

April 18 - May 1, 2025

# Athens Now

information & inspiration

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## Fortify Alabama Will Be "Everglowing" On May 16

By Ali Elizabeth Turner

On May 16, from 6-8 p.m., Fortify Alabama will be hosting their first fundraising gala with the intriguing name of "Everglowing." The Urban Dictionary defines "everglowing" as *something that continues to glow or shine without interruption, often*

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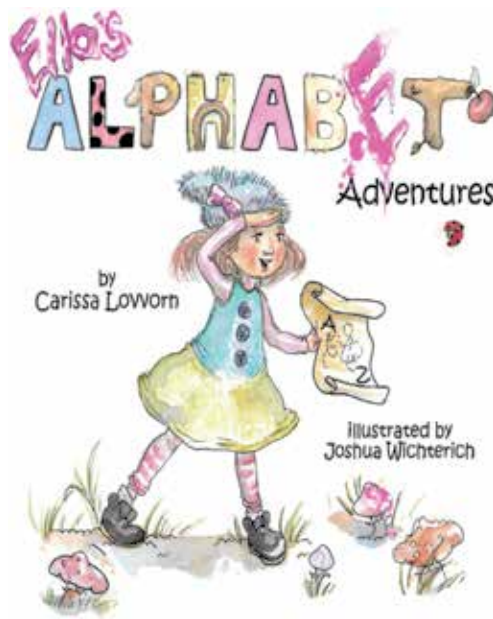


## Come To The Signing Of Ella's Alphabet Adventures At Toodlebugs On May 3

By Ali Elizabeth Turner

On Saturday, May 3, from noon-2 p.m., award-winning local children's author and *Athens Now* columnist Carissa Lovvorn will be at Toodlebugs for the signing of her fifth

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## Publisher's Point

# April -- Awful And Awesome



It's already April, and quite frankly, I am still trying to set my goals for 2025. I am also keenly aware that this month is absolutely packed with history, celebrations, controversies, and opportunities to pray, praise, and perceive.

And the very things that make April so awful as well as so awesome are the events that illustrate the good, the bad, the ugly, and more that are a part of our collective human story. We must always maintain a commitment to "let the story be the story," and to tell it, no matter what.

I was approached in March about the fact that April is Confederate Soldier month, and was given a list of men from our region who fell in the War Between the States, one of the darkest four years

in our history. There were pages full of names that are still common in our area—names like Hobbs, Yarbrough, McKinney, Christopher, McCurry, and Malone. They were the children of parents who loved and prayed for them, and I tried to imagine what it would have been like to have been a mom back then that had lost a son, and or perhaps more than one. Even more difficult would have been being a mom of sons who fought for opposing sides. I thought of the fact that Israel itself experienced a North/South split that came about as a result of some of the same kind of politics, and Jesus encountered and spoke to that split in His day. I was sobered when I considered that the northern tribes and the southern tribes claimed to worship the

same God.

I learned from a family member with deep roots in the Carolinas that during the War Between the States, her Quaker ancestors were pacifists, and it violated their conscience to bear arms. They were sent defenseless to the front to be literal fodder so that armed soldiers would not be the first to fall. And I think of the fact that King David, who was considered to be a man after God's own heart (save in the matter of Uriah and Bathsheba), sent a man to the front in order to accomplish that man's death.

April. It is the month when, thank God, the War Between the States ended. It is the month of Passover. It is the month of the death, burial, and resurrection of Yeshua our Savior. And, I don't think I have

ever been more thankful that I am redeemed. Someone loved me first, died for me, and has never given up on me.

I am fully enjoying, that for the first time since I can remember, we are hearing words from the White House that include "Holy Week," "services," "worship," and more. And, I am also fully enjoying that no one is being inappropriate on the White House lawn doing things that in any other context would have resulted in an arrest. Let's just leave it at that.

So, April is here in all its fullness. It is awful, and it is awesome. It is the perfect symbol of fallen humans that need to be redeemed, and the unspeakable love that came to do just that. My fond hope and prayer for readers of *Athens Now* is that this weekend will be a time when you and your family experience more than too much chocolate or the satisfaction of sporting brand-new duds to church. May it be a signal to yourself and heaven that you are choosing to let April be amazing no matter your personal back story. A joyous resurrection celebration to you all.

*Ali Elizabeth Turner*

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## Mission Complete

by Ali Elizabeth Turner



My mind reels when I think of the fact that two decades have passed since I was in what I have affectionately come to call The Great Sandbox, none other than Iraq. The gratitude in my heart for soldiers has become what I hope is a true personal force multiplier, and the unlikely life lessons learned there while in the midst of indescribable acts of inward and outward sacrifice continue to both strike and guide me to this day.

My mind also reels when I consider that it has been two millennia since the Captain of my salvation died an unspeakable death, and by it defied and then defeated the ultimate enemy. And let me tell you, one of the things that still shakes me to my core is to have served amongst soldiers who first kept me safe so I could do my job, which was to boost their morale by bringing to them a touch of home, and then would gather with me in Saddam's fishing lodge to sing praises to the One who could say, as no one else ever could, "It is finished."

On Easter Sunday of 2005, I was able to show *The Passion of*



© 2004, The Passion of the Christ, Icon Productions / New Market Films, Mel Gibson, Director

*the Christ* to the newly formed Iraqi Special Forces in what had been Uday Hussein's hunting lodge. Effectively, they heard the gospel in Aramaic, and they got it. I think the brutality of Christ's passion as depicted in the film spoke to them, if for no other reason than they had been under the brutal boots of Saddam, Uday, and Qusay, and now they were not only free, but they needed to prepare to make and keep Iraq free, which is clearly an ongoing and highly-resisted process. They

understood perhaps for the first time that there had been One who had a mission to complete, and had won the day against death for all time and eternity. And, His only weapon was love.

What the ISOF forces that saw the film that day did not know was that those whom they had been taught to think of as enemies were all around them and had in fact come to help them. And, I am not talking about Americans, I am talking about Israelis. Because Israel allows dual-citizenship, there

were citizens of Israel who were also citizens of Australia, the UK, the US and other countries who could bring their history and expertise with desert operations that had been supernaturally successful to help a fledgling nation crawl toward representative government that was protected by military force. And, the great irony was that the Iraqis could not know it or they would have rejected the very help that was crucial on several occasions in battling Al-Qaeda. That "crawl" to-

ward freedom has been incremental at best, but if we trust the Scriptures to be true, then we know that Iraq will be the builder of "the highway of holiness." And, at some point I hope they understand that it was the wisdom and sacrifice of their "enemies" that helped them.

In a couple of days, we will celebrate what the Iraqis saw on Easter Sunday 20 years ago -- a mission of love and the ultimate PSYOP strategy that was successfully completed against the worst that hell has to offer. And let us take time to honor and give thanks for the troops who shed their blood for our freedom, the families of the fallen who will only be comforted when heaven becomes home, and the One who said with His last breath, "It is finished." Mission complete.







## Carissa's Corner

# Connected Through The Pain

by Carissa Lovvorn

I'm amazed at the amount of attention one receives when hobbling around on crutches and wearing a boot that seems to make up its own zip code. "What happened?" "You poor thing!" and "I've been there and know how frustrating it is!" are typical comments I hear when I leave the house these days.

At first, I was completely embarrassed about my situation. I've fallen on curbs, struggled to open doors, held up a ceremony because I was so slow, and had my crutches clatter on the floor during the most inopportune time. My gaze tended to be more downcast when in public and not just for the sake of watching my footing. However, over the last several weeks, my mindset slowly started to change. While not ideal, this situation is providing me with an opportunity to minister to others and allowing others the opportunity to do the same for me.

I've listened to and prayed over countless injury stories, talked about recovery in on-line support groups, and bonded with my physical therapy team and fellow 8 a.m. PT patients. I've had friends, family, and strangers bless me through prayers, meals, and words of encouragement. I even had a lady, whom I've never met before kneel, lay both of her hands on my boot, and pray for complete healing.



If not for this injury, would we have taken the time to acknowledge and uplift each other? I would like to think so, but it probably would have been superficial at best. The pain created an avenue for a much deeper connection.

Authors of the Bible highlight the benefits of these types of connections. For example, in the Old Testament King Solomon stated, "As iron sharpens iron, so

one person sharpens another" (Proverbs 27:17 NIV). Later in Ecclesiastes, he explained, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor; if either of them falls down one can help the other up" (Ecclesiastes 4:9). Paul also urged the churches in the region of Galatia to, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way, you fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

Read that again. We are called to carry each other's burdens. God wants us to have connections and support those going through difficult times. We're not meant to "do"

life alone. However, in our efforts to reach out to others, we must remember that not everyone deals with strictly visible physical ailments or injuries. Some hurts are internal and hidden from the world. I often think, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if others could see the things we hold deep inside? Not for judgment, but as an opportunity to relate to one another."

Thank you to those who have reached out regarding my injury. My surgery recovery period is far from complete, so you may catch me stumbling around town over the next few months. In the meantime, I encourage you to share your pain story with someone. It might just be the encouragement you both need to make it through the day.

*Many blessings,  
Carissa*



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# 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 9am - 4pm

## Vidalia Onion Sale

Athens Ladies Civitan Club is selling 10 lb. bags of freshly harvested Vidalia onions for \$12. To order, call Carolyn Stair at 256-658-1985 or Ruby McCartney at 256-655-6080, or send your check to ALCC, PO Box 1814, Athens, AL 35612. Include name, address, phone, and number of bags ordered. Onions will arrive in early May. Orders must be received by April 21, 2025.

## Southern Gospel Singing April 18

The Pylant family and Lauren Talley will be in concert on Fri, Apr 18 at 6:30PM. Nebo Community Church, 17772 Nuclear Plant Rd, Athens. Free admission. Contact is Brandon Pylant, 256-339-0665.

## 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.

## Limestone County Master Gardeners Saturday Workshop: Eco-friendly Gardening – Gardening With Native Plants April 19

10AM – 11AM At the Limestone County Extension Office, 1109 W. Market Street, Athens. Discover plants that: \* Are well-adapted to Northern Alabama's climate and ecosystem \* Use less water \* Less fertilizer \* Are happy in Alabama soil \* Are pollinator magnets \* Bring more birds into you yard \* Require less maintenance \* Are beautiful, many with three season appeal. Taught by Master Gardener Emily Clem. Free and Open to the Public.

## 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.

## Spring Fling May 8

9am-2pm. Athens Activity Center. 912 W Pryor Street, Athens. Games, crafts, food, fun, door prizes, and live music. Complementary lunch at 11am (hamburgers and hotdogs, chips and cookies). Open to all senior citizens 50+. No charge.

## Mental Health Pop-Up Event May 14

10am-2pm. Athens-Limestone Library is hosting a mental health pop-up event for Mental Health Awareness Month. Local counselors and mental health professionals will be on hand to promote their services and help people get access to mental health resources. Pearl Behavioral Health Services, National Alliance on Mental Illnesses, Bradford at Madison, and Recovery Organization of Support Specialists in attendance.

## Act of Congress In Concert May 15

7:00pm. Mccandless Hall, Athens State University, 367 E Bryan St. 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.

## 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.



## Special Feature

# *The High Price Of A Great Love*

by Donna Clark

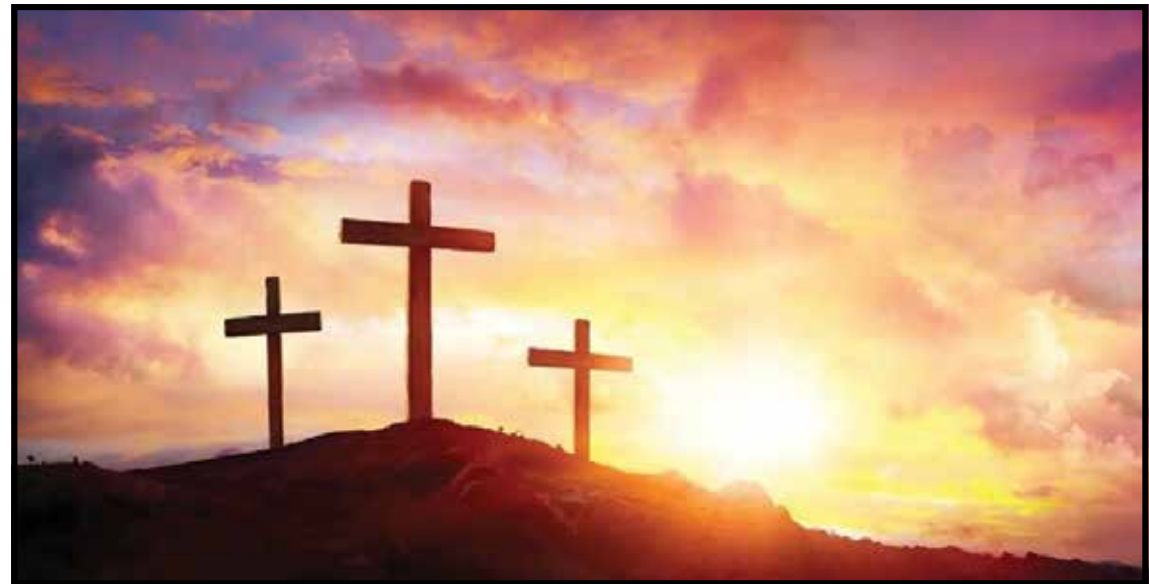


Being the Easter season, I felt it fitting to write on the crucifixion, to remind all of us who say we are believers in the Christ of the most sacrificial price ever paid. I wanted to delve into the pain and humiliation our Savior bore as He gave Himself as a perfect sacrifice for our sins, to remind myself, and you also, of a love that is so great and deep that we cannot fully understand it. However, I found myself struggling with adequate words to share a story so powerful, the story of a Man who was from God, yet human also. A Man who knowing the future that lay before Him, the plan that His Father had set into place, struggled and sought God asking if there was any other way that humankind could be rescued, could the cup possibly pass from Him. After toiling in prayer till sweat became blood, He concluded with, "Not my will, but Yours be done." A complete surrender, total humility, and an utmost trust in His Father.

And there were His students. So much had been taught to them, yet they still didn't fully understand. His love for them was great, yet one betrayed Him and one denied Him. Here is a King, taking the role of a servant, washing the feet of those who sat around the table with Him at Passover. He asks them to eat the bread representing His body and drink the wine representing His blood. Then the announcement, "I am leaving and where I am going you cannot go with Me." The thoughts came. Are we to

be left alone? So much has been given and sacrificed, and now the Rabbi is leaving us? What about the Kingdom He spoke of that was to come? Questions flooded their minds, and knowing their thoughts, He assured each of them that He would send the Comforter to guide and direct them. He left a promise that each of them would do greater things than Him because He was returning to His Father. A lot to process for these disciples. We read the story today and we understand, but the struggle with what their future would become was very real. If I were one at the table that night, I'm sure I would not have understood either. Questions, doubts, fears would have invaded my mind also.

Jesus carried out the Father's plan. He submitted Himself to the humiliation and pain of a death that was intended for the worst offenders, perfected by the Romans as the ultimate execution by torture. But more than the physical pain He endured, my mind goes to the guilt, shame, and mental agony that He willingly submitted Himself to. Of all the sins I can think of, the most gross to the least infraction, Jesus took each of them upon Himself, faced death, and



purchased forgiveness for all the failures we have ever committed, great and small. What a high price paid in order for us to receive such great love. Six hours on a wooden cross enduring excruciating pain, giving up His Spirit, finally surrendering to death. But the story doesn't end there. A visit to the tomb confirmed it. The women had found it empty. "Where is our Lord?" they asked. The angelic figure who appeared reminded them of His words, "He is not here. He has risen, just as He said."

"The Son of Man did not come to be served. He came to serve others and give His life as a ransom for many people" (Mark 10:45). "The Son of Man came to find those who were lost and to save them"

(Luke 19:9). Maybe this is why I found it so difficult to write about the crucifixion itself, the horrid death. Yes, Jesus came, ministered for 3 years, and then died on a cross, a sinner's death. He was buried, but He rose again. Today He is fully alive.

He left Heaven to be among the people and to be the perfect sacrifice for all sins. If this was the calling for Christ, what is the calling of His followers? Shouldn't it be our daily aim to follow Him? Shouldn't we humble ourselves to the plan that He has set for us?

Following in His steps will lead us many places. Some of us will walk among the sick. Others will walk among the needy. Others will show compas-

sion for those who are broken. Some will show forgiveness. Some will teach and pray and others will worship. But the calling doesn't stop there; it's never ending. And only by staying at the foot of the cross, where this great act of love was shown, will we find ourselves becoming the student, learning of Him and His ways. He walked the path of service, calmed the storm, fed the hungry. With Him as our example, He is the one to be fixated upon. He deserves a heart that is looking to Him, following in His steps. Not our will but His be done; He's worthy of the sacrifice and commitment we give. To be fully alive in Him, there is nothing greater.

- Donna



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# The Whirlwind Wednesday

by Ali Elizabeth Turner



For years, we have gotten together at 8:30 a.m. on the first and third Monday of every month to do our interview, pray, and then get the article finished and go on to produce the whole paper on Wednesdays. And every once in a while, we have to wait until Wednesday because of scheduling issues. This was one of those, and if this article ends up seeming like a crazy quilt of wonderful spring events, that's because it is.

While we waited for Mayor Ronnie to arrive from his meeting with U.S. Congressman Dale Strong, Justin Travis, who recently started working at City Hall with Communications and Grant Manager Holly Hollman and I got a chance to chat. Justin is a native of Tuscaloosa and has his degree in journalism from Jacksonville State. Justin has always enjoyed writing and thought he would be a sports writer. As a man of faith, Justin knows that if we want to make God laugh, just tell Him our plans. So, he's been doing a lot of laughing this last month, and is enjoying everything from the Easter Bonnet Festival at the Senior



The 2025 Easter Bonnet Festival

Activity Center to being with kids at the Mayor's Youth Commission, and learning a whole new version of "whirlwind."

In came Mayor Ronnie, who hadn't been sure he was going to be able to make the interview, and it had been a full on "Whirlwind Wednesday."

We are blessed to have a U.S. Congressman who genuinely enjoys our city and county, and who is able to fight for us to get much-needed funding to continue to improve our quality of life. Dale Strong and Ronnie had breakfast on Wednesday morning, and additionally, Congressman Strong is go-

ing to be speaking at a breakfast sponsored by the Chamber on May 12. It will be held at 8 a.m. at Carter Gym on the Athens State University Campus. Tickets are still available.

Back to the "whirlwind." After the breakfast with Congressman Strong, Ronnie came back for one of the chief loves of his life -- the Mayor's Youth Commission. This month's meeting was held at the Birdie Thornton Center, and as many years as the MYC has been there, there have always been students who are deeply touched by the people who frequent the center. This year was no exception.



U.S. Congressman Dale Strong and Athens Mayor Ronnie Marks on "Whirlwind Wednesday"

After leaving Birdie Thornton, Mayor Ronnie, Justin, and Amy Gold had several moments of much-needed levity at the Easter Bonnet Festival. "Ninety-six people came," said Mayor Ronnie, and he

had his own "blue bonnet" that over the years has started to sport all kinds of accessories. His blue hat is a cobalt-colored fedora that has been featured in several skits.

There were more things to discuss -- concerns for people in Athens who were dealing with life-threatening diseases and projects that needed to be completed. Then, there was only one thing left to do, and that was pray. Pray we did, and once again it was time for Ronnie to roll.

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Cooking with Anna

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

by Anna Hamilton

*In 1 John 1:9, it says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Ephesians 1:7 tells us, "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace." There are many other passages throughout the Bible that ensure us that we are forgiven when we confess our sins and when we choose to walk in the ways of the Lord day in and day out. Even in knowing all this to be true, many of us struggle with the concept of truly being forgiven.*

*We don't understand how all of our sins can be forgotten. Our earthly minds can keep us trapped in a place of despair, remembering everything we have ever done that might keep us from the grace that God is offering. When you choose to focus on all the bad in your life, your mind can become filled with bitterness. We must learn to focus on the good in life. Philippians 4:8 says, "Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things." We are commanded as Christians to put all the bad things out of our minds and focus on the good, on the forgiven.*

*When we are forgiven, we must keep trusting God to work everything out. Romans 8:28 assures us that -- "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." This doesn't promise us that our path will be easy. It doesn't promise that we will never have to ask God for forgiveness again, but it does promise that God is working in our lives constantly to ensure that every part of our lives have God's fingerprints all over it. He is working nonstop to ensure that every aspect of your life works perfectly for your good.*

*When forgiveness seems hard to see and feel, we must wait patiently for God to restore. Psalm 62:1-2 says, "Truly my soul finds rest in God; my salvation comes from him. Truly he is my rock and my salvation;*

*he is my fortress, I will never be shaken," God wants us to ask Him for forgiveness. It sometimes seems hard to imagine that we will be forgiven. In those times, we must try to rest in God and know that our salvation truly comes from Him. God is our foundation; He is our rock. In times of trouble, lean into Him and know that if we are planted firmly in Him, we cannot be shaken.*

*Your identity in Christ tells you that you are forgiven. You must stand firm and know who you are in Christ. Galatians 3:26-29 give us that hope. "So, in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothes yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."*

*We are forgiven in Christ. The statement, "I am forgiven in Christ," means that through faith in Jesus Christ, one has received God's forgiveness for their sins, and their sins are no longer a barrier between them and God. This forgiveness is a gift, not earned. God offers forgiveness freely through Christ, and it is received by faith, not through our good works.*

*This week's recipe is an easy weekday side dish that is perfect for these new, springtime vegetables that are finding their way on our supper time tables. My favorite part of summer and spring is all the wonderful and delicious fruit and vegetables. My family loves this recipe, and I sure hope yours does as well.*

*"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you." Ephesians 4:31-32*

## *Dill Roasted Radishes*

### *Ingredients:*

- 1 lb. radishes, sliced*
- 1 Tbsp olive oil*
- 2 Tbsp fresh, chopped dill*
- Salt and pepper to taste*

### *Directions:*

*Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Toss the radishes with the olive oil, dill, salt and pepper.*

*Spread out on a baking sheet lined with aluminum foil. This makes for easy cleanup!*

*Bake at 425 degrees for 15 to 20 minutes or until the radishes are crisp tender. Cool slightly before serving.*







## Captain's Log

# *A Time To Be Thankful*

by Brenda Wilkerson

\* To my energetic one who sent this precious note up through a Bus Ranger and took it upon yourself to gift me with the loveliest of homemade notes, ohhhhhh Thank You! You, my small friend, through your act of kindness, made my heart grow 100 x in a single moment!

\* To my bus family, thank you for your patience as I have changed your seating several times to try and find the best fit!

\* To my 'Tiny' who turned around and threw me the biggest kiss when you finally made it down those giant steps and yelled, "Bye, Fwends," and then doubled over with a gut belly laugh as your Baby Shark backpack almost flipped over your head, your pure joyful innocence is as effective as the most potent drug on the market. I am truly sad that only a few of us enjoy the privilege of breathing in your mood-changing delight. I am already a better person for knowing teensy you.

\* To the mysterious one whose hidden talents include crab hand and twisty tongue, I am proud of you for declaring your gifts as you know them! As your talents grow and change, I pray you will always know that you yourself are a beautiful gift and this crazy world needs the ability and the talents the Lord has blessed you with. Shine little one, shine!

\* To the miniature shark lanyard I found at the DG for a \$1 that fell into by basket and ended up on my tiny blond-haired, lightly freckled-faced rider this afternoon, ugh, I just...couldn't...resist.

\* To my thoughtful upper-

classman who took her time to read lil' Tiny the Pigeon book from the lost and found when I only asked you to give it to him for temporary entertainment, you ROCK sister! Listening to you read and answer all his questions the entire length of our morning journey was exactly what I needed today!

\* To my thoughtful rider who let me know that he wouldn't be riding this afternoon due to his neurologist appointment. Thank you, sir, for your thoughtful consideration at this age.

\* To those walkers and exercisers I pass every morning and afternoon, I see you! I see you and I am so proud that you are taking the time to care for your body in this muggy humid weather. Your daily dedication has made me seriously consider doing the same!

\* To the young dad who sits crisscross applesauce at the end of his driveway with his kindergarten son every single morning, seeing the blue balloons on your mailbox that indicate there is a new baby in the house and seeing the time you take with new big brother seems even more precious! Thank you for the heart smile!

\* To the older riders who keep order, handle problems, report any issues, and keep the peace each day, you are the true heroes on this here bus, and I am honored to be your Captain!

\* To the silver clicker-number-counter thingy I gave Baby Shark (AKA Tiny) in hopes it would curb his loud excitement for an hour, unfortunately you only worked for about 2 minutes. So many songs ('3 lil monkeys' tune) with few recognizable English words belted out of BabyShark's soul, but now, with the clicker

as an easy-to-play instrument!

\* To my favorite clicker accompanied song, "Baby Shark doot (click) doot (click) . . .", might as well join in cause that song is not going away ANYtime soon!

\* To the perfectly square, yellow piece of single-wrapped American cheese food stuck on stop sign number 5, nothing has changed in 5 days, and that is just a bit unnerving! Like a twisted science project, we will be observing your sticky condition twice daily as the seasons change and make our own hypothesis of your ultimate demise. We will also consider personal health choices added to the fact that we actually choose to consume said cheese food.

\* To the 1st grader that declared he and his baby sister were ready to be home and would like to be the next ones off the bus, bless your tired hot hearts! Thank you young big brother for your bravery to approach the cockpit using your words to beautifully express your concern for you and your baby sister. Unfortunately, you two are on the back end of the route.

\* To my chatty brand new rider who has concluded her daily journey on the Yeller Dawg with, "Very nice to meet you," each and every time I drop her off, I love your polite and cheerful attitude!

\* To my arms and shoulders who miraculously did NOT fall off as we danced and spun to successfully complete 143 cul-de-sacs since 1st day... such a miracle straight from Above!

\*To the momma deer and her spotted baby twins galloping through the neighborhood looking to dart into the safe woods nearby, thank you for

providing such awe and wonder for my kids on this early morning in our mobile classroom.

\*To my ol' friend Blue, who blessed us with your appearance in your driveway with your lil' bro while waiting for your big boy middle school bus, we sure miss you buddy. I know you are doing great things!

\*To my Ukrainian Sister R who briefly moved to the front seat when her neighbors got off the bus so she could greet her Russian neighbor momma with a, "Hello," in her native tongue, I love the way you make that connection each day.

\*To the young barefoot father dressed for work, sitting crisscross applesauce in the driveway holding your newborn son as you and your kindergarten wait for this bus, I can only assume you were gifting your precious wife with sleep, rest, or shower. You a good man!

\*To my bestie-friend Monica who sits on her front porch and prays for me each morning as I squeak to a stop for my Ukrainian princess who lives across the street from ya...Ooooh I am feeling those prayers! My 'thank you' honk is heartfelt! Keep those prayers coming.

\*To my kindhearted bus buddy who stood to salute brother Sam's military momma dressed in her full uniform at the bus stop, don't ever stop showing respect and gratitude for those who risk everything and fight to protect our freedom and our lives.

\*To my superhero Netherland brother, Stein, who raises your helpful hand in the very back to help me safely reverse in cul-de-sac #1. With just the

casual wave of two fingers and a thumb you communicate how far this big ol' bus booty can safely maneuver this circular challenge. You are my hero and you don't even know it. Your helpful heart and keen awareness to assist others is such a blessing that this world desperately needs.

\*To my precious cancer momma who just had surgery, it surprised my soul and warmed my heart down to my very toes while sending happy chills down my arms when I saw you this afternoon! Still in your long lounge jammies, you raised your brave hands as far as you possibly could to gift me with our usual heart hands. Oh. My. Heart. Once again, my tears briefly fell. God bless you, BIG sweet fighter momma. It is an honor to walk and pray with you during this uninvited journey.

In other news, lil' Jack triggered our Drama Queen, who quite clearly got up on the wrong side of the bed this lovely Monday Morning. She then proceeded to scribble a note (her favorite way of expression) and flash it at the 3 rambunctious boys behind her. In her bold lettered handwriting, it read, "I will KILL!" And that, my friends, is how you land your little self in the principal's office to finish off an already bad morning for our Cranky Diva. We all have choices, let's make some good ones out there folks!

Heavenly Father, I cannot adequately describe my gratitude for this amazing week! It was hard. It was hot. It was crazy but I have never felt so alive with the endless opportunities around me to be Your hands and feet. Continue to show me where to serve others, no matter how tiny. I'm listening.



# Fortify Alabama Will Be “Everglowing” On May 16

by Ali Elizabeth Turner

*continued from page 1*

*in a metaphorical sense. It can represent a lasting or persistent feeling, light, or emotion. For example, it might be used to describe a feeling of hope or happiness that persists even after a difficult time. I can think of no better way to describe what happens to those who have been trafficked and then, by grace, are offered a way*

*out. This is what Fortify Alabama is all about, and this is what they are hoping you will experience as you join them in accomplishing their goal: To illuminate the darkness of human trafficking in Alabama by raising awareness, providing education, and offering support to those who feel trapped. Guided by faith, we strive to reach the most vulnerable populations in underserved areas, ensuring that every in-*

*dividual knows they are valued and have a path to freedom. Fortify Alabama is a 501(c)3 organization that started in August of 2024. Besides sending up a whole lot of prayer, they carefully make contact primarily in Huntsville with women and men who are caught in the sex trade. However, Fortify Alabama is also dedicated to help and restore those who were lured to our country “to live the American Dream,” are*



**Christie Hensler will be the keynote speaker at Everglowing**

told this is a way to support their family, or find themselves in slavery situations that do not require undesired sexual activity. Because it often takes between 5 and 7 compassionate contacts before a trafficked individual chooses to leave, there are a number of practical needs that must be met in order to make a clean break with a \$150B global industry. Fortify Alabama accomplishes this critical set of outreach components by: *Focusing particularly on populations that are often overlooked. We conduct direct outreach to women in high-risk environments, such as motels, and through online ads. This outreach is compassionate and nonjudgmental, designed to meet victims where they are and offer them a way out. Fortify Alabama provides essential resources, such as hygiene products, clothing, and food, while also fostering trust through prayer and emotional support. This hands-on approach is key to the organization’s success in connecting with individuals who may otherwise remain hidden.* As I interviewed Nicole Wilson, the founder of Fortify Alabama and the organizer of Everglowing, I learned that one of the things that often prevents those being trafficked from leaving is the fear of leaving their pet(s) in the hands of their traffickers. Having a pet in these situations is a double-edged sword; the pets provide much needed unconditional love, and the traffickers leverage and manipulate that love by threatening

harm to the pet. Thankfully, there are local rescues they have partnered with to take in these animals, thus removing this barrier so the survivors can seek the help they need. The *Everglowing* evening promises to be enjoyable, even though the topic is tough. There will be a wonderful chicken Marsala entrée, live music, a silent auction that will include items such as a three-night stay at a Guntersville Lake House, a “last-man-standing heads-or-tails” game that will garner all manner of gifts and provide a lot of fun, and a keynote speaker/best-selling author by the name of Christie Hensler. Christie and supermodel Kathy Ireland co-authored the book *“Strength: Crush Fear, Embrace Change, Achieve Success.”* A few closing thoughts: Fortify Alabama will also be hosting their annual anti-trafficking conference on July 18 in Huntsville, AL. This conference will offer CEUs for first responders, counselors, and many more, but will be open to the public for anyone who wants to educate themselves on what is going on in their backyard. Also, Fortify Alabama is part of Guidestar, which is an organization that ensures accountability for non-profit organizations. For more information re: tickets for Everglowing, the July conference, and ways to get involved, please go to [fortifyalabama.com](http://fortifyalabama.com). See you on May 16!

## Everglowing

### GALA & SILENT AUCTION

Join us for an elegant evening of cocktails, FUNdraising, dinner, and our keynote speaker - Christie Hensler.

MAY 16 6:00PM

For tickets - [givebutter.com/everglowing](http://givebutter.com/everglowing)



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Clean, Green And Beautiful

# Luck Be A Lady

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

Due to the weather forecast a few weeks ago, we had to make the difficult decision to postpone our new casino night fundraiser, “Bet on a Beautiful Limestone.” But guess what...we have a new

date! On May 3, we will be rolling the dice at Irons & Ales! We are very excited for this fundraiser, and we hope that you are too. Dress up and walk down the red carpet and join us for a fun night play-

ing casino games with “funny money”! We have some great prizes to win that were donated by some of Limestone County’s amazing businesses. We’ll have a little bit of everything from poker and roulette

to slot machines and more!

Since we are a nonprofit, we rely on appropriations and donations to operate. All the services that we provide are completely free, and that ain’t cheap! We are proud to offer supplies for cleanups, speakers for programs, and our educational programs. We are in the process of rolling out a new program that will modernize our approach to education, but we’ll talk more about that when the last few pieces are received.

What we do makes a huge difference in the day-to-day lives of all of us, most people just wouldn’t notice until it stopped. In the past five years alone, Keep Athens-Limestone Beautiful is responsible for removing 169,372 pounds of litter from public roadsides and waterways. Some of your county commissioners are removing anywhere from 900-1200 pounds of litter per week. It’s just too much. We believe that education is key to helping change habits, and we hope that we can educate and inspire change.

As you know, we provide an annual, free Household Hazardous Waste Collection for all Limestone County residents. We do receive appropriations for this service, but our costs vary from year to year depending on how much and what chemicals are col-

lected. Since this event is the only way to ethically dispose of most of these chemicals, it is very important to us. With Limestone County’s new and very rapid growth, we are hearing the cries for this service more and more, so we know it’s important to you as well. We are hoping that Casino Night makes a big splash in our HHW fund! Side note -- the Limestone County Commission Recycling Program accepts motor oil Monday-Thursday, 7-3. They are located at 1301 North Jefferson Street.

In an attempt to bring something new and different to Athens, we have landed on “Bet on a Beautiful Limestone.” We hope that a chance to dress up and have fun brings everyone out to roll the dice with us! Tickets are \$50 each, or \$80 per couple. They include hors d’oeuvres, one drink and \$500 in funny money. Additional funny money can be purchased to play with as a straight donation to Keep Athens-Limestone Beautiful! Stop by the office at 125 East Street, Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. We accept cash or checks. Tickets are now available online- <https://keep-athens-limestone-beautiful.square.site/>.

Keep Athens-Limestone Beautiful

# CASINO NIGHT

SATURDAY, MAY 3rd 2025/6pm



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# Come To The Signing Of *Ella's Alphabet Adventures* At Toodlebugs On May 3

By Ali Elizabeth Turner

*continued from page 1*

book, entitled *Ella's Alphabet Adventures*. Toodlebugs Children's Shop is located at 107 Market St. E. in Athens, and is a perfect location for celebrating Carissa's latest book.

*Ella's Alphabet Adventures* is the (almost completely) true story of the whimsical and creative ways in which Ella "did life" during COVID, and actually is the collaborative creation of Carissa, 12-year-old Isabelle, and 8-year-old Ella.

This project began without the end-game of writing another book as its goal. Carissa had an album on Facebook that wasn't even all that current. It was a series of pictures of Ella as a 4-year-old, exploring creation and having all kinds of discovery experiences caught on camera. People began to comment and say, "This needs to be a book!" All but one letter's "story" is factually tied to a real experience, and its resultant charm far transcends the standard "A is for apple, B is for boy, C is for cat."

Carissa wrote a short poem for each letter, and told me with a chuckle, "The girls would definitely tell me when they didn't like the rhyme." The girls also worked on the intro as well as the activity section at the end. Ella appears in several of the illustrations, and is everything from an astronaut with a bow on her helmet to a scuba-diver, again, with a bow. Even the adjacent octopus has a bow! And, even though the book is inspired by the activities of a girl, there is plenty that will appeal to boys.

Carissa's books are one of North Alabama's best "side effects" of COVID. Being at home forced them to be creatively resilient and make "lemonade out of lemons," and it served to launch Carissa's career as an author. Carissa has also started her own publishing company called Starbeams, and Isabelle designed the logo. When COVID first hit and no one knew what it would do or how long it would last, the Lovvorns were put in a difficult position. At the time, Garth owned Valley Mowing, and

was out and about taking care of peoples' property as well as his family. For that whole first summer, he lived two doors down at the vacant home of a neighbor; and every night after work he would come and have a picnic on the lawn with his family. There were no hugs, but still a whole lot of love. The picnic often included the fresh vegetables from the garden Carissa and the girls had planted. Their gardening adventures served to birth Carissa's first book, which is entitled *Seeds For Sharing*.

Another factor that made the COVID era so tough was that Ella had to be hospitalized for pneumonia, and I can say, as someone who has run two schools in two countries, that Carissa did a fine job of homeschooling Ella, as is evidenced by the book. All of Carissa's books are illustrated by award-winning artist Joshua Wichterich, and their families have become friends. Carissa sends him the pictures that have inspired the books; Joshua captures what he sees and feels, and the results are marvelous.

One of the things I have so appreciated about Garth and Carissa as they have raised the girls is the emphasis gently placed on the need as a family and as individuals to give back to the community. As a result of their adventures, *The Sharing Sisters*, *Tutus On A Mission*, and *Capes for a Cause* have evolved into brands and activities that have taught even young kids of both genders that that they can make a difference, and have a whole lot of fun while



doing so.

Carissa was awarded the Excellence In Marketing award for 2025 by the Christian Authors Network, which describes itself as "serving traditionally published authors." She has also collaborated as an editor for other award-winning authors. It is pure joy to watch her grow in her career as well as to be able to heartily recommend her work.

On Monday, April 28 at 10:30 a.m., Carissa, Isabelle, and Ella are going to be my guests on my radio show,

*The Tennessee Valley Spotlight*, which is broadcast on WKAC 1080 AM. Carissa has been on the show several times over the years, and this will be the first time for the girls. We will be hearing about the *Sharing Sisters* from the girls themselves, and it will be the maiden voyage of what could very well be a broadcast career. Who knows? Anything is possible with these ladies, and I hope you will both tune in to the show, as well as show up at Toodlebugs on May 2 for the book signing.

## Starbeams Publishing





# Hello Athens Community

by Nick Niedzwiecki - Owner, CrossFit Athens

My name is Nick, and I'm thrilled to share some exciting news and insights with you as part of CrossFit Athens. Recently, I became a Certified CrossFit Trainer (CF-L3), which has deepened my commitment to helping our community battle one of the most serious issues we face today—chronic disease.

As many of you know, chronic diseases like diabetes, obesity, heart disease, and hypertension are prevalent in our area and across Alabama. These conditions negatively impact not only individual lives but families and communities. I firmly believe—and research strongly supports—that many of these chronic diseases can be effectively managed, prevented, or even reversed through proper exercise, nutrition, and lifestyle adjustments.

My certification as a CF-L3

trainer is not about personal achievement; rather, it signifies that CrossFit Athens now offers even stronger resources to help you tackle these challenges. My training equips me with the expertise necessary to provide effective, safe, and personalized fitness and nutrition guidance for individuals of all ages and fitness levels.

At CrossFit Athens, we take pride in an inclusive, supportive environment where everyone is welcome, whether you're just starting your fitness journey or you've been active for years. My role is to provide personalized coaching, nutritional advice, and ongoing encouragement to ensure you stay committed and see measurable improvements in your health.

Our workouts at CrossFit Athens focus on functional movements that improve your daily life, helping you



feel stronger, healthier, and more energized. I am dedicated to helping you create sustainable habits that lead to lasting health improvements,

fewer injuries, and increased mobility.

I've witnessed firsthand how consistent, structured exercise and nutritional guidance can dramatically improve health outcomes. Members of our gym routinely see reductions in their blood pressure, improved blood sugar levels, healthier weight management, and increased energy and confidence.

I genuinely believe CrossFit Athens holds key solutions to the chronic disease crisis impacting our community. My goal is to make these solutions accessible, achiev-

able, and sustainable for everyone in Athens. Together, we can transform not only your individual health but also the overall wellness of our community.

If you're interested in discovering how we can help you take control of your health, I warmly invite you to visit CrossFit Athens. Let's discuss your goals and explore how we can work together to build a healthier future.

Looking forward to meeting and supporting you on your journey,

- Coach Nick



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# Slinkard On Success

## “H” Is For Habits

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)*

We have come to the letter ‘H’ in our alphabetical series on success and our word is “Habits.” We all have them and some are good, some are bad, and some habits can be downright annoying to other people. Sometimes we disguise our habits by using another descriptive word such as “routine.” I do believe there has been a negative connotation with the word habit, and we need to realize it is a part of our lives and who we are as individuals. We form a habit of how we go about our day.

I am sure the majority of people could tell you exactly what their day-to-day life looks like, whether it be when they are at home, at work, at church, at school, etc. We form habits that dictate the way our lives will go. I was brought up to always be on time; in fact, if you were 10 minutes early, you might as well be considered late. There is a quote I often think about that says, “If you show up consistently 10 minutes late, you can also show up consistently 10 minutes early.” It is all about building the right habits in life.

If you were to take a deep dive into your daily living habits, what would you



find? What habits would be considered good habits, and what habits are those that should be eliminated? Taking the time to be critical of our own lives is not an easy task to do. Have you ever noticed how much easier it is to give advice to other people, but when it comes time for your own life, you have no idea what direction to go?

Do not feel bad, there are times I am in the same boat. However, in the year 2025, we are focused on generating success as we have never had before. We need to take our concept of habits and start moving our life toward creating the habits that help us achieve our goals. We need to do it because no one else is going to do it for us. The fairy is not going to come in the middle of the night and just give you everything you want. It will take work.

If you have not taken the time to think about what

goals you want to accomplish this year, I urge you to do so now, and it will help you to change your life. For instance, if a person has the goal of losing weight (which many people do), the person must focus on what their daily habits have created for them. What do the results suggest? If I have created a habit of eating junk food, I now need to retrain my daily habit and substitute the bad food for a healthier option. Will this be easy? Absolutely not, but it begins with making the choice to change. We must make the

choice for change to happen.

However, before you can make the choice to change you must take the time to understand what you are and are not doing. It was not until I started paying attention to what choices I was making did I begin to realize I had some bad habits, and I needed to get rid of them. I could not begin to think about goal achievement until I was able to remove some obstacles I was creating in my own life. What are some habits that are holding you back in your life? When you take the time to think about this question,

you need to be completely honest with yourself. Stop making excuses to keep doing the same thing.

I believe our lives are impacted by the way we think. Sometimes we think the wrong things, and this is why we do not have success. Instead of thinking like the person we want to be, we think like the person we do not want to be. We do not think success, but we think failure, and this can be devastating for many people. We enable doubt to creep into our way of thinking, and we go from being able-bodied creatures to people marred down in self-doubt. We have created the habit of holding ourselves back. Too many people do not take action until it typically is too late to do so. Whatever you want to achieve in life, you can, but you must first build the habits that bring you closer to achieving your goals daily.

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# A “Secondhand” Emotion

by Lisa Philippart,  
Licensed Professional Counselor

**“Where there  
is anger, there  
is always pain  
underneath.”**

- Eckhart Tolle

I am admitting that I have struggled with recognizing my own anger. I often don't understand it when I feel it, and I sometimes don't know what to do with it when it happens. So, I have become a master at talking myself out of whatever this feeling of anger is. But the more I counsel others, the more I discover the challenges of this emotion. The anger isn't usually the problem, it's often what is buried underneath and/or the action taken. Anger is a natural and mostly automatic response to pain, either physical or emotional. The dictionary definition is “a strong feeling of annoyance, displeasure, or hostility.” Anger tends to occur when we don't feel well, we feel rejected, we feel threatened, or we experience a loss. The type of pain we feel is unpleasant, and because anger does not occur in isolation, it is often characterized as a “secondhand” emotion. The pain alone is not enough to cause the anger. Anger

develops when pain and an anger-triggering thought combine.

As a cognitive-behavior therapist, I believe that our patterns of thought about the world and ourselves control our moods and our behaviors. Therefore, the thoughts that can trigger anger include our own personal assumptions and interpretations of situations that makes us think that pain will follow. Anger is definitely a complex social emotion. It seems that we always have a target for our anger, including ourselves. When something “bad” happens, we feel pain, combined with those anger-triggering thoughts, which then motivates us to take action. Anger is also second-handed in that it can be a substitute emotion. Have you ever changed your feelings of pain into anger? For some of us, it feels better to be angry than it does to be hurting. This changing of emotions from hurting into anger may be done consciously or unconsciously. The advantage of this substitution is primarily for distraction. If you are in pain, you generally think about the pain. But if you are angry, you tend to think about hurt-



ing whomever or whatever has caused the pain. The shift of your attention goes from focusing on yourself to focusing on someone or something else.

The feeling of anger does have its advantages. Anger temporarily protects us from having to recognize and deal with painful real feelings. Instead of focusing on the hurting, you get to think about getting back at the people or situations that created the discomfort. Or maybe your anger helps to hide a frightening situation and/or your vulnerability. Sometimes, becoming angry creates a feeling of righteousness and justice. You may be telling yourself that the people who hurt you are wrong and should be corrected or even punished. You train yourself to become angry with cause. If you can believe that your anger is jus-

tified and therefore so are your actions, you can better explain why you felt, thought, and acted a certain way. The problem becomes that the social judgment of our actions of anger creates real consequences for the angry person. You may believe that your anger “justifies” retaliation. The false feeling of righteousness, whether acceptable or not, offers a fleeting boost to self-esteem. I can attest to the fact that I find it more satisfying to acknowledge painful feelings through

anger than to accept feelings of vulnerability. The bottom line here is that anger generally does not resolve or address the problems that make you feel afraid or exposed or hurting in the first place.

Next time, we will take a look at the ways anger may be harming your overall health.

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# *I Was Just... Temporarily Misplaced...*

by Stephanie Reynolds, Athens-Limestone Tourism Association

OK, OK... I got lost!

In my impatience to explore a new trail, I essentially broke most of my own rules: I didn't take anyone with me. I didn't take my pack. I didn't even take my purse (which is truly a whole kit in itself. One time, The Wonder Sweetie said "If I'm ever lost on a desert island, all I want is Steph's purse").

The few rules I did obey included telling people where I was going and taking a photo of a map (though honestly it was too zoomed out for me to use, so that was only a half-win). I knew what the weather was going to be, so that was good. I was not dressed completely appropriately, so that was bad.

I took my keys and my phone—good.

No water, no signaling, no compass, no first aid—bad.

Why did I, a total 3G (geeky gear gal) not practice what I (incessantly) preach? Oh, because of the usual excuses all folks who get lost without gear give: "I'm just going to walk up a little bit...I won't be gone long...I just want to see what the beginning is like...It will only be like 20 minutes...I don't want to take the extra time...I want to get there before the sun sets...I might not even hike, I just want to look...I know what I'm doing." ...Um, apparently not, baby girl.



There was a little spur off the main trail that I thought might take me to a waterfall. I carefully made a mental note of the area which included a fence (those are always good because you can follow them), an old gate that was open, and an odd part of the path that went both between two trees and around them. I even made note of how rocky the path became. I totally got this.

So, I turned off the path onto the spur, which doubled back at an angle. I could hear water and was eager to see if this was the waterfall. I walked a few minutes and discovered a pretty little crick in the woods with steep banks on the side. At this point, I was getting a little uncomfortable with my lack of gear, and the path seemed to stop at the water. I didn't want to go up the other bank to see if the path continued, so I decided to head back (see, I wasn't going

far!). I passed the rocks, passed the split path with the trees, and found where the path intersected the spur. GREAT! I found the path that led straight to my truck...

Any minute now...

My truck should be in view...

Wait, I was on the other side of the fence. And I didn't see the signs I had seen on the way in. And where was the gate?

Oh, for the love of Pete.

I quickly realized that there was another spur off the spur that I had taken which looked like the main path. It was not.

So now I had three options: Sit and wait. Keep going down this spur. Go back and see if I can find the main path. I decided to keep going and eventually found my truck.

Now, let me tell you why this ended up being my *Athens Now* article and not a headline in the *News Courier*—I really

did just go a little way into the forest. I still had an excellent sense of where my truck was in relation to where I was (<vaguely gestures to the northeast>). I knew where civilization was and how close. If worse came to worst, I would just tromp my way off the path, through the woods, and sheepishly knock on someone's door ("Hello, ma'am, can you please tell me where my truck might be? It seems to have gotten itself lost while I was on the trail...").

This shouldn't have happened though. I know better. In fact, I believe it's usually the professionals who get themselves in more trouble than the newbies because they overestimate their abilities, they see past success instead of read-

ing the situation they are in (yesterday's trail is NOT today's trail, even if it is the same path), and they tend to dismiss the "easy" as something not to be respected.

Yep, that's what I did. But that is the last time. I am thankful to the Lord that this experience was an easy, low risk way to check my impatience, my ego, and get article fodder. I am thankful for the few things I did wisely and for good weather. I am thankful that this was a "pretend" emergency and not a real one, that I was turned around but not truly lost. It could have been bad (or at least mortifyingly embarrassing).

Lesson learned: Gear over minimalism. Maps over memory. Wisdom over impatience.

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Learning As A Lifestyle

# Overcoming Despair And Rediscovering Hope

by Eric M. Betts, PhD

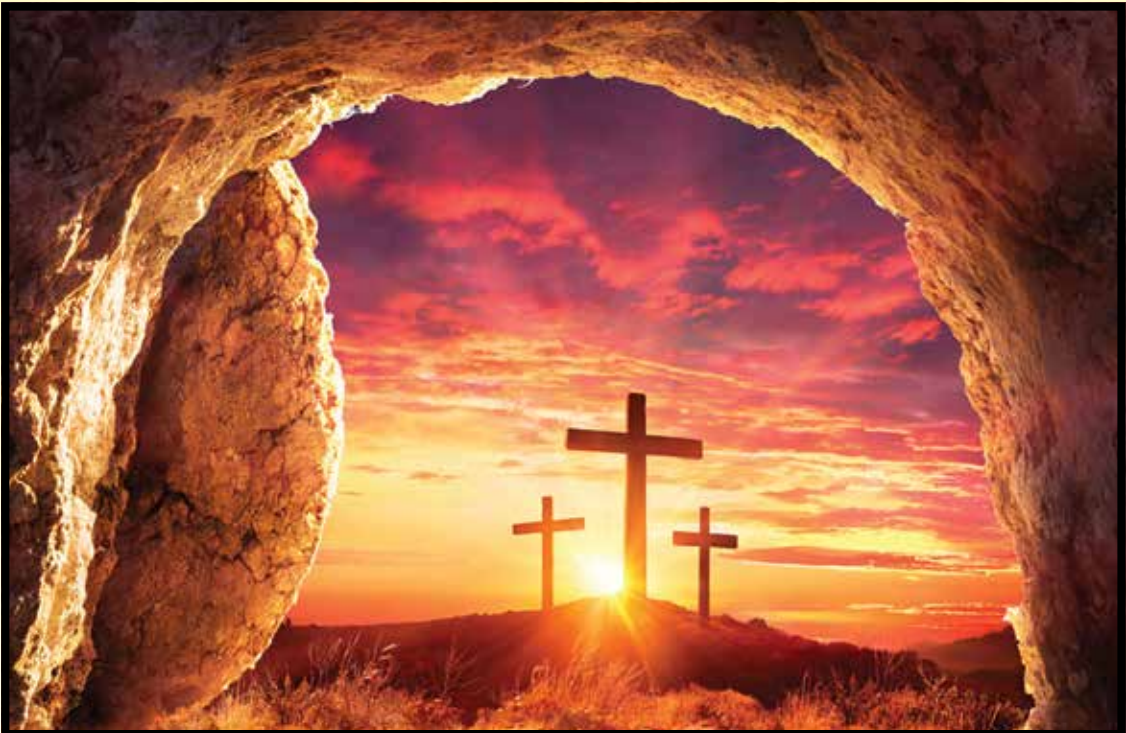
Hampton University School of Religion | Athens State University Coleman Center for Religion Leadership and Culture

This Sunday, millions around the world will observe Easter, a day traditionally associated with renewal, resurrection, and the triumph of hope over darkness. It is the day that Christians mark as the day Jesus of Nazareth rose from the dead, after his horrific death by crucifixion. For many, Easter symbolizes the human capacity to rise from hardship, to face despair and emerge with a renewed sense of purpose. Whether one views the day through a lens of faith or simply as a seasonal turning point, Easter offers an opportunity to reflect on the resilience of the

human spirit.

In life, despair often arrives unannounced—through loss, failure, or the slow erosion of dreams. It can feel suffocating, as if the world has grown dim, stripped of possibility. Yet, history and personal experience alike remind us that despair is never the final chapter. Just as winter surrenders to spring, hardship eventually gives way to new beginnings.

Rediscovering hope requires vision—a willingness to see beyond immediate difficulties and imagine a different future. It may come in small moments: the



warmth of sunlight after days of rain, an unexpected kindness, the

realization that one is stronger than they believed. Often, it is through connection with others that hope is reignited. Whether through art, conversation, or shared experiences, human relationships remind us that we are not alone. The journey from despair to hope is seldom linear, but with each step forward, the horizon expands.

Easter, then, can serve as a universal metaphor for renewal—an invita-

tion to embrace change, to let go of what holds us back, and to step into a new vision for ourselves. It is a reminder that even in the depths of struggle, the potential for transformation remains. Hope is not an illusion; it is a force that shapes lives, communities, and the future itself. This Sunday, whether through tradition or personal reflection, Easter can be a moment to celebrate the enduring strength of the human spirit.

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## The Alternative Approach

# Stay Strong And Healthy The Natural Way!

by Roy Williams

Feel Better with Nutritional Health Care's Healthy Basic Combo, which includes MSM+C, and Ultimate Fruit Veggie. Do you want to feel better every day? Do you want more energy to play with your kids or grandkids, go to work, or enjoy life? It starts with good health -- and good health starts with the right fuel. Or maybe you have children or grandchildren. We're talking about natural vitamins, minerals, and plant nutrients that your body was designed to use.

At Nutritional Health Care, we believe in one simple truth: "If you feed the body what it needs, it will do the rest." Let's talk about three simple things you can do today to start feeling better:

1. Give Your Body MSM+C – The Building Block of Life. This is the product that I believe everyone should take from birth to death. I'll go a step further, it is so safe that I believe that any woman who wishes to give birth or is expecting, should take MSM+C for her overall health and well-being and also to help her baby throughout her pregnancy. That's just

how safe it is.

Have you heard of MSM? It's short for Methylsulfonylmethane -- but don't let that long word scare you! MSM is just a form of sulfur, not the drug that doctors prescribe and many people are allergic to but an all-natural is safe mineral, found in every healthy cell of your body. But here's the thing: Most people don't get enough of it. MSM disappears from food when it's cooked or stored too long. That's why many people feel stiff, tired, and sore as they get older. They are simply deficient of MSM and vitamin C. It has proven to keep joints and muscles moving smoothly; build strong, healthy skin, nails, and hair; clean out the junk that builds up in your blood and organs; lower swelling and pain in the body; and help the heart and blood vessels stay flexible, which is why we often refer to it as "the WD-40 for the human body." Our MSM+C powder or capsules are easy to take and safe for kids and adults. Most people start feeling better in as little as three weeks, reporting to have the energy they had when they were 10 to 15 years

younger.

Get your fruits and veggies (The Easy Way!). You've probably heard it a thousand times: "Eat your fruits and vegetables! But let's be honest -- most of us don't eat nearly enough of them every day. That's why we made Ultimate Fruit & Veggie, a powerful formula that gives you the nutrients from 5 full servings of raw fruits and vegetables, every day in easy-to-take capsules. We decided to name it, Ultimate Fruit and Veggie because after comparing it to all the other fruit and vegetable supplements on the market, ours is simply the ultimate. No shopping, no chopping, no waste. Each serving gives your body natural energy from vitamins and plant nutrients; builds a stronger immune system to help fight off colds, flus, and other ailments; supports digestion and elimination; supports healthy blood sugar, cholesterol, and blood pressure levels; creates more youthful skin, prettier hair, stronger nails and sharper thinking. If you struggle with picky eaters, busy mornings, or don't always have time to eat healthy, this is the easiest way to stay on track for thousands of people.

You Can Do This — And We Can Help!

We formulated and patented MSM+C over 25 years ago, and it has been our number one product ever since. Give it a month, and we believe that you will feel so



much better that you will be telling everyone you know about it. Over the years, many of our customers tell us that they decided to try MSM by another company, and it's simply not as good. In just a few weeks, some of the old aches and pains began to reappear, joints got stiff again energy levels dropped. I'm back for good.

Good health doesn't have to be hard. It just takes a simple plan, good products, and the will to feel better. At Nutritional Health Care, we make it easy by giving you clear

combos that are made for real people with real lives. Whether it's healthy joints, a strong heart, or a happy belly, we have combos made just for your needs. And we always include free instructions so you know exactly what to take to support your health naturally. Check us out at Herbs & More in Athens, NHC Herbs in Killen, our website [www.nhcherbs.com](http://www.nhcherbs.com) or call us at 256-233-0073.

*Your friend in health,  
Roy P. Williams*





## Timing

by Deb Kitchenmaster



Whether biological or not, we can hold a particular person in our hearts with great honor and respect. Our son, Michael, is one of these individuals. In the midst of opportunities, a specific time was set aside to visit, bringing much joy with him, his daughter, and our granddaughter, Emma.

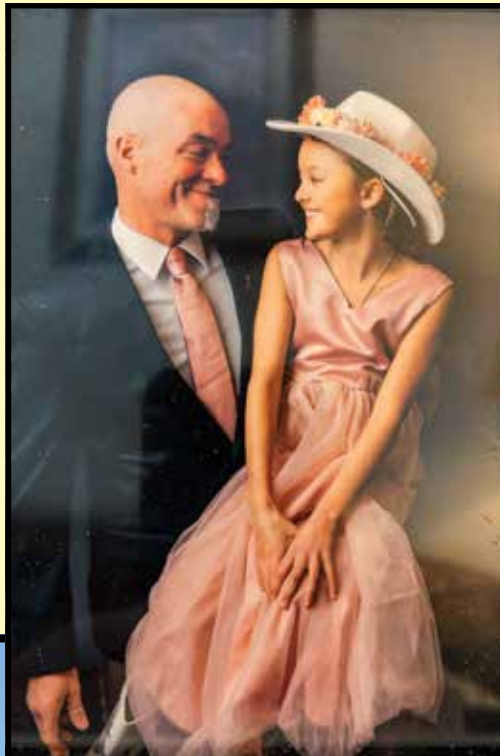
Within one full year there is one twenty-four hour time frame referred to as "birthday." This is a time of entrance on earth (birth), a time of remembering, a time of celebration...a time of gratitude that has the potential of catapulting one into the realm of amazing thankfulness.

There is no price tag that can be attached to a hug, a smile, or being face-to-face. Those moments are priceless! Out of Emma's interest in skincare came the best facial ever!

"Grandma, you are glowing!" In spite of the fact Emma uses good products, not that entire glow came from a bottle. And Michael! One of the kindest people I have ever met in my life. Not because I am his mother, but because of his choices to be the man he has become -- loving, forgiving, and kind.

Emma got to see hoof trimming for the first time, helped

get some of the winter coat off the gelding before she rode, and learned two ground games. What a TIME in the arena of life. Now look at TIMING in the horse arena.



No matter what some may say to you, jokingly or not, horses actually learn quickly. Understanding a horse's learning process is simple and will help you connect

with your horse. First, let's consider horses in the wild. In the wild, they learn to read the surroundings and react in ways that will save their lives. They must learn if a sound or an object is dangerous to the herd (Yes! They look after each other) or safe to ignore. Here's an example: Horses will run with all their might from a hungry lion; however, they will graze peacefully in a meadow while a nearby, tummy-filled lion is resting. If horses didn't learn quickly, they would be in a constant

state of fight or flight. Instead, they read situations in a moment and immediately know how to respond.

In the same, quick-learning process of the horse, let's transition from the wild to the domesticated horse, a horse under saddle. The horse is aware of the rein, the bit, and body cues from the rider, and knows if there is a benefit (release) to responding immediately. The cue is referred to as pressure, which then must be immediately released (no pressure) when the horse does what was asked. Horses seek the release. Responding to the cue means that the horse should feel a release from the bit or leg pressure.

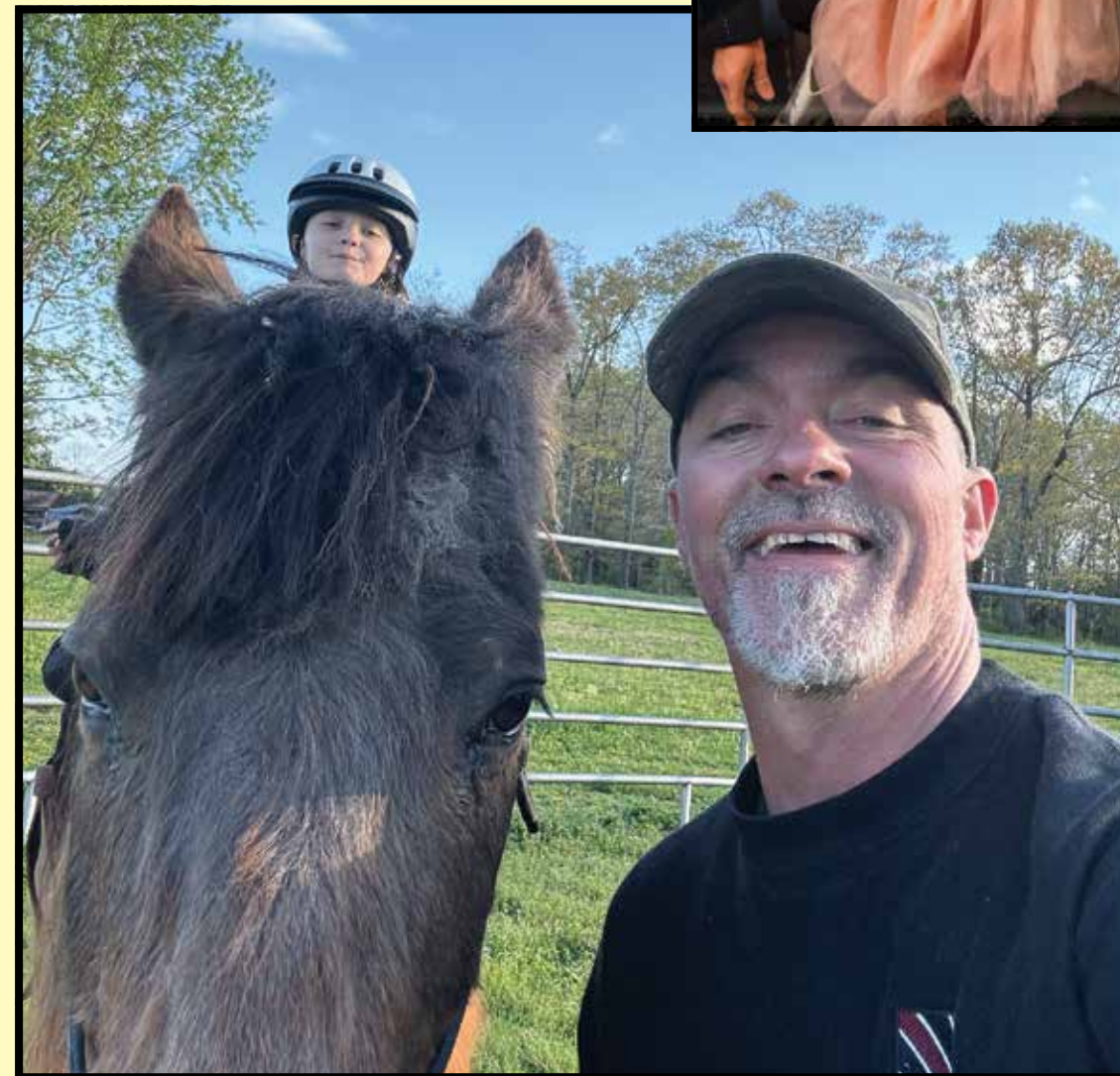
Have you ever heard someone comment about a horse having a hard mouth? In reality, there is no such thing. The mouth of the horse remains soft and tender. It's the horse's mind that has become dull and hardened. How? There's no release from pressure from the bit while being ridden, time after time after time. Be mindful not to use the reins to help you with your balance. Breathe, find your core (if you don't know about your core, ask someone who does) and remind yourself to relax your seat muscles. Move one step at a time, one pace at a time, one cue (pressure) at a time, and one immediate release (no pressure) at a time, letting your horse know, "Right answer."

If it seems you are not getting the answer you are looking for from your horse or it's taking longer than you want for your horse to learn a new skill, pause and think through what the horse is doing instead of what you want. The way he is acting is the way he feels safe and at ease. Your horse may teach you that you need to try a new cue or improve your timing of the release.

Timing is a rhythm. The drumbeat of this timing, this rhythm, is the sound of freedom. REMEMBER: "He has made all things beautiful in its time."

*Your NEIGHbor,  
Deb Kitchenmaster*

*horsinaround188@gmail.com*







## Rightside Way

# Big Bad Benjamins

by Phil Williams



Is it possible for a budget surplus to be a bad thing? Short answer: Yes.

It was reported recently that the Alabama State Senate set a new record for proposed spending with a \$12 billion education budget! The same education budget which is funded in large part by revenue gained from sales tax and income tax. Basically, the education budget in Alabama makes positive gains when people are working and spending.

Alabama's Senate Republicans must believe that people are working and spending at a pretty good clip. Why wouldn't they? They have a budget surplus at their disposal. So, they spent more.

Is that good news? Maybe. Maybe not.

First, consider that just two years ago the legislature passed a bipartisan tax break on overtime pay. It turned out to be a great plan. More folks are working overtime, and businesses are hiring more employees. The plan, sponsored by House Minority Leader Anthony Daniels (D-Huntsville), exceeded all forecasts, resulting in the state giving back approximately \$300 million to hardworking hourly-wage citizens during a lean economy. It has been called "a game-changer for the state's frontline workers" by The HR Digest.

That's great! The legis-

lature gave back some money and still had a surplus so now they can have the biggest budget ever! The plan works!

Not so fast. They may be taking away the tax break. The overtime tax relief legislation is due to "sunset" this year. Without an extension, it will wither and die on the vine. You heard me – apparently, the legislature believes it gave back "too much money." This is theater of the absurd. A Greek tragedy.

The House and Senate are not wavering on something that has never been. To the contrary, the legislature is considering taking something away that has been putting food on people's tables. In effect, failure to extend the overtime tax exemption will result in a tax raise at a time when the economy remains lean at best.

But yet, the state has a budget surplus. So much money. So little to share.

This is a Republican supermajority! A SUPER-majority! In the reddest of red states. The state whose 4th Congressional District had the highest per capita vote for Donald Trump in the last several election cycles. The same Donald Trump who is leading the charge for tax relief, downsizing government, excising wasteful spending, and focusing on America's working-class citizens. Alabama's Republicans have the wind at their back. All the things they say about

themselves in their campaign commercials can come true, if they choose to do so. They not only have the political strength, they also have the political winds.

The question is whether they have the political will.

One of the best and worst terms that you can hear in government is "budget surplus." On the one hand, you would much rather know those in charge of your government engaged the spending and revenue collection aspects of their jobs in such a way that the government doesn't end up declaring a "budget shortfall." It's never a good thing to find out the government didn't collect enough of our money and is forced to cut essential services.

But "budget surplus" can still be a bad thing. When the government has more money than it needs to operate it means, in essence, that they took too much from the taxpayers. When you combine a government surplus with the wiping out of ongoing tax relief, all during a tough econ-

omy...well, at that point government begins to look heartless.

Alabamians are paying more at the store, paying more to the government, keeping less in our pockets, taking fewer vacations, while government winds up having extra to spend. That's when budget surplus becomes more about the Benjamins and less about the taxpayer.

I'm not so libertarian in my views that I don't believe government has an important role to play. Essential services like infrastructure, law enforcement, defense, the court system, and much more are true functions of government. Functions that cost money.

But Alabama is sitting on budget surpluses that come from having received too much revenue during hard times. The goal should be less about the Benjamins and more about the citizens.

More money may seem better than less money. But more money taken from private citizens to fund government well in excess of what is needed should

never result in a roll-over account, or year-end profit. Government should not be in the business of "making a profit" on the backs of its taxpayers. Budget surplus should result in some form of refund to the citizens of the state. I don't mean a simple one-time token payment to appease the masses. I mean reform that stops government from taking so much in the first place.

And (key point here) when you have a surplus but you discontinue an effective tax relief plan, you are no longer a "representative"....you're just an elected bureaucrat.

More about the people - less about the Benjamins!

*Phil Williams is a former State Senator, retired Army Col 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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