

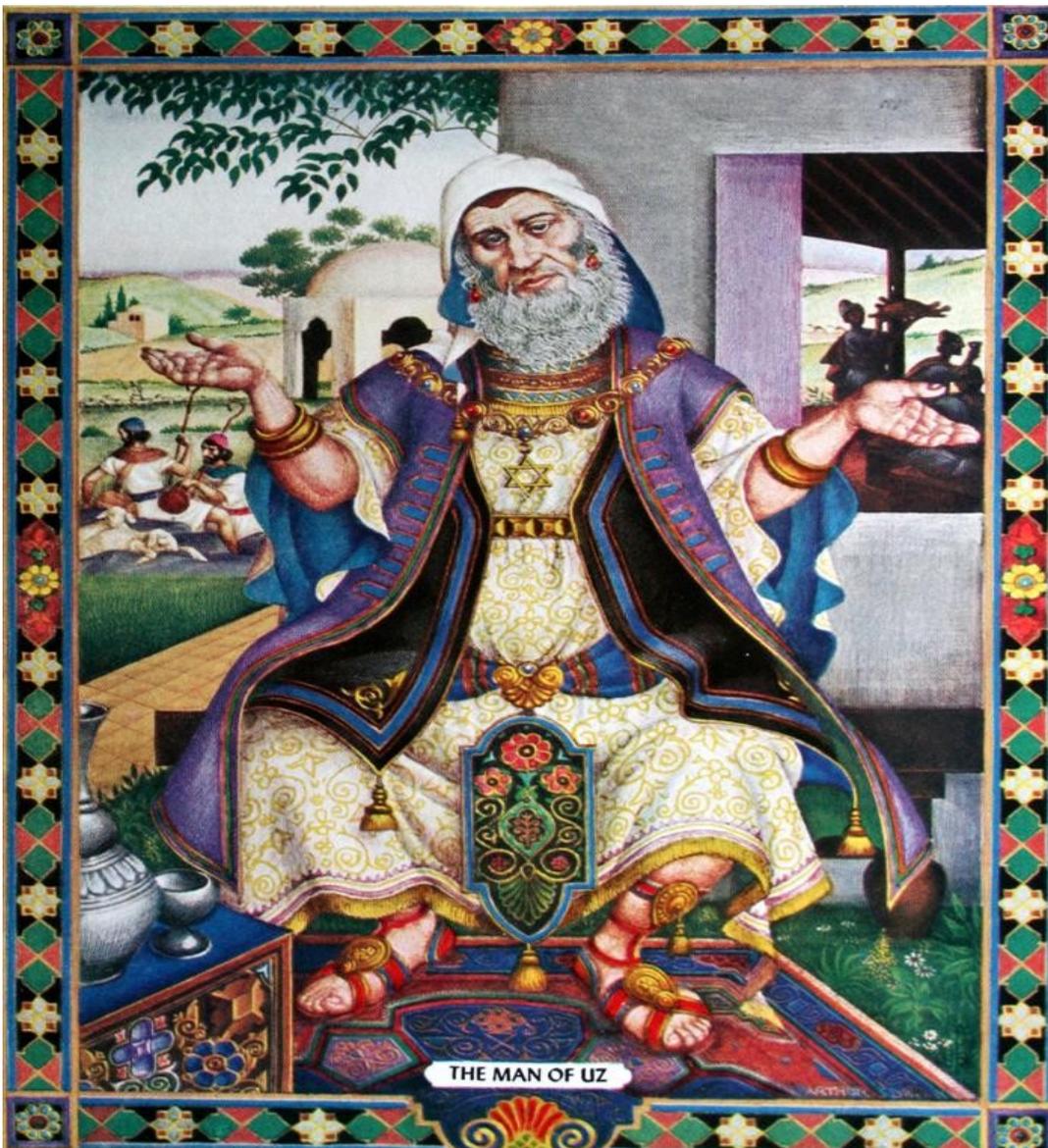
# The Good News

Newsletter - August 2014

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)



## Job

Have you experienced personal trials? Have you suffered some misfortune in your life? What are your thoughts in those hours of deep darkness before sunrise? Have you ever cried over your situation in life? Wondered how your life will ever get better?

If you answer yes to any of these questions, you are not alone. Many have been faced with situations of overwhelming tragedy, suffering and fear. Those who are familiar with the Bible may recall that in the book of Psalms, David has penned more than one plea for God to relieve his fear, suffering and loneliness.

The story of Job in the Bible is focused upon one man's plight and his attempt to reason out an explanation for the trouble in his life. When Job could find no personal shortcoming, error, sin or other justification for his troubles he turned his probing questions to God, asking....no, demanding an explanation for his suffering. And God responded to Job.

What did God share with Job? The answer may not seem very satisfying. You may feel it is not at all helpful to your situation. Are you ready for this? God does not directly answer Job's question. What God gives Job is a long list of questions; questions intended to cause Job to think not just about himself and his situation, but about God's love for all of his creation.

But how does this help Job (or us!) in a time of suffering? Doesn't the Bible teach that God loves and cares for all of his creation, including you and me? Yes, God considers everything that he created (or creates) to be "good." And wrapped up in that truth is the answer to all of the questions about our suffering and the reality of God's love for us. You see, God is in control. Always. Forever. It is better to know God than to know why you are in pain.

We cannot use our personal situations as barometers to measure whether we, or God, are good or worthy. Nor can we look at ourselves to see if, or how much, God loves us. Nothing in the Bible suggests that God's love for us is based upon our performance in life. The pain we feel is not always a sign of God's judgment or punishment. Because God loves his creation, God is not uncaring of our circumstances.

Here is another question for us to consider. Are we capable of loving that which we cannot control? Think about it. What does it take to love someone completely, unconditionally, "no matter what happens"? God has this ability. God loves us no matter what. Can we...do we...say the same thing about God?

-Dale Harris

## THE LORD'S PLANTING

I work for the Chaplain's Department at this facility. In terms of those jobs available in prison, you could say I've got a pretty sweet catch. I mean, they give you all sorts of special privileges, right? Yes and no. Contrary to what a lot of guys think, I'm treated no different from any other inmate. It's even arguable that I've got it harder than other workers because I'm often ridiculed as a Christian.

But I do enjoy a special privilege that I hold to be a true blessing: I'm able to keep and tend to a few potted plants. You see, God created Man from the earth and then gave him the responsibility to cultivate the earth. So there is a deep-rooted (no pun intended) relationship between a man and his dirt—even if that dirt is in an old coffee canister inside an air-conditioned office.

Actually, I inherited my plants from the guy who had my job before me. I'm not the farmer type of guy who knows all about plants and seeds and such. I like plants, don't get me wrong. But I'm more of the practical Gardner and not very enthused about your common indoor plants. So aside from the three indoor plants (vines of some sort), I've got a pepper plant.

Let me back up some: the guy before me had a pepper plant. When I started training for my job I also started training as an indoor gardener. He showed me how to tend the pepper plant, how to water it, and how to pollinate it with a Q-tip--things God would normally tend to if this plant were outside. But since the plant was inside, God needed a man to tend it. And I really don't mind. After all, I was eating the fruits of my labors (free peppers in prison!)

But catastrophe struck nearly a month later. The chaplain I worked with was injured on his way home from work one evening. Someone ran a stop sign and broadsided the driver's side of the chaplain's car. Fortunately, the chaplain's injuries were not life-threatening. But he was beat up pretty bad, and his recovery has been slow and painful.

My point is that pepper plants need water to survive. And for nearly two months I was unable to go to the office and water the plants. When I finally did get back to the office, my once lush and healthy pepper plant was dry, brittle, and lifeless. Peppers grow well in the summer sun; but in an air-conditioned office with no water, the poor thing experienced a virtual winter.

Admittedly, I do not have a green-thumb. There may have been some sort of treatment or technique that I could have used to possibly resuscitate my once-beautiful pepper plant. But all I knew to do was to give it some water and pray. So that's all I did. For the next couple of weeks I continued to water and wait, water and wait. But no use; all my efforts and patient waiting were in vain for the plant left to me when I started my job was dead.

When you expend time and effort with a particular thing, you generally start to develop a sort of affinity for it. It's like you begin to cheer it on because you've invested so much into its success. Now, I'm not saying that I was heart broken when my pepper plant died. But I WAS somewhat disappointed. And then I did what anyone else would have done: I tossed the plant in the trash and bagged the dirt for future usage.

About a year later, I did a little bit of transplanting. Some of my vines had gotten too long and needed a good pruning. Also, I decided to try growing watermelon with seeds I'd collected in the dining hall. These germinated well and quickly sprang up in the freshly turned soil. I became excited by the thought of an indoor-grown watermelon. I didn't really expect a bountiful harvest, but the process of planting and tending the plants gave me something rewarding.

Out of maybe ten seeds sprouted about six tiny watermelon plants! The sight of new life springing forth from the earth is one that appeals to the natural bond between man and the earth, both being of a common element (dirt). And it is interesting to observe and monitor the growth of plants, as any nature video would verify. So the next couple of weeks were engaging as I would anticipate seeing how my plants were growing.

Which, it turned out, wasn't so good. I guess the energy shown as they first sprang up out of the dirt wasn't enough to keep them alive inside the office. After about two or three weeks the tiny watermelon sprouts began to wither and die. Again, I found myself watching in disappointment as my plants perished in the inhospitable environment of the chaplain's office.

But this time proved to be different because at the same time there watermelon sprouts were dying, another green sprout shot up from the potted soil. My initial thought was that it was a late sprouting watermelon seed. "There's hope yet," I surmised, and began to tend to it. The next week held a bit of a surprise when I walked into the office and discovered my new plant had experienced a phenomenal growth spurt and was now almost two inches tall! And I was also surprised to find out that this was no watermelon sprout. Yet, what it was I didn't know.

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A week later I found that my new plant was definitely not a ground vine but had with all its might shot upward another two inches toward the sun. By now the tiny stalk was beginning to fork and several young leaves were causing such an imbalance that my plant was leaning. I did what I could to make a stake out of cardboard (this is prison, remember). And I made sure to rotate the pot so that the window's light was available to the plant evenly.

By now you are probably guessing what I am about to tell you: this new plant of mine that seemingly sprang forth from the earth of its own volition was indeed a pepper plant. Apparently there was a seed--so tiny and unseen, maybe even insignificant in its presence--that had been lying in the soil, dormant for nearly two years.

When the soil was used to plant watermelon the little pepper seed was there unobserved. The water and nutrients that weren't received by the fragile watermelon sprouts found its way to that old pepper seed, which readily--almost hungrily--absorbed it and began to grow. Now here it was several inches tall and standing defiantly over the grave of the former pepper plant and the corpses of the watermelon sprouts!

Okay, let me give you some spiritual principles that I was able to see in this experience.

1. First, I see a striking parallel between my experience in hobby gardening and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. When I see my pepper plant standing victoriously over its grave, I am reminded that Christ rose victoriously over the grave.

2. Secondly, I am reminded of the double sided principle of sowing and reaping: you cannot reap what has not been sown, and whatsoever you sow you will reap. The pepper seed here is representative of sin. Once sown, this seed may lay dormant for a season before it begins to grow and manifest its presence. I also couldn't help but reflect that this seed needed to be nourished before it began to grow.

3. Likewise, when I viewed the pepper seed as New Life in Christ, I realized that this New Life needed to be fed and nurtured in order to be healthy and strong. The first plant died when it was neglected. The potential is there for the current plant to meet the same demise.

4. But as long as the New Life is tended, as a person is attentive to grow in grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ, this Life will grow and multiply. There will be fruit, and this fruit will reflect the health and vitality of the plant itself.

I don't doubt that there are other principles that may be taught from this experience. And truly, there are innumerable experiences in our lives through which God intends to bring us to even greater and deeper spiritual truths. After all, God has brought us into His Divine Family and invites us to experience a deep and rewarding relationship with Him who is the Truth.

But my favorite principle here is that our Lord is like a Gardener. I think about the soil of my heart that was cold, hard, and lifeless. It was painful to have that old stony ground broken up, but that's what it took for God to plant the Seed of Faith. This Seed lay hidden for so long before it ever showed signs of life. But God was patient with me.

And then, when the Seed began to grow and to push its Way upward, God so lovingly and affectionately tended to both the Seed and the heart that Seed is in.

He healed the brokenness; He supports with His mercy and goodness, giving strength by His love and power. Through His Word, He waters and nourishes the Life of the Seed so that I am now able to bring forth fruit unto righteousness.

Last week I picked two peppers from the reborn plant in the chaplain's office. There's a certain sense of pride in my heart when I see how strong and healthy my plant is. There's a certain joy I feel when I see the smaller peppers and know that they will one day be big and delicious.

I can imagine that God feels the same way about us when He sees that we are growing and maturing spiritually. As He looks at our fruit, He remembers the work He has put into us: molding, shaping, watering, feeding. He knows where He has brought us from; and He knows where He intends to take us. He knows our potential. And He delights in helping us reach that potential. In this, He is glorified.

-Christopher

Onward Christian Soldier

By: Devin Bennett

Before I begin this piece I would like everyone to take a moment to pray for all the soldiers, fighting and fallen, and their families. May the Lord give them peace and comfort while they wait to be reunited with those that are away and those they have lost. It's because of these brave men and women that we have a freedom to celebrate. God Bless the USA, and all the world!

This piece is about our role as leaders in this world. Pastoring is not the only form of spiritual leadership for Christian men. The men who take time to write in this journal each month have taken a leadership role. In James 3:1 we are told that not many should become teachers for we will be judged with greater strictness. For we all make mistakes. The best way to teach is through action ie. The way you live your life. As leaders we are accountable to one another and to God. The things we write in this journal are principals that we aspire to live by, not just write about. If we write about spending quality time with God but our actions say something different then this gives out the wrong impression to others. What you say and how you live will affect the spiritual lives of others, so mean what you say. Please know that I am not judging anyone in particular. This is simply something the Lord has placed on my heart. I don't feel that everyone understands the leadership role they assume when they write a piece for this journal. I truly believe every man has sound intentions when they write but is that reflected only in the writing or in the way of life that inspired the writing? Even tho we are weak, God uses us to declare the Good news to others. The declaration of the Good news must not stop at the journal. Jesus wants us to be role models for others. This concept is a heavy burden but it gets easier the more we walk with Him. Jesus tells us in Matthew 11:29-30 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me. For I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. This is what we must strive for each day, to learn from Jesus, to be like Him. This is our mission as Christian Soldiers, to protect our brothers and sisters from the enemy, to speak truth and keep love for one another.

The Song of the Month is: Mouthpiece, "Miracle"

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*Imagine a Time*

Imagine a time in your life when you needed someone to believe in you, but couldn't find anyone. A time when you prayed that some door, any door would open. Giving you the chance you need to provide yourself a place of refuge. But instead, you find no door of the sorts. A time when all backs are turned to you and a human you're not even acknowledged as. When friends and family may have forgotten you. And your enemies secretly, behind closed doors, laugh as they defame your name. But because you stand alone, no one is willing to hear your pleas. A time when everyone is speaking but no one is listening. A time when you needed someone to stand beside you. But besides you, you stand alone. Imagine a time where everyday your life flashes before your eyes. And the realization that your life even in the eyes of the most humane of people, is not worth saving. A time when your spirit wouldn't let your mind rest. And all you had left was hope for a better day. A time when you were so low you couldn't even imagine a way out. Or when you told the truth but the evidence may have suggested otherwise.

Now imagine having to die for all of those times and many more.

Then imagine a Death Row Inmate.

-Anonymous  
Parchman, DR

## *The Victory Tree*

In the strength of God came forth a mixture of hope, saturating the body with life to come. Where there is no hope, there is no life, but under the wings of salvation stood the cross—a Dogwood tree stretching toward the sun. Our salvation came beneath the feathered wings of God.

Your Son, willed, accused, condemned, beaten, humiliated and hung. From Your Son came full, outstanding grace and unlimited love. It was He, then and there, who brought and bought salvation to birth for you and me.

In the sixth hour, darkness fell. The wings of God removed; Your back was turned toward your hanging son, torches lit, a Roman squadron had its fun. Three hours pass; the ninth hour come—the victory is almost won. In his agony, final words: “Forgive them, Father for they know not what they do.” His eyes turn upwards to Your throne. His tongue speaks the last word to you; “IT IS DONE.”

The ninth hour done; the victory is won. Jerusalem shook as the veil split. The soldier standing beneath the tree is hit by the truth: “this was truly God’s Son.”

Your body, dressed for the tomb, is lifeless, but God’s life is Yours. The battle has been fought and the victory is won. Your precious blood has been poured to cover our sin. Wrapped and laid beyond the stony wall, it is Jesus who makes the final call.

On the third day, it was He who came forth and showed for all to see, that life for all was won on the victory tree.

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### *Who Are We Wrestling With?*

Ephesians 6:12: For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.

We as believers know that when we are in trouble or other problems come to us that we don't have a conflict with God and other people. They are not the enemy, sin and Satan are. When our brothers and sisters do something to us or the people that we love, it is not them who we have conflict with, but it is the evil spirits that dwell in them. The devil and his demons want us to have conflicts with others so that it will keep us separated from our Heavenly Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. So, we as believers need to tell our brothers and sisters that our conflict is not with one another. We as believers need not only to tell the people but we need to show them when they do something wrong that we forgive them and show the love of God. We need to tell them that these evil spirits are real and they are looking to destroy the lives of everyone that they can. So lets protect our hearts and our souls, our minds and the those of others with the words of God. Lets stand and fight the evil spirits and not each other. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen and Amen.

Brother in Christ,  
Stephen Elliott Powers  
Parham, DR

\*Please note that this piece was written in Jan 2001. Stephen has suffered multiple strokes and has a bleeding aneurysm which has left him diminished mentally and physically. I am pleased to say that he is a brother strong in the faith. I am happy we have several of his writing pre-strokes. -Roger

*Am I My Brother's Keeper?*  
*Genesis 4:9; Galatians 6:1-10*

This is a question that has been in the Bible for centuries, but for many it was a saying that became famous from the movie, "New Jack City." As spiritually enlightened people, we work very hard to better ourselves and our families, and so often we forget about helping others along the same path. In the good ol' days, the church was the foundation of communities and the word was spread throughout many homes. In this new age of living, not many people are willing and are hesitant to approach others. With all the civil suits and separation of church and state, spirituality has taken a backseat to modernization.

The question still remains as to how I can help my fellow brothers and sisters, especially when so many are content with who and what they are? Personally, I find it very hard to answer that question for the simple fact that some people have no inclination to change unless it resolves in their heart. So, am I my brother's keeper? I honestly don't think there is a yes or no answer to that question. I know that a lot of people are wondering why I just said that. I can't in good conscious try and force what I believe on someone else—they have to be willing.

I think that we should all show some responsibility for who and what we become as people without having our arms twisted. God gave us all freedom of choice to either walk down one path or another. As a people, we have to respect that choice whether we agree with it or not. Judge not lest ye be judged—Matthew 7:1-4.

On the other hand, it takes a community to help those on the fence, so we all must play a part in helping to make the right decision without forcing someone to make a decision just to please everyone. It's okay to help someone on a bike with training wheels but you can't ride the bike for them. What we can do is be the very best that we can and be ready, willing and able to aid others whenever they need our help in having a closer relationship with Almighty God. But more importantly, I think the best thing that we can do is show everyone unconditional love—regardless of what we or they believe in. We can all learn from one another and be each other's keeper.—Galatians 5:13-14.

God Bless You All Always!  
Justin Underwood, Parchman DR

*My Brother's Keeper*

As you stand there contemplating in  
The freezing cold

With open arms, He readily awaits to  
Warm your soul

A shadow in the night, the stars glare  
Shines upon you

The gate is wide open in hopes that you  
Will walk through

Just one foot forward, your efforts  
Are equally matched

All the holes in your past are filled  
And forever patched

Don't be afraid; He sent me to be there  
If the water gets deeper

I'll walk to His house with you for I  
Am my brother's keeper

Justin H. Underwood

## *Something to Keep in Mind*

I was concluding my morning Bible study today when a passage in Sirach caught my eye. I found it to be quite relevant for those of us in prison trying to live a Christ-filled life where our words, more than our actions in most cases, define us. The passage I am referring to reads, “When a sieve is shaken, the refuse appears; so do a person’s faults when he speaks. The kiln tests the potter’s vessels; so the test of a person is in his conversation. Its fruit discloses the cultivation of a tree; so a person’s speech discloses the cultivation of his mind. Do not praise anyone before he speaks, for this is the way people are tested.” (Sirach 27:4-7).

How many times have you engaged in conversations that were unworthy or even contrary to your faith in Jesus? What about a “slip of the tongue”? I hate to admit that I’ve been drawn into topics of discussion that could be considered disrespectful to my Lord. All of us have. I am not writing today to point that out and make anyone feel bad. What I wanted to bring to everyone’s attention is the fact that people are hearing what we say. You may not be aware of the people at the next table, behind you in a line, or in the next cell over, but they are most certainly hearing what you say. Can they tell by our conversations that we are Christians? If not, then what are our words really saying about us?

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## **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 piece 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.**