



BLUE RIDGE CHRISTIAN NEWS



Anne Ministries

“He Will See You Through.”

By Mary-Kathryn Laws
Avery County



This past year a friend at our church has been walking through a difficult season with her child who has been hospitalized due to a congenital heart disease. Over the past few months, they had been patiently awaiting a new heart. Over the past year, they have experienced major setbacks and breakthroughs! Through it all, they have continued to keep their faith and trust in God. About two weeks ago, their daughter received her perfect heart in the arms of Jesus.

After watching their journey of challenges with their daughter, it seemed like every time things seemed to have gotten better they took a turn for the worse.

Have you ever experienced a season where everything seems to be taking a turn for the worse?

Habakkuk did. He experienced many struggles and they just seemed to keep getting worse as time went on.

There is a lesson to learn from Habakkuk. Rather than focusing on how big his problems were, he decided to focus on how big His God was. Through all his hardships, he was able to rejoice in the Lord! Habakkuk knew that even though his situation or season looked bad God was going to see him through.

Sometimes God will lead us to places we don't want to go. He has a plan and reason for everything He does, even if we don't see it. God was Habakkuk's strength. He knew that God would get him through what he couldn't on his own. This is why he can rejoice in his difficult season.

I know that without Jesus, this friend I mentioned would not be able to face the days ahead. But She has Jesus and the promise of Heaven.

It's difficult to be grateful when we are in the depths of despair. If we can learn to be overcome by his greatness instead of life's greatest hardships then we too will be able to praise Him even in the hardest of times!

Let's choose to trust that God will see us through. He saw Habakkuk through, He's seeing this friend through, and I know he'll see you through too!

Habakkuk 3:18

*“yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.”*

Mary-Kathryn Laws is a follower of Jesus Christ. She is a volunteer at Anne Ministries which offers pregnancy support and recovery support services in Avery County. She is very involved in the new moms support group at the ministry. She is a wife, young mother, daughter, sister, teacher, and friend. Mary-Kathryn and her family attend Emmanuel Baptist Church in Newland. She is the daughter of Director Chastity Ogburn at Anne Ministries. For more information about Anne Ministries please visit www.anneministries.com or email anneministries@gmail.com. Like us on Facebook!



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

God

God is the Creator and Ruler of the universe. He has existed eternally in three persons and chooses to manifest Himself in these three ways: as God the Father, as God the Son, and as God the Holy Spirit. These three are co-equal and are one God.

(Genesis 1:1, 26-27; 3:22; Psalm 90:2; Matthew 28:19; 1 Peter 1:2; and 2 Corinthians 13:14)

Jesus

Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, who is fully God and fully human in His incarnation. He lived a sinless human life and offered Himself as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all humanity by dying on a cross. He arose from the dead after three days to demonstrate His power over sin and death. He ascended to heaven and will return again to reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

(Matthew 1:22-23; Isaiah 9:6; John 1:1-5; 14:10-30; Hebrews 4:14-15; 1 Corinthians 15:3-4; Romans 1:3-4; Acts 1:9-11; 1 Timothy 6:14-15; Titus 2:13)

The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is the very Spirit of God, fully divine, manifested in the life of every believer from the moment of salvation. He is equal with the Father and the Son as God. He is present in the world to make men aware of their need for Jesus Christ. He provides the Christian with power for living, understanding of spiritual truth, and guidance in doing what is right. The Christian seeks to live under His daily control.

(2 Corinthians 3:17; John 16:7-13; 14:16-17; Acts 1:8; 1 Corinthians 2:12; 3:16; Ephesians 1:13; Galatians 5:25; Ephesians 5:18)

The Bible

The Bible is the divinely inspired, authoritative, infallible, living and active Word of God to all men. It was written by human authors under the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is the ultimate source of truth for Christian beliefs and living. In it we find a guideline for right relationship with God and God's creation, and a blueprint for personal, emotional, and spiritual growth.

(2 Timothy 1:13; 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:2-21; Psalm 119:105, 160; 12:6; Proverbs 30:5)

Humanity

Humanity is designed and made by God in His image. We have been created as cognitive, moral, ethical, and physical beings and have been equipped by God for both relationship with Him and with one another. Both male and female are gifted by the Creator with characteristics which equip them for the purpose for which they have been created: relationship, dominion, and responsibility. Although God designed us to have fellowship with Him, we became alienated from God through disobedience. As a result, all human beings are born with a sinful nature and choose to sin against God. We are incapable of regaining a right relationship with God through our own efforts.

(Genesis 1:26-28; Psalm 8:3-6; Isaiah 53:6; 59:1-2; Romans 3:23; 5:22; Colossians 1:21; 2 Corinthians 5:17)

Eternity & Eternal Security

Our soul, the essence of our being, was created by God to exist forever. That forever is spent in one of two places: eternally present and in union with God because of His forgiveness and salvation or eternally separated from God because of sin and unbelief. At the moment that our physical body dies, those who are saved are immediately taken to heaven. Those who have rejected God's gift of salvation will spend eternity separated from God in hell. Because God gives man eternal life through Jesus Christ, the believer is secure in that salvation for eternity. Salvation is maintained by the grace and power of God, not by the self-effort of the Christian. It is the grace and eternal power of God that gives this security.

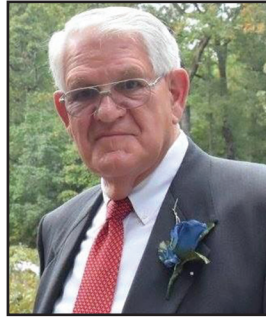
(John 3:16; 5:11-13, 10:29; 1 John 2:25; Romans 6:23; Revelation 20:15; 2 Timothy 1:12; Hebrews 7:25; 10:10-14; 1 Peter 1:3-5)

Salvation

Salvation is God's gift of redemption and reconciliation to Himself and is offered freely to all who accept, by faith alone, Jesus Christ as God's only son and receive Him as Lord and Savior. We can never make up for our sin with self-improvement or good works. It is only by trusting in Jesus Christ as God's offer of forgiveness that you can be saved from sin's penalty. Eternal life begins the moment you receive Jesus Christ into your life by faith.

(Romans 5:1; 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9; John 1:12; 14:6; Titus 3:5; Galatians 3:26)

By Doug Harrell
Mitchell County



I look around today and I am not sure I recognize where I am anymore. I understand I am fast approaching eighty-one years of life here in this old world. Things are changing faster than I can keep up. Things that used to be everyday stuff, a shotgun in the back window of your truck, a knife in your pocket always, church on Sunday morning, and a mother and a dad in the picture of the family, not so anymore for any of these things.

There have always been some on the fringe that we wondered about at times, but things that the Bible talked about as a sin were considered sins. Being a Christian was considered a virtue, not a handicap. Having a prayer and the National Anthem at athletic events was always the norm. You stood for the pledge of allegiance, was not even a question. Representing the Stars and Stripes in Olympic events was one of the greatest honors that could be bestowed on someone and had they been disrespectful of the flag or the National Anthem they would have been disciplined at the least and probably would have been removed from the team.

Today the NFL has decided they will no longer play our National Anthem but are going to substitute a different anthem, a good part of the teams are embracing taking a knee rather than standing at attention for the pledge and National Anthem. What has happened? We are tearing down our history and destroying statues that have honored our forefathers. We are teaching critical race theory, whatever the heck that is! Being born white is a sin and something that we should all be ashamed of if we happen to be born with that particular skin color. I was always taught that we all bled red, that black, white, yellow, or brown we were all precious in His sight! What happened?

I always thought that when a child was born the doctor would say you have a baby boy or a baby girl and you celebrated whichever it was. Now there is a 30, 60, or 90-day window to give you or the baby time to decide what gender the child is! What the heck happened to common sense? If someone happened to lean toward being queer, they were queer and the word gay was for happy people. The word described happiness and joy, not queer behavior. The rainbow was a promise from God that the world would not be destroyed ever again by a flood. Now it has been bastardized into embracing homosexual and transgender behavior. In my youthful days, a woman married a man, and a man married a woman, marriage was a God-ordained institution and it was not even a matter for discussion, never even mentioned. Now we even have mainline denominations performing marriage ceremonies between people of the same sex and calling it right! God have mercy on the leaders of these so-called churches.

Never in my life have I ever seen right called wrong and wrong called right like it is taking place all around us today. If you have a question about what the Bible says, start with reading Romans 1:21-32.

“because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but 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 uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.”

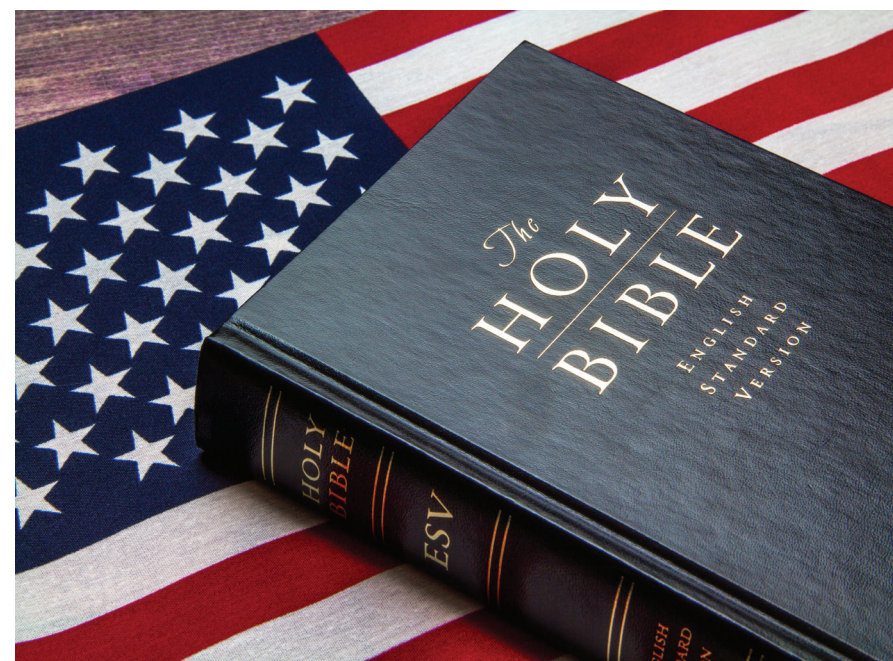
Romans 1:21-32 KJV

As we approach another election cycle, I would ask that each of us who are Christian lay aside our political affiliations and search the platforms of the candidates running and who align with the Christian principles we need to uphold. Do we stand up for a fundamental understanding of mankind? Do we really think it is fair for men and boys to participate in women's sports? Do we think is okay to use abortion as birth control?

“if my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.” 2 Chronicles 7:14 KJV

My prayer is that we as a people and a nation will return to our roots and that we will once again be proud to be one nation under God and remain that way. To God be the glory!!

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



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Publisher/Co-editor – Brian Barrier
828-413-0506
brianb@brcnews.com
Office Manager/Co-editor – Cathy Pritchard
828-765-6800
cathyp@brcnews.com
Sales:
Brian Barrier
828-413-0506
brianb@brcnews.com
Church Directory:
Brian Barrier
828-765-6800
brianb@brcnews.com

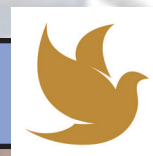
Distribution:
Deborah Slagle
Doug Braswell
Amanda Silver
Ashley Hoilman
Albert Kaylor
Graphic Design / Layout
Lynn Elliott
lynny@brcnews.com
Blue Ridge Christian News
152 Summit Ave.
Spruce Pine, NC 28777
Office – 828-765-6800

“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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Sunday Worship 10:55AM
GCBC Kids 5:30 PM
Wednesday Service 7:00 PM
Youth 7:00 PM
"That the world may know Christ"

Morganton Seventh-day Adventist Church

2187 Jamestown Road
Morganton, NC
828-584-8212

Pastor Steve Bietz

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

Altapass Baptist Church

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

Dr. Marcus R. Benfield

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

Plumtree Church

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

Pastor Ryan Bridgeo
pastor@plumtreechurch.com

Sunday School 9:45 am
Worship Service 10:30 am
Life Groups Tuesday-Thursday evenings, 7:00 pm
Healing Services 2nd Sunday of each month, 6:30 pm
John 15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

Pleasant Hill Baptist Church

2396 Enola Road
Morganton, NC 28655
(828) 437-4082
www.pleasanthillbc.church

**Senior Pastor
Dr. Jack Hodges**

Sunday School: 9:30 am
Sunday Worship: 10:30 am
Sunday Evening: 6:00 pm
Wednesday Evening 6:00 pm
"Love All, Reach All, Teach All, Send All"

Newland Christian Church

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

Pastor - Phillip Greene

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

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828-437-2357
www.burkemontbaptist.org

Sr. Pastor - Dr. Luke Lane

Sunday Services
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9:45a - Sunday School
11:00a - Worship
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www.sprucepinefbc.com
www.spfbc.blogspot.com

**Dr. Rocky Branch
Senior Pastor**

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Sunday Worship - 10:45 am
Sunday Evening - 6:00 pm
Wednesday Evening - 6:30 pm
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Pine Branch Baptist Church

48 Church Road
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www.pinebranchbaptist.org
Email: info@pinebranchbaptist.org

Rev. Bruce Cannon, Interim Pastor

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

Growing Together in Christ

Berry Chapel Baptist Church

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

Pastor - Steve Williams

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

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Spruce Pine United Methodist Church

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

Pastor Richard Schilling

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

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

Table Rock Seventh-day Adventist Church

3121 Adventist Circle
Morganton, NC 28655
828-584-4614
Email: tablerockchurch@gmail.com

Lay Pastor - Faye Acuff

Sabbath (Saturday)
Sabbath School - 9:30 a.m.
Worship Service - 11:00 a.m.
Plant-based Potluck Meal -
4th Saturday each month
Wednesday
Prayer Meeting - 6:00 p.m.

West Marion Baptist Church

365 Stroud St.
Marion, NC 28752
828-545-7159
www.WestMarionBC.com
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Pastor - Heath Ammons

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Landis Orthodox Presbyterian Church

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

Elder Mike Cloy
opcmmikecloy@gmail.com

Sunday School 10:00 AM
Worship Service 11:00 AM
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Obedient Heart Fellowship

Wrong Question

By Jim Huskins
McDowell County



One of the more enduring Christian fads is an implication of the question: What Would Jesus Do? W.W.J.D. appears in many formats, especially bracelets. During the years just before and after the turn of this century, those bracelets were everywhere.

I am in favor of believers aligning their lives more closely with that of the Son of God and communicating that intention. I question, however, any need to ponder how Jesus might respond to circumstance. Rather than speculating about what He might do, our time would be better spent learning what He has already done.

First, Jesus devoted Himself to implementing God's plan. His mission is clear: *"For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me."* (John 6:38) *"For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak."* (John 12:49) *"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done."* (Luke 22:42)

In a way that I do not fully understand, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are One. The Hebrew word for this unity is "echad." Despite being One, each of God's revealed forms has different roles. 1 Corinthians 11:3 says, *"But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God."* In the work of redeeming mankind, the Son is subordinate to the Father. Jesus did what He had been told.

A second focus of Jesus' life is His knowledge of Scripture. Of course this was less of a challenge for Him since He is divine, and He wrote the Book. Through a Spirit-fortified intimacy with God's Word, we are enabled to rebuke the demonic power which surrounds us. *"Man shall not live on bread alone but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."* (Matthew 4:4)

During His temptation, Jesus resisted the devil by quoting scripture. Many Christians believe and teach that the majority of God's Word is no longer relevant. They claim to be "new testament" believers and that "all that Law stuff" does not apply to them. Jesus demonstrated a radically different perspective. When confronted with the most significant temptations satan ever conveyed, Jesus responded three times by quoting the book of Deuteronomy. When accused by the Pharisees of "eating with sinners and tax collectors," He quoted Hosea 6:6, *"I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice."* (Matthew 9:10-13) Jesus said that the Law and the Prophets will be in undiminished effect for as long as heaven and earth remain. How can we who claim to follow Him ignore three-fourths of the Bible?

Jesus also devoted Himself to prayer. The Gospels contain many references to Messiah's prayer life. These include Matthew 14:23, Mark 6:46, Luke 3:21, and John 16:26. He prayed before many of His miracles. Luke 5:16 says that He often slipped away to the wilderness to pray. In Matthew 26:53, He affirmed the power of prayer by telling His disciples that He could ask the father for an army of angels. At the climax of His existential crisis, He fell on His face at Gethsemane and prayed for hours. While He was being slowly tortured to death, He prayed for those who tormented Him. Both Hebrews 7:25 and Romans 8:34 say that Jesus still prays on our behalf in His role as High Priest. One of the most powerful and least understood aspects of Jesus' prayer life is revealed in Hebrews 5:7, *"In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety."*

Here is the key to understanding both what Jesus did and what He expects us to be doing. His prayers were effective because of His piety. Piety is obedience to God's instructions for living. Piety is the opposite of sin. 1 John 3:4 says that sin is breaking God's Law. The only way to keep from sinning is to obey God's Law. He hears our prayers when we devote ourselves to living according to His holy standards.

The Bible tells us that Jesus is both our guide and example. He obeyed God's instructions for living, and so should we. Do not make the mistake of thinking that we love God and others by attempting to project nebulous "warm thoughts and feelings." Biblical love is not about feelings. Biblical love is about action. Do not be deceived by the false doctrines which claim that "grace" makes obedience unnecessary or that grace and Law are incompatible. See Revelation 14:12. Scripture teaches that our job is to live as Jesus lived among us. 1 John 2:3-4 says that the only evidence of a saving relationship with Jesus is our sincere attempt to keep His commandments. That passage goes on to say, *"Whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him. Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked."*

Religious graffiti will never convince anyone that we belong to the one who died for us. The only way to stand out from the members of this lost world is to live like Jesus lived. We never need to wonder what He might do. We have the powerful, unambiguous example of His life. The only legitimate question is, will we be imitators of Him, or will we decide that our own priorities are more important. Thank God that salvation is by grace through faith, but lives to which Holy God calls us are devoted to obedience.

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.

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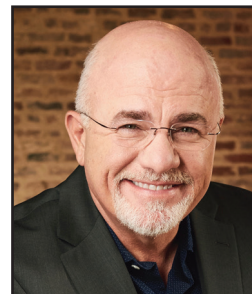
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By Dave Ramsey



Dear Dave,

I'm beginning to feel some bitterness and resentment towards my parents for their recent decisions and financial irresponsibility. Fifteen years ago, while I was still in school, they left good-paying jobs to enter the ministry. They both took pay cuts when they made this decision, and they've been regularly asking for money for living expenses from my husband and me ever since.

Sometimes, they even try to make us feel guilty if we can't give them the amount they ask for. My mom, especially, constantly brings up their call to the ministry, adding that we should want to help them. We believe in their calling, but we also feel they knew they would have to live on less money, and they're being irresponsible with the money they make. What should we do? Abigail

Dear Abigail,

What I'm hearing is giving money to your parents isn't necessarily a financial hardship for you and your husband, but that by consistently giving or loaning your parents money you're losing respect for them. This is not a healthy situation. Your relationship has become strained, and that's a tough thing for anyone to deal with—especially in a parent-child scenario.

Make no mistake, going into the ministry with the right heart is an admirable thing. However, in the Bible, Paul made tents while he conducted his ministry. I'm paraphrasing, of course, but his line was to the effect of, "If you don't work, you don't eat." He had a job. So, I don't think suggesting your folks think about working outside the ministry while trying to do God's work is unfair in a situation like this.

I'm sure your mom is a good person, but no one should do this to their child. On top of it all, she sounds like a travel agent for guilt trips—like she's working you over while implying it's all really for God. That's not only toxic, it's just plain wrong.

It's going to be hard to unravel it all and turn this into a respectable situation where they're not constantly asking for money, and you're not feeling pressure and falling victim to the guilty feelings that enable this behavior. I hope all of you will consider sitting down with a reasonable, objective third party and talking things through. I also hope you'll take some time to read a book called *Boundaries* by Dr. Henry Cloud. It will open your eyes to a few things.

God bless you and your family, Abigail. —Dave

Dear Dave,

I'm 32 and debt-free, except for my house. My grandmother passed away a couple of months ago, and her will has caused problems for my family. I was her only relative living in the same town as she got older, so I looked in on her and helped take care of her because she didn't want to go into a care facility. In her will, she left everything — her house and property, along with about \$300,000 — to me. Some of my relatives said they deserved something. Two have even accused me of wanting everything she had and turning my grandmother against them. I don't like what's happening, but I'm not sure what to do. I never asked her for anything. Jeffrey

Dear Jeffrey,

I hate it when things get ugly between family members, especially at a time when everyone should be pulling together and supporting each other. I'm sorry you're going through all this.

Let me ask you a question. Did you love your grandmother? It sounds to me like you did. A lot! It takes a special person to step in and help the way you did. I think it's pretty obvious she loved you, too.

When a person dies, they can give their belongings to anyone they choose. It was your grandmother's stuff, so it was her decision. Period. She could've spread it around among you and the rest of your family, but she didn't do that. She had her reasons, and her final wishes were just that—her final wishes. No one in your family, even you, deserved anything from her.

I know this is a hard position for you to be in, Jeffrey. This has probably crossed your mind, so I'll go ahead and say it. Generally speaking, it's possible to transfer part of your inheritance to someone else even if it's not specified in the will or trust. Keep in mind, that you might need to seek court approval for such a transfer, depending on the jurisdiction and specific family circumstances.

Or, you can let anyone who has a problem with your grandmother's decision contest the will. Of course, one possible outcome of that is you might have to spend the money she left fighting them in court. The lady left what she left. There's no more. It was her house, her property, and her money. The others aren't entitled to what she had just because they're relatives or they want it.

If you go to church, I'd advise you to spend some time talking to your pastor about the situation. You've got a lot of folks mad at you right now, and I think you might benefit from a few kind words and an objective point of view. I'd also recommend sitting down with a good financial planner—someone with the heart of a teacher—and talking about how to best handle your newfound inheritance. Regardless of your decision, it's always best to have a plan and be prepared.

In the meantime, don't beat yourself up over this, son. You haven't done anything wrong.

God bless you. —Dave

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

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What Jesus Left Behind

By Marlene Houk
Burke County



"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." John 14:27

Recently, after decades of lying in the shadows of obscurity, my cousin sent me an original family letter from over sixty years earlier. What a treasure to see the words! My older sister had written to my mom's sister-in-law, and her daughter had preserved the envelope, postmarked in 1963.

The letter confirmed what I had told my children about one of my childhood diseases and offered a birds-eye view of life when I was a pre-teen. How precious was that rediscovered letter? The words my mom had dictated to my fourteen-year-old sister (written in cursive) about family life, brought memories rushing back to my mind. I'm glad the letter returned to us because the words on lined notebook paper record my life and family culture, a valued relic from my past.

Often, in my spiritual life, earthly circumstances parallel spiritual analogies. When I understand how God is speaking to me through my life, I grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus (See 2 Peter 3:18.) As I thought about the reclaimed letter, I wondered about what Jesus left behind in His earthly life. While we find no proof of His writing—other than His writing in the sand (See John 8:8.)—He did leave us the Bible. Often, when a famous person dies, their possessions rise swiftly in value and significance. What tangible possessions and even invisible legacies such as influences did Jesus leave behind when He ascended to heaven? Let's consider a few.

Mary, Jesus' mother must have cherished any of His clothing and pieces He had fashioned as the earthly child of a carpenter. Perhaps she treasured his family cup from which he drank often, or maybe she tenderly stored the swaddling clothes from His birth. But, most of all, we know she kept His words and memories of her life-altering experiences. Although still a mystery to her, she remembered her amazing part in Jesus' earthly life. Luke 2:19 says, *"But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart."*

Along with Mary, we can ponder the things Jesus left for us. We have Jesus' letter to us, preserved in His Word. In the treasures of the Bible, we, like my family letter, find ourselves totally absorbed by looking into the mirror of the Scriptures. The divinely inspired words offer life in abundance, strength to live for the Lord, and the promise of eternal bliss in His presence.

Another treasure that Jesus left is the Holy Spirit. He bequeathed us His presence in the person of the Spirit. A myriad of books have enumerated the vast legacy of His gifts, and His multiple purposes in our lives which include:

- Guaranteeing us eternal life with Jesus (2 Corinthians 1:21-22)
- Teaching us in the things of the Lord (John 14:26)
- Giving us the words to say to introduce others to Christ (Matthew 10:19-20)
- Gifting us with practical abilities to help other Christians (Romans 12:6-8)
- And many other gifts that will keep us occupied until we meet Jesus (Ephesians 2:7)

Rather than taking us home to heaven immediately when we accept Him as Savior, Jesus allows us to continue living our earthly lives. However, our new lives as Christians are transfused with the light of Jesus, and our new focus on Him shines out to others. As Christians, we can help others come to Jesus and then disciple and minister to others, both believers and nonbelievers.

To help us, Jesus instituted the church as a rich resource for Christians to refresh themselves along their earthly journey. He also imbued His church with a structure to encourage, teach, and extend the Kingdom of God.

The above sample list of treasures Jesus left behind—His Word, the Holy Spirit, other Christians, and the church—becomes more and more precious to us as we journey toward heaven. Like my family's letter, the spiritual value of Jesus' legacy to us as Christians rises to incredible significance in our daily lives. We join with Mary, Jesus' mother, in treasuring the resplendent inheritance Jesus left behind when He ascended to heaven after His resurrection.

Like the letter from my past that delighted me with every word, I exult in every word of Jesus, preserved in the Bible. My worthy goal of being a Christian focuses on having the mind of Christ. He left heaven to turn us from darkness to light and let Himself be known to us (See Acts 26:18.) I'm grateful Jesus loved me first before I turned to Him. He made me significant in His sight enough to die for me and be resurrected so that I could live with Him eternally. This is hope!

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



Trust the Slow Work of God

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



Following my article from last month which began to follow Paul's Mediterranean Sea journey to Rome, this article is a followup to last month's. After Paul had completed two successful missionary journeys, Luke gives an account in Acts 21-28 (and specifically in Chapters 27-28) of Paul's trials and faith on display during his final journey to Rome. This story is a compelling story of faith amid adversity. It is the story of Paul's Mediterranean Sea journey to Rome. He was sent as a prisoner of Rome from Caesarea in Israel to Rome to stand trial before the higher courts of Rome. Though a Jew, Paul was a Roman citizen and he had the right and privilege, as a Roman citizen during a provincial trial, to "appeal to Caesar." Festus, the Roman procurator at Caesarea, granted that appeal and sent him under guard by an Augustan cohort named Julius to be delivered to Rome. They were placed aboard an Adramyttian ship and set sail for the regions along the coast of Asia. During this difficult voyage, Paul would continue to find God's promises, guidance, and provisions along each step of the Journey. That is, indeed, what the Lord desires for us to glean from these important set of lessons or Med Sea Rules. Today, consider a second Med Sea rule: Trust the slow work of God.

The great New England preacher, Phillips Brooks, was noted for his poise and quiet manner. At times, however, even he suffered moments of frustration and irritability. One day a friend saw him feverishly pacing the floor like a caged lion. "What's the trouble, Mr. Brooks?" he asked. "The trouble is that I'm in a hurry, but God isn't!"

History bears out the fact that some of the greatest missionaries of all time devotedly spread the seed of God's Word and yet had to wait long periods before seeing the fruit of their efforts. William Carey, for example, labored 7 years before the first Hindu convert was brought to Christ in Burma. Adoniram Judson toiled 7 years before his faithful preaching was rewarded. In Western Africa, it was 14 years before one convert was received into the Christian church. In New Zealand, it took 9 years; and in Tahiti, it was 16 years before the first harvest of souls began.

James, the half-brother of Jesus who did not accept the claims of Jesus until He appeared to him after the resurrection and who joined others in waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, would write in James 1:2-6, *"Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind."*

As Paul embarked on this "next" part of his "God journey"—a difficult journey that would take him on a long voyage to face the imperial power of Rome, He did so with courage and faith. He did so, knowing that the Lord would guide him and protect him. He did so, realizing that he still had much to learn from God and about God and His goodness. Paul didn't have any idea how long nor what would or could happen along the way. But the one thing that he knew was that his Savior and Lord would walk along with him. And because the Lord was with him, he could trust the slow work of the Lord in his life.

Paul trusted the slow work of God because:

1. God knows what He is doing! God had a plan and a purpose when He placed Paul on that cargo ship. Packed into the ship, Paul and the other prisoners set sail, traveling northward up the coast of Israel. Their first port was Sidon. Paul had friends in Sidon and the Roman cohort, Julius, under whose care he had been entrusted, allowed Paul to disembark and visit his friends for comfort and care. There were some brothers and sisters in Sidon who needed a visit from Paul much more than he needed their care. Don't miss this! God interrupted the voyage to attend to specific needs. Don't you think God knows what He is doing when He interrupts your day and gives you a specific and intentional opportunity to pause, stop what you are doing, and attend to what God needs? Paul could have said, "I'll just stay on the boat. I have an appointment and I don't want to be late." But that's not what he did! And what Paul did is exactly what the Lord Jesus expects that His disciples are going to do. What is that? Trust that God knows what He is doing when trials and temptations come; when interruptions occur; and when God shows you need and opportunities. Here is what you do—get off the boat! Get out of your house and off your pew and get going toward God's specific sending.
2. He cares for you!—The Lord knows what's ahead! And He always prepares for whatever obstacles are in the way. He desires that, like Paul, every one of His children of faith (disciples) will trust His divine plans and Sovereign power to accomplish those plans. He cares for you! As Paul boarded the ship again (v. 4), the ship *"sailed under the shelter of Cyprus because the winds were contrary."* The Lord knows your every need. He knows your struggles and temptations. He knows your heart, mind, and soul. And He is working to bring you under the shelter of His wings. The Psalmist wrote often about taking refuge in the shelter of God's wings (as in Ps. 61:4). He is, of course, referring to the strong arms and strong hands of Almighty God—who has all things under His Sovereign reign and care. His dominion is everlasting and even the storms of life are at His command. Storms are going to come! Will you trust in His care—for He cares for you, as Peter wrote *"casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you."* (1 Peter 5:7)
3. He knows the destination!—When the ship weathered the storm, it continued

continued on page 12

Stay Clean

By Kurt Bomar
Avery County



One of the greatest Kings of Israel was Hezekiah. When he came to power the country was in shambles. His father, Ahaz, had allowed the country to be defeated militarily, economically, and spiritually. He even sacrificed his own small children by fire, to the false god, Molech. Hezekiah, however, had the heart of David, totally devoted to the Lord. His first job was to clean up the Temple, which had been polluted.

2 Chron. 29:4-6 *"He brought in the priests and the Levites, assembled them in the square on the east side 5 and said: "Listen to me, Levites! Consecrate yourselves now and consecrate the temple of the LORD, the God of your ancestors. Remove all defilement from the sanctuary. 6 Our parents were unfaithful; they did evil in the eyes of the LORD our God and forsook him."*

It seems this need for a cleansing process repeats itself not only in history, but we see examples of it in the animal kingdom.

Rats and mice, even though we think of them as dirty, spend most of their waking hours grooming themselves and are surprisingly clean. If you watch your household cat or dog, you will see that they too spend a lot of time just staying clean. The gecko lizards in the desert in the SW part of our country are interesting because they don't have eyelids (despite the GEICO commercials). Yet they live in a place with lots of dirt and sand. So how do they stay clean? God gave them a really long tongue which they actually use to clean their eyes.

So what can we learn from the animals? We too should have an innate desire to be clean.

Yet when it comes to the heart of man, we allow corruption and pollution to affect us internally (much like the Temple above). Therefore our cleansing needs to be carried out daily. How? If we confess our sins, *"He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to purify us from all unrighteousness."* (1 John 1:9)

How often should we do this? Just think of your cat and do it every day. We can't avoid the pollution of this world that sticks to us daily. But we can still stay clean daily (or even moment by moment when prompted by the Holy Spirit) confessing our sins before the Lord. Think of it as that nice feeling you get after taking a refreshing cool shower after a hot sticky August day.

He's waiting to hear from you.

Selah, (think about it)

Kurt Bomar is the Asst. Pastor of Walnut Grove Church.

Lessons From an Assassin's Bullet

By Dr. Adam Dooley



In the aftermath of the attempted assassination of former President Donald Trump, Americans are left wanting answers surrounding the tragedy. One brave father present at the rally, Corey Comperatore, died protecting his family from a stray bullet. Two other attendees, James Copenhaver and David Dutch, suffered critical injuries but are now recovering in stable condition.

The near miss on President Trump was nothing less than breathtaking. Had the Republican nominee not turned his head at precisely the correct moment, the sniper's murderous intent would have been realized. Had the position of the bullet been just one inch to the right, the course of American history would have changed forever in a Pennsylvania field. One cannot come closer to death and emerge unscathed.

While we commend the brave men and women who shielded the president amidst the chaos, questions about the ordeal remain. How was a building just 130 yards from the rally's stage left unsecured? Why was our 45th president allowed to begin his speech while a twenty-year-old killer was simultaneously evading authorities? How could witnesses identify the shooter on the roof a full two minutes before his first shot and nothing be done? Why were there no countermeasures before the assassin's first shot fired?

Hopefully, in time, we will have answers to questions like these to hold those responsible for such deadly blunders accountable. While we wait, I'd like to answer a question of a different sort that, admittedly, not as many people are asking. What spiritual lessons should we learn from the near death of Donald J. Trump? What does the incident teach us about ourselves? Or about the God we serve? Let me suggest three important takeaways.

First, the former president's near demise exposes how fragile we are. Though every human is made in the image of God, possessing an eternal soul, each of us is but a single catastrophe away from passing into eternity. Because the treasure of God's imprint is in earthen vessels, everyday men and women of all ages die (2 Cor. 4:7). Despite the great feats of humanity, the Bible says we spring up like a flower and wither away like a fleeting shadow (Job 14:1-2). The number of our days is but a handbreadth, a mere blip on God's eternal radar (Ps. 39:3-5). Truly, we are here for a moment and then we vanish away (James 4:14).

The events of last weekend were an unwelcomed reminder of how quickly we can, and will, lose everything. Life can end in an instant. History can change in a moment. The disease may ravage our bodies. The decline may swallow up our achievements. The design of others may steal away the time we have left. Every single day, weakness swallows up those who were once strong. These realities do not leave us hopeless, however. Our temporary frailties reveal the eternal strength of our God like nothing else (2 Cor. 4:8-11).

Second, the miraculous intervention that saved Donald Trump's life reminds us that God is sovereign over all things. Some might chalk it up to luck or random chance, but you will never convince me that God did not spare the life of Donald Trump on July 13. God's sovereignty speaks to the fact that He rules over heaven and earth. The Lord has established His throne and He rules over all (Ps. 103:19), including human history (Ps. 66:5-7). We exist because of God's providential care, whereby He creates us, establishes our boundaries, and sustains each breath we take (Acts 17:26-28).

Thus, we can live with confidence that the God who knew us in the womb has written down all the days prepared for us (Psalm 139:16). We cannot add nor take away one moment He prepares for each of us (Job 14:5). Our ways are before Him, and He watches all our paths (Prov. 5:21). I do not pretend to understand all the reasons why God spared the life of President Trump, but I am confident that He will bring it to pass just as He has planned. The same is true for each of us. Finally, our greatest problems are not political, nor are the solutions our world needs. The wickedness required to eliminate your political enemies using assassination is undeniable. Ironically, even those typically hesitant to speak of matters in terms of right and wrong cannot deny the moral repugnancy of last weekend's cowardly act. Only God can help us find our way again. Politics are not insignificant, but neither are they ultimate.

Perhaps this is the moment we need to humble ourselves before the Lord. May we heed the counsel of the psalmist who said, *"Let all the earth fear the Lord; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. The Lord nullifies the counsel of the nations; He frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel of the Lord stands forever; The plans of His heart from generation to generation. Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord, The people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance."* (Ps. 33:8-12).

Dr. Adam B. Dooley is pastor of Englewood Baptist Church in Jackson, TN, and author of *Hope When Life Unravels*. Contact him at adooley@ebcjackson.org. Follow him on Twitter @AdamBDooley.



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By Tammy Hopson
Mitchell County



He must have been a scary man. Maybe even the most feared man around. His reputation preceded him and it wasn't a good one. He was known to be relentless and brutal as he pulled people from their homes and cast them into prison just for being a follower of Jesus. He rejoiced in the death of Christians. There is no doubt that Saul was a dangerous and unlovable man.

But Jesus loved him. And so He sent a man named Ananias on an errand. 'Go help him, Ananias. He is waiting for you.' Ananias loved the Lord and was willing to do anything for Him. But this? This man? Ananias knew he could be arrested and killed so naturally he questions his task. "(But) Lord, I have heard about this man and the harm he has done to your people."

Jesus just replies "Go. I have chosen him." Oh, how hard this must have been for Ananias after knowing all that Saul had done. But he goes anyway and when he finds Saul he reaches out to him in love and calls him brother! He prays for Saul and Saul's life is changed. The Lord then completes the work He had for Saul. He is renamed to Paul and God used him to evangelize the world.

Nothing more is said about Ananias. Nowhere else in scripture do we see this man mentioned, but what a remarkable thing he did! He obeyed the Lord's request and went and loved the unlovable! He was the tool the Lord used to answer the prayer of Saul.

Recently the Lord called me to do the same thing. God gave me the same errand. Oh, it wasn't like the experience of Ananias. It was not life threatening at all but it was still hard. God put it on my heart to reach out to someone (in a very small way) who is usually abrasive and unkind. My task was to bring a small gift just as a random act of kindness. I had no idea how this person would receive it. They could decline it, be angry about it, or just not say anything at all. All of those reactions could certainly hurt my feelings. In my heart I questioned it. "But God? Why her?" In His gentle whisper, the Lord just answered back "Go".

And so I took her a gift. To my surprise, she did not decline it! And her face lit up! There were no sharp words, no edginess but only a genuine thankfulness and a big smile. A softness came over her that I had not seen before. I was so surprised! Afterward, I could not stop thinking about her reaction. God's message in my heart was so loud and clear. Love the unlovable. While my fleshly instinct is to avoid harsh people, God says "Go." What a difference it can make to someone! What a tiny difference it made in her!

Through Ananias Saul's prayers were answered and he went on to know the Lord and change the world. My small act of love will not change the world but it could lead someone to Jesus. Only God knows the reason why He sends us on those errands. Only He knows what the true outcome will be. But oh how wonderful it is to see the change it makes even for just a moment!

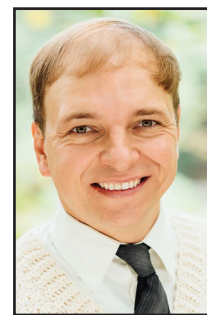
Let's do this together! Let's continue to love the unlovable for when we do we just might be the tool that God uses to answer the prayer of another. After the conversion of Saul, the scriptures say in Acts Chapter 9 that the church had peace and was strengthened, that it was encouraged by the Holy Spirit and it increased in numbers. I am sure today as I write this that the church of our generation will also be strengthened and increase if we too will love the unlovable.

Now that's encouraging!

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. tammyllynnhopson@gmail.com

"Are All Prophets?"

By Art Dmytriyeu
Yancey County



The Bible tells us in 1 Corinthians 12:28 (KJV): "... God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." The first, second, and third categories are apostles, prophets, and teachers. Have you ever wondered why it is like this? It might be a subject for another time, but now let us turn our attention to the prophecy as a gift of the Holy Spirit.

The gift of prophecy is given by God for building up His church and the common good of all. This gift is given by the Holy Spirit. Just like all the spiritual gifts we can be given, the gift of prophecy is relevant and important for this current time. Having the gift of prophecy means a person receives messages or insight from God. It does not change who a person is.

Have you ever wondered if you or someone else you know has this gift? Perhaps, identifying it may be a challenge. Here are several Bible-based suggestions to test the true gift of prophecy.

First, it always goes along with the Bible. "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them." (Isaiah 8:20 KJV).

Second, this gift uplifts Jesus Christ as the Savior and Redeemer who became flesh and dwelled among us (John 1:14). In Revelation 19:10 (KJV), it states: "... for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

Third, true prophets always practice what they preach. "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits." (Matthew 7:15-16 KJV).

Fourth, anyone with the prophetic gift always glorifies God! "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you." (John 16:13-14 KJV).

Finally, all prophecy about the future comes to pass as proof of the genuineness of the gift! "The prophet which prophesieth of peace, when the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the LORD hath truly sent him." (Jeremiah 28:9 KJV).

One of the most prominent co-founders of the Seventh-day Adventist church, Ellen G. White, demonstrated the gift of prophecy and also met the criteria of the above tests of a prophet. The book Great Controversy by this author has stood the test of time and brought many souls to the Saviour. (You may download it here for free: <https://greatcontroversyproject.org/>). Here's a sample quote from this book: "In His word, God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience." (Page vii.1).

Dear reader, please delay no longer! Pray to the Father now about the Gift of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps, you already have it, then use it to God's glory and for His Kingdom! May the Lord Bless You!

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



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Lampstands

By John McCoury
Roan Mountain, Tennessee

“Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now, and what will take place later. The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.” Rev 1:19-20

In Chapters 2-3 we have remarkable letters to the seven churches. Many people would like to skip these letters and get on into the juicier sections of Revelation where the great upheavals of the last days are interpreted. It is a great mistake to do that. Our Lord set his church amid the world and it is his instrument to control and determine human history. The church is expected to exert tremendous influence in the world's affairs. It is a mistake to pass over these letters. Here we see our Lord correcting things within the church, encouraging and teaching it how to live influentially in the day in which it is called to live. As we come to these letters we must ask ourselves: Why are there only seven churches, and why these particular seven? The only good answer is they represent conditions that will exist throughout the whole period of church history from its beginning to its end. In other words, there are only seven types of churches that exist at any one given period. Here these churches are called lampstands. They are not the light themselves, but they hold or bear the light. The light is the truth as it is in Jesus. Many truths are unknown to man in his natural state. No university, important as it may be, has knowledge of the truth which the church is given to tell the world. That is the moral and redemptive light that the church is called to reflect to a dark world. It is the business of the church to tell the truth to the world. We are not simply to make our way through this difficult world as best we can, coming together in little holy huddles to survive until the coming of the Lord. We have an influence to exercise, and these letters to the seven churches marvelously reflect that fact. Each letter is addressed to the angel of the church. Some have seen this as a reference to the pastor of the church. That is not likely, since in all the churches of the New Testament you never find a single human leader. Leadership is always in the plural — elders and pastors of churches. The word angel appears many times in the book outside these seven letters, and in every case, it refers to a heavenly being — what we normally think of as an angel. It suggests that each church has a heavenly being responsible for it. The angel of the church is the one responsible for helping the human leaders of the church to know the mind of the Lord. In Hebrews, we are told that angels are ministering spirits, sent forth to serve the heirs of salvation (Hebrews 1:14 KJV). It seems likely that in those invisible realms, which are very real but which we cannot see, there are angels assigned to each church to help the leaders and the congregation know what is on the heart of its Lord. Lord, you are the light of the world, and I pray that the church today might reflect your light to a dark and weary world. Amen. In what ways do you see the church being the moral and redemptive light in the world today? How can we do better?

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



By Terry Cheek Th.D.
McDowell County



The book of Romans has many divisions, the first one deals with the doctrine of the gospel, found in chapters 1-8. These chapters comprise three themes: sin, salvation, and sanctification.

We will have a great deal of trouble finding chapters inside our Bible that deal as devastatingly with sin as the opening chapters of Romans do. From Romans, we can envision a courtroom where the heathen, the hypocrite, and the Hebrew are brought. Each will be found guilty before God. But Romans doesn't stop there, we find humanity at large being arraigned and exposed to a summary of God's case against humanity. Paul begins with God's indictment of the heathen. For this article heathen is used to describe the unbeliever. Romans 1:19-32 is a survey of the causes and consequences of heathenism. It is here revealed there is not only crude paganism which is an unashamed worship by man of graven images. There is also cultured paganism which is a worship by man of his godless imagination. Paul introduces us to three downward steps into paganism. The first is a deliberate rejection of the truth. The second is wicked beliefs of either a rationalistic or religious nature. These two lead to the third one which can be called sinful behavior.

We begin with verses eighteen, nineteen, and twenty. Where we read, Romans 1:18-20 *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; (19) Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. (20) For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.”*

As we look at this passage Paul opens with the wrath of God being revealed. Wrath is one of those words that grab your attention as soon as you hear it. Thayer defines Wrath as “The ὀργή attributed to God in the N. T. is that in God which stands opposed to man's disobedience, obduracy (especially in resisting the gospel) and sin and manifests itself in punishing the same: John 3:36; Rom. 1:18; 4:15; 9:22a; Heb. 3:11; 4:3; Rev. 14:10; 16:19; 19:15; absolutely.” Humanity has created for itself an artificial and imaginary comfort zone. We often live as if we can impress God by showing that I am not as bad as so-N-so! Paul tells us that all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men draw the wrath of God. This knowledge should terrify us. Verse nineteen describes our awareness of God and everything that may be known of God. It is inside us; God has shown it to us. Even the invisible things from creation. I like to think of it as we all have a spiritual DNA. We know God exists in three persons. We know we are sinners being separated from God from the fall of man and suffering from our depravity. We know that Jesus Christ came to save his elect, the church, and that if called by the Holy Spirit to repent, then upon our submission to this call will be redeemed from God's wrath. Notice from verse twenty that even creation understands wrath and redemption. How sinfully twisted is humanity that we will believe we are somehow on a level above any of God's other acts of creation? We are all without excuse. Paul does an excellent job of describing the condition of the human soul. Regardless of whether we are Hebrew, Heathen, or Hypocrite. We all will face God on his terms, and nobody will have an excuse. I want to encourage you to take time over the next few days, weeks, or even the month ahead to examine yourself under the microscope of scripture and the Holy Spirit. Until we meet again in print or person may God bless you is my prayer.

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



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The Parking Space

By Faye Acuff
Burke County

“But love ye your enemies, and do good . . . and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.”

Luke 6:35 & 36 (KJV)

I was hot, tired, hurt, and frustrated. Earlier in the day I had been viciously attacked and betrayed by someone I loved dearly. I hadn't done what I was accused of but getting things straightened out would take time and money – both of which I was short on. And now I was on my way to yet another of many doctor's appointments. It was a hard day . . .

I pulled into the parking lot and right in front of the door was the perfect parking spot. At least one thing was going my way. As I eased toward “my” parking place another car slipped into the spot. It was very obvious that I was headed for that spot and I was irritated by the nerve of the rude driver! How dare this individual steal “my” spot. I stopped and glared at the woman in the driver's seat. After making sure she saw my displeasure I drove to another parking spot much further from the door of the doctor's office.

As I got out of the car I saw the same woman walking toward me in the parking lot. I prepared myself for a verbal assault and mentally planned my response. And then she spoke. “I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to get your parking place. I'll move my car, and you can park there. It's just that my arthritis hurts me so badly, and when I saw that spot, I just went for it before I realized you were headed for the same place.”

Standing in that hot parking lot I realized I had misread this woman's intentions. I knew that this stranger was showing me more of the love of Jesus than I had offered her. And I was ashamed. I quietly asked her to forgive my bad attitude and told her to leave her car right where it was. I thanked her for her kindness and apologized again.

There in that parking lot, I had a change of heart. God reminded me not to judge another's motives, and He taught me a lesson of love, mercy, humility, and forgiveness – a lesson we would all do well to remember.

Faye Acuff serves as the lay pastor for the Table Rock SDA Church.



Disney World No Competition for Camp BAM!

By Carol Layton, NCBAM Director of Communications

Aubrey's eyes shone with determination as she told her mom, “Make sure our Disney trip is not the week of Camp BAM. I will not miss that!” A rising high school senior, this was Aubrey's 4th Camp BAM as part of “IMPACT Community Youth” – a unique group comprised of church and unchurched teens from Stanly and Rowan counties.

Juan, another camper from IMPACT, was just as determined not to miss Camp BAM 2024. He worked his required 30 hours at Food Lion in just three days in order not to miss a single day of his third Camp BAM.

The zeal of these young campers may lead you to think Camp BAM is packed with thrilling adventures like ziplining, kayaking, and evenings around a campfire. While campers are offered pool time each evening, their days start early with breakfast at 7:30, morning devotions, and arriving at their work sites by nine o'clock sharp.

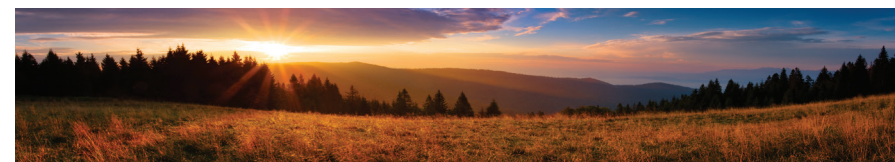
The fourth annual Camp BAM took place June 19-23 on the Mills Home Campus of Baptist Children's Homes (BCH). Hosted by North Carolina Baptist Aging Ministry, (NCBAM), this intergenerational camp allows volunteers to serve aging adults by building wheelchair ramps, installing smoke alarms, and completing other projects. Thirty-eight campers from IMPACT and 11 from FBC Concord participated. They constructed five wheelchair ramps; installed two handrails; mowed, trimmed, and cleaned three yards; moved two tons of durable medical equipment; and served four BCH ministries.

IMPACT volunteers Billy and Monica Talbert have attended Camp BAM each year. Interacting with the kids in care at Baptist Children's Homes was a highlight for Monica. “I love how these kids grew over four days. They learned new strengths, how to work as a team, and how to come out of their shells. They used tools that some of them had never laid eyes on. They built new friendships, gained confidence, and taught me things as well!”

NCBAM's Austin Decker (north central regional director) returned as camp director for the second year. “Camp BAM is about more than fun, although we have a ton of that! These teenagers and adults get to see the impact they can have, build friendships, and grow closer to Jesus. It's powerful!”



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



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to sail on, reaching the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia, and landed at the city of Myra in Lycia. From there, they boarded an Alexandrian ship sailing for Italy. They continued on their journey with the destination in mind. Our God has an eternal destination in mind for you! Despite the storms, or despite the obstacles, and contrary to the lies of Satan and evil and fallen mankind, our faithful, good, God has a wonderful and fool-proof plan to deliver you and me into His eternal presence. His name is Jesus!

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

By Andrew Goins
Watauga County



The Bible is a stage crammed with complex characters whose actions are motivated by desires and dreams, hopes and hurts, expectations, and miscommunications. The Bible is a stage stuffed with stories that are coarse and crude, eloquent and beautiful.

Abraham, motivated by paralyzing fear, gave his wife away to another man to save his own skin—twice. Laughing Sarah exiles Hagar out of cruel jealousy for her husband’s attention, affection, and heart. Jacob and Esau scramble and tussle to earn their father’s favor; the actions of both brothers drip with the desire to hear Isaac say “My son, I am proud of you, I love you.” Potipher’s wife, driven mad with frustrated desire, has Joseph wrongfully condemned “to the pit”. And all this takes place in the bible’s first book.

The Bible sets the table, inviting us to inhabit the world we live in. The Bible is a bad host; it does not sweep the dirt under the rug or stuff the clutter into the closet. It tells the dirty truth about living life on earth: murder, rape, fear, political injustice, national tension, racism and prejudice.

The Bible is earthy and “dirty” but the Bible also reveals the stuff of heaven, the stuff we long to be true yet cannot prove to be true; the stuff we cannot taste, touch, or feel; the stuff we cannot comprehend through reason or logic; the stuff that we can only apprehend through metaphor and myth, through legend and imagination.

C.S. Lewis writes “The heart of Christianity is a myth which is also a fact. The old myth of the Dying God, without ceasing to be myth, comes down from the heaven of legend and imagination to the earth of history...by becoming fact it does not cease to be myth: that is the miracle.”

The Bible uses the vehicle of myth to subvert our expectations, confound our cynicism, and communicate what could have never been predicted—God assuming 46 chromosomes and ignorance, wrapping himself in an amniotic sac and flesh, suffering hunger and “middle school”, receiving splinters and mothering lectures, stubbing his big toe and hitting his funny bone. All of this is the stuff of myth, the stuff of legend, and the stuff that descends from heaven and unfolds in history as fact.

For too long the church has attempted to tidy up the bible, sweeping the dust under the rug and stuffing the clutter into the closet. This is partly because we don’t know what to do with the “dirty stuff”. Is Samson a good guy or a bad guy? Is Solomon a good guy or a bad guy? Samson and Solomon are easy compared to addressing Israel’s slavery and attempted genocide. Here is the problem that arises when we fail to address these parts of the bible: when we mute the bible’s complex and crude stories we inevitably mute the bible’s myth that materializes in Jesus Christ, and therefore mute the breadth of redemption. We must hold together the crude stories with the eloquent myth so that we can know the breadth of God’s redemption through Jesus Christ.

Historically, the church has used the clearer parts of scripture to interpret the more opaque (hazy) parts of scripture. The gospels (which tell the gospel) are considered to be the most clear parts of scripture; they tell the story of Jesus, who is the bible’s living center, the Word of God incarnate. For example, how do we use the gospel to interpret God’s one-time command to commit genocide?

It is not simple. We must know that these crude stories are complex. We must read, teach, and preach these stories in a way that acknowledges their complexity. If we don’t, we run the terrible risk of oversimplification which is often disguised as sophistication. Remember, God will speak in these stories, not because of your sophisticated bible-reading or ingenious interpretation, but through the power of his Spirit. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 2:9-10 “*What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived*”—the things God has prepared for those who love him—these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.” Neither common sense nor brilliance is sufficient to understand these stories. We need the Spirit of God to illuminate and reveal the story’s substance, and content. When we know that God will speak, despite our brilliance, we can say “I don’t know...but look to Jesus!”

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

Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:16



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Mt. Carmel Baptist Church

The Obedience of Faith

By Toby Crowder
Mitchell County

Gen 22:9 "And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood."

Sacrifice... what comes to mind when we hear that term? Many of us will automatically think of our great country and the sacrifice of so many for the freedom that we enjoy today. Others will likely think of the Bible, and perhaps the example of God's love for mankind in sending His Son to be the sacrifice for our sin. Regardless of what immediately comes to mind, the idea of sacrifice usually involves the giving of something, at a great cost to the giver. If you were to look at the Merriam-Webster definition of sacrifice, you would find that it is described as: "an act of offering to a deity something precious." Scripture affords us a great example of this in the account of Abraham's sacrifice in Genesis 22.

I hope that you will take time to at least read verses 1-14, of this remarkable chapter which gives an account of Abraham's journey. We are told in verse one, that the Lord chose to tempt Abraham. The Hebrew word used means "to test or to try." We might say that the Lord chose to "put Abraham to the test." Of course, we have all been tested, with various things, but not to this extent. Some tests are major, some are minor and the consequences range in severity. Perhaps God has "tested" you to try your faith. This chapter is also interesting in that we see several "firsts" in Scripture. Notice the following list of terms, that are mentioned for the very first time in Scripture: Tempt (v.1), Lovest (v.2), Offer (v. 2), Worship (v. 5), Lamb (v. 7.) It certainly becomes evident to us that Abrahams sacrifice was an act of worship!

In this chapter, we see Abraham, a man of faith, doing what seems impossible, but we must also remember the words of Luke 1:37 "For with God nothing shall be impossible." In this story, we are shown something of the nature and character of Abraham. The Lord called Him, and he did not run, hide, or quit. Abraham did not ask for a substitute or ask God to look elsewhere. We know that Abraham obeyed God, but we are not told of his internal struggle to obey...surely it was a heart-wrenching thought to sacrifice his beloved son! Warren Weirsbe has said: "Our faith is not really tested until God asks us to bear what seems to be unbearable, do what seems unreasonable, and expect what seems impossible." What was the basis of Abraham's unwavering obedience? His faith was based on a sincere desire to worship God. This is what he told his companions in v.5 "... I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." Abraham's act of obedience didn't only affect himself, but his people. Not only was Isaac his son, but he was also the heir that was promised. God's covenant with Abram in Gen 15 declared that his descendants would be innumerable. So not only was Abraham sacrificing his son, but also seemingly the promises to his people.

Why did God ask Abraham for his son? Abraham LOVED Isaac, and as his father, he would have been willing to be the sacrifice in his place. But God did not necessarily want Isaac; God wanted more of Abraham! God will often use the things closest to us to try and test our faith. Abraham knew that his worship was going to cost him something, and this worship caused Abraham to surrender both himself and his son. In faith he trusted God as he took his son... the wood... the knife... and the fire and started towards Mt. Moriah. There, Abraham learned in a very real way, that that God would provide for all his needs because Abraham was exactly where God wanted him. Moriah means "chosen by Jehovah" but Abraham called this particular place Jehovah Jireh in v. 14... which means "the Lord will provide." If Abraham had not gone through this, he would not have known God as "Jehovah Jireh." Are we willing to worship through obedience and faith in God's abundant supply?

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



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

Crossword Solution

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R	E	V	E	N	G	E	D		G	R	E	C	I	A
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Foundation Forward

Daniel Boone

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.

Squire and Sarah Boone came to America from England for religious freedom. Their son, Daniel, was born in Pennsylvania on November 2, 1734, and grew up in the Oley Township of Philadelphia. Daniel received a basic education while exploring the local backwoods. These experiences honed the skills that would serve him well as an explorer and a soldier.

Due to religious differences with other parishioners, the Boones moved to North Carolina when Daniel was about 15. During his youth, Daniel discovered that being a long hunter was his forté. Over the years, he went on adventures that had mixed outcomes.

Though others had preceded Boone in exploring the territory of Kentucky, he was the first to find a shortcut using the Cumberland Gap. In the early 1770s, Boone led others to Kentucky on a hunting expedition. It was a fruitful expedition in terms of documenting much about the regions of Kentucky and Tennessee. In 1773, Boone led settlers to Kentucky. During the trip, the group was attacked by Indians. "Two of the party, including Boone's son James, were captured, tortured, and murdered, whereupon the survivors turned back."

In 1775, Boone was commissioned as a captain in the Virginia militia due to his frontier skills and leadership abilities. The Transylvania Purchase of 1775 authorized Boone to explore the Cumberland Gap in Kentucky, and a small base camp became known as Boonesborough. Settlers soon followed to escape the violence of the Revolutionary War. Unfortunately, battles continued in the new land; as Native Americans had sold or given away their land, violent conflicts emerged between them and colonists over the issue of establishing settlements.

An unexpected event at Boonesborough happened on April 24, 1777. Two men who were getting their horses were assaulted just outside the garrison gate by several Shawnees. One colonist was killed and scalped, while the other escaped. Following this, several settlers, including Boone, encountered 50 Shawnee. During this clash, Boone was shot in the foot. As his attacker was about to give Boone a last blow, the assailant was shot and killed by another colonist.

In January 1778, Boone led an expedition of 30 men from Boonesborough to find salt for curing food. While hunting at Licking River, Boone was captured and taken to Shawnee Chief Blackfish. Instead of fighting back, Boone and his men surrendered to the Shawnee on February 8, 1778.

Taken to Chillicothe, Ohio, they were made to run the Shawnee's gauntlet. Boone and his group, who demonstrated bravery and endurance, were adopted by the tribe. Boone and the others gained the Indians' confidence by taking on assigned duties. Boone was to repair the Shawnees' muskets. Unbeknownst to his men, Boone sabotaged the rifles. During this time, Boone could not tell his group that the repairs were a way to defeat the Shawnee and save Boonesborough.

While with a hunting party of his captors, Boone escaped and returned to Boonesborough and learned his family had returned to North Carolina, believing he was dead. Soon thereafter, Boone's life would change as he could have never imagined.

Though Boone's actions saved Boonesborough and its residents, he was charged with treason. Colonel Callaway and Captain Logan filed the charges. They claimed Boone acted illegally by surrendering and plotting with the Indians and British. The officers also envied his increasing fame, which overshadowed them. A court-martial would revoke Boone's commission and ruin his reputation. Military officers were the judges and jurors. Callaway presented the charges, and Boone defended himself. The court-martial quickly ended with Boone being acquitted because of his testimony about his strategy while in captivity. Because of Boone's leadership and tactical actions, the court promoted him to a major. Boone's popularity came from various media sources. Boone, a noble patriotic frontiersman, was vital in forming America. Over the years, Boone was also a sage, statesman, and sheriff. Additionally, Boone was a soldier reaching the rank of colonel. Boone died at Defiance, MO, on September 26, 1820; unfortunately, his final resting site is unsure.

Daniel Boone has many landmarks and towns named in his honor, most notably Boone, NC.

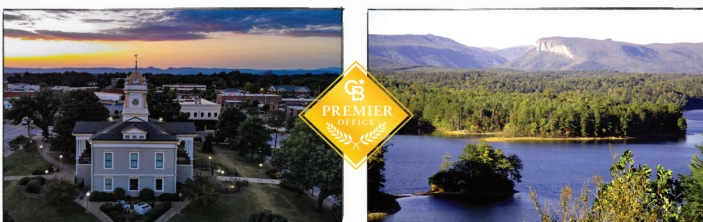
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Dr. David Streater is the director of education for Foundation Forward. He is a retired college instructor and administrator, and a retired probation and parole officer/administrator. David is a criminologist who has an acute history interest, served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

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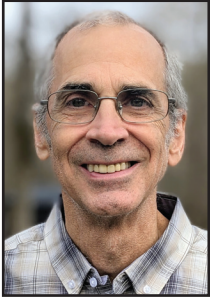
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The LORD/YHVH

By Thomas Thorne
McDowell County



Every word of the Bible is meant to bring us closer to Jesus/Yeshua. The personal name for God in the Old Testament – YHVH – does just that. Let's take a look at it.

Before there was a Hebrew alphabet, Hebrew was originally written with a pictographic script similar to Egyptian hieroglyphics. This is what is known as an ideogrammic language, where pictures or symbols, known as pictographs, are used to represent thoughts or ideas. Throughout hundreds of years, these pictographs morphed into the Hebrew alphabet (aleph-bet) of 22 letters. And much later, "vowel markers" were added to ease the reading and pronunciation of the language.

One of the most interesting, telling, and powerful demonstrations of the original Hebrew ideogrammic language are the pictographs for:

Yod-He-Vav-He – LORD in all Capitals – YHVH – pronounced as Yah-weh or Yehovah.

The name YHVH is spelled with the four Hebrew letters Yod-He-Vav-He and is always translated as LORD (all capitals) in the English Bible Old Testament. Strong's concordance provides the following primary definitions for YHVH – LORD: 1. Self-Existent or Eternal. 2. Jewish national name for God, 3. The Lord. The Brown Driver Briggs Lexicon adds, "Proper name of the God of Israel, the one bringing into being, life-giver, giver of existence, creator, the one who is, absolutely unchangeable, I am He who I am." (A Lexicon is a volume that provides Hebrew words, as written in Hebrew, and their definitions in English.) One thing both have in common is "the name of God."

Just the letters Yod-He-Vav-He and the name LORD (all caps) themselves bring to mind power, majesty, and glory. Certainly, God's name is nothing to be taken in vain, or as empty, or worthless. But is there even more to this great name that we may not have considered?

Let's combine a passage in the book of Exodus with the original pictographs and see if there is an even deeper meaning to this name.

Exodus 3:15: "And God furthermore said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, "The LORD [YHVH], the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you." This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations" (Exod. 3:15 NAS).

Now let's pause for a second and consider the phrase, "My memorial-name to all generations." This makes me think of something to be remembered, discussed, and spoken of in conversation, often. Moses was being told here that YHVH – the Hebrew letter - Yod He Vav He – is the name by which God is to be remembered by for all generations. Let's look at the etymology (description of where a word came from) of this mighty name to see if there is possibly another dimension that we have not considered.

YHVH is spelled with four letters in Hebrew: Yod (English pronunciation – yode), He (hay), Vav (vav), He (hay)). The following table shows the original associated "pictograph" and representation of each letter.

Hebrew Letter	Pictograph	Representation
י	yod	Hand – action, doing
ה	he	Raised arms – revealing, showing
ו	vav	Hook, Nail, tent stake - establishing
ה	he	Raised arms – revealing, showing

- By its pictograph, Yod (the first letter) - which looks like an apostrophe (first column), represents a hand, which implies doing something.
- He (second letter) represents raised arms which imply action or revealing, showing, or looking.
- The third letter, Vav, by its pictograph, is a hook, nail, or tent stake, implying establishing something.
- The word closes with He (raised arms) once again, which implies action, showing, looking, or revealing (a second time)

I maintain that God could very well have been telling Moses over 1,440 years before the physical birth of Jesus, that His name would be remembered by the meaning of these four letters.

And when we put the meaning behind these pictographs together, we have an amazing message for us today which shows the link between the O.T. and the N.T. Once again, the representation of these four letters, summarized is: Hand, Reveal, Nail, Reveal. If we add a little text to these four letters and start in the middle, we have the message for us:

Our Savior has been revealed (He – letter #2) to us personally – Jesus Christ. We have been allowed to get to know Him! Jesus nailed (Vav – letter #3) to a cross and He died a brutal death to take on the sins of humanity. The hand (Yod – letter #1) and power of Jesus will deliver us from slavery, both physical and spiritual. Jesus has been revealed (He -letters #2 & #4) a first time and He will be revealed (He - #4) a second time as King of kings and LORD of Lords.

This is the name, YHVH, that God told Moses He is to be remembered by forever, over 1,400 years before the birth of Jesus/Yeshua as flesh and blood. The representations of each Hebrew pictograph/letter fit perfectly, especially the use of "He" twice" – which is a picture of raised arms and represents revealing – Jesus has been revealed physically once as a man, and will be revealed again to us in all power and glory. Talk about a prophecy!

Conclusion

Our LORD YHVH has told us that His name is to be remembered by the four letters - Yod, He, Vav, He - which in the ancient Hebrew language were pictures of a hand, raised arms/revealing, a nail, and raised arms/revealing.

My charge for all of us this day is to continue to study His word and His truth. We will be richly rewarded with golden nuggets of knowledge, wisdom, information, truth, joy, excitement, and happiness that we will be able to use all throughout our lives.

Tom and his wife Amy are fellowship coordinators for Avdai El Elyon/Servants of the Most High God ministries in Marion, NC. Tom can be reached at servantsotmh@gmail.com.

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 servantsotmh@gmail.com

And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Matthew 17:20



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By Steve Henry
Burke County



Proverbs 18:20-21 *“A man’s belly (his whole being) shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth; and with the increase of his lips shall he be filled. Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof.”*

John 14:12 *“Truly, truly, I say to you, He who believes on Me, the works that I do he shall do also, and greater works than these he shall do, because I go to My Father.”*

We have an enemy that is continually warring to kill, steal, and destroy us (John 10:10). His favorite battleground is our mind where he tries to beat us down and keep us in a constant state of fear, but we don’t have to take his junk. We can use our tongue to start our day with this declaration of greatness and speak it out loud because faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

With gratitude for former blessings we enter this new day with gratitude in advance for abundant new blessings that are ours, and in light of these two Scriptures, these divine provisions, these promises, we therefore declare;

Our whole being is filled with satisfaction; we have plenty in every area of our life. Through our speech, we are rewarded with abundant fruitfulness. With our lips, we set a boundary that terminates unproductive speech, and with the same lips, we choose to enlarge our borders by speaking words of increase, income, produce and revenue. In the words of the psalmist, *“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.”*

By the authority of Almighty God, our Good Shepherd, it excites us to know “the increase is done,” it will come, it will be brought forth, doubtless it will come to pass, it will enter into our possession, surely it is granted to us, surely we will give in return to the point that we will be reminded, “don’t be weary in well doing.” Our “well doing” will be in direct proportion to our “well thinking” and “well speaking.”

We love and appreciate the power that has been granted to us to speak death or life to any situation that arises and we expect, “With Greater Expectancy Than Ever” to freely enjoy and share the abundant reward that is brought forth.

Expecting His Immeasurable Favor In Every Area Of Our Life.

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.

But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Matthew 6:15

“Eat This Scroll”

By Naomi Houston
Avery County



Our mouths get us into trouble. You “open your mouth” and voice an opinion at a meeting and suddenly you’ve become the chair of the committee. We’ve all heard the admonishment that we “engage our brains before we open our mouths to speak”!

Yes, our mouths can get us into trouble, causing us to commit to more than we are really able to accomplish, to make promises that we fail to keep, and often; say things that we later regret.

As Christians we are called by God to, however, use our mouths, our voices, to proclaim the word of God and be a witness to others at all times. Yet, how many times have you been in a discussion about your faith and felt you didn’t know enough to really present your side of the argument effectively?

The prophets of the Old Testament serve as examples of how we can present our mouths to God as living sacrifices, acceptable to His purpose. The prophets were forth-tellers – that is what the word literally means. Forth-tellers who felt an obligation to speak out and who lived their lives fully committed to God. One of those prophets was Ezekiel who got his start with the vision of a scroll and in this vision, God commanded him thus: *“And He said to me, ‘Son of man, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it.’ Then I ate it, and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey.”* Ezekiel 3: 3. Then God told Ezekiel that He was sending him to his own people – people who understood his language, people he knew, his own people. The message to Ezekiel also is for us – we are to be witnesses to those around us – our own friends and neighbors. But, as He told Ezekiel, they will resist, that won’t listen, they won’t hear you – so you need to be prepared so “swallow this word”, “eat this scroll”, and then go to the house of Israel.

Just as food nourishes our body, sustains our being, triggers growth, and enables us to function, God’s Word provides our spiritual being with the same elements of nourishment. When we eat natural food we receive it into our body and when we eat spiritual food, the Word of God, we receive it into our hearts. So “eating the scroll” prophetically represents our receiving the Word of God into our hearts.

Those prophets of the Old Testament presented their mouths to God and proclaimed his message vigorously and effectively. How do we do that today? Ezekiel provides us with the first clue: Swallowing the Word of God. Just as God warned Ezekiel that he would meet with resistance to his message, we, too, meet and will continue to meet with resistance and so the way to prepare and be able to confront this hostile and resistant world: eat God’s Word. Consuming everything we can of the Word gives us the confidence and ability to speak God’s truth.

“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4) This statement by Jesus is a quote from Deuteronomy 8:3. The subject is the provision of God for His people. He has provided more than earthly food. He has also given us His Word in the Scriptures. There are three elements involved in eating the Word – understanding, believing, and surrendering. We eat the Word when we read and study the Bible, when we listen to a sermon, and when we surrender our hearts to the message of God.

John 15: 16 reads: *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit.”* Jesus reminds us in this verse that we are chosen to go into the world and testify of our Hope in Him. It is not optional. We are chosen to take every opportunity presented to us to testify – and to do this we must be prepared. Eat this Scroll! The choice is ours.

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.

Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. 3 John 1:2

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Having a Brain Can Be a Problem

By Dr. James L. Snyder
Ocala, Fla.



I have been showing people a picture of my brain for almost a month now. I've been having a lot of fun doing it and teasing people by saying, "I have proof that I have a brain."

In the beginning, I just believed that having a brain would be a wonderful experience for me. Little did I know that having a brain can create certain problems—problems that my brain not only cannot help but has produced.

I don't think a day has passed, but I have reminded The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage that I have a brain and proof of it. So far, she has gone along with me.

You would think a person with a brain would be able to solve every problem that comes his way. I was to learn that that was not necessarily true, and I have the scars to prove it.

It was Thursday morning, and I was looking for the Bible I used the night before at a prayer meeting. I looked everywhere, but couldn't find it.

Finally, I asked The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage, "Have you seen my Bible? I can't seem to find it."

Looking at me with one of "those looks of hers," she said, "You have a brain, so you find it."

I wasn't expecting that and didn't know where it came from. She just stared at me, so I turned around and went back into my office. Later that day, I found it in my truck.

Whether I left it there the night before or somebody in our residence put it there to trap me, I don't know. I will keep a secret about which one I thought happened. I returned to work, and it was a very good day.

I needed to go to Wal-Mart to pick something up. I looked around for my wallet, but I could not find it anywhere. I usually put it on the counter in the kitchen so I don't lose it.

Looking at the counter, I couldn't see it.

Just then, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage walked into the kitchen. I looked at her and said, "Have you seen my wallet? I thought I put it here on the counter, but I can't find it."

There was, again, that look of hers, and then she responded, "You have a brain, so why don't you use it and find it?"

I was not sure how to respond, so I went on looking for my wallet, and I eventually found it. I was not sure if I had left it where I found it or if somebody put it there to try to trick me.

At this point, I started thinking about all the time I spent boasting and bragging about having a brain and evidence to show that I actually did have a brain. I must say I had a good time during that time. But now, it seems to have backfired on me. I hate it when something backfires on me in a very negative fashion.

Going to my easy chair with a cup of coffee, I sat down and began looking at the picture of my brain. That was the evidence I needed to prove I actually did have a brain. As I looked at it for a few moments, I began to wonder, why is my brain not working right now?

As I looked at the picture, I thought maybe I had gone too far boasting about my brain. Maybe I should've let it go from the beginning. At the time I just thought I was having fun.

After finishing my coffee, I went into my office and began working on a project. I needed to make copies of my project, but when I tried, the copy machine was not working. I looked at it for a little bit and didn't quite know what to do. The only one who knows how to make this copy machine work is The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage.

What do I do now? I need to finish this project, and there is no way I can fix this and get it working.

My only solution was to ask my wife if she could fix the copy machine for me. I didn't know how to ask her. I knew her attitude all day, and I was unsure how I could turn it into a very positive position.

Just then, my wife came to my office door and said, "I have some papers I need to copy. Would you mind if I used the copy machine right now?"

My day could not get any better.

"Oh my dear, yes, of course, come and use it as long as you want to. I need to go to the bathroom for a few moments, so take your time."

I knew when I got back, the copy machine would be running.

Walking back into my office, my wife picked up the papers she had copied and was leaving.

"Everything okay?" I asked.

"Oh yes," she said, "no problems whatsoever."

I like it when a day ends on the positive.

In my reflection, a verse from the Bible came to mind. "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

Dr. James L. Snyder is pastor of the Family of God Fellowship, 1471 Pine Road, Ocala, FL 34472. He lives with his wife in Silver Springs Shores. Call him at 352-687-4240 or e-mail jamesnyder2@att.net. The church web site is www.whatafellowship.com

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The Public Reading of Scriptures

By David B. Sable
Watauga County



In the first church I was in as a Christian in the 1970's those who preached modeled a healthy pattern that always stuck with me. The speaker would read loudly, slowly, and reverently the passage of Scripture they were about to talk about. They attempted to honor Paul's directive to Timothy, "Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching" (1 Timothy 4:13).

As I traveled through different churches in my lifetime, robust public Scripture reading was something I missed. The rushed reading in some services felt more like an intro or a setup for the main attraction of the pastor's sermon. At other times, Scriptures flashed by on PowerPoint as mere footnotes to the relevant topic talk the pastor was giving to attract new seekers.

Historically, the public reading of the Scriptures was part of the lifelong formation of members of the church. This portion of the liturgy is to increase our capacity to hear the Word of God respectfully, fully, and patiently as it is outlined in wide, varied, and generous doses.

In an Anglican service, a Psalm is read together in the congregation though technically this is not a reading. Rather, the Psalms are recognized as the prayer book of the church and read in the congregation (often in unison) as a kind of prayer. This, I admit, is a practice I'm not fully formed in – to read the Psalms with the elated praise, the profound wonder, the deep sadness, the sense of abandonment, and even the angry hatred that the Psalmist expresses.

For the readings, there is an Old Testament reading, a New Testament reading, and a reading from one of the Gospels. Throughout the three-year cycle, it gives the church exposure to the entire breadth of Scripture. It forces the much-neglected Old Testament to carry equal prominence.

Of course, we can't cover the entire Bible even in three years of Sundays, so it is assumed that in each parish (or more likely in this day in age) each individual is also carrying the same practice into their personal life or family. The Daily Office (see www.DailyOffice2019.com) includes a similar pattern of Scripture reading morning and evening: reading the Psalter and two lessons from the Scripture (generally the Old and New Testament).

Interestingly, these Scripture readings are called lessons instead of readings. It is as if to say that just the act of reading out loud--slowly, reverently, and with the heart engaged--becomes a formation in itself instructing and sanctifying even those who lack the mental acuity or giftedness to teach a Bible study or delve deeply into inductive questions. This isn't to say that there is no place for teaching, expounding, study, and memorization. But to engage our hearts in the serious public reading of Scripture – whether as part of our church service or in our morning and evening prayer— is formative in and of itself.

If we take the place of humility and say as Samuel, "Speak, Lord, for your servant hears", it will save us from the self-defeating expectation that we have to understand or assign meaning to every single thing that is read. Instead, we meditate throughout the day and night on what was clearly understood and convicting and turn this into prayer. At other times, teachers, sermons, commentaries, and books can give insight and enlarge our understanding. But during the public reading of Scripture corporately or individually, it is much better to stand in awe and receive the very word of God and not get sidetracked as if it were a Sudoku puzzle to be conquered, a crystal ball to divine our next move, or a maintenance manual to solve all our problems.

David B. Sable lives in Deep Gap, NC with his wife Loretta. They have two grown men. He serves as a member of Christ the King, an Anglican fellowship in the ACNA in Boone, NC



Hey y'all, we are Steven and Jennifer Painter. We started out as some of those folks who saw a sad story on the news about a child who had been neglected or abused and said, "why did this have to happen? We would have gladly taken that child and loved him/her!" Yet we didn't make a move to actually BECOME that family because "it was never the right time" or "we don't know where to start". But really, when IS it the right time? Answer: now. How do we get started? Answer: just make the call! There are children NOW who need someone to bridge that gap. Contact McDowell DSS to learn more. 828-652-3355.

Satan Get Behind Thee

By Timothy W. Tron
Burke County



“When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together he rebuked the unclean spirit and said to him: ‘You mute and deaf spirit, I command you. Go out from him, and never enter him again.’ And after shouting and convulsing him greatly it went out. And he became like a dead man so that many said that he was dead. But Jesus took hold of his hand and lifted him up, and he arose. And when he entered the house, his disciples were asking him in private: ‘Why could we not cast it out?’ And he said to them: ‘This kind cannot go out by any means except by prayer.’” Mark 9:24-29

Stuart walked into the house swiftly and with purpose; like a Navy Seal team, every asset was accounted for, and every variable had been studied in preparation. He had spent the last eight hours while driving home going through the mental list of possible causes for what lay ahead. Days earlier, his wife Stacey had called while he was away visiting family, saying that she didn't think the upstairs air was working. He would have left immediately if he hadn't already agreed to participate in his late Uncle's memorial service. However, there were too many people counting on him. He spoke with Stacey about a possible workaround that she was willing to implement until he could return. Needless to say, there was that annoying thought of something needing to be done that he could not address. It lay in the back of his mind, contaminating the remainder of his visit, like a thorn in his side – something he strongly detested yet couldn't shake. The thorn reminded him of the old tractor that sat out back of the house. For several years since they had moved there from the farm, he had tried to sell it, but again and again, each potential buyer had fallen away. They always seemed to come up with some excuse, even when their initial response to his ad had seemed so promising. The old tractor had become another thorn that seemed to continue to lie dormant, waiting to hound him when he was down, like now. Stuart knew that he had a duty to provide for his loved ones, yet it always seemed like when he was away, everything fell apart through no fault of his own. All this kept following him like a shadow, the unspoken problem that wouldn't leave.

So, when Stuart pulled out of his sister's drive to head home, he began praying, “Lord, thank you for this beautiful day, and thank you for all the blessings in my life. Lord, please help me safely travel home, and please help me figure out the problem with the AC. And Lord, if at all possible, help remind me to put the tractor in the paper again so we can hopefully sell it this summer. - Amen”

Finally arriving home late Friday afternoon, he dumped the contents of his cooler in the fridge and began going through the mental checklist of solutions he had planned in trying to fix the AC. Since his wife, Stacey, was at work, the healthcare worker, Vicki, was attending to his mother-in-law. She had her job; he had his. His mother-in-law, Martha, had come to live with them several months ago when she could no longer handle living in the nursing home in Florida. It was just too uncomfortable for her there, both physically and emotionally. The separation from the family was the worst part. So, when the question came up about her moving in, Stacey asked if Stuart wouldn't mind. He knew in his heart that he couldn't say no, even if he and Martha didn't always get along – it was the right thing to do. Besides, that was the past. Serving God fully meant loving everyone unconditionally, even one's mother-in-law.

Outside, it was reaching nearly eighty-five degrees, and the house was already an uncomfortable seventy-nine. Time was of the essence. It had turned unusually warm for May. Receiving Stacey's phone call immediately struck panic in his heart. Unfortunately, there was little he could do remotely. From his wife's incessant hoarding, she had blocked access to the air handling unit in their garage, making it impossible for Stuart to call someone remotely to fix it. Stuart knew from experience that the fix could be as simple as an HVAC zone issue. To correct it, one only had to simply manually move one of the vent motors to unblock the duct. But to convey this to Stacey, seeing as she had no idea where or how to operate the motor, Stuart might as well have been trying to speak to an alien on the Lunar surface. There was no way she could be his eyes and hands. Then there was Martha, nearly bedridden, dependent upon the family for everything, including her comfort – now trapped in a house that was slowly growing warmer by the minute.

All of this, the problem with the air conditioning, began the day following a very successful day of outreach ministry. Stuart had come to recognize that anything that appeared to be a triumph for God, from bringing someone to salvation to an evening of sincere worship, was usually followed by some attack by the enemy, Satan. These assaults weren't always so obvious. But, like this one, it was pretty clear. It was during these times of tribulation Stuart felt like a man standing in an open boat as the storm raged around him. The man, unfettered by fear, looks out upon the tempest and calmly directs those souls around him who are fearing for their lives to do this and that, things necessary to keep the boat afloat – to survive. Knowing that these things will occur and seeing that God is the one in control, he, the man in the boat, can, with confidence and blessed assurance, know that even within the most horrendous storms of life, God's got this. So, when Stuart received the call from his distraught spouse, he quickly realized this was the latest assault. Thankfully, in the meantime, until he could make it home, Stacey could run the fan, thus circulating the air from the basement to the upper level, maintaining a manageable level of comfort until he could return. So, this had set the stage for when Stuart pulled into the drive that blistering hot Friday afternoon. The first thing Stuart did was to check the vents in the floor. It was apparent that something was wrong beyond just the blocked vent – the air was barely cool. Stuart continued through the usual checklist for when there were AC problems.

As he entered the living room after coming up from the basement, the healthcare worker, Vicki, came out of the master bedroom where Martha was staying. She seemed somewhat bothered. The look on her face was blunt and distant – it spoke of someone who had heard something deeply troubling but had yet to process it. Holding the phone in her hand as if uncertain what to do next, she turned to Stuart and said as if speaking to the air, “You don't happen to know of a minister we could call, do you?” Stuart looked at Vicki, almost dumbfounded. But then, when he realized what she had said, he understood there was something wrong beyond the physical.

“Martha's really distraught and keeps repeating over and over again something about demons controlling her body. She said that she needs to speak to a minister.” Then Vicki paused, and with a voice of deeper concern, “I think it's important to let you know that she hasn't slept for the past three days because of this.” Stuart's mind raced back to the time when Martha had told him that she had done all the going to church that she needed to in her life when he asked her one morning if she would like to go with him to church. Indeed, when one faces the prospect of death, their demeanor can quickly change. The once overly confident to a fault woman now was clutching at the air for truth, for anything that could take her from the hell she faced whenever she closed her eyes. It was as if the darkness was trying to consume her mortal soul.

Almost simultaneously, Stuart thought of the times in the past when there had been opportunities to stand up and be recognized as a minister or pastor, but he had remained seated. Each time, he had felt a conviction afterward, one asking why he hadn't stood. Here it was again, the question. But unlike before, this time, there was a sense of “Now is your time.” Without another moment's hesitation, Stuart headed for Martha's bed chamber.

Entering the dimly lit room, the smells of a bedridden soul, a mixture of body fluids and still, suffocating air, immediately hit him. He approached Martha's bedside and saw the shriveled body and limbs, the bones trying to protrude through the flesh, like aged, yellow wax paper barely able to hold back the skeleton within. She lay on her side, her hands up near her face. Stuart carefully sat on the edge of the bed as her once bright blue eyes now looked up at him through their smoky, glazed perplexity; a look of terror contorted her brow into deep furrows. She spoke in a raspy, hollow voice, “He was here, the demon. He was throwing me around the room while he held me by my ankles. Look at them, look, can't you see the bruises,” she said, pointing with one outstretched, noduled, crooked finger toward her legs clutched in the fetal position. The Vicki drew alongside Stuart, quietly whispering in his ear as Martha continued, conveying to him how she had fallen out of bed the night before. Stacey had been unable to lift her by herself and had to call the EMS. And yes, it was true; she did have a bruise on her thigh. While Martha continued to recall the images of horror, Stuart, for a brief second, could picture Martha being thrown about by some demonic, unseen force. The scene became more than an image as, for a moment, he too could feel the presence of a dark spirit. It sent a shiver up his spine. It was as if the darkness was beginning to find a crevice within his own soul, working its way into his being. He quickly called upon the LORD, forcing the dark figures to vanish. Before those thoughts could continue, Stuart gently took both of Martha's hands in his and began to speak to her in calm, reassuring tones. She continued to desperately convey to him that she was certain that something was trying to kill her, that it had thrown her on the floor the night before. She was certain that he was going to continue to beat her until she died. “You've got to stop him,” she cried, grasping her bony fingers into Stuart's flesh.

Suddenly, from where he didn't know, the feeling that he needed to pray the demon from her being flooded into his mind. He had never done anything like it in his life. Yet, here was God nudging him to act and act now! As he held Martha's hands - the woman who had turned her back on God, the one who adamantly insisted she had it all figured out, who was content on living without God in her life - he began to pray that in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, that God would cast out all demons from this woman's body. He began repeating those words again and again as his mind focused on Jesus. As he spoke, there suddenly came a change in Martha's demeanor. Her breathing began to ease. Where there were once deep furrows, a sea of tranquility parted the skin, making it as smooth as glass. It was obvious, to the point, that Vicki dropped to her knees on the floor behind Stuart, desperately praying openly and along with Stuart.

The sea of darkness had parted, and before them, it was as if an open, dry seabed lay waiting for them to escape. Stuart looked up and realized something had transpired, but what? Then he looked at Martha, and it became clear. She was physically changed.

Before him, Stuart looked at the face of serenity and peace. The soul had been cleansed beyond human touch. Yet, Stuart knew that if the house were left empty from where the demon had been discharged, it would return. Stuart knew he had to close and bolt the door as quickly as possible. Then, without fail, he must somehow invite the Holy Spirit within. The memory of her resistance to going to church returned. The conventional method of asking someone to receive Christ into their life may not work. If he did this wrong, she faced the possibility of being repossessed. “God, what am I to do,” Stuart cried out. In a flash, the answer came to mind. It was then he asked Martha to repeat after him.

Stuart began quoting the twenty-third Psalm as he lovingly stroked the forehead of the woman who had, at times, been one of the biggest detractors in his life – someone for whom he could do no good.

“The Lord is my Shepherd,” Martha repeated, “The Lord is my Shepherd,”

Stuart: “I shall not want.”

Martha: “I shall not want.”

continued on page 24

Retirement Resource Management

The Hidden Tax Trap in Your Retirement Accounts: How to Secure Your Savings

By Steve Gaito
McDowell County



In today's financial landscape, whether you have \$50,000 or \$5,000,000 in retirement savings, understanding the tax implications of your retirement accounts is crucial. The hard-earned money in your Retirement Accounts (IRAs), 401(k), and 403(b) plans can become a significant source of income in your golden years. However, not addressing the embedded taxes in these accounts can result in the government taking a larger share than anticipated. This article explores the importance of tax planning for retirement accounts and introduces a comprehensive solution to minimize your tax burden.

The Importance of Tax Planning in Retirement

The primary objective for most retirees is to ensure their savings last a lifetime. Unfortunately, many overlook the impact of taxes on their retirement funds. When you start withdrawing from your retirement accounts, these funds are typically subject to income tax. The amount you withdraw can also affect your tax bracket, potentially leading to higher overall taxes.

Without proper planning, you might end up paying more taxes than necessary, significantly reducing your retirement income. This is where strategic tax planning becomes essential. By understanding and addressing the tax implications of your retirement accounts, you can implement strategies to minimize your tax burden and maximize your income.

Introducing the Total Tax Burden Report

To help retirees navigate the complexities of tax planning, we have partnered with a specialized group that provides a Total Tax Burden Report. This comprehensive analysis evaluates your qualified retirement accounts, including IRAs, 401(k), and 403(b) plans. The report identifies strategies that allow you to pay less in taxes on the money you have saved, ensuring that more of your hard-earned money stays with you.

Unlike traditional financial planning, which often focuses on asset allocation, our approach emphasizes placing your assets in the most tax-friendly environment. By doing so, you can significantly reduce the taxes you owe upon withdrawal, thereby preserving more of your retirement funds.

Strategies to Minimize Your Tax Burden

Once you have identified the tax challenges associated with your retirement accounts, you can explore various strategies to mitigate them. Here are some key approaches:

1. **Roth Conversions:** Converting a traditional IRA or 401(k) to a Roth IRA can be a tax-efficient strategy. While you will pay taxes on the converted amount in the year of conversion, the future withdrawals from the Roth IRA will be tax-free. This can be particularly advantageous if you expect to be in a higher tax bracket during retirement.
2. **Strategic Withdrawals:** Planning the timing and amount of your withdrawals can help manage your tax bracket. By spreading out your withdrawals and staying within a lower tax bracket, you can minimize the overall taxes paid.
3. **Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs):** If you are over 70½, you can make direct transfers from your IRA to a qualified charity. These QCDs can satisfy your required minimum distribution (RMD) and reduce your taxable income, all while supporting a cause you care about.
4. **Tax-Efficient Investments:** Investing in tax-efficient assets and accounts can further reduce your tax liability. Municipal bonds, for example, offer tax-free interest income at the federal level and potentially at the state level as well.

The Role of a Certified Financial Planner™

Navigating the tax implications of retirement accounts requires specialized knowledge and expertise. As a Certified Financial Planner™ specializing in tax planning for retirement accounts, I am equipped to provide the qualified advice needed to minimize your tax burden. Unlike many financial advisors who focus on managing investments, my practice is dedicated solely to tax planning for retirement accounts.

Giving Through Qualified Retirement Assets

Retirement accounts not only provide income for your golden years but also present opportunities for charitable giving. Once you reach the age of 70½, you can make charitable contributions directly from your IRA. This strategy, known as a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD), allows you to support non-profit organizations while reducing your taxable income. Importantly, QCDs count towards your required minimum distributions (RMDs), helping you manage your tax obligations more effectively.

Resources and Support

To assist you further, I have compiled several resources on my website to help you understand the intricacies of tax planning for retirement accounts. These resources cover topics such as Roth conversions, QCDs, and strategic withdrawal planning. Additionally, I offer personalized consultations to analyze your total tax burden and develop tailored strategies to minimize your taxes.

Schedule Your Free Consultation

If you have questions about the tax implications of your retirement accounts or would like to see your Total Tax Burden Report, I invite you to schedule a free consultation with my office. This initial meeting is at no cost to you, and I believe the insights gained will be invaluable.

Contact Information

To schedule an appointment, please contact Morgan Wylie at:

- Email: morgan.wylie@retirerm.com
- Phone: (828) 559-0299

Conclusion

Understanding and addressing the tax implications of your retirement accounts is essential to ensuring that your savings last a lifetime. By leveraging the Total Tax Burden Report and implementing strategic tax planning, you can significantly reduce your tax burden and maximize your retirement income. As a Certified Financial Planner™ specializing in tax planning for retirement accounts, I am here to help you navigate this complex landscape and secure your financial future. Contact us today to take the first step towards a more tax-efficient retirement.

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

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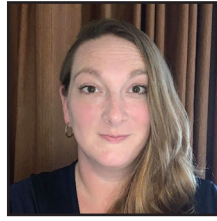


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By Leah Johnson
Mitchell County



I have a confession: I hate asking for help. Whether it's in my personal or professional life, I wrestle with sharing needs. What if people feel burdened? What if they get annoyed? What if they feel like they are being guilted or manipulated into giving up their time or money?

For the longest time, all the what-ifs held me back. I finally realized something important: Holding back on asking for help, especially in ministry, can actually hurt others. If you don't know about the need and have an open invitation to respond, you may be prevented from a blessing. People may be blocked from getting to watch God move if they aren't given the opportunity to step into situations. I've finally concluded my responsibility is to share the opportunity to help, and others have the responsibility to seek God about whether they should respond or not. Needs are all around us, and we aren't called to meet everyone. However, I do believe asking God to show us the places where we should step up to the plate and share our gifts (money, time, talents) is important.

I look around at the Center, and I see so many ways God is working. The stories of lives and hearts changed are mind-blowing. Our faith in God has deepened so much watching Him provide for us and our clients. I firmly believe these stories and the opportunity to get involved need to be shared and not hoarded. Part of my job is to make the Body of Christ aware of ways to stand up and move the way She was created to move.

Right now at the Center, there are a few opportunities to get involved: 1) In celebration of our 30th year, we will be hosting a banquet fundraiser, and are looking for underwriters to help us cover the up-front costs. Businesses, individuals, and churches are encouraged to contact us about underwriting. This will give attendees a way for 100% of their donations to go straight toward meeting our goal on the night of the banquet. 2) We need volunteers in a few different areas right now. If you have time and a passion to love people from hard places, we need to talk!

While I don't like asking for help, I do absolutely love watching God use His people to move in the lives of others. Many of you have already stepped up to the plate and gotten involved. Let me just say we could not do what we do without the people in our community like you. God uses your support to deepen our faith! Thank you for your prayers, donations, time, encouragement, and help spreading the word about us.

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.



Partner Prerequisites

By Christopher L. Scott
Moses Lake, Washington



A pastor of a growing church was approached by a rock concert promoter who had an idea that he proposed: "I'll build a new concert location and you can build your new church on an adjacent property that I will donate to you. We can share the parking needs that we both have. If you allow our concert attendees to use your parking at night you can use our concert stadium on Easter Sundays."

But the conversation stopped when someone reminded the pastor of a few brief verses from the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18,

"Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate," says the Lord. "And do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty. (NASB)

Paul makes it clear believers should not enter into close partnerships with unbelievers. The prohibition is a formal long-term contract-based relationship. The phrase "bound together" in verse 14 comes from the word for yoking animals together as they plow a field. There are three areas in which we as Christians should avoid partnering with unbelievers in ministry, marriage, and business.

In ministry, there is a focus that we need to have on separating from false teachers troubling the church. We as believers should partner with Christian churches that agree with us on the core doctrines of orthodox Christianity.

In marriage, a Christian should not marry a non-Christian. But what does it mean to not be "bound together" with an "unbeliever" (v. 14)? Let me put it this way, if you find the person you are dating is "tolerating your faith" or "supports you and your faith" then you are bound together with a non-Christian.

In business, we also need to avoid close partnerships with unbelievers. Does this mean we make sure the clerk at Winco is a Christian before we allow him to ring up our groceries? Of course not, the partnership Paul restricts is a closely bound long-term mutual relationship that involves a contract.

The pastor of that growing church turned down the rock concert promoter's offer. It was hard for him to do that, but he knew he had to as a believer committed to following God's Scripture. A short time later God provided a new location and new opportunity for him that worked better for his church than the original location the non-Christian concert promoter had suggested.

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

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And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. Matthew 4:23

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To navigate these complexities, we offer a Total Tax Burden Report, which provides a detailed analysis of your retirement accounts and identifies strategies to reduce your tax liability. Strategies like Roth Conversions, strategic withdrawals, Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCDs), and tax-efficient investments can significantly lower your taxes without sacrificing net income. As a Certified Financial Planner™ specializing in tax planning for retirement accounts, I am here to help you secure your financial future. Schedule a free consultation today to take the first step towards a more tax-efficient retirement.

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Ebenezer? Is it Scrooge??? Thus far the Lord has helped us!

By Carol Wallace
Kingsport, Tennessee



When you hear the name, Ebenezer, what is your first thought? Is it Scrooge, the grouchy miser from Charles Dickens's Christmas Carol? Charles Dickens describes Ebenezer Scrooge as "a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint... secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster." The familiar story in the end reveals Ebenezer Scrooge's change of heart as he becomes a more generous man.

This story is not about Ebenezer Scrooge, but the stone named Ebenezer set by Samuel between Mizpah and Shen as a memorial saying, "Thus far the Lord has helped us." 1 Samuel 7:12

"Samuel had cried out to the Lord on behalf of Israel to save them from the hands of the Philistines. Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered a burnt offering to the Lord. As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle against Israel. But the Lord thundered with a loud thunder upon the Philistines, and so confused them that they were overcome before Israel. The men of Israel went out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and drove them back as far as below Beth Car. Then Samuel took a stone, set it up, and called its name Ebenezer." 1 Samuel 7:7-12

We read earlier in Samuel chapters 4 and 5 about the defeat of Israel by the Philistines and the capture of the Ark of the Covenant because they disobeyed the Lord. The placing of the Ebenezer stone was a memorial to God's faithfulness and provision; God's intervention and support; God's presence and deliverance. The Ebenezer stone reflected the reversal in Israel's behavior as they turned back to God. "Thus far the Lord has helped us."

God is our "stone of help" our "stone of salvation." He is our ultimate source of help, strength, and deliverance. Jesus is our cornerstone of faith as a believer. God has plucked us out of a life of sin, and we have the promise of eternal life. Do we remember and share how God's hand has brought us through the battles of this life? The Lord is like a stone, stable and lasting. God is our Ebenezer of peace, guidance, wisdom, grace, mercy, and the innumerable blessings continue. It is good to remember what the Lord has done for us through trials and joys. We can raise our Ebenezer and remember the grace bestowed on us.

Our story is not over as we continue this journey of life. Our faith is assaulted daily in this walk. We are helpless apart from God's grace. Robert Robinson penned a beautiful hymn in 1758 that still blesses our hearts today; "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing." A few words from this hymn...

**Here I raise my Ebenezer;
Hither by thy help I'm come;
And I hope, by thy good pleasure,
Safely to arrive at home.**

**The song goes on the state...
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart; O take and seal it;
Seal it for thy courts above.**

The ultimate Ebenezer is the cross of Calvary where Jesus gave HIS life's blood for you and me. Jesus gave HIS life on Calvary, was buried in that cold, dark tomb, and arose on the third day to live forevermore. He offers the gift of eternal life by HIS grace. We have free will to accept or reject HIS gift of eternal life by our faith in HIM. Our hearts are prone to wander, prone to worldly attractions. "Thus far the Lord has helped us!" He will lead us safely home if we trust in HIM.

May we constantly give thanks for God's faithfulness in our lives. Ebenezer could be closely related to gratitude...acknowledging the power and presence of God in our lives. We raise our Ebenezer for others to see when we share what Jesus has done in our lives. We raise our Ebenezer each time we share our faith, each time we display the fruit of the Spirit, each time we interact with people in a Christ-like manner, in simple displays of faith such as bowing our heads to give thanks to God in a public restaurant we are raising our Ebenezer. We raise our Ebenezer and remember "Thus far the Lord has helped us."

My daughter gifted me with a simple stone from our yard painted with the word "Faith" and a simple heart. This stone sits in my kitchen window and is a gentle reminder of God's faithfulness. Glory to God as we raise our Ebenezer and remember from where our blessings come. HE indeed is the fountain of every blessing.

I thought this Ebenezer story was completed but the Lord had other plans...My heart was heavy as I attended the worship service, on June 30, 2024. As only the Lord can do, one of our songs of worship was "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing." Thank you, Lord, Jesus as this was a balm to my soul. On Friday, June 28, 2024, my brother, Richard Depew, went home with the Lord. During his recent weeks in the hospital, he and I enjoyed sweet conversations and reminiscing. He asked me if I was working on any stories, and I shared with him this recent story entitled "Ebenezer." He said with a surprised look on his face, "Ebenezer...as in Scrooge?" When I told him the beginning of this story, we laughed together and began to talk about the Ebenezer stone. I regret that he did not get to read this Ebenezer story, as he took joy in reading what I had written. He framed a

recent story published in the February 2024 edition of the Blue Ridge Christian News about our mom entitled, Hands of Labor Heart of Love - Mom's Legacy of Love. This story about our mom brought him joy and he wanted to share it with others. We thought we had more time. Time is an element we are not promised and my time with my precious brother here on this earth is done. My heart is sad, and I feel a huge void, yet, at the same time, my heart rejoices in the assurance that because of his trust and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, he is safely home. His Ebenezer was raised in his daily walk with Jesus, and by the testimony of those ministering to his family in the wake of his death, we heard story after story revealing evidence of him raising his Ebenezer stone as others shared how he had influenced their lives and how he shared God's love. This Ebenezer story is dedicated to Richard's memory and the glory of God. Thank you, Lord Jesus, our fountain of every blessing, because of his faith through your marvelous grace, we rest in your promise that Richard has arrived safely home.

Thus far the Lord has helped us...blessings to you as you raise your Ebenezer to glorify our Lord and Savior.

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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Changes

By Bruce Cannon
Mitchell County



Matthew 24:12 *“And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.”*

If you are like me you are dumbfounded at the changes that have taken place in our country over the past few years. More change has taken place in this short period than what changed over the past several decades. We are heading somewhere in society and it appears to be very dark. There is a force behind it all; and that force is powerful, wicked, united, and determined to undermine all that is good. It is the spirit of the antichrist which has always been at work in our world but is gaining strength quickly as Jesus said it would in the last days.

A few days ago my wife and I were walking in our yard and Wendy asked me, “Can you feel it?” I did not know to what she was referring. I didn’t know how to answer so I responded with a question, “What are you sensing?” She replied, “Change, and it’s not good.” She is very perceptive and felt in her spirit that trouble was afoot; that something was quickly changing in our county/state/nation. As you and I listen to the news, as we see what is taking place on our streets and in other areas across our country, we are seeing this change. Lawlessness is rampant; respect for other persons, oneself, and property has waned. And that is exactly what our Lord prophesied would happen before His return. The word translated as “iniquity” in Matthew 24:12 is actually “lawlessness” in the original language. And we are seeing it daily.

Consider some of the more recent lawless activities taking place in America and see if this is so:

*We are attempting to rewrite history rather than learn from it. How many monuments honoring war heroes from our past have been destroyed or removed because they were deemed offensive? I am offended, as are many other believers, at the parading of evil on television, in music, and on the streets of America. What about my rights as a taxpayer? And, what about yours?

*What about the continuing attack upon law enforcement? Where has the effort to “defund police” gotten us? Mark Creech, director of the Christian Action League of North Carolina, stated this about law enforcement, “Law enforcement is the keystone of our civilization; it is what holds society together. Defunding or eliminating police agencies is simply ridiculous and is an agenda being pushed by many of the very so-called leaders who expect special treatment and protection when it comes to their person and property.”

*What about the attack upon the younger in our nation by those bent on putting books in our libraries that promote and teach youth (and older children) how to have sex with peers of the opposite sex and of the same sex? Where has common decency gone?

*What about our changing the sexes of children...in some areas parents don’t have to be notified. Check out this portion of an article released in May of this year: “Beyond notification about the name and pronoun change, schools are not required to include parents in the gender transition. At least three counties — Buncombe, Orange, and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools — spell out a gender-transitioning plan where parents are not required to be included. Teachers and other students must “get with the program” or possibly face harassment charges. Orange County specifically classifies refusing to refer to a person by the preferred name or pronouns as a form of “harassment” and requires other school personnel to report a teacher or student if the preferred names and pronouns are not used or that the employee, himself, will be brought up for disciplinary action.” (<https://nsjonline.com/article/2024/05/summa-parental/>) Notice, the geographical locations considering this action are here in North Carolina; not New York, California, or some other far away area.

Yet, the Bible prophesied all this would take place before the Lord came back for His Church. Imagine, you and I could very well be taken to Heaven in what is known as the Rapture of the Church VERY SOON. In Luke 21:28, Jesus stated *“And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.”*

What must we do? Draw close to God personally and corporately. Teach our children right from wrong. Stand, in love, for those things the Word approves of and against those things the Word condemns. Vote! Pray for God’s mercy and forgiveness upon our nation. Beg Him! Plead with Him through the blood of Christ for help. And, get ready for the Lord’s Return. Amen!

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

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POEM

By Regina McIntosh
Yancey County

GOD DOESN'T MAKE MISTAKES

*When He lit up the world, He knew
His light would overcome
The worst fears, the darkest nights.*

*When He silenced the thunder's roar, He knew
His voice would calm the seas, the winds
No storm could possibly spoil what He shaped
With His gentle hand, His mercy and grace.*

*When He painted the stars, the seas, the sun, He knew
His wonders had only just begun,
While the hearts He designed were filled with hope,
He knew that every dream was stirred by love,
Every joy inspired by the splendor beyond the setting sun.*

*When He revealed the music that accompanies His song,
A song filled with serenity, sincerity, soothing
A song played by angels with their imposing harps,
A song compiled by the beauty that surrounds the soul,
The beauty of a love that just grows and grows... then,
came hope!*

*When He filled our hearts with His guidance,
He taught us that love was the source of our wealth,
Wealth beyond what gold or silver could imagine,
Powerful and fuller than any luxury,
Wealth that comes to those who hear His word...*

*When He sent His only Son, He knew
We'd never know the meaning of His gift,
Until we'd seen beyond the sin and strife,
To the greatest love that has ever been,
To God's ultimate sacrifice...*

*Love that burned brighter than the morning sun,
Love that came to us at God's expense,
Love that taught us the meaning of forgiveness.
Love that restores, repairs and rebuilds.
Love that is best understood by the soul who hears Him...*

*When the heart is convicted of sin, and given the chance
To begin again... born again,
The best life found is the life that is led
By His Son, Jesus, the King who offers sweet forgiveness
To souls He saves by grace, through faith – just believe
Him!*

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>

*And said, If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the LORD that healeth thee.
Exodus 15:26*



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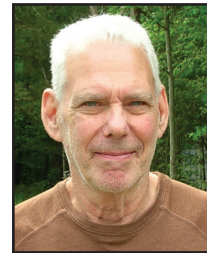
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New Pledge of Allegiance

By Robert Garner
Rutherford County

Back in 2011, a 15-year-old student in Arizona wrote this poem prayer entry which went throughout the Christian community. Perhaps it's worth a rerun? The Lord's Prayer and the Pledge of Allegiance are not allowed in most public schools anymore. This prompted the student to write a New Pledge of Allegiance Poem. Most Christians agree that things have only gotten worse in our new year of 2024.

New Pledge of Allegiance

*Now I set me down in school,
Where praying is against the rule.
For this great nation under God,
Finds mention of Him very odd.*

*If scripture now the class recites,
It violates the Bill of Rights.*

*Any time my head I bow,
Becomes a federal matter now.
Our hair can be purple, orange or green,
That's no offense; it's a freedom scene.
The law is specific, the law is precise,
Prayers spoken aloud are serious vice.*

*For praying in a public hall,
Might offend someone with no faith at all.
In silence alone we must meditate,
God's name is prohibited by the state.*

*We're allowed to cuss and dress like freaks,
pierce our noses, tongues and cheeks.
They've outlawed guns, but first the Bible,
To quote the good book makes me liable.
We can elect a pregnant Senior Queen,
the un-wed daddy' our Senior King.
It's inappropriate to teach right from wrong,
We're taught that such judgments do not belong.*

*We can get our condoms and birth controls,
Study witchcraft, vampires and totem poles.
But the Ten Commandments are not allowed,
No word of God can reach this crowd.*

*It's scary here I must confess,
When chaos reigns the school's a mess.
So, Lord this silent plea I make:
Should I be shot, my soul please take!*

AMEN

Psalm 36:7 & 107:21, "How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. Oh, that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men"!

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

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

Stuart: "He maketh me lie down."
Martha: "He maketh me lie down."

They continued, and as they walked through the valley of the shadow of death, where God told her she should fear no evil, her eyes began to grow heavy, and her voice began to fade. By the end of the Psalm, her voice barely a whisper, Martha ended repeating after Stuart, "And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever," a pause, "and ever," another pause, and then in one last exhale, "...Amen."

Martha then fell into a calm, deep, serene sleep. Finally, at peace, she was free of the demon that had been tormenting her for the past few days.

Not sure of what had happened, Stuart quietly stood, looking at the nurse with a look partly of bewilderment and satisfaction. Had they just seen what they had seen? Not saying a word, each realized they had witnessed something special.

Stuart left the room somewhat numb from the encounter but kept true to his previous mission. It was then that things seemed to take on a life of their own. It was as if another hand was now in control. Within minutes, Stuart was able to get hold of an HVAC repairman who came immediately and, within thirty minutes, had the AC working. The same repairman saw that Stuart had an old tractor sitting in the sideyard and asked, "What's up with that old relic over there," he said, pointing at Stuart's other thorn, the old tractor. "Yeah, I've wanted to sell it for some time but never get the time to put it in the paper." The repairman responded with, "Does it run?" "Sure, it's just got a dead battery at the moment."

Mind if I take a look at her?

No, not at all.

Minutes later, after looking it over, the repairman said he wanted to buy it.

Stuart couldn't believe his ears.

Another prayer was answered.

Later that evening, as Stuart recalled the day's events to his sister on the phone, she said, "We'll, now you've got another testimony to share." It was then that it hit Stuart: how he had been faithful even through the storm, not giving in to Satan's fear but keeping true to his mission, and then, when called upon, answering the call to do what needed to be done, even if it was something that he had never done before. As he reflected on the event, he realized that when he felt God leading him into that dark, ominous room, he never doubted for once what he was about to do, nor did he now. Then it hit him: the prayer he had prayed over Martha had been nothing he had to think about; it was as if the words flowed through him despite what the urgent need required. Likewise, the healthcare worker joins in, echoing the voice within, "Where two or more are gathered, there I am also." The Holy Spirit had dwelt upon them, and through them, casting out that which alone they could not.

As Stuart knelt in prayer that night before turning to bed, he thanked God once again for being there for him and his family, guiding them, delivering them from all evil. As he pulled the covers up to his chin when crawling into bed, and thought of the string of events that seemed to happen so fast. He thought of the many days of torment and how the problem had hung over him like a cloud. It wasn't until God called him into service when he didn't hesitate but responded, that it seemed like those things that took an eternity to formulate a plan for had suddenly resolved themselves, like the Master's hand working out a massive puzzle. It was all done in the blink of an eye. Then it was there again, that comforting feeling of the Master's touch. Stuart closed his eyes, mouthing the words, "Thanks be to God. A feeling of bliss enveloped his being, and he soon fell into a peaceful slumber, unlike any he had known in recent nights.

And the Angels sang in unison, "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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Confident Peace

By Glenda Ward
McDowell County



“...Seek Ye First the Kingdom of God...”

Stress and worry are a thief of our time. We all experience stress and worry in our lives. We have times when we feel out of control and unable to balance our lives. We try to figure out how we can resolve a certain matter or problem, sometimes without going to our sustaining source first. When worry and stress overwhelm us, it robs us of the joy and energy we need for living. God is aware of what we need to live well and He has plans to provide them. We cannot achieve anything by worrying. Remember, when you are worrying and stressed-out God loves and cares about you. God knows of the desires of our hearts as well as our needs.

How can we influence a lost and searching world if we live our lives worrying about the same things as those who don't yet know God? We are to relinquish our worrying. God will look after the rest if we live following His ways. He will provide all we need. We shouldn't worry and stress about the future. God knows the plans He has for us, and if we confide in Him, trusting in Him, that will be all we need. Remind yourself that God has the plans for your life. We are to rest in that promise. Therefore, “...seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” (Matthew 6:33).

Because of the ill effects of stress and worry, worrying may (1) damage your health, (2) cause the object of your worry to consume your thoughts, (3) disrupt your productivity, (4) negatively affect the way you treat others, and (5) reduce your ability to trust in God. There is a difference between worry and genuine concern. Worry immobilizes, but concern moves you to action. We are to turn to God first for help. Let Him fill your thoughts with His desires, take His character for your pattern, serving and obeying Him in everything. It is our responsibility to actively choose to give God first place in all areas of our life.

Planning for tomorrow is time well spent. Worrying about tomorrow is time wasted. Careful planning is thinking ahead about goals, steps ahead, schedules, and trusting in God's way. Planning, when well done, can help alleviate stress and worry. The worrier, on the other side, is consumed by fear and finds it difficult to put trust in God's promises. Worrying lets your plans interfere with your relationship with God. Don't let worry affect your relationship with your Heavenly Father! God is a leader who encourages and stirs us to move ahead in the tasks He has given us and will be with us all the way. He equips us so we can accomplish the tasks He assigns to each of us. He knows our future, and His plans are full of hope. As God goes with us and we fulfill his mission through Jesus Christ, we can have boundless hope. This does not mean we are without pain, suffering, or hardship, but that God will see us through a glorious conclusion. “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.” (Jeremiah 29:11).

God knew we would face stress and worry in our lives. He did not leave us to worry alone but gave us a process to follow instead. He does not leave us helpless. He provides us with a written plan. In Philippians 4:6-7 we actually have a formula to help us overcome worry in our life. It is written right into the Scripture. Worry + Prayer = Peace. Our needs plus Thanksgiving to God = Peace in life. Pray and Thank God for what He has already done for you in your life. Once you have prayed and thanked Him, then submit to Him your needs and allow the peace that only God can provide to wash over you. Be patient, it may not come immediately but pray earnestly and truthfully without ceasing and it will come! God has promised it. This is the best following to take in overcoming stress and worry, go to God first. Don't go sharing your problems and worries with other people in your life. There is a time and place for that after seeking God's face first. Going to God first not only blesses Him, but it keeps us from allowing our worries to increase. God cares. He wants us to come to Him first. And we can apply this recipe or formula anywhere, anytime. Don't allow the enemy to rob you of the joy and peace that today holds.

Turn your worries into prayers. If you want to worry less, then pray more! Real peace comes from knowing that because God is in control, our citizenship in Christ's Kingdom is sure, our future is set, and our victory over sin is certain. Take your cares to Jesus. Allow Him to fill you with wonderful peace. “Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7).

Did you know that not carrying your worries, stress, and daily struggles to God shows that you have not trusted God fully with your life? It takes humility to recognize that God does care. Admit your need(s) to Him. When we turn to God in repentance, He will bear the weight of those struggles. Letting God have your worries is active, not passive. Don't submit to circumstances, but go to the Lord who can control those circumstances. “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time: casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you.” (1 Peter 5:6-7).

It has been established that the best for us is not to worry. We are to cultivate a life of peace and live with a peaceful heart. The antidote to our worrying is prayer, which produces peace. We are to do all we can to live in peace with everyone and that includes ourselves. The good news given by God, the ultimate Gift-Giver is to Cultivate a life of Peace, live Righteously, and live Wisely. The end result of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives is deep and lasting peace. This is a kind of peace that produces confident assurance in any circumstance. With Christ's peace,

we do not need to worry. Fear, uncertainty, doubt, etc. are forces that are at war within us. The peace of God through Jesus Christ moves into our hearts and lives to restrain these hostile forces and offers up comfort in place of conflict and worry alleviating the undue stress. Jesus is willing to give that peace if you are willing to accept it from Him. If your life is full of stress and worry allow the Holy Spirit to fill you with Christ's peace, God's gift of peace in Jesus Christ.

When worry comes knocking, remember that God has gifted you peace and this gift of peace cannot be taken from you. “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (John 14:27).

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.

Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them. Mark 11:24

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Diving In

By Ken and Jan Merop
Cleveland, Tennessee



When growing up, our family vacations were mostly spent at the New Jersey Shore. It always fell within the time of my birthday and the question was always asked, "Do you want a birthday cake or pizza?"

"Pizza!" was always my reply.

If you have ever had boardwalk pizza, you can identify with my enthusiasm to dive in and savor every slice.

I heard the same 'dive in' enthusiasm from a little boy. Only it went like this.

I was volunteering at Grandfather Mountain in North Carolina, which inspires the conservation of the natural world where guests explore, understand, and value its natural wonders.

One of the unusual museum pieces is a huge burl from a tree. A burl is a growth on the outside of the tree. This one is exceptionally large (like a round-shaped bathtub). An artisan has created a huge 'bowl' that people admire and imagine what it could be used for. I believe I heard the best idea yet.

One little boy said, "If I could take that home, I'd fill it with macaroni and cheese!"

I could just see him diving into this never-ending comfort food.

We all like comfort food. The more the better. The more frequent...even better. Truly, we love to dive into its delights and feel the satisfaction every bite brings.

And, so it is with another kind of food.

That food is God's Word, the Bible.

When I think of pizza with its risen dough, tasty tomato sauce, and mozzarella cheese (along with other toppings of meat and veggies), it brings a satisfying delight to my palette and appetite.

Then when I picture that little boy 'diving in' to the creamy, mouthwatering flavor of macaroni and cheese, that same gratification delivers comforting contentment.

When I dive into God's Word, I'm in for a feast of soul food.

First of all, it is alive (like all good food starts out). The Bible is God's living word because Jesus Christ is alive.

John 1: 1-6 NKJV says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

So, every 'mouthful' satisfies the hungry soul with new life-giving bites and comfort with every 'serving.' Jesus called himself the living water and the bread of life; both necessary for nourishment and life.

And the Psalmist didn't neglect our sweet tooth when he compared God's word to honey in Psalm 119:103 which says, "How sweet are Your words to my taste. Sweeter than honey to my mouth!"

So, dive in and be satisfied. Selah

A PLACE TO BE

*Inhale the clean, crisp mountain air.
Fill your senses ~ find nourishment.
Be still in this place...in His presence.
Let the symphony of nature stir your soul.
Be inspired.*

*"The mountains and the hills
shall break forth into singing before you."*

Isaiah 55: 12



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

III. You learn what you can, and can't rely on!

Isaiah 36 says the nation of Israel "leaned" on Egypt to deliver them from invading Babylonians. But it says Egypt was like a "broken reed." They trusted it, but it couldn't save them.

In a crisis, we discover that a lot of things we trust are just "broken reeds." — Hurricane Beryl showed us that forecasts can go wrong; and that the internet we so rely on, can be taken away.

— Many folks had invested thousands of dollars in a generator system they could trust during a crisis like this. But more than one told me their generator went out, a couple of hours into the storm. It was a "broken reed" of sorts to them! Crises reveal a lot of "broken reeds" that aren't worthy of our trust.

But they also remind us that we CAN put our ultimate trust in the Lord:

- God's power never goes out!
- His living water never runs dry.
- His mercies never fail.
- His lovingkindness is everlasting.
- We can absolutely rely on Him in our worst crisis.

Psalm 46:1-2 says: "God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change.

And though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea."

The whole earth may change: the mountains — which we consider so permanent and immovable — may one day slip into the sea! But he says despite all that, we will not fear. WHY?

- Because we have a comfortable, air-conditioned home?
- Because we have cars we can drive anywhere?
- Because we have so much money?

No; Psalm 46 says "Therefore we will not fear" because "GOD IS OUR REFUGE AND STRENGTH."

If Jesus is our Savior, then during the darkest moments of our crisis, we can still walk with God, and know that He is with us; comforting us, leading us, empowering us to serve, learn, grow, and glorify Him. And even if our life is taken away, we know we'll go straight to eternal glory with Him in heaven!

But make certain that you are truly relying on Him for your salvation. Don't trust how good you are, or any good works you've done. Like the song says: "In Christ ALONE my hope is found." Trust what JESUS did on the cross to save you. Lean on HIM. Rely on HIM. Make sure your trust is in JESUS ALONE to save you, and to carry you through your crisis hours.

So "don't waste a good crisis." Make sure you learn and do everything God has for you in it. And especially make sure that "In Christ Alone My Hope Is Found"!

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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Freedom Life Expands

By Jim Smith
McDowell County



Freedom Life Reentry Expands Across Three Counties, Seeking Volunteers and Sweet Treats for Fall Fundraising

Freedom Life Reentry, a beacon of hope for individuals reintegrating into society after incarceration, is spreading its wings. This crucial organization, already established in McDowell County, North Carolina, has proudly announced its expansion into neighboring Avery and Yancey counties. This move signifies a significant step towards providing vital support to a wider range of individuals seeking a second chance.

Why Reentry Services Are Essential

Reentry services play a critical role in fostering a safer and more prosperous community for everyone. When individuals are released from prison or jail, they often face a multitude of challenges: securing stable housing, finding meaningful employment, overcoming addiction, and reconnecting with families. Without proper support, the risk of recidivism – returning to incarceration – soars. This not only impacts the individual but also places a financial and social burden on the entire community.

Freedom Life Reentry tackles these challenges head-on. Their comprehensive programs provide essential resources and support systems that empower formerly incarcerated individuals to rebuild their lives. This includes:

- **Housing assistance:** Finding secure and affordable housing is a cornerstone of successful reentry. Freedom Life helps clients navigate the housing market and connect with potential landlords.
- **Job training and placement:** Developing marketable skills and securing employment are crucial for financial stability. Freedom Life equips clients with job training programs and connects them with potential employers.
- **Mental health counseling:** Many individuals returning from incarceration have experienced trauma and require mental health support. Freedom Life provides access to counseling services to help clients manage these challenges.
- **Addiction treatment:** Recovering from addiction is a critical step in successful reentry. Freedom Life offers resources and support to help clients overcome substance abuse issues.
- **Spiritual support:** Finding meaning and purpose can be a powerful motivator for change. Freedom Life provides opportunities for spiritual growth and connection.

Join the Mission: Volunteer Opportunities Abound

The expansion into new counties necessitates an even stronger support system. Freedom Life is actively seeking passionate volunteers to fuel its mission. Here are some ways you can contribute your time and talents:

- **Office Reception:** Greet clients and visitors with a warm smile, manage schedules, and provide valuable administrative support.
- **Transportation:** Assist clients with transportation needs for appointments, job interviews, and essential errands. Reliable transportation is a major barrier for many re-entering society.
- **Event Planning and Implementation:** Help organize and execute fundraising events that raise awareness and crucial funds to sustain Freedom Life's programs.

A "Part Chocolate and Stories" Fall Extravaganza

Looking for a delicious and inspiring way to support Freedom Life this fall? Mark your calendars for the unique "Art, Chocolate, and Stories" fundraising event series! This innovative concept will pair talented local artists with skilled dessert makers and inspire Freedom Life clients. The result? Stunning thematic tables featuring delectable treats alongside the clients' personal stories and inspiring artwork. Attendees can indulge in delicious desserts while learning about the clients' journeys and the transformative power of Freedom Life. These one-of-a-kind creations will be auctioned off, offering a chance to support the cause while taking home a unique piece of art.

"We are incredibly excited about Freedom Life's expansion and our upcoming fall fundraising events," says Linc Vance - Yancey Reentry Coordinator. "With the dedication of our volunteers and the unwavering support of our community, we can empower even more individuals to build fulfilling and productive lives after incarceration. Together, we can create a safer and more just society for everyone."

Become a Part of the Solution

To learn more about volunteer opportunities or the "Art, Chocolate, and Stories" event series, please contact Freedom Life at 828.559.2224 or visit their website at www.freedlifeministries.org. This fall, indulge your sweet tooth, support a worthy cause, and celebrate the power of second chances with Freedom Life! Details in next month's article!

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

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Head For the Hills

By Caron Cline
Burke County



This summer has been one of the hottest and most humid of the last several years. Outside activities, whether work or play, seem to drain every ounce of energy and can even be dangerous for some. Extreme heat tends to bring out the worst in people, resulting in short tempers that strain even the best of relationships. At this point, a new perspective is needed. It's time to 'head for the hills', for some recalibration. The air smells sweeter, the trees, greener, the streams, clearer, and the beauty of those rolling hills calms the restless mind. A short hike, a walk through a mountain town, and a picnic with a scenic view are all opportunities to allow the stress to melt away. The same thing that happens in the natural can also happen in the spiritual. Spiritual fatigue, discouragement, bursts of anger, and lack of peace overtake our thoughts and feelings. The fires of tribulation sweep across our souls and threaten to destroy every ounce of our faith. Thankfully, the Word of God includes a fire extinguisher. Psalm 121:1-2 says, "I lift my eyes to the hills; from where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth". Jerusalem was always considered the mountain of God and those who traveled to the city were always moving upward. This world system breeds stress, fear, anger, frustration, bitterness, and a host of other negative emotions and attitudes. The enemy hurls these fiery darts against the children of God with the intent of destroying their testimony. Our only hope for deliverance is to seek the Lord. This Psalm reminds God's children that He is their helper, their keeper, and their protector. Lifting our eyes to the hills reminds us that our Father is higher than anything threatening to tear us down. He created the heavens, the earth, and all that is within, therefore, He is certainly able to deliver His people out of the fiery furnace of spiritual burn-out. The God of heaven and earth never slumbers and is ever watching over His children, keeping them safe from harm. The Lord's Hand steadies believers, preventing their feet from slipping as they walk the path of righteousness. Lastly, the Father protects the souls of His people, guarding them from all evil. He always oversees every move of every Christian. Lifting our eyes to those things that are above, and spending time in the presence of the Father relieves all stress, worry, and anxiety caused by the intense heat of worldly trials and temptations. After all, the Lord makes us lie down in the greenest of pastures, leads us beside those still mountain streams, and even prepares a table, a picnic, for us in the presence of our enemies. "Surely goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives". When the heat threatens to overwhelm you, head to the hills!

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

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Please send church or community events to be included in Bits and Pieces each month to cathyp@brcnews.com by the 15th of the month before publication. Thanks.

Mitchell County

Mt Zion Community Church
Friday, August 2, at 7pm. Monthly Gospel Sing-A-Long. Join us for a worship service of lifting our voices in praise to our Lord as we sing old familiar gospel songs. There will also be special music. Refreshments following the service. Mt Zion is located across from Mayland Community College at the Avery/Mitchell County Line.

Mt Zion Community Church
Saturday, August 3, at 7pm and again on Sunday morning at the 9am service Reverend Andy Lambert, Global Methodist Church Evangelist, will be speaking. He will also be speaking at the 11am service on Sunday at the Minneapolis Methodist Church as they celebrate 150 years of service to the Lord.

Mt Zion Community Church
Homecoming and "Dinner on the Ground" will be celebrated at Mt Zion Community Church on Sunday, August 18, 2024.

Gospel Singing
Jack Hicks Memorial Gospel Singing will be hosted by the Cranberrian Corporation on Saturday, August 24, 2024 beginning at 5pm. Location is at the intersection of Highway 19-E and 194 in Elk Park, NC. Featured will be singing groups: The Resurrection, Toe River Drifters, TruBlue and soloist, Mike McClain. Bring a lawn chair and enjoy an evening of gospel music. Food will be available.

Making Memories At The Orchard

By Tricia Van Dyke
Mitchell County



Apple season is officially upon us! July brought our first two apple varieties of the 2024 season to harvest, the Transparent (Lodi) and Early June varieties, and our first U-Pick apple tours headed into the Orchard, returning with baskets full. Seeing families make memories, as they take a step back to a slower time, always brings smiles to our staff. As our outside crews continue to manage our grounds for apple pickers, we look forward to even more memory-making opportunities as we head into August!

As more apple varieties ripen, the Apple Shed, located behind the General Store, will open to serve guests looking for fresh apples from 10 AM to 5 PM. Our inventory of picked apples, bagged in half-peck and full-peck, is ready for those who prefer to pick up and go. Looking for the U-Pick experience? Our U-Pick Apple Tours are also available from the Apple Shed, every hour, on the hour, beginning at 10 AM with the last tour heading out at 4 PM, Wednesday through Sunday.

So just what apples can you expect in August? This can vary a bit, but the Orchard expects to have Red Blaze, Ginger Gold, McIntosh, Gala, and Jona Gold. "As a small-batch heirloom Orchard, we work with many apple varieties, each ripening at their own pace," said Beth Hilton, Executive Director. "We have a lot of experience predicting when apples will be ready, but how long they'll be available before we sell out can be another story. Certain familiar varieties often sell out quickly, but one of my favorite things about heirloom apples is that each variety is unique in its texture and flavor profile. So don't be afraid to experiment and try something new. You may find a new favorite!"

The Orchard Music Program is having a fantastic season, with a full schedule of live, traditional music supporting our nonprofit mission to preserve the history, heritage, and culture of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Our beautiful open-air pavilion, overlooking the Blue Ridge, features free performances each Saturday and Sunday from 2 PM - 4 PM with some of our region's most talented musicians.

- Aug 3: Good Ol' Boys
- Aug 4: Randy Flack
- Aug 10: Slight Departure
- Aug 11: Dollar Brothers
- Aug 17: Split Rail Bluegrass
- Aug 18: Seth & Sara
- Aug 24: Rewind Goodtimz
- Aug 25: Carolina Bluegrass Style
- Aug 31: Ruglifters Trio

On August 9th from 6 PM - 8 PM, the Orchard will host its third evening "fun" raiser of the season, featuring long-time Orchard friend and supporter, Terry McKinney. Terry is an accomplished local musician, an extraordinary singer and songwriter, specializing in traditional country music, gospel, and more. Tickets are \$15, and only available at the General Store counter on the evening of the event. "As a nonprofit, our goal this season is for the Orchard Music Program to be completely self-sufficient through our Music Sponsors," said Sam McKinney, Orchard Mission Manager, "and we're over halfway there. But we still need more help. Attending a fundraising concert or sponsoring a band is a great way for our Orchard friends to make a big difference, and help us continue our mission." The Orchard is also pleased to welcome author and local historian, Michael C. Hardy, who will join us on August 31 from 11:30 AM - 1:30 PM to sell and sign books. Michael was the 2010 North Carolina Historian of the Year and will be selling and signing his most recent book, Hidden History of the Toe River Valley. And of course, don't forget to stop by to see our selection of unique and hand-crafted local items including ceramics, jewelry, toys, and more, all with a focus on the beauty of our regional heritage and culture, located at our General Store. The store also boasts a variety of sweet and savory treats such as warm apple pie, handmade fudge, flavored popcorn, and local honey - all perfect for topping off a memorable day at the Orchard.

The Orchard at Altapass is open from 10 AM to 5 PM, Wednesday - Sunday, through October 26. Lunch at the Apple Core Grill is available from 11 AM to 4 PM Wednesday - Sunday. Come and see us, prepared to enjoy the people, music, art, and natural beauty of the Blue Ridge Mountains. For more information about the Orchard at Altapass, please visit altapassorchard.org; for updates, "like" our Facebook page or "follow" us on Instagram. To stay in the loop, be sure to request our monthly e-newsletter by contacting marketing@altapassorchard.org.

Tricia Van Dyke is the Marketing role for the Orchard





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Sudoku

Solution on page 14

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

Roan Mountain Baptist Church

"God's Aquarium"

By Russell McKinney
Mitchell County



"I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted." (Job 42:2, N.I.V.)

This verse begins Job's apology to God after he has challenged God's wisdom and justice in allowing him to suffer so much tragedy. Call it a confession or call it repentance, but the verse signals the end of Job questioning how God was running the universe. The God the verse describes is big enough to bring His thoughts, purposes, and plans to pass right over the top of all objectors. Job is saying that God is an irresistible, all-powerful deity who can plow His will straight through any resistance it might encounter. He's saying, "Lord, if You want to do something, no one can stop You from doing it."

But hold on a minute. Isn't the Bible filled with stories involving people who actually did prevent God's purposes, plans, and will from being done? It all started with Adam and Eve. If God's plan was for them to continue endlessly in sinless perfection, they certainly thwarted that plan, didn't they? Then along came Cain. If God's plan was for him to bring the right kind of sacrifice and love to his brother Abel, we know what became of that plan. Furthermore, following Cain's murder of Abel, he went out and fathered an entire line of descendants who were all rebels regarding God's purposes, plans, and will. In the end, all of that rebellion culminated in the entire human race, except for Noah and his family, being killed off by way of the great flood.

The point is, that we can't even get through six full chapters of the Bible without encountering millions of people who never conformed to God's plans for their lives. This shows us that an individual's free will does factor into the equation of God's dealings with that individual. The only other conclusion to be drawn is that God actually willed Adam and Eve to eat that forbidden fruit, willed Cain to murder Abel, and willed the human race to reach a state of depravity worthy of almost complete annihilation. That alternative conclusion, of course, cuts completely against the hundreds and hundreds of Bible passages that teach that God is a God of holiness, love, compassion, mercy, and grace.

So, how exactly should we interpret Job 42:2? Well, if God is dead set on doing something and nothing can change His mind about it, He can do that something anytime and in any way He wants to do it. I mean, He's not GOD for nothing!!! What's fascinating about Him, though, is the fact that He desires voluntary submission so much that He not only builds a spiritual/moral free will into each individual but actually allows each individual to exercise that free will arbitrarily. Even if that individual uses free will to thwart (restrain, stop, prevent, undermine) His will, God won't recreate or rewire that individual to produce obedience. As the classic line goes, "God doesn't want robots who have to obey Him."

The illustration of a home aquarium has always been helpful to me when it comes to understanding this balanced relationship between God's sovereignty and man's free will. Imagine an aquarium that sits on a stand in the living room of a home. This aquarium is filled with water and within all that water the fish swim around in a world created especially for them. This world includes gravel, rocks, plastic plants, a miniature sunken ship, a small treasure chest resting beside the ship, and a beautifully painted background. The aquarium also features an air pump, a filtering system, a light, and a heater.

Sometimes the fish in the aquarium get along with each other, but other times they fight and chase each other around. Sometimes the bigger fish even eat the smaller fish. Through it all, though, the owner of the aquarium is never threatened in any way. Regardless of what goes on among the fish inside the aquarium, he remains sovereignly aloof and in charge. He can do whatever he wants to do concerning the aquarium because the whole operation belongs to him and he's the one who keeps it in operation.

Do you see how this illustration can be applied to God's relationship with individuals? Even when people refuse to voluntarily submit to God's plans, purposes, and will, He always remains in charge of the universe in which those individuals live. I don't want to stretch the illustration too far, but wouldn't it be something if the entire universe, including this earth and all the life upon it, is just an aquarium sitting in a corner of heaven? That, perhaps, is a good way of interpreting Job's comment about God's omnipotence. God, as the eternal, universal aquarium keeper, can do whatever He wants to do concerning life in the aquarium, but He allows individuals to swim the course of their own choosing. For that matter, Jesus did compare evangelism to fishing, didn't He? Now that I think about it, maybe that comparison was more appropriate than we have ever realized.

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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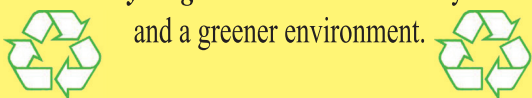
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Adversity Bring Adjustments

By Steve Williams
Mitchell County



All of us have, or will experience adversity in our lives. Some adversities are self-inflicted and others just come. They come without warning. One hour our life is fine, then the next minute a 20-foot title wave hits and you feel like it has destroyed your life. If you knew that adversity was coming your way, you could prepare for it, or at least brace yourself for it. Adversity comes in different forms: layoffs, the death of a loved one, a child in trouble, an accident, bad test results, even a mate's betrayal, etc.... Yet we all know if we live that we are going to have to face adversity. Adversity is no respecter of persons. It doesn't matter what position you hold in society, adversity will touch you. You can be Famous or Unknown, Rich or Poor, Good or Bad it gets us all. There is a question many of us ask ourselves when adversity comes. Why did this have to happen to Me, My Family, or My Church?

If we were to look in the Bible it gives us the answer. We will see that most adversity comes into our lives due to personal sin. Look at David his affair with Bathsheba. Look at Jonah's running away from what Gods call. Think about Samson on how he failed to listen to his parents and do what God wanted him to do. Look at Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. We see that they all deliberately chose to sin. And we see with each sin, came adversities into their lives. Don't think the sin that you are doing or dabbling in doesn't have consequences. Let's say you steal, lie, cheat on mate: you will eventually get caught. Let's say you abuse your body with drugs, drinking, or even sex, they will bring with them addictions and even diseases.

We cannot blame God for our bad Choices in life. We do what we want because we want to. God has given us Free Will, He did not make us robots. And the reason many of us sin is because we deliberately choose to. The consequences of bad decisions bring along with it problems. What you and I have to do is deal with the problem, and that means we have to take responsibility. Think about Adam and Eve. They tried to pass the buck. Eve blamed the serpent. She said he beguiled her or charmed her. Adam blamed God because of the woman God gave him. Remember, you can't blame God or anyone else for your bad choices.

Satan's Goal in our adversities is to cause us to doubt. See doubt causes us to doubt God's Word and God's Goodness. Doubting will bring discouragement into our lives. Keep your eyes on the problem and not on God. Satan's temptations are also a diversion. Satan will make the wrong things seem attractive so that we will want them more than to do what is right. And when this happens we feel defeated. When someone is defeated they feel like a failure and start telling themselves what the use. And when this happens we will fail to take responsibility for our actions and our choices.

God's purpose for adversities that come our way or that He allows to come into our lives is not Bad. That is not God's Plan or will for your life. What we need to see is that our adversities are Setbacks that will pave the way for our Come Backs! Amen! We see in the Bible that Joseph's brothers hated him, and then sold him into slavery was just setting him up for a great comeback in life. Peter denying Jesus three times was setting him up for the day of Pentecost where 3000 were saved. See adversities help us grow closer to the Lord, Experience His presence, and see His power at Work in our lives. So, just hang in there, God is just making adjustments in our lives through our adversities.

Words of Wisdom:

- All the adversity I've had in my life, all my troubles and obstacles, have strengthened me... You may not realize it when it happens, but a kick in the teeth may be the best thing in the world for you. Walt Disney
- There is no education like adversity. N/A
- Adversity makes men, and prosperity makes monsters. N/A
- Adversity causes some men to break; others to break records. William Arthur Ward
- Mentally strong people overcome setbacks with confidence because adversity only makes them better. N/A

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

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Living Sacrifices

By Sandy Mayle
Erie, Pa.



Aren't imperfect gifts sometimes the best? I point to my refrigerator as an example.

My five-year-old granddaughter Celia sometimes brings me artwork she has done in Sunday School class. Of course, it goes onto the fridge. Right now I'm displaying a sheep she made from a flattened coffee filter, on which cotton balls surround a kraft-paper head, and googly eyes give it a deer-in-the-headlights look. The heading says, "The Lord is My Shepherd."

Right there, a sermon. As His sheep, I sometimes wear the same deer-in-the-headlights look. And feel like my head is full of cotton balls. And definitely act like something that needs a shepherd!

The amazing thing is, The Lord is my Shepherd.

Although God required Old Testament Jews to offer as sacrifices only sheep that were perfect (and perfectly dead), today God is asking for sacrifices that are living and imperfect! Flawed, yes, but completely on the altar.

Are you living? Are you imperfect? Then you qualify!

Perhaps you've already asked His forgiveness for your sins and trusted Him for salvation. (If you haven't, start there!). But God wants more from you and me than the "sinner's prayer." He wants us to come to realize, OK, I haven't really given myself body, mind, and soul to the Lord. He wants more. He deserves everything. I need to quit crawling off the altar."

The apostle Paul challenged the Roman believers: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship" (Romans 12:1 NIV).

In the Greek, I'm told, this verse means to offer yourself completely to God at a specific point and from that time forward. To be an ongoing, living, imperfect sacrifice to Him. To be His sometimes-flattened, cotton-headed, googly-eyed sheep wholly and forever.

Not so He can stick you on His fridge, but so He can rest you in green pastures, lead you beside still waters, restore your soul. Lead you in paths of righteousness right through the valley of the shadow of death, anoint you with His Spirit, overflow your life with blessings, and take you into His forever-fold.

Have you offered all you are as a living sacrifice to God?

If not, don't put it off.

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.

The Answer

By Billy Graham



Q: Why do evangelists emphasize God's love, seldom speaking of the sinful nature of mankind? My grandfather was a circuit-riding preacher. As a young boy, I can remember the fear he put into the hearts of those listening to his sermons, but I can also remember the altar being filled at the end of the service and tears being shed as people repented and turned to God. And my dear grandfather would stand, embrace them, and encourage them in their new lives. While I don't enjoy being told about my sin, I understand that we cannot know the true love of God until we admit our sin and turn from it, realizing the amazing love of God.

A: From the writings of the Rev. Billy Graham

There's a tendency to focus on the love of God to the exclusion of the other side of God's nature, for God hates sin. We are told in the Scriptures that God hates liars, proud and haughty looks, and all other manifestations of sin. God has promised to judge sin with the fierceness of his wrath (see Proverbs 6:16-19).

David said, "I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. ... I will confess my transgressions to the Lord" (Psalm 32:5, NKJV).

God doesn't take sin lightly. We live in an age when sin is winked at and where God is treated as one who is indulgent, softhearted, and tolerant of those who break His commandments. People today find it difficult to believe that God hates anything, much less sin.

The truth is, God has not forgotten about sin, though some may pretend it doesn't exist. The reason God hates sin is that, when left unforgiven, it sends people out into a timeless eternity in Hell. God isn't willing that any should perish, but that all come to a knowledge of Him. God's forgiveness brings restoration and gives the repentant sinner joy and contentment in Christ alone.



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YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

NC Senate District 47



Sen. Ralph Hise
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With the conclusion of the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee, Wisconsin last month, former President Donald Trump is officially the Republican nominee for the 2024 presidential election. Former President Trump announced first-term U.S. Senator from Ohio J.D. Vance as his vice-presidential nominee. I had the honor of representing North Carolina as a delegate at the convention and was proud to cast my vote once again to nominate Donald Trump for President.

Campaigns usually heat up after Labor Day, but we seem to be getting an early start this year. July certainly appeared to turn the tide in favor of a second Trump presidency. Joe Biden's abysmal performance at the first debate opened the nation's eyes to the declining health of the current president – even those who have been willfully ignorant of the fact up to that point.

The July 13th assassination attempt against Donald Trump further displayed the former president's resilience and willingness to fight for the American people, no matter the cost. That event also seemed to be a wake-up call for many Americans about the natural progression of the Left's unhinged rhetoric villainizing Trump, his supporters, Republicans more broadly, and anyone who doesn't abide by the woke and open-border party line.

President Biden expressed relief that Trump wasn't further harmed, but only two weeks before the attack, the president called his opponent a threat to freedom, and democracy, and "literally a threat to everything America stands for." Biden doubled down on this sentiment in a July 15th interview, mere days after the shooting, and has yet to take any responsibility for the current highly charged, hostile political environment.

A second Trump presidency is about installing a capable leader in the White House who will look out for American interests at home and on the world stage.

In North Carolina, Republican gubernatorial candidate, Lieutenant Governor Mark Robinson appears to be making strides as well. Robinson spoke at the Republican National Convention, outlining the stark differences between the American economy under Presidents Biden and Trump. He also pointed out that he is proof of the American dream, which is supported by American values such as hard work and keeping the faith. Robinson's vision for North Carolina is more free and less burdened by government overreach.

With the convention behind us, we look to November with the hope that our next group of elected leaders will get the country back on track. In the meantime, though, we will enjoy the remainder of the summer with our family, friends, and community as we strive to remember that politics cannot and should not be the center of our lives or identities.

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

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

On July 22, I had the opportunity to present the Greensboro Sonoco Recycling location with its first Carolina Star award. The Carolina Star Program recognizes leaders in occupational safety and health who are successfully protecting employees from death, injury, and illness by implementing comprehensive and effective safety and health programs and management systems. If you are interested in learning more about the Carolina Star Program, please contact LaMont Smith, Carolina Star's recognition program manager, for more information at lamont.smith@labor.nc.gov. Congratulations Sonoco Recycling of Greensboro on this achievement and thank you for your commitment to safety and health!

Safe + Sound Week is a nationwide event held each August that recognizes the successes of workplace health and safety programs and offers information and ideas on how to keep America's workers safe. This year Safe + Sound Week is Aug. 12-18, 2024. If you would like more information about the campaign, please visit our website.

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

I hope everyone has a great rest of the summer!

NC Senate District 46



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

As your state Senator, I am committed to safeguarding the democratic processes that are foundational to our society. One of the most pressing issues we face today is ensuring that only U.S. citizens have the right to vote in our elections. This principle is exactly what House Bill 1074 (the Citizens Only Constitutional Amendment) seeks to address by amending our state constitution to explicitly state that only U.S. citizens may vote in North Carolina's elections. HB 1074 was passed by the General Assembly and was ratified on June 28, 2024. In November, this Amendment will be on the ballot and you can let your voice be heard on this issue. This matters now because there are places in the United States where noncitizens can vote in elections. For example, in the District of Columbia, noncitizen residents can vote in local elections for the offices of Mayor, Attorney General, DC Council, State Board of Education, and Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner, and can vote on initiative, referendum, recall, or charter amendment measures. Similarly, three cities in Vermont, including the state's largest city and the state's capital, allow non-U.S. citizen residents to vote in local elections. In San Francisco, noncitizen residents can register to vote in local school board elections. Although a New York City law that would have allowed about 800,000 noncitizens to vote in local elections was struck down, noncitizens can still cast ballots in at least 14 municipalities in states that do not explicitly ban noncitizens from voting. After the city of San Francisco enacted its noncitizen voting policy, the city was sued over the law by the conservative organization U.S. Justice Foundation. One of the arguments made by the city was that California's constitution does not state that "only" U.S. citizens may vote. In a brief supporting the noncitizen voting policy, a UCLA professor wrote, "By declining to state that 'only' U.S. citizens 'shall' vote, California's voters anticipated that the Legislature could, and should, expand the franchise to others who 'may' vote." In the Court of Appeals decision upholding the law, the judge wrote that California's citizen voter provision "does not, by its terms, preclude the expansion of the franchise to noncitizens. The City notes the provision could, but does not, state, 'only' a United States citizen . . . may vote." If the California state constitution said "only" a U.S. citizen may vote, the noncitizen voting law may have been unconstitutional. The new language we are proposing is stronger and better suited against any future statutory changes or legal challenges. The threat to NC is it's only a matter of time before Democrats try and find ways to allow noncitizen voting in North Carolina. North Carolina Democrats in Congress representing Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill, and Charlotte already voted to keep the law allowing noncitizens to vote in Washington, DC's elections. In Charlotte, noncitizens are already allowed to serve on city boards and commissions. This is exactly why we need to be proactive now rather than waiting for liberal groups to push for noncitizen voting in our state. Our nation is being overwhelmed with noncitizens crossing the border, and since President Biden took office, there have been more than 7.8 million encounters at the Southern border. Nearly 2 million known gotaways have evaded U.S. Border Patrol under this administration, and President Biden's embrace of an open borders policy is having devastating consequences in North Carolina through the illegal drug trade. We don't need this problem also affecting our elections. North Carolina needs to do its part to protect our republic and keep U.S. elections only for U.S. citizens. The best legal and statutory defense we can have against noncitizens voting in our elections is a constitutional amendment with specific language clarifying that only U.S. citizens can vote in North Carolina's elections, and this November the voters of our state will be able to amend the state constitution to make this crystal clear. While none of our municipalities in North Carolina have yet tried to allow noncitizens to vote, we shouldn't give them any room on this issue. If Democrats regain control of the General Assembly, they could change the law to allow it to happen. In that instance, we need our state constitution to be as strong as possible. So this November when you go to vote, I urge you to support the Citizens Only Constitutional Amendment. By doing so, we will take a significant step toward ensuring that our elections remain the exclusive right of U.S. citizens.

YOUR GOVERNMENT PAGES

NC House District 86



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

ONLY CITIZENS SHOULD VOTE

In 1996, the United States Congress passed a law prohibiting noncitizens from voting in federal elections. This law covers only federal elections for the president, vice president, U.S. House of Representatives, and U.S. Senate. The law does not extend to state and local elections. As a result of the law being limited to elections for federal officials, several localities around the country are allowing non-citizens to vote in elections for state or local officials. I agree with those who see this as a serious threat to our country. First, I would argue, that it is a major factor in maintaining our freedoms and rights that those eligible to vote have some significant awareness of and allegiance to our federal and state constitutions. There is absolutely no assurance that a noncitizen has even the awareness, much less allegiance, to our foundational documents. Moreover, though the current jurisdictions allowing such noncitizen voting are limited in number, it is almost certainly a case of the “camel’s nose under the tent”. If the practice is allowed to get a foothold, we must expect it to spread to wider and wider areas of the country. This, in turn, will contribute to ever more divisive politics because of the growing lack of shared principles among those allowed to vote.

In 2022, the New York City Council passed legislation allowing non-citizens to vote in its local elections. This city action was ultimately struck down by the state’s supreme court as a violation of the New York State Constitution which only permits citizens to vote in state and local elections. Illinois bars noncitizens from voting in state and federal elections but does not prevent them from voting in local elections. California, Maryland, Vermont, and the District of Columbia allow non-citizens to vote in local elections but leave it up to the localities to decide whether to actually permit non-citizens to vote in their elections.

The limitation of federal law to federal official elections only and the above New York City and state examples highlight the urgency of acting to protect against spreading noncitizen voting to North Carolina elections. As a result, I am pleased that the North Carolina General Assembly approved a proposed amendment to our state constitution specifically stating that only United States citizens may vote in state and local elections in North Carolina. For the amendment to become effective and a part of our constitution, the state’s voters will have to approve. Thus, North Carolinians will vote in the upcoming November election to determine whether the amendment will become part of our constitution. We join South Carolina, Oklahoma, Missouri, Kentucky, Idaho, Iowa, and Wisconsin in including such an amendment on the ballot come November.

It is true that North Carolina currently has a law requiring citizenship to vote in state and local elections. However, that law can readily be altered by any session of the state legislature. By making the citizenship requirement part of our state constitution, future legislatures will not be able to get rid of the requirement without repealing the constitutional provision. Repeal would require approval by voters. I believe this issue is one of such importance that it should be part of our constitution, not just a state law changeable at any time by the legislature. If North Carolinians agree in November, the amendment will help secure our elections and ensure that basic level of commitment to shared ideals that are critical to maintaining our freedoms and rights as Americans.



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Enjoying Everyday Life

Freedom from Judgement and Criticism

By Joyce Meyer



Years ago, I was truly one of the most critical and judgmental people I knew. It was my “default” setting.

If I were at the mall or even at church, I could look at someone and immediately make three or four judgments about their clothes, hair, behavior, or family. Or if I walked into someone’s home, everything could be absolutely perfect, but somehow I would notice that one corner of wallpaper that was ripped slightly.

I’ll admit, that judging and criticizing others was something I rather enjoyed doing before God began to change me. However, little by little, He used His Word to begin showing me the truth about myself.

I’ll never forget one day in particular. I had just finished judging someone and nit-picking them about something in my thoughts, when the Holy Spirit so clearly spoke to my heart and said, “Joyce, you look at everyone else with a magnifying glass, but you look at yourself through rose-colored glasses.”

I got the point! The truth is, we can be pretty quick to recognize what’s wrong with other people and see all of their issues. However, even though we may have some of the same problems ourselves, we usually have good excuses to justify them.

Look at what Jesus says in Matthew 7:5: “*You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye*” (NIV).

I love this—it’s so practical. Jesus is basically saying, “You love to point out everyone else’s faults, but you should really begin with yourself. Until you get yourself straightened out, you can’t really even help anyone else!”

We need to forget about what everyone else is or isn’t doing, present ourselves before God, and let Him do a work in us. The truth is, that the more we allow God to change us, the less we are bothered by the faults of others.

Our circumstances may never be perfect, and the things we don’t like about our family, friends, or co-workers may not change, but God can do something even better: He can change us.

These days, if there’s something about my husband, Dave, that I think needs to change, I will pray and ask God for help. But even then, my attitude is completely different than it used to be.

Now, I’ll pray something like, “Lord, if it’s Your will, I ask You to help Dave change in this area. But first, if the problem is really me and not Dave, please show me. Show me if there’s anything I need to change.”

Sure, there are times when we may need to sit down and talk with a friend or family member about their weaknesses or faults for the health of the relationship, but even then, it should be done with humility and love. Our motive should always be to help them.

Psalm 51:6 (AMPC) says, “*Behold, You desire truth in the inner being; make me therefore to know wisdom in my inmost heart.*”

And Ephesians 4:15 (AMPC) says, “*Let our lives lovingly express truth [in all things, speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly]....*”

God wants to reveal the truth to us. He desires for us to face anything that is coming between us and Him...things that are holding us back from His good plan and purpose for our lives.

I’ve learned to ask God regularly, “Show me truth. And help me to face the truth You show me...especially what You show me about myself.”

Can I tell you something? All of those days when I was constantly judging and criticizing others...I wasn’t happy. First, I wasn’t walking in love with people, and I was also sowing seeds for others to judge and criticize me.

But even beyond that, there is such freedom when we can learn to “live and let live”—when we can focus on our own growth and change, and leave the spiritual progress of other people up to God.

When I look back at all of the years I pestered Dave and pressured him to change, it’s almost comical! And now that I have allowed God to change me, I can truly say that I love and enjoy my husband for who he is...and there’s freedom in that.

Let God begin with you. I encourage you to pray, “Lord, please show me the truth about myself. Please change me so I can better help the people around me.”

As you do, the Holy Spirit—the “Spirit of Truth”—will start to show you things about yourself...and help you walk in new levels of freedom.

Joyce Meyer is a New York Times bestselling author and one of the world's leading Bible teachers. Through Joyce Meyer Ministries, she teaches practically and candidly, openly sharing her experiences and helping millions of people to apply biblical principles to their situations and ultimately find hope and restoration through Jesus Christ. Her book Battlefield of the Mind has been a perennial bestseller, teaching people how to win the war in their minds and “think about what they think about.” Joyce holds conferences across the United States, and her Enjoying Everyday Life program is broadcast on TV, radio and online to millions in over 100 languages.



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Todd's Techy Tips

The Digital Dump – Waste!

By Todd Abraham
Athens, Tenn.



Time is the most precious resource we have as human beings. Psalm 90:12 *“So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”* So many mighty men of God testified in the bible about how fleeting life is. And God does not like waste. But what is one of the greatest, if not the most significant, results of technology? It is a waste; of wasted time. To reiterate, God does NOT like waste. Two verses in the New Testament, Ephesians 5:16 and Colossians 4:5, both instruct us to redeem the time. Many say when asked what they are doing, “Oh I'm just killing time.” But my pastor clarified it most properly, “Time is killing you.”

Technology has created the greatest waste in history in the form of wasted time. And almost equally bad is the resulting idolatry. Smartphones are the greatest culprit in addition to social media sites and worst of all, online gaming. My very first video game in the 70s was the Atari 2600 which is where I learned to play Chess surprisingly. Wasn't long after, we saw the handheld games, the Nintendo, the mall arcades, and so on. But fast forward to today with the advent of modern graphics and super advanced coding and now we have a prevalent evil in our midst. On a side note, did you know one of the tactics of the communist agenda to take over the world was the free flow of money? According to a recent survey, the average person spends nearly 7 hours per day online. Also, as I have mentioned before research has proven, that smartphone users stay in a constant state of distraction. God forbid you should turn off notifications for any social media site or similar online platform. Because if you do, nearly every time you visit those sites, they are nagging you to turn them back on. The devil knows that a distracted mind is stomping grounds for him.

Technology has captured the minds of the world in every developed nation! It is the greatest form of free will and mind control ever known to man. The powers that be who are controlled by the devil have found the ideal way to get rich and destroy your soul simultaneously. Find me another preacher that YOU know or have even heard of who is exposing this sinister weapon of Satan for what it is! And, again, it's not me but what God has emphatically impressed in my heart to preach against. And confirmed it to me with signs following and strong chastening. Friend, I strive to live what I preach and preach what I live. These aren't just words on a page to generate more interest for Heartbeat Christian News or to make me out to be somebody. The name of this article, Todd's Techy Tips, was given to me by God and the fact that it is catchy, well praise be to Him for that.

Just remember, we all are going to give a full account of our lives on the day of judgment! Even for every idle word we've spoken. And you know, your conscience bearing witness, if your smartphone and/or technology is an idol to you whether you are honest with yourself or not. If it is, what is the solution? For starters, pray for someone you love who is addicted to it for their deliverance because we reap what we sow. Getting someone you know without doubt can touch God on your behalf in prayer for deliverance. The word of God means the original KJV because He sent His Word to heal us. Faith! It wearies me sometimes to seem redundant but hear this again. Smartphones and technology are the methods the devil is going to use to control the world. It's not going to get better but worse. With freedom being taken away at an alarming rate, without the use of the Constitution, this should give you great spiritual concern! We've all heard the old and familiar phrase, “The devil is in the details.” My friend that is NOT true. The devil wants you to omit and forget the details. God is the One Who requires every detail. Matthew 5:18 *“For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled.”*

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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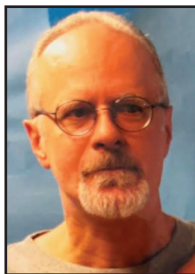
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When Life Meets Death

By Tony Ball



Jesus Christ sure could ruin a good funeral! “What?” you may exclaim. Search the scriptures and you will discover that there is not a single recorded deathbed or funeral, that He attended while walking on this earth, which did not overturn. Let us look at the passage record in Luke 7:11-16, in which we find a funeral procession heading out of the city gate. Imagine, if you will, that you are in one of the crowds...either in the funeral crowd heading out of the city, or the joyful, lively crowd with Christ heading into the city.

As is the custom here in the South, is to honor the group of mourners by giving way. But that’s not what happened. Let’s visualize the scene by imagining the thoughts going through the mourner’s mind.

Suppose we are one of the mourners following the widow, whose only son lay dead on the Bier (stretcher). When our sad, weeping procession of death meets Christ’s joyful, lively group at the narrow passage of the city gate. We would expect the lively group to step aside, and in silence, let us pass. Instead, the One leading the joyful group tells the widow, who is on the way to bury her only child, “Stop Crying.” Now being in the group of mourners, we are probably getting upset at this One. First, he wouldn’t step aside, then He tells the grieving mother to “Stop Crying”.

What He did next most likely has us ready to pick up a rock to throw. Because that One, who is blocking our way, touched the Bier, halting its movement, and spoke to the dead body. He said, “Young man, I say unto you, Arise!” Now, keep in mind that in those times, and in that culture, a widow without children was pretty much destitute. She relied on the kindness and mercy of others.

She won’t have to face a life of begging for her next meal because her son who was dead obeyed the One and sat up! Alive! He began to talk. Now, this passage doesn’t tell us what he said after being made alive. But I know what I said. I, who was once dead, gave my testimony, praising my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the One who gives life. When death meets life, death is defeated, giving way to life.

Tony Ball, a Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary prisoner who continues in the prison system ministering as a Chaplain in a prison or a similar position... although still serving what those of us who know his situation feel is an unjust LIFE WITHOUT PAROLE prison sentence.

“Don’t Waste A Good Crisis”
(Hurricane Beryl, Texas 2024)

By Shawn Thomas
Angleton, Texas



English Prime Minister Winston Churchill said: “Never let a good crisis go to waste”! His statement has been adopted by many politicians recently: “Never let a good crisis go to waste.” Whatever happens, they use it to further their political position.

While we may not agree with them politically, there is a legitimate application to make spiritually. We all experience various crises at times, and when we do, we shouldn’t “waste” them. God always has something good He wants to accomplish through a trial; some lesson for us to learn.

Many of us in south Texas experienced a crisis recently, with Hurricane Beryl. None of us will ever say again: “Oh it’s just a CAT 1” hurricane! It hit us hard: no power/water; no air conditioning in this Texas heat. Many are like our neighbor, with a tree on the roof of their home. It’s been a crisis week for many of us.

Yet in all of that, we need to remember that God has a purpose: something for us to learn; something for us to do. So what are some things we can learn, and not “waste” this Hurricane Beryl Crisis?

I. We have much to be thankful for

James 1 says “every good thing bestowed, and every perfect gift is from above.” But God has given us SO much, especially here in America, that we often take His blessings for granted, and forget to thank Him for them.

Well, some of the things that we take for granted, weren’t granted to us this last week! They were taken away. And we were reminded of just how much we really do appreciate them!

In the middle of the outages, one of our ladies wrote on Facebook: “Sitting here with no power or running water really makes one stop and reflect on the things we take for granted daily.” Isn’t that the truth? Do you realize how much “we take for granted regularly”? Just think of the water we drink, which most of us never give a second thought.

In Robert Caro’s biography of Lyndon Johnson, he wrote about how Texas women used to draw water from a well for their homes. He interviewed one lady who showed him how hard it was to draw just one bucket of water. Then he discovered a 1940 government bulletin which indicated the average family then used 40 gallons of water per person, per day. So a family of 5 needed 200 gallons of water per day — all of it hauled BY HAND from a well — and usually by the wife!

Yet most of us today can just stroll into the kitchen, and get as much water as we want — COLD! Or with ice. Or crushed ice! It’s one of so many blessings we just take for granted.

But the greatest blessing we have isn’t just one of the “modern conveniences,” but the eternal salvation God’s provided for us in Jesus. He died on the cross and paid for our sins, so that we could be totally forgiven by God, and saved. THAT is the greatest blessing we have — don’t take it for granted!

What if you only had, today, the things that you thanked God for yesterday? Let’s get in the habit of starting our day, by reading a Psalm, and then thanking God for all the blessings He gave us the previous day. It’s a great way to start the day! “Don’t Waste a Good Crisis”! Let your trial, whatever it is, remind you to thank God for all the blessings He’s given you!

II. There’s always an opportunity to minister.

Acts tells us the Apostle Paul was imprisoned on a ship that was wrecked in a storm. But the whole time, Paul witnessed and ministered to the other passengers. He always looked for an opportunity to minister — even amid his own crisis.

That’s a good lesson for us, too: even in our own times of crisis, watch for opportunities to witness and minister what the Lord gives you.

The Samaritan’s Purse Disaster Relief team here in south Texas can tell you: that a crisis is actually a really good time to minister, because people have needs, and it gives us an open door to help meet those needs and show God’s love to them.

A crisis is a good opportunity to show that you care for people. One of our members told me that about 15 people had called or texted to check on him! I jokingly said, Larry, I didn’t have that many people check on ME! But a crisis is a great time to reach out and let someone know you care.

— This week one of our men and his boys were busy with their chainsaw helping people. At one of our senior ladies’ houses, they cut up a huge piece of a tree that had blown down.

— Our youth leader took out a group of students to pick up debris from some of our senior adults’ homes.

— Our church opened up a cooling station and had dozens of people come by, to cool off, get ice, or a cold drink, and recharge their electronics. At least one family stayed at the church since their home had been damaged, and they had no power.

This week was a good opportunity for our church to minister. We didn’t “plan” to minister in these ways — but sometimes God plans the best ministry opportunities in ways we never expected, through some of the worst tragedies.

For example, there is no situation in life worse than Corrie Ten Boom being sent to a Nazi concentration camp. But even then, she used that experience to start a Bible study, and she led countless other women to the Lord, who would never have been saved otherwise.

This just reminds us that there’s always an opportunity to minister, even in the worst situations we face. So “Don’t Waste a Good Crisis.” Watch for how God wants you to minister in the midst of it.

continued on page 26

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Faith Without Seeing

By Christy Lowman
Burke County



Growing up one of my favorite birds was the Bob White. I have never seen one in person but I always knew they were around by their call. Growing up, we did not have air conditioning so the majority of the time the windows were open. I remember sitting on my bed and just listening to Bob White's call. They lived in the woods behind our house. The call was very distinct and it sounded just like the words "Bob White." Most of the time a mate in a nearby tree or a relative far off in the distance would answer the call. What I enjoyed the most was a lot of the time I was able to fake the call myself by whistling. Some of my calls were good enough to get an answer back from the real bird and that pleased me greatly.

A few months ago, my husband and I were talking about birds we no longer hear here that we heard all the time when we were growing up. The top bird we both missed was the Bob White. According to research, they have had a huge decline, (85%). They figure most of this is due to habitat loss and certain pesticides that are fatal to them. Also, Bob White's life span is only 6 months to 5 years in the wild. They are a very popular game bird for hunters as well. Nevertheless, I miss them.

Some of the Bob White's habitats are tall grassy fields, farmlands, and pine tree thickets. They can be found in the eastern part of North America, South America, and Mexico.



The Bob White is also known as a partridge or a Virginia quail.

Through Spring and Summer, the Bob Whites pair off with their mates. In the Fall and Winter, they stay in groups called coveys. Each covey can have as little as 3 birds and as many as 20 birds.

These birds are ground birds, meaning they prefer living on the ground than in the trees. However, they can fly on short flights to escape predators. They will peck and scratch the ground like a chicken for food. They also roost on the ground at night. When they are in the covey, they will gather in a circle with their tails facing the center, with their heads pointing outwards. This is to help them stay warm since they do not migrate and to also help them see potential predators coming near.

Most of these quails eat vegetation like leaves, grass, seeds, berries, etc. But at different times of their lives, they will need protein and will eat insects like grasshoppers, crickets, beetles, and such.

A single couple of birds can produce 2-3 broods of offspring a year.

There can be as many as 16 eggs at a time in the nest. Both parents will incubate the nest. The nest is made from a scratch on the ground covered by leaves and grass strands. The female will usually weave an arch of grass strands to go over the nest to camouflage it.

When Bob White babies hatch, they are what is called precocial. Precocial means the babies come out of the nest already covered in down feathers with their eyes open and can already walk. The hatchlings leave the nest not long after hatching however, the parents still care for them and feed them for several months out of the nest.

If a predator comes close to their nest the parent will perform the "broken wing act" to lure the predator away. They do this to protect their chicks, it gives the impression to the predator that their wing is broken and that they can't fly away making them look vulnerable and an easy meal for the predator.

Bob Whites are hardly ever seen but are heard because their call carries a great distance.

Bob Whites reminds me of God. God is always there even though we don't see Him. Sometimes we know He is around by the miracles He performs on our behalf. Sometimes we hear Him speak to us through our conscious. Sometimes you may not feel like God is around because you are going through a hard time and it feels like He is not there. Maybe you are waiting for Him to answer questions, open up a door to a problem, or resolve a problem and you feel helpless and like He is ignoring you. I can assure you this is not the case. He is there, listening, working on your behalf, and waiting when the time is right to help you. Sometimes He may not answer prayers the way we want Him to. For instance, I waited for 13 years for a prayer to be answered before it was, and when it was answered it wasn't exactly how I wanted it answered but He revealed to me then why it was answered the way it was and why it took so long to answer it.

So don't give up on your prayers, pray them without ceasing, He will answer them in His perfect time and He is always there even though we can't see Him. He is still out there just like the Bob Whites are even though I haven't seen them or heard them in many years. I find comfort in the fact that one day when we get to heaven, we will get to see Him and Jesus and I hope one day in the future I will be blessed by hearing the call of the Bob White once again!

If you would like to hear and see a Bob White go here: <https://youtu.be/S4219Wc9DSE?si=qPpKyXAOhVdtgjLt>.

Dear Lord, I pray each one of us will realize and remember You are always here no matter how helpless things may seem. You are always in control and You are always acting for what is best on our behalf. I pray that our relationship with You will grow stronger each day! In Jesus's name, I pray, Amen.

"16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." 1Thessalonians 5:16-18 ESV

"Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Matthew 28:20 NLT

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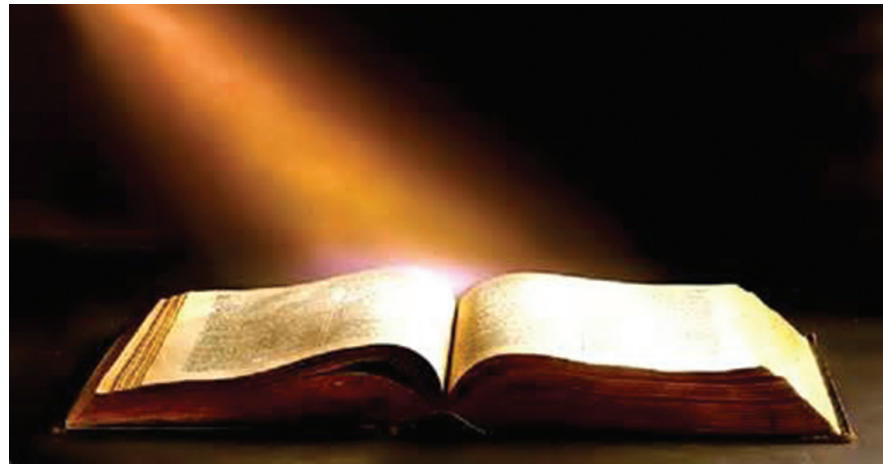
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Christy Lowman is a Christian author and illustrator that lives in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains with her husband and two children. She enjoys writing and illustrating books for all ages. Some of her short stories are published with Guideposts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





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Crossword

ACROSS

1 earneth wages to put it into _____ with holes. (1,3)
(Hag 1:6) KJV
5 As an _____ pleasing to the LORD (Num 29:2)
9 Praise the LORD with _____: sing unto him with the psaltery (Ps 33:2)
13 and hath greatly offended, and _____ himself upon them (Ezek 25:12) KJV
14 And the rough goat is the king of _____ (Dan 8:21) KJV
15 Cut down the tree and _____ off its branches (Dan 4:14)
16 The alien who lives among you will rise _____ you (Deut 28:43)
17 He who _____ his father and drives out his mother is (Prov 19:26)
18 LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the _____ (Ex 14:26)
19 Mockers _____ up a city, but wise men turn away anger (Prov 29:8)
20 No one _____ a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment (Matt 9:16)
21 Uzziah the king was _____ unto the day of his death (1,5) (2 Chron 26:21) KJV
23 The man said, _____ is now bone of my bones (Gen 2:23)
27 Do you see this _____ army? I will give it into your hand (1 Kings 20:13)
28 Moses, Joshua, and David were _____ of some of the books of the Bible
31 I saw something like a large _____ being let down from heaven (Acts 11:5)
34 a foolish man who built his _____ on sand (Matt 7:26)
36 Abner son of _____, the commander of Saul's army (2 Sam 2:8)
37 The nations will _____ and tremble; anguish will grip the people (Exod 15:14)
39 Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, _____ and Ivvah? (2 Kings 18:34)
40 God _____ raised this Jesus to life (Acts 2:32)
41 At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three _____ (Dan 10:2)
44 so that by the grace of God he might _____ death for everyone (Heb 2:9)
45 I will obey your decrees; do not _____ forsake me (Ps 119:8)
47 the sons of Eliphaz were Teman, _____, Zepho (Gen 36:11)
49 When the LORD God _____ the earth and the heavens (Gen 2:4)
50 "Will he even _____ the queen while she is with me in the house?" (Est 7:8)
53 Men stalked us at every _____, so we could not walk in our streets (Lam 4:18)
55 His master replied, _____ done, good and faithful servant (Matt 25:23)

56 "They _____ me," you will say, "but I'm not hurt!" (Prov 23:35)
58 being not a forgetful hearer, but a _____ of the work (James 1:25) KJV
59 David, wearing a linen _____, danced before the LORD (2 Sam 6:14)
60 for wide is the _____, and broad is the way (Matt 7:13)
61 return to it and remove all its vile _____ and detestable idols (Ezek 11:18)
62 He is coming with _____, our faithful and dear brother (Col 4:9)
63 Man is a _____ phantom as he goes to and fro (Ps 39:6)
64 creatures of the sea are being _____ but no man can tame the tongue (James 3:7-8)
65 Like a bird that strays from its _____ is a man who strays (Prov 27:8)

DOWN

1 the Egyptian magicians also did the same things by their secret _____ (Ex 7:11)
2 the brothers sent Paul and Silas away to _____ (Acts 17:10)
3 Then Samuel took _____ of oil, and poured it upon (1,4) (1 Sam 10:1) KJV
4 on the two stones the way a _____ cutter engraves a seal. (Exod 28:11)
5 I will make thy windows of _____, and thy gates of carbuncles (Isa 54:12) KJV
6 He saved us through the washing of _____ (Titus 3:5)
7 by this time there is a bad _____ (John 11:39)
8 Abraham died in a good old _____ (Gen 25:8) KJV
9 Bakkakkar, _____, Galal and Mattaniah son of Mica (1 Chron 9:15)
10 Do not slaughter _____ or a sheep and its young on the same day (1,3) (Lev 22:28)
11 He took one of the man's _____ and closed up the place (Gen 2:21)
12 He was with David at _____ Dammim when the Philistines (1 Chron 11:13)
19 He _____ on the ground, and made clay of the spittle (John 9:6) KJV
20 Sell me some property for a burial _____ here (Gen 23:4)
22 Nobody has _____ heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind (John 9:32)
23 The 19th letter of the Greek alphabet
24 twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn in the _____ thereof (II Ki 4:42) KJV
25 Jacobs new name (Gen 32:28)
26 the wife of Hezron bore him _____ the father of Tekoa (1 Chron 2:25)
29 Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy _____ (Jude 14)
30 Joshua _____ his clothes, and fell to the earth (Joshua 7:6)

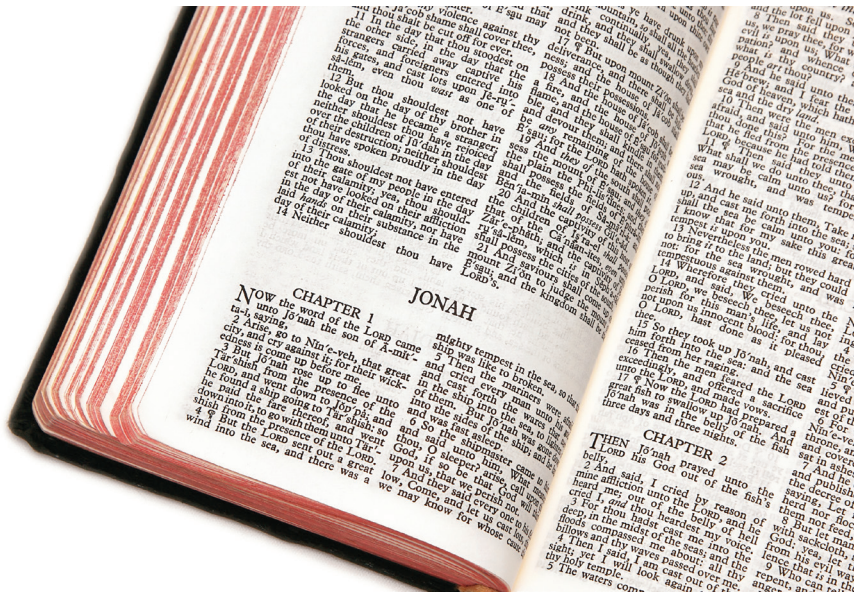
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32 the sun rises with scorching _____ and withers the plant (James 1:11)
33 There were three gates on the _____, three on the north (Rev 21:13)
35 Absalom got his hair stuck in this type of tree (2 Sam 18:9)
38 My steps have _____ to your paths; my feet have not slipped (Ps 17:5)
39 rabbit (Deut 14:7) KJV
41 _____ your cloak around you and follow me (Acts 12:8)
42 The _____ is the lamp of the body (Matt 6:22)
43 If _____ forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles (Matt 5:41)
44 the _____ ones will be brought low (Isa 10:33)
46 represent four kingdoms that will _____ from his nation (Dan 8:22)
48 Remember that you _____ me like clay (Job 10:9)
51 In you, O LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to _____ (Ps 71:1)

52 To _____, mine own son after the common faith (Titus 1:4)
53 As he was scattering the seed, _____ fell along the path (Mark 4:4)
54 Like a lion I will devour them; a wild animal will _____ them (Hos 13:8)
55 "May your God, _____ you serve continually, rescue you!" (Dan 6:16)
57 to see if you would stand the _____ and be obedient (2 Cor 2:9)
58 my eyes are _____ with grief. I call to you, O LORD (Ps 88:9)
59 abbr. for the 17th book of the Old Testament
60 for a _____ and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Isa 8:14) KJV

Solution on page 14



First Baptist of Marshall

Humor

By Buddy Freeman
Madison County



Just before Thanksgiving a Sunday School teacher asked her 4th grade students, "What are you thankful for?" After several students gave their answers, little Johnny stood up and said, "I am happy that I am not a turkey."

A little girl asked her mother, "How did the human race appear?" The mother said, "God made Adam and Eve and they had children. That evening, the girl asked her father the same question. He answered many years ago there were monkeys, from which the human race evolved. The confused little girl returned to her mother and said, "Mom, you said that God created us, but Daddy said that we evolved from monkeys." The mother said, "Dear, I told you about my side of the family, and your father told you about his side of the family."

A HYMN BOOK MADE FOR SENIORS:
"Precious Lord Take My Hand and Help Me Up."
"It Is Well With My Soul, But My Knees Hurt."
"Just A Slower Walk With Thee."
"Go Tell It On The Mountain, But Speak Louder."
"No One Knows the Trouble I Have Seeing."

One Sunday morning, before the beginning of Mass, I asked a group of Children, "What do you have to do to get to heaven?" One young boy yelled at the top of his voice, "Ya gotta die!"

Ohio State's Urban Meyer on one of his players, "He doesn't know the meaning of the word fear. In fact, I saw his grades and he doesn't know the meaning of a lot of words."

Songs of a Lukewarm Christian:
"Take My Life and Let Me Be.".... "Sit up, Sit up for Jesus."..... "Oh How I like Jesus."...."I Surrender Some."

A man played with the same foursome every day. As he opened the freezer before going to the golf course, he turned to his wife and asked, "What shall I take out for dinner?" The wife smiled and said, "ME."

A grandfather looked very different when he came to visit his 5-year-old granddaughter. He had shaved his long beard. This was the first time she had seen his smooth face. She asked, "Granddaddy, whose head do you have on?"

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



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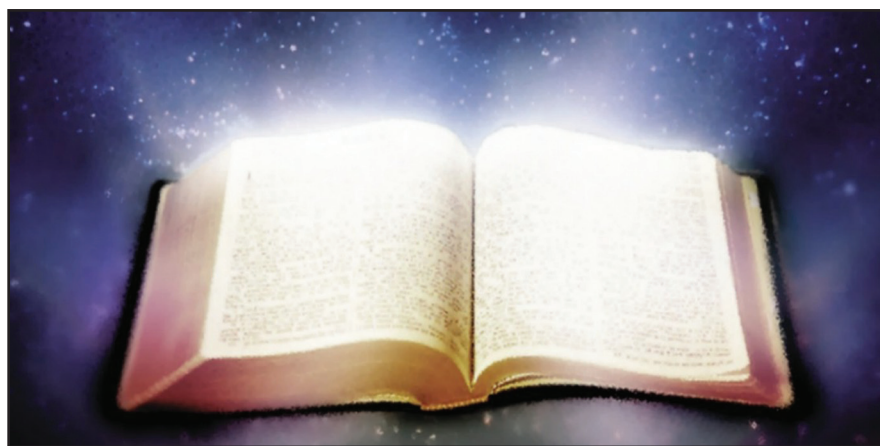
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