November 6 - November 19, 2026

Athens Now

information & inspiration

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Sides Auto Body Repair: *Celebrating Nearly 40 Years Of Excellent Service*



By Ali Elizabeth Turner

Herbert Sides was like so many young dads—wanting to provide well for his family through having a steady job, and then the day came when he knew he was finished with missing out on his family life by working second shift. He came home from 3M and told his wife, Becky, that he had quit and was going to launch a body repair shop. He and his brother Doug had been involved

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Christmas Magic Begins November 19 in Athens–Limestone County!

By Pammie Jimmar



There is something special about Christmas in Athens–Limestone County. The lights begin to twinkle, our downtown storefronts put on their holiday best, and familiar places become the backdrop for new family memories. As I often say, our community looks and feels like we have stepped right into a Hallmark Christmas movie! What makes this season so special to me is the

Continued on page 13

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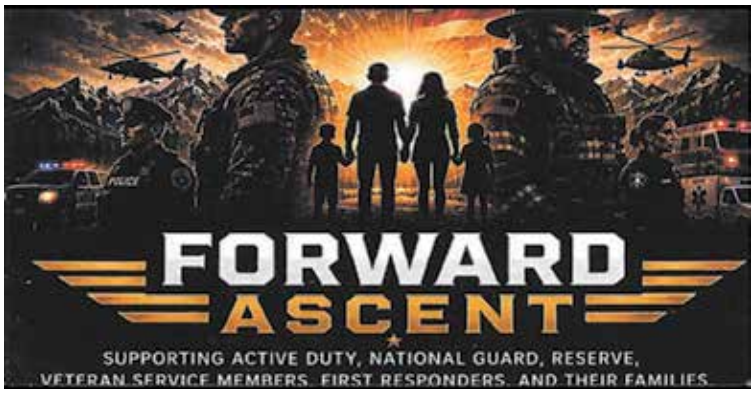
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Publisher's Point

Free As A Bird — Wings For Your Life And Business

Earlier this summer, I found myself scrolling on social media and came across a guy by the name of Michael Pink. He was teaching from the book of Matthew, and I was not prepared for the impact that revisiting a well-known scripture would have on me. Specifically, it was from Matthew 6. And the passage that turned me on my head was, "…behold the birds of the air…"

The first thing I had to face was the word, "Behold." I had always let it zip right on by me, like, "Think about it for a sec," but that is not what the word means at all. The Greek word means many things, including, "to look on, to observe fixedly, to discern clearly—gaze up, look upon."

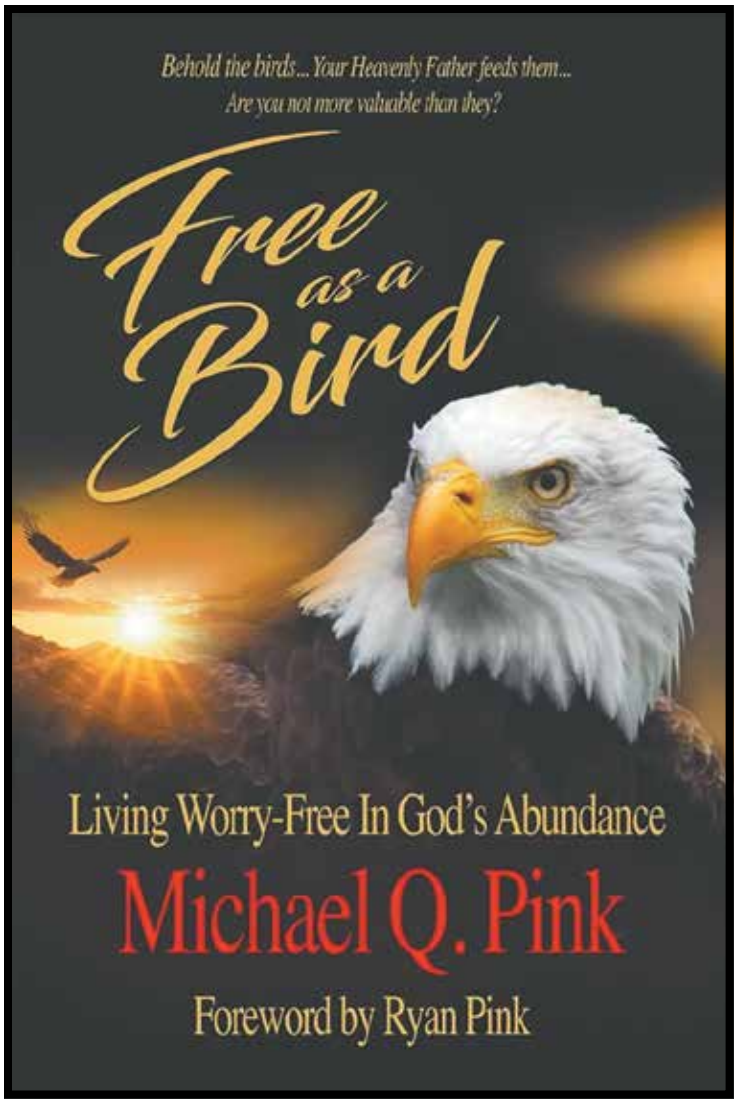
Well, Michael Pink took that admonition seriously, and he did a deep dive into all things bird. What he discovered is that there are about 55 billion birds on the planet as we speak, around 11,000 species of birds, and while they spend a good chunk of time foraging, they do not freak out about where their next meal is coming from. They sing, they dance, they swoop, they fish, they fly, they waddle, and they even pound their heads against things.

Which brings me to one of my favorite birds, the woodpecker. This guy blows my mind. His tongue is made to wrap around the inside of his head to act like a cushion while he is wailing away at the tree, his beak is designed to fit together so well that nothing breaks, and then the tongue is repurposed to fit down into the tree to get larvae for lunch.

Birds have a purpose, and you will never see a woodpecker try and be a kingfisher or vice versa. And that is where Michael shines. He uses nature to teach people truths about themselves and God. He also helps people find their lane and their alignment, and then apply what they have learned to business, life, relationships, ministry, finance, and more.

Here is some of what Michael has to say about *Free As A Bird*:

> *If you ever worry about having your financial needs met, this will show you how to put an end to that worry — permanently. It will also show you where your provision is and how to find it, so you never have to worry about provision for the rest of your life!*
>
> *Jesus explicitly stated, "Don't worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?" Then He gave us the antidote to worry when He instructed us to "Behold the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?"*



And there is the rub. We typically don't match our concepts of our worth with God's perspective, and that leads to all sorts of problems. Thankfully, Michael has dedicated his life to help people soar, and I invite you to consume *Free As A Bird*. You'll be glad you did. For more information on the book and Michael's teachings and other books, go to www.michaelpink.com

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Veterans Day And Its Alabama Roots

by Ali Elizabeth Turner



In 1918, on the 11th Day of November, at 11 a.m., the end of WWI was formalized with a document signed by all the participating nations, and the Great War was over. The ceremony was held in a railcar near Versailles in France. The nations started what was both the rebuilding process as well as the set of circumstances that fostered the rise of Nazism and fascism 20 years later, culminating in WWII. Until after the end of WWII, November 11 was known as Armistice Day, and sought to honor those who had fought in the War to End All Wars.

New York City had the first parade to honor veterans in 1919, and it is still going today. It goes down 5th Avenue. However, just like the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade is strictly a part of NYC culture, there was no intent of having parades become a national event. The very first national celebration of what has come to be called Veterans Day was held right here in Birmingham, Alabama, at the behest of a WWII veteran by the name of Raymond Weeks.



Raymond Weeks of Birmingham, Alabama

Mr. Weeks organized the Birmingham celebration with the idea of honoring all veterans, and unlike Memorial Day, Veterans Day was to honor those who had served and even had been in harm's way, but had not had to make the ultimate sacrifice. I am not proud to admit that it wasn't until I was in Iraq that I understood the difference between the two holidays. I learned there that it is completely inappropriate to wish someone a "Happy Memorial Day," and that is a mistake I no longer make, thank God.



Mr. Weeks wanted Veterans Day to be more celebratory, and he went to Washington D.C. to visit Dwight Eisenhower with a handwritten proposal that this become a national holiday. At the time Raymond Weeks went to DC, Ike was serving as Army Chief of Staff, and Weeks delivered his petition to him personally. Later on, a bill was introduced by Kansas U.S. Congressman Edward Rees.

Eisenhower became president in 1953, and in 1954 he signed into law the bill that made Veterans Day a national holiday, and for the next 38 years, Raymond Weeks served as the National Director of Veterans Day from Birmingham. He also became known as the Father of Veterans Day, and in 1982, President Ronald Reagan honored Weeks with the Presidential Citizen's Medal. Reagan, in his speech honoring Mr. Weeks, said that Raymond Weeks was a person who "…devoted his life to serving others, his community, the American veteran, and his nation." Weeks died in his hometown just three years after the award was given, in 1985 at the age of 76.

This Veterans Day, please take a moment to honor all veterans, and keep an eye out for a service member that deserves to be thanked. You'll never know just how much that might mean to them.





Take Your Business Card To Lunch On November 13!

by Stephanie Reynolds

Limestone Leaders Chapter

Limestone County is growing by leaps and bounds, and we want to help you grow your business along with it!

We are the Limestone Leaders chapter of BNI, Business Network International. We are a group of people who actively strive to be each other's hype and marketing team.

Why is BNI better? Each BNI chapter has a single seat devoted to each particular service or section of industry so you will not be competing with others in our chapter. Because we are made of many services and industries, you get access to leads that you might not have considered.

Each prospective member is evaluated for integrity and fitness—you can trust your new marketing partners to have your back and be eager for you to grow.

Additionally, the Limestone Leaders group is a warm, encouraging group of people—we truly enjoy each other! Our Limestone Leaders chapter takes seriously the Core Values of BNI:

- **Givers Gain®:** The foundational philosophy that by giving business and support to others, you will receive business in return.
- **Building Relationships:** Fostering genuine connections, trust, and long-term networking through activities like weekly meetings and One-to-Ones.



- **Lifelong Learning:** Continuously improving personal and professional skills through training, education, and industry resources.
- **Traditions + Innovation:** Honoring the organization's history and proven methods while embracing new tools, ideas, and technologies.
- **Positive Attitude:** Approaching challenges with optimism, gratitude, and a supportive, solution-focused mindset.
- **Accountability:** Taking responsibility for commitments, following up on referrals, and upholding member reliability to build trust.
- **Recognition:** Acknowledging and celebrating the achievements and contributions of chapter peers.

We have a ton of fun while we are helping each other and want you to come check us out to see if we are a good fit for you and your business. Let us be your sales team!

What: Limestone Leaders BNI Introduction

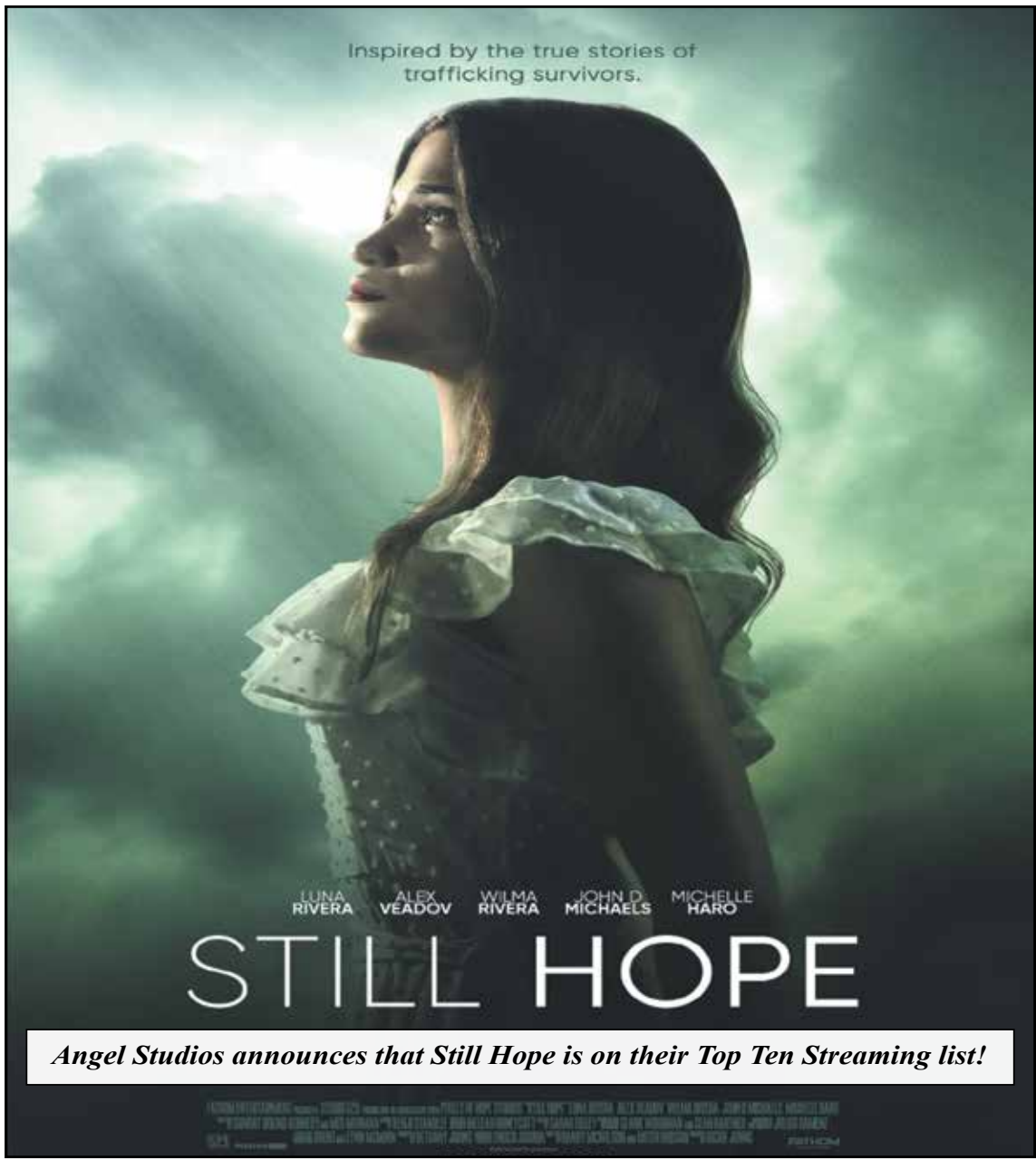
When: 11:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Friday, Nov 13, 2026

Where: Gabrielas Latin Fusion: 110 W Green St, Athens, AL, United States, 35611

Who: Anyone who has a business, is not currently in a BNI Chapter, and who loves networking and seeks to grow their presence in Athens-Limestone County.

How: Bring your business card, that is the only price of admission. Then delight in Gabriela's Latin Fusion sampler while we get to know each other and we introduce you to how BNI can help your business grow.

See you there!



Angel Studios announces that Still Hope is on their Top Ten Streaming list!

Calendar of Events

Limited Edition 24k Gold-Plated Christmas Ornament Sale

Celebrate Limestone County's heritage with the Historical Society's annual Christmas ornament. This year's beautiful collectible honors America 250, marking our nation's historic milestone, and will be available in October. Where to buy & details: Collectors, this will be our only ornament sale this year and the 250 numbered supply will sell out quickly. $35 each. Exclusive retailer: Osborne's Jewelers, Athens. During October only. Benefits the Limestone County Historical Society.

Gettin' Dirty At Master Gardener's - Native Plants And Birds November 10

Please advertise the Master Gardener's November 10th Gettin' Dirty at the Athens Limestone Public Library, 603 Jefferson St., Athens, 11 am - Noon. It is free of charge and open to the public. The topic is Native Plants and Birds presented by Frank Melton and Emily Clem.

AMVETS Veterans Parade November 11

11:00 AM - 1:30 PM. Assemble at AHS travel down Pryor St, left on to Shaw St, right on to Hobbs St, left on to Jefferson St, left on to Market St, right on to Marion St, right on to Washington St, left on to Jefferson and end at Athens-Limestone County Public Library.

Take Your Business Card To Lunch November 13

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2026 Athens-Limestone Tinsel Trail November 19

It's time to start thinking about lights, ornaments, creativity and a little holiday magic. Businesses, organizations, families and groups can decorate a tree and be part of one of Athens-Limestone County's favorite Christmas traditions. Big Spring Memorial Park. 350 Market Street E, Athens, AL.

Tennessee Valley Old Time Fiddlers Concert Series November 19

The Athens State University Foundation and the Tennessee Valley Old Time Fiddlers Convention Steering Committee are pleased to announce the 2026-2027 Tennessee Valley Old Time Fiddlers Concert Series line-up. This six-part series, leading up to the 2027 Fiddlers Convention next October, will allow music enthusiasts to enjoy the sounds of old-time music throughout the year. Junior Sisk is performing first. 7:00 PM - 9:00 PM. McCandless Hall at Athens State University. 300 N. Beaty St., Athens, AL.

2026 Athens-Limestone County Christmas Parade December 5

The Athens-Limestone County Chamber of Commerce invites you to come explore Gingerbread Village at this year's Christmas Parade on Saturday, December 5th! 5:00 PM - 8:00 PM. Downtown Athens

Sippin' Cider Festival – A Downtown Athens Holiday Tradition! December 12

Get ready to sip, shop, and celebrate the holidays in downtown Athens! Join us for the 16th Annual Sippin' Cider Festival, presented by Dream Key from 3 to 7 p.m. What to Expect:

• Festive fun with holiday music, shopping, and cheerful community vibes • Cider Showdown with complimentary tastings from participating merchants • Vote for the best cider and help crown this year's Cider Cup Champion • Shop local and find unique gifts for everyone on your list • Family-friendly activities to bring the holiday spirit to life. Hosted by Athens Main Street, this free event is the perfect way to shop local this holiday season. Downtown Athens, Alabama. Tag your cider-loving crew and join us for an evening of sippin', shoppin', and holiday cheer!

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.



Carissa's Corner

Thankful For The Deadlines

by Carissa Lovvorn

We spend so much of our lives working toward deadlines that we sometimes forget which one matters most.

I had several writing assignments due towards the end of October. At the beginning of the month, I planned my writing schedule and felt like I had plenty of time to get everything done. Then came an upper respiratory virus that was going around, followed by a nasty secondary infection. I spent almost two weeks feeling feverish, groggy, and voiceless, wanting nothing more than to crawl back into bed as soon as I woke up. The looming assignments were always on my mind, but I could barely form a thought, let alone write.

After a quick trip to the doctor and a course of antibiotics, I finally turned a corner and started feeling like myself again. However, with the deadlines quickly approaching, I felt overwhelmed trying to meet them. "What was I thinking?" and "Why did I put this much on myself?" kept running through my mind until, one day, I asked myself a different question. "Am I so focused on meeting the deadlines in front of me that I'm losing sight of the purpose behind them?"

Interruptions are a normal part of life. Sickness, injury, career loss, and financial constraints are just a few examples of circumstances that can alter our plans. Yet even with these disruptions, we still have our heavenly assignments. The Bible calls us to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, souls, and minds and to love others. We're also called to use our spiritual gifts to serve those around us and to go forth and make disciples of all nations.

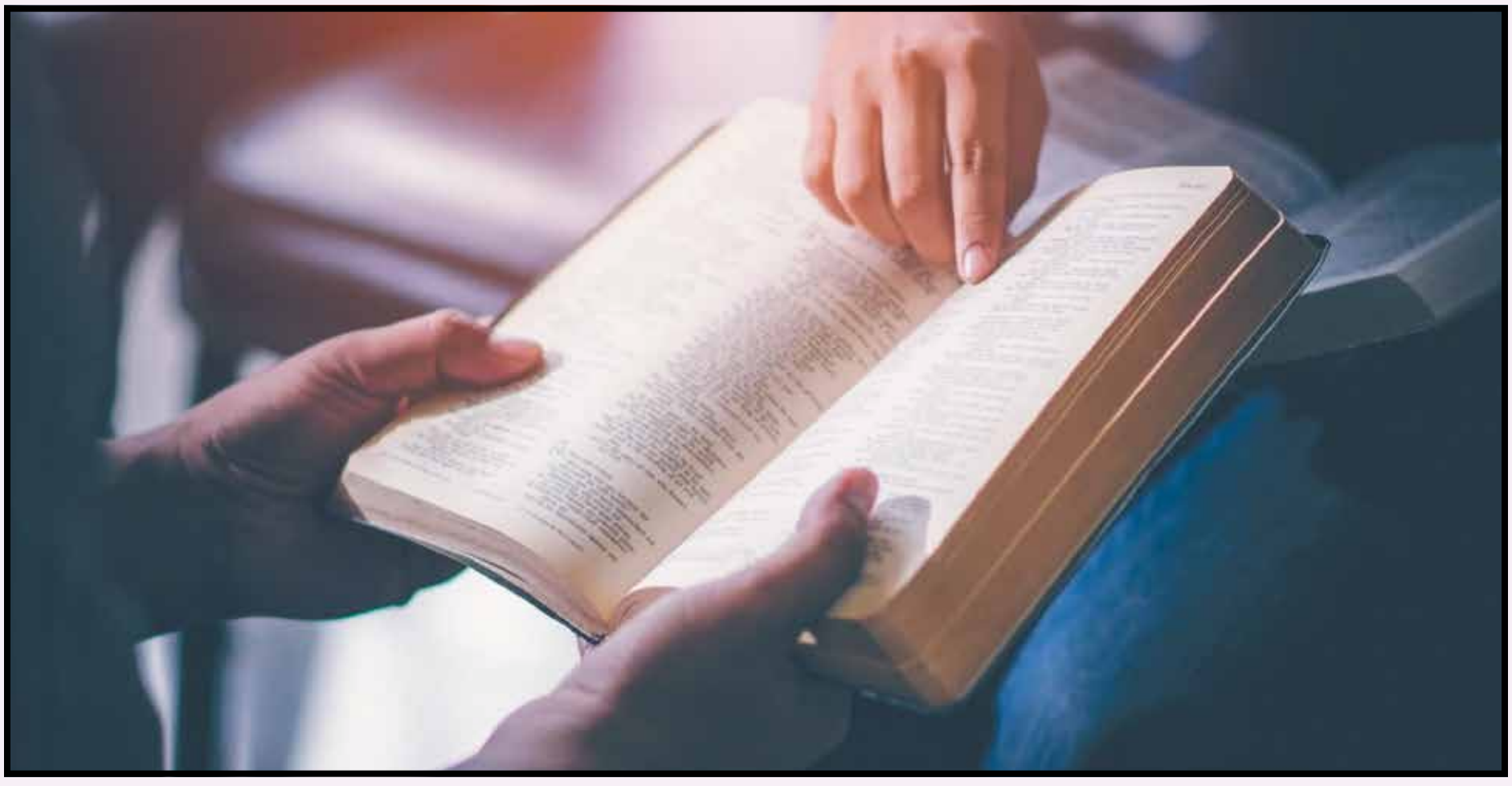
Not only should we continue to pursue these tasks when faced with disruptions, we should do so with urgency. As James 4:14 reminds us, our lives are but vapor in the grand design, a mist that appears for a short while then quickly vanishes. Whatever circumstances we face, we should faithfully pursue what He has entrusted to us, mindful that our time is limited. Take Moses for example. He pleaded with the Lord in prayer, "Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12 NIV). Similarly, Ephesians 5:15–16 instructs us to live wisely, "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity…"

We should also practice gratitude, both for our responsibilities and our blessings. As Paul wrote in his letter to the people of Colossae, "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:17).

So let us work wholeheartedly until the final assignment is due. The one where we meet our Father at the gates of Heaven and make an account for lives. I personally hope to hear, "…well done my good and faithful servant…" In the meantime, I will continue to pursue my assignments both earthly and heavenly with wisdom, diligence, and gratitude.

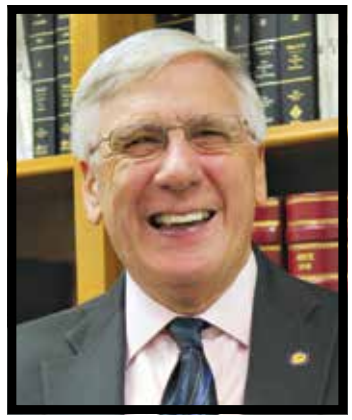
Blessings,

Carissa Lovvorn



Breakdown Or Breakthrough?

by Ali Elizabeth Turner

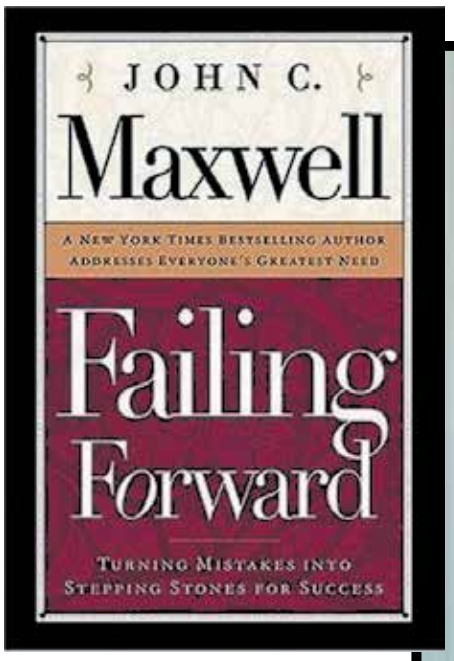


We had just come off the biggest Trunk-or-Treat ever. Mayor Ronnie told me that 2,000 bags of treats had been given out by our first responders, and it was a wonderful time for all—the kids, the parents, and those who serve our city and county. "One of the things the first responders told us was how polite and thankful the kids were," he said. We moved to a talk about our town—how we love it, how others love it, and how Mayor Ronnie is constantly being asked by other mayors how "Athens beez Athens."

"Public safety is crucial, and if we didn't have that, we couldn't do things like Trunk-or-Treat, or anything else," Mayor Ronnie said. Then he added, "Families need to feel safe so we can keep this going."

We moved to the topic of voting. Even though that is now in our rearview mirror, the need to take voting seriously and elect the best possible leadership is something that never goes away, irrespective of what you think of the outcome. We both had lived around people who had been ruled by dictators and had never had the chance to vote in "real" elections. It changes you.

Mayor Ronnie wanted to take time to thank Tere Richardson for her many years of hard work making Athens Main Street what it has become. So many projects have been completed under her leadership; one of the most spectacular being Merchant's Alley. It has gone from being this strange semi-abandoned strip of unused space to one of the coolest places in the downtown core. All the celebrations—Fridays After Five, Chocolate Walk, Sippin' Cider, the Summer Concert Series on the East Side of the Courthouse, Summer Sippin', all of the holiday events -- what a wonderful difference they have made in our quality of life! Anna Clem is the carefully-selected new director of Athens Main Street, and seeing as this is the 20th year, she is stepping into her new role on a firm foundation.





Our thanks go to Tere Richardson, and we wish you well in all that is ahead!

We talked about transportation, infrastructure, all the things that are ongoing challenges in our city and county, what things are the purview of each as well as the Federal government. This moved us on to a discussion from John Maxwell's classic work, *Failing Forward*. He wrote it over a quarter of a century ago, and its principles are timeless. Not everyone knows that John Maxwell has a "most unique" golf swing that Arnold Palmer described as once having "nearly decapitated [Arnold] on the 17th hole." What would have normally been seen as a failure ended up being something over which they had bonded, and Arnold even reframed John's golf swing as something that would make John a perfect potential member for an elite group of over-50 golfers.

John responded by saying that sometimes it comes down to a choice between what he calls "breakdown or breakthrough." Boy, that's true," I thought. And for his part, the mayor quoted John and said, "I'm gonna get up and keep swingin'!" There was only one thing left to do, and that was to pray. So we did, and then it was time for Ronnie to roll.

Tennessee Valley Spotlight
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Faith In The Storm

by Anna Hamilton

There are seasons in life when everything seems to fall apart. The prayers we've prayed seem unanswered, the burdens become heavier, and the road ahead is difficult to see. Sometimes, we find ourselves asking questions that have no easy answers. Why is this happening? Why did God allow it? When will things finally get better?

If you've ever found yourself in a season like that, the book of Job offers some incredible lessons about faith, perseverance, and trusting God when life doesn't go according to plan.

Job was a man who loved God, but he experienced unimaginable suffering. He lost his possessions, his livelihood, his children, and eventually his health. He had every reason to feel defeated. Yet, through his darkest moments, his story reminds us of three important truths.

Everything we have is a gift from God. In Job 1:21, Job declares, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Imagine losing nearly everything you hold dear and still finding the strength to worship God. Job understood that his blessings were never something he could claim as his own. They were gifts entrusted to him by God.

It's easy to praise God when life is beautiful, when our families are healthy, our finances are secure, and our prayers are being answered. But what happens when the blessings seem to disappear?

True faith isn't measured only by how loudly we praise God in our happiest moments. Sometimes, it's revealed in the quiet decision to keep trusting Him when our hearts are breaking.

We may not understand what we've lost, but we can still remember who God is. Our circumstances may change, but His character never does.

A faithful heart can worship even through heartbreak. Job's friends didn't always offer the comfort he needed. They questioned him, misunderstood his suffering, and offered explanations that only added to his pain. Yet Job continued to seek God. And in Job 42:10, we see a beautiful turning point. Job prayed for his friends, and the Lord restored his fortunes.

What a powerful reminder that bitterness doesn't have to become our identity, even when we've been hurt. Contentment doesn't mean pretending everything is okay. It doesn't mean we aren't allowed to grieve, cry, or feel disappointed. It means choosing not to let our circumstances steal our relationship with God.

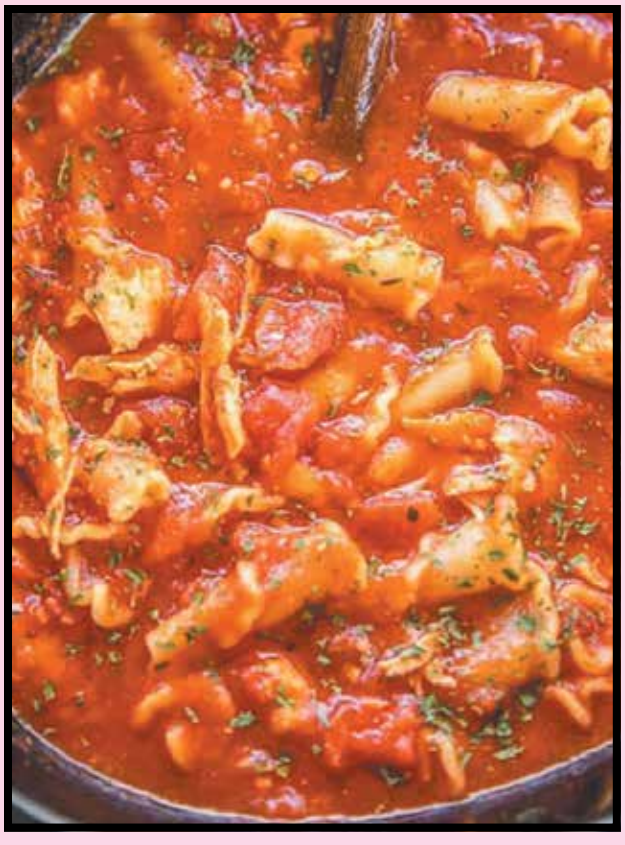
Sometimes the greatest act of faith is praying for someone when you're still waiting for your own breakthrough.

continued on page 22

Garlic Tomato Crockpot Chicken

Ingredients:

2 lbs. boneless skinless chicken breast
2 15 oz cans diced tomatoes with basil, oregano, and garlic
1 small white onion, chopped
1 clove garlic minced
1 tablespoon dried basil
Salt and pepper to taste
1 1/4 cups water
Cooked pasta or rice



Directions:

Place 2 lbs. of boneless skinless chicken breasts in a 6-quart crockpot.

Add the cans of diced tomatoes with basil, oregano, and garlic (undrained); 1 small white onion, chopped; 1 clove garlic, minced; 1 tablespoon dried basil; salt and pepper to taste; and 1 1/4 cups water over top of your chicken.

Cover and cook on low for 4-6 hours or high for 2-3 hours, stirring halfway through the cooking time, if possible, to help the chicken cook evenly.

Shred the chicken and stir to combine sauce. Serve over cooked pasta or rice. Enjoy!



News From The Tourism Office

November To Remember!

by Stephanie Reynolds, Athens-Limestone Tourism Association

Hello, my fabulous Limestonians!

It's finally November and we have some amazing things planned for you around the county this season!

Firstly, I hope you read Pammie Jimmar's front-page article about our Christmas Open House and activities for the holidays. I would like to urge you to hurry to sponsor your tree on our Tinsel Trail this year. The Tinsel Trail is one way we support our local tourism efforts, so by sponsoring a tree, you help tourism! We are filling up fast, and we only have 100 trees, so please order soon.

This is a great idea for businesses who want 24/7 advertising, for families and friend groups to start a tradition, for those who want to remember a lost loved one, and for non-profits. Tourism is a non-profit and I know we non-profits need two things: money and exposure. Sponsoring a Christmas tree on our Tinsel Trail is a great way to let people know how to help you make Athens-Limestone County even more fabulous! People walk around our Tinsel Trail all day every day, and most of the night too, so your business/non-profit/heart will be seen by so many people!

So head to the Athens-Limestone Chamber website, hover over Events & News, then click on Events Calendar. You will see how to register for the Tinsel Trail. (link: https://business.alcchamber.org/events).

Also mark your calendars for the 40th Annual Christmas Open House November 20 - November 22, 2026

We will start with the Tinsel Trail Tree lighting on the 19th. Then Skating on the Square returns, Santa is coming to town for photos and stories. Shop small at the Merry Market. This is an incredible start to the holiday festivities!

Here are more delightful events to make this a season to remember!

AMVETS Veterans Parade November 11, 2026, 11 AM - 1:30 PM

Veterans Day Program & Luncheon, Nov. 11 at 11 AM at the Alabama Veterans Museum (free tickets available on the Athens State University website (Athens.edu)

2026 Athens-Limestone Tinsel Trail November 19, 2026 - January 1, 2027

2026 Athens-Limestone County Christmas Parade December 5, 2026, 5 PM - 8 PM

16th Annual Sippin' Cider Festival December 12, 2026, 3 PM - 7 PM

Ardmore:

November 6 - 8 - Main Street Mercantile Christmas Open House

November 7 - The Rustic Willow Christmas Open House (Santa will be there 10 a.m.-noon)

November 28 - Small Business Saturday at Main Street Mercantile

December 3 - The Rustic Willow's Ladies Night

December 4 (5:30 p.m.) - Tinsel Trail lighting at Ardmore Town Hall Pavilion

December 5 (10 a.m. - noon) - Cookies with Santa at Ardmore Town Hall Pavillion

December 5 - Christmas on Main Street Mercantile Christmas Sales Event

December 7 (6:30 p.m.) - Ardmore Christmas Parade

Elkmont:

December 4th is Santa's Village in Downtown Elkmont

December 5th at 3 PM Elkmont Christmas Parade

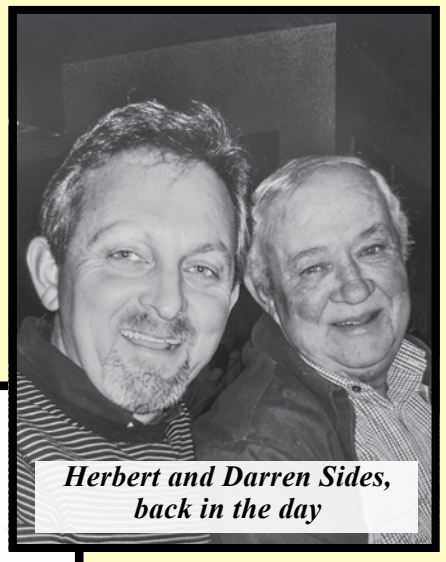
Mooresville:

Saturday, December 12th is the 12 Doors of Christmas: A Holiday Passport Adventure Through Historic Mooresville from 10 a.m. – noon $35/Person



Sides Auto Body Repair: *Celebrating Nearly 40 Years Of Excellent Service*

by Ali Elizabeth Turner



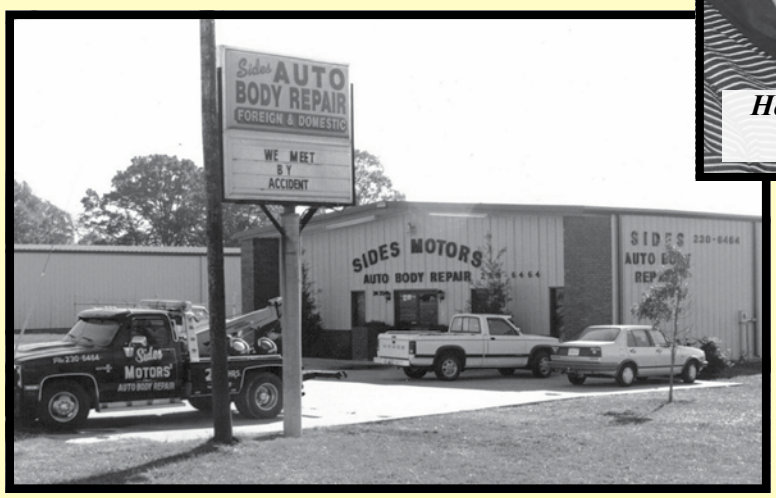
Herbert and Darren Sides, back in the day

continued from page 1

in body work for a while on a casual basis, and Herbert also did some homebuilding. On the day he quit his job, Herbert told Becky, "I know how to do this, and I know we can make it." For a while, the shop was out back at the Sides's home and Herbert would drive up to Nashville to get cars to repair. Eventually the business moved into Athens. Sides Auto Body opened in 1987, the Athens West site opened in 1991 and Sides Auto Body (East) opened in 2020, right when COVID turned our lives upside down. Herbert worked at the West site from 1991 to 1999, and then his son Darren took over the shop.

Recently, I sat down with several members of the Sides family, and enjoyed hearing stories and memories of Herbert, who passed in 2018. He was rarely out of his Liberty overalls, and he loved to cook. Herbert and Becky's daughter, Dana Pressnell, said, "He absolutely loved cars." Herbert actually took a 1964 Mustang and painted it in Athens High School colors -- black and gold -- with the exterior painted a perfect black, and the interior was decked out in plush gold velvet. Dana chuckled as she told of all the cars that they drove as teens as well as what it was like to have her Daddy take her to school in the company wrecker. "You never knew which car was going to be what you drove—it could be covered in Bondo, have a window missing, or be something nice. We drove them all," she said.

Darren started working for his dad washing cars when he was in high school. Sides Auto Body Repair became Darren's career, and he has stayed at West and learned every aspect of the trade. He especially loves customer service and has deep convictions regarding the need to be an excellent provider of service and not be a part of a big-box retail chain. These days it takes the wisdom of Solomon to stay in good standing with the insurance companies as well as the customers, and Darren made it clear that he works first for the customer, not the insurance companies. "Papa always fought for the little guy and he never forgot his roots," they said.



Keith Sides is Doug Side's son, and Doug has passed as well. Like Darren, Keith started working at West when he was in high school, and has made it his career for the last 22 years. He is in customer service and loves everything about the repair process as well as caring for customers. He knows that Sides Auto Body Repair is a legacy business, and he is glad to be a part of it and the family. They all emphasized that there were loyal staff members who stayed at the shop for decades, and everyone agreed they were like family. They include Brian Murray, with 38 years of service; Randy Dean, who worked for 30 years before he retired; and Allen Moore, with 19 years, and who is still working at West.



In 2000, Sides Auto Body (East) opened on January 1, and then COVID hit. For years the family had been told that people on the East side really wanted the kind of care that customers at West had experienced for decades, but didn't want to drive that whole distance. Property miraculously became available, the new facility was built, and then….

A few months and lots and lots of prayer later, East was humming along and has continued to do so. It is managed by Jonathan Johnson, who is married to Alexa, Herbert's granddaughter. Jonathan went to Alabama and worked for Lockheed, and though he is a member of the Sides family by marriage, he shares their passion to serve. One of the things that they did to care for customers during COVID was to sanitize their cars, and the insurance companies paid them to do so. They would also go and pick up customers to get them to their cars in the safest manner possible. Jonathan knows that repairing every aspect of electric cars is the next step, and that certification takes time to attain. Also, if there are other locations added eventually, he wants to keep the same hometown feel that has always set Sides apart. I asked this crew why I should choose Sides Auto Body Repair, either location, for my auto repairs. Their response did not surprise me. They said, "We are local people, and you become part of our family. We will do quality repairs at a fair price, and we will do everything we can to make you comfortable. It has worked for the last 40 years," and I would add, it will work for the next 40. We celebrate with you, Sides Tribe, and thank you for your hard and loving work.



West 2026



East 2026

Sides Auto Body Repair

West -- 17104 US Hwy 72
Athens, AL 35611
256-230 6464

East -- 26941 US Hwy 72
Athens, AL 35613
256-444-0729

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Christmas Magic Begins November 19 in Athens – Limestone County!

By Pammie Jimmar

continued from page 1

people behind the magic: the businesses, volunteers, families, and community partners who come together to create something everyone can enjoy.

This year, the celebration begins November 19, 2026, with the Athens–Limestone Tinsel Trail at Big Spring Memorial Park, kicking off a festive weekend of Christmas Open House, November 20–22.

If you have walked through the Tinsel Trail, you know every tree tells a story. Some celebrate a business or organization. Others reflect a family's favorite traditions, honor someone special, or lovingly remember someone whose presence is especially missed during the holidays. Together, those trees create a beautiful picture of our community, one filled with creativity, love, and heart.

One of my favorite sights is the glow of the lights reflected across the pond. Add families strolling through the park, children pointing out their favorite decorations, and friends stopping to visit, and you have the kind of Christmas experience that brings people back year after year.

Now, we are inviting you to help create that experience!

Local businesses, families, organizations, churches, and community groups can sponsor a live fir tree for $175. Each sponsorship includes the tree, a sponsor sign, and access to electricity. You bring the decorations, the creativity, and a little Christmas spirit.

Make it a team activity for your employees, start a tradition with your children or grandchildren, or gather friends to decorate together. Whether your style is traditional, whimsical, or something completely unexpected, there is room for your story on the Tinsel Trail.

The trail will remain on display November 19, 2026, through January 1, 2027, giving residents and visitors plenty of opportunities to enjoy the park throughout the holiday season.

We are grateful to our presenting sponsor, Hughes Properties II, LLC, and supporting sponsors, Central Church of Christ and Jimmy Smith Buick-GMC, for helping bring this beloved tradition to life.

The holiday fun continues November 20–22, when downtown Athens welcomes everyone to the Square for Christmas Open House. Presented by Dream Key Real Estate, this festive weekend will offer holiday shopping, Skating on the Square, Pictures with Santa, and plenty of opportunities to spend time together in the heart of our community.

Skating on the Square returns! Bring your family and friends and make a few memories while taking a spin around the rink. Skating hours are:

- Friday, November 20: 4–8 p.m.
- Saturday, November 21: 1–5 p.m.
- Sunday, November 22: 1–5 p.m.

Merry Market on Marion will bring even more Christmas cheer to the downtown celebration. Browse local vendors, discover unique gifts, and enjoy the festive atmosphere as you work your way through your holiday shopping list. Market hours are:

- Friday, November 20: 4–8 p.m.
- Saturday, November 21: 11 a.m.–5 p.m.
- Sunday, November 22: Noon–5 p.m.

And, of course, we cannot forget a visit with Santa! We are excited to welcome Fly Leaf Photography back for **Pictures with Santa** on the Limestone County Courthouse lawn, November 21 and 22, from 1–3 p.m. each day. Bring the family, share those Christmas wishes, and capture a little holiday magic to treasure for years to come.

We also have an exciting change to share! New this year, the Athens Christmas Parade will be held on Saturday, December 5. This year's theme, "Gingerbread Village," will bring a sweet touch to one of our favorite community traditions. Mark your calendars, gather your family and friends, and get ready to see how parade participants bring this theme to life!

Throughout the season, I encourage you to make our local businesses part of your holiday traditions. Browse our shops, enjoy a meal, and discover a gift that someone has thoughtfully selected or created. Behind those counters are our neighbors, and supporting them helps keep our community thriving.

For me, the beauty of Christmas is found in those connections. It is taking time to visit, making someone feel welcome, remembering those we love, and sharing the joy and hope of the season.

To register for a Tinsel Trail tree, visit the Athens–Limestone County Chamber of Commerce website at: https://business.alcchamber.org/events/details/2026-athens-limestone-tinsel-trail-3001

Gather your decorating crew, make your downtown plans, and join us. I cannot wait to celebrate another beautiful Christmas season with you in Athens–Limestone County!





Captain's Log

Love You Forever

by Brenda Wilkerson



I was waiting to load up for a field trip at the school I had driven for during my first three years. I waited eagerly in hopes of seeing some of my bus babies I hadn't seen in over a year.

A little blonde-haired, freckle-faced six-year-old boy I had nicknamed Baby Shark stared up the steps and into the eyes of his very first bus driver he ever had since he was three. His eyebrows raised, his mouth opened. As he slowly climbed up the steps, he asked, "Are you my bus driver?" My heart was giddy as I responded, "I sure am, buddy! How are you?" But before I could get the second question out, he buried his little head in my shirt and begin to weep. "Where did you go? Where were you?" Hugging him tight, I replied, "I got a job at a different school. I still love you; you know that right?" He unburied his teary face, looked me in the eyes and with a hoarse tiny voice said, "I didn't know!"

Fighting back unexpected tears, I squeezed him so tight and assured him that I always have and always will forever love him so very much. As the other children were passing by the captain's chair to find their seats, one of his classmates stopped and asked, "Are you his mommy?" Honored to be asked that question, I replied, "No, I'm just his bus driver." Pulling his tear streaked face out of my shirt, he gave me a solid stare with his red eyes, then smiled and turned to go find his seat with friends.

Lord, thank You once again for placing me right exactly here. Every single day, I am keenly aware that You carefully placed me here on this earth, in this time, in this community, at these schools, with Your bus babies. Thank You for the opportunity to serve You in this way.

Brenda







McGhee On Management

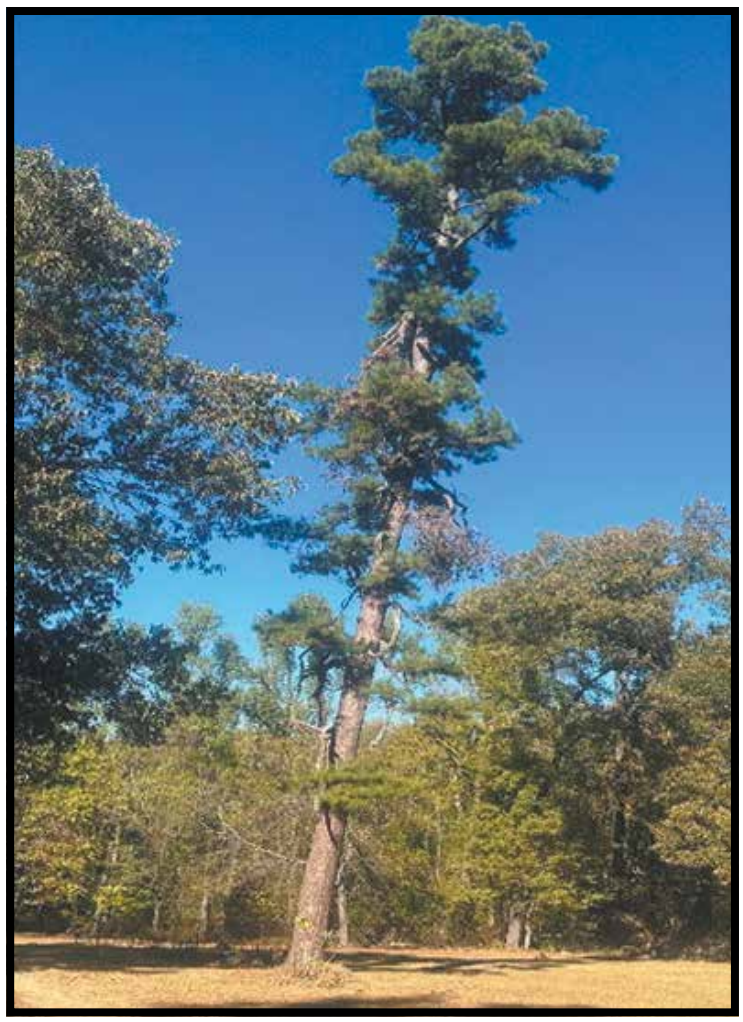
Creation Speaks If We Will Listen

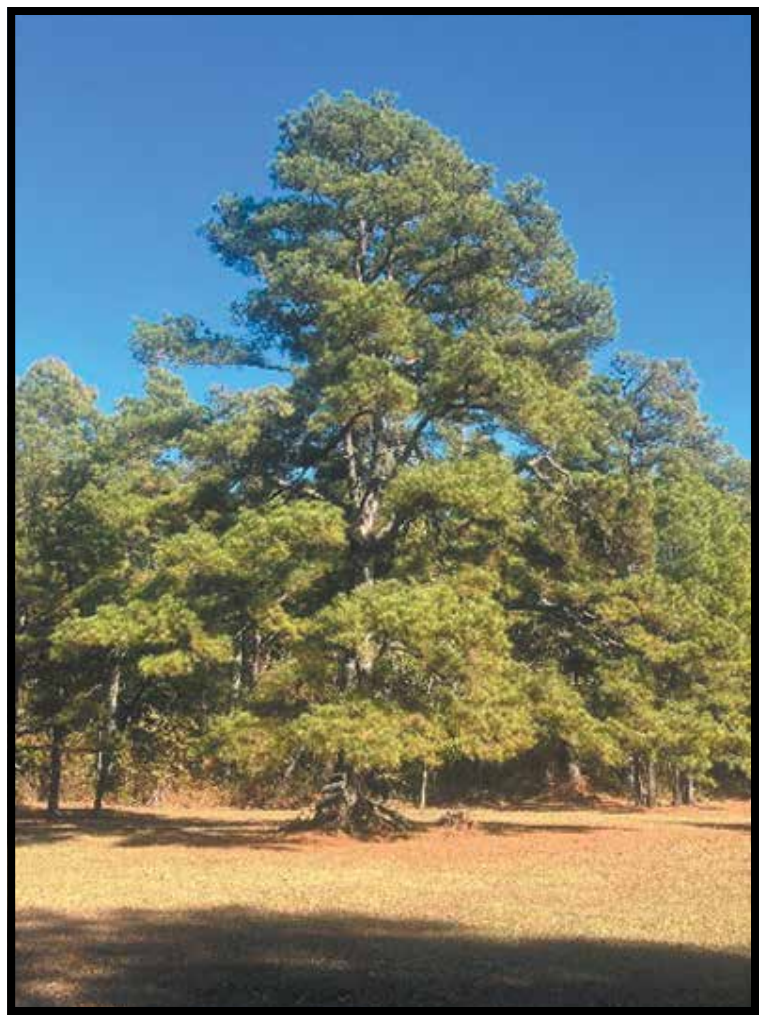
by Detri McGhee - *CLU, ChFC*

Less than a week ago I had a mild heart attack.

The next day, a very difficult stent was finally successfully placed by maneuvering carefully around an aortic valve replacement. I was awake for the procedure, and the difficulty of the placement doubled the time and increased the mental stress of it all. But, now it's done. I am on the mend, and in a few weeks I expect to be feeling better than I have in quite some time.

There have been dozens of things I wanted to share with you since then, but each time I sat down to write, nothing came together. Then, as I took a quiet stroll around our circle drive, I noticed these two very large, very old pine trees in the back meadow.





From my childhood, the words sprang forth: "I think that I shall never see a poem as lovely as a tree…" penned in 1913 by Alfred Joyce Kilmer. And I began to see myself, my friends and my family spoken of in these two trees.

We are all aging. Those of us who can still stand fairly tall, who have weathered many storms, and seen a multitude of seasons are somewhat the worse for wear. Some of us show our battles more than others. Some look almost moth-eaten with thinning foliage, and some of us have blossomed and filled out rather widely. One stoops a little with his walk. One has fluffy, full hair.

I thought of one whose physical appearance looked perhaps even older than its age, and the rough life had certainly left it with sparse spots and empty places. Another had years of their growth still clinging to her, with much shade protecting the grass and ground below her. She looked prosperous and regal as she towered above the squirrels.

What made the difference? Both were very tall, and the growth that still showed on them both looked surprisingly beautiful. About the third time around the circle drive I saw it. I saw what made the difference.

Almost half-way up the tall, slender, more damaged tree there was a very long rotten open area, perhaps 15 feet long, maybe 10 inches across at the most rotted out place. There was still life there in that tree, but it was harder with each storm to stand tall and keep everything running along as it should. There was disease, rot, and probably bugs and/or animals in there that were sapping the tree of its youth, energy, and strength. It was rotten on the inside, and after a while the outside showed it too.

Like people, all of creation is moaning under the weight of the sin and disease and issues of aging that this world contains.

I have had many thoughts about the old trees: What they have been privy to all these years, who shared their shade, how many animals lived in their branches, feasted on their foliage, grazed under their wide branches. Why did some have firmer roots, keeping them stronger than others? These two grew up so close to each other: Why did they end up looking so different?

Poet Kilmer sensed something very important that we all would benefit from pondering often in our lives: Natural creation is far more wondrous and divine than anything we people can write or create. How wise we are to take time to ponder God's creation, consider how we are weathering the storms of life, and if, just perhaps, there are a few bugs we need to get rid of so we can grow healthier whatever time is left in this encasement we call home for now.

Detri L. McGhee would love to hear from you.
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Clean, Green And Beautiful

Colors

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



As the leaves begin to change colors and fall across Limestone County, many homeowners reach for their rakes and leaf blowers to clear their yards. While a tidy lawn may be appealing, leaving some of those fallen leaves behind can actually be one of the best things you can do for your yard, local wildlife, and the environment.

The practice of "leaving the leaves" is an easy, inexpensive way to support a healthier ecosystem right here in North Alabama. Instead of bagging every leaf and sending it to the landfill, consider letting nature put those leaves to work.

Leaves are nature's mulch. As they break down, fallen leaves return valuable nutrients and organic matter to the soil. This natural process improves soil health, helps retain moisture, and can reduce the need for commercial fertilizers. A layer of leaves around trees, shrubs, and garden beds also helps regulate soil temperatures, protecting plant roots from temperature fluctuations during the winter months.

Fallen leaves provide important habitat for wildlife. Many beneficial insects including butterflies, moths, fireflies, and native bees depend on leaf litter to survive the winter. Some butterflies and moths overwinter as eggs, caterpillars, or pupae among fallen leaves. Firefly larvae also use leaf litter as habitat while feeding on organisms such as snails and slugs. When leaves are removed, these insects lose valuable shelter and protection. Leaving leaves in place helps support the food chain and provides habitat for birds and other wildlife that depend on insects for food.

Keeping leaves out of landfills reduces waste. Every fall, bags of leaves are collected and transported away from neighborhoods. Much of this organic material could instead be composted or used as natural ground cover. Allowing leaves to decompose on your property keeps valuable organic matter out of the waste stream and reduces the need to transport and dispose of yard debris.



There are also benefits for Limestone County's waterways. Leaves left in appropriate areas of the yard help protect soil from erosion and improve water absorption. Healthy soil and vegetation can help reduce stormwater runoff, which may carry sediment and pollutants into nearby creeks, streams, and the Tennessee River. This is especially important in our community, where protecting local waterways is essential to maintaining a healthy environment.

You don't have to let your entire yard become a blanket of leaves to make a difference. Consider leaving leaves underneath trees, around shrubs, and in garden beds. You can also create a designated leaf pile in an out-of-the-way corner of your yard to provide wildlife habitat. If leaves accumulate heavily on your lawn, mulch them with a mower so they break down more quickly and return nutrients to the soil. Keep leaves away from storm drains, sidewalks, driveways, and areas where they could create slippery conditions or block drainage.

If you have more leaves than your yard can use, consider composting them. Shredded leaves make an excellent addition to compost piles and can be saved for use in gardens throughout the year.

This fall, Keep Athens-Limestone Beautiful encourages residents to rethink the traditional fall cleanup. A few leaves left behind can make a big difference for local wildlife, healthier soil, and cleaner waterways. Sometimes, the most environmentally friendly thing you can do is simply leave nature where it belongs. So before you grab that rake, remember: **Leaves aren't litter. They're a valuable natural resource!**

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Slinkard On Scriptural Success

The Loneliness Of A Connected World

by D. A. Slinkard

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

Has there ever been a time that we have been able to freely communicate with those around us as we are able to do today? Yet somehow, genuine communication seems to be becoming a lost art. We can send a message to someone on the other side of the world in a matter of seconds. We can video chat with family members who live hundreds of miles away. We can keep up with what our friends are doing, where they are going, what they are eating, and sometimes even what they are thinking. Yet, with all of these advancements in technology, I cannot help but wonder if we have actually become more disconnected from one another.

There was a time when people would sit around the dinner table and have conversations. Families would gather in the living room and actually talk to one another. Neighbors would visit with neighbors, and friends would spend hours together without feeling the need to constantly check something in their pockets. Today, however, it is not uncommon to walk into a restaurant and see an entire family sitting at the same table, with every person staring at a different screen. They are physically together, but mentally they are somewhere else entirely.

Now, do not misunderstand me, I am not against technology. As a matter of fact, I use it every single day, and I am thankful for the many conveniences it provides. Technology has made our lives easier in countless ways, and there is certainly nothing wrong with taking advantage of those benefits. However, I do believe we need to recognize that just because something makes our lives more convenient does not necessarily mean it makes our lives better.

One of the things that concerns me is how easily we have confused communication with connection. There is a tremendous difference between the two. Communication is simply exchanging information, while connection involves building and maintaining meaningful relationships. You can exchange messages with someone every single day and still know very little about what is actually happening in their life.

Think about social media for a moment. We have hundreds, sometimes thousands, of people whom we refer to as our "friends." We see their pictures, read their posts, and occasionally click a button to let them know we approve of something they have shared. Yet, how many of those people could we actually call at two o'clock in the morning if we needed someone to talk to? How many would recognize that something was wrong simply by hearing our voice?

I believe one of the greatest ironies of our generation is that we have become so occupied with keeping up with everybody that we sometimes neglect the people who are right in front of us. We can spend thirty minutes scrolling through the lives of complete strangers while barely giving five minutes of undivided attention to the people living under our own roof. We know what someone across the country had for breakfast, but we may not know what kind of day our spouse or children have had.

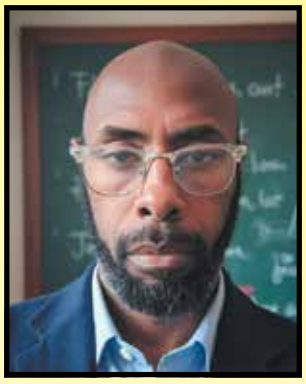
And perhaps the saddest part is that we have become so accustomed to this way of living that we hardly even notice it anymore. How many meaningful conversations have never taken place because someone was distracted by a notification? How many opportunities to encourage someone have been missed because we were too busy looking at a screen? How many memories have we failed to make because we were more concerned about capturing the moment than actually enjoying it?

There is something to be said about looking someone in the eye when they are speaking. There is something valuable about sitting down with a friend and having a conversation without constantly checking the time or reaching for a phone. There is something special about being present, not just physically, but mentally and emotionally.

The reality is that relationships require time, attention, and genuine interest in the lives of others. And while technology can certainly help us maintain those relationships, it was never intended to replace the personal interaction that makes those relationships meaningful.

Perhaps we should put our phones down, spend less time scrolling and more time talking. After all, what good is having the ability to communicate with the entire world if we lose the ability to connect with the people sitting right beside us? Life goes by so fast that if we are not careful we will miss it. Live every day on purpose.





Learning As A Lifestyle

What Does It Mean to Be Human in the Age of AI?

Dignity, Discernment, Formation, and Vocation

by Eric Betts

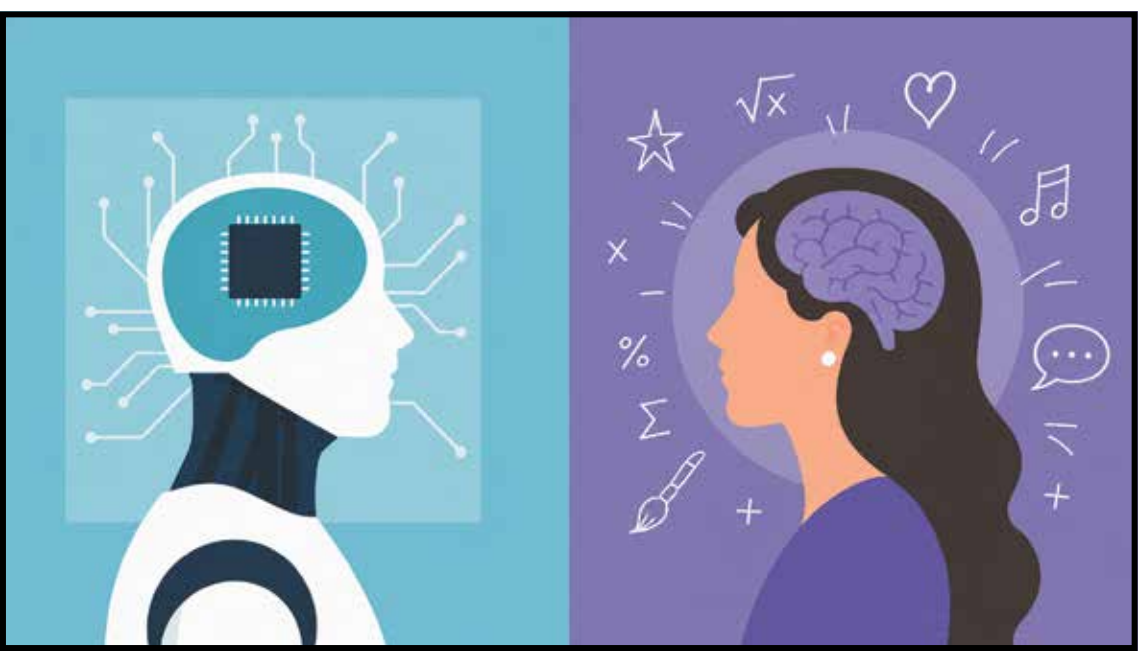
Assistant Director, Curtis Coleman Center for Religion Leadership and Culture at Athens State University

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly reshaping how we work, learn, and engage the world. Recently, during a Chapel Talk sponsored by the Curtis Coleman Center for Religion, Leadership, and Culture at Athens State University, we explored what it means to be human in the age of AI, drawing upon the wisdom of Wendell Berry and the religious intellectual tradition. Yet perhaps a more fundamental question deserves our attention: How have we historically misunderstood what it means to be human, and might AI accelerate those misunderstandings? Four distinctions emerged from this reflection.

Dignity Over Productivity. Modern society frequently measures human worth through economic usefulness. But what happens when machines can perform work once assigned to human beings? If productivity determines value, do those whose labor is no longer needed become disposable? Human beings are not interchangeable cogs in an economic machine. The Christian doctrine of the imago Dei affirms that human dignity precedes productivity. Our worth is not determined by employment, income, or economic contribution. The economy and its technologies should serve human flourishing, rather than human beings existing to serve economic production.

Discernment Over Data. AI can analyze enormous amounts of information, recognize patterns, and generate predictions. Yet data can tell us what has happened without determining what ought to happen. Congresswoman Summer Lee warns that AI algorithms can enshrine biases already present in humankind. Consider documented wrongful arrests resulting from erroneous facial-recognition matches. These cases demonstrate the dangers of treating technological outputs as reliable judgments without adequate human scrutiny. When historical inequalities become embedded in automated systems, technology can accelerate rather than correct injustice. Discernment requires more than processing information; it demands moral judgment, accountability, and recognition of the dignity of those affected.

Formation Over Frictionlessness. One promise of AI is the elimination of difficulty, but not every difficulty is an obstacle to human development. In Inside the Box, David Epstein explores how constraints and what researchers call *desirable difficulties* contribute to learning and growth. This resonates with Howard Thurman's emphasis on wrestling with great ideas. Such wrestling develops patience, intellectual humility, critical judgment, and the capacity to reconsider our assumptions. At commencement, we rarely tell graduates simply to make enormous amounts of money. Instead, we encourage them to become responsible citizens, serve their communities, and make the world better. These are aspirations of formation, not merely information acquisition. We must be careful that in removing the struggle required to obtain information, we do not also eliminate the struggle through which human beings are formed.



Vocation Over Replacement. AI can also serve profoundly constructive purposes. Writing in *Sojourners*, Adam Nicholas Phillips imagines a nonprofit worker in Mississippi helping families navigate fragmented food-assistance programs. AI could organize information across multiple systems and identify families who qualify for assistance but remain overlooked. Yet the worker brings what technology cannot: personal relationships, community knowledge, trust, and moral responsibility. The machine helps identify the need; the human being knows how to respond. Her vocation is extended rather than replaced. This illustrates the larger question confronting us: Will technological advancement merely increase our capacity to produce, or will it deepen our capacity to care? Ultimately, becoming more technologically capable does not necessarily mean becoming more fully human. That depends upon how we value and treat one another.

Technological advancement does not necessarily constitute human advancement. As AI expands our capabilities, we must remain attentive to the ways our misunderstandings of human worth, knowledge, and responsibility may be reinforced rather than corrected. Ultimately, the measure of our progress is not simply what technology enables us to accomplish, but whether we are becoming more fully human in how we value, regard, and treat one another.

Eric M. Betts, PhD

Curtis Coleman Center for Religion, Leadership and Culture

Athens State University



The Alternative Approach

The Complete Vitamin & Mineral Reference Guide

by Roy P. Williams

For all of you who believe that over 80% of our health issues are the result of poor quality, over-processed and toxic foods, allow me to introduce you to a guide that can help you make better decisions concerning your health and nutrition.

This guide Includes information on anti-oxidants, anti-inflammatories, amino acids, nutritional greens, dietary fibers, medical herbs, digestive nutrients and other special nutrients.

When it comes to nutrition, most people don't have a clue where to start. Stop wondering if a specific, vitamin, mineral, herb, or super food is right for you. The research has already been done and it is now available.

Talking about falling in love with a reference guide, this has fast become my favorite. It is so special because the information comes from over 30 thousand pages of research including some of the most successful and well-known naturopaths and scientific studies from all over the world.

And, it is so easy to use. Even though it comes from thousands of pages of research, it is only 30 pages long because they break each nutrient down to specifically what it has been scientifically proven to be effective for. Not all nutrients and super foods are in this guide, however most of the important ones are. Open to the first page and you find the index listing every nutrient that is in the book in alphabetical order.

What makes this reference guide special is when you turn to the nutrient you wish to know more about, the most important and proven benefits are right there, in one easy to read paragraph. Here is just one example Silica. The paragraph reads, "Silica: Necessary for the formation of collagen for bones and connective tissue; promotes healthy nails, skin, and hair; maintains flexible arteries; plays a major role in preventing cardiovascular disease; counteracts the effects of aluminum on the body, and is important in the prevention of Alzheimer's disease and osteoporosis; stimulates the immune system and inhibits the aging process in tissues; important for calcium absorption; improves the elasticity and thickness of the skin."

After spending many years of my life researching the benefits of nutrition, having this one 30-page guide is a true blessing. I told my wife that this reference guide would have saved me thousands of hours if it had been available when I is was in my twenties.

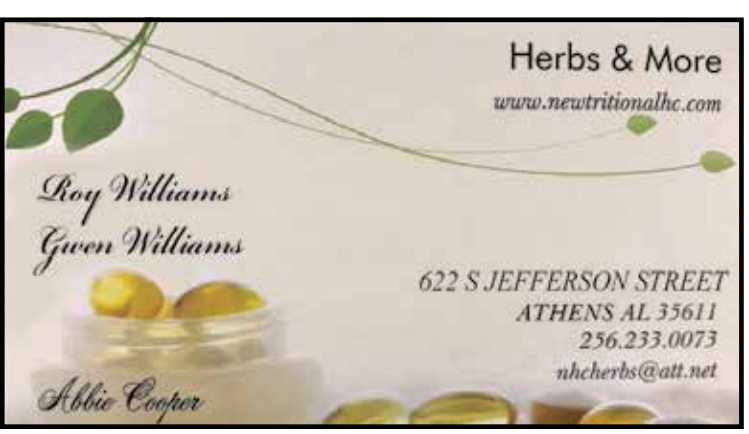
The reason I am telling you about this guide is because we have arranged to make it available to everyone who comes in one of our locations, Herbs & More in Athens and NHC Herb Shop in Killen, or you can order it from our website nhcherbs.com. This reference guide could easily be sold for $25.00 or more. But thanks to the author, we can make it available for a short time, for only $7.95 (limit one per customer). This is a limited time offer so get your copy while they are available. This 30-page guide makes it so easy to decide which nutrient will be most beneficial for you and those you love. Supplements are the new health care; supplements are replacing dangerous drugs and with this guide, you can decide which nutrient you need to support your particular situation.

Remember, this special is a limited time offer; so get yours today. When this shipment runs out, we aren't sure how long it will be before we can get more or if we will ever be able to make it available at this price again. Herb & More in Athens and NHC Herb Shop in Killen and their staff are dedicated to helping people live to their genetic potential without being dependent on pharmaceutical drugs. Millions all over the world are living longer, with a higher quality of life, thanks to proper nutrition. Our future has never been brighter.

Your Friend in Health,

Roy P. Williams







Mental Health Minute

Suspicious Personality Disorders

by Lisa Philippart,
Licensed Professional Counselor

"I don't think people understand how stressful it is to explain what's going on in your head when you don't even understand it yourself."
- Anonymous

Note: Please do not use this information to self-diagnose. Consult a professional.

Currently most psychiatrists tend to use a system of diagnosis which identifies ten types of personality disorders. These disorders are grouped into three categories: suspicious, emotional and impulsive, and anxious. Each personality disorder has its own set of diagnostic criteria. To get a specific diagnosis, you must meet some of the criteria, and the minimum amount you need to meet is different for different types. If you meet criteria for more than one type this may be called mixed personality disorder. It is also possible to get a diagnosis without meeting the full criteria for a specific type. This is known as personality disorder not otherwise specified. Understanding what it means to experience a personality disorder is constantly evolving. Assigning a personality disorder can be a controversial diagnosis. The important thing to remember is that the feelings and behaviors associated with personality disorders are very difficult to live with. However you understand your diagnosis, and whatever terms you prefer to use, you deserve understanding and support.

In this article, we will take a look at the three types of disorders that fall under the suspicious category. These are paranoid, schizoid, and schizotypal personality disorders. The thoughts, feelings, and experiences associated with **paranoid personality disorder** may cause you to find it hard to confide in people, even your friends and family. You may find it difficult to trust other people, believing they will use you or take advantage of you. Because of this high level of constant mistrust, you may have problems relaxing. Your system is on constant high alert, which can be exhausting. You may also read threats and danger (which others don't see) into everyday situations. Innocent remarks or casual looks from others are viewed with suspicion. If this has become a problem for you and is interfering with your activities of daily living, you may fit the criteria for paranoid personality disorder.

Many people with **schizoid personality disorder** are able to function fairly well. Unlike schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorder, you would not usually have psychotic symptoms. However, as a result of the thoughts and feelings associated with



this diagnosis, you may find difficulty in forming close relationships with other people, choosing to live your life without interference from others. With this type of personality disorder you may prefer to be alone with your own thoughts and fantasies, and unable to experience pleasure from usually enjoyable activities. You many have difficulty relating to or are emotionally cold towards others. You may be seen as a loner or dismissive of others. Aloof, cold, detached are words often used to describe someone with this type of personality disorder.

Everyone has his/her own peculiarities or awkward behaviors. But if your patterns of thinking and behaving make relating to others difficult, you may meet the criteria for schizotypal personality disorder. While those with **schizotypal personality disorder** may experience brief psychotic episodes, they are not as frequent or intense as those struggling with schizophrenia; and with this personality disorder, they can usually be made aware of the difference between their distorted ideas and reality. Characteristics and symptoms include presenting with distorted thoughts or perceptions. This makes it challenging to find and make close relationships. You may think and express yourself in ways that others find odd, peculiar, or eccentric, using unusual words or phrases, which make relating to others difficult. You may also believe that you can read minds or that you have some kind of supernatural or special powers, such as a "sixth sense." Because of your difficulty in connecting with others, you may feel anxious and tense with those who do not think as you do. Social situations are extremely stressful. In my next article, we will take a look at the emotional and impulsive category of personality disorders.

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GenZ With JP

The Radicalness Of The Gospel

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

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us (Psalm 103:11-12).

Our society needs Christ, now more than ever. We live in a world that has turned towards hatred, towards God primarily. However, hatred of God inevitably becomes hatred of one another, since God is love. The root cause of this is our inherent sinful nature. However, a big component is also a misunderstanding of the Gospel.

I can't blame someone for struggling to grasp something so radical, yet it's the single remedy that wipes clean the sins of the world. In the midst of political mudslinging, if you don't have Jesus, nothing else matters.

Around 2,026 years ago, God became man and was eventually crucified to save the world from itself. John 3:16 states, "For God so loved the world he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." After rising again three days later, he defeated the grave and sin itself.

He didn't do this because he needed us; he did this because he loved us so dearly. God, who's seen you commit your worst sins, still deemed you worthy of forgiveness. That is the first seed you must plant to understand the Gospel. Accept Jesus into your heart, let his blood cover you and wash you white as snow, and be forgiven. If you take nothing else from this column, sit with that.

The next step of understanding the Gospel is acknowledging the weight of your sin. We are all dirty, rotten sinners who deserve the full wrath of God. We are selfish, arrogant, and we spit in the face of God daily. Even unintentionally, because that is our nature. Until we acknowledge that truth, we cannot fully appreciate what Jesus did on the cross.

The full weight of the sins of the world was upon his shoulders, and he willingly took it on for you. God cannot forgive you until you fully acknowledge your sins. Psalm 51 is the perfect example of this. When the Prophet Nathan confronted David with his sin of adultery with Bathsheba, David was trying to cover it.

Yet, God saw it all. It wasn't until David recognized his sin, begged for forgiveness, and repented that he received the grace of God. This is how we must live. Do not run from your sin; do not act like it didn't happen. Until you get on your knees and confess to the Lord, God cannot give you the fullness of his love.

I believe the most radical aspect of the Gospel is that of forgiveness. God not only forgives us, but he calls us to forgive each other. Even our worst enemies. In fact, especially our worst enemies. If we cannot humble ourselves to forgive those who harmed us, then we haven't truly grasped the gravity of God's forgiveness of us.

After acknowledging your true sinful nature and what Jesus did for you, you will be humble enough to forgive your enemies. The truth is, who are we to not forgive? If God Almighty forgave us and granted us eternal life when we did not deserve it, how can we not grant that forgiveness to those who hurt us? Are we bigger than God? Of course not.

To experience the fullness of the peace and love of the Gospel, we must also extend it to each other by forgiving as the Lord forgave us. Do not hold on to the bitterness of resentment. Don't let that wickedness eat away at you. Forgive your enemies, for they are no better than you. You're just as much a sinner as they are, and they are also worthy of the same forgiveness you received. In a world of evildoers who hate Christ, this does not mean we condone their actions.

This means we release the right of judgment to God. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Romans 12:19). Lastly, we must forgive ourselves for the sin we committed. This does not mean we validate our actions, nor do we willingly commit them again. We accept the fact that God does not view us by our sins. When we are covered by the blood of Jesus, God sees his perfect son. He sees us as his children, whom he loves so dearly. Not by our sins. Do not allow yourself to view yourself by your worst sin after you've received forgiveness. If God doesn't view you that way, then you shouldn't either.

Lastly, we must understand what love is, and enact it daily. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away" (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). This is the standard of true love. This is how we are called to love our spouses, our friends, our neighbors, and yes, even our enemies.

However, understanding love as weak and passive toward evil is incorrect as well. Unbelievers will gaslight those of us who stand up against evil as not being loving or accepting. When Christians stand up against that which is evil, we are not claiming to be God. We are not saying that we are any less sinful than you. On the contrary, we acknowledge our sinful nature.

However, this does not mean we sit idly by as anti-Christian ideology runs rampant. Loving one another is not allowing our community to fall away from the faith. It's speaking truth and saving one another from living a life of sin. Love is not allowing sin to gain a foothold in our society. This does not mean we do so hatefully. We do so patiently, and not in a way that is self-seeking. Righteous backbones who love our society too much to let it fall to the evil one are desperately needed in our world today, and I pray they come quickly.

If you've been sold a story of Christ and the Gospel that has made you resent Christianity, I pray this has helped plant a seed in unlearning that lie. Jesus loves you and wants to spend eternity with you, and if you seek his face, he will find you.

"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

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.

RIGHTSIDE RADIO

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Cooking with Anna (continued from page 9)



Faith In The Storm

by Anna Hamilton

Sometimes it's choosing forgiveness when bitterness would be easier. And sometimes it's simply getting out of bed, taking another breath, and trusting God for one more day. God sees those quiet acts of faith, too.

We don't have to understand everything to trust God. In Job 38, God finally speaks to Job. Rather than giving him a detailed explanation of every painful event, God reminds Job of His power, wisdom, and sovereignty over creation. Job had questions, and he wasn't afraid to express his sorrow. His story teaches us something important: having questions doesn't mean we have lost our faith.

We may never receive an explanation for every difficult season we walk through. We may not understand why certain doors closed, why certain prayers weren't answered the way we hoped, or why some seasons lasted longer than we ever imagined.

But faith means recognizing that our understanding is limited while God's wisdom is not. We don't have to know every detail of the journey to trust the One who walks beside us. Worship Him in the storm.

Perhaps the greatest lesson from Job is that our worship should never be dependent on our circumstances. Anyone can praise God when everything is going right. But there is something incredibly beautiful about a heart that continues to worship when life is falling apart. God never promised that we would never experience heartache, disappointment, or loss. But He did promise that we would never have to face this life without Him.

Your lowest moment does not have to be your final chapter. Your heartbreak does not mean God has abandoned you. And your unanswered questions do not mean He has stopped working.

If you're walking through a storm today, give yourself permission to cry. Give yourself permission to grieve. Take your questions to God and lean on Him when you don't have the strength to stand on your own. Just don't give up on the One who has never given up on you.

Remember: Your circumstances do not determine God's faithfulness. Your storm does not cancel His promises. And even when you cannot see what He's doing, you can trust who He is.

Keep praying. Keep believing. Keep worshiping. The same God who was with Job in his darkest hour is with you in yours.

Sometimes faith isn't understanding the storm. Sometimes faith is simply holding on to God until the storm passes.

This week's recipe is a yummy crockpot dish, perfect for those busy weekday nights. I hope you enjoy it as much as my family does.

"I know you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. My ears have heard you but now my eyes have seen you" (Job 42:2, 5).





Health and Fitness

We Don't Know What We Don't Know

by Nick Niedzwiecki - Owner, CrossFit Athens

How many opportunities have we missed out on in life simply because we made up our minds about something before we ever experienced it? We hear someone's opinion, see something on social media, or make an assumption based on what we think we know. Before we realize it, we have convinced ourselves that something isn't for us. The problem is that we are making decisions based on information we don't actually have. We don't know what we don't know, and sometimes that lack of understanding is the very thing keeping us from something that could change our lives.

I see this happen all the time when it comes to CrossFit. People have an idea in their heads about what happens inside those gym walls. They picture people lifting ridiculous amounts of weight, doing complicated movements, and pushing themselves to the point of exhaustion. Somewhere along the way, they decided that they aren't strong enough, young enough, or fit enough to participate. The interesting part is that many of these people have never actually walked into a CrossFit gym. Their entire opinion is based on something they heard or a video they watched.

What if I told you that the majority of people walking through our doors are just ordinary individuals trying to improve their lives? They're parents, grandparents, business owners, teachers, and people who have spent years putting everyone else's needs ahead of their own. Some haven't exercised in decades. Others have never stepped foot inside a gym. They're not showing up because they're already in great shape. They're showing up because they want to get there.

That's the part people don't see.

You don't have to know how to lift weights. You don't have to be able to run a mile or do a pull-up. You don't even have to know where to begin. That's our job. We meet you where you are, teach you what you need to know, and help you improve one day at a time. The person who hasn't exercised in 20 years can walk through the same doors as someone who has been training for a decade, and both can get exactly what they need.

But none of that matters if you never give yourself the opportunity to find out.

Think about the things you've accomplished in life that once seemed intimidating. At some point, you had to put aside your doubts and take that first step. You didn't have all the answers, and you certainly weren't an expert when you started. You simply decided that the possibility of something better was worth being uncomfortable for a little while.

Your health shouldn't be any different.

At CrossFit Athens, we're not asking you to show up in shape. We're asking you to show up willing to make a change. Leave the assumptions, the opinions, and the excuses at the door. Come see what actually happens inside our gym. Meet the people, talk to the coaches, and discover what you're capable of.

You might find that everything you thought you knew was wrong.

And you might discover that the life you've been wanting was waiting on the other side of a door you were afraid to walk through.

The hardest part isn't the workout. It's deciding to walk through the door.

Coach Nick
Owner
CrossFit Athens
www.crossfitathens.com





From The Porch...

by Amy Hogan Clem

It's early November and Harvest Time! This is one of my favorite seasons. I'm not much of a pumpkin spice fan, but I truly enjoy the cooler temperatures, the leaves changing colors and the preparations for winter. William Blake, an English poet from the early 1800s said, "In seed-time learn, *in harvest teach*, and in winter enjoy". I like that! Let me share what I've learned about sunflowers.

Limestone County's major crops are soybeans, cotton, wheat and corn, according to the USDA National Agricultural Statistical Service, 2026. However, as you drive just outside the city, you are very likely to see fields of sunflowers. Aside from their beauty, sunflowers perform an incredible service! Sunflowers are grown in our hometown primarily for local farm stands for picking and photography venues. **Evey Burns** is pictured enjoying the beauty of a local sunflower patch.

Some local farmers plant sunflowers as a cover crop. This means they sow these seeds after another harvest such as corn, which takes a lot from the soil. Sunflowers also help to prevent erosion and replenish the topsoil. Sunflowers by design store biomass in their stems rather than in the roots, so they don't require much digging or disturbing the soil after their growth is complete. They are also easy to grow and require very little water.

After the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in the spring of 1986, engineers planted acres of sunflowers to clean up the soil. Sunflowers absorbed harmful chemicals from the soil and stored them in their stems. Workers then simply cut their stems and destroyed the remains without further disturbing or re-contaminating the soil. Here's another fun fact about sunflowers: the young flowers tilt their "face" back toward the east during the night after they have followed the sun all day. This natural biological process is called heliotropism. In doing so, the flower heats up faster in the morning and attracts pollinators to perpetuate plant growth. What an amazing Creation!

How exciting it is to enjoy this time of year and appreciate our local farmers who plant by faith, looking forward to a bountiful harvest. The Scriptures tell us in Galatians Chapter 6 to "…not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not" (KJV). Robert Louis Stevenson cautioned us in saying, "Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap, but by the seeds that you plant".

Looking Forward,

Amy Hogan Clem

(This porch picture was taken on East Street at the home of Craig and Kerri Calvert, in the Beaty Historic District).



