

Faith and

THE SAMPSON INDEPENDENT
FAMILY

2015 Spring Edition

Inside:

Personal stories
of inspiration
and goodwill

Dry eyes and faith

By Brittany Cottle

I rolled over, grabbing the edge of the bed. Wrenching in pain, I took a deep breath and let it out. I called for my mom to come and assist me and when she entered my room, she helped me up and into my hard-back brace. I took baby steps, feeling my mom's hands close by in case I stumbled or got to be in too much pain to make it any further. Finally, I reached the bathroom and looked into the mirror as I prepared myself for school that day. I knew that it would be a struggle because it was my first day back after surgery and I didn't know how it was going to feel to be in a brace and baggy clothes in an environment where everyone seemed to judge and put individu-

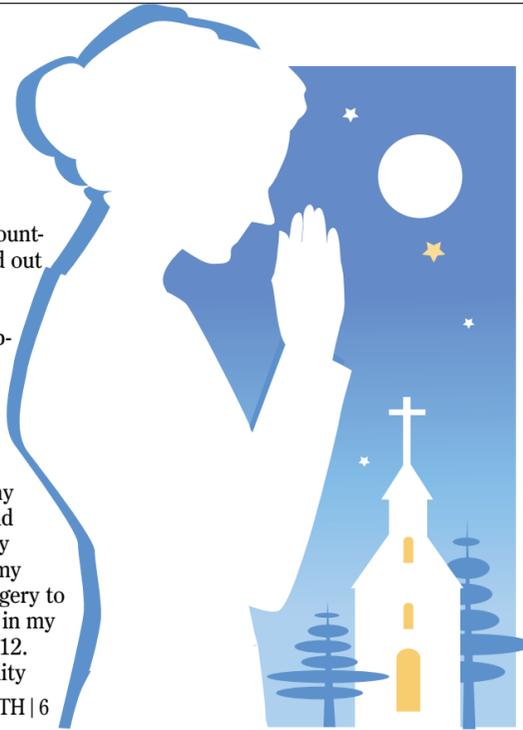
als down. I wasn't ready.

For the over 80% of Americans that are affected by back discomfort, pain isn't an option it is a way of life. What I learned at the age of 14 is that surgery isn't a quick fix or rash decision; it is a quality of life issue. Beginning in May 2010, my life was changed as I experienced something that would be with me for the rest of my life. I was diagnosed with spinal stenosis, a narrowing of the spinal column that puts pressure on the spinal cord. As I came to know the effects of back pain, I somehow had to come to know the effects of surgery as well. Over a three year period I underwent three back surgeries starting with a Posterior Spinal Fusion on October 4, 2010. Following

the fusion, I endured long and countless hours of therapy to only find out that the stress of spinal stenosis had caused strain on my hips, leaving me to take on arthroscopic surgery on April 24, 2011 to treat FAI (Femoroacetabular Impingement) and a labral tear my left hip. With what seemed only an uphill battle, I fought on and continued to endure many hours of therapy. As I worked and worked to get back to playing my sports, I hit another wall. With my third and final surgery, I had surgery to fix a sacroiliac joint dysfunction in my left SI joint on November 27, 2012.

Coming to terms with the reality

See FAITH | 6



"Let Your Light So Shine, That Others May See Your Good Works, And Glorify Your Father In Heaven."



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What we believe



We believe in the Triune God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

We believe that God is the Creator, Preserver, and Ruler of Heaven and Earth.

We believe that Jesus Christ, the Son, was God in flesh revealed and that He came into the world that the world through Him can be saved from sin.

We believe that the Holy Spirit reveals God to people and that those who

worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth.

We believe that the Holy Bible is the inspired word of God, that it is the authority and inspiration for the faith and practice of the Christian life, and that every Christian has an individual responsibility to God to discover the meaning of the Scriptures for his or her own life.

We believe that spiritual regeneration must precede baptism, church membership, and commemoration of the Lord's Supper.

We believe that God created humankind in His own image and made of one blood all nations.

We believe that God is faithful and just to forgive all people who confess their sins and profess their faith in Jesus Christ and that regardless of creed or race, they become the children of God and Christian brothers.

We believe that as a local community of Christians, we are a part of Christ's Church which is universal in scope. Therefore, we believe that we should witness and work for Christ in fellowship with all children of God in an effort to oppose evil and extend the Kingdom of God throughout the world.

We believe that nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Resting in God's grace

By Louise Beheler

In 1950 I graduated from high school at the age of 17. A week later, on June 5th, my cousin and I decided to walk to the drug store in Maysville for a coke and crackers. When we came out of the drug store my girlfriend's marine boyfriend was parked in the front of the store. I jumped up on the front of his car. Just playing he got out of the car and came around to where I was with a 25 caliber German Luger pistol in his hand. He said, "Stick'em up." He then pulled the trigger. The gun fired and a bullet hit me in the stomach. He remarked, "I forgot that I loaded the gun." I slumped off the car onto the ground. He picked me up and carried me two doors down to the Dr.'s office. A friend of my family said, "put her in my car and I'll carry her to the hospital," which was 15 miles away in New Bern.

We passed the highway patrol station on the way and he blew his horn signaling that he wanted to be lead to the hospital by the patrolman. About 15 minutes after we arrived at the hospital the patrolman came up and my friend remarked, "I blew the horn for you to lead me to the hospital" to which the patrolman remarked, "Lead you? I couldn't even catch you."

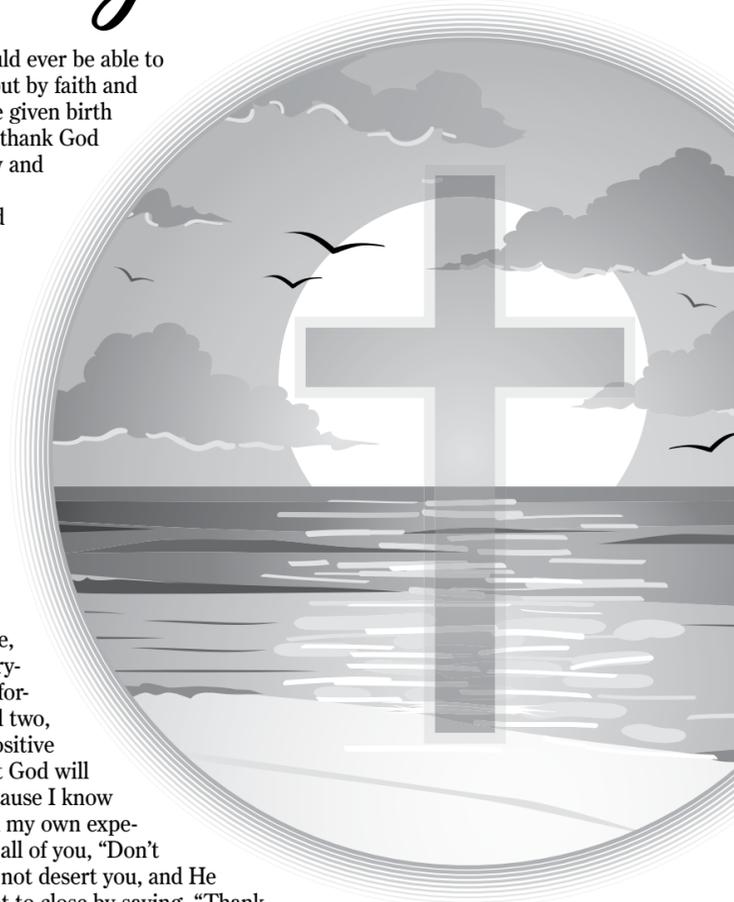
This took place on Monday and the doctors waited all night for my body to stabilize. On Tuesday they operated, sewing up 7 holes in my intestines. In the following days, they pumped poison out of my body and gave me 7 pints of blood. I also had blocked kidneys. The bullet which had stopped near my spinal cord eventually passed out of my body and I still have it to this day.

I was unconscious all that week and on Friday night my church family had a special prayer meeting for my recovery during which my six year old cousin prayed a very special prayer for me. On Saturday morning around 9 o'clock, I came out of the coma. When I woke up the room was lit up like angels were all around me; it was wonderful and I will never forget it.

I weighed 126 pounds before this all happened, and a month after I came out of the hospital I only weighed 93 pounds. My doctors

did not think that I would ever be able to give birth to children, but by faith and the grace of God, I have given birth to two beautiful girls. I thank God every day for His mercy and grace.

Since 1996 I have had cancer four times, with one being a type of cancer that is known to jump around to different places in your body. As a result, I have had four surgeries and 30 treatments of radiation at UNC Hospital in Chapel Hill. Recently when a neighbor of mine discovered that she had cancer, I encouraged her to remember two things in particular. One, she needed to have every-one from Maine to California praying for her. And two, she needed to keep a positive attitude. Have faith that God will help you get better. Because I know His healing power from my own experience. I want to say to all of you, "Don't desert God, for He will not desert you, and He will be with you." I want to close by saying, "Thank you Lord for your mercy and grace."





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Never give up on someone, God doesn't

By Tony Matthis

When I was 13 years old, I was supposed to be baptized but was only dunked in the water. Billy Todd followed me that night and he said he could tell the water was tainted. The only problem was it meant nothing to me because the Preacher had come around during the week with the visiting preacher and talked me into it. It made things look good for revival service if you had some baptisms.

For the next 27 years, I lived my life for me and not for God. I was really wild once and pretty rowdy when I got away from home. Along the way, I met Eleanor and even though her mother promised her on our wedding day that she would buy her anything she wanted if she just wouldn't marry me, well guess what, she did it anyway. Over the next 6 years, we had two sons, Eleanor went to Church and I did what I wanted to do. Sunday was my day; I had worked hard all week and Sunday was fun time. I would leave her and the boy's home every Sunday and any other chance I got, and go hang out with what I thought was my friends, whether it was riding motorcycles or just hanging out. I never physically abused Eleanor, but I mentally abused her and left her and our two boys alone so I could have a good time. Even though I was a complete sinner, the Lord still prospered us through our hard work and good fortune even though I never gave him credit for any of it.

Then in 1978 the good Lord decided to humble this sinner. I broke my back changing tractor tires when one fell on me and crushed one vertebra and fractured two more. For the next 18 months I was useless in my eyes because I could not work. During this time, the Lord began to work on me through the Holy Spirit and opened my eyes to what I really was...A SINNER AND A LOSER. I accepted the Lord as my Savior there on

that bed in Fayetteville Hospital and turned my life around. When I was able to go to church, I publicly gave my life to the Lord at Mt. Gilead Church, and Reverend Oliver Skerrett baptized me into the FAMILY OF JESUS.

I became the GOOD CHRISTIAN by following the LORDS COMMANDMENTS and studying his word just as the Scribes and Pharisees did in Jesus' time. I went to church, tithed, tried to treat my fellow man with love and respect, but still had a hot temper which would lead to hurting friend's feelings. Most importantly, I became a good husband and father. Man was I living the perfect life: we were prospering even more than before, which I attributed to me being a good Christian, and I thought to myself, HEY LORD LOOK WHAT I HAVE DONE FOR YOU. Uh-oh, time to humble the ole boy again.

In May 2012 I had a 95% blockage in the Widow Maker of my heart. Larry Scronce has always said I didn't have one but we proved him wrong. Dr. Newman put the stents in, but I just couldn't get better. After many tests and studies, Dr. Newman found that my aortic valve was 90% gone and I would need an aortic valve replacement; I was going to get the biggest calf's valve ever put in. People wondered how I could act so happy and carefree. I just knew I was going to heaven because I was a GOOD CHRISTIAN. The Lord must have said "This is one hard-headed sucker."

I went into what was supposed to be 3 to 4 hour operation not knowing what

was about to take place. It ended up being 10 hrs. for my family, but only a few minutes for me; but that few minutes would change my life forever. While Dr.

Landvater had my heart in his hand and was about to put it back in, my heart ruptured.

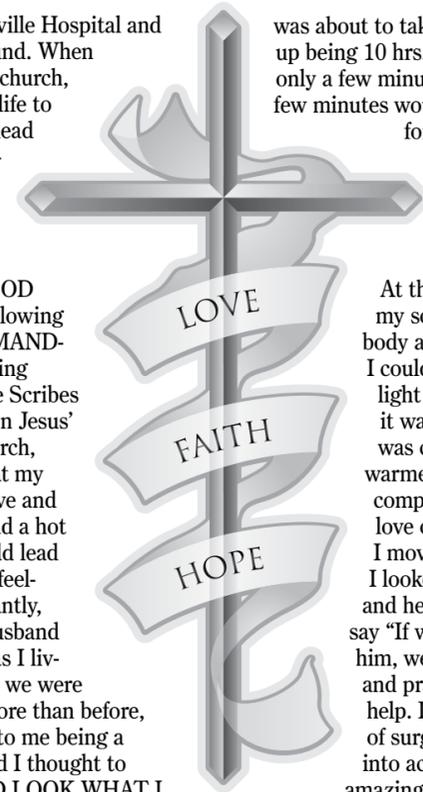
At this point, I died and my soul left this mortal body and started to heaven. I could see the brightest light of pure white but it was not blinding. It was comforting and the warmest feeling of being completely wrapped in the love of MY SAVIOR. As I moved toward the light I looked back at my body and heard Dr. Landvader say "If we are going to save him, we have got to move and pray for the Lords help. I saw the extra team of surgeons as they jumped into action. But the most amazing thing was the Lord

telling me it was not my time and he was not finished with me here on this earth. The Lord spoke to my soul not to my body and I don't know if it was

him or the Holy Spirit but it was as real as when Eleanor hollers at me. After recovery, I confronted Dr. Landvader about what had happened and what he had said in the operating room and he turned as white as a sheep. He said there is no way you could know that, but I did, and the Lord used this to strengthen Dr. Landvader's faith as well as mine. I asked him if he had panicked and he said "No. If the Lord and I panic, you die. We were prepared with an extra team of surgeons and the Lord was prepared to do his part."

The Lord used this to open my eyes and show me the way and what I still was the good Christian but not the good son. The Lord is still humbling me: Since this all started I have been in the hospital 10 times and I sure hope it doesn't take a whole lot more humbling to soften up this hard head. The Lord is not through with me in this life and whatever it is he wants me to do when he calls I will answer. Since the Lord has made me aware that I need to be the good son and not the good Christian, I know that all things are in his hands. Since the Lord has returned me to his service on this earth, he has guided me in leading a dying friend to his salvation and praying with another and his family as God took

See NEVER | 9



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Owen Grove Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church

Vision Statement -
We the people of Owen Grove Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church, with Jesus Christ as our head, have established a vision to provide a Sanctuary of Worship where biblical generations are built on the Word of God, while seeking spiritual growth.



SERVICES:
Sunday Morning 10:00am - 12:00
Sunday Night 6:00pm - 7:00
Wednesday Night 7:30pm-8:30pm

Ministries -
Golden Jubilee, Royal Rangers, Girls Auxillary, Co-Ed Softball, Men's Basketball, Sanctuary Choir, Nursery, Youth Group

Join us Easter for our sun rise service at 7am

Annual Car & Tractor Show 1st Sunday in April
Jeff Testerman Youth Director



Pastor Kim Strickland (919) 946-3796

Join Pastor Kim Strickland on Face Book for Faith Walkers

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Owen Grove PFWB, bringing glory to God

The Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church is a growing and expanding people with a rich heritage of God's blessings. At Owen Grove PFWB, our strength is in the profound impact that the Gospel message has on our lives and the testimony we live before others. It is our sole purpose to bring glory to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, as the head of the church.

The official position of our church's doctrine and practice is presented in our book of Faith and Practices. The government, procedures and expectations approved and established by the church are printed to assist all men in their service to God. We take pride in that our doctrines are scripturally sound, and that through our history, we have emerged with practices and procedures that make it easy for men to serve God through the Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church.

The Mission State for the Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church, was adopted by the General Board of Directors in January, 1996. It reads: The Pentecostal Free Will Baptist Church is a Christian fellowship committed to building biblically functioning communities through worship, instruction, fellowship and expression.

The laymen and minister, alike, are represented in every official action of the church. We move together in unity to accomplish all that God has called us to do. We have established a vision to provide a Sanctuary of Worship where biblical generations are built on the Word of God, while seeking spiritual growth.

Faith

From page 2

that your body will physically not let you do the things you used to do or achieve the goals you set for yourself is truly a life altering moment - especially at the age of 14. So often patients consider themselves to be a victim and ask "why me?" They become bitter, angry and resentful. What I learned is how to turn those emotions into power and how to use that energy and harness it into personal growth and development. What I learned was that "in pain" could be transformed to "empower." Empower is exactly what I did. I empowered myself to live a healthier lifestyle as well as empowered others to make the best out of every situation in life. I was angry and I was bitter. As I look back on that October day in 2010, I see how far I have come. From confused and uneasy, to eager and prepared, I have taken an unfortunate situation and made the best of it. I used to ask "why me?", but now I only say, "I will have faith." I learned that something can only defeat you if you give it the will to.

I like to refer to my 3-year journey with my back as my faith story because as I reflect on the journey, "faith story" is exactly what it is. I can remember my first doctor visit, finding out I would have to have surgery, and the next that followed, being told I would have to have another - and feeling completely defeated and crippled -tears and all. But then I remember the last visit at the age of 16, when I was told that I would need another surgery, and if I didn't have it then having kids someday would be extremely painful and stressful on my hips - and I remember thinking, "I'm only 16, how can I even consider years from now the condition of my body during pregnancy, but I didn't cry - I remember having dry eyes and having the most important thing - faith. Faith that this was God's will and faith that I would be okay. I wasn't upset, sure I was scared, because that was normal, but I knew that The Lord had a plan.

My experience reminds me a lot of Robert Frost's, "The Road Not Taken," for if I had not taken this road, I

wouldn't be the same young woman I am today. I wouldn't understand the importance of the many blessings in my life, nor the small things that I often take for granted. Not disabled, but blessed, I learned to accept the things in which I cannot change, but rather embrace the circumstances in which I am given with "arms high and heart abandoned."

So, I ask each of you, "What are you bitter about? Where does your negative energy come from? Is there something you are holding on to and is it holding you back?" Let go and let GOD. I know that sometimes it just isn't that easy. I know that often times, I don't want to look at the bright side. There are days when my back still aches miserably, and the only relief I can find is when I can lay down and just forget about the day. There are days when my back and my hips feel the best they ever have. In a lot of ways, this roller coaster ride is like my walk with God. That may sound bad at first, but it makes perfect sense. Dr. Threatt said himself just a few Sundays ago that walking with God isn't easy and it's a constant challenge - but a good one. It is supposed to be. I am sure you can all relate. This journey isn't supposed to be easy. Battling surgeries wasn't easy. Some days I don't feel worthy of God's love and I want to go home and hide from the world. Some days my back just hurts so badly, and I want to go home and disappear for a while. But what makes all the difference is that I came to know God through all of this - I mean really know Him. This experience taught me endurance and it taught me to have never-ending faith - just like we a Christians must have every day in our walk with Christ. Just like I came to know and understand the reality of never playing sports again - I came to trust God and know Him through those struggles. But He taught me to let go and to let Him handle it. I will forever be grateful for those struggles I overcame because in them I came to know Christ.

I still remember the first time back to church after my surgery, being welcomed as many asked me how I was and how I was feeling. It is because of moments like this and so many more than I am proud to call Grove Park home.

Clement Baptist: Meeting needs, serving the Lord in the community



Clement Baptist Church is a worldwide Mission Center. Along with many other churches, Clement helps to support over 10,000 missionaries in N.C., the United States, Canada and all over the world. Each month Clement has a churchwide mission project.

For over 100 years, Clement has been the hands and feet of our Lord in the Clement community and surrounding area. Clement has a blended style of worship seeking to bring glory to God and meet the needs of all who attend. Our Sanctuary Orchestra adds much to the worship service.

Clement seeks to minister to each member and offers opportunities for everyone to serve the Lord. On the first Sunday of every month at 9 a.m., a blessing is said for everyone to enjoy a full breakfast before Sunday School, which begins at 10 a.m. each Sunday morning.

We have 15 age-graded Sunday School classes and a co-ed couples class. Morning worship service begins at 11 a.m. Our pastor preaches expository sermons through books of the Bible. During worship, Clement has children's church for children ages two through five.

Clement invites everyone to come worship with us.

The youth of our church meet Sunday evenings at 6 p.m. and the second and fourth Wednesday nights. They gather together for Bible study, special activities and fellowship. The youth are also very involved in missions in our community and out of state. In S.C., as part of Life- Way's M-Fuge Ministry, they repaired homes; with the World Changers, they traveled to Baton Rouge, Louisiana to repair homes damaged by Hurricane Katrina; and with X-Fuge of Life-Way, they traveled to Asheville to work with



underprivileged children.

There are special events and activities for children. Clement is especially proud of the Children's Hand Bell Choir.

The fellowship of Clement also gathers on Wednesday evenings for fellowship and worship. On the first and third Wednesday at 6 p.m., we have a fellowship meal, sanctuary choir practice at 6:30 p.m. and at 7:30 p.m. there are services and activities for everyone.

Clement holds special events all through the year to reach out to the community and surrounding area. Each year in October we celebrate Homecoming and Trunk or Treat; in November we join other churches for a Community Thanksgiving Service; in December we celebrate the birth of Jesus with children and youth Christmas program and a Christmas cantata presented by the Sanctuary

Choir; in January we begin a semester of Faith Sunday School Evangelism Strategy to reach our community for Christ; in February we have a Three's A Couple Valentines banquet; in March we have revival services; in April we celebrate Easter with a sunrise service, egg hunt for children and a special Easter cantata and worship service; in May we celebrate Family Day and remember our military veterans; in the month of June we have Vacation Bible School for all ages and celebrate Father's Day.

Clement Baptist Church is affiliated with the New South River Baptist Association located in Fayetteville, the N.C. Baptist State Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention. We adhere to The Baptist Faith and Message, a statement of faith adopted by the Southern Baptist Convention on June 14, 2000.

Clement Baptist Church



Located in the Community of Clement



SERVICES

Sunday Schedule

10:00 a.m. - Sunday School
11:00 a.m. - Morning Worship
4:00 p.m. - Youth
7:00 p.m. - Every Second Sunday Family Night

Wednesday Schedule

6:30 p.m. - Sanctuary Choir
7:30 p.m. - Pastor's Bible Study and Prayer Time
1st & 3rd Wednesday - Mission Groups
2nd & 4th Wednesday - Youth & God's Kids

MINISTRIES

- Nursery
- Children's Bell Choir
- Youth Group
- Sanctuary Orchestra
- Sanctuary Choir
- Benevolence
- Prayer
- Clement Classics
- CD Ministry
- Mingo Baptist Spanish Mission
- Faith Missions
- Women's Missionary Union
- Baptist Men
- Disaster Relief



Pastor: Dr. James E. Dees, Jr.
Minister of Youth: Michael Smith
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Church Office Hours • 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. Monday-Friday

"We are a Church going into the entire world spreading the Good News of Jesus through evangelism, missions and love."



Give it to God

How is your Christian life? Are you doing everything you can to come closer to God? What do you struggle with on your Christian walk? I am sure a lot of us struggle with things in life; sometimes they are things that are out of our control. The thing we have to learn is one of the hardest things for us to do. Give it to God! We have to believe that He is always with us and always has our back!

Psalms 46:1 says, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble." No one has the perfect life, even though we sometimes believe everyone has it better than us! We need to make the most of our life and especially our life through Christ! Romans 2:2 states, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." We need to make sure that in our walk through Christ that we are pleas-



Erica Faircloth

ing Him! We should not be trying to please man more than God! (Galations 1:10 says, For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.)

Sometimes we get so caught up on things that shouldn't matter as much. A personal struggle for me in my Christian life is prayer. A lot of times, my prayers turn into a conversation with God, but that's okay! This is something very important that we need to do! Take time out of our busy schedules and talk to God! Pray to God not only for yourself and your family, but your neighbors, church members, and even people you don't know!

Being human, I have one constant struggle. I struggle with anxiety, especially when I am surrounded by

See GIVE | 9



First United Methodist Church of Clinton, NC, is the mother church of Methodism for the city of Clinton.

With a history of over 150 years, First UMC Clinton has a history of ministry and missions for over a century, and still remains today as a strong and visible witness of God's love for the world.

First UMC Clinton has recently been recognized as one of the top 100 churches for its programs of innovative and dynamic ministry.

The church is over 675 members strong, and continues to grow with new families each month. The membership is well balanced with all ages and stages in life represented.

With the church's dynamic music program representing a choir that has given concerts around the world, the new pipe organ, new youth house with a strong and growing youth ministry program, and with ministries to families and children, including an after-school care five days a week, First UMC Clinton continues to be a well-balanced church with ministries for everyone.

We belong to Harbor District in the NC Conference of the UMC.



Reverend T.R. Miller

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Give

From page 8

people that I am not close to or hardly know. But this struggle has held me back from a passion that I have in life; my passion for singing. This is something I love to do and can easily do in the privacy of my home or in front of my students, but put me in front of my adult peers; it's a whole new ball game! 1 Timothy 4:14-16 states, 14 Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. 15 Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. 16 Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

Are you holding back the gift that God gave you? Are you unsure of your gift? Pray. Talk to Him! Don't hold back! 1 Timothy 4:16 says not only can your gift do something for you, but it can touch the lives of others. Now, I don't know who I have touched with my singing. It may be three people or it may be 100. The thing that

matters is that I am fulfilling my passion and gift that the Lord has given unto me!

I need to heed my own advice that I am giving to you! Give it to God! 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 says, 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Are you blessed with a talent, a gift from God, and something is holding you back? Do you struggle with everyday life and don't think things will get any better? Are you letting something or someone get in the way of God? Has it been a while since you spoke to Him? Take the time now! Talk to Him! Give it to God! He is always listening! He is always with you! Isaiah 41:10 Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

Never

From page 5

him into his bosom.

It is not about me but about him, for his glory and the salvation of the lost. If I can touch just one person and get them closer to salvation the Lords investment in me has been worthwhile.

With every head bowed and every eyed closed I want you to look at your life. Are you the sinner even though you might not be as bad as I was if you don't know him personally as your Lord and Savior you are still a sinner. Nowhere in the Bible does it have a scale rating of 1 to 10 for sinners, a sinner is a sinner PERIOD. Or are you in the scribe and Pharisee mode as I was for so long being the

GOOD CHRISTIAN thinking that you are not as bad as so and so or I have already got my place reserved in Heaven. The biggest deterrent to people accepting Jesus is worrying about what others will think. What does it matter what others think God knows it all and when you get to Heaven all your sins since salvation and short comings will be on a big screen display for all to see. So when God calls, say YES.

If my faith story had a title it would be NEVER GIVE UP ON SOMEONE BECAUSE GOD DOESN'T.

The second most important that God has given me next to being a brother of Jesus Christ through my salvation (Romans 8:14-17) is he blessed me with a Soul Mate that never gave up on me. During all of these trials she has been with me every step of the way.

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Give it to God and then let it go

By Megan Scronce

I grew up in Grove Park Baptist Church. My parents, grandparents, family have all been active in church, so I was here for almost everything during my childhood-Sunday school, worship, Mission Friends, GAs, Bible Drill, youth, even adult choir practice, where I hid under the pews and did my homework. I'm so thankful for that experience and for this church family; because of that time in my childhood, I came to understand, know, and believe in God. In 2007 my relationship with Him took on a whole new meaning and I started to understand how active God could be in my life.

At that point I was living in West Virginia, pursuing a design job and was engaged to be married in the upcoming year. I thought I had everything I wanted, but over and over, I kept seeing, hearing, and feeling like that wasn't the place I needed to be. I tried to ignore it for a while....actually I tried to ignore it for over a year, through a job change, and changing the date of the wedding

several times. Looking back, I know the feeling was from God, he's the only possible answer, because I was willing to settle.....but He wasn't going to let me. So after much heartache, struggled reasoning, and emotional exhaustion I gave up. I was in a hotel room in Wheeling, WV, talking to my mom on the phone telling her I was unhappy, tired, and just flat out confused about everything. Of course, in her Godly wisdom she advised me to stop dramatizing everything, give it to God and LET IT GO! I'm not one to give things up easy, but as I sat there frustrated and crying I opened my devotional "God Calling" and it said "why do you ask me to guide your footsteps if you won't move your feet". The words were so strong on the page that I could almost hear His voice. That was the first time I felt, so strongly in my heart, that God was ALIVE, active, and speaking to me...actually saying my name. So I made the decision that I would move my feet if He would just tell me what direction. I had never committed to God like that

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before and honestly didn't expect Him to answer....but a few days later, a call came from Mrs. Vanessa Brown offering me a job teaching Art at Sampson Middle School. She was looking for someone to fill that spot, and had said it in the presence of my aunt, who had volunteered my name. I still can't believe it to this day, but she interviewed me and hired me on the phone; I took the job without a mental debate or a pros/cons list! Looking back, it's funny because I had never wanted to teach, and if I had been thinking with my head instead of a heart full of God, I would have said no. But boy did God know what he was doing.

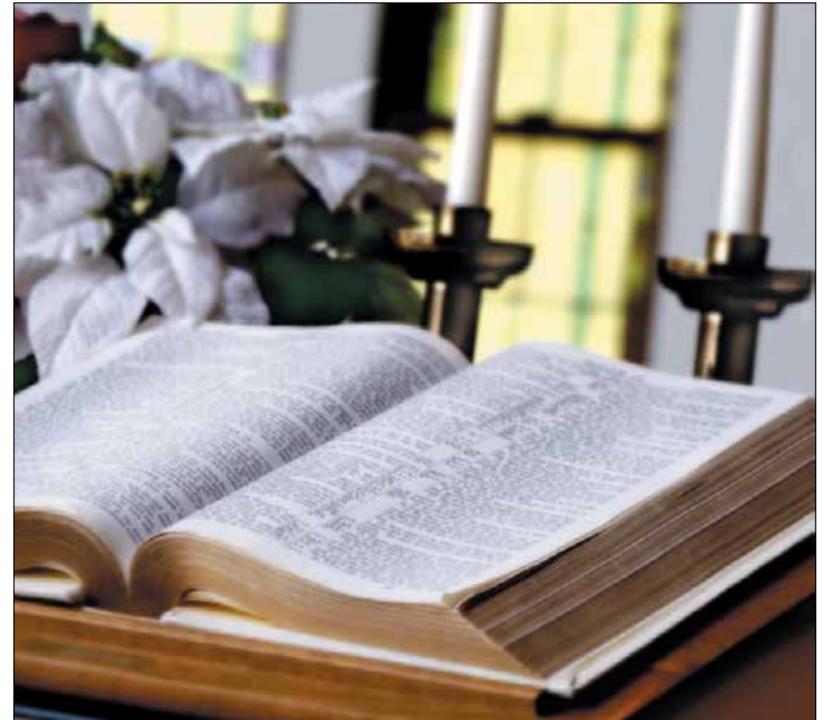
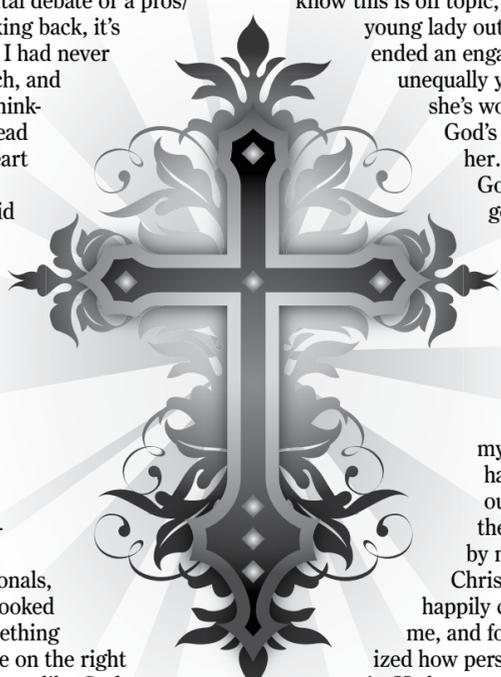
My relationship with God continued to grow and He validated me over and over about my decision. Through people, devotionals, everywhere I looked there was something saying "you are on the right track now". It was like God had cleared all that confusion and clutter in my mind and I realized the only major thing left unsettled was my engagement. I was desperate for answers and had a new understanding of how prayer truly is powerful, so I continued to pray and ask God (cause now I knew he was listening) about what I should do, I went to a Christian counselor, and I got involved in Bible study. For the first time in my life I understood how you can be so "thirsty for God" and I was determined to be everywhere that He was going to be.

After weeks of AGONY and not hearing a direct answer from God, I decided I had to follow my heart and I called the wedding off. For a month, in perfect Megan nature, I worried that I had done the wrong thing, that I had hurt him, hurt his family, and messed up my future. I cried and prayed, and cried and prayed, hoping I hadn't just thrown away God's plan for my life. Then one night in the middle of Ms. Beth Moore explaining our reading for that week, she stopped, looked at the camera and said...."I have to pause right now, I know this is off topic, but there is a

young lady out there who has ended an engagement to an unequally yoked man and she's worried that her God's forgotten about her... dear one, your God has not forgotten about you, you trust Him...He is faithful!"

I COULD NOT BELIEVE IT! God hadn't just spoken to my heart....He had spoken right out loud! As I sat there surrounded by new and old Christian friends happily crying with me, and for me, I realized how personal our God is. He knows what we need

and when we need it....He knows if he can whisper or if he needs to yell. I am so thankful God never gave up on our relationship and that He fought for me, because now when I read the Bible, it is like a note from my BFF, not just ancient stories. I know God has a plan for my life and on days when I am frustrated, when it doesn't look just like I want it to...I am reminded that His plan is far better than my own plan. And that He is faithful and determined to not let his children settle, but for them to be blessed.



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Sampson native Lauren Smith finds academic, athletic, and faith fulfillment at UMO

MOUNT OLIVE — Sampson County native Lauren Smith is a senior exercise science major at the University of Mount Olive (UMO). With her sights set on graduating in August, she pauses to reflect on her collegiate success and growing faith.

Smith is the daughter of Jeff and Karen Smith. Jeff is an international salesman at Hogslat Inc., and Karen is the director of quality and performance improvement at Commwell Health. Jeff and

Karen always knew their daughter was hardworking, athletic, and focused, so they encouraged her to attend a university that coincided with her needs and values as a student athlete.

Smith enrolled at UMO in the fall of 2011. A softball player, she was unsure of how she would juggle athletics and academics, but she quickly forgot those worries and immersed herself in the campus community.

"Before college, I obsessed over my grades. As the salutatorian at Midway High School, I had high expectations. I was nervous to take on the pressures of college-level classes while playing softball. I didn't want to disappoint anyone," explained Smith.

Smith soon found those worries unfounded. She became a part of the UMO Honors pro-



Clinton's Lauren Smith has seen her faith growth, she said, during her years at the University of Mount Olive.

gram, which fed her need for academic vigor and led to community involvement and international travel experiences.

"The Honors program has helped to shape my college journey," she said. "The courses have given me a broader range of understanding in multiple content areas. I've also been able to volunteer with park clean-ups, participate in a pet food drive, write letters to military officers, and help build

a home through Habitat for Humanity - all thanks to the Honors program. I also had the opportunity last May to travel with my Honors class to Greece and Turkey. This experience really helped me understand people and cultures, which has contributed to my sense of open-mindedness."

On the field, Smith has excelled as a pitcher for the lady Trojans. Her accolades include having earned the title of 2nd

Team All-Conference Pitcher in 2012, being a three-time Conference Carolinas Pitcher of the Week, earning the Conference Carolinas Tournament MVP in 2013, and being named as an All-Academic student-athlete for Conference Carolinas in 2014. Smith currently holds the record for most shutouts in one season for the Trojans.

Becoming a UMO athletic standout while still maintaining a 3.84 GPA, it seemed as if

Smith had a full plate, yet she felt something was missing. She found that missing element at the First Baptist Church in Mount Olive (FBCMO).

Smith claims that the Reverend Felicia Fox, the FBCMO associate pastor of students and families, has greatly impacted her faith. With Fox's encouragement Smith has become an active member of FBCMO attending college Bible studies and services, participating in Oasis outreach, working in the church's nursery, and helping with community projects. In the near future she plans to get baptized.

"I was baptized when I was a baby, but being baptized now will outwardly show my commitment and decision to follow Christ. I know God has a plan for my life and I plan on following it."

After graduating from the University of Mount Olive, Smith plans to attend graduate school and one day work at a children's hospital.

The University of Mount Olive is a private institution rooted in the liberal arts tradition with defining Christian values. The university, sponsored by the Convention of Original Free Will Baptists, has locations in Mount Olive, New Bern, Wilmington, Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, Research Triangle Park, Washington, Jacksonville, and in Smithfield at Johnston Community College. For more information, visit www.umo.edu.

Simple, but powerful, lessons of faith

By Lynette Caison

I try not to let a single day go by when I don't say "Thank You Jesus for sending me to Christian parents." Some of my friends did not have that single special blessing when Jesus delivered them into the world; even I did not appreciate the power that my Christian parents and home gave to me. When I was younger, Sunday was the Lord's Day, and we fully observed the Bible description of it. We went to Sunday school, church and back again for the youth activities and worship at night. My mother and Grandmother took me to their women's circle meeting until I become a Sun Bean, then a GA Girl and on to the youth programs. My mother cooked Sunday dinner on Saturday and it was warmed up on Sunday; I tell my family that's the reason I don't care for leftovers. Of course there was no T.V. at the time and preaching was on the radio, so I would play with my dolls and paper dolls, but absolutely no scissors could be used to cut out new items because there was no work done on Sunday.

My parents, for the most part, gave me the truth when I asked a question, and my mother usually knew a Bible verse that would relate to the discussion. Thinking back, there were so many instances that she related a Bible verse to something going on in my life, but one I remember so well. When she read

Phillipians 4:11 where Paul said he had learned to be content in whatever state he was in, I asked her what state it was. She smiled and gave me the 6 year old difference as she knew it between the verb and the noun, and attempted to explain the "state" that Paul was in.

I could go on and on, but the lesson that I will always cherish the most is my mother's simplified Plan of Salvation. We lived on a busy highway at the time of this lesson, and my dog had just been hit by a car and had died. As I sobbed in her arms, I remember asking her if I would see my dog, Popeye, in Heaven. She answered me with a simple explanation, "No honey, animals don't have a soul like people, so God gave us the very special gift of a soul so we can believe that Jesus is God's son and we will see him in Heaven if we accept him as our Savior, and live for Him." The Bible state in Genesis, "Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." (Genesis 1:26, NIV).

All these years later, I can still picture my mama holding me as I cried for my dog, Popeye. More importantly, I can still hear her saying, "believe that God sent his Son Jesus to save us from our sins and you will be saved."

Proud of spiritual works of mercy

By Pat and Kathy Havey
Wilmington, Ohio

"The captivity of our brothers and sisters must be reckoned as our captivity, and the grief of those who are endangered must be esteemed as our grief, since there is indeed one body of our union..."

— St. Cyprian of Alexandria, third-century bishop in North Africa, Letter 59
We are Pat and Kathy Havey of St. Columbkille Parish in Wilmington, the parents of James Havey, Maryknoll Lay Missioner.

James is a graduate of Marquette University with a degree in International Affairs and has been interested in mission since middle school. James began his mission work in junior high with three mission trips to Mexico with Back to Back Ministries of Cincinnati.

He served a mission to Kenya, Africa in high school and while a student at Marquette, he studied for a semester in South Africa, which also involved mission service. It was these experiences which solidified his love of service for the underprivileged. This love of service led him to apply to the Maryknoll Lay Missions program and he will be in Cambodia for three-and-a-half years with the Maryknoll Lay Missioners (www.mklm.org).

We returned from visiting James and the Maryknoll community in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Maryknoll sisters, priests and lay missioners work in a collaborative team with missioners of other countries and groups, all of whom work with highly dedicated Cambodians.

Sister Helen O'Sullivan's MM mission work in Cambodia is fighting the sexual trafficking industry. She joined a group of women engaged in outreach ministry to the vulnerable poor of the commercial sex industry.

In Cambodia, there are many avenues that lead young girls to being trafficked. Debt bondage, for example, can occur when a family needs money to pay for a pressing debt like a hospital bill. The parents may bring their elder daughter to a brothel and receive \$150 for the girl, who then is forced to work off the debt; she is often cheated into working this way for years.

Poverty and illiteracy open other avenues

to human trafficking. According to Hagar Cambodia, an anti-trafficking organization, 77 percent of the population lives on less than \$2 a day, and more than a third live below the national poverty line. Seventy percent of Cambodian women are illiterate with limited job skills.

The sixth corporal work of mercy is to ransom the captive. The Maryknoll community is doing just that by using the spiritual works of mercy; instructing the ignorant, counseling the doubtful, bearing wrongs patiently, forgiving offenses willingly and comforting the afflicted.

As with any industry, success is based on the dynamics of the supply and the demand. In Cambodia, most Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs) have solely focused their work on the rehabilitation of female sex workers and undermining their traffickers (the supply). While this work is very necessary in combating the industry, there are major gaps of the sex industry population not being addressed, namely: the people who seek Cambodian sex workers (the demand), and also the male sex working populations.

James' mission in Cambodia is leading a team performing research to produce a formal report for the NGOs and individuals working to combat the sex industry in Cambodia. This report will detail the cultural and individual reasons as to why Khmer and Foreign men can justify the objectification of people for their own sexual gains. NGOs in Phnom Penh and Cambodia, can then develop informed projects and campaigns that will be more effective in reaching the hearts of these two populations.

What we found amazing in Cambodia is the entrepreneurial spirit these Maryknoll sisters have to accomplish their goals. They have opened rescue centers for the enslaved girls to escape, these centers offer counseling, medical care and legal assistance, they started schools to educate the victims and offer these enslaved girls the opportunity to learn alternative trades such as hotel reception/maid work and a cosmetology school. These programs help the girls reintegrate into the community as many have been abandoned by their families.

We are proud that James is serving God in an underdeveloped country. It was so enriching to see the corporal works and spiritual works of mercy in action in Cambodia.

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My uncle kept his promise

By Pat Haley
Wilmington, Ohio

People of various religious affiliations choose to offer sacrifices, such as “giving up” a favorite food or activity, as a form of penance during the Lenten Season in preparation for Easter.

“Giving up” something isn’t as easy as it sounds. Ask someone battling an addiction, or someone who has a family member seeking sobriety.

Addiction is an unreasonable disease that often comes like a thief in the night, stealing the person’s dignity and sense of worth, as the family bears untold suffering –mourning the loss of their love one’s former self.

I grew up with an alcohol-addicted uncle. He was my mom’s brother, and he lived with us throughout my formative years.

According to stories mom shared with

me when I became a young adult, my uncle had been an innocent farm boy — one who had never been outside Clinton County. That is, not until he was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1941 during World War II.

Our family photo albums are filled with pictures of my uncle in his Army uniform, and during leave, in his baseball catcher’s gear. My mom said he had started drinking during the war and, unfortunately, continued the habit when he returned home.

Alcohol was not his master. At least not yet. For several years he held a responsible job with the State of Ohio. He was a very dependable, hard-working and capable employee. In fact, there were times when we didn’t see him for several days at a time. Unfortunately, in later years it was also true that we wouldn’t see him for days at a time, but for a com-

pletely different reason. My uncle began to drink to excess and it threatened his livelihood.

There was neither a more lovable, kind, nor considerate man on earth than my uncle, when he was sober. My uncle and I were close. In fact, I am his namesake.

In contrast, there was not a more disappointing man on earth, at least to me, when my uncle was drinking. He would start out at a local bar, and migrate to the bars of larger cities. He began to disappear on a Thursday, and our family would not see him again until the following Monday afternoon.

I loved him, and as a young boy, I often prayed for him. When he was home with us, I used to stay close by his side, hoping against hope he would not start drinking again. I often asked him to go with me to watch my baseball games; as well as, drive me around to deliver newspapers. I knew if he was with me, he wouldn’t be drinking. But my efforts were all in vain. He would return to work, and then not come home.

It was inevitable. Finally, a state supervisor called and informed my mom that he had no choice but to terminate my uncle’s employment.

A few years later, during the Lenten Season, my uncle asked me to guess what he was “giving up” for Lent.

“I don’t know,” I responded. “Maybe Pepsi or Coke?”

“No, I am giving up alcohol,” my uncle said, as he threw three beer cans into the trash.

“Oh, do you think you can do it?” I asked in disbelief.

“I’m going to try,” he replied with an unanticipated grin.

Elation swarmed my heart and mind, but I was unsure my uncle could keep his promise and remain sober for more than a few days. Would he ever drink again? Would it be next week, next month, or maybe never? That was my hope, because never is a long, long time in the mind of a boy.

A few days turned into a week. A few more weeks passed. Soon, 40 days had passed. It was Easter Sunday. I turned to see my uncle, dressed in a suit, pull out of our driveway and head to Sunday Mass.

I don’t know if there was more to the story than what he told us, but I know my uncle stayed sober for the remainder of his life. I remember watching him leave our home, to live in a veterans hospital to continue his sobriety.

A few years passed and my uncle was diagnosed with cancer. Sadly, he died that same year.

I don’t drink alcohol today, in large part because of what I saw it do to my uncle. But I do emulate him in other ways. I share his fervor for Lent. I saw what that day on his knees did for him, many years ago.

There are no easy answers to addiction of any kind, but St. Matthew said, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

On his deathbed, I asked my uncle how he was able to overcome his addiction. He simply responded, “I believed it all, didn’t you?”

I could only nod as he softly slipped away.

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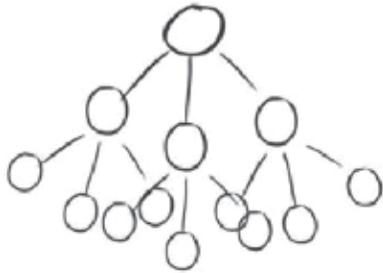
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