



# BLUE RIDGE CHRISTIAN NEWS



## Berry Chapel Baptist Church

### Merry Christmas

By Steve Williams  
Mitchell County



“Preparing for Christmas,” said one fellow,” is a Wrap race.” At least, wisecracked another, “I’ve learned what the Yule means. My wife says, You’ll buy this, and you’ll wrap that, and I do.

But, really, that’s not the way to get ready for Christmas. This is:

1st We Need to Review.

You and I need to take a good look at our hearts and homes. Christmas is Christ's birthday. But we invite everyone to the party, except Christ. Christmas is more than a time for shopping and Santa. It’s a time for the Savior. Let’s Not crowd out Christ.

2nd We Need to Repent:

Repentance is a change of mind. In repentance one says,” I’m wrong. I’m sorry. I’ve been putting fun and gifts ahead of God and His unspeakable gift. But from today on it's Jesus first, others second, and me last.

3rd We Need to Renew:

A man said to Mark Twain, “I wish I had never read Huckleberry Finn.” Why? Demanded the author. “So I could have the pleasure again of reading it for the first time.” He explained. Has the Christmas story lost its excitement because you’ve read it so often? Then Get alone with the Lord and His Word and read anew Luke 2:1-20, asking the Lord to make your heart burn within you as you read it.

4th We Need to Rededicate:

Give the Lord first place in your life. Delight in everything He wants you to do. Day and night meditate on His word and think about ways to follow Him more closely. Do these things, and this Christmas will be the Merriest Christmas of your Life.

As Christians, we need to understand we have the greatest gift anyone can ever receive. You say how is that? Simple, There’s no prayer too hard for Him to answer, no need to great He can’t supply, no problem too difficult for Him to solve. So when we are facing a day of calamity, we can experience calm, in our days of perplexity, we can experience peace, in our days of temptation, we can experience triumph, in our days of sorrow we can experience a song. God’s Salvation and Grace is a gift that never goes away.

My Family Would Like To Wish All Of You A Merry Christmas, and our prayers are that God will Bless you with Good Health and Strength as we go into a New Year.

### Words Of Wisdom

- God can’t be Defeated. Nor can they who trust Him
- The loneliest place in the world is the heart where the Lord Jesus is absent.
- The best teachers are those who live by example.
- No one can make you sin without your consent.
- Got something to do? Do it with all you got.

### Question of the month:

Why don’t you exchange gifts with God by accepting the gift of His Son and giving Him the gift of your body?

### Joke of the Month

An atheist complained to a Christian friend, "You Christians have your special holidays, such as Christmas and Easter. Jews celebrate their national holidays, such as Passover and Yom Kippur. But we atheists have no recognized national holidays. It's unfair discrimination."

His friend replied, "Why don't you celebrate April the First" ( April Fool’s Day).

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





# 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

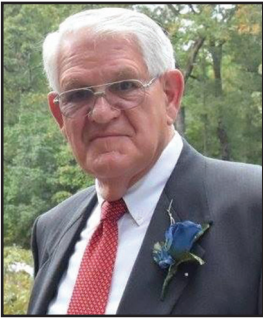
Our soul, the essence of our being, was created by God to exist forever. That forever is spent in one of two places: eternally present and in union with God because of His forgiveness and salvation or eternally separated from God because of sin and unbelief. At the moment that our physical body dies, 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



As I sit down to write this we are just finishing up Thanksgiving festivities with family and friends. We had a wonderful gathering of around 50 celebrating the blessings of the past year and praying for some of the challenges past and present that we are dealing with. One of the things we do is after we eat we go around the room and everyone takes a minute and shares the blessings they have experienced this past year. The reason I am talking about this for December is that almost everyone in the entire room focused their testimony of blessings around their Christian beliefs. The only reason they have those beliefs is because of what happened in December many years ago, the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ.

As we go into this December let us openly proclaim the name of Christ and never shy away from calling it Christmas, not Happy Holidays. In today's culture, the woke society is striving to do away with anything that has to do with the spiritual side of our lives or even our heritage. Decide that you are not ashamed to proclaim the reason for the season was Jesus!

*“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.”* Romans 1:16 KJV

As you go into the Christmas season, decorate, buy, and exchange gifts, and enjoy time together with family and friends. The joy that goes with those things is good. Even though they are good, they should not be the focus. Decide to go all out to make sure that those you are fellowshiping with focus on reaching others for Christ. In today's world, it is more important than it has ever been to be shining the light for Jesus. The forces of evil are more prevalent than at any time in our history. Instant access to everything the devil has the opportunity to provide dulls our senses to the evil that abounds and it becomes the norm if we are not careful.

*“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”* Philippians 4:8, 11 KJV

Remember that we are a product of what we see, associate with, listen to, and spend time with. Decide to spend time really thinking about the astonishment of the shepherds on the hillside as the angels appeared to them, think about Mary and Joseph as they journeyed to Bethlehem and went into the innkeeper and found no room. Think about them going into the stable, actually, the stable where the unblemished lambs were brought to be prepared for sacrifice, and giving birth there, of Jesus being wrapped in the same kinds of cloth that the lambs were wrapped in.

*“And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.”* Luke 2:8-12 KJV

The birth of the Christ Child changed the world forever. Without the birth there could have been no cross, there could have never been a new covenant, and the door to eternal life would not have been opened to the non-Jew. Without the virgin birth of Jesus, God would not have offered us the opportunity to have our sins removed as far as the East is from the West, never to be seen again. Rather than putting all your focus on the gifts and food decide to really stop and give serious thought to what happened over 2000 years ago and what it really means to you, and me!

*“I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.”* John 17:9-11 KJV

I wish each of you reading this a wonderful and joyous Christmas and a Happy and Blessed New Year.

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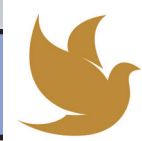
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“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace: that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation: that saith unto Zion. Thy God reigneth!”

Isaiah 52:7 KJV



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## Grassy Creek Baptist Church

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

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

## Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church

2187 Jamestown Road  
Morganton, NC  
828-584-8212

**Pastor Steve Bietz**

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

## Altapass Baptist Church

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

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

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

## Plumtree Church

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

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

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

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

## Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

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

www.pleasanthillbc.church

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

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

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

## Newland Christian Church

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

**Pastor - Phillip Greene**

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

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

## Burkemont Baptist Church

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

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

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

## Mount Carmel Baptist Church

195 Gouges Creek Rd.  
Spruce Pine NC 28777

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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

**Interim Pastor Blake Glenn**

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

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

## Landis Orthodox Presbyterian Church

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

**Elder Mike Cloy**  
opcmiceloy@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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# Anne Ministries

*“For with God nothing shall be impossible” Luke 1:37*

By Chastity Ogburn  
Avery County



I have been reflecting and reading the Christmas story as we approach celebrating the birth of our Savior. I was reminded of how good God is. He is all-knowing and all-powerful, He is a good God even when things don't make sense. God is a faithful God, when He calls us to do something we can trust Him to do what we cannot do and we can trust His timing.

In the first chapter of Luke, Mary asked the angel Gabriel, “How can this be?” The angel had just told this teenage young girl that she would conceive and become pregnant by the Holy Spirit. He told Mary she would give birth to a son and she should call his name JESUS. The angel proceeds to tell her He would be great and He would be called the Son of God. Wow, can you imagine? Mary must have been scared and confused wondering how this all could be. She was a virgin.

Then she was told by the angel that her cousin Elizabeth, who was old in age and had been barren for years, was now pregnant. She was actually six months pregnant. Wow! Gabriel is pronouncing some big things.

I love what Gabriel said as Mary was questioning and pondering all these things, “For with God nothing shall be impossible”. This verse tells of God’s mighty power. What powerful truth is said in these seven words?

We then read in Luke 1:38 about Mary’s obedience and surrender to the call. She hurried and went to visit Elizabeth and they shared in all that God was doing. I can imagine that they are both in awe of our all-knowing, all-powerful, good God.

Elizabeth tells Mary she is blessed for believing in the promises of God. Mary obeyed, trusted, and believed in all that God would do. She embraced her calling. What an example of great faith in our faithful God.

Today, as you are reading this, has God called you to something that seems impossible?

Friend, I would like to encourage you to trust in our good and faithful God. There have been times in my own life God called me to do something and like Mary, I questioned, “God, how can this be? God, I don’t know how to do this. I don’t feel qualified to do this. This seems way too hard for me. What’s gonna happen? I’m scared.”

God wants us to trust Him and His timing because we can’t but He can. I can testify that when I obey the call and surrender to God’s plans and not my own He is always faithful to do all that He has promised. I have seen God many times perform what He said He would do and it has built my faith that much more. I thank Him for the blessings and miracles I have seen him do in my own life and the life of Anne Ministries. Let’s believe like Mary that God will do what He has promised. It may not be on our schedule, there may be a delay, but God is still good in the delay. God is an amazing good God, He wants to bless your life. When it seems like all is lost and broken, believe God for the miracle. I’m thankful Mary believed in the miracle. She was faithful to the call. She birthed Jesus our wonderful Savior. Friend, don’t lose hope. God sees what we can’t. He redeems. He rescues. He provides.

*“With God nothing shall be impossible”. Luke 1:37*

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)

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

# Lakeview Missionary Church

## Striving In Ministry

By Christopher L. Scott  
Moses Lake, Washington



“I need to meet with you and the guys from our Bible study today” my friend urgently said on the phone. Tears streamed down his cheeks as my friend told the four of us how he started using cocaine, again. After six months in a rehab facility and more than a year of sobriety after that, he was back on drugs.

The tears continued to drip as he told us how it all happened. It started with stress as he approached his wedding day. He started drinking alcohol to help him relax. Then a coworker offered him marijuana and he accepted. He progressed to stealing and selling his wife’s beloved family heirlooms to get the money needed for cocaine highs. Eventually, his wife noticed items missing in their house and confronted him.

All of this was occurring while the four of us met for Bible study each Wednesday. If there was one safe group for him to have shared his struggles, it would have been with us. But he didn’t. He hid his struggles from his family and from the guys he was supposed to share his struggles with when he needed to.

Shame, embarrassment, and guilt were already there. He didn’t need any more of that from us. He knew he messed up. He needed assurance we were there for him and he needed a reminder that we are all fighting our own battles.

Paul told the believers living in Corinth, “*Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord*” (1 Corinthians 15:58, NASB).

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul talks about the resurrection of believers and our hope for the future. That’s the source of hope for the future and the incentive for service in the present. As Paul approaches the end of this glorious chapter on the resurrection he reminds the believers to keep strong in their daily walk with God.

There will be setbacks in our Christian life. We will have times when we struggle with temptation, say the wrong things at the worst time, and fail to follow through on commitments we make to others. But it’s important not to get bogged down with the struggles, but to strive to live faithfully to God and continue in ministry. We can’t earn God’s gift of salvation. But once we accept that gift we don’t sit on it. We actively serve God in ministry.

*Christopher L. Scott, a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, is a pastor and freelance writer. Learn more about his writing ministry at [ChristopherLynnScott.com](http://ChristopherLynnScott.com).*

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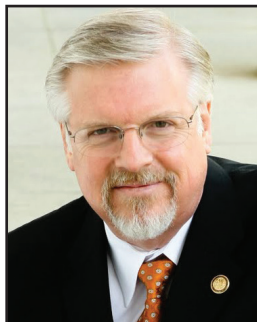
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Revelation Chapter 19: The Marriage of the  
Lamb and the Joyous Celebration of the Bride

By Rev. Mark Creech



Marriage ceremonies are celebrated in diverse ways around the world. The institution of marriage between a man and a woman transcends cultural boundaries and eras. Throughout history, it has been marked by grandeur, tradition, and unique customs, each reflecting the love stories and backgrounds of the couples involved.

Few events capture the world's attention and imagination the way royal weddings do. I feel fortunate, (as I'm sure many others feel the same) to have witnessed three royal weddings in my lifetime: the regal wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer to the modern-day unions of Prince William and Catherine Middleton, and Prince Harry and Meghan Markle. Each of these royal weddings was filled with magnificence and majesty, reflecting the times and the unique personalities of the couples involved.

All three amazing wedding ceremonies were held at iconic historic venues. The brides wore gowns made by the finest bridal designers. The guest list included royalty, world leaders, celebrities, and dignitaries. Each wedding was an international and highly anticipated high-profile event. Millions and millions of people worldwide watched by television or some other media coverage. Following the wedding ceremonies, the couples embarked on carriage processions through the streets. Each of these weddings was noted for their incomparable splendor and significance.

However, as Clarence Larkin says in his book, The Book of Revelation:

"There have been many royal weddings of international interest where the invited guests and spectators witnessed a spectacle magnificent in its appointments, and rejoiced in a union that bound together different nations. But the wedding of the Lamb and his Bride will surpass them all, for it shall unite heaven and earth in a bond that shall never be broken."

Revelation chapter 19 prophesies this future event – the Marriage of the Lamb. The Scriptures say:

"Then I heard again what sounded like the shout of a vast crowd or the roar of mighty ocean waves or the crash of loud thunder: 'Praise the Lord! For the Lord our God, the Almighty reigns. 7 Let us be glad and rejoice, and let us give honor to him. For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb, and his bride has prepared herself. 8 She has been given the finest of pure white linen to wear.' For the fine linen represents the good deeds of God's holy people. 9 And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb.' And he added, 'These are true words that come from God' (Revelation 19:6-9).

Henry Halley of Halley's Bible Handbook says that at the start of Revelation chapter 19 there are essentially two hallelujah choruses.

"The first chorus (1-5), expresses heaven's joyous celebration over the destruction of Babylon," says Halley. "The second chorus, in a swell of voices like an ocean's roar and the roll of distant thunder, announces the Marriage of the Lamb to his true bride."

The Marriage of the Lamb is not just something symbolic but a highly anticipated literal event in biblical prophecy that will take place in heaven, and signify the culmination of God's redemptive plan and the union of Christ (the Lamb) with his bride (the Church).

There are no widely recognized celebrations today that directly mirror what makes up the Marriage of the Lamb. Nevertheless, we know something about what weddings were like in Jesus' day and what they represent in the coming marriage of Christ and his Church. Warren Wiersbe, in Be Victorious, explains most succinctly:

"Jewish weddings in that day were quite unlike weddings in the Western world. First, there was an engagement, usually made by the parents when the prospective bride and groom were quite young. The engagement was binding and could only be broken by a form of divorce. Any unfaithfulness during the engagement was considered adultery.

"When the public ceremony was to be enacted, the groom would go to the bride's house and claim her for himself. He would take her to his home for the wedding supper, and all the guests would join the happy couple. The feast could last as long as a week.

"Today, the church is 'engaged' to Jesus Christ; and we love him even though we have not seen him (1 Peter 1:8). One day he will return and take his bride to heaven (John 14:1-6; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). At the Judgement Seat of Christ, her works will be judged and all her spots and blemishes removed. This being completed, the church will be ready to return to earth with her Bridegroom at the close of the Tribulation to reign with him in glory (see Luke 13:29; Matthew 8:11). Some students believe that the entire Kingdom Age will be the 'marriage supper.'"

Larkin goes even further in detail, addressing questions that often arise about the identity of the bride – questions related to the differences between Israel and the Church, which some people confuse. He writes:

"We must not forget that there are 'two brides' mentioned in the Scriptures. One in the Old Testament, and the other in the New. The one in the Old Testament is Israel, the Bride of Jehovah; the one in the New Testament is the Church, the Bride of Christ. Of Israel, it is said, ['For your Creator will be your husband' Isaiah 54:5-8]. Because of her whoredoms, Israel is a cast-off wife, but God, her husband, promises to take her back when she ceases from her adultery. (Jeremiah 3:1-18; Ezekiel 16:1-63; Hosea 2:1-23; 3:1-5). She will not be taken back as a vir-

continued on page 14



It’s Who You Know

By Jim Huskins  
McDowell County



Pastors who have attended seminary typically own a set of books on Systematic Theology. These volumes cover homiletics, hermeneutics, Christology, epistemology, demonology, angelology, soteriology, eschatology, church history and so forth. The details vary according to denominational perspective, but the headings are remarkably similar.

What is missing from all of these collections is the largest single item covered by the Bible: the Nation of Israel. Israel’s history, her covenants, her mission, her rebellion, her dispersal, and her role in end time events make up at least eighty percent of the Bible. The one topic to which the majority of Scripture is devoted is not deemed worthy of much study. For this reason, few Christians understand, appreciate, or live according to God’s plan for redeeming sinful mankind.

Our Creator called and set apart One Nation so they might carry out His Holy Purpose. Israel’s mission had two primary components. The first was to receive, record, and preserve God’s Holy Word. Second, they were to be the vehicle for bringing this world a Savior.

Israel succeeded in both of these assignments, but she failed miserably to achieve a third, lesser know task. They were supposed to conduct their lives as shining examples of how God wants His people to live—a beacon to the nations. They chose instead to rebel against God and His instructions for living. Their rebellion was so consistent and so long term that God eventually abandoned them to their enemies and ejected them from the Land of Promise.

The exclusion of Israel’s story from Christian theology is rooted in ancient Rome. The Roman Church insisted that “faith in Christ” has no connection to Israel. They proclaimed loudly and forcefully that Israel’s Messiah did not come to earth to fulfill the many promises God made to Israel. They insisted that He came instead to start a new religion. A new religion which Roman Church leaders defined and enforced. A new religion that mostly survived the “protestant reformation.” A new religion that is present in every modern denomination.

Most Christians are part of this new religion. That fact is nowhere more apparent than in the attitudes of most believers toward Moses. If not for a floating basket, a burning bush, and Charlton Heston, Moses might be forgotten. Many believers blame Moses for what they call the “burden of the law.” Few are aware that the Bible ascribes to Moses the role of second-most-important person who ever lived. Only Jesus is greater. Ironically, the Church places Paul in the number two spot. They do so because they misuse Paul’s words to contradict Moses.

Believers who read the Bible with an open mind discover the truth about Moses. Part of that truth is proclaimed in the last Bible chapter before the book of Matthew. Malachi Four summarizes God’s plan. These six verses assure us that God’s people will eventually “*tread down the wicked... under the soles of your feet.*” “*For you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.*”

Most Christians are in favor of the glorious prophecies conveyed by Malachi, but they have no problem ignoring the pivotal instruction found in verse four. “*Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.*” This verse reminds us that God promised salvation only to Israel, and the terms of that salvation were conveyed by God through Moses.

Jesus’ attitude toward Moses is key to understanding all of the Apostolic writings. In Matthew 5:17-20, He tells us to not even consider the possibility that He came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. Both will be in full force for as long as heaven and earth remain. We must follow the teaching of Moses until heaven and earth are replaced. I have yet to encounter a “teacher” who can explain how it is possible for Paul to contradict the Son of God on this point.

Another glimpse into Jesus’ opinion of Moses is found in Matthew 23. Verses two and three have always troubled me. “*The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you,*” The context is that Jesus views “Moses’ seat” as the legitimate source of authority. However, His instruction for us to do and observe whatever the Pharisees tell us makes no sense. His every encounter with, and statement about, the Pharisees make it clear that He has no respect for their actions or their teaching. It is impossible for Jesus to tell us to obey the Pharisees.

The answer to this dilemma is found in several ancient manuscripts of Matthew written in Hebrew rather than Greek. Those documents read, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat, therefore do whatever he tells you.” Somewhere along the way, a scribe misread the text and misquoted Jesus. Of course Jesus would tell us to obey Moses because Moses taught The Word of God.

Jesus’ respect for Moses and his teaching is hammered home in John five. The Pharisees condemned Jesus because He healed on Sabbath. They promoted themselves as experts on everything Moses, but Jesus challenged that claim. The last three verses of the chapter form a blistering accusation. “*Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?*” (John 5:45-47)

On the Great Day when each of us stands for judgment, ignorance of God’s Word will not be an excuse. We are each responsible for knowing what the Bible teaches. Simply put, everyone who wants to know Jesus must first know Moses. As He did with the Pharisees, Jesus still asks each of us, “If you do not believe Moses’s writings, how will you believe my words?”

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*Jim Huskins is pastor of Obedient Heart Fellowship.*

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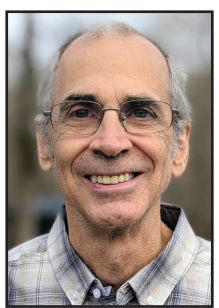
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# Why are 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings Categorized as part of the “Prophets”?

By Thomas Thorne  
McDowell County



In last month’s article, we examined the categorization of the Old Testament into five sections by Christian scholars:

- The Pentateuch – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
- Historical Books – Joshua through Esther
- Poetic Books – Job through the Song of Solomon
- Major Prophets – Isaiah through Daniel
- Minor Prophets – Hosea through Malachi

Plus the fact that Jewish scholars categorize the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible – the Old Testament) into three sections:

- The law – Genesis through Deuteronomy
- The Prophets – Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
- The Writings – Psalm, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 & 2 Chronicles

And how both include all 39 books of the Old Testament.

When looking at this categorization by the Jewish sages many have wondered why the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, and 1 & 2 Kings are not included as part of the “Writings” rather than the “Prophets” After all they are the historical stories of ancient Israel, not predictions, aren’t they? To answer this question we first need to take a look at the word “prophet.” I would say that often times the first thing a person thinks of when they hear the term “prophet” is “one who predicts the future” or “one who interprets the Bible concerning future events.” The key word is “future.” The most commonly used Hebrew word for “prophet” in the Bible is navee (pronounced nah-vee, the word “prophets” would be pronounced ne-vee-eem).

Of the most significant passages in determining its basic meaning is in the book of Exodus. The situation in Exodus 4:10-16 is where God calls Moses to return to Egypt to approach Pharaoh. Moses hesitates, reminding God of what he called inadequate speaking abilities. To this God first responded by reminding Moses that He (God) made man's mouth and vocal cords so He can enable Moses in any fashion He wants, including his speaking. Moses still objects and God says that he will instruct Aaron, Moses’ brother, to speak for him. God emphasizes this by adding, “*He (Aaron) shall speak for you to the people, and he shall be your mouth, and you shall be as God to him.*” (Exod. 4:16 ESV). So there was to be a relationship between Moses and Aaron similar to that between God and a spokesman for him. And then in chapter 7:1 God speaks of Aaron, and his relationship to Moses, by saying, “*and Aaron thy brother shall be your prophet (navee-spokesman)*” (ESV).

Another text in this regard is Amos 7:12-16. Here Amos is at Bethel in Israel speaking against the false altar which Jeroboam, the divided nation of Israel’s first king, had erected. Amaziah, the Bethel priest, encounters the prophet and says, “*Go, flee away to the land of Judah, and eat bread there, and prophesy there, 13 but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom*” (Amos 7:12-13 ESV).

To this, Amos replies in verses 14-15, “*I was no prophet, nor a prophet's son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. 15 But the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to my people Israel.’*” The point concerns the significant usage of the word “prophesy.” Amaziah urges Amos “not to prophesy” anymore at Bethel, and Amos in response says that God had sent him to Israel to prophesy. Thus what he had been doing at Bethel, and motivated Amaziah’s rebuke, was prophesying, or speaking God’s message. These two passages provide a good indication of the meaning of the term “prophet” as being “a spokesman.” Therefore, a prophet of God is a “spokesman for God.” Further study indicates that a true prophet of God will not only “speak” for God but will “speak fervently” for God.

So a prophet can be much more than just one who foretells future events. A prophet acts as a “spokesman” for someone else. A prophet of God is one who acts as a spokesman for God, providing God’s word accurately to others. This could involve God’s word about the distant future, the near future, warning people of their need for change, or even commending people for doing right.

With this background, next month I will explain why the Jewish people categorize the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, and 1 & 2 Kings into the “Prophets” grouping.

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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Avery County

Pleasant Hill Baptist in the Frank Community of Avery County will begin hosting our weekly Masters Club Youth Group starting this evening and will be every Wednesday from 6:45-8:00

Community Carol Sing at Banner Elk Presbyterian Church-December 2 @ 3:00 pm - 5:00 pm-Free. The popular “Small Town Christmas” Carol Sing returns to Banner Elk Presbyterian Church for its third year! All are invited to join a sing-along of familiar Christmas carols inside the beautiful sanctuary of the historic stone church. The 45-minute casual program will include favorite songs for adults and children alike, ranging from Let it Snow to Joy to the World. The grand piano, pipe organ and handbells provide festive accompaniment. Soloists and special musicians join in. Free admission. Address: 420 College Dr SW, Banner Elk

A Banner Elk Christmas, our holiday musical variety show @ The Ensemble Stage, 185 Azalea Cir SE, Banner Elk, NC, Dec 15, 16, and 17  
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Burke County

Dec. 2-Valdese Christmas Parade-Sat, 10 AM–12 PM-Valdese, NC

Dec. 5-Morganton Christmas Parade-Tue, 6–8 PM-Morganton, NC

McDowell County

DEC 7TH, 2023, 5:00 P.M. UNTIL 7:00 P.M.-HISTORIC CHURCH TOUR  
Tour Marion's beautiful historic downtown churches this holiday season.

Members of the public are invited to tour First Baptist Church of Marion and First Presbyterian Church of Marion from 5-7 p.m. on Thursday, December 7.

An additional historic church open house will be held on Thursday, December 14 at St. John's Episcopal Church and St. Matthew's Methodist Church in Marion from 5-7 p.m. For more information, please call 828-652-2215.

Mitchell County

Bakersville Christmas ParadeSaturday, December 2, 2023-Downtown Bakersville-Main Street- Bakersville, NC 28705  
Start: Saturday, December 2, 2023 at 6:00 PM End: Saturday, December 2, 2023 at 8:00 PM

Journey to the manger Saturday, December 9 to Sunday, December 10, 2023  
Bakersville-31 N Mitchell Ave-Bakersville, NC 28705  
Start: Saturday, December 9, 2023 at 5:30 PM End: Sunday, December 10, 2023 at 10:00 PM

Spruce Pine Events:  
December 3rd, 9th, 16th – Light Up Spruce Pine Downtown  
December 2023 – Window Display Contest

Yancey County

Christmas Parade, 12/2/23 1pm-2pm-Very Merry Main Street 5pm-9pm

West Burnsville Baptist Church invites you to join us for what has become a holiday tradition in our area. The 21st Annual West Burnsville Christmas Pageant - Jesus, the Heart of Christmas - will be presented November 30 through December 2 at 7 pm and again Sunday, December 3 at 10:30 am and 3 pm. Wrapped in the love of God, our special gift to the community will include familiar carols, the majestic proclamation of the birth of our Savior, and the celebration of His life, death, and resurrection through drama and music. We are located at 222 West Burnsville Church Road in Burnsville and all performances are free. Call 828-208-3990 for reservations for large groups.

Toe River Chamber Ensemble Hosts Free Holiday Concert  
Get in the holiday spirit with the annual Holiday Concert of the Toe River Chamber Ensemble on Tuesday, December 19, 7:30 pm, at the First Baptist Church on the Burnsville Square. The over twenty-some members, led by director R. Kevin Paul, include musicians from Mitchell, Yancey, Madison and

Buncombe counties.  
The all volunteer group meets weekly for rehearsals and performs concerts throughout the year. The musicians are of all ages and professions: students, doctors, librarians, restaurant owners, teachers, retirees, students and more. All playing for the love of music.  
The Holiday Concert, always a local favorite, includes a variety of music including selections from the holiday movie “Suite from the Polar Express” by Alan Silvestri, “Sleigh Ride" by Leroy Anderson, “Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring” by J.S. Bach, and various other pop and sacred arrangements of other holiday favorites.  
The concerts are always free (donations gratefully accepted), and most frequently held at the First Baptist Church on the Burnsville Square. The church, though not affiliated with the orchestra, is the kind host for rehearsals and concerts. Please visit the website to find out more about the orchestra, its members, and concerts at [www.toeriverchamberensemble.org](http://www.toeriverchamberensemble.org)

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AND SO IT WAS, THAT, WHILE THEY WERE THERE, THE DAYS WERE ACCOMPLISHED THAT SHE SHOULD BE DELIVERED. AND SHE BROUGHT FORTH HER FIRSTBORN SON, AND WRAPPED HIM IN SWADDLING CLOTHES, AND LAID HIM IN A MANGER; BECAUSE THERE WAS NO ROOM FOR THEM IN THE INN  
LUKE 2: 6-7



# Pine Creek Baptist Church

## Christmas is Special

By Bruce Cannon  
Mitchell County

Isaiah 9:6,7 *“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.”*

I love Christmas! People are much more loving, kind, and giving during the Christmas season than at any other time of the year. Cards are sent to folks we haven’t thought of in a long time. Gifts are given. Time is spent with family. Churches are fuller during Christmas than any other time of the year.

Why is Christmas so special? *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”* (John 3:16) At Christmas we see reminders of the greatest gift ever given. We see live nativities and manger scenes. We hear the Christian Christmas music playing. The houses of God and homes are adorned with decorations showing our thankfulness for this amazing gift!

The greatest gift of all of time and eternity is Jesus! We were lost and had to have a Savior. We could not help ourselves. Left to our own devices and abilities we would all die lost in sin. *“But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)”* (Ephesians 2:4,5) Thank You, Lord!

The greatest miracle of all time is Jesus! It is not creation, nor man’s being on earth, though those are two amazing feats. When Paul considered the greatest demonstration of the power of God, he spoke of Jesus. (Philippians 3:10) All of the Bible is about the coming of the Lord Jesus to save man from his sin. Let me share a few verses that speak to this and which speak of His purpose and glory:

Hebrews 10:5 *“Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me.”* Christmas is the coming of the Savior into the world through His birth to be the sacrifice so desperately needed!

John 1:14 *“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”* Philippians 2:5-8 *“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”*

What is Christmas? It is God’s rescue mission to save man from His sin. Though Christ is the perfect example for all of us to follow; and, though He lived a perfect, sinless life that was worthy of redeeming man from His sin, it was His death and bloodshed that paid the price which satisfied the righteous demands of God to save all of mankind!

That’s why I love Christmas SO much. At Christmas, we see the full drama of redemption made complete by the Babe in the manger, the sinless life, the substitutionary death on the Cross, and His resurrection from the grave.

Do what the shepherds did that first Christmas morning: see the Christ in your heart. Realize what He went through just for you to be saved. Do what the wise men did. Bring Him gifts; He’s so worthy of all we can give. This Christmas give Him yourself in holiness, sacrifice, and service. Have the greatest Christmas ever as you do so!

From my heart and home to yours; Merry Christmas!

Bruce Cannon has been called to serve as pastor of Pine Branch Baptist Church in Spruce Pine.

**For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. Luke 2:11**



# Family of God Fellowship

## I Don’t Believe in Superstition...But

By Dr. James L. Snyder  
Ocala, Florida



I don’t believe in any of the superstitious nonsense that seems to be going around these days. Some people have a fear of numbers like 13 and 666. What in the world does a number have to do with anything?

When I am around people who are superstitious like that, I’m afraid I lean toward the naughty side and harass them a little bit. It’s not my fault they’re afraid of some number. But I believe I do have a responsibility to myself to take advantage of situations like that.

Not being superstitious, there are times I am slightly confused about life. Something happens that I don’t feel I’m in charge of. I won’t go to the superstitious side of the road because I don’t believe in that. But sometimes, things happen that I really can’t explain.

For example, the other morning, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage entered the living room, where I was sitting on my easy chair drinking coffee. With a huge smile, she said, “I got you an Apple Fritter for this morning.” And she gave it to me, smiled at me, and then walked away.

Now, I’m supposed to accept this as normal? Absolutely not. There is no reason why she would bring me an Apple Fritter without something attached to it. For the life of me, I could not figure out what was behind this Apple Fritter. There had to be something because The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage never does anything without some reasoning behind it.

Not knowing what to do, I took a little bite of the Apple Fritter, which brought me to a wonderful place of enjoyment. I drank my coffee and ate my Apple Fritter, and my life seemed to be very spectacular at that time.

When I finished the Apple Fritter, I returned to normality and tried to figure out what was behind all of this. There had to be something behind it, and I could not figure it out.

At my stage in life, I wouldn’t ask any questions because I never got the answer I wanted. I just decided to accept it and move on with the day.

The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage went about the day as though nothing strange had happened. I decided to go along with her on that. After all, I don’t know what is behind this.

The following day, I got up and got my coffee, went out to my easy chair in the living room, and started to sip it very carefully. Every morning starts great with a cup of coffee.

As I was getting situated, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage walked in, and I saw in her hand another Apple Fritter. “Here, my dear, is an Apple Fritter. I think you’ll enjoy this today.”

I possibly could process yesterday’s Apple Fritter, but two days in a row was beyond my processing ability. Something is going on, and I have no idea what it is. Being that as it is, I enjoyed that Apple Fritter to the last delicious crumb.

Again, nothing was said to indicate what was behind this Apple Fritter. I was getting a little itchy, and I wanted to find out what was going on. But I didn’t want to sabotage my situation at this time. After all, an Apple Fritter is worth the pain. The day went normal, and she never mentioned the Apple Fritter.

By the time we came to go to bed, nothing was said concerning that. It was just a coincidence, and I could not explain it satisfactorily.

Again, I got up the following day, went and got my coffee, and sat in my easy chair. In a few moments, in walks The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage, and in her hand is another Apple Fritter. Obviously, I did not get up this morning and was still in bed, sleeping and dreaming. This does not happen in real life. I was afraid to do anything for fear of waking up out of this dreamland.

“Here’s an Apple Fritter for you this morning. I think you’ll enjoy it today.” She smiled at me, turned around, and returned to the kitchen.

I held that Apple Fritter in my hand for a few moments, basking in its deliciousness, and then began to eat it slowly and enjoyably.

Three Apple Fritters in a row has to be some record. It’s not that I can’t handle an Apple Fritter because I can. It’s the fact that someone is bringing these Apple Fritters to me who does not like Apple Fritters. Something is happening behind the scenes, and I’m anxious to find out.

The next day, the same thing happened. To have four Apple Fritters in a row is okay with me, but now I’m getting to be suspicious. What in the world am I missing here?

Not wanting to sabotage my good luck the last four days, I kept silent and enjoyed the Apple Fritter. Whatever is behind this, I may never know, but I will enjoy it for whatever it is worth.

I’m expecting the day when The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage will say, “Remember those Apple Fritters I gave you?”

I couldn’t help thinking of a Bible verse, *“And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not”* (Galatians 6:9).

Sometimes, the best thing to do is NOTHING and let God have it.

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 [jamesnyder2@att.net](mailto:jamesnyder2@att.net). The church web site is [www.whatafel-lowship.com](http://www.whatafel-lowship.com)

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Journey to the Manger

Mitchell County

Journey to the Manger Scheduled for December 9 & 10 on the Bakersville Creek Walk

The Bakersville Creek Walk will be ablaze with the retelling of biblical accounts of stories leading to the birth of baby Jesus in a stable. Join other “sojourners” for the 2023 production of The Journey to the Manger. Last year 717 people signed the census and 100 actors performed. We are starting at 5 pm and will conclude at 8 pm.

The ten scenes will include music and scriptures from the Bible as well as a performance enacting the story. Costumes from biblical times will be worn throughout.

Churches and families throughout Mitchell and Yancey Counties will participate. The scenes include:

“Decree to Participate in the Census” (M-Y Methodist & Mine Creek Baptist)

“Gabriel Appears to Mary” (Central Baptist)

“John the Baptist Birth” (Mine Creek Baptist)

“Angel Appears to Joseph” (Altapass Baptist)

“Mary Goes to Joseph” (Bethlehem Baptist)

“Shepherds Plan to Visit Baby Jesus” (Peterson’s Chapel Freewill Baptist)

“Star in the East and Maji” (Little Rock Creek Baptist)

“No Room at the Inn” (Beaver Creek Baptist)

Bethlehem Market (presented by community members)

“The Birth of the Christ Child” (Roan Mountain Baptist)

“The Cross & Empty Tomb” (Bear Creek Baptist)

A reflection area will be available. Gideons and Pastors will also be on hand to answer questions or assist anyone.

A Christmas Choir is also planned under the direction of Kathy Kuhne. Music for the scenes will be directed by Mr. James Laws.

The Journey begins at 5:00 pm on Saturday and Sunday. Attendees should dress warmly and plan for the journey to take between 30 and 40 minutes. Church youth groups are selling snacks and hot beverages to support their programs. The event is free to the public.

If you have questions, please visit the Facebook page @Journey to the Manger-Mitchell. If your church or individuals would like to help offset the cost of advertising, the purchase of costumes, and the preparation of structures, your gift will be welcomed. That information is also on the Facebook page, or you may email [sharonrrowland@gmail.com](mailto:sharonrrowland@gmail.com).



A Royal Birth Announcement

By Caron Cline  
Burke County



In the fullness of time, a royal birth announcement went forth to a very unlikely recipient, a peasant girl named Mary who was engaged to a young man named Joseph. The angel Gabriel had earlier appeared to Zechariah in the Temple, declaring that he and his wife, Elizabeth, would have a son who would be the forerunner of the Messiah. Now, 6 months later, he appears to Mary with the shocking announcement that she was the vessel chosen to carry Israel’s long-awaited deliverer. There was nothing about her that stood out nor had she done anything to deserve this great honor. So, why did God choose her? For the same reason, He chooses us.... because He wants to show us the riches of His grace. Even Gabriel addressed her as ‘O, favored one’, which means ‘full of grace’, saying ‘the Lord is with you’. Mary must have had a thousand questions, yet she only asked one. ‘How can this be?’ Gabriel replied that the Holy Spirit would come upon her, and God’s power would overshadow her, securing an immaculate conception. She was given very little information concerning something that would turn her world upside down. For the rest of her life, Mary held onto the angel’s promise: ‘O, favored one, the Lord is with you’. We can handle anything if we remember that we have the favor of God upon us and the Lord with us. Gabriel did give Mary a sign, the announcement of Elizabeth’s pregnancy in old age, obviously a miracle of God. Mary believed the word of the Lord spoken through the angel and surrendered to God’s will with no regard for the consequences. What would God do in and through us if we would surrender ourselves regardless of the cost? Mary proclaimed herself to be the servant of God and interestingly she would give birth to the Savior of the world who came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. No wonder God chose Mary....she had a servant’s heart; the perfect mother for His servant Son.

Matthew gives us Joseph’s take on the situation after hearing Mary’s news. He doesn’t believe her at first, but after an angelic visit in a dream, he accepts the mission that God has ordained for the couple. If Joseph had divorced Mary publicly, he could have shamed her and kept the money her father had paid as a dowry. If he divorced her privately, he was required to return the dowry resulting in his own shame in a culture that valued honor above everything. Joseph was surely a man of great integrity. Notice that there are no recorded words from Joseph in the Bible. He simply obeyed the word of the Lord by taking Mary as his wife, refusing to walk by sight, but rather by faith. The confusion and doubt of family and friends, the unexpected journey to Bethlehem, the lack of proper lodging, and finally the birth of God’s Son in a damp and dirty stable offered many opportunities for despair. However, Mary and Joseph did not doubt that the word of the Lord had come to them individually and that this was the perfect will of God for their lives. Within a few hours, the Lord confirmed His Word by sending shepherds who had also received a royal birth announcement from an angel. God chose a humble girl to bear His Son, a humble place for Him to be born, and humble people as His first visitors. He still chooses humble people to bear His Name and spread His fame.

*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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# Divine Intervention

By Carol Wallace  
Kingsport, Tenn.

This story is emotional for me, but from Nana’s heart, I want to share this miraculous story about our grandson Gaige’s journey through open heart surgery. We forever want to give glory to the mighty God we serve! I could never begin to know Gaige’s feelings and thoughts completely as he traveled on this journey, but this story is written from his point of view as I saw it; he has read and permitted to share...

The doctor says, “It’s time for intervention.” The word “intervention” can sometimes create havoc in one’s life. I was born with aortic valve stenosis, which is a narrowing of the heart’s aortic valve. Left untreated aortic stenosis can be fatal. In addition to the stenosis, I have leakage in another heart valve. Regular visits to a cardiologist for EKGs and echocardiograms have been a routine part of my life, with the underlying expectation of the doctor announcing the necessity of surgery.

Aortic stenosis has imposed limitations in my life regarding strenuous activities, especially with contact sports. My cardiologist explained a direct hit to the chest could result in death and contact sports increase this possibility.

Intervention first came in 2014 at age 13 when Dr. Ashok Mehta, my pediatric cardiology specialist in Johnson City, TN spoke frankly to my mom in stating he wanted to send my records to Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, TN for a consultation regarding a balloon catheter procedure on my heart.

Mom has always been my advocate in researching the best treatment, facility, and doctors and doing everything possible in my best interest regarding this life-long concern of aortic stenosis. The trip to Vanderbilt was her focus as she began to educate herself and me each step of the way. With tremendous prayer support at home, we departed for Nashville.

Upon arrival, Dr. J, a Pediatric Cardiologist at Vanderbilt, walked us through the planned procedure. A huge concern in this procedure was the size of the balloon catheter; too large and the leak in my heart valve could be worse and cause additional problems; too small and the inflated balloon would not help the narrowing issue in the aortic valve.

Seeking God’s guidance, protection, and will in treatment was a priority. My family prayed the surgeon would be a man of God. The Lord answered our prayers! Dr. J held my hand and prayed with me, Mom, and my Nana before surgery. He told us he always prayed before surgery.

We knew God was in control and His assurance came in the first words of Dr. J’s prayer. The morning of the surgery, Nana woke me up singing a hymn *“This is the Day the Lord Has Made I will Rejoice and be Glad in it,”* based on Psalm 118:24. The first words of Dr. J’s prayer were *“Lord, this is the day you have made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.”*

The balloon catheter procedure was successful in opening the narrowing in the aortic valve giving me four years before open heart surgery became reality. In 2017, the echocardiogram began to show the stenosis was increasing and visits to the cardiologist became more frequent. In discussions with Dr. Mehta, it was evident surgery was on the horizon during the summer break of 2018. Mom began to research surgeons and facilities. Cleveland Clinic in Ohio was the hospital of choice.

Surgical options were researched and discussed with Dr. Mehta and Cleveland Clinic doctors. In the end, the Ross procedure was determined to be the best option for my situation. After opening the heart, if the Ross procedure did not appear to be the best option, we were informed a mechanical heart valve was an alternative.

My family was concerned about what I would be facing. Family, friends, church family, and total strangers heard about my pending surgery and began to pray. Word spread and many people we did not know were praying for me. My Papaw anointed me with oil and he, along with two of my great uncles, prayed over me asking God to guide the surgeons and to give me the best possible results from surgery. This journey was truly covered in prayer. Mom continued to answer my questions to the best of her ability and encouraged me to address my concerns to medical professionals. Overall, I was calm and would often say, “My Mom and Nana are more nervous than I am!”

Arriving in Cleveland on the evening of July 4th, we checked in to the Inter-Continental Hotel adjacent to Cleveland Clinic. We settled in and set about orienting ourselves to where we should be the next morning for preliminary testing and instructions for scheduled surgery on Friday, July 6th.

Thursday morning dawned and we made our way to the clinic for a scheduled EKG, echocardiogram, consultation with doctors, and preliminary preparations. Dr. P, one of the two scheduled surgeons, met with us reviewed my history, and explained again the planned Ross procedure and the alternate mechanical valve procedure. In the back of our minds, we knew this, but when facts are laid on the table, the actual words can bring unpleasant thoughts and questions about the long-term effects.

Dr. P and Dr. S were the two doctors Mom had prayed for during her research. When Cleveland first contacted Mom regarding the surgical team, Dr. P was not on the original list. My Nana told Mom to give it time, God may work it out just as you have asked. Work it out He did! Dr. P’s schedule cleared, and he was assigned to my surgery team. Dr. P is a heart valve repair specialist as well as a Ross procedure specialist! God is so good!

Friday, July 6th, the day of “intervention” had arrived! Dr. S did not meet with us until the morning of the surgery. He quickly reviewed the process, explained what to expect, and asked if I had any questions. I had one ... “Could I get pic-



tures or a video?” He said, “Gaige, I don’t think we can get a video, but pictures, yes, even if I have to take them with my cell phone.” We all enjoyed a good laugh! After Dr. S’s visit, nurses, anesthesiologist, and each surgical team member assured me and my family that this procedure was their top priority.

The next time I was aware, I was in the ICU with tubes, wires, and an anxious Mom and Nana at my bedside. It would be a couple of days before I understood the details of what had happened. Doctors and nurses were in and out and I could remember bits and pieces of conversation. I was vaguely aware that the Ross procedure had not been the surgical route completed, but I did not fully understand what had happened.

Mom told me when I was more alert about the miraculous valve repair and the sharing of good news with family and friends at home. So much rejoicing and happy tears. Text, phone calls, and emails were flying, and praise was abundant! Repair of my aortic valve had not been a part of the pre-op discussions. God is amazing!!!

The next day, Dr. Z, a consultant cardiologist came by my room. Mom had talked with him by phone several times during pre-op consultation and he was a friend of my local cardiologist, Dr. Mehta. He spread his arms, smiled, and said, “Gaige, this is fantastic!”

My surgeons, Dr. P, and Dr. S, had explained in detail to my mom that the repair of the aortic valve had been possible. Dr. S said, “Gaige, in most cases with aortic stenosis, the valve looks like chewed-up beef jerky! This was not the case with you. We were able to trim the stenosis, reattach the valve, and go forward.” The procedure that we expected to last eight-plus hours was completed in less than three hours with totally different results. Dr. S laughed and said, “Gaige, things changed so quickly that I did not have time to pull out my cell phone, but we do have a camera in the OR and I will see what I can do about pictures!”

It was necessary to remain in Cleveland to revisit the hospital in three days. Thursday arrived and we returned to have a chest x-ray and, in the words of the doctor, “a beautiful picture.” We learned more about the surgical procedure in that the sternum was wired together and the wire would eventually be absorbed into the bone as it healed; stitches inside would dissolve, and the incision was glued. Amazing technology!

Restrictions were thoroughly explained for the upcoming weeks and a bit tough for a teen who had been driving to school, working a part-time job, going to the gym, and doing normal activities. A small price to pay to have all my own heart parts and be the recipient of a true miracle.

A follow-up visit with Dr. Mehta on July 17th was encouraging. He was thrilled and said, “Gaige, it is a miracle! It is the best of the best of the best!” He had been in phone consultation with Cleveland surgeons.

When school started, an unexpected side effect of the surgery involved my vocal cords and my ability to sing. I had been involved in school chorus and drama all during high school. During my recovery period, the time came to audition for the East Tennessee Chorus and my voice was not strong enough to qualify. This was concerning as auditions were approaching for a musical scholarship for entering East Tennessee State University in the fall of 2019. Once again, God blessed me with Mom securing a voice coach to help me regain vocal strength and qualify for a music scholarship for college and to qualify for East Tennessee Chorus the second time around. With my voice stronger, I was able to make a more joyful noise! He is always in the details of our lives!

Continued follow-up with a cardiologist will always be necessary and future procedures are possibilities. However, at the age of seventeen having the valve repair leaves the door open for other options in the future. Also, medical technology changes continuously. It is obvious, that my heart’s desire would be for this surgery to last my lifetime, but that is in God’s hands.

By the way, I did see pictures! To God be the glory!

*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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Should Israel Seek A Cease-Fire With Hamas?

By Jim Denison

Israeli forces made a major advance overnight toward Gaza City, marking their deepest push into Palestinian territory since they entered the strip last week. An Israeli soldier who was kidnapped by Hamas on October 7 was freed overnight during ground operations as well. Meanwhile, in a rare news briefing, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ruled out a cease-fire in Israel’s conflict. He was answering calls for such action from the United Nations and Amnesty International among others.

Critics of Israel’s continuing military action against Hamas are responding to reports from the Gaza Health Ministry that the death toll among Palestinians has already passed eight thousand, mostly women and minors. Many doubt the veracity of this organization’s numbers since it is run by Hamas, but the pictures of devastation in Gaza tell a tragic story of their own.

We should all grieve the loss of life in this conflict. However, Israel’s military must contend with the fact that Hamas has hidden weapons under hospitals, schools, and mosques while disguising its fighters like civilians. Their strategy is intended to escalate Palestinian deaths and provoke an international backlash against Israel.

Hamas’s strategy appears to be working. So, should Israel seek a cease-fire with Hamas?

“The next round of war will be inevitable”

As I have followed reporting on this conflict from a wide variety of sources and viewpoints, I found a New York Times guest essay by Dennis B. Ross to be especially informative. Mr. Ross served in the State Department under President George H. W. Bush, was the special Middle East coordinator under President Bill Clinton, and has served as a special advisor for the region as well. His article is headlined, “I Might Have Once Favored a Cease-Fire With Hamas, but Not Now.” His central thesis: “It is clear to me that peace is not going to be possible now or in the future as long as Hamas remains intact and in control of Gaza. Hamas’s power and ability to threaten Israel—and subject Gazan civilians to ever more rounds of violence—must end.”

Ross notes that if Israel agrees to a cease-fire now, Hamas’s military infrastructure, leadership, and control of Gaza will remain intact. As it did after conflicts with Israel in 2009, 2012, 2014, and 2021, the terrorist group will almost certainly rearm for the next conflict. It will be able to add to its system of tunnels running under the area as well.

As a result, he warns, “the next round of war will be inevitable, holding both Gazan citizens and much of the rest of the Middle East hostage to Hamas’s aims.” What makes this conflict different from those in the past? While the atrocities of October 7 have understandably heightened Israel’s outrage and justify a much stronger military response than in previous conflicts, there is more to the story. “If we do not defeat Hamas, we cannot survive here”

As I have been reporting throughout this conflict, the aim of Hamas and Hezbollah, both of which are backed by Iran, is to eradicate Israel and reclaim the area for Palestine. However, these groups acting alone or in concert do not possess the military means to defeat Israel in a conventional war. Nor does Iran, even if it were to engage directly with the Israel Defense Forces. But what they can do, as Ross notes, is to make Israel unlivable and thus drive Israelis to leave. This seems to be their clear goal now. Ross points to predictions by Ali Khamenei, Iran’s supreme leader, that Israel will not survive another twenty-five years. And he quotes an Israeli commander who said after October 7, “If we do not defeat Hamas, we cannot survive here.”

I understand the commander’s sentiment in a way I would not if I had not led more than thirty study tours to Israel over nearly thirty years. Israel is a tiny country, approximately the size of New Jersey. Iran continues to arm Hamas and Hezbollah with ever more sophisticated technology now capable of launching missiles in such numbers that Israel’s Iron Dome defenses cannot protect all their civilians in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and across the country. And the October 7 invasion shocked the Israelis, who believed their sophisticated military intelligence and powerful defense forces would protect them from such atrocities.

Israel’s previous wars were fought by their soldiers against the soldiers of their enemies. Never before have so many civilians been slaughtered or taken hostage. All this to say, in the new world created by the October 7 invasion, if a cease-fire is declared and Hamas survives, Israelis will know that they and their families will be in danger in ways unprecedented in the nation’s seventy-five-year history. “Be strong and courageous”

This fact is crucial to the calculus because so many Israelis live in Israel by choice. Theirs is one of the best-educated, most skilled workforces in the world. Every Israeli I have met would be imminently employable in any nation in the Western world. They have chosen to live in the State of Israel to secure a future for the Jewish people.

If the nation can no longer defend itself, its very reason for existence is in question. And the willingness of its citizens to risk their lives and their families could come into question as well, perhaps leading to an exodus of Israelis from the nation.

As a consequence, through a combination of more advanced weaponry and brutal terrorist attacks, Hamas and its allies have raised for the first time the specter of a world without the State of Israel as we know it. This is why my friends in Israel have said since Hamas’s horrific October 7 invasion that these terrorists must be defeated. They understand firsthand what I have attempted to explain today: the future of the nation is now in the balance.



This fact leads me to conclude this Daily Article by asking you to join me in urgent, consistent intercession for Israel and her people.

- Pray that they will heed God’s instruction to the military general who first led them into their promised land: “Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed” (Joshua 1:9a).
- Pray for Israeli forces to defeat the terrorists who threaten the future of their nation.
- Pray for the protection of Palestinian and Israeli civilians in this conflict.
- And pray that all will turn to the one and only Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6) so they can testify, “*The Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation*” (Isaiah 12:2).

Will you join me in such intercession right now?

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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Crossword Solution

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gin but as a wife. But it is a virgin that the Lamb (Christ) is to marry. So, the wife (Israel) of the Old Testament cannot be the bride (virgin) of the New Testament. Again, the wife (Israel) is to reside in the earthly Jerusalem during the Millennium, while the bride (the Church) will reside in the New Jerusalem. These distinctions make it clear that Israel cannot be the ‘Bride’ of Christ. We must remember that John did not call the bride – [his]wife, until Revelation 21:9, which was after the marriage, when she was no longer a bride but a wife.

“The Bride of the Lamb is from a disowned and outcast race, made so by the disobedience of the head of that race in the Garden of Eden, but the bridegroom saw her and loved her. To redeem her he came from his own lovely home in heaven to her sin-cursed home on earth, where he was rejected by members of her family, seized and subjected to a mock trial, and nailed to a cross as a malefactor, where he laid down voluntarily his life for her, thus demonstrating his love, and opening up the way for her redemption from the law that held her in bondage. He then left her to return to his Father’s house to prepare a home for her, and during the period of her betrothal he left her with his own family, simply sending the Holy Spirit to teach and protect her, and fit her for the day of her marriage, when he will descend into midair to meet her on her way to the bridal halls of heaven (I Thessalonians 4:16-17).”

What is described here is a sacred tapestry of divine love woven throughout both the Old and New Testaments. These two narratives are like two bright glistening stars in the vast cosmos of God’s word.

The wife of the Lord, Israel, is characterized by her unfaithfulness, her infidelity. But her husband, the Lord, stands as a testament to enduring covenantal love. He pursues her relentlessly despite her harlotries. One day, in the latter days, he will win back her heart and she will come home to him.

The height and depth of the husband’s love for his wife, Israel, is a poignant reflection of the divine grace that perseveres through the worst of human frailty and betrayal, promising a future where the flowers of reconciliation and restoration will bloom in the desert (Isaiah 35:1-2), streams will flow in the wasteland (Isaiah 45:2), and desolate land will be turned into a fruitful one (Ezekiel 36:35). God will restore Israel to himself and ultimately keep all of his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

In contrast, the Bride of Christ – that radiant assembly of believers from Pentecost to the Rapture – exemplifies the unspeakable redemptive and transformative power of Christ’s sacrificial love, where he, the Lamb of God, voluntarily and substitutionally laid down his life to redeem and purify his beloved. These two extraordinary love stories, one from ancient times and the other from the dawn of the New Covenant resonate with the timeless message of God’s passionate pursuit of sinners alienated and separated from him.

No wonder the Marriage of the Lamb and the tremendous celebration that follows it, the Marriage Supper, is announced with mighty praises, gladness, and exuberance!

Larkin adds, “If there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7), and that joy is the joy of the Father, how much greater will be the joy of the Father when he shall behold the consummation of his plan for his Son in his marriage to his Bride, the Church.”

It is also notable that Jesus began his ministry by attendance at a wedding – the most joyous occasion in Jewish life. What does this say about the Lord’s relationship with joy and happiness? It suggests that both, including their accompanying synonyms, are God’s great desire for his people, the Church.

Something the late James Montgomery Boice, once pastor of the renowned Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, said about Jesus’ attendance at the wedding in Cana is truly a breath of fresh air and a departure from ordinary thought.

Boice asked, why do you suppose Jesus was invited to the wedding? His answer? “Jesus was always welcomed among those who were having a good time.” There you have it. Jesus enjoyed a wholesome good time and he enjoyed it when others were having the same.

Delight, elation, gladness, thrill, exultation, glee, jubilation, gaiety, and merriment, are at the heart of the Christian experience, and there is every reason for this to be the case. The believer’s sins, past, present, and future are completely covered and forgiven by Christ’s atoning blood. The Spirit of God is always present to comfort, instruct, and lead. Everything bad that comes into the child of God’s life is seized by God’s grace and overruled for good. Any meaningful loss suffered shall be overturned at the resurrection. There is the assurance of heaven’s bliss and the glories of eternal life. What joy!!!

Someone once summed it up, saying, “If you are without Christ, you have nothing, if you have Christ, you have everything you need and more.”

The Psalmist said, “You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever” (Psalmist 16:11). Jesus expressed his desire for his disciples to experience his joy and for their joy to be complete through their relationship with him. He said, “I have told you these things so that you will be filled with my joy. Yes, your joy will overflow!” (John 15:11). The apostle Paul said the fruit of God’s Spirit working in someone’s life is joy (Galatians 5:22-23). Paul admonished, “Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!” (Philippians 4:4)

Boice continues: “I am afraid that if some Christians I know were the pattern, there would be very little to expect of true happiness or good times in the Christian life. Some Christians go around with grim looks and long faces. If they ever find themselves in the company of someone else who is having a good time, they immediately suspect that the cause of the fun is either illegal, immoral, or fattening. Jesus was not like that. He did not condemn those who were enjoying



themselves, and he was not jealous of them. As a result, he was welcome at their gatherings...I believe, of course, that there may be environments from which most Christians should stand free. Yet we often apply that thought adversely and forget to be cheerful. Charles Spurgeon once wrote to his students: ‘Sepulchral tones may fit a man to be an undertaker, but Lazarus is not called out of his grave by hollow moans.’”

Christians who make up the Bride of Christ should be characterized by cheerfulness. The Marriage Supper of the Lamb, which follows the Marriage of the Lamb and is in the future of every lover of Christ. It’s going to be the biggest, most extravagant, fun-filled, joyous party and celebration known to humanity. So, whatever is happening, no matter how bad, for the believer it’s not going to last and the best is yet to come! Oh, happy day!

Here comes the bride, said the apostle John. She “has prepared herself. She has been given the finest of pure white linen to wear. For the fine linen represents the good deeds of God’s holy people” (Revelation 19:8).

Lady Diana Spencer, who became Princess Diana upon her marriage to Prince Charles, made extensive preparations for her wedding in 1981. Her wedding gown was the most memorable. It was fashioned with ivory silk taffeta and featured a fitted bodice, a voluminous skirt with layers of tulle and lace, a 25-foot train, and puffed sleeves. It was adorned with thousands of hand-sewn pearls and sequins. Her gown was a masterpiece and Lady Diana, the Bride radiated an ethereal and timeless beauty that left the entire world spellbound.

In the days of old, a bride would make her own wedding garment. The idea of the bride preparing herself suggests the preparation and sanctification of believers. It implies that followers of the Savior have actively participated in their spiritual growth and readiness for his return. The fine linen of the bride’s gown represents the righteous acts of God’s holy people. These righteous acts are an important aspect of the believer’s life and preparation for the Marriage of the Lamb.

In Exploring Revelation, the late John Phillips wrote: “During his earthly pilgrimage, the believer prepares himself for this day. The garments that beautify the bride are said to be given to her because any good work, any righteous deed, any praiseworthy act we do is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. ‘Work out your own salvation,’ says Paul; then he adds at once, ‘It is God which works in you both to will and do of his good pleasure’ (Philippians 2:12-13). The righteous acts of the true church, performed while on earth and from which the world benefits more than it knows, becomes the fine linen, clean and white in which the bride is arrayed to go forth to meet her groom.”

The late Charles C. Ryrie, in his book Revelation, has added the bride is the bride because of the righteousness of Christ, the bride’s wedding gown will be made up of the righteous deeds that she has done in life.

Revelation, apocalyptic literature, doesn’t speak directly about the Judgment Seat of Christ, which is a judgment of believers. This teaching is explained, mostly by the apostle Paul, in other New Testament passages.

The believer’s judgment takes place in heaven before the Marriage of the Lamb and the Marriage Supper (I Corinthians 3:10-15; I Corinthians 4:5; II Corinthians 5:10).

The Judgment Seat of Christ will sort everything out. The bride must be made ready and prepared. All of her works must be judged as to their purity. She must be purged of works done in the Lord’s name which were of mixed or tainted motives, only what was done wholly for the glory of God will be left to adorn her on that blessed day when she and her beloved are forever joined.

Yes, indeed, as the angel proclaimed with excitement, “Blessed are those who are invited.”

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



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The Answer

By Billy Graham

Q: Why do so many intellectuals have a hard time trusting the Bible? It seems all they can do is tear it down and suggest that anyone who believes its truth is anti-intellectual.

A: From the writings of the Rev. Billy Graham

The Gospel is not anti-intellectual. It demands the use of the mind, but the mind is affected by sin, whether that mind is of superior intelligence or average. A person may be intellectually brilliant, but spiritually ignorant. *“A natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; ... and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned”* (1 Corinthians 2:14, NASB).

An intellectual mind can be turned into a first-class mind when Christ penetrates the heart. Some years ago, one of the most brilliant men in the world was reported to have an IQ of 208 with over 140 patents with a world-leading company. He even attempted theoretically to reconstruct the human brain. He became completely bewildered and shaken, however, when confronted with the complexity and utter impossibility of such a reconstruction. He didn’t know what to do or where to run. His choice was twofold: either the human brain came about by a fantastic chance or by intelligent planning. When faced with the alternative he knew he had only one choice, and he became a believer in God as it was revealed to him through Jesus Christ, whose intellect he could not surpass.

Many people of great intelligence will not accept Christ as their Savior because they cannot prove His existence, yet the plain truth is that God cannot be proved by intellectual arguments alone. If the human mind could fully prove God, He would be no greater than the mind who proves Him!

We may not understand everything in the Bible, but God will give us faith to believe. We must allow faith to go beyond our intellect, receiving His words as the inspired Word of God.

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



Joint Statement From Burke County Board Of Commissioners And Burke County Board Of Education Regarding School Funding And Teacher Supplements

By Cheryl Shuffler  
Burke County



MORGANTON, NC – With the passing of Senate Bill 68 into law (SL 2023-143), Burke County Public Schools plans to increase supplemental pay for teachers. The Burke County Board of Education and the Burke County Board of Commissioners came together in early September for a joint resolution to repeal 40-year-old legislation that restricted funding streams for Burke County Public Schools. Under the previous law, certain sales taxes in Burke County were restricted to school capital projects. Now that the old legislation has been repealed, the school district has the choice to use the funds for operational expenses. With the help of Burke County Commissioners, \$1.5 million can now go toward teacher supplements, which will impact the recruiting and retention of qualified educators. Both boards worked together diligently to research and repeal the decades-long law now aligning Burke County to fund schools as most other counties in the state.

Burke County Board of Commissioners Chair Scott Mulwee said, “By reconciling differences and working together to re-establish local control of school funding, we can now move forward and do what is right for teachers by increasing their supplements and students by increasing per pupil funding.”

Burke County Board of Education Chair Wendi Craven said, “We appreciate stakeholder feedback during the process and for county commissioners providing the opportunity to the school board to make this decision that will benefit teachers and our schools for decades to come. We would also like to thank Senator Warren Daniel and Representative Hugh Blackwell for their work in getting this action swiftly through legislation and repealing the decade’s old laws.”

Cheryl Shuffler is the Public Relations Officer for the Burke County Public School System.



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# Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

## So, Send I You

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

*“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.” (John 3:16-17, NASB)*

That wonderful and powerful message is the foundation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a story that is recounted not only during Christmas but throughout the year. The story of Christmas begins, out of necessity, with this proclamation of a God who loves us so much that He sent to us a Savior, One who would save us from our sins. Loving Father God sent us a redeemer and deliverer, One who came not to judge, but to set us free from the yoke, penalty, and burden of sin. God sent His Son! And although this seems to imply that God is far off, nothing could be further from the truth. Almighty, Sovereign, and Creator God is constantly present. He is, by His own nature, omnipresent and omnipotent; that is, He is able to be present at all times and places and He is able to know and perceive all things. Almighty God is also all-powerful. He is, after all, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. He has, according to the compelling stories written throughout the Word of God, always been present and has always sent His love and care to mankind. God is not far off! He has always been present in the world that He created! Mankind’s problem is that we are separated from Him by our sins. The sending of a Savior reminds us that God broke through the lines of separation and offered sinful humanity salvation, reconciliation, hope, and love. He sought after broken mankind.

Why did God come seeking after us? Because we were lost in sin and without hope! Why did God desire to save or redeem us? Because God loves His crowning and most cherished creation—even when we became darkened by evil and separated from Him by sinful rebellion.

Remember what happened with Adam and Eve. They fell for Satan’s lies and were tricked into rejecting Sovereign God’s presence and eternal love and care. The result was sin, separation, and spiritual death. However, in the right time, God’s time, our great, powerful, and loving God was willing to do what no one or nothing else could do—redeem and save His creation from eternal separation and sin. To accomplish that, God, the Father, SENT His presence in visible human form into this lost and dark world of humanity to seek and save us.

It is crucial to note that the very same Sovereign God who loves and provides salvation for his creation also judges them for their sin and rebellion. The Word of God warns (Romans 3:23), *“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”* Romans 6:23 declares, *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* God’s creation, separated by their sin, needed a Savior—for they could not save themselves from the pronouncement of judgment stamped upon them by sin. And they could not, by any means or devices, span the spiritual distance created as a result of their rebellion. Only God could! And out of His love, He drew near! He broke through, bridging the gap, visiting the down and out, speaking out His love and care to all who were lost and separated from the Father by sin. He came and dwelt among His very own creation. And in order to accomplish this, God took on human flesh. His name, as prophesied by scripture, would be Jesus. The name Jesus means “One who saves.” He was called both “Son of man” (indicating the essence of His existence as fully man) and “Son of God” (indicating the essence of His existence as fully God). How could that be: fully God and fully man? The essence of the makeup and character of Jesus could only be accomplished by an eternal, powerful, sovereign, and loving Creator God.

The Gospels make it absolutely clear that Jesus, the Son of God came to redeem and to save. *“...that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge (condemn) the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.”*

The Gospels also make it abundantly clear that this same Jesus who was sent, also himself sends. That’s where you and I come in. We, who are redeemed and saved from the penalty of our sins; we who have been reconciled to Holy God by the blood of Jesus and have been claimed as spiritual sons and daughters of God; we who have been filled with His Holy Spirit and have been placed together in the Body of Christ—we too, like God’s Son, are sent to this dark and lost world with the wonderful message of a love so great that our God was willing to pay our price for sin.


God is still sending! When the resurrected Lord appeared to His disciples who were hunkered down and filled with fear, He spoke these words, *“Peace be with you.”* And then He said (John 20:21), *“Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.”* A disciple of Jesus Christ has a divine calling as a messenger of this gospel. You and I are sharers of the message of Jesus Christ. Our message to the world is God’s message. It is the message that God came into this world to redeem and to save! God drew near! That is the message of Christmas! God sent His Son (God in flesh) into this world to both: walk among us demonstrating the genuineness and power of God’s love, and to lay down His human life as a propitiation or sin offering. Only as Christ laid down His life as the perfect, sinless Lamb of God would the sufficient price be paid for all of the sins of all of humanity.


But there is a catch! Only those who see Him as God’s Savior, Redeemer, and Lord, will receive the gift of forgiveness and be reconciled to God. And those who do trust in Jesus are then sent out to share the wonderful news of a Savior. Just as Isaiah captured this truth, so must the spiritual children of God respond to His



God’s question and command. *“Whom shall I send and who will go for Us? We answer the Savior and declare, “Here am I, send me!”*

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

  
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*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*  
**John 1:14**



Cranial Facial Release

By Miguel Cruz  
Mitchell County

Cranial Facial Release (CFR) is a balloon assisted advanced endo-nasal cranial technique that has been used successfully to treat various neurological and structural disorders. The objective is to mobilize the bones in the face and the cranium to open up the breathing passageways and facilitate normal cranial function.

Some of the most common conditions that respond to CFR treatment: Breathing disorders, sinus conditions, snoring, sleep apnea, migraine headaches, head trauma/post-concussion syndrome, TMJ disorders, fascial paralysis to name just a few.

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Dr Cruz and Lesia are the owners of Cruz Life Center in Burnsville.



Dr. Cruz Completes Certification in Cranial Facial Release

Dr. Miguel Cruz is in practice along with his wife of 35 years, Lesia Cruz who is a certified Integrative Nutritionist. They own Cruz Life Center in Burnsville NC. Dr. Cruz is a licensed Chiropractor since 1981. When asked what he does for a living he explains that he helps people get out of pain and improve their overall health without the use of drugs or surgery. Something everyone seems to want but nobody seems to know how to get there. Dr. Cruz accepted Jesus Christ in the summer of 1979 while in chiropractic school. He has since dedicated his life towards helping people grow in physical health and spiritual health.

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Isaiah 7:14

By Regina McIntosh  
Yancey County



The Heart of Christmas

Gently falling, floating down from soft skies,  
Caressing the spirit with frosty flecks,  
Rousing warmth inside that dark can't disguise.

Carols sung by those who know love's effects,  
Laughter and light reflect God's compassion,  
Caressing the spirit with frosty flecks,

Blizzards so bright paint the world an ashen,  
Timeless faith reminds the spirit to give.  
Laughter and light reflect God's compassion.

Hailing the birth of One who did forgive,  
Making a way for all to celebrate.  
Timeless faith reminds the spirit to give.

He is One who can set the sinner straight,  
Assuring the soul that they're surely saved.  
Making a way for all to celebrate.

Christmas opens the heart where love's engraved,  
Gently falling, floating down from soft skies,  
Assuring the soul that they're surely saved.  
Rousing warmth inside that dark can't disguise.

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



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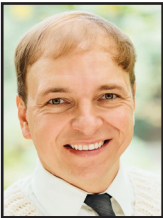
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Seventh Day Adventist Burnsville

“Give Thanks to the Lord!”

By Art Dmytriyeu  
Yancey County



"O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever." (1 Chronicles 16:34; Psalm 106:1; 107:1; 118:1, 29; 136:1 KJV). These are the words of the Bible that perhaps many of us have in our minds and our hearts this season. Our God is a good God! Praise the Lord!

We ought to come with humble thanks for all His mercies that have been given us all through the year, and we should be enjoying the sunshine of His golden blessings that have crowned the year with plenty. When God pours His blessings into our hearts, we should not hide them as we would precious perfume, lest the aroma escape; we should bestow them upon those around us so that they may also be happy and thankful. We have reason for coming into the courts of the Lord with offerings of gratitude that He has preserved our lives another year, and we praise Him for it!

As the children of the Almighty, we should individually aim for a higher and holier standard. The mind will surely become degraded if it is continually occupied with worldly and temporary things. But if trained to dwell upon heavenly, eternal themes, it will be expanded, elevated, and strengthened. The mind should take hold of things unseen and meditate on them; then things of eternal interest will be so exalted above the worldly that temporal affairs will sink into insignificance in comparison. If we do not regard divine things as of high value and neglect to train the mind to prize eternal things more than worldly things, then we lose valuable experience. We might fail to receive the wisdom God has brought within our reach. Suppose we change this order of things and begin today to train the thoughts to dwell upon the great plan of salvation, devoting less time to self-serving. Let's suppose you try to count all your blessings. You have thought so little upon them, and they have been so continual that when reverses or afflictions come, you are grieved and think God is unjust. Really? Have you ever wondered why it is so? Perhaps you do not call to mind how little gratitude you have manifested for all the blessings of God. Maybe you have not deserved them, but because they have flowed in upon you day by day, year by year, you have looked upon them as a matter of course, thinking it was your right to receive every advantage and give nothing in return. "Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's." (Psalm 103:1-5 KJV). What a passage!

Another thing to consider: the Lord sometimes withdraws His mercies to bring people to their senses. Will we make it necessary in our case for Him to do so? Let us look completely away from your own trials and difficulties. Let us cease to magnify our little grievances and put all thoughts of ourselves out of your heart. We better cease self-service and serve the only true and living God. Let His precious melody continue to remain in our hearts, and His praises be on our lips! The blessings of God are more than stars in the sky and more than the sands of the seashore. Think about His love and care for us, and may it inspire us with love that trials cannot interrupt nor afflictions disturb. May the Lord be praised and glorified. As the old hymn goes, "To God be the glory, great things He has done!" Dear Reader, soon we shall know as we are known. If there are any who have had wrong feelings of jealousy, now is the time to confess them. God, help us to humble our proud hearts and bring Jesus into our midst. Please open the door of your hearts and let the Holy Spirit enter, and you will have such a Thanksgiving as you never experienced before. God Bless You!

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



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Humor

By Buddy Freeman  
Madison County



A fellow was walking by a neighbor's house one day when he saw a strange sight. His neighbor had leaned a long stackpole up in a tree and was attempting to climb the pole with a measuring stick to find out how tall it was. "Why don't you just lay it down on the ground and measure it?" the man asked, trying to be helpful. "Because I don't want to know how long it is. I want to know how tall it is," he answered.

A few years ago I went to visit my brother who was stationed in Germany. I assumed that enough Germans would speak English so that I could at least get around. But I found that many people spoke only their native tongue-including the ticket inspector on the train. He punched my ticket, then chatted cordially for a bit, making gestures like a windmill. I just nodded from time to time to show him that I was interested. When he had gone, an American woman soldier in the compartment leaned forward and asked if I spoke German. "No," I confessed. "Then that explains," she said, "why you didn't bat an eyelid when he told you that you were on the wrong train."

Out in Utah, they tell the story of the sheep rancher who all his life wanted a fine car. So he went to the bank and borrowed enough money to buy himself a classy Cadillac limousine. Weeks later, the salesman called him on the telephone and asked how he liked the new car. "It's a dandy," the rancher told him. "OK in every way. But I especially like that glass partition you talked me into buying. I admit I figured it was an extravagance but I sure like it now." "Yeah?" murmured the bemused salesman, "Why?" "When I bring the sheep in from the pasture, the glass keeps 'em from lickin' my neck."

Wife to husband: "I put a little scratch on the bumper, dear. If you want to look at it, it's in the back seat."

A friend of mine has two complaints about his car: The motor won't start and the payments won't stop.

We must mention the city farmer who dressed his scarecrow in an old tuxedo he did not need in the country. "How did it work?" inquired an observant neighbor. "It didn't protect the corn any better," replied the city fellow, "but it attracted a better class of crows."

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



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Jesus Show Up and Show Off

By Leah Johnson  
Mitchell County

As Director, I’ve often said my favorite part of this job is getting a front-row seat to watch Jesus show up and show off! I love getting to share these stories of His faithfulness with others.

One such story happened recently. We got a text from a mom needing formula for her baby. I’m going to be honest with you: When that request came in, I cringed a little inside. I hate saying no to anyone who asks, but we don’t have much formula on our shelves, and there are so many different kinds out there. (We don’t keep a lot on our shelves because we don’t want it to expire before it’s used.) The odds of us having what she needed were pretty slim. I stopped by the Center to check and see if we might possibly have what she was asking for. Wouldn’t you know, we had a HUGE can of exactly the brand and kind she needed? The mom was so excited, and I was quick to point out to her how this must have been a God thing. I love how He’s into the small details, don’t you? This mama will feel seen and provided for, all because of one can of formula. Something else struck me about this story: We have so many people donate physical items to the Center. Most days we pull into the parking lot, and donations are waiting for us on the doorstep. I wonder if people know when they give a pack of diapers, or a car seat, or a can of formula....that very thing may be exactly what someone needs. It may be the thing communicating to them God sees them and their unique situation. Never underestimate the power of a simple gift.

There are a few different ways to meet needs here at the Center: We have a current Amazon Wishlist you can access below. We are also collecting names of churches and individuals who would like to participate in our baby bottle fundraiser this coming January. Please email [tcplifedirector@gmail.com](mailto:tcplifedirector@gmail.com) if you’d like to be added to the list!

Matthew 10:42 “*And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.*”



Amazon Wishlist

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Leah Johnson is a wife and mom of two. She is the Executive Director at M.Y. Life Center and volunteer Advocate for Mitchell/Yancey Forgotten Initiative.



Constantly

By Todd Abraham  
Athens, Tennessee



It wakes you up and you go to sleep with it. It is the first thing you check in the morning. Some of you probably even take it in the shower with you. You absorb its content while you are going about your morning. You take it with you to the car. You peruse it while you are driving even though it is against the law. Even though you claim to be a Christian the bible teaches you to obey all the laws of the land and not the ones you pick and choose. You say you love Jesus and He taught us if we loved Him, we would keep His commandments and His commandments are not grievous. You are watching it at every red light. You sit in the parking lot wasting gas and time entranced by it.

You take it to work with you and check it every chance you get. Even when you know it is wrong and disobedient to the Lord and your boss. Because disobeying your boss is disobeying the Lord with very few exceptions. You take it to the bathroom. You monitor it during your breaks and lunches. You leave work with it and enjoy it during the drive home and at every stop you make. In fact, navigating the aisles of stores is suddenly not possible anymore without the app for that. You shove it in your kid's faces so you don’t have to exercise any patience and actually take the time to teach them things. You share it with your friends and theirs with you. You take it on your runs or you walks and to the gym. It’s with you everywhere you go and during everything you do and occupies probably at least 70% of your waking hours.

You put your life at risk because of using it while you are driving. Or sitting in a parking lot with your car running and absolutely oblivious to reality should anyone sneak up on you and attack you. You take it out to eat with you while you and all of your family are immersed in it and ignoring each other; especially your young, impressionable children. You take it to class, to the bathroom, shopping, in bed and everywhere else that wicked little device will travel. You lie to everyone around you and tell them you can’t live without it. However, you don’t dare tell God that with an honest conscience because you know He will know you are lying.

You spend more time on it than you do in prayer, the word of God, with your spouse, with your children, focusing on the things that really matter, your safety and the safety of those around you. Your desire to have it, hold it, and give yourself to it is greater than your desire to seek the Lord and to do all you can to make sure you are right with Him. And if all that wasn’t bad enough, you even take it to church and let it disrupt what should be the most important part of your week in addition to your daily prayer time and bible time.

Because of it, you waste more of your time which actually is leased to you by God and belongs to Him anyway. You push your conscience aside time and time again when the Lord tries to convict you about it. But your smartphone isn’t an idol, is it? You can quit it anytime you want right? Even though everything I just said is true for almost every one of you reading this, you can stop anytime you want right? You’re not an addict, are you? You aren’t an idolater, are you? The verdict is in. The Judge says guilty as charged! Psalm 97:7 “*Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols: worship him, all ye gods.*”

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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Should Your Church Start a School?

By Sam Currin  
Wake County



In recent decades, both churches and youth have faced significant challenges. Across the board, church attendance has seen a concerning decline, particularly among young people. Additionally, many teens who do attend church often drift away after graduation.

It is not surprising that the decline in church attendance parallels the worrisome decline in adolescent well-being. The prevalence of social media platforms, celebrity idol worship, drugs, alcohol, and pornography simultaneously connect and isolate our youth.

Furthermore, research indicates that religious children often lose their faith while under the supervision of parents who believe they are effectively transmitting their religious values.

Many churches are struggling to attract and keep youth engaged. Denominational leaders and church growth consultants have been promoting various "revitalization" ideas, with varying degrees of success.

This disheartening situation calls for a proactive response to shape future generations with culture-transforming, Christian worldview thinking.

To prevent the next generation of Christian children from falling away, we must create an environment that allows them to be educated in alignment with Christian values.

It is no longer sufficient to rely solely on the brief hour or two spent at church on Sundays to counterbalance the influence of secular school culture during the remaining 35 hours of the week.

Outsourcing the education of our children to the state is no longer the best option, as it often fails to prioritize the values of the church and the home.

So, what can a church do? Is starting a school within the church an option worth considering? Is it an affordable option?

Fortunately, there is good news. The North Carolina General Assembly has made religious schooling economically feasible by significantly expanding the Opportunity Scholarship Program. This program now offers tuition assistance to all students in the Tar Heel state.

Scholarship amounts are determined based on family income, with low and middle-income families receiving the largest awards. This expansion benefits parents who previously could not afford private school tuition for their children.

For the 2023-2024 school year, students are eligible for scholarship grants from \$3,246 to \$7,213.

Since the advent of North Carolina's voucher program a decade ago, numerous churches across the state started schools while others expanded existing schools. Private school enrollment has surged and has significantly outpaced the percentage of growth in traditional public schools.

Most of the scholarship money already goes to religious schools. Statewide, more than two-thirds of private school students are now attending religious schools.

The State Education Assistance Authority (SEAA) oversees the distribution of scholarship funds, which are paid directly to the schools.

Private Christian schools maintain their own academic, religious, and admission standards; and their First Amendment rights are fully protected. The state respects the autonomy of non-public schools in terms of religious and educational philosophies.

Many church buildings remain underutilized during the school week, offering potential space for classrooms, food service facilities, and recreational areas. Remodeling or constructing additional facilities to accommodate more students is an option, as is sharing space with nearby churches or leasing additional space.

Private schools have the flexibility to determine class sizes, and research suggests that smaller class sizes lead to better academic outcomes.

With the availability of the Opportunity Scholarship Program, churches should seize the opportunity to invest in a Christian school and extend their reach into the community.

Christian education offers numerous benefits, including better academic outcomes, lower costs, and the development of discipline and moral foundations that have become scarce in public schools.

With the monopoly on public education funds held by government-run schools, parents often find themselves ineffective in influencing curricula and values. By utilizing the scholarship vouchers, parents can choose schools that align with their beliefs and more effectively pass on their faith to their children.

To address the crisis faced by struggling churches and youth, establishing a Christian school within your church can be a powerful solution. Education plays a significant role in shaping children's beliefs and identity.

Starting a Christian school allows churches to actively engage and educate youth in alignment with Christian values. It is a valuable investment that aligns with the mission of the church and provides a much-needed alternative to secular education.

Dr. Sam Currin (drstcurrin@gmail.com) lives in Raleigh, NC and is a former judge, law professor, and United States Attorney. An ordained Baptist minister, he holds degrees from Wake Forest University, UNC School of Law, and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Dr. Currin is a longtime advocate for K-12 Christian education.

And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. Luke 2:12

The Coming One

By John McCoury  
Roan Mtn, Tenn.



*“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots, a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him — the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord — and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.”* Isaiah 11:1-2.

It is not difficult for us to see that this is a clear prediction of the Lord Jesus. Here in these opening verses is a hint that the Messiah will appear in history in a very obscure way. That is suggested by this word; a shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse. Like a great tree that has been cut down, the ancestry of Jesus represented in David and his father Jesse has been reduced to obscurity and insignificance. But out of that lowly stump will arise a shoot, a single sprout, a man who will, as the prophet goes on to say, be filled with the Spirit of God and who will do a great work in the land. When our Lord is referred to as the son of David in the gospels, it is always in terms of royal glory, but when he is called the stump of Jesse, it is a reference to his humble beginnings. The prophet not only sees the ancestry of Jesus, but he sees him in his Spirit-filled ministry. The Spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, he says.

That Spirit consists of three pairs of characteristics. As you observe these pairs more closely, you can see that they describe Jesus of Nazareth. The first pair, the spirit of wisdom and knowledge, speak of his amazing insight into human affairs. Wisdom is the knowledge of the nature of things, while understanding is the awareness of the differences between them. How clearly Jesus reflected these in his ministry! One of the symbols of our age is the therapist's couch. Therapists have their patients lie on a couch and ask them questions to understand their problems. But our Lord never used a couch for he never had to ask questions. John's gospel tells us that Jesus didn't need any man to tell him what was in man because he knew man. The second pair, the spirit of counsel and might, speak of authority. Counsel is the ability to give good and right advice, while might is the ability to help carry it out. This is described even more fully in the words in verse three, He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear... What a wonderful description of Jesus as he met with people. He spoke of the truth that you can never find out by human powers. He described how the angels live, what happens after death, how prayer works, and how the devil works. These he described with full authority. He did not have to study reference books but rather spoke so that men hearing him said, *“No man ever spake like this man.”* (John 7:46) The third pair, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, speak of our Lord's intimate relationship with the Father. Out of that flows the marvelous serenity of his life. He is never taken by surprise. He always seems to be a master of the occasion. This grows out of his full awareness of the mind of God. He said on one occasion, *“You do not know Him, but I know Him”* (John 8:55). He came to reveal to us the mind of the Father, the graciousness, compassion, truthfulness, and faithfulness of God. All grew out of his knowledge of the Lord and his fear of the Lord. Gracious Father, I thank you for these amazing words from this ancient book. How accurately they picture One who has come to mean more than all else to me. I thank you for the confirmation of the Spirit to my own heart that these words can be fulfilled in me as well In profoundly awesome humility Jesus came as one of us to make us one with Him. Are we learning that His power is perfected in our weakness?

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

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# Making a Difference

## By Beginning a New Life

By Dr. Tom Walker  
McDowell County

2 Corinthians 5:17 says, “*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.*” Since we are living in perilous times, we need some people who can make a difference in this sinful and wicked time in which we find ourselves.

Everything in the spiritual realm begins with personal salvation. There are several things we know about salvation from the Scriptures. Let me give you some of what the Bible reveals about our personal redemption.

It is a free gift. Ephesians 2:8-9 says: “*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.*” “Grace” is God giving man what he does not deserve or merit, while “mercy” is God holding back what mankind actually deserves. It is clearly evident that God delights in mercy because Micah 7:18 says, “*Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger forever, because he delighteth in mercy.*”

It is a satisfying gift. Psalms 107:9 reminds us, “*For he satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness.*” The word “satisfieth” has this meaning: it is something that satisfies you; it gives you something that you want or need. Since there is so little satisfaction found among people today, that makes satisfaction a rare and important matter. Too many folks today are failing to be satisfied since they are looking in the wrong places for what will not satisfy their longing soul.

It is a permanent gift. Romans 6:23 states, “*For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*” The only life God offers to the believing sinner is “eternal” life; He has no temporal life to offer in the spiritual realm. One day the believer may die physically, but since he has eternal life, he cannot die spiritually. What a precious and wonderful salvation we received from a generous and loving God! We are going to take a few minutes to think about what becomes new according to 2 Corinthians 5:17.

### New Position- In Christ

The Bible says, “*If any man be in Christ.*” It would help us greatly and thoroughly bless us if we understand what it means to be in Christ.

It involves how God sees us. We need to remember how God looks at us. Since we have believers, He sees us clothed in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember in the Garden of Eden how our first parents, Adam and Eve, sinned against the Lord. As a result of that sin, God clothed them in animal skins, which is a picture of Christ shedding His atoning blood at Calvary so we might be freed and released from our sin (Genesis 3:21). Animal skins were provided for Adam and Eve after they had sinned. God has made provision to set all sinners free who would come to Him for release and forgiveness from them.

It also involves what we have done with the Gospel. Christ made salvation possible for all men who would repent and believe (Jn. 3:16). He makes an offer of salvation and gives every man a degree of light who comes into the world. John 1:8-9 reveals: “*He (John) was not that Light but was sent to bear witness of that Light (Jesus). That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.*” Every person born into this world is given a degree of light. What he does with it will be determined by how much additional light a person receives. The more light you respond favorably to, the more you are given. We either receive Christ or reject Him; man does have a choice in the matter.

It involves a switch. Suddenly, when we were born again, we were hidden in the righteousness of Christ. It is only when we are in Christ that the sin debt we had is canceled, our relationship with God is restored, and our eternity is secured. John 20:31 declares, “*But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*” New Person in Christ

Notice the words “a new creature.” The word for “creature” is also translated in our KJV as “creation”. “Creature is translated creation in five verses in our New Testament (Mk. 10:6; Mk.13:19; Rom.1:20; Rom. 8:22; 2 Peter 3:4; Rev.3:14). In each instance, it speaks of the creation of the creating ability of God. Fabricating and founding in original form is what is expressed.



Twice in the Bible, there is a reference to a “new man”. Ephesians 4:24 commands us: “*And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.*” It is God when we are born from above that creates a new man and a new nature inside of us. Due to what God does within us, it should not surprise us that we take on a whole new person. The old person is still there, but there is a new man created by God on the inside, producing heavenly, godly desires in us.

The other reference to the new man is found in Colossians 3:10 where the Bible says, “*And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.*” The new believer has a new man to put on (the new self). The new self is constantly being renewed (present-continual tense) in order to keep it victorious over sin. The new self was created to be like God. We become more and more like the Lord as our new natures are refreshed, as we yield to the sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost.

### III. New Passings In Christ

Note the words “Old things are passed away.” What do those five words suggest to us?

The words “passed away” means go away or to go by. What has passed away in the one who receives new life from Christ?

Old thoughts have passed away. I am not saying we never have evil thoughts, but they are not welcome to stay in the life of a true child of God. We do not submit to them like we did before our conversion. We are told what to think about in Philippians 4:8: “*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*” What you think will determine what your life will become.

Old principles have passed away. As new creatures, we have principles that govern our lives that are so much different than before we were saved. To accurately define a principle, we know it is a basic rule about what is right and morally good. Our values drastically change when we receive a divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). For instance, the Apostle Paul, before he met Christ on the Damascus Road, had no problem with persecuting Christians. He even delivered them to their deaths. Values changed after he met Jesus and he began to love those whom he once hated. He poured out his life to propagate the Gospel of Christ that he once hated.

Old companions have passed away. Instead of running with people who would tear down our faith if they could, our companions become people who love the Lord and His Word. Due to the change in Paul’s life, his companions became Gentiles who loved the Lord. Paul felt like David as seen in Psalms 119:63: “*I am a companion of all them that fear thee and of them that keep thy precepts.*” That is exactly how Paul the Apostle felt.

Old aims have passed away. Once we really know the Lord. We aim to do all we do to the glory of God. Paul said, “*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God*” (1 Cor. 10:31). Before conversion, we lived to gratify ourselves instead of glorifying God.

Since the old things have passed away, new practices have entered into our lives. What was not true of us before our salvation experience, is true of us now. We love the church and want to attend it; we love the Bible and want to study and obey it; we love sinners and want to see them saved; we love the Lord and want to wholly follow Him.

If you make a difference in this ungodly society, that will begin at the time of your salvation, after you have repented of your sin and trusted Christ as your personal Savior.

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



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Under the Old Cherry Tree

By Chris Rathbone  
Mitchell County

Under the Old Cherry Tree one weekend, several years ago, we had some of the worst wind we’ve had in a while here in these mountains. As the old saying goes; “Sounded like a freight train coming through the valley!” The loud gusty winds kept many awake through the night hours and many folks lost power due to downed trees.



My brother called me on Sunday morning that weekend to inform me that a tree had fallen on my parent’s house. We made plans to meet there after church to assess the damage it may have done. Fortunately and by God’s grace, only the top of the old cherry tree was lying upon the house. If the tree had fallen a little to one side or the other it could have caused some significant damage either to the house or a tool shed. Daddy and Mama got quite a rude awakening around 2 a.m. that morning. We all are very thankful that everyone was kept safe.

It’s been a while since I had looked at the old tree. It stood on the bank above my parent’s house at the edge of my grandmother’s old home place (That’s Mammie’s house for those of you who knew her). We were surprised at how large the tree had grown. Thinking about the old tree back in the days of my youth brought back many memories.

Mammie had placed an old large milk container in the forks of the tree for a little laying hen. The little hen would only allow Mammie to get the eggs. She would reach in and pick up the hen and cradle it in one arm. While she talked to the hen to calm it down, she gently reached in and retrieved the fresh eggs inside. The little hen never fussed much at all.

One fork of the tree grew out to the left and upward. We managed to get a rope swing on the large limb. There was a wooden board for a seat. Though the limb itself was only 10 or 12 feet off the ground, to a young boy it was very high! All of us grandchildren spent many hours playing and swinging under that cherry tree. Personally, I remember many times around dusk dark in the hot summer days, swinging slowly and letting my feet drag in the dry, dusty ground underneath the swing.

Not only did we swing in the old tree, but we climbed a lot too. In those days telling a boy not to climb a tree was like trying to tell a bear not to sleep in the woods. Boys and tree climbing were like peanut butter and jelly, they just went well together! The challenge each time we climbed was to see if we could get higher than we did the last time. The fear of being so high also brought the satisfaction of knowing you had conquered that fear and reached higher than ever! I still remember having trembling hands and a nervous stomach after climbing down. Even so, the next time we would try again.

In the years when the frost didn’t kill the bloom, the tree yielded some of the best-tasting cherries. When the cherries ripened we would climb and pick some to eat while playing. We helped Mammie pick cherries for cobblers and pies. The smell of those baking in the oven was one I’ll never forget. We often ate too many of the fresh cherries and got the “belly ache”, if you know what I mean! When it was about time for the cherries to start ripening, Mammie would sit on the porch with a shotgun and blast the blackbirds to keep them from getting her cherries. I don’t think she ever realized she was probably blasting more cherries out of the tree than blackbirds!

The old tree had provided food, shade in the summer, and a playground for us grandchildren. Now it will provide some firewood to Daddy and Mama after it seasons out. As we were cutting and cleaning up some of the old tree, I have to admit that a sad feeling sort of came upon me. Sad because the times that have passed can never be visited again except in our memories. It’s sad also that a lot of the family who made those memories so special aren’t with us now. Even though it’s sad in a way, God also reminds me to be thankful. Thankful that I had a family to love and that loved me. Thankful that we had a Godly grandmother to set such an example of faith for us to follow. Thankful we have a Savior who gives us the hope of being reunited one day.

On the way over that day, I shared with my boys many of the memories I have of the old cherry tree. It’s amazing how God uses things from our past to bless us in the present. He even uses the memories that happened under an Old Cherry Tree.

*Preacher Chris Rathbone is former Pastor of Mine Creek Baptist Church.*

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# Mt. Zion Community Church

## Christmas Thoughts

By Naomi Houston  
Avery County



News from our church: Despite the recent event of our Pastor David's stroke a couple of weeks ago our church is alive and thriving. Our last monthly Gospel Sing Along on November 3 drew almost an overflow crowd and what a blessing to raise our voices together in praise as we sang the old gospel songs. Our next Sing Along will be on Friday, December 1st beginning at 7 pm and there will be a time for refreshments and fellowship afterward. God has blessed us with the leadership of Brother Bob Hensley who is filling in for Pastor David during his recovery. We invite you to join us for worship at 9 am on Sunday mornings followed by Sunday School. We also invite you to join us on Christmas Eve at 6 pm for our Candle-light Service. Our thanks to Reverend Jock Ollis and our sister Global Methodist Churches in Minneapolis, Burnsville, and Bakersville for their continued support.

### Some thoughts about Christmas:

Thomas Wolfe wrote those infamous words: "You Can't Go Home Again" many years ago and yet there is something about Christmas that calls us home. There is something about Christmas that turns us homeward – if only in our dreams. "I'll Be Home for Christmas, You Can Count on Me" reminds us of that longing and hope to be, once again, with loved ones.

As we approach the Advent season, we are a people waiting and longing for Christ to be born, and, like children eagerly awaiting Christmas morning, this waiting can be hard. Our whole lives are spent waiting it seems. We're put on hold when we call, we wait in line at the grocery, at the gas pump, our order is late, and will the paint ever dry?

But waiting (it will always be with us) can be made a work of art and so with Advent, we open each Sunday with an invitation to prepare our hearts and be ready for the day Christ will return. We read the prophecy of a promised Messiah in the Old Testament and the story of the fulfillment of that prophecy in the New Testament. We sing the familiar hymns, "O, Come, O Come, Emmanuel", "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus", "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear", "Silent Night", and "Joy to the World". We inch our way towards Christmas, counting the days and carrying out our own family traditions. These are some of the things that call our hearts homeward – to experience year after year that special time together.

Whenever we are preparing to go home, what do we do? If you're like me you begin to make lists lest you forget something. You begin to "put your house in order" and set your mind on your destination and what you might need along the way. In the words of the motto of the Boy Scouts, "Be Prepared" is your watchword.

Advent is a time of preparation – preparing us for the coming of the promised Messiah. It serves to remind us that we have a mission, we who see God at work in this world, and that we are His disciples. Lighting the candles of the Advent wreath provide a beacon calling us home. "We'll leave a light on for you" isn't just an advertising slogan but a promise to us that we have the light that is Jesus Christ to lead us home. Home to Bethlehem just as the star guided the shepherds and the Magi; we're led, once again to that lowly manger where, once again, we find the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ. Yes, we can go home again and so we do during the season of Advent.

*Naomi Houston and her husband, Lt Col Clay Houston USMC Retired, live on Henson Creek in Avery County. They are members of Mt Zion Community Church where Naomi is the adult Sunday School teacher. Both have been actively involved in church throughout their 68 years of marriage and Naomi wrote a weekly column for the Avery Post for many years.*



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NCBAM Provides Help for the Journey to Aging Adults  
By Dr. Sandy C. Gregory, NCBAM Senior Director

As NCBAM approaches its 15th anniversary in 2024, I'm reminded of the early days spent traveling across the state visiting churches, Baptist Associations, and various state agencies in an effort to learn about the needs of aging adults in North Carolina and how we could best frame this new ministry of Baptist Children's Homes.

Government agencies were happy to share information with me, but I could tell they weren't very hopeful about us making a long-term difference. More than one person told me, "Faith-based groups don't stick around." Another said, "They have good intentions and come on full force, but then they fade away."

But thanks to North Carolina Baptist churches, Baptists on Mission volunteers, and the strong presence of God's people living out the Gospel, NCBAM has stood the test of time. We're proud of our state partnerships and the many recognitions and awards we've received from agencies who are grateful we have not faded away, but rather have continued to grow "from strength to strength."

NCBAM began with a statewide Call Center and now our Call Center is just one of 14 different ministry outreaches. One of our most impactful outreaches is Rampin' Up! Held biennially in conjunction with Operation Inasmuch, this event brings attention to the vital need for wheelchair ramps among so many older adults in North Carolina.

Rampin' Up! will be held on April 27 and May 4, 2024. I hope you will call us at 877.506.2226 and make plans to bring greater safety and independence to a senior in your community who is in desperate need of a wheelchair ramp. We have many clients who have been trapped in their homes for months or even years because of just a few steps. I guarantee you the sight of an older adult beaming while walking down their ramp for the first time is a sight you will never forget!

Rampin' Up and our other outreaches demonstrate that NCBAM, along with its supporters and partners, remain in "full force"—and will continue to impact lives for years to come.

*Dr. Sandy C. Gregory has served as senior director of NCBAM since its inception in 2009. Contact Sandy at [scgregory@bchfamily.org](mailto:scgregory@bchfamily.org).*



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# Pause . . . and Consider

## A Man of Few Words

By Ken and Jan Merop  
Cleveland, Tennessee



He was a man of few words. But he was a man of the Word.

And for that, I am forever grateful.

I can still see my Dad, head bent forward over his Bible. He loved God's Word and read it every day. When he was well into his 80's, he memorized several verses in John 14. I still hear his voice reciting them.

Dad believed with all his heart what John 1: 1-4 NKJV says.

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men."*

Dad's heart for God's Word was reflected in all he did. From his love for his wife and family to his profession as a machinist and his dedication to being the spiritual leader in our home.

Though he worked long hours to provide for us, he always got up on Sunday mornings took us to church, and served the Lord in various capacities. Though quiet, we knew to listen when he spoke. He had our love and respect and that of many others. Quite often something he said will come to mind.

I am still listening.

I have a feeling that Joseph, Mary's betrothed, was also a man of few words.

When he learned that Mary was with child and didn't know the details, he could have made a public spectacle of her and divorced her. Rather, Matthew 1:19 says he, *"being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly."*

Here was a righteous and kind man...quietly trying to come up with the best solution. But God intervened and sent an angel to tell him the truth about her pregnancy and that he shouldn't be afraid to marry her.

God entrusted his own Son to this man. Adopted into this particular family, Jesus had the example and training of a godly man as his earthly father.

And though tongues surely wagged and made their own suppositions, Joseph was steadfast in his faith in God, his belief that God knew what he was doing and that Mary needed his love and protection.

God the Father even gave Joseph the privilege of naming the child. *"You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."*

What message might the Father be whispering to you? Listen. Selah



*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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# Morganton Seventh Day Adventist

## The Feedbox Bassinet

By Steve Bietz  
Burke County



Jesus was born in a stable--not the most regal setting for the birth of the Sovereign of the universe. Yet the beauty of the Christmas story is not spoiled by the fact that our Lord was born in the most inglorious of surroundings. Quite the contrary. Somehow, there is profound pathos in the fact that the Creator chose to be born among the humblest of His creatures. The spectacle of His lowly birth strikes a responsive chord in the best of human nature. Behold "*The Mighty God*" (Isa 9:6) lying there on the hay with the faithful donkey standing by. Then watch as His parents lay Him, not in some fancy cradle or bassinet, but in the donkey's feedbox with the other stable animals standing around, because there was no room in the inn.

Except for the worship of the shepherds, who followed the directions of the angel, and later the Magi--foreigners from a distant country who came to worship Him and brought gifts--His birth was unheralded, unrecognized, and unhonored by human beings.

Before His incarnation all the treasures of the universe were Jesus' by right of creation, "*for it was by Him that all things were created both in heaven and on earth, both the seen and the unseen, including Thrones, angelic Lords, celestial Powers and Rulers; all things have been created by Him and for Him*" (Col. 1:16, Moffatt). Yet for our sakes "He became poor" that we "through His poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). This is condescension beyond comprehension. Can we ever appreciate the magnitude of this transaction? Through the incarnation, not only are the riches of His grace placed at our disposal but those who avail themselves of this grace and overcome sin shall inherit all things.

Paul tells us that Jesus, "*though existing in the form of God, did not consider His equality with God something to cling to, but emptied Himself as He took on the form of a slave and became like human beings. So recognized in appearance as a human being, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death; yes, death by the cross*" (Phil. 2:5-8, New Berkeley). We are encouraged to "let this mind be in" us.

May the Christmas story, with its wonderful condescension, strike a responsive chord in your heart and move you to dedicate yourself more fervently to Him who makes it possible for you to become a partaker "*of the divine nature*" (2 Peter 1:4).

Steve Bietz, Pastor, Morganton Seventh day Adventist Church.

*Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Matthew 2:1*



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Roan Mountain Baptist Church

“Why Linus Dropped His Blanket”

By Russell McKinney  
Mitchell County



“And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10-11, K.J.V.)

The character Linus from the Peanuts cartoon series is famously known for two things. First, he always carries his security blanket. Second, he gives the pivotal speech in "A Charlie Brown Christmas." You know that speech. It’s Linus quoting verbatim the K.J.V. of Luke 2:8-14 in response to Charlie Brown’s frustrated cry, “Isn’t there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?”

As many times as you’ve watched Linus give that speech, have you ever noticed a particular thing that he does as part of it? Immediately following his voicing of the words, “Fear not” he drops his trusty blanket and doesn’t pick it up again until he has finished the speech. It’s as if he instinctively understands that you don’t need a security blanket when you know that Jesus is on the scene.

Charles Schulz, the creator of the Peanuts series, converted to Christianity after returning home from serving in World War II. He read theological commentaries the way other people read popular novels, and he taught Sunday School at the churches he attended. He even led one class through a study of the entire Old Testament. He never became the hardcore fundamentalist type and no doubt he would have been labeled “too liberal” by many Christians, but he was never shy about lacing his daily comic strip with references to God and scripture. According to one online article, 560 of the nearly 17,800 Peanuts strips contain some type of religious, spiritual, or theological reference. Schulz himself once said, “I preach in these cartoons, and I reserve the same rights to say what I want to say as the minister in the pulpit.”

"A Charlie Brown Christmas" first aired on December 9, 1965, and the fact that its climatic moment was a speech that simply quoted a portion of the Biblical account of the birth of Jesus was downright shocking for the time. Other holiday specials, especially those aimed at kids, were content to major upon Santa Claus, reindeer, Christmas trees, presents, family, etc. But not only did "A Charlie Brown Christmas" present the story of Christ’s birth, it also condemned the crass commercialism of Christmas. Let’s face it, that was pretty radical stuff for the time. For that matter, it still is today.

So, let me encourage you to go to YouTube, call up Linus’ famous speech, and watch for the precise moment when he purposely drops his blanket. You can view the whole scene in under two minutes, and it will be time well spent. Even more importantly, I would encourage you to drop any worldly security blankets to which you are clinging and instead place your complete trust in the Savior of whom Linus speaks. Just as that angel of the Lord wanted the arrival of Jesus to dispel all fear from the hearts of those shepherds on that night so long ago, fear and Jesus shouldn’t coexist in your heart, either. I’m not saying that the world isn’t a scary place that is filled with frightening things and frightening people, but I am saying that you don’t need a blanket in your hand when you truly have Jesus in your heart.

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

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Sudoku

Solution on page 14

	4	8	3					6
1	5	2						
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Grand View Baptist Church

The True Meaning Of Christmas  
Jesus, the Reason for the Season

By Glenda Ward  
McDowell County



Jesus – The True Meaning of Christmas – The Gift of God.

Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. Jesus came into this world as a tiny infant born over 2000 years ago. The purpose of Jesus’ birth was to enter into the world and become one of us to deliver us from our sins (1 Peter 2:24). Jesus’ birth was unlike any other. Jesus was born of a virgin woman – He was in human form and born as a Jew. He was subject to God’s law and fulfilled it perfectly. Mary was a young teenager, living in the village of Nazareth and engaged to be married to Joseph, a Jewish carpenter. God’s angel Gabriel was sent to Mary to deliver the news of God’s plan. Mary would become the mother of the coming Messiah. The angel told Mary she would deliver a Son by the power of the Holy Spirit and would name Him JESUS.

The birth of Jesus was a historical event. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a small village about 5 miles southwest of Jerusalem. Jesus’ birth came under the law (Galatians 4:4). Jesus is the second person of the Trinity. He was born of a virgin in a lowly stable. He was wrapped in swaddling cloths and laid in a manger (a trough used for feeding cattle and livestock). The Baby Jesus was visited by humble shepherds keeping watch over their flock. Later Jesus was visited by the wise men who rejoiced with great joy, and when they saw the young child with his mother, they fell down and worshipped Him. They presented Him with gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Jesus is not just any person. He is God in the Flesh. As Jesus grew and taught, what He did for us is tied inseparably to who He is. Jesus is fully human and fully God. Jesus took upon Himself full humanity. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice because, although He was fully human, He never sinned. Jesus was subjected to the same temptations and limitations that we are. God’s Son entered into our world so He could display perfection and holiness through His Work of living a perfectly sinless life and dying on the cross for us who are not perfect and living in a sinful corrupt body so that all who trust in Him would be saved from the righteous judgment of God. “God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world could be saved through Him” (John3:16-17). Jesus’ birthplace, Bethlehem Ephratah, was prophesied in the Old Testament (Micah 5:1-2). Jesus being preceded by a great prophet was prophesied in the Old Testament. Esaias told people to prepare to see God's work (Isaiah 40:3). John the Baptist used these words as he challenged people to prepare for the coming Messiah (Matthew 3:3). Christmas is the time of year when we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. The meaning of Christmas is and should be the recognition, appreciation, and honor of the Birth of Jesus, God’s only Son who took possession of our sins upon Himself suffering the punishment we deserve that we could be saved by His saving grace through our faith in Him. Jesus suffered on that cross on Calvary’s Hill, dying in our place for our sins which we chose to commit.

Jesus is the Reason for the Season. Jesus gives meaning to Christmas. Jesus was God in the flesh, perfect, pure, and Holy. He died on the cross and rose from the dead. The True Meaning of Christmas is the celebration of Jesus’ incredible act of love (John 3:16-17). The True meaning of Christmas is the Real Story of God becoming a human being in the person of Jesus Christ. Christmas was necessary because we needed a Savior. Christmas is celebrated each year and the reason we celebrate should be out of gratitude for what God did for us. We remember Jesus’ birth by worshipping Him, being conscious of the poor, and giving to those less fortunate by remembering the gift of Jesus as Jesus gave of Himself.

God loved His own and provided a way “the only way” for us to spend eternity with Him. God reached down His hand and gave His only Son to stand for our sins so that we might go free. Jesus took our punishment for our sins by dying on the cross. He paid the price in FULL!!! We are free from God’s condemnation when we accept God’s free gift of love – Jesus Christ. Read Romans 5:8. Through God’s unfolding plan we should be in Thankful appreciation for the Grace and Forgiveness that God has made available to us through His Son “Jesus Christ”, our Lord and Savior. The real meaning of Christmas is rooted in the lives of God’s people.

Who today would know of Mary, Joseph, or Bethlehem if it were not for Jesus?

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

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# Plumtree Church

## The True Nature of God

By Ryan Bridgeo  
Avery County



It is hard for people to relate to God when they don't know what He is like. Many people have opinions about Him. They think He is angry, that He is hard to please. They say things like "God's going get you" as if He is looking for a reason to punish us. They think that God is violent. They think He is a God who wants to send judgment. They think He causes storms, hurricanes, and floods. They think He sends sickness and disease to punish people or to teach them a lesson. They believe that He causes everything to happen in their lives due to His sovereign perfect will. But they do not understand the true nature of God.

Some people also look at the wars in the Old Testament and think that God is angry and that He likes punishment and death. But that couldn't be further from the truth. Let's think about the USA for example. As a nation America is approximately 239 years old. Research shows that as of 2015 the USA has been involved in war 222 years out of its 239 years of existence. This means that for 93% of its existence, America has been at war. More than 1.1 million American lives have been lost in these 239 years.

If you were to judge America by those numbers some people might conclude that Americans love to fight and kill and that they are angry and mean. People from other countries who do not know or understand the culture, constitution, or reasoning behind some of these wars, may think that we are money-hungry, greedy, evil people who should mind their own business. But I believe that those people would be getting a totally wrong impression of the USA as a whole.

It is the same way with God. We are judging events that happened over 4000 years (not 239), that happened in different countries, in different cultures, and under different covenants. We read these stories through our outside perspectives and judge without a full understanding of the people and God. We read these stories and instantly concluded that God is mean, cruel, angry, hateful, and hard to please.

I believe that in the same way that people can have a wrong impression of America and Americans, people, even good church-going people, can have a wrong impression of God. These misunderstandings have marred people's view of the true nature of God.

The most important relationship is our relationship with God. How you perceive Him, you will receive Him. Who He is to you, is who He will be through you. So, understanding His true nature is pivotal to our relationship with God.

Psalm 86:15 (NIV) *"But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."*

Psalm 106:1 *"Praise the Lord! Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever."*

From these two verses alone, we can see that God is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love, faithful, good, and merciful. This is the true nature of God.

In Hebrews 1:3 (NIV) we see that *"The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being."* This means that Jesus the Son is exactly like Father God. If you want to know what God the Father is like, look at the life of Jesus. Jesus came to reveal the Father's heart of God towards mankind.

Was Jesus violent? Was He angry? Was He hard to please? Did He desire to bring judgment on sinners? Did Jesus cause storms? Did He make people sick with diseases? No, He did not! He was patient and kind. He was gracious and forgiving. This can be seen in the verses of the woman caught in the act of adultery or the woman at the well or Peter after he denied knowing Jesus three times. Jesus said that He didn't come to judge the world but to save the world through Him. He rebuked storms and He healed sicknesses and diseases.

Acts 10:38 says, *"How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him"*. This is the true nature of God.

In the same way that people could have a wrong impression about the United States due to our history of war, it is possible that people could have a wrong impression about God. If you want to know what Father God is like, study the life of Jesus. Jesus is the revelation of the true nature of Father God.

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@plumtree-church.com](mailto:pastor@plumtree-church.com)

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# Snow Hill Baptist Church

## Five Stars - No Regrets Family

By Dean Honeycutt  
Mitchell County



While traveling out west in Montanna, Wyoming, and South Dakota one can drive for miles across large tracts of wilderness. It is beautiful out there. On the way home just north of the Badlands we were looking for a place to stay and we came upon a motel in the middle of nowhere. The next large town was a long way down the road, and we were tired and ready for a rest. We were able to get two of the last rooms available and the folks in line behind us were turned away.

I had booked every lodging place except for this one. We often look at ratings and reviews before we decide to stay somewhere. I will not stay somewhere that has bad reviews. And I will not stay in a place that may not be safe, it's just not wise. So, a four-to-five-star rating is what I am looking for.

When we opened the door to our rooms we were not impressed. The place was not very clean, and we saw bugs on the floor. My mom was looking for bed bugs and we had to get clean sheets. The manager was not very nice or accommodating, to say the least. We made do for one night and would not go back to this place. We often joke about this place now. Compared to the other places we stayed in on our trip this place was a dump. If someone knew the condition of the rooms beforehand, they would not choose to stay in this place.

Why would God leave heaven to come to earth? What kind of review and star rating would God give Earth? Just think for a moment you are staying at the finest resort on earth with all the amenities you can imagine, great food, and maid service. You have it made and you are staying in paradise. Would you leave the resort and go to the roach motel? Of course not. You would not leave a five-star resort to go to a horrible motel. Earth is not a good place to stay when compared to heaven, there is no comparison.

Just think for a moment God leaves the glories of heaven to come to earth. Most people do not leave the comforts of their homes to be homeless. It does not make sense. I am not going to do that and most people I know are not going to do that. But Jesus left His home to come to earth. But not only did He leave His home He also took on human flesh so He could experience the sorrow and suffering of humanity. Jesus emptied Himself of what makes Him God and was born in the likeness of man. Why would God deprive Himself of almighty power and glory to come to earth?

Philippians 2:5-8 *"5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: 7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: 8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."*

The reason God left paradise to come to earth is love and grace. For God so loved the world that He gave us His only Son. God's gift to us is Jesus. The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Everything that Jesus went through is just the opposite of what we would do for our children. We would not send our child to stay at a horrible motel. But God sent Jesus to earth. We would not want them to be born in a stable for animals. We would not wrap them in peasant clothes. We would not want them to suffer. We would not let them be punished for the crimes of another person. And we would not forsake them when they needed us the most. But Jesus did come to a sinful world, He did live without a home, He did receive punishment for sin, and He suffered and died for us.

Christmas is about Jesus. Let's help our children remember what Jesus did for us and the reason we celebrate Christmas. Let's remember that our blessings and comforts come from God. Don't let the world and commercialism steal the true meaning of Christmas. It is amazing the amount of time and money we put into making our children happy at Christmas to see the joy on their faces on Christmas morning. We do all this because we love them and want them to be happy.

We will never comprehend God's love for us and the expense God paid for our grace. Merry Christmas.

Pastor Dean Honeycutt shepherds Snow Hill Baptist Church in Bakersville, NC. He may be reached at 828-385-0213, [snowhillbaptist@gmail.com](mailto:snowhillbaptist@gmail.com) , or visit their website at [www.snowhillbaptist.com](http://www.snowhillbaptist.com).

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New Reentry Office in Yancey County

By Jim Smith  
McDowell County



[Burnsville, NC] – [November 11, 2023] – Freedom Life Yancey (FLY), a division of Freedom Life, is pleased to announce the opening of its new reentry office in Yancey County. The office will be located at 617 West Bypass US Hwy 19 E, Burnsville, NC. FLY will provide comprehensive pre- and post-release life preparation and reintegration services to help currently or formerly incarcerated men and women successfully transition into society.

“We are excited to expand our services into Yancey County and to provide much-needed support to individuals and families who are navigating the reentry process,” said Danny Hampton, Executive Director of Freedom Life. “Our goal is to help people who have struggled with addiction and faced the impact of incarceration overcome the inner and outer barriers they face and build a brighter future for themselves and their families.” “There is nothing better than seeing people discover the value God’s love has for them as they become positive contributors to their families and the entire community.”

- The Yancey County reentry office will offer a variety of services, including:
- Basic needs: Staff and volunteers will provide immediate needs such as food, clothing, shelter, hygiene, etc.
  - Case management: Staff and volunteers will work with individuals to develop a one-year personalized life plan that addresses every short-term and long-term need they have.
  - Employment assistance: Staff and volunteers will help individuals find and secure employment.
  - Housing assistance: Staff and volunteers will help individuals find and secure housing.
  - Legal assistance: Staff and volunteers will provide referrals to legal services.
  - Substance use/mental health treatment: Staff and volunteers will provide referrals to substance use/mental health treatment programs for individuals who need them.
  - Community support system development: Staff and volunteers will work with churches, community organizations, and community addiction support resources such as Celebrate Recovery, AA, and other programs to help individuals build new and positive support systems into their lives.

The office will also offer support groups and workshops for individuals and families impacted by incarceration.

“We believe that everyone deserves a second chance,” said Linc Vance, Yancey County Reentry Coordinator. “Our reentry office is a place where people who have faced incarceration can find the support and resources they need to succeed in life.”

Linc Vance, a native of Avery County, and his family have lived in Yancey County for the past 24 years. Linc recently retired from the Department of Adult Corrections where he served as a corrections officer for 9 years and a probation officer for 20 years. Upon his retirement this year, Linc felt led to apply for the position of Yancey County Reentry Coordinator. “I feel like God has spent the past 20 years preparing me for this mission field,” said Linc Vance. We are very excited to have Linc as the Yancey County Reentry Coordinator.

About Freedom Life

Freedom Life is a faith-based 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that has been providing support and resources to individuals and families impacted by incarceration for over 12 years. The organization has established community Reentry Councils and opened reentry offices in McDowell, Avery, and Yancey Counties. The organization is committed to helping people who have faced incarceration experience God’s love as they seek to successfully build new lives. They are also committed to building stronger communities.

For more information about Freedom Life and/or Freedom Life Yancey and its reentry mission and services, please visit [www.freedomlifeyancey.org](http://www.freedomlifeyancey.org).



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



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Christian Voter Guides





# The "ABC's" Of Gratitude

By Steve Henry  
*Burke County*



As my wife and I were having a conversation about some cares of life that had flooded in on us in a very short period of time, we found ourselves casting those cares on our Savior because He cares for us. Then during our time in prayer, we started thanking Him for all the things we are grateful for. Becky shared with me that when she is overwhelmed with life she starts with the alphabet as her guide and thanks Him for anything that starts with each letter, hence the ABC's of gratitude, therefore we are grateful for:

A. An Amazing Father (when I shared this with my granddaughter, she gave me this one first).

Almighty God wants to be this amazing Father to all of us. We can have a deeply intimate relationship with Him.

*"All spiritual blessings,"* (Ephesians 1:3) instead of all the hellish cursings that filled my life before I came to know Him. I don't know exactly how many blessings there are in His Word for us, but I do know "all" means "all," and as we continue to study His Word we find them there just waiting to be discovered.

All our needs are met in Him (Philippians 4:19).

B. Becky, the love of my life, I shudder to think of where I would be without her.

Barrage of Hope (my daughter gave me this one), He bombards us with His hope as we learn to turn from our way of dealing with life and simply come to Him (Matthew 11:28-30).

Body of Christ, without their help I can never be all God wants me to be.

Blessings, that's what this list is all about.

C. Constant, He is the great Constant in my life, my constant companion, continually helping me, delivering me, and loving me.

I am a child of God!

D. Doug Henry, the man with half a brain taught me so very much about gratitude, things I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

E. Eternal life.

Emmanuel, God with us.

I am an eternal being that will live in eternity with Him forever.

Enthusiasm for life.

Energy to keep on going.

F. Friend of God. He calls us His friend (Exodus 33:11; 2nd Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; John 15:15). God Almighty calls me His friend, what a thought, Hallelujah!

Frasier Smith, what a Godly example for us all.

Faith and the faith-producing Word of God.

G. Goodness of God leads us to repentance.

Grace, grace, God's grace, Grace that is greater than all our sins.

H. Holy Spirit, my constant helper, friend, and guide, Almighty God living in me, hallelujah!

Hope, we will always have hope, and we will always have a future because both are wrapped up in Him. (Jeremiah 29:11 *"For I know the purposes which I am purposing for you, says Jehovah; purposes of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope."*)

I. Immeasurable grace and love of God.

J. Jesus, my Savior, my friend.

Joy unspeakable and full of glory.

K. All the kindness that has been extended to me, for His loving kindness that has transformed and continues to transform my life.

L. Love, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life"*—enough said.

M. *"Made us accepted,"* (Ephesians 1:6) for years I lived in all kinds of destructive behaviors just to be accepted by others, then at the very instant that I received Him as my Savior He did for me what I could not do for myself—He "made" me accepted in His beloved Son.

Made Him to be sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (2nd Corinthians 5:21). What He was "made to do", "causes me to be" (made) the righteousness of God.

Mercy, where would we be without it.

N. "No condemnation," (Romans 8:1). Don't try to figure this one out, just receive it, enjoy it, and let it be a springboard into a Godly life.

O. One, He wants us to be "one" with Him and the Father (John 17:21).

P. Praise Him Daily, we can all work on our Ph.D.!

Pray without ceasing, praise without ceasing, give thanks in all things.

Q. Queen Esther, may we have more of her spirit.

R. Righteousness of God, we have already looked at how through His sacrifice He made (caused us to be) the Righteousness of God.

Repentance, He both leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4) and grants (gives) us repentance (Acts 11:18).

S. Sanctification, Thank You Father for continuing to work on us to change us into Your likeness with ever increasing glory (2nd Corinthians 3:18).

T. Truth, "If we continue in His Word we shall know the truth, and the truth shall set us free" (John 8:31-32).

U. Understanding, "He opens our understanding that we might understand the scriptures" (Luke 24:45).

V. Victory in Jesus, my Savior forever.

W. With God, nothing shall be impossible (Luke 1:37).

X. Xenocentric: oriented toward or preferring a culture other than one's own.

Father, You have oriented me toward and I prefer the culture of eternity rather

than the temporary housing in which I find myself. Because of Your marvelous, matchless, grace, I am a supernatural being in this body of flesh longing to be, and looking forward to the day that I will be totally delivered from this body of death (Romans 7:24). Hallelujah, what a Savior, what a friend. PHD a thousand fold!!!!

Exaltation, (sounds like an X), exalt His name forever.

Y. Yours is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever, Amen (Matthew 6:13).

Z. "The zeal of the Lord" shall perform great works in our lives (2nd Kings 19:31; Isaiah 9:7 and 37:32).

This is my personal list, maybe you should start your own.

*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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# Your Government Page

## NC Senate District 47



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

Over the 13 years I have been serving western North Carolina as a state Senator at the General Assembly, Republican majorities have accomplished many policy wins during this time that make our state a better place to live – balancing the state budget, tax reform, funding critical infrastructure, school choice expansion, and more.

Legislation matters because it shapes the parameters of our society. Lower taxes allow people to keep more of their own money. Sensible regulations that aren't overly burdensome enable aspiring entrepreneurs to pursue their dreams. Targeted social safety net programs empower people to bounce back from hard times and regain their independence from the government.

I am proud of the work we have done over the past 13 years, but I am reminded during the holiday season that policy and its inherent politics are only one piece of the puzzle in our work for a better North Carolina.

People should not ultimately look to the government or politicians to make the world a better place. We can start with our own families and communities. We should support one another through love, charity, and self-sacrifice.

Especially during the holiday season, it is important to look to the example of Jesus Christ as our guide. He cared for the poor, the widowed, the orphaned, and the outcast above himself. He never wavered from his holiness, but he displayed humility of spirit, and extended mercy and grace to even his most hateful enemies.

It is important to have the courage of your convictions, even if those beliefs may not be popular or advantageous. But in a world that values clicks and retweets, I hope we can extend grace and kindness even to those with whom we disagree.

This holiday season, may we all take time to enjoy and express gratitude for the blessings in our lives: family, loved ones, and, most of all, the mercy and goodness of God. Merry Christmas!

## NC Commissioner of Labor



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

I hope everyone enjoyed the Thanksgiving holiday. Thanksgiving is personally my favorite holiday, and I enjoy it the most because of the time spent with family and friends. It also provides me with the opportunity to reflect on how blessed I am and that I have so much to be thankful for.

On Nov. 6, I had the opportunity to participate in the Carolina Star Recertification ceremony at the Sherwin-Williams plant in Greensboro. They have been a part of the Carolina Star program for 15 years and this was their third recertification! Congratulations to Sherwin-Williams on this accomplishment. On that same day, I was also proud to be a part of a Partnership Signing ceremony between the N.C. Department of Labor's Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Division and The Whiting-Turner Contracting Co. This partnership is designed to help improve the safety and health of the employees working at the construction site of the new Wolfsped facility in Siler City.

We are very excited about our 25th annual Toys for Tots campaign. The objective of the program is to "bring the joy of Christmas to America's needy children". If you are in Raleigh on Dec. 13, please feel free to drop by the NCDOL from noon to 3 p.m. and drop off a new, unwrapped toy. If you are not able to join us, please be on the lookout for bins with the Toys for Tots logo throughout the state and please donate!

The safety awards application process will open in January and the deadline for submitting applications is Feb. 15. Previous participants should be on the lookout for emails explaining the new application process and any business that would like to learn more about the program should call Kiley Willard, the safety awards coordinator, at 919-707-7855 or email [safety.awards@labor.nc.gov](mailto:safety.awards@labor.nc.gov). I am looking forward to seeing many of you when the new safety award season begins this spring. It is a little bittersweet as this will be my last safety awards season as your Labor Commissioner.

May God bless you and your family during this season. Merry Christmas!

## NC House District 86



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

### New Budget Targets Behavioral Health

For longer than I care to remember, North Carolina has had significant, unmet needs in behavioral and mental health support. Those needs continue to be one of our most serious circumstances and the area also continues as a serious focus of mine. Although clearly much remains to be done, especially in the area of policy on how to effectively and best deal with those with behavioral or mental health needs, the new state budget does place renewed focus on such concerns. Especially if you, family, or friends may be troubled by such issues, here are some highlights that we must hope will move us in the right direction over the next two years:

- \$50 million dollars to incentivize healthcare workers to serve rural counties such as those in the West, by offering education loan repayment and salary bonuses.
- \$20 million to expand the Innovation Waivers program to an additional 350 people who are currently on the waitlist. I have been advocating for the expansion of this program to additional persons on the waitlist and will continue to do so. However, I am told that a lack of caregivers keeps us from including more.
- \$120 million to increase hourly rates for Direct Care Practitioners who work with those, generally living at home, who already have a slot in the Innovation Waiver program. Hopefully, this will help to increase the supply of caregivers, thereby allowing for more waiver slots to be granted.
- \$130 million to increase rates for Medicaid providers working with substance use disorder, mental health, and intellectual/developmental disabilities. This is an effort to encourage more providers to participate in Medicaid where there is a long-standing shortage, too.
- \$15.6 million to expand the Transitions to Community Living program that provides Innovation Waiver-type services to the mentally ill. Given our persistent lack of inpatient options for the mentally ill, a community treatment setting with proper medical oversight may offer promise.
- \$40 million for signing and retention bonuses for state-operated hospital staff positions at facilities such as Broughton Hospital and the J. Iverson Riddle Center, both severely understaffed at present.
- \$80 million to provide support for families with special needs children and to strengthen specialized behavioral health treatment.



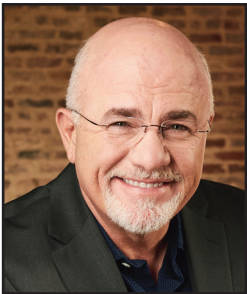


By Dave Ramsey

Dear Dave,

My husband and I want to do a live-in and flip real estate purchase. The idea is to buy a fixer-upper and rent out the basement to help with the mortgage payments. How do you feel about ideas like this?

Erin



Dear Erin,

In a situation like this, you need to do a basic business analysis. You’ve got to have a plan in place, and you’ve got to figure out the worst-case scenario. Part of this is determining whether you can survive if things fall apart. In this case, the worst case is that you can’t get a renter, and the house doesn’t sell. It puts your family in jeopardy, so to me, it’s not an option.

Want my honest opinion? I think you’ve both got a case of house fever right now. The possibility I just mentioned isn’t a rare occurrence. Lots of people have had the same idea, with the best of intentions, and still wound up in a big mess. I love real estate. I mean I really love real estate. And I’ve flipped more than a few houses in my day. But the particulars of this deal make me a little nervous. If you and your husband are willing to accept the possibility of things not working out as you planned—and the fact you might have to take additional jobs for an unknown length of time just to make ends meet—then it might be a play. But for me? Nope. I don’t like putting myself into these kinds of situations.

When I was much younger, I was willing to do all kinds of dangerous stuff and ignore the risk. But going broke decades ago knocked that kind of thinking out of me in a hurry. Any deal that runs the risk of leaving you bankrupt, or the victim of a foreclosure, just isn’t worth it, Erin.

-Dave

Dear Dave,

I read that you recommend saving 15% of your income for retirement. Should I count my employer’s contribution to my retirement plan as part of that 15%?

Carlotta

Dear Carlotta,

That’s a great question. Employer contributions do not count toward the 15 percent I recommend setting aside for retirement. It’s great if you work for a company that offers perks like that, but I want you to put 15 percent of your money into retirement. Whatever your company matches, whatever its pension may be, or even having a military retirement package, none of that enters the equation. I want your money in your name.

Baby Step 4 of my plan says to put 15 percent of your income into retirement accounts. The first thing you should put money into is a matching retirement account. If you’ve got a 401(k), a Roth 401(k), or a 403(b) and your employer offers a match, you should do that up to the match before anything else.

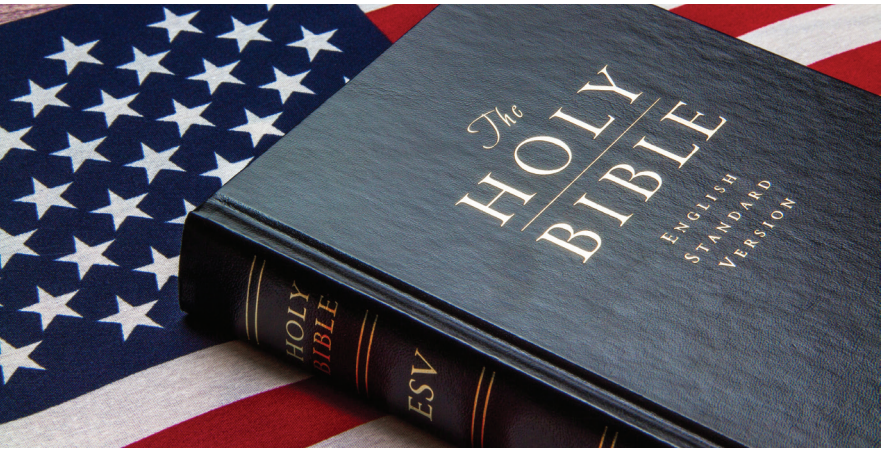
Let’s say your employer will match three percent. Since the goal is 15 percent, that still leaves you with some work to do. You’ve got three percent of your own money already retiring, so then you could look at a Roth IRA. If the Roth, plus what you invested previously to get the match doesn’t equal 15 percent, then you could look at a 403(b), or go back to your 401(k) to hit the 15 percent mark.

And remember, if you’re going to reach your retirement goals, you can’t do it alone. King Solomon, one of the wisest men who ever lived, wrote: *“Where there is no counsel, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety”* (Proverbs 11:14 NKJV). That’s why you need a quality financial advisor—one with the heart of a teacher—to help you navigate complicated financial issues, and guide you toward the kind of retirement you want.

Do you see what I’m saying here, Carlotta? I want you—not the company you work for—to control your financial destiny. I want you to be able to retire with dignity and enjoy life after working hard and saving. The responsibility for making that happen falls to you!

—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).



Reaching Jesus

By Marlene Houk  
Burke County



*“And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature.”* Luke 19:2-3

While wrapping my granddaughter’s birthday gift, I realized some curling ribbon would add a festive flair. Glancing around, I spied the cluster of helium balloons tied to the kitchen chair from an earlier celebration. White ribbon dangled in long curls, offering a nifty solution to my dilemma.

As I taped shiny coiled strands snipped from the balloons to the pink sequined ribbon, a soft shuffling noise sounded behind me. Curious, I looked around for the source within the quiet breakfast nook. I followed the last swooshing whisper and looked high above, gaping as the last of the balloons nestled in our dining nook skylight, their short tails high above my head. I laughed and postponed their retrieval.

A few days later, my daughter tried to retrieve the balloons. Her short stature prevented her from reaching them with her hands. Thinking about a solution, she finally found a painting stick with an extension rod. With quick little strokes, she succeeded in pinning them against the sides of the skylight and shimmied them down the wall. Although the helium caused them to float skyward over and over, she managed to retrieve them one at a time without scratching the paint on the wall. Victory!

She rescued my balloons on Friday. On Sunday, one of our pastors described Zacchaeus in Luke chapter two as a short man. I thought of my daughter, too short to meet her goal of grabbing the balloons with her hands but, like the old saying: where there is a will, there is a way, she overcame. Likewise, Zacchaeus determined to see Jesus because he wanted to know more about the famous healer and teacher. What he lacked in height, he made up in determination. In his struggles that ended in feasting with Jesus, Zacchaeus shares with us how to enjoy Jesus’ in His role as the Bread of Life.

First Zacchaeus climbed to higher ground. As he scrambled up the tree, his dignity drifted away. Perhaps, a few children giggled to see a man of such importance forsake his façade of political correctness for a glimpse of the famous Rabbi. And for millennia since then, Zacchaeus has urged us to climb upward to see Jesus. An old gospel hymn, entitled “Higher Ground,” sings the message well:

The lyrics to the first stanza ask the Lord for something.

**I’m pressing on the upward way,  
New heights I’m gaining ev’ry day;  
Still praying as I’m onward bound,  
“Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.”**

(Oatman, Jr., “Higher Ground,” stanza 1, public domain)

May we, like Zacchaeus, climb higher and higher until we see Jesus clearly. Second, Zacchaeus sought Jesus—a simple concept but quite important. He focused on Jesus, forsaking his tax collection. After his transforming talk with Jesus, he diverted his assets from selfish to selfless, becoming tall in faith. Today, like the man of little stature in Luke, we seek Jesus by following His work and joyfully welcoming Him into our lives.

Third, Zacchaeus hurried to meet Jesus, eagerly fulfilling His command. The short man’s intense focus radiated in his every step as he turned toward Jesus. Like Zacchaeus, rather than bowing to our goals, perhaps we can hurry to Jesus and embrace His perspective for each task of a new day.

Although his story only fills ten verses, Zacchaeus’ message towers above my life as a reminder to seek Jesus with every fiber of my being.

As I carefully folded the now flat (but recovered) balloons, I reflected on my daughter’s humorous illustration of the gospel story of Zacchaeus. Whether rescuing balloons or reaching Jesus, we need Zacchaeus’ example of climbing ever upward in knowing Him, seeking Jesus daily, and hurrying towards Him.

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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Dr. Josiah Bartlett

By David Streater, Ph.D.  
Burke County



This vignette is an educational moment in American history. It is about those who made a difference during the Revolutionary War era and how they served our country.

Josiah Bartlett was an uncommon person born into a typical colonial family. Josiah was born on November 21, 1729, in Amesbury, Massachusetts. He was Stephen and Hannah’s fourth son and fifth child. As an ordinary family of the era, the Bartletts tended a farm while Stephen also worked as a cobbler.

Josiah attended the town’s community school until he was 16. His common school education included Latin and Greek. Bartlett’s language courses helped position him to study and learn medicine under his preceptor, Dr. Ordway.

Working and learning the practice of medicine, Barlett became accomplished at compounding drugs, delivering babies, treating injuries, and other medical treatments. After several years of training, practical experience, and apprenticeship, Josiah was announced as Dr. Bartlett. As Kingston, New Hampshire, needed a physician, Josiah moved and established medical and dental practices. During his 45-year medical career, Dr. Bartlette developed a “stellar reputation among his colleagues and patients as a man of independent thinking and keen understanding.”

Bartlett was elected to the New Hampshire legislature early in his political life. During the Stamp Act uproar, “the Royal Governor [of New Hampshire] attempted to bribe Bartlett into siding with the Crown, but Bartlett ‘rejected every overture.’” During the next several years, Josiah was vital in several positions “as an active advocate against British oppression.” He was a commander in the New Hampshire militia and a member of the Committee of Safety.

In the mid-1770s, as a state legislator, “he cast his lot with the Revolutionaries.” Dr. Barlett was elected to the first provisional Congress when the Royal Governor dissolved the colonial assembly. In 1775, Josiah was elected to the Continental Congress. As revenge, British terrorists burned his home to the ground, and he could not attend the Congressional sessions.

Josiah was again elected to Congress. This time, he was able to attend, and on July 2, 1776, he voted for independence. “Two days later, he cast the first vote to approve the Declaration.” Dr. Josiah Bartlett and John Hancock were the first to sign the document. During the Revolutionary War, Dr. Bartlett treated sick and wounded troops and was also a leading proponent of creating the United States Navy.

During his lifetime, Bartlett was also a justice of the peace, associate chief judge, and chief justice of the superior court. He also promoted the use of science in agriculture, manufacturing, canal projects, and the expansion of roads. Moreover, Bartlett was the president and then governor of New Hampshire. Along with being a signer of the Declaration of Independence, Josiah’s other most cherished time was creating and being the first president of the New Hampshire Medical Society.

A year after leaving public service, this endearing and principal Founding Father died at 65 on May 19, 1795. Bartlett, New Hampshire, is named in his honor. Dr. Josiah Barlett was buried beside his wife, Mary, at the Universalist Church in Kingston.

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

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Habakkuk 2:1-4 "The Righteous Will Live By His Faith"

By Shawn Thomas  
Angleton, Texas



In Charles Dickens's Great Expectations, the central character, Pip, says of his sister, who was married to the kind blacksmith Joe Gargery, “My sister having so much to do, was going to church vicariously; that is to say, Joe and I were going”. Dickens was speaking sarcastically, of course, but some people really adopt that attitude: “Well, my wife takes care of the faith for both of us,” etc. No sir, she can’t! You have to take care of your own faith. Habakkuk 2:4 says: *“The righteous will live by his faith.”*

Sometimes "little words can make a big difference." There is one of those; the word “his” in Habakkuk 2:4. *“The righteous will live by HIS faith.”* That emphasizes the personal nature of faith. It’s not enough for you to be part of a “group” that has faith in God, or be part of a “Christian nation” or a “Christian Church” or a “Christian Family”; YOU must have faith yourself. “The righteous will live by HIS faith.” The faith that saves you and the faith that sustains you in life, must be a personal faith. "The righteous will live by HIS (own) faith." So ask yourself today: do I personally have this faith?

First of all, it takes personal faith to save you. Your wife's faith can't save you. Your parents' faith can't save you. Your grandma who loves you so much and wants you to be in heaven; her faith can’t save you. You yourself must believe in your own heart. It is the only way you can be saved. *"The righteous will live by HIS faith."*

Habakkuk 2:4 is one of the most important verses in all of the word of God because it teaches us how to be saved: not by anything we can achieve, or by anything that anyone else can believe for us. Each of us must put our own personal faith in what Jesus did for US on the cross. “The righteous shall live by HIS faith.” It must become personal for us.

In the early 1500s, a young man named Martin Luther felt a great burden of his sin before a holy God. So he went to his church leaders for counsel, and they prescribed that he do the works of the church as a cure. So Luther did all the works he could, with a fervor few could rival:

- he fasted until he was so weak he could hardly move
- he spent hours on the cold floor before the altar in prayer
- finally, he climbed marble stairs in Rome that supposedly belonged to Pilate, while praying on his knees, hoping to find peace with God. But even as he climbed those steps, he knew his guilt was not being eased. But suddenly the words of Romans 1:17 (which quotes Habakkuk 2:4) echoed in his mind: *"The righteous shall live by his FAITH"*. Suddenly Luther realized that none of these works would make him right with God, but only faith in what Jesus did on the cross. Suddenly Luther finally had the peace with God he had been looking for all of his life! But it had to become real and personal to him. No one else’s faith could save him.

It’s the same for us today. *"The righteous shall live by HIS faith."* If you want to be saved, you must come to a time when you admit your sins, and personally put your trust in Jesus as your Lord & Savior.

The great thing is, this can happen in your heart right now! You don't have to walk down a church aisle, be baptized, or perform a bunch of religious works and deeds. NO! By faith, look to Jesus, who died on the cross for your sins. Put your trust in what He did for you. The MOMENT you believe in your heart, without “doing” anything else, you are saved! You can be saved this very moment, as you believe in your heart! “The righteous shall live by his FAITH”!

Habakkuk 2:4 also applies to a person who is already a Christian, and how they will face the trials of life: “The righteous will live by his faith.” This was the historical context in which God first gave these words to Habakkuk. The fierce Babylonian army was coming as the arm of God to judge Judah for their sins, and godly people like Habakkuk were about to endure tribulation when it came. How could they survive those incredibly difficult days? God gave him the answer: *“The righteous will live by his faith."*

- even as violence swallowed up their country, they were to live by faith.
- even if they personally suffered, they were to live by faith.
- even when they couldn't understand what God was doing, they were to live by faith.

Habakkuk 2:4 was given not only to teach us how to live forever but also to teach us how to live NOW in times of difficulty and pain and trouble. “The righteous will live by his faith.”

This is how believers persevere in troubled times: despite the pain they endure, the opposition they face, the pressure to compromise, and all the evidence to the contrary, the godly person continues to say: “YET I WILL BELIEVE!” *"The righteous will live by his faith."*

Job had that kind of commitment. In the depth of his trials, when he didn’t understand God, he cried out: *“Though He slay me, yet I will trust in Him”* (Job 13:15) In the darkest hour of his despair, Job still *“lived by his faith.”*

Again, this must be PERSONAL faith. “The righteous will live by HIS faith.” In your most trying times, your faith gets very personal. No one else can believe for you. When you’re walking alone through the valley of the shadow of death, through the battles with your own personal giants in life, nobody else can believe for you. Faith gets real and personal in your most difficult hours: do you really believe, or do you not? You discover a lot about your faith in “the dark hours of your soul”!

continued on page 39



# Surprised by Beauty

By Andrew Goins  
Watauga County

“From Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth.” ~ Psalm 50:2

It was a normal day, like any other day full of wool, sunshine, and low-grade boredom. Predictable. Secure. Smothered by monotony and driven by escape, Moses guided the flock to Mt. Horeb. It was a majestic mountain that struck awe like lightning into the heart of the onlooker. It was one of Moses’ favorite places to meander because the mountain always surprised him; the God-carved crevices creeping up the mountain like kudzu up a home, Moses’ home; the wind whistling like an illusive hobo—no one knows where he has been or where he is going; the mountains dry skin ceaselessly pleading to be trudged upon. This mountain commanded to be looked at as gravity commands the rain to fall down. It was awesome.

Walking up the mountain, Moses saw a bush blushing, burning bright red yet not consumed by flame. In this bush the world of predictability was consumed by the flickering flames, burned up, and offered as an ascension offering, marking the boundaries between night and day. Day and night. The incipient rays of dawn crawl up the firmament, marking something new: A vocation to announce the coming salvation. To command the people of God’s liberation. Moses was shocked out of the humdrum sleepy life by the surprise of beauty. God used the beauty of a burning bush to speak. To reveal heaven on earth. It is in surprise that God met with Moses, and it is in surprise that Jesus shocked His disciples with a shalom and a glowing glorified body.

Sometimes God shocks us awake like He did with Moses; we see something beautiful, God calls us by name through that beauty, and we leave transformed with a trajectory and vocation. Other times beauty hides in obscure places, whispering quietly for our attention, but we pass by flustered by all of the bent beauties. Such as pornography which has become America’s iconography. Lust cultivates greed, and greed distorts wonder because the beauty that wonder inspires becomes contingent on ownership. These beauties obscure the truth in their extravagance, conceal eternity by cultivating greed, and transform us into baneful beasts always famished and never full. There are whispering beauties all around us. In the poem, “Auguries of Innocence”, William Blake writes “To see a world in a grain of sand | And a heaven in a wild flower | Hold infinity in the palm of your hand | And eternity in an hour.” This is the holy Christian task: pay attention. To see a world in the smallest of things. Pay attention to the creation, and you will find yourself awake in the dream of angels ascending and descending on the rocks and ridges, trees, and bridges. In fall you will see the blushing bush, burning without being consumed: a place where God calls you by name and you will take off your shoes because it is holy ground. If you pay attention you will find yourself treading through the world with naked feet, because it is all, now holy ground.

“From Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth.” Zion became the shorthand for Jerusalem, which is where the temple was built. Some believe that Mt. Zion was the Mountain that the temple was built on. The temple was extravagantly decorated. It was ineffable. The beauty of Zion in the temple was to remind the Israelite worshipers that they were in a heavenly place, a place where God dwells. It’s important to note that heaven is above all, in Hebrew conception, a place where God dwells. The temple, then, is a place where heaven and earth overlap. Its extravagance ignited the worshipers' imagination so that they could know they were entering a heavenly place. Juxtapose this verse with John 4 where Jesus meets a woman of Samaria who says that the Jews believe the only way to worship Yahweh is by worshiping in Jerusalem, presumably in the temple on Mt. Zion. Jesus responds by saying “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.” The Spirit of God inspires true worship. The time has come when worship is not constrained to Jerusalem because the Spirit of God makes every place a Jerusalem.

Beauty is the engine of wonder. Wonder is the vehicle of heavenly things. It was in the beauty of the blushing bush Moses was seduced in wonder, and into that wonder God spoke. The blushing bush can be metaphorically burned up by the enemy of wonder: predictability. When I assume the world is predictable I will close off my heart to surprise. Kill predictability by paying attention, because in paying attention you will inevitably be surprised. Be surprised by the monarch butterfly burning in the sunlight, yet is not consumed. Be surprised by the singing of the cedar waxwing flinging her song in the waxing morning. Be surprised by the naked trees undressed by the cold, exposing their rough and patterned skin that tenderly whispers of Eden.

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



# Something to Think About

## The Story of Harold and Mack

By Dennis Love  
McDowell County



Harold and Mack served alongside each other in Italy during World War II. One was from Illinois and the other from California. Had these two men met in civilian life, they’d had no common interests and likely would have never been friends. But on the battlefield, they became closer than brothers.

Mack started having a bad feeling that he wasn’t going to make it out alive. So, he gave Harold a few mementos and said that if anything ever happened to him, he was to find his sister and give them to her. He also permitted Harold to kiss her. Harold made a promise to Mack to fulfill his wish. One day later, Mack was killed in heavy artillery fire.

For over 50 years, Harold searched for Mack’s sister. Every lead turned up empty, and every woman with the same name turned up to be the wrong woman. Harold could have given up, and it would have meant nothing to anyone else. But it meant everything to Harold. He made a promise to his best friend, and it was a promise he intended to keep.

Finally, with the help of his daughter, Harold located Mack’s sister. They met at the veteran’s memorial in Marysville, California where Mack’s name is inscribed in marble. Harold gave her all the items that Mack wanted his sister to have. Then he leaned over and kissed her.

Would you keep a promise like that? Could you keep a promise like that? Well, I know someone who’s kept an even greater promise. His name is Jesus.

He promised to shed His glory and come down to this Earth for us...and He did. He promised to live a righteous life that would be an example to follow...and He did.

He promised to choose a few people who would start His church and spread His word so that we can get to know Him...and He did.

He promised to take the punishment for our sins and die on the cross for our salvation...and He did.

He promised to return to the Father and prepare a place for us in Heaven...and He did.

And, He promised to come back one day for us who believe so we can live with Him forever...and...He will.

Proverbs 18:24 talks about a friend who sticks closer than a brother. That’s referring to Jesus!

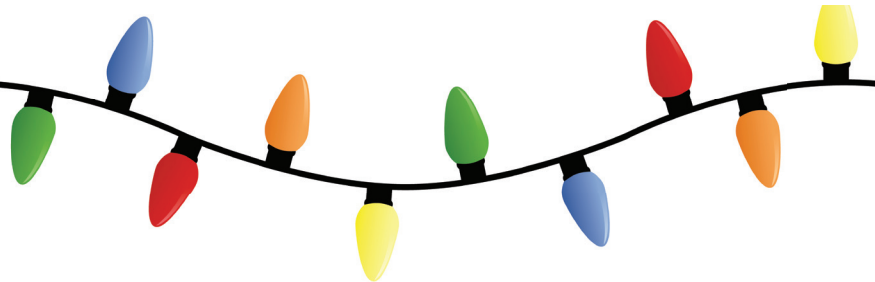
John 15:13 says there is no greater love than for a man to lay down his life for his friends. That’s talking about Jesus!

1 Peter 3:9 reminds us that God is not slack when it comes to His promises. That especially applies to Jesus! What He said, He will do!

There might be things that you doubt, there might be things that you fear. But let your heart and mind find rest in the fact that God keeps His promises! No matter what you have been through and what you may face in the days to come, I pray that you are resting on the promises of God. He promised He would come and be our Emanuel, “God with us” and He came, and He is! Harold kept his promise to Mack even though it took him 50 years to fulfill it. Jesus keeps His promises to us in the here and now, and for all eternity. Rest in His promises and you will have a Merry Christmas!

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

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The Heart Conditions That Will Set You Free

By Joyce Meyer

I have a heart condition—and so do you. I’m not talking about my physical heart. I’m talking about my soul, which is my mind, will, and emotions. This is the heart of our inner life.

Our inner life is more important than anything else because it is based on our thoughts and attitudes, which determine how we live. Real life is the life that’s in you, and not your circumstances—like where you live, what job you have, or who you’re in a relationship with.

Real peace and joy come from God’s Spirit in us, not things or people around us. And when your heart is right with God, it’s amazing how peaceful, content, and even happy you can be in the midst of difficult situations and turmoil.

Matthew 5:8 says the pure in heart will see God. And Proverbs 4:23 instructs us to “*keep and guard your heart with all vigilance and above all that you guard, for out of it flow the springs of life*” (AMPC).

The scripture in Proverbs makes it clear that it’s our responsibility to guard our hearts. And we need to do it often because each day there are countless opportunities for something to creep into our heart that is not pure or pleasing to God.

Checking your motives is a good way to determine what condition your heart is in. Motives reveal why we do what we do, which is actually more important to God than what we’re doing. If we’re really honest with ourselves, most of us will admit that we want to impress people, and this is what’s causing us to do what we do.

But I’ve learned a powerful secret: When we no longer have to impress people and are instead living to please God, we will have real freedom to enjoy life and be who God created us to be.

Think about it. If your schedule is hectic, is it because God is overloading you with responsibility or because you’re striving to do what you feel other people want you to do? Have you ever said, “Well, so-and-so expects me to do this, so that’s why I’m doing it.” Or maybe you were afraid someone would be mad or disappointed with you if you didn’t do what they asked. I’ve done it. And it just made me miserable and even resentful at times.

I also used to do things because I was nosy and just wanted to know what was going on—even at church! I wanted to be involved in some groups because of it. And at one time I even pushed my husband, Dave, to be an elder in the church so he could go to meetings and then tell me what was going on.

As I grew in my relationship with God, He showed me what it means to have a heart like Him. He is a God of grace, mercy, truth, compassion, and generosity. Whatever He tells us to do, it’s because it’s for our good, not His benefit. He gave His best for us when He gave Jesus, His only Son, to die on our behalf so we could be forgiven of our sins through His shed blood.

No matter what condition your heart is in, if you trust God, He can heal you and make your heart like His.

If you aren’t in the habit of checking your heart and really guarding it, I want to encourage you to spend a few hours alone one day and think about what you do and why. If you’re honest with yourself, God can help you see the truth about your condition. And the truth will always make you free!

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).



By Tammy Hopson  
Mitchell County

I could tell right away that something was wrong. I walked into the room and reached for her hand. “Can I help?” I asked as my heart longed to lift her up. Teardrops filled her eyes quickly as she told me of her sorrow and the sadness that was overwhelming her. She spoke of fears and the anxiety that was gripping her as the tears rolled down her cheeks. My friend who was usually so strong now sat broken in front of me. I searched and struggled for something to say. “Can I pray with you?” I asked. Her head nodded slightly as I knelt by her desk and took her hand. Then my mind went completely blank. I was tired and worn out. I could not expound to her the things I know my heart wanted to say and I could not think of what to ask my Father in intercession for my dear friend. “Dear God...I sputtered...then I paused. I resorted to only quoting scriptures. I stated that “*All things work together for the good to those who love God.*” (Romans 8:28). I continued to say pieces of scriptures that came to my mind that mentioned peace and joy. As I stuttered in desperation to help her, I felt like I was absolutely failing. After my prayer, I hugged her and told her I loved her. She wiped her tears then smiled and thanked me for praying with her.

As I drove home I thought I had not helped her at all. I replayed in my mind all the things I had said and how I staggered through my words so poorly. I told myself that I used to be better at this and how unprepared I was to pray for someone today. I started telling God in my spirit if I had felt better I could have helped her more. Then just like He always does, God whispered into my spirit so gently “But you told her my Words.” The scriptures that I quoted to her came flooding back. Those were God’s Words, not mine. Then I began to think about the power of His Word. The scripture in Isaiah 55:11 says that “*God’s Word would not return unto Him void but will accomplish the purpose for which it was sent.*” Another scripture says that God’s Word is powerful, alive, active, and sharper than any two-edged sword. Yes, I had spoken God’s Word to my sweet friend, and I was so happy that I did! Now I am trusting His Word to make a difference in the battles she is facing.

Since that day I cannot stop thinking of what a gift we have been given by God. We are celebrating the birth of Jesus this month and the salvation He brought to us by coming into this world and going to the cross. That surely is a reason to celebrate! But before Jesus left He also spoke these words to our Father “*For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.*” John 17:8. Jesus states here that He gave us the Father’s Words! The ones that are powerful, active, and alive! The Words that will not fail have been given to believers to activate and say by faith to those who are hurting and to those who need His touch. What a wonderful and precious gift we have been given! When I spoke the Words of God to my hurting friend, God promised they would not return to Him void but would accomplish a purpose. I believe with all my heart that when I speak the Word of God to any person, problem, or circumstance God will make those Words live, and although I may never see with my own eyes what they accomplish, God is faithful. My own words may have encouraged my friend for a while, but the Word of God can live in her heart and lift her spirit time and time again. Now I see even more how important it is for me to know what God has said. His Words are a gift I should unwrap and open every single day! I should commit them to memory to use over and over, to encourage others, to encourage myself, and to speak God’s will against troubles, trials, and circumstances. Another friend of mine said to me the other day “As Christians we must speak life into everything”. I know when I speak what God has said I am speaking life. What a wonderful revelation to think about this Holiday season, that so many years ago God came down and a child was born who would save those who believe, that forgiveness of sin has been made available through Him, and that because we believe in Him unto us the Word is given! I am rejoicing in this gift and I have committed to opening it daily and giving it to another! I will begin now by quoting II Thessalonians 3:16 “*Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all.*”

Merry Christmas!



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



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The Voice of Reason

By Timothy W. Tron  
Burke County



It was two weeks before Christmas, and Moon Jargon had yet to finish his Christmas shopping. As usual, he had put it off until nearly the last minute. Of course, it wasn’t as bad as last year when he was literally out on Christmas Eve trying to find stores still open, frantically searching for something to satisfy the people on his shopping list. But this year, he had more time and wanted to find that unique gift for his sister. So, he headed to the old downtown area of Maplewood. Like most small towns, Maplewood’s historic district was once a thriving business community that slowly died but now had become a restoration success story. The only store that remained as it once was in the old days was the Maplewood Hardware Store. Mr. Cary, the store’s proprietor, was himself a relic of the past. He had declined multiple offers to buy him out over the years. His survival was partly due to his one-of-a-kind customer service – the ability to know precisely where customer’s needs existed in the store. As such, Maplewood Hardware had become an attraction in and of itself.

Walking up the street toward the store, Moon noticed the warmth of the late afternoon sun, quite pleasant for mid-December. The cloudless sky overhead was a brilliant blue. Inside, Moon felt wonderful. “This was going to be a special day,” he mused. The display window of Maplewood Hardware was painted to reflect the holiday cheer, reading, “Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year,” complete with fake snow in the corners. Behind the decorations ran Mr. Cary’s toy train, surrounded by a tiny village with cars and pedestrians carrying on as if in real life. As Moon entered the store, he pulled off his sunglasses and headed past the bins of nails still sold by the pound. Moon couldn’t help chuckling as he thought of a potential pun, “A pound of nails, to be pound into wood.” He smiled, but the thoughts continued, “Yet, they remain as metal, never becoming transformed into which they are nailed.” On this latter, he would have to ponder later, for its existence as thought seemed untimely but somehow prophetic.

He was headed to the back corner of the store where Mr. Cary had a unique section called, “Old Dead People’s Stuff.” Its popularity had made it a ‘must see’ attraction of the old town area. There, stashed in the dimly lit corner, were dusty wooden crates, boxes, and all manner of antique items Mr. Carey had collected over the years, up for sale - a grab-bag of potentially hidden gems. Moon found himself staring at the treasure trove of newly stocked ancient wares when his eye quickly centered upon the faded pink, pasty jewelry box. Curious, he picked it up, hesitating momentarily before opening it, thinking, “I’m betting the little ballerina is going to pop up and start dancing to some old children’s melody.” Slowly and with a slight dramatic hesitancy, he raised the lid. Just as he suspected, the worn little dancer emerged, slightly askew to one side, having been touched one too many times by little hands, and began to dance to the music from an ancient time. Behind the dancer, on the now tilted lid, the tiny mirror, once used to reflect a little girl’s image as she smiled watching the ballerina dance, now reflected Moon’s face. But something strange, something that didn’t make sense, played out before him. Instead of the image of the little pink dancer in the mirror, an eerie blue flame danced in her place. It was then, as he stood in mixed amazement and bewilderment, that the music seemed to overwhelm the entire store as if being played on a sound system throughout the building – he suddenly became one with the ephemeral image before him. Then a voice spoke, questioning, “What shall it be?” At that point, Moon almost dropped the antique jewelry box but held on. Before he could formulate a thought, his smartwatch replied, “X message for you?” The mysterious voice replied, “And so it shall be.”

“Blazes,” Moon murmured under his breath, turning his arm to reach for his watch to silence the device, closing the lid momentarily. When he opened the box again, the flame was gone, and the music had stopped. He shook it and opened and closed it a couple of times to try to trigger the flame or music, but nothing happened. Looking around to see if anyone else had witnessed what he had just seen, he only found empty aisles in either direction.

Confused and somewhat unsettled, Moon hesitantly sat the box back down and started for the front door. Physically, he felt fine, but something inside him seemed troubled – a pressure upon his spirit that was perceptible – a foreboding, as when the weather changes. As he was about to reach for the handle of the old wooden door to leave, it opened and pushed inward toward him, the welcoming bell tingling, and a man dressed in all black, with a black hat that covered most of his white hair that was pulled back into a tight ponytail, hurriedly entered. His face was shaven, but his eyes were covered by something that looked like sunglasses but was only the width of his eyes, with red LED lights that raced across the face of the man as if they followed his eyes, scanning the store from one side to the other. He rudely pushed past Moon. There was a sense of urgency, something uncharacteristic of most patrons of Mr. Cary’s store.

Emerging from the store, Moon stood looking out onto the street as a bus passed. The advertisement on its side read, “Maplewood Wishes You and Yours a Very Merry X-Mas and a HNY.” He scoffed to himself, “Sad,” and reached for his sunglasses but realized there was no need. Looking up, he saw the sky was now cloudy, and a slight chill in the air. Indeed, there was a change in the weather as dark clouds seemed to be approaching from the south. The Christmas lights from Mr. Cary’s display window now glowed amber upon the sidewalk, causing Moon to look back at the store and, with a shock, read the words on the picture window, “Merry X-Mas, and a HNY.”

“Wait, what,” Moon questioned himself. “Am I dreaming?”

A dark foreshadowing washed over him again. He paused, to collect himself

but an inner voice said to leave, and leave now! So, he headed for home, hoping something familiar would shake him back to his senses. Locking the door behind him, he flipped on the lights and reached for the remote, flipping on the large screen TV opposite the couch. He grabbed a bottle of water from the fridge and flopped down. The nightly news was starting, so he complacently watched, not listening at first, as his mind slipped back to what he had just encountered. However, his attention was quickly drawn back to the broadcast as the words the news anchor spoke seemed foreign.

“In today’s WPBU, the X-gender WPSS shut down portions of NYC, demanding their RTL to have uncontrolled ATG over all X-kind 2B OK’d. Members clashed with CTR X-testers who supported IVI who were remnants of the underground group known as UGW…” The words continued unabated.

Agitated at what he saw, Moon clicked the remote, changing channels, but again and again, the words people spoke were almost indiscernible – the acronyms appeared to have replaced everyday speech. His head now throbbed. “What was going on,” he asked out loud. Confused and irritated, he jumped to his computer and searched the internet for answers. This played out before him: what was known as Cancel Culture had somehow gone from a mild creep into society to an exponential leap in just the blink of an eye. Anything that was considered offensive was removed from speech and written words. It had become such a part of the Cancel Culture that the Thought Police, TP as they were generally known, were instituted so that if anyone found any reason for something that bothered them, the TP was called immediately. Then, the problem would be remediated as needed, calmly or with as much force as was necessary. All of these actions were done to protect humanity from the previous generations’ insensibilities to one another. This was bequeathed upon mankind, or X-kind, as the TP deemed it, regardless of whether they agreed or not. World Peace was their mantra, and they would stop at nothing to maintain ATG, the Authority To Govern over all humanity.

“But wait, one last thing,” Moon thought to himself as he pulled up his Bible App on his smartwatch. Quickly turning to a verse known by almost everyone, his heart sank as he read, “For X so loved the world it gave its only begotten non-binary person…” The TP had even edited the online Bible to reflect the rules of their authority. Frantic for truth, he turned from the computer and raced to his bedroom. There on his nightstand was his old friend, his well-worn Bible. Moon picked it up and quickly turned to the same passage as the online version he had just read. A peace washed over him, like the loving arms of a father, as he read the scripture – complete, whole, “For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son…” “Thanks be to God,” he breathed with a sigh of relief. Weary, Moon looked at the time on his watch – nine pm. He had enough for one day. “Rest will surely do me good.” Turning in for bed a little early, in the back of his mind, he hoped that he would awake in the morning, and it would all have been a bad dream.

The next day, things had not changed. All the online sources reconfirmed his worst fears. Feeling a need to escape, Moon decided to go for a walk. Maybe things weren’t really that bad in Maplewood. But he soon discovered they were. Every church he passed had the crosses on their steeples replaced with an “X.” The license plates on all the cars read, “In X We Trust.” And the TP seemed to be everywhere, even in his little town. Exasperated to no end, he found a seat on a park bench near the college campus next to a dark-haired student with a thin goatee. He sat down without speaking to the young man, who seemed busy with the device in his hand.

There, watching people pass by, he realized something he had never noticed before. Some people carried backpacks and water bottles while talking through hidden voice communications to invisible companions. Others pulled their scarves around their necks as if cloaking their identity and appeared rapt in discussions with someone through their handheld devices – nobody spoke to another human being in person. Moon had read on the internet the night before about the advancement of communications and how some people had chosen to receive communicator implants. Although he didn’t keep up with technology, it was apparent there had been a significant advancement in science overnight as well. It explained those who talked to the air without any evidence of earbuds or devices. If one didn’t know better, it was as if talking to someone in person was against the law. About that time, another man in black passed by with the same LED sunglasses as the man at the hardware store. Moon thought of the jewelry box and the blue flame. “Was that when it all changed?”

A moment later, an elderly lady in sunglasses sat beside Moon, opposite the goateed man. She and Moon both sat silently, watching the world pass by. Moon felt suddenly compelled to talk to someone – anyone. He turned to the goatee student, nearly the same age as Moon, and asked, “So what is up with all this crazy acronym and “X” business? The man seemed frightened by the question, looking up from his device, his eyebrows raised in horror at Moon’s sudden outburst. “You know, the X-gender, the UGW, ATG, and so on. Doesn’t anybody talk normally anymore, or at all? And I’ve been doing some reading. Did you know that it’s not X-ianity? It’s Christianity! What the heck is wrong with saying God? I can’t find a reference to him anywhere! What’s up with that?”

The man’s face was now white with terror. He leaned as far away from Moon as possible until the park bench wasn’t big enough. He replied to Moon as he quickly stood to leave, with an almost nonexistent voice, “I don’t know what you are talking about, dude.” At this, the stranger hurriedly walked away, repeatedly looking back over his shoulder at Moon and then to the park’s periphery as if he was being followed. At that moment, the little old woman to his right leaned over and softly whispered, “But there are some who do.” She pulled down the edge

continued on page 39



# Crossword

Crossword 279  
ACROSS  
1 the One who\_\_\_enthroned on high (Ps 113:5)  
5 If the \_\_\_wishes to redeem the animal, he must add (Lev 27:13)  
10 husband of Jezebel (IKing 19:1)  
14 Terah became the father of \_\_\_, Nahor and Haran (Gen 11:27)  
16 "We have \_\_\_only five loaves of bread and two fish" (Matt 14:17)  
17 before me was a \_\_\_horse! Its rider was named Death (Rev 6:8)  
18 They hatch cockatrice' eggs, and \_\_\_the spider's web (Isaiah 59:5)  
19 Two men \_\_\_money to a certain moneylender (Luke 7:41)  
20 Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is near Beth \_\_\_ (Josh 7:2)  
21 But the Pharisees and \_\_\_in the law rejected God's purpose (Luke 7:30)  
23 together with her royal \_\_\_and her father (Dan 11:6)  
25 Peter denied it, at that moment a rooster began to \_\_\_ (John 18:27)  
27 in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the \_\_\_angels (1 Tim 5:21)  
28 Persia, Ethiopia, and \_\_\_with them (Ezek 38:5)  
31 Then he said unto him, Come \_\_\_with me, and eat bread (1 King 13:15)  
34 the inscription that was written: MENE , \_\_\_, TEKEL, PARSIN (Dan 5:25)  
35 abbr. for the 20th book of the O.T  
37 branches from poplar, almond and \_\_\_trees and made (Gen 30:37)  
41 They were seared by the \_\_\_heat and they cursed the name (Rev 16:9)  
43 He \_\_\_the temple area and began driving out (Luke 19:45)  
45 The \_\_\_the builders rejected has become the capstone (Matt 21:42)  
46 went to war against \_\_\_king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah (Gen 14:2)  
48 I cast my \_\_\_against them (Acts 26:10)  
49 shall have in the skin of his flesh a rising, a \_\_\_, or bright spot (Lev 13:2) KJV  
51 Esther's \_\_\_and her chamberlains came and told it her (Esth 4:4)  
53 Flee, save your lives, and be like the \_\_\_in the wilderness.( Jer 48:6) KJV  
56 I have not been drinking wine or \_\_\_; I was pouring out my soul (1 Sam 1:15)

59 Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or \_\_\_joking (Eph 5:4)  
60 therefore now make ye \_\_\_with us (1,6) (Josh 9:11) KJV  
64 and it vomited Jonah \_\_\_dry land (Jonah 2:10)  
65 returned to their place and ran at flood \_\_\_as before (Josh 4:18)  
68 I will measure into their \_\_\_the full payment (Isa 65:7)  
69 things full of marrow, of wines on the \_\_\_well refined (Isa 25:6) KJV  
70 does man gain from all his labor at which he \_\_\_under the sun? (Eccl 1:3)  
71 They cooked it in \_\_\_or made it into cakes (1,3) (Num 11:8)  
72 from Jerusalem, and from the coast of \_\_\_and Sidon (Luke 6:17)  
73 with tumors, festering \_\_\_and the itch (Deut 28:27)  
74 Then the beasts go into \_\_\_, and remain (Job 37:8) DOWN  
1 hewed stones, \_\_\_with saws, within and without (1 King 7:9)  
2 the gazelle, the roe deer, the wild goat, the \_\_\_ (Deut 14:5)  
3 You hypocrites, why are you trying to \_\_\_me? (Matt 22:18)  
4 You are my God; \_\_\_your servant who trusts in you (Ps 86:2)  
6 \_\_\_loveth instruction loveth knowledge (Prov 12:1) KJV  
7 A \_\_\_command I give you: Love one another (John 13:34)  
8 Sir, come down \_\_\_my child die (John 4:49) KJV  
9 To \_\_\_them that were under the law (Gal 4:5)  
10 their mighty ones are beaten down, and are fled \_\_\_ (Jer 46:5) KJV  
11 Isn't he the man who raised \_\_\_in Jerusalem (Acts 9:21)  
12 be \_\_\_and always keep on praying for all the saints (Eph 6:18)  
13 As she wept, she \_\_\_over to look into the tomb (John 20:11-12)  
15 Do not withhold your \_\_\_from me, O LORD (Ps 40:11)  
22 they will become snares and \_\_\_for you (Josh 23:13)  
24 I \_\_\_but my heart was awake (Song 5:2)  
26 to see if there are any \_\_\_understand, any who seek God (Ps 14:2)  
28 I have neither \_\_\_on usury, nor men have lent to me (Jer 15:10)  
29 the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go \_\_\_Damascus (Acts 22:10)

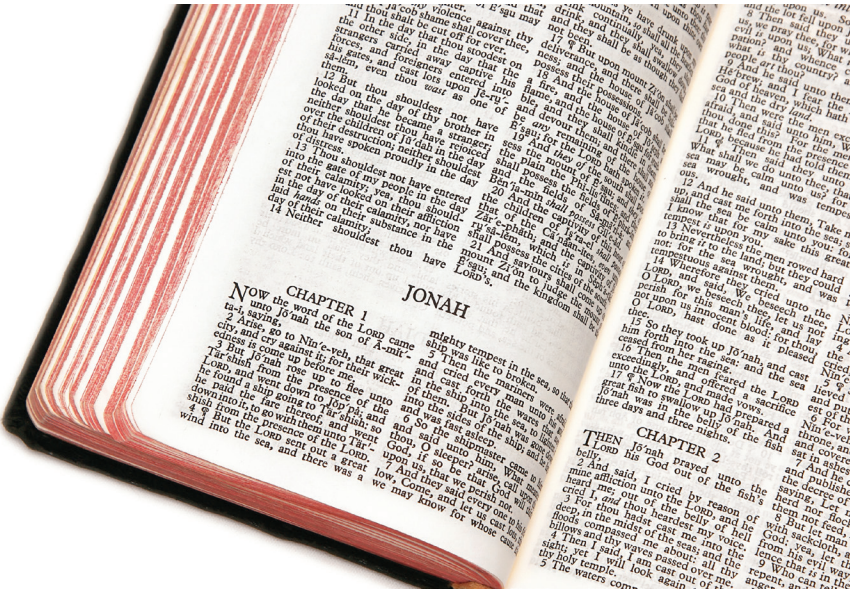
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30 for I have \_\_\_a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb (Judges 16:17)  
32 and gave them power \_\_\_unclean spirits (Mark 6:7)  
33 Darius the \_\_\_took over the kingdom, at the age of sixtytwo (Dan 5:31)  
34 But there went up a \_\_\_from the earth, and watered (Gen 2:6)  
36 Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur and \_\_\_the five kings of Midian (Num 31:8)  
38 one of the tribes of Israel  
39 Thou shalt break them with \_\_\_of iron (1,3) (Ps 2:9) KJV  
40 John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their \_\_\_. (Mark 1:19)  
42 Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have \_\_\_ (Matt 8:20)  
44 A base and \_\_\_brood, they were driven out of the land (Job 30:8)  
47 as their lives \_\_\_away in their mothers' arms (Lam 2:12)  
50 and wore golden sashes around their \_\_\_ (Rev 15:6-7)  
52 Their feet \_\_\_swift to shed

blood (Romans 3:15)  
53 So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as \_\_\_in my mouth (Ezek 3:3)  
54 He replied, "Out of the \_\_\_, something to eat; out of the strong (Judg 14:14)  
55 Early the next morning they \_\_\_and worshiped before the LORD (1 Sam 1:19)  
57 soar like the \_\_\_and make your nest among the stars (Obad 1:4)  
58 As for men, God \_\_\_them so that they may see that they (Eccl 3:18)  
59 brought the ass, and the \_\_\_, and put on them (Matt 21:7) KJV  
61 Nevertheless \_\_\_saw them, and told Absalom (1,3) (2 Sam 17:18) KJV  
62 They \_\_\_at me and say, "Aha! Aha! (Ps 35:21)  
63 The Holy Spirit will come \_\_\_you (Luke 1:35)  
66 Such knowledge is \_\_\_wonderful for me (Ps 139:6)  
67 over the fowl of the \_\_\_, and over the cattle (Gen 1:26)

Solution on page 14





of her shades and gave him a wink. She then handed him a slip of folded yellow paper and got up and left. As she disappeared into a passing crowd, he opened the note and read, “Join us next Sunday for worship at the church on the corner of Dogwood and Locust. Your friend in Christ, not X – Doris, Underground God Worshippers (UGW).”

As the days leading up to Sunday slowly passed, Moon became more and more aware of the changes around him. Each new revelation seemed to grow more regretful. The only thing he could think of that led to this change in reality was the music box. Returning to Maplewood Hardware, Mr. Cary informed him that the TP had purchased the child’s jewelry box a few days ago. Moon remembered the rude stranger in the LED sunglasses. It was then his hopes were dashed at ever finding the box and trying to reverse this curse or whatever it was.

Sunday, Moon found his way to the little church at Dogwood and Locust. Unlike all the other churches he passed, this church had no X on its steeple. Entering the double wooden plank front doors, he found his way into a sanctuary. Likewise, it too was void of any decorations. The only thing of color was a purple cloth draped over the wooden pulpit. On it was the symbol of a single candle positioned underneath seven stars. Other than that, there was nothing else, not even a cross. Through a life-changing sermon, Moon soon learned that he was not alone. Here, amid the Underground God Worshippers, he was hearing the Word of God preached in its purest, original form. The Truth was being shared without compromise. Moon quickly realized he had found a home.

Later that day, Moon decided to have dinner at the X-factory, formerly known as the Cheesecake Factory. After all, it was the holidays, or at least as close to it as one might conceive, and he felt like he was on cloud nine after the morning’s service. His hope had been restored.

There, while seated on a cushioned couch that ran the length of the wall with small tables positioned in front of it, Moon read over the menu on his smart-watch. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the Maître d’ escorting two men in black in his direction and then sat them down at the table next to his. One of the TP removed his black hat, revealing a white ponytail pulled behind. Mr. Ponytail was carrying a shopping bag, which he handed to his comrade, who sat it between Moon and himself on the floor. Moon’s heart raced. Could it be? Looking, but not trying to be caught looking, Moon glanced as far as his vision would allow into the contents of the bag, but to no avail. Whatever was inside was too small to be seen from the top without leaning in that direction. It wasn’t long before Mr. Ponytail left, leaving the younger officer alone. As the waiter came and took their orders, the young TP left his napkin on his seat as he seemed to head towards the X-rooms.

His heart now pounding in his temples, Moon knew this was his chance as he scooted over and peered beyond the rim of the brown paper shopping bag. There, at the bottom, all alone, was the pink, pasty jewelry box.

Time was of the essence. Moon could barely breathe. He knew his life could be in jeopardy, but he did the unthinkable. Reaching down into the bag, he retrieved the box and slid back to his own table. Remembering the previous encounter, Moon quickly silenced his smartwatch before continuing. He then slowly tilted back the lid. The tiny bells within the ancient child’s keepsake began to play, and the blue flame appeared as before. At that moment, Moon looked up, and the TP officer now stood a few paces before him with his X-phaser pulled. The little angry lights pulsated along the length of its smooth black barrel of death. “You are in violation of the bureau’s X realm. Drop the box at once, or I will have to kill you,” he shouted.

Once again, the little blue flame danced as the voice from the box said, “What shall it be?”

As the beam of energy surged from the TP’s weapon, Moon had no time to respond other than the last few words, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” The laser shot into Moon’s chest, causing him to convulse and shake until the life left his body, and he fell asleep for the last time.

Before the lid of the box closed as it fell from Moon’s hand, it replied, “And so it shall be.”

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When the people of God are hurt, or sick; when their prayers aren’t answered, they still live by faith. In your darkest hour, if you truly belong to God, there is something inside of you that says: though I don’t understand this, though I hurt so much. Still, my prayers aren’t answered; at the very core of your being, like Job, your heart will whisper: “*Though He slay me, YET I will trust Him.*” In their darkest, most difficult hours, “*the righteous will live by his faith.*”

“*The righteous will live by his faith.*” How do you need to apply these words to your life today?

— Are you one of those being refined in the “fire” of life’s circumstances right now, and your faith is being tested? Tell the Lord: “I believe, help my unbelief”! Ask Him to help you hold on to your faith no matter how hard it is. “Live by faith” in your circumstances today, just like this verse says.

— Or maybe you’ve never made sure that you personally are saved by faith in Jesus alone. Maybe you’ve been like Martin Luther: trying to do enough, be good enough — and like him, you’ve discovered that you can’t! Today God is saying to you: trust what Jesus did on the cross; put your faith in HIM! “The righteous will live by his faith”

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




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