

The Good News

Newsletter - March 2015

A Publication of University Baptist Church, Hattiesburg, MS

The purpose of University Baptist Church is, through guidance of the Holy Spirit, to assemble and worship God, to love and encourage one another, to proclaim the gospel of Christ, to minister to all people, and to live in peace.

In a world where difficult issues remain, University Baptist Church continues its commitment to be a church where “there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male or female, for (we) are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28)

Is Lent Important?

I begin this article with the question, “Is Lent (the 40 days, excluding Sundays, that lead up to Easter Sunday) important?”, because it seems that, with the business of our everyday lives, we have little time to set aside for Jesus. So, how can we possibly set aside more time to include Lenten practices into our lives? Maybe we can only do five minutes of prayer time. You might be asking, “Can five minutes of prayer make a difference?” I believe Jesus honors the time we give to him. It is my firm belief that, too often, we make spending time with God so difficult that we cannot attain our own lofty goals. Try saying small prayers throughout your day, pray when you are frustrated, and pray when you are sad. In every situation, take your thoughts and concerns to The Lord.

Let us look at what the word Lent means. Lent is the period of preparation for Easter. People prepare for the great celebration of Easter in many ways. Some include abstaining from temptations, For example, many people fast from certain foods during the forty days before Easter. But, it is my contention, that fasting is a personal choice that a follower of Christ must make. Instead, I want to look at Lent from a new perspective. The Purpose behind practicing these forty days of preparation called Lent is to bring us closer to Jesus. I propose that during this season we start with simple prayers. Jesus taught his disciples how to pray using the Lord's prayer Matthew (6:7-15). I Think it is worth noting that Jesus did not teach his disciples a complex prayer, but one they could understand, remember, and that brought focus to their lives and the lives around them. Talking to God should not be so difficult that we are discouraged from having a relationship with Jesus.

During the season of Lent, we are reminded of our sinful nature. We are reminded of how Jesus delivered us from and forgave us of our sins. Through his death on the cross and rising from the dead, Jesus has freed us. In fact, the season of Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, a day that we remember our mortality. During a traditional Ash Wednesday Service, ashes are put on our heads in the shape of a cross to remind us that we are created from the dust and will return to dust, but also to remind us of the power of Christ's love seen in his death and resurrection. Lent helps us remember our mortality, from dust we are formed and to dust we shall return (Genesis 3:19). Jesus mentions the practice of ashes in Matthew (11:21) "Woe to you Chorazin and Bethsaida for if the mighty "works were done in Tyre and Sidon you would have repented long ago with sack cloth and ashes. Lent urges us to reflect upon our lives and repent of our sins. It remains important for us to remember that we all need forgiveness for our sins—in fact we are taught in The Lord's prayer to forgive those who trespass against us. (Matthew 6:14)

So, yes, I think Lent is important. Lent reminds us that we are human; it offers us a time to reflect upon what we have done and what we have left undone; it reminds us of our need for forgiveness; it reminds us to draw close to God and prepare for the great Mystery of Easter to come. Lent teaches us all that we need forgiveness and that we need to forgive—a hard lesson and practice for all of us, but one to be thankful for.

In Isaiah (53:5) we are reminded that Christ was wounded for our transgressions it is by his stripes we are healed.

David Woullard

NEVER GIVE UP!

First, I'd like for "Muleskinner" to be used in any writings I do. "Reason", most of the people who know me know me as Muleskinner, and for just some funny reason I think that makes a difference especially in discussing the topic I have chosen, "Never Give Up".

It doesn't just apply to those who are incarcerated. The people in the free world also face problems and stumbling blocks, and at times giving up would seem to be so much easier. Having that special faith in our Lord and Savior will see you through.

That carries me directly to Hebrews 12:1-13 (enduring hardship as discipline). Here is a little piece of advice I was given as a child: "If it doesn't kill you, it only makes you stronger and smarter."

Then Hebrews 13:1-25 is a constant reminder that all grace is found in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

NEVER GIVE UP!

(The following was written by Stephen Powers in 2001. He had two strokes and currently has an aneurysm on his brain. He continues to remain hopeful and faithful to His Word. God bless.)

How We Should Serve True Justice

Zechariah 7:9 "Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Execute true justice, show mercy and compassion, everyone to his brother.

Our Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior are showing us all through the bible just how we should be serving true justice, by showing us mercy and compassion on others. And they are expecting us as believers and followers of Christ to show mercy and compassion on our brothers and sisters when they do something wrong to us or the people that we love. Serving true justice is to forgive and help those that are in need, and who has wronged us. The devil and his demons want us to serve their kind of justice by not forgiving others who have hurt us or the people that we love and throw them away forever and to hate them for whatever they have done.

But our Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior wants us to show love to all no matter what has been done or said. If we say that we love God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ, then let's serve true justice as we are commanded to do. Have mercy, love, and compassion for the poor, the homeless, and others. In Jesus name we pray Amen and Amen.

Brother-in-Christ
Stephen Elliott Powers 8/17/01

Read Matthew 5:16

*Our Deepest Fear**

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?

Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.

We were born to manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission do the same. As we are liberated from our own fears, our presence automatically liberates others.

*Written by: Nelson Mandela, 1994 inaugural speech

Take a Stand

What a year it's been! Is it only me or was 2014 and now 2015 a year of soaring highs and crushing lows? I can only guess what is in store for Christ's Church these coming months. I look forward to it, whatever may come. God willing, do any of you readers have any big plans? Do those plans involve helping others?

As many of you know, my death sentences were overturned and I was transferred from Death Row to the Forrest County Sheriff's Office last December. I have been in isolation ever since. The isolation has given me a lot of time to reflect upon my life these past few years and I've been able to do to help people even while on Death Row. I wasn't the only man on the Row helping people. Mississippi Death Row is peppered with good Christian men (and a woman) that have helped an uncountable number of people. Just look at the majority of names in this newsletter. Most, you will notice, are men on Death Row.

Now I have written some fire and brimstone anti-death penalty articles over the years, a couple too flammable to make the cut for this newsletter. I have mellowed out some but my being away from Death Row for the last few months has only served to intensify my belief that the death penalty is wrong in all circumstances.

I asked at the beginning of this if you had any plans to help others this year. How about helping to save the lives of the men and women on Mississippi Death Row? Let's actually make a concentrated effort to abolish the barbaric practice of state murder. I would have you all remember that just like the army fights in your name, so the state executes in your name. Unlike the army, the state can't claim "collateral damage" when it kills an innocent person by lethal injection on your behalf.

I was reading Ezekiel 3:16-21 recently and it made me wonder if a person is guiltless of murder if they haven't spoken out against the death penalty. It's one thing to know it's wrong but simply believing that is not enough. Is speaking out against it enough to absolve you if you don't add action to the word? Is this cry for help on behalf of my brothers and sister on death Row enough to absolve me? Let us all come together and actually *do* something instead of merely talking about it. Who will lead the charge? Let us pray about this and ask our Lord, the All Merciful, to guide us. May he bless you all.

I'll leave you with some food for thought. This is a quote out of "Reflections on the Guillotine, Resistance, Rebellion, and Death" by Albert Camus.

"An execution is not simply death. It is just as different from the privation of life as a concentration camp is from prison. It adds to death a rule, a public premeditation known to the future victim, an organization which is itself a source of moral sufferings more terrible than death. Capital punishment is the most premeditated of murders, to which no criminal's deed, however calculated, can be compared. For there to be an equivalency, the death penalty would have to punish a criminal who had warned his victim of the date at which he would inflict a horrible death on him and who, from that moment onward had confined him at his mercy for months (years). Such a monster is not encountered in private life."

Roger Gillett

Former Death Row prisoner

March Piece

Last month was the second attempt at introducing Gospel Games. I want to thank everyone that has played a part in putting this together. Unfortunately there were problems with the printing of the email and as you saw the puzzle was distorted and incomplete. Given this, the second time we have printed that puzzle, I'm going to assume everyone at least tried to find the words. So we are going to give you the hidden phrase and move on to the next Gospel Games. We have fixed the problem so there will be a new Gospel Games starting in April, every other month.

The theme for the last Gospel Games is "Grace" and the hidden phrase is "Grace is unmerited favor from God". If you're not quite sure what that means then the following poem is definitely for you. But before we get into the poem I would like to share my perspective and what it's like for me to experience His amazing grace. For me, to receive God's grace is to redeem your inner child. At the heart of our inner child is trust and it is trust that we find when we experience God's grace. To be reunited with God the Father, and our inner child, is to be accepted, affirmed, and most of all loved. I am truly blessed!

His Amazing Grace

It is the reflection of salvation that we can never earn, given through the death of His Son, a gift we don't deserve; It is the liberator that has freed us from the law and the curse of sin without our heart; abounding our spirit in relationship with God's own heart.

It is our true provision and infinite perspective in times of trouble and loss; it is the principle of our encouragement daily as we carry our cross.

It is His self revelation and divine power, it is the soft pillow of eternal certainty in our last hour.

It is His unmerited favor that has made our place in eternity safe; it is God's hand as walk and live by faith.

It is the justification given though Jesus Christ who died for our sake, and is a tribute to that precious gift;

His Amazing Grace.

- by Kingdom Kid

2 Corinthians 12:9

Song of the month:

Mississippi Mass Choir, "Amazing Grace"

A Visit

A week ago today, I had the privilege of visiting Roger Gillett, a long time contributor to our *Good News* and former inmate on Death Row. Roger and I have corresponded by letter several times, and I have read many of his articles in our newsletter, but I knew that meeting in person would be different than reading an article. The written language is limited, it doesn't allow for body language or tone differentiation; it is easy to misinterpret meanings, it is hard to get across a facial expression using only words and responses to one another are always delayed, sometimes causing a fractured conversation.

Roger and I met with a glass between us and spoke through telephones, but for the first time, we heard one another's voice, we saw one another's face, and I heard Roger in a new way. I didn't do much talking in this meeting; I was much more interested in hearing the stories that Roger had to tell—about his move, about his new experiences, about the men that he has met and the ways that God is working in that place. The stories he shared gave me more insight into who Roger is and what is important to him—beyond facial expressions, tone changes and everything else that helps us understand what one another is saying—the stories Roger told communicated more to me about who he is and helped me connect to him more as my brother in Christ.

I am thankful for stories that tell more about who we are, what matters to us, how we see the world, and where we find God. I am thankful for the stories you all tell and hope to read more of each of your stories as we share in the *Good News* together.

Kat Spangler

*If It's Gonna Get Done**

I feel like Moses
Facing the Red Sea
or the disciples looking out
on the multitudes to feed

Lord, I've followed you too far
to think of turning back
It all seems so impossible
Unless I face the fact

If it's gonna get done
You're gonna have to do it
Then this world will come
to see your power through it

Father I trust you
I believe it's true
If it's gonna get done
I't gonna have to come from you

We're in the conrer
with my back against the wall
I'm just a prisoner of habit
when worry comes to call

I know miracles to you
are commonplace
but you'll have to pardon me
If I stand here amazed

What a thrill
when this world can see
it's not something that I
did for you
but something that you did through me

*From "Experiencing God: Music for Knowing and Doing the Will of God"

Submitted by: Jason Keller

Death Row, Parchman, MS

A Positive Message

In 1894 a child was born in a small town of ninety-six people in South Carolina. This child grew into a man, succeeding in the face of adversity.

This man was Benjamin E. Mays, a schoolmaster who mentored many boys. Among these boys were Martin Luther King, Sr., Maynard Jackson and David Satchee.

There's a very strong quote of his which stands with fortitude for the young and old alike:

"It must be born in mind that the tragedy in life doesn't lie in not reaching your goal, the tragedy lies in having no goal to reach. It isn't calamity to die with dreams unfulfilled, but it's a calamity not to dream.

It's not a disaster to be unable to capture your ideal, but it's a disaster to have no ideal to capture. It's not a disgrace not to reach the stars, but it's a disgrace to have no stars to reach for. Not failure, but low aim is a sin."

Justin H. Underwood

Awareness

Awareness is the key to one's mind's eye; the ability to create total comprehension within an individual who seeks understanding and beauty of self-existence. We commit to the truth and realization of oneself by setting forth new directions, supplying materials, resources, and the settings conducive to positive change. As long as we are willing to learn the proper ways of becoming successful in this society of great turmoil, we will prosper. Together we shall put forth all our works and efforts to the best of our abilities to gain a sense of achievement and satisfaction. We are here to benefit each other in growth and awareness, and we are here to acquire a trust within our own self so that we might trust others in our lives.

One of Satan's strategies is to get us to forget that we are fighting a spiritual battle, and get us instead to focus on the physical challenges we face. Unfortunately, he will often use people to do just that. If you look a bit closer though, behind the scenes of these conflicts and challenges in our lives, you will see Satan lurking there, working to defeat you. This is what we must be aware of; people are not the problem. We must stop running away all the time to avoid facing our real selves. We need to put God first, and then we will be able to attack the criminal masks and strip away our negative images, finally realizing the beauty of living life as successful people.

Sherwood B.

There lives a man whose smile is contagious
Wrongfully accused of a crime that was outrageous

Bitter or angry, this condemned man is not
He's always thankful for the few things he's got

A stranger in a land, a mere tourist
Going to see his father, the most high and purest

I pray that some of his days be spent on the outside
Either way, on a cloud of flames he will ride

Scott A. Johnson, dedicated to Justin Underwood

Mind Over Matter

Read John 16:12-13

"You can do whatever you put your mind to doing."

Quite often we use every excuse for our faults and our failures except placing the blame where it really lies: ourselves. The mind is a very powerful thing to have if you learn to apply it to the tasks that are necessary rather than letting it roam on needless things. They say the mind is a terrible thing to waste, yet so many are guilty of doing that every day. Have you ever been around a people that talk about the same negative or worthless things every day? Some conversations are just not worth having, and they serve no real purpose in accomplishing or reaching the heights for which one should strive. Nothing happens overnight, but if you're not progressing in your journey with God then you're regressing. We have to have mind over matter, and Almighty God is the only one who can teach us with His spirit to open our minds and hearts so that we can understand the spiritual truths and continue to progress. (1 Corinthians 2:7-11)

He has left us the guidelines (the keys) to opening up our minds in very simple steps:

- 1) Begin with prayer (Psalms 119:17-18)
- 2) Read the Bible (Nehemiah 8:1-3)
- 3) Study the Bible (John 14:26)
- 4) Meditate on the Bible (Psalms 1:1-2)

I know that it's very hard in today's world to find peace and quiet so that one can study and meditate on God's word, but you have the opportunity, if you're willing to make the time. Mind over matter is very important if you truly want to have oneness with God. Only by reaching for the stars can you touch the stars, so search your heart and let the Most High guide you towards the Heavens.

God Bless You Always!
Justin H. Underwood

Mind Over Matter

Can the depths of my mind really be reached?
Erased and cleansed with some all-purpose bleach.

Far beyond the normal of a regular day,
A picture in disguise but disguised to portray—
Portray a picture of complete and utter control,
Stripped, searched, and shredded down to the very soul.

All crevices are plugged, but there's still a hint of light,
To give safe passage; to give perceiving sight.

What matters most is the truth the heart desires,
Giving the mind opportunity to seek before the clock expires.

The truth that matters within the hearts of His beloved,
Mind over matter the more I seem to think of it.



Some suggested topics for the Newsletter

Thank you for the continued letters, thoughts, and poems you send in to us each month. We want to know more about who you all are. Story seems to be one of the best ways to get to know who someone really is and so we encourage you all to look at some of these suggested topics to see if any inspiration comes as we seek community with one another. Please know that these are not to restrict your writing; you are certainly welcome to choose to write on another topic or in another form. They are simply some ideas, as all writers need somewhere to start. Thank you for your continued contributions to this newsletter and happy writing!

- Choose a story or a character from the Bible and tell us how it speaks to your life or how you connect to it.
- Make up a short story.
- Tell us about a character you've read in a book or watched in a movie that inspires you and why.
- Tell us your favorite song. What is it about this song that draws you to it?
- Write a song or send in a piece of original artwork.