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The Hodges Family

Kindness Reciprocated: Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church Welcomes The Hodges Family Ministry Team

By Ali Elizabeth Turner

It is common in Athens, AL, for a church to warmly welcome a new pastor and family to their congregation, and that has certainly been the experience of Pastor Ross Hodges, his wife Joanna, and their four kids—Elias, 10, Charlotte, 8, Isaac, 8,

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Getting To Know Your Limestone County Commissioners: Johnny Turner, District 2

By Johnny Turner

Limestone County is the fastest growing county in the state and District 2 is "ground zero" for that growth. Our county is growing at about 3.6% a year, about 4000 people a year. Over the next decade we are expected to grow another 26%. A driving factor to that growth is the federal spending in

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Johnny Turner



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Publisher's Point

Calm Skies, Jubilant Hearts

Monday, October 13, 2025 is what I refer to as a "Day of Days." There are events, breaking news, and endless film clips that serve to embroider into my being memories that I shall take to my grave, and the return of the hostages to what the Hebrew language calls *eretz Israel*, or in English, the land of Israel, is certainly one of them.

Backing up two years, in 2023 on the 50th anniversary of the Yom Kippur War, I wrote a **Publisher's Point** commemorating the tragic and ultimately triumphant event that occurred when I was 20. It was simply called, *The Miracles of the Yom Kippur War*, and believe me, there were many miracles resulting once again in the supernatural preservation of the State of Israel. I remember having an eerie feeling that it was "too quiet," and that all hell was going to break loose, and it did the next day. We are all too familiar with what Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has called "the worst attack on the Jewish people since the Holocaust," and it has rightly been called by Bibi a "day that will live forever in infamy," a nod to FDR's speech regarding the attack on Pearl Harbor. It has been said that if you were going to compare relative population sizes of our nations, what happened in 2023 is



tantamount to someone killing 40,000 American citizens in a single day.

Sobering stuff, this. And, if we don't consider, remember and protect the memory of how egregious the 2023 attack by Hamas on Israel truly was, then we won't be able to celebrate what I hope is "peace breaking out in the Middle East" to the fullest. For my part, if I had not just seen the film *The Dragon's Prophecy* and watch a young Hamas terrorist calling his parents in real time on his cell phone to tell them that he had just "killed ten Jews with my bare hands," and then have the proud parents respond with the Arabic equivalent of "Way to go, son," I don't think Monday's hostage release would have meant quite as much to me.

So, focusing on Monday's

miracle, the only way I can convey to you the personal impact of this "Day of Days" is to try to describe a clip filmed by the Israeli Defense Force of one of the reunions. A young man, perhaps in his late 20s/early 30s walked into a hallway where he was lovingly ambushed by two guys that I assume were family. The just-liberated man was wrapped in the Israeli flag, and it was the group hug of all time. However, what got me the most was a woman, perhaps a relative, who came into the same hallway, waiting her turn to "have at him." She somehow offloaded her joy by literally jumping up and down until she could launch into her now-former-hostage-family member's arms. Launch she did, and to date I cannot think or talk about it dry-eyed.

What will happen next?

I don't know. I do know that according to Scripture, there will certainly be a final battle that will end with the return of Yeshua, but for now I choose to celebrate unashamedly. For now, the words of President Trump to the Knesset are perfect:

After so many years of unceasing war and endless danger, today the skies are calm, the guns are silent, the sirens are still, and the sun rises on a Holy Land that is finally at peace.

Let us pray for the peace of Jerusalem until it is no longer necessary.

Ali Elizabeth Turner

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Save The Date For The Wall That Heals: *November 6-9, 2025*

Courtesy, Athens State University



The Wall That Heals, a three-quarter scale replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial along with a mobile Education Center, is coming to Athens, Alabama on November 6-9, 2025 at Beasley Field on the campus of Athens State University. *The Wall That Heals* honors the more than three million Americans who served in the U.S. Armed forces in the Vietnam War, and it bears the names of the 58,281 men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in Vietnam. The Wall will be open 24 hours a day and free to the public.

The Wall That Heals is transported from community to community in a 53-foot trailer. When parked, the trailer opens with exhibits built into its sides, allowing it to serve as a mobile Education Center telling the story of the Vietnam War, The Wall, and the divisive era in American history.

The three-quarter scale Wall replica is 375 feet in length and stands 7.5 feet high at its tallest point. Visitors will experience The Wall rising above them as they walk towards the apex, a key feature of the design of The Wall in DC. Visitors are able to do name rubbings of individual service member's names on The Wall.

The mobile Education Center exhibit includes: digital photo displays of "Hometown Heroes" – service members whose names are on The Wall that list their home of record within the area of a visit, digital photo displays of Vietnam veterans from the local area honored through VVMF's *In Mem-*

ory program which honors veterans who returned home from Vietnam and later died, video displays that teach about the history and impact of The Wall, educational exhibits told through items representative of those left at The Wall in DC, a replica of the *In Memory* plaque, a map of Vietnam, and a chronological overview of the Vietnam War. The exhibits tell the story of the Vietnam War, The Wall and the era surrounding the conflict, and are designed to put American experiences in Vietnam in a historical and cultural context.

Schedule of Events

The Wall That Heals will arrive at Beasley Field at Athens State University (415 E Hobbs Street, Athens, AL) on Tuesday, November 4 and open to the public on Thursday, November 6 where it will remain open 24 hours a day. The Wall will close at 2 p.m. on Sunday, November 9. The full schedule of events includes:

Tuesday, November 4

The Wall That Heals will be escorted via motorcade from the Elk River Boat Launch (19951 Hwy 72, Rogersville, AL) to Beasley Field at Athens State University (415 E Hobbs Street, Athens, AL). A map of the escort route can be found at www.thewallthathealsathens.org.

- Meet at Elk River Boat Launch for escort at 11 a.m.
- Safety briefing at 11:45 a.m.
- Kickstands Up at noon
- The Wall That Heals arrives at Athens State

around 1 p.m.

Wednesday, November 5

- Construction of *The Wall That Heals* begins at 8:30 a.m.
- Volunteer shifts begin at 2 p.m.
- Volunteer training at 6 p.m.

Thursday, November 6

- ***The Wall That Heals* will open 24 hours a day to visitors, rain or shine, beginning immediately following the Opening Ceremony.**

- Opening Ceremony at 8:30 a.m. – This ceremony is free and open to the public.
- Guided tours begin at 11 a.m.

- Taps will be played at sunset

Friday, November 7

- *The Wall That Heals* is open 24 hours a day to visitors, rain or shine.
- PTSD Awareness Cer-

emony at 6 p.m. – This ceremony is free and open to the public.

- Taps will be played at the conclusion of the PTSD Awareness Ceremony

Saturday, November 8

- *The Wall That Heals* is open 24 hours a day to visitors, rain or shine.

- Taps will be played at sunset

Sunday, November 9

- Closing Ceremony at 1:45 p.m. – This ceremony is free and open to the public.

- Taps will be played at 2 p.m.

- ***The Wall That Heals* closes to the public at 2 p.m.**

Volunteers

Hosting *The Wall That Heals* is a tremendous privilege – and it requires tremendous community support.

The Wall will be open to the public 24 hours a day during its time at Athens State. To ensure that every visitor

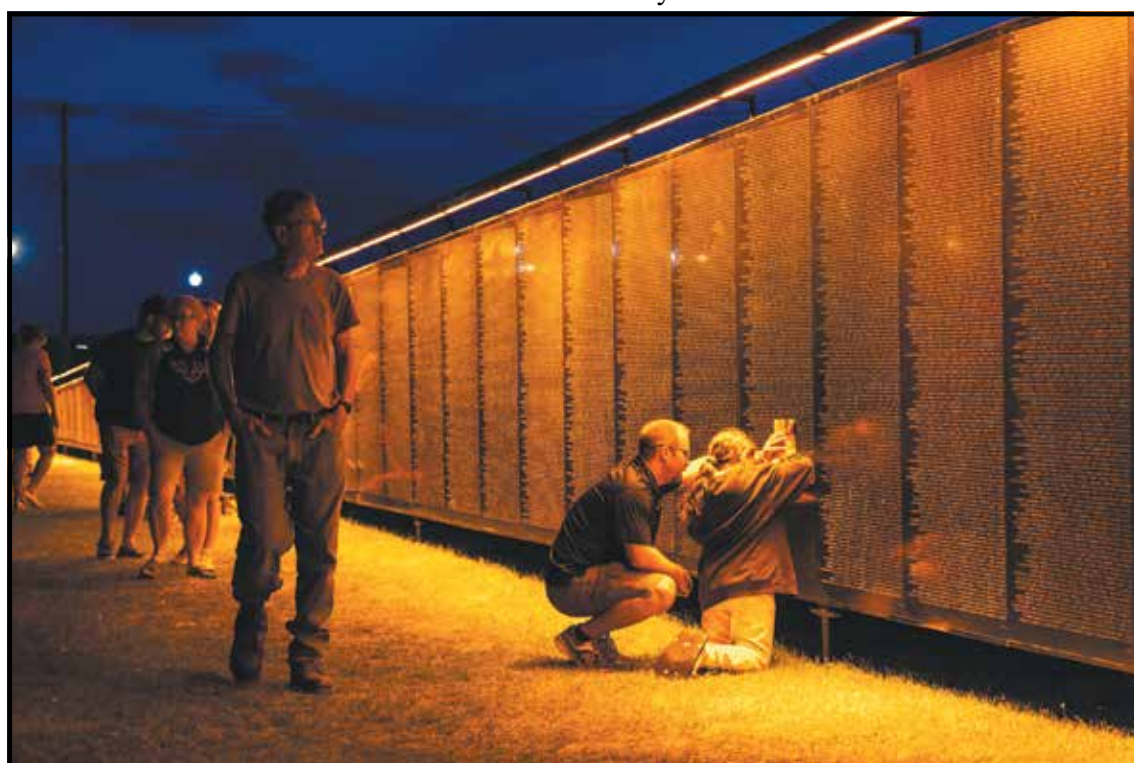
has a meaningful, respectful, and safe experience, we are seeking dedicated volunteers to help support the exhibit around the clock.

Volunteer roles include:

- Greeters and guides
- Parking and traffic assistants
- Overnight watch and site security
- Set-up and take-down crews
- Support for ceremonies and special events
- Volunteer check-in and hospitality
- Mobile Education Center assistants

If you would like to support *The Wall That Heals* by volunteering, please sign up here: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10C0445A4AC28A6F85-54919250-thewall#/>

For more information about *The Wall That Heals*, please visit www.thewallthathealsathens.org.



Restoring The Heart

by Donna Clark



In my last article, I introduced you to a great writing by Jentezen Franklin, *Love Like You've Never Been Hurt*. Many are hurting from recent and ancient pains of rejection and a lack of love and understanding. As I mentioned in that article, love is the only answer to fractured relationships. That type of love can only be demonstrated to others and received for ourselves with help from our Heavenly Father. It doesn't matter what you have done or what has been done to you, Jesus sees you as one of His wonderful masterpieces.

When it comes down to it, what matters is how our Savior sees us. There will always be the fault finders and those ready to falsely accuse, but when we know in our hearts that we have a Father who loves us and we have the assurance in our soul that we are striving to serve Him, no words or actions should disturb us. However, there are times that we are very much disturbed, disrupted, and downtrodden. As much as we are grieved over the actions and words that we've done, or even lack of by others, it saddens God to see us hurting. The good news is that God can bring peace; He can repair what's been torn apart. Even if it's not the restoration of a relationship that maybe you've longed for, there can be a peace in your heart that will begin to heal

the wound. There can be a stillness and calmness that can settle the emotional storm. If there's a pain of any sort that attacks your mind and heart, the first step I'd like to encourage you to take is to get out of the cage. Let me explain...

Jentezen shares a story about a bear that was captured as a cub and raised in a traveling circus. His life was spent in a 12"x12" cage with a diet of rotten food and dirty water. Every day of his life, he walked back and forth in this cage, swinging his head from left to right, stopping only to eat and sleep. Onlookers would throw items in the cage to stop this back-and-forth pattern, but he always returned to the same rhythm. Finally, the bear was sold to a local zoo where he had a huge area to roam, sparkling pools to frolic in, and

companions to share his life with. The sad thing is the bear continued to pace back and forth as if he were still captive in that cage he'd known for years. The bear was imprisoned by mental bars not metal ones. Sometimes, we can do the 12-foot shuffle. That's exactly where your enemy wants to keep you and as long as you continue that pattern, the good plan that God has for your life can't be fully achieved and your destiny could be destroyed. How sad to think of all the people with such great talents and abilities being snuffed out, opportunities lost, all because of being mentally bound by the injustices of others or failures they see in themselves. So, how do we stop the continuing pattern? By renewing our mind.

In Romans 12:1-2, Paul tells us to give ourselves

to God, not to copy the behavior and customs of this world, to let God transform us into new beings by changing the way we think. Three steps to change wrong thinking. You might not can change another person, what they've done or said, but you can change how you let it affect you. You can't undo the past, if you're struggling with a mistake or failure yourself, there is no going back and undoing. Meditating on God's word is the cure for that haunting, painful past. It's like recalibrating your mind to think on the good things, not the negative. It's time to shift the focus.

The past can only be healed in one way -- forgive it -- the one thing you can do to change all of your tomorrows. It's not an easy task to say the least, but when

our life is surrendered to Christ, totally, completely, we have that love that is so far reaching with such a miraculous ability to heal all our scars. A simple prayer is given in the book for those who just don't know what to pray or where to start --

Father -- I forgive and let go of all the mistakes and sins in my life. The lessons have been learned. I forgive everyone and especially myself. Starting today, I choose to walk in love and I thank You for the strength and grace to do it. Amen.

The most important battles we fight, many times, happen in our minds. So, talk back to your inner critic. Focus on a God who loves you tremendously and always will. Renew your mind.

The title of this book really drew me in; I wanted to learn more for myself and to help others. I want to continue this in my next article, but for today let me leave you with this. Your enemy will tell you there is no hope for you, your family. Carry the grudge, wear the shame, give up all hope of reconciliation. Your enemy will tell you it's impossible to love like you've never been hurt. God, however, tells us something completely different; and He will enable you to bury the pain and shame. Healing is possible. God is ready to restore.

- Donna



Calendar of Events

Limestone County Historical Society Quarterly Meeting October 19

The Limestone County Historical Society will hold its quarterly meeting Sunday, October 19, in the Rodgers Center of the First Presbyterian Church in Athens. Refreshments will be served at 2:30 p.m. with the meeting to follow at 3:00. Craig Beasley, former communications and public information representative for TVA's Browns Ferry nuclear plant, will speak about TVA's presence and importance in the region and the nation's commercial nuclear power programs, including new technology being developed to meet modern power demands. Everyone interested in the history of North Alabama is invited to attend.

19th Annual Athens Storytelling Festival October 23 - 25

Take a seat in the tent and settle in to enjoy internationally-renowned storytellers, award-winning liars, and world-class musicians. Performances open to the public Thursday evening, Oct 23, and all day Friday and Saturday, Oct 24-25, 2025. 8:00 AM-7:30 PM. Athens State University. <https://www.athensstorytellingfestival.com/>

Southern Gospel Singing October 25

The Mylon Hayes Family and the Pylant Family will be singing at 5PM. Tabernacle Baptist Church, 24330 Drawbaugh Rd, Athens AL. Free admission, love offering will be received.

Pink Elephant Luncheon October 29

In honor of October being Breast Cancer Awareness Month, the Athens-Limestone Hospital will host the Pink Elephant Luncheon with Keynote Speaker Pammie Jimmar, CEO & President of the Athens-Limestone County Chamber of Commerce. 11:00 AM- 12:30 PM. Limestone County Event Center, 114 W. Pryor St. Athens. Link: <https://one.bidpal.net/pinkelephant2025/welcome>

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.

ALH Foundation Crystal Cup Golf Tournament November 3

Join the Athens-Limestone Hospital Foundation for the 2025 Crystal Cup Golf Tournament presented by Jimmy Smith Auto Group. They are so thrilled to be back for another year of golf at Canebrake Club in Athens, AL! 10:30 AM-7:00 PM. <https://crystal-cup-golf-tournament.perfectgolfevent.com/>

Quack Attack 5K November 8

The Quack Attack 5K is a fundraising event to benefit the wetland conservation of Swan Creek. 7:00 AM-8:00 AM. 5K to begin on East St north of Washington, take a right on Forrest St, right on Houston, right on 1st Ave, right on Madison St, then take a left on Market St, right on Marion St, left on Forrest St, left on Beaty St and then a right into Big Springs Park where the 5K will conclude.

Salute to Service: A Musical Tribute to Veterans November 8

Please join us for a special, one-night only performance by JIMMY FORTUNE on Saturday, November 8, 2025, at 7:00 PM in historic McCandless Hall at Athens State University. With a discounted ticket price for veterans, this concert will honor our hometown heroes and feature patriotic musical selections in celebration of Veterans Day. <https://athensstate.ticketspice.com/salute-to-service>

Veterans Day Parade November 11

11:00 AM-1:30 PM. Assembly at Athens High School. Parade will go down Pryor Street, left on Shaw Street, right onto Hobbs Street, left on Jefferson, left on Market, right on Marion, right on Washington, left on Jefferson and end at the Athens-Limestone Public Library. 655 Hwy. 31 N., Athens, AL.

Holiday Farmers Market November 22

The Holiday Market encourages all of our local patrons to shop and eat quality fresh produce at the updated pavilion in downtown Athens this holiday season. 8:00 AM-6:00 PM. Athens Farmers Market at Doug Gates Park. <https://athensmainstreet.org/athens-farmers-market/>

Athens-Limestone County Christmas Parade December 4

The annual Athens-Limestone County Christmas Parade is ready to show off the magic of the holidays with this year's theme "Merry, Movies & Magic!" 5:00 PM-7:00 PM. Downtown Athens.



Shots Vs. Nutrition & Movement For Weight Loss

by Nick Niedzwiecki - Owner, CrossFit Athens

In today's health culture, the "weight loss shot" (often GLP-1 or related injectable drugs) is rapidly becoming a fad. Promises of effortless fat loss with a weekly jab are tempting. But the reality is stark: these shots are a short-term patch to a lifelong problem, not a substitute for building habits that last. Relying solely on medication without embracing nutrition and movement sets people up for rebound weight gain, health risks, and frustration.

Why the shot is a "Band-Aid" — and a risky one

1. Weight rebounds when you stop. A major issue is that these drugs suppress hunger or slow digestion, but don't teach your body how to maintain balance. Studies show that when patients discontinue GLP-1 injectables, many regain much of the weight they lost. One review noted that 327 participants regained two-thirds of their weight within one year after stopping. Another study in *The Lancet* (2024) found that weight loss was better maintained when injectable drug use was paired with ongoing lifestyle changes—but once the drug is withdrawn, the benefits fade quickly.

2. Side effects and health dangers are real. These drugs carry non-trivial risks. Common side effects include nau-

sea, vomiting, diarrhea, constipation, bloating, and gastrointestinal discomfort. More serious but less common risks include pancreatitis, gallbladder disease, kidney injury, and potentially thyroid tumors in susceptible individuals. The FDA has also warned against unapproved compounded versions, which may cause injection site reactions or worse. One especially telling risk: when people stop the drug, they often regain fat disproportionately (more fat, less muscle), lowering metabolic rate and making future weight control harder.

3. Case studies and real-world tragedies

- o In KSL's recent reporting on weight loss shots, 10,000 serious or life-threatening reactions have been reported to the FDA's database; 162 deaths were listed as involving these shots.

- o A Scottish woman named Amy Jack, 31, reportedly entered a seven-week coma after severe adverse reactions to an online-purchased weight loss injection regime.

- o A New York Post article noted that Ozempic and similar injections were implicated in 162 U.S. deaths over recent years, though causality is not always proven.

4. While extreme, these stories underscore that what looks like a mir-



acle remedy may carry hidden dangers.

5. You lose control over process. A shot hands control to a drug rather than to your own habits and willpower. If the injections fail, become too expensive, or cause intolerable side effects, you can be left with no tools to sustain healthy weight on your own.

Why nutrition + movement are superior

- Root cause approach: Diet and exercise address the energy balance that actually governs weight. You learn to eat in a way that fuels your body without excess, and to move so that your metabolism remains active.

- Skill-building and self-reliance: Developing lifelong eating habits, portion control, strength training, and cardiovascular activity

gives you autonomy. No external fix needed.

- Better body composition: With strength training + proper diet, you preserve or build lean muscle, which supports metabolism and resilience.

- Sustainable over decades: A shot might work for months or a couple of years (if tolerated), but good habits carry you through life's changes (aging, stress, lifestyle shifts).

Consider this hypothetical "case study" — two similar individuals, both initially overweight. Person A goes on a weight-loss injection and drops 10 % of weight over six months. But after stopping, rebounds to +8 % above baseline. Person B undertakes a gradual but consistent plan of improved nutrition and strength + cardio, losing 7 % in six months, but

continues refining habits and ends up 12 % below baseline two years later. The sustained progress comes from behavioral foundation, not a drug.

Final call: choose the long game

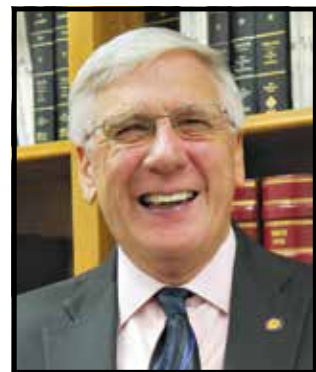
Weight issues are seldom solved by a quick fix. The shot may feel like a magic shortcut, but it's a patch—temporary, risky, and fragile. It won't teach you how to eat, how to move, or how to cope when life throws curveballs.

If you want lasting transformation, invest in your nutrition and exercise. Learn the science of macro- and micro-nutrients, build strength, find forms of movement you enjoy, get support, and be patient. This path isn't glamorous like a shot promise—but it's real, safe (when done right), sustainable, and ultimately empowering.

What Makes Ronnie Roll

The Most Crucial Of Conversations

by Ali Elizabeth Turner



I was almost 15 minutes late to our usual 8:30 Monday morning meeting for the purpose of conducting the latest *Ronnie* interview. Why? I had been completely caught up in the release of the Israeli hostages after two years of horror. The film clips of families being re-united is something I will carry in my heart's memory for the rest of my days.

Essentially, when I walked in, Mayor Ronnie said, "We need to pray," and so we did. We gave thanks for all that God had done to bring this day into history, and watched a few minutes of the news. We also asked that God would help this peace agreement to hold. The Abraham Accords resulting in Victory in Israel Day need divine help, and we asked for just that.

"Talk about a *Crucial Conversation*," said the mayor. (For several editions of *What Makes Ronnie Roll* we have

been talking about an excellent book of the same title.) *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High* is essentially the communication skills equivalent of *The Art Of The Deal*, and the application of the wisdom therein that caused "peace to break out" in the Middle East is epic stuff.

Here is a description of the book and its impact that seemed especially pertinent on this historic Monday:

"The book is compelling. Yes, I found myself in too many of their examples of what not to do when caught in these worst-of-all-worlds situations! GET THIS BOOK, WHIP OUT A PEN AND GET READY TO SCRIBBLE MARGIN NOTES FURIOUSLY, AND PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE THE INVALUABLE TOOLS THESE AUTHORS PRESENT. I know I did--and it helped me salvage several difficult situations



and repair my damaged self-esteem in others. I will need another copy pretty soon, as I'm wearing out the pages in this one!" —James Belasco, best-selling author of *Flight of the Buffalo*, entrepreneur, professor, and executive director of the *Financial Times Knowledge Dialogue*.



Mayor Ronnie waxed philosophical for a bit by telling stories about how you can read about something, and even see pictures, but it is not until you see something up close and personal that

you get an actual dose of reality. In his case, when he worked for DHR and had to train people, there were times when he held children that had been beaten with coat hangers and burned with cigarettes. Trying to describe

what he had seen and experienced to those who had never seen such things was nigh on to impossible. Those kinds of things don't begin to describe what happened two years ago in Israel, and the fact that we have peace on any level that lasts for any significant

amount of time or challenge would depend on what he called "the We's." The "We's" mean the team, and if we don't keep the "We" in our national team, state team, or the Athens team, what people have worked so hard to bring about can go sideways in a heartbeat.

"*WE* have so much to celebrate, so much to be proud of," the mayor said as he prepared to head out. Though we had already prayed, we prayed again to say thanks, and then once again it was time for Ronnie to roll.

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My Identity In Christ: God Says *I Am Courageous*

by Anna Hamilton

Fear often whispers that we are too weak, too small, or too unqualified, but God speaks a different truth. In Christ, I am not defined by my fears, insecurities, or limitations. My identity is not rooted in who I am on my own; it is rooted in who Christ is within me. And because Christ lives in me, I am courageous.

There are moments in life when fear tries to overwhelm us -- fear of failure, rejection, uncertainty, or danger. But God never

intended for fear to define us. Over and over in Scripture, He calls His children to walk in boldness, not because we are naturally fearless, but because He is with us.

Courage is not the absence of fear; it's confidence in God. God never promised that we would never face intimidating situations. Instead, He reminds us over and over that we do not face them alone. "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous.

continued on page 24

Slow Cooker Pumpkin Chili

Ingredients:

*1 can (26 ounces) tomato sauce
1 can (27 ounces) diced tomatoes
2 cans of kidney beans, drained and rinsed
2 lbs. ground beef
1 medium red onion, diced
1 red bell pepper, chopped and diced
1 yellow bell pepper, chopped and diced
1 green bell peppers, chopped and diced
1 can of green chilis
2 T. chili powder
8 oz. pumpkin puree (make sure it is not pumpkin pie mix)
Salt and pepper to taste
Sour cream, chives and cheese to garnish*

Directions:

Brown the ground beef with the chopped onions until meat is cooked through and onions are soft. Then place the meat and onions to the slow cooker. Then add the tomato sauce, diced tomatoes, green chilis, and rinsed beans to the meat mixture in the slow cooker.



Add the green, red and yellow peppers, chili powder, pumpkin puree, and mix it up and put it on HIGH setting for 4-5 hours.

Serve into bowls and top with a dollop of sour cream and some chives.

Tourism News And Upcoming Events

by Stephanie Reynolds, Athens-Limestone Tourism Association



BOY HOWDY, are we in the thick of our busy season!

Last week, I attended the Southern Automotive Conference to represent our gorgeous county. What a great event that was and thank you to LCEDA for inviting me!

I also attended Alabama Mountain Lakes Brainstorming session. In that amazing meeting, we had a very finite amount of time to write either a pitch or a marketing campaign with a limited budget then present it to the room. The latter sounded less fun, so I went with the pitch and hastily scribbled this:

“There is a place where
water falls
And trails wind through
pine bough halls
Song and laughter
fill the air
We can’t wait to
see you there!”

Time-born stories,
historic places
Cozy shops and
open spaces
Beckon everyone to roam
To Limestone County
and find their home.

Where new is old
and old is new
The only thing we
lack is you!”

Now, the poem could use some work, but I have to say how much I love just thinking about how amazing Limestone County is. I am not exaggerating! Every time I am asked to think about our county (which is a lot because I’m in tourism), it makes

me happy. We are so exquisitely blessed with our trails and town squares, our rural areas and celebrations, but most of all we are blessed because of YOU, our people. Your kindness, warmth, and Southern hospitality are actually known far beyond our borders—did you know that? YOU are what makes this area special, and I am warmed in the cockles of my heart because of you.

Thank you for being you; you make my job of wooing tourists easy!

Now, let me tell you some ah-mazing things we have coming up, going down, and just around the corner...

Firstly, everyone please come out and enjoy the free concert we will be having on Monday the 20th of October by the courthouse. The band is called Worth the Wait and is wonderful! The concert starts at 8 p.m. Bring your lawn chairs, hit up some local restaurants for a snack or three, and get ready for some great music.

Secondly, the STORY-TELLING Festival is next week too! Make sure you get your tickets and come listen to our master story-



tellers tickle your funny bone. Go to <https://www.athensstorytellingfestival.com/> to get tickets.

Thirdly, we have Jazz in the City coming up this Sunday, October 19 from 4 to 6 p.m. The Athens-Limestone Tourism Association invites you to grab your lawn chair, bring a friend, and let the timeless rhythms set the tone for a relaxing evening

outdoors. Whether you’re a lifelong jazz fan or just looking for a peaceful way to wind down your weekend, this free community event is the perfect way to connect and enjoy the arts right here in Athens.

Fourthly, the Fall Merchant’s Alley Happy Hour Music Series is on the 17th, 24th, and 31st of this month! The Athens Main Street Merchants Alley

Happy Hour Music Series is back this fall every Friday night from September 5, 2025, to October 31, 2025, in the alleyway on Jefferson Street from 5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Y’all this is our busy season, we have so much for you to do! Let’s not waste this beautiful weather and friendly neighbors, let’s make a million memories together!

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Kindness Reciprocated: *Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church Welcomes The Hodges Family Ministry Team*

by Ali Elizabeth Turner

continued from page 1

and Abel, 7. And while the idea of “team” can have a number of connotations, I experienced firsthand being ministered to by every member of the family as I interviewed them, and was the recipient of great kindness from each of them. I have no doubt that God has brought them to Athens “for such a time as this.”

Ross and Joanna met while in seminary, and both graduated from Westminster Seminary California, located in Escondido. Ross is an Alabama boy, born and raised in Montgomery, and

Joanna is from the Chicago area. While they were students, Joanna made it clear that God had put it on her heart to be an adoptive mom, and Ross was on board with that from the get-go. That began an arduous adventure that has resulted in the adoption of four truly heart-capturing kids: Elias, age 10; Charlotte, age 8; Isaac, age 8; and Abel, age 7. Isaac and Abel are full siblings and look like twins.

The road to adoption has been more than rocky, and as is always the case with believers, heartbreak will invariably result in holy beauty inwardly, if you let it. It certainly has been the case with the Hodges, who, amongst other things, dealt with infertility themselves along with having to release a child who had been theirs for nine months back to a biological parent. It was indeed the “dark night of the soul” for both of them, and has equipped them to not only minister to other adoptive parents, but to people who are hungry for God, His Word, and to become Kingdom builders. As Ross tells it, one day he was sitting in a state of what felt like numbing, terminal shock after having lost the baby he



had come to love so deeply. He told God, “I don’t think I can make it through this.” And God whispered back, “My grace is sufficient.” And so it has been for both of these parents that have chosen to turn their pain into purpose.

As a first call out of seminary, Ross had been in a church plant position as an assistant pastor, and when they moved from Charleston back to the Montgomery area, they kind of felt as though they would settle there permanently and raise their kids there. Family was close by and things were comfortable. However, both of them experienced the unique restlessness that comes when God is fixin’ to do something new, and their story of getting from Montgomery to Athens has the fingerprints of God all over it.

Joanna and Ross were literally doing what parents do sometimes, and that was having a confab in the bathroom. (Those of you who have had a passel of kids know that sometimes it’s the only place Mommy and Daddy can talk like grown-ups.) The upshot of the conversation was that if God wanted to re-locate them to another assignment, they were open. Pretty gene-

ric prayer, and by their own admission, they really didn’t expect what happened next AT ALL. Literally two hours later, Ross checked his email, and there was an invitation from a search committee that had been written and sent in the morning. They had prayed in the evening, and as Joanna tells it, she looked up to the heavens and simply said, “OK, God.”

They arrived on August 1, and it’s no surprise that they have fallen in love with their congregation as well as Athens. Grace is a small church, follows the guidelines of the Presbyterian Church of America, and has a heart to serve as well as be a part of all that God is doing in Athens-Limestone County. Recently, Joanna and Ross attended the fundraising luncheon for the Women’s Resource Center, and we all talked about bawling our way through the testimony of Steven Holland, a man who was the product of the rape of a developmentally delayed woman. It was indeed a remarkable story and an unforgettable gathering.

Grace Covenant is also involved in the Kiddie Carnival, the Community Table, and is looking forward to the Vete-

rans’ Day Parade as well as the Christmas Parade. They will have tables on the Square that will reach out to the community to let Athens know what they are about. They have Bible studies, youth group, a women’s musical ensemble, and more. If you are looking for a smaller, caring, traditional Presbyterian (PCA) fellowship, then come visit Grace Covenant, where their commitment to kindness is uncommon.

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Church, PCA***

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Athens AL, 35613**

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256 444-2492**

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**Sunday School
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Wednesdays 6:30 p.m.

Gracecovenantathens.org

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Clean, Green And Beautiful

Recycling 101 For Limestone County

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

Currently, Athens City curbside recycling has been suspended. Once the blue bins are emptied, the recycling is transferred to Decatur for sorting and bailing. The Decatur facility is experiencing a staffing crisis, and it is absolute chaos, so they have been forced to stop accepting new loads. Thankfully the Limestone County Commission has started a recycling program, so there are still options for Athens residents. The Limestone County Commission and Keri Chalmers are working diligently to grow this program for Limestone County residents, but this will cause an influx, and any help to minimize the chaos will be greatly appreciated.

The drop off location is located at 1301 North Jefferson Street, where the old L&S Shopping Center used to be. Currently, the drop off location is open Monday-Thursday 7 a.m.-3 p.m. If the gates are open

on a Friday, you are more than welcome to stop in and drop your sorted recycling. They accept plastics #1 (items like drink, shampoo, and detergent bottles), aluminum cans, steel cans, mixed papers (books, magazines, junk mail), and cardboard. A new service that is being offered is USED MOTOR OIL recycling! There is a large white tank in the lot, and you are welcome to leave your containers to be emptied and then ethically disposed of. If you choose to empty your own containers, please be sure to put the cap back on the tank!

Please, keep in mind that this program is growing. While they are close to completing a building, they aren't there yet. It is very important to sort your recycling and not to dump trash. As always, break down boxes and remove all plastic and Styrofoam. Things will be hectic until a new rhythm is established to handle the excess. Please, don't start filling an empty trailer until



the ones in the line are full. The extra empty trailers are needed and used every day to transport materials.

When the Athens-Limestone Recycling Center closed, we lost the option to recycle glass in Limestone County. Currently, the only option for recycling glass is with Phoenix Glass Recycling of North Alabama. They are in Huntsville. Check out their Facebook page or website -- phoenix-glassrecycling.com -- for details on their process. Glass recycling is very important for the environment. Glass NEVER breaks down, nor does it ever lose quality. It can be recycled infinitely.

Electronics are full of precious metals and plastic. You can take small electronics, such as computers, computer accessories, and cell phones, to Staples for recycling at any time for free. To recycle larger items, such as flat screen and plasma televisions, call Keri Chalmers at 256-871-0674. The old box televisions are only accepted at the Household Hazard-

ous Waste collection hosted by KALB and the Limestone County Commission. They will not be picked up in bulk trash or accepted at the transfer station because they contain mercury.

Pak Mail on Forrest Street accepts several different items for recycling. They accept Styrofoam packaging peanuts, bubble wrap, plastic air pockets, and packaging paper. This is all very important to get as much use out of these items as possible because only the packing paper breaks down. And all of it is lightweight, so it travels fast and far like plastic bags.

We can help make Limestone County better in so



many ways. Recycling is a major benefit to Limestone County. It will create more jobs, which benefits everyone. It will cut down on waste in our landfills. Recycling will cut down on the litter that seems to cover our roadways these days. It will reduce the number of raw materials mined for making new products. So, make life easy and sort your materials until the City of Athens has a recycling service again.



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www.KALBCares.com

Getting To Know Your Limestone County Commissioners: *Johnny Turner, District 2*

By Johnny Turner

continued from page 1

the Metro Huntsville area. When you combine that with the corporate investments, a trained workforce, good education, interstate and rail conditions you have the ingredients for explosive growth. Then you add in proximity to Birmingham and Nashville, and you can see the challenges as well as the opportunities.

Many people think of the county commissioner as the person who takes care of the roads. That is true, but there is much more to the job. In my opinion, the most important aspect of the job is setting policy and forming the budget for the county. Along with that, I see my job as a commissioner as an advocate for the county. I frequently travel to Montgomery in that capacity and stay in contact with our elected officials. While going to DC on a regular basis is more difficult, I regularly talk to the district liaisons with the offices of Congressman Strong and Senator Britt. It is important to get state and federal funding to assist with projects in our county.

But back to the roads; it is estimated 82% of our workers commute, and the average commute time is 30 minutes. That increased traffic puts a stress on our road system. So along with regular maintenance, such as fixing potholes and resurfacing roads, my district is faced with dealing with roads and intersections approaching capacity. An example of that is the Capshaw and

East Limestone intersection. Capshaw is a major route that is used to avoid Hwy 72, and during the school year, traffic there can be heavy. We have been waiting on a grant from the state to assist with the project, but that has dragged on. I made the decision to move forward with the project. My thoughts are that traffic isn't going to decrease and neither will the costs. I expect that project to be completed in the summer of 2026. That project alone will cost approximately 1.4 million.

In addition, we will be working on Barksdale Road and Ed Ray Road next year with Rebuild Alabama money. I would also expect about another 5 miles of roads to be resurfaced. With 187 miles of road in our district, that means we can resurface roads about every 19 years. That's not including upgrades to intersections, adding turning lanes, and other upgrades to existing roads. While I would like to see more, that is what our current budget allows. Each mile of road resurfacing costs about \$100,000. Almost all road work is paid for by revenue generated by gas taxes. So, please fill up in the county whenever possible.

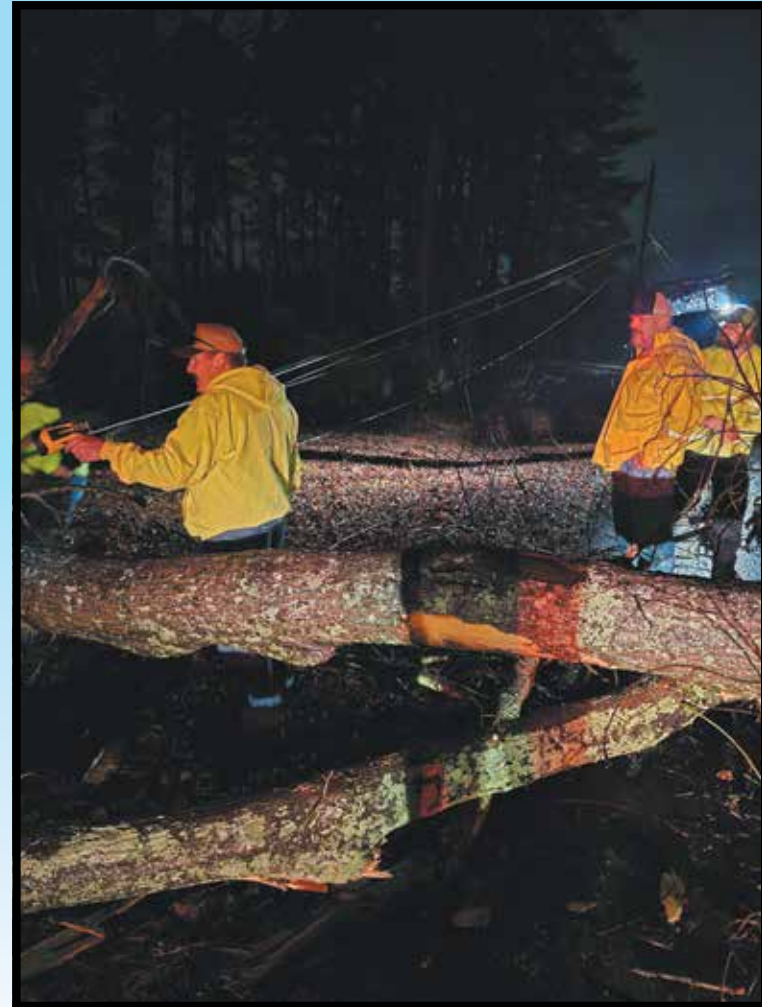
District 2 has 5 full time employees led by Ben Pepper, the district road supervisor. The equipment the crew runs includes everything from pickup trucks to some that is highly specialized, such as the Mantis. The Mantis can get to places and do things that



a bush hog cannot, and takes a specially trained operator to get the job done. Each of these workers are experienced in using heavy equipment and have a CDL license. By contrast, my background is the corporate and political world, and I certainly am not an expert in running heavy equipment or paving roads. However, because our district has such a skilled and experienced workforce, I feel very comfortable with the work that these guys do. I think we make a good team.

We also have a part time litter employee that heads up our litter patrol. We pick up trash on the roadways two to three days a week. By utilizing labor from the jail, we can do this very efficiently.

Our shop is located on Pepper Road, and in addition to being a shed for equipment, we have a place for residents to dump their yard debris. While we can't take construction debris, it gives an opportunity for people to get rid of tree trimmings and other yard debris.



We also have a drop off location for old tires. We do ask that people stack them neatly in the proper trailer, and so far they have.

I have been in office about a year. It has been frustrating at times but also very rewarding. There are times people disagree with me, and I am willing to listen. I have told folks I may not always be right, and we may not always agree, but my goal is to be the most transparent elected official in the county.

Lastly, on a personal note, I am 64 years old with a beautiful younger wife, Amber, and a precious daughter, Charlotte, who turns 7 in December. I retired from the federal government after spending 12 years working for Congress-

man Brooks. Before that, I had spent my career in the corporate world. I also spent several years on the board of a community bank, which I find helpful in evaluating financial decisions.

It is my honor to serve you. I know full well that the taxpayers pay my salary and that I work for them. Thank you for the opportunity, and if you wish to reach me you may email or call me.

***Johnny.
turner@
limestone-
county-al.gov***

256-232-2964 office

256-800-4634 cell



Captain's Log

Mission Abort

by Brenda Wilkerson

In my attempt to help the kids understand the noise volume each one is expelling, I tried an experiment. I got on the mic and told them what I was going to attempt to do.

So, without delay, I told everyone to 'talk like so-in-so.' Ahhhhh... mission accomplished as the volume of the bus went up and down when mimicking each name I called. As the experiment was winding down with lots of giggles, I called on one last student who is quite the chatty soul. I was so confused as the noise coming from the 50 voices behind me was nothing like the others.

As it gradually sunk in what they were doing, I was both horrified and

almost wet myself with laughter as I looked through my ginormous mirror to see his reaction. As confused as he was too, a slow toothy grin and a twinkle in his eye flickered as I am confident he just loved attention of any kind.

Whew, I thought, I did not destroy this kid with my silly experiment. For what I heard in unison was 50 children pretending to throw up because he was the last kid to throw up on the bus.

Oh my Lord, sweet Jesus . . . please help me to NOT ruin these children by complete accident! Amen!

(An appropriate prayer for parents as well)

~Brenda





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Protecting Your Story
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Slinkard On Success

“T” Is For Teachable

by D. A. Slinkard

D.A. Slinkard would love your feedback. You can contact him at da.slinkard@gmail.com

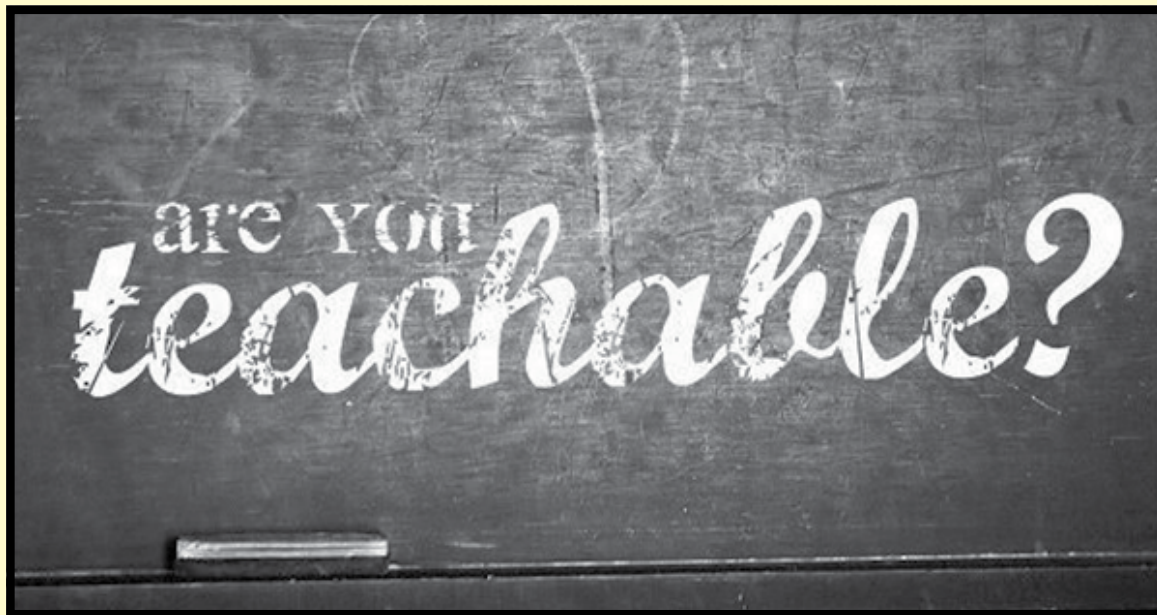
We are to the 20th article of 2025, and our letter is “T” for teachable. We should all be teachable, but the truth is not everyone has the right attitude. It has been said that when a person stops learning is when they start dying, and I believe this. It does not matter what age a person is, they should be teachable with their attitude and approach to life. There is always something we can learn in life to help make us a better person, yet many times people believe they have it all figured out. This attitude helps lead to a downward spiral not only personally but to the detriment of our society.

The question becomes – How does someone become teachable? The first thing we must realize is it will take work to have the right approach. We need to keep an open mind to understand we are not always right, and I know it may be hard to fathom, but there are times when I am wrong. I must have an open mind in order to realize there are times I may be wrong about something. If you are wrong, you need to be able to own up to it — admit it and proceed forward; yet too often people have the hardest time admitting when they are wrong. Sadly, I end up being wrong quite often, but we all need to learn how to

respond to the times we are wrong.

Learning how to respond helps us to keep our ego in check, because if we are not careful, we can have runaway egos that create an ugly monster for us. How many people have been destroyed because they have thought themselves to be better than what they are? I can think of several people who have stumbled in life because of pride. I immediately think of Proverbs 16:18, “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” We need to be honest with ourselves; there are so many guiding principles from the Bible that could help everyone live a better life and live a life that impacts the world. Yet we have a segment of society trying to take the Bible out of society. Go figure!

When it comes to being teachable, I believe another factor that helps mold this mentality is how often a person asks for feedback. This is vital in improving ourselves, but we have become a society that wants to be told how



great we are and do not want to concern ourselves with what areas we need improvement upon. Can you say, “Participation trophies?” We want to feel like a winner, yet some of the biggest lessons learned in life have come from the times I lost and not from when I was winning. Are you someone who can ask for feedback, and are you willing to do something with the feedback you receive? We all have things we can do a better job with in our life, but too often we do not want to take the extra effort it requires.

The next characteristic I think about when I think of someone who is teachable is respect-

ful. This might not make sense, but we need to be respectful to those who are trying to give us feedback because I believe these people do so because they care. They want to see you do well, and chances are they have your best interests at heart. I will always remember when my dad would give me advice or correction, he would say, “Son, I have seen the sun rise and sun set more than you have...” He was telling me he had more wisdom because he had lived longer, and we need kids to learn how to be respectful.

Sadly, we have a generation of kids who are brats. We have a generation of

kids who get what they want, when they want, because they have soft parents. Sometimes waiting in life makes you work harder and teaches you patience. If a kid’s parents give them everything, it teaches them nothing but to be even more of a brat. Teachable is the word. If you want to have a better life, if you want to perform better on the job, if you want to be a more productive person in society – it is a word that must fit into your vocabulary. What are some things in your life for which you need to be more teachable? What steps can you take to improve your life?



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The View From The Bridge

Embracing The Season Of Change: *A Fall Reflection*

by Jackie Warner

Career Development Facilitator

"Impact, Engage, Grow" Community Matters



As the crisp air settles in and the trees begin their vibrant transformation, I find myself falling in love all over again—with fall. There's something deeply comforting about this season: the golden hues of changing leaves, the cozy embrace of sweaters pulled from storage, and the familiar taste of chili simmering on the stove. The sweet

aroma of pies and cinnamon-spiced treats fills our homes and hearts with warmth.

But beyond the sensory delights, fall speaks to something deeper. It's a season of transition—a divine invitation to reflect, release, and renew. Just as trees shed their leaves, we too are called to let go of what no longer serves us. Whether it's old habits, lingering doubts, or emotion-

al burdens, fall reminds us that release is not loss—it's preparation for growth.

This year has brought many blessings. I'm grateful for the accomplishments that have unfolded and the ways the Lord has provided for me and my family. Yet, it hasn't been without sorrow. Personal trials have left their mark, but through it all, I hold fast to the truth: the Lord

orders our steps for His good and His glory. Even when life feels uncertain, His Word remains a steady light.

My daughter recently reminded me of something profound: while devotionals and spiritual articles can uplift us, nothing replaces the power of opening the Bible. The Word is divine, alive, and essential—our daily bread. In this season of slowing down

and turning inward, I encourage each of you to lean into the present moment. Let the Lord fill you. Let His Word guide you.

As we turn the page to fall, may we embrace its beauty, its lessons, and its quiet call to transformation. Let this be a season not just of change, but of deeper connection—with ourselves, with others, and with God.





Learning As A Lifestyle

Grief And The Holidays: *Honoring The Unseen Weight*

by Eric Betts
Assistant Director, Curtis Coleman Center for Religion Leadership and Culture at Athens State University

We are now headed into the holiday season, which is often wrapped in glittering lights and cheerful gatherings, which can feel unbearably heavy for those carrying grief. While society may expect joy and celebration, many find themselves navigating memories, absences, and emotional dissonance. The empty chair at the table, the silence where laughter once echoed—these are not just metaphors but lived realities. Grief doesn't pause for Christmas carols or New Year's countdowns. It lingers, reshapes, and resurfaces, often in ways that defy calendar expectations.

There is no expiration date on sorrow. The idea that grief should follow a linear timeline—three months, six months, one year—is not only false but harmful. People



grieve differently, and the depth of loss cannot be measured by time passed. Some may feel

numb for years, others may cry daily, and still others may find themselves laughing one

moment and aching the next. Healing is not a performance, and the pressure to “move on” often silences the very process that leads to genuine restoration.

Policing grief—whether through unsolicited advice, spiritual platitudes, or social expectations—invalidates the mourner's experience. Telling someone to “be strong,” “look on the bright side,” or “get over it” may come from good intentions, but it often reinforces isolation. Grief is not weakness. It is love with nowhere to go. When we rush people through their mourning, we deny them the dignity of remembrance, the sacred-

ness of lament, and the right to honor their loss in their own way.

Instead, we must create space for grief to breathe. That means allowing people to skip the party, cry during the hymn, or speak the name of the one who's gone without fear of awkwardness. It means recognizing that grief may show up in traditions, in smells, in songs—and that's okay. To grieve is to remember, and to remember is to love. This holiday season, let us resist the urge to fix, and instead offer presence, patience, and permission—for grief to be what it is, for as long as it needs to be.





The Alternative Approach

Iodine And Health

by Roy Williams

As much as science has changed the world we live in today, much of the knowledge about health is being hidden and therefore overlooked. Some of that knowledge goes back for hundreds of years, and in many cases, could be saving people a lot of suffering and even deaths. In this article, you are going to learn about one of those all-natural dietary supplements that is safe and effective for extending life and preventing some of the common disorders Americans are suffering from today.

Most of us have heard of this supplement called iodine, but would probably be hard-pressed to explain what it does. Before widespread use of synthetic drugs and antibiotics, iodine was recommended for everything from healing wounds and stopping disease. It was also used to destroy bacteria and viruses, and possibly even for the prevention of cancer.

Without adequate stores of iodine, many people suffer from preventable disease and die early. You may suffer from a number of diseases that negatively affect your quality of life. Some of these disorders include thyroid disease and goiter; breast, prostate, ovarian, thyroid, pancreatic and other cancers; infertility, and miscarriages, fibrocystic breast disease, ovarian, pancreatic and thyroid cysts and possibly endometriosis; obesity; mental retardation; autism; allergies; asthma; Parkinson's

disease and other brain disorders.

Approximately 2 billion people, or one-third of the world's population, live in areas defined as iodine deficient by the World Health Organization. Their statistics show that about 15% all populations are deficient. Dr. David Brownstein says that 90% of the 5,000 patients he has tested are iodine insufficient. He also writes that over half of all pregnant women are iodine deficient.

So, what if a supplement that cost pennies a day could protect a child's brain and give him or her a life of promise and productivity? So many of our children today are growing up mentally and physically crippled, never to reach their intellectual potential, only because their mothers didn't get enough iodine during conception and pregnancy, according to Robert Thompson, M.D.

Here is a very short list of the scientifically validated health benefits of adequate iodine intake, yet almost no doctor today is trained to check and make sure their patients are consuming enough iodine. Just one more way the modern day "Sick Care System" keeps us ignorant and lets us down. Adequate intake of iodine has been scientifically proven to prevent breast, prostate, ovarian, thyroid, and pancreatic cancer. It helps us maintain a healthy weight, stop food cravings, and keeps our metabolism running



normally. Iodine boosts energy and libido, stops brain fog, and improves focus. Iodine increases IQ in children and possibly prevents autism, improves blood sugar in people with diabetes, and reduces the risk of Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases.

To help you understand just how important iodine is, look at the facts that we have known for many years. Iodine is found in every single cell in your body. Your hormones need iodine to perform their jobs. Iodine is essential for thyroid function and every part of the cascade of metabolic processes that the thyroid governs. Your immune system needs iodine to function. It is a powerful antimicrobial that can prevent you from getting the common cold or stop an infection of a wound to preventing cancer. It is necessary for healthy

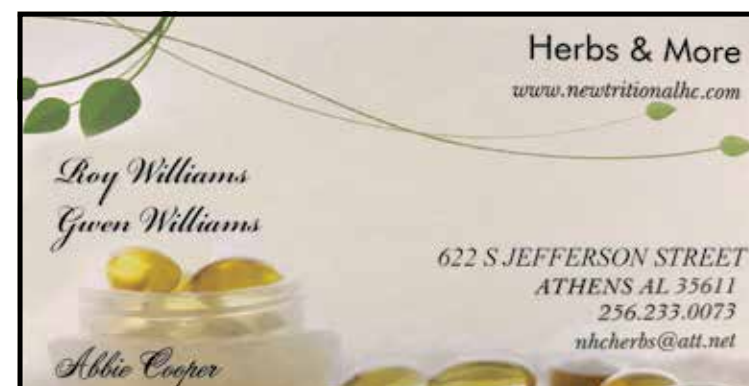
breast tissue and is critical for brain development in babies.

Approximately 2 billion people, or one-third, are defined as iodine deficient including millions in India, China, and the United States. You might ask, "How could this be?" Some of the longest living people live in areas where large amounts of iodine are found abundantly; this includes the mountainous regions like the Himalayas, the Andes, and the Alps. The lowest levels of naturally occurring iodine include Central Asia, Central Africa, much of Europe, and large parts

of America. It has been identified as the good guy wearing the white hat, bringing good health to all those who are getting enough in their diet.

Unfortunately, the American diet does not contain anywhere near enough to maintain optimal levels of iodine or optimal health. The good news is that getting enough iodine in our diet is as simple as taking 2 capsules of the only iodine I recommend because it contains and delivers three different types of iodine in the exact amounts needed. It comes in a one- or two-month supply for less than a dollar a day. It delivers 30,000 mcg in a daily dose, which most medical professionals agree is safe even if you are taking other medications. This particular iodine delivers a perfectly balanced amount of potassium iodine, sodium iodine, and molecular iodine (from kelp). Stop the guess work and take the best. Go by Herbs & More in Athens, NHC Herb Shop in Killen, or call us 256-757-0660 to have it delivered.

*Your Friend in Health,
Roy P Williams*



Synergy

by Deb Kitchenmaster



The layers and the dimensions of synergy are far reaching. Synergy refers to the interaction of two or more agents or forces that produces an effect that is greater than the sum of their individual effects. Some words that bring understanding to this amazing reality are words like union, unity, alliance, cooperation, harmony, concert, connect, and collaboration. Simply, it is a characteristic or manner of an interaction. It's about mutual support, pulling together, hook-up, and communion.

The Greek word "synergos" appears in the New Testament to describe cooperation between God and humans in contexts such as spreading the Gospel, God working all things for good, and believers working together in faith. Working with God signifies where human effort is combined with God's power.

A man by the name of Timothy is called a co-worker in God's service in

spreading the Gospel. God's work in all things speaks of God working TOGETHER (synergy) for the good of those who love Him. Jesus speaks of a synergistic principle – "If two of you shall AGREE on earth as touching anything that they say; 'ASK', it will be done for them of my Father who is in heaven."

Another example of synergy would be "interpersonal cooperation" among believers as seen in 2 Corinthians 6:1. Paul urges believers not to receive God's grace in vain and to live as co-workers with Him, knowing that "when two or three come TOGETHER in my name, there am I with them." Stephen Covey states, "Synergy is what happens when one plus one equals ten or a hundred or even a thousand! It's the profound result when two or more respectful human beings determine to go beyond their preconceived ideas to meet a great challenge." We were eye-witnesses to this very thing on Monday, October 13, 2025! Yes. The power of human beings in agree-



ment with one another created a synergy that brought about a shift and reset for the betterment of humanity. "Synergy is better than my way or your way... It's OUR way."

Synergy means the combined effect of two or more elements – like divine grace and human effort or thought and soul -- which is greater than the sum of their separate parts. These hook-ups, these connections lead us to spiritual growth and transformation.

Have you ever questioned

how a human being on a horse with saddle, pad, and bridle can get ahead of a herd of wild horses and redirect them? What about a human being on a horse with saddle, pad, and bridle spotting a horse, in the midst of running wild horses, without a rider on its back, no saddle, no pad and no bridle -- the rider on the horse gets close enough to the wild one to throw a rope around its head? You are eye-witnessing the synergy of horse and rider.

I called her Black Beauty. There were at least two or three trainers that gave up on her and labeled her "crazy" and "dangerous." She was neither. She was misunderstood! This mare did not respond to the methods of these trainers because she was super sensitive and their ways did not work for her. Of course, she wasn't worth your time because she was just a stupid, crazy, dangerous horse. This horse did require your time and your attention to get to know her. Once understood, once respected, once unified, this horse served special needs people beau-

tifully!

Inspired by a true story, The Long Shot, with Julie Benz and Marsha Mason, depicts synergy using your DVD player. Through their UNION the rider becomes the horse's eyes and the horse becomes the rider's legs. This story reflects the value of boundaries, the freedom that comes from forgiving and the endurance that comes to your character, from not giving up. TOGETHER they are unstoppable.

The movie, Amazing Racer, starring Claire Forlani, Daryl Hannah, Louis Gossett Jr., Eric Roberts, and Julianne Michelle communicate how the synergy of grief, lies, and abandonment can be exchanged for the synergy of rescued, truth, and valued.

"Your most important work is always ahead of you, never behind you." Stephen Covey

*Your NEIGHbor,
Deb Kitchenmaster*

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Rightside Way

Crying Wolf Is A Learned Behavior

by Phil Williams

Is anyone else tired of liberals crying wolf?

We've all heard the Aesop's fable of the boy who cried, "Wolf!" As the tale goes, a young boy cried, "Wolf!" alarming the people of the village who came running to protect their flocks. It was a lark, and the boy laughed at their panic. Enjoying himself, he cried, "Wolf!" a second time, and once again the villagers rushed out to the field only to see the boy laughing at them. Then a real wolf came, but when he cried, "Wolf!" the third time, no one believed him, and the boy became wolf food.

On its face, the fable of the boy who cried wolf is about trust, truthfulness, and loyalty. But I imagine that somewhere in the backstory is a negative example that led the fictional boy to believe he could lie for effect and get away with it. The boy was wrong, he knew it, and he deserved the consequences of leading people to believe there was an emergency when there wasn't. But "crying wolf" is often a learned behavior.

Knuckleheads don't want to do what's necessary to get a job done, earn a promotion, or take responsibility, so they

manufacture a crisis by crying wolf and leverage the lie for their own purposes.

Liberal Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson does this daily. A former teachers' union activist, Johnson is a man who has never led anything in his life, yet serves as the chief executive of one of the largest, most dynamic cities in the world. If stupid was a crime, Brandon Johnson would be facing a life sentence. Johnson takes to the microphone daily claiming President Trump is personally arresting black men, using rhetoric like fascist, Nazi, and thugs when speaking about law enforcement. The activist mayor recently claimed that the right side of politics is trying to incite a "rematch of the Civil War." He signed an executive order setting up so-called "ICE-free zones" and requested that citizens of Chicago rise up and resist ICE. His behavior is galling, it is foolish, and is clear evidence that somewhere along the way Brandon Johnson was taught that crying wolf is a tactic. A strategy. A tool in the political toolbox.

What example does that give to the younger generation? A story broke a few years ago that answers the question quite well.

The 56th Fighter Wing

at Luke Air Force Base dealt with a young black enlisted man alleging that a white superior officer had denied him a requested special duty. In response to his inquiry, the white superior allegedly responded that "the Air Force is looking for somebody of white complexion and with the image that the Air Force needs." It turned into a whole thing, as you might imagine.

The allegations fell in an era of hyper-sensitivity in the wake of BLM riots and claims by the Biden administration of systemic racism in the military ranks. But despite the political climate, the allegations were proven false. He cried wolf for the sole purpose of trying to advance his personal career. Instead, he wound up eaten by the wolf, facing punishment under the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

Did he really think that he would get away with it? In my humble opinion, it was just another situation where the boy cried wolf, yet doing so was a learned behavior. He felt the political winds and saw politicians and pundits literally kneeling in front of protestors. Erstwhile Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin had issued an operational shutdown filled with histrionic assertions of

extremism, racism and sexism in the US Military. Millions of man hours were lost in the wake of the cries of wolf. The Heritage Foundation called it a solution in search of a problem. Why would the young Airman not think that he could get away with it? He learned that crying wolf is okay.

Fast forward again to Chicago's Brandon Johnson. Lump in Oregon Governor Tina Kotek or Congressman Dan Goldman with whom I sparred recently on CNN. None of them or any of their peers wish to acknowledge the harm that their cries of wolf are doing to their constituents. Denying on the one hand that problems exist on the streets of their represented cities and towns, they instead cry wolf, labeling Trump as the fomenter of discord and terror. That same rhetoric then educates impressionable minds that they must commit more acts of violence against law enforcement and riot in the streets.

All that crazy rhetoric does is teach young minds to cry wolf.

I heard an older lawyer remind a jury that of one of the opposing witnesses had been caught lying on the stand. He followed by telling them that his grandad used to say, "You lie

about a little, you'll lie about a lot." Politicos and pundits who scream that the sky is falling, who cry wolf at the drop of a hat, evidence a willingness to lie to get their way. If they will lie about one thing what else are they lying about?

Ronald Reagan once said, "America was built on the voluntary principle by good neighbors who knew that they had to rely on each other." That's true. But it's hard to rely on a liar, and lying is often a learned behavior.

Politicians need to stop crying wolf. A civil society emerges from truth.

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.





Cooking with Anna (continued from page 9)

My Identity In Christ: *God Says I Am Courageous*

by Anna Hamilton

Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9).

Courage is not about never feeling afraid; it is about moving forward in spite of fear, knowing that the power of God goes with me. His presence is my boldness. His strength becomes my bravery.

Christ in me makes me bold. On my own, I may feel uncertain but in Christ, I have supernatural strength. When I feel small, I remember that the Spirit inside me is greater than anything against me. “Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.” 1 John 4:4

When I face spiritual battles, I stand firm knowing I am equipped and protected. “Be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power” (Ephesians 6:10). When I feel unqualified, I remember that God chooses the weak to display His strength. “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9). With Christ in me, I no longer have to shrink back. I can speak truth boldly, love fearlessly, and walk confidently into the unknown.

Courage is my calling. God did not create me to live hidden, anxious, or defeated. He created me to stand firm, walk in faith, and live as a light in darkness. I am courageous when I: Choose faith over what I feel. Stand for truth even when it’s unpopular. Love boldly even when I risk rejection. Obey God even when it doesn’t make sense. Courage isn’t just a personality trait it is a spiritual

identity.

I am courageous not because of who I am, but because of who Christ is in me. I will not let fear define me or silence me. I will move forward in faith, trusting God with every step. The Lord is my strength, my shield, and my confidence. In Christ, I am brave. I am bold. I am courageous.

No matter what I face, I stand firm in this unshakable truth: My identity in Christ is secure and in Him, I am courageous.

When I feel small, I remember that the Spirit inside me is greater than anything against me. When I feel weak, I remember that God’s power is made perfect in my weakness. When I feel unqualified, I remember that courage is not about confidence in myself — it is about confidence in Christ within me.

This week’s recipe is a classic with a twist. When the weather turns cool and there is a crisp breeze in the air, chili seems to be on everyone’s menu. It is a favorite for sure. This chili recipe has the added yumminess and nutritional value of pumpkin. The addition of this orange, autumn favorite squash is fun and a great way to sneak in more veggies for your family. I hope your family loves it as much as we do. Feel free to swap out the ground beef for ground turkey, ground chicken, or leave out the meat all together for a yummy vegetarian chili. Make the recipe work for your family.

“The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psalm 27:1)

Domestic Violence And Mental Illness

by Lisa Philippart,
Licensed Professional Counselor



"Relationships are like glass. Sometimes it's better to leave them broken than to hurt yourself putting them back together."

- Unknown

October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month. According to the National Violence Hotline, a common assumption is that domestic abuse can be attributed to the partner's mental health condition. Some of the mental illnesses considered are bipolar disorder, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), narcissistic personality disorder, borderline personality disorder, and antisocial personality disorder. And while these are serious mental illnesses, they are not the cause for domestic abuse. In fact, there is nothing in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition, (DSM-5) that states that

mental illness solely is the cause for a partner to be abusive. However, there are a number of diagnoses that can increase the risk for abusive patterns to appear, not only in a relationship, but in other areas of life. When a person is mentally ill, all areas of his or her life are affected. In contrast, abuse typically only impacts a personal relationship.

We can separate abusive behavior in an intimate-partner relationship from a mental illness. These abusive behaviors usually only occur in intimate-partner relationships -- meaning that an abusive partner will not show their negative or harmful actions toward friends, co-workers, or other family members. The abusive partner is able to portray a front that is all happy and well to the rest of the world. But when it's just the partner and victim, a different side of the abuser comes out. The impact

of being the only person to see this behavior is isolating for the victim, as they may think that no one else will believe them. This makes it easier for the abuser to make the partner feel responsible for the abusive behavior, reinforcing the isolation. Sound familiar? (See my article on Gaslighting from June 21, 2019.) In the case of domestic violence, it would then follow that the abusive partner may have an "unhealthy" value system rather than a mental illness. If the abuse was caused by a mental illness, the perpetrator would also yell and/or hit friends, family, and coworkers when upset. I will acknowledge that there are times when there appears to be a correlation between domestic abuse and mental illness. Some people struggle with mental illness and are also abusive to a partner, just as some people have a mental illness and are supportive partners.

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I believe it is important to keep in mind that the mental illness and the abusive behaviors need to be identified and addressed separately. Unfortunately, many abusers do not accept responsibility for their actions. There is no admission of harm, so they choose not to seek professional help or even show a willingness to change. If that's the case, then the abuser tends to continue mistreatment, which escalates over time. Why Does He Do That is a book written by Lundy Bancroft, which attempts to clarify whether what a partner is doing is abuse or abuse with mental illness. She includes several questions to ask that might help to answer that question:

Does the abusive partner yell, scream, or hit others outside of the relationship?

Does the abusive partner make others check in to see where they are and who they are with?

Does the abusive partner verbally tear down others?

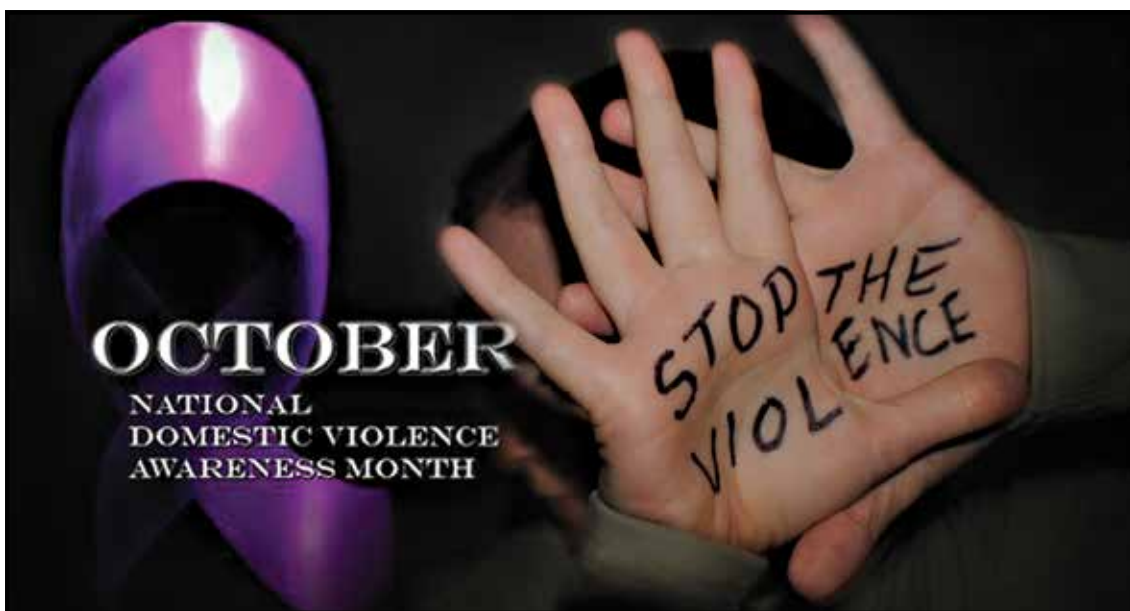
Does the abusive partner pressure others to do

things that they would rather not do?

Does the abusive partner threaten others?

If the answer to these questions is no, then most likely the abuser is not suffering from a mental illness. If the answer to these questions is yes, then it is possible that the abuser is experiencing some form of mental illness. Even if a partner has a mental illness, that is never an excuse for abuse. Abuse is a choice someone makes in order to maintain power and control. If you are in an abusive relationship, please seek help from HOPE Place, a program of Crisis Services of North Alabama. The 24-hour crisis line number is (256)716-1000 or 1-800-691-8426. Everyone deserves a healthy, loving, supportive, and safe relationship all of the time.

Lisa Philippart is a Licensed Professional Counselor, who divides her time between her own private practice in Huntsville and providing personal counseling services at Athens State University.



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