Pause...and Consider

You get to Choose

By Ken and Jan Merop Cleveland, Tennessee

I was afraid. No doubt about it.

Alone in my house with my infant son...with the grim prospect of separation and divorce looming; yes, I was afraid.

Checking all five doors several times and looking in on my sleeping son for who knows how many times, I padded into my now single

master bedroom for that first night as head of household.

Not a title I chose nor one I would have ever wanted for myself.

Vet here I was

Yet, here I was.

My happily ever after no longer existed. Instead, loneliness and the unknown future pressed down hard.

That was about 50 years ago. And, yet, when recalled, I can still see myself as a young mother with my baby son and the effect that fear could have had on us both.

I had a choice. And only recently I heard someone say that faith and fear ask us to believe in something we cannot see. You get to choose.

Fear would have robbed me of my joy in the Lord, the joy I had in being a mother to my precious son, and the overall joy of life itself.

My faith, on the other hand, was firmly anchored in Christ. He promised to never leave me or forsake me. He was changeless even amongst the changes happening in our lives. Faith in God's unfailing love beckoned me.

Though I hadn't heard that saying then, I am so glad that I chose faith.

Psalm 56: 3 & 4 NLT says "But when I am afraid, I will put my trust in you. I praise God for what he has promised. I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? What can mere mortals do to me?"

Was that the end of my fear? No. Other challenges and hurts were hurled at me over the years as well as feelings of inadequacy. Yet, at every hurdle, fear had to face the God I know (as a contemporary song says), and His presence and promises, His care and provision always came through.

A famous passage of Scripture, Isaiah 40: 28-30 reminds us of the strength God gives. It enables us to act in a moment of crisis by giving us the power to do what needs to be done.

It also declares that He will prove sufficient under the weight of any battle. In other words, you will have whatever you need, whenever you need it, and wherever you need it.

So, keep your eyes on Jesus with expectancy. Faith or fear. You get to choose.

Barnyard Quilt

On the Quilt Trail in North Carolina, nature's downy blanket of yellow blooms exquisitely displays God's homespun creation.

"Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow...

If God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers...

He will certainly care for you."

Matthew 6:28 & 30



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.

Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven: Luke 6:37

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)

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Life Lessons

October is Special

By Doug Harrell *Mitchell County*

October has always been special to me for many reasons, one of which is that this is usually the month that I take off on vacation for a week to 10 days. For many years we have made a family trip to the north woods of Wisconsin to go bird hunting. Some of you think that hunting and shooting a little bird is a sin and a crime. I don't see it that way at all. The good Lord gave us do-



minion over the animals and things on this earth. He provided quail to His people when they were wandering in the wilderness.

The primary thing about these trips is that they have been trips of togetherness for the family and some friends as well. This tradition started back in the 1970s with my mother, dad, myself, and friends. Most of those who were with us in those days have already crossed over to Jordan. For many years Barbara and I would go along with Mother and Dad and our relationship was cemented during those years. As our sons got older we took them along on the trips as well.

Over the years after Mother and Dad passed I took sons and grandsons. Now I am taking great-grandsons and have for the past few years. There is something about spending time in God's great outdoors that molds a person's character and makes them appreciate His handiwork.

I know today many of you prefer the beach and others prefer camping, as well as lots of other activities and places. I just really encourage you to invest in time with your family. As you are doing that, put importance on reminding them and teaching them about the great creator, the one and only, the God of it all. Don't neglect taking time to share God's word and His promises with your family and companions. Most of all, make sure that your actions and motives while you are out and about always reflect your belief in Jesus Christ and let that be known by your behavior.

It is not just your time in the pews of a church that sets the pathway for you and shows others the way life should be lived. Playtime behavior is just as important as prayer time on Sunday.

Now I know that those of you with children who are back in school for the most part, are back in the routine of school, and vacation time is behind you. That is okay, holidays are ahead and there will be time in the coming months for family time of sharing and caring. Always be aware that your actions matter, wherever and whenever. God never sleeps, His word never stops being true. Always strive to be that light on the hill, that beacon of hope, that lighthouse that guides and leads the way.

"Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; And lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, And he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: Fear the LORD, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel, And marrow to thy bones." Proverbs 3:5-8 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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BLUE RIDGE CHRISTIAN NEWS

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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
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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 & Orchestra, Adult Bible Study, Youth
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125 Tappan Street Spruce Pine, NC 28777 828-765-9411 www.sprucepinefbc.com www.spfbc.blogspot.com

Dr. Rocky Branch Senior Pastor

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

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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

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Bear Creek Baptist Church

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

Interim Pastor Blake Glenn

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 opcmikecloy@gmail.com

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

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Roan Mountain Baptist Church

"The Food Won't Come to You"

By Russell McKinney Mitchell County

My son Ryan, who was eleven years old at the time, got off a classic line one day. He was lying on his bed watching television, and his mother had just finished her nightly chore of preparing his supper. But when she told him that supper was ready, he didn't respond. Finally, after a few minutes,



she ratcheted up the tone to a vintage motherly level and said, "Ryan, get in there and get your food!" In startled response, he said with genuine surprise, "Oh, I thought it was going to come to me."

As a pastor, I just have to relate that line to church attendance. Christian, the spiritual food doesn't come to you. No, you have to actually go to church and get it. It's all there, laid out for you, but it won't magically make its way to where you are and jump into your mouth.

Now, I know all about the television ministries, YouTube ministries, and Facebook Live ministries most churches now offer. Those ministries allow you to sit right wherever you are and be fed. Still, though, there is nothing like experiencing the complete "meal" you get by attending your local congregation. Furthermore, those ministries were never meant to take the place of you literally attending your local church. Unfortunately, during the months when most churches only offered online services because of the COVID-19 pandemic, far too many Christians got far too comfortable staying at home for church rather than going to church.

Some years ago, at the Seattle Special Olympics, nine special athletes lined up at the starting line for the 100-yard dash. When the starting pistol sounded, eight of them took off down the track, but one boy stumbled out of the blocks, rolled a couple of times, and began to cry. That's when something truly wonderful happened. When the other eight runners heard the boy crying, they slowed down to see what was wrong and then went back to help him. One girl with Down's Syndrome bent down, kissed him, and said, "This will make it better." Later, with their arms linked tightly together, all nine runners walked down the track and crossed the finish line together. That's a beautiful picture of what a church can be like. Brothers and sisters in Christ can help each other in life's race by encouraging and supporting one another. Try getting that from television, YouTube, or Facebook.

Of course, I realize that I'm painting a very idyllic view of churches. I'm a pastor, remember? It's not like I haven't seen my share of church members behaving badly toward one another. Nevertheless, when the church is right, there is no place like it on earth. It's a place for learning, growing, fellowshipping, sharing, giving, and worshiping. Seriously, if you are a Christian, why wouldn't you want to be there?

And believe me, I've heard just about all the excuses for not going to church. Again, I'm a pastor, remember? However, many of those excuses just don't hold any weight with the Lord. In his book, The Miracles of Our Lord, Charles Ryrie offers a good word about such excuses. He does it in the context of his comments concerning Christ's attendance at synagogue. He writes:

If our Lord had wanted to use reasons, such as those often heard today, for not attending public worship He could have found many. Certainly, He got very little out of the message, for after all He was the fulfillment of every Scripture read or explained in the service. Surely He knew more about God and spiritual things than anyone present, including the leaders in the synagogue. He knew that the organization He was supporting would soon be replaced by the church. But still, He went regularly. Christian liberty, properly understood, does not free one from regular responsibilities, including attending worship services (see Heb. 10:25).

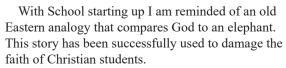
So, Christian, I ask you, "How is your church attendance these days?" It's been said that church attendees are like cars in that they start missing before they quit. Well, you haven't been sputtering, have you? If you have, then consider this God's wakeup call for you to get back in tune. Alluding again to my opening illustration, you need to realize that the food won't come to you, and you should go claim that fulfilling meal that is awaiting you down there at your local church.

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

Walnut Grove Church

What is God Like?

By Kurt Bomar Avery County



It goes something like this. Four blind men approach an elephant and by feeling the elephant attempt to describe it.

The first man feels the trunk and says "God is like a snake." The second feels a leg and says "God is like a tree." The third feels his tail and says, "God is like a rope." The fourth feels the side of the elephant and says, "God is like a wall."

The purpose of the story is to tell Christians "You only have a limited perspective of God and there is truth about God that you don't know and that other religions do know."

It sounds good until the alert student asks "How would a man who sees the whole elephant describe it?

This is where Christianity has the advantage over other world religions. We can see what God looks like. He looks like Jesus! Col. 1:15 says Christ is the image of the invisible God. Philip the disciple asked Jesus one day to show them the Father. Jesus responded: "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father." John 14:9.

While other religions describe limited truths about God, comprehensively they are wrong. God is not a snake, tree, rope, or wall; He is the real deal, the whole elephant! We can know him fully by studying his Son.

Teach your kids to defend their faith!

Kurt Bomar is pastor of Walnut Grove Church.



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Plumtree Church

Sinners or Saints

By Ryan Bridgeo Avery County

Romans 5:12 (NIV) says, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way, death came to all people, because all sinned." In the garden, when Adam and Eve decided to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they spiritually died, and they gave up their authority to the



enemy. From then on, every person born was born with a sinful nature. We can see this with the very first person born after the fall, Cain, who killed his brother Abel. You see, we didn't become sinners when we committed our first sin. We are all born sinners, just like Cain was, because of Adam's sin. This is important to

But are we still sinners after we are born again? Many people are confused by this question. They are not sure what the truth is. I often hear people say, "I'm just an old sinner saved by grace." Now it is true that we were all born sinners and, indeed, we are now saved by grace through faith, but are we sinners after we are born again? Are we saved and sinners at the same time?

Let's see what the Word has to say. The Bible refers to believers as "saints", "holy ones", or "righteous ones", more than 240 times. While unbelievers are referred to as sinners over 330 times. So, the Bible clearly calls unbelievers sinners, and believers "saints," "holy ones," or "righteous ones," indicating that we cannot be sinners and saints at the same time. We were sinners when we were unbelievers, but we became saints when we were saved.

I think part of the confusion with this question comes from a misunderstanding about sin and sinners. We often relate sin and sinners with people's behavior. Romans 6:1-2 (NIV) says, "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" There are two Greek words used for sin and sins in chapter 6 of Romans. One is hamartia, used 48 times in Romans, and 16 times in chapter 6 alone. The other is hamartano, used 7 times in Romans, and once in Romans chapter 6 (vs. 15). Hamartia (16 times in chapter 6) is a noun; a person, place, or thing while hamartano, used only once in chapter 6, is a verb, an action word. Guess which Greek word is used in verses 1-2? You're right, it is hamartia. The verse couldn't be translated shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase because sinning is a verb. Hamartia is a noun, so it must be a person, place, or thing. Now sin isn't a person. It isn't the Devil because the Devil isn't omnipresent. It also isn't a thing, like a rock or a tree. So, by the process of elimination, it must be a place. A spiritual place, called sin. So, this verse could be translated as, "Shall we go on living in the place called sin, so that grace might increase?" This changes the

Think about this, Romans 7:14 says, "We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin (noun - place)." Now if you live in California, you are called a Californian. If you live in the United States of America, you are called an American. If you live in Canada, you are called a Canadian. So, if you live in sin, you are called a sinner. Once we move from the place of sin to the place of righteousness, we have new titles. Colossians 1:13 (KJV) says, "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son." We do not live in darkness anymore, we do not live in sin anymore, we have been translated out and into the Kingdom of God. This new location or position in Christ makes us saints, not our behavior.

Misunderstanding the scriptures causes people to be afraid of calling themselves saints. For example, 1 John 1:8-10 says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." People read this and think that if they call themselves a saint, that insinuates that they never sin, and here it says, if we say we have not sinned, we deceive ourselves and we are calling God a liar. So, to honor the Word (in their minds) they call themselves sinners. But as we saw before, the Bible teaches that sinners are unbelievers, and saints are believers. God's reality that brings us personal freedom, says we are now saints, through Christ. We are not to call ourselves sinners or unbelievers anymore.

Neil Anderson in his book, Victory over Darkness writes, "telling Christians that they are sinners and then disciplining them if they don't act like saints seems counterproductive at least and inconsistent with the Bible at worst." I think Neil was being very kind.

The Word of God says that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But once we receive Christ, we are no longer sinners, we are saints who sometimes sin. We don't live in sin, we don't practice sin, we have been translated into a new Kingdom, into a place called righteousness. This new location or place in Christ is what makes us saints, not our behavior.

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

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Marlene's Meditations

Rizpah's Messages

By Marlene Houk Burle County

"And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night." 2 Samuel 21:10



Ask any Bible scholar about Rizpah, and she or he might hesitate, trying to remember her place in Scripture. She lived as the only concubine (mistress) of King Saul, the first king of God's chosen people, the Israelites. The sons of her union with King Saul were hanged as punishment for King Saul's breaking an oath. And she kept the vultures and beasts from devouring their bodies during the time of harvesting barley. Her drama unfolds in the book of 2 Samuel, chapters 3 and 21.

We hold much in common with her: roles in life, emotions, tragedy, and a Godsized purpose for pain. Honor and horror create a contrast of luxury and lament in the ancient pages of the Bible about this obscure member of the royal court. Rizpah's narrative shows the paradox of 2 Corinthians 12:10: "for when I am weak, then am I strong." When life throws us into a pit of despair and hopelessness, Jesus casts our story on the stormy waters of life. And others draw strength from our survival, savoring the way God transforms our troubles into spiritual triumph.

Rizpah sends us simple solutions to cope with life's sorrows. Here are five of her priceless treasures of wisdom:

- 1. Neither enemies nor the horror of our circumstances changes our identity in Christ. Strangely, in Rizpah's life—whether living in the lap of luxury in the palace as the king's consort or outside on the lonely hillside, guarding her sons' dead bodies—her father is mentioned four times. Like Rizpah, as Christians, our heavenly Father God stays connected to us through our life's ups and downs. What a joy to read John 1:12 as a beloved child of God! "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:"
- 2. Rizpah shows us that determining to honor God in our crises banishes the vultures of hopelessness and the beasts of despair. Our trust in God's plan allows Him to use us in extraordinary ways. When we look beyond our troubles to how the Lord helps others gain fortitude from our failures, priceless closure heals us. Listen closely to 2 Samuel 22:33, and you will hear the heartbeat of God's love for us, especially in our sadness. "God is my strength and power: and he maketh my way perfect."
- 3. She examples for us how to find treasure in the pit of despair as our life tumbles into an abyss. When she laid her sackcloth of mourning on the rock, God magnified her message for us 3,000 years later by laying down a priceless revelation. When I lay my sorrows on the Rock (a strong symbol for God in the Bible), He will send out ripples of wisdom to others through my experiences. Like Rizpah, my life contains the potential for God to magnify His grace, riches, and mercies as my story lives on in His bigger picture. I can echo the heroes of faith in Hebrews chapter 11 with my own faith.
- 4. When life freezes us, we choose to look beyond our barriers to God who empowers our worst with His grace and proves through us His strength and care. God's plan for us eclipses our boundaries in life according to 2 Corinthians 4:18. "While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."
- 5. Rizpah focused beyond her suffering to honoring her sons, revealing a critical concept in coping with life. She points to looking beyond our season of sorrow to honoring the Lord. Of all the blessings of a Lord-focus, hope springs up in our souls as we think about an eternity of enjoying His love. We can revel in the riches of Christ in us as Christians as explained in Colossians 1:27. "To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:"

Rizpah stands as the sixtieth-named woman of the Bible, signaling to us how to survive sorrow. Her story offers relevant and reliable ways to handle trouble, and I'm glad God revealed His wisdom through her actions!

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







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Sept. 9-11 Set As "Project Leader Workship Weekend"

Local Event Nationwide





{Wilkesboro, NC, Sept 1,} 2023—Hundreds of locally led volunteer teams are scheduled to host more than 500 events across the nation during the second weekend in September for Operation Christmas Child, a global project of Samaritan's Purse that shares the true meaning of Christmas with children in need around the world.

Volunteers in their own communities will gather during Project Leader Workshop Weekend to support and connect with those who are leading their families, community groups, and churches to pack gift-filled shoebox gifts. The community is invited to attend and can Find Local Events happening nationwide by searching city and state or ZIP code.

Locally, the High Country Area Volunteer Team is hosting a Workshop on Sunday, September 10, from 2-3:30 pm at Alliance Bible Fellowship. The address for the church is 1035 NC Highway 105 Bypass, Boone, NC, and everyone is welcome! Each event is unique, but all will aim to encourage and inspire attendees as well as equip them with resources to plan, prepare, and promote the project. Community efforts to pack shoeboxes with school supplies, hygiene items, and fun toys will contribute to the project's global goal of reaching more than 11 million children in Jesus' Name.

Operation Christmas Child, a project of Samaritan's Purse, seeks to demonstrate God's love in a tangible way to children in need around the world and, together with the local church worldwide, to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. Since 1993, Operation Christmas Child has collected and delivered more than 209 million gift-filled shoeboxes to children in more than 170 countries and territories. For more information on how to participate in Operation Christmas Child, visit samaritanspurse.org/occ.



GOOD NEWS. GREAT JOY.
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Collection Week: November 13 - 20, 2023

Drop off location:

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Evergreen Church

Hope for the Future

By John McCoury
Roan Mountain, Tennessee

"Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands." 2 Corinthians 5:1 What marvelous words! It is obvious that here is a description of the present body of flesh and bones we live in contrasted with the same



body, risen and glorified by the activity of the Spirit of God. When you compare these words with those in 1 Corinthians 15, you can see that Paul is talking here about the resurrected body, that body we shall receive in which he says mortality will be swallowed up in immortality. He uses the same terminology here. It is the body, he says, that we shall enter in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, we will be changed and this new body will be given to us (1 Corinthians 15:52). Here he is contrasting the two. The present body, he says, is like a tent. We are living a temporary experience, as people do when they live in a tent. I sometimes feel uncomfortable in this tent of my earthly body. I am sure you do, too. A tent is not very satisfying. The stakes begin to loosen, the poles begin to sag, the tent itself sags in various spots, the cold penetrates, and it is not very comfortable. Some of us feel that way as we grow older. But we are looking forward to the resurrection body, the permanent building, that which God had in mind when He made us in the beginning, the permanent dwelling place designed by God without any human help, a house not made with hands. Nothing human produces it or adds to it; nothing that the undertaker does while our body is being prepared for the grave adds a single thing to what God will do that will produce the body of glory that is to come. The point Paul makes is that it is already ours in eternity. We have, he says. Notice the present tense: not We will have. We have an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands already there, waiting for us to put on. The apostle says that this new body, the resurrected body, is an experience of not being disembodied but being further embodied. He changes the idiom from the building to the body and says it is like being further clothed so that it is more than we have at the moment. If you feel like you are clothed by being in a body, then in that body you will feel even more clothed, further clothed. No one wants to float around in a bodiless existence. Paul says your actual experience will be this: You will be further clothed upon death as believers. You will have a new body. That is a weight of glory beyond all description, and it will come instantly, for the one who has prepared us for this very thing is God. I thank You, Lord, that when that moment of glory breaks upon my startled heart, I shall at last see Him whom I have long loved and served. Have we forgotten the expectation and hope of our glorious future, for body, soul, and spirit?

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

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Bits 'n Pieces

Avery County

Community Good Friday Service at Banner Elk Presbyterian Church

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

Burke County

October is Spooktacular! Pumpkin Decorating Contest October 26th Paint or Carving! Just bring your creativity! Old Rock School Front Steps \$5 per pumpkin entry Pumpkin Submissions 1-4pm Pumpkin Viewing 4-5pm All ages can participate! Applicants must bring a submission form for prize consideration. 3 winners will be chosen at 5pm Prizes \$100 in value each Most Creative! Scariest! Funniest! Halloween Movie October 26th @2pm (Burke County Schools dismiss at 11:30) Old Rock School Auditorium \$2 per person Young Frankenstein The Mel Brooks Musical October 13,14,19,20,21,26,27,28 7:30pm at the Cranford Amphitheatre Treats in the Streets October 31st 4-6pm Trick or Treat Downtown Special Performance By Silver Sneakers Dancers

Bridge Worship Center Ministries International in Hickory, NC invites all to join us for our October tent revival. We will begin on Thursday, October 5th and run through Sunday, Oct 8, each night at 7 pm and Sunday there will be a morning service at 10:30 as well. There will be musical guests and prayer each night. It will be rain or shine under the tent! The address is 5530 Chesnut Dr, Hickory, NC 28602. We are also looking for faith partners and sponsors. For more information, please go to www.bridgeworshipcenternc.com

McDowell County

"Mountain Glory Festival is the second Saturday of October. The Festival is a street craft show. Since 1984, the Festival has featured regional crafters and artist in Downtown Marion, spanning three City blocks. Hours are 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM."

Mitchell County

Spruce Pine Events:

Liberty Hill Baptist Church Fellowship Building, Saturday, October 21st 12 nnon to 3 PM Games for Young and Old. Bounce House Cake Walk Crafts Free Chili or Soup Meal with sides and Dessert

Come join the fun and fellowship. Address: 289 Hoot Owl Rd, Spruce Pine, NC 28777

September 28-Oct. 31st – Scarecrow Contest October 7 – BBQ & Bluegrass Festival – Riverside Park October 14th and 15th – Potter's Market – Cross Street Building







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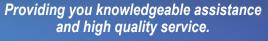








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Mitchell Baptist Association

Pray and Vote

By Monica Kirtz Mitchell County

A "watchman" is a word that is not commonly used today, but it was used hundreds of years ago, even dating back to Bible days. In the book of Ezekiel, a "watchman" was of great importance. A "watchman" was someone responsible for guarding a town or city. They watched for trouble, including armies that were approaching, and sounded an alarm to alert the citizens.



In our current world, "watchmen" are needed. As we face local elections in our town, we need to pray and vote. We also need wisdom to make the right choices. Our standard is The Bible. It is God's Word to us. What does God say to us in His Word about government?

We start with prayer. 1 Timothy 2:1-2 says, "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty."

- *Government is appointed by God. Romans 13:1
- *We need leaders who fear God. Exodus 18:21
- *Solutions for our town come only from God. Psalm 33:12
- *Pray for elections to be honest, fair, and without corruption. Proverbs 16:13
- *Pray for the church to repent of sins in our personal lives, as well as in the life of the church as a whole. 2 Chronicles 7:14
- *Pray for divine protection over our town during elections. Psalm 91
- *Pray, seeking God's purpose, for our town. Psalm 42:1
- *Pray for God's presence to be experienced in our town. Psalm 16:11

So please, let's not take our freedoms for granted. We are responsible for our citizens and our future generations. We are responsible for how we handle our freedoms. God has blessed us. Let's honor Him by protecting our freedoms. If you haven't registered to vote, do so before October 13. Now...pray and vote!

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





Dave Says

By Dave Ramsey

Dear Dave.

My mother-in-law is 85, and she's had some health setbacks recently. The family got together with her, and as a group, we decided it was time to sell her property and move her into an apartment at a nice senior living facility. She should see a little over \$300,000 from the sale of her house. Aside from that, she has about \$10,000 in a savings account. The problem is, that she'll only receive



\$2,100 a month in Social Security, and rent at the facility is \$2,600 per month. Plus she loves making donations to charities. With interest rates where they are, is a CD ladder a good place to put the money to help her cash flow expenses in the future? — Ed

Dear Ed,

If this were my mother-in-law, I'd want her to do better than a CD (certificate of deposit) ladder. Even with the deficit between her Social Security income and the cost of rent, she'll only need to see \$6,000 a year from the investment to make up the difference. And, she's 85. Even if she got nothing in terms of interest, the chances of her burning all the way through her nest egg before she dies are almost zero. I know the thought of her passing away isn't pleasant, but it's something you have to take into consideration.

As far as the charities go? Right now, she's the charity. Maybe not in the traditional sense of the word, but it's time for mom to come first. Only the strong can help the weak. I didn't let my toddlers carry our newborn. And when it comes to money, you've got to have the financial strength—the free and clear assets—to carry others. Take care of your own household first. That's her responsibility at this point.

Ed, you're not going to mess this up unless you put the money in crypto, or something stupid like that. If you want to do some high-yield savings as a part of it, that's fine. If it were me, I'd probably end up investing some of it too. Here's the thing: Overall, if you could make 8% on it, that's \$2,000 a month, and it lasts indefinitely. That's not even touching the principal. But like I said before, even if you make nothing on it, just divide \$6,000 into \$300,000. See what I mean? It's probably going to last as long as she does.

Of course, there may be some other medical bills, and you'd probably want her to have a life other than just paying bills. That's why I'd like to see that extra \$2,000 a month happening. It would provide a little cushion. And there may be a few other little things from time to time the family would have to pick up, but that's not unusual in a situation like this.

You all can make this work for her. Don't be super aggressive, but don't be super conservative either. — Dave

Dear Dave

I just discovered you and your teachings a couple of weeks ago. I'm already on Baby Step 2, and I was wondering if I should buy life insurance now or wait until I've finished paying off debt. I'm single with no children, and I owe a total of \$44,700. I have a \$25,000 company-funded life insurance policy through my employer. What do you think I should do? — Elizabeth

Dear Elizabeth,

If you have a life insurance need, it's not a Baby Step. It's a necessity in your budget and something you need to put in place as soon as possible. But from what you've told me, you don't have a great need for life insurance at this point. No one, except you, is depending on your income, and the \$25,000 policy you have through your employer is more than enough to take care of any final expenses if something happened to you.

The main purpose of life insurance is to take care of those you leave behind when you die. If someone is financially dependent on your income, I recommend having 10 to 12 times your annual income wrapped up in a good-level term life insurance policy. That means if you make \$80,000 a year, you should have a policy worth anywhere from \$800,000 to \$960,000.

If I were you, I wouldn't buy another life insurance policy at all right now. If you get married or have kids somewhere down the road, then buy it immediately. In that case, both you and your spouse should have 15- to 20-year level term policies of 10 to 12 times your individual incomes.

b And never buy anything except level-term life insurance. The reason? That covers you until you're out of debt—should a spouse bring some into the picture—and the two of you have so much cash piled up that you don't need to pay for a life insurance policy anymore. It's called being self-insured, and that's a great place to be.

Good question, Elizabeth! — 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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Christian Action League

The Vanishing Workforce: Unraveling Mysteries Behind So Many 'Help Wanted' Signs

By Rev. Mark Creech

Garnering considerable media attention were last year's remarks by John Mackey, the founder of Whole Foods. Mackey criticized the younger generations, suggesting they didn't seem to want to work. He argued they weren't motivated to work because they prioritize meaningful work. However, he also stated they needed to earn meaningful work over time.



Mackey's comments reflected the different work ethics held by older and younger generations.

Soon I will be 66 years old and I've never seen so many "Help Wanted" signs in front of businesses. We're living in a time when a substantial fraction of our nation's dedicated workforce seems to have vanished.

The global COVID-19 pandemic certainly disrupted the labor market, causing a shortage of workers. As businesses have tried to bounce back, they've had a hard time finding enough employees to meet demand. This increased demand for workers is seen across the industries of hospitality, healthcare, manufacturing, retail, and transportation, among others. Establishments are offering incentives, bonuses, and increased wages to attract workers. But to place all of the blame on COVID seems to be a shallow way of looking at the problem.

Recently, I came across an excellent article written by the editor-in-chief of Tomorrow's World, Gerald E. Weston. Weston's editorial was titled, Where Have All the Workers Gone?

Weston quoted data from a 2016 report by the Brookings Institution that was issued long before COVID. The report said, "The share of prime-age men [25-54] who are working or looking for work has been falling for half a century."

Weston added, "This is far from being an exclusively American problem. Canada, Australia, Britain, and Germany have similar worker shortages. In France, riots are spawned over attempts by the government to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64 to alleviate the government's burden of pensions. Even in China, attitudes are changing. This June 2022 NPR headline sums it up: 'Hard work is a point of pride in China. But a culture of slacking off is now in vogue.'"

Many factors could be cited for the worker shortage: skill gaps, economic conditions, immigration policies, education, socioeconomic trends, technological advances, globalization, demographic changes, etc.

However, Weston cited something much deeper – the ascendancy of belief in the theory of evolution. He wrote:

"Belief in the theory of evolution has deceived mankind into thinking there is no existential purpose for humanity – and has left us adrift in virtually every realm of life. But we are not a product of chance. God created us with a purpose. He created us to be productive...Too many have forgotten that there is reward in work, no matter how humble...God created mankind to work, and when we choose not to work – out of laziness rather than genuine medical necessity – we invite negative consequences."

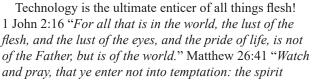
Another factor contributing to a smaller workforce, at least here in America, has been the practice of abortion. Thank God for the overturning of Roe v. Wade by the Supreme Court. The egregious abortion decision by the High Court in 1973 has been responsible for the destruction of more than 60 million lives. Roe v. Wade is now gone and many states are tightening abortion restrictions. However, the heinous practice continues and must be stopped.

Abortion has resulted in lower birth rates, which have led to a smaller pool of potential workers entering the labor force. Reproductive choice has left us with

continued on page 24

Todd's Techy Tips

Flesh Pot
By Todd Abraham
Athens, Tennessee





indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." The word of God teaches us how challenging it is for us to get this flesh under subjection to the will of God. The Lord Himself warned us in the above scripture. It's a battle for the mind as my dear friend and true prophet of God warned it would be during this time we live in. Sadly, most people's minds are already gone. Sold out to vain carnal lusts which will destroy them in the end. Our natural minds are insatiably searching for something new and technology is the brain candy to keep it deluded.

God put the title of this article on my mind for several days. Most folks' minds experience no freedom anymore. Freedom to just be quiet and meditate, recollect, plan and focus and, God forbid, relax. And, as we have mentioned before, nearly all of the information overload most of us allow ourselves to be inundated with is useless junk. Like one of those post-apocalyptic, massive junkyards full of defunct vehicles of various sizes and such. It takes discipline to prepare ourselves to seek the Lord and to separate ourselves from all distractions. To give ourselves enough time to be quiet so we can hear the voice of the Lord. Technology is contrary to all of that as 1 John 2:16 warns us. Technology, especially smartphones, is a seething fleshpot of carnal wanderlust and it's captivated nearly the entire world. Satan has the world right where he wants to drop the hammer and bring in the one world government and one world church.

It all seems dreamy now because money is tight but still flowing freely. Most can still go and buy things to their heart's desire. Freedom still prevails in most developed countries in the western hemisphere. And the media doesn't tell you the truth and show you just how dire everything actually is. The blitzkrieg of advertising in every media format just keeps people blinded to reality. The fear of the Lord is gone almost completely in the world today. Most everyone acts like God relaxed and took a nap and stopped holding them accountable for their sin. Revelation 3:15-17 "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor; and blind, and naked:"

Just remember, though, friend that God's memory is perfect and He doesn't change and His standard never relaxes. Nahum 1:3 "The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet." When the mighty US dollar collapses, the world will go into a tailspin that will leave many of you lost forever and reprobate. Satan loves for you to allow yourself to think you are on easy street. The second you stop trying to be spiritually vigilant and leaning to your own understanding, he has you like the bird in the snare. You should read the parable of the 10 virgins with their lamps in Matthew 25:1-13. The oil the five were lacking is symbolic of the anointing of God which they didn't have. By the time they realized it, it was too late. Do you have oil in your lamp?

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



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Denison Forum

The No. 1 Personal Trait for a Long Life May Surprise You

By Jim Denison

The number of people in the US living to at least one hundred years old has doubled over the last decade. Ask many centenarians their secret and they'll credit their positive attitude. But David Watson, a professor emeritus of personality psychology at the University of Notre Dame, disagrees: "I think the effects of just being positive are overrated."

Dr. Watson claims that the trait most related to longevity is conscientiousness, or being organized and disciplined. This is likely because conscientious people are better at taking care of themselves concerning eating habits, healthy behaviors, and safe activities.

I wonder if the same trait is vital to the longevity of a nation.

USA Today is reporting that school shootings have hit an all-time high for the second year in a row. The 2021-22 school year saw more than twice the shootings of the previous year, which was itself the highest in two decades. Unsurprisingly, Gen Z (people between nine and twenty-four years old) are struggling with their mental health; only 15 percent said their mental health was excellent, compared with 52 percent of millennials who said the same a decade ago.

Here's another window into our societal psyche: only 26 percent of Americans are optimistic about the future of the family. And no wonder: only 23 percent believe being married is important to living a fulfilling life, compared to 71 percent who point to "having a job or career they enjoy." In addition, 58 percent believe a married gay or lesbian couple raising children together is "acceptable"; 53 percent say the same about an unmarried gay or lesbian couple raising children.

The Lord said of ancient Israel, "My people did not listen to my voice" (Psalm 81:11), "so I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels" (v. 12). And we know how that turned out.

Is America following the same path?

"These great pillars of human happiness"

President George Washington laid the cornerstone of the US Capitol building on this day in 1793. He had already helped to lay the cultural cornerstone of our new nation; in his First Inaugural Address, for example, he paid homage to the "Almighty Being who rules over the universe; who presides in the counsels of nations; and whose providential aids can supply every human defect." He then said of his fellow Americans, "Every step by which they have advanced to the character of an independent nation seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency."

Washington would later declare in his "Farewell Address," "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of men and citizens."

What would our first president think of the "dispositions and habits" of political culture

today?

More to the point, what does God?

He said of ancient Israel, "I know the things that come into your mind" (Ezekiel 11:5) and thus knew that "you have not walked in my statutes, nor obeyed my rules" (v. 12). He said of the first-century Roman Empire, "with the wine of sexual immorality the dwellers on earth have become drunk" (Revelation 17:2). He warned the superpowers of the day: "Behold, I am bringing punishment on the king of Babylon and his land, as I punished the king of Assyria" (Jeremiah 50:18).

What was true then is true today: "No creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Hebrews 4:13). Americans included. "To follow truth, and thus to follow thee"

The good news is that the good news of the gospel is still "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16). Billy Graham was right: "One of the Bible's greatest truths is that our lives can be different. No matter what our past has been, Christ stands ready to forgive and cleanse us—and then to make us new."

This is because "if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). This is not our work but God's transforming miracle: "All this is from God, who through Christ has reconciled us to himself" (v. 18). Now we are "ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (v. 20). To this end, let's close by making John White Chadwick's hymn our prayer:

Eternal Ruler of the ceaseless round Of circling planets singing on their way; Guide of the nations from the night profound Into the glory of the perfect day; Rule in our hearts, that we may ever be Guided and strengthened and upheld by thee. We would be one in hatred of all wrong, One in our love of all things sweet and fair, One with the joy that breaketh into song, One with the grief that trembles into prayer, One in the power that makes thy children free To follow truth, and thus to follow thee. O clothe us with thy heavenly armor, Lord, Thy trusty shield, thy sword of love divine: Our inspiration be thy constant word; We ask no victories that are not thine. Give or withhold, let pain or pleasure be; Enough to know that we are serving thee. Is serving Christ enough for you today?

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



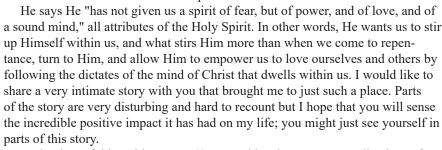
The Power Of Repentance

My Battle With Covid 19

By Steve Henry Burke County

My battle with Covid 19 led to a more intense battle with myself that taught me the power of repentance to unleash the favor of God on my life.

2nd Timothy 1:6 tells us to stir up the gift of God that is in us. Many times we see the word "gift" and we think it is "something" we get. However, in light of the next verse, I think it is a "someone" that He wants us to stir up.



At the time of this writing, I am 68 years old and not on any medications of any kind. For some reason, God has blessed Becky and I with incredibly good health. Except for a few colds and the occasional flu, I have always felt good physically. However, when I do start feeling bad, the only thing I want is to feel good again. Ask my wife and she will attest to the fact that I am not a good patient. Over the years I have commented, "If I ever get anything seriously wrong with me I will probably do myself in by over-medicating just so I can feel good again." Little did I know that Satan was taking note of this comment and would try to use it against me in the future, but once again I would realize that God was the one who was truly in control and was actually engineering the circumstances of my life to deliver me from some "stinkin thinkin" that had the potential to destroy me. After all, Satan has come to steal, kill, and destroy.

I woke on the morning of December 3rd, 2020 feeling some achiness in my body, but I didn't think much about it so I went on to work. The achiness grew for the next three days, so Becky and I went to be tested for Covid 19 on the 6th. Sure enough we both tested positive for the virus. I called my doctor and he told us all we could do at this point was treat the symptoms. Becky's symptoms worsened with more severe body aches and fever and by the end of the week the virus was settling into my lungs and I felt the worst that I have ever felt in my life. As my lungs continued to deteriorate my doctor ordered oxygen for me but by this time my lungs were so inflamed it did little to help me breathe. I felt so miserable I remember asking God to please let me die.

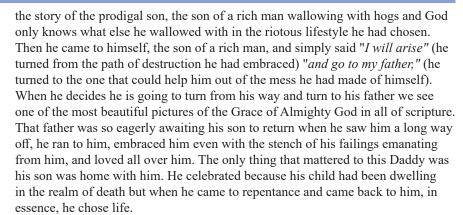
As I mentioned earlier Satan was listening and he began to convince me of how worthless I was by hitting me with a barrage of failures that I had made over the years. Now I was considering myself useless because I couldn't fight off this thing that had taken over my body. I made the mistake of listening to him as he started implanting thoughts of suicide in my mind. As I listened to him I started to formulate a text in my mind that I was going to send to a friend of mine telling him they could find my body behind a storage building in my backyard. I was going to ask him to get law enforcement out there as quickly as possible so Becky would not be the one to find me. I planned to click the send button on my phone and pull the trigger. However, by this time, I couldn't get enough energy to go outside.

On the 14th the EMS came to transport me to the hospital and Becky shared with me later that when they left with me she didn't think she would see me alive again. Little did she realize I had been hoping to die and because my first plan failed I was formulating another plan to bring an end to my suffering. Unfortunately for her, I called her from the ER and told her that I had just shared with the doctors that I was not to be put on a ventilator and I also wanted a Do Not Resuscitate order in place. I was hoping I would quickly deteriorate to the point that I would need the ventilator but without it, I would surely die. My precious wife told me later that the phone call scared her to death. I'm sorry I put you through that Becky.

I was admitted to the Covid ICU unit at Carolinas Healthcare System/ Blueridge here in Morganton and as my condition continued to worsen for the next couple of days I thought it wouldn't be long before my plan came together and I would be out of my suffering, "but God" (is that not the most beautiful phrase in all of His precious Word) had another plan that I am convinced was initiated by the prayers of my brothers and sisters in Christ on my behalf.

December 17th was probably the lowest point ever in my life but God's Word came to my mind and changed it to one of the greatest victories I have ever experienced. The phrase "I shall live and not die" started coming to my mind, actually it comes from Psalm 118:17 "I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord." Even though it was reversed in my mind from how it is written in His Word, I believe He was reversing my thinking to get me in line with what He was doing. I had a choice to make at this point. Would I continue to listen to my enemy and my flesh or would I turn from my plan and embrace His? Fortunately, I chose the latter and started declaring "I shall live and not die." I even told the doctor that I just had a major turnaround in my thinking and I was ready to fight. I knew I had come to true repentance and trust in Him when I told the doctor to use a ventilator if necessary and to remove the DNR from my chart. I think he was elated and later found out that he called Becky and shared with her that he thought I had just turned a major corner in this fight.

The least sign of repentance on our part always unleashes God's favor. Look at



That was the same decision I came to as I lay in that hospital bed, and when I chose to trust God and His plan I knew I was going to live and not die, I even dubbed myself "The Covid Overcomer" because I wanted Satan to know that his plan was overcome by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of my testimony (Revelation 12:11). Then is when I started seeing God's Favor unleashed on my life as I started hearing what He was saying to me. Just as Satan bombarded me with his hellish thoughts of death and destruction my Precious Father started flooding my mind with thoughts of life and victory.

Thoughts such as:

"I will never leave you, or forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5);

"I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing, therefore choose life," (Deuteronomy 30:19);

"You are the head and not the tail; you are above and not beneath" (Deuteronomy 28:13):

"I have not given you the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2nd Timothy 1:7);

I listened to the verse in "Amazing Grace" that says "through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come, it's Grace that leads me safe thus far and Grace will lead me home."

DON'T MISS THIS! Looking back on all this I see now that He had been flooding my mind with His thoughts all along, but I could not "receive" them until I quit listening to my flesh and Satan (repentance) and embraced His plan for me.

With a new determination to fight this battle, I remembered something that I have communicated for years, i.e. "We cannot be all God wants us to be without the help of our brothers and sisters in Christ, we are one body and as we learn to function as such we can see amazing things take place, the impossible, becomes possible." I determined that I would not fight alone and as I kept my network of support updated about my condition I saw the Body of Christ shine with a brilliance that dispelled any darkness that tried to overcome me. There were many such dark times, many things to overcome for the next several days (Satan doesn't give up ground easily that he is trespassing on), but as I continued to keep "The Covid Overcomer Network" updated, they continued to pray, and all the encouragement I received enabled me to keep my fighting spirit high and return to my family on Christmas Eve to enjoy the most special Christmas our family has ever experienced.

I cannot begin to tell you how important an encouraging word is when you are in a battle for your life, but maybe God's Word can put it into perspective for us. In Proverbs 25:11 He says "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." He uses two of the most valuable substances on earth to describe how vitally important a word spoken at the right time can be. At some of my lowest times, I would get a text from many of you with scripture, with an "I'm praying for you and pulling for you," with a video of a song that kept me directed to the one that was fighting my battle for me and in turn keeping my fighting spirit high, even and especially, in the very face of the one that wanted to destroy me. Satan doesn't have a chance when God unleashes His Favor on His children. I will be forever grateful to everyone who was a part of "The Covid Overcomer Network," for I could not have done this without you.

One of the greatest expressions of His Favor was through the extreme professionalism of every one of the caregivers I had at the hospital and the many home health care providers I had after returning home. They worked tirelessly with me and the many other patients they were taking care of, but the thing that struck me about them more than anything else was the kindness that they showed me while I was in their care. I am convinced they had a strength about them that had to come from the very throne room of my Almighty God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Please keep any healthcare provider you know in your prayers and heap all the praise and encouragement on them that you can. I can't imagine what they have been through this past year. They are truly special people, heroes in my book, thank God for His calling on their lives. I gratefully recognize them as part of "The Covid Overcomer Network" that God put together to bring me through this.

My recovery continues at home now. With Becky by my side and my Savior in my heart I am expecting a full recovery and healing from His Mighty Heart of Grace.

You may not be struggling with something as severe as Covid 19, many of you are faced with greater or lesser struggles, but be assured we all are struggling with something and if you're not you will be. If we could just learn to be quick to turn from our way of dealing with struggle and turn to Him in our time of struggle we could live the blessed life He has in store for all of us.

Jesus said it best in Matthew 11:28-30, "Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and my burden is light." Many times when we find ourselves

continued on page 35

Sudoku Solution

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

Crossword Solution

S	1	N	Е	W		Α	С	С	0		A	D	D	S
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M	Е	D	Е		E	L	S	Е		S	Е	N	S	Е
E	D	E	N		S	Ε	Т	S		Е	D	G	E	S

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Retired Pastor Bear Creek Baptist Church

The Heavens Declare The Glory Of God

By Bruce Cannon *Mitchell County*

Job 12:7-10 "But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the LORD hath wrought this? In whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind."



Once again the Lord is getting ready to make western North Carolina a very color-filled, beautiful place. Already the fall colors are beginning in the higher elevations. How amazing! What a palette of colors the Lord uses to decorate the trees! How amazing are His eyes and heart for beauty!

And if He will do that for Himself and for us to enjoy, what more will He do for those who love Him? Paul wrote in Romans 8:32, "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

As we look at the beauty of the trees let us remember there is a Divine Being, the Lord, who loves us so much and watches over us just as He does the trees. Jesus Himself taught, "Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is today in the field, and tomorrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye need these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:27-32)

Are we not much more important in the Lord's eyes than the grasses of the field, the colors of the trees, and the sparrows? Absolutely! So as we see the fall colors, or the beauty of a sunrise or sunset, or the beauty of a starry night or the moon that is so beautiful to gaze upon remember that there is a God who loves us more than words can say. He wants to walk with us through life! He wants to encourage us, give us peace, make our lives full of joy, and let us sense His presence in our lives fully. After all, He gave His only begotten Son for our salvation!

As I write this article I am enjoying the Lord and want badly for you to enjoy Him as well. Tell Him you love Him right now. Tell Him how thankful you are to know that He is with you and will always be with you. Tell Him that you are so thankful to know that He is in control of this universe and that nothing can come against us without His knowledge. Walk with Him. Pray to Him. Read His Word. And, as you do these things, feel His amazing love for you.

And, whenever you see the fall colors do not take them for granted. Remember there is a God who does all of this for us every year as a demonstration of His love for us.

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.





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.

Family of God Fellowship

How Many Coughs is Enough For One Day

By Dr. James L. Snyder Ocala, Fla.

This past week started rather rough. At least rougher than oth-

It started with a cough. A cough is not that serious if it's just one cough or maybe two. But it is not good when it is one cough after another and another.

One day last week, right after this coughing spell began, the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage and I enjoyed a fine supper, and I sat back in my chair as we started watching TV and relaxing after a busy day.

Then, my coughing spree began. I coughed and coughed and coughed almost uncontrollably. I've had a coughing fit, and then I sneezed my brains out. That's not

I was hoping to get this under control and quite soon.

Looking at me, the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage said, "What's all that coughing about?" She said it as though I had control over my coughing. "Oh, nothing," I said, "I think I just swallowed a fly." Then I smiled.

"What," she exclaimed, "you swallowed a fly? Didn't you have enough at supper?" Now, I'm in trouble. I had no explanation that she would accept.

Then, I had another coughing spell that seemed worse than before. I tried to stop

At my age, you would think I could control the things in my life. I tried, but I have yet to be successful.

Now, Miss-Nurse-Am-I stepped in. She had a thermometer to take my temperature, and it was high. She gave me a Covid test, and I passed, much to her chagrin and my smile. She then took my blood pressure, and it was high. Imagine 2 out of 3!

When all her testing was finished, she looked at me seriously. This was on Saturday, and she said we had to cancel our Sunday morning service. I tried to protest, but I was coughing too much to respond.

Not having the church service on Sunday morning is a great downer for me. I love nothing more than Sunday church. And there was no replacement, so the service had to be canceled. That made me cough even more with a sour ending.

Then, the law was laid down. "I'm calling the doctor," she said, "on Monday and schedule an appointment. You're sick."

In my position, I had nothing to do but cough.

There is nothing more that I like doing than seeing my doctor to begin the week. He loves seeing me, and we all know why. It ain't my charming, good looks, that's for sure.

There is no Sunday I like less than not going to church and wearing pajamas all day. I did try to get dressed, but Miss-Nurse-Am-I caught me and said, "Don't you dare get dressed. You're spending the day in bed. You're sick."

Well, if I want to object to Miss-Nurse-Am-I, I had better make plans for my

I did not know how long a Sunday is when I'm in my pajamas, not permitted to do anything but cough. And cough, I did.

I tried to take advantage of these coughing spells and sometimes faked some. Don't let her know, but a fake cough can have a soothing element to it, along with a

Then Monday came, as it always does. The appointment was made for the morning, thanks to a cancellation. And I was getting ready to go to the doctor and get his report on my condition. I wasn't that anxious, but I had no choice then.

My appointment was at 10:15, and I arrived just before 10:00. I like to be early. I was lucky, and I got to see my doctor at 11:10. This is why doctors call us patients. We have to have patience to see the doctor.

Finally, the doctor was ready for me. First, I had to see his nurse to get the information for the medical evaluation. She took my temperature, my blood pressure, and

Thirty minutes after she was finished, the doctor finally came. At that time, I was thinking of slipping out and going home and telling the wife the doctor said I was fine. As I was finishing this thought, guess who walked in?

I greeted him with a series of coughs.

"Not doing well," the doctor asked.

"That's why I'm here, Doc."

He looked through the nurse's information and then checked my lungs. After checking the statistics and asking me questions, he finally concluded. Looking at me, he said, "You have acute bronchitis."

I glared back at the doctor and said, "Doc, this bronchitis is not cute to any degree." I then coughed in his direction three times.

After the doctor's visit, the worst part of the day, I had to return to the Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage and tell her what the doctor said was wrong with me and that she was right. She said I had bronchitis.

Looking at my watch, I saw I had enough time to stop and get some personal medication, an Apple Fritter. What she doesn't know gets me in no trouble.

While recovering from my sickness, I read something interesting in the Bible. "But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick" (Matthew 9:12).

As I get older, I realize that there are times when I do need to see a doctor. Even Jesus believed that.

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. The church web site is www.whatafellowship.com







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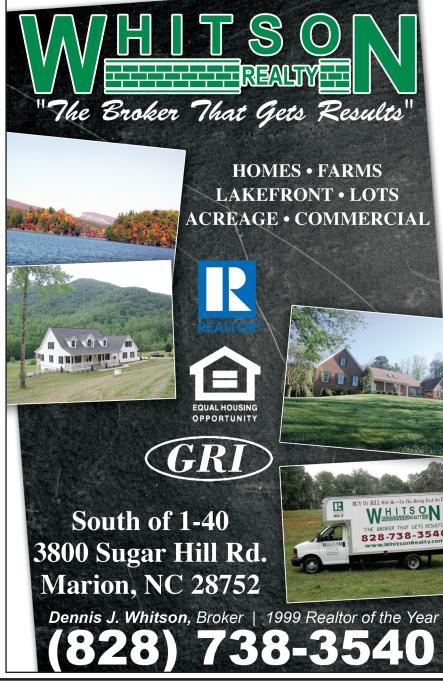


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Keep on Kickin

By Carol Wallace Kingsport, Tennessee

"I'm kickin' but not too high!" Memorable words from

My father-in-law of fifty years was a no-nonsense, hardworking, gentle with his grandchildren but firm in discipline kind of guy. When Granddaddy spoke, people knew he meant business. He was a teenager in the depression years and was familiar with the conservative philosophy of "use it up, wear it out, make it do or do without."



Granddaddy loved the Lord and served Him diligently in his church and community. He and our beloved Grandmother, his bride of seventy years, labored together as Christian parents teaching their children Jesus' love. My husband and his sister were taken to church all their growing up years and Grandmother and Granddaddy rejoiced together when both children accepted Jesus as their Savior. Church attendance and participation were an important part of family life.

As a young man, he learned to sing by "shaped notes" and served as Music Director at church for many years. My husband, Larry, loves to share the stories of his dad seeing him in the congregation whispering or giggling with a friend. In the middle of leading a congregational hymn, Granddaddy would jerk his head to one side indicating Larry should move immediately or suffer the consequences when he got home. Friends in the congregation knew the signal and would smile as Larry got up and moved to a different pew. Larry recalls well the "disciplinary talks" he and Granddaddy had about behavior in church.

Granddaddy served the Lord as a Deacon and was a Christian influence in his workplace. At his funeral, a friend relayed the story of how Granddaddy took him under his wing at work to show him the ropes and in no uncertain terms told him, "There will be none of that disrespectful language as we work together." With respect, this young man heeded Granddaddy's advice, cleaned up his language, and they became friends. This young man grew in the grace of Jesus, married, raised a family, and continues to serve the Lord. He never forgot the "stand up" Christian influence of Granddaddy in the workplace.

A World War II veteran, Granddaddy served in the US Army as a medic and was proud to have done so. He faithfully voted in local and national elections and encouraged patriotism, as he and his fellow service members fought to protect the freedom Americans enjoy today. He prayed for his country and its leaders.

After retirement, he pursued his passion for woodworking. Family and friends enjoy furniture and smaller items in our homes that reflect his touch. In later years, he relished making spoon rings, planting tomatoes, and watching birds from his deck. Anyone who came to visit went home with a spoon ring or a small wooden item made by his hands. He continued to be faithful in sharing his faith with others and in giving the Lord thanks and glory for victories.

Larry and I dated in high school and were married when we were eighteen and nineteen. His Dad stood as his best man on that sweltering day in July 1969. Sadly, we spent our 50th anniversary planning his funeral, as the Lord took him home at the age of ninety-seven. He passed on July 4th and comments were made that he gained his true independence on this America's Independence Day, as he went to heaven with Jesus.

Galatians 6:9 "And let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." We continue to remember fondly when we asked, "How are you doing, Granddaddy?" He would answer, "I'm kickin' but not too high." His body may have been weary, but his spirit was strong in faith to keep on keeping

God is pleased when we keep on keeping on. He is our source of strength and courage in the valleys of life. He walks with us to the very end through the valley of the shadow of death. Granddaddy went to check on his tomatoes, had a fall, and crawled back to his chair on the deck. He needed stitches and we took him to the emergency room. He was struggling to breathe, and testing revealed he was much sicker than we knew. He came home with hospice and went to his eternal home two weeks later. He kept on keeping on to the very end talking to family and friends as they came to say goodbye. His life was an example of not growing weary while doing good for in due season we will reap if we do not lose heart. Granddaddy's harvest continues to show that he planted well.

His testimony is a heritage for his family and part of our family dialogue is "I'm kickin' but not too high." We know Granddaddy put his faith and trust in Jesus Christ and believed in his heart God's promise of eternal life. It is our faith and trust in Jesus that assures our hearts that Granddaddy is kickin' high in heaven and enjoying eternity with Jesus.

Another keepsake expression from Granddaddy still heard often in our family is "well, anyway!" No matter the story or situation he was relaying, he would throw up both hands and end with "well anyway!" In other words, there is nothing else to say, end of story! Thank you, Granddaddy, for sharing God's love and for harvesting well. When you stepped into heaven, the angels may have heard the sweet expression we fondly remember, "well, anyway!" In other words, end of the story; I am home at last!

Discouragement comes and disappointments arise. Life is difficult at times and requires perseverance. In these times, do not grow weary, keep on keeping on. Well, anyway, blessings to you as you keep on kickin' even if it is not too high.

My husband, Larry and I reside in Kingsport, TN and are members 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 (Tammy), 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.



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Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

Announcing a May 2024 Journey to Israel

By Dr. & Mrs. Jack R. Hodges, Jr. *Burke County*

I would like to personally invite you to join my wife, Shawn, and me on a May 2024 Biblical tour of Israel. As former IMB missionaries for 15 years to Gaza and Nazareth, Israel (International Mission Board of the Southern



Baptist Convention), we draw from personal experiences to make the land, the people, and the Bible stories and narratives come alive. The Biblical Journey to Israel will take you to the places you've read about in the Bible: Nazareth, Capernaum, the Sea of Galilee, the River Jordan, and Jerusalem. The Bible will come alive as you walk where Jesus walked and experience the cultural and physical setting where God became man and dwelt upon us. You will also visit some unique sights and places that I have requested from our Tour Agency, Vered Tours, which most tours do not visit. Our agent is Ari Merom, an Israeli who formerly worked in the Ministry of Tourism. This trip is scheduled for May—a time when Israel is alive with colors and the weather is not yet scorching hot. It's the best time to visit Israel!

The Biblical Journey to Israel is May 6-16, 2024. It is a ten-day all-inclusive trip. The cost is \$4,995. This price includes the cost of airfare roundtrip Charlotte—Tel Aviv; all transfers and transportation; all hotel accommodations: all breakfasts and dinners; all touring and entrance fees; a full-time, licensed, and experienced English-speaking tour guide/manager; and gratuities to guide, driver, hotel waiters or porters.

If you are interested in gaining more information. You can download a flyer and an itinerary from the Pleasant Hill resources webpage. If you are interested in signing up (spaces are limited), you can click on the following link to go directly to the Vered Tours/WeTravel webpage.

I hope you can join us on this exciting journey.

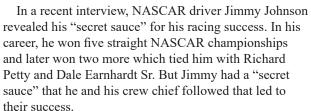
Dr. Jack R.Hodges, Jr. is the Senior Pastor at Pleasant Hill Baptist Church in Morganton, Burke County. He has served as a pastor, a biblical counselor and a International Mission Board missionary.

Check out our Website-www.brcnews.com
And find us on Facebook

Lakeview Missionary Church

The Christian's Secret Sauce

By Christopher L. Scott *Moses Lake, Wash.*





It was testing. Jimmy and his team would drive to racetracks during the week and test their cars for hours at a time. They'd try different shocks in the car springs, different air pressures in the tires, or adjust the suspension higher or lower. He describes those testing trips to different race tracks as the "secret sauce" that led to his success.

For believers, we too have a secret sauce. Ours does not deal with practice in race cars. Ours is about love for others. Paul describes that love in the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians:

"Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7, NASB)

When someone says something mean, we respond in love by being kind (even when we want to say something mean back at them). When someone fails to follow through on a commitment, we respond in love by offering them another chance (even when we want to explain how much the person disappointed us).

Last week I arrived at a coffee shop in which I had prearranged (and prepaid) for a large batch of coffee to be prepared for me to take to the public school staff next to our church. When I arrived at the coffee shop the coffee was not ready, I waited fifteen minutes for them to gather the coffee, cups, lids, stir sticks, creamer, and sugar together. All that stuff was supposed to happen before I arrived. When the young barista handed me the coffee fifteen minutes later I smiled and handed her a five-dollar bill as a personal tip. Love!

Love is our secret sauce that leads to our success as believers when we interact with the world and our community of believers.

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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Tim's Treasures

One of a Kind

By Timothy W. Tron *Burke County*

It is magnificent to watch a flower bloom over several days, or something even more glorious, to experience pregnancy with your spouse and the eventual birth of a child. The former is quick, lasting only a few days, if that. The latter, taking months, became a once-in-a-lifetime event. Both are important in God's creation, but unlike the physically obvious miracles of life, there is another miraculous event as important as the latter previously men



miraculous event as important as the latter previously mentioned that often goes unseen, undetected.

This last week was another one for the memory books. Never before had I encountered such a spiritual, uplifting feeling when visiting one of the most unlikely of places - the dentist's office. To understand the significance of the moment, a little context is needed. You see, sometimes, when you take that plunge, step off that cliff to serve God fully, you inadvertently leave something behind. In my case, there were many things, but one that grew more pertinent with time was the care of my teeth. It had been over eight years since I last visited a dentist's office. I took care to brush at least twice daily and to floss (occasionally), but those annual appointments are necessary to keep the plaque from building up below your gum lines. After many years of neglect, I finally made that dreaded appointment last fall. As expected, the news wasn't good. Due to extreme plaque build-up, two deep cleanings would be required. Herein begins the foundation for the story that God was about to reveal. As so many times before in my life, a blessing would come from the suffering.

During the initial visit, around September of last year, the first dance with the oral sledgehammer, the dental hygienist assigned to my case, was professional and polite. My heart went out to her because my neglect had made her job much more difficult. A few weeks later, in October, the second cleaning took place, and there seemed to be a slight change in her demeanor. Again, my heart went out to her, but there was more to her cordial, introductory conversation than the previous visit – something entirely unexpected considering the task at hand. Something about the questions about what I did on campus seemed to hint at a curiosity that wasn't there before.

A few months later, around February, I had a follow-up appointment for the deep cleaning. This time, the same dental hygienist met me in the waiting room to usher me back. I still hadn't memorized her name, but she looked familiar. We went back to the room, and this time, the conversation seemed to open up more about faith-related topics, but unlike before, there wasn't a probing, but rather something confirming, something that said she was a believer – "But to what degree," my mind pondered. A feeling of appreciation and thankfulness washed over me. As we planned a follow-up appointment, she seemed particularly concerned that I should return sooner than later. So, we made an appointment as soon as the insurance would allow.

A couple of days later, the suggestion for a friend's request came up on my social media feed. It looked like the young lady who had been my hygienist a few days earlier. Still unsure of her name, I clicked on the profile, revealing that my suspicions were true, but not to the degree I imagined. No, it was much better. My heart leaped for joy. Her name was Sara, and yes, she was a believer, but the good news didn't stop there. She had recently given her life to Christ last year in November, one of her posts had proudly proclaimed. In addition, she was married to a veteran of the Afghan War. It was true. She had changed, and it wasn't just my imagination. Suddenly, there were many questions and a longing to speak to someone whom I wouldn't get to see for several months. Was it a coincidence that she asked if I wanted to return sooner than later? Besides the questions, I felt an urgent need to congratulate her on her decision to follow Christ and provide encouragement. But most importantly, I wanted to find out how she was doing since her choice. But my follow-up appointment wouldn't be for quite a while – so I patiently waited.

The months passed. The memory faded.

The morning of my long-awaited follow-up appointment, we were greeted with the first chill of autumn in the air. Sitting outside on the porch of the Local Lion coffee shop, we found ourselves seeking longer sleeves and thicker second layers of clothing to adorn before our Bible study had adjourned. One could say the weather had a part to play, but something was moving, something stirring the spirit within that was palpable. Due to medical conditions, I'm now only allowed to drink decaffeinated coffee, so it wasn't the coffee talking – it was the power of the Holy Spirit at work. Before reaching my office, instead of the morning polite hellos, I felt compelled to hug my colleagues, taking them by surprise, and in each case, a smile and something of a gracious response were met. The further my footsteps carried me to my little hole in the wall of the spacious campus, the greater a joy seemed to grow in my heart. But what could it be that was causing such a stir? The answer would soon be revealed.

We all have them now, those electronic calendars. More than once, thanks to the tools that allow you to be notified of upcoming meetings and appointments, I've nearly missed something important, but the calendar saved me. As the company of students and colleagues poured into my little office that morning, the memory of the appointment soon vanished. It was when the third notification popped up on my calendar that a feeling of panic washed over me. I looked at the time and realized that I had to leave immediately. Because I was so overwhelmed with the flurry of customers, I had missed the previous notifications. In other words, I was about to be late for something I had anticipated with great joy for several months.

Odd, you say. Yes, it definitely would be the first time I would be looking forward, with joyful anticipation, to a trip to the dentist's office.

As I was about to head out the door, I thought of what a new believer needed. In our walk, when we first come to Christ, it is almost as important what we do after the decision as the decision itself. Helping others in their walk of faith after making such a life-changing decision is crucial in getting them to see how to walk the path of their new life. With this in mind, I grabbed a couple of copies of the Blueridge Christian News and my book, 'Bruecke to Heaven,' to give her in case she needed something to aid her in her journey. Whether she wanted them or not, it would be a chance to take that had no downside other than the materials being discarded. But the upside was far more potentially rewarding – affirming her decision.

Pulling out of the campus parking lot, potentially arriving a couple of minutes late, the philharmonic orchestra's music on the radio seemed to match the brilliant clear blue azure sky above. As I drove, I prayed that God would protect my drive and not let anything get in the way of this moment to spoil this opportunity to share with a new believer. From that point, every light turned green, and the traffic parted like the Red Sea. Miraculously arriving with over a minute to spare, the receptionist called my name as I entered the door, "Tim?"

"Yes," I replied.

"The hygienist will be right with you."

"Great," was my reply as I reached for the pen on the counter. I wrote Sarah's name inside the book, unsure whether she was even there or if the gift would be received with the best intentions. A couple of minutes later, the figure of the dental hygienist emerged from the back room, calling my name from beneath her medical mask, "Tim?"

Sarah stood waiting, a smile curling the edges of her eyes into small, happy wrinkles. "Thank God," I breathed to myself.

"Come on back." We unceremoniously made our way to her room, where she was all prepared. Before I sat down, my euphoria must have been almost comical. Eagerly, almost as a child sharing the story of catching the big fish in the pond, I began confessing my previous assumptions, how I had sensed the change, how there was something almost miraculous how her name had shown up on the social media, and then to find that we were nearly at her spiritual Birth date.

"Here are a couple of things for your early Birthday gift," I said hesitantly, handing her the book and papers, explaining what they were and their intent to help her in her spiritual walk. Before I could finish, it was apparent the suspicion had been correct as she began to respond with a joyful thankfulness. From that point, the spiritual floodgates began to open. As I started to sit down in the reclined dental chair, the thought occurred to me, "Here underneath the lamps of iridescent lamps, in what, up to this point in my life, had always figured to be the necessary personal health torture chamber, where pains we seldom seek to find are inflicted upon us for our own good are received, was now about to become a bed of repose for a time of fellowship and testimony unlike any other. How much like God is that? To turn something bad into something awesome?" What followed would soon become the most jubilant hour of dental cleaning I had ever experienced.

Sarah began by describing how she first felt the changes after her decision. She said she realized things were different one day while working on a patient when she heard the lyrics of a song on the radio playing, which wouldn't have bothered her before her salvation. But since that change, Sarah said she was convicted enough by the words she was hearing that she had to pause her work and change the channel – it was that moving. Sarah then went on to describe the things in life that once meant little now meant a lot more - the things that never bothered you before, but now they do kind of thing. It was a revelation that warmed my heart the more she spoke.

Then Sarah told me how she hadn't been able to share her testimony and wondered what she was to do next. It wasn't until there was a death in her extended family when her brother-in-law's mother passed that she was afforded that opportunity. At the funeral, the preacher presented the gospel and path to salvation as part of the eulogy. She said she could see her brother-in-law struggling, warring with the flesh against the choice at hand. It was then, she said, that she heard a voice speaking to her to be bold. Sarah approached her sister's husband and encouraged him to give it all to Christ. At that point, she shared her testimony with him. It was the first time she told anyone of her salvation. The joy it gave her was apparent. Even through the medical mask, her eyes told the story.

From there, Sarah then began to tell me of her conversion, the encounter with the Holy Spirit, again and again, and how, after arriving home one evening, she just sat in her car and wept, knowing that God was calling her. The following Sunday, at the church service, she gave her life to Christ.

We continued stopping, me responding, talking, then continuing, then pausing, then responding over and over, to the point it was almost comical, in the sense that this was unlike any dental cleaning – it was pure fellowship. Time seemed to fly, but with each new revelation, every additional revelation, my heart was overjoyed to know that God had put me there for a reason, if nothing else, to provide confirmation that God was listening, that God would put people in her life to be there to for her and to help her.

We spoke about her husband, Daniel, a former marine, having served several tours in Afghanistan. Inside, I knew that it was inevitable that the young man would definitely have some form of mental trauma from war. There was a great possibility that he would suffer from flashbacks that would overwhelm his being. She confirmed my fears when she said that Daniel had not yet come to Christ and that he avoided going to church. It was more than just an occurrence that the most

continued on page 21

Community News

Mt. Zion Community Church

Mitchell County

Mt Zion Community Church – has always been a church for the people. The church, previously known as Mt Zion United Methodist Church, disaffiliated from the United Methodist Church effective July 31, 2023.

Following the disaffiliation the church, now called Mt Zion Community Church, joined the Global Methodist Church which is a Bible-based traditional Church

The withdrawal from the United Methodist Church has been brewing for many years as the United Methodist Church denomination became more and more liberal and they were not even following their own book of discipline. The situation finally came to a decision point and several thousand churches throughout the United States and the world have either completed the disaffiliation process or are pursuing disaffiliation.

We're still Methodist – just not United Methodist - but Global Methodist and there is a distinction. As Global Methodists, we believe that the Bible is the holy inspired, and unchanging word of God and we hold to traditional values. So as the United Methodist Church becomes more and more liberal in their interpretation of the Scriptures the Global Methodist will not do this.

Many of our members have deep roots in our church but when the time came for the vote on disaffiliation there were only 2 dissenting votes and no abstentions so we were well beyond the minimum percentage of "yea" votes needed for the process to continue. Later when a vote was taken concerning whether or not to join the Global Methodist the vote was 100% for joining.

During the transition period, we were able to have well-qualified speakers to fill the pulpit until the Global Methodist assigned Pastor David Green and his wife, Francey, to our church. (Pastor David is also pastoring a church in Watauga County). Pastor David preaches from Scripture and he has a heart for God and a love for people. The presence of the Holy Spirit is evident in our worship services and we're excited about what the future has in store for us.

If you're looking for a place to worship we invite you to join us. Worship service begins at 9 am on Sunday with Sunday School following at 10 am. Mt Zion Community Church is located at 12 Franklintown Road just off Highway 19-E near the Avery/Mitchell County line and across from Mayland Community College. We have a Facebook page. You may also call 828-284-7759 for more information.

On Friday, October 13, at 7 pm the church will be hosting a Gospel Singing worship service featuring congregational singing of beloved old hymns. A time of fellowship and light refreshments will follow. Everyone is welcome.



Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

National Dessert Day

By Caron Cline Burke County

October 14th is National Dessert Day. The majority of Americans have never met a dessert they did not like. The fall of the year brings its own specialty sweets; pumpkin pies and pumpkin rolls; pumpkin cheesecake; apple pies; and sweet potato casseroles, just to name a few. Unfortunately, Americans consume about 17 teaspoons of sugar a



day, totaling about 60 pounds of sugar per year. This is 3 times more than any one person should allow themselves. Resisting the temptation to indulge requires incredible self-control. Interestingly, the spelling of this word is often confused with the spelling of another word, desert. Although the spellings are similar the definitions could not be more different. Dessert is a sweet, savory treat that sets the taste buds singing. Eating sweets seems to produce feelings of happiness and pleasure, causing the body to continually crave this sugar high. Although dessert is appealing, it contains ingredients known for producing poor health conditions. On the other hand, a desert is a difficult and dry place, lacking in food and water. No one willingly chooses to spend quality time in a desert. Yet so often the Lord leads His people into such a place to produce spiritual strength. Jesus was led into the desert by the Holy Spirit immediately following His baptism where He was tempted by the devil. Some things happen in the place of affliction that cannot happen anywhere else. If believers are indulging the flesh, nothing of true eternal value can be born. Only empty calories that harden the soul's arteries are produced. It is in the desert, the place of want, that endurance and faith are formed. Isaiah 48:10 is a word from the Lord to His people: "Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction". The desert, the furnace of affliction, reveals the state of the heart. Is the faith that we profess a faith that tastes sweet but contains empty calories? Or is the faith we profess one that can survive difficulties and still offer the sacrifice of praise? Difficult seasons produce a hunger and thirst for righteousness, a desire for the bread of life, the living Word. The prophet Ezekiel was called to speak a word of judgment to the people of God, a word which would plunge him into a desert season. God encouraged him by saying: '...Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll. He said to me, 'Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you'. Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth'. (Ezekiel 3:1-3) Psalm 119:103 also declares: 'How sweet are Your words to my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey to my mouth!' In those desert seasons of life, we learn to fill our souls with the living word of God. The Holy Spirit inspired this comparison of God's word with honey. Modern science now believes that honey contains anti-depressants, anti-convulsants, and anti-anxiety properties. It also improves memory problems and promotes the healing of wounds, especially burns. The desert brings hunger, thirst, burns, as well as other wounds, yet it is the place where God can administer His healing, strengthening, living Word; the place where He can burn away the dross and purify a people for His own purpose and glory! Go ahead and enjoy that pumpkin cheesecake or apple pie but remember that it is the enduring word of God that brings life and health to your whole body!

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

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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By Thomas Thorne *McDowell County*

In last month's article, we started by reading Acts 2:38, where Peter admonishes everyone to, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." I then postulated that repentance is a necessary step toward forgiveness and the receipt of the Holy Spirit. We then reviewed three elements of repentance: Recognition



of one's sins as sins - recognition that sin is wrong, remorse and sorrow for our sins, and confession. We then considered that there are three more elements to full repentance:

- Stopping the wrong actions
- Forgiving
- Restitution if possible

"Stopping/desisting from" is neither a moral-intellectual analysis nor a feeling; it is an action. It is a ceasing from the sin, a desisting from the patterns of sinful action to which we have become addicted. Desisting from sin involves actually stopping the sinful action. To do so also involves consciously repressing thoughts and fantasies about the sinful activity, and making a firm commitment never to commit the sinful act again. This is serious and takes effort.

The last two elements, Forgiving and Restitution, are where things really get difficult sometimes, but are vital. You might say, "Where the rubber meets the road." How many times have we heard it said, "I will never forgive that person" or something similar? What did Jesus say about forgiving? Amid the classic "Lord's prayer" he tells us to pray to God, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt. 6:12 ESV). Notice how this is worded, "as we also have forgiven (past tense) our debtors." Two things stand out in this passage. First, it appears to be assumed that we have already forgiven our debtors. We are not walking around carrying grudges with chips on our shoulders, we have already forgiven others who have wronged us. In other words, forgiving is a natural pattern in our lives. When we have sinned against someone, we don't delay. When it comes to our mind we ask forgiveness. Second, we can expect to be forgiven in like manner as we have forgiven others.

Then again, in Matthew 6:14-15 Jesus unequivocally says, "For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." There can be no question that forgiving others accompanies repentance. The last point I want to suggest for full repentance is restitution. Restitution is the act of making good, as best one can, for any damage done. If one has stolen, one must return the object or pay compensation. If one has damaged another's reputation, one must attempt to correct the injury to the offended party. If we have let someone down with our speech or actions, we need to do our best to apologize and make it right.

The interrelationship between these steps is best described as a spiral that touches each of the six points yet advances with each turn. Thus, one may begin at any point—with recognition, remorse, confession, action-analysis-stopping, forgiveness, or restitution. However, as one repeats the steps again and again, one's analysis and remorse deepen, one's restitution and commitment to desist become firmer, forgiveness becomes deeper, and one's confession becomes more profound.

As one cycles through these six phases, one's repentance becomes more earnest. At the highest level, one achieves "full repentance," which would require full consciousness and action such that, given the same situation, one would refrain from the sin for which one had repented.

Sinfulness is a very deep dimension of human existence and dealing with it calls upon all our spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and moral resources—and we need to recognize that ceasing to sin is the baseline of repentance.

Acts 2:38, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." Shalom Shalom everyone.

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 servantsotmhg@gmail.com



recent article in one of the papers that I had given her covered just such a character. She asked that I pray for Danny, as she liked to call him, that she didn't know how to reach him and was fearful that he was falling into a dark place. "Did you know him before he went to Afghanistan," I asked.

"No, he had already been when we first met."

Inside, I was somehow thankful, for that alone could easily, as it often does, drive a wedge in any relationship. Sarah confirmed my fears when she recalled how his family said he had changed. Sometimes, I've read and seen how war can change men. Marriages are often the casualties of such conflicts. Years after the wars have ended, the battles still rage within those men and women who were part of that death and destruction. She went on to share how her little three-year-old nephew would ask Danny to go to church with them. But each time he was asked, he declined. "I just pray that eventually he won't be able to say no," she said lovingly.

A little while later, after a short period of silence, Sarah paused again in her work and said softly, "Please keep Danny in your prayers," Her voice said it all. "I definitely will." What she didn't know was that he was already in my prayers. There was an urgency to our time together that seemed to press upon me. How often do we come across someone who comes to know Christ, but due to outside circumstances, you know that you won't see them again for a long time, if ever? Inside, you fear they may not have enough help in their walk - not enough love or support surrounding them. All these things and more kept pressing me to lovingly encourage her as much as the visit would allow.

Eventually, we went on to talk about many things of faith – things to look out for in the early stages of our walk in Christ, to look for those convictions and messages from God, and the feeling associated with sharing one's testimony, all with scripture references. In all, as I helped her watch the clock so that we ended my appointment on time, it felt more like a fellowship party than a visit to the dentist. But after all, it was nearly Sarah's spiritual Birthday, so why not? We ended in prayer, saying our goodbyes until the next time.

In this life's journey, we will come across many Sarahs. Knowing life will keep us separated, careers, distances, and struggles, we must lift them up in prayer because, eventually, we have to leave. We must remind ourselves that they found Him without us; they surely will be able to continue to find Him when they need him most. As much as we would like, we can't be there for everyone we run across on our missions. We eventually have to return from overseas, drive back home, or even more permanently, pass from this life to the next, long before we feel we were able to finish pouring into those beautiful souls whom we will leave behind, who don't have a good shepherd to watch over them. Thankfully, Sarah has found a good shepherd – her preacher is a devout man of God – a true disciple maker. But not everyone finds a community led by a good shepherd. Many are left alone to struggle. Yet, we must pray that God be with them and know that with Him, all things are possible. Yes, we might leave a little piece of our hearts with them. But we can take comfort in knowing that with God watering that tiny seed of hope, we can pray that it blossoms someday into a beautiful, devout follower of Christ who will go on to make many more believers – after we've long gone on to be with our Father in eternity.

And for that, we can always say, "Thanks be to God."

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

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Kids Corner

Spirit Of Faithfulness

By Christy Lowman Burke County

There are several different definitions of faithfulness. I like the simple way www.vocabulary.com puts it: Faithfulness is a commitment to something or someone. Most of the time faithfulness is thought of when a man and a woman get

married and stay faithful to each other the rest of their lives or until death does them part. In the animal world, several animals mate for life. Some examples are Cardinals, doves, pigeons, wolves, coyotes, swans, and many others. It was hard to choose which animal to talk about when it comes to faithfulness but ultimately the salmon won.

Salmon are born in coastal freshwater rivers at their source. The source of a river is called its headwaters. Here they live for at least six months, some species stay here for up to three years. Then the salmon start an over 100-mile journey to the ocean where they will live between 1 to 7 years. On this trip to sea, they familiarize themselves with their surroundings and make mental notes by using their keen sense of smell so they can find their way back home after their seven years are up in the ocean. Some scientists believe the earth's magnetic pull also helps them get back home. They embark on this great journey back so they can spawn and have their babies in the same waters they were born, where they know for a fact, that their babies will be safe and stand a chance to live. After all, they survived there. Spawning is when fish make a nest, mate, and lay eggs so they can have babies.

It is both miraculous and fascinating that salmon can live in both freshwater and salt water. This ability is called anadromous. Most fish are not able to live in both types of water. Exposure to a different water usually kills fish. But the Salmon can do it, and the Atlantic salmon can go back and forth several times in their lifetime if they can make it past the many predators and fishing nets. The Pacific salmon usually die after their first trip home because it uses all their energy to get back plus most of them stop eating after they spawn and make nests. The females make nests in the rocky riverbeds with their tails. After all of this, the salmon simply do not have the energy left to make the long trip back to the ocean.

Salmon's sense of smell is so great that they can smell the teeniest, tiniest scent in a body of water as large as 10 gigantic swimming pools.

Salmon can change color as much as three times during their lives. Male salmon turn a bright red when it is time to spawn, sometimes they also grow a hump on their back (especially the pink salmon). Some will grow canine teeth or develop a curvature of the jawbone called a kype.

The smallest salmon is the pink salmon which usually only weighs 3-5 pounds but can reach 12 pounds and 30 inches long. The largest salmon is the Chinook/ king salmon which can weigh as much as 130 pounds and can reach a length of 58 inches.

The word salmon is derived from the Latin language. The Latin word Salmo or salive means to leap. This word perfectly describes salmon because sometimes they must leap upstream in vigorous waters to get back home. There are videos of bears standing in the river catching salmon in their mouths when they leap out of the water.

This fish plays a large part in the ecosystem and survival of many other living things. Many trees, plants, insects, birds, and animals benefit from salmon. They have also been a huge source of meat for colonies in the past and still are for many people. Salmon meat is rich in Omega 3s, and vitamin D, and is high in protein. Salmon brings in approximately 10 billion dollars each year in income for the United States alone.

Now, back to how salmon made the top animal in my book for being faithful. Salmon travel over a hundred miles in the ocean, avoiding fisherman nets, sharks, orcas, seals, and several other oceanic predators to get back home to their freshwater river stream. You would think when they reach the freshwater stream the rest of the journey would be easy, but it is the hardest. The rivers are filled with vigorous, strong currents of water from the mountains. Here the salmon must fight as hard as it can to get up the streams and waterfalls to the headwaters of the rivers. Most of the time they must even jump and leap out of the water to move upward. Many of them get bruises, cuts, and scrapes from the rocks on their journey

upstream. During this part of their journey, they have more fishermen to avoid, and new predators such as bears, wolves, eagles, and many others. Salmon are faithful in the fact that they will overcome this large feat even though the odds are high against them. They faithfully complete their journey, because if they don't, their species will become extinct. No matter how hard things



get or how discouraged the salmon gets, it keeps on going even though everything in their world is against them. They know at the end; their goal will finally be completed. I think they stopped eating at the end because they finished their mission in life. I like to think that they die happy knowing that their babies will be born safely and that they completed God's purpose for their life.

How does this apply to you in your Christian walk? As Christians, the salmon and their story should give us hope, strength, and reassurance that we can overcome any obstacles and complete our goals and tasks. All we have to do is keep on going and not lose faith. This, however, is not possible if we don't lean on God during our journey. We must pray and have Him along the way. He is our assur-

As Christians we should also be faithful in many ways in our lives, staying faithful in our marriage, taking care of our parents, and taking care of other elderly people as well as widows and orphans. Feeding the hungry and helping those who are going through a disaster are just a few examples. We, as Christians, must be faithful to others in their time of need. After all, that is a big part of what being a Christian is about. We are told to be the light and hope in our world.

The salmon's fight upstream to their spawning grounds is much like our daily walk as Christians. It can feel like an uphill battle filled with many obstacles, injuries, and predators waiting to consume us just off the path. Here we must always keep our faith and our eyes on Jesus. If we are steadfast and faithful at the end of our journey, just like the salmon, we will complete our mission and hear God say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Dear Lord, I pray that you will guide us and help us be faithful Christians to others around us. Help us be the beacon of light and hope to others so they may see You in us. I thank you, dear Lord, for the animals you have brought before us that show us how to be faithful and what faithfulness is all about. We thank you also for Jesus who is faithful to us in all areas of our life. Help us lean on Your faithfulness in our times of need. In Jesus's name, I pray, Amen.

"For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light." Ephesians 5:8 ESV

Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name *in the sight of God and man.* Proverbs 3:3-4

But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one. 2Thessalonians 3:3

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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-al ias=books&text=Christy+Lowman&sort=relevancerank. You can reach her at https://www.facebook.com/authorChristyLowman/ or christyssoaps@yahoo.com.



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Berry Chapel Baptist Church

Rebound

By Steve Williams Mitchell County

Basketball season is almost here. One of the most important skills for players to have is the ability to rebound. Rebounds occur because a shot somewhere has been missed. There is no need for a rebound unless something has been missed. That means a shot was attempted, but somehow something went wrong when the shot was taken, therefore we need a rebound.



One reason a shot can be missed is that a player was off in their perspective. They were looking at the goal, but what they saw and what they did didn't match. They may have shot too long, too hard, too soft.

Another reason that shots are missed in a basketball game is because the opposing team is in the player's face. It's the job of the opposing team to wave their hands in the shooter's face and obstruct their view. They are trying to distract the other player so that he will miss the shot.

Sometimes shots are missed because players are fouled. A foul means that a player has been bumped into or touched, pushed, or tripped while trying to shoot the ball, making the shooter not able to make the shot.

Any coach will want their player to go for a rebound on their missed shot. The player shouldn't walk off the court, quit the game, or throw in the towel because they have missed a shot. A good player will go back up for a ball and retrieve it to shoot it again.

In the Bible, there are lots of people who missed shots. Many of God's servants missed their targets and had to deal with the consequences of their missed shots. In, fact a study of God's Word shows us that many of the people God used were people who were on the rebound. We can't and must not allow our failures and mistakes that happen in life to destroy us or dictate to us how we are to live our lives. God is a God of second chances, so get the rebound and shoot again.

Here are some ways to rebound when you miss the shot.

- Don't Be A Turtle. When we miss a shot in life, we want to hide in our shells.
- Have a Regular Spiritual With God. This is the only way you will grow close to God.
- Break Bad Habits. Because bad habits will break you.
- Be Careful Who You Spend Your Time With. People can lead you astray.
- Be Careful How You Spend Your Money. You can find yourself in deep debt.
- Don't Just React to Life. Do your best to learn from it.
- Don't Just Talk About Your Setbacks. Talk about your future goals in life.

Words of Wisdom:

- The most important lesson to remember is that failure is inevitable, but so is success, so rebound. N/A
- Strength and growth come only through continuous effort and struggle. N/A
- \bullet Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from a determined will. N/A
- I've always believed that if you put in the work, the results will come. Michael Jordan

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



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an aging population that has created a shortage in industries that heavily rely on younger employees.

The Joint Economic Committee Republicans, chaired by ranking member, Sen. Mike Lee (R-UT), issued a report in June of 2022, that succinctly addressed the issue, saying:

"In the long run, abortion shrinks the labor force, stunts innovation, and limits economic growth. It also weakens the solvency of social insurance programs such as Social Security and Medicare that rely on workers to support a growing elderly population."

Still, one other dynamic rarely mentioned is having a "creeping effect" on diminishing our country's work ethic. I'm referring to the exponential growth of gambling in America.

Historically, only a few states had legal gambling options, such as Nevada and New Jersey. However, an increasing number of states have now approved various forms of gambling, including casinos, racetracks, and state lotteries.

The rise of online gambling has played a crucial role in gambling's rapid spread. Moreover, a cultural shift towards normalizing gaming has also contributed to its widespread acceptance. Sports betting, for instance, has gained immense popularity, and the lifting of federal restrictions on sports wagering by the Supreme Court in 2018 further propelled its progression.

There are a significant number of young people who are now engaging in gambling. The availability of online gaming platforms and widespread marketing efforts targeting youth and young adults have contributed to its popularity among this demographic. Additionally, the rise of e-sports betting and mobile gambling apps has made gaming more accessible and appealing to youth.

Why should we be concerned? I suggest it ought to be seen as a big deal because of what we are passing down to our children.

Back in the 1990s, at a national meeting of the Christian Coalition, Senator Richard Lugar explained:

"The spread of gambling is a measure of the moral erosion taking place in our country...It says that if you play enough, you can hit the jackpot and be freed from the discipline of self-support through a job or the long commitment of ongoing education....We cannot tolerate the 'get rich quick' symbolism of gambling while pleading with our children to avoid other 'tosses of the dice' that lead to unhealthy living and destructive behavior."

As Americans embrace the philosophy of gambling more, they will appreciate the privilege of working less.

In his classic work, Seducing America, Rex Rogers provided an insightful and thought-provoking statement on the relationship between gambling and work. He wrote:

"God says, 'A hard worker has plenty of food, but a person who chases fantasies has no sense (Proverbs 12:11).'

"There is no better definition for chasing fantasies than gambling. Gambling encourages people not to work and to throw their money away on blind wishes. By gambling, people attempt to avoid God's principle, 'By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food' (Genesis 3:19)....Gambling masquerades as surrogate work. It undermines work, rationality, and responsibility. But work is both a command and a gift of God (Exod. 20:9; Eph. 4:28; 2 Thess. 3:6-12; I Tim. 5:8)."

Indeed, this world is not a place of boundless random processes, which is what evolution is about. The conception of a human being is divinely ordered, which is what abortion denies. Life is not directed by luck and chance, which is what gambling is about.

No. A Sovereign God is in full control, ever working to bring about his perfect will. And, he commands us to work, dedicating our labors and actions to him, acknowledging him as our ultimate employer, and seeking to bring him glory in everything we do (I Cor. 10:31).

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

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First Baptist of Marshall

HumorBy Buddy Freeman *Madison County*

I had just moved into a new apartment and was having problems with the mailman who was delivering the previous tenant's mail to my address. Hoping to resolve the situation, I enlarged my name on the mailbox, but he still kept giving



me the wrong letters. Finally, I left a note saying that he was delivering the mail incorrectly. The next day I went to the box to find this addition to my message: "Sir, I am delivering the mail correctly. You're just living at the wrong address."

A man was caught, tried, and jailed for being a thief with stolen goods. But the police couldn't find half of the loot. He would not tell them where he had hidden it. Then one day he got a letter from his wife saying, "It's time to plant the garden, but since you're in jail, there's no one to do it. Looks like I'll have to dig it up by myself." The prisoner wrote his wife a letter saying, "Don't dig in the garden. That's where I buried all the loot the cops are after. So don't touch that old garden plot." He handed the letter to the guard to mail for him. Soon, he got another letter from his wife. She said, "The other day a truckload of cops came to the house and dug up the entire garden. What shall I do?" The wise prisoner wrote back saying, "Plant the garden."

A man asked his wife what she'd like for her birthday. "I'd like to be six again," she replied. On the morning of her birthday, he got her up bright and early, and off they went to a local theme park. What a day! He put her on every ride in the park: the Death Slide, the Screaming Loop, the Wall of Feareverything there. Wow! Five hours later she staggered out of the park, he head reeling and her stomach upside down. Right to McDonald's they went, where her husband ordered her a Happy Meal along with extra fries and a chocolate shake. Then it was off to a movie-the latest Star Wars epic, and popcorn, Pepsi Cola, and M&M's. What a fabulous adventure! Finally, she wobbled home with her husband and collapsed into bed. He leaned over and lovingly asked, "Well, dear, what was it like being six again?" One eye opened. "You idiot, I meant my dress size." The moral of this story. Even when the man is listening, and trying hard, he's still gonna get it wrong. Ain't it the truth!

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

Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins. Proverbs 10:12

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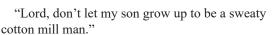
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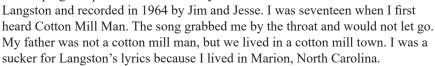
Obedient Heart Fellowship

The Old, Old Story

By Jim Huskins McDowell County



This poignant petition was written by Joe



"I was born in the shadow of a cotton mill smoke stack down in Alabama's bottom land. Where my grand pappy broke his back, pulling on a cotton sack, raising my pa to be a cotton mill man. I've got lots of memories of government commodities, when all our meat came in a can. While the bossman on the hill, bought his steak and ate his fill. Called upon to clean his grill, a cotton mill man."

The first stanza of Langston's brilliant critique of the Southern textile industry cuts deeply. I knew that everything he wrote was genuine because I grew up among his field studies. I was appalled by conditions in the mills and their villages. Little did I know that Southern textile culture in 1960 was dramatically better than the circumstances of only a generation earlier. I may have had a better perspective on that improvement if someone had seen fit to tell me about the Marion Massacre.

My hometown catapulted to national infamy in the wake of a deadly confrontation during the early morning of October 2, 1929. The local Sherriff and a team of "deputies" faced down a group of workers who walked out of Marion Manufacturing as part of a wildcat strike. The officers eventually fired into the crowd. Six men died. At least several dozen more were injured. The local hospital refused to treat the injured. Local churches refused to help bury the dead. The day after the shooting, most of the mill workers reported for work. Either they had no idea what else to do, or they were terrified of being the next one in the crosshairs.

The most deadly confrontation in Southern textile labor relations prompted Sinclair Lewis to spend that summer in Marion. Woody Guthrie composed a song called Marion Massacre. Americans everywhere heard about it, but by the time I started school less than thirty years later, the Marion Massacre had become a dark and shameful secret. I did not know about the killings until my mid-forties. Only recently have I learned some of the sordid details.

I am a life-long advocate of free enterprise capitalism. I regret that we have cast it aside. Even more important to me, however, is another cornerstone of the American System: equal justice under the law. Nothing about the conditions experienced by the employees of Marion Manufacturing in 1929 was just. Apparently, the bossman on the hill, Reginald Baldwin, held his employees in lower regard than he did the machinery they operated. I understand why Baldwin and his cronies were happy to sweep this event under the rug, but I am astounded that everyone else did the same. For decades, no one discussed the tragedy.

I am of the generation who became socially aware during the 1960s. If someone had told me about the causes and results of that deadly melee, I may have had a better understanding of the social and political dynamics which followed JFK's assassination. Our hometown massacre was rooted in corporate greed, oppression of the powerless, corrupt government, biased law enforcement, unbalanced courts, medical and ecclesiastical malpractice, and even communist intervention. I may have been better equipped to confront such demonic forces during my transition from adolescence to manhood if my education had included exposure to the most local of history. The massacre was never discussed.

I have recalled that tragedy many times over the six years since I became convinced that the entire Bible is both true and relevant. In a conspiracy of silence unimaginably larger and more destructive than the coverup of the Marion Massacre, everyone who nurtured me in Christian faith and practice conveyed misinformation about who Jesus is, what He came to accomplish, and why. I was taught that Unchangeable God changed His mind sometime between the books of Malachi and Matthew. They told me that the Nation of Israel has been replaced by something called the "gentile church." They said God had reneged on promises made to Israel since the days of Abraham. They insisted that Jesus died, not to deliver His children from sin and guide them in paths of righteousness, but so that we might sin at will and without consequence. I was taught that Paul the Apostle—in direct contradiction of both the Father and the Son—somehow revoked God's instructions for living which He conveyed through Moses.

I suspect that some of my teachers noticed the glaring failure of these doctrines to conform with clear, Biblical teaching. I wish that those who noticed the inconsistencies had found the grace to share their concerns. I may have been inspired to lay aside the manmade doctrines long enough to discover what the Bible says.

Salvation cannot be earned. It comes only by grace through faith. Most believers refuse to admit, however, that the Bible also teaches that saving faith does not exist outside of those whose lives are characterized by righteous obedience. Faith is incomplete unless it leads to righteousness. See the second chapter of James and 1 John 2:3-4.

The death of six mill workers in 1929 is an unspeakable tragedy, but that event offers profound lessons about human nature. The Bible is long and deep and challenging, but it is the Living Word of God. Most believers are unaware and apparently unconcerned that the Word contradicts most of what they have been taught. Perhaps it would be better to learn the truth now rather than to someday hear Jesus say "I never knew you!"

Jim Huskins is pastor of Obedient Heart Fellowship.

Something to Think About

A Place at The Table

By Dennis Love McDowell County

Jesus said in John 14 to His disciples and to us that He was going to prepare a place for us. He said it this way. "In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." (John 14:2-3)

So, Jesus told His disciples on an individual basis, and He is telling us, that He has gone "to prepare a place for you." Now this doesn't mean that Jesus was going back to Heaven so that He could begin the process of building Heaven. It simply means that He was going back into Heaven to prepare a place for you and me in Heaven. One day there will be a great banquet in Heaven. In my mind, I picture a grand dining table. A table not only set for a king but one prepared by a King...the King of Kings. I can imagine that the silverware is sparkling, and the feast is spread. I can imagine looking around the table and seeing name tags marking the places of those invited to this grand and eternal feast.

In my mind's eye, I walk around the table and see names like Moses, David, Jeremiah, Elijah, Peter, James, and John. Then my eyes come upon a name that brings a great big smile to my face. It reads....."Dennis R. Love". Then it dawns on me, WOW, He really has gone and prepared a place for little ole me!! The beautiful thing about this truth is that there is plenty of room at this table. Invitations have actually gone out to everyone, and the King is more than able to accommodate all who may come.

Unfortunately, not all will RSVP. Sadly, there will be several empty chairs. But not mine! I will be there. I didn't ignore my invitation. I responded before it was too late. I may not be the first to be seated at this table, but I will be seated. How about you? Have you even realized you have been invited? Well, you are!! I really hope to see you there. Please respond to your invitation if you haven't already done so. At some point, the doors will be shut, and no more replies will be accepted. And what a difference it will be for those seated at the table and those who are not.

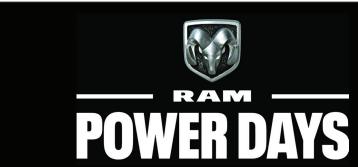
Don't forget.....There's a Place at the Table for You!! How do I know? Because He said, "I go to prepare a place for you." Respond to your invitation, and I will see you at the table!

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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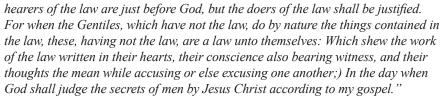
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The Inspiring Word

Romans 2
By Terry Cheek
McDowell County

Continuing our study into Romans we return to Chapter Two where we read the following.

Romans 2: 12-16 "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; (For not the



Reading this passage requires us to pay close attention to the grammatical structure. Notice the parenthesis. This is an explanatory statement by Paul. If we read the verse first without the parenthesis we find the following. "For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel." Paul reminds us that all will be judged according to the gospel.

Now let us take a look at Paul's explanatory statement in the parenthesis. For all practical matters, the first-century population could be broken down into two groups. The Jew and the Gentile. The Jew had a lifetime of access to God's written law. On the other hand, the Gentile did not. According to popular Jewish belief of that day, the Jew was privileged and not the Gentile. Paul wanted to make sure the Jew and the Gentile knew they were on equal footing with God. But how? We are told the hearers of the law are not justified, but the doers of the law are. Paul quickly refers to Hebrews 8: 7-11 "For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest." The new covenant was Jesus Christ. God's law is placed into our minds and written on our hearts. Paul is explaining that to the first century Jew and Gentile.

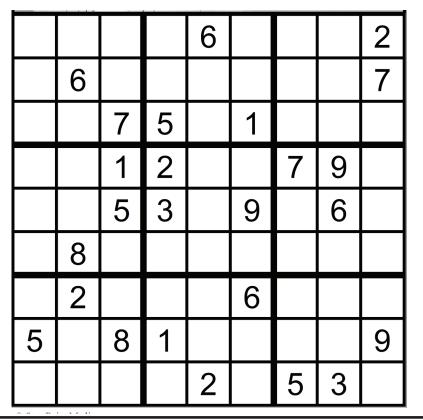
This teaching is expounded into the twenty-first century as well. Only in the Church age, it speaks to those who have heard the preaching and teaching of God's Word and those who may not have had access to a missionary or place of worship. All of creation is a testimony of God's existence and His word being written on our hearts and in our minds will have our conscience bear witness of Christ's saving grace by faith. No one will have an excuse. We are not told we will understand, we are told we will know and have the opportunity to believe in Jesus Christ, or not. Our belief will determine whether we are hearers of the law or doers of the law. And if we are justified before God through Jesus Christ. This passage is very sobering, one that demands our attention.

Until we meet again in print or person, may God bless you is my prayer.

Terry Cheek is the founder and broadcaster of The Inspiring Word media ministry. He and Lori are members of Blue Ridge Church of Marion N.C. You can contact Terry by email at theinspiringword@gmail.com.

Sudoku

Solution on page 14



Foundation Forward

Anthony Wayne
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.

On January 1, 1745, Anthony Wayne was born in Waynesboro, Pennsylvania. He attended the Philadelphia Academy, excelling in math. Being talented with calculations, he

became a surveyor. Involved with land speculation connected Wayne to Benjamin Franklin, who taught Wayne about the political disagreements between the colonies and Britain.

Anthony then served in the Pennsylvania legislature and its regional Committee of Public Safety. As friction intensified against Britain, Wayne entered the military to serve, as had his father and grandfather. In January 1776, Anthony was commissioned a colonel in the Continental Army.

Wayne won and lost battles, as is typical in military conflicts. At the Battle of Three Rivers, he saw action in Canada and received minor injuries. Next, he and his troops proceeded to the Battle of Brandywine. The Hessian and British soldiers outnumbered Wayne, causing the patriots to retreat. Wayne requested a court-marital to investigate his leadership, judgment, and battle carnage, including the Battle of Paoli. The court acquitted Anthony "with the highest honor… [actions of a] brave and vigilant officer."

Wayne was also defeated at Germantown. Regrouping his militia, he moved west, eventually coming to Valley Forge for the winter. In February 1778, he traveled to New Jersey for vital provisions for his soldiers. On June 28, 1778, at the Battle of Monmouth, Wayne and General Charles Lee engaged the British. General Lee retreated, leaving Wayne and his men in a dire situation. With reinforcements that George Washington ordered, Wayne and his troops encircled the British, causing them to flee.

The Battle of Stony Point was a minor clash but had a great psychological uplift for the American soldiers. With the British focused elsewhere, Washington and Wayne created a plan to retake Stony Point. Wayne saw this as an opportunity for revenge for earlier battles, especially Paoli. On July 15, 1779, Wayne was victorious by overpowering the British using guerrilla tactics.

Anthony remained on duty throughout the Revolution. He testified before Congress about the needs of soldiers and calmed the troops when they were threatening mutiny. Wayne also served in other battles and oversaw the liberation of Charleston, South Carolina. He was promoted to major general because of his loyalty, leadership, and bravery on and off the battlefield.

In civilian life, Anthony was not successful as a farmer or politician. He was elected to office and then resigned over disputes concerning the election. Wayne again found his calling when President Washington appointed him as the Commanding General of the United States Army (1792 to his death in 1796). While overseeing the Army, Wayne was successful in various battles that led to ending turmoil in the new nation. These included the Battle of Fallen Timbers and negotiating the Treaty of Greenville that established borders of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan.

During his career, Anthony Wayne was awarded a gold medal for his gallant service and earned the nickname "Mad Anthony." This moniker came from his commanding leadership, valiant personality, and battle strategies.

On December 15, 1796, this fiery patriot died from gout while returning home from a military detail and was buried in Wayne, Pennsylvania.

Please visit your Charters of Freedom setting in most western North Carolina counties. A Charters of Freedom setting consists of the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. They are on permanent display analogous to the Charters of Freedom in the National Archives, Washington, DC. Please visit FoundationForward.com to learn more about our existing settings. Vance and Mary Jo Patterson are the benefactors and originators of Foundation Forward, a 501(c)(3) education non-profit.

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

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

But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, Luke 6:27

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When My Soul Grows Wings

By Regina McIntosh Yancey County

I do not know when my time on earth
Will end, when I will go —
I'm not sure if I'm destined for tomorrow
Or if today will have the final say



I do not know when my heart will leave
This place, for that home above —
I don't know when I'll be on the final road,
Ending my journey here, going on...
To higher ground, where I'll be found —
More alive than I've ever been, more alive
Than the singing flames of grace,
More alive than the stars who glisten bright,
More alive than the shadows falling over the night,
More alive than the dancing of hearts who delight
In knowing that Jesus is there the moment
We finally say goodbye to this life and hello —
To eternal life, where we'll know the wonder of a love
Far more alive than we could have ever hoped to find!

I do not know when I'll let go of the moments, One by one – focusing only on the wonder of Him, The Savior of the world, the One who I've yet to see – Yet have always felt within, believed...

When He is there beside me, I'll see no need For the fears, the tears, the years long past, Now only memories of what did not last, As Jesus, with His gentle kiss... Echoing beautiful across the silence of a breath, Restoring music to its melodious colors, Whimsical rhythms of sapphire and rose, Fanciful graces in lavender and scarlet, Whispers of laughter in gold and flowing lights, Promising the darkness that, with joy, There are notes of worship poured out over the perfect, Where He lives - the Risen peace, the Rescuer, The Protector, Deliverer, Redeemer, Liberator -The ONLY ONE who can restore the soul with a love Far more wonderful than any love its ever known on earth, A love that stirs spirits to renewal as they meet the One Who reaches beyond the prayers and praise, Into the soul who is sincere and appreciates, believes He is everything!

With Him, there will be no need for anything Except the precious faith that remembers His amazing GRACE!

When my soul grows wings, I have no doubt there will be
Joy that is mind-boggling, so alive that it restores the heart
With a healing that will never grow old, a feeling that will always show
Beyond this world, in heaven, there is pleasure that knows no doubting,
A beautiful that is unending peace, forever with me – His light
Reassuring and preparing me to meet eternity with a glimpse of everlasting
Grace, His saving grace and His gift to those who believe
He is the answer to every need – He is the reason that I'm saved
From the darkness of a hell that I'll never need to see, since He chose me!

With HIM, I am forever free – with Him, I'm forever grateful to be – Someone who can experience His love, His peace, His everlasting Gift to those who believe – He is who He says He is... He is Jesus, The King of Kings and the Prince of Peace, from everlasting to everlasting, He'll always be...

It's Him who I believe!

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







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Mt. Carmel Baptist Church

Preacher Bob

By Toby Crowder Mitchell County

On Thursday morning, August 17, 2023, "Preacher Bob" McCurry finally beheld what he had spent over fifty years preaching about. When I received the news that he had passed, my heart was broken, but I rejoiced for my friend as I began to realize that he had finally made it home. I told someone that day that I felt sure Bob was finally at the intersection of Hallelujah Avenue and Glory Boulevard just as we'd heard him



say so many times. Robert L. McCurry was born on January 3, 1943, in Erwin TN to Hanford and Bonnie McCurry. As a young man, he met the love of his life, Carolyn, through a relative and they were later married on July 8, 1967. After five or six years of marriage, Bob and Carolyn were attending Unicoi Baptist Church where Bob served as a Deacon and Sunday School Teacher and eventually announced his calling into the Gospel ministry. His son Bryan was five, and daughter Beth was two, when the Lord opened the door for Bob and Carolyn to be called to Spring Creek Baptist Church in Buladean where they would faithfully serve as Pastor and wife, for almost 50 years. Bob was working at Magnavox at the time, and he continued there until July of 1975 when they stepped out on faith and entered full-time ministry. Their younger son Israel came along later in 1983. Together they built a life and ministry, along with their three children Bryan, Beth, and Israel and later became "Pappy & Mimmie" to their six grandchildren: Peyton, Gabriel, Jackson, Deegan, Zoey, and Judson. Bob liked to say that your family was the only thing that you could take with you to Heaven, and he was able to lead all nine of his children and grandchildren to the Lord and baptize them.

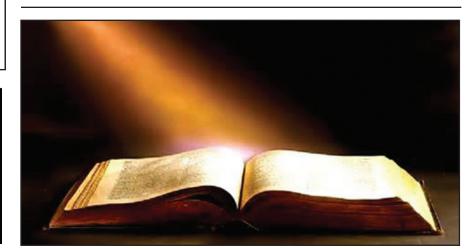
Bob and his family faithfully made the commute across the mountain to Buladean until June of 1976, when they moved into their home just below the church which had been started earlier in the Spring of that year. Over the next several decades, Bro. Bob faithfully preached the Word of God as he continued to Pastor Spring Creek, and preach revivals that called him to Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, and all over both Carolinas. Bob also had a burden for the people of Jamacia and made at least twenty-six trips there over his ministry, faithfully preaching the Gospel.

Bob was a friend to everyone, and especially to other men of God and preachers that he encountered. Most preachers and members alike were amazed at Bob's ability to memorize Scripture and quote several passages without opening his Bible. Bro Bob was able to "read it off the walls of his mind" and his sermon titles were always unique and memorable. One of his favorite phrases was "He owns the cattle on a thousand hills" and "Your problem is never too big for God." Bro Bob had a gift for keeping the message simple and focused on Jesus. His wife, Carolyn, told me recently "We are just simple people, and I am amazed with all that the Lord could do with just simple people. I just want to brag on the Lord and how he used him."

When asked if Bob had a favorite Scripture, Carolyn said that it would be hard to choose because he had so many favorites, but she always remembered that Bob would use John 14:6 when he was talking to people about salvation and letting them know that "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." If that was Bob's favorite Scripture would be hard to say, but "Lamb" was Bob's favorite name for Jesus, and that certainly was his message... that Jesus, the Lamb of God, is the only way.

As we celebrate Pastor Appreciation Month, I am so thankful for the time that I knew Bob McCurry. My first memories of hearing him preach were on a borrowed cassette tape of the message "Eagle Christians" when I was a teenager. Later, he and I formed a friendship as he did with many other Pastors in this area, and that friendship was a great blessing in my life. Bro. Bob was a very special servant of God and will long be remembered in this area and Association as Pastor, Friend, Mentor, and Man of God. It was always a blessing to hear him close a service by thanking God for what he was "doing for my friends around this altar." Preacher Bob made a big impact on this area, and on the many lives that he touched. May we follow his example in our ministry, and never lose sight of the simple truth of the Gospel that he preached for over fifty years. Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life!

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



Anne Ministries

October is Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month

By Chastity Ogburn Avery County

"He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds." -Psalm 147:3

I thought it was going to be a normal doctor's appointment that cold December morning.

We were scheduled for a monthly routine OB/GYN visit. We were so excited to hear our baby's heartbeat and see how our baby was growing. Our excitement soon turned into fear and panic.

Why could the doctor not find the baby's heartbeat? My first thoughts.... Is the doctor doing something wrong? Maybe the baby is positioned in a difficult spot and the Doppler is just not picking it up... so much silence in those moments. Our greatest fear turned into reality when we were moved to another room to have an ultrasound that confirmed our baby had no heartbeat. She had already passed from life in the womb to her eternal home with Jesus.

Brokenhearted describes the emotions that morning. We were devastated and wounded. All our hopes and dreams we had for our unborn baby were crushed that morning. Why God?

One in four pregnancies end in miscarriage and stillbirth affects about 1 in 160 pregnancies each year in the United States. When a pregnancy ends in a miscarriage or stillbirth there are many emotions experienced. It is important to give yourself and your spouse permission to grieve. We live in a world that hardly acknowledges life inside a mother's womb. We need to understand that it's okay to grieve our loss and acknowledge the life of our baby.

Psalm 147:3 tells us, "He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds." I had to surrender my broken and wounded heart to Jesus. Trusting that His ways and plans are so much higher than mine. In my time of grief and loss, I found much comfort in my Lord. Matthew 5:4 says, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." The Lord was near and did not abandon me in my time of loss. He was always there. Lexie Anne's life was created by God for His great plans and purpose. Her life was brief here on earth but now we see His beautiful plans unfolding and how God is using her life through the work at Anne Ministries.

October is Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month. Anne Ministries reaches out to those hurting from miscarriage, stillbirth, or infant loss. The ministry offers a one-on-one Bible study called "Anchored" written by Erin Cushman. This Bible study invites you to grieve in an honest and faith-filled way. You are invited to lay your deepest hurt at the foot of the cross and allow God to anchor your brokenness. The ministry also makes care packages for mothers who have experienced loss. If you or someone you know has had a miscarriage, stillbirth, or an infant loss please reach out to us. We are here to offer hope and healing to those hurting.

I am so thankful for the hope that only Christ can give and the promise of one day seeing our girl in our heavenly eternal home. God is good! He can take our pain to purpose. I give Him all glory, honor, and praise!

Jeremiah 29:11- "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future."

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

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YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

NC Senate District 47



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

Last month, the Senate gave final approval to our state's newly revised budget, continuing the success North Carolina has experienced over the past decade in record growth and success. In sustaining this prosperity, we are addressing our most pressing needs while prioritizing modernization and stabilization of infrastructure that supports continued growth. This budget funds key reserves like the Savings Reserve, our state Disaster Relief Fund, and the Medicaid contingency fund while cutting taxes by \$1.2 billion for all North Carolina families and businesses over the next two years. Scheduled personal income tax cuts will drop to 4.5% in 2024, and then to 2.49% if certain revenue triggers are met in future years.

As we look to the future, many of our communities are faced with the need to replace aging infrastructure. Over the past few budget cycles, we've assisted those communities, particularly with their local water and wastewater system responsibilities. This budget is no different

An appropriation of \$2 billion will address more than 200 local water and sewer projects across the state. Beyond water and sewer, there's an additional \$1.25 billion for local projects such as local volunteer fire departments, law enforcement infrastructure, and park systems.

On the education front, all students for the 2024-25 school year will be eligible for an Opportunity Scholarship, with the award amount being based on income. As not every recipient will receive the full award amount, any savings realized by the Opportunity Scholarship Program will be reinvested in the public school system. Opportunity Scholarship schools have always been required to administer a nationally standardized test, but starting in school year 2024-25, these schools will be required to administer the same nationally standardized tests selected by the State Education Assistance Authority in the third and eighth grades, as well as the ACT in the eleventh grade. The schools would then have to retain test performance data for all students and report aggregated data on test performance for grades three, eight, and 11 to the SEAA. This data would then be used to analyze performance compared to national outcomes on the respective tests as well as learning gains or losses. Opportunity Scholarship schools have always been accountable to the families utilizing the program. If a school doesn't perform to the standards parents expect, then that student can be pulled out of that school. You can't do that in the public school system. These new accountability measures will help guide us as the program continues to grow in popularity.

Our community colleges are on the frontline of educating and training the next generation of workers and have become an integral partner in providing an able workforce for companies that move to and expand in our state. As many of our community college students are parents themselves, we have provided support to them in the budget through a \$1.2 million recurring appropriation for the Childcare Grant Program for childcare services.

I will be sharing more about the budget; however, if you have specific questions, please email me at ralph.hise@ncleg.gov or call my legislative office at 919-733-3460.

NC Commissioner of Labor



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

As we head into October, that means we are getting closer to our favorite fall activities, heading to the mountains to see the changing leaves, the fair season will be in full swing, and of course, Halloween!

On Sept. 5, I had the opportunity to visit Gate Precast Co., in Oxford, and present their company with a SHARP award renewal. What made this visit particularly special was this being their 11th-year renewal for the SHARP program. The SHARP program is designed for small and mid-size employers that have established, implemented, and maintained exceptional workplace safety standards. There is a passion and excitement for workplace safety within their company that is almost tangible. Congratulations to Gate Precast Co. and keep up the great work! If you or you know of an employer that would be interested in participating in our SHARP program, please call 919-707-7846.

The N.C. State Fair kicks off Oct. 12. On Oct. 9, I will participate in Media Day and then take the opportunity to explore the fair, meet with Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler, and maybe, even enjoy a turkey leg. The N.C. State Fair is open October 12-22 at the N.C. State Fairgrounds in Raleigh. I hope you get to experience the N.C. State Fair this year with your loved ones and make it the Best Day Ever!

Have a wonderful October and I hope you enjoy family time, carving pumpkins, apple cider, and trick-or-treating. Happy Hallow-een!

NC House District 86



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

State Budget Passed, No Casinos Included

After a lengthy stalemate, a new two-year state budget for July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2025, was approved by the North Carolina legislature on September 22nd. For months, Senate leader, Phil Berger, insisted that provisions be included in the budget legalizing certain uses of marijuana. He also insisted there would be no budget unless the budget authorized the operation by gambling interests of four new casinos in North Carolina, the first casinos on non-tribal lands in the state. The House had already refused to agree to a separate bill passed by the Senate on the marijuana issue. Despite exerting significant pressures to change votes in the House, the Senate ultimately concluded a budget could not pass in the House if the marijuana proposal was included.

Perhaps given the House's position on marijuana, Sen. Berger did not offer his casino proposal as a separate bill. Instead, he insisted that the casinos be a part of any state budget. This tactic also met with strong resistance in the House. Even so, over several weeks, Senator Berger attempted to strong-arm the House into a budget with the casinos. Berger publicly told the press that if the House would not vote for a budget including casinos, then the Senate would not vote for a budget at all. He said that, if the House would not agree to the Senate's position, then all local projects to be funded in the budget, state employee and educator raises, all state retiree bonuses, and all tax reductions would die.

Despite the Senate threat, enough House members held strong in opposition to casinos. The result was that, on Tuesday, the 19th, Senator Berger held a press conference, took back his threat, and indicated the Senate would join with the House in approving a new budget, not including the casinos. This reversal of the Senate's position led to a budget being finally approved on the 22nd. This approval was, in turn, followed by the good news that Governor Cooper would not veto the budget.

I am relieved that we finally have a state budget. State employees stand to receive a 7% raise over two years, teachers and highway patrolmen even more. Taxes are cut; education receives substantial new funding. No budget is perfect and certainly this new one is not. However, I think we can be especially gratified that enough members of the House, of whom I was one, stood up to Senate threats so that casinos and marijuana are not part of the budget. To be sure, Senator Berger put everyone on notice that he would be back with his casino proposal and, I predict, with marijuana, too. So, we can expect the fight to recur.

God Bless America

YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

NC Senate District 46



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

I am pleased to share that the NC General Assembly recently passed the 2023-25 budget continuing more than a decade of economic successes in North Carolina with thoughtful spending and government growth kept in check. It will make infrastructure in rural North Carolina more robust, return over a billion dollars to taxpayers hamstrung by failing Bidenomics, and put student outcomes and parental choice ahead of bureaucracy. Following are some highlights of the conference report - Taxes are cut by \$1.2 billion for North Carolina families and businesses over the next two years. Scheduled personal income tax cuts are accelerated, dropping the rate to 4.5% in 2024 and down to 2.49% if certain revenue triggers are met. The Rainy-Day fund balance will receive an appropriation of \$125 million increasing the balance to just under \$5 billion. Most state employees will receive a 7% pay raise across the biennium and teachers receive an average pay raise of 7% over the biennium. Most state law enforcement officers will receive between a 5.5% and 11% raise depending on their agency, rank, and current pay scale in the first year. To support recruitment and retention efforts at the State Highway Patrol, rank-and-file deputies will receive an 11% salary increase. School bus drivers receive a 6% pay increase in the first year of the biennium. Also included is \$2 billion for more than 200 local water and wastewater projects across the state. Of note is an additional \$700 million earmarked for highway maintenance programs, including contract resurfacing, general maintenance, and bridge construction and preservation. This plan expands school choice/Opportunity Scholarships to all students, with the largest scholarships going to students with the greatest financial needs. Savings realized from students enrolling in a private school after receiving an Opportunity Scholarship will be reinvested back into the public school system. \$35 million in both years of the biennium will fund school safety grants, which can be used for school safety training, safety equipment in schools, and subsidizing the School Resource Officer program. \$40 million is used for targeted bonuses to employees working in state health facilities and \$60 million to increase the wages of direct care workers who provide personal care services to individuals on the state's Innovations Waiver. Carolina Pregnancy Care Fellowship receives \$6.25 million of new funding in each year of the biennium to support grants to pregnancy centers for services, equipment, training, and instructional materials. \$2.7 million is designated to help implement North Carolina's voter ID law and \$50,000 in recurring funds goes to the online application process that tracks mail-in ballots through the postal stream. These provisions help build confidence in the integrity of North Carolina's absentee ballot system. While the state budget passed both the NC House and Senate on September 22nd, at the time of printing it is on Governor Cooper's desk awaiting action and has not yet become law. For additional information, navigate to the 2023 Budget tab on the homepage of ncleg.gov under News & Information.







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God Will Provide

By Tammy Hopson Mitchell County

The line at the food bank was long and it was always cold outside. Maybe because the foodbank was only open on Wednesday mornings. Even when my Mom and I with my baby sister would arrive early to get a good place in line, it was never early enough. The long line of people wrapped around the little white church in the middle of town. The wait was so long. But eventually, we made it



up to the door of the little side building. I remember the little old lady who seemed just as grumpy as I was to be there on that day. Every week it was the same process. She asked our name and searched the little green box for the index card showing who we were, our family size, and our monthly income. Then she abruptly asked, "How many in your household?" Time stopped while she squinted her eyes and looked us up and down as if she wondered if we were telling the truth. Would we have lied if we thought we could get away with it? At times I think we would have to get one more loaf of bread or more canned food. Next, we were given 3 paper bags, which were considered suitable to hold all that we needed until they opened again the following week. Slowly, we made our way through the line as each volunteer asked us again about our family size and placed the week's donations in our grocery bags. I can still see the plastic baggies partially filled with dry beans, rice, flour, and spilt peas. Then the cans came. A few cans of this and a few cans of that. Sometimes soup, sometimes green beans or peas, and always tomato sauce or stewed tomatoes. Then there were the odd things like garbanzo beans or canned mackerel. I remember hoping and praying for things like Spagettios, ravioli, or even chili with beans. Sometimes there were special things like day-old pastries or stale loaves of French bread. And then a few times a year we received big blocks of cheese and butter.

Since my mother was not a cook she did not know what to do with so many of these foods. I can still see our cupboards full of bags of beans and rice and other dry goods because my mother didn't know how to cook them and she never learned. Out of necessity, I taught myself to cook rice without burning or overflowing the pan. Soon I was adding butter and tomato sauce. This became a normal meal for me during those years. After I had my own children to feed I learned what I could do with those bags of pintos, blackeyed peas, and split peas, but it took me a while. I raised a lot of kids on a very small budget and I learned how to put big pots of things together. Coming to the South also helped me to learn how to add ham hocks and pork to things to flavor them. I learned to make breads and biscuits from scratch because homemade things are cheaper and feed more hungry mouths. I studied how to grow a garden and then preserve it for my large family. I didn't have the privilege of learning from a grandparent or parent or anyone else. As I learned I had to improvise when I could not afford the ingredients. There were not always eggs in my fridge for baking or enough milk to use in gravies or sauces or just for drinking. But God used that time in my life for a purpose. Today I can say I have plenty of those things and I have the knowledge of how to put those things together and create something good to eat. But I had to go through the "foodbank line" first. I went through the hardship of need and hunger. I know what it's like to worry over your next meal or the empty bellies of your babies. As I look back on my past those days are still very real to me.

Just the other day I came home with an armload of fresh food. I unpacked it all and laid it out on the counter. As I looked at my kitchen filled with groceries the memory of those hard years came rushing back and I had to stop and thank God again for all He has brought me through.

Psalm 22:26 says " The poor shall eat and be satisfied; Those who seek Him will praise the Lord."

I know that God will always provide for me and for that I will continue to praise Him.

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

Morganton Seventh Day Adventist Church

Choose You This Day
By Steve Bietz
Burke County

In 1974 we were introduced to a new way of advertising fast food burgers. Burger King launched a new ad campaign that included a ditty that belted out, "Have it your way, Have it your way, Have it your way at Burger King. Hold the pickles, hold the lettuce, special orders don't upset us. All we ask is that you



let us serve it your way. Have it your way, Have it your way, Have it your way at Burger King."

That little ditty was a game changer in the fast food business as other fast food chains had to scramble to allow the customer to have more options with flexible burger toppers. Before that little diddy, fast food chains did not include any customer customizing. The 'Have It Your Way' campaign has been the most successful advertising promotion Burger King has ever launched.

In most walks of life today, the customer demands flexible options. But what about the walk with God? Now I'm not suggesting that God does not give us options. The gift of free will is extremely important to our God. God did not establish a planet of robots but rather gave His human creation options.

I remember a girl who lived with her family a few houses down the street from where I grew up. We kids were all playing with our Christmas gifts that we had unwrapped. And this girl had gotten a doll and the doll had a string on the back of its neck. I must have been around 9 or 10 years old and because my folks had two sons, we did not have dolls in our home and I had never seen one with a string attached to its neck. When the girl pulled the string the doll talked! If I remember correctly the doll would repeat 4 or 5 statements. One statement was "I Love You." The doll could be forced to say "I Love You" over and over again. God did not create us with strings on our necks. Instead, God created us with the freedom to choose. We can actually choose to have it our way instead of doing things God's way.

As Joshua grew old he gathered the Israelites to give them his parting thoughts. We have these words of Joshua recorded in Joshua 24:15. "And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

We get to choose whether or not we live our lives following the ways of God. I would like to go on record as saying I believe the smartest way we could ever choose to live is by living in accordance with the principles that we find in scripture. Not with a string attached to our necks so that God can just yank them out now and again to hear us say that we love Him. God cherishes our freedom to choose. I pray that you and I make the smart choice to love our God and to love His principles. The psalmist David would tell us in Psalm 119:97, "O how I love thy law." And you know what...the psalmist David chose to say it without a string on his neck. Choose you this day.

Steve Bietz, Pastor, Morganton Seventh day Adventist Church.





Mine Creek Baptist Church

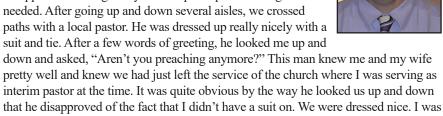
The Power Of Repentance

continued from page 13

Just Stop!

By Chris Rathbone Mitchell County

Years ago, after a Wednesday evening service, my wife and I stopped at a local grocery store to pick up a few things we needed. After going up and down several aisles, we crossed



wearing khaki pants and a collared polo. The point he was making without saying it

in words was that he disapproved of the fact that I didn't preach that evening in a suit

and tie. The look on his face was one of disdain, disapproval, and to be quite honest,

Now let me give you a little background. The church I was serving in at the time had Bible study and prayer time on Wednesday evenings. It was a casual setting where we studied through books of the Bible. Most folks, including my wife and I, were doing all they could to get off of work, get cleaned up, eat some supper, and get to church on time. Many of those who chose to come to church on Wednesday evenings did so without supper and wore the clothes they had worked in all day. Often, after we had already started, I would see some folks slip in the door and quietly take a seat in the back of the church wearing their work uniform. They just simply did not have time to go home and get all prettied up but did all they could to get to the service.

Many times over the years, people have approached me after a service and apologized for having to wear their work clothes to either a mid-week service or even on a Sunday morning. I've had dedicated members of all churches I've pastored leave work to attend worship and then return to work again after it was over. In every case, not one time did I feel the need to scold someone over the way they were dressed. To be honest, they impressed me with their dedication. The fact that they had such a desire to be there to worship and learn more about their Savior was a great blessing to this preacher.

Now before you start your sermon, let me say that I have spoken to the subject of modest clothing on many occasions. With all my heart I believe in being respectful and decent in the way that we dress as Christians. The issue I have is when we make it a point to judge the content or intent of someone's heart when they are not dressed in a manner in which we would choose. The fact that I was judged by another Christian brother based on not wearing a suit opened my eyes to what a lot of folks may feel when they attend church perhaps for the first time. Let me give you an example

One Sunday morning during the Sunday School hour, several of us were getting things together for the worship service. The door opened to the sanctuary and in walked a man I knew pretty well. He was dressed in his work clothes and boots. He made it about halfway down the aisle before collapsing and literally crawling to the altar sobbing as he made his way and leaving grease marks on the carpet. We spent the next 20 minutes crying out to God on this man's behalf as he wept in repentance. Now, what if I had stopped him at the door and told him he needed to go home and clean up?! Let's stop with our legalistic way of thinking. Let's stop with the attitude that the way we may choose to dress makes us more holy and righteous than others. Let's stop looking at the outward appearance of people and strive to look to the needs of their hearts. Do you know why? Because that's exactly what Jesus would do! So,

In Christ, Preacher Chris James 2:1 "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons."

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

laboring over life's issues we labor harder to try to figure out a way to deal with what we are laboring with in the first place, when Jesus tells us to simply come to Him and He will give us rest. He wants us to spend time with Him in His Word to learn of Him and discover that He always has our best interest at heart, i.e. finding rest for our weary souls.

As I mentioned earlier God was in control of what was going on in my life, not Satan. Luke 22:31-32 says "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold Satan has desired you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not. And when you are converted, strengthen your brothers."

We see how Satan had a strong desire to have Peter so he could "sift" him. The word "sift" means "to riddle." We would be foolish to think that Satan doesn't have a similar plan for our lives. He riddled my mind with thoughts of destruction and death. My Savior offset his plan as He was praying for me, THINK ABOUT THIS, at a time in my life when I couldn't bring myself to trust Him, my Savior was interceding for me to the Father that my faith would not fail. The prayers of the saints are precious and powerful but to think that Jesus is praying for us also is one of the most incredible thoughts I have ever had, What a Friend we have in Jesus. How can we lose when we belong to the greatest Overcomer Network ever put together with none other than the Lord of Glory leading the charge into battle for us?

We go through many conversions in our walk with the Lord, the most important of course is when we receive Him as our Savior. The conversion I experienced through this trial was a return to what our Savior teaches about life. We should always choose life no matter what. At the outset of this story, I shared with you "If I ever get anything seriously wrong with me I will probably do myself in by over-medicating just so I can feel good again." That will no longer be a part of my inner thought processes, nor my speech unless I am sharing this story. Now it will be, "If I ever get anything seriously wrong with me I will choose life, and life

Let's agree together that we will let our light shine so brilliantly into this lost and hurting world that they will see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven by deciding to turn from their way of salvation and turn to Him for His better plan (Matthew 5:16).

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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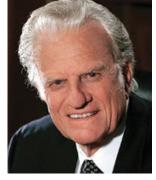
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Billy Graham Evangelistic Association

The Answer

By Billy Graham

Q: My life has been hard, and I'm only 26 years old. I was born to an unmarried mother who gave me up without even seeing me and the rejection has been unbearable. Why does God allow some people to be born as accidents, and is there something God can do to make me feel worthwhile? The loneliness is overwhelming and the parental abandonment is horrible, and it has led me to a place where all I care about is finding peace—somewhere. I know that selfishness is a sin, but I don't know how to change it.



A: From the writings of the Rev. Billy Graham

Long before the world was created, God knew all about every person born. From eternity, we were part of His plan. No one is here by accident or by chance. No one has a choice about being born—but God is still the Giver of life. He's the Creator of everything. We came from Him—and our greatest joy will come from giving ourselves back to Him. God desires to have a personal relationship with us. This is why He came from Heaven, to show us His great love.

There are multitudes of lonely people who carry heavy and difficult burdens of grief and pain. God calls out to people everywhere to repent of sin and commit their lives to Him. Christ will forgive us, fill us with joy, and take us into His family.

God sends forth His message of love, but we must tune in. We must be willing to listen and to receive His message and then obey it. When Christ's love fills our hearts, it puts selfishness on the run.

Each person has a decision to make. Will we turn away from God, or will we turn toward Him? Which road will we take? One road leads to doubt, anger, bitterness, fear, hopelessness, and despair. The other road leads to hope, comfort, peace, strength, and joy.

(This column is based on the words and writings of the late Rev. Billy Graham.)

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



Snow Hill Baptist Church No Regrets

Are We Abounding in Sin?

By Dean Honeycutt *Mitchell*

I am outraged along with many others over the senseless death of retired police chief Andreas Probst in Las Vegas. Probst was riding his bicycle on the morning of August 14, when a teen driver intentionally hit him from behind and killed him. The horrific collision was videoed by a teen passenger. You can hear the teens laughing as they target Probst. The driver asks, "Ready?"



And the passenger says, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, hit his a--." The driver proceeds to hit Probst from the rear sending Probst up into the air hitting the windshield and then hitting the pavement hard. Probst was taken to a hospital and pronounced dead.

Probst wife outraged made this statement, "It's not just about one victim. We as a nation are victims. We are victims of senseless crimes; we all need to show up and show our outrage in the courtrooms." Our hearts break for this family and senseless murder. Capital punishment is a law that exists to deter crime. Criminals have no fear of our current judicial system.

It is hard to understand how people can hurt others and kill them without any remorse or compassion for human life. We see this on the news all the time how ungodly and evil people have no regard for human life. And what can we expect out of a nation who have killed millions of unborn babies without remorse and value of life? Because of abortions, violent video games, police backlash, glamorization of crime and criminals portrayed in movies and music, no accountability for riots, and an unjust legal system, we have become a nation that has lost its moral path.

We are fast approaching what Jesus said the world would be like prior to his return. Jesus said, "because sin shall abound, the love of many will grow cold." Sin is abounding in America and people do not love one another. When we do not care for one another then we do not care about a person's life. We have no regard or respect for human life. This attitude is growing in America and sin is abounding. The confusion about gender identity and the prolific approval of gay and lesbian people is a sign that we are nearing the last days.

Jesus said as in the days of Noah and Lot so shall be the behavior and morality of people on earth before the return of Christ. Two prevalent characterizations of Noah's time and Lots are first a blatant disregard for human life and second sexual perversion with moral depravity. It is not hard for us to see and understand we are on a fast track to the same culture and actions that brought judgment from God. Non-believers are blinded to the demoralization of America. How often do you hear journalists or news reporters discussing the sinfulness of the human heart? How often do you hear them discussing what must take place in a person's heart for them to do good and love others? How do we treat people with respect and how do we love others as ourselves if we do not acknowledge we are sinners in need of a Savior? Our public schools are shameful because we have replaced discipline with tolerance.

On a national level, we do not encourage the institute of marriage between one man and one woman. We do not encourage the family unit. The best environment for a child is the home with a mom and dad loving that child and training that child to follow Jesus. What you are looking for will radically impact what you are living for.

I am frustrated as many are at the moral decay of America. I am tired of seeing all the gay commercials on television. There is no respect for the Church or the preacher of God's Word.

I love my family, and I love my church, and I love living and I am really concerned about my grandchildren living in this world. Lord help us, please. May the Lord creator of heaven and earth have mercy on us.

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

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Bible Briefs

One Talent Buried in The Earth

By Robert Garner Rutherford County

Mathew 25:14, "For the Kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods". We must first keep in mind this is a parable; Strongs G3850 is "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning".

The Man traveling into a far country, the kingdom of heaven, is the Lord Jesus Christ, who called his own servants, and delivered to them his goods. 2 Co 4:5, "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake".

Mathew 25:15, "And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey".

Each servant receives a specific number of talents pertaining to his own ability; (several - ability). Strongs # G2398 Several, his own, pertaining to one's self. Strongs # G1411 Ability, his strength, power, mighty work; inherent power, power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature, or which a person or thing exerts and puts forth.

Only the Lord Jesus can judge his servants. Rom. 14:4, "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master [Jesus Christ] he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand".

Mathew 25:16, "Then he that received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them five other talents".

To trade, Strongs # G2038, to labor or do work. Strongs 3673; "went and traded with the same". Strongs # 846, together, or persons assembled together. John 4:36, "And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathered fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together". Acts 20:24, "But I put no value on my life, if only at the end of it I may see the work complete which was given to me by the Lord Jesus, to be a witness of the good news of the grace of God".

Mathew 25:21, "His Lord said to him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Two of Christ's servants double the number of talents given to them for the service of those taking up collections for the ministering of the word of God. Strongs # G1006 to feed portrays the duty of a Christian teacher or servant to promote in every way the spiritual welfare of the members of the true church of God. Feeding sheep is the act of feeding spiritual food, the truth of the scriptures.

John 21:17, "Jesus said unto him a third time Feed my Sheep". Acts 20:28, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood".

Faithful Servants of God are his representatives. The elect of God, who have been called by him are to be faithful witnesses of the Gospel. Eph 1:3-5, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places In Christ. According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his well".

The tithes of the nation of Israel, old ceremonial laws, were brought into the temple storehouse treasury of the Lord. Christ's servants' blessings of talents and all their possessions are given by God. As Jesus sat over against the treasury, he beheld how the rich cast in much. The poor widow threw in two mites, a trifle amount. Mark 12:44, Jesus said, "For all they did cast in their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all she had, even all her living".

Remember the parable of the rich man, Luke 16:19, or the rich man easily going through the eye of a needle?, Mathew 19:24 The world flourishes on many types of false prosperity gospels. Pro 28:20, "A faithful man shall abound with blessings: but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent".

What an amazing illustration and influence, the poor widow giving contributions of everything she had as recorded in the scriptures. This is an extraordinary example proclaimed to millions over the years as they study the word of God and consider their tithes.

Mathew 25:18. "But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his Lord's money".

Symbolically, the servant concealing his Lord's given money in the earth was the destruction of his fellowship duty he had with the Lord Jesus Christ. His talent was hidden in the darkness of an earth pit. 2Co 4:3, "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost". Mathew 25:30, "And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth".

The servant hiding the Lord's talent in the cursed earth was concealing his obligation to bring the gospel to the world. The servant was to bring the scriptures (feeding sheep) so people would become saved. A person saved is like a tithe in the treasury of the Lord's house. All are waiting for the return of Jesus Christ multiplying tithes by the millions of those who are in the service of following Jesus Christ. Mathew 18:23, "Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take accounts of his servants". Luke 12:34, "for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also".

Malachi 3: 8-10, "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the

storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it".

Interested in the End Times Study Group, Unsealed, as recorded in Daniel 12:4? "Shut up the words, seal the book, to the time of the end, knowledge shall be increased". Email valleygravel@otlook.com. Your comments are always appreciated.

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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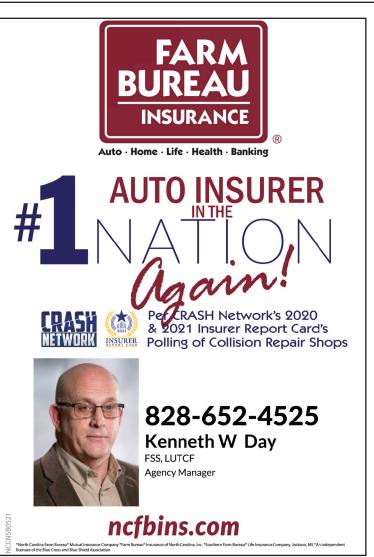


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Crossword

Crossword
ACROSS
1 he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the
that shrank (Gen 32:32)
6 Nor did Asher drive out those living in or Sidon
(Judg 1:31)
10 The fear of the LORD length to life (Prov 10:27)
14 As an pleasing to the
LORD (Num 29:2) 15 As as Jesus was
baptized, he went up out of the water (Matt 3:16)
16 Do not because of evil
men or be envious of the wicked (Prov 24:19)
17 In my Father's house are
many (John 14:2) 18 the tongue can no man
; it is an unruly evil (James 3:8)
19 ninth letter of Greek
alphabet 20 a prophetess,, the
daughter of Phanue
(Luke 2:36) 21 will not remain united, any
more than iron with
clay (Dan 2:43) 22 But the word of the Lord
endureth for (1 Pet 1:25) KJV
23 Bring it to me, and I
will eat of my son's venison (Gen 27:25)
25 not only do they become
, but also gossips (1 Tim 5:13)
27 reject (Job 10:3) 29 He him Noah and said,
"He will comfort us
(Gen 5:29) 31 and to be
desired to make one wise
(1,4) (Gen 3:6) 32 He had his journey from
Babylon on the first day of (Ezra 7:9)
33 a spider's trap (Isa 59:5)
36 Do not up the words of the prophecy of this book
(Rev 22:10)
37 His legs are pillars of marble set on of pure
gold (Song 5:15)
38 rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger,,
malice (Col 3:8) 39 David sent them to you to
explore the city and it
out (2 Sam 10:3) 40 and the most important
in the synagogues
(Matt 23:6) 41 a raised or projecting edge
(Ezek 43:17) 42 He down his hail like
pebbles (Ps 147:17)
43 and your houses turned into of rubble (Dan 2:5)
44 Can a maid forget her
ornaments, or a bride her? (Jer 2:32) KJV
47 I cast my against them
(Acts 26:10) 49 very expensive perfume.

made of pure
made of pure
(Mark 14:3)
50 II
50 However, I that I
worship the God of our
1
fathers (Acts 24:14)
· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·
53 Am I, or a whale,
that thou settest a watch
(1,3) (Job 7:12) KJV
56 As man who
casteth firebrands (1,3)
· · · ·
(Prov 26:18) KJV
57 They worship me in;
their teachings are but rules
taught (Matt 15:9)
58 the furnace heated seven
times hotter than
(Dan 3:19)
59 Darius the took over the
kingdom (Dan 5:31)
60 Above all, guard your heart (Prov 4:23)
heart (Prov 4.23)
61 They are a nation without
, there is no discernment
(Deut 32:28)
` ,
62 a river went out of to
water the garden (Gen 2:10)
63 silver in two bags, with two
_
of clothing
$\overline{(2 \text{ Vings 5.22})}$
(2 Kings 5:23)
64 do not reap to the very
of your field (Lev 23:22)
DOWN
1 no longer to call her;
her name will be Sarah
(Gen 17:15)
2 the brass, the, the tin,
1.1 1.1 21.21
and the lead (Num 31:22)
3 called on the name of Baal
from morning even until
_
(1 King 18:26)
4 they shall call his name ,
4 they shall call his name ,
4 they shall call his name, which means, "God with us"
4 they shall call his name, which means, "God with us" (Matt 1:23) KJV
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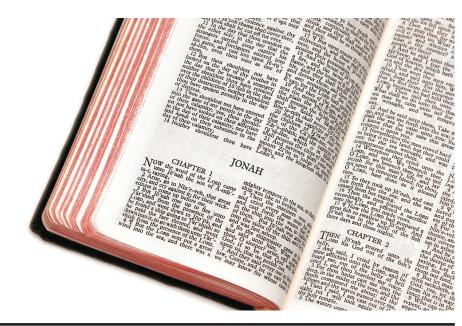
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will not fall into temptation (Mark 14:38) 29 Foxes have holes and birds of the air have (Matt 8:20) 30 he has appeared once for all at the end of the (Heb 9:26) 31 Biblical transportation vehicle (Matt.21:5) KJV 32 Tear down your father's altar to (Judg 6:25) 33 bare your legs, and through the streams (Isa 47:2) 34 They hatch the of vipers and spin a spider's web (Isa 59:5) 35 stinging insect (Isa 7:18) KJV 37 deprives (Lam 1:20) 38 your brother Timothy has been (Heb 13:23) 40 a third at the Gate, and a third at the gate behind (2 Kings 11:6) 41 your lightning ___ up the world (Ps 77:18) 42 For there is nothing that

will not be disclosed (Luke 8:17) 43 the ___ is to be scoured and rinsed with water (Lev 6:28) 44 a people for himself, and to make for himself (1,4) (2 Sam 7:23) 45 animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being ___ (James 3:7-8) 46 sailors came alongside to for your wares (Ezek 27:9) 47 with wheat and barley, and fig trees, (Deut 8:8) 48 Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' (1 Tim 4:7) 51 at the valley of Shaveh, which is the king's (Gen 14:17).KJV 52 there went up a from the earth (Gen 2:6) 54 this song will be in the land of Judah (Isa 26:1) 55 Men at ___ have contempt for misfortune (Job 12:5) 58 the law is good, if a man it lawfully (1 Tim 1:8)

Solution on page 14



49 very expensive perfume,



Mark Your Calendars for Hilloween October 25-28 in Mitchell County, NC.



Hilloween is a new festival celebrating the history and mystery of the Blue Ridge Mountains, events include: a Haunted Schoolhouse, the Bakersville Night Festival, an Ole-Fashioned Children's Carnival and

the **Spruce Pine Street Festival** (featuring The Del McCoury Band) and much more.

Welcome "home" living legend

Del McCoury when he
performs a free concert with

The Del McCoury Band
on Saturday, October 28 in
beautiful Spruce Pine, NC.



Check out HilloweenNC.org for full details.

This event is co-created by Hilloween, a nonprofit organization, and the University of North Carolina School of the Arts.

