

The Good News

Newsletter - November 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)



Giving Thanks for the Saints

As we enter into this new Fall Season, the days are getting shorter and night is more apparent. Halloween brings thoughts of mystery and magic, horrifying fear and knee buckling laughter; it brings reminders of death and the hope for life. And as the cool breezes begin to replace the once hot and humid days of summer, I am taken back to right around this time last year. I was just beginning my adventures here at University Baptist Church, meeting friends, experiencing life in Hattiesburg and learning what this new position would hold for me. I was finding my way here and wondering which way things would go with my uncle back home.

Just one year ago, my uncle was awaiting a double lung transplant. He had gone from short winded at times to nearing the end of his breaths. Six times he had received the call that there were lungs awaiting him, six times he had taken the trip to Chapel Hill where he was to undergo surgery, and six times he had been sent back home. Remaining hopeful but beginning to feel a bit of fear, the idea that this transplant may not come in time for him began to creep into the back of my mind. Days grew shorter and nights longer... it seemed this may be the fate of my uncle as well. Then, on Halloween day, as I was preparing for an All Hallows Eve at UBC, I answered my phone to hear that there had been a seventh call and my uncle was being prepped for surgery. It would be extensive, and we wouldn't know the outcome for many hours.

Entering the still, quiet UBC sanctuary that night, I prepared to hear the stories of the Saints. I stared into the glow of the crackling fire on the altar table, and I thought of the surgical room where my uncle laid, the team of doctors hurriedly and precisely working on his body. As I sat in the still and quiet of that dim room, I thought of the hurry, worry and wait of the hospital -of my aunt and cousin in the waiting room and others of us all around. I thought about the person whose body was now void of breath, and those would be dead lungs that would somehow give new fullness to my uncle's now shallow breath, new life to my uncle whose life seemed to be running out. And I thought of the Holy Spirit as I watched the flickering flames of the candle, thought of the sweeping, cool breezes of fall and as I breathed each breath in and out.

This year, as the names of the Saints of UBC are called out in the service, I will be in Charlotte, NC, celebrating the one year anniversary of new life's breath for my uncle. But in all the life and celebration this anniversary holds, it also holds a deep reality of death and loss. So, as I celebrate my uncle this season, giving thanks for the life he has been given and for the gift he is to me, I also remember the life that was lost and the family whose one year anniversary is a more somber occasion.

I hope for peace for the family who grieves, and mark their loved one as a Saint. As we remember all those who have gone before us, offering gifts of life through their own, I give thanks for the lives informed, strengthened and continued because of them.

Peace to you all,
Kat

My Bloody Feet

Barefoot across ten thousand fiery nails.
An Iron chariot I would pull.
Across a desert dressed in thorn.
Just To be beat.

Refusing drink and battling with naked feet
against Satan's heat.
Upon my vessel I gladly accept...
The scorn.

To endure ridicule with a smile and therefore be condemned.
on the judgement seat.
To have me pierced from side to crown.
To hope that worthiness can be found.

To become like the my master spit on and hung.
To be as a leper numbered with thieves.
Upon The hill I let Jesus love shine in me.
The Worlds riches I gave up.

I traded them for a cross and timber from...
Carpenter's mill.
"I cried out to The Lord Jesus is mine!"
He executed all this to show us .
With his bloody feet how much He loves Us.

In Jesus Name - Amen

by David Cox
Parch man, Death Row

In My Prayers

Read Ephesians 6:18; Psalms 50:23; I Timothy 2:1-6

Everyone has habits -whether they be good or bad. Most people spend a lifetime trying to kick their habits but I've got a habit that I want to keep for the rest of my life. I have a habit of prayer and it has become a constant in my life. Every morning, the first thing that I do when I roll out of bed is fall to my knees in prayer, giving thanks to Almighty God for another day. He has blessed me with the precious gift of life! My prayers though aren't just about me or the situation of a death sentence I'm facing. Rather, my prayers are for my family and all my brothers and sister around the world. We are all God's children and all need prayer. We all need to love each other and not only ourselves. Loving one another despite what race, sex, sexuality, religion, nationality, and ethnicity one may be is the truly unblemished love of Almighty God (I Cor. 13).

So, make prayer a habit worth keeping and you'll truly be blessed for it!

God Bless you always!

Justin Underwood
Parchman, DR

In My Prayers

I've fallen..
I've fallen to my knees to rest for
A little while,
To give comfort to every soul and to the
spirit of every child... In my prayers!

To every child of God asking for his
Grace and his mercy,
For all the precious blessings that he's bestowed
Upon us willingly... In my prayers!

I've risen...
I've risen to the heights for
Which I stand,
To give praise to the most high for his holy
and righteous plan...In my prayers!

His plans to nurture and to fill us all with
His unconditional love,
So that we'll as unite together as a family
In the heavens above...In my prayers!

By: Justin Underwood
Parchman, DR

For November Good News (from the letters David Walker took to type)

(Please note that the following piece was written on 02 / 23 /2001. Stephen has since suffered multiple strokes and has a bleeding aneurysm. I am pleased to report that he remains strong in faith. I am happy we have several of his writings pre-strokes to share. --- Roger G.)

There Is No One Perfect In This World

Romans 3:23 "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

We as believers know that there is no one perfect in this world today, because we all have said or done something wrong in our lives. We also need to tell everyone that we meet that when someone does something to us or the people that we love that doesn't mean that we are better than they are, it means to help them. We need to tell the people to watch out for the devil and his demons that they will tell us that we are better than that person and that we should not forgive them. We know that there was only one perfect man to walk this earth and His name is Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. We need to tell everyone that we meet that we strive to reach that perfection just as Jesus Christ walked perfect in this world. We also need to watch out because the devil and his demons are using people to deceive by telling them that Jesus Christ did not walk perfectly on this earth. So let's tell others to be perfect in love and having a forgiving heart just like our Heavenly Father and His Son Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior have done and is still doing. In Jesus name we pray Amen and Amen.

Brother in Christ
Stephen Elliot Powers
Parchman Death Row

A Note From A Reader

I want to send this message to all of the people contributing to this wonderful newsletter and working in prison ministry. I am very proud of you all! The God we serve is so great and your participation in the Good News continues to bring glory to His Son, Jesus.

I have been lifted up by the testimonies and I am so thankful for them. You see, like so many of you I wasn't called by our Lord until later in life. Your stories, poems, and art are so powerful that it shows those of us in the world what the one and only God can do despite any hardships and isolation.

I want you all to remain hopeful in Christ. Not long ago, a prisoner incarcerated for seventeen years for a crime he didn't commit kept praying for our Lord to set him free. Never losing hope, and obedient in his faith, he was finally rewarded. God set him free. I ask that you all never lose hope and work everyday to grow in Christ through prayer and obedience to His word.

I have spoken to my nephew Roger about heaven and I can't help but think that if I was in his place I would want to go there immediately. He has told me and now I tell you that there is work for us to do. Heaven can wait. Please continue to write for this Good News Newsletter and spread the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. We all love God so let's do the work He has given us the tools for. I will continue praying for you.

Let me tell you all again how proud of you I am. We will all rejoice together one day and sing glorious songs to our God and His Son. I can't wait for the day when I join my family, friends, and all of those reading this newsletter in God's new world. It will be a wonderful time without pain, sorrow, or death. I am truly excited to be able to pet lions, tigers, and bears. I encourage you to read Isaiah 11: 1-10 and share my anticipatory faith.

Keep up the good work. God loves you all.

Marsha Dougherty

Blessings!

Ephesians 1:3

At 11:55 pm on October 5th, I awoke from a very good sleep and I'm guessing that our Almighty God wanted me to witness at 12 am October 6th, my 41st birthday. Yes, it's a blessing to be another year older, another year wiser, and another year strong, strengthened by his love. It may be sad to some and even to me that I'm in prison to celebrate the day God gave me the precious gift of life but I'm humbled by the fact that he's given me grace and mercy despite where I am. Yes, another glorious year, but I couldn't go back to sleep so I climbed up on my top bunk in my cell and I looked out my window at the stars and moon in heaven. What a beautiful sight to see. I really miss sitting outdoors at night in the peace of the night, gazing at God's home. With a tear in my eye, the heavens opened up with a light rain and I knew that God was teary eyed as well. There are blessings in everything and we have to recognize that and recognize who they are from.

Our God is awesome. May he bless you always!

Justin Underwood
Parchman, DR

It's a Blessing!

Watching his tears stream down my window
Refreshed my soul,
Warming my spirit although the temperatures
Were slightly cold.

I gaze at the heavens at the shiny sparkles
In his eyes,
Early morning comes as dawn breaks across
The eastern skies...It's a Blessing!

Restless but resting in the comfort of his
Loving embrace,
I'm wakened by the small dashes of hot
Water on my face

The day begins from whence the day has
First began,
His spirit within me is the spirit within
Every Godly man... It's a Blessing!

I relinquish the peace but his peace still
Resides within me,
Breakfast has arrived and has awakened the
Sleeping serenity.

Another day behind the bars of a tempered yet
Teemping prison society,
My eyes were opened today and I accept his
Precious gift graciously...It's a Blessing!

By Justin Underwood

Fear Not!

Unwarranted fear is a subtle-working, destructive poison. It can creep into us undetected and work on our hearts and minds even while we sleep. We often don't realize it has laid its foundation within until we begin to feel and see the walls it has raised. Fear can dominate our thoughts and ruin our ability to witness Jesus. Be aware!

My entire prison experience has been played out on Mississippi Death Row. After ten years of solitary confinement and abuse by the State I have lost many of my social skills. My mind has developed odd coping mechanisms that resemble OCD and PTSD and I have a hard time at times processing certain emotions. On the flip side of this solitary confinement coin I have become much wiser and very, very strong spiritually. I'm not sure the trade-offs balance out, but that's a thought for another day.

Anyway, I have recently been given reason to believe that I will be transferring off of Death Row into the general prison population. I was informed by M.D.O.C. representatives that I must move to one of several "transition" buildings--transition building being another name for a building that holds the troublemakers and/or rule breakers. Since I have lost most of my social skills I began to worry about how I will be able to navigate through a strange new environment that runs on chaos. I began to run scenarios through my never resting mind. How would I be able to live and work around men that wanted to harm me? The lies, gossip, and outright violence I hear emanating from these transition buildings began to fill me with an irrational fear of the future. I lost sleep and my peace evaporated. Reading God's word quickly became fruitless and my prayers were like sand in my mouth. Those two things are truly terrifying. I would have you all note that I have been through a capital trial and under a sentence of death for many years and the fear I felt recently was like nothing before it.

I was visiting with one of my friends from First Baptist Church in Raymond, MS (a shout-out to Brother Lowery) a couple of weeks ago and I began to tell him my story. God bless our dear brother! I had just told him that I would be moving into a transition building, not yet getting to the part of my story about how afraid I was, when he said, "I bet the harvest over there is ripe." That simple missionary logic erased my fears instantly. His words flipped a switch in my head, turning my dark, irrational fear into Christ's guiding light. I can't believe that I have read, believed, and stood firm on God's promises for peace, protection, and guidance for so many years only to be derailed by an unknown "what if" kind of fear. Jesus emphatically declares in His Sermon on the Mount to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness and not to worry about tomorrow. And why worry when we have the promises of angelic protectors and God speaking directly in Psalm 91. He promises those of us that love Him, ". . . I will deliver (you); I will protect those who know my name. When you call to me I will answer you; I will be with you in trouble, I will rescue you and honor you. With long life I will satisfy you, and show you my salvation." (Psalm 91: 14-16) How could I let any fear, justified or not, make me forget my position in Christ Jesus? I vow it will not happen again!

My dear friends, trust that if we remain in God's will He will put us where He wants us to be to do the work He has set before us. Please pray with me that our Lord will show us all the doors He has opened for us and give us the strength to boldly step through them, as well as the wisdom to avoid the doors He has closed to us.

God bless you all in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Roger Gillet

Parchman Death Row
November 2014 Good News

A Response from a Reader

I received the Good News newsletter, and I was very glad to get it. The writings and poems were all good. *I Keep Digging* was very good and I shared it with a friend of mine who is in the hospital at this time. He really enjoyed that poem and it lifted his spirits. You know, the word tells us that the work is plentiful and the workers are few. There is work for us to do and Jesus pointed it out in Matthew 25. God is good and sent his only son to die for all of us. He tells me that if I follow him and keep his commandments and statutes I'll receive all his blessings. (Deut. 28).

We all have to keep digging and find his love because he tells us to love one another and even our enemies. No where does God say that it'll be easy so we all have to find his love inside of us and keep digging for his blessings.

It's early morning and I'm writing this letter to everyone because the writings and poems stirred my spirit. Thanks for blessing with *I Keep Digging!*

Your brother in Christ,

Frederick Singleton
Flora, MS

Infinite Grace and Infinite Space

I recently read an article by Father Ron Rolheiser that was published in Mississippi Catholic Newspaper. He wrote of some folks' misconception that God's grace is finite, that we should expect only so much of it. I got to thinking of various articles and tv programs I have read and seen over the years that dealt with a word rhyming with grace; I speak of space. No, not the allegedly empty area between my ears. I write of the vastness of the heavens we gaze at—when not locked inside a prison cell—at night. By the accounts of most scientists, our universe and the emptiness of much of it is continually expanding. Most of this reasoning is based on observable actions of various heavenly bodies and then deductive reasoning takes over to form a theory to explain what may be out there. Notice I said, may be. Our human minds can only fathom so much and then we must speculate. Accepting the theory of an expanding universe then leads to the question: what are the limits of this expansion? Let's back up for a second and go to the book of Genesis. We are told that in the beginning there was darkness and void. Then, the heavens and the earth were created. No mention is made of the limits of his creation of these entities. Over the centuries man's understanding of the composition of his creations has advanced. I am certain it will continue to do so. I am also certain we, humankind, will NEVER fully understand the limits, the extent of all the wonders he made. To do so would imply we have the same knowledge as God.

Let's connect this to his grace. Just as we will never understand the limits of space, we shall never experience the limits of his grace. We can get in a space craft now and travel beyond our own galaxy if we lived long enough. Yet, it would only scratch the surface of what our limited understanding of the universe is now. It is written that his grace is sufficient for our needs. With that in mind, need we concern ourselves with questions about its limits? I think not.

Richard Jordan
Parchman, DR

How Can You?

Romans 8

A question that pertains to many people all around the world and especially here in America , where many proclaim Christ as their savior but don't follow his teachings. It's very easy to say that you are of God then your thoughts and actions are that of the devil. If Jesus lifts me to salvation rather than condemnation, then how can you condemn me? Far too many think that they have the power to speak for Christ and have asserted what they think best (man's law) over God's law.

Now, here I sit on Death Row, a condemned man according to the state and all those that represent the callous death penalty imposed upon myself and others. And so I impose this question upon you: How can you be of Christ who represents life, and want to put me to death?

How Can You?

How can you be a man of God and then
Want to take my life;

How can you be a man of peace and then
Cut me deep with a knife?

How can you be my brother in Christ and then
condemn me in the face of man;
How can you lift me in prayer and then
Strike me down with your hand?

How can you be spiritually enlightened and then
Speak so foolishly;
How can you be so enriched in life and then
Act so conceitedly?

How can you wade in the water and then
Watch me drown;
How can you smile in the face of others and then
Give me a frown?

How can you have God's love if you don't
Show his love to all;
How can you get to heaven's gate if you can't
Climb over strife's wall?

By: Justin Underwood
Parchman, DR

BEST FRIEND

I was working at the Ford Dealership in Grand Rapids, Michigan in the early part of 1990. I'd heard a group of sales staff saying they were going to a Saturday Night Live show and so I said to count me in. Well, Saturday night came and I met everyone at a familiar restaurant to eat and to go. My Dad had passed on Labor Day in '89 and I was longing to live in snow country again. This particular night, it started snowing and I brought a 4x4 Bronco that'll go through snow. We were almost there when I saw this car off the road. I got the truck behind the car and used my vehicle to push it out.

We soon got to a church called Calvary Non-Denominational Church and I realized that this was not a comedy club. God had a purpose for me and He was reaching out to me, but I just didn't see it at the time. I parked, got my date out the other side of the vehicle, and we were both kind of nervous. There was a couple that came up to us and thanked us for the help earlier. Then this young set of twins came up to us smiling (I myself am a mirror twin as my brother and I have the same birth mark). One of them said he wanted to introduce me to his best friend and I realized that I'd mistook this as I was shaking the other twin's hand.

After all this, we all went inside of the church and I was looking for others who I worked with. Finding them, we joined groups and I went to get cold sodas as this was unlike any church I'd ever been in. This place seated about 8,000 and as I was coming back to my seat I saw the young couple again walking to the platform. They were youth pastors there as the 1st skit was starting and then the lights had dimmed when the 2nd skit started. I could see and hear laughter everywhere and I could understand the salvation side of the dialogue. I saw a group passing out new Bibles as well as accepting donations for a youth trip so I paid for two and gave one to my girlfriend at that time.

As the night ended, we were leaving a crowded parking lot when this young boy about 9 years old asked if he could see my Bible for a couple of minutes. I said sure as he walked over to a bench. My girlfriend asked me to look as the boy had got down on his knees with his sister, who both had curly hair, and he was pointing to pages in the Bible. I wasn't sure of what they were doing as I wasn't familiar with salvation yet but I soon realized the young boy was leading his sister to Jesus. As I looked around, I saw this couple watching them and I could see that they had curly hair as well. I heard the young boy ask me if I wanted to know why he called Him my "best friend".

I looked at the group and asked them if they were seeing what I was seeing. I walked over there and told them both they could keep that, as I wanted their parents to fill out the front. I stood there in awe as the young boy put me on the spot and asked me If I wanted to meet his "best friend". I told him I'd think about it and now I wonder to this day would I be here on Death Row if I'd accepted Jesus back in early 1990? Would I be counting the days 'till Christmas while I'm sitting here realizing the missed opportunities that I chose not to accept the Lord?

This beautiful season, I ask all who are reading this letter: Is there someone you know who doesn't know Jesus? It is your honor, your burden, and the most joyful occasion to get the opportunity to share God. Don't just think about it; Do it! You will not regret the growth behind your action.

I take this time to thank all who are responsible for this ministry at your great church.

God bless all this coming Christmas season.

In Christ Always,
Tim Evans
Death Row, Parchman

Do you walk the walk?

I know that most of you , if not all of you, have heard the old saying, "if you talk the talk, then you have to walk the walk." It means that if talk about believing in a certain way of thinking and/or living, then your daily life and actions should reflect the way you say you think and/or believe. This doesn't mean you live a certain way 2 or 3 days a week or only when it is convenient and easy to do. It means that your daily walk through life and your daily actions reflect what you say you believe in everyday.

I am not saying that we as Christians have to live perfect lives, and never do or say sinful things. As long as we live in the flesh bodies we are going to have urges and thoughts about things we shouldn't. Even the strongest of us will at times give in to them. But that doesn't mean we are not true Christians. When we fall short (which most of us do), we have to pray for forgiveness, and the strength to resist those temptations in the future.

My grandfather was a deacon in a Southern Baptist Church for more than 30 years. I was raised to know right from wrong not only in society's eyes, but the right and wrong way to be a Christian. We are suppose to be witnesses for God by sharing our beliefs and faith with others. A big part of that is sharing God's word with those we come in contact with. But, I believe that it is just as important to live our lives as examples for other people to follow.

New Christians are "children in Christ", especially those who knew nothing about God, Jesus, the Bible, etc. before they dedicate their lives to the Lord. Like children who learn from their parents how to live their lives, a very big part of what they learn comes from watching how their parents live their lives. When it comes down to it, our religion is based completely on faith. Faith that there was such a "person" as Jesus, that he was God's Son, that he died on the cross for our sins, and then was raised from the dead. Over time, through a variety of ways, God strengthens a new Christian's faith. At some point, in my life at least, it no longer is a matter of faith, it becomes an unwavering knowledge that the "Good News" of the Gospel is true.

But, starting out, new Christians rely on what they are being told is the truth. They trust, have 'faith" in the person who shares the Good News with them, that the person is telling them the truth. They have to trust the integrity of the person who is teaching them. If we don't "walk the walk", new Christians have no reason to trust what we are telling them is true. We have to lead by example, and conduct ourselves in a manner that is in line with God's Word. If we don't, new Christians have no reason to believe the Good News. We do more harm than we do good; we, in fact, drive people away instead of towards "the faith."

As I said earlier, none of us can be perfect. So we have to ask ourselves everyday, "Have I walked the walk today?" What can I do better tomorrow that just by my actions will encourage others to walk on the same path that I am on? I have found myself lately not living up to my grandfathers example. I will be working on correcting that, and I encourage all of you to examine your daily walk with God. New Christians and even older ones, look to us to see if they are on the right path.

Charles C.

THY STAMP OF GRACE

Stamp Thine image upon me, Lord,
And I shall be a mirror of Your face.
This image I shall gladly bear,
And, formed in my heart, You I shall ever wear.

I shall glow with Your grace!
I yearn to image Thee with each new day.
And may the Spirit's presence within me stay
To Strengthen the assurance in which I'm held
And to increase my love for the One they nailed.

A mirror of Your face may my portion be,
So that all may come to behold Thee in me.
I yearn to portray Jesus in my face,
And His shadow is everything I desire to be.

David Cox
Parchman Death Row

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.