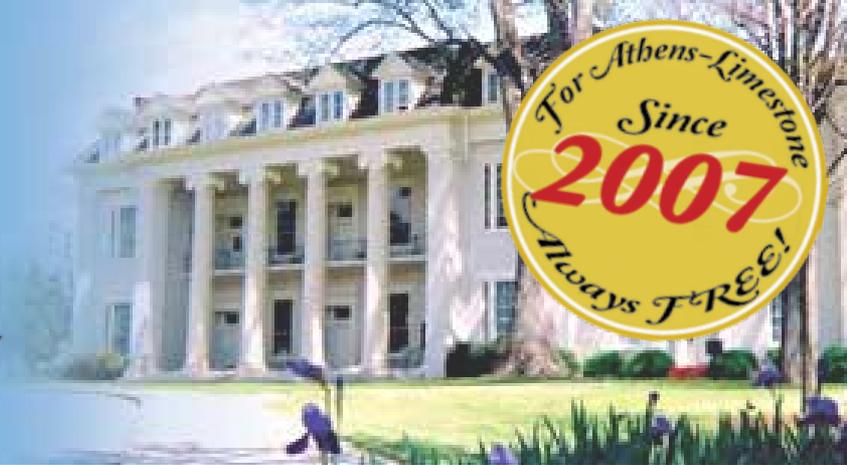


February 20 - March 5, 2026

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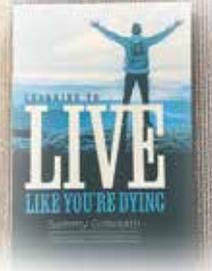
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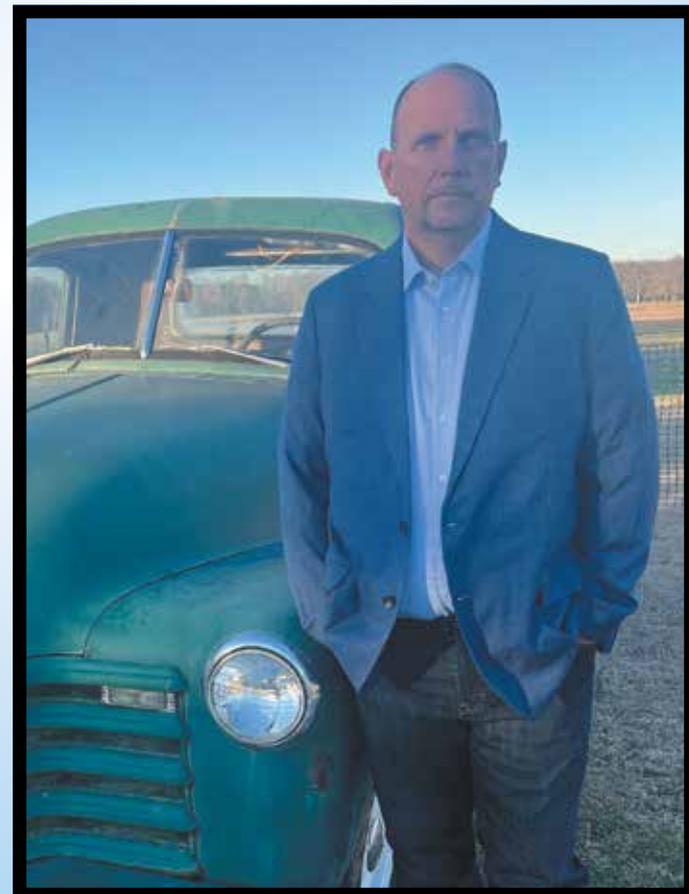
Scott Craig Is Running For Limestone County Commission Chairman

By Scott Craig

Thanks for letting me put this announcement in this *Athens Now* newspaper. It's hard to get your name out to everyone in the county without spending a lot of money to do it.

I was born and raised in Limestone County, Alabama. I graduated from West Limestone High School in 1990, played basketball at the University of Alabama Huntsville for a year before joining the United States Air Force. I married while in the Air Force and have been married for 31 years. I am a member of the Athens chapters of AMVETS and VFW. After the Air Force, I returned to Alabama for a few years before moving to Mississippi. It just wasn't the same as being

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Publisher's Point

AI Gospel Babies, Pros And Cons

To say I am a fledgling when it comes to AI is generous. I am still soaking wet and honestly haven't pecked my way out of my shell, truth be told. But peering out, I have had my eye on something that both delights and nearly horrifies me, and that is the recent trend of using AI-generated babies to sing and preach the Gospel. I have at times laughed, gone, "Awwwww," and have also gotten squirmy. I would be interested in hearing what you think, truly.

So, let's start with the "Awwwww...." factor. Little toddler kiddos crinkling up their noses as they sing their hearts out to the solid urban lyrics of "Don't Play With Me, God On My Side." The object of the declaration is of course the defeated one, and you have everything from minicops standing in front of their patrol cars to the Taj Mahal praising God and thanking Him for His protection in good times and bad. "Thanks be to God who always causes us to triumph" becomes old strength in a new way.

Next, there is the literal newborn whose nose is still smashed down on his face and is navigating on his not-yet-straightened-out neo-natal legs out the doors of the hospital. A voice calls out,

"Hey, where ya goin'? You just got here!" The baby turns around and in a firm child's voice states, "This generation needs Jesus, and I'm going out to preach the Gospel." Good on ya, li'l brother! Get after it!

Then there are endless, wonderful Gospel songs with powerful voices that "remind you of powerful voices." Okay.... These have reached number one on Gospel charts, and why we have to number anything on Gospel charts (wutttt?) still makes me scratch my head. I suppose it could be argued that hymnwriters of old that still show up are chart-toppers after all this time, but that is probably a topic for another day. And, I seriously doubt that they had "trending" on their minds when they were singing the old, old story that is still relevant today.

Now, for some serious cons. I am not Catholic, but whoever created Father Justin, who I guess ultimately became "the AI priest formerly known as Father Justin" (and just became just Justin) apparently asserted that babies could be baptized with Gatorade. Ummmm, no. Whether you believe in infant baptism or not is not the point,



here. Gatorade externally applied is for drenching coaches' heads after a playoff victory. Water is for baptism. Any questions?

For me, at this point, the pros are winning, but not by a landslide. I have found myself humming and singing Gospel truths with a smile on my face as I remember those adorable babies. And then, I also have to tell myself, "Ummm, Ali, they are not real." True,

and the question is, if one of those "babies" opens someone up to the love of God and they surrender to it, (the love, not the baby,) is that a bad thing? You tell me.

Ali Elizabeth Turner

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Fort Hampton's Interesting History

by Ali Elizabeth Turner

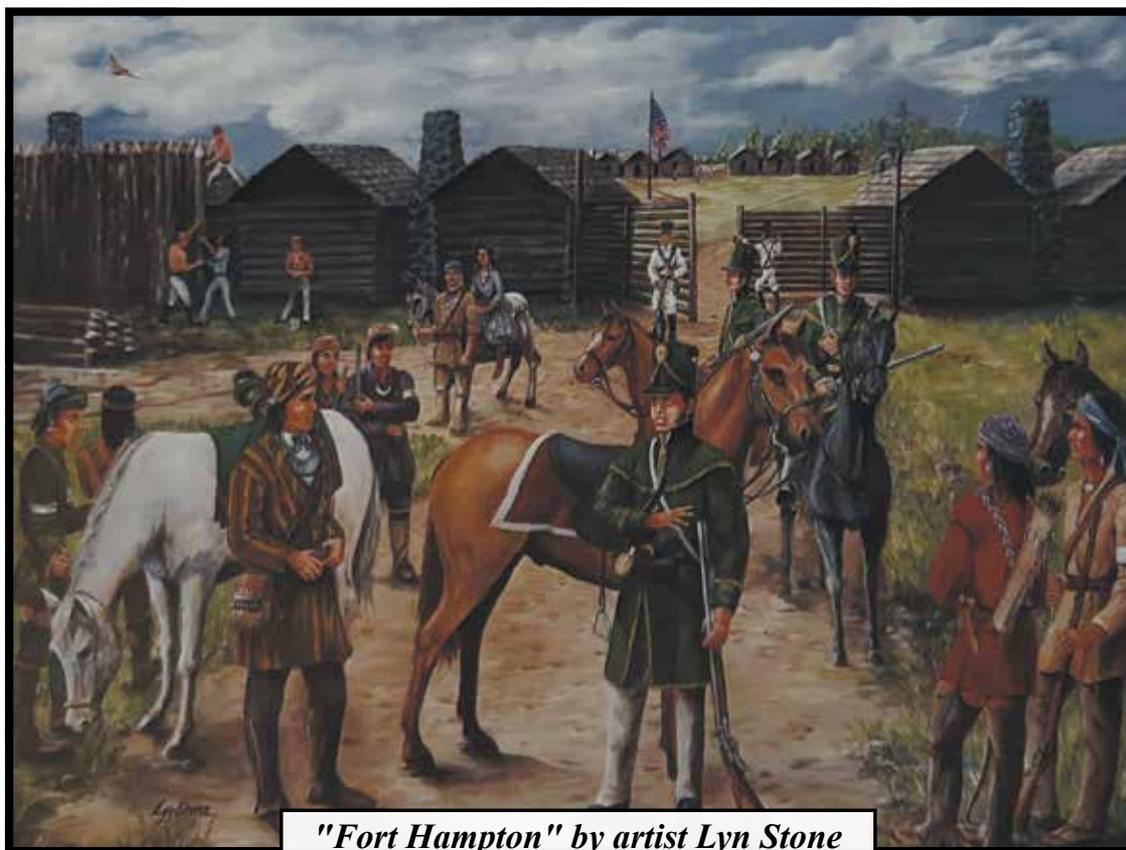


In 1810, President James Madison ordered something that was indeed rare—the building of a fort whose sole purpose was to protect Chickasaw land owners from white squatters. Fort Hampton was built and used for less than a decade in that capacity, and originally had no defenses. This is rather unusual for anything that is described as a fort. If I may wax philosophical for a moment, I find it sadly fascinating that so many of the things that plague fallen humans keep re-appearing; ideas such as slavery will be quelled and reappear, and at the moment, on our planet more people are in various forms of slavery than at any other time in human history. Squatting on someone's land or in their woods makes digital headlines these days, but back when Fort Hampton was built, the problem was apparently troublesome enough that it garnered the attention of a U.S. president in the infancy of our nation, and upholding land rights in this instance was paramount. It is indeed ironic when you consider that Alabama is also famous for being a long portion of the Trail of Tears. However, in this case,

without apology, white soldiers removed white squatters from land that belonged to the Chickasaw, and there was never a shot fired between anyone. No outward hostilities were ever recorded, even though the soldiers had to do their job more than once.

The fort was located on a hill overlooking the Elk River near Wright Road. The coordinates are 34° 48.187' N, 87° 11.913' W. Its location was chosen because of the literal advantage of "higher ground." A historical marker is located on Hwy 72 about ¼ mile south of the actual location of fort, which today is on private property. An excavation project occurred in 2013, and the owners were happy to have their land dug up. No human remains were found, but there were things like nails, buttons from uniforms, and logs from former buildings.

As forts go, Hampton was small. It only had 32 log cabins laid out in a rectangle that was approximately 236 feet square. The soldiers were primarily from the Rifle Regiment, and even Sam Houston, who, as part of his legacy was adopted by the Cherokee, served



"Fort Hampton" by artist Lyn Stone

there for a while.

Defensible barriers were added when the War of 1812 broke out, and blessedly, once again they were never needed. In between removing squatters, the soldiers began clearing brush and building the roads that eventually would link Huntsville with Limestone County, and Lime-

stone County to what ultimately became the final borders of Tennessee.

The reason I included this piece of history in a **Soldier** column is that I am a firm believer in "letting the story be the story." Just tell it. Don't try to change it, sanitize it, remove it, revise it, or do anything to it. I am also a firm believer

that if you do so, if you let the good, the bad and ugly do their work, you will find something redemptive. In this case, soldiers were ordered by a U.S. president to protect the land rights of the Chickasaw, and they did it. And so, let us honor such actions and protect the story.

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Athens Athletics: A “Recipe” For Service And Success Since 2003

by Ali Elizabeth Turner

How in the world does the word “recipe” fit into the product and service description of a store whose titular focus has to do with all things athletic? Well, it is a dear and a tough story that Athens Athletics founder Randy McKinney told us recently at a presentation he gave at our Limestone Leaders Business Network International group. Before his mom passed a few months ago, Randy wanted to capture a bit of her legacy by getting the recipes of two of her most “famous” (and some of his favorite) dishes: “chewy cakes” and potato salad. Chewy cakes are essentially brown sugar brownies -- no chocolate, nuts optional. They are soft, just like brownies, and have been a “must-have” in the McKinney family since Randy was a kid. The other was his mom’s potato salad that had a secret ingredient whose secret is now out. She would make a pretty standard Southern-style potato salad, and with each batch would add a medium-sized yellow apple for just a touch of sweetness. It was very important to Randy that she write the recipe in her own handwriting for reasons I’ll explain below.

Randy took some bamboo cutting boards and used the shop laser to literally burn the recipes on to them for fam-

ily bereavement gifts, and the idea has taken off. Real estate agents in particular have taken to using the cutting boards to give as gifts at closing, and they are perfect for just about any occasion where a personalized gift for the kitchen fills the bill especially well.

The “bread and butter” of Athens Athletics has always been T-shirts, and with spring sports almost upon us, Randy and his trusty crew are gearing up for producing mini-to-mondo batches of shirts, depending on the needs of the client. Back in the day, the only way to make T-shirts was by use of screen printing, and Athens Athletics still does that. However, with the advent of direct-to-film (DTF) machines, it is now much easier, faster, and less wear and tear on the shoulders. The DTF machine also makes it possible for a shirt to have 16 colors, and with the DTF it is just as easy to make one as it is 1,000.

Randy spent two decades working at Steelcase, which was a stable and steady income for his wife and three sons. However, as is the case with so many of our *Athens Now* clients, Randy had the hankering to become a business owner, took his last two weeks of accrued vacation, and experienced an “apprenticeship-

by-fire” learning the athletic supply trade at a local store before they closed their doors. He has told me with a laugh that he thought that he would eventually get to the place that he could watch ESPN at the shop and stay abreast of the sports world, especially baseball. While that hasn’t happened, over the years he has built a solid business and team, and this fall when he had to have rotator cuff surgery, they did a beautiful job of holding down the fort and keeping Athens Athletics going while he recovered.

Athens Athletics can do just about anything decorative to a hat, shirt, mug, trophy, travel mug, license plate, cutting board, and more. They also sell all kinds of sports equipment. They do computer-realized embroidery along with sublimation, which is a way of causing paint to actually sink into something like a metal license plate and become a part of it.

Another brilliant stroke was for Athens Athletics to become a U-Haul facility, and this helped keep them going during COVID. When certain businesses were deemed “non-essential,” it was determined that making it possible for people to move things was indeed essential, for which Randy has always



The Athens Athletics crew: (L-R) Randy McKinney - owner, Mandy Marks, Brianna Smith and Karen Owens



Athens Athletics newest member Jayden Owens

been thankful. I can say from experience that when we have needed to use a U-Haul, Athens Athletics made the transportation part of our endeavor so much easier and treated us with great care and kindness.

Recently, a whole new feature and service has been made available to customers of Athens Athletics, and that is the

online store. Many different schools, churches, organizations, businesses, and families have done fundraisers, and in the past, the ordering and collecting part of the endeavor could be a real pain. Beth McKinney, Randy’s wife spent years as a STEM teacher, and brought the online feature to the store. Now people pick the design of the shirt, go online to order it, pick it up, and the amount of the agreed upon fundraiser is generated automatically. Everybody loves it—the customers and the crew.

Athens Athletics has a saying, and it is, “If it can be decorated, we will decorate it!” Stop by today and let them show you what they can do for you, your business, or your group.

Athens Athletics
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Hours:
 Monday-Friday 9-5,
 Saturday 9-noon
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Calendar of Events

EmpowerHER Women's Summit February 25

The EmpowerHER Women's Summit invites professionals of all backgrounds in Athens-Limestone County to connect, grow, and lift one another higher. EmpowerHER will feature notable speakers, interactive roundtable discussions, and opportunities for women to share stories and ideas with one another. 8:30AM-1:30PM.

Hospice of Limestone County's Chili Challenge February 28

Hospice of Limestone County's Annual Chili Challenge will return to delicious action on Saturday, Feb. 28. 11:00AM-2:00PM. Alabama Veterans Museum and Archives. 114 W. Pryor St. Athens, AL.

2026 Boutique Crawl Day 1 March 7

This March, downtown Athens' clothing and gift boutiques will offer major specials during the 2026 Boutique Crawl for two Saturdays. Shoppers can enjoy exclusive deals, and for every purchase over \$20, they can enter to win a \$500 Shopping Spree in downtown Athens.

State of the City Address March 10

Join the Athens-Limestone County Chamber of Commerce as they host the State of the City Address. Athens Mayor, Ronnie Marks, will take this opportunity to update the community on the city's progress and the past year in review. Breakfast begins at 8am with the program starting promptly at 8:30am. Alabama Veterans Museum and Archives, 114 W. Pryor St.

Tennessee Valley Old Time Fiddlers Concert Series March 19

Please join us for a special performance by The Gibson Brothers on Thursday, March 19, 2026, at 7:00 PM in historic McCandless Hall at Athens State University. 7:00 PM-9:00 PM. McCandless Hall at Athens State University. 302 Bryan St. Athens, AL.

3rd Annual Singing River Smoke-O-Rama BBQ Festival March 27

Fire up the grills and sharpen the knives! The Singing River Smoke-O-Rama BBQ Festival is officially returning

to Athens, Alabama, on March 27th and 28th, 2026. 6:00 PM. Limestone County Sheriff's Rodeo Arena. 18118 SR-99 Athens, AL.

National Walking Week April 1 - 7

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

Good Friday on the Square April 3

Community worship even to celebrate Good Friday and Easter weekend. 5:00 PM-7:00 PM. Limestone County Courthouse. 200 W. Washington St., Athens.

2026 Fridays After Five Concert Series April 24

Athens Main Street's highly-anticipated Fridays After Five Concert Series will return in 2026 for another year. Don't forget your lawn chairs. East Side of the Limestone County Courthouse.

DMAC Fest May 9

Live music, food trucks, free admission. All proceeds benefit the DMAC Foundation Trade School Scholarship fund. 5:00PM-9:30PM. Limestone County Courthouse Square.

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.



Health and Fitness

CrossFit Athens: *More Than a Gym— A Center for Health*

by Nick Niedzwiecki - Owner, CrossFit Athens



Most gyms focus on one thing: exercise. Rows of machines, quick workouts, and little guidance beyond a printed routine on the wall. While exercise is important, it's only one piece of the health puzzle. At CrossFit Athens, we believe true health goes far beyond burning calories. We exist to help people fix the problems that exercise alone can't solve.

CrossFit Athens is not a place you simply "work out." It is a center for health.

Many of the issues people struggle with today—low energy, chronic pain, weight gain, diabetes, high blood pressure, and poor mobility—didn't appear overnight. They are the result of years of poor nutrition, sedentary habits, and a lack of education around how the human body actually works. You can't undo that with a treadmill and a few dumbbells.

That's where CrossFit Athens is different.

Our approach starts with movement that is functional, scalable, and coached. We teach people how to squat, hinge, push, pull, carry, and move their bodies the

way they were designed to move. Whether someone is 25 or 65, a former athlete or a complete beginner, every workout is adjusted to meet them where they are. No one is left guessing what to do or how to do it safely.

But movement is only half the equation.

At CrossFit Athens, nutrition is not an afterthought—it's a cornerstone. We focus on using food as medicine, teaching our members how to fuel their bodies with real, whole foods that support energy, strength, and long-term health. We don't promote fad diets, quick fixes, or extreme restrictions. Instead, we educate people on sustainable habits that help reverse the root causes of many chronic health conditions.

This combination of intelligent movement and intentional nutrition is what sets CrossFit Athens apart. We don't chase short-term results; we build long-term solutions.

Accountability is another major difference. In a traditional gym, it's easy to show up inconsistently—or not at all. At CrossFit Athens, you

are coached, known, and supported. Our staff knows your name, your goals, and your limitations. Progress is tracked. Questions are encouraged. Wins—big and small—are celebrated.

The result? Stronger bodies, healthier habits, and a community that genuinely cares.

CrossFit Athens is for anyone who wants more than just a workout. It's for people who want to feel better, move better, and live better—not just now, but for decades to come. Health isn't about chasing perfection; it's about building resilience. And that's exactly what we do every day.

If you're tired of gyms



that only scratch the surface, CrossFit Athens is ready to help you address health at its core—through food, movement, and expert guidance that actually works.

- Coach Nick
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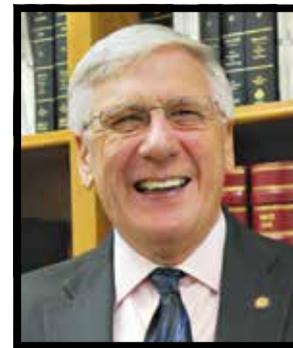
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What Makes Ronnie Roll

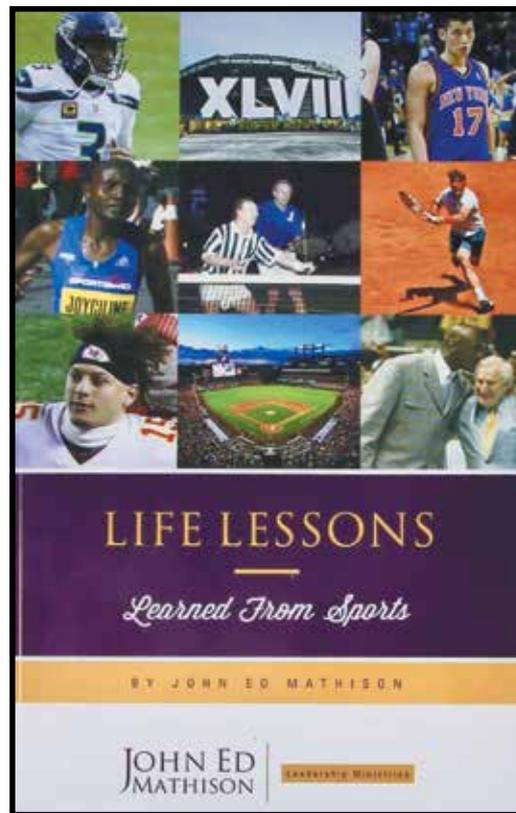
The Positive Influence Challenge

by Ali Elizabeth Turner



“I’ve been thinking,” said the mayor as I sipped a cuppa and prepared to take notes. “Who is a positive influence in your life?” I thought, “Oh, there are so many,” but I knew this was a rhetorical question. He then took out two books. The first was *Life Lessons Learned From Sports*, by John Ed Mathison, and the second, *Learning To Live Like You’re Dying*, by Sammy Gilbreath. Both of the books are autographed, and we did a series a few years back on John Ed’s. Both are precious possessions, and one especially pertinent in a day when it seems that grit and the will to “continue until you can’t” are in short supply.

Sammy’s book has a forward written by Anne Graham Lotz, daughter of evangelist Billy Graham, and is a positive influence challenge on steroids. Sammy was given a “death sentence” way back in 1984, and was told to get his affairs in order because medical science was certain that his passing was imminent. Well, it is now 2026, Sammy is still with us and just recently had supper with Mayor Ronnie and Sandra at Old Black Bear in Athens. Sammy also happens to be Mayor Ronnie’s cousin...his mama and Ronnie’s were sisters. So, the man has continued to live, albeit everyone knows that because of his condition, which is called hypertrophic cardiomyopathy,



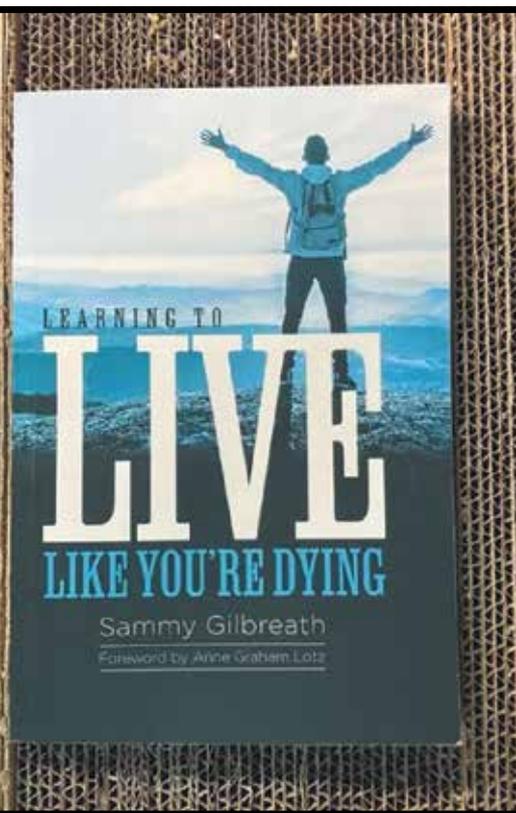
every minute of every day could be his last. So, the book has inspirational chapters with such cheery titles as, “A Ticking Time Bomb: You’re going to die anyway; you might as well die trying something,” or “Today Is Another Good Day: It Is the bottom of the ninth inning, two outs and a 3-2 count.” I think my favorite so far is, “Value Spiritual Blessings More Than Physical Things: Grace is never given in advance, only at the point of need, and when needed there is always more than enough.”

So, the heart of the challenge came in the form of this question, and it was one the mayor was asking me, Athens, and himself: “Who and how are you influencing?” Food for thought, for sure. We then launched into a discussion of how encouraging it had been to attend the Chamber of

Commerce Coffee held at Athens State University, which showcased a number of not-for-profits in our area. There were all manner of organizations, and each had a worthy cause. Just to visit vendor tables and hear people describe their mission put a light in our eyes and a spring in our step.

League of Dreams, which is an organization of former MLB players that provides baseball clinics to persons with various special needs had been at the SportsPlex, and the ongoing project to complete Make-A-Way Park fully accessible to all had just been featured on WAAY 31 News.

The Mardi Gras Parade had been the best one ever, and the lobby table at City Hall was overflowing with what

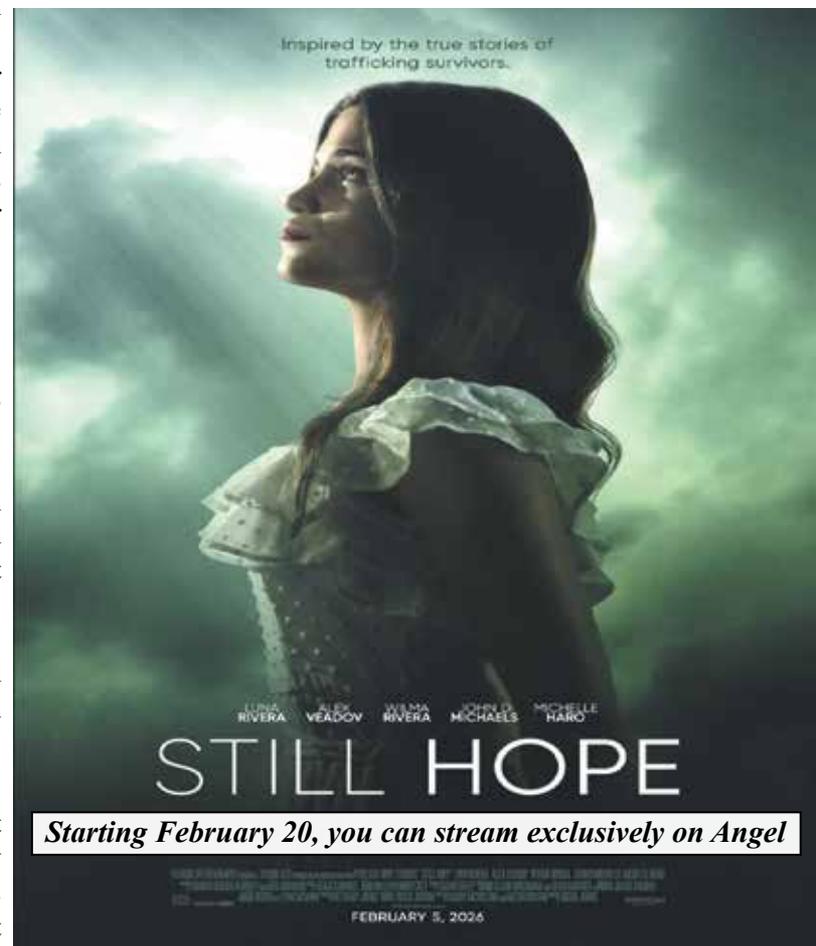


had been advertised as “let the good cans roll” in abundance...for our community. There were more floats, far more in attendance, and while I

was in his office, someone texted the mayor with thanks for the event.

Mayor Ronnie had been at a meeting with people who had moved here from Florida, Wisconsin, Texas, and other places, and will have more opportunities to educate this group as to how our local government works. “We are growing,” he said, “and it’s wonderful as well as tough.” Speaking of government, the Mayor’s Youth Commission was going to go line-dancing with their Senior Buddies at the Senior Center.

Mayor Marks concluded that the “challenge” is to be someone who has a life that works in a community that works.” So, we prayed to that end, and once again it was time for Ronnie to roll.





Let It Go!

by Anna Hamilton

Life has a way of filling our hands and hearts with things we were never meant to carry forever. Regret, fear, shame, and the need to control or please others can quietly weigh us down, shaping our outlook and limiting our joy. Yet growth often begins with release. Letting go isn't about forgetting or pretending struggles don't exist; it's about trusting that something better can take their place.

Here are six powerful things worth releasing to move forward with clarity and peace.

Learn to let go of the pain of regret. Everyone has moments they wish they could redo. Regret can linger, replaying old mistakes and missed opportunities until they feel like defining chapters of our identity. But the past does not have to dictate the future. Growth comes from learning — not from dwelling.

When we release regret, we create space for renewal. Instead of asking, "Why did this happen?" we begin asking "What can I become from here?" Forward

continued on page 22

Chicken and Zucchini Stir Fry

Ingredients:

- 1 lb. boneless skinless chicken breast (or thighs), thinly sliced*
- 2 medium zucchinis sliced into half-moons*
- 1 red bell pepper, sliced (optional)*
- 3 cloves garlic, minced*
- 2 Tbsps. soy sauce*
- 1 Tbsp. honey or brown sugar*
- 1 tsp. sesame oil*
- 2 Tbsps. vegetable oil for stir-frying*
- Salt and pepper to taste*
- Sesame seeds and green onions for garnish*

Directions:

Slice chicken and veggies. Mince garlic. In a small bowl, whisk together soy sauce, honey, and sesame oil.

Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a skillet or wok over medium-high heat. Add chicken, season with salt and pepper, and cook until golden and fully cooked (5–6 minutes). Remove and set aside.

Add remaining oil. Sauté zucchini and bell pepper until just tender, about 3–4 minutes. Add garlic and cook for 30 seconds more.

Return chicken to the pan. Pour in the sauce and toss to coat. Cook for 1–2 more minutes, until



everything is heated through and well coated.

Garnish with sesame seeds and green onions. Serve hot over rice, noodles, or enjoy on its own.

When The Trail Walks You Back

by Stephanie Reynolds, Athens-Limestone Tourism Association



My watch buzzed with a message from my first-born, female heir. “Do you want to hit the trail Sat. morning?” I could read the weariness and determination in her text. You know when you’re worn thin but want to use whatever scraps of energy you have to make a change--even if just for an afternoon--and you want someone to do it with you?

I understood the assignment. “Ooooo! Sounds great! Where/how far/Richard Martin or Swan Creek?” I replied. Not just because I want to be supportive but also...trails. And trails mean “Low carb diets are for at home. On the trail we need gummy bears.” Consider me sold.

We decided to hit the north end of Richard Martin, starting in Elkmont. On Saturday, she arrived at the house early, and I was running late, so between the two of us we were on time, just after 9 a.m.

We started off with quiet, introverted drive, assuring each other that we would not be offended if the other person needed to pop in earbuds and just be alone with their thoughts. Oh, we didn’t need to now, we reassured each other. “But just in case you need to, I understand.”

The rules of engagement agreed upon, we headed up the trail. “How long has this been paved?” my girl asked. “I don’t remember it.”

“It’s been awhile. It’s for accessibility.” It also makes a very pleasant path for strollers and the

unsteady. I love how the Richard Martin Trail offers something for everyone: gravel and dirt for horses and trail runners, pavement for wheelchairs, strollers, and those who need sure footing. We want everyone on the trails regardless of their mode of transportation, and eleven miles is long enough to make space for all.

“I know I can listen to music, but I don’t really want to,” my girl said suddenly. “I’m enjoying hearing the birdsong.”

“Me too!” I agreed enthusiastically. The birds’ “dawn chorus” was lasting well into the morning. Perhaps they, too, thought a mild and overcast Saturday perfect to ease into slowly. Maybe (if I am being fanciful) they knew that two introverts would love nothing more than to hear them sing on the trail.

As I type this, I think of how profound it was to hear their concert. I don’t know about you, but it is hard for me to shake off modern life. I get restless when I am trying to relax. I find myself reaching for my phone to check “Very Important Things™” about 48 seconds after I decide I’m taking a down day.

But because we had the birdsong, each other, and spotty reception, it was easy to keep our phones in our pockets.

At first, our chat was pleasantly prosaic—food, trees, shopping. “We need to buy new insoles for our race.” “I don’t know whether to eat this now or wait”

“I love how those bushes don’t lose their leaves—you see them? They make the forest look lacy.” Chatter was pleasant and one-noted at the ending of the dawn chorus encore. The birds took their bow and flew off into forest and field.

And still we walked. One foot in front of the other. Miles lasted as interminably as the old abutments holding the covered bridge we crossed—beautiful and enduring and worn. As exercise fatigues the legs, it also fatigues our defenses. Suddenly, conversation turned thoughtful, deep, and heavy with burden and blessing. Shopping and shoes gave way to faith, eternity, and how to love humans as they heal, with careful hands so one doesn’t cut themselves on another’s sharp edges, and how to smooth down our

sharp edges in turn.

At some point as we walked, the trail stopped only leading back to Elkmont. The trail also walked me back, gently, to a long-ago part of me, and I remembered. Yes, I was 54 and it was Alabama, and 2026. But suddenly, I was also me as a child with no cell phone, no chores, nothing to do but look at rocks and scuff dust and just be outside under a lightly laden sky.

If I had tried to rest my body at home, my mind would never have relaxed. It would have made my weary bones get off the couch and into the kitchen, then the laundry room, then the bedroom to put away clothes. There were articles to write and food to cook and emails to check.

Even if I made myself sit, my mind wouldn’t have put down the electric hum

of machine and to-do lists. The hum would have turned into clanging, persistent ringing that left me more tired at the end of my “rest” than I was before.

But on the trail...ahh, on the trail...there is nothing to do but walk. Breathe. Talk. Be. Love. Pray. To go back to a time when you explored the world until the streetlights came on. Curiously watched a ladybug. Stared at the clouds and the cows and the flowers. The trail will tire your body but renew your mind.

As I was writing this article, I asked my girl if she had anything to mention about our walk. She strained in thought, hungry and knee deep in her workday. Then she said in three words that which I have taken a whole article to convey:

“I was refreshed.”





Clean, Green And Beautiful

Heigh-Ho

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

Oh spring, we see you coming. Spring is crazy for Keep Athens-Limestone Beautiful. We have all sorts of happenings, and this year is no different. Although we don't have some of the dates cemented yet, we have a packed schedule. We're so ready for better weather and longer days -- that means we can get more accomplished.

Right now, I'm planning the Earth Day Expo. This year, it will be April 25, in the Athens State University Ballroom. Thanks to Limestone County Water and Sewage Authority, we will have Steve Trash back in McCandless Hall. We'll also have Rise Raptors again. TBAKI is sponsoring the student art contest again. This year, the theme is "You Belong Among the Wildflowers." Again, this is open to any student within Limestone County. We'll have some great prizes again, and thankfully TBAKI judges the art. After last year, that's something I'm happy about. I heard that hard decisions had to be made. This year, we are going to have some new, fantastically fun exhibits! We don't want to spill the beans just yet, but we are excited!

We're planning clean-ups like crazy too! We'll hit the Tennessee and Elk Rivers like always,



Mayor Ronnie Marks triumphing over his arch enemy, litter.

but there is so much to do all over Limestone County! Lookout Pest Control is continuing the Ardmore Spring Clean for March 21. We'll meet in the parking lot of Jones Drugs as usual and disperse from there. This is such a great community event, and so very well planned. It is so beneficial to the Ardmore community. Through the many years of Ardmore Pest and Turf, thousands and thousands of pounds of trash have been removed from roadsides. We can't wait to get more dates finalized. If you need volunteer hours, we've got you. And don't forget to tell high schoolers how much having volunteer hours helps on those college applications and ré-

sumés.

And of course we'll have the annual Household Hazardous Waste Collection. I'm still waiting for a couple of people to confirm the date, but it will be in May. Like always, we'll be taking household chemicals, paint and paint products, lawn chemicals, automotive chemicals, fluorescent bulbs, tube TVs and medications. Keep this in mind as you begin your spring cleaning because this is your one chance to ethically dispose of the chemicals for an entire year.

Just to prove how crazy we are, we are planning on having our "Let There Be Cake" fundraiser again May 29. We'll be at the Athens State University LaunchBox dur-



Leigh Patterson and Sparky always make Earth Day brighter.

ing the May 'Fridays After Five.' Come taste some absolutely delicious cakes made by local bakers. There were so many unique and robust flavors last year, we're still talking about them. This is a great opportunity to taste-test cakes if you have an event coming up. It's a win-win, you can tackle your sweet tooth and help us help Limestone County at the same time!

We're going to be busy, but we wouldn't have it



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Scott Craig Is Running For Limestone County Commission Chairman



by Scott Craig

continued from page 1

in North Alabama, so we moved back in 2003 and have been here ever since. I worked for TVA at Browns Ferry Nuclear Plant from 2003-2025. Also, I'm a small business owner (Prime-time Basketball Academy) where I work with youth in basketball and coach AAU teams.

The land where we live in Northern Limestone County is family land that was purchased by my grandfather back in the 1930s. Being raised here, I have seen firsthand a lot of the changes that everyone is talking about.

Why are you running for the position of Limestone County Chairman? -- Firstly, I'm not a politician, I'm an everyday guy that

wants to leave the place I call home better for the generations to come. Everyone in this county has many of the same issues. People are busy trying to survive everyday life, and don't have enough time to keep up with county government. Most people I speak with don't even know what this position does and thinks everyone is a road commissioner. I want to start putting the county as a whole first again. There is a lot of the county besides just around Athens. These areas seem to be forgotten, unless it's an election year.

Shocking to no one, county roads are mostly an embarrassment that we have to drive on daily.

The budget is accurate but the level of detail where anyone could look at it and understand it is

lacking.

The services offered by Limestone County must improve.

Working sessions for the county commission seem to be nothing more than a formality, just checking a box.

What would you change if you are elected Chairman of Limestone County? -- Through my many years of working for great leadership, I have come up with my own leadership style. You don't have to be the smartest person in the room, but you must be willing to listen to the smartest person before you start making decisions. I like to collaborate with others before forming a decision. This position is not what I want, it's about what the people want.

This can happen by making the working session a true working session. Individuals normally must take off work to come to this meeting. They are given 3 minutes to speak with the commission, not discussing issues with an individual commissioner, unless it's a conversation off the record, outside, and in between working meetings and normal commission meetings.

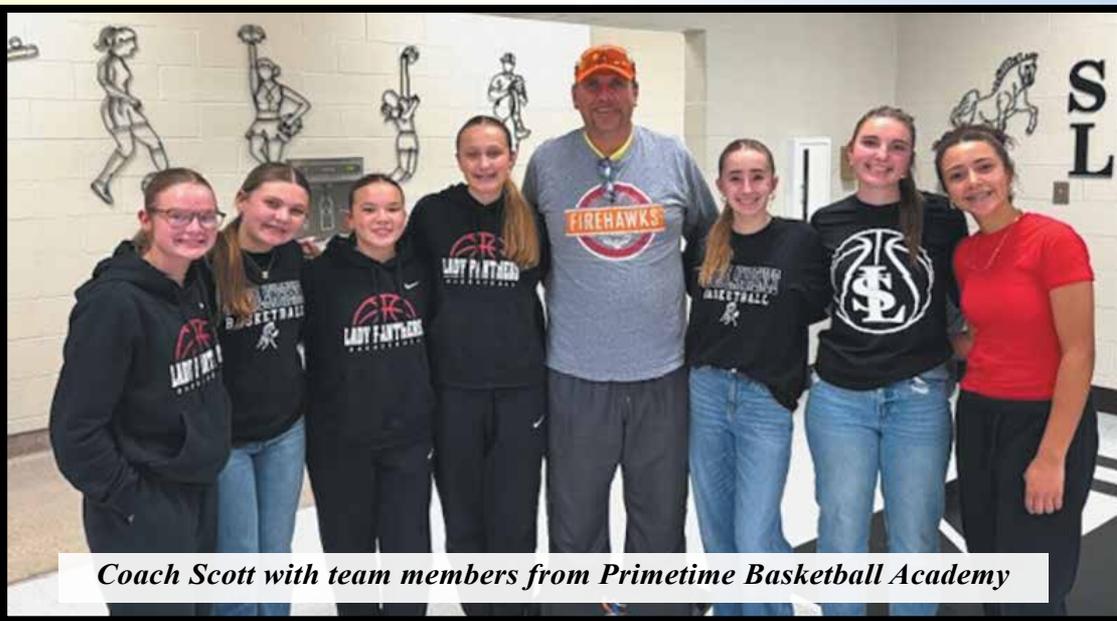
Why would someone vote for you instead of the other two candidates? -- I want to say that, unlike popular beliefs, you don't have to dislike someone to run against them in an election. I have respect for anyone who chooses to run for a county position. I have nothing personal against either of these candidates. I feel

that with my leadership we can get Limestone County moving in pace with the population growth.

The other two candidates have been in politics for numerous years. I have no political agenda besides wanting to leave this county better for the generations that will follow.

The incumbent ran on buzzwords of "accountability" and "transparency" during his campaign in 2018. (Source:





Coach Scott with team members from Primetime Basketball Academy

(Athens News Courier). Here we are in 2026, and the same issues are being discussed again.

Another candidate has been a commissioner for a little over a year and has some ideas, but it would be easier to get his ideas pushed through in the position he holds now than if he was the chairman.

The days of “We have always done it this way” must be a thing of the past. The people moving into this area are not going to take that as an acceptable answer anymore, and neither should we. There is a budget surplus at this time, and that money must be used to improve roads and services and, of course, pay off debt. Limestone County Commission

has made some financial choices in the past few years that seem to be questionable. Giving \$4 million (\$400,000 annually for 10 years) of county tax dollars to a state college for an event center project. That's not acceptable when we have roads that will knock your vehicle out of alignment if you don't see the pothole in time. Volunteer fire de-

partments are struggling with funding and personnel. This past year the line item for volunteer fire departments was taken off budget completely. Funding VFDs needs to be discussed at a work session. As chairman, I'll follow the process to get this discussion on the agenda for a work session, then facilitate the discussion with commissioners in this public meeting. We'll set a due date for a second discussion -- no more kicking the can down the road. After public discussions, the funding decision will be placed on the Commission meeting's agenda for a vote for public record. This is the transparency and accountability the public's been asking for since at least 2018.

As your chairman, I know we can't fix everything “Day 1,” but my promise is we will start having these-public discussions and move forward to the next issue. Leaving issues lingering makes the public not trust government. We must get a plan to get ahead of the road issue in the county. Allocating extra funds will help, but it is nothing more than

a Band-Aid, not a solution.

Strategic thinking, safer roads, intentional growth, and leadership that delivers for Limestone County is my

promise.

I ask for your vote on 19 May 2026 in the Republican primary. I'm not a career politician, I'm a normal citizen who is tired of hearing, “This is the way we have always done it.” Those days are past; that's why roads are in the condition they are in. We must use the taxpayers' dollars to put Limestone County first. Questionable spending needs to stop.

Limestone County is growing; we must work to make sure our county

stays safe and provides services that make Limestone County residents proud. I want to have a county that others benchmark and come to look at as the standard on how to deal with growth.

I ask for your vote on May 19, and let's start putting Limestone County first.

Individuals that are willing to volunteer in any way are appreciated. You can contact us or ask questions at the sites below. Thank you.

Email: scottcraig4limestonechairman@yahoo.com
Website: scottcraigforchairman.com
Facebook: [Scott Craig for Limestone County Chairman](#)



Captain's Log

Not Just A Bus Driver

by Brenda Wilkerson

Uncut and untucked. This is raw, so buckle up.

My hands took turns wiping the tears running down my neck on the way back to the school after my last afternoon drop off. It's been a heavy day. This week my bus numbers are down almost 50% because my babies have the flu, and it has ransacked our elementary school. Our school system tried to break the contagious cycle by opting for an e-learning day on Friday so kids would be at home an additional day with a holiday on Monday.

On the following a.m. high school route, I heard bus drivers diligently working together on the radio to pick up the kids of a driver/teacher who didn't show up this morning, which is highly unlikely under normal circumstances. I found out later he had died in his sleep.

On the afternoon route, my sweet girl who confided in me about a previous suicide attempt had now been plagued with stress-related seizures and had been in and out of the hospital. She told me she felt like one was coming on, so I told her to let me

know if she needed me. Not five minutes later, her brother came up to me in a panic to tell me that she was indeed seizing. I pulled over safely, popped my brakes, initiated the hazards, and called it in. While I was with her (still seizing), one of my students manned the radio to get school officials and the EMTs to our location. During all of this, I hear normal bus driver chatter in the background, including the voice of a former fellow driver who had put his hands on me a few years back. (I was blamed for his behavior - not by the school - and the driver was sent to another location.) Not random info but it puts in perspective my brain capacity to handle all the things at the same time.

After paramedics showed up to assist my girl, we were back on track. The very last student I dropped off was the one that I have asked prayers for. She read me the lyrics of a song that she wrote in history class today about her abusive, drug-addicted birth mother who abandoned her. The song was titled "Gone before Dawn" --



You were the night I was hiding from forever. Feels like I never really found the way. Buried in the silence, I didn't think I could make it better. You just left me in the shadows, walked away. I'm shaking like the windows in a storm - you left the lights off. I was frozen, turned bitter in my chest. And all my aching questions, old fears never left. It's crazy, I'm not used to all this hurt you put me through. But you made me wish to hide from the world and just sleep right through. The words you speak cut deeper in me, you're Gone before Dawn. I remember every promise you'd leave

Momma, haunt me. I was surprised to see hope in your eyes, but I never once felt safe at night. Your love just passed me by as bright as the sun, but you burned right through me, left me numb. Another illusion, you made me feel lost and undone. But you made me wish to hide from the world and just sleep right through. The word that you speak cuts deeper in me, you were . . .

Gone before Dawn.

I am a puddle. I am exhausted! Y'all pray for my precious bus kids!

Because of this appointed day, I have enrolled in a class to be certified in

trauma care. Today was no accident. I'm listening, Lord!

Bottom Line: We are not promised tomorrow! What are you here for? Who are you here for? Lean into the quiet places and beg God for direction. Time will not wait for you.

So, if I died tonight, the world would still go on, other drivers would pitch in and get all my kids to school like they did for Mr. Frank this morning. My own children and grands would be sad but adjust, and after some time, go on and live big in their purpose. My few personal items will be dispersed and memories of me will fade away within the next generation.

Question: Will you leave this earth confident you achieved what you were placed here for?

**If you are suffering from abuse from ANYone, even those who are supposed to love and protect you, I see you and, yep, me too. Please reach out, and I can get you some support to walk you through the next steps to healing.

Warning: Not all churches are trained or equipped to handle certain relational situations. Find one that fits you well.

I'm here if you need to talk; just message me.

#notjustabusdriver

#RawUncutUntucked

#onceuponaschoolbus6

~Brenda

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Slinkard On Scriptural Success

The Difference Between Success And Failure

by D. A. Slinkard

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

Recently, I was asked, “What separates those who have success versus those who seem to draw the short end of the stick in business?” My immediate knee-jerk reaction was to answer the individual by giving a short statement about hard work and a positive attitude. However, the more I thought about this question, the more I realized what is prevalent to someone who is successful.

This one ingredient can be used in various aspects of life and it comes down to the word “self-discipline.” The definition of self-discipline is, “the ability to control one’s feelings and overcome one’s weaknesses; the ability to pursue what one thinks is right despite temptations to abandon it.”

The more I reflected upon this definition, it became apparent to me that what separates someone from success and failure boils down to the amount of self-discipline a person has. Think about the number of New Year’s resolutions that people write down at the beginning of the year. Yet, by this time of year, you find most people have already “abandoned” the resolutions they were so ambitious about months earlier.

Take someone who is focusing on their health and someone who lacks self-discipline; life is much easier for someone to sit back on the couch compared to getting their body in motion. I’ve written in the past about people waiting to go after their dreams. Why? Self-discipline or rather

a lack thereof becomes the downfall of many people.

In the world of business, it is not easy to have the ability to keep fighting when the odds are stacked against you. When the world has your back against the wall, one of the hardest feats known to man is picking yourself back up when life has beat you down. This proverbial “beat-down” could be a job you were fired from, a promotion you were overlooked for, or even a person turning you down for a date. It took me asking my wife out 13 times before she reluctantly agreed to a first date!

We all face obstacles and struggles in our lives. If you have a heartbeat, you’re going to have problems. The answer to these problems lies in how we respond

to these struggles. This is where having self-discipline comes into play. Having the ability to be in control of your feelings and your actions make the disappointing times a lot easier to handle, as opposed to when you feel out-of-balance with life.

You may be asking yourself, “How does a person find self-discipline?” I narrow this response down to three things. The first is “Goal Setting” and making sure you are writing out your goals on a daily basis. Who has a better shot of hitting their goal – the person who writes their goal once in a New Year’s resolution or the person who writes their goal down every day? The obvious answer is the person continuously writing out their goals. If you’re not doing this, start today.

The second is “Time Management” and your ability to control the hours you have. Everyone has 168 hours per week. No one can create more time or less time, as we are all guaranteed the same hours. What’s important is what we do with the time we have. The biggest lie that people repeat is they do not have enough time. If it’s important to you, you’ll find a way. If it’s not, then you’ll find an excuse.

I am a believer in the written to-do list. I learned this special skill-set from my wife who has helped educate and domesticate me in so many ways! This list is simple to do and takes what you want to get accomplished and assigns an importance to the tasks you want to complete. There will be days you hit it out on your to-do list, and

other days it will look like you barely touched it. Regardless of the good or bad, keep making your daily list of what you want to get done.

The final word is “Persistence.” You must be obsessed or persistent in achieving self-discipline. In life, you’re going to face obstacles, but you’ve got to build self-discipline in your life to find success. There’s a quote I love that states, “Persistence beats resistance,” and I point this out because if I wouldn’t have been persistent with my wife, we wouldn’t be married today.

I urge you to work on your self-discipline and create the life you’ve always wanted. Don’t abandon your dreams.



McGhee On Management

How Does EI Relate To Depression?

by Detri L. McGhee - *CLU, ChFC, B.Min*

Depression is a sensitive subject and a word that has many degrees of application. Depression can relate to mild emotional sadness, or a more intense sense of loss or hopelessness, all the way to such pessimism, emptiness, or hopelessness that people seriously consider taking their lives to escape the pain and anguish. First of all, let me be very clear. Some types of depression are related to body chemistry and require medical help to offset that problem. It is a wise person who recognizes that and is careful to faithfully adhere to their needed treatments.

It is important to understand that depression is common to all human beings. Everything living is subject to depression. Depression is not a 4-letter word. Clinically, we generally won't answer "YES" on the medical questionnaire under

"depression." Many tend to be offended if asked, "Could your aches and pains be caused from depression?"

All living things are subject to depression. Have you ever seen a damaged tree? Some limbs die, yet hang on for years. Ever see a starving animal? They are listless from lack of food, but they are also sad and their eyes reflect their hopelessness. They have been hungry for so long, they appear to give up. Only things that cannot feel or react, like rocks, are devoid of the ability to be depressed.

So, why do some people have only short periods of depression, others for months, even years, and some never seem to get over those symptoms for decades?

Emotional Intelligence levels have a lot to do with the ability to cope with and conquer depression.

Properly developed EI skills enable us to recognize that we are slipping into that mindset and choose – CHOOSE! Such a POWERFUL LIFE-SKILL! – choose to take the necessary steps to remove that negativity from our lives.

"Oh," many say, and have taught others to say, "I just can't help it!" And in very rare cases, that may be true. But, for most of us, (my apologies to those who enjoy pity parties) that is simply not true. Most people, especially those who read articles like this, have plenty of moxie to grab the depression source by the throat and destroy it. The human mind cannot hold two strong thoughts in the forefront of our thinking at the same time. We cannot breathe in and out at the same time. We cannot jump up and squat down at the same time. You cannot fill your mind with depressing, sad, dark, pitiful, hopeless thoughts and at the same time fill it with hope, joy, gratitude, light and praise. You choose. And when you realize that you have been choosing to walk in paths that are leading you where you do not wish to stay, you then have the power, the right, and the obligation to yourself and others to turn around, determine where you DO want to go, who you DO want to be, and how you will get there. Change can be difficult. But it can be the best thing ever for your life.

Are you carrying every situation, thought, desire,



and planned action to its logical conclusion mentally before you walk the path so far that you cannot profitably turn back? If not, wouldn't that be something you might want to begin doing? THAT is an EI skill that is worth practicing.

Sometimes, the quickest way to conquer depression is to simply return to doing the simplest most commonplace things that need to be done in your immediate world. Work? Complete that dreaded task hanging over your head. Home? Clean out that garage/junk drawer/pantry. Student? Complete that neglected lesson/project. Mentally? Get that apology out of the way.

Too often we are waiting for a flash of lightning or have winning lottery ticket. We want bolts of inspiration, or rays of sunshine to suddenly burst through, when all the while, we couldn't see well because we had sunglasses on or were looking in a dark hole without a flashlight.

See the simple. Learn to laugh again. Express your emotions properly. Identify your ideas. Consider your circumstances

as opportunities to conquer, shine, or heal. Think thoughts worthy of your time and life. Define your true desires. Measure them against the expected results. Realign your priorities to fulfill worthy goals. Flee destructive desires. For many of us, conquering depression and negative personalities can be done only by ourselves. You alone are responsible for your choices. No one can demand you obey them. And no one can take your ability to choose unless you give them that right. Start with one common, needed task. Learn to "eat that elephant one bite at a time." Choose wisely.

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Voices Of Light *Love, Legacy, And Fruit*

by Jackie Warner

Career Development Facilitator

“Impact, Engage, Grow” Community Matters



Voice of Light 1: Understanding the True Meaning of Love

There comes a time when the heart begins to ask deep questions — questions about what love truly is. Not the kind wrapped in red hearts and roses, not the kind that fades after Valentine’s Day, but the kind that transforms, convicts, and heals.

We hear, “*Love yourself.*” We hear, “*Love your neighbor.*” We hear, “*Love covers a multitude of sins.*”

But in a world filled with confusion, exhaustion, and uncertainty, we must pause and ask: **Do we really understand love?**

Scripture reminds us: “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8) and “Let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:18).

Love is not a moment. Love is not a holiday. Love is a lifestyle — a light we are called to carry.

Voice of Light 2: The Radiance of African American History

February also brings African American History Month — a time to honor a legacy far too vast to fit into 28 days. Our history is 365. Our story is woven into the very fabric of this nation.

African American history is a light that has

never gone out.

It is the light of ancestors who endured the unimaginable. The light of leaders who stood when standing was dangerous. The light of families who built, prayed, and persevered. The light of a people who refused to let darkness define them.

Our history is a testimony of love in action: Love that resisted oppression. Love that protected community. Love that believed in freedom. Love that hoped for a future not yet seen.

“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it” (John 1:5).

African American history is not just Black history — it is American history. It is human history. It is the story of light breaking through darkness.

Voice of Light 3: Love as the Light That Breaks Division

We are living in unprecedented times. Our nation feels fractured, weary, and overwhelmed. Division is loud. Hate is loud. Fear is loud.

But love — real, God centered love — is louder.

“Let all that you do be done in love” (1 Corinthians 16:14)

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3)

Love is not weakness. Love is not silence. Love

is not avoidance.

Love is strength. Love is clarity. Love is obedience to God.

When we release hate, when we remove the things that divide us, when we lift one another up through Scripture and truth, we become carriers of light in a dark world.

This is the same light that fueled the Civil Rights Movement. The same light that carried our ancestors through storms. The same light that still has the power to heal our nation.

Voice of Light 4: The Fig Tree and the Light Within

This is where love becomes personal.

Jesus approached a fig tree full of leaves — full of presentation — but bearing no fruit. It looked alive, but it had nothing real to offer.

“Every tree is known by its own fruit” (Luke 6:44).

“You will know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:16).

“I chose you... to bear fruit — fruit that will last” (John 15:16).

So we must ask ourselves:

Am I producing fruit or just producing leaves?

Am I shining light or just reflecting an image? Am I living God’s Word or simply displaying it? Am I representing Christ or performing for people?



African American history teaches us that fruit is not appearance — it is action. Fruit is not performance — it is perseverance. Fruit is not presentation — it is purpose.

This is not condemnation — it is invitation. An invitation to authenticity. An invitation to transformation. An invitation to let God’s light shine from within.

Voice of Light 5: Becoming Light Bearers in Our Generation

So what does it mean to be a Voice of Light? It means to honor the God who is love. It means to carry the legacy of those

who came before us. It means to let love be the center of our identity, our relationships, and our communities.

As we honor African American History Month, as we navigate a divided nation, we are called to be light bearers.

Love that lifts. Love that listens. Love that heals. Love that produces fruit. Love that reflects Christ.

Because the world doesn’t need more leaves — it needs more fruit. It needs more love. It needs more light. It needs more of God shining through us.



Learning As A Lifestyle

Leadership Legacies Of Jesse Jackson

by Eric Betts

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

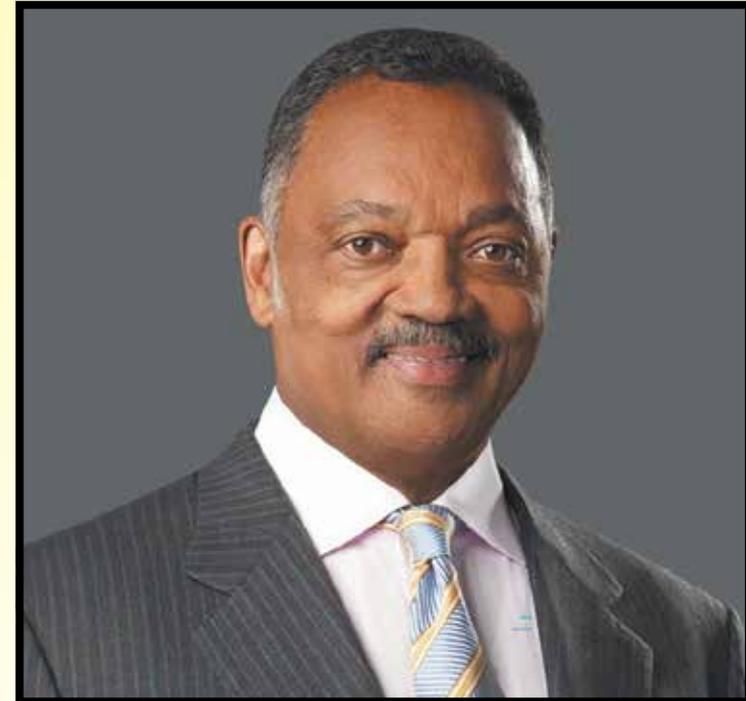
The passing of a notable and historical civil rights leader, Rev. Jesse Jackson, invites leaders to pause and consider what it means to rise from humble beginnings and still carry a global vision. Born in the segregated South, Jackson grew up in a world determined to tell him he was a nobody. Yet he refused to internalize that lie. His early life—marked by poverty, exclusion, and the daily indignities of Jim Crow—became the soil from which his leadership grew. He learned early that dignity is not bestowed by society but rooted in the sacred worth of every human being. Leaders today need that same grounding: the ability to see themselves clearly, to understand the forces that shaped them, and to refuse the temptation to let hardship shrink their imagination.



Jackson's accomplishments stretched far beyond the marches and microphones that made him famous. He built institutions, expanded voter access, negotiated international hostage releases, and carried the concerns of the marginalized into rooms where they were never meant to be heard. His leadership

was not performative; it was persistent. He believed that reconciliation was not a sentimental gesture but a disciplined practice—one that required courage, proximity, and a willingness to stand for right in hostile spaces. In an era when many leaders retreat into echo chambers, Jackson modeled what it means to step into conflict with a posture of bridge building rather than self protection.

At the heart of Jackson's leadership was a simple but radical conviction: everybody is a somebody. He preached it, organized around it, and built coalitions on its



foundation. This principle was not motivational fluff; it was a theological claim. To Jackson, human worth was sacred, not situational. Leaders who adopt this posture resist the corrosive pull of hierarchy, favoritism, and transactional relationships. They learn to see the custodian and the CEO with the same clarity. They learn to treat opponents as image bearers rather than obstacles. And they learn that reconciliation begins not with strategy but with how we choose to see one another.

Perhaps Jackson's most

enduring gift to leaders is his refusal to relinquish hope, even in situations that appeared hopeless. Whether confronting apartheid, negotiating international crises, or challenging domestic injustice, he carried a stubborn belief that change was possible. Hope, for Jackson, was not naïve optimism; it was disciplined endurance. Leaders today face their own versions of impossible situations—polarization, institutional fatigue, and communities fractured by mistrust. Jackson's life reminds us that hope is not a luxury; it is a leadership responsibility. To lead is to believe that transformation is still possible, even when the evidence is thin. His passing challenges us to carry that hope forward with the same courage, humility, and unwavering commitment to the sacred worth of every person.

Tennessee Valley Spotlight

Mondays at 10am
1080 AM WKAC

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The Alternative Approach

A Healthier Way Forward For Pain And Mobility

by Roy Williams

Pain is not a defect in the human body. It is a message. It tells us that tissue is inflamed, circulation is compromised, or the body lacks the raw materials required to repair itself. For decades, pain management has focused almost exclusively on silencing that message. While this approach may bring temporary relief, it rarely restores strength, mobility, or long-term function.

Nutritional health care begins with a different premise. The body was designed to heal, but it cannot do so without the correct building blocks. When those materials are missing or insufficient, pain persists. When they are restored in proper amounts, healing follows.

The foundation behind MSM + C and Relief: We call that combination, the Healthy Pain Combo, because it has proven to be so effective that many

customers have been able to stop all medications for pain in four days. The key is to begin with one Relief capsule with each meal three times daily. If the pain does not decrease the first day, increase to 2 capsules with each meal on day 2. If the pain is not decreased, on day 3 go to 3 capsules with each meal. Relief is so safe that it can be taken with any medication and there are no known side effects. Once you get relief you may be able to cut down to 1 capsule 3 times daily.

MSM + C is the foundation of the system. We call it the base for all nutrition because it helps your body digest and deliver all other nutrients from your food or supplements. Because it has the same toxicity level as water, it can be taken with any prescription.

MSM + C delivers a clinical dose of Opti-MSM®,

paired with a highly absorbable vitamin C, bioflavonoids, and minerals. Vitamin C is not included merely as an antioxidant. It is required for collagen synthesis and dramatically improves sulfur utilization at the cellular level. Together, MSM and vitamin C increase cellular permeability, allowing nutrients to enter cells more efficiently while metabolic waste is eliminated.

This process improves hydration within joints, strengthens connective tissue, and restores the internal environment necessary for healing. MSM + C does not act like a pain reliever. It acts like a repair nutrient and is a very powerful anti-inflammatory.

While MSM + C focuses on rebuilding and nutrient delivery, Relief is formulated to calm the inflammatory processes that keep pain active. Inflammation is not inherently harmful. It becomes damaging when it is excessive, chronic, and poorly regulated. Relief addresses this problem using a broad spectrum of natural compounds selected for potency, synergy, and bioavailability.

Relief does not force the body into numbness. It restores balance.

When MSM + C and Relief are taken together, they form the Healthy Pain Combo. This combination works because it respects how healing actually occurs. Tis-

sue cannot rebuild in an inflamed environment. Inflammation cannot resolve if circulation is poor. Circulation cannot improve if connective tissue remains damaged. Each product supports the other.

What should people expect when starting the Healthy Pain Combo?

Most individuals notice less pain and improved mobility in just a few days. Morning stiffness often decreases as joint hydration improves and inflammatory pressure begins to settle. Movement feels smoother and less restricted.

Next comes endurance. As circulation improves and tissue integrity strengthens, daily activities require less effort. Walking, standing, lifting, and exercise become more manageable, and recovery time shortens. Over weeks and months, deeper structural repair takes place. Cartilage, tendons, ligaments, and fascia regenerate slowly but predictably when supplied with consistent nutritional support. This is not a quick fix. It is a biological process.

Many also experience secondary benefits. Im-

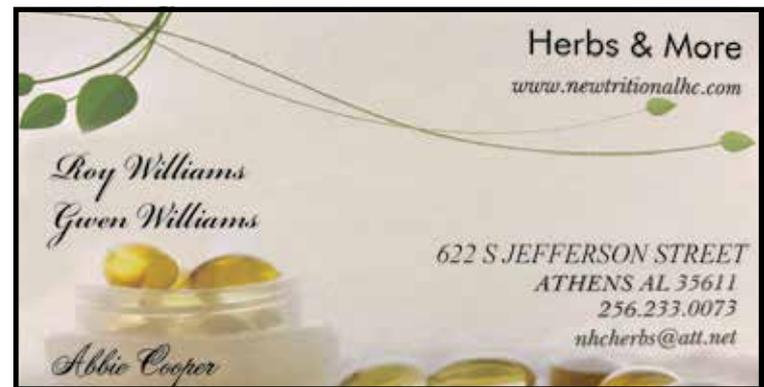
proved sleep as discomfort decreases. Greater overall energy as oxygen delivery improves. Enhanced effectiveness of food and other supplements due to the absorption-supporting effects of this dynamic combo.

The Healthy Pain Combo represents a shift in how pain is understood. Instead of asking how to suppress it, NEWritational Health Care asks what the body requires to resolve it. When that question is answered correctly, the solution becomes logical.

Pain is not an inevitable consequence of aging. Loss of mobility is not a rule of nature. Strength, movement, and comfort are outcomes of proper support.

When the body is given what it needs, it remembers how to heal. To get more information go Herbs & More in Athens, NHC Herb Shop in Killen or our website at www.nhcherbs.com. Take this article in for a 20% discount off your first Healthy Pain Combo. You'll be glad you did.

*Your friend in health,
Roy P. Williams*



Parasites - Part 2

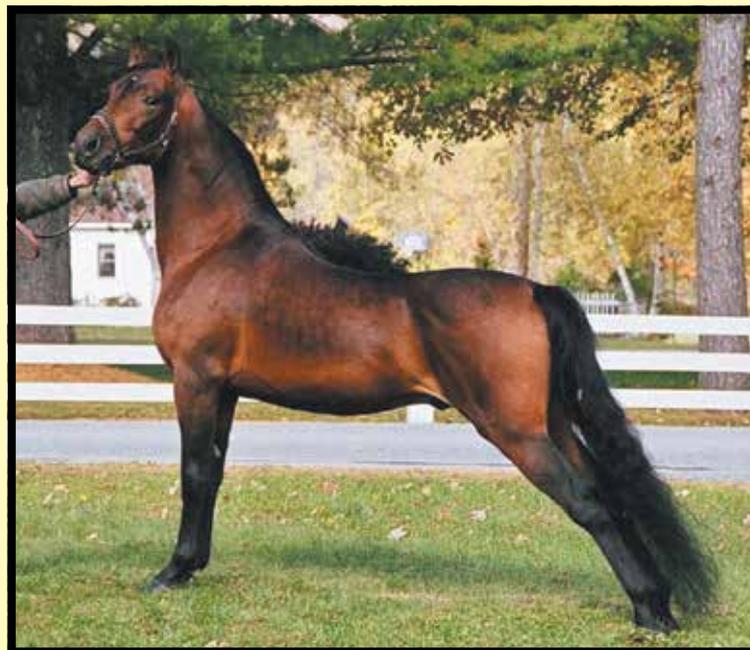
by Deb Kitchenmaster

In the January 16 – February 5, 2026 HORSE WHISPERING column we talked about parasites -- identifying three specific ones, their life cycles, and what signs your horse might be showing you that may indicate an infestation.

Facts are facts, and it is a fact that parasites are becoming resistance to de-wormers. Literature is actually reporting considerable resistance to wormers like Benzelmin, Panacur, and Anthelcide. Surprisingly, there is even resistance to Strongid (pyrantel pamoate) being reported. The only product that doesn't have resis-

tance problems in equine parasites is Ivermectin. Is it possible that the 'cure' (de-worming) may be weakening our horses (especially if chemicals weaken rather than strengthen our horses)? A recent article in a major equine health magazine stated, "Custom de-worming programs based on consultation of a veterinarian and fecal exams of individual horses will help postpone drug abuse and thus drug resistance by common parasites." They went on to call it "a looming disaster" if we continue de-worming the way we do today (routinely).

"As needed" de-worming



is the answer! The key is to determine WHEN de-worming is needed. The first step is to understand that each horse is an individual – each with individual needs and circumstances. This is a different approach; instead of de-worming by the calendar, it is our responsibility to look at each situation. It's not difficult, and it may save you some money. Doesn't that sound good? The answer is SIMPLY check a fecal sample FIRST before you de-worm. All it takes is a thimble full of manure to be checked by your veterinarian. Most usually charge \$10 to \$15. You may experience a little resistance because they, too, have been exposed to the same myth that "All: horses have worms." Some entangled in misinformation and myths will try to convince you to worm without checking or will try to sell you a paste wormer. This simple choice to test can lead to healthier horses and, for sure, have fewer resistant parasites in the fu-

ture. Our horses' future is in our hands. I invite you to consider checking fecal exams first before you de-worm.

Also, consider the consequences if you de-worm indiscriminately. If the egg count in the fecal manner is 250 or more in the exam, the horse needs to be wormed. If the fecal manner exam is less than 250 egg count, the horse is not in need of worming. Get comfortable with asking questions! A good question to begin with -- "Is that preventive measure (especially non-natural) really necessary?" Note: Worms most likely will not be a problem in a dry, hot area; whereas, if the season is warm and moist, you might be more concerned. A really cold winter can be a hidden blessing against some parasites!

In summary: Do a fecal exam, and worm when egg count is 250 or more. If egg count is less than 250, pass on worming that individual horse at this time. Repeat fecal



exam every 3 months. The best time to check for effectiveness AFTER de-worming with any product is 2-3 weeks. If you happen to have a horse with a large number of eggs, it should be checked and de-wormed regularly, as needed. New horses entering your farm should ideally be isolated for several days and worm checked prior to putting them into the group.

Two products we have discovered promoting horse health is a paste for creating an environment worms don't thrive in and another is a supplement you mix with your grain feeding that repels bugs! WORM CHECK is an all-natural combination of several herbs that is proving effective on all species of parasites. It's an herbal supplement in paste form. It actually works by supporting the horse's own immune system. We had a situation with a horse where we, under consultation, ended up giving the horse one tube a day for 10 consecutive days. The horse recovered! The other is called BUG CHECK. It's a supplement you mix with your grain feeding. It repels bugs from the inside out.

May we create a "healthy parasite-zone-free environment" inside and out!

*Your NEIGHbor,
Deb Kitchenmaster*

horsinaround188@gmail.com





GenZ With JP

The Epstein Blunder

by JP Plott, Co-host of *Rightside Radio*



US Attorney General, Pam Bondi

I've written before about this fictitious belief that there's no real divide amongst us Americans. The belief that the "right" vs. the "left" is really a fake divide created by the elite of our society, only intended to divide us from our fellow Americans. I find this rather ignorant. To ignore the fact that there is a growing communist, Marxist, atheist, and just flat-out evil faction of the political left that is seeking to destroy America from within does nothing but let them win. They want Christians and conservatives to believe in this fallacy that all of their fellow Americans really want the same thing, so that they can defeat them.

But here's the caveat. This is an ideological, and dare I say, theological divide. Not a party line divide. I do not keep my Christian beliefs separate from politics, and neither should you. The problem with building your house off of the flimsy foundation, that is, a political party, is that you are relying on fallen men to be correct 100% of the time. You drift with the wind as your party blows you from side to side. You have no true stable bedrock of principle. One that is unchanging and can be relied on. Matthew 7:24-25 states: "Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the

winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock." Therefore, I am not a Republican. I am a Christian who has my own principles. The Republican Party aligns with my principles most of the time, but that does not mean I am a Republican. My foundation is that of the eternal, along with my principles. When the Republican Party goes against these principles, I shall loudly call them out. A perfect example of this is the blunder that was the Epstein files.

The windy road that started with Kash Patel, Dan Bongino, JD Vance, and even Donald Trump himself, promising transparency by releasing all of the Epstein files when elected. This was a core promise in the Trump campaign, and one that garnered him much support. The average American wanted to see these monsters that preyed on children held accountable after years of seemingly evading all punishment because of their power and money. After a shocking memo from the DOJ on a random Sunday night proclaiming there were no Epstein files and months of gaslighting from the president that they were a "Democrat hoax," Thomas Massie and Ro Khanna forced the administration by law to release everything they had. After being late to the deadline by law to release all of the files, millions of emails and pictures came out showing the true evil that transpired from Epstein and his counterparts. However, it didn't

end there.

The DOJ was then caught by Massie redacting the names of six co-conspirators in the files. This is after Kash Patel testified to Congress months ago that there was no evidence of trafficking from Epstein to other individuals. Pam Bondi testified before the House Judiciary Committee and was pressed by Massie on why the names of co-conspirators were redacted. Pam Bondi emotionally responded by calling Massie a "failed politician" who suffered from "Trump-derangement syndrome." In the midst of attacking almost every member of the committee, it seemed, she also stated that the stock market was booming and that we needed to be talking about this instead of Epstein. She never provided an answer as to why the DOJ hid the names of these co-conspirators, giving these evil men refuge from justice. The Epstein file debacle, from beginning to end, was nothing but a political blunder by the Trump ad-

ministration. And a colossal one at that.

After proclaiming to be an administration filled with strong Christians who don't leave their faith at the door and will fight hard for the return of Christian values in this country, they just partook in one of the greatest cover-ups in American political history. The fact that the Justice Department was caught red-handed protecting elite pedophiles who trafficked and ruined the lives of hundreds of underage girls will make you sick to your stomach. That is, if you have a soul. It seems to me that too many in this administration lack exactly that. They're too focused on the midterms. They're too focused on not rocking the boat with the elite of this world. They're too worried about the stock market crashing in response to who's implicated in the files. To hell with your midterms. If you refuse to hold those accountable who committed satanic levels of evil because you lack a spine, or care more about what is po-

litically advantageous for yourself, then we are not the same. I don't care if you call yourself a Republican. Pam Bondi needs to resign in disgrace, and there needs to be full accountability moving forward. And the truth is, I'm simply the one who holds the values those in this administration claimed to hold themselves. If you live and die by party, you'll get burnt. But if you live by the Word, you'll never be forsaken.

Justin "JP" Plott is the production manager for Rightside Media, and Producer for Rightside Radio. JP joined the Rightside team in late 2024 after working at WVNN in Huntsville, Alabama. He quickly became a top-notch, multi-media producer and a voice of Gen-Z conservatism.



★★ Solid, Conservative, and Just Plain Right! ★★



Let It Go!

by Anna Hamilton

movement starts when we trust that new beginnings are always possible. Isaiah 43:18-19 tells us, “Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”

Learn to let go of the need for approval. The desire to be accepted is human, but living for others’ validation can become exhausting. When approval becomes the measure of worth, personal authenticity is easily lost.

Letting go of this need restores freedom. It allows decisions to come from conviction rather than comparison. Confidence grows when we stop seeking permission to be ourselves and start aligning with deeper purpose and values. Galatians 1:10 tells us, “Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.”

Learn to let go of the desire to control. Control can feel like security, a way to guarantee outcomes or prevent disappointment. Yet life rarely unfolds exactly as planned. Clinging too tightly often leads to stress, frustration, and burnout.

Releasing control isn’t about giving up responsibility; it’s about embracing trust. It means doing your best while accepting that not everything is yours to manage. In that surrender, peace replaces pressure, and flexibility replaces fear. Proverbs 3:5 tells us to “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”

Learn to let go of the shame of the past. Shame is heavier than regret. While regret focuses on actions, shame convinces us something is wrong with who we are. Carrying it isolates and discourages growth.

Letting go of shame allows healing to begin. It reminds us that identity is not permanently marked by past missteps. Self-compassion and acceptance help rewrite inner narratives — transforming them from condemnation into resilience and understanding. Psalms 34:5 gives us the reassurance that “Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.”

Learn to let go of the fear of the future. Uncertainty can be unsettling. Fear of what lies ahead often leads to hesitation or avoidance, keeping opportunities just out of reach.

When we release fear, we step into possibility. Trusting that the future holds potential rather than threat encourages courage and curiosity. Instead of shrinking back, we begin moving forward, one hopeful step at a time. Jeremiah 29:11 lets us know, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Learn to let go of unforgiveness. Holding onto resentment binds us to pain long after the moment has passed. Forgiveness is often misunderstood as excusing harm, but in reality, it is an act of self-liberation.

Choosing forgiveness whether toward others or ourselves breaks bitterness’s hold. It doesn’t erase the past; it loosens its grip. In its place comes emotional freedom and the ability to move forward unburdened. Colossians 3:13 tells us to “Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”

Letting go is not a one-time act, it’s a practice. It requires patience, reflection, and sometimes courage. But with every weight released, there is more room for peace, purpose, and growth.

By surrendering regret, approval-seeking, control, shame, fear, and unforgiveness, we open the door to a lighter and more grounded life. What we release does not define us but what we embrace afterward certainly can.

This week’s recipe is a yummy chicken stir fry. Feel free to change up the proteins that your family loves, like beef, ground turkey, or even shrimp. This recipe is a weeknight favorite because it is super yummy and super quick to prepare. I hope you enjoy it as much as my family does.

“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” Ephesians 4:31-32

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