# theENCOURAGERmagazine





#### ON THE COVER

Congregant Lena Aldrige is all smiles as she flashes a winning smile for the camere during her February 17, 2019 photo shoot at CCC.

Photography By: Michael R. Spry © 2019

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### GOD'S PROTECTION

ftentimes when we think of God's

protection, we think of it in terms of God protecting us from bad things, from things that affect our lives in a negative way. The 23rd Psalm is one of the most beloved portions of Scripture and it reveals to us just how much the Good Shepherd cares for His sheep. It is a picture of the love that God has for His people.

When we think of love we often think of it being manifested in a manner that shields those being loved from danger. Now it is true that God does, many times, manifest His love by helping His people avoid danger or hardship. But Scripture often presents God's love for and protection of His people in a different way.

Here in the 23rd Psalm the writer begins by presenting God as one who cares for His sheep and

[Godl does not shield [us] from

hardship

OT

difficulty

- Pastor Reginald Elliott -

ensures that they have everything they need. Yet in

the process of doing this He does not shield them from hardship or difficulty. He allows them to walk through the valley of the shadow of death. The language suggests that the valley of the shadow of death is not a place through which one would, of their own accord, choose to walk. The valley represents a place or time of difficulty, and in such times our first response is to ask, "Where is God?" The common assumption among men is that if God is with you, you will not have to walk through such a place.

The truth is God's protection is revealed not only by keeping His children from trouble, but also by being with them and helping them through times of difficulty. So wherever you are in your

life's journey, know that He is with you protecting you, even in the valley of the shadow of death.

# CHRISTIAN COMEDY CORNER CAROLYNJACKSON

# "A merry heart doeth good like a medicine"

Proverbs 17:22 (KJV)

One day, Kendrick and his mom were coming home. His mom was complaining about the mortgage bill. Kendrick said he could help. When his mom told him the price he was like, "Can I give 10% like in church for offering?" His mom said that doesn't work in this house. Kendrick said, "The Lord works in every house."



How does Moses make tea? "Hebrews" it!!

I was in Florida and saw a bumper sticker on a parked car that read "I miss Baltimore." So I broke the window, flatten two tires, removed his GPS and



left a note that read, "I hope this helps."

Never invest in funerals. It's a dying industry.

The teacher asks Little Johnny to "briefly" explain what hard water is...Little Johnny: ICE!!





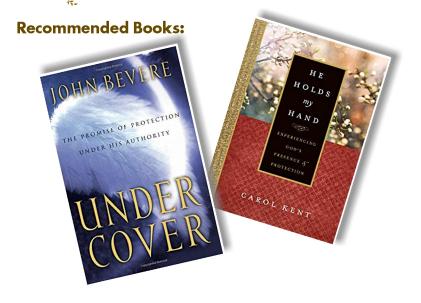
# THELIBRARIAN'S DESK DESIREE COLLINS

#### **PROTECTION IS IMPORTANT!**

rotection is important, would you not agree? Everyone desires to feel a sense of security and safety. Especially in the world we live in today. The world is gripped by fear. Danger is all around us. People are subject to harm in every conceivable place and way; churches, schools, shopping centers, simply sitting in your car or even, sitting in your own home. Sin has infiltrated every dimension of space on the place we call Earth. Some people only put their trust in people they know, their families, or themselves. They don't trust their neighbors, law enforcement, and heaven forbid, the government. So who or what can we trust?

Don't despair, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior has given us His eternal protection that will guard our minds and hearts. God's protection has deep roots, penetrating the very marrow of our being. 2 Samuel 22:2-4 (KJV) says, "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; The God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my savior; thou save me from violence. I will call on the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from mine enemies." As Christians we must learn to run to God, not from God in all situations and circumstances. It is His good pleasure to keep guard over our minds and hearts and keep us in perfect peace, the "peace, which is far beyond human understanding" (Philippians 4:7, GNT).

God's Word is over flowing with words of protection for us as believers. There is spiritual protection in the Word of God for every attack of the enemy, be that on the mind, body, or spirit! Psalm 91 gives us multiple examples of our Lord and Savior keeping watch over us and delivering us from all kinds of evil seen and unseen. These scriptures give us loving assurance of God's love and protection over us. God is not a man, He cannot lie. He has promised to protect us from harm. "He shall cover thee with his feathers and under his wings shalt thou trust...he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways" (Psalm 91:4, 11, KJV). Many Christians believe God's Word as truth, but ignore it in their daily living. God's presence watches over us continually. Entrust yourself to God's watchful care, the best and only protection you will ever need!



# A GREAT**ESCAPE**

efore I became a member of Columbia Community Church I was in a cult. I wasn't there long, it was about 6 months. I remember everything

happening so fast. One day I decided to leave the church I grew up in (which was a very hard decision) and against my family's wishes. I started looking for another church. I spent a month or two church hopping and then one day while I was dining alone at the food court at the mall and a young lady came over and sat with me. I'm a really friendly person so

although it was weird (there were plenty of empty tables where she could've sat), I smiled and we started talking about work and our background. All of a sudden the young lady whipped out a Bible. It was almost like she pulled it from behind her back. She slammed it on the table and read a few verses and then invited me to Bible study. She told me that God sent her to me.

I was pretty excited about going to Bible study. I thought maybe this would be my new church. Everything was normal—at first. Little by little I would notice something strange and when I

would question it, they would look at me like I was crazy. I remember the first time they asked me to stay at their church. Like overnight. It was already

pretty late and I had work in the morning and they tried to guilt trip me by saying if I left, I was putting work before God. There is a lot more to the story, but I'll just end it there. Trust me, it gets *really* eerie.

When I think about times like that when I was lost, confused, and scared, I think about God's protection. He was that

voice in my head telling me that I needed to get out of there. He kept my mind from being infiltrated and brought me safely out of that situation. After escaping the cult the last thing I wanted to do was go to church and for a moment I considered going back to the church where I grew up, but God told me to keep searching and reminded me that He would protect me wherever I went. I learned a lot of valuable lessons during that time period and started to really see God's Word work in my life. God is a protector! Some of my favorite verses about His protection are below.





## WE'RE INGOOD HANDS

f all themes, God's Protection has to be one of the most important and powerful. God's protection, in a way, is the essence of His relationship with us. We rely on it for the smallest things on a day to day basis, but at the same time it describes our self-inflicted plight and subsequent salvation through Jesus Christ. Protection is an essential part of our daily lives – behind the veil of our "sophisticated" society, we are still flesh and blood striving for survival. We *need* God's protection, whether we know it or not. Without it, we are literally dead.

A fundamental truth of Christianity is that the entire world is in the hands of God. Our own actions and sin drive us away from Him and into calamity – into the hands of satan. In the world satan has power – the story of Job tells us this. It also tells us that he is the adversary, and has set himself against both mankind and God. Without God's protection we are subject to satan and his evil plans, which manifest themselves in sin and death across the world. Our weapon is faith, and faith's power is God's protection.

What's more, is that God acts for us beyond even the parameters of our own faith, protecting us oftentimes thanklessly in our daily existence. God acts in our lives in subliminal ways – defending us against things beyond our control when we safely travel, when we safely consume food and drink, when we safely interact with others, the roof over our head is structurally sound, we recover from illnesses, and we live in a country of relative peace. Traffic accidents and acts of violence take the lives of tens of thousands every year, yet every Christian who wakes to see another day has been carried there

in the protective hand of God.

From the beginning, "protection" has been a central theme of God's relationship with man. Adam and Eve existed in the utopian Garden of Eden, secure from all hurt, harm, and evil. God's protection in this instance extended so far as to save them from death – as long as they relied upon it. It was only when they went outside of God's edicts and instead placed their faith in their own intellect that they became vulnerable. Once again it was satan who led them into the trap of death, but similarly to us yet again, it was Adam and Eve who willingly took the step into destruction. God's protection will extend as far as our faith allows it too, and will guide us similarly. It would not be a stretch to say that God protects man from himself – calling upon him to instead trust in God. Sin began with disbelief, a lack of faith that the Word of God was true. Alternatively then God's Protection begins with belief, that God will and can protect us.

God's protection is the ultimate benefit of our Christianity – it is our faith that He will protect us from ultimate death and instead carry us into eternal paradise with Him in Heaven. God's protection is the knowledge that no matter what happens to us on Earth, we are assured of eternal life. Matthew 10:28 (GW) says, "Don't be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Instead, fear the one that can kill both soul and body in hell." Outside of God's protection we are doomed – we are helpless to sin and become servants of satan. Inside of God's protection we will have everything. Psalm 37:37 (KJV) says, "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace."

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# White South Haves In the falls

t was a dream come true. I'd always wanted to visit Alaska. The "whipped cream" was that I was going to travel to Alaska via Vancouver, Canada. I planned to arrive a day earlier and leave a day later for time to travel to Victoria, Canada to have high tea at the Empress Hotel. It would require a couple of hours of travel to the ship

docking area and a ferry ride.

Once there I was told it would take approximately another hour to arrive at my destination.

Nevertheless, I was excited.

The "cherry" on top of the whipped cream was that during

my week cruise I would spend every day attending morning Bible devotions, noonday Bible meetings, and nighttime Christian concerts.

The plane ride was pleasingly uneventful. I arrived in Vancouver, and received my luggage from the baggage area only to be confronted with a line of more than a hundred people waiting for taxis. We were told a large population of taxi drivers were off celebrating Ramadan. I was advised by the airport representative enforcing and delegating the taxi line that I had a choice. I could re-enter the airport area, proceed to the lounge area and wait for about an hour or I could proceed to the inner city subway across the street, and the designated subway stop was less than a block and a

half walking distance to my hotel. Burdened with two rolling suit cases, a carryon bag, and a purse I brazenly chose the subway.

I exited the subway, I looked at my GPS, and began to walk the block distance. After walking two blocks and no hotel in sight I stopped

and took another look at my GPS and realized I was somehow further away from my destination than I was when I exited the subway. I had a choice. I could turn around and go back the way I came or continue the path outlined in the

GPS. I was only 9 minutes away, walking distance. I chose to continue the path of the GPS. I crossed the street and a man crossed in front of me and then across the street yelling to himself and almost getting hit by cars travelling down the street. I began to get anxious and continue to walk the remainder of the 9 minutes to my destination. As I walked, I noticed the stores I passed were drug paraphernalia stores, voodoo stores, and a store with a skeleton hanging in the door way. It was July. At the corner I again took a look at my GPS and realized I was now 11 minutes from my destination. How could that be? I realized it was dusk and soon night would add visible darkness to the haunting feelings I experienced walking to what felt like an endless destination.

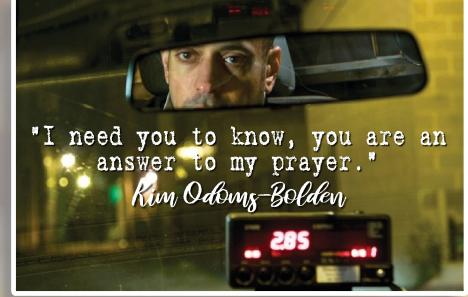
I stopped, made a hard right turn to the curved corner. I placed my hands on both rolling suitcases while holding the carry bag and my purse as close as I knew how to. Unbelievably, I closed my eyes, called out to the Lord and prayed for His help, His comfort, and His protection. I told Him I

needed Him
NOW. Right
now. When I
opened my eyes
I noted a taxi
across the street,
at the light, four
lanes from
where I stood.
When the light
turned green the
taxi crossed
three lanes and

stopped in front of me. I screamed JESUS! The driver very quickly exited the taxi van and began loading my luggage. As I entered the taxi, I said to the man "I need you to know, you are an answer to my prayer." The man made no gestures or comment. He closed the door to the van and entered the driver's seat and began to drive. He asked, "Where are you headed?" I gave him the address and I again stated, "I need for you to understand, I prayed to the Creator of heaven and earth, and His

Son Jesus Christ for the Power of the Holy Spirit to rescue me, and you are an answer to that prayer. "The taxi driver stated, "It's a good thing because another block and you would have been in the worst part of Vancouver." I remember him saying something about where horrible things happen. The

taxi driver said,
"I had to stop
because you
were waving
your hands." I
knew the
waving hands
the driver saw
where not my
hands. God
supernaturally
sent His angels
to rescue and



protect me from what lay ahead.

"God protected the Israelites and delivered them from the Egyptians, He protected Daniel in the lion's den, He protected the Jewish nation from Haman's annihilation decree. What He did for them how much more would He do for me. "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty" (Psalm 91:1, NIV). God commanded His angels concerning me. How much more will He do for you? Hallellujah!!!

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ecently, our beloved Pastor Reginald Elliot, led us in saying Psalm 23 as part of his opening Sunday morning message. He further surprised many when he challenged all present to actually recite it. Before anyone could sneak a peek, the large screen monitors that were displaying the verses, suddenly went dark, the soft sound of bibles closing, and gasps were heard across the audience. But our voices started out strong and in unison, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want", verse one, done. Verse two, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures", the volume dropped. "He 1-e-a-d-e-t-h m-e, beside...," we lost a few voices, "...the still waters. He...restoreth my soul". You heard some voices catch up. Then a noticeable pause, what was next?! A few brave souls pressed on, "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness". It was like trying to remember a log-on or password. Was it my birthday or my address that comes first? It seemed like all was forgiven by the time we arrived at verse 4, "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." We had reached the top of the proverbial mountain, for it was all downhill now. The voices regrouped, affirmation returned to the words, and the cadence of the last phrases strode boldly. We all concluded verse six like champions, "Surely, goodness and mercy shall

follow me *all* the days of my life: and I *will* dwell in the house of the Lord *forever*."

It was again my privilege to speak to one who, in her own everyday-ness, embodies the efforts of that Sunday. Lena Aldridge agreed to speak to me, to us, and share some precious lessons taught only by that greatest of all Shepherds.

**Linwood Childs (LC):** Please tell us your story about God's protection.

**Lena Aldridge (LA):** Well, so much in 70 years. Blessed, blessed! I think of my life as having been blessed with strong role models. An African proverb says it takes a village. I have been blessed with villages all along my life that have protected and helped me. Of course, my first role model was my mother. We came all the way from Sarasota, Florida after my father passed away. I'm talking about a mom who came with 3 small children with just the clothes on their backs, not having a job, nor knowing exactly where she was coming to. But Someone was helping her make a change so she could get on her feet. It's one thing to carry yourself, it's another thing all together to have 3 kids on your shoulders. Even though she struggled she did very well.

(Continued on Page 11)

don't give cancer any strength...

IT'S

OVER

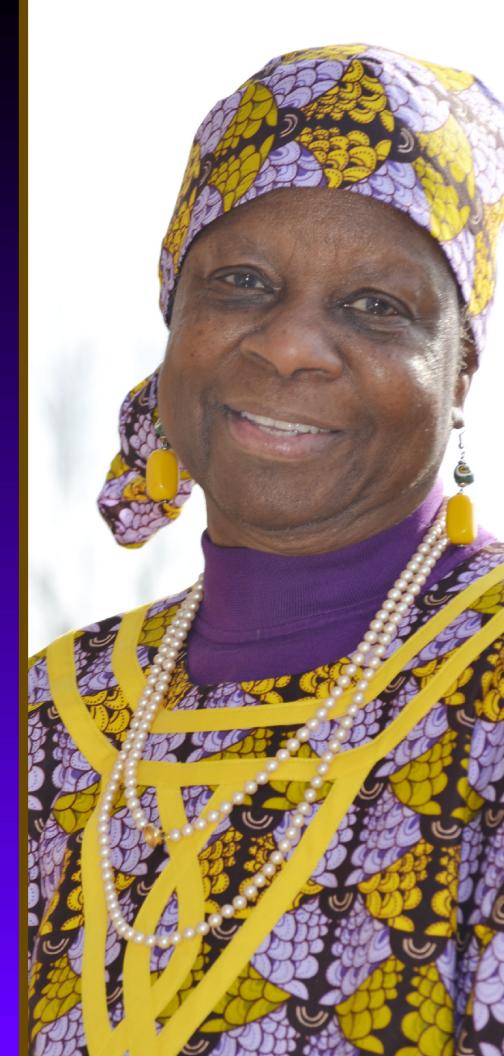
THERE

and I'm

over here

Lena Aldridge







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We came from a place where we had never seen snow. It was new to us. So, we took a pot and put it out on the windowsill and after a while we had enough, and we would eat the snow. We were kids. God moved us from down south, to up north, through hungry days, watching my mom go from place to place until she found a job after my dad died. We saw how God brought people into her life to show her how to take care of her three kids. The village has never, ever left me.

LC: So you see the "village" having an important place in life.

LA: Critical. There was a woman, not my godmother, but I call her my God-sent-mother, who entered my life way back in 1959. Even though she and her husband had 3 daughters of their own, she just took me in right along with them. Whenever and whatever my mom could not do, she stepped right in and helped us.

LC: You moved to Maryland from Florida?

LA: No, we moved to Philadelphia and lived there for some 30 years.

LC: Really! Well how about that. We each talked about our former stomping ground. Our elementary

schools were blocks apart.

LA: My sister and brother-in-law were in the military and they retired and moved here, in Maryland. Because my sister always took care of us and I looked up to her, I ended up following her down to Maryland, which was a blessing. My sister, whom I call my heavenly angel (I believe in angels), she was my earthly angel while she was here with us. When we were young, she headed-up taking care of my brother and me. She was more of a mother than a sister to us, and even more a mother than a daughter to my mother, because she also took care of us, even my mother when she needed to. Surely there were struggles, all along the way.

When I looked back at those times and where we lived, there was always the village. There looking out for everyone. Times were different than they are today. And that's why I say you were blessed when you got into that village. If you had a need someone always picked up on it, and before long, tried to meet that need for you.

Rev Elliott said this sometime ago, that we are not unique, we are imitators. What we have seen others do, we do. I thank God that God has put good imitators in front of me. I could have gone down the wrong path. But I thank Him, that unknown to



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me, God put people in our path to help keep us from heading into the easy but wrong path, and keeping to the right path. Don't think that you don't get exposed to wrong paths, we all do. But thank God for those who were there, that He put there, so we wouldn't go too far down the wrong path.

LC: I didn't specifically intend to, but I guess the opportunity pushed Lena to recall a great many things.

LA: I could tell you of many miracles in and around my life. So many. But right now. I think one of the greatest blessings of age is looking back and seeing how blessed you've been. Not knowing it then, but surely knowing it now, that it wasn't you at all, but it was God. Now you look back and say, "Oh my Lord! You were still looking out for me, even when I'm grown."

I tell my children, and try to teach them this, that in *every* negative situation you can find a blessing in it. Because if you stick with the negativity it will bring you down. The negative will *never* guide you to where you need to go.

**LC:** How did you come to find out about Columbia Community Church.

LA: Through a baby!

**LC:** She must have read the mixture of surprise and questioning on my face.

LA: Seriously, through a baby. My then infant great grandson was being christened by Reverend Elliott. No one in the family was saying anything to me about the details. I had never heard of Columbia Community Church. So, when I heard and because I wanted to be part of the family for this event, I came here to witness the blessing.

**LC:** Lena's story then took a familiar turn.

LA: Well the next Sunday after the blessing we came back. Now my sister and I did literally everything together. She was visiting another church and about join. But I told her I was going to go back to Columbia Community Church. My sister said, "Well okay, I'll go with you." We came and we never left. I came here through an innocent baby who never knew all that was going on around him. God truly does guide us through people and events. I felt at home.

**LC:** She noted her thoughts after her baptism many years ago when she was a teenager.

LA: I was baptized back in Philadelphia when I was 16. I said to myself even then, that I wanted to (Continued on Page 13)

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belong to a small church. I didn't want to be a clicker, just one among say 3,000 members.

**LC:** Lena spoke fondly of the connections that began occurring over the months and times since she joined CCC.

**LA:** By the end of 2014 when my older sister was preparing...making her transition...

LC: "Transition" is Lena's way of saying, preparing to pass from this earthly home to God's eternal home.

LA: ... saints like the Spences and others, precious others came over, out in the cold weather, just to

pray for my sister. That did not have to happen. It was such a blessing!

**LC:** While listening to Lena you could almost hear her mind working, as she thought of other connections.

LA: I'm a talker, one-on-one, though. So, if I'm out shopping then I'm talking with someone. One of those times I was out, talking to someone, and I was about to leave I said God bless and have a blessed week. The other person said the same thing back to me and I was so surprised. And, yes, I discovered she was a member of Columbia Community Church! I met my spiritual sister of all places, on the parking lot of a large supermarket.



Lena Aldridge







We would go to Sarah's House together, we would come to bible study together, and come to church together.

**LC:** Who was this "sister", none other than the late Delores Johnson

**LA:** Due to circumstances in the family, I was so blessed to be able raise my great-granddaughter from just a few weeks of age until she was 9 years old. The Spences encouraged us to have her christened when she was still quite young and that drew in more of my family members.

**LC:** It was then that Lena told me her grand son is related to the Spences; Clyde and Ollie. What a small and blessed world. Through much of my interview with Lena we laughed heartily about several things including the following.

**LA:** Something happened between me and Pastor Elliott. He said something like, he doesn't want you to join this church because you like him or Sister Elliott. That rested on me for some time. Now I'm not one who goes against leadership and authority. But this is what happened one Sunday after the service while we were all greeting and talking. I don't know, but I just got bold. I said, Pastor, I wouldn't dare correct you. I've got to correct you

on something.

**LC:** Lena, began laughing heartily as she remembered her thoughts just seconds before she spoke to Pastor Elliott.

**LA:** I felt he was thinking something like, "Ok she is about to tell me I'm preaching some error or false doctrine". So, I was thinking that Pastor Elliott was thinking, "Here we go!"

**LC:** As I was listening to Lena, I was thinking the same thing too!

LA: So, he dropped his head a little, and said, "Okay". I told him exactly what he said regarding this and then I said to Pastor, "I tell you, if we didn't have respect for you and your wife, and love for you I wouldn't come back here. I pass 3 or 4 churches before I get here. So, I have to tell you, I have to have love and respect for you in order for me to listen to the Word that you are trying to teach to me!" He said, "Okay, I can accept that." I am a true believer that your environment impacts you a lot. You've heard the phrase, "birds of a feather flock together". My church is a good flock, because it keeps you in the right path and direction.

**LC:** God's protection.

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LA: Thank God, you can live long enough to have a testimony. It's like on the prayer line, Sis. Ayres and Sis. Jackson say every morning, if it had not been for God on our side, where would we be. They had all been praying, and praying, for my brother. My brother had a situation several months ago. He's a Viet Nam veteran, living alone in Philadelphia. He fell at home, and I asked someone in Philly to go check on him. Well he was disoriented to the point that he had to be taken to the hospital and kept for observations. But when they took him through the closed MRI for testing it caused a panic attack. By the time I got to up to Philly the next day they had him in physical restraints in the mental ward. So, he was there for a day or two until he started coming back to himself. But as he still couldn't walk, we had to physically attend to him. After just a week or so, he was up, out of the wheel chair, moving and walking. He has an African dance background, and he started to teach the therapists how to dance! So, when I got back to the prayer line, I had a testimony about the one they had been praying for. This is how God keeps you encouraged!

Sister Ivy! In 2016 with my first diagnosis of breast cancer, I happened to mention it to Sister Ivy Samuel. I told her the result of the tests and said, "Yes, Sister Ivy, I have breast cancer." She raised her voice, "Oh, Sister Lena we're not

claiming that!" The next time I saw Sister Ivy, she had ginger root for me. And I needed to take it. From one person to another God has blessed me so much. I hate to start calling names, because so many people have and are such a blessing to me.

Columbia Community Church is my village now. When people call me and I'm not home, they know now, I'm busy giving back at the village.

I don't think this generation realizes just how blessed, blessed they really are. I'm sure I didn't either when I was young and just took things for granted. Things that happened and somehow, we get through it and don't really know or understand how! I can tell you this truth, if you don't learn your lesson the first time, like Rev. Elliott says all the time, you will surely repeat it, over and over again. Sometimes that's the only way we learn. I don't know why this is a surprise to many, but our children watch us far more than we realize. We can't have a cigarette hanging out of our mouths and try to tell them about not smoking. Parenting is a big responsibility. And you never know who is watching you and how you may influence even other generations. You may be doing something good that seems small and simple to you, totally unaware that you are saving someone else from hardship or bad outcomes. I watched the generation before me and I said, "Oh, I like what



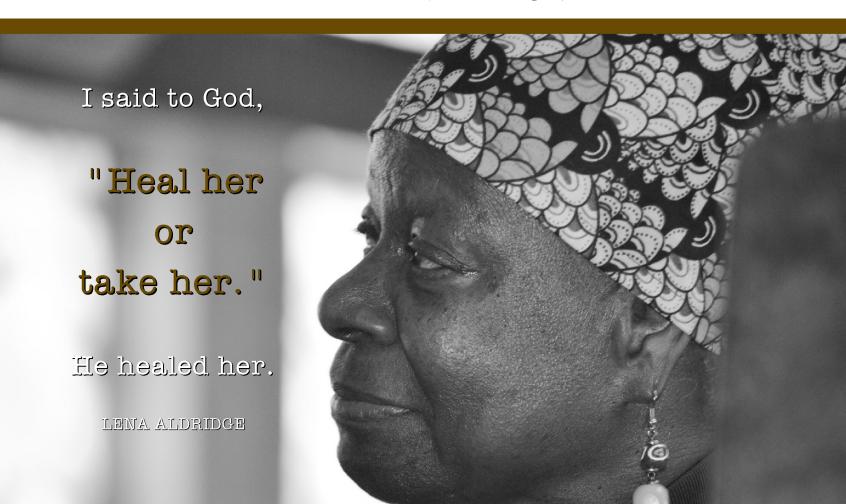
this one did or that one." We all saw both sides, the partying side and the spiritual side. When you make the right life decision you're blessed to hang with the right people.

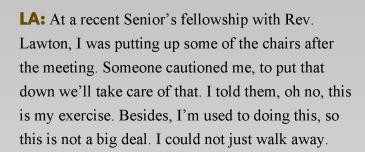
Many people don't know that they are doing the wrong things, they think it's good and alright, leading them to share that wrong with others. Their thought -- it's good for me it must be good for you too. But all along it's not good at all.

**LC:** People say you're a very giving person.

LA: I have watched other people do so much giving to me. So, it taught me that giving is what life is *all* about. I saw my God-sent-mother move out of her own home for an entire year to live with her aunt who was ill. When you see other people just giving and, giving and giving... I'm just used to it.

LC: Sister Lena sends out encouragement cards to let people know that they are in her thoughts and prayers. You'll see her serving with the Care and Comfort ministry or hear her in the 5am prayer line. (Continued on Page 17)





**LC:** Lena shared with me that she attends the Care Givers Support group.

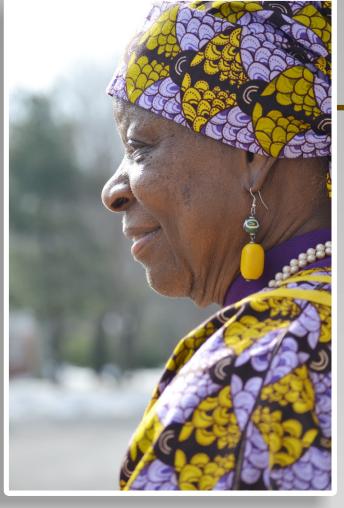
**LA:** My daughter is in her fifties now, but when she was 7 years old, she was hit by a car. The car did only small damage, it broke her thumb. But while under general anesthesia the oxygen was not properly administered. So, she unfortunately went into cardiac arrest and that resulted into a 6-month coma. This is why I can tell you many a miracle has happened in my life. The doctors said she would be in a vegetative state the rest of her life. Many people were staying and standing around praying for her. I prayed just one prayer; I said to God, "Heal her or take her." He healed her. She's left with somewhat of a developmental disability. But her sister, that is next in age to her, comes by our home every weekend and gives me and her a little break. This helps maintain our relationship. Although she's feels that's she is all grown up physically, she's not grown up mentally.

LC: Since Lena's children have only known their sister being home, they have taken on the responsibility of taking care of her.

LA: Since this is my 2nd bout of cancer, my thought to them was if you have to place her in a group home or facility, just make sure you visit very regularly and keep her part of the family. But anyone who knows my family, and knows her sister, she is going to keep her home and not going to let that happen. This comes back to your foundation and environment -- being taught compassion for others and caring for one another. This may be beside the point, but this is at least part of the cause of all that's happening in Baltimore City and similar cities; they have not been taught to care and love people. All they've been taught is to fight, fight, fight through the land of survival. They are afraid to step out of what they are so familiar with. If you move them out of that environment, they resort to what they think they have to do to survive and they are back into the same culture.

**LC:** We talked for some time longer as Lena spoke of the urgent need to become a witness to others versus trying too hard to be their friend.

LA: When it comes to a situation where you are the person that has to be the testing ground, go on



decisions. You really need to take regular time to reflect.

I read an article of a woman, I believe it was in a Dear Abby column. The woman told Abby that she was depressed. Abbey told her to start writing down her blessings. She wrote Abby back and said she attempted to write down all her blessing, but

before she could finish ran out of ink! Brother Childs, you don't have enough ink to write all the blessings that have come my way.

LC: I noted the rarity of this comment. Far more than often, the stress is placed in the weight of one's problems. But to my surprise Lena has had a life full of challenges but she is very reluctant to mention them. Surprised of what appeared to be effortless joy that overflows her life. She would much rather talk about the multitude of blessings. How are you handling this recurrence of cancer?

LA: I don't give cancer any strength. It may have been listed beside my *name* but it's over *there*, and I'm over *here*. God has enabled me to get up and stand and He already knows what I'm going to do with my strength. I expect to live another 20-30 years. My late sister who took such great care of us never complained, not one day of her life. I have never heard her complain. I was with her in 2016 until she made her transition. She blessed me then

and is still blessing me. Although 2018 was *the* most *difficult* year of my life, God has never left me.

LC: Believe me when I tell you, "difficult" does not even come close to describing her year. With my challenges from within and without Lena has slacked her pace. She laughs about how Linda Byrd, attempted in vain, to

keep her from attending some functions that the Care and Comfort ministry was hosting.

LA: Linda told me to stay home. Not happening! I threatened to tell Pastor Elliott that she was blocking people from coming to church (LOL)!!

LC: If in fact Lena is walking through Psalm 23, she is stuck in the middle of verse 4. "I will fear no evil, for thou art with me". Lena has told me with grateful tears of all her family members and village members who continually pray to and praise God for still supplying all she needs. She is right, I don't have enough ink to tell you how beloved this suffering servant is. Finally, I made the mistake of asking Lena what her favorite song is, and when she told me I was speechless.

LA: When I hear the music of the song, and see Sister Terry Slacum come down to the mic, I stand. "I Never Lost My Praise". My praise, still here!



# KIDS WITH FOODALLERGIES

urrently there are over 6 million children with food allergies in the United States. Some allergies have the potential to cause a very severe reaction called **anaphylaxis**, which can be fatal. The most common food allergies are peanuts & milk. Families should protect their children by educating and preparing them about a life with a food allergy.

#### **Protection at Home**

Rid your kitchen of unsafe foods for your child. Minimize "cross contamination" in which allergens from unsafe foods come in contact with utensils or cookware that should be allergy-free. Get into the habit of checking food labels. Some allergens may not be obvious.

#### **Protection at School**

Notify the school nurse & provide the school with information regarding the allergy and any emergency medication that may need to be kept at school. An epinephrine auto injector may be vital for your child'safety. It is easy to use and school personnel as well as your child can be trained to use it.

#### **Protection at Restaurants**

Always check menus prior to ordering. If you are unsure about ingredients, ask. Most restaurants are

very accommodating providing the information to keep their patrons safe.

#### Teach your child about their allergies:

- -The importance of checking food labels
- -Asking questions before eating unfamiliar foods
- -Always carrying their emergency medication if it has been prescribed

# Be aware of possible symptoms of an allergic reaction:

- -Tingling or itching mouth
- -Hives
- -Swelling of the lips, face, or tongue
- -Wheezing or nasal congestion
- -Abdominal pain, diarrhea, nausea or vomiting
- -Dizziness lightheadedness

All of the above signal impending anaphylaxis, that may progress to a life threatening situation with constriction of the airways and swollen throat, making it difficult to breathe or talk, shock (severe drop in blood pressure), confusion and loss of consciousness. It may seem like a tough job keeping a child with food allergies safe and healthy, but education and remaining vigilant will allow these children to live normal healthy lives.

# LET US PRAY ANGELAHUNT BONITTO

#### **GOD IS OUR REFUGE**

#### **Psalm 91:2**

"I will say to the Lord, My refuge and My fortress, My God in whom I trust!"

here do you typically turn when the bottom drops out of your life? Or, when you face an issue that is embarrassing...maybe even scandalous? In the Psalms David found his safe place in the Lord. David turned to the living God and found in Him a place to heal, to be shielded from his enemies, and to get direction. He called God his "refuge." Which means a protective place.

Why do we need a refuge? There are at least 3 answers in Psalm (31): First, we need a refuge when we are in distress. You know those feelings, don't you? Your eyes are red from weeping. Depression is weighing you down. That's when we need a refuge. Secondly, we need a refuge because we are sinful and guilt overwhelms us. We have Feelings like, "It's my fault." Or, I'm to blame." Thirdly, we need a refuge because we are tortured by the thought of what people are saying about us. It is often more than we can bear.

How is God our refuge? When we think of the word refuge we picture a large building with locks on the doors, maybe a thick-walled fortress, or perhaps something as simple as a canopy to keep you dry in a rainstorm. Whatever picture comes to mind, we can agree that a refuge is a safe place. When the Bible describes God as our refuge, it is saying that God is our safe place when we need protection from something.

A friend of mine had her first child out of wedlock at the age of 14. Her mother and aunts wanted her to abort the child or give the child away. She refused. She wanted to raise her baby herself.

Knowing it was going to be hard and a struggle, she trusted God would help her. She shared that through the hard times, and they were very hard, God was her refuge. Today, she is a plus size super model and her son is an accomplished entrepreneur. She married a wonderful man and the two of them are a spiritual power couple.

How do I make God my refuge? An easy way to make God our refuge is to simply ask. David said, "Pour out your hearts to him"; that's what David did all the time. He poured out his heart to God about what was going on in his life and asked God to help. We may be tempted to look for safety in things other than God, such as putting our trust in man, a job, our money, our homes, but such things can only provide a false sense of security. A tornado can destroy your home in 60 seconds. Your job can be cut any time; man can lie and lead you down the wrong path. God is the only real refuge we'll ever find.

In fact, when we as Christians do not make God our refuge we are sinning. Isaiah 28:15 says the Lord rebuked the Israelites for making "a lie their refuge and falsehood a hiding place." No matter what your circumstance, the safest place to be is always in the center of God's will. He promises to be our refuge: "'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you,' He says. So we can say with confidence, 'The Lord is our helper; we will not be afraid. What can man do to us?"" (Hebrews 13:5–6).

#### Let Us Pray:

Heavenly Father, I pray you will be my Refuge, my Fortress, my God in who I trust today and every day.Lord, teach me to know your voice, shelter me from every storm, protect me from every deception, and keep me always close to your heart, filled with your love and light, in Jesus' name, Amen.





### MESSAGE FROMTHE EDITOR

eady or not 2019 is here! Again, I find myself pondering the goodness of the Lord as I exit 2018. In keeping with our theme, God's Protection, there have been several references to Psalm 91. The power, comfort, and protection of this psalm so often becomes a part of my wife's and my daily prayer. It boggles my mind when I think of the many anxiety and stress inducing situations that await us on daily basis that God, through His providence, diverts from our paths, and spares us from unseen dangers. Many times in life I praise God for delays in my plans (which He later reveals of a danger or untoward circumstance from which I was protected). Many times He blocks things from occurring and reveals that it was for my benefit and safety. Recently my wife and I have undergone a construction project in our home to convert our heating and air conditioning system from electric to gas.

According to our contract the final payment was due upon a passing inspection certificate. Well, the contractor completed his work and was pressing us for payment; however, the inspection was not scheduled for another 3 days. We advised of the terms of the contract and insisted on payment upon a passing inspection. The contractor was not very happy. The contractor informed that he spoke to an inspector from our county who advised that he could use flex piping to come from the crawl space through the cinder block foundation and connect directly to the gas meter that BG&E would come out to install. However, on the day of inspection the inspector (who was not the inspector to whom our contractor had been speaking) advised that flex piping

could not run from the crawl space to the BG&E meter and that metal piping had to run through the cinder block. Although the job passed the rough-in inspection the inspector advised that the current configuration would not pass a final inspection when BG&E comes out to install their meter (which would be at least another six weeks out). This resulted in additional work and expense to the contractor. I recommended that the work be done the same day since he was already at our residence. After negotiating and having a conversation about when that work would occur, the frustrated contractor conceded that he would complete the additional work at no additional cost to me and grumpily agreed to change the configuration.

God used that situation to show me that He blocked the final payment until the additional work was completed so that I could avoid the burden of tracking the contractor down later, even though the contractor was rightfully entitled to the final payment because the rough-in work did pass inspection (but would not have passed a final inspection). The Lord knew in advance and spared us the burden of trying to accomplish that at a later time...whew!! Thank you Jesus!

On a closing note, I want to extend my gratitude and appreciation to my wife, my daughters, The Encourager ministry's wonderful staff, our Pastors, and our valued readers for your ongoing support. Extending prayers to each of you for a Blessed, Happy, Healthy, and Prosperous New Year!

Michael &



#### **COLUMBIA COMMUNITY CHURCH**

8516 Thomas Williams Way P.O. Box 2292 Columbia, MD 21045

#### **SCHEDULE OF SERVICES**

#### EVERY SUNDAY:

10:00 AM Church School (All Ages)11:00 AM Meditation & Prayer11:15 AM Morning Worship

#### COMMUNION SERVICES

1st Sunday of Every Month

#### EVEDY WEDNESDAY

Noon-Day Prayer 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM
Noon-Day Bible Study 12:00 PM - 01:00 PM
Evening Prayer 07:30 PM - 08:00 PM
Evening Bible Study 08:00 PM - 09:00 PM

Youth Bible Study 07:00 PM - 08:00 PM

#### GENERAL INFORMATION

#### **CARE & COMFORT MINISTRY**

Sis. Linda M. Byrd: 410-313-9673 / Sis. Donna Givhan / 410-997-3276 columbiamdcareandcomfort@gmail.com

#### **CHURCH CONTACTS**

Phone: 410-465-7040 / Fax: 410-465-0943 Church Website: www.columbiaccmd.org

#### **CHURCH LIBRARY**

Open Every Sunday 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM and after service until 2:00 PM