



WORDS FROM LEADERS PAST AND PRESENT, 2021

*ELDER*  
*LIFE VERSE*  
BOOKLET



# GOD'S WORD IS INSPIRED, LIVING, AND ACTIVE.

Every page, every verse, every word is filled with wisdom coming from the Father.

While we endeavor to read and respond to all of scripture, there are certain verses that appeal to each of us in different, fresh, and timeless ways. These "life verses" are those which come to mind immediately when we need to hear from the Lord and guide us in our walk with Him.

As we consider the nearly 200 years of history and impact God has had through Mountain Christian Church, our elders have provided guidance and wisdom each step of the way as the Father leads them. As elders of the congregation, we each considered what we deem our personal life verse, and shared with each other in our gatherings. As we thought about compiling these in order to bless others, we realized that our predecessor elders have had an impact and were also led by their favorite personal verses.

This booklet is a compilation of the writings of the current eldership, as well as many former elders, and the spouses of former elders. We trust that God will use these to bless not only the people of Mountain, but countless others as well.

# BARBARA COOK

WIFE OF FORMER LEAD PASTOR, CHARLES COOK

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## LIFE VERSE/QUOTE

*"Life has different chapters but God writes the book, so don't be afraid to turn the pages."*

I reflect back to the time when Charles died and it seemed as though time stood still and it was hard to go on. During that time, I was in a Bible study group, which turned out to be my lifeline at the time. It was a safe place where I could talk, or cry, and share how I was feeling.

Many pages have turned since Charles' passing and this quote reminds me of that group and I can honestly say that being part of that group, and being part of Christian community, is essential to life. We must continue to have joy in life and remain in community, and not be afraid to turn a new page.

# BOB GREENE

FORMER PASTOR AND ELDER

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## LIFE VERSE/QUOTE

*"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."*

**2 TIMOTHY 4:7-8**

# CARRIE TYSON-SHEFFY

WIFE OF FORMER ELDER, CHARLIE TYSON

WIFE OF FORMER ELDER, DON SHEFFY (REMARRIED)

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## LIFE VERSE/QUOTE

*"Heaven is filled with earth's broken lives, and there is no one bruised on earth who Christ cannot take and restore to glorious blessedness and beauty. He can take the life crushed by pain or sorrow and make it into a harp whose music shall be all praise. He can lift earth's saddest failures up to heaven's glory."*

**-J.R. MILLER**

I am blessed to have been born into a Christian family and raised in Mountain Christian Church. Just the name of our church conjures up sweet memories of my childhood, warm thoughts of family... of safety... of home.

I have had a life filled with all the rich blessings that only God can provide. But, as with everyone, I have had times of deep sadness and regrets and sorrows that have filled my heart with great heaviness, some of which are too personal, the pain too close to the surface to speak of here. I carry the name of Jesus close to my heart, on my lips, on the tip of my tongue and I call on Him... "Jesus Jesus Jesus." I never fail to feel the silent presence of the spirit of God's Son as He reveals His love and mysterious presence to me.

Philippians 2:9-10 says, *"Therefore God elevated him to the place of the highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth."*

There is no situation too great for His name and my relationship with Jesus has had an impact on every aspect of my life.

In May, 1995, I had an experience while driving home from an evening church service at Mountain. It was late, dark and raining hard.

I was by myself and I was crying almost as hard as the rain hitting my windshield.



To this day I know the exact spot on the road when the Spirit came to me and touched my soul and I was in that moment forever changed. I didn't see angels or hear church bells, but I felt His touch. Only months later did I realize that God was preparing me to begin a work on staff at Mountain. Those months without a Senior Pastor were difficult months in the life of the church, and in mine. So many times I wondered if I was worthy to come before Him. Although my "for such a time as this" dreams had begun to fade, I continued to follow God's direction and the King of kings continued to answer my utterances. Some ten months later, Ben Cachiaras would arrive to pick up the reins and guide Mountain to the flagship church it is today. The months turned into wonderful years of service and I was privileged to work beside Ben, Charles Cook and David Robinson and other fine, wise men and women of God.

When I was diagnosed with Insulin Dependent Diabetes, I called on His name to help me cope with a lifetime of needles, insulin, pumps, monitoring and all that goes into maintaining a blood glucose level conducive to life.

When both of my girls were diagnosed with severe autoimmune diseases that they would deal with, to one degree or another the rest of their lives, I called on His name.

When Charlie was dying of West Nile Virus, behind my mask I uttered His name over and over as I pleaded with the doctors to help him.

When my grandchildren are hurting, when our business ceased operations, when my bones are broken, when a world-wide pandemic hits, when the world around me seems to be crumbling, I call out His name.

Psalm 91 tells me God is my shelter and He will be with me in times of trouble when I acknowledge His name. God gave Himself to me as a baby. C. S. Lewis says He wants my life to be a "Bethlehem." When I breathe His name, I believe it produces "downright joy in the heart of Jesus," as I am confident in Him no matter what lies ahead.

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus... There's just something about that Name.

# DAVE FLUMBAUM

FORMER ELDER

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## LIFE VERSE/QUOTE

*"...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."*

### **PHILIPPIANS 1:6 NIV**

When this verse became important to me is not clear. However, its impact has been evident in my later years as my relationship with the Lord grows and deepens.

Being an athlete, an avid sports fan, a hiker, traveler, and a task-oriented employee, teacher, helper, and parent, finishing has always been important to me. I appreciate completion and closure, wrapping things up.

Listening to the words of Jesus from the cross continue to penetrate my being when I hear Him say, "It is finished". His immediate purpose was fulfilled but His ultimate purpose was still in process.

So when Paul penned these words in his letter to the Philippians, I became aware of a wonderful truth for my life. *"...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."*

Philippians 1:6 (NIV)

God is at work in me and in my church. He is shaping and guiding us toward a wonderful ending. This journey had its beginning with Him and He will see it through to the finish.

Therefore, we are to be confident in Him.

It will be an exciting celebration when we, with our Lord, experience the sound of His voice saying, "DONE."

# Dewey BARKER

FORMER ELDER

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## LIFE VERSE/QUOTE

*"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."*

### **HEBREWS 11:1 KJV**

To be honest, this has been very hard for me. I know my life verse and understand its power over my life. My struggle is the reality of the now and my verse. I just turned 79 and as I look back over my life I see an off loading of responsibilities—my girls got married, sold off my rental properties, retired from work, and 5 years ago I stepped down from the Elders after 31 years. Now in good health and on no meds, what does He desire of me for the next 20 years?

The Bible says that God has dealt to each and every one of us a measure of faith. However, there are certain ways your faith works, and links you to the Heavenly Father. The Bible says that faith is the substance of things hoped for, a substance which first has a stage of development—of incubation—before its usage can be full and effective. There are four basic steps to the process of incubation.

First, to use your faith you must be able to envision a clear cut objective (the seed). Faith is the "substance" of things hoped for. You cannot have a vague idea about your goal, it must be specific. If you want corn you do not plant apple seeds. Each of your goals (seeds) has its own DNA. In Luke 18:35–42 Jesus was on His way to Jericho and a blind man, Bartimaeus, by the side of the road began crying out "Son of David, have mercy (vague) on me!" Jesus stopped and questioned him. "What do you want Me to do for you?" He said "Lord, I want to regain my sight!" And Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has made you well."

Second, if you have a clear cut picture, you should have a burning desire for those objectives. Psalm 37:4 says, “Delight yourself in the Lord; and He shall give you the desires of your heart.” Proverbs 10:24 says, “The desire of the righteous will be granted.” I view this step of developing a burning desire as the fertilization of the seed.

Third, you must have the substance or evidence. When you have a clear cut goal, and you have this desire burning in your heart, then you should kneel down and pray until you receive the substance, the assurance, the evidence. Timewise this can take minutes, hours, days, or years. I view this step as the growth phase where you will see evidence or receive assurance that things are moving.

Fourth, you should show evidence of your faith. Speak the word. What becomes pregnant in your heart and mind is going to come out in your circumstance. In Exodus 14:15, “On the bank of the Red Sea with the Egyptians coming, God rebuked Moses saying, “Moses, why are you crying to me? Give the command and the Red Sea shall be divided.” Claim and speak the word of assurance for the word actually goes out and creates. God spoke and the whole world came into being. Your word is the material which the Holy Spirit uses to create. This step four I find to be my most difficult—we stop in fear of rejection or failure. But the Word of God tells us many times to fear not.

In summary:

1. Get a clear cut objective.
2. Develop a burning desire.
3. Pray until you have the substance, the evidence.
4. Then speak the word about which you have been given the evidence.

# Donald H. Sherry

FORMER ELDER

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## LIFE VERSE/QUOTE

*"Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen, and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior."*

### **HABAKKUK 3:17-18**

Many years ago, I attended a men's Bible study that met very early each Wednesday morning. I specifically remember one particular time when we were discussing a section of the book of Habakkuk. God's people were going through an extremely difficult time and God seemed nowhere to be found. At the very end of his writing, the prophet instructed the people to wait patiently on the Lord and to continue to be joyful and to praise Him. He tells them in chapter 3 verses 17 and 18:

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen, and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.

As part of our study we were instructed to bring this same feeling of helplessness to our own current time and imagine ourselves to be in a similar situation. How would we rewrite this passage?

At that time, I was working in a law firm and had no idea of ever being in such a situation. However, after some thought, I wrote the following:

Though my telephone never rings and there are no prospects for business in sight, though all the efforts I put forth seem to fail, and my work produces no income for food and other needs, though no people are coming through the doors of my office and there are no files on my desk, yet I will rejoice in the Lord and be joyful in God my Savior. The sovereign Lord will be my strength.

It all sounded good at the time I wrote it, because it didn't apply to my situation. Little did I know that not many years after I wrote that, the firm I was with decided to close.

All of a sudden I was on my own. This put me into the situation that I had written about, but of course I wasn't even thinking back to that time. However, at some point, God seemed to direct me to what I had learned in that Bible study and what I had written. It was time to see if I could live up to what I had boldly stated. This was not easy to do. My feeling was to quit law and find some other avenue of employment. However, through much thought, prayer and encouragement I learned, not as quickly as I would have liked, but over time, that if I did continue to praise and worship God with a joyful heart, no matter what my situation, God's response would come.

Now, many years later, when the encouragement is for me to slow down, God continues to respond, and has reversed those dire statements that I had written years ago, many times over.

I have learned that none of us can know what the future holds for our work or our lives, but I like the way these later verses are written in the Message version:

If we continue to sing praises to God, and turn cartwheels of joy to our Savior, we can count on God's rule to prevail and we take heart and gain strength.

# DORIS CUNNINGHAM

WIFE OF FORMER ELDER, ELLSWORTH CUNNINGHAM

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## LIFE VERSE/QUOTE

*"I am the Lord, your God who takes your right hand and says to you,  
Do not fear, I will help you."*

### **ISAIAH 41:13**

Many years ago, I was scheduled to have a kidney removed. The night before surgery, fifteen of my best friends circled around me to pray and to remind me of God's promises. The strength and peace I felt that night is impossible to describe and can come only from God. The next morning, as I was wheeled into surgery, I claimed Isaiah 41:13. From my stretcher, I remember I physically raised my right hand into the air as a cry to God. I needed His help and His hand in mine.

This verse has been my consolation throughout many dark valleys, when the LORD has taken my hand to lead, support, and encourage me.

I was grateful for the strength of God's hand in mine when my nine-month-old grandson was diagnosed with cancer, followed by surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy.

One Labor Day we were preparing our home for a visit from our nephew and his family when we received news that his F16 US Air Force plane had crashed in Texas. We spent that Labor Day attending his funeral. As I observed the jet flyover and the missing man formation, the dust swirled around his casket and God squeezed my hand tightly.

God helped me as I said goodbye to my dad and many years later to my mom. Both served Christ here at Mountain. One Sunday afternoon in 2005, my sister-in-law and her husband were flying to have lunch at a nearby airport when their plane went down. Again, I found myself needing the strength of God's hand as I walked into Cook Auditorium where both of their caskets laid side by side.



Ellsworth and I began dating in high school and had been married for fifty-three years when he lost his battle with cancer. After his death, I held onto God even tighter through that season of grief.

Isaiah 41:13 has meant so much to me in my life because over and over I have felt the need for God's strong hand in mine. While He holds my right hand, He tells me not to fear because He will not only be with me, He will help me. He is faithful. He has held my hand in the past and I can trust He will do it again.

# Erik Lackey

FORMER ELDER

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## LIFE VERSE/QUOTE

*"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."*

### **MATTHEW 5:3**

The children at the celebration picnic that day were so eager, so excited for the meal being shared at the festive event that was culminating our mission trip. They were thanking us for coming, sharing and working alongside them for the past 10 days. Our team was given the privilege of being first in line as they gave us generous helpings of rice, beans, and chicken. It was a welcome meal at the end of a long week of hard work and limited sleep. However, the children were the last in line. And what had been large servings that over-flowed our plates, was only small spoonfuls of rice and beans along with some meatless bones and cartilage for them. I watched them eat as they used their hands to eagerly scoop up the food and then to break the bones in half and suck out the marrow.

It broke me. Just thinking about it takes me back to that day and the tears flow now like they did then.

The year was 2005 and my family had been attending Mountain Christian Church for a little over a year. Through MCC, God was working hard on me to understand that relationships, not rules, are what make our faith flourish. I was being stretched and nudged to give more than I had in the past. Something that my selfish ways were not used to, but there was a calling towards it. God was saying, "Trust me. Completely." At this same time, I was reaching a milestone at work as my 15th anniversary would be that year and I would soon have the coveted 4th week of vacation. No plans had been made yet on how it would be used. After one of the church services there were some information tables set up about short-term mission trips. God spoke to me then like he does today. Not using words but creating feelings inside me that are a mix of nervous energy and an overwhelming sense of being called to something bigger than myself. I don't remember the details or really any of the information shared but the Dominican Republic was where I needed to go.

The mission seemed pretty clear to me then: Bring joy to the poor in spirit, lonely, and lost by being an example of Christ's love for all people. I believed at the time that by changing or influencing their circumstances, we would bring joy and hope to the desolate souls of these marginalized people, despite the conditions that they lived in and the material possessions they lacked. How flawed was my thinking then! Circumstances and material possessions are an avenue to joy and peace? I know the true answer to that now.

That moment of brokenness in October of 2005, standing outside in the church courtyard watching the children eat every last morsel on their plates, placed me in the crucible between outrage and heart break. Wanting to place blame on whoever or whatever caused this injustice... as I stood there with my big plate of food and my own twinges of hunger pains. I wish that I could write about how I sat down with the kids and shared my food with them. But I can't. I really don't remember what I did. I just remember being overwhelmed by my brokenness.

What was so convicting to me was that the children that day were joyful. Their gratitude for the meal, despite how meager it was, was genuine. The hospitality extended to our team was an act of sacrifice by our hosts. The script was flipped on me that day.

We were there to help them. How could they afford this level of generosity out of their poverty? And how could they be so joyful in doing so? It seemed so backwards. And it was. But there was not something wrong with what they did, there was something wrong with my willingness to accept it. There was something incomplete with my spirit.

My early thoughts of circumstances and possessions being the catalyst to joy were so very wrong. At the heart of it all, my judgment of them and their circumstances was nothing more than a reflection of my own brokenness. I was (am, if I am being honest) the one dependent upon circumstances and possessions, and was labeling them with my own bias and weakness. Funny how I catch myself doing that time and time again; as if the rest of the world is broken, but I am the poster child of Christianity.

You see, I get frustrated when I can't decide what to choose in my 100+ channel cable TV package. They are grateful when their electricity stays on for a full day. I am annoyed when Wal-Mart is once again out of stock on the item I wanted. They are grateful when they have food on the table. I am disappointed when a rainy day keeps me inside. They are grateful when the roof of their tiny home affords them some protection from the elements, leaks and all. In my abundance comes jealousy when I realize others have more. In their poverty comes joy when their needs are met.

Matthew 5:3 was always very confusing to me. Who were the 'poor in spirit' and why would the kingdom of heaven be theirs? What I know now was that I was confusing the Holy Spirit with my own Spirit. What Jesus is teaching here through His Sermon on the Mount is that we need to be 'surrendered' to Him. Left unchecked, our spirit can be one of arrogance, impatience, selfishness, and just about anything else that is contrary to the 'fruit of the spirit' (Galatians 5:22). God allowed my spirit to be broken and to remind me that He is in charge of our circumstances, not me. When I take credit for the good, blame others for the bad and do not acknowledge and trust God with all things, I am not poor in spirit. To be truly poor in spirit, I must submit to Him for all things. I must also focus my love and energy on my relationships with those I am serving, not on the circumstance.

That 'extra week' of vacation was given back to God for the next 14 years. It was hard at times missing my family, wondering what a 'real' vacation would feel like, all the time-consuming planning and preparation, and sometimes, the diarrhea. Yes, that can be a gift of some mission trips depending on where you go. But He always provided the time, finances, energy, and safety. Each year I was thrown into the crucible of sacrifice, my spirit broken, refined, and pulled out better than I was before. More grateful, more joyful, more humble, and more dependent upon the grace afforded to me by a loving God. 2019 was the first year that this vacation week was not spent serving God on a mission trip and my heart aches for the opportunity to do it again. I don't want to imply that less service equals less joy as if I am bartering with God. I just know that in service to Him, out of the gratitude for what He has already done by hanging on the cross, I find immeasurable joy. In my sacrifice and brokenness, I find wholeness. When I allow myself to be poor in spirit, I am most grateful for all that He has done.

So, I boldly ask you, "What crucible will you allow yourself to be thrown into?" You can't out give God, but I dare you to try.

Let's go, church.

**Gil Shelsby**

CURRENT ELDER, 2021

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## **LIFE VERSE/QUOTE**

*"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."*

### **JEREMIAH 1:5**

When I was asked what my life verse was I had to reflect for quite some time, not because I had so many choices, but because throughout most of my life I was unfamiliar with Scripture.

I became a Christian and commenced my walk with the Lord later in life. It is not as if I did not know about Jesus, it was simply that I did not know Him. Mountain was the place that truly introduced me and started a journey that changed my life. As I reflect over wasted years I wondered how the Lord could be so patient with me. But then I realized, God always had a plan and my life verse became evident.

God, speaking to the prophet Jeremiah said:

“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.”

I like the way the Message interprets these words: “Before I shaped you in the womb, I knew all about you. Before you saw the light of day I had holy plans for you”.

His grace is evident when I reflect on what God was doing during the years I turned my back on him. He still said:

I have plans for you

Even though you don't know me;

Even though you do not know my Word;

Even though you do not take time to acknowledge me;

Even though you pass by my church without a glance;

Even though you think you have achieved so much on your own;

Even though you are not grateful for the bounty of blessings;

Even though you are protected from harm despite yourself;

Even though your life is full of worshipped idols; and

Even though you stop by time to time when you needed something.

Nevertheless, I still have plans for you.

When you come to know Christ later in life you think about your journey and the forks in the road which changed your life. Growing up south of Baltimore I thought Bel Air was the other side of the world. Multiple events, choices, and opportunities landed me in Harford County. Eventually I ended up at a church, now nearly 200 years old, which opened my eyes to Truth. I was baptized here. Since then the Lord has taken me on a wonderful journey through children's ministry, the mission field, and then to eldership. My first reaction to the request to serve as an elder was, "Why me?" I should have fully understood, that's right, God has a plan for me despite my late start. Each of my service opportunities have been enriching, an opportunity to grow and great for the soul. I only hope and pray that they were pleasing enough for the Lord. My time as an elder will end and I am not certain where I will be called to serve next, but of this I am sure, He has a plan.

# Glynn Wells

FORMER ELDER

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## LIFE VERSE/QUOTE

*"Never do anything that someone else can or will do when there is so much to be done that no one else can or will do."*

### DAWSON TROTMAN

*"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."*

### 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-19

The message of the cross is truly the greatest thing that we could ever hear, have ever heard, could ever share, have ever shared, or could ever teach. Let's go a step further and say that as believers in our heavenly father's word we are very wise to believe in it. This is true wisdom and it is totally different and opposed to worldly wisdom. It is like grace in that it is a gift from the father of lights. We can never get it on our own by study. Knowledge shows up by test but wisdom shows up in relationships.

So now I need to give you my "life quote." It is from Dawson Trotman, an evangelist and founder of the Navigators. He said, "Never do anything that someone else can or will do when there is so much to be done that no one else can or will do." Our faith in God's promises, our desire to be laborers in the kingdom, and our understanding of God's wisdom led Patsy and I and our young family to East Africa to work with Christian Missionary Fellowship in medical missions for several years. God's word has that kind of power, power to lead and power to drive you forward and power to sustain you.

There's another verse that really hit home to us while working in rural Maasailand and later helping to support Mary and Wallace Kamau in their work in the Mathare slum of Nairobi and the Missions of Hope

school work in Turkana, Kenya. We continue to support children in both Nairobi and Turkana because of the following verse:

Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you. (James 1:27 NLT)

# Greg Tutino

FORMER ELDER

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## LIFE VERSE/QUOTE

*But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him."*

### 1 CORINTHIANS 2:9

I was asked to write a devotion about a bible verse that has particular meaning to my life, a sort of "life verse." I don't know that I have a life verse as in different seasons of my life different passages of the Bible take a more prominent role in my thoughts.

Currently I have been marveling at Genesis 3:14–18. This is where God is speaking to Satan, and Adam and Eve, right after they ate from the Tree of Knowledge. God curses the serpent (Satan) and curses the ground, but he does not curse Adam and Eve for sinning. There was a consequence for their sin to be sure, but God did not curse them. If they had been cursed that would have closed the door to Christ entering this world and slammed shut any opportunity for the forgiveness of our sins. From the very moment of man's sin, at that very instant, God prepared a way for us to be with him through the death of Jesus on the cross as payment for our sins. It is a good reminder to me of how particular, how purposeful, how passionate God is about his love for us.



But a verse I keep coming back to, the one I wrote on the concrete base of the NLC before the floor was put down is also the one I wrote on an unfinished beam on the top of the Museum of the Bible in DC, is found in 1 Corinthians 2:9.

But, as it is written,  
“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,  
nor the heart of man imagined,  
what God has prepared for those who love him”

This verse says to me that no matter how we try we cannot foresee or imagine or even think up what God will do for those he loves. And God is not limited in his resources. In Psalm 24:1 we are told:

“The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world  
and all who are in it.”

So not only does he have every resource at his disposal, he also has all his people at his disposal... and that’s just in this world! When Adam and Eve sinned God prepared a way for us to come back into his presence through his son Jesus. He brought every resource on earth and in heaven for this one purpose.

But that was old testament times, what about how this works now? If we truly believe in God and what his word says and believe Jesus when he says he has come to save us; well then God is free to love on us, and when he does, there is nothing that is not at his disposal, no resource that he can’t bring to bear to help us with anything we might be dealing with—no matter how big or how small.

Genesis 3:14–18 is a great example of his unrestricted love. The second Adam sinned, God prepared a way for us so we would not be separated from him, so that we would be with him in heaven always; free of any sin.

Whatever you are going through God has the entire universe at his disposal to help you. Lean on him, put your faith in the promise of Jesus, the forgiveness of our sins through his death on the cross, and pray to God for wisdom, deliverance, courage, and joy. He will likely answer in unexpected ways and possibly ways we won’t yet understand this side of heaven, but he will answer, and it will be out of the love that a father has for his children.

We are all sinners, and there is a price or a consequence we have as a result of our sin. Just as God did not condemn Adam and Eve, neither are you and I condemned. In the moment of the first sin, God created a way for our sin to be paid by someone else, his son, his only son. Jesus took on that consequence freely. Think for a moment about this gift, the magnitude of what has been put in place for you and me. A way to walk away from our past, present, and future sins. A way not into condemnation but a way into freedom, to a God who loves us for who he made us to be.

But what a few verses mean to me doesn't matter. What matters, really matters is what God's word means to you. Take this moment to sit with God and consider what he has done. Read his word and just talk with him a bit, then take the next step—whatever that might be.

May God bless you, restore you and be gracious to you.

# JEFF OWENS

FORMER ELDER

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## LIFE VERSE/QUOTE

*"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose."*

### ROMANS 8:28

There are many sections of scripture that I enjoy and meditate on such as Psalm 100. But the one verse that I would claim as a life verse would be Romans 8:28, "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose."

The reason I chose this verse over the years is because of my having to deal with cancer as a youth.

When I was fifteen I found out that I had bone cancer, Ewing's Sarcoma, which changed my whole life. Until then I was a typical teenager, who loved sports and everything else that a typical teenager loved. But with the cancer my whole life changed. I could no longer do many of the things I loved. I had Cobalt radiation. I had operations twice a year for six years. My leg drained for seven years. I broke my leg five different times. I was in a leg cast nine months, then three months, then three months, you get the picture. The last year and a half of high school I walked with a bulky leg brace. No more sports, no more being cool, etc. But during this time God revealed himself to me and I made Jesus the Lord of my life. As my faith grew I realized that through the cancer God had done amazing things in my life. My relationship with God through Jesus and my relationships with family and friends became the most important things in my life. My relationship with God has truly molded my life and for that I am forever thankful.

So I have come to realize that God can and does "cause all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose."

*Jim Payne*

FORMER ELDER

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## LIFE VERSE/QUOTE

*"The Lord has done **this** [emphasis added], and it is marvelous in our eyes."*

## PSALM 118:23

Recently Psalm 118:23 has blessed me as a source of encouragement and affirmation of God's faithfulness and unconditional love. Verse 22, which says "The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone" is the "**this**" which I see as a direct reference to our Lord Jesus Christ.

God sent his perfect Son to bear the consequence of my and your sin through a horrific crucifixion, and death on a wooden cross. As God's most precious gift, Christ's sacrifice can never be understated yet I have chosen to apply the "this," to also include the barrage of blessings that God reigns down on my life every day. Undeserved, impossible to earn, pure gifts of grace. The specifics of these blessings aren't important other than to acknowledge that they are all from Him.

Oswald Chambers puts it this way, "All of Almighty God is ours in the Lord Jesus! And He will reach to the last grain of sand and the remotest star to bless us if we only obey Him." More Him, less me. It seems so stinkin' simple, but we must work tirelessly to keep our focus on Him and to give Him all the glory and honor.

Put Him first in everything and He'll take it from there. Do this, and you will find yourself saying, "The Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes" as often as I do.

# JOANNE RICHARDSON

WIFE OF FORMER ELDER, HENRY RICHARDSON

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## LIFE VERSE/QUOTE

*"...things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man", all that God has prepared for those who love him."*

### 1 CORINTHIANS 2:9

This verse encapsulates Henry's attitude about life in general. He was always looking forward to what could be, instead of focusing on things as they were. He was always positive and hopeful and put his trust in God.

# LINDA LetURGEZ

WIFE OF FORMER ELDER, JOE LETURGEZ

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## LIFE VERSE/QUOTE

*"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord; plans for hope and a future."*

### **JEREMIAH 29:11**

My husband, Joe's role as Elder was one of the most valued to him in life. He loved his church and felt honored and privileged to serve it in that capacity. I cannot speak for him but I do know that during the different seasons in his life he had various Scriptures that spoke to those particular times, but he turned many times to Jeremiah 29:11:

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord;  
plans for hope and a future.

Those words given to Jeremiah (and us) encouraged Joe as they reminded him of God's **faithfulness**, the **hope** that is in Him and nowhere else, and an eternal **future** with God.

God has been FAITHFUL through the generations to fulfill His promise given to Abraham that through Abraham all peoples, Jew and Gentile alike, would be blessed. God has a plan and that plan is Jesus, whose earthly family is descended from Abraham.

Yet to all who received Him [Jesus], to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.

### **JOHN 1:12**

Joe and I, both separately and together, have been witnesses of God's faithfulness: in calling us to Himself, financial provision, emotional health, and the knitting together of our families. God never changes; in fact, by His nature He cannot change. He has been faithful in the past and will remain faithful in the future. If we are truthful we know that nothing in this life is secure. He is the Rock, a sure foundation that we can build our lives upon with assurance.

God is not only faithful, but he also offers us HOPE. There is a verse that has always spoken to me—

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all are made alive.

### **1 CORINTHIANS 15:22**

As a sinful daughter of Adam, it is a life-giving hope to know that even though I deserve death and separation from God my Creator, Christ in His suffering on the cross has taken on Himself my sins and enabled a way to be present with God now and eternally.

More recently, these Scriptures quicken my spirit, not only of hope but of the FUTURE He is providing:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!  
In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of His son Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that will never perish, spoil or fade— kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

### **1 PETER 1:3-5**

God, in His great mercy, has provided a future with Him. Hallelujah!

May all of us, Jew and every form of Gentile, know of God's unchanging faithful character, the hope He has extended to us through His Son, Jesus, for a restored relationship with God; and of a future with God both here on earth and after that, with Him forever.

# MARK RICHARDSON

CURRENT ELDER, 2021

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## LIFE VERSE/QUOTE

*“Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding; Acknowledge Him in all your ways, and He will make straight your paths.”*

### PROVERBS 3-5-6

I chose my life verse as a young man of 19 years old and have done my best to live by it ever since. I was a sophomore at a Christian college at the time and my summer job was traveling the country representing my alma mater at Christian summer camps. Like most folks at that age, I was obsessed with trying to figure out what I should do with my life. But I didn't want to just settle for what I wanted to do, I felt that God had uniquely created me to accomplish His specific good works which He had determined in advance (Eph. 2:10); so to be more precise, I was obsessed with determining God's Will for my life.

That summer turned out to be the perfect crucible for wrestling with my life quest to determine God's Will. Ten straight weeks of Christian summer camps, studying the Word, worshipping and listening to at least one sermon a day gave me plenty of uninterrupted time to focus on discovering God's Will for my life. I specifically remember one dean of a camp that preached a sermon on God's Will—he had my attention! But I was so disappointed when he got to his conclusion—God's Will, he said, was like an umbrella—that God basically just wanted us to be obedient, and anything we chose to do within that 'obedience' umbrella was okay with Him. I thought, that might be somewhat true, but I know there is a best path for me—a path that God has already determined me for—my calling. I didn't want an acceptable path; I wanted God's very best path. So from that day on, I've always prayed, “God, put me on your path—the best path for my life.”



It was later that summer during a study of the book of Proverbs that I had my “Aha!” moment. God helped me to find my life verse that solved my dilemma:

Trust in the Lord with all your heart;  
do not depend on your own understanding;  
Acknowledge Him in all your ways,  
and He will make straight your paths.

### **PROVERBS 3:5-6**

I thought, this will be my formula for staying in His Will! I wouldn't have to worry about making the perfect decision for every twist and turn of my life. If I could just 1) Trust in the Lord with all my heart; 2) and not depend on my own understanding, and 3) acknowledge Him in all my ways, then He would make straight my paths (thereby helping me to fulfill my calling). If I could just do my part, He would do His part. It would be a matter of faith in the all-powerful God of the Universe—He wouldn't help me to make perfect decisions—He would actually straighten the paths that I am walking on! What a relief! I could trust, and not rely on my understanding, and acknowledge Him and He could make my path His path. I know it sounds simple in retrospect, but it was a turning point in my life.

That simple formula, which God so graciously helped me to understand over 40 years ago now, has gotten me through many tough times: hard career decisions, a broken engagement, the still birth of our little girl, my father's death, and excruciating business decisions, to name a few. It has also been an encouragement through some of the happiest times of my life: almost 40 years of marriage to the love of my life and soulmate, parenting four beautiful children from birth to adulthood, the privilege of serving as a leader in the church for over 20 years, and the many, many blessings of leading and running two businesses that the Lord was gracious enough to entrust me with.

Proverbs 3:5-6 has truly been a verse for guiding me on His best path for me through my life. Thank you for answering that persistent prayer of mine, Lord!

# Mike Butler

CURRENT ELDER, 2021

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## LIFE VERSE/QUOTE

*"Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, who seek the Lord:  
Look to the rock from which you were hewn and to the quarry from  
which you were dug."*

### **ISAIAH 51:1**

I grew up in the land of quarries in southern Indiana. While Hoosiers are primarily known for basketball and farming, the digging, cutting, and production of limestone was a major industry for many years. In fact, my grandfather was a proud stonecutter, and my father worked in the highway construction industry for his entire 40-year career. The stone from the hills of my home state provided the raw material for many famous buildings and landmarks, including the Washington National Cathedral, the Pentagon, 35 of the 50 US state capitol buildings, and even one of the most famous skyscrapers in the world. The Empire Quarry is now a hole in the ground near Oolitic, Indiana where both of my parents attended high school, but the stone from that ground rises in the middle of downtown Manhattan to form the Empire State Building.

The images from the Academy Award winning movie *Breaking Away* are real—swimming and fishing in quarry holes are favorite pastimes of many folks. As a constant reminder, in my office I have a paperweight in the shape of the state as well as bookends reminding me of my alma mater—Indiana University. These limestone pieces came from my grandmother, so there is a good chance my grandfather had a hand in cutting them. When I was fresh out of high school, my first real job was at an asphalt plant and quarry that taught me the value of hard, tough work. Being around the men and women who made their living from the rocks in the ground showed me the power of commitment to a difficult job. The longer we want something to last, the harder and longer it takes to build. Stone buildings require

digging, hauling, measuring, cutting, stacking, and finishing heavy rocks which cannot and does not happen overnight.

In the words of Winston Churchill, “The longer you look back, the farther you can look forward.” More than stone and quarries, my heritage runs deep with men and women walking with Christ. The gift of a godly family is worth more than any amount of money made from digging rocks, and yet that is worth nothing without a truly personal walk with God. The adage “God has no grandchildren” sums it up, because no matter what my earthly heritage, be it godly or pagan, Christ can make a living stone out of me. This work of Christ is much like the work I saw around me—it is a long process to take raw stone and make it into a building. Yet Christ is patient and will not rest until he has fashioned the stone into his perfect handiwork.

When the religious hypocrites challenged John the Baptist in Matthew 3, he challenged them right back by saying “...do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘we have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham.” God can even take random rocks in the barren wilderness and make them his children.

The rock from which I was cut is not dependent on family history, as much as that means to me. Even better than that, God himself dug me from an ancient quarry. Along with the rest of God’s family, He is building us all into an eternal building not made by human hands with Christ himself as the cornerstone.

# Mike McNeely

FORMER ELDER

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## LIFE VERSE/QUOTE

*“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”*

### **PHILIPPIANS 3:12-14**

A passage that has always resonated with me is in Paul’s letter to the Philippians, also my favorite book of the Bible.

Prior to writing this note, I can’t say I’ve consciously analyzed why these have been some of my favorite verses. There are a couple reasons I believe this passage in particular speaks to me:

- Paul says he knows he currently falls short. Despite all of his efforts and accomplishments for the Kingdom, he has the maturity and humility to recognize he is on a journey and he has more work to do. Throughout Paul’s letters he exudes authority and confidence but there is no question what the source is.
- “I press on,” “to take hold,” “straining ahead,” “I press on toward the goal,” “to win the prize;” all these phrases are action oriented. Paul was a man of action; he trained leaders, he planted churches, he preached and evangelized at every opportunity. He overcame substantial obstacles. Difficult circumstances that we may encounter (which are not likely to rival Paul’s) must not deter us from the calling we have.
- Paul makes it clear in other writings that his salvation is not earned or in question. But working toward being more Christ like and bringing more of His Kingdom to earth challenge us all along our journey. Complacency was not in Paul’s vocabulary.

I've been part of the Mountain Christian Church community since 1989. Mountain has been on the move during all that time—just as God is on the move. God has put opportunities for Kingdom impact in front of us and more times than not, this church has responded. My family and I have been blessed to be part of it—but there is always more to do!

# Mike Ritter

CURRENT ELDER, 2021

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## LIFE VERSE/QUOTE

*“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

## PHILIPPIANS 4:4-7 NIV

The assignment of sharing a “Life Verse” came up as we were preparing for the annual Elder retreat in October 2019. Given that I was responsible for organizing several aspects of the retreat, I was glad that I was not given the assignment of sharing my verse at the retreat. However, when my turn came around with the November 2019 Elder Business Meeting, I was in a bit of a quandary because Mark Richardson had shared Proverbs 3:5–6, which was the verse that immediately sprung to my mind as the assignment was shared. So, here I was... there was no “rule” that said I could not share the same verse, but I took some time to reflect on other areas of scripture, to discern if there was something that God wanted me to share. That’s when Philippians 4:4–7 sprung into my mind. Immediately, I knew that this was the scripture for me to share with the team!

Philippians is a New Testament letter from Paul the Apostle, written while he was in prison, and addressed to the Christian congregation he had established in Macedonia. In this letter, Paul is exhorting his readers to remain steadfast in their faith and to imitate the humility of Christ. There are great words in this letter and in this verse in particular, words that are even more remarkable when you consider Paul's present circumstance. Let's examine some of what Paul shares in this verse:

**Rejoice**—In the first 11 words of this verse, Paul tells us two times to REJOICE. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again; Rejoice. One thing we know is that when scripture repeats something, it is important for us to pay attention. So, what are we being told when we hear rejoice at the start of this verse? Rejoice is a spiritual joy that comes through your relationship with God through Jesus Christ. It is a constant state—a result of your active faith in God. When you rejoice, it reflects God's love FOR YOU! So, we are told to rejoice always. This is not just a feeling or a result of circumstance, it is a state of being that comes about because God loves us, and we have a deep, intimate relationship with Him. So, REJOICE!

**Gentleness**—Next, we are told to let our gentleness be evident to all. Gentleness comes about in your life when you live a life rejoicing in the Lord. Do you see how that works? Live in God's love for you—live in this deep, intimate relationship with Him—and, as a result, you will live with a gentleness toward all people. So, how will we be known? Or those of us that rejoice in the Lord and display gentleness to all, we will be known by the way we love one another. It will be evident regardless of our circumstance, just as it was evident in Paul as he wrote these words from prison.

**The Lord is near**—Tucked at the end of verse 5 are four words that might seem like throw-away words, but they are important and valuable words; The Lord is near. This is a reminder to you and to me that God is with us always. This closeness with the Lord is what leads us to rejoice! This is a reminder to stay close to Him, because He wants to be close to you. God wants to be close to you in good times and in bad times. And since our rejoicing is not a function of our circumstance, but a function of our relationship with God, it's really important for us to realize at all times that the Lord is near.

In James 4:8 it says come near to God and he will come near to you. It's up to us to take the step toward God, and when we do, He takes a step toward us, too. Come near to God, in the good and bad times and live in gentleness and rejoicing. But remember, the closeness that you yearn for in the bad times is easier to feel if you have developed and invested in the closeness during the good times.

Verse 6 brings the promises that comes from living in this relationship with God.

Do not be anxious about anything—Being anxious is excessive care about something that distracts you from God. So, what are we called to do? TRUST! We must 1–recognize that we are giving excessive care/concern to something and 2–trust in God and His promises, realizing that 3–worry accomplishes nothing. Jesus himself teaches us about worry in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6: 25–34. It was the combination of the promises in Philippians 4 and the teachings in Matthew 6 that were so important to my deceased wife, Jody and me during her 14-year battle with cancer. Learning to not be anxious—learning not to worry—learning to trust God—rejoicing in the good and the bad—and knowing that through it all, the Lord was near—that was the freedom that we needed to live our lives to the fullest during our 14 year battle. If you knew Jody, you likely didn't know that she was fighting cancer. She never let it define her or shape her, and together, we lived a full, beautiful life, rejoicing in the Lord.

Every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God—Basically, you have a choice. Are you going to worry or are you going to pray? It's up to you to choose. God wants to hear from you. He wants to know what you want. But remember, just because you want something, it might not be what God has for you. So, ask, but be willing for God's will to be done—even if it's different than what you want. You might not always understand what God gives you, but it's not a question of understanding, but a question of trusting. Are you willing to pray for what you want, while trusting what God gives you? Bring your humble petitions to God—bring them, big and small—bring them in gratitude and in a spirit of thanksgiving—and know that God knows what He is doing, and His will is perfect.



Finally, verse 7 brings it all together.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

This is the peace that we all long for. Peace beyond our understanding—peace that guards our hearts—peace that guards our minds—the peace that we all long for in our lives. It’s available to us—and it was and continues to be available to me! Live a life of rejoicing, gentleness, closeness, trust and prayer and the peace that you desire will be yours.

# PAUL HARKINS

FORMER ELDER

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## LIFE VERSE/QUOTE

*“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

### **2 TIMOTHY 3:14-17**

From the time of childhood I was taught from those whom I learned it, to treat God’s Word as Holy. It is God’s Word to us, never let it touch the ground, never let it be put on the floor. Treat it as the most important tangible thing that you have, because from it you will know God’s salvation for you, you will know how to live the best life that God has in store for you. It will tell you how to handle all aspects of your life. For the Word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Memorize it, study it for you will never stop learning from it. Many things will come and go

but the Word of God will endure forever. Heaven and Earth will pass away but this Word of God will never pass away.

This passage of scripture may seem to be unusual for a life passage, but the reality is that all of God's words in His book bring life and meaning to each of us. I cherish each moment that I can read and study His Word because the Holy Spirit that is within me lets the scriptures permeate my mind and heart to God's truth, it makes me aware of my sin and repentance that is needed in my life, it trains me in righteousness, it is the lamp to my feet, God's Word draws us closer to Him the source of all life. Only absolute truth can be found in God's Word to us. It is timeless, culture does not define it because culture comes and goes but only the Word of God is the source of absolute truth. It doesn't matter what I think, if it is contrary to scripture, then it is contrary to the author of scripture. It is the total source of strength through life's tough battles because it assures us of God's love and care for us.

In America it is easy to have access to God's Word. In fact many of us have multiple copies of the Bible in our homes. The tragedy is that many do not realize what we have. I have been in countries where the Bible is prohibited. I have seen how the Word of God has provided life to them, how to get one page out of the Bible to have for a night to study and memorize so that they could pass it to another the next night. I have seen how God's Word changes lives, it does not go out void when it is read and taught. We should hunger for God's Word everyday, it should be treated as our most prized possession. We should treat it as the Holy Word of God which it is. I thank God that I had people in my life who taught me from an early age to treat the Bible in this way. So this is why these verses are so important to me because I know that all the answers to the best life are in this book. And I know that God speaks to me with every word that is written. But most of all it is summed up in verse John 3:16:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,  
that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

# Pete CARPENTER

FORMER ELDER

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## LIFE VERSE/QUOTE

*"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough troubles of its own."*

### **MATTHEW 6:33-34**

A group of men were being discipled by our youth pastor together. We were learning and memorizing verses which was not my personal strong point. I had lost my job and my oldest son Peter was in college with two more getting ready for college. I was transitioning my work, going into business with a man in New Jersey.

One day, on my ride to New Jersey, I was working on memorizing the verse noted above: Matthew 6:33-34. Although I was employed in a new adventure in New Jersey, little did I know that God was working on me and was preparing me for a new storm that was coming.

One day, not too far away from when I was memorizing Matthew 6:33-34, I was in a waiting room of a State Farm office and in the middle of the office was a large Bible on a stand. The verse I was working to memorize was underlined for all to see. It seemed more than just a coincidence that I had just memorized that verse.

In my new role, I was learning what it was like to have to work with people who had lost many things due to fires or other disasters. As I reflected on what I had memorized and what was now before me, it seemed that God was trying to show me how to really see the people with whom I would be working; who had lost everything and to find hope and rest in the verse. This verse could get people through; in fact, it got me through the storm that I was going through. Following the wisdom from the verse helped build the business to a place where it thrived. At 56 years of age, I closed the business

in New Jersey and for the next two and a half years I struggled as a family looking for work and doing odd jobs. But God was still at work.

I met a man at church and we became friends and he was looking to expand his business. I joined his business, now able to bring the experiences I had from the business I had left and the things that God gave to me along with this new opportunity helped the business to flourish.

The seven or eight years of ups and downs really and truly tested my faith in this verse. Time and time again I found a refuge in it and as the verse says, leaned on things that I couldn't really see. Doing so not only increased my faith but it also helped me to understand how amazing it is what God will do when we have faith and trust in him.

**Ron Fisher**

CURRENT ELDER, 2021

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## **LIFE VERSE/QUOTE**

*"For I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for good and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope."*

### **JEREMIAH 29:11 LBT**

*"And we know that all things work together for good, for those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose."*

### **ROMANS 8:28 NKJV**

Both of these verses speak to God's sovereignty and providence over my life.

Because I have surrendered my life to him, I have both confidence and assurance that he will accomplish His purposes for my life—for His namesake and for His glory.

I take comfort in knowing that He is personally concerned for me and that He will never fail to assist me in overcoming the consequences of my failures and poor choices by always providing a path for my recovery and restoration, because He is intent on making me holy.

My love for God suspends my desire to be intentionally or blatantly disobedient, and therefore I acknowledge and accept that nothing can stop or thwart His good plans for me.

God will bring to completion the good work that he has begun in me. Now when I look back, I can clearly see His presence throughout every stage and season of my life. As I look forward, I know deep down in my soul that He will be right there with me in every stage and season to come.

# TOM CLARK

FORMER ELDER

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## LIFE VERSE/QUOTE

*"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."*

### **MATTHEW 7:12**

I was in the third grade (somewhere back in the dark ages) the first time that I can remember hearing this verse, and I am pretty sure that it was the first time that I had ever heard it. I was not in church, I was at school, and the words were being said by what seemed to my little boy ears like a smug little girl (of course, in the third grade, it sort of seemed like all little girls were a little smug).

The truth is that I didn't know that what she was saying was scripture, (actually she was quoting the sister passage Luke 6:31, and she was saying it like it is translated in the King James version "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.") And to throw me off even more, she told me that it was the Golden Rule, so my first thought was something like "oh man, another school rule." Why do third grade

girls always know rules that I don't know, and why do they seem to enjoy quoting them to me so much?

Fast forward a little, and I am in Sunday School, and the teacher is telling us that "The Golden Rule" is actually Luke 6:31, and it is from the Bible. And I'll admit that it didn't surprise me that the Bible had another rule for me. I certainly didn't think of it as a life verse at the time, it mostly sounded like something that an adult would say to keep me from having any fun.

So why/how did my perspective change? Well, I think that it probably started a year or two later. I had some minor surgery, but back then, even minor surgery entailed a stay of several days in the hospital. So, there I was, in my hospital ward, sleeping at night, when a sound woke me up. The sound was made by a cleaning lady who was cleaning the ward, and it scared the dickens out of me. So, I cried or yelled or both "Who are you?" To which she replied I am the cleaning lady. That's when things got ugly. In my semi defense, I was awakened from sleep, I was surprised that there was a stranger in the ward, and I was doubly surprised that the stranger was a black woman. To say the least, my little preteen brain reacted poorly, and I blurted out "my daddy doesn't allow any black women in my room in the dark." To which this poor lady, who was doing nothing more than her job, responded, "Well if your daddy doesn't like it, he can just pay to have you moved to some other hospital."

Can I point out to you, that this happened over 60 years ago, and the whole scene is still very clear in my head. What a scared little snot I was. I took that incident with me from that hospital ward, and brooded over it, and tried to figure out what I could or should have done differently, and why I had been so ugly to a stranger. Life may hand us object lessons all of the time, but I don't always see them as clearly as I saw this one.

I knew I had been wrong. I knew I had reacted badly, and I would also like to say I immediately changed, and started really following Jesus' words. But the thing was that I still didn't like the idea of rules much, and I was just starting to realize that I needed to figure out a better way of living. And that is why Matthew 7:12 is my life verse, not Luke 6:31. Matthew 7:12 is not a rule, it is a way of life. That's why Jesus said "This sums up the law and the prophets." I am most certainly not perfect, but I do try to keep this way of living. It goes right along with loving others as you love yourself.

# Tom Day

FORMER ELDER

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## LIFE VERSE/QUOTE

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.*

*Blessed are the meek,  
for they will inherit the earth.*

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled.*

*Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.*

*Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God.*

*Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called children of God.*

*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”*

## **MATTHEW 5:3-10**

These verses provide a great picture of those who are most deserving of these blessings. I particularly like the lead in “Blessed are the poor in spirit” because those who begin by admitting their own shortcomings are in the best position to experiencing God’s blessing and enjoy his kingdom.

# Tony Letke

FORMER ELDER

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## LIFE VERSE/QUOTE

*...“If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”*

### **JOHN 8:31-32**

In small group settings and leadership meetings every New Year, the question often arises; “what is your word for the year?” Most often, a word will immediately come to mind. In some cases, it requires some time and reflection. It is usually a word that represents a particular challenge one is facing, or a quality of heart or mind that one desires or is pursuing. What I find more challenging, is answering the question; “what is your favorite verse or passage of Scripture?”

Or, often asked another way; “what is your life-verse?” That is a tough one, because I love all of God’s Word, and its supernatural power to teach, train, and equip us to be all that God intends for us to be.

As it says in 2 Timothy 3:16–17:

All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

I remember asking that “life-verse” question to our leadership team during one of our annual elder retreats. We were staying at one of my favorite retreat locations, “Osprey Point” near St. Michaels, Maryland. What dawned on me during that retreat, was how each person’s life-verse somehow related to their passion and calling regarding life and ministry. Others have said that their life verse is a verse that has changed their life or continues to inspire them in a powerful and unique way.

For me, the answer came pretty quickly. John 8:31–32:

*...If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*



I have always hungered for, and still have a burning desire to seek, know and understand all of God's truth. For me, it has been a matter of life and death. As a young person growing up, I heard the gospel message and attended confirmation classes as a teen at our local church. I remember feeling a sense of joy, and a longing to follow Jesus and live a life as a believer and a student of the Word.

Unfortunately, life got very complicated and messy, and I drifted far from my childhood dreams and commitment. During my High School days and the years that followed, I became a victim of my foolish ways and the things of this world. The falsehood and the deception that has destroyed so many was having its way with me. In my early twenties, I realized that I was dying inside, and desperately needed to be rescued. I never lost my faith completely, but I did become very confused, frustrated and lost in the world. That led to a passionate quest to find my way back to the truth I learned as a child. I spent the better part of seven years researching and studying all the world's religions. After all, the world had convinced me that all roads lead to God. During those years I acquired a worldview that was a dangerous mixture of contradicting beliefs. That was until my fiancé Cara and I finally decided it was time to return to church and the faith of our youth.

The church we decided to attend after years of wandering around in the dark, was Mountain Christian Church, in Joppa, Maryland. All my years of seeking and searching was rewarded and blessed, by the grace and mercy of God. My deliverance, healing, and ultimate freedom was miraculous. As I sat and soaked up God's Word that was beautifully and faithfully taught, my life was changed. Fast forward 37 years later, and I can truly testify to the power of God's truth as revealed in His inspired Word. "The truth will make you free."

Looking back, I realize how deceived I was. Without the truth Of God in my heart, I could not find the beautiful way of life that God intends. That all changed when I met Jesus, who is the truth, the way and the life (John 14:6). As I continued the exciting journey of discipleship, and learned to abide in God's Word, I was not only set free from my past, but equally inspired to respond to God's divine plan and calling. Jesus healed my broken heart and set me, the captive free, to be all that God intended me to be. That reminds me of my second favorite passage of Scripture, Isaiah 61:1-3. Jesus read and quoted these words when he began His ministry;

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and freedom to the prisoners; to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.

That binding up and setting free is what we all need and is the doorway to all of God's favor and blessing. Teaching others about the truth and love of God has been my life's mission and my greatest joy. There is so much confusion and heart ache in our world today. Lies and deception were the cause and the downfall of mankind as recorded in Genesis. Unfortunately, they continue to be to this very day. At the root of all sin and the works of the devil are lies, half-truths, and deception. Jesus came to destroy those lies, and every work of the devil. The Apostle John makes that clear, and is recorded in 1 John 3:8:

...The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

We have the blessed privilege of sharing the good news of Jesus as we learn to abide in Him and His Word. As His disciples, and those who follow in His footsteps, we are set free to seek and save all that is lost. We do that by bringing Heaven to earth as we walk and serve in His truth and love.

In fact, the Apostle John said that his greatest joy was hearing that God's people were walking in the truth (3 John 1:4):

I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.

I believe John made that point because he knew firsthand that our walk with Jesus, who is the truth, would lead us to be faithful and fruitful in this world, and prepare us for the next. He also knew that walking in the truth sanctifies our hearts and minds, and that it is God's desire and intention for His people. Becoming like Jesus enables us to love, lead and serve like Jesus. Jesus prayed to the Father, not only for our salvation, but also for our sanctification (John 17:17):

Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth.

I am so thankful for the grace of God that opened my eyes and my heart to the living truth of God. What is even more incredible, is the fact that He could heal a mess like me, to teach, lead, and heal others for His glory. Who would have thought that my desperate search and

need for God's truth, would result in Him using me as a teacher and leader at Mountain for the last 25 years? That which the devil meant for harm; God has redeemed for good. That's amazing grace for sure!

My hope and prayer for you and me is found in Ephesians 4:15.

The Living Bible Translation says:

...We will lovingly follow the truth at all times—speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly—and so become more and more in every way like Christ who is the Head of His Body, the Church.

# Wyett Colclasure

FORMER ELDER

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## LIFE VERSE/QUOTE

*But King David replied to Araunah, "No, I insist on paying the full price. I will not take for the Lord what is yours, or sacrifice a burnt offering that costs me nothing."*

### 1 CHRONICLES 21:24

Deciding a life verse took a long time. You see, the concept of a life verse wasn't talked about for much of my life so my thoughts are largely retrospective. It took time, but several years ago I found it, a verse that puts many closely related thoughts into a capsule, helps me understand some of my previous choices, and now more consciously guides my choices. Here's how it happened.

I am a guy who likes to find the simple and powerful thread that runs through a complex matter. Some people seem to revel in long and usually winding journeys. I prefer to find the thread that cuts through the jargon, the what-ifs, and the distractions to get to the essential elements of the problem and its solution. That approach is stronger, much like an axiom in mathematics instead of a convoluted geometric "proof."

I started out to be a high school chemistry teacher, not a 30-year Army officer and a consultant for 18 years after that. The University of Illinois is a land grant school so it is required to have an ROTC program. At the time the university also chose to make the first two years or Basic ROTC mandatory. By my junior year Advanced ROTC—the second two years—seemed like a good idea so that happened, and when a regular commission was offered that seemed like a good idea too. Initially I figured a few years of active duty would honor my father and uncles who had served in combat.

After a few years of active duty, a long term career that combined teaching chemistry and the Army seemed interesting, so I applied to be an instructor at West Point only to be told the best thing for me was to address each assignment in turn and do my best at it. Translated—uh, you really don't seem to be cut out for that level work. I accepted the advice. Some years later, the Army surprisingly offered me the chance to get a PhD degree on the Army's dime but by then the depth of academic digging which would be required didn't seem to fit. Several years later I realized my niche was on the crack between the operational and the technical worlds, and over the years I often served as a sort of translator between the scientist in the lab and the operators (aka grunts, knuckle draggers, snake eaters, and other terms outsiders aren't allowed to use) and sometimes, later on, even with politicians.

That "crossover" path was very rewarding for me. Eventually it led to my active duty career highlight of being selected by a specialized board as the Army's manager for chemical and biological defense systems. That was the assignment that brought me to Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland in 1991. My post-Army professional highlight during a consulting career was being selected three times to serve on a National Academy of Sciences study panel involving my technical area.

How did this happen? Not because I had set those results as a life goal. Rather the driving force was to do my job, always meet expectations, and exceed them when I could. It took hard work and many extra hours while trying to pursue my army career inside a Christian life. And sometimes my wife and family did not receive the attention they should have. Despite that, I have been richly blessed with family support through 53 years of marriage to Virginia and through our three children.

It hasn't always been smooth. When Wyatt III was 13 he survived crisis neurosurgery that removed a very large tumor attached to his brain stem. That altered our lives drastically but we made it. Despite the setback, he graduated from high school on time, earned a degree in mathematics, and subsequently worked in IT for the Battelle Memorial Institute's Aberdeen office. He died in 2013 from another cancer. I don't know whether that whole experience was a burnt offering or not, but it did provide many opportunities to encourage others facing a similar crisis.

I do know that as Virginia and I traveled our life journey, we tithed my income as the baseline (offerings are additional) a practice I have maintained since my first job in the 8th grade. I testify to you that you won't out give God. While I have been blessed to do and see many things, there were other popular ones passed by. Some were by choice as they weren't especially appealing to me. Others I desired but they fell below the cut line of time and money priorities. Now at age 77, in good health, and a cancer survivor, I don't complain.

Well then, what's the driving verse? It is 1 Chronicles 21:24 when King David asked to buy a threshing floor at full price and the owner tried to give David the threshing floor and materials to use for his sacrifice. David responded "No, I insist on paying the full price. I will not take for the LORD what is yours, or sacrifice a burnt offering that costs me nothing." (NIV) Because he was king he could have had his cake and eaten it too by accepting something of value from a subordinate without paying for it. He refused.

Though without recognizing it consciously for a long time that's been a pattern for me. A cheap sacrifice is an oxymoron; there isn't such a thing. I keep striving to be honest and real in my life and hope you do too.

# BEN CACHIARAS

CURRENT LEAD PASTOR, 2021

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## LIFE VERSE/QUOTE

*"Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."*

### **1 CORINTHIANS 15:58**

Sometimes it's hard to keep going in life and ministry.

The burden of caring for souls is a heavy one. Walking with people through suffering and sin means you carry part of their burdens yourself. The weight adds up. Discipling people who then disappoint or fall away is deflating. For every win in ministry there are setbacks and heartache. There is the incessant weight of leadership, the challenges of strategy and staff, and the frustrations of finances. Add to this is the insidious attacks from the Enemy, the growing blatant contempt of all we stand for from an increasingly hostile culture, and the onslaught of criticism and opposing opinions from other believers, not to mention the personal burdens of life and family — and it's no wonder so many in ministry are fed up and burnt out.

For every ministry volunteer or pastor who fouls out of ministry due to moral failure, there are a dozen who hang up their cleats because of discouragement.

In Paul's inspired letter to the Corinthians he addresses a host of issues threatening to unravel their community. Serious divisions, flagrant immorality, petty lawsuits, confusion about marriage, controversies over spiritual gifts and abuses of the Lord's Table are weighing them down. The church was a mess, and those leading were burdened with discouragement.

At the end of the letter we find the longest passage about resurrection and the age to come in the entire Bible.

Fifty-eight verses of dense, complex, heady eschatology culminates in a rousing crescendo celebrating the confidence that is ultimately ours, as even death is swallowed up in victory.

Whatever it may look like at any given moment — with church floundering, faith flagging, and attitudes failing — remember, Paul seems to be saying, because of Jesus we come out on top!

That's when Paul drops in the practical upshot of all this resurrection talk. The future resurrection means that here and now, the work we do for Christ truly matters.

And we must NEVER. GIVE. UP.

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

### **1 CORINTHIANS 15:58 NIV**

Nobody said following Jesus or doing ministry in his name would be easy. But the church through the centuries has prevailed through innumerable threats and dire challenges because leaders had their eye on the end game and in the meantime stood their ground, refusing to budge, quit, bend or give up.

I have given my life to ministry like that. And here at Mountain I have found inexpressible strength through the encouragement of remarkable men and women who have given themselves fully to the work of the Lord. For nearly 200 years we have stood firm. I end each vision day quoting this verse to the staff. Each time my eyes grow wet as I think of the grace of Jesus who sustains us through everything.

We are blessed at Mountain with so much to celebrate, incredible fruit in which to rejoice. But like the Corinth church, we are also a mess, in need of correction and growth.

And so we keep going, letting neither complacency nor discouragement slow us down. Because we know that whatever we do with Christ for his mission of making disciples is never in vain.

# YOUR PERSONAL LIFE VERSE

Now that you have heard from leaders past and present, we invite you to choose your personal life verse as well.

This may take some time as the Spirit guides you, but we trust that the process will enrich and inspire you. Please commit it to memory, so that you join the Psalmist and declare *"...I have hidden your Word in my heart, that I might not sin against you."*

## PSALM 119:11





  
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