery County



Mark 1:14-15, “Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, 15 and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.’” Jesus is saying here that the time is fulfilled; the time is now; the Kingdom of God is at hand. But, for us to walk in the Kingdom, we must repent and believe the gospel. And for us to truly believe the gospel we must truly repent. This is the process of faith.

When I was growing up, I often heard sermons that proclaimed that we needed to “Repent, Repent, Repent.” At the time I didn’t understand what the word meant. I tried to figure it out by watching those around me. Repentance was modeled for me in a few different ways. One way is when people would go to the altar and cry. They would hear a message that moved them or made them feel guilty and they would respond by going to the altar. They would cry and cry, sometimes making quite a scene, but there wasn’t always a real change that followed. Those same people would often be back the next week. Another way I saw repentance modeled was by confession of sins. People would search their hearts and confess everything they had ever done. It was like their faith was in their ability to confess. I am not sure what they believed would happen if they forgot something. Maybe, they believed they would go to Hell. I don’t know. I am not saying that there is anything wrong with going to the altar or confessing our sins. I have had encounters with God doing both, but our faith cannot rest on these things. Our faith needs to rest on Him.

Many of us have heard definitions of repentance over the years. For example, a turning away, going from one direction to another, a turning from sin to righteous behavior. Turning away from sin to a righteous lifestyle is wisdom. We should make every effort to move away from sin, but this is not the true definition of “repent” or what Jesus had in mind in our opening scripture verse. The word “repent” is the Greek word metanoia. Meta means to change and noia means your mind. Jesus was saying, “change how you think, and believe the gospel” and “change how you think for the Kingdom of God is at hand”. This isn’t just about thinking different thoughts but an entirely new way of thinking. True transformation is going to come by renewing or changing how we think.

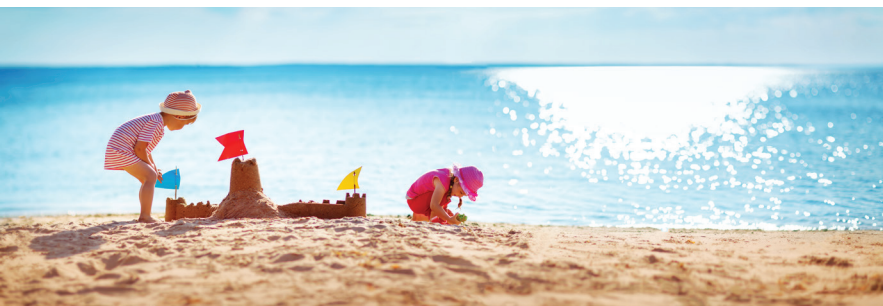
Romans 12:2 says, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” The word “transformed” here is the Greek word “metamorphoo” which is where we get our English word metamorphous. Metamorphous is the process the caterpillar goes through to become a butterfly. In the same way, a caterpillar is transformed into a beautiful butterfly by this process, we are transformed by the process of renewing our minds or changing how we think. Until we think like God, until we agree with what He says, there will not be true transformation. There will also not be true repentance or true Bible-believing faith.

Let me give you a few examples. Firstly, let’s say that you struggle with believing that your sins are forgiven. You know what the Bible says, and you mentally agree that it must be true. But for whatever reason, you sometimes struggle with believing this in your heart. If that is the case, then you need to repent (change how you think and agree with God) and then you can truly believe in your heart. You need to find the verses in the Bible that talk about forgiveness, meditate on them, and confess them out loud. Verses like Psalm 103:12, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.” Or Hebrews 8:12 which says, “For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.” As you meditate on these verses and others like them, confess them over your life and you will start to believe them. This process will take time, but after you believe them, you will experience true repentance (metanoia) and transformation.

Secondly, let's say you struggle with the thought that He dances over you with singing (Zephaniah 3:17).

Again, you might agree with this intellectually, but you don’t truly believe it in your heart. This is not faith, as real faith is from the heart, not the head. With the heart, man believes unto righteousness (Romans 10:10). You need to repent (change how you think and agree with God) and then you can believe this in your heart. Jesus said in John 8:32, “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” It is God’s truth, God’s reality, that will set you free. As you meditate on His truth, despite how you feel, it will bring true transformation, true repentance, and true faith in His Word. So let us truly repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand.

Ryan Bridgeo can be reached at 828-765-6919. For more information you can visit the church website at [www.plumtreechurch.com](http://www.plumtreechurch.com) or email [pastor@plumtreechurch.com](mailto:pastor@plumtreechurch.com)



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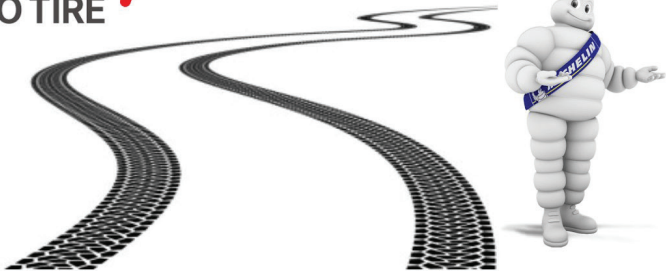


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Have Giggle Will Laugh

By Dr. James L. Snyder  
Ocala, Florida



I have many problems in my life. I have yet to recognize all of my problems, but I'm sure I will soon.

That's why it's so great to be married to someone like The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage. There is no problem she cannot fix, and I have many examples to prove it.

There is one problem she hasn't been able to fix. That is, I laugh too much. At least, according to her.

If something happens or someone says something, I will start to giggle, and I know that in a short time, I will be laughing. I know how to laugh better than anybody I know. Just ask The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage.

Through the years, I have tried to moderate it. I don't want to laugh at everything even though there is a giggle inside of me. Most people don't think everything is funny, while I, on the other side, can't think of anything that isn't funny. Someone may tell me something or say something unwittingly, and I begin to giggle. I know when that starts, I have no control over my giggle-itis. The only cure I have found for giggle-itis is laughter.

Someone may be telling a very serious story about their life, and I hear it wrong and think they are saying something altogether different, and it kicks in my giggle-itis.

It wouldn't be so bad if I could control it when it happens, but as history has proven, I cannot.

I do try to keep some things serious. I must confess, however, that changes from day to day. What is serious today may not be serious tomorrow, and I am the last one to know how to control that.

I've often discussed this with The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage, and she has tried to counsel me in this area on how to control my laughter.

I try to explain to her that it is not so much the laughter as it is the giggle. If I could control my giggles, I wouldn't have any problem with laughter. She doesn't get it and laughs at me.

You must agree, there are many things in this world that are funny. And I do not believe we should overlook or ignore those situations.

Last week I was standing in line at the post office, and at the counter was a very nice older lady. She was paying for some postage and gave the cashier a \$50 bill. Then the cashier, preparing to give her money back, said something strange. He said, "Mam, what denomination would you like?"

I hadn't heard that in a long time and was anxious to hear how the lady would respond.

She looked at the cashier with a very serious look and said, "Sir, I'm a Baptist, so give it to me in the Baptist denomination."

Little did I know she was not joking, but I laughed at her, trying to conceal it. The cashier stared at her, not knowing what to do. I'm not sure what money he gave her because I was laughing too much on the inside.

It's so hard for me to laugh on the inside and keep it from getting on the outside. What is inside eventually comes outside. I was laughing about that for the rest of the day. And still, when I think of it, I chuckle on the inside.

Just the other day, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage came and informed me that she would be gone thrift store shopping with her daughters for the day. Looking at me, she seriously said, "Can you get your own lunch today while I'm gone?"

For some reason, that tripped the giggle button inside, and my giggle-itis had kicked in.

Looking at her while giggling, I said, "Don't worry. I'll clean the refrigerator out by the time you get home."

Then I started laughing almost uncontrollably. She, on the other hand, looked at me with her infamous scowl and said, without laughing, "I don't think so."

I could not stop laughing as she walked out the front door. Several hours later, I was still laughing and went and looked in the refrigerator to see how much work I had on hand.

When I opened the refrigerator door, I immediately stopped laughing. There at the front was a bowl of broccoli. I know she did that on purpose, and it completely cured my giggle-itis. I had to devise a plan for that broccoli to make me laugh and her scowl. Now the giggle-itis is beginning to turn on.

I think a bowl of Apple Fritters would be an excellent replacement. This is one of the few items that will make the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage scowl. Seeing that scowl will be worth all I can offer now.

Just the thought of that began a giggle inside of me. Thinking more of this it developed into laughter. I just can't wait to get even.

While I was laughing, I thought of one of my favorite Bible verses. *"All the days of the afflicted are evil: but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast"* (Proverbs 15:15.

When I think of broccoli I have evil feelings, but the Apple Fritter thought brings a lot of merriment to me.

Then I remembered Proverbs 17:22. *"A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones."*

Dr. James L. Snyder is pastor of the Family of God Fellowship, 1471 Pine Road, Ocala, FL 34472. He lives with his wife in Silver Springs Shores. Call him at 352-687-4240 or e-mail [jamessnyder2@att.net](mailto:jamessnyder2@att.net). The church web site is [www.whatafel-lowship.com](http://www.whatafel-lowship.com)

Discover True Happiness in Your Life

By Joyce Meyer



I believe everyone has a desire to be happy. In fact, much of what we do is motivated by that desire, yet there are so many people who are not happy with their lives because they have wrong mindsets and attitudes.

But through studying God's Word, I've discovered how to overcome the hindrances to true happiness.

**It's All in Your Mind**

Happiness can be defined as the product of expecting something good to happen to you. I love this because it means that even if something good isn't happening to me right now, I can have hope and expect that something good will happen. We don't have to wait for our circumstances to dictate whether we should be happy or not.

The truth is, you'll never be truly happy if you don't make a decision to be happy, no matter what your circumstances may be. It's so important to understand that you can choose your thoughts; you don't have to just think about anything that drops into your mind.

Proverbs 23:7 (AMPC) says, *"For as he thinks in his heart, so is he."* I like to say it this way: Where the mind goes, the man follows. And Romans 12:2 (NIV) teaches us not to *"conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."*

When we choose to think the way God thinks, our mind is renewed and we can have the *"same attitude and purpose and [humble] mind"* that Jesus demonstrated for us (Philippians 2:5 AMPC, emphasis mine). THIS is the secret to experiencing real happiness and joy.

**It's All About Attitude**

Your attitude is your thought life turned inside-out. It's the mental posture you take toward whatever is happening in your life...how you decide to approach your circumstances and think about them. The good news is you can change your whole life by simply changing your attitude.

Here's a personal example that demonstrates what I'm talking about. One morning I woke up with a headache due to sinus allergies and I just wasn't feeling great. I got up and my thoughts went something like this: "My head hurts. This is a workout day and I don't want to do that..." I got that far when I realized I wasn't helping myself by being negative and I needed to turn my attitude around. So I started saying, "Thank You, God, that I can walk even though my head hurts and that I can still work out today. Thank You for my home, thank You for my family, and for all You're going to do in me and through me today!" You know, it only took a few minutes for my whole mindset to change and I felt better.

I believe it's God's will for us to be the same whether our circumstances are easy or hard, comfortable or painful. And we can do it if we choose to trust Him and believe that no matter what's going on, He is with us, He has our best interest at heart, and He will cause all things to work together for our good in His way and His time (Romans 8:28).

**It's a Choice You Can Make**

I realize we can't always control our circumstances or what happens to us, but we can choose our attitude. And no one can take away our hope in Christ if we don't let them.

Viktor Frankl, a survivor of a Nazi concentration camp during World War II, said, "Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

Maybe you have an attitude of self-pity because your life has been hard and you've suffered injustices. Maybe you've been stuck in the pain of a past experience because you've refused to forgive the one who hurt you. Or maybe you have a tendency to be negative, rather than a person who naturally has a more positive temperament.

I used to be very negative and I've had to work at having a good attitude. But I've learned that instead of blaming other people or things for my problems, I have to give them to God and take responsibility for my attitude. When I started doing this, then I began to experience changes in my heart and mind that have brought genuine peace and happiness to my life.

I want to encourage you to spend time in God's Word, discovering the truth about His love for you and all Jesus has done for you. Choose to believe what God says about you as His unique masterpiece that He created (Ephesians 2:10; Psalm 139:13-14), and about who you are in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Ephesians 1). This is the key to true happiness in your life!

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





Sudoku Solution

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

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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Poem

By Regina McIntosh  
Yancey County



Worth More Than Millions

Jesus gives me directions  
To love as He has loved  
With a sincere compassion  
That knows no conditions

This love of His has no limits  
It goes beyond worry and strife  
It fills the heart with a joy...  
That can only be expressed in rebirth

This love of His has a purpose  
To give generously, without constraint  
With a true sensitivity to the feelings...  
That someone else has felt

This love of His has been given  
To bring salvation to the sinner  
Reaching into a wretched heart...  
And bringing about a complete surrender

This love of His holds the answers  
To every question we might ask,  
Creates a sense of peace on the inside  
That could never compare to another serenity

This love of His sends us promises  
That our greatest fears will be overcome  
By the assurance that no harm can arise...  
For those who trust in God's only Son

This love of His mends what is broken  
Whether it be a heart or a spiritual pain  
It restores the one who feels shattered...  
With a promise of true hope and faith

This love of His succeeds where nothing else can  
Pleading victory from these nail-scarred hands  
Reaching down to the poorest, lost sinner  
And giving a new life, a new way, a second chance.

This love of His is worth more than millions  
No amount of money can possibly buy it  
Through grace, it is eternal salvation sent to us  
Who simply have the faith to accept Him

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

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.



# A Peek Inside a Love Letter

By Carol Wallace  
Kingsport, Tenn.

Why do we find it hard to share our faith with family? It should be the easiest topic of conversation, yet we allow Satan to throw up the roadblocks.

My heart is burdened as to the eternal destiny of family members we rarely see. What is the most effective way of sharing the gospel with family dear to your heart and living so far away? Prayer is the front line of defense against Satan and the direct line to the throne of God’s grace boldly bringing supplication for hearts to be receptive to the gospel. When the Holy Spirit nudges the heart about what we can do, action on those nudges can be challenging.

Writing letters is becoming a lost art replaced with instant text, email, and the rapid world of social media. A letter is held in hand, pondered over and perhaps read again, tucked away or shared. I grew up in a time when letter writing was almost as good as a personal conversation. My husband of 54 years and I were dating when he left for the US Air Force, and letters were our connection to the heart. No texting, no email, and rare phone call when he could stand in line for a pay phone, dropping quarters, nickels, and dimes to hear a voice from home and talk until his money ran out. Each letter was a treasure and bridged the separation of two young hearts. After all these years, some of those letters are in a box on the closet shelf, and our kids may someday catch a glimpse of their parents’ young hearts.

When you open the mailbox, what catches your eye first as you flip through the envelopes? Personal letters, notes, and cards are what we are anxious to read; not bills and advertisements.

The Holy Spirit impressed upon my heart to write letters expressing love and concern for several loved ones’ eternal destinies. You may enjoy a peek inside. The letter began with updates on family activities and chit chat continuing with a gentle reminder they are in our prayers often and a sincere desire to share with them the gospel. With heartfelt love came scripture guidance to God’s plan of salvation explaining.

**How to Arrive at Your Heavenly Home When This Life Is Over**

**Recognizing You Are a Sinner**

- Romans 3:23 – *“all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”*

Among God’s Ten Commandments are commands not to lie, steal or covet. If you were on trial for the crime of lying, stealing, or being envious could you be found guilty on any occasion? All of us would have to answer YES! Every person is guilty of sin; no one is exempt from it.

**Realize That Sin Has a Price That Must Be Paid**

- Romans 6:23 - *“For the wages of sin is death.”* Eternal separation from God. Do you want to pay this wage?

**Realize That Christ Came to Pay the Price for You**

- Romans 5:8 - *“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”*
- John 3:16 explains, *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”*

**Accept the Free Gift of Salvation**

- John 6:47 - *“He that believeth on me hath everlasting life”*
- Romans 10:13 – *“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”*

After reading this scripture, if you believe that Jesus died on the cross to pay for your sins and your heart is convicted to ask for His forgiveness and to take you to heaven when this life is over, He will if you sincerely pray and ask Him. There are no special words; repeating words of prayer cannot save you; it is belief in your heart who Jesus is and what He has done for you. Pray sincerely from your heart acknowledging you are a sinner and that you believe Jesus died on the cross to pay for your sins; tell Him that you believe that He died for you and rose from the grave after three days to give you everlasting life. Ask His forgiveness for sin and ask His guidance in helping you to live each day to glorify Him.

In closing, a final encouragement to reach out to other believers, join a Bible Study, find a church fellowship, or join church services online. Share your experience with others and grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus.

Letters were dropped in the mailbox the same day they were written before Satan could plant the seed of doubt, the seed of fear, the seed of rejection in my mind.

This world is full of “anti-Christian” sentiments. God says, “In this world you will have tribulations, but do not fear, I have overcome the world.” My tribulation of the heart in recent days has been finding a way to reach out to loved ones far away to tell them of the love of Jesus. With the help of the Holy Spirit, this tribulation has been released from my heart on the wings of the US Postal Service. Join me in praying for tender and receptive hearts of the recipients.

Only sweet Jesus, the keeper of the heart, knows the effect these letters may have. We can only do as He asks and share His love; the Holy Spirit convicts the heart. The Bible is God’s love letter to us, and He wants us to share His love with others. There may be a love letter in your future waiting to be written to someone far away or the neighbor next door. Blessing to you as you share His story.

Happy letter writing!

*My husband, Larry and I reside in Kingsport, TN and we recently joined the fellowship of Buffalo Ridge Baptist Church in Gray, TN. We grew up in Fall Branch, TN and were both saved at a young age. We have two children, Jonathan, and Kala and one grandson, Gaige. I am a retired Administrative Assistant and have enjoyed serving in various Children and Ladies Ministries through the years.*



# Billy Graham Evangelistic Association

## Billy Graham’s “My Answer” How does a Christian Deal with Temptation?

J. Edwin Orr once compared the Christian attacked by Satan to a mouse being attacked by a mother wielding a broom. The mouse doesn’t sit there contemplating the mother or the broom. It’s busy looking for a way to escape. So we Christians under satanic attack should look for our “way of escape.” God says that He has made such a way.

Temptation is not a sign that our lives are not right with God. Many times, it’s actually a sign that we are right with God. Temptation is not a sin. God never tempts His own children. He never causes His children to doubt. All doubts and temptations come from the devil; he cannot compel a person to yield to the temptation. His power is made inoperative in the life of a yielded Christian who is completely dependent upon God.

A poet put it this way: “The devil trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees.”

Our responsibility is to stay far from temptation, but when we face it, we demonstrate our dependence on God by calling on the Name of Jesus to give us boldness in our refusal to submit to the devil.

The New Testament book of Jude tells us the archangel Michael contended with the devil and said, *“The Lord rebuke you”* (Jude 9). Michael called upon God to take care of the devil, and He did!

Don’t savor temptations, don’t dwell on them or toy with them or replay them over in your mind. The more you think about a particular temptation, the more enticing it becomes. That’s what Eve did; she thought about Satan’s temptation. We must do what Joseph did when faced with temptation—flee. Flee from sin and stay close to Christ.

*And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. Mark 11:25*




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The Book Is Here!

By Jim Smith  
McDowell County

Freedom Life Releases New Reentry Devotional Book

Freedom Life Ministries, a non-profit organization that provides support and resources to people who are incarcerated or have recently been released from prison, has released a new reentry devotional book. The book, titled "Second Chance - a Reentry Devotional," is available now on Amazon Kindle and will be available in paperback and hardcover later this week.

The devotional was written by staff and clients of Freedom Life who have experienced firsthand the challenges of reentry. The book includes 40 daily devotions that offer hope, encouragement, and practical advice for those who are transitioning back into society.

The devotions cover a variety of topics, including:

- Dealing with the emotional and psychological effects of incarceration
- Finding hope and strength in Jesus
- Rebuilding relationships with family and friends
- Avoiding recidivism
- Testimonies and stories from clients

The book also includes a linked resource section with information on a variety of organizations that can provide support to people who are transitioning from incarceration.

"We are excited to release this new devotional book," said Danny Hampton, Executive Director of Freedom Life. "We believe that it will be a valuable resource for people who are in incarceration and transitioning from incarceration. The book offers hope, encouragement, and practical advice that can help people rebuild their lives and avoid recidivism."

About Freedom Life Ministries

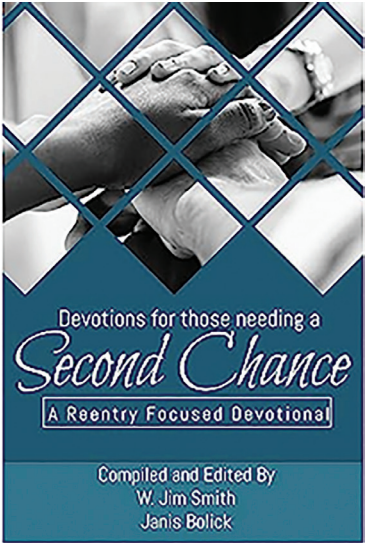
Freedom Life Ministries is a non-profit organization that provides support and resources to people who are incarcerated or have recently been released from prison. The organization's mission is to help people successfully reintegrate into society and avoid recidivism.

Freedom Life has been operating in Marion, NC for over 10 years. The organization offers a variety of services, including job training and placement, housing assistance, mental health and substance abuse treatment connections, legal assistance connections, and family support.

For more information about Freedom Life Ministries, please visit their website at [www.freedomlifeministries.org](http://www.freedomlifeministries.org).

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

*Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. James 5:16*



By Bruce Cannon  
Mitchell County



"O, How I Love Jesus." O, how we need Jesus! How burdened I am to see the condition of our Nation. It breaks my heart to see America having moved so far from the teachings of the Word to embrace lifestyles that the Word condemns! A perfect example of this is the National Education Association encouraging younger children in America to read books promoting deviant sexuality\* over the summer. When there is such a push in our education system to indoctrinate even our younger school students to accept homosexual lifestyles, when traditional historical Judeo-Christian values have been completely discarded in the public schools across America, when Jesus has been censored out of the public school system, and when our students are having to deal with transgender students using bathrooms based upon their current gender identification we have a serious problem! Again, O how we need Jesus!

Recently I have been led to preach a series of messages from John 14-17. I have entitled the series "Beholding the Christ, The Lamb of God." Can I share hope for what we are having to deal with today in America? We have hope! I entitled the message, "Help For Today, Hope For Tomorrow." We have an amazing hope for tomorrow! We get to go home to be with the Lord. But the problem we face is having to get from what we are dealing with today to the point of being able to enter into Heaven! That answer comes at the end of this article.

I am a firm believer that what we are seeing in our nation was prophesied to take place just before Jesus comes back for the Church in the Rapture. In Luke 17:28,29 Jesus taught, "Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all."

We know what Sodom and Gomorrah were like. Homosexuality was the way of the land with the men of the city wanting to lie with the angels of God. Historians describe these two cities as being "licentious." Webster's dictionary defines licentious as "lacking legal or moral restraints. especially: disregarding sexual restraints." Isn't that what we are seeing in America today? One can hardly watch any public television without seeing so much evidence of a "godless" culture!

Now, what is our hope for today? How do we get through these dark times? The answer is: live for Christ, get just as close to the Lord as we personally can, AND make sure we bring all of our family to Him. Children must be taught the historical Judeo-Christian value principles America was founded upon! While we may not be able to have Jesus in our public schools, we CAN and MUST have Him first and foremost in our homes!

Teach the Scriptures daily to family. Model Christian beliefs in the home. Don't condone or allow evil to invade your home. Screen the media, music, and websites for all family members. I have always preached and believed that the Word of God is the answer to the issues we deal with. I have also always preached that "evil seeds sown bring a harvest!" When we allow the evils of the day to enter into our minds through music, tv and such it WILL begin to condition us AND OUR CHILDREN to accept things we must not!

Remember, we have hope for tomorrow; we also have help for today! The Creator is on our side. He, through His Holy Spirit, will provide encouragement, help, wisdom, and protection if we will just take the teachings of the Word seriously. After all, the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God! Know the Word! Meditate on the Word! Live out the teachings of the Word and see the Spirit of God protect our families from this current onslaught of evil. Amen!

\* <https://nypost.com/2023/07/05/the-largest-teachers-union-in-america-recommended-educators-include-gender-queer-in-their-summer-reading/>

*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.*

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# Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

## Be-attitudes: Those Who Suffer Persecution

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



Jesus declared in Matthew 5:10-12, “*Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*”

As Jesus concluded His sermon of the “Beatitudes,” He gave a final warning for anyone who takes up his/her cross and follows Him. Those who choose to follow Christ as Lord and Savior can expect countless numbers of blessings from the Lord, both here, now, and for all eternity. But one who really sells out to follow Christ can also expect that this life journey and walk of faith will be (not might be) both dangerous and costly. Living as a Christian is going to cost you something! But the blessings far outweigh the costs. The writers of the Salt and Light devotional (from the YouVersion Bible app) state, “The very fact that we are meek, peace-loving, hungry for God, pure in heart and compassionate will cause us to become prime targets for subtle and not-so-subtle persecution at work, school and your neighborhood.”

Listen to the following indisputable facts! An average of 833 Christians will be martyred daily. That is, they will be killed because of their faith in Christ. That’s more than 300,000 Christians martyred each year! These staggering statistics come from David Barrett, editor of the World Christian Encyclopedia and a leading authority on Christianity worldwide. He concludes that the worldwide statistical chance of becoming a martyr in your lifetime if you are a Christian, is one in 200. If you are a missionary, it is one in 50. If you are a national or native full-time evangelist, your chances are one in 20. Talk about some serious commitment to following Jesus and preaching His gospel of love and salvation in none other than Jesus.

A report released by the International Society for Human Rights claimed that more than 25,000 Christians worldwide are imprisoned for their faith in Christ. Christians are being held in penitentiaries, hard labor camps, and other detention centers in several nations. Particularly cited as violators of Christians’ rights were Ethiopia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, and Burundi, all Marxist-leaning African states. In Mozambique alone, 12,000 believers are being held in agricultural work camps. In Ethiopia, 10,000 Christians are imprisoned, some for nothing more than wearing Christian symbols in public. Not only communist countries, but also Islamic countries and regimes are constantly imprisoning, murdering, and executing Christians and routinely destroying churches, homes, and properties of pastors and priests. Few American believers are aware of how pervasive religious persecution is around the world.

The early followers of Christ were fully aware of the threats of persecution that surrounded them. Each of the apostles and disciples knew that their lives hung in the balance every day that they served the Lord and shared the gospel message. They likely both knew and expected that they would both suffer for the cause of Christ and quite likely meet a horrible death just like their Master and Savior. And yet, they remained committed!

Our Lord and Savior certainly recognized the impact of sin and evil in the world. But here in this final beatitude, He was talking about specific persecution that would arise and be leveled against any who committed themselves to follow Him and His way. You don’t have to go looking for evil and persecution, evil and persecution will usually find the one who follows Christ. Jesus warned us, “*Don’t be surprised by it!*” Then our Redeemer declared, “*But know this, that when it does arise and you are willing and able to stand for Christ through it, then your certain reward is the kingdom of heaven.*”

“*Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you on account of Me*” proclaimed the Master in verse 11. The three most important words are those last three—“*...because of Me!*” When the focus of insults, persecution, or slander is Jesus, then is it clearly not about you and me! It should never be about us! Your life is to be offered as a living sacrifice to the Lord. Your life is about Him living in you. And when we hide ourselves in Christ, the motive of the persecution will be about the opposition of sin and the flesh against the Lord. Frank Staggs wrote (Broadman Commentary, Vol. 8, p. 106), “The mark of the redeemed is that they are redeeming. True Christians are not only saved but saving, not of themselves but as Christ lives in them.”

Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 4:17, “*For our momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison...*” You see! There is an eternal purpose in the afflictions and persecutions that we suffer for His sake. It is producing righteousness, goodness, and trust. And earlier in the chapter (verses 7-9), the Apostle Paul wrote, “But we have this treasure in earthen containers so that the extraordinary greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed;” What a mighty and wonderful promise from God! He is readying us for His presence for all eternity. He is burning away the chaff of selfishness and self-reliance—so that we will live solely and completely for His glory. He is asking us to place our lives on the altar of life—so that He can display His power and might. He is pleading for you to place your life on the line because you can trust Him completely.

Peter would also echo this eternal truth (1 Peter 3:14), “*But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be in dread...*” Psalm 34:19 declares, “*The afflictions of the*

*righteous are many, But the Lord rescues him from them all.*”

The Master spoke eight “Be” attitudes on that little hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee. He declared that each of them is an absolutely essential characteristic of someone who is sold out to Jesus. They are eight fundamental choices that each of you should and must make to proclaim that Jesus is Lord, Savior, and Master of your life. Jesus promised that you are truly and supremely blessed as you choose His spiritual way of life. “Be” (live as): (1) the spiritually poor, (2) those who mourn; (3) the gently and meek; (4) those who hunger for God; (5) the merciful; (6) the pure; (7) the peacemakers, and (8) the persecuted. May God bless you and keep you as you live in Christ.

*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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Scissors, Paper, and Little Hands  
No Regrets Family

By Dean Honeycutt  
Mitchell County

My little granddaughter loves to stay with me and Pam. And we love it when she stays with us. But she is a handful because she is so active. Her attention span is short and so she plays with one thing for a little while and then she is going to do something else that will entertain her for a while. She is highly active and inquisitive. You must keep an eye on her, or she will be into something that may be harmful to her. She rode a toy car off our porch and crashed at the bottom of the steps. Thankfully, she was okay. One time she got into a drawer with scissors and paper. This is where she does her “work” as she calls it. And she proceeded to cut the paper into little bitty pieces and the pieces fell onto the floor. When it was time to eat lunch and have a drink she wanted, I told her she had to pick up the paper first and that she was the one who made the mess and needed to clean it up. I could see the tears gathering in her eyes as she thought about what I said to her. She knew that she needed to do what was right and clean up her mess. So, with her little hands, she got down on the floor and picked up the pieces of paper. My heart melted as I saw her feeling sorrow for making a mess and realizing she was responsible for it. How true it is for us when we sin against God, and we make a mess. The pieces of sin are in our lives, and we know we are responsible. And that still small voice of the Holy Spirit says you need to clean that up. And with contrition and sorrow for what we have done, we ask God for forgiveness. And God says, “I love you and I forgive you.” I am confident that our Father in Heaven is grateful when He sees our sorrow and brokenness over sin. I am so grateful the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sins and moves in our hearts to repent and turn from our sins. I am grateful for a compassionate and merciful God that loves us and died on the cross for our sins. God bless you.

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.



Accommodating Others Shows Love

By Christopher L. Scott  
Moses Lake, Wash.



In the Left Behind fictional book series, there’s a statement that has always stood out to me. Cameron “Buck” Williams is the protagonist throughout the books (played by Kirk Cameron and Nicholas Cage in the films). During Buck’s travels, he meets Ken Ritz, a private pilot that ends up flying Buck in and out of some difficult situations. While Buck is a Christian; Ken Ritz is not. But Ken’s commitment to helping Buck with his Christian ministry is unwavering. At one point the non-believing pilot Ken tells Buck, “I’ve seen the way you people take care of each other.” Ken had seen how the Christians during the tribulation were desperately working hard to take care of each other and meet needs. What a testimony we can have as believers to the non-Christian world when we love and care for each other sacrificially. There was an issue in the city of Corinth that required the Christians to sacrifice and accommodate each other. Paul wrote, “Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense either to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God; just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit but the profit of the many, so that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1, NASB) Just before this, Paul describes how there were issues among the Christians regarding eating meat. There was meat that had been sacrificed to idols and served at pagan feasts. There also was meat sacrificed to idols that eventually was brought to the meat market, purchased by individuals, and taken home and served at private dinners. What Paul was telling the people here is that they are okay to eat that meat unless they are questioned by people. If someone was unsure and asked if it should be eaten or not, a Christian was obligated to abstain from eating the meat as a way to accommodate the conscience of his or her fellow believer. In other words, Christians restricted their liberty at the request of others. Even if they were hungry! As Christians now we show our love for others carefully evaluating our actions and how they might affect others. If a Christian brother is on a diet, we should choose to eat healthy food in front of him. If a Christian sister is trying to manage her money well, we should not invite her out to eat at expensive restaurants with us. One of the ways that people can identify us as Christians is how we care for each other and make accommodations for each other.

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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# Anne Ministries

## Man Has It Changed

By Chastity Ogburn  
Avery County



Well, summer is over and school is fixing to crank back up. Buses will be rolling and parents waiting in school lines to drop off their kids for another year. I have seen so many changes in school in my life. I remember when almost, everyone rode the bus to school. Very few people were taken to school by their parents. I remember when you carried your lunch to school in a lunch box and ate at your desk. Then came the lunchroom, no more sandwiches, but hot meals. It was wonderful not to have to eat a sandwich every day. I also remember when they taught the basics, Reading, Writing, English, Math, Science, History, and PE or Physical Education. These basic are what has made America great, and also made great American leaders. Then come people trying to change everything. I remember in high school they came up with this math called Algebra. It had symbols instead of numbers, that dealt with shapes of objects and their properties of space. I knew when they introduced this in math that our world was going to be a mess. You say why do you say that? Well, my math teacher come in one day and told all of us that pi r square. Well, I told my math teacher that all the pies I had ever eaten were round. And you know what? I got kicked out of the class.

I know that I am a dinosaur, and I know change is important. But, I also know that change can be very dangerous. All we have to do is look at this generation and what our government is telling our schools to teach their students. In my days there was no problem with knowing if you were a male or a female. If a little boy was to tell his teacher that he was a girl or a girl was to tell her teacher she was a boy. They would have simply pulled him to the side and explained to them what a boy is or what a girl is. But today our government will not allow our teachers to tell them this. What's even worse is we have people that are over our education system that can't give you a simple definition or tell you the difference between a boy and a girl themselves. I don't even believe that they need to be in our educational field if they don't know the difference themselves. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to tell the difference. When I went to school you didn't have kids coming to school telling their teacher that they were a cat. Because if you did, my teachers would have given them a can of cat food and a litter box, not the lunchroom and bathroom till they figured out, what they really were. It is time for people to wake up and smell the roses. Something is wrong and it's time for people to stand up against all this stupidity, that we are allowing to happen. We have let it go so far that we have men today that think they are women and that they can have babies. If they would have just taken the science classes that I had to take they would know that men couldn't have babies. I'll tell you what has happened. People in this world have turned their back on God and the things of God. And the Bible says when a man does this that God will deal with them; Romans 1:28 *"And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient."* And that my friend is what we see happening right before our very eyes today. People all over are falling like flies because they are believing the lies of this world. The Bible tells us in Philippians 2:12-13 *"to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."* For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." The trouble today is very few people do this. They do not fear God and they are going to live their lives the way they want to. So please remember that ignorance is not bliss, but it is big trouble. May God please forgive us for our ignorance.

Words of Wisdom:

- The greater our knowledge increases the more our ignorance unfolds. John F. Kennedy
- Beware of false knowledge; it is more dangerous than ignorance. George Bernard Shaw
- Ignorance is the curse of God; knowledge is the wing wherewith we fly to heaven. William Shakespeare
- The greatest obstacle to discovery is not ignorance - it is the illusion of knowledge. N/A
- Truth will always be truth, regardless of lack of understanding, disbelief or ignorance. W. Clement Stone

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

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Luke 1:57-66 "Swimming Upstream"

By Shawn Thomas  
Angleton, Texas



Once I was canoeing, and the river was shallow, so just for fun I wanted to see how far I could swim against the current. I got out and swam as hard as I could—but when I looked up, I had gotten absolutely nowhere! It’s hard to swim against the current: when the whole river is going one way, and you are trying to swim against it.

But that’s very much like what God has called us to do, as His people. Our whole society is moving in one direction, morally and spiritually. They have one set of beliefs; one way of doing things; what “everyone says” is what we should all believe, say, and do. But rarely does God want His people to do what everyone else does. He almost always wants us to “swim upstream,” against the current, and do things differently, HIS way. Because it’s only then that He gets glory from our life.

Luke Chapter 1 shows us an example of this, in the naming of John the Baptist. This happened over 2000 years ago, but it’s very relevant to us today. It shows what happens when we obey God and “swim upstream”:

When you obey God, you often go against convention.

After John was born: 59 says “*they were going to call him Zacharias, after his father.*” Why were they going to do that? Because that was the custom; the tradition. It’s what everyone expected.

But that’s not what Zecharias and Elizabeth did. Verse 13 says God’s angel Gabriel appeared to Zecharias and told him that Elizabeth, who was of old age, would have a son, and that his name would be “John.” They decided to obey God and give him the name the angel commanded. It’s not what “everyone” expected—but it’s what GOD told them to do. They were “swimming upstream.”

If we are going to be serious about obeying God, and following Jesus today, we are often going to have to “swim upstream” and go against some “conventional wisdom” and traditions.

Nowhere is this more so than regarding salvation. “Conventional wisdom” says, if you want to get to heaven, do a lot of good works. 70% of Americans believe that good works will get you into heaven. That’s what “everyone” thinks. But the Bible says in Romans 3:20, that “*by the works of the Law, no flesh will be justified in His sight.*” The Bible says, if you want to be saved, STOP trying to save yourself by good works and deeds and trust what Jesus did on the cross to save you. To be saved, you must “swim upstream” and go against conventional wisdom.

And it doesn’t stop at salvation, either. All through the Christian life, God will call you to obey Him, and go against “conventional tradition” and wisdom.

Conventional wisdom says “put yourself out there” and promote yourself; if you don’t do it, no one else will! But God says, I am in charge of your destiny; trust ME to lead you where I want you to be.

There are SO many applications of this; so many ways in which He commands us to do things differently than the world: in our finances, in our marriages, in our families, in the way we make decisions, in the way we do business, in the way we do ministry—the applications are almost endless. Let God’s Spirit apply this to



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YOUR own life and your personal situations today. But know this: if you choose to obey God, it is more than likely that He will ask you to do something that is different from convention, tradition, and worldly wisdom. Remember, He said in Romans 12:2, “*And do not be conformed to this world.*” As His people, we are NOT to be like the world; we are to be different. So when we obey God, He will have us do some things that do not “conform” to the world’s methods and traditions.

So ask yourself today: “Is there some area in my life today, where I need to obey God, instead of tradition or popular opinion?”

When you obey God, other people may not understand.

:61 “*And they said to her, ‘there is no one among your relatives who is called by that name.’*”

Zecharias and Elizabeth were just obeying God’s command when they named their son John. But the people around them questioned their decision. This shows us that there are always those who do not understand when you set out to obey God.

When I was growing up there was a young man in our youth group at church whose dad was a local businessman, and he was very “business-minded.” At some point he discovered that his son was tithing, giving 10% of what he made, to our church. So he pulled him aside and said, “Son, if you would take that same 10%, and put it in a savings account, you would build up quite a chunk of money!” This man just didn’t understand; he didn’t have the spiritual perspective that God gives us everything we have; and that we give that tithe back to Him to show our gratitude for it.

It will often be like that: when you obey God, there will almost always be people who don’t understand what you are doing. Sometimes, like for that young man, it’s your own family that doesn’t understand. Or maybe it’s an employer, who doesn’t see why you won’t compromise on a business expense, or cut corners on the job like everyone else. Or maybe it’s even people at church who don’t understand why you’re doing something that you really believe God would have you do.

We need to get used to being misunderstood. As our society deteriorates, this will become more and more of an issue. If we are going to be faithful to God over the next years, we need to be willing to fly in the face of increasingly hostile public opinion: Why don’t we accept gays and lesbians as members? Why won’t we affirm transgender people? Why not give women the “right to choose” abortion? And on and on. We are going to have to make a choice: we can either serve the God of the Bible or the god of public opinion. But we can’t do both. If you are going to obey God and be a follower of Jesus Christ, you need to know that many people will not understand your obedience.

When you obey God, you experience freedom.

:63 “*And he asked for a tablet and wrote as follows: ‘his name is John.’ And they were all astonished.*” :64 “*And at once his mouth was opened as his tongue loosed.*”

Ever since Zacharias had questioned Gabriel’s message in:18, he had been unable to speak. But when he made the commitment to obey God in the naming of his son—even in the face of all the objections that “they” had—God opened his mouth again, and he received the freedom that he had been missing. But his freedom was waiting on his obedience to God.

The same thing is true for us. There is great freedom that comes when we decide to obey God.

Again, this is true of salvation. When you try to justify yourself before God by your own good works and deeds, you find yourself in bondage: how many good works do you have to do? How good do you have to be? But when you give up that “works salvation” and decide instead to trust what Jesus did on the cross, and rest in His grace, there is freedom! As the old song says, “the burden of my heart rolled away!” Now you don’t have to worry about how good you are; now you don’t have to worry about saving yourself; now you’re trusting in what JESUS did to save you. There is freedom when you obey Him for salvation.

It’s true in so many areas of our lives. There’s freedom, joy, and peace in your heart when you obey God. Again, there are so many ways this can apply to us:— You may have an area of disobedience in your life, and you know it, and you are carrying it around like a big burden on your back. Obey God, and you will lose that burden, and it will be replaced with freedom and joy!— Maybe you’ve gotten all caught up in the “traditional wisdom” of what “they say” you ought to do financially, and you’ve felt like you had to have “that” car, and “that” house, and “that” stuff, and you’ve sacrificed and compromised to do it—but you’re in slavery to what “they say”! God says “*do not be conformed to the world*”—you don’t have to have everything “they say” you need. Obey God, and you’ll find new freedom!— Or maybe everyone’s telling you there’s someone you should hate and despise, but God’s telling you to love and forgive them. You’ll lose a great burden, and find great freedom, when you obey God, even if others don’t understand.

Let God’s Spirit apply this scripture to your heart today. Obey God! Do what He tells you in His word, no matter what “everybody else thinks,” and you will find new-found freedom and joy, just like Zacharias did.

It’s just like the old song says: “For the favor He shows, and the joy He bestows Are for them who will trust and obey.”

But you will never find the freedom and joy you’re longing for until you commit to obeying God. Just like Zacharias’ freedom to speak was waiting on his obedience, so YOUR own freedom and joy today may be waiting on your obedience to God in a certain area of YOUR life, right now!

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



# Mine Creek Baptist Church

## The Devil Goes to Church

By Chris Rathbone  
Mitchell County

Years ago a church member gave me an old Bible her father used when he preached years ago. According to what I’ve heard, he had a wonderful ministry for a long time in our area. He had been with Lord for many years by the time I came to know this family. As I looked through the old Bible there were some sermon notes and outlines from years and years ago. Reading through the notes there was one in particular that caught my attention. The title was “The Devil goes to Church!”

My first thought was “That’s a true statement! I’ve run into the devil several times through some church attendees!” However, after reading through the condensed notes I realized that there must have been something going on in the church where he was preaching. He warned of not allowing things in the church that were dangerous to our spiritual growth. He talked of compromise and that if we aren’t careful we’ll give the devil a foothold in the church.

After reading through his shortened sermon notes, I came to realize that something was going on at that particular time that he must have felt the need to address. Although in his notes, this preacher never really plainly spoke of what this particular situation was all about.

Eventually, I returned the Bible to the family after his daughter passed away because I felt that the Bible should stay in their family. So upon returning the Bible I mentioned this particular sermon to another daughter and asked if she knew what was going on at that time that he felt the need to address it. The daughter, who was in her 70s, looked at me, smiled, and said, “I know exactly what it was about! It was about the Stamps Baxter hymnal that churches were using!” She went on to explain that at that particular time, the Stamps Baxter hymnals had recently come out and many churches were using them in their worship services. Several local preachers, including her father, didn’t like the timing, beat, etc, of how the songs were written and were preaching that it was akin to “Honky Tonk music”, in the words of her dad. She smile and simply said, “I didn’t agree with that myself.”

Today, you and I think nothing of using a Stamps Baxter hymnal in our services because they’ve been our churches for decades. Matter of fact, I just pulled one out of my bookcase and flipped through it. The one I have dates back to the 80s. I’m sure the one this preacher was referring to dates back to the 40s or 50s. Contained in the one I have are songs like Amazing Grace, Blessed Assurance, Faith is the Victory, Do You Know My Jesus?, I’ll Fly Away, Love Lifted Me, etc, etc. This particular book is filled with beautiful old hymns that have touched the hearts of many children of God over the years and they still do. Now the question comes, “Why would someone be against such songs being sung in worship services?” Well, to put it bluntly, it wasn’t about the words of songs or the message they contained, it was about the music style and the preference that individuals liked.

Now some of y’all aren’t gonna like what I’m about to write. Your personal preferences do not mean that someone else’s preferences are wrong or of the devil. There are days that I listen to Bluegrass gospel. There are other times I’m singing to faithful old hymns that have stood the test of time. While other times it may be contemporary praise and worship that ministers to my heart and exalts Jesus. In all of these there are some that I like and some I don’t, that’s my preference.

The point is this, when the worship of our Savior becomes about preference more than about Jesus, that, my friends, is when the devil comes to church....

Make it all about Jesus children of God, and the devil will have no place to sit!

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



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John Stark  
By David Streater, Ph.D.  
Burke County



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

John Stark was born in Londonderry, New Hampshire, on  
August 28, 1728. He had a limited formal education because of  
John's parents, as they lived a nomadic lifestyle on the American frontier. However,  
his upbringing allowed John to learn "agriculture, hunting, and trapping," making  
him self-reliant.

While a young man, John, his brother, and two others were returning from a  
hunting trip in the mountains of New Hampshire when they encountered a problem;  
the Abenakis tribe kidnapped Stark, while the others escaped or were killed. John's  
bravery was shown by running the gauntlet of the Abenaki men. Stark caught them  
off guard by running toward the gauntlet line, hugging the Bravehearts, and yelling,  
"I'll kiss all your women." As punishment, John was put to work hoeing the fields.  
In retaliation, he cut down their corn and beans, leaving only weeds. Ironically,  
John's eccentric actions impressed the Abenakis, who accepted him as one of their  
own.

After John was set free, his acquired survival skills led him to be commissioned  
as an officer in Rogers' Rangers. With continued experiences and achieved leader-  
ship expertise, Stark was promoted to colonel and assigned to lead the efforts at the  
Battles of Bunker Hill and Bennington, a transition time in the Revolutionary War.

Stark and General Washington combined their forces to set the stage for the "at-  
tack on the Hessians at Trenton [just] before their [troops'] enlistments expired."  
This decision led Stark and his men to be among those who crossed the Delaware  
River with George Washington on December 25, 1776. This action allowed Stark to  
oversee victories at the battles of Trenton and Princeton.

John Stark is known for developing many military tactics, including having his  
soldiers be battle-ready in several ways. One was to tell his men they were worth  
more than the Hessians and other enemies. Another was not to make Mrs. Stark and  
their wives battle-torn widows. Stark also introduced the patriots to camouflage to  
blend into the environment and discern themselves from their combatants. He also  
had an uncanny ability to choose when to battle and how best to prepare. Those who  
did not heed his advice often paid the ultimate price.

Stark was one of the longest-lived generals of the Revolutionary War, reaching  
the age of 93. He is recognized for attacks that cost the British a thousand lives and  
bestowed all British forces surrender by General Burgoyne. Stark was also a court  
member that sentenced the British spy John André to death.

General John Stark was an American hero and patriot in every sense of the word!  
His remarkable leadership skills led to victorious battles and convinced other sover-  
eigns to join America in its struggle for independence. In later life, John Stark origi-  
nated the axiom of Live Free or Die – Death is not the worst of evils, which became  
New Hampshire's motto (Humphries, 2019). At his funeral with military honors on  
May 8, 1822, three cannon volleys were fired, "surrendering his arms to his God."

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paver information and complementary educational materials.

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

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Burke County

In 2009, St. Matthews UMC in Morganton, NC opened Open Hearts Bakery in their church kitchen. The purpose of the OHB was two parts: to hire employment-challenged individuals; and financially support existing, local non-profits that work with low-income families and individuals. Over time the bakery noticed their employees could not find affordable housing for their families. As a result, Open Hearts Place was officially founded as a 501(c)3 in January 2020. The newly formed Board of Directors raised the funds to finance and build three small rental homes on property donated to OHP by St. Matthews UMC. These homes provided Open Hearts Place with affordable, intermediate, rental housing to families for approximately three years while the OHP Programming Team mentored the families to qualify for a mortgage and eventually own an entry-level home. In March 2022, three families moved into the three new homes. Each of the four adults has good-paying, steady jobs and the seven children are doing well in school and participating in many extracurricular activities. The families are working on budgeting, debt reduction, savings, and their credit score in preparation to apply for a home mortgage.

Phase 2 includes building three more small homes and bringing three more families into the OHP program. We plan to break ground in July 2023 and hopefully will have the families selected and ready for move-in by the end of the year. We are already planning Phase 3. OHP is in the process of purchasing 45 acres in Burke County with plans to build a community of approximately 100 homes to rent and sell to our workforce and senior citizens. The community will include single-family homes, townhomes, Habitat homes, multi-unit homes, and small senior homes to sell along with Open Hearts Place homes to rent. We have already reached out to the City of Morganton, Burke County Government, Habitat, Western Piedmont Community College, Solar International (Solar Energy Company), and many local and regional funders to see how we all might partner on this progressive project that will benefit so many families.

The Open Hearts Place homes are only part of the program. The more critical part is our programming. We have a part-time case manager along with experienced volunteers (our Allies) that work intimately with the families. Sometimes the families and Allies meet every week or twice a month depending on the area of concentration. We have already seen our families make tremendous strides toward financial independence. Each family pays a participation fee set at no more than 30% of the family's income. OHP sets back 25% of their participation fees. This money is placed in an untouchable saving account that will be given to the families when they move out of our homes into their own homes. The OHP programming team will also continue to support the families even after they move on. We hope to always be available to our families in any way they may need our support.

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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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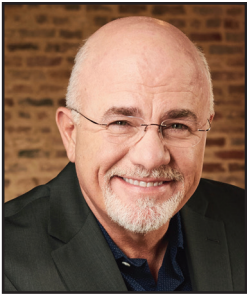
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By Dave Ramsey

Dear Dave,  
I graduated from college six years ago with a business degree. Currently, I'm in data analytics making about \$40,000 a year and have \$155,000 in student loan debt. Do you have any recommendations as far as refinancing my student loans and getting the interest rates and monthly payments down?  
Austin



Dear Austin,  
I'm not trying to be mean here, but what in the world are you doing in data analytics that pays so poorly? Most of the folks I know in that area make a ton more. And you're going to need to start making a whole lot more to pay off \$155,000 in student loans.  
For starters, you shouldn't be looking at this from a what-can-I-do-to-make-this-manageable perspective. You don't want to give this Sallie Mae nightmare a haircut, then tell her to sit in the corner all nice and pretty. You want her to leave! Now, there's nothing inherently wrong with refinancing to get a lower interest rate, or lower payments, if you do it the right way. But in most cases that translates into keeping the debt around forever. You need a better plan.  
Instead, let's shift the main goal from that to paying this thing off as fast as possible. That means big, hairy chunks of payments on the principal. And that'll probably mean picking up an extra job or two, because right now you've got what I call a shovel-to-hole ratio problem. The hole you're in is a big one — a \$155,000 one. And you're working with a \$40,000 shovel. You need a bigger shovel, and a lot of extra work, instead of trying to keep these loans around like they're pets. What can you do — for a short period of time — that's legal, moral and will make you the most money the fastest?  
On the day job side of things, you may want to consider looking for a position with a different company, Austin. You're way underpaid if you're in data analytics and making just \$40,000 a year.  
Good luck!  
— Dave

Dear Dave,  
I know you recommend using cash or debit cards instead of credit cards. But can you explain why my husband and I shouldn't take advantage of credit card points for travel expenses that are required for work but will be reimbursed by the employer?

Cathy  
Dear Cathy,  
So, your employer is so poor they require you to advance them for your travel? You do understand if your employer decides not to pay you one month—for whatever reason—that it's your credit card and your debt, right? Even if this hasn't happened yet, you're exposed to the risk. All for a couple of airline miles that are virtually impossible to use? No, thanks.  
I understand this is standard procedure for some companies, but then a big chunk of corporate America has conned its employee base into taking out a loan on their behalf—with a promise of repayment—and the employee taking on all the risk. On top of that, these companies act as if operating this way is no big deal. Well, it is a big deal. And it's not a good way to run a business or treat your employees.  
Cathy, I once counseled a guy who walked into my office with \$11,000 on his American Express card that was "supposed" to be reimbursed. Guess what happened? When he went into work earlier that day, he found a padlock on the door. The company he worked for had filed Chapter 11 bankruptcy, and he got nothing. At that point, he had \$11,000 on his American Express card, and the credit card company didn't care one bit about his company going broke. They wanted their money.  
When you use a credit card, you spend more than when using a debit card or cash. Tons of research has proven this to be true. Using someone else's money just doesn't produce the same friction in your brain as paying for something with your own money. You don't feel the sting of it leaving your personal account. Do you want to know something else? I've never met a single millionaire who pointed to credit cards and airline miles as the reasons for their financial success.  
But I do know a lot of broke, middle-class people strutting around, bragging that they gamed the system. They'll tell you they beat a multi-billion-dollar company, one that spends tens of millions of dollars every year on studying consumer behavior in depth, at their own game. No, they really didn't. I'm telling you all this, Cathy, because I want you and your husband to protect your number-one wealth-building tool: your income.  
Long story short: If you play with snakes, sooner or later you'll get bitten.  
-Dave

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



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Intertwined

By Ken and Jan Merop  
Cleveland, Tennessee



A bear on a swing adds a bit of whimsy hanging from a tree branch in our front yard.

However, after several years of being out in the seasonal elements, the rope began to fray. One day, my husband Ken remarked that our bear was hanging on a precarious angle because of the worn-out rope that needed replacing.

We contemplated a trip to a hardware store until Ken discovered a nylon rope in the garage that he thought would work.

“Do you mind a yellow rope?” he asked.

“No. I think that would draw more attention to the bear.”

And, so, he worked to remove the frayed rope and secure the swinging bear with the yellow nylon rope that was actually much stronger.

As I looked closely at this rope, I saw three strands tightly intertwined. Not only wouldn’t the nylon succumb to the weather, the three strands fortified the bear’s support.

In Ecclesiastes 4: 12 NLT it says, “...a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.”

The context speaks of companionship but is easily applied in situations that require strength and cohesiveness.

How would God have us look at ourselves concerning him?

First, we must come to terms with who we believe God to be. After that, in the light of his word, who do we personally believe ourselves to be? When these questions are answered, we come to know God more intimately.

We accept his love, kindness, goodness, justice, mercy, and grace. This is only the beginning but leads to knowing him more and more through his other traits and attributes. Within the scope of all he is, we see who we are...who he says we are.

God is a God of mercy. He promises in Malachi 3: 17, “...they will be my own special treasure.”

If God sees us as a treasure, his jewels, then we can have healthy self-esteem because it is rooted in him.

So, one cord is having intimacy with him. A second cord is a victory when we clothe ourselves in the whole armor of God.

But what about the third cord? Remember that a cord of three strands is strong. Jesus is the third cord that completes the picture.

With him, we have our identity...who he created us to be. We have our victory through his indwelling Holy Spirit both now and for eternity...tightly tied together in our relationship with him and his presence with us.

Be secure in who he is, and who you are, and be tightly intertwined with the cords of his unfailing love. Selah

*Bear with me and I with you*

*This bear is whimsical and fun.*

*He brings a smile to my face.*

*Yet, he reminds me of a command  
to lift up, support, and comfort others.  
Bear with them in good times and bad.*

*And, remember,  
Jesus is our great burden bearer.*

*“Bear one another’s burdens,  
And so fulfill the law of Christ.”  
Galatians 6:2 NKJV*



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



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# North Carolina Baptist Aging Ministry

## Camp BAM 2023 Makes Impact on Communities

By Carol Layton

The third annual Camp BAM took place July 12-16 on the Mills Home Campus of Baptist Children's Homes (BCH). This intergenerational service camp is held by North Carolina Baptist Aging Ministry (NCBAM) and offers a chance for volunteers to serve aging adults in the community by building wheelchair ramps, installing smoke alarms, and completing other projects. Forty-one campers from IMPACT Community Youth and FBC Concord participated this year.

This year's intergenerational camp included teenagers, octogenarians, and every decade between. Many Camp BAM veterans were able to train new campers in wielding a post-hole digger, using power tools, smoothing concrete, installing smoke alarms, and the value of measuring twice and cutting once.

The camp began on Wednesday afternoon with campers settling into their rooms on the Mills Home campus. After dinner, they received training in smoke alarm installation, attended a worship service, and then enjoyed ice-breaker games to get to know each other.

Over the next three hot July days, campers built six wheelchair ramps, mowed, trimmed, and cleaned three yards, and served three BCH ministries. They pulled weeds in Greater Vision's community garden, organized the ministry's clothes closet, and sorted donations at the Mills Home food locker. Campers especially enjoyed one afternoon devoted to playing games with children in care at the children's home.

NCBAM's Austin Decker (north central regional director) served as camp director. "We were thrilled this year to be able to stretch our ministry projects budget because of grant funds received from the American Rescue Plan Act." (NCBAM received \$275,000 for safety/home improvement projects in four Triad counties.)

Lindsay Ridenhour appreciated the impact camp had on her son. "I am beyond grateful for this opportunity for Carson – for the impact not only in the communities but in these kids' lives as well. What a blessing!"

Philip Hightower's teenagers attended camp and he volunteered one day with them. "It was the first time for all of us. I wasn't sure what to expect. The whole experience and seeing it come together was far beyond what I imagined. I'm very proud of this group of kids and their leaders. No doubt this is God's work."

Monica and Billy Talbert lead IMPACT Community Youth and have attended all three Camp BAMs. "I wish everyone could see what we saw this week. We are incredibly proud of these kids! They stepped out of their comfort zones more than once. We witnessed some pray with the ones we built ramps for. They interacted with children not as fortunate as they are. Billy and I are so proud of the kids and feel so blessed to be a small part of their lives!"

Octogenarian Jeanette Moon traveled three hours to volunteer at Camp BAM. She received services from Camp BAM during last summer's Camp held at BCH's Kennedy Home in Kinston. Jeanette came to Thomasville to reconnect with the campers and to bless them by serving meals and keeping the dining area clean.

Through five days of service, campers acquired new skills, learned to work together as a team, and expanded their perspectives by meeting people outside their everyday lives—from children in care at BCH to older adults trapped in their homes and struggling to afford basic necessities. Most importantly, campers were able to share their faith with the people they served and see God's hand in every project they completed.

Help fund Camp BAM in perpetuity by contributing to the Live Out Luke Endowment. Mail your gift to The North Carolina Baptist Foundation, 201 Convention Drive, Cary, NC 27511. Or designate your gift at [ncbam.org](http://ncbam.org).

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



This 41-foot ramp was one of the longest built. NCBAM's client can now leave home safely – and more frequently.



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The Orchard at Altapass

August At The Orchard At Altapass

By Kate Groff  
Mitchell County

Everything is chugging along at the Orchard. The model train keeps tracking around the rails. Apples continue to ripen with the next heirloom variety due any day. “Heyrides” meander through the trees (now available at 12:30 and 2:30 p.m. both Saturday and Sunday); Orchard book club meets on the 16th at 11 a.m. in the red barn (every third Wednesday), and music continues to entertain every Saturday and Sunday on the pavilion. Dancing encouraged. Music begins at 2 p.m. and is free to all unless otherwise indicated.

- August 5: Rewind Goodtimz
- August 6: Slight Departure
- August 12: William Ritter
- August 13: Carolina Bluegrass Style (new)
- August 17: Adams, Ritter & Norton Special Evening Concert (\$10)
- August 19: Miller & Pardue (new)
- August 20: SouthWind String Band (new)
- August 26: Split Rail Bluegrass
- August 27: Seth & Sara

On Thursday, August 17, from 6 to 8 p.m., the Orchard will host a second special evening fundraising concert featuring Sheila Kay Adams, award-winning balladeer and storyteller with long-time Orchard musician, William Ritter, and new generation ballad signer, Donna Ray Norton. Admission is \$10 with the split proceeds going to help fund the music program.

Don’t forget, Music Jam every Thursday afternoon from 1 to 3:30 p.m. If you play, practice, or just want to listen, come on over—no charge. All are welcome. Sours Mountain Homestead Farm, a family-owned goat and rescue farm, will be on premises all day August 26-27, talking about their goat milk products for sale in the General Store.

Please watch the website, altapassorchard.org, or our Facebook page for apple updates (bagged and U-Pick), and start making plans to visit this month. The apple pie is always right out of the oven, the ice cream cold and yes, creamy. The Apple Core Grill is now open 11 to 4 p.m., Wednesday-Sunday, through October 29.

Located at 1025 Orchard Road near Spruce Pine at mile 328.3 on the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Orchard is a not-for-profit working, small-batch heirloom apple orchard, and educational venue. Hours are 10 to 5 p.m., Wednesday-Sunday. For more information, visit the website and Facebook page. Experience the Orchard at Altapass.

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



A Grateful Girl

Press Release -Grateful Girl Gathering

By Patti Jensen  
Mitchell County

Grateful Girl Gathering Christian Women’s Conference Returns for 2023

Have you ever felt the need to connect with other Christian women in your community? Have you ever had a prayer for a closer relationship with your friends and for ways to impact your community? Have you ever prayed for God to help you be more grateful even on tough days?

You are not alone! The Grateful Girl Gathering was born from prayers just like that...Praying for God to reveal how we could use our gifts and talents for Him to bless other women just like us! We are women of different ages and different churches who were seeking a unique event that could bring women together to worship, study God’s word, hear amazing speakers, and have fun!

The Grateful Girl Gathering Christian Women’s Conference returns in 2023 bringing an event to encourage women with great speakers, amazing worship music, and a time to connect and be encouraged.

The Grateful Girl Gathering will be held Saturday, September 9th at the Cross Street Commerce Center in Spruce Pine, NC. In its 3rd year, the conference team is planning a great day for women of all ages! In the first two years of the conference, women from all across WNC as well as other states attended the conference and this year is already shaping up to be a great one. “The planning team for the Grateful Girl Gathering is made up of women from different area churches and are of different ages and stages in life,” said Patti Jensen, one of the team members. “We hope that women make plans to attend this year to hear the speakers, experience the worship and enjoy the fun activities allowing them to connect with other women from our area.”

Three speakers are slated for the conference this year including Nicki Koziaraz, Tiffany Johnson, and Tara Lorencen. There are also three exciting DIY session presenters coming to share DIY lessons in cookie decorating, designing your own essential oil roller with oils from the Bible, and creating a painting on canvas. Another fun feature is the pop-up boutique with booths from WNC small businesses. And this year the Sunshine Photo Bus will be on hand to capture memories with your friends both old and new!

Tickets are on sale now at [www.gratefulgirlgathering.com](http://www.gratefulgirlgathering.com). For updates and notices, those interested are encouraged to sign up for the conference newsletter on the website.

The event is sponsored by several businesses and churches throughout the region. If your business or church is interested in helping to make the event possible, you can visit [www.gratefulgirlgathering.com/sponsors](http://www.gratefulgirlgathering.com/sponsors).

“There are a lot of factors in this world that are negative and discouraging,” said Jensen. “But we want to remind the women in our communities that God is good, that He loves them and has a special purpose for their lives,” said Jensen. “We desire that women will come to the conference and feel a connection to God and the other women in attendance!”

For more information visit [www.gratefulgirlgathering.com](http://www.gratefulgirlgathering.com) and follow along on Facebook and Instagram at [@agratefulgirlgathering](https://www.instagram.com/agratefulgirlgathering)



Out of town? You can still read the "Good News" on our new Website: [www.brcnews.com](http://www.brcnews.com) And find us on Facebook

Sudoku

Solution on page 14

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

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

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At All Costs

By Tim Tron  
Burke County



The shadows had barely begun to stretch across the barren, mountainous landscape as the setting sun finally gave up its stranglehold on the sweltering temperatures. Platoon Sergeant Jack Turner's back lay against the track of the armored personnel carrier. Scattered around him in other positions of cover, the rest of his platoon sat waiting for Ops to call in the strike. Their target was an enemy concentration just beyond a crucial bridge that stretched across the Arghandab River, a vital link between them and the enemy's stronghold. Once the fortifications were blown, Jack and his team were instructed to take out all insurgents in the area, clearing it for another build-up coming behind them and taking back control of the all-important bridge.

Jack's earpiece squawked as the corpsman took confirmed the coordinates. Moments later, two F-35B Stealth Fighters thundered overhead, their exhaust fanning the men below as they gut-twisted a ninety-degree turn as their missiles flared from underneath. One hit just beyond the far side of the bridge, hitting a large swath of fortified bunkers and machine gun nests, the explosion echoing across the valley. The other hit a weapons depot, both exploding almost simultaneously. There was a momentary pause, then the voices from command came to advance. "Hold the bridge at all costs," the voice echoed in Jack's head. While the smoke from the explosions still provided the crucial cover they needed, Jack yelled at his men, "Let's go." Without hesitation, his platoon began to advance on the critical link, knowing full well that the enemy that remained was waiting.

They were within fifty yards of the bridge when the distinctive sound of the AK47 began firing. To his left, Davis went down. The helmet did little good, as the headshot was instant - he never felt a thing. To Jack's right, Tex took a round to his leg, throwing him to the ground, scrambling now to find cover before the next bullet found its mark. Again and again, the sound of lead stinging the air, like a nest of angry hornets, buzzed by his head -the sound of death, with the ever-present thought, "Eventually, one of those would be for him." No sooner had the words passed through his mind than a mortar struck, the shock waves through him backward as a piece of shrapnel hit his chest, burning, rage, and fear enveloped his body. A strange warmth began to ebb down his left side. Still conscious, he sat up, looking around him. There was no sound anymore, the senses stunned, but he could see his men still working their way before him, stealthily advancing into the shroud of smoke and dust.

Another explosion, another wave of shock.

The world now separated from his existence, he fought the urge to sleep – the shock was unbearable. "Focus, dang it, focus," Jack repeated the words out loud, yet he could still not hear his own voice. Trying to stand, leaning on his rifle for support, he lurched forward, seeking to catch up with his men. The voices in the earpiece kept shouting, "Hold the bridge at all costs." At that moment, the repeated feeling of being tapped in the chest caught his attention. Looking down, he saw the rounds penetrating his upper torso, and blood began to flow. Slowly, like being caught in quicksand, he felt his body melting into the ground. Unsure of what was happening, he fought against the feeling, struggling to move his legs, only to look down and see that they now had dissolved into the earth below him. Gradually, against his will, Jack began to melt into nothingness.

"Hold the bridge at all costs, at all costs," the voice echoed.

He battled once again to move what was once a leg, but nothing. With all his might, he forced himself to focus, "Just one toe, move just one toe." Jack strained with every ounce of strength he could muster until there was finally a slight twitch.

Gasping for breath, he sat up – sweating and stunned, the nightmare had returned. He could still feel himself trying to move a toe. He twisted both his feet, responding out of confirmation more than ability, assured it had only been a dream. He breathed a sigh of relief. He reached up and felt his chest beneath his damp t-shirt. The smooth, tortuous ridges of the scars from the battle were still there. The painful reminders would never go away. They would forever be part of his story. He squinted at the nightstand nearby. It was already late in the morning; he was supposed to go pick up his son from the rehab clinic at noon. Trying to function, he swung his legs over to the floor and started to get up. The pang from the previous night's binge still stung. Jack tried to escape the past by drowning himself in the bottle, but as much as he wanted to leave it all behind, it remained with him, like a stain on his soul. The pain turned to bitterness, so much so that when he returned from Afghanistan, he was not the same father as when he left. His anger soon bled over into his family. Eventually, his wife left him, taking their son Isaac with her. But the darkness crept into all their lives as his son, like his father, found comfort in alcohol. Yet, unlike his dad, his son Isaac couldn't control his desire. His life had gone from a bright, healthy teenager, to one of a chronic alcoholic, in and out of rehab.

The day progressed, and as was typical for their relationship. After Jack picked Isaac up from the clinic, they got into an argument over some trivial event which triggered a wave of anger in them both. In the end, they were both bloodied, and Jack watched as Isaac limped away, crying, screaming that he was going to put an end to this. A few days later, Jack got a call from the Sheriff's office. It was one of his old high-school buddies, Preston. After a short jaunt down memory lane, he got down to business. He was calling to warn Jack that his son had lawyered up and that he was requesting a restraining order on him. Preston added that to avoid the legalities, he should not come near his son. "Avoid him at all costs," were his words. The last altercation was the final straw to break the camel's back, and Jack knew it. Against his will, Jack cut off all communications with his son – another

painful memory, another scar.

Years would pass, and Jack would remarry. He found a Godly woman name Shelly that understood his PTSD. He and Shelly became one; oneness as far as those traumas would allow. Yet, the darkness would not abate. Jack and Shelly were both chain smokers. Eventually, the harm associated with such addictions caught up with them. First, it was Shelly that was diagnosed with lung cancer. The initial prognosis was that she might have a year to live. For the first time in his life, Jack prayed. He begged God to give him more time with this woman that was a godsend in his life. Jack took out a second mortgage on the house to pay for an experimental drug that the Doctor's said might extend her life. Seemingly, God answered Jack's prayers. Shelly lived twelve more years, but during the last two, she was bedridden. At about that time, Jack came developed throat cancer. It took every bit of strength he had to make it through each day. He quit his job, taking what meager pay he could collect from his incomplete pension and welfare.

To some, it seemed as if Jack had been cursed. In all practicality, he had lost a wife and his son. And now, his beloved Shelly was dying. If he didn't beat this cancer, he could easily join her in the grave. He was ok with that too. For the last two years of her life, he remained at home, becoming her primary caregiver. It was gut-wrenching, watching his soulmate slip away.

Meanwhile, Jack battled through the surgeries and radiation treatments, which nearly killed him. He would've given everything to go in her place, but it was not to be. She passed on a cool summer morning as she watched the hummingbirds on their porch from her bed in the living room.

A few days later, as Jack stood looking out at the few he came to her funeral service, he thought, "Why couldn't this have been me instead of her God?" That day, another one that he would just as soon forget, was another painful reminder that his life was hell on earth - one more scar. He would just as soon stop the treatments for his throat cancer, but there was something that felt unfinished, something he had to do before letting go.

It was a cold, blustery night as Jack's truck pulled out of the hospital parking lot in Indy. Another round of chemo, another draining week of needles, and sleepless nights. The snow was falling so hard that his headlights could barely make out the ice-covered road before him. The hospital offered to put him in the hospital-ity room for the night, but he insisted he get home. His faithful dog Joe was there waiting. She was all he had left.

The three-hour ride would be rough, but he had been in tougher straits. The streets of Indianapolis were all but deserted as he wound his way through the unfamiliar roads. Seeing the sign pointing toward the interstate, the GPS voice confirmed his turn. As he rounded the corner, a figure barely visible flashed before his headlights. Unsure, Jack slammed on the breaks, but too late. His truck slid, now out of control; a loud thump and the sound of the bumper hitting something metal caused the truck to stop abruptly. He jumped out of the cab and did his best to shuffle on the slick surface toward the headlights. The blur of the blizzard-like condition made it difficult to see. Holding his hand above his eyes to shield them from the onslaught, he rounded the hood, holding onto the truck with one hand. There on the ground lay a figure, still, unmoving. "Holy crap, I've killed somebody," he said under his breath. He knelt and searched through the dark layers of clothing for the skin. Feeling for a pulse at the person's neck, he felt warmth and a faint heartbeat. Knowing time was of the essence, he reached for his phone to call 911. "Crap, it's in the truck," he thought.

He started to get up to retrieve the device, but as he began to get up, a moan came from the injured pedestrian, now quickly beginning to be covered by a thin layer of white. "My shoulder, oh, my head." Before Jack could respond, the lump of humanity sat up. It was an elderly man, his white beard closely trimmed but barely visible above the scarf wrapped around his neck. A black stocking cap pulled down tight around his ears revealed tufts of white hair from underneath. But something about his eyes caused Jack to pause. They twinkled a brilliant blue that seemed unnatural.

"Hey, old chap, I think I've had a spill." The man's voice had a Scottish ring. "Well, not really," Jack responded hesitantly.

"I was just on my way to meet an old friend when bam, out of nowhere, I landed here."

"Yes, I'm so, so sorry."

"Oh, hey, I think I'll be okay. If you could just help me up here."

"Oh sure, not a problem."

Jack reached down, and with all his remaining strength, for the treatments had drained him physically, he did his best to get him up. They both leaned against the snow-covered hood of the vehicle catching their breath. "Can I take you to the emergency room to get you checked out," Jack asked with concern.

"Well, maybe, but I'll tell you what I could use more right now."

"What's that."

"A good hot cup of joe."

"Seriously," Jack quipped. He thought back to his military training and how shock could confuse people and disorient them to the point that they sometimes make fatal decisions. He felt he needed to step in. "I really think we should have you checked out. You hit your head pretty hard."

"Well, I understand and appreciate your concern, laddy," the stranger replied, smiling as those eyes sparkled even more, "but I think we both could use a good hot cup of brew. Don't ja?"

"Sure, but in this weather, who will be open?"

"Oh, no problem. I know of a little shop just around the corner. That is, if'n you don't mind?"

"Oh, of course not, it's the least I could do," Jack now went along with it,

*continued on page 36*



Humor

By Buddy Freeman  
Madison County

“Hello? Is this the fire department?”.... “Yes.”..... “Listen, my house is on fire. You got to come right away. It's terrible.”...” Okay, how do we get to your house?”... “Don't you have some of those big red trucks?”

Lady running to catch the Trash Truck. She yelled, “ Am I too late for the garbage?” Garbage Man says, “No, no just hop in.”

Wife: “Honey, have you seen that young couple who just moved in? They are so sweet. When he leaves to go to work he kisses her bye. When he comes home he brings her a dozen of roses. Now why can't you do that?” Husband, “I don't even know her.”

Truths that little children have learned: 1) No matter how hard you try, you can't baptize a cat. 2) When your mom is mad at your dad, don't let her brush your hair. 3) If your sister hits you, don't hit her back...they always catch the second person. 4) You can't trust a dog to watch your food. 5) The best place to be when you're sad is Grandma's lap.

Truths that adults have learned: 1) Raising teenagers is like nailing Jell-O to a tree. 2) Wrinkles don't hurt. 3) All families are like fudge...Mostly sweet, with a few nuts. 4) Middle age is when you choose your cereal for fiber, not for the toys.

Attorney: The youngest son, the 20-year-old, how old is he? Witness: He's 20, much like your IQ.

Attorney: She has three children, right? Witness: Yes. Attorney: How many were boys? Witness: None. Attorney: Were there any girls? Witness: Your Honor, I think I need a different attorney. Can I get a new attorney?

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



By Steve Henry  
Burke County



His desire for us is that we might be filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18-21). We've all heard the term DUI or "driving under the influence." When we have an excess of alcohol we are influenced by it in word and deed. When we are "filled with the Spirit" our words and deeds are influenced by Him.

For example, I remember in another lifetime when I put too much alcohol in my body, it influenced my thinking, my attitude, and especially my speech, and my walk. I said and did some of the stupidest things I have ever said or done, things that I am still ashamed of to this day when I think of them. Thank God, when Satan tries to use them against me I remind him that all that mess has been taken care of by the Blood of the Lamb and the word of my testimony, but they are still embarrassing to think about, and the most shameful part about it, I was doing all those things just to try to be accepted by a crowd that was as messed up as I and probably didn't care about me in the first place.

In this new life, I have been given, I have spent time internalizing His Word and it has influenced my thinking, my attitude, my speech, and my walk. I don't think there is anything mystical about being filled with the Spirit. I don't think it is some great movement on me by the Holy Spirit, it is a command that is fulfilled by just plain old mental work, studying His Word to fill my mind with His thoughts daily, listening to His Word in song, in preaching, and the lives of other believers.

After we internalize it by study, then we can speak it in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, and as we speak it our faith grows because "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God" (Romans 10:17). But keep this in mind, we can't speak what we don't know, so as He teaches us in 2nd Timothy 2:15, "study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth"

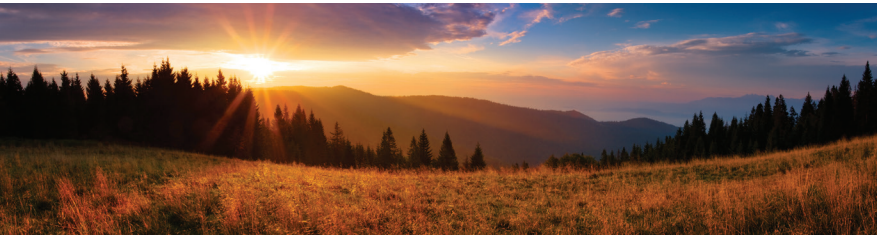
Once He gives us the command to "be filled with the Spirit" (vs.18) He immediately gives us instruction as to how to carry it out, and not just instruction but these next few elements should also be evidence to us that we are focusing on the study and meditation on His Word that will bring about the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

(vs19) "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;" Meditate on His Word day and night (Psalm 1:1-3). We have all heard that if you talk to yourself you are crazy. From this scripture, I believe an argument could be made that it is not crazy but advisable to talk to yourself, as long as you are speaking the right things. One of the greatest ways to internalize God's Word is through song, no matter what form it may take, whether a psalm, a hymn, or a spiritual song, and it will also help us fulfill the command to "take up our cross" that we looked at in another study.

(vs. 20) "Giving thanks always for all things unto God;" The natural outflow of a heart filled with God's Word is gratitude. As we are reminded from His Word of how deeply He loves us we will probably spend more time thanking Him for His blessings than asking Him for blessings.

(vs. 21) "Submitting yourselves, one to another in the fear of God." We must learn that we will need the help of our brothers and sisters in Christ to accomplish what He wants. We need to come down from our spiritual high horse, get honest with others, and ask for their help. That is the way God has designed His Body. Find someone you can be totally honest with and that will be honest with you. Someone that will encourage you to be more than you think you can be; someone who will see through you when you make excuses for not being all you can be.

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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# Todd's Techy Tips

**Consumed**  
By Todd Abraham  
*Athens, Tenn.*

It's the first thing you check when you wake up in the morning if it's not what wakes you up. It's the last thing you look at before you close your eyes to go to sleep. It occupies more of your time than any other person and/or thing in your life. It keeps your mind in a constant state of distraction. It interferes with your prayer time. It negates the alone, quiet time you should be spending with the Lord to hear His voice. It's the fog that clouds your mind 24/7. Have you figured out what I'm talking about?

A close-up photograph of a man with short brown hair, smiling broadly. He is wearing a dark blue button-down shirt over a white t-shirt. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a wooden cabinet or door.

Many of you probably take it in the shower to play music. If you aren't watching something on it then you are probably listening to music on it. If you aren't doing either of the aforementioned, then you are probably talking on it. Whenever possible, you are shoving it in front of your children under the guise of they are learning from it. When in reality, it's a crutch for you to not be 'burdened' by their need for attention. You check it constantly at work and, most likely, find excuses to step aside so you can check it even more. You take it to the bathroom at work which causes extended trips decreasing your productivity and displeasing God. Your focus on your lunch break is entirely on it. As soon as you get off work, it's the first thing you look at. On the drive home, you are constantly monitoring it and disobeying the law of the land and the commandment of God. Your entire evening at home is overwhelmed by it until you close your eyes to sleep. You anger God because you have it present during your prayer time causing double-mindedness and the inability to focus totally on Him and His Word.

You go out with your family and your whole family is constantly on them. If your content wasn't distracting enough then you feel the need to share with each other what you all are watching. You deny your babies and toddlers the attention they deserve by your attention being pulled away by it and/or shoving it in their faces so you can be free to do whatever. You take more pictures than any one human should ever take in 100 lifetimes. You let it focus all of your energy on you with selfies and TikTok videos which is contrary to the witness you should be portraying as a true Christian. It consumes your mind with material things and things of this life. You never use it to praise the Lord for all His wonderful works He does in your life and if you do, it's rare. You never use it as a means to find more souls you can be a witness to for them to come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

It keeps your mind clouded constantly and makes a liar out of you to God and man when you say you can't live without it. It makes you a disobedient Christian in more than one way if you have minor children who you buy these abominable devices for. It encourages them at an early age before they even begin to know the true difference between right and wrong, to become idolaters and focus on all the things Satan loves to use to destroy souls. If all the above wasn't bad enough, it costs you twice as much if not more than a basic phone which is also displeasing to God because He doesn't condone waste at all. It's smartphones dummies!

You are consumed by your smartphones. You are an idolater. Psalm 97:7 “*Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols: worship him, all ye gods.*” Revelation 21:8 “*But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.*” Repent! Jesus is coming.

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

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# YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

## NC Senate District 47



Sen. Ralph Hise  
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919-733-3460

Governor Cooper recently vetoed three bills that have large implications for protecting North Carolina children and families from getting caught in the crossfire of the ongoing national culture war – House Bill 808, House Bill 574, and Senate Bill 49.

House Bill 808 - Gender Transition/Minors prohibits medical professionals from performing gender reassignment surgeries or prescribing puberty blockers or cross-sex hormones to children under 18 years of age. The bill is a companion to one I filed in the Senate this session.

A 2022 study from the law school at UCLA found that the percentage of youth who identify as transgender doubled in the five years between 2017 and 2022 from 0.7% to 1.4%. In comparison, only 0.5% of adults 25 to 64 identify as transgender.

These numbers suggest an alarming herd-mentality element to the growth of gender confusion in young people. Procedures such as gender reassignments and mastectomies are permanent and extremely damaging for young people. House Bill 808 protects minors from making life-altering decisions that they will likely come to regret.

House Bill 574 - Fairness in Women's Sports Act also addresses some of the negative ramifications of the ongoing cultural shift toward gender confusion and dysphoria in young people. Biological males should not be allowed to compete on women's and girls' sports teams.

On average, males have physical traits that would give them an unfair advantage against female competitors. This can mean the loss of scholarships and championship opportunities for girls who would otherwise earn those achievements.

Finally, Senate Bill 49 - Parents Bill of Rights outlines basic protections for parents' rights in the K-12 public school system. These include measures to ensure academic transparency and prevent sexuality, gender identity, and sexual activity from being ingrained in the school's curriculum. It also requires that parents be informed before any change in a child's name or pronouns is being used by school personnel or on official school records.

I look forward to overturning Governor Cooper's vetoes of these three bills which speak to common sense protections for children's safety, female athletes, and the rights of parents.

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

## NC Commissioner of Labor



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

I hope everyone has been enjoying their summer and staying cool! Hopefully, everyone has had an opportunity to spend time with their families and friends or enjoy a break or vacation!

In July, I was able to send members of my leadership team to the National Association of Government Labor Officials (NAGLO) Conference in Montgomery, Alabama. NAGLO was formed more than 100 years ago for the purpose of representing and collaborating with state departments of labor. Although no state labor department is identical to another, most states share certain responsibilities such as occupational safety and health, wage and hour enforcement, inspection of elevators and amusement devices, unemployment insurance oversight, etc. At this year's conference, my staff was able to listen to presentations on what different states and the federal government are doing with their consultation programs, wage and hour, how to improve our workforce, and learn from one another about best practices used in different departments of labor. Thank you to the Alabama Department of Labor for hosting this collaborative and informative conference.

I was able to tour the new headquarters of Trans-Tech Inc. in Gastonia in late July. This company is the largest trainer of CDL drivers in the state of North Carolina and they have 10 branches throughout the state. They were able to train over 2,000 drivers last year. CDL education is very important, and I appreciated the opportunity to be invited to visit and learn more about what Trans-Tech Inc. does in our state.

Fair season is right around the corner and August is the unofficial start to the local fair season. I am looking forward to visiting fairs around the state and enjoying the activities and events these local fairs have to offer. I want to say a special thank you to my Elevator and Amusement Device Bureau inspectors for all of their hard work inspecting and ensuring that the rides at the fair are safe for all to enjoy.

I hope everyone has a great rest of the summer!

## NC House District 86



Rep. Hugh Blackwell  
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[Hugh.Blackwell@ncleg.net](mailto:Hugh.Blackwell@ncleg.net)

### Sex Change for Children Ill-Advised

Much attention is being paid in today's culture to so-called transgender treatments and surgeries. These types of procedures are increasingly recognized as both experimental and potentially devastating, particularly for children. For example, substantial questions remain as to the effects on brain development, psychological well-being, bone mineral accrual, and reproductive health, especially when performed on minors. Most importantly, most folks understand that childhood is a time when a child is undergoing a variety of changes in the process of maturing, both physically and emotionally. No parent is likely to be surprised that a child's mood or choices can change quickly, dramatically, and fundamentally. So, while such "transgendering" may be largely experimental, it is also characterized by high numbers of persons who, having begun or largely completed the process as a minor, find that it was a mistake. Sadly, at that point, for those individuals, there may be no realistic way out of a bad decision.

There are two main categories of gender transition treatment: hormonal treatment and surgical intervention. Hormonal treatment is the more commonly used treatment for children. As a result, some physicians may prescribe puberty blockers for a child as early as 9 years of age to inhibit the development of the child's normal sexual characteristics. Then, cross-sex hormones are often prescribed to promote opposite-sex characteristics. Finally, these hormones may be used in the second category of sexual surgeries. Both categories present dangers and irreversible consequences. While the dangers entailed by sexual surgeries tend to be more apparent, those of hormonal therapies are not really less.

Convinced of the dangers and of the ever-evolving changes that naturally accompany childhood, I introduced legislation this year to require that children, except for in cases of truly unique medical circumstances, wait until they are 18 to begin treatment to change to the opposite sex, whether with hormones, surgery or a combination of both. Although the bill I introduced went through some modification in the legislative process, I believe the bill finally passed by both the NC House and the NC Senate is needed to protect our children. It prohibits both sexual surgeries and prescribing puberty-blocking and cross-sex drugs for those under 18. For those 18 and older who choose to change their sexual characteristics, they will have full opportunity to seek available options. The point is that those under 18 will need to wait to become adults before making such a permanent, obviously life-altering decision. Unfortunately, Governor Roy Cooper has vetoed the bill. Even so, we can be optimistic that the legislature will override his veto and that this important bill protecting our children will become law.

# God Bless America



# YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

## NC Senate District 46



Sen. Warren Daniel  
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919-715-7823

This month I would like to share some legislative and fiscal highlights from the perspective of a member of the North Carolina General Assembly. For history’s sake, I’d like to offer a review of the fiscal shape of NC over the last dozen years. Coming out of the recession of 2009-10, the state was looking at a \$2.5 billion budget deficit for 2011. There were structural changes that needed to be made and some tough decisions were required to correct some of the issues. As a result of those changes, the projected deficit of 2011 was turned into a series of revenue surpluses beginning in 2015. In FY 2019-2020 the projected budget surplus was looking to become a projected loss of \$1.13 billion, due to the shutdown of the economy due to COVID-19. However, the state used cash reserves (the Rainy Day fund) and CARES Act funding to plug the budget hole and provide funding for high-priority projects, and to protect state employees from furloughs similar to those that affected teachers and state employees in 2009-10. This is the result of continued tax reform (reductions) and smart fiscal management by the Republican General Assembly which have in turn led to strong economic growth in our state.

Saving for the future has been a crucial priority. Over the past 12 years, the Republican General Assembly has increased the savings reserve (often called the “Rainy Day Fund”) from \$150 million under Democrat leadership in 2010 to a balance of \$4.75 billion in FY 2022-23. In addition, since 2016, NC has had to spend nearly \$1.5 billion from the savings reserve on disaster relief for multiple natural disasters, including hurricanes, severe storms, fires, flooding, and an earthquake. The Republican-led General Assembly has and will continue to make having a robust savings reserve a priority so that our state is prepared for the next natural disaster or the current Biden recession. These fiscal policies have helped to raise the esteem of North Carolina in many national business publications such as Site Selection Magazine, Forbes, CNBC, the Tax Foundation, and Chief Executive Magazine. It was recently announced that for the second year in a row, North Carolina earned the #1 position in CNBC’s annual “America’s Top States for Business” rankings. Since 2007, CNBC has ranked all 50 states across several categories to determine which state is the best for business. North Carolina was named №1 for the first time in 2022 and retained the top position this year, with CNBC citing North Carolina’s best-in-the-nation workforce, booming economy, and strong career education. CNBC notes that winning consecutively is a rare feat in the study. Among the categories measured by CNBC, North Carolina scored first in Workforce, third in Economy, seventh in Education, and tenth in Business Friendliness. Securing the top spot two years in a row is evidence that the pro-business and pro-growth reforms created and enacted by the Republican-led state legislature are working. This is just a small part of the good news that is happening in North Carolina!



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Vacation Time

By Caron Cline  
Burke County

Mark 6:33-44

Summer offers the perfect opportunity to take some time away from our busy schedules and enjoy uninterrupted time with loved ones. Even Jesus encouraged some downtime for His disciples after an exhausting and exhilarating season of ministry. All thirteen men boarded a boat and set out for a secluded spot for this much-needed rest. However, the crowds discovered their plan and reached the destination before the boat ever landed on shore. Everyone wanted something from Jesus; healing, deliverance, provision, and even entertainment. Beneath the surface, these people were longing for something to satisfy their soul; something not easily identified. Jesus was always moved with compassion at the sight of these lost sheep. He understood that these people needed God’s truth-His Word-so He opened His mouth and spoke life to all who would hear. His purpose was to reveal the Heavenly Father in living color. After a long day of spiritual food, the disciples realized that this crowd also needed physical food. There seemed to be no other answer but to send them on their way in order to provide for themselves. After all, no one in their midst could feed this crowd. Much to their surprise, Jesus commanded them to do so. What?! This was an impossible assignment; not to mention that they were supposed to be on vacation. 200 days' wages couldn’t feed this group! Ironically, these men had recently returned from a mission trip where they were not allowed to carry extra food, clothing, or money; where every need was provided. Suddenly, amnesia had removed this memory as well as their faith, and there seemed to be no hope of having enough provisions to feed this multitude. But with faith in Jesus, all things are possible. All the Master asked them to do was focus on what they did have, not on what they did not have. 5 loaves and 2 fish was their answer, but what could be done with such a small offering? It is always enough, for it has nothing to do with the offering, but only to whom it is offered. Jesus multiplies everything that He touches exponentially. He asked all the people to sit down in groups of hundreds and fifties in anticipation of receiving a blessing. Jesus took this small amount of food, looked toward heaven, blessed, and broke it. He then offered bread and fish to the disciples. The men began distributing bread and fish to the hungry crowd. When their baskets were empty, Jesus refilled them and this continued until every hungry person was completely satisfied. The disciples themselves left satisfied with a basket of leftovers to carry home. We cannot empty ourselves in Jesus’ Name without Him filling us over and over again. We cannot out-give God. Serving others energizes a believer and replaces weariness with the peace of God, a peace that never fails to restore the soul. What a privilege to be the hands and feet of Jesus! A hungry multitude was fed that day, spiritually and physically. There is a hungry multitude in our midst today who are longing for something to satisfy their soul. ‘You give them something to eat!’

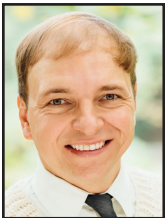
John 6:51 *“I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh”.*

*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.*



“The Body of Christ”

By Art Dmytriiev  
Yancey County



As many of us remember the words of the hymn “I am the church! You are the church” where the very first stanza is: The church is not a building; the church is not a steeple; the church is not a resting place; the church is a people.” What is the Church? Is it a building with stained glass windows? Is it people dressed up, congregating to sing hymns? What is it?

To answer this question, we need to go to the very beginning of human civilization. Adam and Eve were the first church on Earth! The first community. God does not just call individuals to work on their own for the kingdom of Heaven. He calls the church community as a whole to work together. Church members are the people who spread the gospel by working together. The Bible tells us the church is the community of believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Also, one famous Christian author said: "The church is God's appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. From the beginning, it has been God's plan that through His church shall be reflected to the world His fullness and His sufficiency." (White, E. G. (1911) The Acts of the Apostles, p. 9. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association.)

The authority of the church and church leaders always remained in Jesus Christ. As the Bible tells us in James 1:27 KJV: *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."*

The Bible refers to the Church as Christ's Bride, and just as a bride prepares to meet her groom at her wedding, so the Church prepares itself for the Second Coming of Christ.

The Church is the Body of Christ, which contains many believers - the parts of the Body with Jesus Christ as the head (1 Corinthians 12). Just as the body needs each organ to survive, each part of the Body of Christ is important. It illustrates that every person, no matter their gifts or talents, is valuable and has a purpose in the Church. In Ephesians 4:11–13 KJV we read: *"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ..."*

In the Bible, the church is called the family of God, where God is our Father, and fellow Christians are our brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus is the reason that we are a church. We strive to foster a community of believers who love, support and encourage one another, and to help our friends find freedom, healing, and hope in Jesus. In the book of Revelation, we read: *"And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ."* (Revelation 12:17 KJV). In this great conflict, we can only overcome *"by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of our testimony"* (Revelation 12:11), and Jesus Christ guarantees victory!

Dear Reader, what is Church for you? How do you define it? What is your relation to the Church? Wherever you are in your journey with God, do not delay any longer. Join His Body by proclaiming the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

*Pr. Art Dmytriiev 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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Prayer Teaches Trust In God's Timing

By Glenda Ward  
McDowell County



The Word of God, when interwoven with prayer, serves as direction and guidance, conviction and comfort, a deterrent from sin, an escape, and a counselor. A deeper walk with Christ is evident when our first response in any situation is to seek out the advice found in God's Word. When you pray, do not end your prayer without having aroused in your heart some feeling towards God. When after prayer you begin to read God's Word, do not finish reading without having felt in your heart the truth of what you read. These two feelings – one inspired by prayer, the other by reading – are mutually warm to one another; and if you pay attention to yourself, they will keep you under their influence during the whole day. Take pains to practice these two methods exactly and you will see for yourself what will happen.

God's spark, is a ray of grace that will fall at least into your heart. There is no way in which you, yourself, can produce it: it comes forth direct from God. A pattern develops when you pray for a specific request ... First, pray ... then wait ... then receive. How you wait upon God's timing says a lot about the depth of trust you have in God. Attitudes resulting from being impatient, nervous restlessness, running ahead of God, and not waiting for God's signals often classify our personalities in prayer. The daily discipline of prayer teaches us to wait or trust in God's best for us. Through your prayer journeys, you will discover that much of what you ask God for is His Will, but your timing may be wrong! Only when all the pieces slip neatly into place, can you ponder and appreciate the extra benefits of what time and waiting allowed to transpire.

Waiting and trusting and persevering in prayer, in some cases for a length of time before a specific prayer request is revealed by God, so it is in the life of the believer who prays without giving up. Though we may not receive the answer to our prayers as we had envisioned, our responsibility in prayer is to never stop waiting, trusting, praying, or expecting of God – the God of Ephesians 3:20, who does immeasurably more than all we could ask or imagine, to answer our request. Understanding the dynamics of persevering prayer comes only from the actual experience of praying. Only through truly waiting upon God and His response to a prayer request can one develop an inner trust in God that is sure of His provision, though the details are unseen. Patience and perseverance in prayer come only from waiting on Him. The discipline of waiting includes asking God if we are praying rightly, if we have heard His promise accurately, evaluating our motives, honestly examining if they are impure or selfish, and being able to acknowledge when our hopes are centered on something other than God's Will. The more completely you cease being concerned about the TIME in which your prayers are to be answered, the more freedom you'll enjoy in your prayer life!

When looking at the Word of God for real-life illustrations of those who sought God's specific plan and received it; this provides encouragement to believe that the principle is the same for anyone who loves God and fears Him. Convinced by Scripture and personal experience, loving, revering, and obeying God is the pathway to asking for and obtaining His Will in one's life. From one's personal relationship with God, one gains the assurance that He indeed has a specific plan for that person's life. (Reference Matthew 21:22).

God has a plan. This verse points to the truth. "... and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them" (Psalms 139:16). May I say that when I have asked, I have always received guidance and direction (though in God's timing), and because God has shown me the way, I know where I am going. "I have received the call, and I am following."

During prayer, a solution to some problem that perplexes you in your spiritual life comes out of itself from an unknown source. This is the true Christian way of being taught God's Truth. We find the promise is fulfilled in John 6:45, "...And they shall all be taught of God...". It is that Truths are inscribed in the heart by the finger of God and remain there firm and not forgotten.

Ask for His will, and believe in what God says is yours, until you receive all that He has for you.

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



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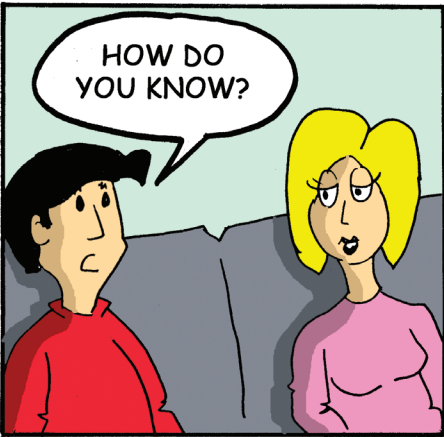
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knowing that he had to stick with this guy, whoever he was, to ensure he wasn't still traumatized from the collision.

Jack helped him into the truck's passenger side, then shuffled around to his side and backed out of the light pole that had caused his truck's forward motion. He drove slowly through the white-out conditions, following the old man's direction. Sure enough, they pulled up in front of an ancient-looking establishment, something out of the early 1900s. "Here it is," the old guy remarked as Jack pulled



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alongside the curb. There wasn't any other vehicle around, so the parking was easy. Once inside, the low mellow lighting added to the ambiance, making the dark wood and large fire in the fireplace seem like home. Across the table, the old man sat. As the waitress brought them their coffees, the old guy smiled at her, and she responded as if he was an old friend. "Clearly a regular," Jack mused to himself.

"My friends call me Gabe," finally, he introduced himself, extending a gloved hand with the fingertips removed toward Jack. The steam from the coffee drifted between them like a morning fog over a dark bog.

"I'm Jack, a pleasure to meet you, or rather, bump into you," he responded with a smile. They both chuckled. "Really, Gabe, if you want me to take you to the ER, I would be more than happy."

"I'm fine, my boy, not a word more about it. I've had worse scrapes. Besides, we've got a lot to talk about."

Jack didn't quite get that last bit, but then again, the old guy had a pretty good knock on the old noggin, so the least he could do would be to humor him for a while. The more Gabe talked, the more Jack felt like he had known Gabe his whole life. They spoke of many things, but the longer the conversation went on, the more it began to feel like it was the old guy was reaching into his very soul, pulling him up from the depths of despair.

"You see, my boy, it is the love of God that permeates everything and everyone. Without it, we are nothing but creatures existing without a purpose. By Jove, if I didn't know better, I'd say you have lost everything except the life you now cling to. But have you wondered why?"

Jack shook his head no. Gabe seemed to be reading his thoughts, and yet, he was right. He had only focused on the details of making it from one day to the next, not looking beyond what was in the immediate.

"You've probably pushed others in your world away because of this baggage you carry. In your anger, you've put up barriers where you'd rather pull them down. Am I getting you?"

With his head down now, looking at the table, Jack whispered, "Yeah. Pretty damn good."

"Jack, you've got to seek God, and when you find him, let his love be the light that draws those back to you. It's the only way. Quit trying to make it work. Let God into your life, and then step back and watch what can happen."

Jack's head was swimming now, unable to think; he needed a moment to regain himself. "Excuse me for a second, but I need to hit the restroom. The coffee, you know..." Gabe nodded, smiling lovingly. Jack wandered back to the restroom and stayed there until the dizziness dissipated. When he returned, the little old man was gone. His heart sank. He started to sit down but noticed a napkin folded in the spot where he had been sitting. Curious, he picked it up and read the inscription. At that moment, something inside Jack snapped. Years of pain and years of denial suddenly washed away. He began to weep.

The drive back to New Harmony seemed like minutes. When he left the coffee shop, the skies had cleared, and the roads were already melting. When he got home, Joe was happy to see him. He then found that old Bible on the shelf beside Shelly's box of ashes. Jack turned page after page, reading scripture until he fell asleep on the couch. The next day he called Isaac and asked if they could meet in a few days, that he had something he needed to share. There, in that meeting, Jack told his son about the horrors of war and how he wanted to apologize for all the wrongs he had done in his son's life. Then he asked Isaac to give him one more chance.

Weeks would pass. Jack joined a Bible study group in town, and soon, everyone could see the changes. Gone was the hiding. Gone were the harsh words. Slowly, Isaac started coming around. He and Jack began fishing and hunting together again, something they hadn't done since Isaac's childhood. Isaac even sat with his father on Sunday evenings reading the Bible with him. Slowly, like Jack, Isaac began to change. He had seen something in his father that felt different. It was so significant that it caused him to seek help with his alcoholism. He went through a recovery program, and before he knew it, he was two years clean.

But no matter how much God's love poured through Jack, his body continued to wither away from the cancer. Soon, he passed. As Isaac went through the house to gather his dad's belongings, he found a napkin lying on the shelf next to Shelly's ashes. Picking it up, he read the aged, tear-stained note. The emotion rose in his eyes as the tears began to stream down his own face, Isaac remembered his father talking about the strange encounter in Indy a few years ago, but he never shared with him what the old man left behind. There in his hands, he read the words that changed his father's eternal life and saved his soul.

There on the white piece of paper, the old man had touched Jack in only a way that could have come from God, "Dearest Jack, remember to cling to God and to seek Him with all your heart. And Jack, most of all, Hold the bridge at all costs. – Your Friend, Gabe."

Thanks be to God.

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



Spiritual Poison Control

By Robert Garner  
Rutherford County

Symbolically, the deaf ear is (Strong's # H2795). Men who will not hear the prophets and obey the law. Psalm 58:4, *“their poison is like the poison of a serpent: they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear”*.

Isaiah 29:24 *“They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmured shall learn doctrine”*.

After Christ was crucified and had risen, he commissioned the disciples; Mark 16:15 *“go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature”*. The disciples in the days of Jesus were basically the same as today’s followers of Jesus Christ, apprentice students of the gospel. They were to proclaim to the public, all the world, something which has been done. (Strong's G2784), *“Go and Preach; to herald or officiate by the public proclamation of the gospel and matters pertaining to it, made by Jesus, by the apostles and other Christian teachers”*.

Modern-day disciples, (John 6:44 who the Father must draw to Himself), must believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They can have the signs listed below following them. A sign is a shadow, it has no physical properties. The shadow of God Almighty protects mankind’s soul. Signs and shadows are symbolic of The Father, The Son Jesus, and the Holy Ghost. They have no physical manifestation. Psalm 91:1, *“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty”*.

Today’s modern-day disciples, Christian teachers, must always be mindful of Paul’s statements in Acts 20:29 & 30. *“For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also, of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse (Strong's G1294, corrupt God’s word) things, to draw away disciples after them.”*

Signs Of the Comforter, Who Is the Holy Spirit.

Mark 16:17, *“and these signs shall follow them that believe; in my name shall they cast out devils: they shall speak with new tongues.”* John 14:26, *“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever have I have said to you.”*

Casting Out Devils.

James 4:7, (Strong's # G5293, be under submission to God) *“Submit yourselves therefore to God, resist the devil, and he will flee from you”*.

Speak With New Tongues

Job 27:4, *“My lips shall not speak wickedness, nor my tongue utter deceit”*. Mark 16:18, *“They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover”*.

Take Up Serpents

Luke 10:19, *“Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy [the devils]: and nothing by any means shall hurt you”*.

Drink Any Deadly Thing

The elect teachers of God will not be deceived (Strong's # G635, Seduce, to be led away from truth to error) by false Christs, false prophets, or false Gospels. Mark 13:22, *“False Christs and false prophets will arise, and shall shew signs and wonders, to seduce, if it were possible, even the elect”*.

John 7:37,38 *“In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, if any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.”*

Mark 16:18, “To Drink” refers to (Strong's # G4095) “figuratively, to receive into the soul that which serves to refresh, strengthen, and nourish unto life eternal”.

Also, it’s extremely important to understand “To Drink”, Strong's #H8354, figuratively can define drinking a cup of God's wrath, of slaughter and wicked deeds. Job 15:16, *“How much more abominable and filthier is man, which drinketh iniquity [sin] like water”*. Obadiah 1:16, *“for as you have drunk upon my holy mountain, so shall all the heathen drink continually, yea, they shall drink, and they shall swallow down, and they shall be as though they had not been”*.

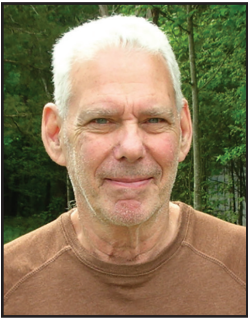
Lay Hands on The Sick and they Shall Recover

Perhaps the most symbolic sign in all of the scriptures is the hand. Figuratively representing the “right hand of the power of God”. Hebrews 12:2, *“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God”*. 1 Peter 5:6, *“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time”*. “Exalt” Strong's # G5312, to raise you to dignity, honor, and happiness.

The “laying on of hands” to someone is a symbolic gesture of bringing someone under “The Mighty Hand of God”, the power of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps God’s Word will open the deaf ear to hear the scriptures spoken by his servant; a modern-day disciple or Christian teacher. 2 Corinthians 6:6 & 7, *“By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned [sincere]. By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and the left”*.

Mark 16:18 refers to recovering from spiritual sickness of one’s soul, not physical sickness. 2 Corinthians 4:16, *“for this cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day”*. 2 Timothy 2:26 *“and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him as well”*.

The ministry of Jesus Christ leaves no doubt that He healed all manner of sickness, Mathew 9:35. Healing physical disease by mankind is not the ability of



those who teach the word of God. Why do we have hospitals full of disease and death? 1 Corinthians 15:22, *“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive”*.

The “power of Satan” can be manifested by deceivers who are Antichrists; of which there are many in the world today. 2 Thessalonians 2:9, *“working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders”*. The deceivers claim the ability to heal physical sickness. Their subjects fall backward as they claim to have received a miracle of physical healing; known as being “slain by the spirit”.

Falling backward is a sign of corruption, deceivers, shame, confusion, and demonic activity.

John 18:6, *“As soon then as he had said unto them, I Am He, they went backward, and fell to the ground”*. Isaiah 44:25, *“That frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish”*. Jeremiah 7:24, *“But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward”*. Psalm 70:2. *“Let them be ashamed and confounded that seek after my soul: let them be turned backward, and put to confusion, that desire my hurt”*.

Job 27:11 sums up perfectly the responsibility of those who bring the Gospel to mankind. *“I will teach you by the hand of God: that which is with the Almighty will I not conceal”*.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus, continue in your endurance of teaching God’s word; *“the word of the Lord endureth for ever”*. 1 Peter 4:6 *“for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit”*.

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

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


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# Crossword

ACROSS

1 The \_\_\_\_ is not held secure, the sail is not spread (Isa 33:23)

5 he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of \_\_\_\_ (2 Sam 6:19)

9 Then God said, "Let the \_\_\_\_ produce vegetation (Gen 1:11)

13 whatsoever hath \_\_\_\_\_, that shall ye not offer (1,7) (Lev 22:20) KJV

14 But if he be \_\_\_\_ than thy estimation, then he shall present (Lev 27:8) KJV

15 The twenty ninth book of the Old Testament.

16 The \_\_\_\_\_ trees cover him with their shadow (Job 40:22)

17 Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur and \_\_\_\_ the five kings of Midian (Num 31:8)

18 I came near unto \_\_\_\_ of them that stood by (Daniel 7:16)

19 \_\_\_\_ man can live and not see death? (Ps 89:48)

20 they which went up also from Telharesha, Cherub, \_\_\_\_ (Neh 7:61) KJV

21 They \_\_\_\_, "The Lord needs it." (Luke 19:34)

23 I hold \_\_\_\_ to your statutes, O LORD (Ps 119:31)

25 "You \_\_\_\_ were with Jesus of Galilee," she said (Matt 26:69)

26 know that you have no authority to \_\_\_\_ taxes (Ezra 7:24)

29 topaz, and the diamond, the \_\_\_\_, the onyx (Ezek 28:13)

32 their sailors came alongside to trade for your \_\_\_\_ (Ezek 27:9)

34 saying, \_\_\_\_, Eli, lama sabachthani (Matt 27:46)

36 you must cancel any debt your brother \_\_\_\_ you (Deut 15:3)

38 ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you \_\_\_\_ (Matt 11:28) KJV

39 the hour cometh, \_\_\_\_, is now come, (John 16:32) KJV

40 from the hand of the wicked, from the \_\_\_\_ of evil (Ps 71:4)

43 lies down, like a lioness who \_\_\_\_ to rouse him? (Gen 49:9)

44 a vine, and brought forth branches, and shot forth \_\_\_\_ (Ezek 17:6) KJV

46 Saul and Abner son of Ner had \_\_\_\_ down (1 Sam 26:5)

49 he entered the temple \_\_\_\_ and began driving out those who were (Luke 19:45)

50 We \_\_\_\_ whenever we are weak but you are strong (3,4) (2 Cor 13:9)

54 in \_\_\_\_, Zeboim and Neballat (Neh 11:34)

57 The body is a \_\_\_\_, though it is made up of many parts (1 Cor 12:12)

58 Sir, come down \_\_\_\_ my child die (John 4:49) KJV

59 30th book of the Old Testament

60 If anyone \_\_\_\_ to be first, he must be the very last (Mark 9:35)

61 will men take \_\_\_\_ of it to hang any vessel thereon (1,3) (Ezek 15:3) KJV

62 rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, \_\_\_\_, slander (Col 3:8)

63 forthwith they sprung up, because they had no \_\_\_\_ of earth (Matt 13:5) KJV

64 You were in \_\_\_\_, the garden of God (Ezek 28:13)

65 the most upright worse than a \_\_\_\_ hedge (Mic 7:4)

66 Likewise every good \_\_\_\_ bears good fruit (Matt 7:17)

Down

1 You will overthrow every fortified city and every \_\_\_\_ town (2 Kings 3:19)

2 a gentle tongue can break \_\_\_\_ (1,4) (Prov 25:15)

3 Multitudes who \_\_\_\_ in the dust of the earth will awake (Dan 12:2)

4 exiles who lived at \_\_\_\_ Abib near the Kebar River (Ezek 3:15)

5 make its plates and \_\_\_\_ of pure gold (Ex 25:29)

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

7 let them also \_\_\_\_ love thy name be joyful in thee (Ps 5:11) KJV

8 David sent them to you to explore the city and \_\_\_\_ it out (2 Sam 10:3)

9 Teach me, O \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_ follow your decrees (4,2) (Ps 119:33)

10 there before me was a man riding \_\_\_\_ horse (1,3) (Zech 1:8)

11 Bel bows down, \_\_\_\_ stoops low; their idols (Isa 46:1)

12 by us who ate and \_\_\_\_ with him after he rose from the dead (Acts 10:41)

19 Therefore disaster \_\_\_\_ overtake him in an instant (Prov 6:15)

20 the poison of \_\_\_\_ is under their lips (Rom 3:13) KJV

22 The good shepherd \_\_\_\_ down his life for the sheep (John 10:11)

23 king of Tyre had furnished Solomon with cedar trees and \_\_\_\_ trees (1 King 9:11)

24 To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. \_\_\_\_ (Phil 4:20)

27 with the words of David, and of Asaph the \_\_\_\_ (2 Chr 29:30)

28 he himself gives all men life and breath and everything \_\_\_\_ (Acts 17:25)

29 "All these I have kept since I was a \_\_\_\_, " he said (Luke 18:21)

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30 twenty he goats, two hundred \_\_\_\_, and twenty rams (Gen 32:14)

31 Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor \_\_\_\_ (Luke 12:24)

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

35 seven of every kind of clean animal, a male and \_\_\_\_ mate (Gen 7:2)

37 I particularly \_\_\_\_ you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon (Heb 13:19)

38 "At midnight the cry \_\_\_\_ out: 'Here's the bridegroom!' (Matt 25:6)

40 \_\_\_\_ your sword upon your side, O mighty one (Ps 45:3)

41 gather your children together, \_\_\_\_ hen gathers her chicks (2,1) (Luke 13:34)

42 the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the \_\_\_\_ (Amos 9:13)

43 there was a continual \_\_\_\_ given him of the king (Jer 52:34) KJV

45 here were plentiful supplies of flour, fig cakes, \_\_\_\_ cakes (1 Chron 12:40)

47 wicked men have \_\_\_\_ among you (Deut 13:13)

48 In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to \_\_\_\_ (Ps 71:1)

51 Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the \_\_\_\_ (Matt 26:6)

52 angels hastened Lot, saying, \_\_\_\_, take thy wife (Gen 19:15) KJV

53 the \_\_\_\_ forest has been cut down (Zech 11:2)

55 As \_\_\_\_\_ man who casteth firebrands (1,3) (Prov 26:18) KJV

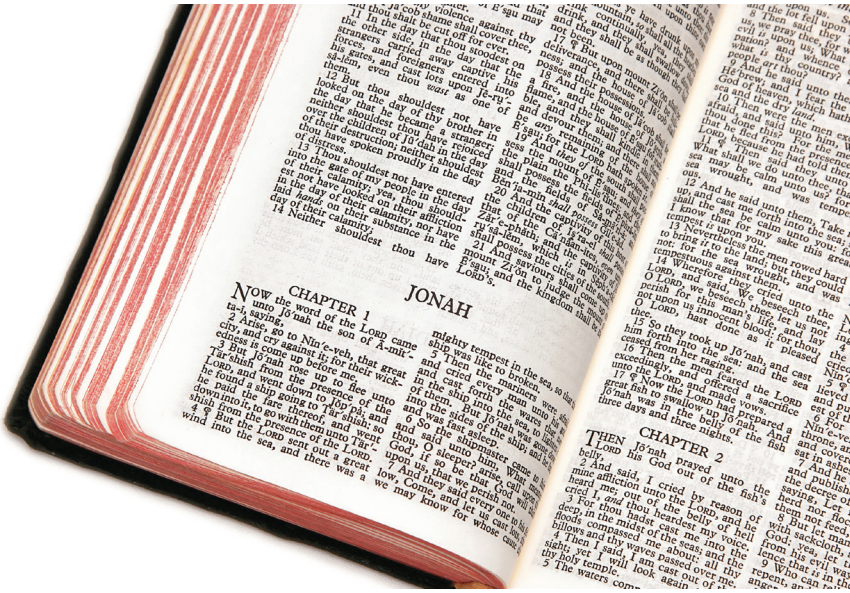
56 they will \_\_\_\_ out the bread by weight (Lev 26:26)

57 loose the bands of wickedness, to \_\_\_\_ the heavy burdens (Isa 58:6) KJV

60 she began to \_\_\_\_ his feet with her tears (Luke 7:38)

61 picnic pest (Prov 6:6)

Solution on page 14





Spirit Of Goodness

By Christy Lowman  
Burke County



I have developed a new sense of respect for the animal that I chose to represent the spirit of goodness. According to the Oxford Dictionary, goodness is “the quality of being morally good or virtuous.” Another word for goodness is generosity. Generosity is the act of “being kind and generous” as defined by Oxford. Goodness translated in Greek means “uprightness of heart and life” and is called agathosune. Another definition is: doing good by others, not doing good to be recognized. The Bible takes it a step further, meaning goodness is choosing to do right and good deeds over doing wrong and evil deeds, with no exceptions. In the Bible, there are several examples of people being generous and doing good and what is right by others even if that person had wronged them.

When God gave us the fruits of the spirit: Love, joy, peace, goodness, gentleness, kindness, patience, faithfulness, and self-control, He put the Holy Spirit in charge of working with our hearts to make us the best person we can be. These fruits are the results of us allowing the Holy Spirit to work in us which in turn ultimately develops us into being a Christlike person where the good deeds we do and how we act glorifies God. God wants to desperately grow us to be the best that we can be in Christ. Biblical goodness is having good morals and choosing to be the best person you can be. It might be choosing to do good towards someone who has done bad things to you instead of treating them like they treated you. It may be sharing your lunch with someone who doesn’t have lunch. It could be as simple as lending your extra pencil to someone in school. Sometimes being good means taking a stand and standing in the way of someone being bullied or hurt by someone else. Goodness is doing what is good and right instead of what is easy and mean. Humans by nature want to treat the ones that have hurt them the same way but that is not what God wants us to do. We are evil by nature, when we are hurt or have been mistreated, choosing to act in kindness is hard but displays the spirit of goodness.

The animal I chose to represent goodness is none other than the largest land mammal, the elephant. There are two types, the Asian and the African and they weigh as much as one or two cars! Elephants display goodness in so many ways. They are extremely sensitive and caring. They also experience feelings and emotions, display self-awareness, kindness, and compassion, and are highly intelligent. Elephants are great nurturers. If a baby cries or is sick the mother and other members of the herd will hug, comfort, and caress the baby with their trunks to comfort it. If an elephant dies other elephants, even those not in their herd, will try to comfort and revive it by gently rubbing its head with their trunk or by picking its body up. They will stop and take a moment of silence when one has died. Since an elephant doesn’t forget, they will remember the place where their loved ones passed away many years later and will stop and have a moment of silence at their grave. While elephants mourn their loved ones, other herd members will comfort those through touch and strokes during mourning and difficult times. People have witnessed liquid run out of the temporal glands on the sides of the elephant's head like we do when we cry when elephants mourn.

When baby elephants, (called calves) are born, the herd sounds out a trumpet celebration announcing the birth. The babies are born blind and can't stand for 20 mins. It takes them an hour to walk and within 2 days can keep up with the moving herd. Within this time, the whole herd will guard the baby until it can stand. Other herd members will also babysit calves when needed. If a baby gets in trouble or is stuck in mud or a pond. The other elephants will work together to rescue the calf.

An elephant’s trunk is like an arm and hand to us. They cannot survive without their trunk. On the very end of the trunk, there is a finger, (African elephants have 2 fingers while Asians have only one). This finger allows them to pick up teeny tiny items, like a blade of grass, a peanut, or a grain of rice. The trunk is strong enough to pick up a full-grown horse. The trunk can carry up to 8 liters of water. Elephants also use the trunk as a snorkeling device when swimming, (they are great swimmers). They take showers with their trunks as well as give hugs and comfort others. Elephants will also use their trunks to pull darts out of the skin of other elephants. Babies have been seen sucking their trunks like our babies do with their thumbs. Elephants have over 40,000 muscles just in their trunks while we only have 600 muscles in our entire body!

Elephants are faithful to their friends. There are many stories out there about elephants helping and befriending animals and people. One elephant’s best friend was a dog. When the dog got hurt the elephant stood outside the window of the house and watched and waited for her girl pal to heal and get better instead of roaming the large acreage. She also carried the dog’s body back when it was attacked and killed by coyotes. Another example is a female elephant that accidentally broke a man’s leg. When she realized he was hurt, she gently carried him and placed him under a shade tree. She then would check on him and comfort him with her trunk. She ran off other animals that came near as well as the rescuers. Her herd left her, but she faithfully stayed behind and tended to the hurt man until the others lured her away far enough to rescue him.

Some other cool facts about elephants are the African elephant’s ears are shaped like the continent of Africa while the Asian’s ears look more like the continent of India.

Elephants are vegetarians who eat up to 400 lbs. of food today. This is the same amount as an entire stocked vending machine! Humans only eat 3-5 lbs. a day. It would take 80 days of you eating five pounds of food a day to reach the amount of food an elephant eats in just one day!

Not all elephants have ivory tusks. Tusks are incisor teeth. They use them to rip bark off the trees, dig for roots, and protection. An elephant’s molar is the size of a brick.

Elephants are so smart they can recognize themselves in the mirror. In Japan, they were able to teach an elephant how to pick the computer touch screen that showed the most fruit on it. Elephants can also distinguish between good and bad people.



Elephants communicate in many ways. Some of the sounds elephants make, we cannot hear. These sounds are called elephant rumbles. Rumbles can be heard by other elephants up to 2km away. They communicate with trumpet-like sounds as well. They also communicate with touch, scent, and sounds that create vibrations in the ground that they feel in their feet and bones. Here is a video if you would like to hear an elephant rumble <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDi-iFF2oWg> The herd is run by an older female elephant. Most herds have around two dozen females in them. The youngsters learn vital information from their elders, like where to go for food and water, etc.

Although elephants’ skin looks tough it is highly sensitive. It is 2.5 inches thick but is subject to sunburn. They take mud and dirt baths to protect them from the sun. Elephants can retain water inside the wrinkles and skin folds to help keep them cool.

What do you think? Did I pick a good animal to demonstrate goodness? Can you think of ways you can show goodness in this evil world? How can you be generous to others? How did Jesus demonstrate goodness?

Dear Lord, I thank you so much for giving us the Holy Spirit to guide us and mold us into the person you want us to be. I thank you for giving us examples of how others have used the fruits of the spirit in the Bible. I also thank you for the animals you have created for us to learn from. Dear Lord, goodness is not always an easy trait to demonstrate. Please help us always choose to act in goodness instead of evilness. In Jesus s name, I pray, Amen.

“In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” Matthew 5:16 NIV  
“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” Galatians 6:10 NIV

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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](https://www.amazon.com/s/ref=dp_byline_sr_book_1?ie=UTF8&field-author=Christy+Lowman&search-alias=books&text=Christy+Lowman&sort=relevancerank). You can reach her at <https://www.facebook.com/authorChristyLowman/> or [christyssoaps@yahoo.com](mailto:christyssoaps@yahoo.com).



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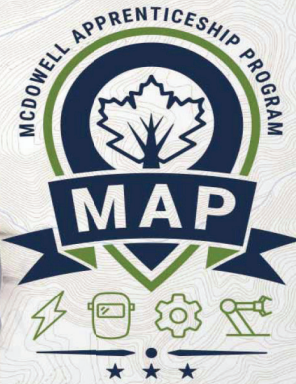
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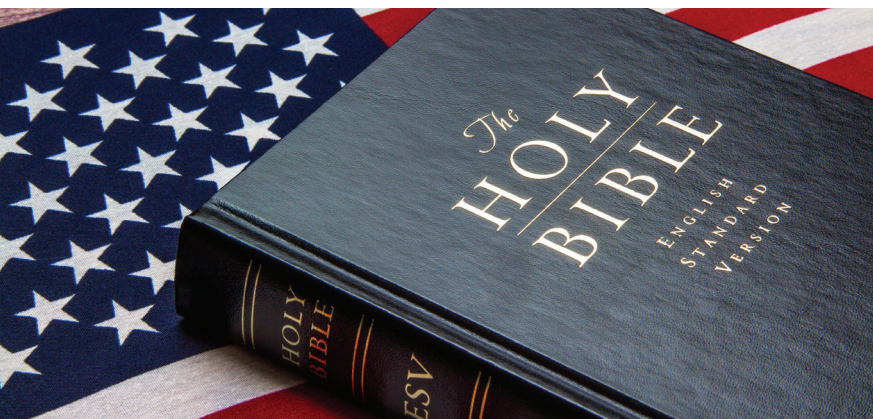
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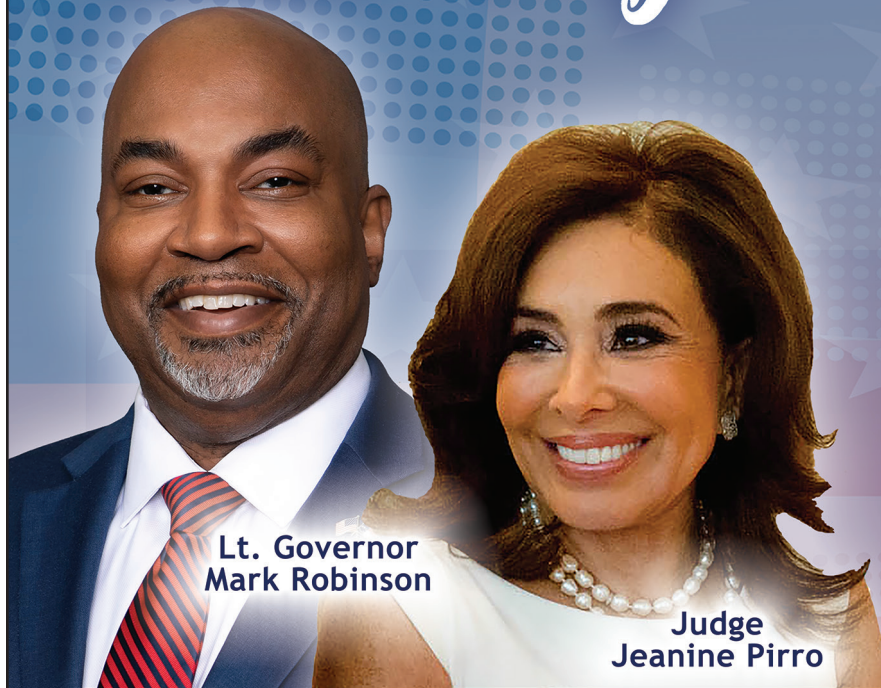
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