

The Hilltopper **February 2022**

From Pastor Mike

My niece got engaged in December 2020. They were eager to get married, planned a smaller wedding, and were married six months later. My daughter, Rachel, got engaged in February 2020 just weeks before COVID-19 brought everything to a standstill. After nearly two years of waiting out COVID-19, they decided to scale back the wedding and get married in a few months. There have been many challenges for engaged couples planning a wedding during the pandemic.

From time to time, I get emails from couples who have become engaged. It is a time of excitement, commitment, and devotion (it can also be a time of stress, but it is hopeful stress.) "Engagement" can mean many things, but all the definitions share the concepts of involvement and commitment.

The Lilly Foundation does the most extensive research on churches and non-profits in America. The loudest message from the Lilly Foundation to America's churches and nonprofits is that they are suffering from a crisis of engagement – that is, involvement and commitment.

This makes sense after nearly two years of social separation due to our continuing global pandemic. In March of 2020, we were planning a spiritual pilgrimage to South Korea, reviewing our Safe Sanctuary policies, looking to re-establish our Youth Ministry, and we were seeing good levels of both attendance and financial support. Two years later, while we remain in an overall healthy position, we – our church council, finance chair, nominations committee, and other lay leaders – are monitoring levels of engagement while seeking God's direction as we address this challenge.

As you can imagine, this is very strange and difficult work. There are families and folks we have not seen in quite some time and as variants of COVID roll through the area we are not sure how or when they might re-engage with our ministry once again. As your pastor, I am left to wonder, "How is their relationship with God? How is their spiritual health?" As part of the Body of Christ, we find ourselves questioning, "What do we offer if our church is left diminished by the effects of all this time apart?"

I am left with two convictions. The first is that we cannot know precise answers to these questions at this exact moment. The second is that with God's help we'll navigate our way through with a resolve to offer our best to God and neighbor in the manner of Jesus Christ.

Chances are that if you are reading this you are pretty engaged with our church family (either physically or virtually). In a way, I am "preaching" to the proverbial choir. But, as a follower of Jesus, I am compelled to ask for your help. I am reminded of Luke 15 where Jesus teaches three "parables of the lost." For the Christian there is always a concern for the one not present; for the one who is not near; for the one who wandered away. Will you join me in prayer? Prayer for an end to rolling variants of the virus which make engagement with some older members difficult? Prayer for vaccines for the youngest among us – so our youngest families will feel safe engaging with our ministry? Will you join me in prayer for your pastor and leaders as we focus our efforts on engaging those who are less engaged than they were two years ago? An increase in engagement will help us discern the future in as much as it will be good for the spiritual health not only for our congregation but for those, we pray will be re-engaged with our church family in the year to come.

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Mike

A Busy Sunday on February 6th!

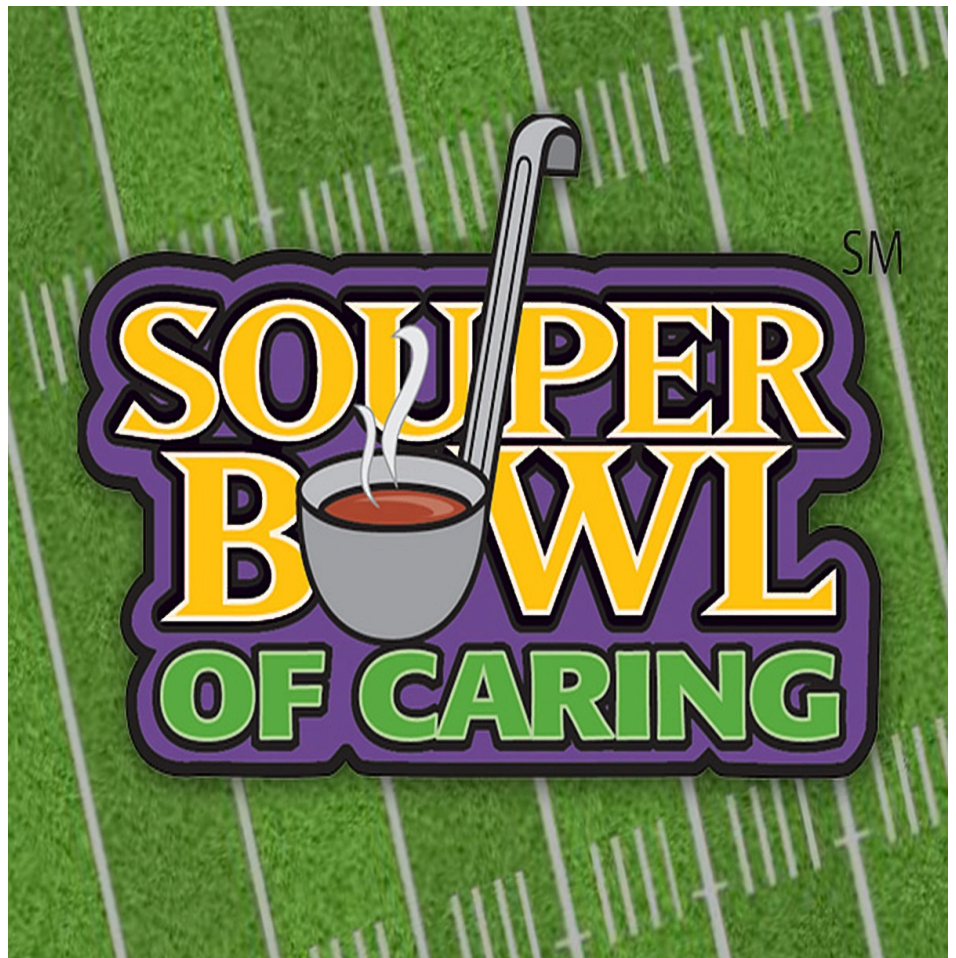


**Children's
Sunday
School
restarts on
February 6th
@ 9:30am
Ages 3-17**

Souper Bowl of Caring!

Right after Worship
on Sunday,
February 6th!

Bring a donation for
the Blue Ridge Area
Food Bank and share
in a variety of
homemade soups,
sandwiches, desserts
drinks and fellowship!





The following are the minutes from the **JANUARY** meeting of the Church Council. The minutes are available for you to help the entire church family Stay In The Know about how this group is caring for New Hope UMC!

Church Council Meeting Minutes - January 27, 2022

Present: Kevin Armstrong, Bianca Brensinger, Samantha Breninger, Alicia Copeland, Robin Craun, Cindy Deavers, Wanda Harding, Corey Johnson, Nathan Kutz, Pastor Mike, Bruce Rogers, Cindy Sheets, Dallas VanLear and Karen Whitmer

The meeting was called to order by chairman Dallas VanLear, with devotions and prayer by Pastor Mike from In Touch, Romans 7:14-25.

The minutes from the December meeting were accepted as distributed.

Finance Report: *(Kevin Armstrong reported)*

2021 in Review:

- Funded 100% of apportionments
- Funded 100% of planned local outreach missions
- Averaged \$3,000 per week in weekly giving
- But, we spent \$6,600 more than we took in.
- We lost 11 members last year
- To meet our budget for this year, we need to take in \$3,580 per week.

For apportionments for 2022: Kevin made a motion that we start this year by paying 100% of our District apportionments, which would be \$288/month; and 75% of our Conference apportionments, which would be \$1,811/month. That would be a total of \$2,099 per month for both sets of apportionments. And we would reevaluate quarterly. There was some discussion about when it would be most advantageous to reevaluate this decision, monthly or quarterly. We can reevaluate it monthly if needed. Samantha seconded the motion. And it was passed unanimously.

~ Audits will be due this spring and Kevin will get in touch with the chairpersons of each committee in the near future to discuss this.

Treasurer's Report: *(Cindy Deavers reported)*

- ~ In Year End Report: under the Cemetery Dividends - we earned \$521.26 in interest in CDs at Dupont Community CC
 - One plot was purchased for \$1,000 and that money went into the Cemetery Fund.
 - In the report - under Miscellaneous - \$621 in a special donation was taken up on Christmas Eve for the Tornado Victims.
 - We gave our donations to the local charities that we had committed to in the past.

Financial Secretary: *(Robin Craun reported)*

- ~ Giving statements are in the Narthex. If you have any problems or concerns, please contact Robin. She will take the ones that are still left and mail them out on Monday, January 31st.

Trustees: *(Corey Johnson reported)*

- ~ Mitch Brensinger is our new Trustees Chairperson. Teresa Barr and Pastor Mike will work together to take care of the cemetery records.
- ~ The trustees will be buying more salt to help keep our parking lot and sidewalks clean and clear of ice and snow.
- ~ The paintings and the heavy tables that were in the multi-purpose room (old library) have been moved.

Pastor's Report: *(Pastor Mike reported)*

- ~ Children's Sunday School restarts this Sunday, January 30th. Thank you to all the teachers who have and will continue to make this possible. They will be starting in the Social Hall and assessing how many children we have in what classes. Please contact any families with children and/or grandchildren that you think may be interested.
- ~ We are planning on having an Ash Wednesday Service in the first week of March. A Pancake Supper is TBD.
- ~ Pastor Mike nominated Wanda Harding and Karen Whitmer for the nominating committee. Dallas seconded the motion and it was passed unanimously.
- ~ A Lenten Bible Study will be in March and April.

Worship: *(Pastor Mike reported)*

- ~ We will be planning an Ash Wednesday Service in March.
- ~ Thanks to Cindy S. for making our first remote Worship Service on January 16th a success.

Spiritual Nurture: *(Samantha Brensinger reported)*

- ~ Last Sunday they asked for Kids' Rock volunteers. Two people stepped up - Martha Fretwell and JoEtta Walker will be volunteering on the third Sunday of each month. Samantha and Bianca will volunteer on the second Sunday of each month. They are looking for one more pair of volunteers to take over the fourth Sundays of each month. Samantha and Bianca will take care of the fifth Sundays, and there is no Kids' Rock for the first Sundays of the month, due to having Holy Communion.
- ~ They are looking for any and all ideas for any kid's related activities and events, if you have any idea please let Samantha know.

Evangelism: *(Nathan Kutz reported)*

- ~ Looking to start a monthly or quarterly 'supply' drive at church to help local charities with their ongoing needs. Such as: socks and earplugs for the Valley Mission, etc.

United Methodist Men: *(Bruce Rogers reported)*

- ~ Things are going good at the New Hope Dump.
- ~ Their January meeting was canceled due to snow.
- ~ In February they will have a guest speaker from Grace Christian School, all are invited.

United Methodist Women: *(Wanda Harding reported)*

- ~ The three circles plan to start meeting again in February.
- The Sisters of Faith will meet on Tuesday, February 1st at 1:30pm in the social hall.
- The Circle of Hope will meet on Monday, February 7th at 7:00pm in the social hall.
- The Circle of Love will meet on Tuesday, February 8th at 7:00pm in the social hall.
- And on Thursday, February 17th at 6:30pm, the Circle of Hope will serve the meal for the United Methodist Men's monthly meeting.

Staff/Parish Relations: *(Pastor Mike reported)*

- ~ They met in January to decide about Pastor Mike staying with us. He wants to stay and we want to keep him here.

Membership: *(Karen Whitmer reported)*

- ~ We have lost members Mark Bryant and Paul Abbe recently.

Youth: *(Bianca Brensinger reported)*

- ~ The youth is hosting the Souper Bowl of Caring on February 6th at 12 pm. If you like to bring soup, sandwiches, desserts or drinks there is a sign-up sheet in the narthex or you can let Samantha Brensinger know. Samanthabrensinger@gmail.com or 717-306-8364.
- The youth will be collecting canned and boxed food donations for the local food bank. This year we are going to have teams and the youth/children's team with the most donations will get a special prize.
- The teams are divided as so, if you sit on the pastor's side of the church you are on a team along with the youth/children that sit on that side. And if you sit on the Lay Leader's (Jennifer) side of the church, then you are on a team with the children and youth that sit on that side. If you have donations find one of the youth/children from your team and they will put it on their team table.
- We have not decided on team names yet. If you have any questions please contact Samantha Brensinger or Bianca Brensinger.

Communications: *(Cindy Sheets reported)*

- ~ Splashtop has been installed on the computer in the a/v room. This allows Cindy Sheets (or anyone with the log-in info) to access the computer remotely. This will allow her to continue to have live-streaming on the Worship service, even if she can not be present in the church building. There will still need to be at least one person in the a/v room, in order to control the camera, the PowerPoint and soundboard.
- ~ In the next month, Cindy Sheets will make a 'How-To' List, for anyone who wants or needs to come into the a/v room to cut on all the equipment and get everything set up for any type of service in the sanctuary.
- ~ The issue of having difficulty in hearing those at the microphone on the Lectern side was discussed. Cindy S. will work to troubleshoot this problem, working along with Pastor Mike, Jennifer Strother, and others who used the microphone. It was suggested that Cindy S., look into the cost of a variety of different types of microphones for the Lectern, as an alternative or upgrade in order for everyone to be able to hear those who are speaking on that side of the Sanctuary.

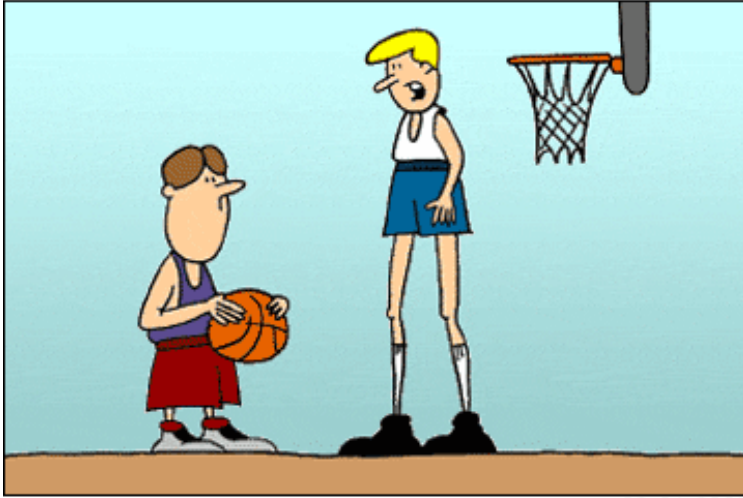
Unfinished Business:

- ~ Pastor Mike hopes to have the open spots on the Trustees committee filled by their February meeting.
- ~ Dallas thanked everyone for coming and for doing their part to keep their commitments to keeping the church functioning.
- ~ Dallas closed the meeting, and Pastor Mike sent us off with prayer. The meeting ended at 7:25pm.

Respectfully submitted by: Cynthia Sheets, Recording Secretary

The next Church Council Meeting will be on Thursday, February 24th, 2022 at 6:30pm.

Just For Laughs



02-04-2003

I ALWAYS PRAYED THAT I WOULD GET TALL
BUT I FORGOT TO MENTION
"PROPORTIONALLY"

explained. Modern scholarship has shown that the Red Sea in that area was only 10-inches deep at that time. It was no problem for the Israelites to wade across."

The boy was stumped. His eyes wandered from the man back to the Bible laying open in his lap. The man, content that he had enlightened a poor, naive young person to the finer points of scientific insight, turned to go. Scarcely had he taken two steps when the boy began to rejoice and praise louder than before. The man turned to ask the reason for this resumed jubilation.

"Wow!" exclaimed the boy happily, "God is greater than I thought! Not only did He lead the whole nation of Israel through the Red Sea, He topped it off by drowning the whole Egyptian army in 10 inches of water!"



A collector of rare books ran into an acquaintance who told him he had just thrown away an old Bible that he found in a dusty, old box. He happened to mention that Guten-somebody-or-other had printed it.

"Not Gutenberg?" gasped the collector.

"Yes, that was it!"

"Oh No!! You've thrown away one of the first books ever printed. A copy recently sold at auction for half a million dollars!"

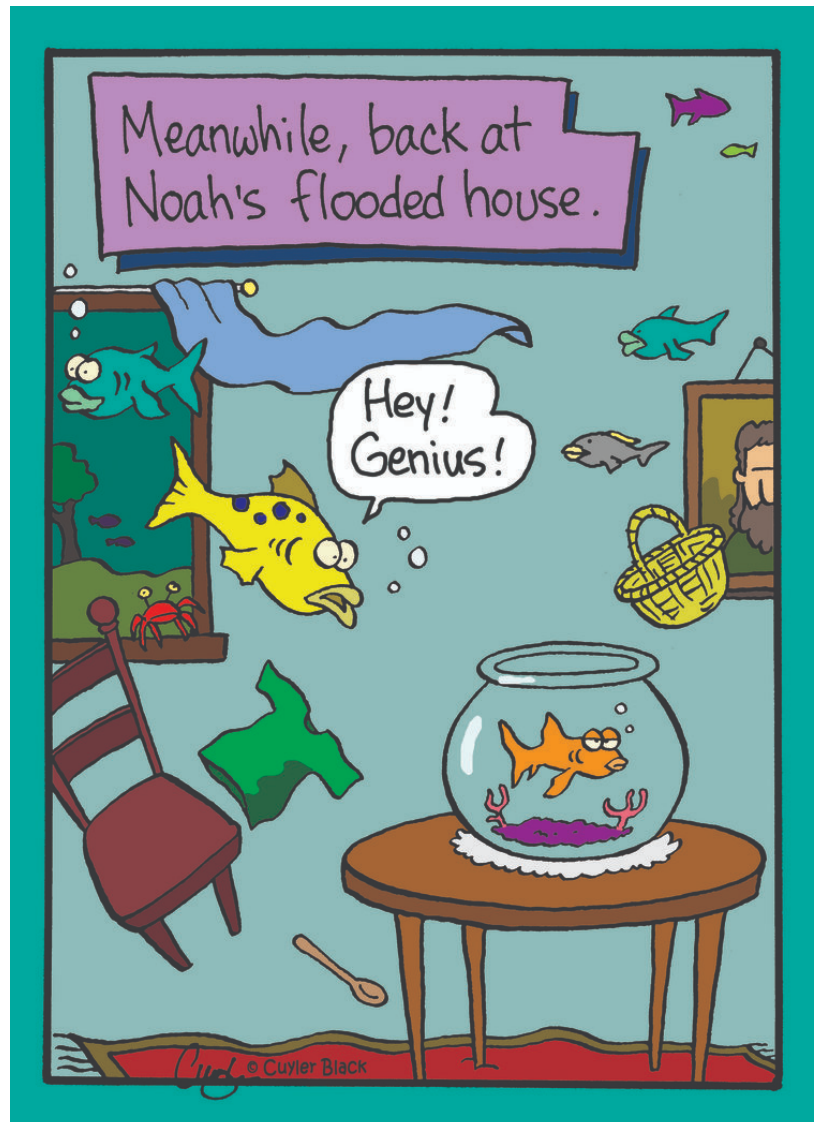
"Oh, I don't think this book would have been worth anything close to that much," replied the man. "It was scribbled all over in the margins by some guy named Martin Luther."

A boy was sitting on a park bench with one hand resting on an open Bible. He was loudly exclaiming his praise to God. "Hallelujah! Hallelujah! God is great!" he yelled without worrying whether anyone heard him or not.

Shortly after, along came a man who had recently completed some studies at a local university. Feeling very enlightened in the ways of truth and very eager to show this enlightenment, he asked the boy about the source of his joy.

"Hey" asked the boy in return with a bright laugh, "Don't you have any idea what God is able to do? I just read that God opened up the waves of the Red Sea and led the whole nation of Israel right through the middle."


The enlightened man laughed lightly, sat down next to the boy and began to try to open his eyes to the "realities" of the miracles of the Bible. "That can all be very easily





Birthdays & Anniversaries

1 - Loretta Dameron
- Martha English
- Jamie Stout

2 - Kylie Armstrong
 Al & Lynn Tuten

4 - Robert Shiflett

5 - JoEtta Walker

7 - Alicia Copeland

8 - Colin Hester


9 - Nancy Pyle

10 - Ian Gruber

13 - Owen Pence

14 - Ernest Shaver
- Becky Tate

15 - Cooper Coffey
- Rebecca McCaskey
- Tonya Meier
- Holly Morris
- Joan Simmons


17 - Pastor Shin
- Seth Joyner
- Zach Rickman
 Lewis & Karen Whitmer

18 - Susie Shreckhise

19 - Jo Layman
- Robert Riner

20 - Helen Shiflett

21 - Austine Belsky
- Al Tuten


22 - Corey Johnson
 Colin & Teresa Hester

23 - Mike Shreckhise

24 - Jennifer Bottenmiller
- Tabatha Herring

25 - Marc Mehler

26 - Dave Dively

27 - Stephen Sundeen
 Richard & Natosha Ritchie

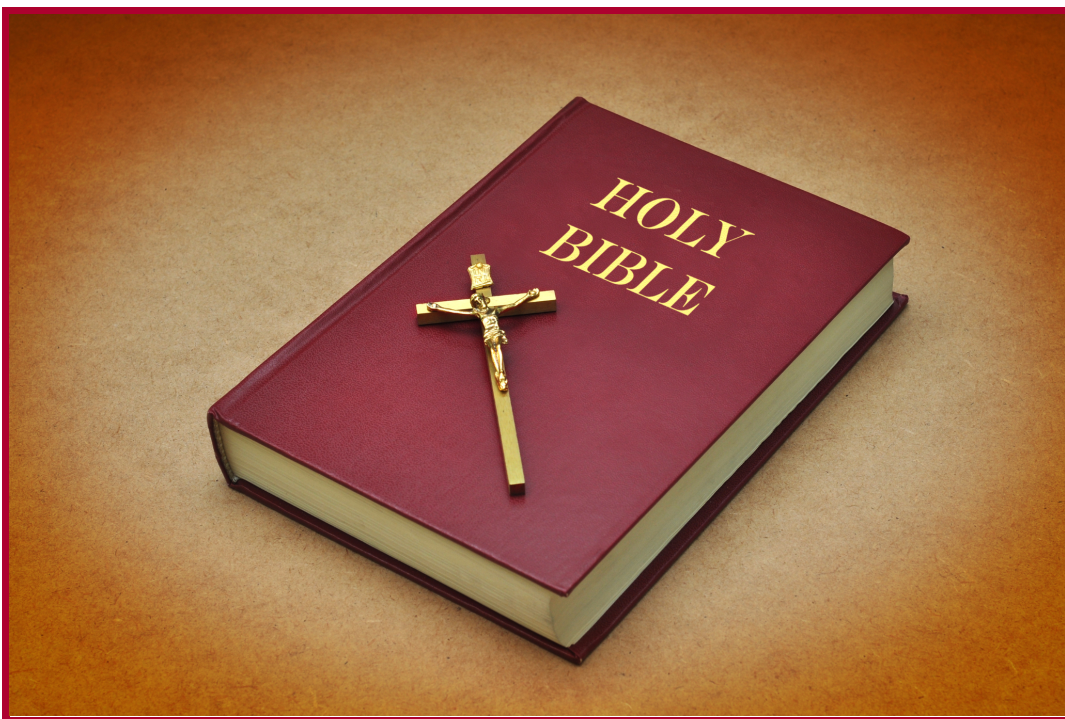
Feeding On His Word

“Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways! You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently. Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes! Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments. I will praise you with an upright heart when I learn your righteous rules. I will keep your statutes; do not utterly forsake me! How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes! With my lips, I declare all the rules of your mouth. In the way of your testimonies, I delight as much as in all riches. I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.” Psalm 119:1-16 ESV

I want to begin this with a story. A couple of years ago a man that I know had begun to really come to Christ and put his faith in him. He wrote poetry from time to time and had written a poem describing the start of his new relationship with God. He began to realize that without ever really knowing and hearing and accepting the Gospel everything he was doing in life was actually against God. He had gone about life with a hammer in his hand trying to build life to his standards. When Jesus Christ began to reveal himself to this man he knew that he needed to start building life to the standards of the one who died on the cross. It was 2020 and he had committed himself to God, but he hadn't really started feeding on God's word regularly. A virus had come about, there was an election full of turmoil coming about, it was definitely a complicated year. But by the end of that year, he did not question his faith, but as he looked around he asked the question, why is there so much anxiousness with people who claim to be Christians. And frankly at times with himself included. It occurred to him that he had never really taken his time and truly read the Bible. He had read bits and pieces, mostly to understand different teachings and doctrine and thereby turning to different passages in church and out of church. In December 2020, he was in a store that had free New Testaments, so he thought well I'm just going to grab a few. They were small and handy yet big enough to read comfortably and perfect to fit in a backpack. His wife got him a compact bible for Christmas that year. And throughout the first two months of

2021, he read the four Gospels for the first time, in order and truly let them sink in. What happened changed that man's entire perspective and being forever. The words of Christ transformed him and to this day he isn't the same.

That man is me. I've found that the peace that we need comes from God, and leaning on his word at all times over anything else instead of our words produces real peace.



How important is your bible? Can you live without reading it? Do I actually understand what I'm reading? These are questions I started asking myself. Please don't misunderstand me and think that I am saying that all you have to do is read your bible every day, and that's all it takes to be a Christian. Actually, repentance of your sins and faith in Jesus Christ are technically all it takes, by grace through faith alone. But I am of the opinion that when something is true it's real and it lives. Some of the things I've come to appreciate are my own weaknesses and failures. Because through them I've seen the perfection of Christ's power. I had lived for 31 years, and since I was 18 had been relying on myself for everything or as much as I could provide. The problem was that applied to my relationship with God as well. Truly looking back on it, my walk with God and salvation depended on me. When all we rely on is human flesh and bones, something will always be wrong. There will always be imperfections and at the end of the day we will always come up short. When I read through the four Gospels I truly began to see the depth of my own sin and truly how much pride I had had in my life. When I saw the actions of Jesus I cheered him on, but then there were times when he was talking to me and he confronted me. The Gospel will always be confrontational or else it is not the Gospel. It confronts us in love, yet it demands a decision and results. I really began to understand the true love of the Father and how everything depends on Jesus Christ.

Ever since then I have read or listened to the bible every day, in various patterns and it is truly something that I rely on. It is something that I have felt to encourage others to do as well. We are all like ships on the sea of life. And we all have anchors, the issue was that we build our own ships and anchors. Sooner or later there will be a storm that will come on the sea that we will not be able to handle on our own. And if you are on God's ship and Christ is your anchor you will still go through storms in life, but you won't be shaken. Please please if you got off of the ship at some point in your life or you've never been on it, come to it. There is plenty of room for you. I've spent a lot of time wondering why it took me so long to find my place on the rock that is Christ. But in reading God's word I have seen and am understanding the complete sovereignty of God. He truly is in control and his plan is always perfect. Our problems in life are not caused by him, our problems are the result of us and others. But his love, his steadfast love truly endures forever. Like the above passage says, store up his word in your heart so in time your actions offend Him less and less.

Jesus said in John 17:17 in his prayer to the Father, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth." Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16 "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,".

So I want to encourage you this year to look at your bible in a whole new way. Read it as if you have never read it before, read it as a child without knowledge. Jesus said unless we become like children we will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Even if it's only one chapter a day, read it slowly and let it live inside of you. And my prayer is that as you read it, it will begin to read through you like it did me. I pray that Jesus Christ will reveal himself to you more this year and that he will reveal himself in you. May God bless you and I pray that these words have left you better than before you read them.

In the last year we have felt led to help provide Bibles to people who need them, so if you don't have an adequate bible, or you would like advice in picking one or a better one, please don't hesitate to email us and we would be happy to help you. We have also been very concerned about the hunger crisis in our country. One of our local food banks can provide 40 meals for only \$10. Biweekly you could help provide 1,040 meals a year. So we encourage you to join us and help those in need. Be on the lookout for further information on this soon.

Thank you and we pray that all of you are blessed,
Nathan & Cheryl Kutz
Real Life Heavenly Hands

The next regularly scheduled UMM meeting is Thursday, February 17th at 6:30pm.

The United Methodist Women will provide a meal for the meeting. Everyone planning to attend the meeting should notify Kim Maugans or Bruce Rogers, so we will have a good headcount for the meal.

Our program will be presented by Dr. Donald Larson, Head of School for Grace Christian School, in Staunton.

He will talk about the mission of Grace Christian School and the spiritual, academic, character and covenant to community core values that come from a Christian biblical worldview. You can learn more about GCS at: <https://www.gcswarriors.org/who-we-are/headofschool.cfm>

The meeting is open to all the men of the church. Plan now to join us for an evening of fellowship.



Altar Flowers

Ministry Opportunity

**If you would like to purchase flowers for the altar in 2022,
In Honor Of someone, or In Memory Of someone,
please contact Pam VanLear at: (540) 290-0647
The cost for altar flowers is \$40.**

Kids' Corner - Valentine's Day

By: Sharla Guenther



Valentine's Day is a special day of the year. There are parties, chocolates, cards, and candy with "Be Mine" written on them. Other than all that where does Valentine's Day come from?

There are several stories about a priest named Valentine who performed secret marriages when an emperor ordered that no young men should be married because they would be better soldiers in the war. Another story is about a man named Valentine who fell in love with a girl while he was in jail. Just before he died he wrote her a love letter and signed it, "From your Valentine". I don't know if these stories are true or not, I guess it doesn't really matter. I think the important part is: that we know what love is and know where it came from.

The Bible tells us that love is from God and that God is love. The neat thing about God's love is that it's not a feeling to him, he can't fall out of love with us. He loves

us even when we're not loveable and when we're grumpy or doing bad things. He loves all of us no matter what.

The tricky part is loving others like God loves us. God's love is much different than the mushy kissy stuff that you see on TV or all around you. It's not bad to be mushy with your family but sometimes its harder to show other people how you love them. We can't just go around kissing everyone to show them our love!

There is a special kind of love we can have for others, it's called agape love. This doesn't have to be mushy love, just see people as God would see them. Pretend for a day that you have special glasses on and that everyone you see you love just because God loves them, like the way you love a mom or dad, brother or sister.

I'm sure you'll run into somebody you don't think deserves your love or you just don't want to love at all, but God loves them and if we love God we are supposed to love them too.

Who exactly are we supposed to love?

*Love God *Love yourself

*Love your family

*Love your friends

*Love your neighbors

*Love your enemies

What are some ways that we can love God? It's not as hard as you think. How do you show others you love them? We talk to them, try to get to know them better, listen to them, and sometimes we do things for them. We can do all these things for God. We might not be able to touch Him but we can pray to God, read the Bible and learn about him, obey Him and do the things he asks us to do.

We are also supposed to love ourselves. This doesn't mean that we should think we're better than everybody else. We get this from a Bible verse that says do for others as you would want them to do for you. This means we should take care of ourselves. Things like looking before we cross the street, eating our vegetables, and getting a good sleep at night are ways we can do that. Remember that if you're a Christian the Spirit of God lives inside us and he wants us to treat ourselves with respect.

Loving our family is hopefully pretty easy. Even though we get mad at our parents sometimes because they don't let us do something, we still love them. Just remember that you are part of a family and nothing will ever change that. You should always be able to depend on each other and they'll be the ones to tell you the truth before anyone else.

Loving our friends should be easy because we pick the people we want to be friends with. The thing is, sometimes when we disagree with our friends we think we don't have to be their friends anymore, but God's love would ask us to forgive them and try to work things out.

Do you know who your neighbors are? Neighbors aren't just the people who live next to you but are everyone you might run into. I don't want to encourage you to run up to strangers but think about helping others with love. By helping an elderly lady who needs help with her groceries, returning a wallet found on the street, or even praying for people on the news that are in trouble are just a few ways to love a neighbor.

I hope you don't have any enemies but there will always be someone that you don't get along with or believe the opposite of what you believe. There are many, many people that don't believe in God and that purposely do things that hurt him and God still loves them. Loving people that bully us or our friends seems impossible, but it's not with God's help. By asking for God's help we will be able to love our enemies easier when we just can't do it on our own.

Learning to love like God takes a long time and takes God's help. It's easier to love than to hate, so have lots of fun learning to love God and everyone around you!



If you would like to add an article or announcement to the Hilltopper, please contact us! Call/Text: (540) 280-1860 or NewHopeUMC.Virginia@gmail.com

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