

342 Macedonia Church Road, Sparta, NC 28675

You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet

"You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains." (Matthew 24:6-8) "If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened." (Matthew 24:22) NIV

You might need to check your Armor. . . The Armor Of God

the belt of truth

"Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth," Paul says. Truth is the belt that holds all the other pieces of the armor in place. The truth is that God's love and salvation has set us free from sin and death and we vow a personal commitment to truth in all we do.

the breastplate of righteousness

The breastplate covers the heart and shields it and the other vital organs. This breastplate of righteousness is entirely the righteousness of Jesus which He gives us freely when we accept Him as our Savior. It is Christ's righteousness—not our own righteousness—that covers and protects us.

the shoes of the gospel

We must put on "gospel shoes" that will allow us to march wherever our Lord leads. Satan will try to place obstacles in our path, but in Jesus' strength we can walk forward, following our Lord, obeying Him, and advancing the gospel.

the shield of faith

This faith is not something that comes from within us. It is God's gift to us. He gives each of us a measure of faith (Romans 12:3). Then as we walk with Him, that faith grows and develops until it becomes a shield, protecting us and allowing us to live a victorious life in Christ.

the helmet of salvation

The helmet protects the head—perhaps the most vital part of the body since it is the seat of thought and the mind. When we have a sure knowledge of our salvation, we will not be moved by Satan's deceptions. When we are certain that we are in Christ with our sins forgiven, we will have a peace that nothing can disturb.

the sword of the spirit

God's Word—the Bible—is described as "living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12). Jesus used this weapon when Satan tempted Him in the wilderness. To each of Satan's efforts to lead Him into sin, Jesus replied, "it is written. . ." and proceeded to quote Scripture to destroy Satan's temptations. God's Word is truth (John 17:17). That is why it is so powerful. That is why it is so important that we study the Bible and become familiar with its truths and its power.

Sharing Thoughts

Our Elders will be sharing their thoughts in this segment of the newsletter.

"But love your enemies and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil people." Luke 6:35 NASB

Earlier this year, I had a conversation with some folks about how to deal with people who have an adversarial relationship with us. One of the stories I heard that day was about family members who were just plain mean. The people I was talking with made no claims about having a relationship with Christ Jesus. I thought to myself, "This is the perfect moment to reference one of the radical teachings of Jesus." In Luke 6:35, Jesus said, "Love your enemies and do good and lend, expecting nothing in return." Well.....isn't that exactly the opposite of how we would normally choose to respond to an adversary? On the plain of earth, we're tempted to say, "That doesn't work here." But Jesus was teaching that the kingdom of God is like this, and we should be living by the principles of His kingdom. Notice that Jesus said our reward will be great and we will be identified as sons of the Most High if we obey Him in this area. I got to witness this first hand in the Moria refugee camp in Greece. One of the Arab evangelists I was working with told me the Muslims in the camp say that the Christian volunteers who work in the camp are from God. The knew that no one would come to serve them, working for free, except those who are from God. Love that compels us to do such an unconventional act as loving our adversary is not of this world.

A few days ago, I was speaking to a group at another church about this verse. One person asked a very insightful question. "Is it your experience that some people take advantage of this love?" Absolutely. But that's never an excuse to stop loving. If we continue to love while ungrateful people show no response, our love only becomes more powerful. Jesus finished this command by saying God shows kindness and love to evil and ungrateful people every day. When we have an opportunity to love an enemy, it may be an incredibly hard thing to do. We will find that it's also an incredibly Godly thing to do.

Tim Stamper



DÉSIRÉ AND THE YO-YO

God used a simple light-up yo-yo to remind me of His love.

I remember walking every day to school when I was young. Most of the time I went without any lunch because my parents couldn't afford to feed all of us a lunch. I was one of seven children, and we lived in a very poor area of Burkina Faso. It was hard to even earn enough money for food, and nobody had money for gifts at Christmas. My parents did not buy things like toys or even many books to read.

When I received my first gift, it was in an Operation Christmas Child shoebox, and it was a real blessing for me. We also listened to a presentation of the Gospel, and I received a copy of the Greatest Gift booklet. Though I had already accepted Christ a couple years earlier and grown up in church, I was excited to read that book over and over to learn more about Him.

I couldn't wait to see what was inside my shoebox, but I also looked forward to what God was going to do in my life. We did not open our boxes at the event. We wanted to share the experience with our family. When I got home I opened the box up and saw all those wonderful gifts. There were toys and books, and what I especially enjoyed was my yo-yo. It was a special yo-yo, because at night it would just light up my dark neighborhood. I wasn't just excited about having new toys and new things, though. I was also excited because I was surprised to receive a gift from people I didn't know and might never meet. Honestly, I had never received a gift in my life, and I never expected it.

So, when Operation Christmas Child told me that people from the other side of the world cared about me, it helped me to experience even more thankfulness for God's faithfulness toward me. Who would ever think that God would use a simple light-up yo-yo in a shoebox to remind me of His love? I think back to that Saturday morning and to all the ways God has continued to be faithful to me since then. God has even used me to share His love with others in my country. A few years after receiving that shoebox I began another journey I didn't expect. When I was 12 years old I started a children's ministry in my neighborhood to teach others about Jesus Christ. Since then I've been able to share the love of God throughout my neighborhood and in many villages in Burkina Faso.

More recently, I've been involved in evangelism and discipleship as part of Operation Christmas Child. As I've taught The Greatest Journey discipleship program throughout my country, I have seen God change the hearts of many children. I've seen nine churches started as a result of Gospel seeds planted through The Greatest Journey project. Today I live in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where I attend Bible college and am learning to be an even better teacher of God's Word.

I am so grateful to the many, many people who pack Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes, because through one of these simple gifts God opened more of my heart to Him and to telling others about Him. And thank you for praying for God to work through Operation Christmas Child and for praying for kids to become disciples and disciple makers like He made me.



February 11: A packing party for Operation Christmas Child. This packing party will be specific to boys and girls in the 2-4 age range. Please shop accordingly. If you have questions contact Sharon Alexander (sharonalex1983@gmail.com). She will give you more details.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Fellowship Meal - January 29: AFTER our service on Sunday, we will be having a potluck lunch followed by a brief meeting on our potential building expansion. We are excited to hear any new ideas or concerns you all might have come up with since our last meeting. There are plenty of outlets in the kitchen for crock pots and oven space for dishes that need to be kept warm or warmed up before our meal.

FUND RAISER - January 29: Elliot Church is doing a fundraiser for his Eagle Scout project. That fundraiser is being held at Becca's Backwoods Bean this Sunday morning. They will be selling cinnamon rolls and coffee. We know that many of you would love the opportunity to support Elliot in this but the timing is also difficult because of it being a Sunday morning. So, we are purchasing a bunch of them and inviting anyone who wants to come a little early this Sunday to enjoy a cinnamon roll at the church. They will be available in the kitchen and we'll have coffee on hand as well. Come on out and enjoy a little fellowship time before the service starts.

February 18 at 6:00 pm: Valentine's Dinner is hosted by the men of the church to serve and appreciate the ladies. All are encouraged to attend. Men who would like to assist, please see Daryl Simpson.

Pregnancy Care Center Fund Raiser



Grace Community Church supports the work of our local Pregnancy Care Center with an annual fund raiser of baby bottles filled with donations. Baby bottles will be collected at end of February. Empty bottles are in the vestibule. Be sure to get one and start filling your bottle that extra change (and bills) you have in hand. This organization does a great job and we want to help support this ministry.



With the new faces in church I thought it might be good to "check out" and "return items" for all who have not used the library yet. There is a clipboard on your right as you enter the library, it holds a sign out sheet; write down the date you are taking the item(s) out - title of item(s) - your name - your phone number. When returning your item(s) - on the clipboard - write down the date you are returning it and then place the item(s) on the shelf that is also on the right, that's it!

The book being reviewed below can be found in the Non-Fiction section.

Belinda Hiemstra

Miraclesby C.S. Lewis

Though this book was little more than 200 pages, it has taken months of picking it up and setting it down to get through it. Lewis sets the framework and the feasibility of miracles . . . and frankly it often exceeded my attention span or ability to track with him. Along the way, between many pages, suddenly a concept would grab me and make me consider something I had not considered in the past. Though a difficult read for me I've been left with some newish concepts about miracles and compelling acceptance of divine intervention.

Nancy Plante



Every Wednesday afternoon, 4:30 - 6 pm the church doors are open to anyone who wants to spend time in prayer. Come and go as your schedule allows.

Monthly prayer request sheets are available on the table in front of the sound booth. Take a sheet home & support those in need of prayer.

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