

Evergreen Church

LOVE

By John McCoury Roan Mountain, TN

"And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." 1 Corinthians 13:13

As we let our minds run through the teaching of the word of God, it must become immediately evident that the basic quality of a home is love. A home without love is no home at all; it's just a place to live, a place to change your clothes, catch a bite to eat, and get ready for the next outing. But homes are places where love reigns, otherwise they're not homes. It begins with the love of a man and his wife for each other. When I stand at a wedding altar and join together two people who are beginning a home, it is obvious they love each other. You can see it in their faces as they exchange vows. This is the true beginning of a home, and as children come along in homes, that love broadens out to include every single child.

But in many homes today, love is gone. Each party in the home is concerned with their own interests and has forgotten that the basic ingredient essential to home life is to be concerned with each other's interests instead. Many homes exist based on trying to preserve order if nothing else. I think of the man with a military background who would get his family up every morning, line them up, and give them orders for the day. He would give them out and say Any questions? And for the most part, no one dared ask any questions. But after several long years of this, finally, his eight-year-old boy raised his hand. The father said to him, All right, what do you want to know? The boy said, How do you get out of this outfit? You can't blame him for asking that! The problem with many homes is that they think there is love, but it's only self-concern.

Love is a misunderstood quality. Unfortunately, under the perverted impact of much of Hollywood's production, we have a false concept of love. We think that love is sort of a warm feeling, but love is acceptance and self-giving. This is why Christians have the greatest possibility for a happy home — Christians are continually experiencing this kind of love from God. He accepts us, doesn't He? He loves us, He doesn't get sarcastic with us, nor treat us with disdain. He loves us even though our behavior doesn't meet with His approval. Love is making time to be with one another, talk to one another, and share one another's interests. Otherwise, how can love be self-giving? Self-giving requires time, and in our modern homes, this is one of the major problems. There's so little time to be together. If the home begins to suffer in this respect, then time must be made to be together so that love may have its healing effect. We need to talk and share and work together, and the happiest homes are always homes where a family makes the effort to be together and to share. This doesn't come by demanding

time, it comes by giving time. As you begin this in your home, it makes it easier for the rest of the home to share as well. So love is the first ingredient of an ideal home.

Father, thank you for the privilege of having a home where I belong, a place of love that calls to mind the dearest memories of my life because there I was loved. I pray that my home will be a place where love dwells. What can I do to nurture a climate of sacrificial love in my home?

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



WE LOVE HIM, BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US. -1 JOHN 4:19

Life Lessons

By Doug Harrell Mitchell County

February is the month of Valentine's Day, I look at it as "Love Month". There is nothing outside the saving grace of our Heavenly Father that has the impact on our lives that love does. Our lives center around being cared for, needed, being worthy, and most of all, being loved! The Bible talks about the love of God all through the chapters and verses that we read. John 3:16 is the standard by which many of us hopefully build our



lives. For God did so love the world that He was willing to give His only begotten Son that you and I, yes us, could have eternal life, not just a hole in the ground to rot and decay in! One of the most important things in life is for us to spread that love around to those around us. Starting with our family, how often do you tell them that you love them? Do you voice that every day of your life? Do you ingrain that in their minds to the point that there is never a question about that? As you are raising your children do you love them enough to correct them, to guide them in the right direction? Think about it, being their best friend is not necessarily your job. Your job is to love them enough to equip them to face the future in a tough world with the ability to survive and be a contributing adult when they mature. Do you take the time to tell your mate daily, several times, that you love and treasure them, that you give thanks to God for having been blessed with them for a partner over the years, do your actions also bear this out?

- 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 King James Version (KJV)
- "4 Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,
- 5 Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;
- 6 Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;
- 7 Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."

In the King James Bible, the word Charity is used for love, love is called the

most important of the traits mentioned. Do you understand how critical it is for each of us in our personal lives and the lives of those whose paths we cross each day? It is all too easy to become judgmental in our acceptance of those around us and we oftentimes overlook the fact that we are all children of God and that His grace is sufficient to deal with it all. We all have access to a High Priest who was exposed to all sin but sinned not, and He understands our human nature, but most of all, He loves us enough to forgive our sins, and the sins of those around us, if we will confess and turn back to Him.

We cannot bring others into the fold of God if we turn away from them because they have fallen short. We don't have to condone evil or sin, but we are commanded to love and forgive as God forgave and forgives each of us. The Lord's Prayer tells us that we are asking for God's forgiveness as we forgive others! We are part of the equation, we have a role to play by being willing to forgive also. Carrying a grudge around, or being angry with a family member or neighbor does more to harm us than it does them. Anger is like a cancer in our hearts, it eats it away and destroys it. Always strive to be the first to say I am sorry, and be the first to accept someone's apology, forgive even if you may not forget. I truly believe that when God forgives, He also forgets, our sins are no more! I pray for that ability!

Determine to be an open book, admit your frailty, and accept the same in others. Strive to let your love be evident even in times of correction, guide, and direct with sincere love, but be willing to use tough love at times when it is needed. Don't tell folks that is all okay when it is wrong, but be conscious of how you do it. Remember that the tongue is a little member of your body, but it is like the rudder of a large ship, it can turn the ship around. Turn the ships around with love in your voice. Remember the Proverb, a soft answer turneth away wrath. Guard your words, count to ten first, think about the WWJD bracelet (What Would Jesus Do), and act accordingly. What did Jesus do when talking with the woman caught in adultery? He said neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more! Be more conscious of giving love than hostility, love does conquer all. To God be the glory.

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





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

Isaiah 52:7 KJV



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Tim's Treasures

By Tim Tron
Burke County

Going through the Christmas season, we often hear the story of Mary and Joseph and the unexpected, supernatural revelation of Mary being with a child. Joseph received the news with much agitation and angst. Therein lies the rub.

If we would look at this predicament through modern
Western eyes, Joseph could have easily sung this seventies Bee Gees song, "How Deep is Your Love," to Mary upon receiving this debilitating news.

And you come to me on a summer breeze Keep me warm in your love, then you softly leave And it's me you need to show How deep is your love?

How deep is your love? How deep is your love? I really mean to learn.
'Cause we're livin' in a world of fools.
Breakin' us down.
When they all should let us be.
We belong to you and me.

In February, it's not hard to find aisles of romantic Valentine's Day cards with thought-provoking, heart-wrenching passages meant for that particular someone in your life. Yet, as with many young relationships, the themes in these cards are often extremely idolatrous in their nature, focusing on the love of Eros – making the object of your love your god. Time after time, on a college campus, the scene plays out, many times regardless of the person's faith, when they fall in love with that special someone. If they are a believer or not, they supplant their relationship with God with that of their beloved. Then, sadly, when something doesn't work, that perceived soulmate cheats on them, or their personalities beyond the physical embrace are just not compatible, their world comes crashing down. Break-ups are painful and traumatic. The once "perfect couple" now have nothing to lean on, having replaced their faith, if they ever had one at all, with this new Eros love.

Yet, Joseph's love for Mary was much deeper than the superficial collegiate type of relationship. It was such that when Mary shared how the Holy Ghost had planted the Son of God in her womb, Joseph knew he had at least two options. The first was to believe her story, no matter how improbable and unbelievable, to dispel all disbelief. The prophets had spoken of this day. "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) Should he doubt the voice of the prophets in the face of debilitating public shame? Was this child to become the coming Messiah, or was this some bastard child that he would be raising? He loved Mary more than anyone could know, but this news made him sad, angry, and confused all at the same time.

But these were just her words at this point – her side of the story and nothing else.

Then there was the question of Mary's fidelity, which begged the second option: should he put her behind him as quickly as possible? This was the grievous, dark side – how could she cheat on him, his beloved to whom he was willing to be betrothed? Could she really do this? He had known this girl for most of his life. This was unlike anything the Mary he knew would ever do, yet it had been done, so she claimed. Was she possibly raped? Was she delusional? Did she not want to reveal the identity of the perpetrator because he was a friend or family member?

Fraught by the decision that his culture's legal system required, Joseph prepared to put Mary away privately, "Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily." (Matthew 1:19)

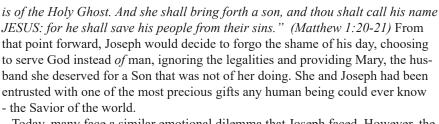
His love, now deemed unclean, would be lost, cast into the dregs of society. His heart was heavy with the grief of this news.

A little over thirty-three years later, the same anxieties and angst would play out, but in an even more seemingly exacerbating scenario, with the same being at its center.

Their leader had been put to death in one of the most shameful judicious acts: one created to humiliate and disgrace the direst of criminals, being crucified on the cross. Now, his body lay in a tomb. This wasn't supposed to be. Like Joseph, at that moment, the disciples only knew one side of the story. Their fear overwhelmed their understanding, driving them to act instinctually. Undoubtedly, the ones who had brought forth this case against Jesus would soon be after them, too. From the womb to the tomb, Jesus' arrival was wrought with nearly as much dread as was his going.

Yet, their fears were soon dashed when the risen Christ appeared to them. For this reason, they finally realized that they had been in the presence of God for the entirety of their ministry. They would not only be emboldened to share the story but would give their lives in exchange. Jesus' disciples would be martyred for sharing the gospel. They were willing to face certain death because, once the risen Christ was known, their minds finally made the connection to the prophecies and Jesus' own teaching – the one true God came to earth to die for all so that all might live.

The angel of the Lord would come to visit Joseph, saying, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her



Today, many face a similar emotional dilemma that Joseph faced. However, the birth of a child is not the looming prospect, but rather, their salvation – the ability to believe in a risen Savior. In a sense, their potential to be born again into a new life is at stake. To accept the story of a man who claimed to be God, being put to death by crucifixion, and then rising three days later is, for some, a stretch, if not impossible. The world belittles those who blindly receive this as truth. Their arguments are many. It seems that sometimes, the more educated a person becomes, the less of those things that are outside of the natural law are perceptible, let alone believable. Those who choose not to believe become bound by chains of science to the point they argue against anything outside its realms as improbable. The world's legalistic viewpoint overwhelms their spiritual longing to understand something beyond what the world allows. To go beyond reason and to accept the supernatural is an act of faith. Those who refuse to believe anything beyond reason hold to a faith limited by their ability to understand. Their bondage of logic becomes their faith, or the lack thereof. They spend their lives seeking a deeper understanding of a love that eludes their preconceived concepts.

Like Joseph, some avoid confrontation by quietly dismissing claims that go against the world's belief (or lack thereof) system, accepting their fate without argument. Yet, some receive inspiration, whether from dreams or reading scripture, through which the Holy Spirit speaks to them. They find that there is more to the world than what they have been told - a more profound love. There is essentially another dimension to which we cannot fathom beyond the natural laws. When someone is faced with this news, these revelations, they become emboldened, disregarding that implausibility the world places upon anything outside of its logic, and accept that there is the possibility of life beyond this one. There is a reason to listen to the teachings of Jesus, and there is a source of morality beyond the relativistic options given by today's Western Cultures.

The Gospels' story, the good news of salvation, becomes an option to choose, not to belittle. Therein lies the hope of life eternal. Like those disciples in the upper room, like Joseph and Mary, once they received the confirmation of the Holy Spirit, their lives would be forever changed. They made a choice that went against logic, against the beliefs of the world. There was no turning back.

We have the same option today – to choose to believe in the Risen Savior, Jesus Christ, or not. To know him is to know true love, Agape. To love unconditionally is to be as Christ. We all have choices in this life that will affect us for all eternity.

Then the real question becomes, "How deep is your love?"
Hopefully, you too, will see that there is more to this world than meets the eye.
Superficial romance, making that special someone into a god, never ends well.
Superseding God's love with fleshly desire makes a mockery of His love for us.
Accept Christ into your life and discover what true love can be and, ultimately, how deep your love can become.

May this season of love find you seeking a relationship that is not built upon the world's carnality but rather something far greater, far deeper – the love of Jesus Christ.

Thanks be to God.

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

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God's Valentine

For God so lo V ed the world that He g A ve

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The Inspiring Word

By Terry Cheek Th.D. *McDowell County*

February brings us the holiday of love, Valentine's Day. I'm not going to write about the intimacy between husband and wife. I am going to remind us of the greatest love ever encountered by mankind. The love of God is displayed through His son Jesus Christ. Let's open by visiting a few verses.



John 15:11-13 "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

Christ opens with a simple reminder. A desire that His joy would remain in you. But who is Christ specifically speaking to? As I read all of chapter 15 and back into chapter 14, I find Jesus talking to His disciples. As Christ prepares His disciples for his death, burial, and resurrection He commands his disciples to cling to love as displayed to them through His life. Specifically, we love one another as Christ has loved us. That is a bar set so high, apart from grace and the Holy Spirit, we cannot achieve it. Sure, we can love fellow Christians to a point. Likewise, we can only be loved by fellow Christians up to a point. Beyond that, we fail on both accounts. However, Christ does say it is a commandment, and it is given that our joy would be full. Let's think about this. Joy, how often do you find yourself struggling to find joy? How often do you meet others with the same struggle? Could it be that we are struggling to love as Christ has directed us? Remember we are not discussing love as defined in our heart or mind. We are discussing love as defined by God and displayed by his Son while recording it in his word. A Christian relationship with God through Jesus Christ is one of personal witness and testimony. It is how we live and what we say. We cannot live a Christian life apart from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. We cannot have that relationship apart from saving grace.

Loving one another as Christ has loved us is not a mountain to climb. It is a submission to embrace. That's right if we submit to Christ through the Holy Spirit and seek His guidance, forgiveness, grace, and mercy we will love as defined by God. This is something every Christian should strive with conviction to achieve. Do I speak as if one has arrived? Not. I write to myself first and share my revelations with this audience. Prayerfully seeking the Lord's hand upon His universal church.

Christ directs our thoughts to the greatest love a man can have. The love of self-sacrifice. We know Christ displayed this on the cross. Not because He had to, but because He loved us this much. He left us an example of how we should love each other. When we're loveable and when we are not. Until we meet again, in person or print, may God bless you is my prayer.

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





Grand View Baptist

Understanding God's Purpose Brokenness to Purpose

By Glenda Ward McDowell County

"At the commandment of the Lord they rested in the tents, and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed: they kept the charge of the Lord at the commandment of the Lord by the hand of Moses." - Numbers 9:23

Pray and seek God's guidance and direction in finding your purpose in God's Will for your life.

The Israelites traveled and camped as God guided them. When you follow God's guidance, you know you are where God wants you, whether you are moving or staying in one place. You are physically somewhere right now: Instead of praying, "God, what do you want me to do next?" ask, "God, what do you want me to do while I am right here?" Direction from God is not just for your next move. He has a purpose in placing you where you are right now.

You were created by God for a purpose. At the present, your purpose may seem obsolete. You may have to search for it, but you can find it. Instead of looking for your purpose, look for God. He knows the plan He has for you. God placed your purpose in you. When you learn His ways your effort will involve aligning yourself with His Will and with His design to maximize your potential.

The Israelites spent 40 years on a journey that should have lasted 11 days. It wasn't the distance that stood between them and the Promised Land. It was the condition of their hearts. God's purpose went deeper than simply transporting a huge group of people to a new land. He was preparing them to live in obedience to Him once they arrived. (Reference Deuteronomy 1:1-2).

God will bring about your greatness. You don't need to force it. Draw close to God, and He will fulfill your purpose for you and through you. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: ..." (John 15:16). Jesus made the first choice - to love and to die for us, to offer us eternal life. We make the next choice - to accept or reject His offer. Without His choice, we would have no

Your Spiritual life, power, and strength come from the Holy Spirit. Self-pity and blame both make you ineffective for the Kingdom of God. You must intentionally and personally pursue Spiritual growth and Spiritual maturity if you are going to have a lasting impact on the lives you touch. "If ye abide in Me, and My Words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). Apart from Him our efforts are unfruitful. The purposes in a person's life are deep within, but one who has insight draws them out. God has a specific plan and Will for your life. How can you know God's Will for your life? You have to be intentional and search for it! Most of the time you have to find God's purpose in life. Your purpose doesn't find you! One of the greatest honors we have is to discover what God has for us in our lives. In Jeremiah chapter 29 verse 11 it is saying, God knows the future and His plan for our life is good and full of hope. He can provide our agenda and go with us as we fulfill His mission on earth if we make the right decision to seek Him out and the plan He has for us. We can have boundless hope and blessings.

Jesus is the good shepherd. He knows His sheep. "As the Father knoweth Me, even so I know the Father: and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one-fold, and One Shepherd." (John 10:15-16). Jesus says, If you remain in Me and I in you, you will bear much fruit. If we do not remain in Jesus Christ and stay focused on Him in life, we are like a branch that is withered and thrown away; such branches are picked up, and thrown into the fire to burn. The reason so many people fail to discover God's Will for themselves is because distraction is easy and satan is working overtime in people's lives today. We can spend so much time on the means that we forget to focus on God's purpose and the end result.

When you are stuck to who you were before deciding to find God's Will and your purpose in life, you will need to redeem your past or you will never be able to move forward into your future to live out God's purpose. It isn't about forgetting the past. It is about finding value even in your greatest pain and heartache. One of the things you will discover when you find God's Will and purpose in your life is that many times your greatest purpose in God's plan comes from your greatest pain. Scripture states, "... and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation, that they should seek the Lord, ... and find Him, though He be not far from everyone of us, for in Him we live, and move, and have our being ..., For we also are His offspring ..." (Acts 17:26-27). God marked our appointed times in history and the boundaries thereof. God did this so we could seek Him, reach out to Him, and find Him. Your past has a purpose, no matter how painful it becomes. See the purpose in your past and you will begin to see the purpose in God's Will for your future. Prayer is the key to finding your Spiritual gift and God's Will and purpose in your life.

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.

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. -John 15:13







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Billy Graham Evangelistic Association

The Answer

By Billy Graham

Q: I constantly hear about how people should love one another but when I look at the world, the evidence is overwhelming—there is more hate than love. Even in my own life, I find that I stay upset and angry and find it difficult to show love, especially to those who do wrong. I've asked the Lord to help me be more loving but it seems many times that I exhibit just the opposite and it discourages me. I'm sure God prefers that we exhibit love rather than hate.

A: From the writings of the Rev. Billy Graham

For those who belong to Jesus Christ, God's priority is that His love would become the hallmark of life—because it is the hallmark of Christ's life. How does this become a reality? It doesn't happen by accident or by gritting our teeth and hoping that somehow we can make ourselves love others. It happens only as we grow closer to Christ and submit our lives to Him, allowing His Holy Spirit to cleanse and change us. The Bible says that "the fruit of the Spirit is love" (Galatians 5:22, NKJV).

This happens only gradually, one step at a time, and it starts by settling our relationship with God through receiving salvation offered by His Son, Jesus Christ. God then brings us to peace with Him, gives us peace in our hearts, and peace with others. When we receive Christ as our personal Savior and Lord, the warfare between God and us is over. We also find that peace with others takes a lifetime to develop; we won't be complete until we reach Heaven.

Almost nothing is as complex as the human personality, and no simple formula will ever cover every relationship. But for all who ask, God will implant His love within and then help us live according to His will.

(This column is based on the words and writings of the late Rev. Billy Graham.) Do you belong to Jesus Christ? Pray now.

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Marlene's Meditations

Life's Winters
By Marlene Houk
Burke County

Job 37:10 "By the breath of God frost is given: and the breadth of the waters is straitened (confined)."

Sun shimmering on water graces any day with its stunning beauty, but the sheen on frozen water carries its own glory.

The wintery rays shone on the frozen water of the large fountain in the small-town plaza, and the opaque ice muted the glow of the sun's brilliance. The sun and ice both revealed the glory of Job 37:10. God's very breath brings us the beauty of a sunny wintry day that is filled with His goodness. Children seemed oblivious to the cold. Others braved nippy winds, clutching heavy coats as they scurried down long sidewalks. But all were being blessed by the breath of God.

The fountain in Valdese, NC sits serenely inside the Piedmont town and offers a stunning sight on an icy cold day. The sun glints off the ice, but you can hear the water still bubbling underneath as the top-frozen layers catch the sun's rays and toss them into the crisp air. The frozen fountain reminded me of God's Son-Jesus-bringing the sunshine of His love and presence into our lives, melting the ice of our life's winters and tossing the glory of those troubles into eternity as the following verse

affirms. 2 Corinthians 4:17 says, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;"

When we experience the icy frozen waters of fear, sorrow, and depression as they insidiously cover our lives, remember this. The Son still shines His glory on the worst parts of our lives and brings, not the blinding rays of a summer day, but the muted glow of His glory on our afflictions. His Word will not return void. As we bask in its glow, the ice disappears, and the waters fill with food for our souls. Jesus redeems our trials, suffusing them with His glory and tossing them into eternity!

and tossing them into eternity!

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





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A Pastor's View

Psalm 61: 5 Pictures of God's Help

By Shawn Thomas Angleton, Texas

A couple of weeks ago I was awakened in the middle of the night by a tornado warning on my wife's phone. When that alarm goes off, you're supposed to take refuge in a shelter, a to shatter and harm you. We're from Oklahoma, where there

center hallway, a bathtub, or someplace where there's no glass are a TON of tornadoes, and that's pretty much standard procedure. When the warning goes off — and they go off there a lot — you take refuge in your tornado shelter if you have one, or the safest place in your home, wherever

that is. In Psalm 61, David is in a "storm" of sorts, and he takes "shelter" in his "safe place" — but his "safe place" is not a man-made shelter; but GOD Himself! We see here that David was very confident in the Lord's protection and deliverance. Notice

at least 5 things he lists that God is like to him in his time of trouble: 1. In:2b he says, "lead me to the ROCK that is higher than I".

"Rock" here is the Hebrew word "tzur," not a little "stone"; it indicates a huge rock, a cliff. It was used to describe Mt. Horeb, where Moses met the Lord. It's the word God used when He put Moses in "the cleft of the rock" — a place in a huge rock/cliff.

People in ancient times were always seeking shelter in places high up in the mountains or cliffs for protection. Petra, in southwest Jordan, was the capital of the Nabatean Kingdom, and it was a fortress city that was literally cut out of rock, only accessible through a narrow canyon entrance. It was a good place to run and be safe from one's enemies.

In the same way, David says, God, YOU are MY ROCK. You are my "fortress" or "safe place" that I flee to when I am under attack. God can be that for us today too. When we feel under attack, run to HIM!

2. "You have been a REFUGE for me." (:3)

"Mach-seh" is a refuge, or shelter, from rain or storm, or enemy.

I've read several accounts of the Hamas attack on Israel a couple of months ago, and how when they were attacking, many of the Israelis had a "safe room" they went to for protection. Over 1000 Israelis were killed in that attack, but several others were saved, by going to their "safe room" as a place of refuge from the assault.

David says this is what GOD is for me: He is my "refuge," my "shelter," my "safe room" where I can run in times of trouble.

3. "a TOWER of strength against the enemy" (:3b)

"Tower" here is the Hebrew "migdal" it means a "tower" or what we might think of as a castle. As you may know, Jerusalem, like most ancient cities, had walls around it to protect it, and every so often along the wall there would be a tower. Towers like this were common in those days, as places to be safe from enemy attacks on your city. So David says in :3, Lord, YOU are my strong "tower" against the enemy.

4. "let me dwell in Your TENT forever" (:4)

I was watching a documentary the other day about the Battle of El Alamein in World War II when the Germans were about to capture Egypt from Britain. A huge sandstorm hit the area, and they had video footage of this huge cloud of sand, hundreds of feet high, that was about to hit them. It looked like something from a horror movie! Then it showed all the men running to their tents, to give them a measure of protection from all that wind and sand that was about to blast them. The TENT was a place of protection and security. So David says here, that is what GOD is for me; He is my "TENT," my shelter, my comfort.

5. "Let me take refuge in the shelter of Your WINGS." (:4b)

Here God is pictured like a mother bird that hides its young under its wings, to protect them from fire, storm, or enemy predators. David says again, God is like this protection for me. I take refuge in HIS wings.

So there are at least FIVE PICTURES here of how God is the One David went to for help in times of trouble, as his: ROCK, REFUGE, TOWER, TENT, and WINGS to hide under.

Significantly, this section ends with the Hebrew word "Selah," which scholars believe means "pause", or "musical interlude." I envision it telling us: "stop and think about" what you just read, which makes sense here: "stop and think about" how God can be all these kinds of help for you!

Many of God's people today need to heed this admonition, and spend some more time thinking about how God is our Rock; our Refuge; our Tower; our Tent; and the Wings we hide under.

- That means we won't just sit around and worry when bad things happen, or when we are threatened with bad news.
- Instead, we run to God, who is our Rock, Tower, Refuge, Tent, and Wings.
- It means we should turn to Him in prayer immediately like David did; seek His answers, find comfort in His word, and then DO what He shows us to do. Whenever we're in trouble, like David was in Psalm 61, we should turn to the Lord like he did, and let Him be all these 5 things for us.

But that's not the end of it! In:5-8 Psalm 61 takes an important turn. David says in:5 "For You have HEARD my vows, O God ...". Now David is not only asking God to help him; he shows faith that God HAS heard him! It is important: not only that we ask God for help, but also that we believe that He WILL!

How many times does Jesus tell people to "have faith" or "your faith has saved you"?

Hebrews 4:2, speaking of the people of Israel in the wilderness, says

"But the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard." He's saying, you need to BELIEVE what God says; you must have FAITH in it for it to be effective in your life.

David expresses that faith several times in:5-8:

- -:5 "For You HAVE heard my vows, O God"
- -:5b "You HAVE given me the inheritance of those who fear Your name".
- —:6 "You WILL prolong the king's life"
- -:7 "He WILL abide before God forever"
- -: 8 "So I WILL sing praise to Your name forever, that I may pay my vows day by day"

David is calling on the Lord to be his Rock, Refuge, Tower, Tent, and Wings and then he expresses faith that God WILL do for him what he asks.

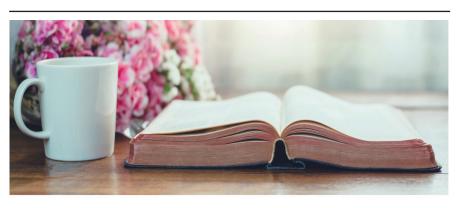
We need to do this too. When we turn to God in our times of trouble, we need to BELIEVE that He WILL!

- Don't just continually say "Oh Lord have mercy", BELIEVE that He HAS shown you mercy!
- Don't merely ask Him to help you; say, "God I TRUST that You WILL help me in this situation because You promised in Your word that You would."

If like David in Psalm 61, you are wrestling with something today, bring that thing to the Lord, and ask Him to be your Rock, Refuge, Tower, Tent, and Wings but then also BELIEVE that He WILL be all that for you, just like David did here in

And when he answers you, do what David committed to doing in:8, and sing praise to His name, forever!

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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Daniel

By Thomas Thorne *McDowell County*

Over the last three months, we have been examining the categorization of the Old Testament as divided by Christian and Jewish scholars. We noticed that the Jewish scholars divide the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) into three categories: the Law (Hebrew Torah), the Prophets (Neviim), and the Writings (Ketuvim). Interestingly enough the book of Daniel, which is considered by Christians to be one of the chief prophetic books of the Bible, is included in the "writings" category. In today's article, I want to explain why this is so.



As we previously studied, a prophet is "one who speaks for another," and therefore a prophet of God would be "one who speaks for God." Although Christians place the book of Daniel in the Major Prophets division, the Jewish sages include it along with The Writings rather than The Prophets. This indeed is quite curious for a Believer without a Jewish background as we consider Daniel to be one of the most important prophetic books in the Bible! The book of Daniel is in two parts with the first six chapters being "historical/narrative," telling stories from the life of Daniel and his friends while chapters 7-12 are apocalyptic visions leading up to the return of Jesus. And Daniel was definitely what we defined as a prophet earlier, being a "spokesman for God!"

Does the book of Daniel, being placed among the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Ruth, Esther, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, and 1st/2nd Chronicles show us that it was not considered to be a part of prophecy? No, the real reason is that Judaism does not consider Daniel to be a prophet, but something else. One might ask, how can that be? Parts of the book deal with the Greek empire, the fall of Babylon, the Medo-Persian empire, and the Roman empire, all the way up to the return of Jesus. There is no doubt that all of these were in the future from the life of Daniel (approx. 620 B.C. – 530 B.C.).

The reason the Jewish people do not list the book of Daniel with the "prophets" is because the Jewish definition of a Biblical prophet is one who had direct communication with God. Daniel, on the other hand, received divine inspiration via the Holy Spirit (Hebrew Ruach HaKodesh). Daniel, along with his friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, were placed in a pagan kingdom where the LORD did not speak or appear to them in the same way He did with Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah. Nevertheless, the men of this foreign kingdom (Babylon) saw God's power and sovereignty in Daniel's and their own lives.

Indeed, the prophets of old had the Spirit of God within them, although the Jewish sages say that God's spirit gave Daniel a depth of insight and revelation uncommon to prophets. In this way, Daniel is considered to be a "sage," and in the Talmud (the authoritative body of Jewish tradition comprising the Mishnah and Gemara – Webster Dictionary, accessed 12/8/23) we read that a "sage is superior to a prophet" (Bava Batra 12a).

According to the Rabbis of the Talmud, Daniel was endowed with such an incredible gift of wisdom, that if one were to weigh his wisdom against that of all the wise men of the gentile nations, Daniel's would outweigh them all (Talmud, Yoma 77a)

My last several articles have been describing the organization of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible. In summary, Christian scholars categorize the O.T. into five parts:

- The Pentateuch Genesis through Deuteronomy
- Historical books: Joshua through Esther 12 books
- Poetic books: Job through the Song of Solomon 5 books
- Major prophets: Isaiah through Daniel 5 books
- Minor prophets: Hosea through Malachi 12 books

The Jewish people divide the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) into three sections:

- The Torah (law, instruction, direction) consists of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy (5 books)
- The Neviim (Prophets) include Joshua, Judges, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi (21 books)
- The Ketuvim (Writings) is made up of Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, 1 and 2 Chronicles (13 books)

I hope this past series of articles has helped clarify any questions as to why the differences in the divisions plus provided some additional understanding into the Old Testament.

Shalom

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



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Run to Your Father

By Tammy Hopson Mitchell County

The seats on the airplane were small and the flight was long. The high altitude seemed to war against me making my body and my ears ring. After 20 years I was going back home. My life had taken many turns and twists over those years and sometimes I felt like I was moving full speed ahead and others hardly a crawl. Tragedy had struck me many times. The death of my mother, a divorce and reorganization of my family's life, the death of a baby sister, and the most



devastating thing I could ever imagine, the sudden loss of my oldest son. Life had become way too hard and my heart had become frozen and numb. I was only going through the necessary motions as I struggled to carry the heavy weight of grief through each passing day. I was in desperate need of comfort, acceptance, and love. I knew I had to go home. I needed to visit the land I came from, where my mother and sister came from, and also the place where my son was born. I needed to reconnect with someone or something and be reminded who I was.

The flight seemed to last forever. I kept peering out the window to see any hint of home only to see that we were surrounded by clouds. I tried to sit back and relax but my anxiousness kept me shifting in my seat. There was no getting comfortable. Finally, the clouds began to dissipate, and I could see the land below. "The mountains! Oh, the mountains!" my heart cried. The peaks of the Cascades were in view! They were reaching for me and saying "Welcome Home". After we landed, I couldn't get off the plane fast enough. I wanted to see the streets of my city. I drove around to see the familiar places, my heart filled with joy at the memory of where I came from, and the place that I had lived. Then I went to my father's house. I pulled up into the driveway nervous and shaky. Would he be the same? Would he love me the same? I made my way slowly to the door. Suddenly, this large man stood in front of me with his arms open wide and tears in his eyes. He wrapped his arms around me and at that moment I wondered why I had waited so long. He was the same as when I saw him 20 years ago! He was still my Dad! During my visit with him, we reconnected and I remembered whose daughter I am. It soothed my heart to be near him and I vowed I would never stay away this long again.

After, coming back to North Carolina, there have been many times I have felt the same way. The weight of the losses I have endured is something I must carry until I reach heaven. But the memory of going home has become a beautiful poignant analogy for me and pulls me forward when I cannot take another step. I will go home to see my Dad every chance I get and I have been back to see him since that visit in 2020.

But through the pain, I still seek a place of comfort and there are times when I cannot continue to carry the heaviness of losing my beloved son, my sister, or my mother. This life still gets too hard and the world around me can still feel foreign, frozen, and not my home. But when those feelings try to take over, I still run to my Father. Except, I don't fly home to Seattle. I do not have to travel very far at all. There is no need for an airplane ride or an expensive ticket. I simply must get down on my knees. The soothing and comfort I long for, the connection my heart and soul truly need is with my Heavenly Father. He is there waiting for me and His arms are outstretched and longing to hold me. When I fall into His giant embrace, I am reminded that I am His daughter and even if I have been away far too long He loves me still. With His love, His Spirit comforts me and assures me that I am still His. He knows this world can be hard and feel so cold, but He has prepared for me (and for you) a beautiful place. There is a world waiting for us where death and sorrow cannot enter, where upon our arrival we will be welcomed by our Father Himself. A place that will feel familiar and warm and when we get there we will know that we have finally made it home.

I am wondering if you are carrying the same weight as me. Are you enduring the same losses that I am? Is there pain in your life that is so heavy that you can hardly take another step? If so, don't wait another second. Run to your Father! He is waiting for you with outstretched hands and He will comfort you.

Luke 15:20 "And he arose and came to his Father......and his Father saw him and embraced him..."

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

HE THAT LOVETH NOT KNOWETH NOT GOD; FOR GOD IS LOVE. -1 JOHN 4:8 KJV

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Enjoying Everyday Life

Living Amazed

By Joyce Meyer

"Amazing grace...how sweet the sound!" "How great Thou art!" "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus..." "There's just something about that Name!" "Praise God from Whom all blessings flow!"

These are all lyrics to a few old hymns of the church.

Their words convey a certain wonder and adoration of the greatness of God. This kind of wide-eyed, jaw-dropping amazement should certainly promote a hopeful outlook on life.

Today we have numerous ways to experience God's goodness. We can watch and listen to Bible teachings on TV, radio, and the internet, find encouragement in social media, listen to uplifting music, and read inspiring books—the list is almost endless

However, even with all the ways the Word is available to us, it seems as though we have lost some of the reverence and respect for God that we once had, and familiarity may be the culprit. Now, it's not that familiarity is a bad thing necessarily, but when something—or someone—becomes common or ordinary to us, we begin to take it for granted and it is no longer special. I believe this can happen with our relationship with God.

Several years ago, I asked the Lord, "Why don't I have exciting, special things happen in my life anymore?"

God spoke to my heart and said, "Joyce, I still do those things all the time. You have just gotten used to it."

God wants us to live amazed by His goodness in our lives...to actively take notice of the truly wonderful things He does for us. Why? Because when we live amazed, we will never be without hope! Let's look at the story of Abraham...

God had blessed Abraham abundantly. However, there was one thing that he and his wife, Sarah, didn't have—a child. Abraham said, "...Lord God, what can You give me, since I am going on [from this world] childless...?

"And He [God] brought him outside [his tent into the starlight] and said, Look now toward the heavens and count the stars—if you are able to number them. Then he said to him, So shall your descendants be (Genesis 15:2, 5 AMPC)."

Although Abraham's circumstances looked overwhelming, the Lord brought him out of his tent to amaze him and remind him that He could do the impossible.

I believe we can all spend too much time "in our tent," looking at our own problems. That's why the Bible says to look away from all that will distract unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2).

Every time we decide to pray, read His Word, or simply dwell on the great things He has done for us in the past, it produces hope. And, like Abraham, we soon begin thinking, Wow, maybe He can do this for me!

If we can't find anything else to be amazed about, we can at least rejoice that we will live for eternity! But in the meantime, there is much more to inspire our wide-eyed wonder; all we have to do is simply pay attention.

Think back to a time shortly after you began your relationship with God. How did you feel? Were you extremely happy? Were you amazed by the presence of God...His grace...His love for you? How did you express your love and gratitude to Him? Did you laugh, cry, or dance before Him? Did you shout praises to Him or maybe bow in silent reverence? Whatever you did was your expression of the value, or importance, of your new and growing relationship with God.

It's like a jar of salad dressing sitting on a shelf—most of the seasoning settles to the bottom of the bottle. But when you shake that bottle up, all the ingredients mix together and then the dressing can add flavor to a salad. In the same way, we can stir ourselves up and regain the reverence, respect, and awe we once had for the Lord. Shake up those memories of what God has done for you. Begin to do what you did when you first experienced God's presence, grace, and love. Learn

to maintain that amazement, because the more amazed you are, the more hopeful, joyful, and peaceful you'll be—and the more "flavor" you'll add to this world.

There are several ways we can stir ourselves up. Just stop and think for a moment. Begin to reminisce about the goodness of God in your life. Remember things He's done for you. Keep a journal to record your prayer needs and then the answers and breakthroughs, or a gratitude notebook to just write down things you are thankful for. Share with others what God is doing in your life! It doesn't matter whether they're big or small things; remembrance is vital to maintaining hope, and these things can help remind you. When you focus on how wonderful God is and all the great things He's done...is doing...and even will do in your life, your natural response will be praise, adoration, and awe. Don't let yourself ever get used to it...stay amazed!

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

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Full of Grace and Truth

By Andrew Goins Watauga County

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." \sim John $1\cdot14$



The whole of the cosmos is a turntable. Spinning and spiraling. Our world rotating on the 23.5 degree axis. Slight tilt and is masterfully built, waiting for the needle to drop. Jesus the needle drops and our wild and wonderful world makes music, like Beethoven's Symphony Nom. 5 booming with beauty and brawn, or Tchaokovsky's Piano Piano Concerto Nom. 1, with vigor and vibrance bringing vivid vitality into a world void of perfect rightness, or maybe more like Louis Armstrong soulfully and slowly seducing a soul-less world because Jesus came to make your soul-full. When Jesus moves into the neighborhood, there is life because He comes full of both grace and truth. Grace and truth are fully realized when held together, and mutually illuminating. Grace and truth are fully realized in the reality of heaven on earth. For the bible authors, heaven was a place full of God's presence. There are clues that the bible authors give us that implies when heaven is descending to earth.

For example, in Genesis 28, Jacob has a dream in a field. He saw a ladder/stairs on which were angels ascending and descending. This was a place where heaven and earth were meshed and merged. Because this was a place where heaven and earth were meshed and merged together, that place was called Bethel, which is Hebrew for "House of God." Later in the story of the Bible, a temple is built in that place. A "Bethel" if you will. It is a sacred place where heaven and earth are meshed and merged.

Another example is in Isaiah 6, where Isaiah sees a vision. In that vision, he finds himself in the temple of Yahweh. He sees YahWeh's robe, which is on earth, and does not see His head, because His head is in the heavens. His Body is on earth, and His head is in the heavens. Through the biblical witness, we find that the temple is a place where heaven and earth are meshed and merged.

In John 1:50, Jesus tells Nathaniel "Very truly I tell you, you will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." Does that sound familiar? Remember what Jacob dreamed of in the field? Jesus is calling Himself the Bethel. Jesus is calling Himself a temple; in Christ we encounter God. Jesus is the tabernacle/temple of God. One of the ways Jesus embodies His "temple-hood" is by holding together grace and truth, as John comments in saying "the only Son from the Father full of grace and truth." Just like Jesus meshes and merges heaven (God's dwelling place) and earth (our dwelling place,) He also meshes and merges grace and truth so that they are wed together. Flesh of flesh and bone of bone.

Truth is the realm of God's presence in which we are brought. As Calvin says, if "we discover in God's law a picture of God's own image," we know that we cannot conform to that law without grace. Truth is reality Himself that we are brought into; not by the grace of revelation, but through grace the revelation in and of itself

Put plainly, reality (truth) is discovered in revelation (grace.) Thus we are not brought into reality on our own doing, but through revelation—through grace. Both of which are external to ourselves. At this point, we have been grasped by the hand of God

It is when we have been grasped by God's hand that we have been rightly reoriented. We find ourselves in a reality where we pray "May your kingdom come"
while simultaneously answering that prayer in our prayers. A reality where the
homeless are helped and the hurting healed. A reality where we chant with all the
saints and angels our yes in Christ. Our broken hearts are broken apart, so that we
can be put back together—made whole and holy, so that through our whole and
holy hearts the whole world might be made whole and holy, washed by the cleansing of Jesus' water and blood flowing from His side onto the spear that is you and
I. Our piercing Him is the means through which we are pieced back together.

May God's Grace grasp you, and His tender Truth touch you. In Jesus' name.

Amen

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



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If ye love me, keep my commandments.
-John 14:15

Berry Chapel Baptist Church

Sovereign of GodBy Steve Williams *Mitchell County*

Howdy,

We use words like luck, chance, and fate to describe something that happens just out of the blue or without explanation. The problem with using these words is that we are failing to acknowledge the sovereignty of God. God's sovereignty just means that God completely rules over everybody and everything in the world. His author-



ity is supreme and cannot be challenged. So if He wills to do something there is nothing in the universe that can stop Him.

In the day that we are living, it seems that the world is running out of control. Ungodly and evil things seem to be going on everywhere getting worse by the day. People are wondering where God is and why He is allowing this to continue. But what we have to understand is this, all the evil that happens is because of man's bad decisions, but God can make it good. We may not understand how He does it. We may not see all the moving pieces that are part of His plan. Because of His sovereignty, His will, and His way, His plan will come to pass. Even when it looks like nothing is making any sense, He is in control. The things that we see taking place are just a part of a larger, well-thought-out plan to bring us where He wants us to be. God is not saying "Oh my goodness what's going on."

It's like this, if you wear a watch, and someone else asks you for the time, you would look at the face of your watch because it tells the time. But the only reason that you can see the correct time on the face of the watch is that, underneath it, a series of very tiny gears and other mechanisms continually move and function to make sure the face shows the correct time. In other words, what you see exists because of what you can't see happening. Even if you don't see what's underneath or understand how it all works, you must trust those tiny moving parts will always tell you the truth. When you are dealing with the sovereignty of God, you'll never see all that there is to see. What you do see often doesn't make a lot of sense. That is because God is always doing more than one thing at a time. He is dealing with millions of things at the same time, even though we do not see it or understand it. We just have to place our faith in Him and know that He is taking care of everything.

The thing that God's people have to get into their heads and their spiritual lives, is that God has got everything under control. Whether we can see it or not, or whether in this world or our lives, just remember God Rules no matter what.

Pastor Steve Williams

Words of Wisdom:

- There are two kinds of people: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, 'All right, then, have it your way.' C. S. Lewis
- Each life is made up of mistakes and learning, waiting and growing, practicing patience, and being persistent. -Billy Graham
- Our heavenly Father understands our disappointment, suffering, pain, fear, and doubt. He is always there to encourage our hearts and help us understand that He's sufficient for all of our needs. When I accepted this as an absolute truth in my life, I found that my worrying stopped. -Charles Stanley
- I believe you have to keep the theological standard high; the Lord said, 'Be perfect,' and Christians have to be striving for that standard with all there is in them. -Adrian Rogers
- Because God is sovereign, He is never caught by surprise. -N/A

Something To Think About:

There is a 0.0296 chance that your child will become a professional athlete. There is a 100% chance that your child will stand before God.

Get them to church.

The Bible says in Proverbs 22:6 "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it."

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



Seventh Day Adventist Burnsville

The Immersion To a New Life

By Art Dmytriyev Yancey County

It was a regular church service day when, in front of the congregation, a preacher had been performing the baptism of a friend who asked him for an unusual favor: to hold him under the water for a while — longer than usual preachers hold. The reason for his request was the experience of a brand-new life — die symbolically and become a born-again Christian.



Nearly every Christian denomination today practices baptism. It is a Biblically-based doctrine. Why then do most of the churches do it differently: some sprinkle with water, some baptize in the sand, others baptize different parts of the bodies, and some experience complete immersion?

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:38 KJV). Baptism testifies to our conviction to follow Jesus and drives us to live out our faith boldly and without fear. The biblical practice of baptism is an outward demonstration of an inward commitment. It symbolizes the death and burial of Jesus Christ. When one comes up out of the water, they are symbolically raised to a new life in Christ. It's an exciting start to a new Christian's life.

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen." (Matthew 28:19–20 KJV). Jesus commanded every believer to go out into the world preaching the Good News. Also, He said new believers were to be baptized. Baptism moves the heart of the believer toward a deep relationship with Christ. In the Bible, baptism is demonstrated as part of the Christian life. Baptism shows choice and transformation of the heart of the believer, and it begins the journey of a life deeply changed.

"Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:13–17 KJV). John the Baptist proclaimed the Word of God, and he called people to confess their sins through repentance, but Jesus did not need to repent and confess anything. He is God! So, we may conclude that baptism is simply an outward expression of a Christian's faith, and Jesus' example of baptism demonstrated his dedication to His Father in Heaven. So, we, as Christians, show our dedication to God through the biblical practice of baptism.

You may ask: Do Christians need to be baptized to be saved? The Bible answers: "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." (Ephesians 2:8–9 KJV). It's the blood of Jesus that saves us, not baptism. Salvation is a free gift from God. It's the Holy Spirit's work that makes the difference. After the baptism, through the power of the Holy Spirit, a person joyfully begins a new life!

Dear Reader, have you ever been baptized? If not, then delay no longer. Dedicate your life to Jesus as your Redeemer and Savior! Perhaps you were baptized, but something happened in your life, and today you feel disconnected from the source of Life. Please come to Jesus immediately and surrender yourself to Him. The best way to do it is by being baptized in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. They practice Biblical baptism by immersion, and they teach 100% Bible-based doctrine. Come, dedicate yourself to the Lord, and begin the New Life! May the Lord Bless You!

Pr. Art Dmytriyev 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



State Point Media

Romance Scams on the Rise and Elderly are Particularly Vulnerable

They say, "you can't buy love," but scammers have figured out a way to exploit it for profit.

Romance scams are at an all-time high and, while victims cross all demographics, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) reports that elders are increasingly targeted. Why? Because they often have retirement savings at their disposal and may be more isolated and less tech-savvy.

"Romance scammers often manipulate emotions to gain trust," says Mark Kwapiszeski, head of enterprise fraud for PNC. "Those who fall victim end up putting feelings above logic. This can create embarrassment and, as a result, these crimes are less likely to be reported."

Scammers will create convincing profiles on dating and social media apps, reaching out to their target feigning familiarity or attraction. Things move quickly, but there is always a reason they can't meet on video or in person. They may claim to have a reason that requires them to be overseas or out of reach. They tell their target everything they want to hear, and the hook is set.

Suddenly, a crisis arises that they insist they need help financial help to mitigate. Or maybe they need finances to set up a new life together. They ask for the money but would prefer it be sent in a form like cryptocurrency or gift card where there is little chance of the victim ever recovering it.

Such scams are highly effective. In 2022 alone, romance scams resulted in \$1.3 billion lost, more than double the money lost in the previous year, according to the FTC.

To add insult to injury, scammers may convince their target to send them revealing photos they will later use to extort them. They may even play the long game and build trust over time, then convince their target to invest with them, without the victim ever getting any return.

"A romance scammer can invest a long time in cultivating trust, which makes these scams particularly nefarious," Kwapiszeski says.

To protect against potential romance scams, follow these tips:

- Before sending money or sharing financial information, consult a friend or family member. Simply talking to someone not involved in the situation is often enough to identify red flags.
- Trust your gut. If something seems too good to be true, it probably is.
- Beware of "love bombing," when a person lavishes you with excessive flattery, affection, and praise early in the relationship to manipulate your emotions.
- Be wary of strangers reaching out on social media.
- If you like someone, ask for a quick video chat. If they refuse or make up outlandish excuses, that's a red flag.
- Stay alert to photos or biographical details that don't match up with what someone's told you.
- Use image and name-reverse searches to validate the identity of people you meet online.
- Never send intimate photos to strangers or invest without doing your due diligence.
 - Confide in family and friends if you grow suspicious.

Elders have lost homes, emptied out retirement accounts, and risked lifetime savings for a love interest that never truly existed. Once the shock abates and the money is gone, the shame sets in and some have even resorted to self-harm instead of admitting to being defrauded in this way. If a loved one falls victim to a romance scam, it's important to respond with empathy.

If you believe you or someone you love has been a victim of fraud, PNC Bank's web resources, as part of its Security and Privacy Center (pnc.com), can help After taking immediate measures to protect yourself, block the scammer on all accounts, change your passwords, and report the incident to the FTC and FBI.

The best line of defense against romance scams is awareness. Understanding common tactics can help you stay protected.



Sudoku Solution

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

Crossword Solution

Н	0	L	D	S		S	С	Α	В		S	Α	L	Е
Α	٧	Е	R	Т		Α	L	S	0		Р	L	Α	Υ
R	Ε	F	Е	R		L	0	S	Т		Α	1	D	Е
Е	N	Т	W	1	N	Е	S		Н	W	1	N	Е	D
M				N	Α	М	Ε		L	1	N	Ε	N	
	С	Α	R	G	0		S	Р	Е	D				S
M	Α	R	Α		М	Ε	Т	Ε		Т	R	1	В	Е
Α	R	Α	М	Α	1	С		Α	S	Н	Α	D	0	W
Т	Ε	М	Р	Т		Н	Ε	L	Р		1	L	L	S
Е				Α	S	0	N		0	1	L	Е	D	
	S	Р	Е	L	Т		Q	U	1	Т	١	lo.27	6	Е
S	Е	L	L	Е	R			N	L	0	Α	D	Е	D
Α	L	Α	D		Α	S	1	D	Ε		В	R	Α	G
M	Ε	N	Е		Р	U	R	Ε	R		В	Α	S	Е
Е	D	Е	R		S	Ε	Е	R	S		Α	G	Е	S

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Kids' Corner

The Giggler

By Christy Lowman Burke County

Did you know there is an animal that we refer to as the king of the jungle and king of the beasts? I'm not sure why we say the jungle because they don't actually live there. This animal is also used as a symbol and reference to God. Do you know what this animal is?



The lion. This big cat is the second largest cat in the world. The lion can be found in the grasslands, and savannahs in Africa along with a small group located in India. Lions can grow up to 8.2 feet long and weigh as much as 550 pounds. However, the lions that live in India are much smaller. Lions are mostly yellow and brown but every so often a white one is born. Lions can run up to 50mph for short distances and can jump as high as 36 feet. They are also great climbers and can scale a wall with ease.

Their diet usually consists of zebras, giraffes, wild boars, cape buffalo, wildebeests, and antelope. Sometimes they steal other animals and kill them instead of catching their own meal. They eat so much at one time that they can go a few days without eating.

Most of the time the lionesses (females) do all the hunting for food for the entire group called a pride. A pride can have as many as 30 members. Lions are considered the most social cats because of how large their family group is.

While the females are out hunting the males are busy protecting their territory. The territory can stretch up to 100 square miles.

Lions spend most of their time sleeping and resting because they do not have sweat glands. This makes them tire quickly. They sleep and lay around 16-20 hours. Lions hunt mostly during the day but can change their hunting schedule tonight if there is a better chance of catching a meal.

A lion's roar can be heard 5 miles away and can last as long as 40 seconds. All lions in the pride will roar in unison to warn intruders to leave. They are equipped with unique voice boxes that allow them to make many other noises including squealing, purring, screaming, and grunting. Can you imagine if you were out in the tall grass walking around, not being able to see what was around you then suddenly hearing a bunch of lions roar solid for almost a minute? How eerie would that be? The hairs on my arms would stand up!

Only the male lions have a mane but not all males have one. Some just grow a fringe around their neck. The color of a lion's mane shows how old and experienced they are. A younger male has a lighter mane, while older males have a dark brown one. A dark, long mane symbolizes good health and a great fighter. Most males will choose to fight a male with a light-haired, short mane before a darker-colored one. Scientific experiments show that female lions prefer a male with a dark long mane.

The mane will grow up to 16 centimeters long. It protects the lion's neck and makes the lion look bigger than it is to intimidate predators and rivals.

A lion's toenails are made of keratin, which is the same thing as ours. They have 5 toes on their front paws and 4 on their back.

Lions walk on their large toes and the pads of their feet. This allows them to walk around quietly and sneak up on their prey. Their heels never touch the ground when they walk.

Lions have been a symbol of strength, royalty, courage, valor, and nobility. Lions have been mentioned many times in the Bible. Do you remember the story of Daniel in the lions' den? Or Samson and the lion?

Lions may be known as the king of the jungle and the king of the beasts, but did you know that God is known as the King of Kings? What do you think it means to be the King of Kings? It means God reigns over every person, every beast, and every living and non-living thing. He is God, there is no one mightier or higher than Him. He is the ultimate being.

God is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords! He is the giant alpha Lion so to speak. He will reign on high forever and ever. Doesn't it make you feel good that you are part of the family of God? He wants you to be His family and cares deeply for you because He is your heavenly Father. I can't imagine what it would be like to not know God. It must be hard to live on earth if you don't know Him. I talk to Him, pray to Him, and rely on Him every day. Do you? If you don't know if you are a part of the family of God but want to be, contact me, at christys-soaps@yahoo.com, or the newspaper. We will help you or send you to someone who can.

Dear God, I pray with all of my heart that everyone who reads this newspaper will get saved and become part of the family of God. I pray that you will guide this paper to the hands of non-believers. Help it reach as many people as possible. I pray that more and more people will realize that you are the alpha lion and that they need to get to know you. In Jesus's name, I pray. Amen.



"But mightier than the violent raging of the seas, mightier than the breakers on the shore— the LORD above is mightier than these!" NLT Psalms 93:4

"The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God." Psalms 104:21

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

Christian Action League

The Recipe for a Happy Nation Requires Religious and Moral Instruction in Schools

By Annie Holmquist

As a grade school student, one of my favorite field trips was spending a day attending the one-room school at a local historical site. My friends and I would pack our noontime meal in lunch buckets, dress in aprons and bonnets, and participate in a spelling bee at the close of the day.

But our lessons in the classroom covered more than just the three Rs. Often, the teacher would explain the types of trouble that students of old would get into and the consequences they would receive for such behavior. To demonstrate, my friend Teresa got her braid "dipped" in the inkwell by a "naughty" boy, who was then sent to the corner to wear the dunce cap, while my friend Amy once had to play the antsy girl who had to stand at the blackboard, nose to a chalk circle, to teach her to remain still.

Such behaviors seem miniscule by today's standards, but they demonstrate the expectation of moral instruction and discipline in the classrooms of yore.

Sadly, such moral classroom instruction is no more, and parents are noticing. A recent poll of homeschoolers released by The Washington Post found that 34 percent of homeschooling parents were teaching their child at home to "provide religious instruction" and 68 percent were doing so to "provide moral instruction."

Some may immediately reply to such news by saying that moral or religious instruction doesn't belong in the public schools—they are supposed to be secular institutions, governed by secular principles, right?

But at least one of our nation's Founders didn't look at it that way. In fact, Dr. Benjamin Rush, a signatory to the Declaration of Independence, declared religious and moral instruction as key components of the nation's education system, critical to the health of the country. Delineating the following principles for education, he encouraged Americans to lay "the foundations for nurseries of wise and good men."

Patriotism as a Form of Moral Instruction

Love of country is often viewed as a bad thing in today's culture. Patriotism is divisive, many say—we are seeking to raise global citizens, after all.

Rush shunned such an idea, encouraging Americans to educate the nation's youth within our own borders, for "the principle of patriotism stands in need of the reinforcement of prejudice." To foster this connection to the nation and its laws, Rush encouraged building camaraderie among young students through community events such as sports and work, for building such connections "add greatly to the obligations of mutual benevolence."

In cultivating patriotism and community in students, we subsequently teach the morality of kindness—a prized but often absent virtue in today's culture.

No Gender Gap in Moral Instruction

The Founding Fathers weren't the feminine oppressors many make them out to be, a fact Rush demonstrated in his advocacy for women to learn the same "principles of liberty and government"—those derived from moral instruction—that men learned. Rush did so because he recognized the influence women have on society.

"The opinions and conduct of men are often regulated by the women," he wrote, "and their approbation is frequently the principal reward of the hero's dangers, and the patriot's toils." He further noted that women are the ones who form "the first impressions upon the minds of children"; thus, instructing them in moral principles ensured that such instruction would be passed along to subsequent generations.

Religious Instruction Is the Seed of Liberty

Local and national politics are filled with tirades and treatises on the failings of public education, with many clueless about how to turn around this perpetual disaster.

Rush offered a simple answer to this problem, noting that good education needs a good foundation, and "the only foundation for a useful education in a republic is to be laid in Religion."

Religion is the only good soil in which virtue can grow, Rush continued, and when virtue is cultivated, it brings forth liberty, "the object and life of all republican governments."

That liberty is vital to our nation's government is seen multiple times in the Constitution's First Amendment. With liberty, our citizens have a free press through which they can learn various ideas and theories; with liberty, citizens can learn about the right way to petition the government; with liberty, citizens can gather to exchange ideas, hear religious teachings, and to listen to the speech of others and express their own thoughts.

In short, religious instruction sets off the chain reaction leading to a free country where children can learn with free and open minds. Kiss that religious instruction goodbye, and you can expect the dominos to fall in a long line toward totalitarianism.

The Best Form of Religious Instruction

If religious instruction is so important, what religious beliefs should be advanced in the United States' schools?

Here again Rush had an answer. "I had rather see the opinions of Confucius or Mahomed inculcated upon our youth than see them grow up wholly devoid of a system of religious principles," he wrote.

But if given a choice, Rush preferred that schools teach Christianity because of the character it produces in its adherents—including "humility, self-denial, and brotherly kindness"—and the benefits it brings to a republican form of government. "All its doctrines and precepts are calculated to promote the happiness of society, and the safety and well-being of civil government," he wrote.

The Recipe for a Happy Nation

Rush concluded his thoughts on education in the fledgling United States by writing: "From the combined and reciprocal influence of religion, liberty, and learning upon the morals, manners, and knowledge of individuals, of these, upon government, and of government, upon individuals, it is impossible to measure the degrees of happiness and perfection to which mankind may be raised."

In other words, the recipe for a happy nation comes by combining religion, morality, and education.

Uttered today, such thoughts would meet with accusations of failing to separate church and state. But given that Rush was one of the founding members of our nation, he likely understood that our government would cease to function properly without laying the foundation of morality and religion in the hearts of young students.

Perhaps it's time we try his suggestions once again.



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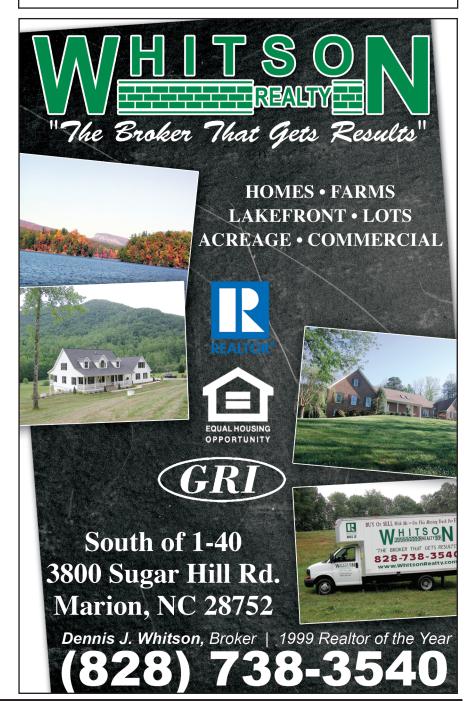
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Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

New Shoes

By Caron Cline Burke County

On February 19th, our nation will once again celebrate President's Day. I recently finished an interesting book on the life of John F. Kennedy and although this federal holiday focuses on George Washington, it is also a day to remember and honor all who served as President of the United States. One chapter of the book on Kennedy's life focused solely on November 22, 1963, the day that JFK was assassinated. The week preceding the visit to Dallas, TX,



was filled with many of Kennedy's closest advisors warning him of the possible dangers of the trip. The city of Dallas was known for its violence at the time, and many feared that President Kennedy's popularity in Texas was very low. A most solemn warning against making the trip was delivered by none other than Billy Graham. Unfortunately, JFK ignored the concerns of every one of these advisors and moved forward with the trip. Proverbs 11:14 says: 'Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory'. Many counselors offered a consistent message to the President, yet pride prevented him from listening. What if the President had heeded those continual warnings? How might history have been changed? We will never know the answer to these questions. Sadly, JFK made a foolish, fatal choice and was shot just hours after arriving in Dallas. The definition of the word 'choice', is 'an act of selecting or making a decision when faced with two or more possibilities.' God created mankind with the ability to think, reason, and choose.

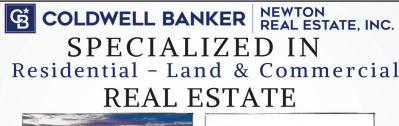
In Deuteronomy 30:19, shortly before his death, Moses challenged the children of Israel: "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So, choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants." God's Word defines the choices that will either result in blessings or curses, and we would be wise to mine the depths of His Word, and search out and obey those things that will result in a blessed life. The God of the Universe will never force Himself on anyone, yet He longs to be gracious to all. He is a Shepherd King, providing mankind's deepest spiritual needs for rest, peace, restoration, guidance, and cleansing. Our Shepherd sustains us even in the presence of our enemies and anoints our heads with the oil of gladness. He promises goodness and mercy all the days of our lives and the honor of dwelling in the house of the Lord forever. (Psalm 23) These are only a few of the incredible blessings promised to those who choose Christ Jesus, Who is the Resurrection and the Life. May we have the spirit of Joshua, who declared his allegiance and choice of Jehovah God over every other god: 'If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord'. (Joshua 24:15) Choosing to serve the Lord will result in a life of blessings, peace, power, and victory!

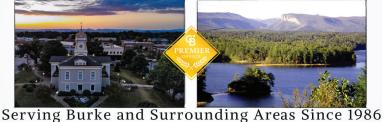
Caron Cline is a follower of Jesus Christ who loves to teach the word of God. Her desire is to see every believer growing in the grace and knowledge of the



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Anne Ministries

Reflecting God's Love to Others

By Mary-Kathryn Laws Avery County

Valentine's Day is right around the corner! There are many legends as to why we celebrate this "holiday". There were actually three men who were named Valentine that are considered to be martyrs. The most well-known of the martyrs lived in third-century Rome during the time Christians were persecuted for their faith. This man



and other Christians during this time period spent their lives teaching about Jesus Christ. St. Valentine was not afraid to publicly show his love for God and other believers. Valentine comforted those who were going to be put to death for their faith. He showed others love and compassion while also giving strength and hope during a time of despair.

As Christians, we are called to love others and to display the love of Christ. St. Valentine was willing to stand up for what he believed in regardless of what others thought. Are we willing to stand up for our beliefs? Will we stand up for the unborn? Do our lives reflect the love of Christ?

As Christians and Pro-Lifers, we need to show the love of Christ to those who need it the most. Show the love of Jesus to the girl who may be considering abortion. Show the love of Christ to the mom struggling to meet the needs of her family. Show the love of Jesus to the woman who has had an abortion and needs forgiveness and Grace. Show the love of God to the woman who has had a miscarriage and needs hope. There are so many people in our everyday lives that we can show the love of Jesus too.

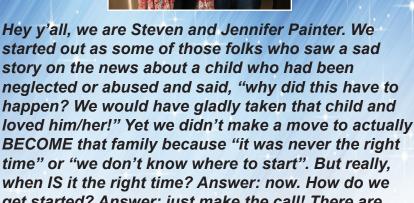
We can follow the example of St. Valentine to model our Christian walk and responsibility to love, have compassion, and kindness to everyone we meet. God commands us to love others just as He has loved us. Let us all reflect the love God shows us, back to Him and others.

This Valentine's Day and every day remember that God made you in His image and He loves you.

"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." John 13:34

Mary-Kathryn Laws is the daughter of Chastity Ogburn, Founder of Anne Ministries. In 2018, the Lord put on Chastity's heart the calling to reach out to those hurting from loss. Anne Ministries began in September 2018. Anne means "grace" and that is what this ministry is about, extending God's grace and allowing Him to heal your deepest hurt. This ministry reaches out to those hurting from abortion, miscarriage, stillbirth, and infant loss. The ministry expanded in 2021 offering pregnancy support services to those facing an unplanned pregnancy. Chastity and her family attend Emmanuel Baptist Church in Newland, NC.





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Family of God

Love Is Not A Toy

By Dr. James L. Snyder *Ocala, Florida*

Love is not a toy to play around with and then when you're done, throw it away. Many people think that way, which is why there is so much trouble with families today.

I was packing my bags, preparing to leave for Bible college to pursue a pastoral ministry. It wasn't my choice; God was calling me and I yielded to His calling.

While packing my clothes for the trip, a thought devel-

oped, and I'm always wary of thoughts that come into my head. The thought was, that if God wanted me to be a pastor, I needed a special wife to serve alongside me as a team. I had no idea how to do that. Dating was not my strong suit, so what do I do?

As I pondered this situation, I did not know what to do, so I prayed about it, and then another thought came to me.

So I prayed, "Oh, God, if you have called me to be a pastor, then I need a wife that can support me in this ministry. I need you to bring into my life such a woman"

But that wasn't the end of my prayer. I concluded my prayer, "Dear God, I pray that the first woman I meet on that college campus will be your choice of a wife for me."

After reflecting on that, I smiled and thought, what a stupid prayer to make. Who in their right mind would ever offer God a prayer like that? Fortunately, I have never been in my right mind.

The distance between where I lived and the college I was going to was approximately five hours. Knowing the prayer I had offered the Lord, I was nervous as we approached our destination.

Then, we arrived at the parking lot of the men's dormitory. This would be a safe place because, after all, it was a men's dormitory.

As we pulled in, I looked out my window, and coming out of the men's dormitory was a young woman with her hair rolled up in tin cans. I never saw anything like that before.

I whispered to God, "That woman doesn't count because I have not touched my feet to the ground." I'm sure God chuckled at my prayer at that time.

During the next several days, I could not keep from running into this young lady.

One of my roommates in the dorm invited me to come with him and his girl-friend to lunch. Then he said his sister was coming along with them if I didn't mind. Of course, I didn't mind, I was glad to go out for lunch with friends.

When my roommate picked up his girlfriend and sister, I noticed his sister was the same woman I saw coming out of the men's dorm on the day I arrived.

I'm not sure if this qualified as an official date because I didn't plan it; I was just going along for the lunch.

From then on, there was no day that I did not cross paths with this young lady in some way. We developed a relationship, and I thought we were just good friends. How was I to know?

This August, we will celebrate our 53rd wedding anniversary. In February of that year, we became engaged. Eleven months after I met her, we got married.

When I think of love, especially between husband and wife, I think of Amos 3:3, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?"

I have learned that agreement is the bowl in which true love is brewed.

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

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

-1 Corinthians 13:13

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Dave Says

Dave Says By Dave Ramsey

We are teaching our five-year-old about money. Do you feel we should step in and fix things when he makes mistakes?

Dear Dave,

My wife and I have started teaching our five-year-old son about money. Do you feel we should step in and fix

things when he makes mistakes, or let him experience the consequences of his actions? It's so hard on my wife, especially, to see him disappointed when he makes a mistake, and his plans don't work out.

Dear Lane,

I know this might sound mean to some folks, but sometimes a good financial disappointment when you're young is the best thing that can happen to you. They're hard to watch happen or to experience, but often they'll teach life-long lessons. No decent parent wants to see their child sad or hurt, but the reality is a pretty good teacher when it comes to learning how the world works.

One of the jobs of a parent is to look for teachable moments with their kids. Of course, when it comes to teaching there's always a chance the student won't learn the lesson well enough the first time around. I'm not sure how you're doing things, but if I were in your shoes, I'd follow these steps. First, give him a chance to earn some money. In my book, that means work. No allowances! There's a lot of self-esteem and value to be found in accomplishing a given task successfully.

Then, once you pay him for the work he does, you have another perfect chance for teachable moments, because you can help him learn about saving, spending, and giving, and how to do all three wisely.

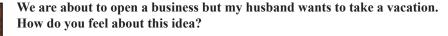
It's always hard on parents when they see their kids unhappy. I know we went through it with ours. As a parent and protector, you want to jump in and make everything okay. But the hard truth is that fixing or doing everything for them is the easy way out. And in the process of doing that, a child will begin to develop a sort of learned helplessness.

Sometimes, Lane, you need to love kids enough to not do things for them. Let them make some mistakes, experience the consequences, and fix things themselves. And it's better for them to do all this while they're still under your guidance and protection. —Dave

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Dear Dave,

My husband and I bought a franchise recently, and we are opening our business in a couple of months. We've got \$40,000 saved up, but my husband wants us to take a two-week vacation before we open for business. He feels that the business will completely consume us for the next two or three years, and he wants to go into things relaxed and refreshed. How do you feel about this idea? Jill

I understand where your husband's coming from. A business is very time-consuming, and to make it a success you'll have to eat, sleep, and breathe it for a very long time.

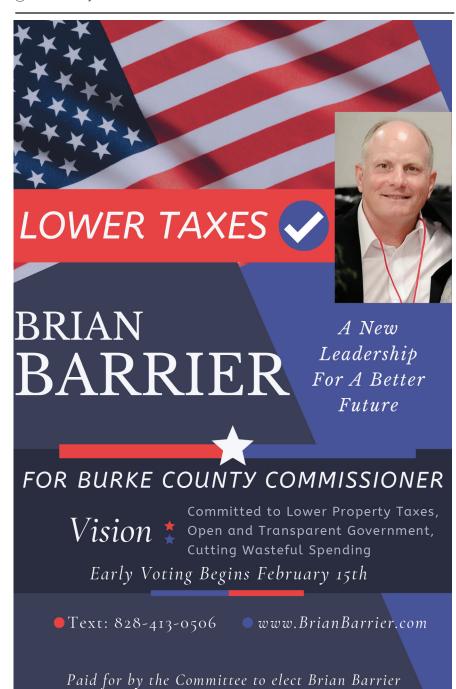
But here's the reality of your situation. Right now, you're basically unemployed. On top of that, you have just \$40,000 with which to start a business. It's time to rev up your engines and get to work, not spend a bunch of money vacationing. Trust me, there'll be plenty of time to celebrate after you've won, maybe in even bigger and better ways if you'll just delay gratification and put in the dedication and hard work now.

When it comes to opening a new business, a good rule of thumb is this: Everything's going to take twice as long to accomplish as you thought it would, and everything's going to be twice as expensive as you thought it'd be. I'm sure you're both smart people, but my guess is you're not exceptions to this rule when it comes to opening and running a small business.

Think about it, every single dollar connected with your business could mean the difference between survival and going under. Like I said, I kind of get your husband's thought process, but it would be a very unwise idea right now. You've got to look at the big picture. You're going to be heartbroken, and maybe in a real financial bind, if you have to close up shop in a few months because you ran out

On the other hand, if you work hard now, stay smart, and make this thing a success, you can take a vacation—and really celebrate—when the time is right! —Dave

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



Lessons I've Learned From The Man With Half A Brain."

By Steve Henry Burke County

Lesson #2; Doug Knew His Shepherd

Doug loved the 23rd Psalm and on many occasions, I had to read it to him. One such time will be etched into my memory forever because it was another time that God used "the man with half a brain" to remind me, "the man with the fully functioning brain," of something that I should not need to be reminded of.



As I started reading to him I said "The Lord is my Shepherd," Doug immediately jumped in and said, "I shall not want." When I got to the verse that says "He restores my soul" I asked, "Doug, what do you think that means?" His response was, "I'm safe." Another time I asked him the same question when I got to the same section of the psalm. His response was, "I'm well." I was reminded immediately of the hymn "It is well with my soul." The third time I read the same portion to him and asked him once again what it meant. His response was, "He takes care

I have heard many godly men teach and preach on the 23rd Psalm, and read many wonderful books about its power to change our lives but I have never heard a more simple yet profound explanation of that power than the one Doug gave me.

After all, when we allow our Good Shepherd to "take care of us" (to tend to us) we will realize "we are safe, it is well with us no matter what is going on in our lives, and we shall not want." What else do we need? On the other hand, when we choose to control our lives we will come to the same realization that the prodigal son came to, "we shall be in want" (Luke 15:14), but take heart, our Father allows u-turns, just come back home to Him.

One other occasion that demonstrated how much Doug loved the 23rd Psalm came through an encounter in the Special Needs Sunday School class of which he was a member. Joe, his teacher approached me after class one Sunday and said "I've got to tell you what Doug just did." The teachers had an exercise that involved a question on an index card for each member. Doug's question was "What do you do when you're troubled?" Doug's response, he quoted the 23rd Psalm to the rest of the class.

Oh by the way, we should all be careful of the use of the term "special needs" as referring only to a particular segment of our society, because at the end of the day, we all have our own set of special needs that can only be met by the same Shepherd that Doug knew, loved, and is with now in eternity.

Remember He has provided a throne of Grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find Grace to help "in time of need" (Hebrews 4:16), and if I may, "for any need."

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.



Lakeview Missionary Church

The Buck Stops with God

By Christopher L. Scott Moses Lake, Wash.

"The buck stops here" is a saying we've heard many times. Perhaps most famously from former US President, Harry S. Truman. He regularly said "The Buck Stops Here" in speeches and he even had a sign made and placed it on his desk in the Oval Office. As believers, we have a slightly different saying. We could alter it to, "The buck stops with God." And that's how Paul saw his ministry and his life.



Paul wrote in one of his letters to the believers in the city of Corinth, "Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and anointed us is God" (2 Corinthians 1:21, NASB, emphasis added). Paul describes God's direction for his life and how God's direction was different than his personal desires. Paul is telling us that God was in control of his life. Paul continues that it was God "who also sealed us and gave us the Spirit in our hearts as a pledge" (2 Corinthians 1:22, emphasis added). Here the word "seal" indicates ownership, authentication, and security. The word "pledge" is a guarantee of God will fulfill his promises.

Paul shared similar assurances in his letter to the believers in Ephesus, "In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory" (Ephesians 1:13-14, emphasis added). These types of assurances that God has a hold of us and that His Spirit indwells us should free us up to do ministry in our churches, work hard at our jobs, and love our families well.

Cooper Kupp is a wide receiver in the National Football League. While performing well individually and reaching the Super Bowl game as a member of the Los Angeles Rams in 2022 he was asked by reporters what kind of pressure he felt to perform in the biggest game of his career. He casually replied, "My motivation coming in every single day is to run the race in such a way as to honor God with the passions and talents that He's given me." Imagine the pressure a young twenty-something-year-old feels playing football in front of 60 million people watching. But when you know you are placed where you are by God and for a purpose by God, it removes all the pressure.

We too can experience that release as well. It's nice to know the buck stops with God. Why? Because that means it does not stop with us! That's comforting. And it takes the pressure off of us. While we might experience struggles and difficulties in the place we are in now, the buck stops with God. He's placed us where He wants us and we are there to give Him glory.

Christopher L. Scott, a graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, is a pastor and freelance writer. Learn more about his writing ministry at ChristopherLynnScott.



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Denison Forum

in response?

"I never thought something like this could happen": the immigration crisis and two biblical responses By Jim Denison

US officials met yesterday with Mexico's president, seeking measures to limit a surge of migrants reaching the US southwestern border. Meanwhile, a caravan with an estimated 7,500 members is making its way toward the border this morning. While they are drawing international attention, this is actually a smaller number than the daily migrant encounters this month, which have been averaging more than 9,600 a day.



More than two million people were apprehended at the border in this fiscal year. The surge is creating chaos in parts of southern Texas and Arizona and straining resources as far away as New York, Denver, and Chicago.

In the Del Rio sector of the Texas border, which includes Eagle Pass, as many as four thousand migrants have been processed a day. "Illegal border crossings have always happened," said Eagle Pass fire chief Manuel Mello. "Groups of ten, twelve—that was a large group. But now you see three thousand and four thousand in one day. I never thought something like this could happen."

What is causing this crisis? How should we think biblically and act redemptively

Explaining the surge

This is a massively complex and emotionally fraught issue. However, the crisis can be framed in terms of "push" and "pull" factors.

"Push" factors include war, famine, or economic challenges that cause people to leave their home countries and seek a new home. For example, leaders of the caravan coming to the US are calling the movement an "exodus from poverty." Venezuela has descended into disarray in recent years, while Nicaragua's government has become more repressive. The Congressional Research Service also cites natural disasters fueled by climate change and a general lack of security.

However, the New York Times notes that there have been no recent wars in Latin America and the region's poverty rate has been flat. Accordingly, the article states that push factors don't explain the entire surge "and maybe not even most of it."

"Pull" factors, by contrast, encourage migrants to come in response to an economic boom or a more lax immigration policy. During Joe Biden's presidential campaign, the Times notes, "he spoke in much more welcoming tones than not only Donald Trump but also Barack Obama." President Biden in turn blames Congress for failing to respond to his immigration reform proposals and requests for additional funds to address the crisis.

The result of these complex and interrelated factors is that, according to the Times, the number of people apprehended at the border has risen more than four-fold since 2020 compared with the average level in the 2010s.

Reconciling two biblical themes

In my book, The State of Our Nation: 7 Critical Issues, I devoted an entire chapter to the issue of illegal immigration. There I discuss several biblical texts relevant to today's topic. We can summarize them today in two categories.

One: Scripture affirms the importance of borders (Deuteronomy 32:8; Numbers 34:1–15; Ezekiel 47:13–23), the rule of law (Romans 13:1–2; Titus 3:1; 1 Peter 2:13–14; 1 Timothy 1:8–10), and self-defense (Luke 11:21; Exodus 22:2; Proverbs 25:26; Nehemiah 4:17–18).

Two: Immigrants are not to be mistreated (Exodus 22:21) but loved (Leviticus 19:33–34; Deuteronomy 10:18–19) and helped (Deuteronomy 24:19–22; Ezekiel 47:21–23; Zechariah 7:10; Malachi 3:5; Hebrews 13:2). At-risk children are to be especially valued (Matthew 18:10; 19:14) and protected (James 1:27).

Our problem comes in reconciling these two themes. Without secure borders and the rule of law, a nation cannot thrive for the sake of its present and future populations. However, without immigrants, most nations cannot flourish; this is especially true for America, a nation comprised almost entirely of immigrants and their descendants.

Children who enter the US illegally or are born to parents who did are an example of our challenge. On one hand, should they be forced to pay for the illegal actions of their parents (Exodus 18:19–20)? On the other, is it fair for them to benefit from these actions (cf. Matthew 22:21)?

Your hands and your heart

My purpose in this brief Daily Article is obviously not to explore in detail the complexities of this deeply divisive issue. Persistent, unresolved societal challenges are seldom resolved by simple intellectual solutions. Whether the issue is opioid and drug abuse, alcoholism, homelessness, poverty, systemic injustice, crime, or any other ongoing crisis, you and I are likely not going to solve the problem today.

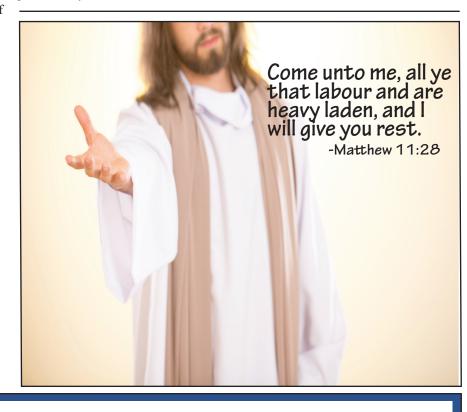
Policy debates are vital, of course. We should pray for our legislators, hold them accountable to their constituents, and vote our conscience. But we should also do what we can do personally to be part of the solution.

As we have discussed this week, you and I are called to continue Jesus' earthly ministry today. Our spiritual gifts, talents, education, opportunities, and experiences are the uniquely crafted way he is advancing his kingdom through us. This is how we can do "greater" works than he did (John 14:12)—billions of people can fulfill his kingdom mission more fully than he could in a single body.

Will you ask God to help you respond redemptively to the needs you can meet today? Will you offer Jesus your hands and your heart as the "body of Christ" for our hurting world (1 Corinthians 12:27)?

When we do, God's kingdom comes as his will is done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10). And our world can never be the same.

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





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Snow Hill Baptist Church

Church Splits:
What Does God Think?
By Dean Honeycutt
Mitchell County

I am writing about Church splits, what are they, and who do they affect? This is a touching issue right now because of a recent church split. Do I have any right or obligation to write about church splits? Absolutely, because all the early New Testament leaders (Apostles and pastors) were involved with issues concerning the



churches. That is why the Jerusalem council (Acts 15) met to discuss the exclusion of circumcision and salvation. Over the years the church and its leaders have come together to decide doctrinal issues. From the earliest of times second century ad., the Apostles Creed, to more recent meetings 1742 The Philadelphian Confession.

A church split is when two groups of people disagree about something in a church. The disagreement becomes so divisive that one group leaves the church. Who is in the right? The people who leave or the people who stay. Thom S. Rainer, a thirty-year veteran in ministry, author, and founder of Church Answers cites four reasons a church may split. Churches tend to split because of a power struggle within the church that involves deacons and pastors, church members who sow seeds of discord, financial problems, and doctrinal issues. (Nine Thoughts on Church Splits; Thom S. Rainer) I have never been associated with a church split, however every church I have known to split was because of a power struggle within the church.

God is not happy when a church splits. Church splits do not demonstrate the love of Christ. Church splits are a terrible testimony to the Body of Christ. Church splits do not send a Christian message to an unbelieving community. A church is to be unified and in harmony with one another. It is a shame when our sin and pride divide the body of Christ. What are we going to do when we get to heaven and see the very people we argued with? Or those who are so divisive may not go to heaven. God is not the author of confusion. Satan wants to divide and deceive. A person may have a leadership position and they are in control and are unwilling to humble themselves and relinquish control for the benefit of the church. No one benefits from a church split. People may say things that can never be taken back.

Churches who are experiencing problems want to resolve these issues internally and do not reach out for help to a council of pastors. I understand churches like their autonomy, but are we not accountable to God and the Bible, and would it not be helpful to seek Godly counsel from Godly pastors who could help guide churches through potential problems that lead to a split?

The Apostle Paul spoke of divisions in the Corinthian Church. 1 Corinthians 1:10 "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." 1 Corinthians 12:25 "That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another."

What is the right response to church division? Pray for wisdom and guidance. Understand what the Bible says about unity. Philippians 2:3 "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves." If you are not part of the solution, then you are part of the problem. Ask what the best for the church is. What would Jesus do in this situation? Is it better for the church if I resign? What does the Bible say about this doctrine? Who can I go to and ask for forgiveness? How can we resolve this problem before we split? Make every effort to avoid a church split.

Dave was rescued from an island he had been stranded on for twenty years. He was the only living person on the remote island. He showed his rescuers all the buildings he had built while on the island. One person noticed two churches. They asked Dave why there were two churches. Dave replied we had an argument at the first church, so I left and went to the second church.

Love in Christ,

Pastor Dean Honeycutt

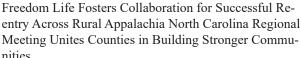
Pastor Dean Honeycutt shepherds Snow Hill Baptist Church in Bakersville, NC. He may be reached at 828-385-0213, snowhillbaptist@gmail.com, or visit their website at www.snowhillbaptist.com.



Freedom Life Ministries

Freedom Life Fosters Collaboration for Successful Reentry Across Rural Appalachia North Carolina By Jim Smith

McDowell County



In a landmark event for northern rural counties in

Western North Carolina, Freedom Life hosted its first-ever regional reentry meeting this past December. This meeting brought together key stakeholders from Avery, Yancey, and McDowell counties to discuss and collaborate on successful reentry initiatives. In addition, leadership from the North Carolina Department of Adult Correction and other regional agencies were present. The gathering marked a significant step towards fostering cross-county partnerships and building stronger communities through impactful regional reentry work.

Over 120 regional representatives attended the meeting, including sheriffs from all three counties, who actively participated in discussions and pledged their support for collaborative efforts. Two keynote addresses were delivered by George Pettigrew, Deputy Secretary for Rehabilitation and Reentry for the State of North Carolina, and Representative for NC District 85, Dudley Greene. Both emphasized the importance of regional cooperation in supporting individuals returning from incarceration.

"Successful reentry is not just about individual programs or services," Pettigrew stated. "It's about building a network of support that extends across communities and jurisdictions. This meeting is a testament to the commitment of these counties to working together and creating a system that truly helps people reintegrate into society and lead productive lives."

The meeting focused on identifying common challenges and opportunities for collaboration in areas such as employment assistance, housing, substance abuse treatment, and mental health services. Participants engaged in lively discussions, brainstorming innovative solutions, and exploring potential partnerships between organizations and agencies across county lines.

"This is a historic moment for our region," remarked Danny Hampton, Executive Director of Freedom Life. "For too long, reentry has been viewed as an isolated issue within individual counties. This meeting proves that we can achieve far greater results by working together, sharing resources, and leveraging our collective strengths."

"There is a great need for reentry resources in our region. It can pull the community together for a common goal and focus. Our communities will be very much enhanced by successful reentry services like Freedom Life," Dudley Greene, area Representative District 85

The positive energy and sense of purpose that permeated the meeting left participants feeling optimistic about the future of reentry in rural Appalachian counties. The attendees expressed their unwavering commitment to continuing the dialogue and translating the enthusiasm generated at the meeting into concrete action plans.

"We are all in this together," Sheriff Ricky Buchanan of McDowell County declared. "By working across county lines, we can create a seamless system of support that empowers individuals returning from incarceration to thrive and contribute to our communities."

This rural northern Appalachia regional meeting represents a significant milestone in the quest for successful rural reentry engagement and support. The event has laid the groundwork for ongoing collaboration, resource sharing, and innovative program development, ultimately paving the way for stronger communities and brighter futures for individuals reintegrating from incarceration.

The success of this initial meeting underscores the crucial role of organizations like Freedom Life in facilitating cross-county cooperation and driving positive change. As the momentum generated by the event continues to build, one can only hope that the spirit of collaboration will extend beyond rural northern Appalachia, serving as a model for successful rural reentry efforts across the entire state and beyond.

With the recent expansion into Avery and Yancey counties, Freedom Life has expanded its ongoing commitment to building a collaborative network of rural reentry support across Western North Carolina. The organization is actively working with local partners, including law enforcement agencies, social service organizations, and faith-based communities, to create a seamless system of reentry services.

"We believe that successful reentry is a community effort," said Hampton. "By working together, we can create a stronger, more supportive environment for individuals returning from incarceration and help them reintegrate into society as productive members of our communities."

The reentry work that has been done in McDowell County for the past twelve years along with the opening of the Avery and Yancey County reentry offices, and the forming of Reentry Councils, are a testament to Freedom Life's dedication to making a difference in the lives of people returning from incarceration. With its comprehensive services and collaborative approach, Freedom Life is paving the way for a brighter future for individuals and communities across Western North Carolina.

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

It's been a snowy week here in the Mitchell County mountains. Two different weather systems came through bringing snow and extremely cold temperatures to our area. Personally, I'm a snow lover and have been since my childhood. Everyone keeps telling me that will change as I get older. So far,

that love hasn't wavered a bit. Most likely I'll always love snow but just won't get out in it as much when I get older. Back in my early years of school, we actually got "snow days" and none of this online learning mess. I would wake up early and listen to the local am radio station WTOE for school closures. Oh the joy that would flood my soul when Bruce Icard would say, "Mitchell County schools will be closed for today." The excitement would be so great that I usually couldn't go back to sleep. All the kids in the holler would spend the entire day outside if our moms would allow. There was sledding, tubing, snowball fights, building snowmen, snow tunnels, etc. All the fun things that come with an official snow day.

One of the things that the news always encourages when winter weather is on the way is getting prepared. We often joke about how the grocery stores get slammed and shelves are bare of milk, bread, and eggs. It's almost as if people think they aren't gonna be able to get out for weeks. The truth is, most of the time the snow is usually gone here in the south in a few days. However, when the weatherman gets it right and snow comes, it pays to be prepared.

What are some of the things we do to prepare for winter storms? Well, obviously we "storm" the grocery store for food even when we already have plenty at home for the most part. We get out the warm clothes for the frigid temperatures we will face going outside. I always like to fuel up the vehicles so I'm not having to pump gas in the cold. The heating sources need to be filled up whether it's the woodbox, oil, or propane tanks. If the forecast is for several inches, I go ahead and put the scraping blade on the ATV. We also make sure the pets have all they need. It's a good idea to check all the batteries in the flashlights or lanterns in case the electricity goes out. Sometimes the weatherman misses it and we get nothing or not near as much as we expected, and sometimes they get it right and we are thankful we made preparations. The point is, we do things to prepare for what may or may not be coming.

The Bible teaches us that Jesus promised us that He will come again. He told His disciples in John chapter 14 that He was going to prepare a place for them, and if He was going to prepare a place for His disciples, He would come again and receive them to Himself. Many argue over whether He will come before the tribulation, in the middle of the tribulation, or after the tribulation. Some will try to say they have figured out the exact date of His return, That date comes and goes because Jesus Himself said in Mark 13 that "No man knows"! Jesus teaches us that we are "Take ye heed, watch, and pray: for ye know not when the time is." Mark 13:33

While we certainly discern that things in this world are going exactly the way the Bible teaches, the date of the Lord's return is something no man can know. The point is to be ready whenever that may be. Jesus exhorts His children to be on watch, to be alert, and to pray. In other words, we should be living our lives like we believe Jesus could return at any moment.

Have you made preparations for the return of Jesus? Are you born again? Have you placed your faith in Jesus and His work alone for your salvation and eternal life? Christian, are you skipping through this life living neglecting your duty and responsibilities to your Savior? When He comes will He find you ready and alert, looking for His return?

Ready or not, Jesus is coming again! He's made a promise and He will keep that promise. Please give your life to Christ if you haven't! Christian, stop letting this old world distract you from the Lord's will for your life! Live every day as it could be the day Jesus could come again! Be prepared!

In Christ, Preacher Chris

www.brcnews.com

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

Devotional

Happy Valentine's Day By Regina McIntosh Yancey County

Happy Valentine's Day

As we celebrate love Whispering joy that abides *Inside those hearts who know* True love is more than Hearts and flowers

It takes time – it takes prayer True love is a sign that God is there, Providing the foundation, The inspiration for a life together Promising joy that lasts, joy forever

As we celebrate the feelings That silence our darkness, Awaken our kindness, gentling Even the struggles that arise From doubts and discouragements

It is this love, this great love That abides within those who see He is the answer to every need, He sees our darkness and still breathes Light inside us – making us see... Love that answers every prayer we speak

Love this wonderful is a love that betrays Hearts who listen to the One who made a way *Beyond the stars – past the sunrise,* Into the peace of a forever who can see ... Together, we are free – to live our lives in Agreement with the hope that sings...

As we celebrate the miracle of the love that is foreverw *Happy Valentine's Day – I'm so thankful we're together!*

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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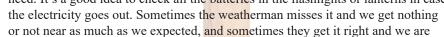


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Mt. Zion Community Church

As We Were All

By Naomi Houston Avery County

As we were all "on a journey to Bethlehem" a few weeks ago, we now begin our journey to Jerusalem. The Lenten Season lasts for forty days and we enter into that symbolic time of forty. After forty days and nights of rain and floods, Noah floated into a freshly washed new world. It took forty

years of wandering before the chosen people of God were able to finally enter into the Promised Land. We have just observed in our church services the baptism of Jesus and following that event we know He spent forty days and nights in the wilderness fasting before facing and overcoming the temptations of the Devil.

So, as we begin the observance of Lent we have the privilege to experience that journey with Christ – perhaps the greatest journey that history records, as He travels those few miles into Jerusalem. His journey was slow – painfully slow from the viewpoint of His disciples for they were looking for results. The Kingdom of God should appear immediately! As Jesus journeyed towards Jerusalem He had Jerusalem as His goal but at the same time He didn't regard the places along the way as "vacant lots". Each place encountered along the way was a different place as a result of His being there. One definition of the English word "occupy" is to "seize, to take possession of" and another meaning is "to dwell" while a third meaning says to "fill all the available space". How many of us actually "occupy" the space we are in? As Jesus journeyed to Jerusalem He "occupied" each encounter along the way.

During the forty days of Lent, the Church invites us to engage in Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving to help us engage in the need to be transformed. Prayer, we are told, is good for the soul, fasting is good for our body and almsgiving is good for our neighbor.

Lent means length, long – but it also means slow, as in the musical sign "lento". So we are encouraged to go slowly and dig deeply, to get the most out of these forty days. There are lines from a hymn that read: "Take time to be holy" and we need not only to sing it but also let the words sink in. During these forty days may each of us "occupy" each moment and seek to experience the journey to Jerusalem as never before.

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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Morganton Seventh Day Adventist

Sweet on You By Steve Bietz Burke County

The phrase was immortalized by William Shakespeare who included it in The Tragedy Of Hamlet, Prince Of Denmark. "Sweets To The Sweet." In February, we buy a lot of sweets for our sweeties. Someone might convey that another person is "sweet on you." Do we believe that God is sweet on us?



The apostle Paul tells us that God's character has been misunderstood and misinterpreted since the beginning of the world. People knew something about Him once, but they didn't glorify Him as God. As a result, they "became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like a corruptible man, and to birds, and four footed-beasts, and creeping things" (Romans 1:21-23).

It is possible for us, in our minds, to change God into something other than He really is, even if we don't bow down to idols of wood and stone. If we don't have the proper understanding of His character, then we're worshiping a false God! Unless we know what God is really like, we won't be able to reveal Him to the rest of the world! Jesus came to demonstrate to the world what the Father is

One day Jesus and His disciples passed by a blind man (John 1:9). The disciples asked "Master, who sinned? this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" Their question was based on the common concept of God and evil. The people of Christ's day believed that disease and death were God's arbitrary punishment for wrongdoing, either by the sufferer himself or by his parents. Because of this, the suffering person had the additional burden of being considered a great sinner. Jesus corrected their error by explaining that sickness and pain are caused by Satan. But one of the devil's clever traps is to project his own attributes onto God and as a result, millions of people through the centuries have blamed God for suffering, sickness, and death.

But John 3:16 and 17 tell us that God loved the world so much that He sent His own Son to redeem us. He "sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved." In other words, God is really, really sweet on us! That's the gospel. That's redemption!

Steve Bietz, Pastor, Morganton Seventh day Adventist Church.



Pine Branch Baptist

Month of Love

By Bruce Cannon Mitchell County

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." (1 John 4:7,8)

"Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32)



February is known by many as the month for love, even though every day should be a day for love. And, we should take every opportunity to express love both to God, our family and to man in general. The Scriptures teach that we love because He (the Lord) first loved us. (I John 4:19) He placed within the heart of man the desire to love and be loved.

There are so many Scriptures which speak about love. Luke 12:32 states that the Father takes great delight in giving gifts to His children. James wrote, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." (1:17) Every gift the Lord gives is a "good" gift. Why does God give so many gifts? He loves us!

The Lord gives so many tangible gifts, but it's the many intangible ones that really bless us and enable us to bless others. "He gives peace which passeth all understanding" (Phil. 4:7). He gives joy unspeakable (1 Peter 1:8). He, as stated above, gives the ability to love and be loved. He gives abundant grace. He gives heavenly hugs that warm our heart and pick up our spirit.

These are the gifts that we must share with others. They are also gifts which, when given, come back to us in an abundant manner. When we give love, it comes back and increases our love and ability to love. When we demonstrate peace, we are able to help others experience peace. When we show forth joy, we are able to help others have joy which further increases our own.

Remember what Jesus taught in Luke 6:38 when He said, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."

Take the month of February and give these wonderful gifts to others. Give them what God has so freely given us. And as you are doing so, make sure you do not forget the one's closest to you. Make sure you give abundant love, peace and joy to them as well. They will greatly love you for doing so!

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





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Hands of Labor Heart of Love - Mom's Legacy of Love

By Carol Wallace Kingsport, Tenneessee

"She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness." Proverbs 31:27 My Mom does not know the meaning of the word idle! A resume listing her experience would be lengthy. She accepted a host of blue-collar jobs and gave her best as a labor of love to raise her family. In the forties, Mom had to leave school in the eighth grade and go to work. She is one of nine children and knew the meaning of challenging work from an



early age. She does not labor the long hard hours of yesteryear, but to this day, at the age of ninety-one, she keeps busy quilting, tending her flowers, cooking for others, and is active in her church and community. Against her children's better judgment, she still rides the mower to cut her lawn. She takes time to help the local fire department peel apples for apple butter fundraisers and keeps abreast of needs in the community. She enjoys warm afternoons on her front porch reading or talking with neighbors stopping by for a visit.

Her macaroni salad is legendary in the Fall Branch, TN community, fondly referred to as the "Branch." She delivers macaroni salad to shut-ins; the local pharmacy staff; the beauty shop; neighbors; and new residents. Multiple residents in the Branch could share "Madeline" stories. One gentleman laughs and enjoys recalling how he stopped in the middle of the Branch to assist her with a lawn mower. She had tied a push mower to the back of her vehicle and was pulling it home; the mower came loose and was passing Mom on the road! Only one of her "take care of it yourself" adventures. She has never been afraid to tackle work and improvise ways to get the job done!

Her numerous occupations did not involve a typical five-day eight-to-five position. A trip down memory lane of Mom's outside-the-home employment would include reading water meters and preparing monthly bills for our rural community. She went from house to house, physically lifting lids from water meters with a crowbar, reading and recording water usage, and preparing postcards for each resident in the community. This is vivid in my memory as I helped address those

Mom took in ironing at the bargain rate of ten cents per item. This was in the days of ironing and starching dress shirts, jeans, and all other articles of clothing, no wash and wear! She taught me to iron by beginning with what she called "flat pieces." Mowing lawns, house cleaning, and painting the whole interiors of homes would be included multiple times on her resume. Sitting as a caregiver with friends and neighbors highlighted her uncertified nursing skills.

When my sister was age two and I was beginning high school, she took the ministry job of caretaker of First Baptist Church Fall Branch. This was truly a ministry position because she approached this employment opportunity as a way to serve the Lord and her church family and a way to provide for her five children. She enjoyed cleaning and preparing God's house for worship week to week. Helping her with this responsibly was a part of my high school memories. At that time, caretaker responsibilities included mowing the church cemetery. How well I remember blisters left from using a push mower. She taught her children to work, and we may not have been too happy about tasks at the time, but we all grew up to be responsible in our work ethic and providing for our families. She would still be quick to speak up if she thought otherwise!

For several years, Mom cleaned the local post office building daily. As her children grew, she worked at a local plant for a few years and when Piccadilly Cafeteria came to Kingsport, she accepted a position and traveled for Piccadilly to train Salad Department Staff during the opening of multiple cafeterias. She received sincere compliments for her colorful, appetizing salad bar and submitted a recipe for a broccoli salad to Piccadilly Headquarters. She was delighted when the recipe became a staple in Piccadilly Cafeterias and was advertised on the menu as "Broccoli Madeline."

Upon retirement from Piccadilly, she remodeled the old post office building in the Branch and opened the Old Post Office Café. This little café became a favorite spot in the Branch where friends and neighbors gathered for breakfast and lunch. Also, for a second time, she became the caretaker of First Baptist Church. She genuinely enjoyed serving in this capacity until she was not physically able. Upon retirement, she said, "My heart and mind are willing, but my body will no longer allow me to do the job needed." The church has three stories, an activity building, fellowship hall, and Mom kept it spic and span. Her church family teased her about being the "bleach lady" as she disinfected well! At her retirement luncheon, among her parting gifts was a gallon of bleach!

In addition to these outside-the-home jobs, Mom planted a huge garden, canned and/or froze most of our food, milked cows, helped plant and harvest tobacco, and other unending chores required on a small farm, all while keeping a house full of kids clothed and fed. In the fall, a huge kettle of apple, pumpkin, and/ or pear butter prepared over an open fire was part of the family preparation for winter. The smell of wood smoke and cinnamon filled the air and the anticipation of Mom's hot butter biscuits and love in a jar will always be a sweet memory.

Among the multiple daily chores, Mom found the time to cultivate her gift of a green thumb in planting flowers, and her flowers grow more beautiful each year. Grandkids have taken pictures of her flowers and even made her postcards featuring gorgeous blooms from her yard. She gives names to special plants given to her by friends and family. A vine grows around her front porch, providing comfortable shade in the heat of summer. This vine is a cutting from her parents' front porch when she was a young girl.

As a young mother, she cared for an invalid mother-in-law and often was a second mother to several nieces and nephews when her sister-in-law needed assistance. She had no problem finding chores for these nieces and nephews, too.

Enough of the work history details and more to the point of her legacy of arduous work. Challenging work and busy hands are how Mom loves us. She loves us well! No one under Mom's roof is allowed to use the "B" word! This word is a bit more common in today's culture. Visit my mom and she will demonstrate to you that the word "bored" should not be in our vocabulary! Even the youngest greatgrandchildren learn this lesson from our precious Mimi! She is a no-nonsense, get it done, do not complain, and move on to the next project kind of woman. She can set you straight in no uncertain terms and love you through it! One of my brothers said when we were young, "Mom, you invent work!" Never a dull moment!

She is the patriarch of four generations and keeps us all in line, even the in-laws know when Mimi speaks, you had best listen. She treats in-laws the same as her children. In addition to her five biological children, Mom raised two daughtersin-love who came to live with her when my sister was in middle school. Coming from an insecure family situation, she welcomed them as friends of my sister and a few overnight stays turned into a permanent living situation. She treated the girls as her own, taught them the value of work, and saw to it they had part-time jobs as soon as age allowed. Mom now boasts of eleven grandchildren, fifteen greatgrandchildren and still counting. When family members take vacations, Mom's only request is "Bring me a rock!" She has a rock collection from as far away as Israel and each one has a story!

Mom opened her home to her aging siblings when they needed a bit of her tender loving care, and her home has provided temporary shelter and comfort for several of her widowed friends when life brought difficult circumstances. Her door and her heart are open to her family, friends, and neighbors. When someone new moves into the community, she is quick to prepare a dish of macaroni salad, visit, and invite them to church. She takes opportunities to talk with others about their eternal home with Jesus.

A recent conversation with Mom revealed a glimpse of her continued influence in her community. Her doorbell rang on Halloween night and a gentleman in the community whom she had been witnessing presented her with pink roses and these kind words..." thank you, Ms. Madeline for all the good food you have shared with me." Mom was pleasantly surprised, and it was a joy to my heart to remind her she has no idea the people she has touched for the Lord with her giving spirit. To God be the glory!

The Lord is pleased with busy hands doing work that glorifies Him. Mom's strength comes from above as Psalm 121:1-2 provides a reference for this kind of strength. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth." Mom relies heavily on God's help, and He continues to bless. She is not materially wealthy and has had struggles all her life. This has never held her back from helping others. With God's help, she finds a way. Colossians 3:23 would be a good scripture to claim for Mom. "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters."

Our family is blessed to gather on major holidays and family celebrations with an attendance of fifty or more. Friends are always welcome! Mom still cooks breakfast every other Saturday morning for those who can drop by for delicious homemade biscuits and gravy! Breakfast used to be an every Sunday morning treat but the family grew so large that Mom could not get everyone fed and get to Sunday School, so she changed that schedule, and everyone goes to church on time! One can "listen and hear the love" when our family is together!

Our Mom, our Mimi, has worked hard with her hands and loved with all her heart to raise her family to love God and others. She is a sinner saved by grace, a child of God waking each day to serve others and to glorify her Savior. Her children rise up and call her blessed. Thank you, Mom, for your rich legacy of work and love. We are forever grateful to God for you!

One of her favorite verses of scripture is Philippians 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." HE is her strength, indeed! Now, I am off to get work done before Mom visits!

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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Foothills Baptist Bible College

Making a Difference By Giving

By Dr. Tom Walker McDowell County

In Luke 6:38 the Lord Jesus says: "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."



One of the greatest blessings of life is to be a person who is a generous individual. The Lord saved me when I was about eight years old, but I did not immediately begin to be the giver that I should have been. Later, I married Linda Tipton, who gave the encouragement I needed to become a solid tither. We make it a practice to give a tenth of our income to the local church and beyond the tithe, offerings as well. As a result, you will have experienced many blessings from the Lord. The person who hoards his or her money, failing to be generous toward the work of the Lord, is not enjoying the blessings that could be experienced. We are going to consider the truths we can discover from Luke 6:38.

The Demand

The word that introduces the verse under consideration is the word "Give." One way we understand the Bible is to carefully study words. To give implies several thoughts. What does it mean to give? It basically means to transfer one's possession or holding of something to someone else. When we give, we provide for someone else or make a present or a gift to someone other than ourselves.

Our English Bible New Testament came from the Koine Greek language and it is very revealing. After my years of study in Greek, here is the understanding I get from this little four-letter word. It is a present tense word, which points us to an ongoing or continuing practice, not a spasmodic one. Not only is the word present tense, it is in the imperative mood, meaning it is a command, not a suggestion. "Give" is also a plural verb, hinting at the idea that not just one should carry the financial load in a local church, but that all should participate in giving. Each one should do his or her own part in supporting the work of the Lord. Not all can give the same amount, but we can give in the same proportion (tithe-10%). Nothing on earth is more reasonable, and fair, than the tithe.

It is a reasonable demand because it is according to income. A person making \$200,000.00 per year, would be able to give much more than an individual living on Social Security and a small retirement check.

It is a productive command. It we will do what God commands us to do, it will produce wonderful results in our lives. We must put God to the test so that He might prove what He is able to do when we obey Him.

It is a helpful command. I had a friend years ago that sat down and talked to me concerning his financial life. While sitting at the dinner table, he told me about how as an evangelist, years ago, he found himself in debt. God directed him to some verses in the Bible; there God spoke to this evangelist through His Word. He continually increased his giving and gave himself out of debt. God honored him for his cooperation with God's divine plan!

The Delight

After commanding us to give, the Lord makes a delightful statement. Note the words "It shall be given unto you." If something is delightful, it is something that pleases or gratifies a person. Nothing should delight us more than this promise from the lips of Jesus.

There is no evidence of uncertainty in those words, but there is certainty and assurance in them. "Give....it shall be given unto you." Some have called this the "Golden Rule of God. As you deal with others, so shall God deal with you. We should be kind, generous, ready to make allowance, easy to be appeased, and ready to do good with what means we have at our disposal. It is by the measure you give that will be measured to you again in your day of need.

It is a moving incentive to give. No one can say they do not have a selfish bone in their body. But, some who are very substantial in their giving can claim this heart-warming promise. God guarantees what you give will come back with dividends and in multiplication. Proverbs 11:25 tells us, "The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself."

The Degree

Let's think about the words—" good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom." The term "good measure" speaks of having a full measure, nothing lacking. The words "pressed down" may refer to the processing of grapes. When they are pressed down, there are more grapes that could be put into the press. "Shaken together" has reference to the bringing together what is shaken so there would be room made for more. "Running over" means to be so full that the measure would be overflowed.

Those words express to us if we will do what God expects us to do, then there will always be enough, and often more than enough, to have our daily needs met. The message is simple, if you want more, give to the Lord's cause regularly and proportionately.

1 Corinthians 16:2 gives us instruction on when to give to the church-"Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." You will possess by the proportion you give. When others see your generosity, many will of their own will, or being moved by the Lord, will help you see that your needs are met. You never go wrong by doing right and being compassionate toward others.

The Decision

Note the words- "Shall men give into your bosom." The best decision to make, is not to hold back in your generosity, but to be a good giver. William Barclay gives some insight into this statement by our Lord: "The Jew wore a long loose

robe down to the feet, and round the waist a girdle. The robe could be pulled up so that the bosom of the robe above the girdle formed a kind of outsize pocket in which things could be carried. So the modern equivalent of the phrase would be, "People will fill your pocket" (Barclay's Daily Study Bible).

If you choose right, look at what God promises in another place in the Bible. If you choose to honor the Lord in your giving--- in Malachi 3:10-11 God promises, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the Lord of hosts."

God knows how to rebuke the devourer! What does that mean? The Hebrew word translated "devourer" means "eater" and refers to the locust or caterpillar or any such creature that devours crops. It can speak of pests or insects. The "devourer" could also refer to plant diseases—anything that would destroy Israel's crops. Swarms of locusts were common in the Middle East in those days and could destroy virtually all the produce of an entire country. The devastation brought by locusts could be devastating. When God said He would "rebuke the devourer," He promised that He would protect Israel from such disasters. Like all promises under the Mosaic Law, the promise of God to rebuke the devourer was conditional. If the Israelites would cease robbing God and give their whole tithe (Malachi 3:9–10), as required by the Law (Leviticus 27:30), then God would keep the locusts away from them and bless them with such abundance of healthy crops that theirs would be known as a "delightful land" (Malachi 3:12).

So many churches undergo many fund-raising efforts because their members do not give their tithe and offering as they should. The Lord says part of the reason for our giving is that there may be "meat in mine house." If the church is going to have funds to do what it needs to do, people who know the Lord must give, and each one should do his or her part, whatever that might be. The end result will be that God will bless us and be pleased with us.

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





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Clint's Chronicles on the Funny Farm

Dear friends,

When you're me it's hard to decide which story to share next with 50,000 of my closest friends. Oftentimes people are perplexed as to why I am willing to relay tales of my incompetence month after month. I tell them that I am a proof-positive that there is a merciful God Who looks after the fools of this world...and I am chief among them.



The Farmer's Apprentice

It was early October 2010, and time for the Family Fun Festival at Harrell Hill Farms. This annual harvest celebration is truly a wonderful event highlighted by Gospel music, face-painting for children, hayrides, excellent BBQ pork and other goodies, and the making of old-timey sorghum molasses. If you've never attended this country festival, you should make plans to come next year. Anyway, back to the story.

When I came to Harrell Hill Farms in the Spring of 2010, A.D. "Daddy D" Harrell kind of adopted me as somewhat of a "project." Day-to-day I was "in the custody" of Farmer Doug, as you know, but Daddy D. occasionally stepped-in when needed to provide me some special lessons. This was to be such a day as he pulled up to the barn and honked the horn of his Chevy pick-up truck. As always, I went running to see what was on his mind.

"Get in, I wanna show you something," he said with a wry smile. I was usually tentative when summoned this way but knew I was not to question his commands. I climbed into the passenger seat having no idea what would come next.

We meandered up Byrd Road, weaving slightly from left to right (Daddy D's eyesight wasn't what it once was!) until we arrived at Farmer Doug and Barbara's farmhouse and parked in the driveway. "Come on," was my only instruction, and I went

Daddy D. carried an old, oil-stained brown bag that appeared heavy in one hand. As we approached the front porch he began digging in the bag, first tossing me a couple of worm-riddled "sheep's nose" apples (I think that's what he called them), then he handed me some sticks and dried leaves, and finally unveiled a rusty contraption of some sort. I confess, I quickly identified the first three contents but couldn't imagine what we would do with the ancient, rusty, medieval torture device. Soon I would know.

Setting the Steel Trap

Please understand, Daddy D's hands were pretty gnarly...I don't mind telling you the man didn't have a single straight digit. I can only imagine how his hands had become so — Ummm, weathered would be a nice term but they were a mess. I once remember him threading his boots with a pair of pliers because his fingers couldn't do it! At any rate, he said "I'm going to tell you what to do, but you have to follow my instructions. I would do this myself, but my fingers can't manipulate the trap like they used to. Now, don't do anything until I tell you." Always the eager learner, I agreed to the challenge.

"Now look," he began, "we've got a groundhog under the porch here and it's digging tunnels all the way under the house. We're going to set this trap to try and get rid of it." By this time, I am getting pretty excited, just think – "Farmer Clint The Trapper". It just had a certain ring to it, don't you think?

Another thing you have to know about Daddy D, he was fun and mischievous much of the time I spent with him, BUT...he was VERY SERIOUS when teaching me things which might be considered dangerous..."Clint, don't ever go into the woods with a chainsaw by yourself; be sure you have a partner!" ... or, "Son, you've gotta watch where you're going with that tractor and hay rake, you're running people off the road down there!" ... "Always check to make sure the power is off on the fence before you climb over!" The warnings were endless.

Daddy D was a long-time educator and was about to crank up his teaching voice. I'm not sure exactly what he planned to say but I have intimate recall of his next comment...to paraphrase, "DANG IT, BOY, YOU'RE GOING TO KILL YOURSELF!" (Oops, I think I made him mad).

You see, in my mind, I already had graduated to "Farmer Clint the Trapper" and had the jaws of that steel monster wide open. As I went to put it on the ground it snapped with the force of a 500 lb. gator, narrowly missing my right hand. And I thought to myself, "Oh yeah, Daddy D said, 'you have to follow my instructions.' Guess I failed that test."

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I wiped my brow and looked him in the eye as Daddy D "dressed me down" for a little while longer – a verbal whuppin' I'd earned; then we went about the business of resetting the trap. He, with his very bent fingers actually did the "setting"; I was allowed only to sprinkle a few leaves and twigs in the vicinity. Daddy D put those sheep's head apples nearby as bait. "That'll get the job done," he said. And he winked at me – you know, that 'wink' we get from a parent which actually means, 'it's okay now, I still love you, let's move on.'

Back at The Barn

While I was learning to be a groundhog trapper, Farmer Doug and Larry were busy boiling the juice from sorghum cane. This is a very tedious process which requires continuous skimming to remove the various impurities and proteins which rise to the surface. It forms greenish foam – similar to the slime used in Ghost Busters – and it must be scooped into buckets for disposal. Anyway, there were a couple of 5-gallon buckets of what I call "molasses scum" beside the pan.

"Hey, Farmer Clint, why don't you take some of that up to the pigs? They will be your friends for life," Farmer Doug laughed. Now that was rather funny since you may remember that I had some rather unpleasant encounters with these aggressive piggies earlier in my stay on the farm.

Obediently, dutifully, I grabbed a bucket of scum and walked to my truck. After having nearly chopped off my hand with a groundhog trap-thingamabob, I was "into" following directions to the letter. So, I left a 5-gallon bucket full of molasses drippings just inside the piggy fence. I looked forward to a new, improved relationship with the hogs after this little gift.

Too Much of a Good Thing?

It has been said that too much of a good thing can be a bad thing. Apparently, that is true of molasses and piggies.

The next morning, as we enjoyed Doug's patented buckwheat pancakes with molasses mixed with butter, it started:

Doug: "Hey, Clint...Ummm, did you give molasses to the pigs?"

Me: "Yeah, and they REALLY liked 'em."

Doug: "Well thanks for that. I wonder, how much did you give 'em?"

Me: "Just one of the 5-gallon buckets full."

Doug: "Oh, a WHOLE 5-gallon bucket full?"

Me: "Yeah, but it was a couple of inches from the top 'cause the rest spilled out into the truck bed."

Doug: "Hmmmm..." – now that crooked, wily, half-cocked smile overtaking his face.

Me: "Now what? You tell me to give the pigs some molasses, I give the pigs molasses. Didn't you want me to give them molasses?"

Doug: "Yes, I did. I was thinking more like a cupful in their evening feed. But you gave them 5 gallons, right?"

Me: "Yes I did. Are they okay?"

Doug: "Hmmm, not sure yet. When I drove by all 5 of them were lying on their backs with their feet straight up in the air."

Me: "Dead, are the pigs dead?"

Doug: "Naw, they aren't dead. Not sure if they will be or not since I've never given 5 pigs a 5-gallon bucket of molasses."

Me: "Darn it, Doug, I'm so sorry. I thought you meant...oh never mind."

Doug: "Once again, it's my fault, Clint. I forget that you're still new to the farm; I need to communicate better; to let you know exactly what I'm saying."

You must know that by now I'm feeling pretty much like the village idiot. I'd disappointed Daddy D by nearly severing my arm; now I may have killed Doug's pigs. What next?

Doug: "There's one thing about it, Pollard."

Me: "Yeah, what's that?"

Doug: "If they don't die beforehand, that will be some mighty sweet-tasting BBQ next fall!"

I received that message...my second "wink" of the day. (And those pigs lived until the next October).

Still humbled in the hills, Farmer Clint



Something to Think About

A Bible and A Quarter

By Dennis Love McDowell County

Here is a little experiment I want you to check out for yourself. All you will need is a Bible and a quarter.

Got them? Ok.....

Put the Bible on a table or a countertop in front of you. Now closely inspect the quarter. Make sure there are no holes in it,

and it has the right dead President on it. NOW, stand back about three feet from your Bible while holding the quarter in your right hand between your thumb and index finger. While looking at your Bible, close your left eye.

Slowly lift the quarter in front of your face, holding it at arm's length between you and your Bible. Now slowly bring the quarter towards your open right eye. Bring it closer and closer until it almost covers your right eye.

Ok, now the observations.

Notice when you had the quarter at arm's length you could still easily see your Bible. And notice how the closer you brought that quarter to your eye, the less of your Bible you could see. And I would guess that at some point that quarter completely covered your Bible so that you could not see it at all. That is, unless your quarter has holes in it, or you cheated.

Ok, now the conclusion.

Without a doubt, we all need money. It's a part of this world that we live in and there is nothing wrong with us getting it, having it, or using it. But I hope that you see from this simple illustration that we need to keep it in the proper perspective in our lives

If money is all we desire, all we think about, all we hope for, then it will eventually blind us from the things of God and many other important things as well. However, if we keep it in its proper place in our hearts and minds, then we can get it, have it, and use it, and it will not affect our relationship with God or others.

The Lord knows that we tend to get all funny when it comes to money. This is why He gives us a clear and loving warning about it in 1 Timothy 6:9-10.

"But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows."

If you can learn the lesson of keeping a quarter at arm's length, then you will be well on your way to keeping money in its rightful place, while at the same time keeping your eyes on God!

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



Sudoku

Solution on page 14

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

Words

By Ryan Bridgeo Avery County

I grew up hearing the phrase that sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me. But I have found from experience that this just isn't true. Sometimes words that are spoken have a lasting impact on our lives. What is it about words that cause them to somehow stick to us and cause us pain?

The Word of God teaches that there is power in our words. Proverbs 18:21 (NIV) says, "The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit."

Proverbs 6:2 (KJV) says, "thou art snared with the words of thy mouth, thou art taken with the words of thy mouth." Proverbs 13:3 (AMP) says, "he who guards his mouth keeps his life, but he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin." Proverbs 12:14 (KJV) says, "a man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth." Proverbs 12:18 (NASB) says, "there is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, But the tongue of the wise brings healing." When some people speak rashly, or harshly it's like they are jabbing a sword into someone and cutting them, damaging them, or damaging themselves. Our words are not just words, they carry power. They create the environment and the atmosphere in which we live.

From these five Proverbs, we see that 1) Our tongue has the power of death. 2) We are snared by our words. 3) When we talk too much we will come to ruin. 4) When we speak rashly, we hurt people like a sword would. But we also see that 1) Our tongue has the power of life. 2) Our tongue produces satisfying good fruit. 3) If we guard our tongue, we keep our life. 4) The tongue of the wise brings healing. There is power in our mouths.

Matthew 12:36 (NASB) says, "But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment." So if God hears every careless word that we speak, I would assume that He also hears all of the other words that we speak, so He can determine which words are careless and which words are not. In fact, Psalms 139:4 (NIV) says, "Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely." Believing this should change how we talk to each other and talk in general. Matthew 12:37 goes on to say, "For by your words you shall be justified, and by your words you shall be condemned." What we say to each other and God is important. Therefore, we need to choose wisely what we are saying.

Many people talk to God like it is a telephone conversation. Once they have said everything they need to say they mentally hang up. To them, the conversation is over, and they assume that God isn't listening to them anymore. They have their prayer time, their devotional time, and then they mentally hang up. Their life and their time with God are completely compartmentalized like they are punching their timecard at work. But is this an accurate picture of our prayer time, our communication with God? What if God hears every word we say just like it is a prayer?

Remember the Book of Job? For almost 36 chapters Job and his three friends are talking and his friends are trying to convince Job that he has sinned and that he needs to repent. But then in the last four chapters, God starts speaking to Job and his friends, correcting them for some of the things that were said. You may remember this verse from the story where God said to Job, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding." So even though these four men were talking with each other and not to God specifically, He still heard them and had some things to say about their conversation.

Another example is after the 12 spies investigated the land of Canaan. Numbers 14:26-28 record that the Lord said to Moses and Aaron: "How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. So, tell them, 'As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very things I heard you say." Now were these people who were grumbling and complaining praying? I don't believe they were. But I would like to propose to you that with God there is no difference between prayer time and when we are just talking. He hears it all. Notice God said, "I will do to you the very things I heard you say." We are responsible for what we say.

Clearly, our words are especially important to God. The words that we speak flow from our hearts and what is in our heart is important to Him. Jesus said that out of the abundance of our hearts, our mouth speaks. So if you want to know what is in your heart listen to what you are saying. Don't deny it, don't suppress it, just listen, and acknowledge what you are saying, and let the Lord help you deal with the root issues behind your words, like fear, trauma, unbelief, ignorance, etc. By owning what you are saying and taking responsibility for it, you can receive grace, mercy, forgiveness, and help to change what you have been saying and begin to speak life because there is power in your words.

Deuteronomy 30:19 says "This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live." We have all been given a choice in what we are going to say. One way leads to life and the other death. Which one will you choose? This is a choice we will need to make over and over every single day. If you love life, speak life - and your words will work for you. But if you speak death, your words will work for you too. Life and death truly are in the power of our mouths. Therefore, we need to be speaking life because there is power in our words. 2 Corinthians 4:13 says, It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken. With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak."

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Foundation Forward

William Ellery

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.

William Ellery, a small man who spoke wisely, was born on December 22, 1727, in Newport, Rhode Island. Ellery was the second son of William, Sr., and Elizabeth's marriage. William was an excellent student and was tutored by his father. At 16 years old, William entered Harvard as a legacy student and graduated in 1747.

William wanted to attend law school. Knowing that being a young attorney would not provide a steady income, he decided to go another way by working in his father's enterprise. Over the next several decades, Ellery became a Rhode Island naval officer and a Master Mason. He also worked as a court clerk and Rhode Island's General Assembly administrator. These experiences exposed him to deeds, writs, briefs, and other legal forms related to criminal and civil law.

In 1764, William's father died, leaving him an inheritance. This financial gift allowed Ellery to study law and pursue other areas of life that interested him. Due to the colonies' dispute with England over taxes and other essential matters, William joined the 'High Sons of Liberty.' In 1770, when he was 42, Ellery began his dream career as an attorney. Being a lawyer led him to be active in resisting the Stamp Act of 1765 and the Intolerable Acts of 1767.

When Samuel Ward, a Continental Congress delegate from Rhode Island, died of smallpox, a special election was called. On May 4, 1776, Ellery was elected for the open seat. As a new representative, he signed the Declaration of Independence with the experienced delegates. Remembering others signing the Declaration, William said, 'I was determined to see how they all looked as they signed what might be their death warrant.'

Ellery was never physically injured, but the British retaliated by destroying his property and home in December 1776. In the years that followed, William continued to serve in several ways: Chief Justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court, member of the Committee of Foreign Relations, and member of the admiralty court, the Marine Committee, and other councils. Ellery also served in positions that considered postal routes, military procurement, wounded Revolutionary War veterans, and public affairs.

In his later years, William had other achievements, including advocating "in Rhode Island ratification of the federal constitution." William also joined the efforts to "abolish slavery throughout the Country" and acquired an affection for theology. George Washington appointed him as the collector of customs from 1790 until he died in 1820. This position was vital as it was the new national government's primary revenue source. The customs tax was replaced by the federal income tax, which began in 1913 via the 16th Constitutional Amendment. Ellery continued to be a Renaissance man: "At the time of his death, [William] was sitting in his chair reading De Officiis" about ethics and philosophy. On February 15, 1820, at 92, Ellery died in his Newport, Rhode Island home. He was an enduring and righteous patriot who led his state under five presidential administrations. William Ellery was buried in Rhode Island's Common Ground Cemetery in Newport.

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

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

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

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Let all that you do be done in love.
-1 Corinthians 16:14

Todd's Techy Tips

Remember When?

By Todd Abraham *Athens, Tennessee*

Are you hypnotized by your phone? Did you know there is a direct scientific correlation between the two; hypnosis and smartphone addiction? Smartphone use has risen dramatically in the past decade. In the United States, 96% of young adults own a smartphone, and half



of teenagers report feeling addicted to their phones. Other developed countries show similar rates. Researchers and reporters have compared this heavy phone use to a trance or hypnosis. Madrigal even likens the "hypnotic" state of endless social media scrolling to the trance-like absorption of slot machines, due to their intermittent rewards. If heavy smartphone use can resemble hypnosis, more hypnotizable people may also be more prone to problematic smartphone use, in which phone use interferes with daily life. The American Psychological Association defines hypnosis as a "state of consciousness involving focused attention and reduced peripheral awareness characterized by an enhanced capacity for response to suggestion". (Source: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7330005).

If smartphones were used for only what they should be used for, the Lord wouldn't have put this installment of Heartbeat Christian News in here for about 10 years! The sad part is, as we read in the above chapter, 96% of young adults now own these wicked devices and at least half of them willingly admit they are addicted to them. But no age bracket is immune to these idols except for babies who aren't able to manipulate them. But, no worries, their parents are rushing them into the digital delusion as fast as possible. What most people don't realize, especially Christians who should be aware, is the devil wants to control your mind. And he will unless you stay vigilant in prayer, the word of God, faithful church attendance, and take heed to God's preachers. One of the strongest witnesses you could have to a lost soul in this age of technology is not having a smartphone! Because the most effective testimony from a Christian is one solicited from them by a lost person. It's a proven fact that humans receive anything much more willingly when they ask for it and it is not forced upon them.

If the devil can control your mind, he has you right where he wants you. If he can't control your mind but can keep you in a state of double-mindedness, he has right where he wants you. James 1:8 "A double-minded man is unstable in ALL his ways." My very dear friend, former pastor, and a true prophet of God forecasted how today's world would be a battle for the mind. Sadly, most people's minds are already gone. Lost in a sea of mindless digital delusion. Part of what has caused this is God Almighty withdrawing His Spirit from this country which is the last spiritual Gentile Israel. Add to that, the convenience of having this small, portable idol easily carried wherever you go. What people, especially Christians, aren't grasping is that there is typically a great extended period of God's grace just before severe judgment falls. And when God's anger comes to fruition, the devastation can last for several generations!

It's up to you to seek God for the tough answers as to whether or not you are addicted to your smartphone. Ask God if there is anything in your life causing division between you and Him. If you are on the right path with the Lord, you will be blessed but you will also be faced with one challenge after another. Because the devil only attacks those who are a threat to him. So if life is smooth and easy for you, then you are backslid and need to repent and get your heart right with God. Psalms 34:19 "MANY are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all."

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

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Roan Mountain Baptist Church

Bread and Stone

By Russell McKinney Mitchell County

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?" (Matthew 7:7-9, N. K. L.V.)

One writer has said, "The Lord's answers to our prayers are infinitely perfect, and eternity will show that often when we were asking for a stone that looked like bread, He was giving us bread that looked like stone." I, for one, know what it's like to ask for some version of "bread" in prayer only to have God send an answer that seemed to be some version of "stone." Pull up a chair and I'll tell you about it.

At some point during Tonya's pregnancy with our first child, Ryan, it dawned on me that someone was going to have to babysit the kid. At that time, Tonya was teaching middle school and her income was necessary for us to pay our bills. So, either she was going to have to quit her job and become a full-time mother, which would also have meant selling our house and downsizing, or some other arrangements would have to be made. But neither one of our mothers could help out because both were still working at the time, and we couldn't afford to pay a babysitter, either.

And so, we put our house on the market for a reasonable price and I began praying that God would send us a buyer. I thought, "If we can sell and get this mortgage off us, Tonya can resign from teaching and we can buy a smaller house that we can afford on my pastor's income. Even if we don't buy a smaller house, maybe God will send me to a church that offers a parsonage as a part of their salary package." Either solution made sense to me, and I devoted a ton of prayer requests to the situation.

However, as the months passed, it became increasingly obvious that God wasn't going to let us sell our house. Even though we had plenty of people look at it, no one was serious enough to buy it. Then, on June 17th, Ryan was born.

Since school started back on the first of August, we had a window of six weeks or so with Tonya at home with him. After that, the inevitable came to pass as the first day of school rolled around and Tonya headed off to her job. That left you-know-who to step up to the plate and babysit. I was available because we pastors, for whatever it's worth, have the option of setting our own schedules.

Did I want to take a crash course in tending to the needs of a baby? No. Did I want to become a Mister Mom? Of course not. Was I a little ticked off at God for not letting us sell the house? Yep. You see, in my mind, I had asked for a piece of bread and God had sent a rock. It wasn't that I didn't love Ryan. I just thought Tonya would have made an infinitely superior babysitter for him.

Anyway, to make a long story short, I kept Ryan every day, from morning



until afternoon, for all the years until he started kindergarten. Tonya took over on weekends and during the summers, but the rest of the time the responsibility was mine. My daily routine consisted of fixing his meals, bathing him, cleaning up his messes, making the beds, tidying up the house, and doing the laundry. If I had any spare time, or if Ryan took a nap, I worked on sermon preparation. Any pastoral visiting I needed to do had to wait until Tonya got home from school. Trust me, all that wasn't how I would have chosen to carry out my life and ministry during those years. It was, however, the answer God sent.

And do you know what God did a few years later when Tonya became pregnant with our second child, Royce? He kept that same plan in place. So, right on schedule, I served as Royce's babysitter until he started school, just as I had done for Ryan. I did get a slight reprieve with Royce because he attended preschool for a couple of years before he started kindergarten. Other than that, though, my years of keeping him looked a lot like a rerun of my years keeping Ryan.

Oh, and guess what happened along about the time Royce started school? That's when a guy called me out of the clear blue and asked if we would be interested in selling our house. I answered, "Yes," and a few weeks later the papers were signed. I remain convinced that if Tonya and I had had a third child, we wouldn't have sold that house until I had babysat that child as well!

Well, all of that seems like another lifetime ago now. But you know what? I've actually reached a point where I miss my babysitting era. I think about the fact that back then I could still protect the boys from life's heartbreaks. Surely, friends like Barney, Bear In The Big Blue House, and PB and J Otter meant them no harm. Also, there was such a sweetness to those days, an innocence that children get robbed of, little by little, as they grow up.

Sure, I understand that it's all a part of the ebb and flow of life. I also understand God wants little boys to mature into fine young men who serve Him in the real world. But don't blame me for sometimes longing for those simpler years. The fact is, they allowed me to forge an intimate relationship with each of my two sons, a relationship that continues to grow deeper all the time.

I've heard more than one pastor bemoan the fact that he missed out on his kid's childhood because he spent so much time doing church work. As for me, though, I've now accumulated enough wisdom to realize God was doing me a loving favor by seeing to it that such a thing didn't happen to me. There I was, thinking all the time He was being mean by sending me stone, when in reality He was sending me some of the best bread I'll ever know in this life.

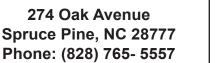
Truth be told, it's bread I wouldn't mind tasting again if such a thing was possible. Unfortunately, the best I can do now is catch a whiff of its aroma by looking at pictures or watching old videotapes. That fleeting smell always brings a smile to my face and reminds me again just how wonderful that bread was, and it makes me question how in the world I could ever have classified it as stone.

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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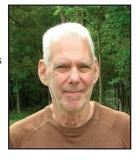
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Bible Briefs

Holy Spirit or Intuition?

By Robert Garner Rutherford County

The Old Testament spiritual analysis of the dove/pigeon is one of the fowl animals, used as a sin offering sacrificed to the LORD, on the altar within the Tabernacle. Undeniably, a spiritual reference to Jesus Christ. Leviticus 1:14, "And if the burnt sacrifice of his offering to the LORD be of fowls, then he shall bring his offering of turtledoves, or young pigeons".



Mathew 3:16 "And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him". "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatever I have said unto you", John 14:26.

Can we differentiate how the Holy Spirit gives us wisdom, rather than our own intuition of logical reasoning? How can we perceive being given knowledge regarding a particular decision, or activity we're thinking about? Can the Spirit of God send the solution of solving a particular problem we have to our inward parts? Job asks the perfect question 38:36; "who hath put wisdom in the inward parts; or who hath given understanding to the heart"? The inward parts refer to the seat of the mind and thought, its inner regions and hidden recesses.

Psalm 51:6, "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom".

For Christians, we have the Spirit of truth and the Word of Christ, dwelling within us. We know Him, (John 14:17). He also gives us wisdom and knowledge for our occupations and business activities. John 14:18, "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you". Four times we read in Psalm 107:8,15,21,31; "Oh, that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men".

The Holy Spirit of God will never bring wisdom to the hearts of men concerning evil devices or inventions. The Holy Spirit won't help anyone pick a winning lottery number, that would be the power; (Luke 4:6) of Satan's temptation, (Luke 4:13). Psalm 37:7, "Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of man who bringeth wicked evil devices to pass. Job 28:28, "to depart from evil is understanding". Pro. 9:10, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the holy is understanding".

The LORD commanded the Israelite workmen to construct all the vessels, utensils, apparatus, furniture, instruments, tools, etc. for the Tabernacle. Exodus 35:35 (the tabernacle workmen) "them hath he filled with wisdom of the heart, to work all manner of work, of the engraver, and of the cunning workman, and of the embroiderer, in blue, and in purple, in scarlet, and in fine linen, and of the weaver, even of them that do any work, and of those that devise cunning work."

The LORD called Bezaleel the son of Uri, and the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. Exodus 35:31-33, "And he hath filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship. To devise curious works, in gold, silver and in brass, in cutting stones, carving of wood, to make any manner of cunning [device, invention] work".

David the King speaking, 1 Chronicles 29:2, "Now I have prepared with all my might for the house of God the gold for things made of gold, and the silver for things of silver, and the brass for things of brass, and the iron for things of iron, and the wood for things of wood; onyx stones, and stones to be set, glistering stones, and of divers' colors, and all manner of precious stones, and marble stones in abundance".

Who trained the skillful hands of the artificers (craftsman, artisans, engravers) to work in all these various materials? Who has filled the workmen's heart with such desire, abilities of strategy, to fashion all these things for the house of God? 1Chronicles 29:5 "The gold for things of gold, and silver for things of silver, and all manner of work to be made by the artificers. And who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the LORD"? Exo. 35:10, "And every wise hearted among you shall come, and make all that the LORD hath commanded."

Men that go to sea in their ships, have various business activities in "great waters". They see the works of the LORD in the deep. Their souls begin to melt (destress) because of the great waves in a stormy sea. "They reel to and fro, and stagger like drunken men, they're at their wits' end". Crying to the LORD in their trouble, He brings them out of their distress, He makes the storm calm, and the waves become still. "He brings them to their desired city". Psalm 107: 23-30.

"Pray without ceasing" 1 Th 5:17, refers to giving thanks, praise, and honor to God and the Holy Spirit. We can pray with our inner mind's voice, without speaking, in all of life's activities. Communicate with your inner voice, "I Love You God Almighty, with all my heart and soul". Telling a loved one, I Love You, is a blessing to both them and yourself. Thank God for all his problem-solving blessings, wisdom, and knowledge which was brought to you by the Holy Spirit. Read Psalm 150, A Psalm of Praise; "Let everything that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD".

Before God Almighty spoke the universe into existence, the Christian "child of God", was chosen "before the foundation of the world". Ephesians 1:3,4; "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ. According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love".

The child of God has been predestinated (Strongs # 4309, decreed from eternity

past, foreordain, appointed beforehand). Ephesians 1:5, "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will".

May the Holy Spirit of God give you wisdom, knowledge, and truth in every work you do.

Ephesians 3:16; "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man".

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



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





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YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

NC Senate District 47



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

The North Carolina legislature operates in a legislative biennium, which always begins in January of odd-numbered years and runs through December of the following even-numbered year, also election years. The time between the two working sessions is known as the "interim," which, this year, began following the adjournment of the long session this past November.

The General Assembly spends the interim conducting legislative oversight meetings on different agencies and functions of state government. Interim committees may also choose a particular policy area to study, bringing in experts and stakeholders to inform future actions that the legislature may wish to take.

This session, I have been appointed by Senate President Pro Tempore, Phil Berger (R-Rockingham), to serve on the following interim committees: Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Information Technology (Co-Chair), Joint Legislative Elections Oversight Committee (Member), Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services (Member), Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Medicaid (Member), Legislative Research Commission (Member), Legislative Services Commission (Member), Revenue Laws Study Committee (Member), and the Joint Legislative Commission on Governmental Operations (Ex Officio).

Other interim committees cover a range of topics from agriculture to transportation. Scheduled committee meetings can be found on the General Assembly website calendar. As in the legislative session, you can sign up for email notifications to receive meeting notices and updates for any interim committees that interest you.

The legislative short session will begin in April. Short session has limitations on the types of bills that can be introduced and considered. Bills related to the state budget or elections can be considered, along with appointment bills and proposed constitutional amendments. The primary type of bills that will be considered are those that met the crossover deadline in 2023. This means that they passed out of their chamber of origin by the designated deadline last spring.

An analysis from New Frame Government Affairs, available on their Instagram page, summarized that 270 bills are eligible for consideration in 2024, out of 1,659 bills filed. They further explain that 200 of those bills are House bills, which constitute 22 percent of House bills filed, while the other 70 are Senate bills, representing 9 percent of bills filed in the Senate.

The short session will convene on April 24, 2024. In the meantime, the General Assembly is scheduled to meet monthly, at which time we may have legislative business to attend to.

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

NC Commissioner of Labor



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

January 2 marked three years on the job for me as Labor Commissioner. I have really enjoyed my time traveling across the state, meeting employees and employers, seeing the work our N.C. Department of Labor (NCDOL) employees do every day, and getting the opportunity to visit different communities and worksites. We live and work in an amazing state that continues to grow in population and industry.

Our Gold Star Grower awards luncheon will take place on Feb. 1, 2024. I am excited to attend this event as we will be celebrating 30 years of the Gold Star Grower program. The Gold Star Grower Program is administered through the NCDOL's Agricultural Safety and Health (ASH) Bureau of the Occupational Safety and Health Division. This program recognizes growers who provide farmworker housing that meets and exceeds all of the requirements of the Migrant Housing Act of North Carolina. I want to congratulate the growers – many of whom live in western North Carolina – who qualified for Gold Star status and will receive their award at the luncheon in Raleigh.

Safety Award season is almost upon us! As a reminder, the deadline for safety award applications is Feb. 15, 2024. The Safety Awards application process has transitioned from a hard copy mail-in form to an electronic online form. Many of you are dedicated and long-term participants in the Safety Awards program and I encourage all employers to apply for this award. Information about participation, including the application, can be found on our website or you can call Kiley Willard, safety awards coordinator, at 919-707-7855. I look forward to seeing you at one of our banquets scheduled for this spring or summer!

I hope everyone stays safe and have a blessed February!

NC Senate District 46



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

The first month of 2024 has already flown by and I hope your year is off to an excellent start. The General Assembly is scheduled to begin our legislative session in late April. In the interim, legislative oversight committees will meet to review, study, and scrutinize how the various state government agencies are doing.

This year I have been appointed by Senate Leader Phil Berger to co-chair the Joint Legislative Elections Oversight Committee and serve on the Joint Legislative Administrative Procedure Oversight Committee and the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety. I look forward to working alongside my colleagues as we have discussions on topics of importance that will inform our legislative priorities for the upcoming session.

I also wanted to share an update about 3 bills that went into law on January 1st. Senate Bill 157 (Update Provisional License Requirements) enacts changes in the process of new drivers earning their licenses. Starting January 1, most new drivers will add an extra few months of learning and supervised driving before being able to get their full license. Teen drivers will be eligible for a limited learner's permit (Level 1) at 15. They must hold a Level 1 permit for 9 months to receive a Level 2 limited provisional license. After holding a Level 2 license for 6 months, eligible drivers can receive a full provisional license. Drivers must have no tickets in the previous 6 months and must have a driving eligibility certificate to obtain the Level 3 license. House Bill 8 (Require Age Verification for Adult Websites) contains an age verification requirement to access websites that publish and distribute materials that are harmful to minors. Commercial entities that publish or distribute pornographic material from a website that contains over 33% of this material are now required to verify the age of people attempting to access the material. It is my understanding that some websites promoting this offensive content have fully blocked users in NC from accessing it due to this new legal hurdle. Finally, SB 747 (Elections Law Changes) prohibits officials from accepting private money (i.e. Zuck Bucks) to administer elections and directs state courts to inform elections officials about potential jurors who may be disqualified from both serving on a jury and voting if they are not US citizens. You may research these bills further at NCLEG.GOV. As always, it is an honor to serve you in the 46th Senate District. Please contact my staff in Raleigh if I may ever be of assistance.



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YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

NC House District 86



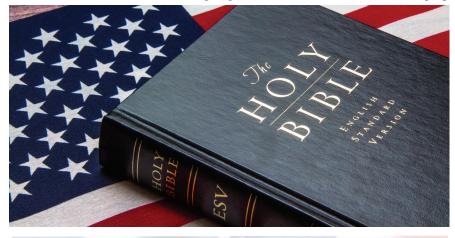
Rep. Hugh Blackwell 919-733-5805 Hugh.Blackwell@ncleg.net

You may have heard the troubling news that North Carolina insurers want to raise home insurance rates by an average of 42.2% across the state. Insurers contend they need to increase premiums because of significant increases in claims payouts resulting from both rising inflation and storm frequency. Although 42.2% is the average insurers are proposing statewide, the actual average increase varies greatly depending upon where in North Carolina you may live. For Burke County where I live, though still facing significant proposed increases, the average proposed increase is 20.5%, less than half the state-proposed increase.

However, the statewide average jump in prices (42.2%) appears to be driven largely by the recent history of destructive storms in some parts of the state, and predictions that these occurrences will continue. In some areas along the coast, the proposed rates almost double current premiums. Luckily, Burke County (outside of the great flood of 1916) has little history of such environmental property damage. Thus, Burke County is tied for the fourth lowest in the proposed rate increase, far below the average.

While we are all concerned by the frightening headlines on the insurers' proposed rates, we can hopefully take some comfort from the history of these proposed rate increases. Over the years, the insurers have typically gotten far less in actually approved increases than those originally proposed. The system is set up with two main actors: the North Carolina Rate Bureau (NCRB) represents the interests of insurance companies and puts forth their initial proposal. Then the North Carolina Department of Insurance (DOI), representing the interests of the state as a whole, considers the proposal and negotiates with the NCRB. In years past, the finalized, negotiated rate increase has always been much lower than the initial proposal.

The last time a new rate scheme was proposed by the NCRB (in 2020), the suggested average 24.5% increase was negotiated down by DOI to a final average increase of 7.9%. Of course, because that is an average, many folks will have perhaps no increase or certainly less while some may be more. For further perspective, according to analyses by two national publications, North Carolina's cost of home insurance is in the middle of the fifty states, being either 25th or 24th. North Carlina's General Assembly created the DOI and the NCRB to strike a balance between a price that allows insurance companies to make a profit so that they will continue being willing to offer homeowner insurance while at the same time keeping premiums low enough so as not to gouge homeowners. The negotiation is ongoing now on these most recent insurers' proposed increases.



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My Life Center

Resolutions or Words

By Leah Johnson Mitchell County

Over the past few years, I've noticed a trend right around the New Year. Instead of making resolutions, a lot of people choose a word or phrase to define the coming year. I've heard people say their word is Strength, Growth, Wonder, or even Humility to name a few.

Personally, I don't do resolutions or words. This year though, God had other plans. He gave me a song. When I first heard it, I couldn't stop playing it. I couldn't get

it out of my head. I shared it with our staff and volunteers, and it has quickly become our prayer; our anthem for 2024 and beyond.

"Take It All Back" By Tauren Wells and We the Kingdom is phenomenal. Do yourself a favor and look it up. I promise you won't regret it!

In the song, it talks about taking back what the enemy of our souls has stolen from us. As Christians, we can claim this promise as our own, and it's definitely exciting! When I think about our clients and all the enemy of our souls has stolen from them, this song takes on a different meaning though. Most of the clients we serve have experienced at least one of these: trauma, loss, addiction, parents and children torn apart, homelessness, abuse...and the list goes on.

When I look at these women, I don't pity them. I see warriors waiting to rise up, silence the lies they have believed, and take back what the enemy has stolen from them. Our God is an expert at giving beauty for ashes, strength for fear, gladness for mourning, and peace for despair.

At the Center, we get to walk alongside clients and share with them about the only One who can set them free. We had a client walk into our Center and tell us she'd been far away from God. She said it felt like the hits just kept on coming into her life, and she knew the only way out was to get back into a relationship with Jesus. Something kept on telling her to come here. Do you know what led her to this point? Diapers and Christmas boxes....love and lack of judgment. The Gospel was offered with open hands.

I shared the song with her and told her I firmly believed God gave me the song for the Center, but it was for her too. I found myself thinking we are going to see more and more of this as the months roll by. People are hungry for answers. They are tired of the lies. They need to know because of Jesus they have the power to get back their peace, joy, innocence, and self-worth.

To see our 2024 promo video inspired by "Take it All Back", Scan the QR code at the bottom. This is a short video detailing who we are and what we do.

As we celebrate our 30th year in operation, we invite you to link arms with us, walk with us, and help us reclaim what the enemy has stolen. Take it all back: Not part, not a few, ALL.

M.Y. Life Center (Formerly Tri-County Pregnancy Center) is located in Burnsville at 112 Mercy Street. We offer compassionate support and love to anyone facing an unexpected pregnancy or wishing to prepare for childbirth and/or improve their parenting skills through the life-changing Good News of Jesus Christ. To contact us or learn more about our services, visit www.mylifefamilycenter.com.



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



Mt. Carmel Baptist Church

A Costly Love

By Toby Crowder Mitchell County

John 15:9 & 13 "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love... Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.'

This month brings us Valentine's Day and with it an opportunity to show expressions of our love to our spouses or significant other. Thousands upon thousands of cards, flowers, and gifts will be given while some will spend more than they

are comfortably able to at this time of year, searching for that gift that is "just right." I think that I would be correct in saying that for some folks, February 14th is a costly day! But isn't that the point of it all...to sacrificially give so that the person receiving it realizes our sincerity and love for them? When we think about tokens of love, and consider the costliness of love, we must not forget the words of our Lord in John 15.

In this chapter, Jesus is discussing relationships with His disciples. He defines Himself as the vine, and the disciples as the branches, and then reminds them that without Him, they can do nothing (v.5). At the core of this conversation is the subject of love. Not a passing fascination, or first-grade "puppy dog" love... but true, real, and lasting love. Love is cheap and misunderstood in today's world and our culture. People and couples are quick to say "I Love you" as a tagline at the end of a call, or without really understanding what Love is. According to Alan Redpath, we get our English word agony from agape. "It means the actual absorption of our being in one great passion."

Jesus uses this word (agape) in verse nine and several other times in this passage. This was and is a CONTINUAL love; a love that knows no beginning and no end because it is of God and originates in Him. Our love is at times fleeting, dependent upon conditions and circumstances. We love others until they no longer serve our needs or fit into our "mold." I am thankful today that God does not love us with that kind of inconsistent love, but this continuing love is founded in the very nature of God, for God IS love... not just a God OF love. We read in 1 John 4:19 "We love him, because he first loved us." and Romans 5:8 declares that "... God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." As believers, we can rejoice in this continual love that we have as the basis of our relationship with God!

This love is also a COMMANDING love. Commanding in this regard deals with how it affects others, as we display the love of God in our lives. In this one command, is contained so many others... that we love one another, with the Love of God. This type of love should be the standard of every Christian...it is how we are known to belong to Him. Jesus offered this as a command in John 13:34-35 "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

While we remember that this is a continual and commanding type of love, let us never forget that God's love was COSTLY! This love and the salvation that accompanies it is without cost to us, but it costs God His Son! Can we imagine a love so intense that we would lay down our lives, or our child's life, for someone that we do not know? Many would for family... maybe even some friends... but for a stranger? We learn in 1 John 4:9-10 "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins." This is the undeniable proof that God loves a guilty world and that this love was manifest in His Son! This love was costly to God the Father, and it will be costly to us as we love others with the love of God!

Toby Crowder serves as Pastor of Mt. Carmel Baptist Church in Spruce Pine. He and his wife Leslie have been married for almost 30 years and have two daughters, Emilee, and Katy. Feel free to contact him at MCfamilyforChrist.org or mtcarmelsprucepine@gmail.com



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Obedient Heart Fellowship

For God So Loved

By Jim Huskins

McDowell County

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD." (Isaiah 55:8)

You and I are trained to think and respond within a Greek philosophical paradigm. Greek thinking is cerebral and theoretical. Hebrew thinking—the culture that produced the Bible—is concrete, practical, rooted in action. Nowhere is this difference more evident than in our modern understanding of "love."

In Greek thought, "love" is mostly about emotion and self gratification. The ancient philosophers understood and described higher forms of love. "Philia" is a platonic bond involving spiritual connection, trust, and shared values. Philia often occurs between friends and family members, but it is also a necessary component of lasting, romantic relationships.

"Storge" is often associated with family love. It involves care and devotion. This word describes a parent caring for a child in such a way that the child feels safe, comfortable, and wanted. The caregiver expects nothing in return.

The Greek notion of "mature love" is "pragma." Pragma is based on duty, reason, and shared goals. Like philia, pragma is not limited to romantic partnerships, but it is indispensable for building functional families and close friendships. Pragma produces personal sacrifice for a spouse or child or friend. Pragma is closely related to the highest form of Greek love. Agape always places another's interest ahead of one's own.

In spite of these noble categories of love recognized by the philosophers, the primary love of modern, Greek-inspired culture is eros—unbridled lust. "Eros" has been a primary focus of Western Culture for more than a century. We have deified the gratification of lust in almost every area. The modern abomination known as "woke" is a logical conclusion. Those who promote this perversity believe they are entitled to satisfy their lust whenever and with whomever they choose.

Our modern view of "love" is polar opposite to that of Hebrew culture. Scriptural references to lust are cautionary tales. The Bible devotes shockingly little space to what we would consider "romantic love." The ancient Hebrew word for "love" is "ahavah." The verb form is "ahav." These words carry at their root the idea of "gift." One way of understanding the equivalence between "love" and "gift" is to consider the manner in which we acquire parents and siblings.

We do not choose our family. In traditional Hebrew culture, one did not choose their spouse. These people are "privileged gifts." "Ahav" means "to provide for and protect a privileged gift." The Biblical approach to love—for God, for family, or for neighbors—involves little if any emotion. The process of "providing for and protecting the privileged gift" is rooted in action. We "love" by "doing" what is necessary for the wellbeing of the object of our love.

What we think of as "love" mostly involves distorting Bible truth. For example, we tend to be so blinded by "love" that we often ignore destructive behavior in those close to us. Rather than "acting" to interrupt and redirect unhealthy patterns, we choose the path of least resistance. We fear a breech in the relationship more than we value the other's best interest. This is the opposite of "providing for and protecting the privileged gift." Because we use "love" as an excuse for ignoring bad behavior,s we assume that God does the same. This is a tragic mistake.

One of the core messages of the Bible is that Holy God cannot abide the presence of sin. A particularly damaging "manmade doctrine" claims that God's great love for us "excuses" our sin. Many modern believers, divorced from familiarity with Hebrew thought and culture, read John 3:16 or Romans 5:8 and assume that God loves like we do—by turning a blind eye to our sin. NOT A SINGLE VERSE OF SCRIPTURE SUPPORTS THIS CLAIM!

The reality of what the Bible teaches about believers "continuing in sin" is summarized by 1 Peter 1:14-16, "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" Paul says the same thing, "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (Romans 6:1-2)

Rather than "winking at sin," God condemns it. Ananias and Sapphira died because of a single sin. Paul insists that strife, jealousy, and anger are among the sins that will keep someone from inheriting the Kingdom. (Galatians 5:19-21) On Judgment Day, many will demand admittance because they prophesied in His name, cast out demons in His name, and did mighty works in His name. Jesus will respond that He did not know them because they were disobedient. (Matthew 7:21-23)

Jeremiah 31:34, Hebrews 8:12, and Hebrews 10:17, all teach that God will remember our sins no more. His forgetfulness applies to sins brought to Him in confession and repentance. This is the definition of grace. God cannot help but remember sin that we continue to throw in His face.

If the "love of God" was an automatic excuse for our sin, then Jesus did not need to die. His perfect sacrifice was necessary to pay the terrible penalty for our sin. Jesus died to free us from eternal death. He did not die to give us license to sin with impunity. Sin is still abhorrent to Holy God. He saves us so we may carry out the holy work of making disciples of all nations.

"And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him." (I John 2:3-4)

"But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you."

Lest We Drift

Temptation creeps quietly under every garden gate. "Did God really say...?"

www.brcnews.com

The father of lies revealed much of himself as he led Adam and Eve astray. One of those insights is his astonishing ability to sow doubt. Unchallenged, doubt bears the fruit of confusion, redefinition, and rejection of truth.

Our culture is awash in satanic doubt. One of our Supreme Court Justices cannot define the word "woman." A startling number of professing Christians attempt to blend the religion of evolution with the worship of Creator God. "People of faith" consider marriage optional and same sex relationships acceptable. "Freedom in Christ" is an excuse for sinful practices which the Bible labels abomination. Some Christians endorse the murder of unborn babies. None of these heresies would be thinkable had not the ancient adversary been able to instill doubt in the minds of well-intended people.

This rejection of Biblical truth is blatant in the widespread misunderstanding of what constitutes "worship." Modern Christians believe that "worship" is about singing or listening to other people sing. The Bible teaches no such thing.

The Hebrew word for "worship" is shachah, Strong's 7812. It means "to bow down." In traditional Eastern cultures, the act of prostrating oneself before another is an acknowledgment of inferiority. The one being worshipped is affirmed as greater, stronger, and more significant. Hebrew worship always includes sacrifice. Implicit in the Hebrew act of "bowing before" is a commitment to absolute obedience. Nowhere in the Bible is worship defined as "singing to" or "singing about" someone.

Unquestioning obedience is evident in Abraham's response when he was called to sacrifice the son of the promise. The word shachah occurs twice before. In Genesis 18:2, Abraham bowed before three visitors to his camp. In 19:1, Lot bowed before two angels at his home in Sodom. The first account where the definition of shachah is fleshed out through action includes Genesis 22:5, "Then Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.""

Abraham's example provides startling perspective on the nature of worship. God told him to take the long-awaited son of promise, travel to Mt. Moriah, kill the boy, and offer his body as a burnt offering. His response leaves no doubt that worship is unquestioning obedience. Also, worship never involves arguing with God

"But God, you promised us this boy. We waited a long time. We're too old to have another. This is going to break his mother's heart. Surely you don't expect me to kill my own son. You've never before asked for human sacrifice."

None of these natural reactions were included in Abraham's response. Instead, he devoted himself to the details of carrying out what he had been told. He rose early, saddled his donkey, selected two servants to assist, split wood for the sacrifice, and set out for the assigned destination. When they arrived, Abraham told his servants that he and Issac were about to worship.

But how was that possible? They had no choir, no stage, no keyboard, no electric guitar or bass, no microphone, no amplifier, no drum kit, and no laser lights. The closest thing to a smoke machine was a simple altar and some firewood. Who could worship under those conditions? When Abraham bound his only son with a rope and placed him on the altar, no one sang. No one waved their hands. No professional musicians presented a concert. The worship Abraham offered was nothing but obedience.

All of us come to God with a sinful nature. He expects us to change. He demands that our every desire be to honor Him by following His Son's example. Jesus walked in perfect obedience. Many churches tell us that all we have to do is nod our head and repeat a little prayer. Jesus says that we must hunger and thirst after righteousness. He says to every disciple, "If you love me, keep My commandments." Grace does not mean that we are excused from obedience. Grace is what covers our human frailty when we fail in spite of sincere effort.

The Second Chapter of Hebrews offers us this challenge: "Pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it." Our old enemy's demonstrated goal is to trick us into paying attention to the wrong things. His plan is working. Jesus left us to carry out the most important work in history. He assured us that He will return to finish the job. He commanded us to gather each Sabbath to be instructed and encouraged so that we might do a better job. How did the devil convince us that our job is to show up on Sundays for entertainment and emotional catharsis? How did he distract us from the fact that "worship" is what we do the rest of the week?

Hebrews 11:6 teaches that "Without faith it is impossible to please God." Most Churches claim that "faith" is something you think. The Bible teaches that "faith" is what you do. Here is that lesson in James 2:21, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?" Saving faith always leads to a sincere attempt to live in obedience. An obedient life is an unending act of worship.

The ancient deceiver led Eve down that garden path to rebellion. The cost of the first sin is unimaginable. Now he has redefined "worship" as "singing." When we gather as believers, we should sing joyfully and loudly. Singing helps focus and express our delight and devotion to the One who died in our place. But singing is not worship, and "Church" does not exist merely to meet my needs. Hebrews 11:17 says that, "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Issac." We could sing nonstop for the next hundred years and never scratch the surface of that level of commitment.

Obedient Heart Fellowship meets each Sabbath (Seventh Day) at 3023 US 221 N. Marion, NC. 10:00 A.M. 828-460-7913

Jim Huskins is pastor of Obedient Heart Fellowship.

Happy Valentine's Day!

Retirement Resource Management

Discover Your Retirement Score - A Path to Financial Peace of Mind By Steve Gaito

McDowell County

You've heard of a credit score, but have you ever considered your retirement score? Your retirement isn't just about your savings; it's about your financial well-being and peace of mind in your golden years. That's why I'm excited to introduce you to the IFW Retirement Roadmap, a revolutionary program developed by the Institute of Financial Wellness (IFW) that estimates your probability of success in retirement.



At IFW, we use the same scientific and mathematical principles that NASA, engineers, and even casinos rely on to calculate success. We understand that your retirement journey is unique, and there's more to it than just your assets. Factors like the location of your assets, inflation, budgeting, your age, life expectancy, and taxes all play a crucial role in determining the success of your retirement plan.

I am thrilled to share that I recently became certified by the Institute of Financial Wellness to provide you with the IFW Retirement Scores. This comprehensive analysis is designed to show you how likely you are to succeed with your current retirement plan. Whether you're well-prepared or have some areas that need improvement, this analysis will provide valuable insights into your financial future.

Here's what you can expect from the IFW Retirement Roadmap:

- A personalized assessment of your retirement readiness.
- Insights into areas where you can enhance your retirement score.
- Validation of your current plan if you're already in good shape.
- A clear path towards enjoying a worry-free retirement.

Ready to take the first step towards securing your financial future? To access your free IFW Retirement Score, go to: https://www.ifwretirementroadmap.com/steve-gaito/

Don't leave your retirement to chance. With the IFW Retirement Roadmap, you'll have the tools and knowledge to make informed decisions and take control of your financial destiny. Your retirement score matters, and we're here to help you make it the best it can be.

If you have any questions or need further information, please do not hesitate to reach out. Your financial well-being is our top priority, and I look forward to assisting you on your journey toward a prosperous retirement.

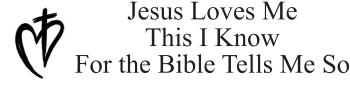
Steve Gaito, CFO®

Certified IFW Retirement Roadmap Advisor

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

Has provided financial planning for missionaries through the International Mission Board.





Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

The Path to Discipleship

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

God, out of His deep love for mankind, saw the devastating and destructive effects of humanity's personal choice of sin and rebellion and made a way for redemption and reconciliation. In the Incarnate Christ, He drew near and leaned in toward lost humanity. And when He was near enough for



them to hear His voice, He called out to them personally and said, "Come follow Me!" The Lord Jesus then gathered together those who responded to His call and followed Him into a small group of traveling companions and taught them how to love God, love one another, and love others by His own life and example. Then, He sent them out to go and do the very same thing that He had done. Jesus told His disciples, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

Real faith and obedience put feet to the task. Real faith trusts that the Lord will equip each one of us to accomplish His call. Real faith chooses to die to self, lay down our lives for the sake of the call, and jump completely into God's call to go, to share the gospel, to love with Christ's love, to disciple, baptize, and teach all to follow after Christ Jesus. There is a pathway to follow once one has surrendered to the Lordship claim of Jesus. That pathway is called the "Discipleship Pathway."

You may be familiar with the poem "The Road Not Taken," by Robert Frost.

"A Road Not Taken": Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, And sorry I could not travel both And be one traveler, long I stood And looked down one as far as I could To where it bent in the undergrowth; Then took the other, as just as fair, And having perhaps the better claim, Because it was grassy and wanted wear; Though as for that the passing there Had worn them really about the same, And both that morning equally lay In leaves no step had trodden black. Oh, I kept the first for another day! Yet knowing how way leads on to way, I doubted if I should ever come back. I shall be telling this with a sigh Somewhere ages and ages hence: Two roads diverged in a wood, and I— I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference.

In this poem, Frost captures the dilemma that faces everyone with a choice. Oftentimes, there are so many good choices from which to choose. But a choice must be made! The best choice, implied by the author of this poem and continuously echoed by a modern secularistic culture, is to choose what's best for YOU! But, when a follower of Christ chooses what's best for them, then they are no longer following Jesus!

In fact, Jesus spoke the following spiritual truth to His disciples (Matt. 16:24-26) "If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what good will it do a person if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his soul? Or what will a person give in exchange for his soul?" The choice is clear! However, the choice is never simple! The choice that you and I have to make every day is to either follow Christ or the ways of this world. As much as we would like to have both, Jesus said that we can't! A choice must be made! The choice is either to deny self and take up the cross of Christ or serve one's self and gain the pleasures and satisfactions of this world. The choice is either to fulfill the calling and mandate of the Lord or to gain the approval and accolades of the world. That choice is a hard choice that requires much prayer and supplication. But, a choice must be and will be made by each of us.

Notice in this passage that Jesus warns, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul?" The difficult answer to that question is "nothing!" And then notice that Jesus is saying a choice must be made. You may not realize it, but making no choice is actually making a choice! And making no choice is NOT choosing the heart and will of the Father. Jesus insists, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow Me." The most significant choice that anyone will make in their lifetime is the choice of what to do with Jesus! Will you follow Christ or not? That choice affects everything in life! That choice not only affects this life but also eternal life.

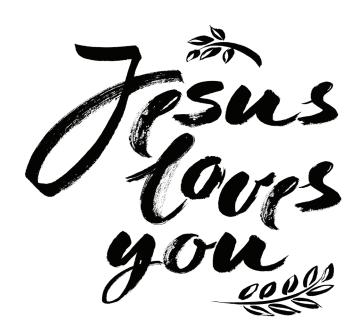
In addition to salvation, every follower of Christ must also make another significant choice; that is, are you going to lay down your life for Christ, or are you going to hold onto it for yourself? Perhaps the real question that we should be asking ourselves as a believer doesn't have to do with whether I am a Christian or not; but rather, Am I growing in my relationship with Christ? Am I equipped and ready to follow His commands? I am free from sin or worldly treasures so that I Continued pg. 37

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may be obedient to His calling and command to be a disciple-maker.

One last word for the church. A healthy church makes disciples! That's what every church growth and disciple-making expert insists. We are often tempted to measure the health of a church by several different methods: by how many are attending (worship, bible study, small groups, e-groups, etc.); by how many have been saved and baptized; by how big our facilities are; or by how much money the church has or is giving. Jesus made clear the standard for church health and church growth: going and making disciples. Disciple-making is both leading people to Jesus and walking along with them as they become more Christlike—teaching them, equipping them, and helping them to become disciple-makers themselves. Leading someone to a saving encounter with Christ is one of the greatest opportunities to exercise our faith in Christ. But equally as important is the commitment to walk alongside those that give their heart and life to Jesus and need a Christ-like and obedient Christian to show them how to live in Christ and for Christ. Will you commit yourself as a follower of Christ to go and make disciples?

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



First Baptist of Marshall

Humor

By Buddy Freeman *Madison County*

As the result of an explosive argument with our mother, my little brother pasted a sign reading "I hate Mom" on the door to his room and slammed it shut. My dad, a school psychologist, came home after work to the tense standoff. "I'll take



care of it," he confidently told Mom, and went into my brother's room. Minutes later, Dad came out. "He doesn't hate you anymore, "he reassured her. Sure enough, my brother had crossed "Mom" on his sign. It now read "I hate Dad."

My musician son decided to play at his own wedding reception. That day, tuning his strings was taking longer than usual. "It's a little harder to do with a ring on," he apologized to the waiting guests. That's when a man called out, "Everything's harder with a ring on."

All my husband wanted was to pay for some batteries, but none of the clerks in the electronics store seemed interested in helping him. "I've got an idea," I said and pulled a tape measure out of my purse. I stepped over to one of the giant plasma-screen TVs and started to measure it. Faster than you can say high-definition, a young man came running over. "May I help you?" he asked breathlessly. "Yes," I said. "I'd like to buy these batteries."

Our son was constantly wandering in and out of the house, leaving the front or back door wide open. "Once and for all, will you please close that!" my exasperated wife pleaded one day. "Were you born in a barn?" "No, I was born in a hospital," he replied, smirking. "With automatic doors."

A store owner in a small town got a phone call asking for a toothbrush. The owner asked, "Do you want an expensive or a cheap one?" The caller replied, "Make it a good one. There are five of us here."

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



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Crossword

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69 Edom southward were Kabzeel,	ı
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71 he has appeared once for all at the	1
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5 he will bend and his bow (Ps 7:12)	(
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52 branches from poplar, almond and

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trees and made (Gen 30:37)

53 An __ must be blameless, the husband of but one wife (Titus 1:6)

55 the holy city shall they tread __ foot forty and two months.

(Rev 11:2)

56 Priests must not shave their heads or shave off the __ of their beards (Lev 21:5)

57 to another faith by the __ Spirit, to another gifts of healing (1 Cor 12:9)

59 received whereby whereb

whereby we cry, ____, Father. (Rom 8:15) KJV 60 catch them in their net, and gather them in their ____ (Hab 1:15)

61 Men at ____ have contempt for misfortune (Job 12:5)
64 if someone wants to ____ you and

take your tunic (Matt 5:40)

Solution on page 14



65 you rely on the law and

New Writer

By Sandy Mayle

Erie, Pennsylvania

I've been reading the Bible since I was old enough to read. I've used the New King James Version, the NIV, the Amplified Bible, the New Living Translation, The Message, and others. I have read every verse multiple times, studied many of its individual books in-depth, researched various topics, attended classes to learn what the Bible says about this or that...

All this not to brag, but to confess something that sounds awful: occasionally, I have gotten bored with the Bible. Even while I absolutely believed its words and recognized that I desperately needed what it had to say to me, I wished I could read it with fresh eyes, discover something new and fascinating, and find some way to bring it alive again.

At one point, those feelings persisted for many months. The daily devotional book I was using was very good, but I longed to be renewed in love for the Bible itself and to once again enjoy reading and studying it. Surely God Himself wanted me to love His Word!

I confessed my boredom and desire to Him and wrote down a simple prayer request: That I would be awakened to Your Word. And the Holy Spirit led me to Psalm 119. Here was a writer who loved God's Word and took 176 verses to say so! He had the kind of appetite for Scripture that I wanted.

So I added three scripture verses to my prayer request, and began to pray them day after day:

- 1. "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law" (Ps. 119:18 NIV). 2. "Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your Word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart" (Jer. 15:16 NKJV).
- 3. "Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long" (Ps. 119:97 NIV).

I asked and asked for those words to become true of me. Nothing dramatic happened overnight, but in time an idea formed: over the next twelve months, each month I would study a different Bible book or character or topic, however the Lord led. I would write down the ways He spoke through His Word and the conclusions He revealed. Read supporting books and material. Take any action steps He urged. Learn and change and grow in twelve different ways in the coming twelve months!

Along with the fresh inspiration and direction for my Bible study came a renewed love for God's Word and excitement about delving into it - definite answers to the prayers I'd been praying.

How did this plan play out for me?

Initially, I was tempted to sit down and sketch out the entire year, listing twelve monthly topics. But the Lord checked me: He would give me each month's study in His timing. So that's the way we did it. Sometimes I didn't know where we were headed next until the first of the month loomed, but the Spirit always directed me in time.

It was an intriguing journey. Monthly subjects included:

January: the tongue (mine needed some boundaries), based largely on Proverbs. I was given several key verses to pray daily.

April: people (I am not a people person). In the gospel of Mark I observed Jesus as He interacted with people throughout His three years of ministry. I saw there a pattern of courage and compassion I need to imitate.

May: God in me. I was freshly astounded as I contemplated God's literal presence within me, and challenged to further open myself to "be filled with all the fullness of God" (Eph. 3:17 NIV).

November: God's Word (Psalm 119). I fell in love with the Word all over again as nearly every one of the Psalm's 176 verses affirmed the power or practicality or excellence of the Bible.



Family Gatherings

394 East Main St.

Burnsville, NC

December: review. I spent the month condensing and internalizing the year's lessons.

The entire year was like a treasure hunt as I followed one reference to another, finding out what the Bible said on the different topics, browsing reference books and Spirit-selected writings of other Christians, and praying that revealed truth would heal and shape my spirit, renew my mind and impact the way I live.

Often days of pouring over Scripture verses and journaling what the Holy Spirit revealed resulted in a few verses that summed up the entire subject. These became my emphasis for the month, influencing how I prayed and giving focus to my thoughts throughout the day. Through the work of the Spirit, they changed me. At the end of the month, I was a different person than when it began.

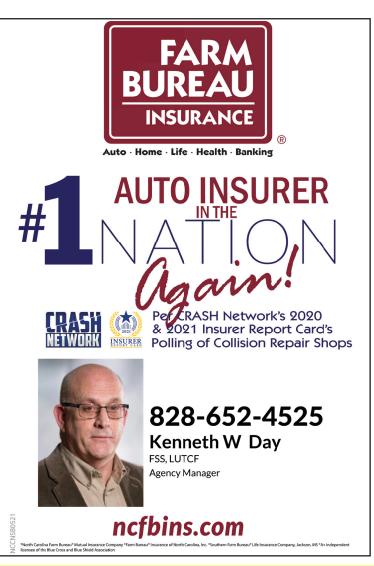
And I continued to pray selected verses from previous months because I didn't want to forget the guidance I was given for my tongue or Jesus' examples for interacting with people. At year's end, I was able to assign a note card for each month's study, with takeaways, scriptures, and prayer points, so that I would always have a "condensed version" of the year's lessons at hand.

If you, too, ask God for a fresh passion for His Word, His answer may look very different. He will lead you down a path unique to your needs and His plan for you. The important thing to remember is that God delights in opening His Word to us through His Spirit. He's stored just what we need there, and He longs to lead us to it. Although a few of the things He tells us are "secrets" for our personal benefit, much of it is meant to be passed on, as the Spirit directs, to others through the relationships, giftings, and ministries we've been given.

I know that my own enthusiasm waxes and wanes. So I want to remember those three prayers that ask God to give me a passion for His Word. I don't take this enthusiasm for granted. It's God-given, and I want to cherish and nurture it and, God helping me, never become bored with the Bible again.

Sandy Mayle is a freelancer who has written for Focus on the Family, Prayer Connect, Just Between Us, and many other publications. She and her husband Dave have been married 48 years and have three sons and eight grandchildren. She can be contacted at dasmayle@gmail.com.





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