



the ENCOURAGER magazine

January 2023



FREELY GIVE

COLUMBIA COMMUNITY CHURCH



ON THE COVER

The Bonittos strike a regal pose during their photo shoot on 04/15/23 outside their home in Elkridge, MD. Angela is a Staff Writer for The Encourager Magazine's column, "Let Us Pray", and Scott is one of our anointed church musicians.

Photography By: Michael R. Spry © 2023

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if you declare with your mouth,
"Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God
raised him from the dead

you will be saved

Romans 10:9, NIV

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theENCOURAGERmagazine



A WORD FROM **THE WORD**

PASTOR REGINALD L. ELLIOTT

*Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers,
raise the dead, cast out devils:
Freely ye have received,*

Freely give.

Matthew 10:8, KJV

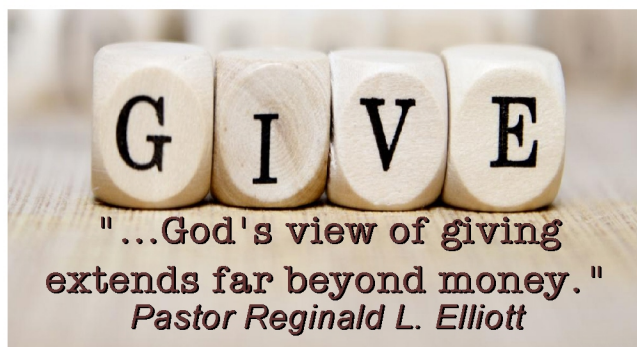
FREELY GIVE

Whenever the subject of giving is discussed in the Bible, many automatically assume that the focus is on money. While God has much to

say about giving of one's financial resources, God's view of giving extends far beyond money. The scripture cited on the opposite page is part of the instructions Jesus gave to His disciples as He was about to send them out to preach the gospel of the kingdom. In these instructions He tells them where they were to go and what they were to do.

Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, He said. While His initial command was for the gospel to go only to Israel, this would later be expanded to include the whole world. So the instructions He gave them which were to serve as guidance for them as they went to the lost sheep of the house of Israel are still applicable today as Christians proclaim the gospel.


As He sent them out He said, "heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give." Implicit in this statement is the reality that they had witnessed these acts being performed and that they had been given power to do them also. One cannot give away something one does not have; one must first receive



and be in possession of something before one can give it away. This passage speaks powerfully of the need for us, as His witnesses, to both be in

touch with and to be touched by the power of God. We must be in possession of something that will meet the real needs of mankind.

Matthew 10:8 tells us that those early disciples had received something that they could give, Jesus said, "freely ye have received, freely give." What they had received and what we have received are blessings that address the real issues of life - freedom from the influences of sin that adversely affect daily life and preparing man for eternity. That is what man needs more than anything, and only those who have been with God can give man what he really needs.

We have experienced the life that can only come from Jesus. Don't neglect to share with others what you have received and emphasize that it is freely given to all who believe and ask. Tell it wherever you go, to as many as will listen, and emphasize repeatedly that it is free. FREELY YOU HAVE RECEIVED, FREELY GIVE TO ALL YOU CAN BY SHARING WHAT HE HAS DONE FOR YOU. 

SPRING: REBIRTH, REJUVENATION, **RENEWAL**

CAROLYN FLEMING, RN

"...Behold, I make all things new..."

Revelation 21:5, KJV

Springtime is the season when we shed the cold and often dreary effects of winter. It is a great time to increase our time spent outdoors. Numerous studies have shown time spent outdoors can have a calming, rejuvenating effect on our mental and physical health.

We've all experienced at some time the calm of being in fresh air, feeling breezes, hearing birds sing. These God given gifts help to bring our bodies and minds back into rhythm.

When you can truly take some time to focus on the things we often take for granted: flowers blooming, giant trees, the warmth of sunlight, gentle breezes, it can instill a peace and humbleness in our spirits about the goodness of God. For me, I feel a renewed gratefulness for everything in my life. It has been proven scientifically that being outdoors reduces blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension, and the production of stress hormones.

The problem is we often spend our time

outdoors rushing from one place to another, sitting in traffic, or smelling the fumes of our industrialized lives. Our bodies and nervous



systems need nature to give us a rebirth.

Study after study has shown that the human brain and body react to nature in ways that enhance our sense of connection, reduce pain, help fight anxiety and allow us to experience a deep sense of calm.

Here are some facts from the *Journal of Environmental Psychology*:

Taking short nature breaks when you are stressed or mentally fatigued is helpful

Taking your work outside whenever possible increases concentration

Nature hikes reduce anxiety and depression



A study done by a researcher at Texas A&M University on patients that underwent surgery found that there was less pain and a shorter recovery for those that had a view of trees, rather than a view of a wall.

A study in the *American Journal of Public Health* showed that children diagnosed with ADHD who spend time playing outdoors report fewer symptoms of inattention and impulsivity than doing the same activities indoors.


What can we do as spring approaches to improve our mental and physical health?

Find time to get outdoors every day.

Find a special place to connect with nature away from peers, academic and relationship pressures. It could be a porch, rooftop, backyard, or park bench.

Eat seasonal unprocessed foods. Look for the many vegetables and fruits available in spring and summer.

Any exercise routines that can be taken outside will be beneficial.

Dear God...thank you for Your freely given gifts in nature that are available to us every day. May we take time to appreciate and allow them to calm our spirits and bring us peace. Amen. 

CHRISTIAN COMEDY **CORNER**

CAROLYN JACKSON
COLLIN DUNLAP

REMEMBER
"A merry heart doeth good like a medicine"

Proverbs 17:22 (KJV)



Question: How do you make Holy Water?

Answer: You take some regular water and boil the devil out of it.

I'm on two diets. I wasn't getting enough food on one.

God promised men that good and obedient wives would be found in all corners of the world. Then he made the earth round and laughed and laughed and laughed.

Husband to hard-of-hearing wife in a soft voice, "Love is tried and true."

His wife asked, "What??"

Husband again said, "Love is tried and true."

Wife asked, "What??"

Husband for the third time said, "Love is tried and true!"

Wife said "Fine!! I'm sick of you too!"



As I watch this generation try to rewrite our history, I'm sure of one thing: it will be misspelled and have no punctuation. 🐔

Blessings 2U,
Sister Carolyn Jackson
Brother Collin Dunlap

GIVE FREELY

WINNIE LaFRANCE-CHAMBERS

The best things in life are free. I'm sure that many of us have heard or said that famous saying. As an adult, I fully understand why the word *best* was used. As you journey through life, you will truly appreciate when someone takes the time to see you as a full human being -- a person with emotions and a life outside of the moments you share with them. Sometimes we get so caught up in the service someone is conducting for our benefit or a specific role within our family, but everyone needs a moment to breathe, a reason to smile, and some grace. Think of all the times someone made your day by freely giving to you. Below are some things you can freely give! Keep these in mind as you go through your day. 🕊️

* Kindness * Respect * Friendship *
* Wisdom * Compliments * Greetings *
* An Ear * A Shoulder * A Hug * A Smile *

RESPECT | LOVE | ENCOURAGEMENT | THANKS | SUPPORT | TRUST

PEACE OF MIND | A LESSON FOR LIFE | A RANDOM ACT OF KINDNESS | CONFIDENCE | A SMILE | SPACE | TIME | HOPE

The Gift of Giving

Give out of love, not obligation.
Give when it's least expected.
Give without strings attached.
Give from your heart.
Give of yourself.
Give to show that you care.
Give help without causing helplessness.
Give something that takes personal sacrifice.
Give to make a difference.
Give without keeping score.
Give for no reason at all.
Give a little if you can't give a lot.
Give without attracting attention to yourself.
Give without being asked.
Give of your experience.
Give to those who need it most.

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AN OPINION | A MOMENT TO REMEMBER | RESPONSIBILITY | GUIDANCE | KUDOS

OPPORTUNITY | APPRECIATION | TRUTH | UNDIVIDED ATTENTION | A SHOULDER TO CRY ON | BLESSINGS



LIBRARY HOURS
Open Every Sunday
Before Service:
10:00am - 11:00am
After Service:
Until 2:00pm

THE LIBRARIAN'S DESK

DESIREE COLLINS


"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16, KJV).

Enough said... This gift, this blessing is given to us the moment we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Jesus is our ultimate example of how we as Christians should "live and give". Jesus set the standard for forgiveness, for love and for giving. Christ gave Himself as a ransom for our sin, motivated simply by the love of mankind -- His Creation.

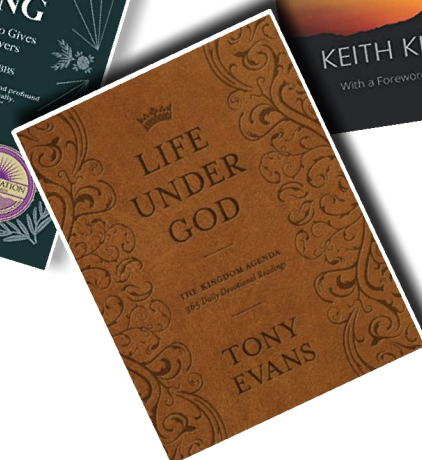
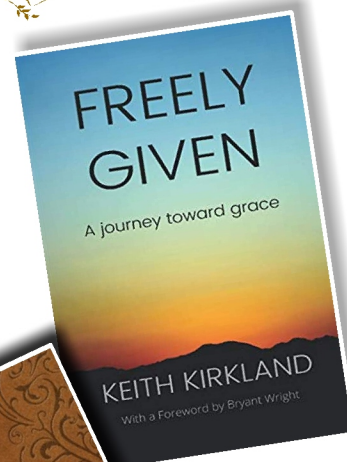
Whether we give to God or give to others, the giving must be motivated by love, with no strings. Paul tells us, "...he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity" (Romans 12:8, KJV). No strings attached, no self-enduring motive, and no ostentation.

This spirit and act of giving is a blessing for you, the giver, to the receiver of the giving; and most of all to the provider of the giving gift... God. When the act is motivated and rooted in simple "thankfulness", God will take "delight" because He is being glorified in the giving that reflects the nature and character of God. Giving freely trusts in God's provisions--that God will provide even when it cannot be explained by man, and does not make sense in the natural mind of man. Freely

giving trusts in God's provision to bless others, and increases our faith. Freely giving provokes divine intervention. God blesses us so that we may bless others. "God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 8:1, NIV).

Much of our redemptive work on earth is to help others grow and achieve their just hope and aspirations that God has prepared for them. When we give generously and sacrificially, it is not because God needs anything from us, but because we want to sow our love for Him. Giving is an expression of love, obedience, gratitude, and trust with the byproduct being unspeakable joy. **God is glorified in our giving.** 

Recommended Books:





FREEINDEED

TAYLORLANDRUM



Out of the many, many lessons Jesus taught during his earthly ministry, there are a few core themes that run through the fiber of all of them. When asked which of the Ten Commandments was the most important, Jesus responded, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matthew 22:37-39, NRSVUE).


This response shows us that although God disseminated 10 Commandments to His people, they can all be summed up by the principles applied through these two. If we as Christians are able to follow these two simple rules, we will find ourselves perfectly in tune with the other eight. If we love God with our entire heart, we will find ourselves following His commandments out of our love and recognition for who He is and how His guidance allows us to live a better life. If we love our neighbors as ourselves, we will not steal, kill, or be jealous of one another.

While many detractors will attempt to pit certain scriptures against one another in order to try to prove that the Bible conflicts itself, the truth is that God is always the same. God gives us multiple lessons and stories to reinforce the same points – He knows us better than anyone, and in His infinite knowledge, He realizes that different people need different examples in order to understand. God has always been intolerant of sin, and He has always provided those who seek Him a way to escape its fatal effects.

Jesus came to Earth as the ultimate dispensation of God’s message, and as such, He

represents the full manifestation of God’s grace. Throughout His ministry, Jesus preached a variety of messages, but both His ministry and His messages carry a common thread throughout each of them, which is that we are called to freely give. Jesus never charged a fee for His healing of the disabled, nor did He ever demand compensation or acclaim for the miracles He performed. No matter where Jesus went or what He did, He freely gave of His healing, restorative powers.

As Christian’s we are called to model our lives after Jesus, even if isn’t possible to adequately emulate Him. Whether it was feeding the 5,000 with only a few loaves of bread and fish or raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus’ miracles were a free gift from the inventor of love to mankind. If we look all the way back to Genesis, we can see that God Himself provided for Adam and Eve in a like manner – the entire Garden of Eden and all of the animals of the Earth were given to them to rule over without stipulation or compensation required. God has always wanted to freely bestow blessings and goodness on men and women – only calling us to receive them openly.

Likewise, when we go out into the world as missionaries and ambassadors for Christ, we are called to freely give unto others just as Jesus freely gives to us. The Bible calls us to minister to the poor, to lend without expecting repayment, and to give whenever and whatever we can. Our ultimate salvation and a place for us is reserved in Heaven, and it didn’t cost us anything. Jesus paid the price. Matthew 10:8 (NIV) sums up our goal perfectly: “Freely you have received; freely give.” God will bless us for it. 

SCOTT & ANGELA *Bonitto* GETTING TO KNOW ASSISTANT PASTOR LINWOODCHILDS



Regardless of your life, I think we all would agree that giving will always play an important part in it. It is even more so in the Christian life, whether it's giving valuable time, talent, resources of energy or extraordinary effort. Whether it's on our jobs, in our homes or in our communities, what and how we give is a crucial aspect of success and often the reason that life's purposes are fulfilled. I had a Recent conversation with Scott and Angela Bonitto during which this topic of giving precipitated the following conversation.

Linwood Childs (LC): Scott and Angela: We appreciate the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and how His giving significantly impacts life. So, let me ask you, when it comes to giving how has giving changed your lives, personally or professionally? Or how have you benefited from giving?

Angela Bonitto (AB): Wow, we are quiet people, not used to being at the center of things.

Scott Bonitto (SB): Yes, that's true believe it or not.

AB: We're just not used to being anywhere close to being the center of attention. I really don't look to be benefited when I give. I give a lot of my time to

young people to help them with navigating school, educational pursuits, and challenges as well as assisting parents and students in navigating the teaching environment and educational structures. I guess because I've done it so much with my own son, Will, who had a learning disability, so I always had to advocate for him, because of this I naturally gravitate toward helping other people overcome various obstacles and challenges – but I never look to benefit from it, it is just something we do... a natural thing.

LC: That's good, you have given him the support that he may not have had, had it not been for you.

AB: Right, because you know that's just a mom trying to help her child get through school and college, to be the best person that they can be. Kids with disabilities could be left behind if you're not involved like you should be. So, what I learned just kind of got filtered over to others, to the football moms that I know often with just a question like: Okay, can you help me with this? Even today, I still have young people calling me from college saying hey, Angie can you help me with this... Can you direct me with this...? And my answer is always, sure, I'll do what I can... I'll help you find the money you need to stay in school or access to this or that opportunity. I'll talk with them about how to
(Continued on Page 11)

Why can't

we just

HELP

EACH

OTHER

OUT

without

expecting

monetary

returns

Scott Bonitto





talk to their professors or how catch up on their assignments. You know some kids when they fall behind they get scared, become paralyzed and then they don't do anything. My thing is if you don't talk then your silence is going to keep you behind, reminding them that professors are people too. Go and talk to them. Tell them what's going on, and the professors can help them. They'll come to you for prayer in a hot minute as well, and I definitely don't mind. Our house is always open, all kinds of kids come to our house.

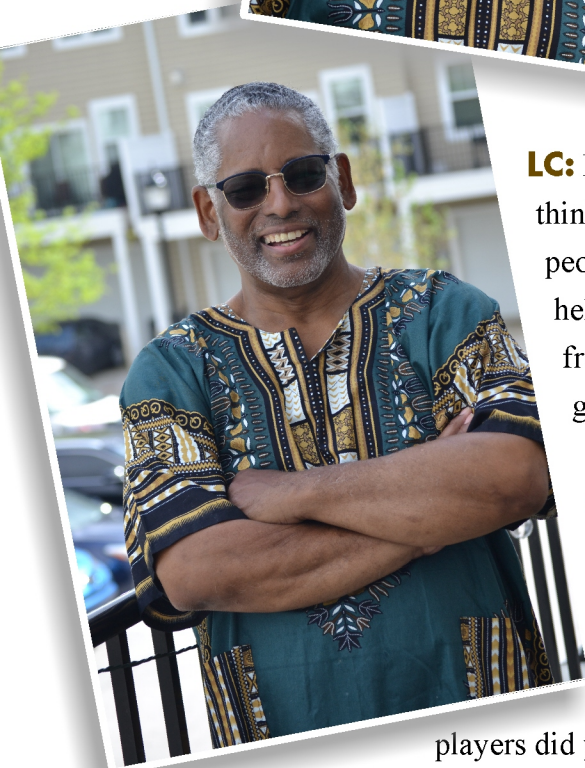
LC: How did you learn that?

AB: How did I learned that? Well, my background is in journalism; I went to school to be a journalist and was a journalist for many, many years. I worked for newspapers as a general assignment reporter and you had to cover many different things and topics. When you're a general assignment reporter you don't have a specialty. So, whatever you do you have to look it up to the know background, and educate yourself on the topic. That kinda gave me the introduction to a lot of these things. After working for a number of years, I had a great conversation about professional athletes and I mentioned that I had a real problem with black athletes because they don't tend to give back to the community. They *have* the platform, they *have* the money to do so, but they won't do it. So, one of our

friends said well, let me call a professional football player that I know. The player called me and we talked on the phone, he liked what I was saying, but in a

real sense I was giving him the riot act. He asked, "Well you seem to know what you're talking about, so can you help me?" I reminded him that I was a journalist and not in sports, but he said, "Still you know what you're talking about." So, I began to help that young man use *his* image to help the black community. When these athletes have this much attention on them they don't realize how easily they can help their community and bring money and support to the community simply by using their own platform. So, I taught them how to do that. Then one player called me and then another player called me, and then another. So, I just started helping them. It was just a natural to help people, but I didn't expect this.





LC: Isn't that great. Just think, how many people have you helped stemming from that one act of giving.

SB: She formed her own sports marketing business. So about how many players did you have?

AB: So, I had about 16 players.

SB: So, you had basketball and football, right?

AB: Basketball, football, and baseball. I had **Eric Davis** from the Orioles, some Ravens players. I was working with him when he was diagnosed with colon cancer. Since he was a top tier, signature player, he worked with some of the league's top names in the field – the likes of Cal Ripken, Brady Anderson. They were expecting so much from him, but then he developed supposedly life ending high-stage colon cancer. Now this is significant because the Lord told me to stick with him, right. Now because the baseball season is long and the

players move from town to town a lot, to keep their families stable their families are not usually with them. So, the night before the planned surgery, I was with him at Johns Hopkins Hospital. His mom flew in first and his wife flew in a little later. While sitting in the hospital with his mom, she told me that the Lord had her studying healing Scriptures for an entire year just before this and she had no idea why. She now said, I know why the Lord had me studying healing Scriptures for a whole year. So, he went on and had the surgery.

The surgeon's report was that the surgery went well and he is in recovery. While his mom was receiving the update, mom said to me, "Angela are you a believer?" Duh, yeah! And she said, "Well, come with me." She grabbed me and we went into the recovery room, and she prayed up a *storm*! And Eric began to cry a bit. She said, "Good, go ahead and cry, get it out, for after this you're not going to cry anymore, because you are healed, in **Jesus'** name!" She looked at me and said, "It's done, he's healed." During the next couple of months he returned to baseball. Now here's the challenge – he still was scheduled to go through 72 rounds of chemotherapy. And of course, the question was could he play, really play at pro levels. While he made plans to return to baseball, he started his chemo.

(Continued on Page 13)

Well after a few months, the first game was up. That game was electrifying. The game was out of town, and I was getting calls from everywhere. The bases were loaded, and **Eric** was up next to bat. They were all wondering if he was going to get a hit. I remember saying he is going to have a homerun, and sure enough he got up and hit a homerun!

LC: Whew!!

AB: From that I was able to get him a promotional campaign about colon cancer. He was young at just 34 years of age. The company Bristol-Myers Squibb, a pharmaceutical company, called me. They wanted to partner with Eric. So, I brokered a

deal; we received a million dollars to do a promotional campaign for colon cancer. So many black men get colon cancer and don't get testing or treatment. So, I lined Eric up with every radio station of every city on the baseball game schedule. I set it up so he could do interviews at every city that he played in.

Eric took his treatment on the road. Wherever he was playing he would take the treatment. We had a facility set up so he could go in and have his scheduled treatment; we had one at each city he played in. He was powerful. Many became inspired by Eric. He became so popular, that there were lines of cancer patients lined up outside the cancer facilities for treatment simply because he was

I am a person who now truly believes in the power of prayer

Angela Hunt Bonitto





coming there to get his treatment. The attitude of the crowds was, if he can do it, and then play baseball, and hit home runs, if he could get this treatment and return to professional sports and do this so well, surely, then I could also get the treatment I needed. That was a blessing to witness Eric's mom give her testimony of how over a year she studied the Scriptures of healing just for this time and to witness the power of God in that recovery room.

LC: It is a real blessing to see how this struggle inspired and impacted so many. (Just as an aside, there are few true life stories, let alone baseball stories, as inspiring as that of Eric Davis. Now we know a little of the backstory: somebody was praying for him. Sports writers all over the country wrote about how utterly impressed they were with Eric's on-field and off-field giving of himself. Many wrote about his enormous natural talents as a ball player was being eclipsed by his unparalleled giving)

AB: The Lord also blessed me to have the opportunity to work with Whitney Phipps, the gospel singer. He has a center, a learning center for kids who have parents who are incarcerated. This was to try to end the generational curse of going to prison. I was his fundraiser for the centers. I

worked with him for about 10 years to raise money for the centers because they were all free to the kids. So, over a long period of time, we raised about \$60 million.

LC: What was it like working with Whitney Phipps?

AB: What I learned with working with Whitney is that he's a strong man of faith. With him everything was, "God is going to work it out! God is going to work it out!" Because honestly, sometimes I would panic. I would update Whitney, telling him we're not meeting these goals or that point, but he would say we are going to pray and God *is* going to work it out. And I kid you not, in the middle of our strained skills and struggles, we would get a donor pop-up, who would say, "I will give you \$2 million." So, I was exposed to so many people who had strong, strong faith. I was also impacted by Barry Black who was the chaplain of the U.S. Senate.

LC: Barry Black, in 2003 was the first African American to hold the position of Chaplain of the U.S. Senate. In 2018 he also wrote a book entitled, *Make Your Voice Heard in Heaven*. He is known for is very inspiring and moving prayers.

(Continued on Page 15)



AB: I was so unbelievably benefited as I was exposed to these wonderful acts of faith, and their results. This helped my faith to become strengthened through the power of prayer. I am a person who now truly believes in the power of prayer.

LC: If I may add, also in the power of giving! I see how your earlier steps of selflessly giving, has had a snowball effect of blessing to so many other people. So overall how long have you been doing this?

AB: Well, I recently retired, just a couple years ago, but overall, about 25 years.

SB: It's also seeing the small things that God does that helps me see Him better. I love helping people, and it always amazes me when you do something for someone and they respond with, "Can I pay you for this?" And oddly enough I hate when people say that because I don't do it to get paid. I like working on cars, even though I haven't done as much in these later years as I used to. I would get requests asking me to put brakes on cars, or do other things, other repairs. I would say, "Sure!" I will go ahead and do it. And it's good that they would receive it and want to do something to pay you back, but I would not expect it. I often ask

myself, "Why does everything have to be financial? Why can't we just help each other without expecting monetary returns?"

AB: In truth that's how we met. We met because you were giving of your time to others, on the football field. You were running the concession stand.

SB: Yes, I was doing this for Alan Fleming and his organization, supporting the CCC Warriors. I would go pick up all the food, go to Costco or BJ's, and cook food for everyone who came to the games. Then set it up at the concession stand at the games.

AB: Yes, for *all* these kids, all day long.

LC: You did all of this?

SB: Yes! I loved it.

AB: And that's how we met. My boys were on the CCC Warriors various teams. So, I was on the field with them all day long, they were each on different levels. You know boys get hungry. So, I was *constantly* going to the concession stand – that's how Scott and I met!



SB: Yes, I was minding my own business, just cooking burgers, just minding my own business.

AB: Right!

LC: So, who spoke to whom first?

AB: He spoke to me first. He told me to try his “famous” buffalo wings. One of my sons had just finished playing and it was early around 9:00 a.m. So, of course my sons played on different teams, and played at different times. And I told him that it was 9 o’clock in the morning and I don’t eat buffalo wings that early in the day and that I’ll come back around noon after my other son plays. Scott said, “Well they’re going to be gone by then.” And I said, “What, sure!” Sure enough when I got back they were *all* gone. Scott said, “I’ll set aside a plate next week.” I responded, “Yeah, right!” But next week he did bring me my own plate.

LC: He had your number! Scott, what was your recipe for the buffalo wings you gave her?

SB: Well, if I told you that I’d have to kill you!

LC: Please don’t tell me!

SB: Sorry it’s been so long since I made them I

don’t remember the recipe. But it’s was a special blend starting with a particular brand of sauce.

AB: I think it was Frank’s.

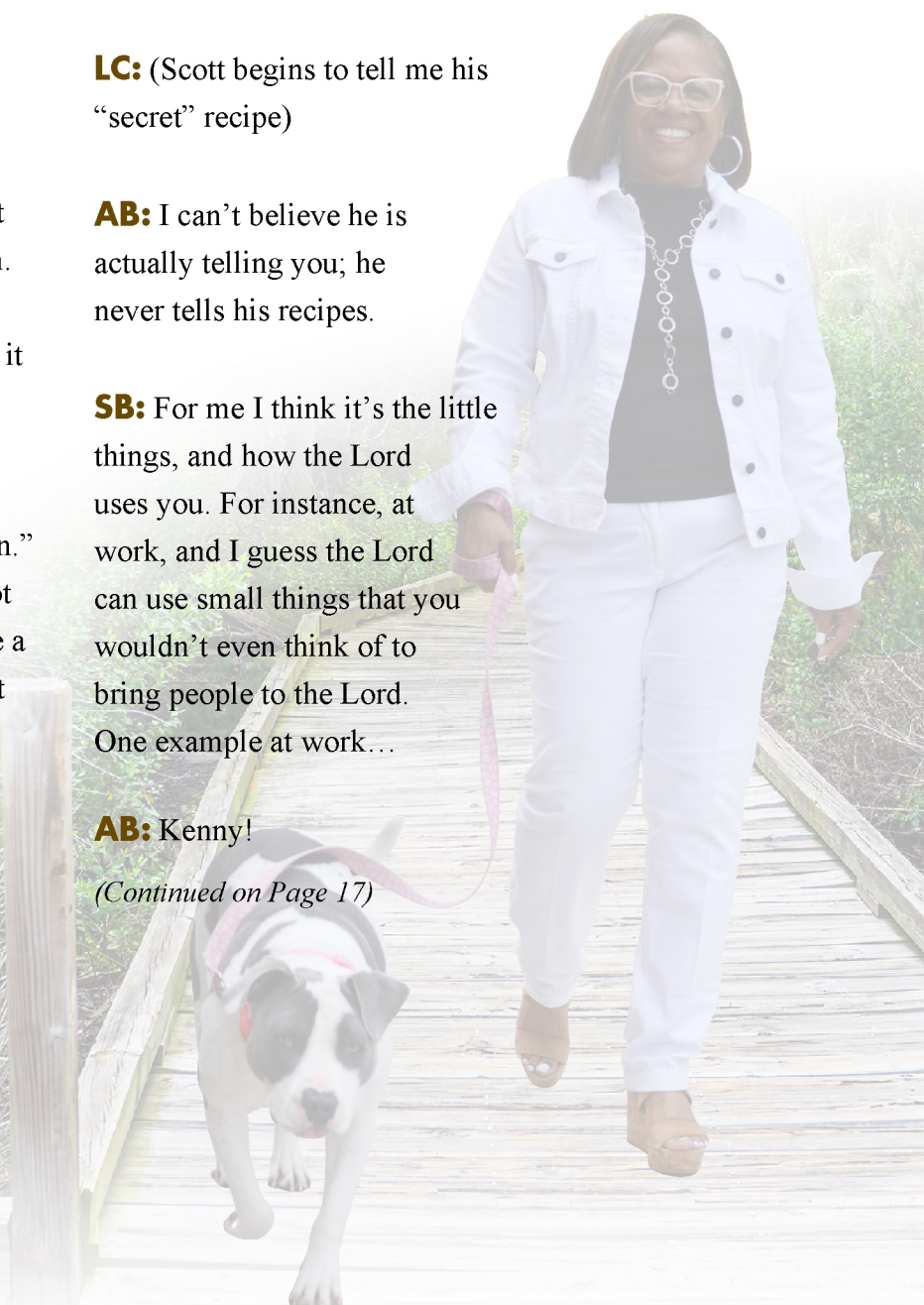
LC: (Scott begins to tell me his “secret” recipe)

AB: I can’t believe he is actually telling you; he never tells his recipes.

SB: For me I think it’s the little things, and how the Lord uses you. For instance, at work, and I guess the Lord can use small things that you wouldn’t even think of to bring people to the Lord. One example at work...

AB: Kenny!

(Continued on Page 17)



SB: Yes Kenny! I work on computers, all of my focus is on computers at a point-of-sale, involving registers and servers. So, each of us has to take a week of calls, working from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., and then from 5 to 9 at night on standby in case something urgent comes up. You're the person that has to resolve the problem. This includes Saturdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and standby on Sundays, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Listen to this when it's my turn, I pray and ask the Lord for an easy week and don't let any calls come in, to help me to be able to stay home, and to go to church on Sundays, and to not let me get called out. And...I don't. When I asked my coworkers about their week and weekend, they'll say, "Oh yes, I got killed this weekend. We got so many calls." It got to the point where I don't get any calls during my week or the weekend. They actually say, "Scott, I know you're not going to have any calls this weekend because of the Lord." That's right you gotta pray and believe. I told them just ask Him, ask Him to do something for you. At first, they were joking but now they are serious. So, I just talked to a co-worker, Kenny this weekend, and he just called me and said, "I prayed, I really prayed and I'm not getting anything! It's all quiet!"

LC: (We all laughed)

SB: For me it's the simple things, it's the little



things. For me it doesn't have to be just the dramatic things. The Lord *can* work *through* you, often in something very simple.

AB: Yes, He's in the small things. I think people forget that.

SB: It does not have to be like the children of Israel going through the Red Sea, with God opening the sea for them.

AB: You can get stuck on the amazing that God does and can't see God in all the other things. We should be in a prayerful mindset, and a mindset recognizing the presence of God. Then you'll see things happen. Yes, I like to also pray with specificity.

LC: Let us be truly grateful for the many types or modes of prayer, whether formal and informal prayer, God gives grace for both.

SB: We also give by helping each other in our prayers. Often we want God to do something immediately and the other will be there to help us recognize that God's time is not always our time. Let's wait for God's time, for He *will* take care of whatever it is your praying for.

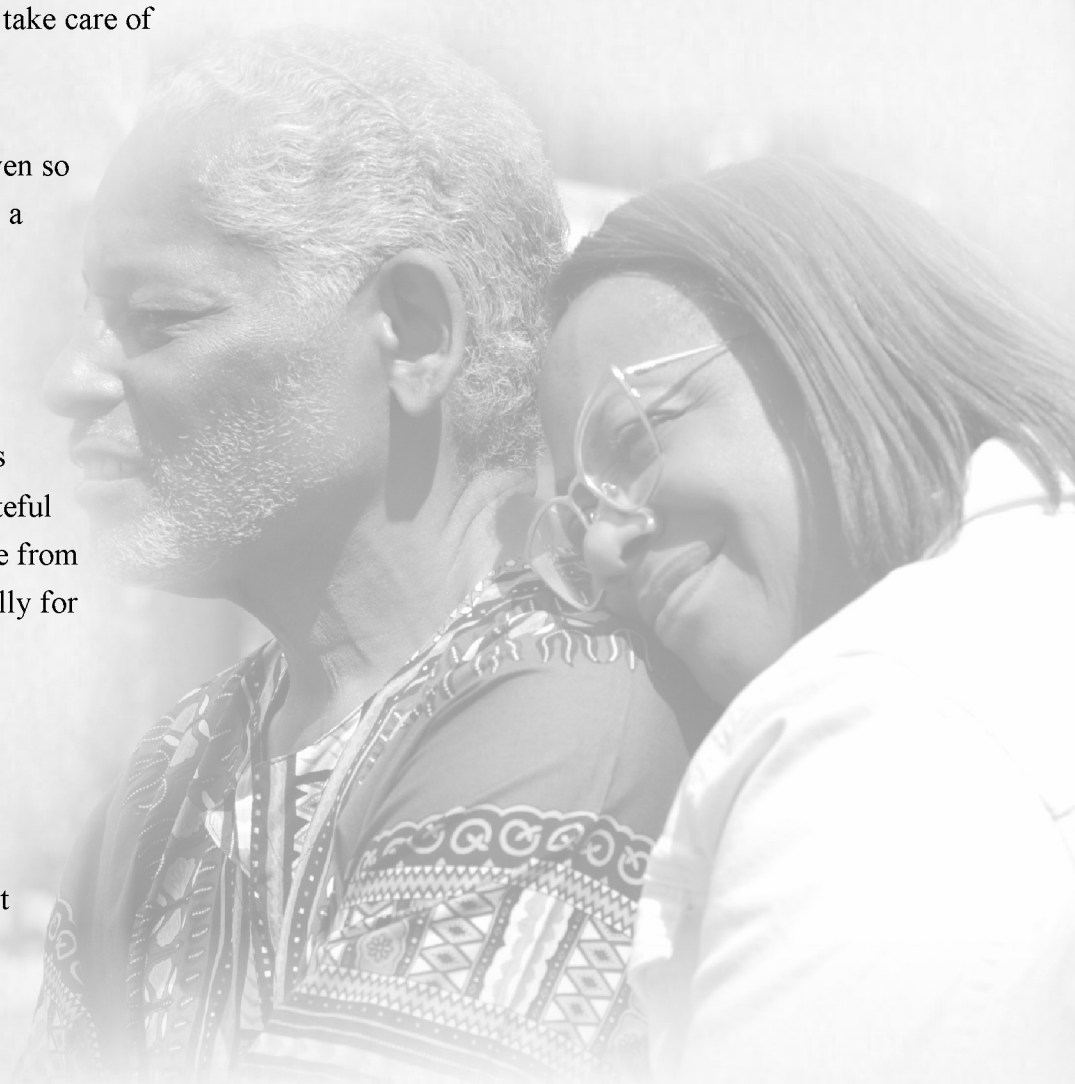
LC: We can give because God has given so much to us. The Bible says God loves a cheerful giver. What is one thing that you are very grateful to have been able to give?

AB: I'm so very grateful that God has given me a praying spirit. I am so grateful that many years ago, the Lord took me from being a person who only prayed literally for three minutes.

ALL: Laughing!

AB: Because all that praying was not me, it was just not me. But God taught me how praying for people actually helps them. A lot of people now

send me text messages, saying thank you so much for praying and being there. Sometimes, I will pick up the phone and just say, "Hi" or "I heard that you're going through something and do you want me to pray for you?" If they say yes, I say well let's pray right now, I don't wait. And then I'll follow-up later that day or the next day and pray for
(Continued on Page 19)





them. And I'm so grateful the Lord gives me that ability to do that. There was once upon a time I would not pray. People said pray for me and I will look at them and say, "What? Pray?" God has given me the ability to help people to pray who think they can't pray or don't know how to pray; to show them they can – it's often right there. I have a small weekly prayer circle that meets, and we pray for prayer requests. I'm also on the church prayer line every morning at 5 am. But for me, I have to tell you I look forward to the testimonies afterwards, because you see how God is moving and that keeps you motivated.

SB: I also love to talk to God in simple fashion just like I'm talking to a real person standing in front of me. I love talking to God plainly: "Lord what do I need to do to fix this" or "What do *You* want to do?"


LC: What is your favorite Scripture?

SB: Psalm 23 because to me it speaks of how the Lord is going to protect you and how he's going to never leave you. Out of all of them that is my favorite.

AB: It's been the same for a very long time: 2 Chronicles 7:14. If we do our part, we will see



changes. Instead of complaining about politicians we can do our part giving ourselves to God.

LC: We concluded our discussions around the words and sentiment of our Savior, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35, KJV). 



Mercy (Mer-See Me Lord)

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theENCOURAGERmagazine

FEATURED ARTICLE

KIM ODOMS-BOLDEN

To date there have been one-hundred and five, six hundred and one, four-hundred and seventy million COVID-19 cases recorded in the United States (US). 1,148,000 thousand died of COVID-19 in the US. Albeit 103,000,000 million recovered, yet many are still suffering the after effects and the sordid remnant pains of the COVID-19 pandemic. With many suffering how does it appear people, Christians included, are still reluctant to show mercy to other people suffering. For example, corner street beggars are still viewed as lazy. Some, who would never consider themselves lazy, prior to the pandemic lived what they considered their best lives yet, found themselves in a beggar situation and could have joined corner street beggars. Hence, why Christians pray, “Our Father who art in heaven...give me this day my daily bread” because tomorrow is coming but it is not promised that individuals will live to see it on this side of Glory. Consider the unmerciful servant:

“A man who owed him ten thousand bags of *gold* was brought to him since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. At this the servant fell on his knees before him, “Be patient with me,” he begged, and I will pay back everything.” The servants master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. But when the servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred *silver* coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. “Pay back what you owe me!” He demanded. His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, “Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.” But he refused. Instead he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that happened.”

“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all the debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’” In anger the master handed him over to the

jailers to be tortured, until he could pay back all he owed. “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart” (Matthew 18:21-35, NIV). The message Bible version translates the “ten thousand bags of gold as *\$100,000.00* and the “hundred silver coins as *\$10.00*.”

Has not God the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit been merciful unto you? All who are reading this have a life that has been spared. Christians are told to “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give” (Matthew 10:8, NIV).

As crazy as it seems, it takes courage to beg anybody for anything. We know this because James tells us “you have not because you ask not.” God knew it was going to take courage, humility to ask, let alone beg another human being for anything. I could be wrong (as I have been wrong before) and, if I live long enough...either way I don’t believe anybody thought as a child when I grow up I want to be a beggar on the corner of Rt. 108 and Rt. 175. Jesus told His disciples as He ascended into heaven, “the poor will always be among you.” Try the next time you get paid to set aside money and ask the Lord to show you what He would have you do with it. Note: this is NOT the tithe. Then wait to hear His voice – it could be at a gas station, in line at a grocery store, go figure – at church. Or, maybe take the walk to the Human Services Department and hand out food gift cards to the thirty people sitting in the waiting room. The Bible says, “Help and give without expecting a return. You’ll never – I promise – regret it. Live out this God-created identity the way our Father lives toward us, generously and graciously, even when we’re at our worst. Our Father is kind; you be kind” (Luke 6:35-36, MSG).

Don’t overthink it and don’t compare yourself with anyone else. Allow God to bring your mind into submission to His way, His will, and His purpose so He, not you, will be GLORIFIED!!!



The Gift That Keeps Giving...

LET US **PRAY**
ANGELA HUNT BONITTO

"Rather, I am a sinner if I rebuild the old system of law I already tore down. For when I tried to keep the law, it condemned me. So I died to the law—I stopped trying to meet all its requirements—so that I might live for God. My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not treat the grace of God as meaningless. For if keeping the law could make us right with God, then there was no need for Christ to die" (Galatians 2:18-21, NIV).

When I think about this scripture, what comes to mind concerning our prayer lives as Christians is that Jesus is the living Lord who died for us, who made the law dead to us once we became born again. This was a gift our Lord gave to us that we might live to God. And, if we live to God, His word says anything that we pray for according to His will, we have (1John 5:14-15).

Jesus did that for us on the cross, so that we would no longer be separated from God to allow us to have a relationship with God. And from that relationship our prayers would be heard, they would not be in vain. We would not pray amiss. Praise God! 2 Corinthians 3:6 further tells us the Law kills, but the Spirit gives life. We can rejoice



that when we pray in the Spirit our prayers have life! Because Jesus gave His life freely, we can pray with confidence knowing He hears us and will answer.

Praying with confidence means we pray expecting help. We do not pray thinking we are going to get turned down for help. How often do you go to a parent or someone you trust who cares about you and ask for help thinking they are going to say no? If you were not confident that you were going to get their help, you probably would not approach them. God's word said we can come to Him with confidence. That tells me that our prayers will be answered. Remember, as Christians, God lives in us and greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world (John 4:4).



Therefore, by faith we go to God in prayer unleashing our burdens, knowing that He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). There is no greater power that I'd rather have on my side in prayer than Jesus, because if He is for me who can be against me? We are victorious because of Jesus. This is why we ought to run like the wind to God in prayer, never skipping a moment, like Daniel, to pray to the one who gives us life, who carries our burdens, who heals our bodies, and gives us peace. Jesus freely gave His life to make this happen for us because He loved us.

We can honor Jesus by walking in faith, believing that what we ask in faith He will do. Before Jesus left this earth, He told His followers they will do greater works than Him (John 14:12). Jesus has given us the greatest gift of all, reconciliation to God, open access to the Almighty God, and grace. That grace enables us to be partakers of Jesus' gifts. Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV) says, "For I know the plans I have for you...plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Thank you, Jesus for freely giving your life for ours.

Let Us Pray...

*Father in Heaven, thank You for the precious gift of Your son, Jesus Christ. Without Him, where would we be? We have eternal life and Your eternal love, and we are grateful. Guide us Lord in our daily actions and give us strength to defeat the works of the enemy, that Your kingdom may be established here on earth. **Amen!***





In the summer of 2017 my father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. This was a tragic and an unexpected situation for my sister and me. For a variety of reasons my husband, Willie, and I decided to move my father into our home, which already contained five people. We did not have a bedroom for him so we had a contractor come in and create a room for him by splitting our living room. Extending ourselves to have compassion on a loved one was not a small venture; it required us to shift around, pack up or get rid of a lot of things throughout the home and on the property. Also, this was not the first time that we had opened our home to family and had it impact our lives.


The Holy Spirit led Paul to write to the Corinthian church, "Each one should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not out of regret or compulsion. For God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7 BSB). Due to the physical, emotional and spiritual challenges that we faced as we tried to help family we have wondered if our actions were done in error. Unexpected change is not easy, especially when it impacts personal space and daily routines of life. Were we acting out of regret and impulsiveness? Were we being cheerful givers?

Early in our marriage we set our heart to be a blessing and support to our family, especially our parents. Walking in the commands and truths of Scripture is not a simple task; it is a process of spiritual growth filled with potential missteps. Satan likes to put "what if's" in our mind to create pits of doubt, regret or guilt. A few of his tactics are: attempting to have us fixate on our own discomforts and not the needs of others; mock our

sincerity by reminding us of moments when we weren't cheerful; or whisper taunting words that our efforts and sacrifices for another are fruitless.

Thankfully true joy and giving comes from the Lord. It comes from surrendering our heart to our heavenly Father; seeking Him through faith in Jesus; and by leaning on the Holy Spirit to give us the ability, wisdom and understanding to walk in God's Word (Ezekiel 36:26; John 15: 9-11; John 14:26). As our connection to the Holy Trinity deepens so does our desire to give; He guides and sustains us in our giving. The Holy Spirit tells us, "And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things, at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work" (2 Corinthians 9:8, BSB). Praise God!

Prayer flowed often in my family as we faced the challenge of altering our wants and desires for the needs of someone else, but so did blessings. God sent my sister and me blessings through our children, extended family members and friends that assisted in the transition of my father from our family home, the selling of our home, and watching over him.

Having our home changed multiple times for family has had its struggles, but often when we reflect on our life we can only give God praise and thanks for all He has done. The Holy Spirit reminds us that God will: supply and multiply our resources; increase the harvest of our righteousness (which shows itself in active goodness, kindness, and love); and enrich us in every way to be generous on every occasion, so that our giving will produce thanksgiving to Him (2 Corinthians 9:10-12 AMP). Praise God from whom all blessings flow. 



ON THE INSIDE COVERS

Inside Front: Assistant Pastor Juanita Elliott embraces congregant Camille Dunlap after anointing her with oil during an invitation for prayer on February 19, 2023.

Photography By: Michael R. Spry © 2023

Inside Back: Assistant Pastor Linwood Childs poses with his proud family after delivering his inaugural sermon on May 22, 2022. Pictured with him are his daughter Antoinette, son Linwood Jr (LJ), and wife Francine.

Photography By: Michael R. Spry © 2022

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 & Prayer
11:15 AM Morning Worship

COMMUNION SERVICE:

1st Sunday of Every Month

EVERY 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

1st & 3rd WEDNESDAYS:

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

GENERAL INFORMATION

CARE & COMFORT MINISTRY

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columbiamdcareandcomfort@gmail.com

CHURCH CONTACTS

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Church Website: www.columbiaccmd.org

CHURCH LIBRARY

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