



# BLUE RIDGE CHRISTIAN NEWS



## Retired Pastor Bear Creek Baptist Church

### We Are Not Saved

By Bruce Cannon  
Mitchell County

Jeremiah 8:20 *“The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.”*

As this article is read, most likely school will be back in session, the vacations of summer will be over and we will be getting ready for the upcoming fall and winter seasons. As this time of the year comes, I always remember the above verse. It is burdensome. Consider the setting of the verse: the time of its being penned down and the situation the nation of Judah was in and you will see so many similarities between Jeremiah’s day and that of our own.

Jeremiah was a prophet whose ministry was to the nation of Judah. His ministry began around 626 BC and concluded after 587 BC. At the beginning of his ministry, he saw the nation turning away from God. Judah was acting like the nations around them. They were worshipping other gods, sacrificing their children, and so forth. He knew the Lord would not put up with that kind of behavior from His own people. And so he preached, prayed, and wept before God for the sins of his people.

The unthinkable began to happen in 605 BC as God allowed Babylon to come into Judah and take many of its citizens captive. It happened again in 597 BC and yet again in 587 BC. After the third time Babylon came into Judah, their soldiers tore down the temple Solomon built, damaged the walls, and took more of the Jews into captivity. The nation was decimated!

This takes me to the verse above. Jeremiah was marking time in Babylon. He was a captive along with so many other Jews. Year after year passed and the people were still not being “saved”. Judgment from God had fallen upon the Jews and there seemed to be no end in sight. Thus, Jeremiah marks the time by harvests and summer. He laments *“And we are not saved.”*

This is so eerily reminiscent of what is happening in America. I know no one has hauled us off to another nation or into captivity as Judah was, but we are in captivity. We are losing freedoms! We are falling from within! Look at all of the divisions in our country. What is even worse is that we are seeing a lessening of people truthfully, faithfully worshipping our Lord. A fewer percentage of our population is attending houses of worship than ever before in our lifetime. And all the while evil is taking such a hold in the U.S.; I see it so clearly! I pray you see it too and are praying as I am.

Our current national leadership has taken us into a level of debt that we cannot support or sustain. Other economies are getting so much stronger than ours, and



foreign military powers are flexing their muscle. In addition, we are seeing so much depravity and debauchery paraded before us from within with no shame in doing so whatsoever! What the Bible calls sin is being promoted and encouraged even to our youngest. We all have recently seen drag queens reading to children in libraries, the curriculum in public schools that have no business being there, tv shows promoting and normalizing wicked behavior and so much more!

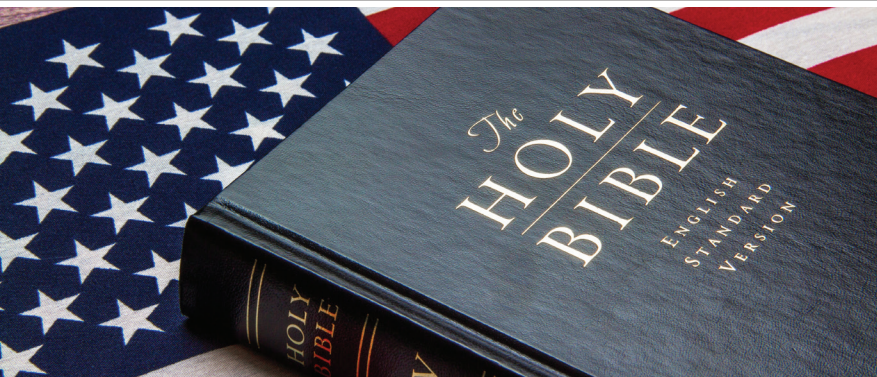
Judah’s hope in Jeremiah’s day was for someone to set them free from Babylon’s grasp and allow them to go back to Judah. It would happen when the Medes and Persians defeated the Babylonians. Finally, after such a long period, they returned to their homeland. They returned to find the destruction of the Temple. But, at least, they were finally able to go home.

What is the hope for America? The Lord! A return to Him! Our hope is not in the White House, Senate, or in our Governors. It’s in the Lord! If only America would return to Him in brokenness, humility, and repentance, He would work on our behalf. He would move mightily in our midst.

If the only hope for America is the Lord, we must pray, repent and humble ourselves before the Almighty! We must claim Scriptures such as 2 Chronicles 7:14 *“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”* We must practice the disciplines that will always invoke the mercies of God and grant us the power of God in such overwhelming situations.

Let us join together in prayer at this critical point in time. Pray privately. Pray corporately. Claim the above promise that God will hear our prayers, forgive our sins, and heal our land. Thank You!

*Bruce Cannon is the retired pastor of Bear Creek Baptist Church in Bakersville. Formerly he served as Director of Missions for the Bladen Baptist Association and has served on the General Board of the Baptist State Convention of North Carolina.*





# What We Believe

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

### God

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

### Jesus

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

### The Holy Spirit

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

### The Bible

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

### Humanity

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

### Eternity & Eternal Security

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

### Salvation

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

# Life Lessons

By Doug Harrell  
Mitchell County



Previously I wrote Life Lessons on the events taking place here in America. This month I want to continue in somewhat the same vein but look at what is taking place in our homes and businesses. We are all dealing with such unknowns: the protests, the looting and destroying of property, the removal of any reference to Christ from our hallowed halls, attempts to remove the words "Under God" from our pledge and it goes on and on. It seems as if we have learned nothing from history. I studied Social Sciences and Psychology in college years ago and was fascinated by Roman and Greek history. It seems as if we in America are treading on the same path at breakneck speed. The debauchery and things taking place today would make our founders turn over in their graves. It seems as if scripture is playing out before our very eyes; good is being called evil and evil is being called good! What it boils down to is the fact that we as individuals must stand firm in our Christian commitment. It needs to show in our demeanor. It needs to be obvious to anyone that we meet what our beliefs are. I am going to include in this life lesson a devotion that I wrote not too long ago about being recognized as a Christian.

Have you ever met someone that you just knew was a Christian just by talking with them for a few minutes? I think most of us have. What makes the difference? What things make it evident that the person is in a true relationship with their Lord and Savior? Is it their smile, is it a necklace they are wearing, is it the gleam in their eye, the words they are saying, or their loving nature? Think about these things this morning and ask yourself if you are recognizable as a Christian, what do others see in you when they meet you on the street?

We all need to strive to be that personal witness to those around by our personal demeanor, our actions, and our language. Our entire being needs to shout out that we have a risen Savior that is our friend and confidant. When you start your day, look in a mirror and say to yourself, I am a child of the King, I am going to make sure that the light of Christ makes me recognizable to other around me today that I might be a beacon that shows the way to salvation through the faith and belief in Jesus Christ.

Put on a happy face, a smiling face, and be the first to offer a hand and a hug. Listen rather than talk. Show concern for your fellow man with a true interest in the other person. Guard your tongue, watch your mouth, and be uplifting in your conversation. Be that person that others are drawn to, not shied away from.

*"Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."* Matthew 5:15-16 KJV

Make sure you and I are doing what is right and teaching our children and families right from wrong. We each have a manual, a manuscript, and a set of directions to go by. Make sure you are building on those solid foundations stones of truth that never change.

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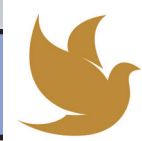
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“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace: that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation: that saith unto Zion. Thy God reigneth!”

Isaiah 52:7 KJV



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# Church Directory



## Grassy Creek Baptist Church

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

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

## Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church

2187 Jamestown Road  
Morganton, NC  
828-584-8212

**Pastor Steve Bietz**

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

## Altapass Baptist Church

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

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

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

## Plumtree Church

4527 Hwy 19E  
Plumtree, NC 28664  
828-765-6919  
www.plumtreechurch.com

**Pastor Ryan Bridgeo**  
pastor@plumtreechurch.com

Sunday School 9:45 am  
Worship Service 10:30 am  
Life Groups Tuesday-Thursday evenings, 7:00 pm  
Healing Services 2nd Sunday of each month, 6:30 pm

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

## Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

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

www.pleasanthillbc.church

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

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

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

## Newland Christian Church

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

**Pastor - Phillip Greene**

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

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

## Burkemont Baptist Church

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

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

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

## Mount Carmel Baptist Church

195 Gouges Creek Rd.  
Spruce Pine NC 28777

John 3:16 says that YOU are  
loved!  
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www.mcfamilyforchrist.org

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

*"A Family Focused On Christ"*

## First Baptist Church of Spruce Pine

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

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

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

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

## Pine Branch Baptist Church

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

**Rev. Bruce Cannon, Interim Pastor**

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

Growing Together in Christ

## Berry Chapel Baptist Church

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

**Pastor - Steve Williams**

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

Where Everybody is Somebody  
And Jesus Christ is Lord!

## Spruce Pine United Methodist Church

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

**Pastor Richard Schilling**

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

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

## Bear Creek Baptist Church

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

**Reverend Bruce Cannon**

Sunday School 9:00 AM  
Worship Service 10:00 AM  
Discipleship 6:00 PM  
Evening Worship 6:00 PM  
Wednesday Worship 6:30 PM

*"For God so loved the world, he  
gave his only Son..."*

## Landis Orthodox Presbyterian Church

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

**Elder Mike Cloy**  
opc@mikecloy@gmail.com

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

*Come Celebrate the Glory of God in Reverent  
Worship Ps. 96:3; John 17:1*



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# Plumtree Church

## The Lord our Righteousness

By Ryan Bridgeo  
Avery County



There are seven redemptive names of God scattered throughout the Old Testament. They are:

1. Jehovah-Rapha, the Lord our Healer
2. Jehovah-Nissi, the Lord our Banner (or Refuge)
3. Jehovah-Shammah, the Lord (who) is Present
4. Jehovah-Tsidkenu, the Lord our Righteousness
5. Jehovah-Shalom, the Lord our Peace
6. Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord our Provider
7. Jehovah-Ra'ah, the Lord our Shepherd

All of these names point to Christ. He is our healer, our refuge, ever-present, our righteousness, our peace, our provider, and our shepherd. In this lesson, I am going to focus on Jehovah-Tsidkenu, the Lord our Righteousness. "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." (Jeremiah 23:5-6)

Jehovah-Tsidkenu is "the Lord our Righteousness" in Hebrew. In my experience as a pastor, many people get confused about the subject of righteousness. When they think of righteousness they usually think of righteous behavior. Now righteous behavior is important; we should all try to live right and treat others as we want to be treated. But righteousness and righteous behavior are two different things. It is righteousness that will be the focus of this lesson. I believe that a lack of understanding about righteousness holds many Christians in bondage. Not understanding righteousness will affect how we view ourselves, others, and God. It will affect how we believe God sees us, how we serve God, how we worship, how we pray, our expectations when we pray, and many other things as well. Our understanding of righteousness is pivotal to our Christian experience.

Hebrews 5:13 says, "For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe." If we don't understand righteousness, we will never grow past the baby stages of Christian living. Many Christians today are not sure what they believe about righteousness, and that is why I wanted to encourage you with this lesson. The first thing we need to understand is that there are two kinds of righteousness. There is the righteousness of God and the righteousness of man. The righteousness of God is referring to His holiness and perfection. The righteousness of man is referring to our behavior or works.

The Word of God says our righteousness is like a filthy rag (Isaiah 64:6). Romans 3:10 says, "There is no one righteous, not even one." These verses are referring to our righteousness or self-righteousness. Self-righteousness is man's best effort to try and be good enough before God, which is impossible for any human to do. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin (Romans 3:20 emphasis mine). The best law keeper ever will not be declared righteous in God's sight by his good works. Our good works may look righteous in man's sight but never in God's. There is no way for us to obtain the right standing with God by obeying the law or doing good works. If we lived a million years, we could not do enough good to earn the right standing with God. However, there is a way to receive the right standing with God, but it is not through our works.

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. (Romans 3:21-22) Paul is saying here that there is now a way for us to become righteous by faith in Jesus Christ and not by our works of observing the Law. So, the truth is there is a way to become righteous, but it is not through our own works and effort. How do we become righteous? Romans 10:10 says, "For with the heart one believes unto righteousness and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Romans 5:17 further explains, for if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ?

From these verses, we learn that: 1) with the heart, we believe unto righteousness, and 2) righteousness is a gift to be received. Righteousness means right standing with God. Therefore, our right standing with God is a gift. Today, we have a right standing with God not because of anything we have done or ever could do but because of what Jesus Christ has already done for us. We become righteous by believing unto righteousness and receiving the gift of righteousness. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Praise God, Jesus Christ became sin. He took all our sins and the consequences of our sins upon Himself. When we place our faith or our belief in Christ as our source of righteousness, we become righteous; we receive the gift of right standing with God. So, it is true that there is no one righteous, not even one, who can obtain the right standing with God by their own effort. But when we put our faith in Jesus and His finished work on the cross, we receive the gift of righteousness—the gift of right standing with God—and we become the righteousness of God in Him. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being wit-

nessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. (Romans 3:21-22) Recall Jeremiah 23:5-6 that we began this lesson with: "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper and execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely; now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." Has this day come? Has the righteous branch come through the lineage of King David and the lineage of Judah? Yes. Who was that verse referring to? Jesus. And what was His name in which He was to be called? The LORD our Righteousness. Jesus is our righteousness. He is our right standing with God. He provided our right standing with God through what He did not by anything we could ever do. When we place our faith in Jesus and His finished work on the cross, we inherit the gift of eternal life and right standing with God. Praise God! If you are born again, you are the righteousness of God. You are righteous. You received this position as a gift. You didn't earn it, so it is not self-righteousness. It is the gift of righteousness.

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

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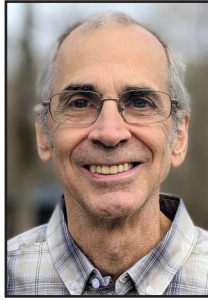


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# Repentance

By Thomas Thorne  
McDowell County



The apostle Peter told us in 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.*” Clearly, repentance, which is commonly thought of as “being sorry for our sins” is a necessary step toward forgiveness and the receipt of the Holy Spirit. Is “being sorry for our sins” all there is to repentance?

The word repentance comes from the Hebrew verb shuv, which means to “*turn back, return, bring back, go back, turnabout, turn oneself.*” In 1 Kings 8:48 and 2 Chron. 6:38 the word is translated as “repent.” In Isaiah 58:12 a different conjugation of the verb shuv is translated as “restorer.” So we can see that to “turn back,” “return,” or “restore” are all related to the term “repent.”

Now consider, turning, returning, turning back, or restoring requires action. For us to “turn” requires that we make a change. If we are heading in one direction and we make a 180-degree turn, we need to stop, re-orient our thinking and our path of travel, turn around, and go in the other direction. We don’t just stop, pause, and head back on the same path as before. We literally and physically make a change in direction. And this is the crux of repentance, change.

Now, I’m going to make a statement here that I think we as believers in Jesus will all agree with. “We all want to follow Jesus as much as possible and we want to do what is right!” In the rest of this article plus next months I would like to remind us of what has been considered as the six elements that constitute full repentance. The kind of repentance we all are trying to achieve. The six elements are:

1. Recognition of one’s sins as sins
2. Remorse-sorrow
3. Confession
4. Desisting from sin - Stopping the sin
5. Forgiveness
6. Restitution where possible

The first element, “recognition” of one’s sins as sins is an act of one’s intelligence, moral conscience, and relationship with God. It involves knowing that certain actions are wrong and sinful. Recognizing that such actions are not according to the teachings of God and analyzing one’s motives for these sinful actions as deeply as one can. In the business vernacular, this would be called “root cause analysis.”

For example, stealing must be seen not only as a national crime but also as a sin against another human and a violation of God’s eternal commandments. It also involves realizing that such acts are motivated by some of the darkest elements in our being, elements that we need to root out. The first element is that we recognize sin as sin. Recognize that it is wrong and that if we are participating in it, we are not following our God, and our actions are wrong!

The second phase, “remorse” or “sorrow” is a feeling. It is composed of feelings of regret and of failure to maintain one’s moral standards. It may also encompass feelings of being lost or trapped, anguish, despair at our sinfulness, and a feeling of being alienated from God and our own deepest spiritual roots. Although, after repentance, we do our best never to participate in such actions again, these negative feelings need not remain. After we have recognized that what we have done was wrong and that we have not followed the teachings of God we will be sorry for our wrong actions. The second element of full repentance is having remorse, being sorry.

“Confession,” the third element, has two forms: James 5:16 tells us to “*Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working*” (James 5:16 ESV). There is also an individual confession of our sins to God. Psalm 32:5 tell us, “*I acknowledged [confessed] my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to the LORD, and you forgave the iniquity of my sin*” (ESV).

Psalm 51 is David’s prayer of repentance after his sin with Bathsheba. In verses 1-4, David cries out, “*O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin! For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment*” (Psa. 51:1-4 ESV).

1 John 1:8-10 tells us “*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. [But], if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us*” (1 John 1:7-10 ESV). The more specific the confession, the better. The third element of full repentance is confession.

We have covered three elements of repentance: recognition, remorse-sorrow, and confession. In next month’s article, we will review the last three and discuss how they all tie together and result in “full 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](mailto:servantsotmhg@gmail.com)

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# Obedient Heart Fellowship

## Off the Clock?

By Jim Huskins  
McDowell County



I recently spent twelve long minutes at the counter of a fast-food restaurant. During that time, an employee came within three feet of me on his way to the restroom. He faced straight ahead. He stared at the floor. He never spoke. He never looked my way. I was astounded. A few minutes later, he came back. Not a word. Not a glance. It was bizarre.

When I could stand it no longer, I walked behind the counter. This forced the person working the drive-thru to notice me. He eventually came to take my order. I asked about the employee who ignored me. Twice. I was told, “He doesn’t work the register. He couldn’t take your order.”

“No problem,” I responded. “But surely he could have acknowledged my presence and told me that he would get someone to serve me.”

“No, he couldn’t do that either,” I was told. “He’s off the clock.”

By this point in my “dining experience,” my frustration and disbelief turned to shock and elevated blood pressure. I wanted to ask the young man about training programs and customer service policies. My long-dead father screamed inside my head that employees owe loyalty to those who write their checks. Pure self interest should encourage every employee to make a habit of assisting customers. If nothing else, ignoring a fellow human in need of assistance is a gross violation of something once called “common courtesy.”

All these things flooded my mind as I stared in disbelief across that cash register, but I realized that further conversation would be wasted effort. The young man who told me that his coworker was off the clock had no interest in my opinions. I placed my order without additional comment. Over the next few days, however, I found myself obsessing over the disastrous results of something called compartmentalization.

Psychology Today defines this term as: “A defense mechanism in which people mentally separate conflicting thoughts, emotions, or experiences to avoid the discomfort of contradiction.” When our actions are inconsistent with our convictions, we experience something called “cognitive dissonance.” To avoid resulting pain, we often resort to denial, repression, projection, and other mind games.

Most believers experience times when the inconsistencies between our convictions and our actions are almost unbearable. One of the most popular mechanisms for coping is pretending that we are “off God’s clock.” Perhaps these interludes when we convince ourselves that God is not watching should be labeled “time off for bad behavior.”

This approach stands in contrast to one the most beloved verses in Scripture. Psalm 19:14 reads, “*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.*” My treatment of this verse is indebted to the work of Hebrew scholar, Tom Thorne.

Through technical analysis of the Hebrew text, Tom makes the case that King David’s supplication for acceptability is more than a platitude or flippant prayer to offer when we want to convince God that we are “being spiritual.” Hebrew syntax is different than English word arrangement, but in this case the difference adds even more emphasis to a powerful set of ideas. Tom’s literal translation of Psalm 19:14 reads: “*Let these be for pleasure, goodwill, acceptance, liking, and favor: the words of my mouth and the thinking, meditation, planning, talk, music, and even the playing—of my mind, my character, my disposition, my inclination, my loyalty, my concern, my intention, and my purpose.*”

The next two Hebrew words proclaim David’s desire that all these aspects of his person and character would qualify to stand the scrutiny of Holy God’s most intimate focus. David is not content to merely put on his best suit and shine his Sunday shoes for a once-a-week trip to “meet with God.” Instead of pretending that he could hide certain parts of himself from all-knowing God, David pursued the opposite of compartmentalization. His core desire was that God would grant him the grace of purifying his every thought and action. Rather than hold back a few “secret rooms” in his psyche, David wanted to shine the light of holiness into every nook and cranny of his existence.

The next-to-last word in this verse can be translated “large rock” or “boulder.” Hebrew thinking recognizes this as an image of God because it represents both an unshakable foundation and an unassailable defensive position. When we make our stand in God’s mighty shadow, we need never fear the devil’s slings and arrows. David wanted every aspect of himself to be protected.

The last word in David’s prayer is “redeemer.” A redeemer reclaims ownership by paying a debt. Every human owes a debt to Holy God because He cannot abide the presence of sin. Thanks be to God that He sent his own Son to pay the debt that we could never pay. Long before Christ was born, King David knew that God is in the redemption business.

David’s prayer is that every aspect of his life—even his pleasures, his recreations, his secret plans and ambitions—might stand the test of God’s closest scrutiny. It is part of one of the most magnificent chapters in Scripture. Psalm 19 is a thrilling hymn of praise. Most Christians are convinced that God’s law is flawed and burdensome. David says that Torah is perfect and that it revives the soul. We are taught that the instructions for living God gave through Moses represent some counterfeit of faith. David said, “The rules of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.”

The Nineteenth Psalm sprang from David’s recognition that a life worth living is devoted to righteousness. He wanted nothing more than to abide in God without the baggage of his sinful nature. At a time when many “Christian leaders” insist that sin no longer matters, King David shouts across the centuries that those who earnestly desire to live every moment in the presence of Holy God are never off the clock.

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Jim Huskins is pastor of Obedient Heart Fellowship.

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# Roan Mountain Baptist Church

## "Have You Forgiven God?"

By Russell McKinney  
Mitchell



That title is not a misprint. I'm guessing that you've heard a lot of preaching about God forgiving you. For that matter, you've probably also heard a lot about you forgiving others. But when was the last time you heard anything about you forgiving God? "Never," you say. Then pull up a chair and let's talk about it.

Maybe a spouse died. Maybe a child died. Maybe a test result came back bad. Maybe the surgery didn't produce the desired results. Maybe a marriage never happened. Maybe one ended in divorce. Maybe a job was lost. Maybe a business went bust. Maybe a terrible injustice occurred. Maybe a dream turned into a nightmare. Whatever it was that happened (or didn't happen) to you, all you know is that you prayed your guts out for God to come through for you but He came up small, very small. At least that's your assessment of what happened.

And you've heard the well-intentioned advice of family, friends, and colleagues. "You need to get over this." "You have to move on with your life." "You've dwelt on this long enough." "It's time to let this go." For your part, though, such words fall upon deaf ears. Why? Well, allow me to suggest that you just flat out aren't ready to move on. Furthermore, let me also suggest that you and your situation have unfinished business, some of which involve you forgiving the God whom you think failed you.

If you do feel disappointment or anger toward God, the chances are that you've expressed it by attempting to get back at Him. Basically, you've tried to hurt Him the way you believe He has hurt you. Such attempts at revenge usually take the form of quitting church, failing to pray, letting dust collect on your Bible, and purposefully engaging in some sin or all of the above. These things (and some others I didn't list) are your way of saying to God, "Hey if You didn't care about doing what I wanted You to do for me, why should I care about doing what You want me to do for You?"

One of the great problems with the thousands of "Christianity lite," "health-and-wealth," "prosperity," and "self-help" sermons that pass for preaching these days is that they only convey one side of God's nature. These sermons tell you over and over that God can do exceedingly, abundantly above all that you can ask or think. They tell you that He is an all-powerful God who never met a problem that He couldn't fix. They tell you that your miracle is on its way. What they don't tell you is that God being able to do something doesn't mean that He will do it, and His having the power to fix a problem doesn't always translate to Him fixing it. And as for your miracle being on its way, well, let's just say that some miracles evidently get lost in the mail.

I'm talking now to the person, even the Christian, who had faith that God was going to save your day, only to discover that He opted not to do it. Mary and Martha received their miracle when Lazarus was resurrected, but you didn't get yours. Jesus walked on the water to keep the chosen 12's boat from sinking, but you rode yours all the way down to the bottom. David felled his Goliath, but your Goliath body-slammed you, put his foot in the middle of your chest, raised his sword in victory over you, and has been enjoying the accolades ever since.

I truly believe that God has you reading this right now because He doesn't want you to abort the work He is doing inside you in the aftermath of your traumatic event. While He's not asking you to put on a fake smile and act like nothing happened to you, He does want you to stick with Him. Rather than burying your disappointment/anger toward Him and cutting off all communications, He wants you to acknowledge that disappointment/anger and convey your emotions to Him by way of prayer. His offer to you is, "Let's talk about what you are feeling toward Me, and in so doing begin the process of bringing you out the other end of it."

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Of course, it's along about here that someone might say, "But who are we to second-guess God? He is the Creator and we are mere dust. He doesn't have to explain Himself to us. And since He cannot sin, He never makes a mistake and therefore never needs to be forgiven."

My comeback to that is that a person (or God) can disappoint someone or anger someone without actually committing a sin or making a mistake. You see, disappointment or anger occurs within the mind of the person who considers himself or herself the victim. So, even as God remains authentically innocent of any charges the person might level toward Him, He is gracious enough not to take offense at the charges. Even more, than not taking offense at them, He's loving enough to actually come to the person and say, "Let me help you take what you're feeling and weave it into a deeper experience with Me than you've ever had."

Actually, the Bible provides us with numerous examples of people who became disappointed/angry with God. Here are a few names from that list:

1. After patiently waiting for years for God to give him and his wife Sarah a child, Abraham finally expressed the disappointment/anger he was feeling toward God about the delay. (Genesis 15:1-3)
2. After Moses had been leading the Israelites for a while, there came a time when he expressed his disappointment/anger toward God because of all the problems that were associated with leading such a group. He even told God, "*If you are going to keep treating me like this, please kill me now.*" (Numbers 11:10-15)
3. David got mad at God for striking Uzzah dead when Uzzah touched the Ark of the Covenant as it was being transported to Jerusalem. (2 Samuel 6:1-8)
4. Jonah got mad at God for sparing the citizens of Nineveh. He got so mad that he asked God to kill him. (Jonah 3:10;4:1-4)
5. Jeremiah once reached an emotional low point in his ministry and expressed his disappointment/anger toward God by asking Him, "*Why is my pain perpetual and my wound incurable, which refuses to be healed? Will You be to me like an unreliable stream, as waters that fail?*" (Jeremiah 15:18)
6. John the Baptist became disappointed that Jesus hadn't ushered in the glorious Messianic Age for Israel yet and even openly questioned whether or not Jesus truly was the Messiah. (Matthew 11:1-3)
7. When Jesus first told the chosen 12 that He was going to Jerusalem to be put to death there, Peter took Him aside and actually rebuked Him for saying it. (Matthew 16:21-22)

If you think that all of these servants of the Lord didn't have to work through these complicated feelings they were feeling toward Him, you don't have the first clue about human nature. It's not that these men didn't understand that God is sovereign, holy, and doesn't make mistakes. The problem they all had was that their emotions didn't ask for permission to pop up inside them. This is how we humans are wired. Instinctually, we feel what we feel, and even though self-control can prevent us from expressing those feelings or acting upon them, what self-control cannot do is change the feelings themselves.

This is where the admittedly strange idea of forgiving God comes into play. Staying disappointed in Him or mad at Him is your choice, but that mindset will never get you to a better place spiritually. At some point, you're going to have to enter into some uncommon times of prayer with Him, prayers in which you vent all that toxic stuff that is bubbling inside you. Trust me, God can take it. If He took it from Abraham, Moses, David, Jonah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and Peter, He can take it from you. Then, once you are finished with your venting — and that might require numerous rounds of prayer — you and God can begin to rebuild the fellowship between the two of you. Afterward, once that fellowship has been rebuilt to an adequate extent, the two of you can start to rebuild your "fellowship" to walk hand in hand with your fellowship.

Am I saying that any of this process is easy? Certainly not. The truth is that it's so hard that many people never complete it and consequently spend the rest of their lives disappointed/angry with God. Others try to race through the process like it's some kind of speed course and consequently fail to glean its full benefits. Neither outcome is desirable.

But then there are those precious few who slowly, carefully, methodically put in the time and effort to max out the course and in so doing reach an intimate fellowship with God that is deeper and more multilayered than any they ever planned to have with Him. These are the people who understand God as fully as He can be understood, and they incorporate that understanding into ministry. In particular, they can counsel others who find themselves disappointed/angry with God. I won't close this post by asking you to become such a counselor — that would require you to first become disappointed/angry with God, and I wouldn't wish that on anybody — but I will close it by asking you to become such a counselor if you've lived firsthand what I've described in the preceding paragraphs. In case you haven't figured it out yet, I myself am in that group, and so what I've written here has been my attempt to be that kind of counselor. As for how God uses all this in the lives of others, I guess I'll just leave that to Him.

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





Avery County

The Avery A&H Fair is hosting the 5th annual Draft Pull on September 2nd, 2023, at the A&H Fairground. The Mini-division will begin at 12 p.m. The large horses will begin afterward around 2 p.m. It is advised that you bring your own chair for seating at the event. Admission is \$10 per person, with free admission for children 10 years and younger. Vendors must contact Katie by 8/29/23 at (828) 260-6301 by call or text in order to secure a booth at the Pull

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Fruit of the Spirit

By John Sorenson



In my grandson’s preschool last year, one of the key things they covered as growing children was the Fruit of the Spirit. This foundational knowledge of what God develops in us is key to our growth as believers in Jesus. After we come to know Christ as our Lord and Savior, we are filled with the Holy Spirit who begins to mature these in us. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things, there is no law.” Galatians 5:22-23 shows us clearly the gifts that God grows in us—and while we need to impart to our children and grandchildren, it is vital for us adults as well. Assessing these in ourselves as well as those we disciple can help us identify our strengths and weaknesses, rejoice or repent, surrender to our Lord in the areas we see the fruits of our lives withering, and prioritize growing in what the Holy Spirit is doing in us.

Also, when you look at the life of Jesus, you see every one of these qualities. If you’ll devote yourself to Him, you’ll look like He does! If you’re walking close to the Lord, you’ll see the Fruit of the Spirit in your own life; and these traits will help you become an effective witness for Jesus. Now, you may think, “How can I share the Gospel using the Fruit of the Spirit?” That’s what we will look at in today’s blog. Think of each one and use them in your actions and speech. Let your intentions be out of love, speak with joy, share His peace, and be patient with those you share with. So without further ado, let’s look at each and see how they can impact us as growing Christians who are commissioned to offer these things to those who do not know Jesus through the Gospel!

LOVE, JOY, AND PEACE

Have you heard the old song, “I’ve got the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart?” Well, if you know Jesus then you can experience true joy! And you can spread it, too. When you placed your trust in Jesus alone, you’ve experienced the love of God; and there is true joy and peace in knowing where you’ll spend eternity. Love, joy, and peace are God-given characteristics to lead people to saving faith in Him.

Pio, who learned to share his faith, told us that before his brother led him to Jesus that he struggled with immense anger. Now that he knows Jesus, he says his heart is full of peace and joy and that he can now share love and forgiveness with others. And if we have put our trust in Jesus alone, we have a Godly love for others.

Jesus is recorded saying in Mark 12, “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.*” The second is this: “*Love your neighbor as yourself.*” There is no commandment greater than these.” And that is exactly what the Spirit grows in us. We can’t help but love others and share the Good News of the Gospel with them! We can’t help but reach out to the poor and hurting.

And we have joy and peace as we do it. Even through the hardest times of a Christian’s life, if they are cultivating the Fruit of the Spirit, there is unexplainable peace and joy. It reminds me of what James wrote in the first chapter of his letter, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” God uses even the hard things to grow our joy and peace. Let’s live our lives as a testimony to what Christ has done in us and share the love, joy, and peace we have with others through the Gospel.

PATIENCE, KINDNESS, AND GOODNESS


Isn’t God good? All the time! All the time, God is good. We also know that He is kind...and He is patient. Bill had been praying for decades for his sister-in-law to come to saving faith in Jesus. He patiently prayed for her heart to be softened, and she finally accepted Jesus as her Lord and Savior. Talk about a celebration! Bill’s testimony shows us God’s kindness and goodness, and His patient pursuit of our hearts. The Lord gave Bill the patience to pray for his sister-in-law and the words to speak the Gospel to her. Romans 2:4 says, “*Do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?*” I feel like I need to write it again...it’s the kindness of the Lord that brings us to repentance. So how can you be an example of patience, kindness, and goodness? Look to the Lord and His Word, and He will produce the Fruit of His Spirit in you. Ask it of Him, and He will bestow it on you. Jesus said in Matthew 7:

“*Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. Which of you, if your son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him!*” (Matthew 7:7-11)


GENTLENESS AND FAITHFULNESS

As easy as gentleness and faithfulness seems, I would contest that these two are some of the hardest to cultivate! And yet, these two are clearly aspects of God’s character, and as His children, we should prioritize their growth. Even though God is all-powerful, glorious, and holy, our amazing and strong Father—Creator of the heavens and the earth—is exceedingly gentle with us. And He is faithful from generation to generation! But many times—especially with these particular Fruit of the Spirit—we place them on our “Christian To Do List”...as merely another box to check off or aspects we show and do when we are at church. Barna Research did a study that shares that most churchgoers equate spiritual maturity with

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# First Baptist of Marshall

## Humor

By Buddy Freeman  
Madison County

Someone’s cell phone rang in the middle of the pastor’s sermon at a morning church service. The pastor hesitated a moment, then said, “You better get that. It might be God calling you.”



- Cowboy 10 Commandments:
- 1) Just one God
  - 2) Put nothin’ before God
  - 3) Watch yer mouth
  - 4) Git yourself to Sunday meetin.
  - 5) Honor yer Ma & Pa.
  - 6) No killin’.
  - 7) No foolin’ around with another feller’s gal.
  - 8) Don’t take what ain’t yers.
  - 9) No tellin’ tales or gossipin’.
  - 10) Don’t be hankerin’ for yer buddy’s stuff.

What is the oldest sin on earth? (Stealing Apples.)  
Poor Adam and Eve had another claim to fame: They were the first to raise a little Cain.

Some people go to church to see who didn’t.

Preacher, “It seems that every sermon you preach is better than the next one.”  
A deacon wrote a poem and sent it to his Pastor. It says, “My pastor’s eyes I never see shine. When he prays he closes his, I close mine.” Then the Pastor wrote him back, “When I am dead for me shed no tears. For, I will be no deader dead that you have been for years.”

A little boy asked his Dad, “Did you go to Sunday School every week?” “ I sure did, son,” his father replied. The boy said, “I bet it won’t do me any good, either.”

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

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# Family of God Fellowship

## So This Is Old Age

By Dr. James Snyder  
Ocala, Fla.

The other morning I got up; at least, I tried to get up, but the bones in every part of my body had organized a labor strike against me. I’m not quite sure what they were protesting.

As I lay there groaning over these bones, I did not realize how many bones I had in my body. I’m sure some bones in my body shouldn’t be there, and I’ll have to ask my mother how they got there. The only problem is, she’s in a nursing home with dementia.

If I thought my bones were creaking when I was lying in bed, the bones were screaming a lot louder as I rolled over and got up.

If I only knew what they wanted, I could help them.  
As I wobbled out to the kitchen, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage some and said, “Well, old man. What’s it like getting old?”

Even at this stage in life, my mind is active, and I had a very quirky response to that question, but fortunately for me, I did remember not to mention it.

I wobbled over to the table and sat down for breakfast.  
After breakfast, I went to my office with a fresh cup of coffee, sat in my chair, and rambled through my mind.

This got me thinking about my grandfather. I now understand why he walked the way he walked. If only he were alive now, I could walk along with him.

I now regret all those years of making fun of him and my father as they got old. At the time, I never thought in a million years I would get as old as they were. But time has a way of changing your opinion about many things.

My wife came to the door of my office and said, “Do you remember your doctor’s appointment for today?”

I didn’t, so I got out my planner, and right there it was in plain sight, in my own handwriting, my doctor’s appointment for 10 o’clock. Jotting things down in your planner so you don’t forget something is great, but my problem is I forget to look at the planner.

Maybe this is the reason my bones were creaking this morning. They didn’t want me to see the doctor because they knew I would tell him about my creaking bones, and he might do something about it.

I recently had a birthday and not sure which one because, throughout my life, I have had so many birthdays that it’s hard to keep up. But this year, that birthday was a landmark in achieving old age.

I never knew what old age was, but now I’m beginning to comprehend it a little bit more.

At the doctor’s, I complained to him about my creaking old bones and asked what I could do. He looked at me, smiled an old doctor’s smile, and said, “That’s the benefit of getting old and not dying. Just exercise more, and it will all go away.”

It was easy for him to say because he’s not my age. I hope I live long enough to see him when he is my age, so I can laugh at his creaking bones.

As we drove home, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage looked over at me and said, “Well, old man, what did the doctor have to say?”

“He told me,” I said with a rather sour smirk, “that I need to eat more Apple Fritters each day. That will take away the pain in my bones.”

Looking at me and not smiling, she said, “For your information, we will have broccoli for lunch today.” Then she snickered one of her silly snickers.

If only I could remember to forget certain things, I wouldn’t get into so much trouble. I just put on a fake smile, hoping she was joking.

My creaking bones are the least of my problems, at least for today.

Looking at her, I sweetly said, “Why don’t we go out for lunch today? We can go to the restaurant of your choice.”

She agreed, and we both smiled, and she pulled up at her favorite restaurant. As for me, I don’t have a favorite restaurant; I just like a restaurant to serve food. But not so with The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage. Nine out of ten restaurants that we go to, she doesn’t like. This is one thing that I have not yet forgotten, so I let her choose the restaurant.

We got seated, ordered our lunch, and had a wonderful time together. The only problem with eating out with her is she always orders broccoli.

We were finished eating, and the waitress brought our check. I smiled at her and reached into my pocket for my wallet, and much to my dismay, it was not there. I forgot my wallet.

Just when you think you’ve got a problem solved, it turns out quite different. “My dear,” I said as sweetly as possible, “I forgot my wallet. Do you mind paying for lunch today?”

That was the most expensive lunch I’ve ever had.  
As I was thinking about this I couldn’t help but remember what David said. “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long” (Psalm 32:3).

What I take away from this is, when I keep silent about my age, there other things that are going to give away my secret.

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

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Remembering Bob Ross

By Dennis Love  
McDowell County

Do you remember Bob Ross? He had a TV show on PBS called “The Joy of Painting.” Bob Ross passed away in 1995, at the age of 52, due to lymphoma. He was very passionate about painting and created a lot of artwork during his career. I used to love hearing his voice and watching him paint. His voice was very relaxing. He would talk just a notch above a whisper. He would start with a blank canvas and end up with a masterpiece. Plus, he had a very positive attitude as he would describe his paintings as if they were human. He would often talk about the ‘happy little trees’ while painting them. I never took the time to hear and see God in him and his artwork until recently.

I now realize that the Lord is the artist painting the picture of my life. Just like Bob Ross, God started with a blank canvas. A canvas that I had messed up, but He wiped it clean with the blood of Jesus. Then He chose from globs of paint that by themselves were nothing more than an oily mess on a painting board that He Himself held in His hand.

And even when God first started painting, to me and I’m sure to others watching, all anyone could see in my life were smudges of color that made no sense. They looked like blotches that could never turn out to be anything good. But the Lord saw something. In fact, He saw it all.

Just like Bob Ross, before He ever lifted a finger toward my canvas, He already saw in His mind what the finished picture would look like. So now God is creating in me what He had always purposed before I ever existed. I still can’t see it, but He can.

I don’t always understand what is being done in my life, but I do better understand that it is God who is doing it. That helps me to trust the process more, especially when the strokes of His brush start to hurt.

So, I will wait while the Master painter works. I will try to do better about questioning and complaining. There is nothing else He has created that is less than a work of art, so I know that if He started on me, He has plans to create something great. Matter-of-fact, the Bible says in Philippians 1:6, “*And I am certain that God, who began the good work within me, will continue His work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.*”

You see....God is my master, and I want to be His masterpiece. I hope He is yours so that you will be His!

*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*



A False Security

By Caron Cline  
Burke County

On September 11, 2001, the foundations of our nation were shaken. It is hard to imagine that 22 years have passed so quickly. Four passenger airplanes were hijacked by terrorists who attempted to destroy our nation’s economic, political, and military centers. In doing so, they were also willing to destroy themselves. Life suddenly changed for Americans and fear filled hearts as never before. This attack on our home court was shocking and completely unexpected. 2996 people died that day and thousands more were injured. Who would dare attempt such an evil act against the most powerful nation in the world? The answer is Islamic terrorists who were angered by America’s support of Israel, among other things. 9/11 was a rude awakening to the vulnerability of the United States of America against terrorist attacks. Pew Research Center surveyed a large group of Americans in the days following the attacks; 71% felt depressed; 49% had difficulty concentrating; 33% had trouble sleeping. Could it be that most of these people were suffering from false security? Dependence upon a government, a political party, or a strong military is a recipe for disaster. For followers of Christ, our help and our hope are in the name of the Lord. News outlets focus on violence, global warming, natural disasters, and deadly diseases. A steady diet of these entrées will distort a believer’s perspective, producing emotions not consistent with the word of God. Proverbs 18:10 says: “*The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runs into it and is safe*”. There are multiple descriptive names used for God in the Old Testament. When the inflation rate threatens to swallow young families, Jehovah Jireh, the Lord our Provider, is a refuge. When wars and rumors of wars produce fear of the future, Jehovah Shalom, the Lord our Peace, is perfect rest. When unexplained diseases attack unexpectedly, Jehovah Rapha, the Lord our Healer, is the Great Physician. When isolation and loneliness deliver depression and emotional anguish, Jehovah Shamma, the Lord Who is there, is ever present, refusing to leave or forsake His children. When mass shootings at schools, churches, and retail outlets become commonplace, Jehovah Chereb, the God Who fights on behalf of His people, is our shield and victory. Most importantly, Jehovah Elyon, the Most High God, is sovereign over each and every world event. The One Who watches over His people neither slumbers nor sleeps. ‘*The Lord will keep you from all harm-He will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore*’. (Psalm 121:7-8) Anxiety issues are at epidemic proportions in our nation, yet those who know their God and run into the strong tower of His Name will receive the wisdom, grace, and peace necessary to navigate the white waters of this turbulent world. It is futile to trust your security to this world’s systems; instead, trust the only One Who knows the end from the beginning. His foundation will never be shaken!

*Caron Cline is a follower of Jesus Christ who loves to teach the word of God. Her desire is to see every believer growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.*



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## Marlene's Meditations

### Copy and Paste for Christians

By Marlene Houk  
Burke County



Proverbs 3:6 "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths."

From the days of onionskin copies to today's "copy and paste" option, the ability to duplicate has exploded. In the early 1970s, I remember carefully sandwiching the translucent brownish paper between delicate black carbon sheets, inserting the packet slowly into the ancient manual typewriter, and producing so many copies that they gradually faded into barely discernible words. Sometimes, the last copy was almost indecipherable because the pressure of the keys was insufficient to make a solid impression. Today, with a few delicate clicks on the computer keyboard, a myriad of materials can be duplicated in just seconds, including text, pictures, clip art, and other graphics. Voilà! With no bells or whistles, your copied material lands quietly in your own personal file. Copying someone is easy.

The simple process of copy and paste reminds me of a spiritual parallel. Bible heroes climbed impossibly difficult mountains in their dramatic stories of faith, and they've left a GPS map for us. It is this: just as it is easy to highlight the material to be copied in today's computer age, so our faith journey becomes clearer when we highlight the paths of Bible heroes. Abraham, Sarah, King David, and Paul the Apostle, to name a few heroes, encourage us to copy their spiritual truths, and "paste" them into our lives.

For example, in Hebrews 11:11, the Bible records that: "Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised." Sarah was 90 years old when she had the baby that God promised to her and Abraham. How did she accomplish the impossible feat of delivering a baby at 90 years old?

The Bible says that she received strength through faith to conceive Isaac. She physically remained married and faithful to Abraham. This enabled her to fulfill God's will for her which was to conceive Isaac.

One of the ways that we can "copy and paste" Sarah's faith into our own Christian lives is to keep physically doing the things that we know are God's will for us. Faith is the link between God's plan for us and our physical ability to fulfill that plan. It is then that God will strengthen us, like Sarah, to conceive the spiritual seed of His will that seems impossible for us to deliver.

For example, working with non-believers who doubt our faith seems challenging, but the Lord directs our path when we acknowledge Him in all our ways (See verse above.) We continue to physically work each day, to focus on the Lord rather than react to their taunts, and to refuse to be polarized. God then uses our willingness as a sign of our faith that He will do as He promises to "work all things together for good" (Romans 8:28). The seed of the Gospel may be conceived in their non-believing hearts and new life in Christ delivered into their lives.

We can copy King David's earthly tenacity (because we, like him, believe God is faithful) into our own spiritual goals. As we "paste" his pattern of physically continuing to do that which God commands, others recognize His working in our lives. God promises—we believe—faith becomes stronger—we receive the strength of body, soul, and spirit—we physically act in the direction of God's will—miracles happen—God gets the glory! Here are the instructions to "copy and paste" the wisdom from Bible giants of faith into your life:

1. Highlight their actions by studying their stories in the Bible.
2. Press the "CTRL" (Control) key and the letter C in your life by copying their wisdom.
3. Open the document of your life.
4. Press the "CTRL" (Control) and the letter V in your life, applying the wisdom from your Bible study.

Try it! You can "copy and paste" the spiritual lessons Bible characters teach you into your life. Watch God duplicate His glory in you through faith!

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



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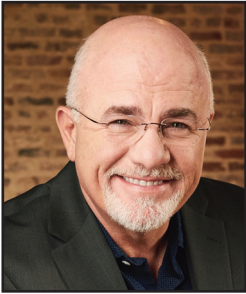


By Dave Ramsey

Dear Dave,

Is there any flexibility in your rule about not spending more than 25% of your take-home pay on rent or monthly mortgage payments? I live downtown in Washington, D.C., and I'm finding it's pretty hard to do here. I make about \$90,000 a year, but I'm spending a little over \$2,000 a month in rent. Rent is my largest expense by far, and I don't spend a lot of other money, so I'm still able to save a little and do other things. Can you give me your opinion about this approach?

— Tanner



Dear Tanner,

True, I advise people to spend no more than 25% of their take-home pay on housing. Math still works in every city and state in the country. You don't get a pass on math just because you live in Washington, D.C., even though Congress and a lot of other people there think you do.

But there's really nothing magical about 25%. The purpose behind it is, I don't want you to be house poor. If you find yourself still able to save and invest because you keep other financial aspects of your lifestyle so low, then you're okay. The problem with most people starts when they've got a high cost of housing, and those payments put a real squeeze on their budgets. It doesn't leave them enough room to save up to buy the next car, so that car becomes debt. The same thing happens with Christmas and vacations and everything else. They don't have enough extra money to save for things because a huge chunk of their income is flying out the door every month wrapped up in rent or a house payment.

Now, you're telling me your situation works for you because you've made room in your budget and live a very frugal lifestyle by choice. That's cool. I'm not mad at you about that. But here's the thing: Whatever you spend on rent disappears. And the more money you burn, the less you've got on hand for other things.

I'm not exactly sure how you adjust that in your situation. Maybe you move outside the city and commute, or perhaps you add a roommate into the equation. Or, maybe you're fine with how things are and that's the way you want to live. That's okay too. But my reasoning behind the 25% figure—which is actually more of a guideline than a rule—is so you don't become house poor. I want you to be able to save, invest and give generously. Plus, I want you to own your own home one day.

And you won't be able to do that if everything you make is going toward big payments!

— 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](http://daveramsey.com) and on Twitter at [@DaveRamsey](https://twitter.com/DaveRamsey).



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“Who in the World Are the Remnant People?”

By Art Dmytriyeu  
Yancey County



What? Remnant people? Who are they?  
As you have probably heard, the term "remnant" is the Bible term, and it refers to a group of people who remain loyal to the Lord God after a time of hardship. The Bible tells us who will make up this end-time remnant:  
"... the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." (Revelation 12:17 KJV). The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. This remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness. So, the Bible is full of stories where God calls His chosen people out of dangerous places or destructive company for their own safety. One of those stories is in Genesis chapter 6 - the story of Noah. Just see the narrative: "... GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them. But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. ... Noah walked with God." (Genesis 6:5–9 KJV). Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord because he walked with God.

Later on, Jesus refers to the Flood when He said in Matthew 24:37 (KJV): "But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." So, in the last days, right before Jesus returns to earth to take His followers to heaven, a Noah-like situation will happen again. In the book, which tells about the last days events - the book of Revelation, Satan is depicted as a raging dragon, while God's church and His people are symbolized by a woman which the dragon seeks to destroy. Revelation 12:17 (KJV): "... the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." So, the remnant people of God have a distinguishing mission! Rather than hiding their faith, they are commissioned to share the gospel and tell others about who God is and what He has done. You can read more about their missing in the book of Revelation, chapter 14:6-11 -- the gospel via Three Angels' Message.

Dear reader, have you ever thought about belonging to the remnant people of God? Perhaps, you have, but if you have not, then do not delay any longer! Give your heart to the Lord and the Gospel. Jesus said: "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it." (Mark 8:34–35 KJV). Let's become the remnant people of God today and obtain eternal salvation!

Pr. Art Dmytriyeu is originally from Siberia. He has traveled the world in Evangelism and pastoral ministry. He serves as a pastor in North Carolina, holds a Master of Divinity degree, and is currently a Doctor of Ministry candidate. More information at: <https://burnsvillenc.adventistchurch.org/pastors-blog>

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.



# The Righteousness Of God Vs. the Wretched Man

By Steve Henry  
Burke County



A friend of mine sent me a text recently in which he described the continual battle he has between enjoying the fact that he is *“the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus”* (2nd Corinthians 5:21) and all the benefits that go with that, and the sobering fact that he walks sometimes in unrighteousness and dealing with the guilt that goes with that. The Lord reminded me of some things because I need to be reminded of them once again myself and continue to speak them to myself and others whether they make sense to these finite human minds or not.

First of all, we find ourselves in some pretty good company. The Apostle Paul found himself in the same predicament as you and I, *“For I do not do the good that I desire; but the evil which I do not will, that I do. But if I do what I do not desire, it is no more I working it out, but sin dwelling in me”* ..... *“O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”* (Romans 7:19-20; 24-25).

Paul felt like a wretched man because he was acting like a wretched man, but in God’s view, he made a big mistake when he spoke out loud that he was a wretched man, because two verses later he declares *“There is therefore NOW no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.”* At the very same moment that Paul declared himself a wretched man, God said *“I ain’t buying it (well maybe He didn’t say ain’t). What could possibly happen in a few verses that would change Paul’s perspective so profoundly—the answer is found in the middle of these three verses, he had a come to Jesus meeting “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

That is the only answer we have or need, we just keep coming to Jesus and He will give us rest (Matthew 11:28-30), that is His promise to us even when we find ourselves laboring about our wretched behavior.

Something else He reminded me of was the power of a friend, *“Confess faults to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”*(James 5:16). When we get brutally honest with each other we can pray, encourage, and help each other be all that God wants us to be, therefore bringing about the healing that our Savior wants to bless us with. First and foremost our confession should be to Him, but He also says we need the help of someone in the Body of Christ to overcome persistent sin that continues to rear its ugly head. Expect His healing today in every way, Hallelujah!

Another interesting thing He reminded me of was His patience with us in how often we come to Him in repentance, *“Take heed to yourselves. If your brother trespasses against you, rebuke him. And if he repents, forgive him. And if he trespasses against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turns again to you, saying, I repent, you shall forgive him”* (Luke 17:3-4).

If the same person sins against me seven times in a day and they keep coming back just *“saying I repent,”* I’m going to wonder whether they are sincere or not. Satan wants to pull the sincerity card on us when we willfully sin against our Savior, we might even fall for His lie and start believing *“I said I repent, but did I really mean it,”* and dwell in the condemnation he is speaking to us.

“But God” has a totally different perspective on it. Seven is the number of completion in God’s Word. In verse 4 he uses the term *“turns again to you,”* just keep turning to Him again, and again, and again, and He will give you rest. Just keep turning from our sin and turn to Him *“saying I repent”* and He is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse all trespasses (1st John 1:9).

Hosea 14:2-4 says *“Take with you words, and turn to Jehovah..... I will heal their backslidings; I will love them freely.”* Satan wants us to dwell in doubt, our wonderful gracious Daddy always gives us the benefit of the doubt.

Finally, we need to do what Clebe McClary says to do in his book *“Living Proof”* and sic FIDO on our enemy as he uses our fleshly minds to keep us bound. Forget It Drive On

FIDO is a Biblical principle. Just as in the story of Job, Satan is constantly accusing us and is so bold as to go before God about us (Job 1:6 and 12). When we confess our sins God chooses not to remember them (Hebrews 10:17). In essence He says *“I choose not to remember them so why should you,”* and He always wants us to continue on (Philippians 3:12), not wallow in the guilt in which Satan loves to entrench us. When Satan comes with his condemnation over sins that have been confessed I need to speak out loud *“Henry, (put your name in the blank) Forget It and Drive On.”* Call it silly, call it whatever you want but using this simple little phrase will result in walking in the freedom in which He wants us to dwell. Why does it work? Because *“faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God”* (Romans 10:17), as we hear ourselves (and it is imperative we speak it out loud) declaring this profoundly Biblical phrase we are obtaining the faith to believe that I don’t have to listen to this mind of flesh, or my enemy and can walk in the freedom my Savior says I have.

We all have regrets over past failures, but a child of God should never say *“I regret”* because when we verbalize them we are bringing up something that God chooses not to remember about us. Our Father has always been adamant about us not dwelling in the past (Isaiah 43:18).

IF ALL THIS SOUNDS *“TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE,”* IT’S PROBABLY JESUS!

*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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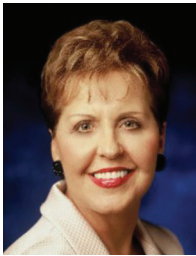
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Living in Peace with Prickly People

By Joyce Meyer



Have you ever had that one person in your life? You know, that one person who seems to be able to push all your wrong buttons at all the wrong times? We’ve all been there. And in our world today—with all the anger, hatred, and violence—it’s easy to feel overwhelmed.

Fortunately, people who have flaws and faults are nothing new. All you need to do is read Genesis—the first book of the Bible, often referred to as “The Book of Beginnings”—to realize that. One of the earliest recorded stories in Genesis is about Cain, who killed his brother, Abel, because he was jealous of him (see Genesis 4:8). As we read on, we see a number of broken people who do terrible things (see Genesis 16:1–6; 19:30–38; 27:1–35; 37:18–36). And yet, the people involved in these situations are people God used for His plans and purpose—so I guess this means there’s hope for us too.

The truth is if we’re going to love anyone—no matter who they are—we have to accept that they’ll have flaws, because no one is perfect, including you and me. And if we’re going to live in peace, we must learn to walk in love. This means we need to learn to love people who are hard to love.

Love is so much more than a feeling; it’s how we treat people, and it changes everything. Just imagine how different our world would be today if people truly loved one another. So I have decided that I am going to love people, which includes those who are hard to love. And I’m asking you to make the same decision because I believe if enough of us do it, we will impact the world in a very positive way.

**Prickly, Porcupine People**

In the animal kingdom, probably the most difficult animal to get close to is the porcupine. Porcupines are not usually considered loveable. Each one has about 30,000 sharp quills that can stick you and be very painful—even dangerous. These quills are their way of protecting themselves.

People also often develop ways of protecting themselves, especially if they have been hurt in the past. I say it like this, “Hurting people hurt people.” And sometimes, our methods of self-protection come across as very odd to the people who are dealing with us. For example, a person who has been hurt may be extremely defensive and think they are being rejected when that is not the case at all. Or, they may argue all the time, striving to be right in every situation because that is the only way they can feel good about themselves.

I happen to know a few people like this, and you probably know some too. I call them “porcupine people.” They are difficult to be around because you are likely to get hurt. If you get close to them, you will see their flaws and quirks, and likely experience them. It would be so nice if we could just place an order for the kind of people we would like to have in our life, but people come “as is” and we either take them as they are or end up alone.

God takes us the way we are and helps us become all that we should be. The question is: Are we willing to do this for other people? My husband, Dave, did it for me, and had he not loved me unconditionally, I probably wouldn’t be in ministry today. You see when Dave prayed for a wife, he asked God to give him someone who needed help, and God certainly answered his prayer because I needed a lot of help.

Growing up, I experienced sexual abuse from my father. And because of that past abuse, I ended up becoming a porcupine person too. Dave said he knew the first night he met me that I was the girl for him. As it turned out, he was right, but he had to be willing to love someone who was very hard to love for a very long time before he had a wife who was loveable.

Now I pray regularly to be good to people and make them feel good when they are around me. It’s not always easy, and sometimes I still stick out my quills. But God is working with me, and I always want to be willing to work with the porcupine people He puts in my life too. We may sustain little wounds from time to time as we walk through life with other people, but we are much better off having relationships than living in isolation.

**We All Need to Be Loved**

Despite their prickles, I don’t believe there is a person on the planet who doesn’t want to be loved. As a matter of fact, most people who are hard to love are the way they are because they have never experienced real love. They are dissatisfied and looking for something to fill the emptiness they feel, but often they don’t know what they are looking for, so they search for it in all the wrong places. Each time they think they find what they have been longing for, they end up disappointed, and it only makes their behavior more challenging for those around them.

But we can make a difference. When we have God’s love in our hearts—His peace, kindness, mercy, forgiveness, joy, and many other blessings—we can let it flow through us to other people. Loving people who are hard to love will be difficult on most days, but God never asks us to do something without His help. And all things are possible with Him (Matthew 19:26). So don’t listen to the lie that it is just too hard. You can do it because God is with you and He will love others through you. Even the prickly ones.

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

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Consumed - Part 2

By Todd Abraham  
Athens, Tennessee



In case you missed part one of this from Todd’s Techy Tips, you can find it in our July 2023 issue which is also marked as the 7th issue of 2023. We don’t date Heartbeat Christian News because we don’t print time-sensitive articles as a rule. Plus, the word of God, rightly divided, never gets old or outdated. I’m just a vessel the Lord chose to do this newspaper but I still am blessed every time I read an issue of this newspaper regardless of how old it is.

On to the sequel! Smartphones are completely addictive as we have pointed out many times here and the #1 idol in the world in developed countries. I wrote a poem called “I Can Carry My Idol Wherever I Go” which is what makes smartphones even more dangerous spiritually. I’m guessing probably 7 out of every 10 drivers I observe are on their phones whether they are driving or stopped at a light. A lady in a full-sized truck in the Walmart parking lot yesterday was just sitting there totally preoccupied with her phone behind the wheel when she should’ve been turning right or left. Thank God no one was behind her. As we pointed out in the first installment of ‘Consumed’, these wicked little devices have almost every owner of them encapsulated from the time they open their eyes until they close them at night. Which is idolatry; plain and simple.

But what the Lord showed me after we printed the July issue was that is still not enough for many. As if they weren’t connected enough, they had to go one step further and get a smartwatch LOL. I will remind you, in case you haven’t heard, that it is easy to go to hell. If you don’t keep a constant, daily vigilant watch spiritually in prayer, the word of God, and fellowship with the body of Christ friend, you ain’t gonna make it. And God isn’t going to make any exceptions for you. God doesn’t do favoritism. So consider the following. Smartphones, smartwatches, and those personal digital home assistants like Alexa are like a bird in a digital cage. The funny thing is though that the devil knows exactly how powerful these things are in helping his agenda. In fact, he must be dancing in glee feeling like he has finally found his jackpot influence. Smartphones and smartwatches are like slot machines in a gambling addict’s pocket.

One of the greatest signs of their addictive power is that hardly any of you who read this will even pray about the power those dumb little devices have over you mentally and spiritually. Case closed right LOL. Point made! Many of you don’t even remember the peace of mind you enjoyed when smartphones didn’t exist. Who needs to be that connected?! The human mind/psyche isn’t even equipped to safely handle that kind of sensory overload. And like we have mentioned before in Todd’s Techy Tips, if your smartphone and smartwatch wasn’t enough to consume you, then how many times do you catch yourself sharing your content with your friends or vice versa? Do you want to go to hell? That is prerogative. God isn’t going to stop you. He isn’t going to give you some vision or warning in a dream or any other dumb carnal wonder to get your attention. He gave you this preacher writing this article who has enough boldness in the Holy Ghost to warn you and not hold back! And as I have written before, most preachers are as guilty as you are so they too are in danger of hellfire if they don’t repent. You can’t preach against what you do yourself without being a hypocrite. Like my dear friend told a young man one time who heard what he preached with a carnal ear told him. The young man said, “You can’t tell me what to do. I’ll go to hell if I want to.” To which my friend boldly replied, “Then go to hell, son.” God is a completely free-will God!

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

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***Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest. Luke 10:2***

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Far More Americans Believe in Angels than believe in Hell: Cafeteria Religion and The Joy of Living “Coram Deo”  
By Jim Denison



Nearly 70 percent of Americans believe in the existence of angels, according to a recent Associated Press-NORC survey. The same percentage believe in heaven, though even more (72 percent) believe in the power of prayer. (I wonder: If there’s no heaven, why pray to the God who lives there?)

However, only 58 percent believe in hell, and even fewer (56 percent) believe in the existence of the devil.

I can understand why we would favor this cafeteria-style religion. Most of us want to think our prayers are heard, angels exist to help us, and heaven is our future. Fewer want to worry about the alternatives.

But ignoring reality makes it no less real.

Is another “tripledemic” coming?

According to Axios, “existential threats to humanity are soaring.” The article cites climate change, artificial intelligence, and Russian and Chinese nuclear arsenals. Health experts are warning of another “tripledemic” of COVID, flu, and RSV this fall; the US Surgeon General has identified an “epidemic of loneliness and isolation” in our society.

We can tell ourselves that the Russians and Chinese are our friends, that AI and climate change pose no threats, and that viruses and loneliness are problems for other people. But those who downplay geopolitical enemies often make them worse (as British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain’s appeasement of Adolf Hitler tragically demonstrated). Ignoring technological, climate, and physical and mental health dangers only makes them more dangerous.

As C. S. Lewis noted in The Screwtape Letters, Satan wants us to discount his existence so he can act in a world that is ignorant of his devilish schemes. He especially wants us to reject the existence of hell so he can convince us that we do not need to be saved from it.

How can Christ's followers make a difference in a lost society that doesn’t believe it’s lost?

“The great problems call for many small solutions”

In Losing Our Religion: An Altar Call for Evangelical America, Russell Moore tells of the time poet and novelist Wendell Berry met with a group of environmental activists. He told them that the worst obstacle to their effort was the idea that their solutions should be as large-scale as the problem they were addressing. Instead, he said, “The great problems call for many small solutions.” This must start with the honesty to name things as they are, he explained, and the imagination to see that it doesn’t have to be this way. This is frustrating, he acknowledged: “Some will find it an insult to their sense of proportion, others to their sense of drama.”

Dr. Moore observes: “You cannot change the human condition, and you cannot change the technological or cultural ecosystem in which you live and move and have your being. But you can be changed. And you will need to be” (his emphasis).

Jeremiah would have agreed: “*I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps*” (Jeremiah 10:23). God agreed with his prophet: “*Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land*” (Jeremiah 17:5–6).

Is America “cursed” today?

By contrast, “*Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is in the LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit*” (vv. 7–8).

Is America “blessed” today?

The joy of living “coram Deo”

Now let’s get personal. Living in a secularized, post-Christian, even anti-Christian culture, why would you and I trust in God more than we do and in ourselves less than we do? The answer transcends the intellectual: we can believe that heaven, angels, hell, and the devil exist, but such rational assent changes nothing in our lives or our world.

As the Protestant Reformers noted, notitia (the content of our faith) must lead to assensus (believing our notitia is true), but this must then lead to fiducia (entrusting ourselves to the God who is Truth). No doubt, you have taken the first two steps.

Why do you need to take the third today?

Pause for a moment and ask your Father: “What part of my life is not fully yielded to your Spirit? What is my next act of fiducia?” Then ask him to help you take this step now. If you lack the faith to do so, pray for the faith to have faith (cf. Mark 9:24).

Life is best-lived coram Deo (“before the face of God”). Such holistic, joyful holiness changes us and changes our culture, one soul at a time.

Scooping the ocean with a thimble

The philosopher Peter Kreeft introduces his personal website with this story: “Augustine tells of a vision of seeing a little boy at a beach scooping up the ocean thimbleful by thimbleful and emptying it out on the sand. Then he sees an angel who tells him that this boy will have emptied out the entire ocean long before Augustine has exhausted what can be said about God.”

What was true of the greatest theologian after Paul is certainly true of you and me. But we can experience our omnipotent Lord in ways no words can capture. When last were you awed by God?

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



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Sleepless In September

By Steve Bietz  
Burke County

September is considered to be one of the most stressful months of the year. With summer coming to an end and summer vacations in the rearview mirror and adding to this the back-to-school pressures, well, it's daunting. We are told that September brings a whole lot of sleeplessness. With less sleep comes a long list of issues. One item on the list is our reaction time. Health specialists tell us that sleep is paramount to our reaction time. Less sleep means that we are more prone to injury because we react more slowly. We are told that teens in grades 7 - 12 when they sleep less than 8 hours a day, double their risk of injury because of reaction time.

Have you thought about God's reaction time? Certainly, the psalmist David gave it some thought. Again and again, we see David wondering why God was taking so long and not reacting faster to his problems. Is God sleeping? For example: *"How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?"* (Psalm 13:1) I recall Elijah, In 1 Kings 18, taunting the priests of Baal on Mt Carmel with claiming that they should yell louder to their god Baal because he may have been sleeping. We do not need to yell out our prayers so that we can wake up our God.

I am thankful for what the psalmist includes for us in Psalm 121:3 - 4. *"He who watches over you will not slumber; indeed, He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep."*

You and I may struggle to sleep in September and find ourselves nodding off from time to time...hopefully not while we are driving. But we have a Watchman who never dozes off. God is always on duty watching over us. His presence is constant. His protection is 24/7 for you and me. He is alert day and night and not even for one moment does He get sleepy. God is sleepless, yet this thought is not to cause us concern. Instead, we are to rejoice that our God never slumbers on duty and never sleeps, not even in September.

Steve Bietz, Pastor, Morganton Seventh day Adventist Church.



Learning And Using Your Spiritual Gift

By Christopher L. Scott  
Moses Lake, Washington

In a recent interview, NASCAR driver Jimmy Johnson revealed his “secret sauce” for his racing success. In his career when he won five straight NASCAR championships and later won two more which tied him with Richard Petty and Dale Earnhardt Sr. But Jimmy had a “secret sauce” that he and his crew chief followed that led to their success.

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.

As 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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POEM

For Brian Blankenship,  
A Heart Worth Remembering.

By Regina McIntosh  
Yancey County



*Stronger than I could imagine being,  
Reminding me that love isn't always agreeing –  
But it is fiercer than a roaring lion,  
Just like this man, we all called Brian*

*His light fell gentle among the shadows,  
Erasing the dark, embracing the One who rose –  
Silencing the fears with His own tender tears,  
He has a new life, now, meant for Jesus' heirs*

*Faithful to the One whom he always clung,  
He knew Him since he was so very young...  
Recognized the joy that comes to life inside,  
Grace that grows so certain it can't be denied*

*Everyone who knew Brian, knew He was a light,  
Reflecting Jesus' promises, His amazing insight –  
Into the spirit, the heart and the soul, the belief  
Comforting even the worst darkness, however brief*

*There isn't a soul who knew him on this earth  
Who wasn't touched by his kindness, He was worth –  
More than words can describe or explain away,  
He was more valuable than these verses can portray*

*Whatever happens, whatever sacrifices we make  
There is the certainty that God won't make a mistake –  
When it was time to go, Brian was undeniably ready,  
His relationship with Jesus had always been steady*

*Everyone down here will miss the preacher, the man,  
But everyone in heaven is singing praises, for the lineman –  
Who finally came to meet with the Savior of his soul,  
Jesus, who invites every heart to be made whole!*

*Yes, we'll miss him more than words could explain,  
But there is no doubting, he's with One who will reign –  
Forever, through eternity, with love wiping away every tear,  
Yes, we'll miss him – but I've convinced there is no need to fear!*

*He's with the Father now – He's with Jesus, the Savior and Son,  
He's experiencing glory, now and that will never be outdone –  
He's filled with joy now – joy forevermore, joy on the other shore,  
He's with the Father now – He's with the One who we'll forever adore!*

Country boy, country preacher, the country through and through – he helped my faith, my hope, my charity. He stirred my soul to listen to the spirit who is guiding me, the Holy Spirit, the light of my world. He reached beyond kind and gentle, caused my heart to smile, and kindled assurance within me – confidence in the One who made me, the One who saved me, the One who so amazes me. Pastor Brian, with his country heart, a heart who loved ginseng digging, hunting excursions, and any reason for journeying into the woods where he was most contented – will be missed. Blessed with a sincere smile and kind, a laugh that could encourage anyone to delight in the moments, an authenticity as a Christian that was heartwarming and convincing, assuring even the worst cynic that Jesus Christ is alive and well – interceding for those who pray with conviction that what they're believing for is something grace and faith will pursue. Brian was a Christian who didn't back down. He left listeners with words that would convince any doubter. He offered each hearer the gospel and, if lost, reminded them of the cost of doubting the One who went to the cross. He isn't gone – his love and kindness linger on and his light still shines bright in his heavenly home, where he's talking with Jesus, the only One who could have brought his soul from this world to eternity with God. I'm thankful that I knew Brian and I'm thankful that his light shined with true love. He will always be in my heart and all those hearts who remember him and smile – because there is no doubt of where he is at, and the fact that his smile is brighter, more exciting than it has ever been. Because I knew Brian, my friend – my brother, I know that his heart is celebrating in the presence of our Father! Yes, oh yes, I'll miss him and grieve for him. But, I'm absolutely certain that, one day soon, I'll see him again and we'll praise the Savior forever and ever in that promised land!

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>

The Orchard at Altapass

September At The Orchard At Altapass

By Kate Groff  
Mitchell County



It's fall at the Orchard at Altapass. Only two months remain in our season. Apples continue to ripen and provide opportunities for u-picking on guided experiences or purchasing by the bag at the Apple Shed. Trees are as full as the lineup in the Pavilion, and music takes center stage beginning on September 2nd with Possum Creek, followed by Skiffle Creek on the 3rd; 9th and 10th—Kuhne & McKinney and The Ruglifters respectively; 16th and 17th—The Scatterlings and Butterbeans; 23rd and 24th—Don Pedi and Randy Flack. On the 30th, welcome Greg Candel at 12:30 for an hour of rousing musical fun in 'Bunkum County'. And at month's end, The Ruglifters return to the pavilion stage. Add in the music jam every Thursday from 1-3:30, and the music lineup is complete for another month. Always welcome. Always free. Always on the pavilion. And dancing is always encouraged.

But that's just the music. Anticipated later in the month on Wednesday, the 27th, the Orchard welcomes the return of the Overmountain Victory Trail Association's evening presentation—a regional slice of history that is engaging, entertaining, and educational. More details to follow.

The month will be busy, aptly tasty, and fun with something for all ages. The music and dancing. The grill (open Wednesday-Sunday). The views (under conservancy, never to be developed). The games and activities (no batteries required). A "hayride" perhaps (weekends)? The camaraderie of friends, family, and just plain folks. And, of course, the apples, all heirlooms, all delicious (U-Pick and pre-bagged).

Located at 1025 Orchard Road near Spruce Pine at mile 328.3 on the Blue Ridge Parkway, the Orchard is a not-for-profit working small-batch apple orchard and educational venue. Hours are 10 to 5, Wednesday-Sunday. Family- and pet-friendly. Wheelchair accessible. Buses welcome. For information, please visit [www.altapassorchard.org](http://www.altapassorchard.org).

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



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following a list of rules. But that’s not what the Bible says at all. Instead, Jesus tells us to abide in Him to produce spiritual fruit.

When we truly have gentleness and faithfulness in our life, it pours into every moment, second, and hour. It’s shown in how we treat our spouses. It is displayed by how we parent our children. It’s the response we have to an upset neighbor or the way we interact with our coworkers. And faithfulness is loyalty to our Father in heaven and our promises—just like He is faithful to us. When we answer a person, we let our yes be yes and our no be no. We follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, and we are faithful to the commands and commission that Jesus told us, *“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”* (Matthew 28:16-20).

Lamentations 3 says that because of the Lord’s great love, we’re not consumed – His mercy is new every morning, and great is His faithfulness! The Lord is so gentle with us and faithful to us. Let’s be the same to our Lord and Savior and others by sharing the greatest gift we can with them: the Good News of what Jesus has done for us.

SELF-CONTROL

Finally, let’s talk about self-control! The Oxford Dictionary defines self-control as “the ability to control oneself, in particular one’s emotions and desires or the expression of them in one’s behavior, especially in difficult situations.” Wow. Talk about a tough part of our character to grow! But Jesus is our ultimate example—especially in this area. It reminds me of His time in the wilderness for forty days when Satan came to tempt Him. Jesus was starving and weak. It would have been easy to accept the enemies' promises of food, provision, and power. But the enemy was doing what He did best—imparting false promises. As discussed above, our great God is FAITHFUL and KEEPS His promises; and at that moment, Jesus depended on His Father and displayed enormous self-control. Jesus spoke the Word of God right back to Satan: “It is written: *‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’*” (Matthew 4:4). There are two key ways to grow self-control in our own lives. The first is to depend on Scripture. It’s like the psalmist so beautifully wrote to God: *“I have hidden Your Word in my heart that I might not sin against You.”* We can walk in the footsteps of our Savior and use the Bible to defeat the enemy’s temptations in our life. Secondly, we can rely on God through prayer. When our first reaction to temptation and sin is to run to God and seek Him, He will answer. He will help us through. As Peter wrote in 1 Peter 5, *“Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.”* God is our Rock and our Salvation. What then shall we fear? And through our self-control, we can show others the power of Jesus in our lives. We can share how God delivers us day-to-day as vulnerable and real testimonies to our friends and power. In our weakness, we can show Jesus’ strength and the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

So let’s get growing! Let us cultivate the Fruit of the Spirit in our own life and outpour what Jesus is doing by reaching out to others. And may God richly bless you as you prioritize this in your life.

*Rev. John B. Sorensen, D.D. is the President/CEO of Evangelism Explosion International, headquartered in Arden, N.C. EE has been a leader in equipping Christians to share their faith for more than 50 years. For more free tips and resources, visit evangelismexplosion.org.*

*And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. Revelation 14:15*

Dive In!

By Kurt Bomar  
Avery County



We’ve all done it. We’ve waded into a chilly pool or stream on a hot day in anticipation of refreshment. But then our toes hit the cold water and we think, “Do I really want to do this?” Little by little we continue to question our total commitment as we slowly wade in (all the while looking over our shoulder to make sure someone doesn’t splash us or push us in.). Finally, we realize the torture of the slow approach is too much to bear and we make the full plunge. Then we think, “Why didn’t I do that from the beginning, this feels great!”

There’s a story in the Bible that reminds me of this summertime ritual in Ezekiel 47. There Ezekiel is led to the waters flowing from the Temple. First, he stepped in up to his ankles, then downstream a bit he steps in up to his knees, further down he goes in up to his waist and finally the water is over his head.

Don’t miss the picture here. The Spirit of the Lord is always inviting us to step into the waters (water in Scripture often is a picture of the Holy Spirit).

Some of us will wade in up to our ankles and be content to stay there. That is, we are standing in Christ and believing in him.

Others choose to go deeper, up to their knees. Our knees are a picture of prayer, we fall on them and pray for others.

Others go deeper yet, up to their waist. Our waist is a picture of the reproductive part of our body, these people share their faith and reproduce other Christians by actively witnessing to a lost world.

And finally, others just take the plunge allowing the Lord to have His will over their lives, totally surrendering to Him day by day and hour by hour.

Each level of commitment brings with it a level of refreshment, but as we have all learned at the pool, the greatest refreshment comes when we make a total commitment.

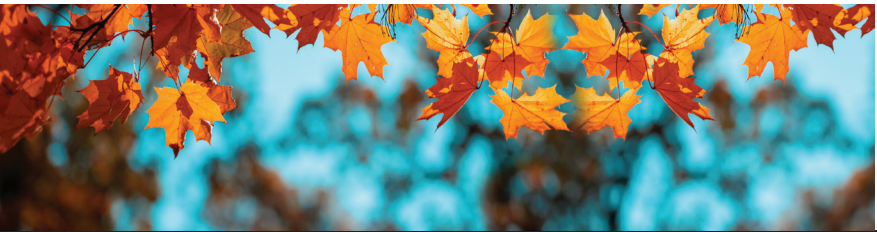
Where are you in your level of commitment? Are you a solid believer, not being tossed to and fro in your faith? Do you have a daily pattern of prayer for others? Is it a priority for you to share your faith? Have you placed the Lord on the throne of your life giving Him free reign to rule over your every decision?

Here’s the special part. Jesus invites us to go all out for Him and he promises a level of refreshment that can only be maximized by taking the full plunge. But at the same time, He is the perfect gentleman, He will invite, but He will not force. It’s up to us.

My suggestion? Dive in, take the plunge!  
Selah (think about it)



Kurt Bomar is pastor of Walnut Grove Church.



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# Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

## Faithful in the Little Things, Faithful in Much

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

Jesus told many parables during His public ministry. Most were easy to understand because the Lord used simple stories about well know things, issues, or objects to illustrate moral, ethical, or spiritual lessons. They were usually very effective in exposing sinful human choices and behavior and speaking and revealing the truth about Kingdom principles. This allowed Christ Jesus to engage and connect with listeners and teach eternal truths. There were a few of His parables that were, however, difficult and confusing to understand by both the disciples and those who were also listening. One of those was the “parable of the unjust servant” found in Luke 16:1-17. Immediately after Jesus told the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15), He followed that simple parable with a more complex story that is both complicated and confusing.

In the “parable of the unjust servant,” a rich man is told that one of his stewards, a man who had been hired to manage or oversee the owner’s property or business, has been wasting his money. The owner summons the manager to fire him. He has made up his mind. He needed managers/stewards whom he could trust completely. And this man had proven himself untrustworthy. When the steward stands before the owner and learns of his fate, he begins moaning and groaning about not being able to get work anywhere else. “I’m not strong enough to dig and I am ashamed to beg,” admits the steward. Unmoved by the excuses, the rich man fires him. But before the steward packs up and leaves, he shrewdly calls in some of the rich man’s debtors and offers them huge discounts on their debts. Owe 600 gallons of oil, take your bill and quickly write down 300. Owe 70 bushels of wheat, write down 40. Upon learning of what the steward has done, the rich man actually praised and commended him for his shrewd and clever move. He has succeeded in “one-upping” the master. Although it didn’t save his job, it appears that this sharp-witted and clever former steward had gotten the last laugh.

Jesus uses this story and the characters in this parable to illustrate how shrewd and self-centered the workings of the unrighteous are. Jesus is not commending the actions of the steward. Rather, the Lord Jesus is driving home a point about the hearts of those who do not seek after the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. He is pointing out and contrasting the way the world approaches money and riches with the way God wants His followers and disciples to use the resources that He has so richly given them.

Notice that every one of the characters in the story is unjust and unrighteous. They are corrupt and dishonest and know how to get what they want. Jesus knew that the Pharisees were listening as He told this parable to His disciples. And He wanted to lay down two important spiritual principles about true, genuine, and God-centered faithfulness and service.

The first lesson (found in verse 10) has to do with how believers faithfully deal with the resources that God has given. Jesus said, “*He who is faithful in a very little thing is faithful also in much; and he who is unrighteous in a very little thing is unrighteous also in much.*” The lesson for those who trust in the Lord and live their lives surrendered to and under His Lordship and ownership is: We are to faithfully sow into the Kingdom rather than into the world. Wisdom, discernment, honesty, and integrity are required if we are to be entrusted with the eternal and spiritual things of God.

The second lesson (found in verse 13 speaks about sincere and undivided service to the Lord. Jesus declared, “*No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.*” The lesson for those who desire to really make a spiritual impact in this dark, evil world is: We cannot serve God and ourselves at the same time!

As Joshua gathered the people of Israel at Shechem and demanded that they present themselves before God, he said (Joshua 24:14-15), “*Now, therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*” This is the same message that Christ Jesus has for every one of us. Choose for yourself today whom you will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Let that be your confession and declaration today!

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



# God Will Help

By Tammy Hopson  
Mitchell County



“Mom, I can’t find my other shoe!” cried my little girl at the top of her lungs. Another frantic Sunday morning had well begun. I panickily searched under beds, inside closets, between couch cushions, and in toy boxes to find the missing shoe. Noticing my oldest daughter was still in the bathroom, I shouted to her that she needed to hurry. I walked past my middle daughter in the hall. Trying not to sound irritable I said to her “Please go outside and find your brother.” I continued my search for the same shoe that seemed to disappear every single Sunday. Suddenly a mud-caked boy came blasting in the back door. “I fell off my bike!!!” he shouted and then with one look at his mother’s face, he marched off to his room to change clothes before a far worse fate came upon him. ”I FOUND IT!!!” shrieked my little girl as she held the shoe high up in the sky as if she were proclaiming a great victory. “Put it on” I ordered sternly as I scooped up the baby and the diaper bag and headed towards the car. I let off one last shout through the house “It’s time to go! We will be late!” A quick fastening of the car seat and several honks later I finally had all five of my little children in the car and headed to church. Breathing a sigh of relief and accepting that we were going to be late (again) I glanced into the rearview mirror at their little faces. Some of them still needed a little cleaning and there was still hair that needed brushing, but a few crooked ponytails and dirt-stained cheeks were not going to keep us from church.

During those years, getting my young family to church was hard enough but then one day I read this scripture in Deuteronomy 6:6-7(NAS) “*These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. And you shall repeat them diligently to your sons and speak of them when you sit in your house, when you walk on the road, when you lie down, and when you get up*” I remember feeling so overwhelmed by that verse. Does God really want me and my children to talk about Him all of the time? I could hardly get shoes on their feet or keep them out of the mud long enough to get them to church on time, how in the world was I going to fulfill this scripture in their lives? It seemed so hard and all I could do was ask God for help.

Through the years the words of my Pastor kept echoing in my heart “.... you need to have those kids in church every chance you get”. Somehow we kept making it to church. We still had the same frantic mornings and unexpected hurdles week after week and none of us arrived looking perfect but we went almost every Sunday.

One particular evening we were coming back from service. My children were in their teens. In the car with us was our neighbor boy. I could hear the kids talking to him in the back seat. He was asking questions about the sermon and they were answering and explaining it to him. The rest of the ride home they all talked about God and His love. As I pulled into the driveway that night the Lord reminded me of the scripture in Deuteronomy. Then He nudged my heart “You’re doing it.” The command in that verse was happening! Then I recalled all of the years we had traveled to church as a family. We had been doing the same thing! We had spent a lot of the ride talking about church, scriptures, lessons, and God. But it didn’t happen just because I required it. I did not force us to talk about God. All of those years, God was doing something too. He was writing His Words on their hearts. Through those church services my children fell in love with God and they could not help but share that love with others. All I did was simply ask God for help. To this day God is still fulfilling that scripture in their lives as they take their own families to church. I know they have the same frantic moments with lost shoes and messy faces. But I continue to tell them to “...have those kids in church every chance you get” and when it all seems too hard just ask and God will help.

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

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Goodness of God

By Terry Cheek  
McDowell County

Romans 2:4 “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?”

From chapter two verses one through three the Bible asks if we who commit sin and point out the sin of others do so thinking we will avoid judgment. We know that we cannot avoid judgment. Why would we want to be so hypocritical about it? We pick up this article with verse four which asks if we despise the riches of God. Specifically, goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering. The goodness of God speaks of his many attributes, some of which are virtue, purity, and grace. God accepts the repentance of his children as an act of grace and mercy brought about through his purity and virtue. Then there is forbearance which is God's restraint from giving us justice instead of mercy. Again speaking to the child of God. When we rebel or become judgmental we risk bearing the wrath of God. Who are we to condemn someone when we are nothing more than redeemed individuals by God's saving grace? Finally, there is longsuffering. Which is God patiently enduring the faults and failures of those saved by grace through faith in Christ. It is easy for us to forget where we came from after years of faithfully following God through Jesus Christ. The Christian is reminded of where they came from. I am reminded of being told as an adolescent and young adult to not get above my raising. We should always remember in the lives of every born-again believer, those who are walking closely and at a distance, that God's goodness will lead us all to repentance.

Romans 2:5-11 “But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: For there is no respect of persons with God.”

Our Bible describes a person with a hard and impenitent heart as someone who is calloused against God and does not have any sorrow for their actions or behavior. This can be a religious person who has spent their entire life in church attendance and service. Or it can be someone who has never darkened the door of a church. God is not speaking to the act of an outward appearance. He is speaking to the condition of their heart. The Pharisees looked good but many if not most of them had a hard and impenitent heart. That is why they refused to accept Jesus and their Messiah. We are told specifically that these people have a revelation of the righteous judgment of God. Revelation is the revealing of secrets and them becoming known. Each one of us will have the secrets of our hearts revealed by God's righteousness and sovereignty. Those who seek the glory of God, his honor, and eternal life. And, those who are contentious, obeying unrighteousness, indignation, and wrath. The Westminster shorter catechism offers this. “What is the chief end of man? A: Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” 1 Corinthians 10:31: “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” How often do we seek to glorify ourselves or others? We can stand with some of the mightiest men preaching and teaching the Bible but if we do not stand to glorify God we are failing him. Finally, we are told God is no respecter of persons. Our family name, finances, influence, years of church membership, or the people who know us do not impress God. Only the purpose held in our hearts. Until we meet again in person or print may God bless you is my prayer Nelson, Thomas. KJV Study Bible, eBook. Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.

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



What Seeds are Dropping from Your Leaky Seed Basket?

By Carol Wallace  
Kingsport, Tennessee



My Mom is 90 years young, and though not physically able to plant and tend a large vegetable garden, she planted a row of beans in her flower garden this year. She is not even a great fan of green beans but enjoys preparing and sharing them with others. In recent years, her canning schedule included 70 to 100 plus quarts of green beans! Working the soil and reaping the fruits of her labor gives her joy. The family jokes that Mom could put a stick in the mud, and it would grow. She has always been quick to give the Lord credit for the fruitfulness of her garden.

Memories of the gardens of my youth had endless rows of vegetables always needing tending. Much of my summertime growing up, as the oldest of five, was spent gathering and working the vegetables in Mom's garden; breaking beans, shucking corn, pepper, okra, onions, tomatoes, and other veggies Mom grew to feed a hungry family. A friend visiting from South Carolina once ask, “Why are your potatoes so dirty?” She was a city girl and had never seen freshly dug potatoes! A row of beautiful flowers in the garden was an added delight and helped deter insects and encourage pollination.

If you planted vegetable seeds this past spring, the fresh food of your garden is probably coming to an end, weeds are plentiful and ready to be cleared and tossed by the wayside. Fall is around the corner, and harvest is drawing nigh. Perhaps you have preserved the fruits of your labor for enjoyment this winter, or perhaps you have a friend that will share some dirty potatoes and green tomatoes!

A couple of years ago, I was privileged to attend a Bible Study, Pullin’ Weeds Plantin’ Seeds, Maintaining Your Spiritual Life, by Crystal L Ratcliff. This study often comes to mind when I read in God's Word the parable of the sower. This parable is recorded in three of the four Gospels, which would emphasize the importance of the lesson concerning the condition of the heart when the seed of God's Word is planted. Matthew 13; Mark 4; Luke 8.

- Seeds planted by the wayside serve as feed for the birds, quickly snatched up and gone. Consider the hard, packed earth on a well-used path. God's Word is heard but there is never any belief; the heart is hard.
- Seeds planted in rocky ground sprout quickly but develop no roots and soon die. Mom would say “That ground is slate rock, and nothing will grow.” God's Word is heard but there is no root to sustain it; the heart is shallow.
- Seeds planted among the thorns are soon choked out. Have you pulled sticker weeds in your garden that have roots as long as your arm? Plants would soon be consumed. God's Word is heard but worldly activities consume the heart, and the things of God are choked out; the heart is crowded.
- Only seeds planted in the good soil that has been softened and tended by the work of the gardener sprout, develop roots, grow, mature, and produce fruit. When God's Word is planted in a receptive heart, eager to learn, grow and serve, as it is guided by the Spirit and encouraged by others, the heart is fruitful.

So, are our hearts hard, shallow, crowded, or fruitful? Perhaps, at times, we may have experienced all these heart conditions, but the good soil of our hearts should be eager for the latter. A fruitful heart is always pulling away weeds of life that seek to choke and crowd out God's Word and continue planting seeds of His love along the journey. Never perfect but continually striving to overcome the weeds and produce fruit.

As we work and cultivate our vegetable garden, it is a gentle reminder of cultivating our hearts to receive and share God's word. Our lives are a leaky seed basket. Do we drop seeds of love, friendship, encouragement, trust, listening, kindness, helpfulness, forgiveness, humility, and other attributes of a fruitful heart? These seeds have the opportunity to fall on receptive hearts and reflect God's love. Is the opposite true in that our leaky basket drops weeds in the form of bitterness, worldliness, fear, selfishness, pride, and other attributes of a barren heart? Questions to ponder as we travel this journey. God looks upon the heart; is it fruitful or barren?

May your heart basket be filled with fruitful seeds and dead weeds and may you reap the harvest of a bountiful garden in God's love. Happy weedin’!

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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# Sept. 9-11 Set As “Project Leader Workshop 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 week-end 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](http://samaritanspurse.org/occ).

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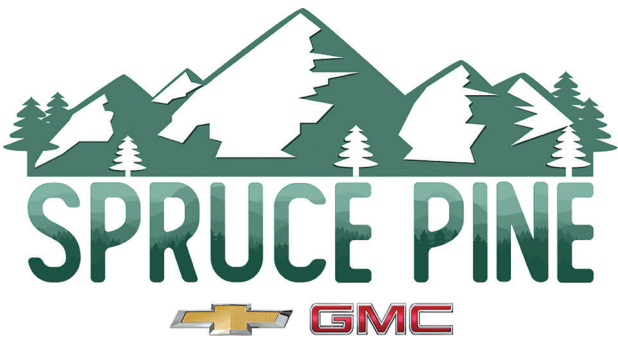


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# Berry Chapel Baptist Church

## Trusting God In Hard Times

By Steve Williams  
Mitchell County



I have found out that Hard Times is a part of life. Just as the good times, happy times, and joyous times of life are part of life, so are the difficult, hard, and dark times. The life of Jesus is an example of this. He had a remarkable season of ministry, and many people were healed and restored. But the true value of His coming to earth is found in the difficult and hard times He faced, the false accusations, the cruel punishment, and the death that He endured giving us the hope and faith we have. The truth of that matter is that no one is exempt from troubles and challenges in life. Although when we are facing hard times, it may appear as if everyone else is doing just fine, this is not the case. Friends, we do not know what our fellow man is facing. The Bible speaks about ‘when trouble comes’ not ‘if trouble comes’. The Bible says in Nahum 1:7 “*The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.*” The wonderful thing that we can know during hard times is that the Lord is with us. He has not abandoned us and He offers us Himself as a refuge while passing through the valley.

Sometimes we can look at the hardship we are facing as something we may have done wrong. Although wrong-doing has its consequences, but times of difficulty are not necessarily the result. As Christians, we may believe that we have moved out of darkness and into light when we are saved and this is true. But the hard times of life are still something we will face. It is possible to do all the right things and still go through hard times. I am reminded of Jesus’ disciples. He sent them by boat across the sea and en route to their destination. They faced a storm. They were actually in the perfect will of God and yet faced this major challenge. This should show all of us that even amid a storm if you are in the will of God that is the safest place to be.

Let me share with you some Good news about hard times, Hard Times Will Pass. When we go through hard times, it can feel like trouble is all we have known our entire lives. It may even feel like it will never end. I remember when my mother had a bad experience with a routine procedure. Doctors punched holes in her esophagus and lungs and she had to have many operations to try to repair the problem. Then she fell to Alzheimer’s and many other health problems. She was sick for several years before the Lord called her home. Those years felt like an eternity. But even within those hard times, there were moments of joy and delight with some precious memories. There would be times that she didn’t know who I was but I could ask her to pray for me. I would lay my head in her lap and she would place her hands on my head and whisper a prayer for me. When she would recognize who I was when I walked into her room and had a big smile on her face, that would just melt my heart. I remember the last months and days of her life it was back and forth from the hospital. Then came the time that she drew that last breath and it was bittersweet. She was gone and it hurt, but she was in Heaven and that was great because she had finished her journey. The Bible says in Psalm 50:15 “*And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.*”

See every hardship we encounter, every trial we have to face, and every battle that we find ourselves in, has its own Expiration Date on it. So please understand Hard Times Will Pass.

### Words of Wisdom:

- People need hard times and opposition to develop their spiritual relationship with Christ. N/A
- Hard times don't create heroes. It is during the hard times when the 'hero' within us is revealed. N/A
- Even the securest financial plan and the finest health coverage aren't enough to hold us steady when the challenges come... We need something more, something deeper and unshakeable, something that will see us through life's hard times. Billy Graham
- The most important thing is that sometimes you have to go through hard times to get to the good stuff. N/A
- During hard times don't trust your emotions. N/A

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



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How To Handle An Attack

By John McCoury  
Roan Mountain, Tennessee

He ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, “*What are those feeble Jews doing?*” Nehemiah 4:1b-2a Most of us have had experience with what is called Murphy's Law, the idea that if anything can go wrong, it will. There are many applications for it. For instance, if you try to fix something, Murphy's Law says it will take longer than you anticipated; it will cost more than you expected; it will break down before it is paid for; and someone will not like it when it is done! We have come to such a circumstance in chapter 4 of the book of Nehemiah. Here Nehemiah faces severe and violent opposition to his work of rebuilding the walls and gates of Jerusalem. The opposition takes off its gloves, and the real battle begins. We, like Nehemiah, have an enemy who opposes us with craftiness and power. Against every effort on our part to get our lives together and recover from damage, hurt, and ruin, we will experience opposition from the enemy. Almost invariably his first attempt to halt such recovery is to discourage us through ridicule, derision, or rejection. Hear the scorn, derision, and sarcasm in those comments! Many of us, perhaps, have experienced this kind of attack. I know personally of people who are unwilling to do what is right because they fear their friends will laugh at them or mock them. I know a man who is unable to stop drinking because his drinking friends make fun of him. Yet drink is destroying his life. I know of others who are hooked on drugs, but they do not want to stop because they are afraid they will be laughed at. These are the powerful weapons the enemy employs here. Most of us have had some experience with this weapon of ridicule and mockery that the enemy employs here. Perhaps you have had someone say to you when you are trying to stop something wrong, Who do you think you are, anyhow? Do you think you are better than us? Or perhaps someone says, You've made a good start, but you won't hold out. You won't last. Nehemiah regards this attack as an insult against God Himself. Note that he does not argue back nor does he retaliate. He does not blister these men with an angry rebuttal. He simply responds by praying. It reminds us of Peter's words about Jesus: When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats (1 Peter 2:23). This is a helpful picture of how to handle that kind of attack. Dear Father, strengthen us to do what is right regardless of the ridicule I receive and help us to respond to that ridicule in prayer and faith.

How do we respond when we are ridiculed or scorned? What is a better way to respond than in fear, anger, hurt, or defense?

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



The Answer

By Billy Graham



Q: It is said that Christians make up the body of Christ and are to be like Him. How is this possible seeing that we are still in the flesh?

A: From the writings of the Rev. Billy Graham  
Jesus prayed to His Father for those who would belong to Him, “that they may be one just as We are one” (John 17:22).

God’s will is for us to become more and more like Christ. It is that simple—and also that complex. We have all heard people say, “You look just like your mother!” or “You look just like your brother!” They saw a family resemblance.

Grandparents often spend hours trying to decide whom a newborn baby resembles in the family (usually with little success!). Some may have seen married couples who looked more and more like each other as the years went by.

In a far deeper way, God’s will is that we would bear a family resemblance to His Son. In other words, God’s plan is for us to become more and more like Jesus—not physically, of course, but in the way we think and act, and treat other people. Do others see something of Christ in our lives?

The Bible says, “*His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue*” (2 Peter 1:3). It pleases the Lord when we make it our goal [by the power of the Holy Spirit] to become more like Christ; pursuing that which is pure and good in the sight of God.

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

Are you at peace with God? Pray now.



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Kaleidoscope Of Another Kind

By Ken and Jan Merop  
Cleveland, Tennessee



Riding along in the car enjoying the bright, sunny morning, a reflection caught my eye. I tried to find it in that exact spot but as I moved my head, it disappeared. However, it had only moved.

Momentarily, it was on the dashboard only quickly to appear on the door. On it went for a couple of minutes as I tried to discern the movement, colors, and shape I was seeing.

For a bit, it remained a mystery.

Sometime before these little bursts of brightness started dancing before my eyes in the car, I had purchased a necklace. It has a bright silver chain with a heart-shaped, locket-type glass face that opens to receive a memento.

I placed in the heart locket a lone charm of a simple flower with different colored stones in each petal.

You guessed it!

That day in the car, I was wearing the necklace. As we drove along the curvy roads, the sun reflected off the silver necklace and colorful stones creating a kaleidoscope that continually gave me a new perspective in a heart shape.

Take this thought further with me, please.

In Psalm 145 we read of many of God's attributes. When I have been asked to speak about one characteristic of God that stands out to me, I immediately say, His faithfulness.

I can recall so many ways in my life that I have experienced his faithfulness to me. Yet, even that one word only touches on what that really means.

As I read through Psalm 145, I discovered more about his greatness, power, splendor, miracles, goodness, mercy, and compassion. On and on it goes.

In other words, God's faithfulness is like that dancing jewel of colors and brightness that kept surprising me with its many reflective appearances. Only far more impressive and expansive than I can hope to imagine from the very heart of God.

In Ephesians 3: 20 NKJV we read, "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

If in His faithfulness He shines mercy upon me, I can't even fathom the intricate facets inhabited in the depth of his mercy. The same applies to each one of His abundant characteristics.

So, when He visits you through one of his many attributes, remember even that one is like a kaleidoscope of precious jewels brightening your life. Selah

*A Singular Heart*

*A heart singularly focused on God  
opens itself to His abundant love  
that flows freely to others.*

*Sometimes that heart bleeds with the one loved.  
Other times it rejoices with exuberance.*

*And, still, there are times when it quietly embraces.  
We are designed to have a singular heart for God...  
the One who embodies love.*

*"God is love, and all who live in love live in God,  
and God lives in them."  
1 John 4: 16b*



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



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# Landis Presbyterian

## Pastor Serafini Arrives at Landis Presbyterian in Year 100

By Michael Cloy  
McDowell County

Pastor Johnny and his wife, Berry Serafini, arrived in early August 2023 to begin his ministry at Landis Orthodox Presbyterian Church as the Landis Presbyterian celebrates its 100 years of ministry to Marion and McDowell County. The Serafini family is composed of eleven children. They are Johnny, Jr., Markie, Harley, Angela, Eslie, Anna, Luke, Katie, Levi, Evelyn, and Madeline. Johnny's ministerial journey began when Johnny's parents enrolled him in a Christian American school in São Paulo, Brazil. Johnny came to know the Lord through this school's Christian teachers, Bible classes, and Friday assembly meetings that often featured the preached Word of God.

After earning a degree in Agricultural Engineering, Johnny went to work with an evangelistic mission in the city of São José dos Campos as part of a Reformed Baptist congregation from 1989 to 1990. In 1991 he continued his education by attending Clemson University, earning a Master's degree in 1993. Returning to Brazil, Johnny served as Youth Director at Grace Baptist Church, São José dos Campos, Brazil, from 1993-1995.

In November 1995, Berry and Johnny were married. Berry is the daughter of Mr. Harley and Mrs. Margaret Davis. Harley is from Alabama, and Margaret is from Morganton, NC. The Davis family has conducted an agricultural ministry in the Amazon Basin over the last sixty years. Berry, therefore, grew up in the North Brazilian Amazon Basin, assisting with the missionary work started by her grandfather and continued by her father and mother today.

In 1995 Johnny became the Pastor of Grace Baptist Church, São José dos Campos, Brazil, where he served until 1997. After ministering in São José dos Campos, Johnny's father-in-law, Mr. Harley Davis, invited Johnny to help him in his ministry as an evangelist while Johnny considered seminary studies. Johnny and Berry moved from the city to the jungle, where they lived for eight years.

Johnny and Berry moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 2005, where Johnny enrolled at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary. Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary trains men in preaching practical theology. Practical theology preaching is a head, heart, and hands means of hearing God's word. The hearer of God's word is led by the Holy Spirit to think about the truth of scripture and embrace the meaning of scripture with their heart so they can apply it to how they live. Johnny graduated from PRTS in 2009 with a Master's in Divinity and was called to be the Pastor at Heritage Reformed Congregation Church in Kinnelon, NJ, serving until July 2023.

The Presbytery of the Southeast of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church will conduct an installation service for Pastor Johnny Serafini on Friday, September 15, 2023, at First Presbyterian Church in Marion. One hundred years ago, Landis Presbyterian Church became a mission work of the First Presbyterian Church of Marion under the leadership of Dr. Rev. James C. Story, so it is fitting that Landis conduct the installation service at Landis's mother church.

You can learn more about Landis OPC at [landisopc.org](http://landisopc.org). Please consider joining us for worship and help us welcome the Serafini family to Marion. Our address is 4975 North US-221, Marion, NC 28752.

Mike Cloy is an Ordained Ruling Elder on the Session of Landis, OPC. You can contact him at [opcsmikecloy@gmail.com](mailto:opcsmikecloy@gmail.com)





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SBC Sunday School Lesson Provided Great Opportunity to Address Neglected Topic

By Rev. Mark Creech

My wife, Kim, and I attend a small Baptist Church in the metropolis of Eureka, North Carolina. I’m being facetious about Eureka’s size because actually, it’s a town in Wayne County with a population of about 200. Our pastor is stupendous and the congregation of Mount Nelson Baptist Church are some of the sweetest and most faithful saints I’ve ever known. We drive 30 minutes from our home in Smithfield to be with them.

Because of my speaking schedule, I am not in attendance most of the time. However, I committed to teaching Sunday School at Mount Nelson every Fifth Sunday. I look forward to it with great anticipation, and the members of the Sunday School class always indicate they are very eager to hear me explain God’s Word to them.

Last Sunday, it was my day to teach and the passage was from Jeremiah 35: 4-19. Southern Baptist Sunday School literature titled the lesson, Worthy.

The primary point of the lesson was that God commended the faithfulness of the Recabite clan as an example for the wayward people of Judah. Despite being commanded by their ancestor Jonadab to never drink wine or build houses, the Recabites faithfully adhered to these instructions for generations (approximately 300 years). God contrasts their obedience with the disobedience of Judah, emphasizing the value of the Recabites’ faithfulness and promising them a continuing presence before him.

As I shared with the class, I explained that I thought it providential that this particular lesson had fallen to me. As the executive director of the Christian Action League, I have addressed the subject of alcohol for 23 years and have encouraged followers of Christ to abstain.

I acknowledge the complexity of the subject and admonished the class that if people want to understand the topic from a sound Christian worldview, they’ll have to do more than accept cursory arguments in favor of drinking, such as: “Well didn’t Jesus turn the water into wine.” Or, “The Bible doesn’t forbid drinking but only condemns getting drunk.” Such a shallow understanding is indicative of failing to dig deep enough to discover what the Bible actually says.

I qualified my remarks by arguing that I understood the primary point of the text had little to do with alcohol. But because there has been a significant decline in abstinence among evangelicals in recent years, Jeremiah 35, and its story about the Recabites’ vow not to drink wine, provides a great opportunity to revisit the subject of alcohol use. Something that must not escape our notice is God’s endorsement of the Recabites’ decision to follow abstinence.

It is my prayer that you will find this Sunday School lesson of help to you and your family.

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

And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. John 4:36



William Paca

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.

William Paca (pronounced “Pay-Ka”) was born October 31, 1740, in Abingdon, Maryland. William’s earlier education was by his parents and tutors in his home, studying science and the classics. By 1762, Paca had earned his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the College of Philadelphia, now the University of Pennsylvania. Next, William became an attorney after reading law with Stephen Bordley and studying law at Middle Temple Hall in London.

While practicing law, William and Samuel Chase formed an enduring friendship, even though they were ardent adversaries in the courtroom. Paca and Chase became formidable patriots as they railed against the royal (British loyal) governor regarding taxes. Unlike Chase, who gave spirited public speeches, Paca inspired people by writing compelling newspaper articles for independence. Paca and Chase formed the Annapolis Sons of Liberty as the relationship between the colonies and England deteriorated.

Paca became an influential patriot serving as a delegate from Maryland to the First and Second Continental Congresses. At first, Maryland was hesitant to allow him to support independence. While waiting in Philadelphia for a decision from Annapolis, Paca received authorization to vote for independence. Paca and Chase signed the Declaration of Independence next to each other. They proudly signed “immediately under the bold and famous flourish of John Hancock.”

In 1787, Paca, like others, was disappointed in the new United States Constitution because it did not embrace fundamental human rights. William suggested covering freedoms of religion and the press and seeking “legal protections for citizens accused of crimes.” Paca continued his patriotic contributions in many ways. Two respects were to help frame the Maryland constitution and serve as a Maryland state senator.

Like others during the Revolutionary War era, Paca did not realize the impact of not stopping slavery. However, he was an altruistic and patriotic soldier serving in the militia and enthusiastically supported benefits for veterans. During his lifetime, he held numerous crucial positions: State senator, superior and appellate court judge, United States district court judge, and governor of Maryland. Other undertakings that Paca pursued and accomplished were supporting the separation of church and state, and helping draft Maryland’s state constitution. William also assisted in establishing Washington College in Chestertown, MD, in 1782.

Having witnessed success and disappointment, William Paca died in the mansion on his Wye plantation just before his 59th birthday on October 13, 1799. At his death, William was lonely and depressed. However, he was described “as a man beloved and respected by all who knew him—considered at all times as a sincere and honest man.”

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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](mailto: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.

Sudoku

Solution on page 14

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5 |   | 6 |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|   |   |   | 3 |   |   |   | 4 |   |
| 9 | 1 | 4 |   | 7 |   |   | 2 |   |
| 2 | 4 |   |   | 9 | 3 |   |   |   |
| 8 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   | 1 |
|   |   |   | 2 | 8 |   |   | 3 | 4 |
|   | 2 |   |   | 6 |   | 3 | 8 | 9 |
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A Three Day’s Walk

By Tim Tron  
Burke County



Driving up the mountain the other morning, I prayed that God would speak to me, giving me the words to follow for the day. No more had the prayer been finished than the words, "Walk with Me," came. About this time, after my car broke through the clouds that sheltered my home down below - the most brilliant sunrise beckoned. It was one of those moments when you felt the Lord speaking to you through his creation. The scripture in Psalm 91 seemed to fit, *"He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say[a] to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."* As my thoughts pondered the "Walk with Me" command, my car notified me of an incoming message. One of my young brothers in Christ, Joe, asked if I was going to go to the Local Lion for coffee. Now, earlier, I had contemplated what to do with the morning - to get coffee before work, to sleep in, or eat breakfast and then go straight to the office. It wasn't until after the answer to my prayer did the images and messages began to roll in, so of course, I responded, "I'm on my way."

There, sitting on the porch of the Local Lion with Joe, we talked about "Walking" in scripture and what it could mean. Joe immediately brought up the three days that Abraham walked to sacrifice Isaac as God had commanded. Imagine walking with your son, who doesn't really know your intentions, that you are about to offer him to God as a living sacrifice. We pondered over the scripture in Genesis, thinking about the correlation to Christ's sacrifice on the cross. For most, if not all of us, giving up our only son would be extremely difficult, if not impossible. But Abraham was not your typical father. In Genesis 17, God spoke to him, saying, *"I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."*

So, for argument's sake, let's take a walk with Abraham.

[Day 1]

Abraham rose early, long before sunrise, preparing for their journey. Meanwhile, Isaac slept in. And why not? He was a teenager after all. Yet, before the sun had hit the horizon, Abraham already had the wood split and the donkey saddled. His servants had breakfast waiting as he shook Isaac gently by the shoulder. "My son, get up. We have to go." Jacob's questioning, sleepy eyes must have wondered what was at hand. "God has told me that we have to go to the land of Moriah to make an offering.

"Why do I have to go?"

"God has spoken to me once again, but this time, I need your help to fulfill God's plan."

So, begrudgingly the teen arose and ate breakfast with his father. Isaac had heard the stories of how God had spoken to his father and mother and how he was conceived in their old age. He expected that his father's need for him to go was divinely directed, so, for that reason, he was happy to help, but this early morning business wasn’t what he had in mind. Meanwhile, Abraham looked upon Isaac as they sat before the fire, eating. The words from God kept running through his head, *"Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him."* He knew that sacrificing Isaac would be counterintuitive to what God had commanded, but why? Regardless, he had to obey. He had come too far in his life's journey to do otherwise now.

The dread that must have hung over the countenance of Abraham was comparable to those disciples who sat in the shadow at the foot of the cross. As the Roman soldiers prepared to lower the blood-stained post upon which Christ’s limp body hung, their hearts must have been torn. "It wasn't supposed to end this way," they thought to themselves.

The sun was barely breaking over the distant mountains when Abraham, Isaac, and two men-servants departed home with the donkey loaded with firewood in tow.

The disciples watched with heavy hearts as they lay the body of their Savior in the tomb.

The long shadows that hung across the valley before them were merely a precursor to what awaited.

[Day 2]

The doors were locked. The questions abounded around the table where the disciples had gathered in the upper room. Would the Jewish authorities come for them next? What were these last three years about if this is how it ends? So many doubts and fears.

Yet, as Abraham walked with the three other traveling companions, his mind reflected on all the encounters with God and how they led up to this day. What inner turmoil he must have faced. The memories returned again and again of God speaking to him, saying, *"Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be ... Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates "* Then there was the visit by the three men in the plains of Mamre. Again, the Lord spoke to Abraham and Sarah, telling them that even in her old age, she would bare a son. Hearing this from the door of their tent, Sarah laughed in herself. God immediately answered her, saying, *"Is there anything too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son."*

One thing was absolute: Abraham believed in the Lord with all his heart. Knowing this, God "Counted it to him for righteousness." Yet, Abraham was only

human - indeed, he would still have doubts. Before he laid down that second night to sleep, he prayed for God to comfort his soul and softly whispered, *"As I lay here in silence, Lord, I search my heart and my ways. The light of Your face shines forth on me as You fill my heart with gladness. In peace I lie down and sleep to-night, for You have made this dwelling a sure and trustworthy abode."* That night, unlike the many nights before, Abraham slept a peaceful sleep.

[Day 3]

*"Then on the third day, Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off. And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you. And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together. And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together."*

When they reached the place that God had told Abraham about, Isaac began to worry. There was no lamb, no other animal for which they could sacrifice. His heart began to race as the realization came to him, it was he who would be sacrificed. Sensing his anxiousness, Jacob bound Isaac and placed him upon the altar of wood. Isaac watched in horror as his father raised the knife. He closed his eyes, already preparing for the shock of the blade in his heart. But then there was nothing. Silence.

Raising the knife about to drive it into Isaac's heart, the angel of the LORD called to Abraham out of heaven, "Abraham, Abraham."

He stopped, hand still raised, clutching the blade, and replied, "Here am I." Eyes still closed, Isaac heard the bleating of an animal nearby. He opened his eyes as his father lifted him from the altar, untying and hugging him. Tears of relief filled his eyes as he watched his father retrieve the ram from the thicket nearby. The joy of knowing he had been spared, saved from certain death, filled his soul. In that fateful moment, hand raised, ready to drive the knife into his only son's chest, God spared Isaac. He declared that Abraham had shown himself worthy, having not withheld offering up his only son as a sacrifice. The ram became Isaac's substitute. Yet, it was Christ who, for us, became the ram in the thicket, the propitiation for all our sins. God gave his only son so that we, the Isaacs of the world, would not face death but that we would be spared.

Fearing the end was near, the disciples huddled in that dark room behind locked doors. Their fears were dashed away forever when Jesus suddenly appeared in the midst of them. Their souls were restored when he said to them, "Peace be unto you."

He had risen indeed.

Death was not the end of the story.

As we walk through our daily lives, we, too, will have doubts and fears. It is when we finally give them over to God that we are truly free of the bondage of sin. As Jesus told his disciples, *"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."* Many people feel that the harder they work, the longer they try, and eventually, they will clean off that plate of things to do and achieve that magnificent goal the world had taught them that they need to accomplish to be successful. It is when we finally realize that the rat race never ends, that we cannot do it alone, and that there has to be a better way. Then, we can truly realize our purpose and fulfillment in this life.

As we go through life's journey, many struggle with giving it all over to God. Many don't care to come to know their Savior until it's too late. But having the faith to accept Christ into your life is a close correlation to Abraham's experience at that sacrificial altar. He placed everything he had been promised upon the altar. The lineage and seed of his future generations lay before him. When it seemed he was about to drive the knife into his only son's chest; God spared Abraham's son. Likewise, many find themselves down and out; in their deepest darkest moments, they finally give it over to God, only to discover that He had been there with them all along, simply waiting for them to ask.

As you go about your day, try to focus on your walk with God. Listen for that still small voice and be prepared to act when the answer finally comes - you'll be amazed at what He can do.

And always remember, "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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Love Is An Investment  
1st Corinthians Chapter 13

By Glenda Ward  
McDowell County



What is love and how do we love better? Why should we choose to love? Love is an investment. It is inspirational and practical. But there are moments when we become impatient and forget to love. The verses in Chapter 13 of 1st Corinthians give us instructions and reasons to choose to love. Love is a sacrifice. When you are laying the foundation for your future and you invest in love, you get an outstanding return. If you invest without love you end up selling yourself short and get far worse than what you are worthy of. Scripture says if you do not have love, it profits you nothing. Even the greatest of all sacrificial actions are of no benefit without love.

The Bible is the Living Word, the written truth that reflects reality. Scripture is full of admonitions (high-octane encouragement) to inform us of what is True because God wants us to gain an understanding of love. None is greater than Paul's admonition to love. When we choose to love, we also seek the best for ourselves because love is profitable to us. In giving love, we participate in the blessing of love. We receive as we give. (Reference 1st Corinthians 13:1-3).

Love is more important than all the Spiritual gifts exercised in the church body. Great faith, acts of dedication or sacrifice, and miracle-working power produce very little without love. Love makes our actions and gifts useful. Love is available to everyone. Sometimes we get irritated or angered by others. Much irritability comes from our desire to be perfectionists in what we do and in what we have in our surroundings. A desire to run things perfectly can erupt in anger at people who get in the way or even ruin that desire. And marriage is no exception. In marriage, we need to remember that perfection exists only in God. We are to love Him and not the visions we have for perfection here in our life.

Paul wrote that love abides forever. Today in morally corrupt marriages love has become a mixed-up term with little meaning and people are confused about love. Love is the greatest of all human qualities and is an attribute of God Himself. Faith is the foundation and content of God's message; hope is the attitude and focus; love is action. When your faith and your hope are in line with God's Will, you are free to love completely because you understand how God loves.

True love is a choice. There are moments in life when we become irritated, impatient, and sometimes want to scream out of frustration. It is then we must choose to love even when we have been hurt by people we love. Be reminded that God grants you patience by putting you in situations that requires your patience. God places an irritant before you so you can choose to love. The circumstances you are given are your opportunity. God is love and the power to love comes from Love Himself. We unleash the Holy Spirit to flow through us to others when we choose to love. It is only through God's help and guidance that we can make proper choices. And in marriages making the proper choices to love your spouse instead of rejecting them requires the opportunity to do so.

Transcendence is the power to live above the situations and circumstances in which you may find yourself within your marriage. You need to make the most of the opportunities these situations and circumstances provide. In Ephesians, Paul wants the church to live worthily, as God's children. To live choosing humility and patience and loving each other. By allowing God's Spirit to do that in your heart, you can live in peace with others. It is God's love that we embody here on earth so that others can know Him. May we remember in moments of impatience, that love is a choice and we can therefore choose to love for it is God's Spirit in us who helps us live fruitful lives (Reference Ephesians 4:1-2).

There is nothing that reveals our beliefs and priorities more than what we actually do. If our actions do not match our work, they are like vapor in the wind. In 1st John 3:18, it says, "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth." If we are inconsistent, our lack of action neutralizes our speaking. We are to do what we say and say what we do. If our words and actions do not work in harmony, both are ineffective. Although we all love to hear someone say they love us, it is not only about saying the word. Love is an action. True love is mainly about doing. When we choose love we are acting in our own best interest. Love is the truest manifestation of who we are. Love is putting faith into action.

True love is patience. Patience is a choice we make to engage in love when circumstances irritate us. Love is kind. We should choose kindness in treating others as we would like to be treated. Read 1st Corinthians Chapter 13. There are times that love may cause pain, but that pain is worth it because love brings meaning to everything we do. Anything we do outside of love does not matter or last. Everything we do when we show love brings lasting benefits. Love is lived out intentionally even in marriages. We cannot exercise true love with an inward focus. When you set aside selfish desires to love others, then you will be most fulfilled. When you interact with your spouse are you seeking their best or are you being intentional about elevating their well-being? Read 1st Corinthians 13:4-13 to see if there are areas in your life where you can show greater love to your spouse or others. To gain profit from loving others, an excellent investment in those relationships is required. The greatest investments are actions of true love. (Reference 1st Corinthians 13:4-7). Love is what ties everything completely together. Love is the answer because God is Love. He is what brings peace and unity. (Reference Colossians 3:12-15).

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



Taxes as the Unseen Debt for Future Generations

By Steve Gaito  
McDowell County



Throughout their lives, individuals strive to achieve financial stability by eliminating debt and building a secure future for themselves and their loved ones. However, as the years roll on and retirement draws near, a different kind of debt often remains unnoticed: the tax burden imposed on retirement accounts. This tax debt becomes a legacy left behind for the next generation, and it's essential to understand the implications it can have on their financial well-being. In this article, we'll explore the concept of taxes as debt on retirement accounts and shed light on how it can impact the financial legacy passed down to children.

The Hidden Debt: Taxes on Retirement Accounts

Retirement accounts, such as traditional 401(k)s and Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs), have been a popular vehicle for individuals to save for their golden years. These accounts offer the advantage of tax-deferred growth, allowing investments to compound over time without immediate tax implications. However, the tax benefits of these accounts come with strings attached.

When individuals contribute to traditional retirement accounts, they do so with pre-tax dollars, meaning they get a tax deduction in the year of contribution. However, the taxes on these contributions are merely deferred until withdrawals are made during retirement. These withdrawals are then taxed as ordinary income. This deferred taxation sets the stage for a debt-like scenario, as the taxes that were deferred during the working years become a liability to be paid by the retiree or, in many cases, their heirs.

The Inheritance of Tax Debt

While the idea of passing along retirement accounts to one's children to provide them with financial security is noble, the reality can be quite different. Children who inherit traditional retirement accounts are often faced with the responsibility of paying deferred taxes. This scenario can lead to unintended financial consequences for beneficiaries who were not prepared for the tax burden.

Consider the case of an individual who passes away and leaves a substantial traditional retirement account to their children. These children, while mourning the loss of their loved one, are also confronted with the reality of the taxes owed on the inherited account. Depending on the size of the account and the beneficiaries' individual tax situation, this can result in a significant tax bill that might be due within a relatively short timeframe.

RMDs: A Double-Edged Sword

Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs) further complicate the tax picture for beneficiaries of traditional retirement accounts. RMDs are mandatory withdrawals that individuals must begin taking from their retirement accounts once they reach a certain age. These withdrawals are subject to income tax, potentially pushing beneficiaries into higher tax brackets and resulting in higher tax liabilities.

For heirs who are already in their peak earning years, inheriting a traditional retirement account and its associated RMDs can lead to a substantial increase in their taxable income. This influx of income could potentially impact their eligibility for certain tax credits and deductions, making the financial situation more complex and challenging.

Minimizing the Inherited Tax Debt

While the concept of inherited tax debt may seem overwhelming, some strategies can help mitigate its impact:

- 1. Roth Conversions: Consider converting traditional retirement account funds into Roth accounts. While this incurs an immediate tax liability, the benefits of tax-free withdrawals during retirement and tax-free inheritance for beneficiaries can outweigh the initial tax hit.
- 2. Strategic Withdrawals: For those in retirement, strategically withdrawing funds from retirement accounts to manage tax brackets and minimize RMDs can be effective in reducing the tax burden on heirs.
- 3. Life Insurance: Utilizing life insurance can provide beneficiaries with a tax-free inheritance that helps offset the tax debt from traditional retirement accounts.
- 4. Education and Planning: Educating beneficiaries about the potential tax implications and working with financial professionals to create a comprehensive estate plan can ensure that they are prepared to handle the inherited tax debt.

Conclusion: A Balanced Legacy

Retirement accounts have long been celebrated as a way to secure financial well-being in one's golden years. However, it's crucial to recognize that the tax-deferred nature of these accounts creates a debt-like situation that can impact the next generation. While taxes on inherited retirement accounts cannot be entirely avoided, strategic planning and informed decision-making can help reduce their impact. By understanding the implications of this hidden debt and taking proactive steps to address it, individuals can create a more balanced financial legacy for their loved ones—one that empowers them with knowledge and resources to navigate the complexities of the tax landscape and make the most of the inheritance they receive.

If you would like to discuss what impact taxes may have on your legacy I would like to help. I specialize in tax-efficient transfer of wealth from generation to generation and would love to help you help your kids. To schedule an appointment, contact my office at [morgan.wylie@retirerm.com](mailto:morgan.wylie@retirerm.com) or call (828) 599-0299.

Your kids will thank you.

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

Fall For Life

By Chastity Ogburn  
Avery County



I reflected back today on when Anne Ministries had its first annual March For Life in January of 2021. We were blessed with a good turnout despite the freezing cold weather. God has now led us to have our first annual fundraising banquet this fall. We are excited to see all that God has in store for this event.

Anne Ministries will be having its first annual fundraising Fall For Life Banquet on September 23, 2023. This event will begin with a Silent Auction at 5:30 pm. We have had a wonderful response with several different local businesses and individuals donating some great items. Dinner and program for the evening will begin at 6:30 pm. Our guest speaker will be Helen Rogers with Agape Pregnancy Support Services located in Fayetteville, NC. Ms. Rogers has been involved in Pregnancy Support Ministries for over 40 years. I first met Ms. Helen Rogers in 1997, when my pastor connected us. She loves babies, loves people, and wants them to know Jesus. It was 26 years ago that Ms. Helen helped me on my journey toward healing by helping me work through "Forgiven and Set Free" a post-abortive Bible study for those that have had a past abortion. I'm so thankful that God placed this dear lady in my life. Now, to look back and see how God has brought us back together and all that God has done has been amazing. God is so good! Ms. Helen has been a great help and support to Anne Ministries. She was there when we first opened the doors at Anne Ministries in 2021 and helped with leading our first training with volunteers.

If you would like to purchase tickets to this life-supporting event you can visit [anneministries.com](http://anneministries.com) or call 828-742-1973. Individual tickets are being sold for \$30.00 or \$50.00 per couple. You may also host a 6-person table for \$180.00 or an 8-person table for \$240.00. The Fall For Life Banquet will be held at the N.C. Cooperative Extension Avery County Center 661 Vale Road, Newland, NC 28657. This is a great opportunity to come out and learn about the services offered at Anne Ministries and meet some of its volunteers.

Anne Ministries is a non-profit pro-life ministry in Avery County. We offer pregnancy support services and recovery services to those that have had a past abortion, miscarriage, stillbirth, or infant loss. All of our services are free and confidential. Anne means "grace" and God has called us to extend His grace to those in need. The ministry mission statement is Isaiah 61:1-3.

Anne Ministries does not receive government funding and is supported only by those that generously give to help support the work that God has called us to do. We hope you will plan to join us on September 23, 2023, for our first annual Fall For Life Banquet!

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

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September 2023- Blue Ridge Christian News page 31



# YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

## NC Senate District 47



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

While work on the state budget continues, the General Assembly convened in August to handle some outstanding business from the legislative long session. At the top of the list was holding override votes for six bills recently vetoed by Governor Roy Cooper.

Veto overrides require a three-fifths majority of the members present in both chambers of the legislature. We successfully overrode all six vetoes on a variety of issues, bringing this session's veto override count to 14.

Senate Bill 49 – Parents' Bill of Rights, of which I was a cosponsor, became law by a vote of 27-18 in the Senate and 72-47 in the House along straight party lines. This new law codifies that parents have ultimate control over their child's education. This encompasses a variety of rights, including the right to be made aware of any changes to a child's name or pronouns used by school personnel or in school records. The bill also ensures age-appropriate instruction in our public classrooms by prohibiting the inclusion of gender identity, sexual activity, or sexuality in the curriculum for grades K-4.

A companion bill to Senate Bill 639, Youth Health Protection Act, which I filed in the Senate, House Bill 808, Gender Transition/Minors, prohibits medical professionals from performing harmful surgeries or prescribing life-altering hormone treatments and puberty blockers for minors. Our society has long acknowledged that children are not mature enough to understand the long-term consequences of their choices. This bill protects children from undergoing medically unnecessary and potentially devastating treatments. The bill passed the Senate along party lines but obtained a bipartisan vote of 74-45 in the House.

I also cosponsored the Senate companion bill to House Bill 574, Fairness in Women's Sports Act, which ensures that biological males are not allowed to compete on girls' teams for high school athletics in North Carolina. There are obvious fairness and safety issues for allowing biological males to impede on spaces and contests designed for women and girls. Female athletes deserve the common-sense protections provided in House Bill 574. The override vote for this bill mirrored the numbers in House Bill 808.

Two of the other vetoed bills made changes to how the state governs charter schools, while the final bill dealt with regulations to building codes at the local level. All six bills have now become law.

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

## NC Commissioner of Labor



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

It's hard to believe summer is almost over and we're headed into the cooler days of September. I love the summertime, but I am looking forward to Fall and all the wonderful activities going on throughout the season!

As I mentioned in last month's column, August kicked off the traditional county fair season. September opens with one of the largest fairs in our state – the N.C. Mountain State Fair in Fletcher. I will participate in the fair's safety press conference with Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler on Sept. 7 and will tour the fairgrounds with our Elevator and Amusement Device Bureau staff.

The N.C. Mine Safety and Health Conference is Sept. 13-15 in Cherokee. The conference is jointly sponsored by NCDOL's Mine and Quarry Bureau and the N.C. Aggregates Association. The Mine and Quarry Bureau provides critical safety and health services to operators, employees, and contractors in the aggregate industry. As part of the event, our Communications team will record an episode of Inside NC Labor with the staff of our Mine and Quarry Bureau to discuss their roles, the work they do, and how important it is that our state has the services they provide.

I am also very excited to attend the Carolina Star Safety Conference, happening Sept. 20-22, at the Koury Convention Center in Greensboro. Last year's theme was "25 Years of Safety – Past, Present, Future" and the conference had 724 participants from across the state. I am looking forward to this year's conference having even more participation. Our Recognition Program staff and the Carolina Star Safety Conference Board of Directors put in a lot of hard work to make this conference the success that it is.

Later this month, I will also be attending the Occupational Safety and Health State Plan Association (OSHSPA) meeting in Saratoga Springs, NY. There are 29 states and territories that are an OSHA-approved state plans, and this meeting provides an opportunity for those state plans to meet and discuss what is going on in their states and to also talk with Federal OSHA. I hope everyone enjoys the upcoming Labor Day weekend!

## NC House District 86



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

### Positive New Laws Enacted Legislature Overrides Six Cooper Vetoes

On August 16, 2023, North Carolina's legislature successfully overrode six significant bills previously vetoed by Governor Roy Cooper. In this article, I would like to highlight five of the six bills overridden.

First, we overrode the veto of a bill I introduced to delay until an individual is at least 18 years old the use of gender transition surgeries and the prescribing of puberty blockers and other hormones for the purpose of "transitioning". We should all be keenly aware that such "treatments" are highly likely to have permanent, life-changing consequences. The nature of minors is to change their minds about all manner of things as they grow older. Moreover, medical "transitioning" is still deeply experimental and potentially dangerous. In fact, many European countries that once led the push for such therapies are turning back and severely restricting them. In the circumstances, it seems clearly wise to delay such decisions until the individuals affected are 18 or older.

We also overrode the veto of the "Fairness in Women's Sports Act". This bill addresses the problem created by those classifying themselves as "transitioned" women, whether by surgeries/hormones or by simple self-identification, who wish to participate in women's sports. When biological men, born with the genes for superior muscle mass and larger frames characteristic of males, compete in women's sports with a resulting competitive edge, it can clearly result in both physical harm and unfairness to biological women. Legislative health committees heard testimony from female athletes directly affected and seeking reform. These women included both those injured and those unfairly penalized. Currently, school districts and the High School Athletic Association determine what is allowed. The new law prohibits those born as men from competing in female sports in our schools.

A third veto overridden was one declaring parents to have certain rights with respect to their children. The rights mentioned in the bill relate primarily to the education of children and, to some extent, children's medical care. Under the bill, schools are prohibited from presenting sexually explicit content before 5th Grade. Though I voted for the override, in my opinion, it is a weak bill because it does not give parents much in the way of recourse in the event their rights are not respected by government officials. It continues broad exceptions to parents' rights in both education and health matters and it fails to address parents' rights in other areas where the government interacts with their children. It does, I hope, represent at least a first step in the right direction.

Two other bills passed over the governor's veto relate to increasing educational choices for students. Simply put, the two bills loosen restrictions on charter school growth. Charter schools are public schools but, because they are intended to give more leeway from the more regulated traditional public schools, they may be viewed by parents as offering a better "fit" for students whose parents make that choice. One of the overridden bills reorganizes the advisory board for charters to strengthen that board's decision-making authority and to alleviate the potential for decisions being left to individuals hostile to charters success. The second school choice bill, which has now become law over the veto, gives charter schools more flexibility in terms of admissions and creates the option for local government to aid charters with capital improvements. State and county governments currently provide all capital needs for traditional public schools while public charter schools receive no government funds for their facilities and capital equipment. Instead, the public charter schools must raise privately all funds for their capital needs. Thus, the second bill, in this instance, opens up the option should a local county wish to assist with charter schools' capital expenses.



# YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

## NC Senate District 46



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

Wednesday, August 16, was a momentous day at the NC General Assembly. Members of both the NC Senate and the NC House gavelled in to take decisive action as six of Gov. Roy Cooper’s vetoes were overridden, ensuring the bills became law despite his objections. While the Senate votes were along party lines, several of the six overrides received bipartisan support in the House. These legislative overrides enjoy broad support among North Carolina’s citizens. The bills are as follows: 1) SB49 The “Parents’ Bill of Rights” strengthens the rights of parents regarding the education of their children. The bill also ensures age-appropriate material is being taught to the youngest students, and keeps parents informed on the well-being of their children. A Washington Post poll shows 77% of adults think it’s inappropriate for teachers to discuss trans identity in public schools with students in K-3. 2) HB574 The “Fairness in Women’s Sports Act” bans biological men from competing in women’s sports. A recent Gallup survey found that 69% of Americans say transgender athletes should only be allowed to compete on sports teams that conform to their birth gender. 3) HB488 addresses housing affordability issues across North Carolina. It removes unnecessary requirements that greatly inflate the cost of new home ownership. 4) HB618 gives more authority over charter schools in North Carolina to the Charter Schools Review Board. 5) HB219 “Charter School Omnibus” allows the proper growth of charter schools so they can accommodate ever-increasing demand. 6) HB808 “Gender Transition/Minors” bans gender-reassignment surgery, puberty blockers, and cross-sex hormones for minors. A Washington Post-KFF poll results reported that 68% of adults oppose children ages 10–14 having access to puberty-blocking medication under medical supervision. In summary, there have been 14 vetoes in 2023. All 14 have been overridden by the legislature. Election legislation was also passed to the Governor’s desk on the 16th. Both chambers approved bill language the House proposed to SB747 Elections Law Changes. Please visit the landing page of your General Assembly website at [ncleg.gov](http://ncleg.gov) to read more about these actions under News & Information. I again thank you for allowing me the privilege of serving you, the citizens of Burke, McDowell, and Buncombe Counties. If I may be of assistance, please do not hesitate to contact my Raleigh office staff.





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### Ministry Hope House

By Jessica Williams  
Mitchell County



This is Jessica Williams, director and I would like to take this time to introduce you to NEVER2SCARRED MINISTRY/HOPE HOUSE located in Spruce Pine, NC. We are an in-house Christ-centered ministry for helping women to recover from addictions to drugs and alcohol. Our program is a 6-month intensive healing and heart restoration, work therapy program for women that includes housing and educational resources for women through Christian leaders that volunteer their time weekly.

They receive teaching WHO LOVE is, How to show love, and express love in a Healthy way. How to have and make healthy relationships, how to take care of themselves, hygiene, healthy cooking, cleaning... They have One-on-one Christian Counseling and basic education skills ...GED, how to get a job, pay bills, save money, and social skills.

We officially opened for residents on April 16, 2022. Our ladies began to come on April 16th and we now have seven ladies living at the Hope House at this time. Including our full-time night manager, Susan Davis, a recent graduate of the program, and our weekend manager, Ange Meade also a graduate of the program.

They also have praise and worship with Debbie Forb, Bible studies with Dr. Rocky Branch, Barbara Macomber, Shirley Marsh, Linda B. Pitman, and Janice Branch They also attend Celebrate Recovery on Thursdays. Tanya Phillips and Debbie Forb teach cooking, life skills, and nutrition weekly.

Anyone who is interested in becoming a volunteer can go online, fill out an application, and read all the rules and regulations to become a volunteer.

We begin Family Day at the Hope House on September 13th, 2022 which allows those who have been at residence for at least 30 days to have their family attend. Family Day is scheduled for the 2nd Saturday of every month. Refreshments and/or meals are provided for everyone in attendance. Several days have had meals donated by a family person.

The ladies are involved with the organization, "Sewing Seeds", a ministry that makes dresses for girls and shorts for boys in foreign countries. Our ladies have been participating in sewing these once a month at Bear Creek Baptist Church. It has been a very rewarding experience for them all.

Our prayer request at this time is for the transition house plans to move forward and become a reality for the ladies who finish the recovery program. At this time our biggest need is a 16-passenger van to be able to transport all the ladies to appointments, outings, and church services and monitory donations for expenses.

If churches and organizations are interested in our ministry coming to speak we are willing to schedule a date and time. Just call Jessica at 828-467-7243. Our ladies can share their testimonies, sing as a group, and help with events as part of their giving back to the community.

Women interested in becoming residents should go online and read all materials with qualifications, and rules and fill out the information needed to apply. You can also find on line our website online: [never2scarred.com](http://never2scarred.com). There you can find instructions for donating to our ministry and locate what needs we have at this time. We also have a Facebook page that is updated regularly. We are a 501c3 ministry, so donations can be tax deductible.

Jessica Williams is the director of Never2Scarred Hope Ministry.

*Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Matthew 9:37*

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# The Defoliated Worship

By Andrew Goins  
Watauga County



Before the reformation, the Lord's Supper was framed as a sacrifice. Scholars date the genesis of this theology to Ambrose of Milan of the fourth century. This theology germinated in the soil of time until it slowly bloomed in the Middle Ages as a dramatic re-enactment of the upper room accounts in the synoptic gospels. It became a drama observed by the peasants and participated in by the priests but once a year. When a crumb of bread fell onto the ground, the people were struck with "the fear of the Lord", for they believed this Lord would strike them all dead as a consequence of such an atrocious act of accidental irreverence. It became a sacrificial ceremony observed with awe in which the bread and wine (if the rituals were done correctly) transformed the materials into Jesus' body and blood. The rituals and reverence crowded out Christ in their extravagance. The reformers were appalled by the extravagance and sought to simplify. They thought that the extravagance supplemented substance. They tried to wed simplicity and substance according to the solemn vow that is the scriptures. They went back to the scriptures to re-form their theology of the Lord's Supper.

Why tell this dusty and dirty story? Because extravagance has defoliated the tree of simplicity and substance in the American Church. This defoliation has taken place in making our theology into a theory. Theology and theory sound quite similar, but they are distinct. I might theorize that Christ died, was raised with the Spirit of God, and ascended to heaven to be seated at the right hand of the Father where, as Gerard Manley Hopkins said well, "plays in ten thousand places". Though that may be my working theory, my theology might be that God died and that it is my responsibility to incarnate Christ here and now; by eloquent speech that gently coaxes people into repentance, or coercive speech aimed at guiltning the church into discipleship, or flamboyant and flashy worship aimed at entertaining the church into revival. These things assume the death of God and that my responsibility is to play the role of God.

Theology is ideas earthed in the material of relationships, temptations, and marriage. It is the big ideas grounded in everyday life. The theory is the hot air balloon of theology whose tether was cut by cunning questions and platitudinous answers.

The American Church often occupies theory in worship. We say we believe Christ is present and on the move, every time two or more gather, but our worship services are compensating our unbelief with an extravagance. We say we believe in the Holy Spirit, but we decorate our gatherings with seductive songs that sing out like sirens beckoning us into the sea that is ceaseless stimulation. We do not need stimulation but simplicity. We need the stimulation to get out of the way to transform our whole selves (including the heart) into a soul that is in perpetual praise of God.

In the last article I wrote, I addressed the name dilemma worship leaders are in. I submitted that we worship leaders need new names besides music minister, worship leader, or even the more biblical title, choirmaster. We need a biblical name. Asaph was a leader of worship. I proposed (lightheartedly and playfully) that we call ourselves children of Asaph. Noncoincidentally, there are twelve poems/prayers/songs by Asaph. One of the notable themes in each of these Psalms is simplicity. Simplicity obscures ambiguity and illuminates the substance of truth. We need the truth told simply. Flashy lights, dim rooms, and loud music are a profligate way of worship. We need to go back to the basics of Worship and live out our theology of Christ's resurrection and ascension. I am going to begin writing about Asaph's first Psalm which is Psalm 50, trusting that the Holy Spirit is on the move and that the Word of God does not need extravagance to compensate for its beautiful simplicity. We, children of Asaph (worship leaders), need a reformation. We need to go back to the scripture to discover the part in this play that is God's

story. Then we need to learn our lines by chanting them like a creed. As we chant Psalm 50 we will find ourselves transformed.

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

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A Pattern Of Commitment

By Toby Crowder  
Mitchell County

Acts 1:14 *“These all continued with one accord in prayer and sup-  
plication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with  
his brethren.”*

I read a statement some time back that said, “In order to make an  
impact, you must be involved.” With all due respect to the author of  
that statement, I would like to offer a somewhat revised version and  
say that “in order to make an impact, you must be COMMITTED!”  
Some people take commitment very seriously, while others find  
commitment to be a challenge. Churches today are struggling to operate due to a lack of  
committed members and servants. Are you being committed to the person of Jesus Christ,  
and the things of God? To help answer this question, may I recommend that you consider  
the pattern of your lifestyle?

We all have days and times that we are committed, and thankfully so. Without some  
level of commitment among Christians and church members, it would be difficult to  
accomplish many of the tasks of the local church. In looking at the many examples in  
Scripture, I noticed the commitment of Mary in Acts chapter one and began to ponder her  
presence there with the disciples and other dedicated followers of Christ, after His ascen-  
sion. She had been a young Jewish girl when she is introduced in Scripture, and now we  
see her decades later still gathered with the body of believers that had been left behind to  
await His promises.

Change comes with life, and change came for young Mary when we first meet her in  
Luke's Gospel. When the angel told her that God had a plan for her life, Mary was faced  
with a decision... would she follow God's plan for her life, or would she rebel against  
Him? Mary had found her purpose early in life, and it became her reason for living. Our  
purpose in life sets the pattern for every decision and action we make. By submitting her  
life to God's plan, she set the standard for the remainder of her life and actions. Notice all  
the times in Scripture that Mary is present simply because she followed God's will and  
committed herself to Him in service. She was present at the wedding in Cana of Galilee...  
she was often present throughout the Gospels... and at Calvary. Her actions show that she  
was committed to God's plan and that dictated the patterns of her life.

Many times, when faced with a conflicting decision, the patterns of our life are revealed.  
If our first thought is “What Will It Cost?”, then money is the pattern, and money can  
be taken away. If we ask, “How Long Will It Take?”, then time is the pattern, and it will  
always run out. If we ask, “How Will I Feel?” then pleasure is the pattern and will soon  
diminish. How often do we ask ourselves “What will others think?” When we allow that  
answer to control our decisions, then popularity is the determining factor, and the opinion  
of humanity is fleeting at best. What we should be asking are questions such as: “How  
will this affect my relationship with God?” ... “Will this bring honor and glory to the Lord  
Jesus Christ?” ... “Will humanity and those without Christ benefit from this decision?”  
Consider the pattern of Mary's life from the first time we learn of her in Scripture. She was  
young, single, and scared, yet she was obedient and faithful to God's will. Consider all that  
Mary had been through in her life as she watched Jesus grow from a baby into adulthood.  
She saw Him perform miracles. She watched firsthand as He healed the sick, fed the needy,  
and raised the dead. She watched Him be unjustly accused, condemned in a mock trial,  
and later receive the death sentence. She watched Him carry the cross where He was spat  
upon and crucified. She followed her son to the very end, but Luke tells us in Acts 1:14 that  
she followed Him farther than that. Mary knew and believed the words of our Savior and  
was faithful as she waited with the other followers for His promise to be fulfilled. Will we  
follow her example of commitment as we await His return?

*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*



John 6:27 “Will Your Work Perish, or Last?”

By Shawn Thomas  
Angleton, Texas



During the great economic crash of 1873, Theodore Roosevelt's  
father wrote to his wife that he felt especially sorry for a Mr. Clews,  
who had made business his whole life. He'd told Roosevelt not  
long before that he never even took a vacation. Now, Roosevelt  
told his wife, everything this man spent his whole life on, has been  
“swept away ... in a day.”

Could this happen to you? It matters what you're working for. In John 6:27 Jesus tells  
the crowd: *“Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to  
eternal life.”* Jesus told the multitude: you can either spend your life working for things  
that will perish — OR for things that will last for eternity. And the same thing is true for us  
too.

In John 3:16 Jesus set before us the single most important question about anyone's life:  
will they perish, or will they have eternal life?

When President Eisenhower was on his deathbed, he called for Billy Graham to come  
and visit him. Eisenhower said to him, “Billy, tell me again how I can know that I have  
eternal life; nothing else matters now.” On his deathbed, nothing else in life mattered to  
Dwight Eisenhower more than knowing for sure that he had eternal life.

But there's never anything more important than knowing that you have eternal life. How  
can you know? The Bible says God created us to experience eternal life with Him. But  
we all sinned against God, and our sins cause us to “perish,” separated from God in hell.  
This is what John 3:16, is all about: *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only  
Begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”* Jesus  
died on the cross, paying for our sins so that if we trust in Him, He will give us eternal life.  
THE most important question of your life is: have you put your faith in Jesus' death on the  
cross to forgive your sins, make you right with God, and give you eternal life?

Then the next question is: will the work you do in life perish or last? In I Corinthians  
3:12-15, Paul wrote: *“Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious  
stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it,  
because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's  
work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he will receive a reward. If  
any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved - yet so as  
through fire.”*

If you are a Christian, then on the foundation of Christ you can either build with “gold,  
silver”, etc. -- things that will last, OR with “wood, hay, and straw” -- things that will per-  
ish. Some Christians will be like a man who ran out of a burning house and lost every-  
thing. They themselves will be saved, *“yet so as through fire.”* They won't have anything  
to show for their life; it was spent on things that wouldn't last.

A young person once lamented over how they'd worked all summer but had nothing left  
to show for it. They'd spent everything as they went along! But how much worse to spend  
your whole LIFE with nothing to show at the end of it! To avoid that, must consciously  
invest our lives in things that will matter for eternity.

How do you decide what to do with your life? Many ask: “How can I make the most  
money?”, or “What will make me famous?” Instead, we should ask, “What can I do to  
glorify God, that will last for eternity?” Choose to invest your life in serving God and oth-  
ers.

Even in a "secular" career, you can still invest some of what you make in eternity. When  
you are paid for your job, you've basically traded those hours of your life for the money  
you received. So on what are you spending your money — for which have you traded  
your life? We must all spend some on what Jesus calls “food which perishes.” But are you  
also investing at least some in “the food which endures” — in things that will bring you an  
eternal reward?

Years ago a Texan did very well in the oil business, and he gave a large sum of money  
to a Baptist ministry here. But not long afterward, he lost everything in an “oil bust.” One  
of his friends said to him: “Now I bet you wished you didn't give all that to that ministry!”  
But he said “Not at all. If I hadn't, I would have lost all THAT, too. As it turns out, all I kept  
is what I gave away.” That's true for us too. All we really “keep” is what we give away. If  
we really believe in heaven and eternal rewards, then we should be investing our income  
in eternity.

And how much of your time is spent on things which perish, versus things that endure?  
Most of us have to work, but what do you do with the time you have left? Don't just watch  
tv and go to bed and get up the next day to do it all over again. Jesus encourages us here:  
don't waste your life by spending it all on “food which perishes.” Instead, invest your time  
in things that will last: worshiping God, and reaching, teaching, and caring for people in  
Jesus' name. Are you doing some things like that personally, or through your church or a  
ministry? How much of your time are you investing in eternity? Get specific: what will  
you do THIS week, which will not be wasted, but will last for eternity?

I once visited a senior adult couple who told me about a woman they knew years ago.  
One day her home caught on fire, and she panicked, and began running around, trying to  
decide what to save. In her panic, she grabbed a huge block of ice she'd purchased for her  
ice box, and with a tremendous deal of effort, dragged it out to her front yard. It was the  
only thing she was able to bring out of her house before it burned to the ground. She stood  
there, watching her house burn, while all that she “saved,” was a block of ice — which  
quickly melted away.

The thing is, that's a picture of what many are doing: spending their whole life on things  
that won't last but will just melt away into nothing, for all eternity. Jesus calls us to some-  
thing better than that, to examine our lives, our habits, our money, and our commitments.  
And He says: *“Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to  
eternal life.”*

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

The Best Mix On The Dial



# Change is Hard, God is Good

By Chris Rathbone  
Mitchell County

Change is hard. Whether that change is something you feel God has initiated in your life or if that change comes from something that is out of our control, change is hard.

While listening to a great friend and pastor preach recently, he made a statement that spoke deeply to my heart. While preaching on “Change and Transition” he said, “Sometimes we just have to trust that God knows what He is doing and follow Him.” Rev. Toby Crowder

To me there seem to be different kinds of changes that come into our lives. First are the changes that are common in life to everyone. Such as growing older and the change and challenges that come with it. Time goes by in life and kids grow up through the various stages and we just have to go through those changes. Sometimes our health changes as we age or even a disease or sickness comes unexpectedly. Our lives change. Jobs will end and we must change careers. Relationships can sometimes change through no choice of our own and we have to adjust whether we like it or not. Influences from the outside, so to speak, will sometimes force change that we didn’t see coming. We didn’t want these changes, but they come anyway. Life in general is full of constant change. This is just a part of life with which we must trust God to guide us through.

Another is the change we choose. What I mean by that is you and I make a choice to change something in our lives. We don’t like a job, or we find a better paying job and we choose to change. Maybe we’ve let our health go down and we choose to change our eating and exercise habits. Sometimes a car we’ve had for years keeps giving us trouble and costing us repairs all the time, so we choose to invest in a more dependable one. We can often choose to change where we live. These kinds of changes are the ones you and I have control over. We tend to like these kind because we are in charge. No one else or circumstances we come into is forcing us to have to change. We get to make the decision ourselves for what we feel may be our best interest, so we change!

Lastly, as a Christian, I believe there is the change that God initiates. There’s a couple ways this may happen. First, God through the Holy Spirit may convict us there is something in our lives that needs to change, or He wants to change. This may happen through the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Let’s say we read the Bible or hear a sermon preached that convicts us of a sin or habit that is displeasing to the Lord and detrimental to our spiritual welfare. Obviously, this is where God is initiating a needed change that we should follow through on.



Next, under God initiated change, is that God is leading us in a different direction in life. This has nothing to do with something wrong or sinful, but He is pointing us in different direction in ministry or life in general. The situation we are in now is not bad, nothing is wrong, but God begins to deal with our heart that there is something else He has for us. The work we have been doing is coming to an end and as brother Toby Crowder preached in that message, “God is turning the page to another chapter for us.”

We may not completely understand it all or even know where God is leading us at the moment but we do know that He is leading us to change. While there may be many unanswered questions, He gives us peace to trust Him through it all.

Well, that’s where I’m at right now! There’s nothing wrong, nothing bad going on, matter of fact, if anything, it’s a time of blessing in the ministry! However, God has initiated a change for our lives. At this moment as I’m writing, there are many unanswered questions about “Why now?” or even “Where are you taking us Lord?” Even in those questions, there is peace. How can one have peace with so much uncertainty? Well, because when there is change that God is calling us to make, we can rest assured it’s for His glory and our blessing. This isn’t the first time God has called us to a change and I’m almost certain it won’t be the last! Pray for our family as we seek God’s direction during this time of change. Change is hard, God is good!

Proverbs 3:5-6 *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.*

(Some of my favorite verses!)

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



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# Crossword

ACROSS

1 earneth wages to put it into \_\_\_\_\_ with holes. (1,3) (Hag 1:6) KJV

5 As an \_\_\_\_ pleasing to the LORD (Num 29:2)

9 Praise the LORD with \_\_\_\_: sing unto him with the psaltery (Ps 33:2)

13 and hath greatly offended, and \_\_\_\_ himself upon them (Ezek 25:12) KJV

14 And the rough goat is the king of \_\_\_\_ (Dan 8:21) KJV

15 Cut down the tree and \_\_\_\_\_ off its branches (Dan 4:14)

16 The alien who lives among you will rise \_\_\_\_ you (Deut 28:43)

17 He who \_\_\_\_ his father and drives out his mother is (Prov 19:26)

18 LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the \_\_\_\_ (Ex 14:26)

19 Mockers \_\_\_\_ up a city, but wise men turn away anger (Prov 29:8)

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

21 Uzziah the king was \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ unto the day of his death (1,5) (2 Chron 26:21) KJV

23 The man said, \_\_\_\_ is now bone of my bones (Gen 2:23)

27 Do you see this \_\_\_\_ army? I will give it into your hand (1 Kings 20:13)

28 Moses, Joshua, and David were \_\_\_\_ of some of the books of the Bible

31 I saw something like a large \_\_\_\_ being let down from heaven (Acts 11:5)

34 a foolish man who built his \_\_\_\_ on sand (Matt 7:26)

36 Abner son of \_\_\_\_, the commander of Saul's army (2 Sam 2:8)

37 The nations will \_\_\_\_ and tremble; anguish will grip the people (Exod 15:14)

39 Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, \_\_\_\_ and Ivvah? (2 Kings 18:34)

40 God \_\_\_\_ raised this Jesus to life (Acts 2:32)

41 At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three \_\_\_\_ (Dan 10:2)

44 so that by the grace of God he might \_\_\_\_ death for everyone (Heb 2:9)

45 I will obey your decrees; do not \_\_\_\_ forsake me (Ps 119:8)

47 the sons of Eliphaz were Teman, \_\_\_\_, Zepho (Gen 36:11)

49 When the LORD God \_\_\_\_ the earth and the heavens (Gen 2:4)

50 "Will he even \_\_\_\_ the queen while she is with me in the house?" (Est 7:8)

53 Men stalked us at every \_\_\_\_,

so we could not walk in our streets (Lam 4:18)

55 His master replied, \_\_\_\_ done, good and faithful servant (Matt 25:23)

56 "They \_\_\_\_ me," you will say, "but I'm not hurt! (Prov 23:35)

58 being not a forgetful hearer, but a \_\_\_\_ of the work (James 1:25) KJV

59 David, wearing a linen \_\_\_\_, danced before the LORD (2 Sam 6:14)

60 for wide is the \_\_\_\_, and broad is the way (Matt 7:13)

61 return to it and remove all its vile \_\_\_\_ and detestable idols (Ezek 11:18)

62 He is coming with \_\_\_\_, our faithful and dear brother (Col 4:9)

63 Man is a \_\_\_\_ phantom as he goes to and fro (Ps 39:6)

64 creatures of the sea are being \_\_\_\_ but no man can tame the tongue (James 3:7-8)

65 Like a bird that strays from its \_\_\_\_ is a man who strays (Prov 27:8)

DOWN

1 the Egyptian magicians also did the same things by their secret \_\_\_\_ (Ex 7:11)

2 the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to \_\_\_\_ (Acts 17:10)

3 Then Samuel took \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ of oil, and poured it upon (1,4) (1 Sam 10:1) KJV

4 on the two stones the way a \_\_\_\_ cutter engraves a seal. (Exod 28:11)

5 I will make thy windows of \_\_\_\_, and thy gates of carbuncles (Isa 54:12) KJV

6 He saved us through the washing of \_\_\_\_ (Titus 3:5)

7 by this time there is a bad \_\_\_\_ (John 11:39)

8 Abraham died in a good old \_\_\_\_ (Gen 25:8) KJV

9 Bakkakkar, \_\_\_\_, Galal and Mattaniah son of Mica (1 Chron 9:15)

10 Do not slaughter \_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_ or a sheep and its young on the same day (1,3) (Lev 22:28)

11 He took one of the man's \_\_\_\_ and closed up the place (Gen 2:21)

12 He was with David at \_\_\_\_ Dammim when the Philistines (1 Chron 11:13)

19 He \_\_\_\_ on the ground, and made clay of the spittle (John 9:6) KJV

20 Sell me some property for a burial \_\_\_\_ here (Gen 23:4)

22 Nobody has \_\_\_\_ heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind (John 9:32)

23 The 19th letter of the Greek alphabet

24 twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the \_\_\_\_ thereof (II Ki 4:42) KJV

25 Jacobs new name (Gen

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| 63 |    |    |   |    |    | 64 |    |  |    |    |    | 65 |        |    |

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32:28)

26 the wife of Hezron bore him \_\_\_\_ the father of Tekoa (1 Chron 2:25)

29 Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy \_\_\_\_ (Jude 14)

30 Joshua \_\_\_\_ his clothes, and fell to the earth (Joshua 7:6)

32 the sun rises with scorching \_\_\_\_ and withers the plant (James 1:11)

33 There were three gates on the \_\_\_\_, three on the north (Rev 21:13)

35 Absalom got his hair stuck in this type of tree (2 Sam 18:9)

38 My steps have \_\_\_\_ to your paths; my feet have not slipped (Ps 17:5)

39 rabbit (Deut 14:7) KJV

41 \_\_\_\_ your cloak around you and follow me (Acts 12:8)

42 The \_\_\_\_ is the lamp of the body (Matt 6:22)

43 If \_\_\_\_ forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles (Matt 5:41)

44 the \_\_\_\_ ones will be brought low (Isa 10:33)

46 represent four kingdoms that will \_\_\_\_ from his nation (Dan 8:22)

48 Remember that you \_\_\_\_ me like clay (Job 10:9)

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

52 To \_\_\_\_, mine own son after the common faith (Titus 1:4)

53 As he was scattering the seed, \_\_\_\_ fell along the path (Mark 4:4)

54 Like a lion I will devour them; a wild animal will \_\_\_\_ them (Hos 13:8)

55 "May your God, \_\_\_\_ you serve continually, rescue you!" (Dan 6:16)

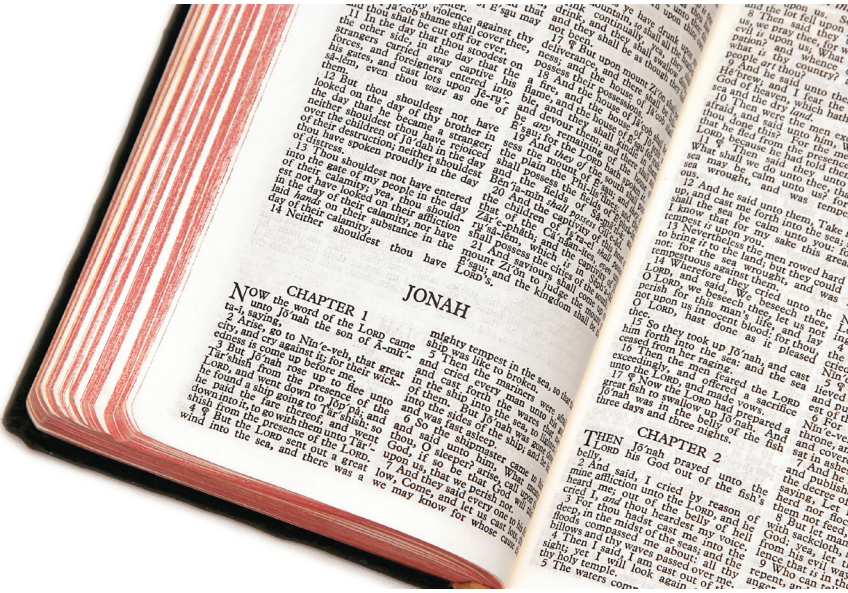
57 to see if you would stand the \_\_\_\_ and be obedient (2 Cor 2:9)

58 my eyes are \_\_\_\_ with grief. I call to you, O LORD (Ps 88:9)

59 abbr. for the 17th book of the Old Testament

60 for a \_\_\_\_ and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Isa 8:14) KJV

Solution on page 14





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