

The Good News

Newsletter - July/August

A publication of University Baptist Church, Hattiesburg, MS

The purpose of University Baptist Church is, through guidance of 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, UBC is committed to its core values of being inclusive, inquisitive, and community minded.

A Godly Gamble

The mire of uncertainty is certainly deep;
and the hill of adversity is stunningly steep.
The weakest of wills will wallow and weep;
and the rest of the weary will stumble and creep.

In the way that lies madness lay a trap for the eyes;
and following that path is where he who goes, dies.
But there is a One all your hopes, He supplies;
the Godly go rightly, gazes fixed on the skies.

In the storms He stops stately, ever to remind;
that he who now sees, was previously blind.
The lesson learned longly, is that life won't rewind;
but for he who looks lightly, what was lost, he can find.

To sum it all up, is to say only this:
the harder you look, the more likely you miss.
That Jesus is Lord, and you cannot dismiss,
that ignorance is costly, and is seldomly bliss.

One final note, to all who remain:
such sinister sin is simply insane.
To continue this way is profoundly profane;
so the arrival is awry in the Kingly domain.

Once you have suffered, and enough is enough;
determine to turn to the One who is tough.
One you have done, and He's told you quite gruff,
that your life is now lovely, it was never a bluff.

-Matt Wilbanks

“Hold My Hand”
Psalm 73:22 – 28; Isa. 41:13 – 20

I received a letter the other day from a very good friend and brother in Christ – Dick Allison. As always, his letters contain words that are uplifting, encouraging, complimentary, and quite often inspiring.

Myself, I feel blessed to inspire others in the Word of God and I'm always eager to learn from others and to teach others as well. On this day though, I was taught a very valuable lesson from my big brother about love and about sacrifice. He shared with me this love for the love of his life – Jane Allison – and how God truly blessed him with her.

I can only imagine someone as special and as devoted at my side every step every day. He keeps me updated on her medical condition as we pray for one another day in and day out. We have never met one another, although I feel like I've known him all my life.

One of the things he said that touched me and made my knees buckle was the fact that he has to hold Jane's hand to help her with her balance. But even when, or if, she regains her balance, he says he'll never stop holding her hand. When we do things out of love, it becomes something natural in our every day life.

Even when I was an unfaithful heathen to God once upon a time in life, He still held my hand and made sure I kept my balance as I walked to and from. - Psalm 119: 116-117.

There are many times in my life that I could have been dead and long gone from this life. I remember going rabbit hunting with O.D. Hudson and one of my schoolmates Eric Battle one time.

We came upon a dried up river bed that looked safe to cross. Like an idiot, I leaped down into the river bed and I sunk waist-deep into mud that I thought was hardened dirt. Still holding the 12 gauge shotgun (single-shot) in my hand, I heard them yelling at me to be careful as the barrel was pointed directly at my head and my finger was on the trigger lever.

I can only imagine what would have happened...I can only imagine. God held my hand that day I know because He saw me here today being a witness, testifying, and giving glory to His beloved name. - Psalm 86:9-13, 1 Cor. 6:19-20.

Everybody has a story to tell and I do hope that I have inspired someone to testify and to be a witness of the power and glory of God.

I thank brother Dick and sister Jane Allison for being an inspiration and true friends. I pray that you continue to hold hands as Almighty God holds all of our hands.

Remember, God gave mankind two hands for reason – one to help ourselves and the other to help others. - Neh. 8:10, 12, Esther 9:19, Eccl. 11: 1-6; Luke 6:30-31; 2 Cor. 9:7-15; and 1 Tim. 6: 17 – 19.

God Bless Everyone!

Justin Underwood

“Hold My Hand”

When the shadows at length have lifted and
I share my story
How the darkness turned to day and I
saw Him in His glory

Carrying the heavy weight of ill purged
from my broken heart
He consecrated me and, with a Christ-like
touch, set me apart

The old man melted like snow in the
glance of the Lord
I stand in the fullness of His might; I'm
protected by the Sword

As I walk through the valley of the shadow
of death, He holds my hand
Going over each dear delight of His purpose
and His righteous plan

The ashes of my heart blaze with fire
and winged zeal
With weary feet, He holds my hand as we
labor up Calvary Hill.

In order for man to live eternally, he must
go to the cross and die
And I surrender to the Rock of Ages that is
higher than I

No longer will I give the world my heart
or fall prey to its desires
Because I love the Lord, He has shielded me
from the torment and the fires

He has cleansed me and given me the righteous
attire of a new man
As I walk along the narrow path of life, He
gently holds my hand.
-Justin Underwood

My Testimony

My Testimony Unfortunately, while I am not in prison, it doesn't mean that I don't deserve to be. My time on this planet has been used more frequently and for a longer period of time to hurt people than to help and in everyday life, I have often been more selfish than not. However, for some reason, there has always been a presence of God in my life watching over me, whether I deserved it or not, and that's how I got here today.

For most of my adult life, I was obsessed with alcohol, among other drugs. No matter what incentive I had, I could not exist sober. Alcohol and drugs ruined any chance I had at success in my marriage, school, or any other relationship. I wasn't capable of caring about anything or anyone – even people I swore I loved more than anything. I would do anything to ensure that I could keep drinking, and went to great lengths to continue. I drove drunk every single day, stole, lied, and hung around people that should've been my downfall, but for some reason, I never hit anyone with my car, never ended up in prison, and my consequences were not nearly as bad as some of those around me. It was like I was in a protective bubble.

God works in mysterious ways and has a plan for all of us. I could not see my own worth or any value to anything that I could do on my own, but he could. When I had my daughter, I was still trying any way I could to continue drinking. Any problem that I had in my life, I blamed on anything besides alcohol, until I couldn't go on any longer and finally ended up losing custody of her. While many women and men cannot get sober, even after they lose their children, for some reason, this was how I came to be able to get sober. If I wouldn't have had a child, I truly believe that I would be dead or in prison by now. But, God saw fit to give me a child and save my life.

I don't judge anyone who isn't able to get sober for their children, or anyone who is in prison for things that I easily could've done in any one of my many blackouts. I don't understand why I didn't kill anyone or myself or even get more than a misdemeanor charge, but I know that God has a reason for keeping me in my daughter's life, whether it's to raise her or to better myself.

Since I've gotten sober, it has been very clear to me that I am blessed beyond what I deserve. I haven't found the reason yet; I just have to trust that God knows what he's doing. I have been in and out of treatment, therapy and church for the entirety of my sobriety and watched people with far more responsibility and worth than I fail to recover. It's heartbreaking. I don't understand why God chose to give me another chance, but I truly believe that if those struggling will hand their problems over to him, he will cure them of their shortcomings – whether they are addiction related or not.

I don't know if my addiction was from God or Satan, but either way, it has helped me be a much better person than I would be without it. I don't judge those around me who have done wrong and I don't take my life for granted. I never miss a chance to better myself or to help someone when I can. I understand more than most that every day is a gift and I am truly grateful. There but for the grace of God, go I.

- Erin Gregory

Could You Explain Love to Me?

I talked to a friend of mine today. There are so many things that I don't know, and don't understand. How do I let things pass by me without even noticing? Have you ever really thought about what the world expects from you? Go even one step further, and what do you think God expects from you? Any ideas? I know the world expects so much. Do this, do that, and keep doing this while doing that. Pay attention to this, and that, and that thing way over the top of that hill. Find out who needs what and just do it, and just do it NOW! How can people even think it's possible to get even a small portion of that done?

God, now that's a guy that's easy to please. He just wants you to believe in Him with all your heart, mind, and soul. He wants you to love your neighbor as you love yourself. From my standpoint, that looks pretty easy. The hurdle I'm having trouble getting over – well that might take a minute. How can someone love you without having to do something for them? That just doesn't happen. One of my favorite verses is 1 John 4:19. (*19 We love because he first loved us.*) I've always wondered how that can be. How can someone possibly love us just because? This is God we're talking about here. The Big Guy, the Head Cheese, our Creator, Our Father. Why would someone so amazing, so glorified, so holy, love such complete sin-filled messes that we are? If you have any answers, please let me know, I would love to hear them.

Most people think, and it's a good thing they do, that parents are supposed to love their children that way. That it's the direct example of unconditional love, but what about those people who have never had it? What about the ones who don't have someone to love them? How do you teach something like that? unconditional love to someone? Oh blah, blah, blah, and this is how it is. Really? Do you really expect someone who hasn't had love like that before just to fall in line and believe that it can happen? Let me tell you, it takes years and years to even wrap your head around that as a concept. There has to be an angle, there has to be a way, what's the catch?

All these years, the thing that has gotten me through this is God. I may not have had the love of my parents, or even most of my family, but the one person I always knew was there – My Savior. Good times or bad, He has been there for me. I've been told that one of the best ways to overcome adversity is prayer. I do agree with that, but I think if I prayed anymore I would probably be out of a job. Even knowing God most of my life, I still wonder why. Why does he love me? I've done nothing, I haven't made any donations, I Haven't taught any children, I haven't helped anyone across the street, or fed anyone. Why does he love me? The answer couldn't be more simple – Because He loves me. The broken, weird, ugly me, with all the bumps and bruises, and all the hurts that lay just under the surface. He Loves Me. So now, I know that my life isn't my own. I know that everything I do needs to glorify the One that makes it all possible. The One who picks me up and dusts me off and puts me right back into the fight. The One who talks to me in the night, when my tears fall silently on the pillow. The One who calms me in the eye of every storm.

Love is a strange thing. The best possible model of how things should be – God's love for His children. We must strive for that. We can't buy it, or even earn it. It just is. So now we must live our lives and just show that love to others. Helping them to see that the Lord is the only way, and He is our only need. In this great big world, just keep your eyes fixed upon the Lord and call His name. He will be there. He always has and always will be. Lord Jesus, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me – a sinner. Lord Jesus, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me – a sinner. The love is there, just reach for it.

Love Lifted Me

1 I was sinking deep in sin, far from the peaceful shore,
Very deeply stained within, sinking to rise no more;
But the Master of the sea heard my despairing cry,
From the waters lifted me, now safe am I.

Refrain:

Love lifted me! Love lifted me!
When nothing else could help,
Love lifted me.
Love lifted me! Love lifted me!
When nothing else could help,
Love lifted me.

2 All my heart to Him I give, ever to Him I'll cling,
In his blessed presence live, ever his praises sing.
Love so mighty and so true merits my soul's best songs;
Faithful loving service, too, to Him belongs. [Refrain]

3 Souls in danger, look above, Jesus completely saves;
He will lift you by His love out of the angry waves;
He's the master of the sea, billows His will obey;
He your Savior wants to be, be saved today. [Refrain]

(One of the first hymns I ever learned as a child, and I think I've sung that to everyone one of the kids in our family. Love does truly lift me up. God bless each and every one of you, and I beg you, just reach out to the Lord, He's right there waiting)

Gayle H.

Growing Spiritually

How many of you reading this newsletter know what your purpose in life is? Do you think that we are put here for a single purpose or do we go from task to task as we mature? Do you think that we stay in one place spiritually, mentally, and emotionally until we pass a "test" that proves we are ready for the next stage in life?

These are some of the questions I've been pondering the last few weeks and they have prompted me to search my past and chart my growth as a man and as a Christian. I was surprised at my discovery.

That there is a growing process is without doubt. As we recall our childhoods it is easy to see that we had to crawl before we walked, walked before we ran. When we were in school we learned how to count before we could add, before we could multiply and divide. There can be no doubts that there are steps to growth that must be taken in order and each new step is built upon the ones that have come before. This is true of our physical development, our mental and emotional development, and holding to the pattern, it is true of our spiritual development as well.

How do we measure growth? Remembering the days spent in school our growth was measured through tests and the dreaded pop quiz. Our teachers were able to see where we were strong and where we were still in need of instruction. The tests also showed us a lot about ourselves. Did you dread the pop quiz or were you prepared for it? Had you put in the work and made every effort to learn what was being taught? We certainly knew what we didn't know after the test was over.

So how do we prepare for the spiritual tests that come our way and how do we prepare for the next area of growth once we pass the tests? Jesus tells us to overcome the obstacles we face, the pop quizzes of life, that help us grow. We mature through the challenges and hardships and come out the other side better than before.

I love James 1:2-4 because he makes this very point. *2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.* Without testing we cannot grow and without total reliance on Jesus we cannot pass the tests.

Are you ready for a life test? What about a pop quiz? I believe the answer can be determined by looking at your prayer life. If you have good "study" habits and talk to the Teacher all the time you will be able to pass all the test life can give to you.

What was the last test you were given? Did you ace it, fail, or just barely get by? Why? Have a great month and remember Jesus is coming soon.

R. Gillett
Parchman Death Row

Running the Race

*Let us run with endurance the race set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus
Hebrews 12:1-2*

In many ways the Christian walk of life can be likened to running a marathon.

The day God called us to come to Him was the day we signed up for the race and when we accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and savior we started to run.

In order to run a marathon the participant needs to exercise endurance and discipline. Although physical training is essential, the mental part is crucial if we want to reach the finish line.

This summer I ran my third marathon. From experience I know that sooner or later during the race my muscles will start to burn and grow stiff. The pain and exhaustion will steal my focus and I will ask myself "why did I sign up for this?"

Undoubtedly doubt is something all Christians will encounter during the course of the race of life. The afflictions in life steal our attention and our eyes that were supposed to be fixed on Jesus start to roam around. In Matthew 14:29-31 we read about Peter who, when coming to Jesus on the sea of Galilee, steps out of the boat and walks on the water, but when the wind and the waves of the sea distract him, he loses his eyes on the Lord, whereupon he starts to sink.

As soon as we lose our focus on Christ the devil takes his chance. Before we know it he is there telling us to give up and to stop running in order to end the pain. When this happens we have two choices: We can either listen to him, step off and pronounce ourselves defeated by the world, or we can lift our eyes and, as Peter did, turn to the Lord for help. Is it always easy? Definitely not! After all Satan is the ruler of this world, 2 Cor 4:4.

The marathon runner might ask himself; why could I not get to run under better conditions? Why does it have to be so hot today or why do we so often have to run uphill? Why couldn't we just get to run downhill? Likewise, as Christians we might be tempted to, like Job, question the Lord's purposes with our lives, when circumstances turn harsh, painful and unfavorable Job 3:23.

Sometimes the afflictions of the world force us to slow down to a walk. We might even step aside for awhile before we are fit to get back on track.

In Philippians 3:14 Paul says "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." For a marathon runner the goal is the finish line (and maybe also a medal and a t-shirt). For the Christian the goal is the end of this life with the judgment seat of Christ and all God's purposes for his saved children. When we finish we receive the crown of righteousness 1 Cor 2:25, 2 Tim 4:8. For the marathon runner his ambition for the race might be to run faster. As Christians our ambition should be to adopt a mind like Christ and let our thoughts and actions in life be to His glory. I did reach the finish line after 26.2 miles. Having now run three marathons I know that the more it hurt during the race and the more I was tested with pain and doubt, the more I also rejoiced when I finally finished. I am convinced that the same is true for a Christian; the more afflictions we encounter on our way and the more doubt and despair that hunt our mind, the more we will rejoice having overcome these obstacles at the end of life. What we love and believe in is worth fighting and suffering for, dying for and in this case running for.

Although not all Christians will literally run a marathon during their lives, we are all fellow participants in the Christian race of life and if we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus we are all winners when we reach the finish line, having endured and conquered the afflictions of the world through Him who gives us strength.

Before closing this text I also want to make aware that the length of a Marathon, as previously mentioned, is 26.2 miles or 42 kilometers. We know that 40 is a significant number in the Bible. It's the number of testing and endurance to reach maturity. I thus ask myself it is a mere coincidence that this race, which many people see as the ultimate test of endurance, measures a little more than 40 kilometers?

Jenny Ekström