

March 21 - April 3, 2025

# Athens Now

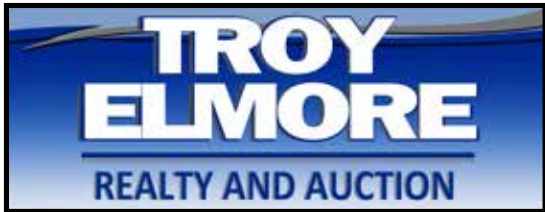
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## Special Feature



### What Are We Waiting...

I'm beginning to see it – the signs of spring, and I am definitely welcoming the changes this season brings...  
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## Clean, Green And Beautiful

**Spring Fever...**  
As many of you know, the Athens-Limestone Beautification Board partnered with the Advanced Agriculture class from the Limestone County Career...  
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## Tourism

**11 Weird Things...**  
Hello, my amazing Limestoneians! My fabulous trail buddies! My "what's-around-the-bend" explorers! We have so many trails and treks coming up for you this spring!...  
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# BNI LIMESTONE LEADERS

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*Growing Businesses By Building Strong Relationships*

## CEI Bookstore And Truth Publications: *Seventy Years Of Serving... Even Through The Storms*

By Ali Elizabeth Turner

Seventy years ago, the Fudge family opened a Christian bookstore in Athens that was located on Market and Jeffer-

son in what was the original location of McConnell's Funeral Home. Over the years, they added publishing to their list of services, and have always had a heart to "equip the saints" for the ministry, as

Continued on pages 16-17



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**Publisher's Point**

*The Circle Of Wood*

The Grand Ol' Opry has a tap root in Athens, and that came as a result of the music of the Delmore Brothers. Most of you know that they have their very own museum in McCandless Hall on the campus of Athens State University that shows their pioneering work in country music, and every year we honor them at the Fiddlers' Convention.

The Opry just turned 100, and to say that the musical birthday party that

was thrown on Wednesday night in its favor was stellar just doesn't do it justice. There were classic country artists, cross-over artists, young ones, old ones, black ones, brown ones, Native Americans and at least one Kiwi. There was more than one that was disabled icon, and the tribute to stroke survivor Randy Travis flat broke me up. Carrie Underwood sang two of Randy's songs, and timed the ending by walking

down into the audience so he could sing, with his own voice, one word: "Amen." People were on their feet, people were cryin,' and people were praisin' God.

What makes Randy's two syllable declaration of faith (after having suffered a debilitating stroke in 2013) all the more poignant is that Artificial Intelligence has been used to help him release a new album. In 2023, Nashville, was confronted with



the prospect of figuring out how to manage something with the potential for crazy evil like AI. Warner Music Nashville and the country community decided that they would use AI for good. Their goal? Making it "so Randy Travis could sing again." How did they do it? They found someone by the name of James Dupre with a voice similar to Randy's, and who recorded the album. Then they painstakingly combed through Randy's albums to find comparable words and layered them over the new recording. The result is something that Randy says, "By God's grace and the support of family, friends, fellow artists and fans, I'm able to create the music I so dearly love...Many thanks to my wonderful team and the best

fans in the world for putting me back in the saddle again! I've enjoyed every moment of it."

On to "the Circle." When the Opry was at the Ryman, the stage was wooden. When the Opry moved into its new and current home in 1974, an eight-foot piece of the Ryman stage was cut into a six-foot circle and installed on the new stage. Now, every member of the Opry stands in it when they perform, and they are invited into it when they are chosen to become a member. What makes an old wooden circle so special? Some say it's the scuff marks. What are the scuff marks? The lives of those who are uncommonly vulnerable about their history, and many of whom have rebuilt their lives by grace. And, please don't forget that the songs that come from "the scuffs" so often point both the singers and the listeners to Someone who toted a wooden cross, died on it, and gave a new song and a new life to anyone who would will receive them.

*Ali Elizabeth Turner*

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# The Heart That Runs Into The Fray

by Ali Elizabeth Turner



It is hard to believe that it has been more than 20 years since I spent three of the most transformational years of my life in what we have affectionately come to call the Great Sandbox -- better known as Iraq.

The life lessons learned there have stuck with me. I watched brave Iraqis grapple with the fall out of having been ruled by Saddam Hussein for decades and then try to build a culture and a nation that was replete with new choices and opportunities. I watched Sunnis and soldiers crash into the love of God for the first time and experience that unmistakable blend of joy and relief that comes with knowing that you are forgiven totally. I watched soldiers grieve over the knowledge that their Stateside wife just filed for divorce or perhaps was pregnant with another man's child.

I watched soldiers cause the marble walls of the ballroom in Saddam's Birthday Palace reverberate with songs of praise. I made coffee, timed races, showed movies, played ping pong by the hour, try to learn how to play pool, and get really good at Yahtzee. But the thing that wipes me out to this day was having the honor of experiencing what I have come to call "the heart that runs into the fray." This happened all day, every day, and it showed up in soldiers from nations as far

flung as South Korea and Uganda.

What is this "frayed" heart? In a word, it is that unmistakable quality that I don't think can be taught in boot camp; the one that compels a Joe or a Jane to run into the burning building and put themselves in harm's way in the off chance that they can make a difference. This past Tuesday, I saw it in the hearts of the Limestone County Sheriff's Chamber of Commerce coffee held at the rodeo grounds. They were fresh off of a triumph: nine men had been arrested who had trafficked girls, and a girl was returned to her family.

They were talking about the rodeo that was about to be an important part of spring in Limestone County. They swallowed back tears as the special needs rodeo was discussed, and how it had changed their lives. I spoke at length with a sergeant whose primary duty was with inmates, and who wanted to make a difference in their lives. He was determined, and he was weary. This is something I saw over and over in Iraq, and it even showed up in 130+ degree heat.

But what got me thinking about a lingering effect from the "Sandbox" was watching as our Sheriff, Josh McLaughlin, allowed himself to be tazed in various ways in order

to demonstrate new equipment that greatly reduces the need for lethal force. This equipment is expensive, and it was purchased through the proceeds from the annual Sheriff's Rodeo. He didn't ask his officers or detectives to be tazed; he did it. He also gave US a chance to be recipients of "less-than-lethal-force" if we so desired, and not surprisingly, there were no takers.

I so wanted to say to him, "That's okay, we don't need the demo," and when he asked if there were any questions, I was the first to ask, "How long does it (the effect of the shock) last?" He looked at me and said, "It's over immediately." I was re-



lieved; relieved as I was 20 years ago when I watched soldiers functioning under the type of true leadership that would not dream of asking their squads to do something that they

themselves would not do. To me, this is the heart that runs into the fray, and I would say that we are blessed to have it here in Limestone County amongst our veterans and first responders.





# What Are We Waiting For?

by Donna Clark



I'm beginning to see it – the signs of spring, and I am definitely welcoming the changes this season brings. All that appeared dead is revealing signs of life once again. I get excited seeing the new plants arriving at the local nurseries, and I begin to envision a gorgeous lawn with flowers and shrubs, ready for a debut in *Southern Living Magazine*. Well, I'm definitely dreaming as I do not have a green thumb; sadly, more of my plants die than live, or at least end up a huge disappointment. But I still dream.

And then there's the spring cleaning that comes with this time of year. Dust bunnies are removed, comforters and bed linens are all given a good washing, even the closet gets a good purge as we transition from the winter apparel to the spring and summer fashions. Now, this I can do well -- cleaning, removing the old, and bringing in the fresh and new. However, maybe there is a more important form of spring cleaning that we may be missing. We focus so much on the changes this season brings, we buy the plants, deep clean the house and the car, get excited and maybe even frantic over a new wardrobe, but we never look at what might really need a change and that's our hearts and attitudes. What if we did as David when he asked God to search his heart and to point out anything that

offends Him? Now that's a "spring" cleaning on a whole new level, a very important one.

What if we took some time to think on what God would love to do in our lives? Maybe He would like to clean out the cobwebs of negativity that have become the normal response. What if He was allowed to purge the old attitudes giving us a new mindset, a more positive, grateful way of thinking? Then to let Jesus perform a good heart cleansing of the hatred towards others and become more humble and forgiving, less bitter. What if we could rid ourselves of the habits that have no positive effect on our lives, replace them with actions that would have a life-giving benefit? Life giving words would flow from our mouth instead of words that cause pain. Then we dust off our Bible, vacuum up the influences of the world, and involve Jesus in our everyday life. How much better would we be?

Christian artists, King and Country, released a song in 2022 entitled "What Are We Waiting For?" I feel the lyrics are so timely. They speak of our days, like running a race, a blur trying to keep pace. I believe so many of us feel that is our lives today. Yet we can't move because we are in our own way. What if we allowed Jesus to direct our days? What if we could surrender to the

heart cleansing that I'm sure all of us could use to some degree, and become the light that no one could ignore? The clock is ticking and no one is making more time. Now is the moment to take a deep look into our hearts, check our attitudes, our words, even our body language. What do people think when they see you, or me, coming down the street? What do we want to be remembered for? We only have so much time on this earth, only a small window to make a big impact. So, what are we waiting for?

Tomorrow my husband and I will make a trip to the nursery in hopes of finding those plants that can live despite what I do or don't do to them. I'm looking at the new spring fashions and the thought of a clean house thrills me! However, this year, I'm wanting God to

do the spring cleaning in my heart and mind that I know is much needed. I want the new opportunities. I want to accomplish more for Him and less for me. I need to sacrifice my wants, take a long hard look at what I feel is important, and check where I invest or possibly waste so much valuable time. What am I REALLY doing with the life that has been given me? This song spoke to me, got me to thinking, as we say. And I'm so thankful for the thought-provoking message. Here are just a few of the lyrics that I wanted to share with you. We can take what we have left of our lives and start anew. We can finish this race well if we are willing to let God direct us, teach us, and if we love others more than we do ourselves. Give this some thought – what if we begin this season

and...

*Put the pen on a new page*

*Dream about what we could change*

*And live it out before it's too late*

*The beauty of it is*

*We've just one life to live*

*And no one knows what happens next.*

*If I love better*

*And you love better*

*Our love will live on forever.*

*Why are we wasting all the time like someone's making more?*

(©2022, For King And Country)

What could be better in our personal lives if we did the cleaning of our hearts and minds? What a great difference it could make. What are we waiting for?

- Donna





# Calendar of Events

## 2025 Summer Camp Registration Open Now

Your child will participate in a variety of fun activities designed by the North Alabama Zoological Society to promote awareness of our Alabama biodiversity, ecosystems and conservation. Campers will enjoy include art projects, games, hands-on experiences, and lots of time enjoying the Alabama outdoors. [www.nalzs.org/nature-camp-pnp](http://www.nalzs.org/nature-camp-pnp)

### Camp Helen Baptist Camp

14477 Baptist Camp Rd, Harvest, AL 35749

June 2-6, 2025 (ages 6-11) \$295 9:00am - 4:00pm

July 7-11, 2025 (ages 6-11) \$295 9:00am - 4:00pm

BIO QUEST: June 2-6, 2025 (ages 12-14) \$295 9:00am - 4:00pm

&

### J.D. & Annie S. Hays Nature Preserve

7161 US-431, Owens Cross Roads, AL 35763

June 24-27, 2025 (ages 6-11) \$250 8:00am - 3:00pm

## Home Heart and Heritage Quilt Exhibition Through April 21

Monthaven ARts & Cultural Center sponsored our hosting of the Home Heart and Heritage Quilt Exhibition: A quilt exhibit celebrating Black history. The exhibit is free to view and is open to the public. Athens-Limestone Public Library.

## National Walking Week Apr 1 - 7

Hosted by AVA America's Walking Club is a great time to get out and about on Athens-Limestone's trails, tracks and treks including the AVA Athens Historic Volksmarch (you can explore trail options more here) to explore and take steps to benefit your heart, mind and spirit. Trail brochures are available at the Athens-Limestone Visitors Center 100 North Beaty Street in Athens Monday-Friday from 8:00AM-5:00PM and a selection of guest favorites are available on the porch in the covered boxes year-round.

## 2025 Kids Festival April 5

9AM - 4PM. Calhoun Community College, 6250 US-31, Tanner, AL. This Festival is free to attend, General Parking is free, Premium Parking is \$10.00/car. The North Alabama Zoological Society is excited to host our 4th annual outdoor Kids & Family Festival. We love teaching children about Alabama's unique biodiversity and helping them to have opportunities to be outside and explore nature. This event also highlights the vibrant array of local vendors and exhibitors who contribute to our community's family-friendly environment. Come as

a family and join us for a day of fun, food, and the best of Alabama's outdoors! We are so excited to present the 2025 Kids Festival Sponsor, Passport Booths and Partner Booths! [www.nalzs.org/kf2025](http://www.nalzs.org/kf2025) DRAWINGS & PRIZES: The festival will have various drawings and giveaways.

## Coffee Call April 5

Alabama Veteran's Museum, 100 Pryor St W, Athens, AL. Veterans and their families are invited for breakfast and fellowship from 8:00am - 9:30am. at the Alabama Veterans Museum and Archive. 256-771-7578.

## Spring Craft Fair April 19

Spring Craft Fair for the library will be on Saturday, April 19th, from 9 am - 1 pm. It is free for patrons to attend. They can meet local vendors and purchase gifts for Easter, mothers day, or just for fun. Athens-Limestone Public Library.

## Act of Congress In Concert May 15

7:00pm Mccandless Hall, Athens State University, 367 E Bryan St, Athens. Act of Congress has been touring as a band for over 15 years, but it feels like they're just getting started. Dave Higgs of NPR's Bluegrass Breakdown called them "one of the freshest sounding, exuberant bands in all of the known acoustic universe." This genre-bending acoustic quartet's unique blend of pop, folk, gospel, and bluegrass shines on their latest release, The Hymns That Made Us. The state of Alabama has proven to be rich soil for the creative growth of Act of Congress. They have consistently been voted a "Must See Live Act of Alabama" and were the featured artist in the state's "Keep Alabama Beautiful" campaign. Adult tickets are \$15. Kids under 18 are \$5. The Gold Sponsor for this concert is Southern States Bank.

## Digital Literacy Classes

Athens-Limestone County Public Library will host a series of Digital Literacy Classes in conjunction with Calhoun Community College & Drake State Community & Technical College. Classes will boost your digital confidence & provide you with skills and training needed in today's job market. Courses include: Computer & Internet Basics, Email, Windows OS, & Microsoft Word®. M-W 9:00 - 12:00 or M-W 1:00 - 4:00. Classes start January 24th. Call us at (256) 306-2830 to learn more.





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## What Makes Ronnie Roll

# The Enslaved Becomes The “Empoweror”

by Ali Elizabeth Turner



Over the years, it has been common to come into Mayor Ronnie’s office for an interview, finding him dressed for the job and sporting any and all manner of ties. There’s the one that he uses for reading Dr. Seuss books to kids at various local schools. There are ties for all of the seasons and holidays, and a purple and gold one for Trinity School. March 17, St. Patrick’s Day was no exception. The mayor had on a green tie that sported shamrocks, and our discussion turned to the most famous celebration that occurs annually in the month of March. It is actually celebrated all over the world in more than 200 countries. The oldest St. Patrick’s Day Parade started in St. Augustine, Florida, in 1601, and it became a national holiday in 1904.

The traditional corned-beef-and-cabbage meal is typically not preferred in the UK, and I told him that my mom used to make yeast rolls shaped like shamrocks; we had corned beef and cabbage, and often she would make crême de menthe pie for dessert. Sometimes we had pis-

tachio ice cream and chocolate cookies. I asked the mayor if there were any future plans to dye Athens Creek green like Chicago has dyed the Chicago River for the last six decades. His answer was “No,” followed by a chuckle.

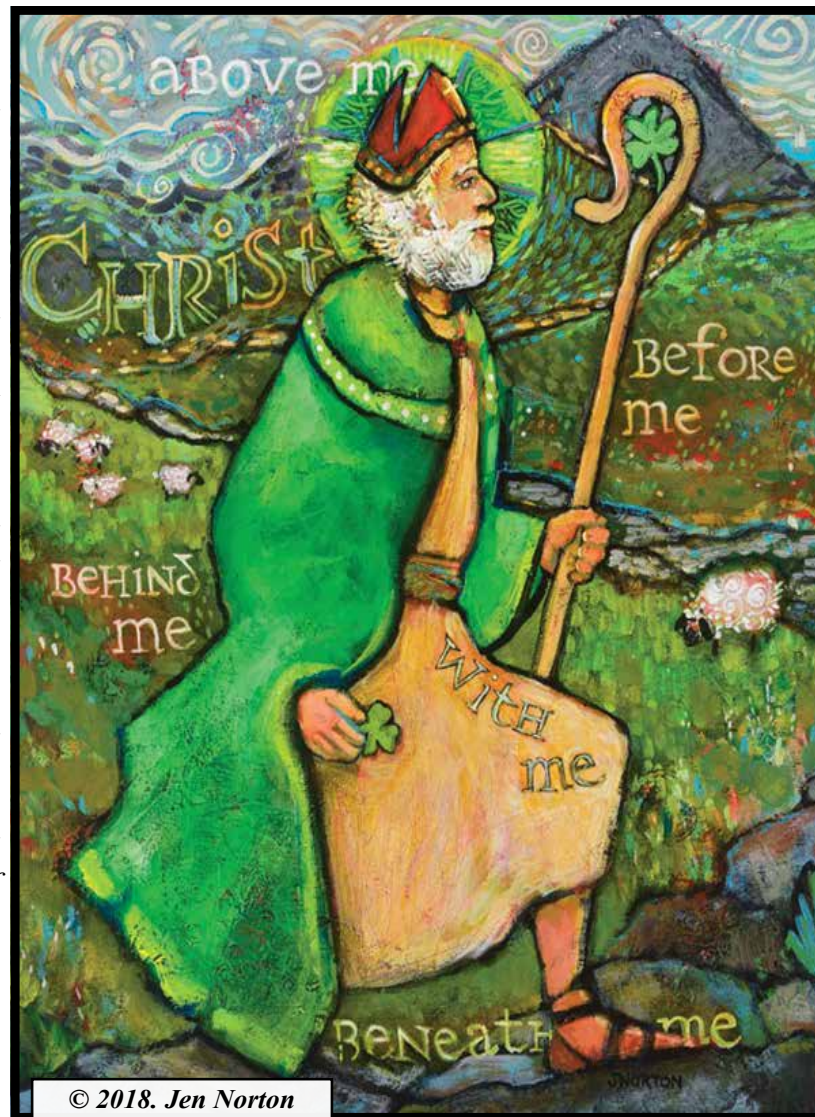
Speaking of shamrocks, it is thought that they became somewhat of a sacred plant because the three leaves symbolized the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And, when it comes to four-leaf clovers, statistics seem to suggest that the chances of finding one are about one in five thousand.

We both knew a little about the patron saint of the Irish, and learned some things. First of all, what was a total surprise was that St. Patrick has actually never been canonized as a saint (the process wasn’t in place at that time). He also was once a slave. According to History:

*Ripped from his home, Patrick herded sheep for a local chieftain on the slopes of Mount Slemish in County Antrim in the north of Ireland. Deprived of food and clothes, Patrick lived in virtual isola-*

*tion. His only companions were his flock and his newfound faith. Amid the desolation, Patrick’s Christianity blossomed. He prayed as many as 100 times during the day—and matched that total at night. Patrick wrote in the Confessio that six years into his captivity, an angel appeared in a dream and told him, “You have fasted well. Very soon you will return to your native country.” The angel told him of a ship leaving Ireland, and the young man walked across 200 miles of peat bogs and forests before arriving at a port, possibly Wexford, where he found a cargo ship bound for the European continent.*

*After the captain refused him passage, Patrick began to pray. Before he could finish, though, a sailor from the ship came shouting, “Come quickly – those men are calling you!” After learning that the captain*



*changed his mind, Patrick sailed away from Ireland, believing that God’s protection must have been responsible for his unlikely escape.*

Of course, there are those who believe this account of Patrick’s life is just a myth, but here is one thing we do know.

Patrick spread the gospel, and spent 40 years of his life doing so. Essentially, the enslaved became the “empoweror.” Yes, I know, that is not a real word in the English language, but the only thing that is close is “emperor,” and that doesn’t work at all. At the end of the day, St. Patrick’s Day is about freedom, sacrifice, and way more than parades, green beer, or rivers. Having discovered some new things, there was only one thing left to do, and that was to pray. So, we did, and then it was time for Ronnie to roll.

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# *A Smart Investment You May be Missing*

by Detri McGhee - CLU, ChFC



Some of you consider yourself qualified as a truly savvy investor. Others likely feel stressed when someone wants to talk about investing. There is a plethora of investment options and opportunities that can propel us to financial security or force us to bankruptcy. Likely, the majority of us are somewhere in between.

Free advice abounds! And soon, I will offer you a little more. But for now, let's look at some free advice that turned out badly if followed.

Thomas J. Watson, IBM Chairman in 1943, said: "I think there's a world market for about five computers." (OOPS!)

James Hoffa, president of the Teamsters Union, said in 1975: "I don't need bodyguards."

In 1911, France's Marshal Fouch said: "Airplanes are interesting toys, but of no military value."

H. G. Wells, in 1902, said: "My imagination refuses to see any sort of submarine doing anything but suffocating its crew and foundering at sea."

Men the world deemed as high successes made massively errant judgments concerning the value of certain opportunities.

There is one very wealthy man whose advice you might be wise to heed. "The most important investment you can make is in yourself," Warren Buffett is known

for saying. That includes choosing the right education, training, and professional development to propel you forward in life and business.

Investments in developing your own personal emotional intelligence can bring a massively successful ROI! Learning how to handle criticism, benefit from advice even from someone you do not particularly like, developing elephant-hide toughness when corrected and dove-gentleness on reactions to problems are just a few of the skills you can sharpen when you have the right tools.

Criticism management skills are available and well worth the effort to acquire and implement. While you wait for the full C-A-T Training to be published, I will share just a few results of applying the system to your everyday personal and professional life.

1. Upon implementation of the system in daily life, you will develop the ability to more objectively assess any and all comments concerning your personal and professional actions.
2. What starts out awkward and tedious can become FUN and PROFITABLE.
3. CM training helps conquer fear of failure AND fear of success.
4. CM enables you to harness this energy to infuse life, amaze your



critics, control your destiny, and energize your daily walk.

The FREE advice I promised you earlier is this: Invest in your Emotionally Intelligence. Go to [www.criticismmanagement.com](http://www.criticismmanagement.com). Learn all

you can from the site and watch for more information on the full program.

*Detri would love to hear from you! Especially your thoughts on how to handle criticism, or problems you would like*

*to get feedback on from others. Email: [detrimghee@gmail.com](mailto:detrimghee@gmail.com) or Facebook: Criticism Management by Detri. Free outline for Criticism Management available at [www.criticismmanagement.com](http://www.criticismmanagement.com)*







## Captain's Log

# Driving Blind

by Brenda Wilkerson

Due to sickness and bus driver shortages everywhere, our driver team routinely helps with our local middle and high school routes. Being my turn, I was given the sub route sheet. Let's just say, some high school drivers are notorious for their painfully skimpy directions. So, with 3 pages of skeletal directions securely stapled together, I am assured a difficult journey with high school kids I've never met, going to streets I've never been, while weaving the equivalent of a bulky yellow 747 through uncharted territory. Driving. Blind. With a bag full of sour straws, I did what any other wise bus driver would do... Bribe them with sour candy

if they help get this bus load home. There. You can throw those vague directions to the wind as each helpful student took their turn moving to the front seat to guide me to their next stop home. Done (Whew) and Done . These kids were fantastic! Working together, they used excellent worded direction to assure everybody got home safe and sound with no missed stops. An added blessing was that not only were they great co-captains, these older students were polite and patient. Lord, what a reflective picture of what our obedience to Your promptings should look like. Spiritually, we are 'driving blind' while waiting on our loving Lord to reveal the next



step with His heavenly directions that will lead us through jarring bumps and uncharted territory

to peace and eventually, safely Home. May we press into Him, praying and reading His direc-

tions so we can hear His voice clearly whisper the next step in our journey. Amen

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## Slinkard On Success

# “F” Is For Focus

by D. A. Slinkard

*D.A. Slinkard would love your feedback. You can contact him at [da.slinkard@gmail.com](mailto:da.slinkard@gmail.com)*

Our letter for this article is “F” and our word is “Focus” which is the ability to direct your attention and energy toward a specific goal or task without being distracted. In today’s fast-paced world, distractions are everywhere—social media, emails, notifications, and even our own thoughts pulling us in multiple directions. The difference between those who achieve success and those who don’t often comes down to one simple factor: focus.

When we lack focus, we fall into a cycle of busyness without productivity. We start tasks but don’t complete them, we have big dreams but don’t follow through, and we chase multiple things without making significant progress in any. However, when we cultivate focus, we gain clarity, improve efficiency, and move toward our goals with precision.

Before you can focus on something, you need to know what you’re focusing on. Lack of clarity leads to scattered energy and wasted effort. Too many people are not able to make any traction in life because their focus is not on what it should be. We need to set clear expectations for ourselves. Instead of saying, “I want to be successful,” define what success means for you. Is it financial freedom? A thriving business? Improved health? The clearer your goal, the easier it is to focus.

We also need to realize that many things demand

our attention daily, but not all of them move us toward our goals. Identifying what truly matters helps us eliminate distractions. Little by little we can get closer and closer to our goals, and once you’re clear on your goals, you can prioritize your daily tasks accordingly. This prevents you from spending time on things that don’t contribute to your long-term success. It is all about living your life on purpose.

Improving focus requires intentional effort. It is way too easy to get distracted and lose sight of what you want to accomplish. Some things you may want to try are as follows: **Eliminate Distractions** – Turn off unnecessary notifications, set up a quiet workspace, and minimize interruptions. **Time-Blocking** – Dedicate specific time slots for important tasks and avoid multitasking. **Pomodoro Technique** – Work in focused 25-minute sessions followed by short breaks to maintain productivity. **The Two-Minute Rule** – If a task takes less than two minutes, do it immediately to avoid mental clutter. **Setting a Daily Focus Goal** – Start each day with one main objective to direct your energy toward.

Focus is like a muscle—



it strengthens with training. We need to spend time training our minds to focus. Unfortunately, it seems the longer I live the shorter our attention spans become. We live in the day of entertainment, and I believe that unless someone is constantly entertained, it is hard to keep their attention. We need to avoid technology and screen time as much as possible. I believe too many people are addicted to their phones and tablets, and we need to put them down.

We need to learn how to be in the moment. Too many people are busy recording their memories through their smart devices rather than making memories through their own eyes. There is so

much more to life than what we have been living, but it takes being intentional to have that life. Our lives can be different than how they are right now, but it is going to take a concentrated effort of focusing on what we want. Too often people focus on what they do not want, and this leads them down a long, winding, and draining road.

If we change our thought process – if we change what we focus on – we can

change the world around us. When we take a precise look at how we want things to be and then take intentional steps each day to achieve this, we find how powerful we can be. We must stop limiting ourselves with our small-minded beliefs and start thinking big because the world we live in will allow you to have as much or as little success as you believe is possible.

In a world full of distractions, focus is a superpower. Developing the ability to concentrate on meaningful goals can transform your life. I encourage you to start small—eliminate distractions, set clear goals, and commit to deep work. Remember, success is not about being busy but about being productive. Challenge yourself today and implement one focus-improving strategy and see how it impacts your productivity. By mastering focus, you set yourself on the path to success, one intentional step at a time.



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Clean, Green And Beautiful

# Spring Fever

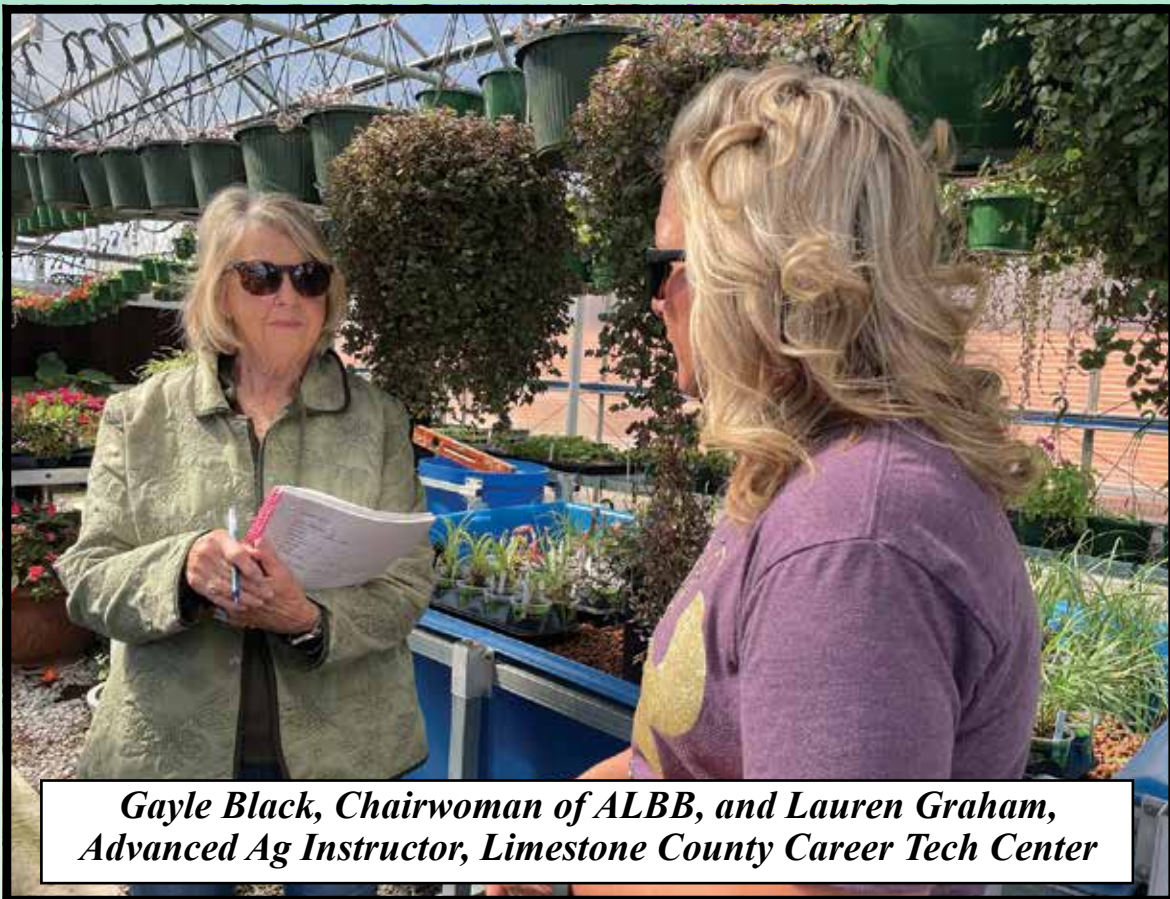
by Claire Tribble - Executive Director, Keep Athens-Limestone Beautiful

As many of you know, the Athens-Limestone Beautification Board partnered with the Advanced Agriculture class from the Limestone County Career Technical School for the Downtown Project. If you've never heard of the Downtown Project, we have large, concrete pots filled with the bright, beautiful annuals that line the sidewalks downtown. This is a project that was started in the early 2000s and is still going and growing! With the sun shining and warmer days and nights, we are itching to get started with the spring planting.

Back in the fall, the students worked hard to help us empty the summer annuals and replace them with pumpkins and the colorful fall

pansies. They took the annuals they removed back to the greenhouse at Tanner High School to learn how to propagate and root the plants. They were able to practice their newly learned skills, and it paid off! The Beautification Board toured the greenhouse last week, and the tables were filled with bright, beautiful blooms. It was quite the site. Hanging baskets were starting to fill in, and they looked great. To say that we were impressed with and proud for the Advanced Agriculture students is an understatement!

With the warmer and sunnier days, we are itching to get started with the spring planting. We can't wait to see the bus pull up loaded with students and plants to



*Gayle Black, Chairwoman of ALBB, and Lauren Graham, Advanced Ag Instructor, Limestone County Career Tech Center*

get busy. I think everyone is ready to see those bright summer colors after such a long winter. We plan on starting the

first week of April. If you feel inspired to get your hands in some dirt, reach out and I'll send you the details. We always welcome volunteers!

The students didn't just grow our plants, they grew plants for their annual plant sale! Their tables were filled with blooms, succulents, grasses, and a few vegetable plants that will all be available to purchase. This year, it will be held on April 12 from 8 a.m.-

noon at their greenhouse at Tanner High School. The greenhouse is behind the school, you turn off of Huntsville Brownsferry Road onto the road in between the school and the cemetery. Just follow that road to the back and you'll spot the greenhouse. The proceeds from the plant sale will go back into the program to help them grow!



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Cooking with Anna

# My Identity In Christ: *God Says I Am Approved*

by Anna Hamilton

*Have you ever applied for entrance into an exclusive social club and been denied? Have you ever wanted to be included in the cool kids group? Have you ever wanted to just feel accepted? Well, when you are a child of God, you have been approved and accepted. Romans 15:7 says, "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God."*

*As a child, you craved approval from your parents. You tried to get good grades, you auditioned for the play, you tried out for the football team, you did everything in your power to gain the approval you so craved. When you are a child of God, you also crave His approval. Knowing that you are*

*approved by God give you a sense of peace and hope. It also increases your faith.*

*Because of Jesus' sacrifice for us on the cross, we are children of God, we are brothers with Christ, and we are fully approved by God. Romans 8:15 says, "For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba Father!'"*

*"For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). God has a purpose for each and every one of us. He*

*continued on page 23*

## *Deli-Style Pasta Salad*

### *Ingredients:*

- 1 box tri-color pasta*
- 2 large cucumbers; peeled, seeded, and chopped*
- 1 large red onion; sliced into thin strips*
- 2 large green bell peppers; diced*
- 2 large tomatoes; seeded and diced*
- 1 large can (6.5 oz.) sliced black olives*
- 1 16 oz. bottle of Italian salad dressing*
- 1 2.6 oz. bottle of Salad Supreme seasoning;*  
*I prefer McCormick brand*

### *Directions:*

*Cook pasta according to package directions. Drain and rinse with cold water. Set aside.*



*In a large bowl combine pasta and vegetables. In a small bowl, whisk together the salad dressing and Salad Supreme seasoning. Pour over pasta and vegetables. Mix well.*

*Cover and refrigerate. Toss gently before serving.*



# The Only Comparison That Matters: *You Vs. You*

by Nick Niedzwiecki - Owner, CrossFit Athens



It's easy to feel discouraged in today's world of endless social media highlight reels. Scroll through Instagram, and you'll see chiseled abs, perfect meal prep, and people lifting weights you can't imagine touching. It's enough to make anyone feel like they're falling behind before they even get started. But here's the truth: The only comparison that matters is the one between you and the person you were yesterday.

When it comes to health and fitness, progress isn't about looking like someone else. It's about be-

coming a better version of yourself—step by step, day by day. If you let social media dictate your success, you may never feel like you're doing enough. If you focus on your own progress, you'll start to see real, lasting change.

## The Problem With Social Media Comparisons

Social media creates unrealistic expectations. People post their best angles, best lighting, and best days—but not the struggles, setbacks, or bad workouts. What you see isn't the full picture. If you compare your real life to someone

else's highlight reel, you'll always feel like you're coming up short.

Even worse, social media can stop you from starting at all. If you believe you'll never look like the influencers you follow, why bother trying? This kind of thinking is the reason so many people stay stuck. They let comparison steal their motivation before they even give themselves a chance to improve.

## How CrossFit Athens Helps You See Real Progress

At CrossFit Athens, we believe progress is built

on daily habits, not overnight transformations. Our workouts, coaching, and community are designed to help you track and celebrate your progress in a meaningful way.

1. Tracking Your Workouts – At CrossFit Athens, every workout is measurable. Whether it's lifting heavier weights, finishing a workout faster, or getting your first pull-up, you'll see improvement over time. Progress isn't just about looking different, it's about doing more than you could before.

2. Building Consistency – Showing up consistently

is the key to long-term success. Our structured classes and supportive environment help you stay accountable. Instead of worrying about perfection, you'll focus on small improvements each day.

3. Celebrating Your Wins – Every PR (personal record), every extra rep, and every moment of pushing past your comfort zone is a victory. At CrossFit Athens, you're surrounded by coaches and a community that celebrate your progress with you.

4. Focusing on Performance, Not Appearance – While social media often focuses on aesthetics, CrossFit is about what your body can do. You'll see progress in your strength, endurance, and confidence—not just in the mirror.

## The Only Competition Is You

The real key to long-term success in health and fitness is tracking your own progress, not someone else's. Maybe you couldn't do a push-up last month, and now you can do five. Maybe you used to dread working out, and now you look forward to it. These are the things that matter.

If you're ready to start measuring success by what truly counts, CrossFit Athens is here to help. Stay consistent, trust the process, and keep pushing forward. The only person you need to be better than is the person you were yesterday.





# 11 Weird Things

by Stephanie Reynolds, Athens-Limestone Tourism Association



Hello, my amazing Limestoneians! My fabulous trail buddies! My “what’s-around-the-bend” explorers!

We have so many trails and treks coming up for you this spring! The April Walking Tours will take place every Saturday in April at 10 a.m. (unless there is severe weather). This is a statewide program highlighting the amazing history of various communities (but y’all know that ours is the coolest!). It is free, will take 1-1.5 hours, and they are different each Saturday. Here is the schedule -- April 5: Houston District, April 12: University District, April 19: Square District, April 26: Beaty District.

It would help us if you could sign up on our

Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/exploreathensal>) page, but you can also just show up. We start every walk at the Tourism Office at 100 N. Beaty Street, Athens, AL. Wear comfortable shoes and bring a bottle of water. You don’t HAVE to dress up in historical garb...but you won’t be the only one if you do! (No dogs allowed, though, except for service animals.)

Then we have two trail walks coming in May! The 3rd of May walk will start (and end!) at Warehouse Pizza in Elkmont. We will meet at 10:45 a.m., go a little bit up the Richard Martin Trail, walk back to Warehouse, and the people can get lunch if they want. This walk DOES require a pre-registration but is free. The first 25

to sign up will get a free ice cream at Warehouse Pizza! See our Facebook page for that as well. This walk will be beginner level, about 4 miles long, and fairly flat.

Then on the 10th of May, we will have an intermediate/advanced hike for those who are ready for a challenge. Check our Facebook page in April for more information.

Now, you don’t have to bring a pack on the Richard Martin Trail... but gear is fun! If you read my trail articles last year (see the Athens Now website under “Tourism” to catch up if you missed them), you know the basics: water (!), sunscreen, any medications (especially Epi-pens or inhalers), a decent first-aid kit, a snack (I highly recom-

mend Haribo Gummi Bears), extra socks, bug spray, a hat, multitool, phone charger with cord, hand sanitizer, cordage, headlamp, a couple of handwarmers, tissues, a lighter, and a whistle. This would be more of an “Optimist” day pack for a well-traveled trail. If you were going to go out in the woods, you would want more, but this will get you started.

But when you master the basics of “I Heart Gear” backpacking, here are 11 weird things to consider putting in your pack as well.

1. Some plastic grocery store bags—Useful for putting trash, wet socks, and treasures in. Also useful for keeping things dry if you get caught out in the rain.
2. Hair ties/bands—Useful for hair, of course, but also binding loose straps, half-eaten snacks, or securing a water bottle to your belt if its clip breaks. Also, if you are putting up a tarp, an easy way to secure it is with a small rock and a hair band
3. Duct tape—I don’t even have to mention how useful this is for everything from preventing blisters on your feet to covering a hole worn in your pack or shoes to keeping shoes on if laces break (and you didn’t bring cordage).
4. Feminine products—Not just for

their intended use but also can be extra padding for a place that is getting a lot of pressure (shoulder, etc.), or if you need extra protection/gauze for a wound.

5. Safety Pins—So many uses, including some interesting first aid ones that you can Google.

6. Tiny tubes of superglue—Like safety pins, there are multiple uses.

7. Spare underpants—No explanation needed.

8. Vaseline soaked (real) cotton balls—Fire starting and lubricating hot spots and chafing areas.

9. Spare bottle cap (like from a 2-liter bottle)—Protects your hands or feet if you are putting in tent stakes.

10. Small bottle of olive oil—Great for adding calories if you are hiking distances.

11. Plastic netting that onions, etc. come in—For scrubbing pots and for using as a net.

There you go! A few extras to throw in your pack. Do you have any unusual items or unusual uses for regular items? Head to our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/exploreathensal> and let us know! Also, if you have any pics of you fabulous folk on our amazing trails, please share with our Facebook page and Instagram!





# CEI Bookstore And Truth Publications: *Seventy Years Of Serving...Even Through The Storms*

by Ali Elizabeth Turner

*continued from page 1*

well as help any and all on their spiritual journey.

In 2012, CEI moved to what became (until December's tornado) their new location in the old Beasley building on S. Marion Street, and modernized their operation. They were able to ship carefully written supplies all over the world, and they always kept the vision of creating resources that are true to the Bible and are understandable for everyone. Truth Publications became their incorporated brand.

Lance Taylor joined the CEI family in 2016, and here is a bit of his story. He is a native of West Limestone, graduated from Athens Bible School in 2002, and got a degree in business from Freed-Hardeman. He is the



Director of Operations for CEI/Truth Publications, and is a husband, father, coach, and baseball fan. Lance is also a testicular cancer survivor, and knows what is like to trust God for his literal life. He will be the first to tell you that the things that he

and his crew have gone through prepared them for the holiday season's "baptism of fire" that destroyed the CEI store, and now we are watching a true "beauty-from-ashes" story unfold right before our eyes. More on that in a minute...

The first major trial at



the Marion Street location was losing Tammy Woodward after a long battle with breast cancer. That was in 2019, and Lance had to wrestle with the Almighty until he "walked with a halt" over the question, "Why her and not me?" This is a common crucible for cancer survivors whether or not they are believers. Then COVID hit, and subsequently church attendance and therefore supplying churches with materials took a hit everywhere. Interestingly, because everyone was now at home, it was the increased sales of pre-packaged communion kits and personal devotionals that kept them afloat. During that time, they worked hard to re-brand, upgrade technology and customer ser-

vice, increase scope and impact, and craft a wonderful slogan that has served them and our community well:

Taking His hand, helping each other home

Then a literal "perfect storm" hit around 11:15 p.m. on December 28, 2024, and at 12:22 a.m. On December 29, Lance received a text and a picture that stunned him to the point that all he could say was, "Oh my!" It had been sent by long-time CEI/Truth Publications employee Kerri Calvert, and Lance drove straight way to the shop. The Quonset-style roof of the ca. 1945 building had been completely blown off, daggers of wood and clumps of insulation had been blown



*The CEI crew cleaning up after the storm*





all over the downtown core of Athens, and just about everything was soaked to the point of being ruined. Everyone agreed that if the 100 mph. storm had hit during the day, there would have been fatalities, and thankfully no one was even injured. Lance's second thought was, "The Lord will make a way," and that has certainly been the case. By way of personal testimony, our Athens Now newspaper rack was slammed up against the front door, unscathed, and the next day Lance gallantly retrieved it for me. I almost felt guilty, given all that he and the CEI family were observing from a state of shock. Close to a half million dollars of inventory and supplies were a total loss, and the building was deemed unsafe.

Then, the rebirth began. Lance was quick to give thanks first to God, then for the community, several groups, individuals, and entities for their

support, prayers, and elbow grease. Hartford Insurance has been with them every step of the way, as well as Neil Johnston of Athens Insurance. Brown &

Brown Accounting offered space for them to sort through the mess. "About 3% of the inventory was able to be salvaged," he said. Kyle Pope, who chairs



Truth Publications, had already upgraded the print-on-demand aspect of online sales, and so they barely missed a step with fulfilling orders. Tere Richardson of Athens Main Street got Lance in touch with Jim Batson, owner of the historic Estes building at 103 W. Washington that had been home to High Cotton Arts. High Cotton had already planned on moving, and were able to move into the Scout/Music House, and CEI was back in business.

Currently the store looks like a warehouse, and that's just fine with everybody, and there is a possibility that the Marion Street store might be able to be restored at some point in the future. For now, there are relics from the damaged store along with some cheerful spring decorations in the front windows. Books are on the shelves, customer service is in full swing, and the mission to provide what Lance calls

a "safe supply house" for God's people has literally weathered the storm. Lance says, "We want to provide true Southern hospitality and help you buy YOUR Bible." They are also grateful that they are able to ship excellent, Bible-based supplies to Africa, the Philippines, and Mexico.

Stop by today and let the folks of the not-for-profit CEI/Truth Publications do what they have done for the past 70 years: meet you on your spiritual journey, and help you "arrive Home" in good shape.

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## *The True Fast*

by Eric Betts, Assistant Professor | Course Developer, Hampton University School of Religion

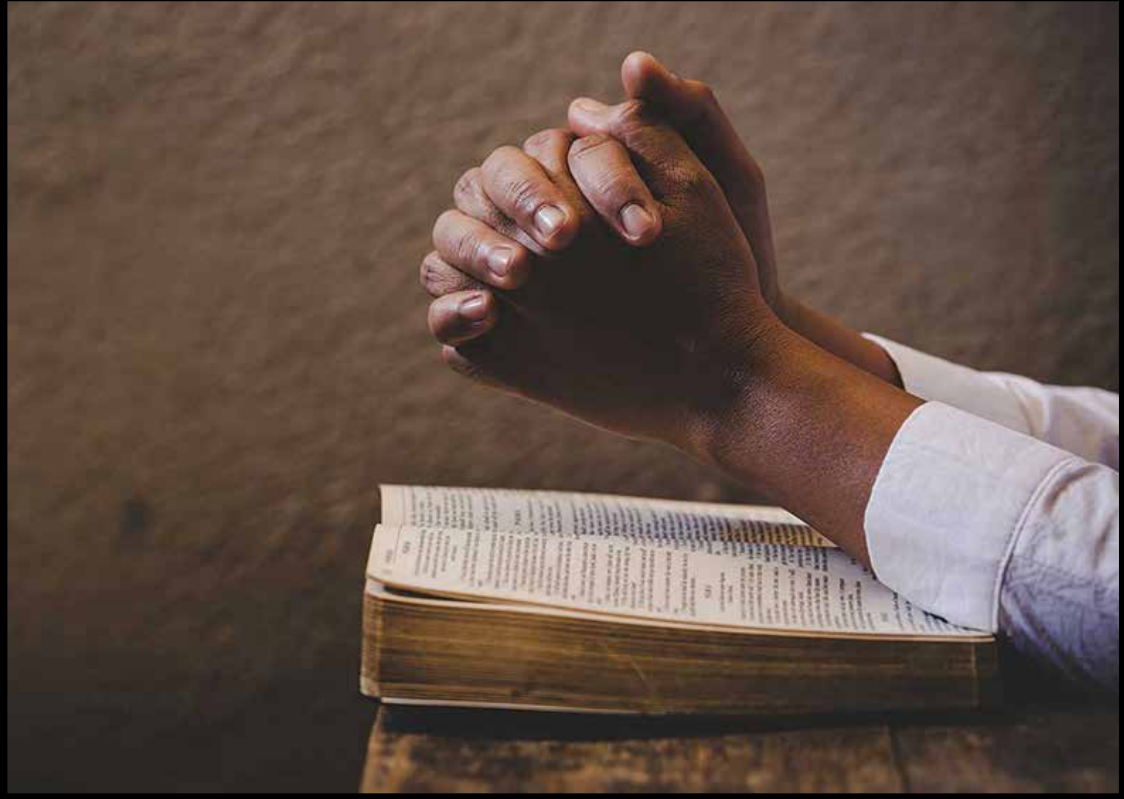


The Lenten season is traditionally marked by fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, guiding believers to a deeper spiritual connection. While fasting from food is often emphasized, the concept of fasting extends beyond the physical to encompass the transformation of the heart and mind. A commitment to permanently fast from comparison, greed or gluttony, and backbiting offers a profound path to spiritual renewal, fostering love, humility, and generosity in one's daily life.

Fasting from comparison challenges the individual to break free from the constant measurement of oneself against others. In a

world saturated with social media and societal expectations, comparison can breed envy and discontentment. Lent invites believers to embrace their uniqueness and recognize the blessings in their own lives. Refraining from comparison, causes one to cultivate gratitude and the ability to celebrate others' successes without jealousy or resentment, drawing closer to God's image of love and unity.

Greed and gluttony are temptations that pull the heart away from spiritual fulfillment. Permanent fasting from these tendencies involves a mindful approach to consumption—be it material wealth, food, or other resources. This



shift encourages individuals to prioritize generosity and selflessness, as they learn to share

abundantly with others. Such fasting from greed, helps one build a deeper connection to the under-

served, serving as a vessel for compassion and empathy, embodying the call to care for the less fortunate.

Finally, backbiting undermines relationships and erodes the foundation of community. Choosing to fast from gossip and harmful speech means practicing kindness, forgiveness, and constructive dialogue. It is a commitment to speak life into others rather than tear them down. This deliberate decision to avoid backbiting fosters harmony and trust, creating a spirit of togetherness that reflects the teachings of Christ. Permanent fasting from these destructive behaviors transforms Lent from a temporary practice to a lifelong journey of spiritual growth and personal integrity.



*Get your knife straight and get your life straight*



## The View From The Bridge

# Connection Lost... *Are You Dialing The Right Number?*

by Jackie Warner

**Career Development Facilitator**

**"Impact, Engage, Grow" Community Matters**

Ever heard the saying, "Looking for love in all the wrong places"? In 1 John 4:16, it says

"We know that we have come to know and believe that God loves us. **God is love**, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him."

When we read John 15:1, we get to know our True and Everlasting source. It says: "I am the true vine, and my father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even

more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me." We must abide in HIM!

Call HIM and tell HIM what is going on; what is on your mind. Open 24/7 -- No appointments are necessary. A busy signal you will not get, nor will you be put on hold or asked to provide a call back number. HIS telephone line is never busy!

We are the branches, and we

will not bear real fruit in and of ourselves; we must abide in HIM and stay connected. We tend to forget the power of being plugged into the right source. What is your source connection? Are you living in the vine? Have you lost your connection? Are you depending on another source to fill you up and provide what is needed in your life? Recognize that reconnecting with God is a process, and don't be afraid to "push restart." **HE has not left you!**

### 1. Cultivate a Prayer Life

One of the most fundamental ways to stay connected to the

vine is through prayer. Prayer is the lifeline that links you directly to God. Commit to daily devotional time where you can read Scriptures, meditate on their meanings, and reflect on their application in your life.

### 2. Engage with Scripture

The Bible is OUR guidebook -- GOD'S WORD filled with wisdom, teachings, and promises. Attend a virtual or in-person Bible study group.

### 3. Worship Participation

Regularly attend church services and events where you can worship collectively and

partake in activities. Worship is an expression of reverence and adoration for God. Through worship, you acknowledge His greatness and cultivate a heart of gratitude strengthening your faith.

***Until Next Time, Be Sincere, Kind and Intentional***

*Jackie Warner, Community Outreach Specialist*

*Email:*

*thebridge.us@gmail.com*

*Check out upcoming events: <http://thebridge-us.yolasite.com/>*



**Jesus is**  
**Only One Call**  
**away**



## Awaiting The 'GROOM'

by Deb Kitchenmaster



As the hours of light increase in our daily, ordinary, twenty-four hours, a signal is activated in our horses' bodies to 'let go' or 'release.' What are they letting go of? Their winter coats! Why? They no longer serve them. Their winter coat is no longer needed. A new season is being entered into and the old needs to 'GO.' Time to get the groom tools out and touch, touch, touch; brush, brush, brush. You might as well sing as you groom, "Let it go. Let it go."

One of the best bonding times with the horses we love is grooming time. Grooming stimulates circulation and brings your attention to what you may need to be

aware of. Here is a simple reminder of what items you and your horse will enjoy during your grooming session:

Grooming Tote

Shedding blades and blocks

Curry Comb

Body brushes (hard, stiff or dandy brush) (medium brush) (soft brush) (face brush)

Mane and tail combs/brushes

Hoof pick

Sweat Scraper

You also may want to add to your wash rack area some coat conditioners and detanglers. Hoof oils are nice to have in stock at any given time.

Grooming CONNECTS

horse and rider to help form and strengthen a relationship that can carry over to other aspects of handling and riding. Yes, grooming aids in increasing circulation and notice any changes in their coats or body weight. Do horses enjoy being groomed? YES. One of the benefits grooming brings to the horse would be physical comfort. Grooming helps remove dirt, dust, and loose hair, which can be uncomfortable for horses. Did you know that when a horse grooms your back, they see you as a friend? Horses groom each other in the wild not only because it feels good to them, but also because it is a way to show affection towards each other. Horses will nibble at each

other's withers, backs, and necks.

This is to two young ladies, known as 'Twin Hearts' -- Do you remember back in the day eye-witnessing a horse actually licking a human? When a horse licks you it is a symbol of comfort, a sign of relaxation and contentment. During moments of relaxation and contentment, your horse may choose to express their comfort by licking you. This action indicates that they feel safe, secure, and at ease in your presence. It is a testament to the calming effect you have on them.

When a horse 'smiles' by half-closing its eyes, stretching out its upper lip, and pointing its ears backward, it's a sign of

happiness and contentment, often seen when they are being groomed or scratched. What about trust? Any meaningful relationship is rooted and grounded by a root of trust. How does a horse show that they trust YOU? One way is that they will willingly leave their herd. They'll be relaxed around you, stand still as you brush them, lower their heads, lick, and chew. These are all signs that a horse trusts you.

Working or active horses benefit from daily grooming, however, only three or four times a week if the horse isn't very active. Regular grooming sessions give you the opportunity to spend one-on-one time with your horse. Regular grooming sessions take at least twenty minutes, depending on how dirty your horse is. One more thing about grooming! It's important to be aware that you don't over groom your horse, especially in the winter if they are not clipped and spend a lot of time outside. Why? Over grooming can strip their coat of natural oils and reduce its waterproofing abilities.

We are on our feet, standing tall on Psalms 20:7-8 (MSG)... "See those people polishing their chariots, and those others grooming their horses?"

Enjoy the GROOM,

*Your NEIGHbor,  
Deb Kitchenmaster*

*horsinaround188@gmail.com*







# Red Dawn Remembered

by Phil Williams

I'm a child of the '80s. I have iconic memories of Ronald Reagan, Pac Man, and seeing Van Halen live in '81. It was big hair, big bands, and big times. It was cruising in my '68 Mustang with Journey's Escape album playing in a near endless loop on cassette. The '80s were hanging out at the mall when I wasn't working at the mall. It was high school football, prom dates, and hating Algebra. The '80s were just cool.

It was an era of growth and pride in who we were as a nation. America was coming out of the Carter era. The man in the White House was a real leader who really led.

And the movies...wow! There were Top Gun, Iron Eagle, First Blood, Uncommon Valor, An Officer and a Gentleman. But there was also the galvanizing classic that every high school guy wanted to be a part of...drum roll please... Red Dawn.

Director John Milius gave us the flick with everything. It was red, white, and blue; hard-pressed; overcoming odds; courage under fire; stare down your enemies 'Merica!

Red Dawn premiered in August, 1984, with a cast of teen stars playing high school students from a small Colorado town. When

the Soviets invaded the U.S. they took to the hills to survive. Along the way, the group accidentally became guerilla fighters. It was Robin Hood, Green Berets, and The Breakfast Club all wrapped up in one storyline. In the wake of every raid, every Russian vehicle they blew up, every supply depot they destroyed, they painted the name of their high school mascot...Wolverines! Every kid in America pictured themselves as a Wolverine.

Why did we love that movie so much? Why did it become an instant hit and an enduring classic? I think partly because it felt somewhat real. There was always the threat of the Soviet bear on the horizon. The Cold War was in its final years but it was still going, and America was in a resurgence on the world stage.

But it also felt like American spirit. Where good folks, who live normal lives, will rise up and do abnormal things if the times call for it. Red Dawn hit theaters less than a decade after the fall of Saigon and just a few years after the Iran hostage saga. American pride on the world stage had been wounded. We needed a reminder of who we really were.

Time Magazine described Red Dawn as a "Pop cultural inoculation against the Vietnam Syndrome of self-doubt

about the morality of U.S. foreign policy." Okay, that's highbrow talk to say that it struck a much-needed chord.

It also resonated with members of the U.S. military. In 2003, soon after the invasion of Iraq, the capture of Saddam Hussein was code-named "Operation Red Dawn," with the prime target location labeled "Wolverine I." Army Captain Geoffrey McMurray, who chose the name, said, "I think all of us in the military have seen Red Dawn."

Director John Milius was one of the few openly conservative filmmakers in Hollywood. He wanted a movie that showcased patriotism and a love for the American military. He also embedded warnings in the script about losing liberties, like speech and the right to bear arms. The film was an instant hit. It made waves. It drew the attention of patriots everywhere. Former Reagan Secretary of State Al Haig said, "It captures the stresses of patriotism, the emotions of love, and above all, the futility of war."

In a recent Fox News interview, Amanda Milius, daughter of director John Milius, was asked why the film has resonated for more than a generation. In her words the whole movie is summed up in one line by the character played by Patrick Swayze. Asked why he

and the others fought so desperately against steep odds he says, "Because we live here." Amanda Milius elaborated, "This is our responsibility...It's like this very American idea of, I'm going to go, and I just know in my bones that if somebody were to invade my land, I would go and protect it in whatever way I could with my high school friends in a truck."

But Hollywood didn't go for it. John Milius was told that his work was too political and he "needed to calm it all down a notch." Movie critic Roger Ebert said the movie was "corrupt from beginning to end" with a "right wing ideology that the picture doesn't deserve." It was the first movie in history to receive the new PG-13 rating. The national coalition on television violence decried it as the most violent movie ever made with an average of 134 acts of violence in one hour.

What Hollywood missed was that it was supposed to be right wing. It was absolutely about patriotism. It was liberty and freedom embodied. It was the honor of defending that which is ours from those that would dare try to take it. Hollywood may have hated it but America loved it. Liberals always seem surprised when patriotism is popular, and liberty is loved. Faith, family, and freedom will

always be themes that red-blooded everyday folks will pay good money to enjoy.

By and large, we prefer to be inspired. Preachy, you-can-do-better apologetics are so often the theme of the left. If they want to sell tickets, they need to realize that we prefer to be reminded of the goodness and enduring value of who we are rather than the progressive whine-fest that Hollywood so often defaults to.

Red Dawn. An American classic. A movie made to remind a generation that we might take a lick but we'll give back double.

More of that! Wolverines!

*Phil Williams is a former State Senator, retired Army Colel and combat veteran, and a practicing Attorney. He previously served with the leadership of the Alabama Policy Institute in Birmingham. Phil currently hosts the conservative news/talkshow Rightside Radio M-F 2-5 pm on multiple channels throughout the southeast. His column appears weekly throughout Alabama. The views and opinions expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the policy or position of this news source. To contact Phil or request him for a speaking engagement go to [www.rightsideradio.org](http://www.rightsideradio.org).*







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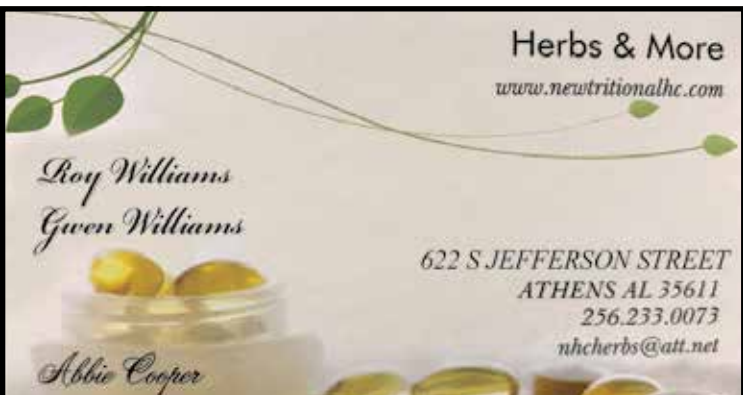
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Cooking with Anna (continued from page 13)

# My Identity In Christ: God Says *I Am Approved*

by Anna Hamilton

*has prepared good works for us to do in this world. This helps bring other people to know Christ. When we are accepted by Christ, we understand that our worth comes from God and not our own actions.*

*Most of us have desperately looked for and wanted the approval of others. In high school, you may want to buy the newest pair of tennis shoes to fit in with the crowd. In college, you may find yourself pressured to indulge in alcohol at parties. Once you graduate and are in the workforce, you may find yourself wanting to do anything possible to get ahead of your fellow employees. In all of these actions, we are seeking the approval of the world, that doesn't matter at all. Rather than trying to please people, we should seek the approval of God above all else. "Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10).*

*For the past few years, my husband and I have been diligently trying to get and keep our finances in order so that we could get a mortgage on the house we have been renting. This week we were told that it isn't going to happen. We have done all we can and are now looking at alternatives to gain financing. To be honest, when I got the news that we were not going to be able to be approved, I fell apart. The approval we had so desperately worked for was gone. We are trusting in God's plan for us and doing*

*our best to faithfully cling to hope. We are clinging to verses like Jeremiah 29:11, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." And Romans 8:28, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."*

*We can be confident that God will indeed bless us beyond our wildest imagination because we know that God fully approves of us because of who we are in Christ. God is our Father and wants the best for His children. "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace" (Numbers 6:26).*

*This week's recipe is a yummy pasta salad loaded with veggies and perfect for spring and summer. Secretly, I can eat it all year long. It is perfect for any outdoor BBQ because it doesn't have any mayo in it. It pairs perfectly with a piece of grilled chicken or salmon. I hope you enjoy it as much as my family does.*

*"The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me? The Lord is on my side as my helper; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man. It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in princes" (Psalm 118:6-9).*



# Rewiring Your Second Brain

by Lisa Philippart,  
Licensed Professional Counselor



*“The gut is the seat of all feeling.”*  
- Suzy Kassem

In my last article, we discussed the gut-brain connection. I asked you to at least consider that there is a connection between inflammation in the gut and symptoms of mental illness. I am not a dietician nor a nutritionist, but if you are willing to go with me and take this relationship a step further, we may be able to find ways to cultivate good gut bacteria to reduce depression and other mental health challenges. Changes in what you put in your body can lead to healthier mental and emotional states. And this can now be verified by empirical research and data.

**Antibiotic Use:** Regular antibiotic use can kill the diverse microbiota in the gut. Antibiotics can't discern between which bacteria is beneficial for our health and which is not; and overuse can affect long-term health. For ex-

ample, a connection has been made between inflammatory bowel disease (IBD,) which may be a result of a permanent change in microbiota, and depression. **Probiotics:** In 2013, a microbiologist in California discovered that mice with some autistic features had lower levels of a common gut bacterium (*Bacteriodes fragilis*) than “normal” mice. These mice were stressed, antisocial, and had gastrointestinal issues. When the scientists fed the mice a probiotic (*B. fragilis*), the symptoms reversed. In a 2015 study, researchers in the Netherlands discovered that in a four-week study, participants receiving multispecies probiotics showed reduced rumination and aggressive thoughts as a result of a reduction in sadness. **Fermented foods:** Fermented food is the best kind of probiotic you can feed your gut. These foods contain a broad combinations of microbes, so your chances are better that you will get some useful bacteria. One of the easiest,

most common fermented foods is yogurt. FF are recommended for improvement in overall symptoms including depression, anxiety, brain fog, hormonal issues, and fatigue.

**Here's the Dirt:** Are you obsessed with using hand sanitizers? (I'll admit I have to work on this one.) Did you know that overuse of sanitization may be making us sick? Over-sanitizing can kill all bacteria, including the good kind. Scientists have been researching why children who grow up in homes with a dog have a lower risk of developing allergies. Turns out dog ownership is associated with a kind of house dust that exposes us to important strains of good bacteria. Additionally, the soil brought into our homes has wonderful healing elements that can boost our immune systems. **Sugar and Processed Food:** A diet high in sugar causes changes in the gut bacteria. In an Oregon State University study of mice with a high-sugar diet, it was discovered that

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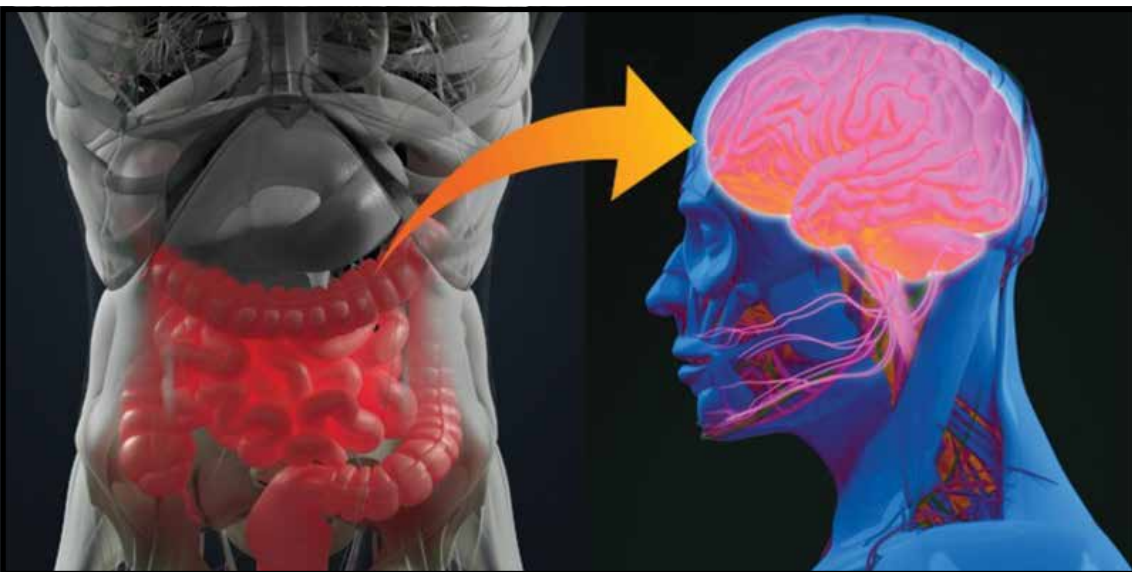


cognitive flexibility was impaired. This impairment means that the mice experienced difficulty in adjusting to changing situations. Additionally, the high-sugar diet negatively affected the mice's long-term and short-term memories. **Plants and Fiber:** By eating more plants, we are able to achieve and maintain microbiota diversity in our gut systems. This, by extension, would lead to a clearer mind and happier disposition. The gut microbes are kept busy feasting on fiber which keeps the intestinal lining intact, unlike the sugars that starve the gut bugs so that they nibble on the mucous lining of our intestines. Changing one's diet transforms gut bacteria, which leads to happier and healthier mind, body, and spirit. **Red Meat:** In April 2013, a Harvard study compared the effects of extreme diets on nine participants. The first diet consisted of meat and cheese; the second diet was fiber-rich consisting of only foods from plants. The scientists tracked changes in the microbiomes and discovered that on the animal diet, the bacteria in the gut produced more Bilophila, which has been found to cause in-

flammation and intestinal diseases. After about three days on the animal diet, the volunteers' behavior began to be affected by the change in microbiota.

Let me add one more lifestyle change suggestion that can have an enormous positive effect on your gut health. **Lower Stress:** When you feel stressed, your body discharges natural steroids and adrenaline, triggering your immune system to release inflammatory proteins. (This happens whether the threat is real or imagined.) Your intestinal bacteria and immune-response system work very closely together to remove possible diseases or foreign agents. Chronic immune response weakens the health of your gut leading to unbalanced microbiomes which causes all kinds of diseases, such as Crohn's disease and IBD. Does lowering stress lead to a healthy gut, or does a healthy gut lead to lower stress? Does it really matter? Literally, food for thought...

*Lisa Philippart is a Licensed Professional Counselor whose practice is in Madison, Alabama*





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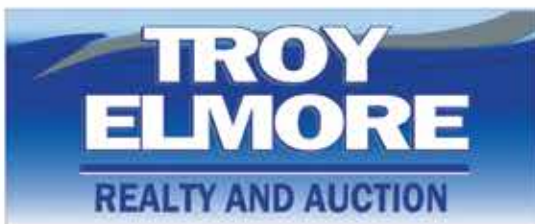
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“Your passion is waiting for your courage to catch up.”  
~ Isabelle Lafleche



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