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Page 8

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See inside back cover!

Exercise, diet and sunlight fight winter blues



Despite the joy of the holiday season, the end of Daylight Saving Time marked the start of the winter blues for many people.

"A more serious version of winter blues is called Seasonal Affective Disorder," Dr. Angeline Stanislaus, chief medical director for the Missouri Department of Mental Health, told MissouriNet. "It's a type of depression that usually appears as the seasons change to winter. The shorter the day is, the more depressed they feel. They actu-

■ Please see BLUES page 3



The Coming King of Christmas

In times of crisis, whether it be a financial collapse, rising crime, political in-fighting, moral failures among the influential, the blood shed from war or wide spread corruption, people naturally want change. History is replete with renowned figures that rose from obscurity in eras of uncertainty to influence a nation or affect the world. No matter what a person's

political or religious affiliation is, during a crisis, they just simply want things to turn around.

This is why in the course of human history God would routinely intervene in national and world affairs by raising up a chosen messenger to bring about change. One such man was King David. When he was young, he was anointed by God to be Israel's

future king. "Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward." (1 Samuel 13:13) As the years went by, young David rose to prominence and fulfilled God's mission leading Israel toward its greatest years.

■ Please see KING page 2

New plate gets nixed already



Kansas introduced a new standard license plate for 2024, but it has already been nixed.

According to authorities, the old design with raised letters and numbers has deteriorated and is difficult to identify by law enforcement.

"Many of the embossed plates out on the road have become difficult to read due to significant deterioration," says David Harper, Director of the Kansas Department of Revenue Division of Vehicles in a news release. "Replacing these plates will not only help law enforcement but ensure that drivers can be easily identified in case of emergency."

The new plate displays a wheat-yellow color in the background with black and

■ Please see PLATE page 3

Fellowship Bible Church Brings First Century Bethlehem to Topeka

As the Christmas season approaches, Fellowship Bible Church has announced the return of their much-anticipated annual event, Bethlehem Experience. Taking place on December 8,9,10 and December 15,16,17, this immersive event invites the community to step back in time and witness first century Bethlehem in a way that engages all the senses.

"This Christmas, we want to experience the first-century world as we

share the authentic Christmas story," said Joe Hishmeh, Lead Pastor at Fellowship Bible Church. "Within our reenactment, people can see, hear, taste, and feel the world Jesus came into and connect to the story in a real way."

Bethlehem Experience sets out to transport visitors to the streets of Bethlehem, providing an opportunity to witness the unfolding of the Christmas story in a truly immersive setting. At-

■ Please see BETHLEHEM page 3



Brendan Wiley leaves Topeka Zoo; interim director announced

Brendan Wiley, director of the Topeka Zoo since 2010, has left to take a new role at a zoo in Waco, Texas.

"We are deeply grateful for Brendan's leadership and his dedication to the Topeka Zoo and our entire community," said Fred Patton, board president of the Topeka Zoo. "His tireless efforts have helped shape our zoo into the vibrant and respected organization it is today. We will long reflect upon Brendan's tenure as a transformational period that enables our zoo to flourish for decades to come. While we are saddened by his departure, we wish Brendan the absolute best with his new position at the Cameron Park Zoo in Waco, Texas."



When Wiley took over, the zoo was in turmoil after several animals died and management problems were in the news.

Wiley started projects to raise money to expand exhibits and create new ones over the years, including Giraffe and Friends, the Kay McFarland Japanese Garden, and Camp Cowabunga.

There have also been several popular

fundraisers at the zoo, including Brew at the Zoo and the Zoo Lights attraction under Wiley's direction. The Zoo also hosted many notable spring and summer exhibits, such as Penguin Plunge, Alligator Frenzy, Sea Lion Splash, Saving Sharks, and most recently Dinosaurs Alive!

The Topeka Zoo and Conservation Center has named Fawn Moser as interim Chief Executive Officer of the Topeka Zoo. Moser has been a dedicated employee of the Topeka Zoo for nearly four decades. With her extensive experience in zoo management and animal care, Moser is well-prepared to take on the role of interim CEO. Her pas-

sion for the Topeka Zoo is unparalleled and her commitment to the welfare of the animals in the zoo's care has been evident throughout her distinguished career.

"Fawn has been an integral part in the zoo's recent achievements and will provide strong leadership during this transition," said Fred Patton, Board President of the Topeka Zoo. "We thank Brendan Wiley for his dedication and look forward to working with Canopy Strategic Partners to find a permanent CEO who will continue to build upon the zoo's successes."

The search for a permanent CEO is underway, and Canopy Strategic Partners, a leading executive search firm, has been engaged to manage the selection process. Canopy Strategic Partners is working closely with the Topeka Zoo's Board of Directors to identify the best



candidate to lead the organization into the future.

Pictured is Fawn with then newborn giraffe, Hope. Hope was born in July 2010 with hyperextended fetlocks, and required special care and casts on both front legs until her gait was corrected. Hope can now be seen as an adult at Giraffe & Friends.

BLUES

continued from page 1

ally feel very gloomy and lack motivation to do anything. The appetite is changed, craving a lot of sugar, they may gain weight, they sleep a lot and then they also have this sense of feeling of worthlessness."

Sunlight is a great mood booster. "Get outside. and go get sunlight," she said. "It's very, very critical. Usually a walk, a 30-minute walk during lunchtime or even getting out of the office or the house and sitting outside in the light, even when it is gloomy, will make a big difference."

Participating in social activities instead of being cooped up at home

helps brighten those winter blues.

"People's bodies really struggle to wake up early," Stanislaus said. "That really changes as well, when you change a clock back-and-forth, people might have noticed that it takes probably several weeks to get a brained rhythm to wake and to sleep with the change in the clock. That does play a role as well."

Simply moving also helps, said Dr. Irinia Todorov, an integrative medicine physician. Before going out in the cold, people should take a few extra precautions, such as making sure their shoes are up to the challenge and that they stretch properly. An indoor gym requires only a few pieces of basic equipment.

Reducing social media use also can

help, especially during the holiday season. Pysycolgist Dr. Dawn Potter recommends setting limits, because people put extra pressure on themselves when they try to measure up to someone else's holiday experience.

Finally, such comfort foods as oatmeal with sliced bananas, chicken soup or an apple with peanut butter can help perk up the spirits.

KING

continued from page 1

During his reign God made this promise to him, "And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever." (2 Samuel 7:16) What a promise! But how is that possible? For David knew he would eventually be laid to rest like all others.

David understood that his promised eternal reign would obviously not be himself, but through his future lineage. He believed that through generations yet born, there would always be a king from his line. But more so, he wisely understood there would eventually arise from his line, a King greater than himself and all others, whom would reign forever.

And who was that future king?

On the first Christmas Day there was born a baby from the line of David. His name was Jesus. His birth was foretold centuries earlier by Isaiah, "All this took place to fulfill

what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us)." (Matthew 1:22-23) Jesus grew up to become the greatest spiritual leader in Israel's history, and eventually gave Himself to die on a cross and rise again for the people of Israel, and the whole world. He once said of Himself, "I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." (Revelation 22:16) And the angels of heaven declared that Jesus was the Anointed One spoken about in David's promise, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." (Rev. 11:15)

Like Jesus' ancestor, David, He was a King and came as a Deliverer. However, David was a king of a physical nation who sought to deliver his countrymen from their surrounding enemies. Conversely, Jesus came not to set up and rule over a physical kingdom, but a spiritual

one.

Let me ask, why do nations go to war? Why is there crime and rampant immorality? Why are there crises? Because of evil in the hearts of people. However, Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection provided a pathway for people to be delivered from this indwelling evil. When they meet His conditions of faith and repentance, they can be instantaneously made new.

What effect do hearts and lives made holy through Jesus have? They have the ability to change an entire family, city, nation and the world.

And one day this will happen. He came the first time as a baby, but He has promised to return a second time as a divine Warrior. Then He will physically deliver the whole world from His enemies and set up a physical kingdom where He will reign forever.

This Christmas, enter into Jesus' kingdom. Trust Him with your whole being and be made new!

—Clint Decker is President of Great

Awakenings and Speaking Truth is a nationally syndicated column. Please share your comment with Clint at

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Survey reveals stunning fact about Bible reading



Only 9 percent of Americans read their Bibles daily, one-fourth open the scriptures once a week and 38 percent never use them, an American Bible Society survey found.

That same study found a stunning 26 million Americans stopped turning to scripture regularly during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when routines and norms were profoundly upended.

"This is grieving to me," Michael Youssef, pastor of the Church of the Apostles in Atlanta and executive president of Leading the Way,

said in an interview with CBN News. "And we are surprised at what's happening in our culture and our society? Are we surprised when we have neglected the measuring stick?"

Youssef, author of the new book "How to Read the Bible (As If Your Life Depends on It)," addressed statements that Pastor Andy Stanley made about the Old Testament and its importance to the Christian faith. Youssef compared the Old Testament to the foundation of a building, a necessity for any sound

structure.

"Get 'unhitched' from the Old Testament?" he asked. "This would be like saying, 'I love this big, beautiful, tall building, but the foundation is not really necessary. Let's get rid of it.' You get rid of the foundation, the building will not stand for very long. And I often say if you understand the Bible, if you understand the unity of that book, it is one book — not two books."

Youssef often compares the Bible to a house.

"The Old Testament is that house, the foundation and the walls, but it's lacking a roof," he said. "The New Testament is that roof. And therefore, together, you have one building, one house. Or like a play that has two acts, act one and act two. One without the other does not really make a lot of sense."

The books of the Old Testament, Youssef said, constantly declare "Christ is coming," which comes to fruition in the pages of the New Testament, written after Jesus' resurrection.

PLATE

continued from page 1

midnight blue text. The design pays tribute to the state motto, "ad astra per aspera," with "to the stars" printed across the bottom of the plate.

"The new license plate design promotes the state and our sense of optimism as Kansans travel near and far," says Governor Laura Kelly. "It serves as a

reminder that there are endless possibilities and that we should always reach for the stars.

"Bridgette Jobe, Director of Kansas Tourism disagrees saying, "To the Stars proclaims to the rest of the world the Kansas optimistic and forward-looking spirit."

But the design did not sit well with many Kansans. Some argued the colors too closely matched New York license plates or were the colors of the University

of Missouri

After an outcry on social media about the ugliness of the new design, Gov. Laura Kelly said on Tuesday that the state will pause production on the new plate and give Kansans a chance to vote on the final design.

Another big change is in store is that you can't keep your old number as the state is adding a digit to its alphanumeric system.

BETHLEHEM

continued from page 1

tendees will be surrounded by the sights, sounds, and even tastes of first century Bethlehem, creating an unforgettable ex-

perience for individuals and families alike.

"This year we will enhance our exhibits and focus on children engaging and experiencing the story through interactive projects," said Hishmeh.

One of the highlights of this year's

Bethlehem Experience is a passport that each child will be given to begin their journey to Bethlehem. By the end of a tour, the passport will be filled with a collection of stamps from each location visited by families. This year, families can come together to not only witness but actively participate in the story of Christmas with a souvenir that will create a memorable experience for everyone who attends.

Bethlehem Experience will be held at Fellowship Bible Church, located at 6800 SW 10th Avenue. Admission is free, but tickets are required. The event will run for two weekends on December 8, 9, 10, and December 15, 16, 17, and everyone is invited to attend. For tickets and more information, please visit <https://fbctopeka.com/bethlehem-experience/>.

C5Alive Christmas Luncheon scheduled

The December C5Alive Christmas Luncheon will be held on the 14th at Fairlawn Plaza Mall. Christmas games and fun activities are on the agenda.

The cost is \$15 for C5 members and first-time guests who RSVP, and \$17 at the door. Repeat guests pay \$20. RSVPs and inquiries can be sent to info@C5Alive.org.

"POWER" luncheons are held on the second Thursday of each month and are open to the public. C5Alive is dedicated to creating Christian culture in the Capital City, by developing and uniting Christian Leadership in community businesses, non-profits and churches.

Upcoming luncheon dates are Jan. 11, Feb. 8 and Mar. 14.

C5 also hosts other periodic events, including **EASTERFEST**, the annual Topeka Easter Parade and Fun Fair, held on N. Kansas Avenue and at

Great Overland Station on the day before Easter. The 2024 date is March 30.

The 3rd Annual C5Alive **TOPEKA FALL FEST** was held on September 16, 2023 at **Great Overland Station**.

C5 members may also sponsor luncheons and other events as a way to promote their organiza-



tions. C5 is currently holding a membership drive with special incentives for new members.

For more information about C5, go to www.facebook.com/C5Alive, C5Alive.org, or call 785-640-6399.

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Letters from 'Daisy' - No. 6

Below is another article from someone I have been working with, who is going by the name, "Daisy". As I saw how writing was so healing for Daisy, I believe God has prompted me to help facilitate her being able to share her journey with you. I believe it will not only be healing for her, but also for many of those who read what she has to say. If you would want to write to Daisy, you can send your email to, shane@shanemjones.com, and I will forward it to her.

Shane M. Jones, LSCSW

Shane M. Jones & Associates, P.A.

#6... My story continues.

At the end of my last article I touched on believing God can do anything. I will never think differently. Sometimes He makes us go through hardships and tough times to help us grow in His faith and help us come out stronger.

The past month has been one of those times for me. I had abstained from self harm for close to a year. However I had a relapse. Due to the looming holidays and other issues, I began again. This past month I have cut on the top of both of my hands. As you know, there's not much there to cut.

In my family, special occasions like Thanksgiving and Christmas were usually left uncelebrated. They were just regular days. It did bother me at first but since I'm in my thirties you would think I had gotten used to it. But this time of year usually affects me negatively.

The holidays and issues in therapy have led me back down that dark road of self harm. After thirty plus years of self harm has left little flesh unscarred.

One day I made the decision to buy a cutting tool that would work on my hands. I purchased a flooring knife used to cut carpet and linoleum. This was unlike anything I had used before. I was used to the straight cut from a razor blade but the floor knife was bigger and duller. So, instead of a straight clean cut the knife literally tore the skin off my hands. My left is basically healed however my right looks like I simply scraped the skin off. It is very uncomfortable but that has not stopped me. The flooring knife was not a good choice. I have had to fight the urge every day to not make my wounds worse.

Just because I began again, that doesn't mean I have given up on God. Actually I need him more now than I ever have. My old ways have consumed my life again. But it's not going to take over my life like it has in the past. I'm working on it in therapy and trying to be nice to myself. From a small child I was taught I wasn't worth anything and deserved everything I got.

One hand is basically healed other than thick scar tissue left behind however the other is still being abused. The cuts are fresh and new. The left hand is torn and raw.



So even though I have had a hiccup, that doesn't mean I'm going to roll over and give up. No! I have been here before and have come out on top.

It's been hard but God has been right here with me. There's never been a time He has left my side. I may have lost sight of him, however I knew he would never leave me.

So yes, I've had a setback, but I have God on my side along with great support from my therapist and growing church family. For those of you who have never been through a similar situation you're fortunate. Someone should never do this to themselves. Sometimes I wonder why me? Yet I wouldn't change anything, including the taking away of my scars.

Sometimes in life we are dealt a hand that we just don't understand. We may never know exactly why God allowed this to happen, but He has a reason. We may never know that reason but we just have to trust Jesus knows what is best for us and will not lead us astray. Why? Because "we shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul (Luke 10:27) If we do this, we have absolutely nothing to worry about.

More to come...

-Daisy

Bethlehem decides to cancel Christmas in honor of Hamas



The iconic Christmas tree in Bethlehem has been removed as the Palestinian-controlled city honors "martyrs" in Gaza. Photo: Wikicommons, public domain.

The Arab rulers of Bethlehem are canceling Christmas.

The city was once 86% Christian majority but after Israel turned over control to the Palestinian Authority, most Christians fled. As recently as 1995, 80% of the city was Christian. They now make up just 12%.

Now the Muslim-majority city is removing all Christmas decorations from public places "in honor of the martyrs" killed in Gaza, the city said in a Facebook post this week.

A spokesman for the city claimed: "It is not appropriate at all to have such festivities while there is a massacre happening in

Gaza and attacks in the West Bank."

The city typically hosts thousands of tourists during the Bethlehem Christmas season but tourism has trailed off in recent years. Jewish tour guides, who typically lead Christian tours, are not allowed in the city, nor are Jewish bus drivers.

Christians in the city are fearful to speak out, according to numerous reports. Church leaders that control Church of the Nativity have in recent decades been forced to align with the Palestinian Authority to prevent acts of violence against the dwindling community.

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Silver Dollar City inspires with Christmas celebrations

When it comes to the holiday season, many families are making Silver Dollar City a part of their Christmas celebrations.

My wife Anita and I traveled with family last weekend to experience its

We took in some of our regular, and favorite coasters and other rides but another ride we always include is the Shoot Out at the Mine. Here you glide in a “boat” across water through a maze while hitting your targets with an elec-

The park also features plenty of other kid-friendly sights and activities including the Frisco Sing-Along Train that takes you into the woods and then past the city’s illuminated buildings. And who doesn’t love Grandpa’s Mansion – perfect for any age.

Charles Dickens’ A Christmas Carol: Broadway in Branson

No discussion in our family of Silver Dollar City’s Christmas celebration excludes their theatrical masterpiece: Charles Dickens’ A Christmas Carol.

This 45-minute mini-Broadway production is a heartwarming and classic story of redemption that is more special each time you see it. The park’s adaptation of this beloved tale is a testament to the dedication and talent of its many performers—some of whom have been playing their roles for years.

You are transported to Victorian-era London through an intricately designed set as the cast follows the journey of Ebenezer Scrooge and the spirits who visit him on Christmas Eve. The attention to detail in the production is remarkable, from the authentic costumes to the stunning set design. With top-notch actors and a script that remains faithful to Dickens’ original work, the play is a highlight of a visit to the park. Families are left with a profound sense of the holiday’s true meaning – one of love, generosity, and most importantly—redemption through forgiveness.

The park has more live entertainment than any amusement park in the nation. Saloon Fa La La La La Follies is always a highlight. This high-energy vaudeville show combines comedy, music, and dance to engage audiences and leave them in stitches. Filled with puns and slapstick humor, the show ends as one of the cast members remembers back to her family Christmas and clearly lays out the Gospel for all to hear. How powerful! For some in the audience, that might be the only time



“Old Time Christmas.” This beloved theme park is not just an attraction (voted #1 in the nation); it’s a cherished holiday tradition for many families—including ours.

The Lights: A Mesmerizing Spectacle

Each year, Silver Dollar City installs more than 6.5 million dazzling lights, transforming it into a Christmas wonderland. So amazing are the lights that they draw visitors from across the country to experience its breathtaking scope of magical Christmas cheer. Unless you see it you cannot comprehend how detailed they are. Even the nation’s largest cities cannot compete with what this theme park has created.

The lights seemingly take up every square inch of the park, from the roller coasters to 150-year-old oak trees to every single building spread out across its 61 acres giving it the nickname “City of Lights.”

Through December 30, the park opens at 11am and closes at 10, giving you time to explore its many features. When we arrived, we were on a mission! We immediately headed for Fire In the Hole which will be retired at the end of December. Don’t fear, it will be replaced by a 21st-century version in the spring. While we will miss the old ride (it was their first “roller coaster”) because our girls could ride when they were little, the replacement building looks huge and promises to increase the thrills while making sure the small kids can enjoy its twists and turns. No doubt, Red Flanders will still be looking for the pants. You know, those darn Baldnobbers done stole ‘em!

tronic gun.

With the sunlight fading we meandered back to the Town Square to eat dinner before the evening festivities began. The magic does begin as the sun sets. Rudolph’s Holly Jolly Christmas parade kicks off the evening activities as people line the parade route that stretches across the park. It ends with Joy on the Town Square featuring the 80-foot Christmas tree with dancing lights synchronized to your favorite Christmas tunes. Nearby you can warm yourself up with some Wassel or a chicken buffet.

Walking through this immersive experience takes you through streets adorned with glowing trees, festive displays, and twinkling ornaments, creating a sense of inspiration that captivates visitors of all ages. Our favorite area was Midtown, with its 1.5 million lights, towering magic trees, an illuminated spinning world globe 100 feet in the air, running reindeer, and 50-foot light tunnels. It’s one of the main reasons why families return year after year.



they will hear the Gospel in person. It’s a profound testament to the commitment that the park’s Christian owners set out when they created it in the 1960s.

Family Atmosphere: A Heartwarming Tradition

We’ve been traveling to SDC for 25 years and have experienced first-hand its family-friendly atmosphere. During the Christmas season, this feeling of togetherness is amplified. One thing that is not lost on us is how the park places the real reason for Christmas at the center of its celebrations. What other park has a world-class living nativity?

All of this combines to give a warm feeling of nostalgia that permeates the air. For our now grown children, the park provided some of their most pleasant memories during childhood. How fun for them to return as adults! They, too, notice it as a place where timeless values and the spirit of the season are celebrated.

As kids become adults, it is often difficult to shop for them for Christmas. For many, “experience” gifts are what matters. Activities that families of adult children, or with kids of any age, can do together. Old Time Christmas is something you can do each year, creating memories for future generations.

TIPS:

Add-Ons: The park can be very crowded. If you plan to enjoy rides, entertainment and the evening lights, consider purchasing one of several passes to speed you along. You’ll avoid the lines giving you more time for more shows, rides and other entertainment. The Show Lover’s Pass allows you to skip the long lines and get in first. If rides are your thing, purchase a TrailBlasers pass giving you first access to the rides. As for food, the Christmas Tasting Passport offers 5 different food items that can be purchased at your leisure throughout the day. At \$35 per adult, it will more than cover lunch, dinner and snacks in between.

Dress in layers. Missouri’s coolish to warm fall days can lead to chilly evenings, considering most of your time will be spent outdoors. They do have lockers for rent.

Arrive Early. Be there when the gates open. Then head to your “must do” ride.

Plan your shows: Shows are the perfect time to rest from the walking. Spread them out during the day. Don’t forget to see the Living Nativity.

Sales: We purchased our day passes during a “flash sale” on the SDC website. Keep your eyes open!

—Dwight Widaman / Metro Voice

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Dear Dave,

My wife and I are debt-free except for our mortgage and two Parent PLUS loans for our daughters' college educations. One of the loans totals \$18,078, and the other is for \$41,500. Both girls want to pay them off using the new extended plan being offered, but I'm 59 1/2, and I've got about \$500,000 in a 401(k) from a previous job along with \$125,000 from a job I started five years ago. We've been thinking about just paying the loans off for the girls, but we wanted to know your thoughts.

Mike

Dear Mike,

If I were in your shoes, I'd just go ahead and pay them off. Technically, you're liable for the loans. They are not.

The extended plan you're talking about is garbage. In reality, it means the loans are never paid back. The extended plan is 30 years of not even making the principal payment. No interest is paid, and they don't touch the principal. The whole thing works backward for 30 years, and it's the very definition of a

stupid government program.

I don't think you want your daughters to be part of something like this. But that means you're going to be stuck with paying off these loans. You might as well own it and pay them off now.

I want you to understand this, Mike. I don't advise people to dip into their savings every time a problem comes up prior to retirement. But you're 59 1/2, and at that point there's no penalty. Plus, you've got \$625,000 sitting there. You're going to pull less than \$60,000 out, plus a little in taxes, to make the problem go away. It's not as bad as it could be, but I'm afraid you're going to have to pay a little stupid tax on this one. I'm sure your girls didn't know all this, but it's a perfect example of what can happen when you put your faith in a stupid plan coming out of Washington.

I hate it for you guys—and everyone else in America who took out a bunch of student loans—because you're getting messed over by your own government. The first way they messed you over was to put a student loan program out there and then tell you the way to success was to borrow tens and hundreds of thousands of dollars for a degree in left-handed puppetry. And now, guess what? You're a barista! Then, they start shouting they're going to forgive it all. After that it's, "No, we're not."

The fact is, they don't intend to forgive it. It's the biggest scam in history perpetrated on the American public by our government

— Dave

By Ryan Shumaker
Smartvestor Pro at
The Retirement Team



While we've entered the season of giving, there is one place that many are likely giving far more than they should: the Internal Revenue Service. As we've pointed out in previous articles and constantly talk about on our radio show, taxes are very different and often times much higher on retirement account withdrawals after you've retired and started Social Security. Because of this, many are paying more than their fair share in taxes. If you are someone that doesn't believe you've given the government enough of your money, there is an option to make gifts to reduce the debt at <https://www.pay.gov/public/form/start/23779454>. Surprisingly over \$1.6 million was donated last year and nearly \$1.3 million so far this year!

If you're someone that doesn't want to give the taxman more than their fair share, you may want to take our 401(k) / IRA IQ Quiz. It is designed to flush out the biggest mistakes people make with retirement account distribution planning. Each question highlights a situation that could lead to the demise of your 401(k), IRA, or other retirement savings if you aren't careful.

1. Do you have most of your retirement savings in a company 401(k), 403(b), or 457 retirement plan?

YES NO

2. Do you have company stock in your 401(k)?

YES NO

3. Is your retirement plan one of the largest assets you own?

YES NO

4. Have you recently left your company, retired, or will you be retiring soon?

YES NO

5. After you retire, will you be leaving your retirement account with your former employer?

YES NO

6. Will you be taking a lump-sum distribution from your company plan at any time?

YES NO

7. Will your retirement account sav-

ings pass according to the terms in your will?

YES NO

8. Have you named a trust to be the beneficiary of your retirement plan?

YES NO

9. Is your estate the beneficiary of your retirement plan?

YES NO

10. Will you be leaving your retirement assets to your spouse?

YES NO

11. Have you put off instructing your beneficiaries what to do – and what not to do – with your retirement plan when they inherit it?

YES NO

12. Do you want to be able to control the payouts on your retirement account(s) after your death to prevent your beneficiaries from squandering the money?

YES NO

13. Will you be inheriting a retirement account from anyone?

YES NO

14. Are you 100% confident that your bank, broker, financial advisor, or mutual fund company will have all the necessary documentation on your retirement account(s) that your beneficiaries will need?

YES NO

15. Are you unsure of the exact amount that the IRS requires you to withdraw from your retirement account, and when?

YES NO

16. Do you own a life insurance policy?

YES NO

17. Will you be rolling cash, stock, or other property over from one retirement account to another?

YES NO

18. Has it been more than a year since you last updated the beneficiary forms for every retirement account you own?

YES NO

19. Will you need to tap into your retirement saving before you reach age 59½?

YES NO

20. Have you heard of the Roth IRA but taken no steps to find out more or set one up yet?

YES NO

Total Marked YES: _____

Total Marked NO: _____

Now that you've been through the quiz, take the total number of 'yes' answers and multiply them by 5. This represents the approximate percentage of your retirement savings that will probably go to the U.S. Treasury. The total number of 'no' points multiplied by 5 represents an approximation of how much you and your family will likely keep on average without having a strategic tax plan in place.

Percentage IRS is likely to keep:

Percentage I am likely to keep:

If you feel that the percentage the IRS is likely to keep is too high or percentage you are likely to keep is too low, consider speaking with a financial professional that is proficient in tax efficient retirement planning. There are a lot of worthy charities and causes you can give to this holiday season that most would consider more deserving than the IRS.

Other great articles about retirement, investing, and tax reduction can be seen at RetireTopeka.com/blog.

Material discussed is meant for general/informational purposes and is not intended to be used as the sole basis for any financial decisions, nor be construed as advice to meet your particular needs. Portions of this material are excerpted from Ed Slott's book "The Retirement Savings Time Bomb ... and How to Defuse It." Please consult a financial professional for further information.

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Near Retirement? Here Are Five Smart Year-End Tax Moves to Explore

By Jim Hanna



Hanna

Although tax filing season is months away, the window to make timely tax-saving moves is closing. In most cases, you must act by December 31 to apply any tax savings to your 2023 federal income tax return.

If you are nearing retirement, identifying ways to effectively manage your tax burden may take on greater importance. Consider the following strategies to benefit you now and in the future.

#1 – Plan carefully to maximize the value of deductions

Most people claim a standard deduction when filing taxes. The standard deduction in 2023 is \$13,850 for single filers and \$27,700 for married couples filing a joint return. If you anticipate potentially exceeding those thresholds this year or next, it may make sense to bundle deductions to the extent possible to get the most impact in the year in which you itemize. This can include timing the payment of property and income taxes if possible and making large charitable contributions.

#2 – Consider donating appreciated stock or other assets

If you don't itemize deductions, cash charitable contributions won't be deductible. As an alternative strategy, you may want to consider donating appreciated assets to a charitable organization. This approach can help you avoid the capital gains tax that you would otherwise have to pay if you sold the asset first and then made the gift. Work with your tax advisor to determine the best approach for your circumstances.

#3 – Lock in capital losses if selling an asset makes sense

Perhaps you own stock (or other assets) in a taxable account that may no longer be a fit for your portfolio. If so, and the asset is worth less than you paid for it, you can sell the asset and claim a capital loss. The value of the loss can be used to offset capital gains and up to \$3,000 of ordinary income. Any surplus losses can be carried over to offset gains in future years. Be sure you are comfortable with the change in your portfolio before a holding is sold.

#4 – Consider a Roth IRA conversion

Building up a Roth IRA can be a great way to give yourself more flexibility as you structure a tax-efficient retirement income stream. Along with making after-tax contributions to a Roth IRA (if you qualify), you should discuss with your tax and financial professional if opportunities to convert savings from traditional IRAs and workplace savings plans to a Roth IRA are a good choice for you. Be strategic in doing so. You may want to convert only as much in a single year as possible without moving into a higher tax bracket (taxes will be due on some or all of the converted amount). Roth conversions make the most sense if you anticipate being in a higher tax bracket in retirement. A Roth conversion will not always make sense, so it's important to consider your personal situation as you make your choice.

#5 – Use FSA dollars

If you've taken the tax-saving step of setting money aside in a Flexible Spending Account to help with out-of-pocket medical expenses, check your balance. FSAs allow you to set pre-tax dollars aside and use the funds to pay for certain medical and dental expenses

such as deductibles, copays, prescriptions, over-the-counter medications and medical equipment. Check your employer's FSA rules to see if they extend a grace period to spend dollars (up to mid-March 2024) or allow some leftover money to be carried over into an FSA for next year. If neither option is offered, you need to spend your balance in 2023 or you will forfeit leftover dollars.

As you consider tax strategies to benefit you now and, in the future, consult with an advisor and tax professional to see if any of these actions make sense for you.

Jim Hanna, CFP®, MBA, CKA®, is a Private Wealth Advisor and Certified Kingdom Advisor® with Heart Financial Partners a private wealth advisory practice of Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC. He specializes in fee-based financial planning and asset management strategies.

To contact: 785.358.6278 x19, 601 S Kansas Ave., Topeka, KS 66603, or ameripriseadvisors.com/james.c.hanna,

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But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream. - Amos 5:24



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Jim Hanna, CFP®, MBA, CKA®

Private Wealth Advisor | Certified Kingdom Advisor®

Heart Financial Partners

A financial advisory practice of Ameriprise Financial Services, LLC

785.357.6278 x19

601 S Kansas Ave, Topeka, KS 66603

james.c.hanna@ampf.com

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Celebrate the Holidays in Downtown Topeka!

As we enter the Holiday season, Downtown is looking better than ever! People are getting in the Christmas Spirit!

Christmas shopping in Down-town Topeka can be fun, with all the unique shops and a bit of nostalgia in the air. It might remind you of a time when shopping was more exciting and more personal.

Following are some tidbits from some of your friendly downtown merchants.

A Full-Service Florist & Gift Shop

Absolute Design by Brenda, 629 S. Kansas Avenue, offers hand-selected flowers and exquisite designs with de-



livery throughout the Topeka area. They have an expansive line of gifts, jewelry and home decor for all your holiday and year-round needs.

This locally-owned florist delivers courteous, professional service and the highest quality floral and gift items around. Their experienced designers can create floral

designs that will complement any occasion and meet your budget & style expectations as well. Daily delivery service is available to all local funeral homes, hospitals and nursing homes. You can even save \$5.00 by using the coupon on this page!



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You can also order or wire flowers 24 hours a day at the website: www.absolutebybrenda.com.

Taking chocolate to a new level

Owners Nick & Terry Xidis at Hazel Hill Chocolate, 724 S. Kansas Avenue, have been a Downtown staple for years.

Hazel Hill, Terry's grandmother, is a symbol of their dedication to a family tradition of "the best in everything they do." Nick is the third generation chocolatier, and they use only the finest ingredients, chocolate, fresh cream and butter, to produce hand-made treats that explode with flavor.

Lately, Nick has been making hand-crafted chocolate from cacao (coco beans) that import from around the globe. Much like fine wine, each cacao origin produces a unique flavor profile in the finished chocolate.

"There are only a couple of hundred companies in the US that hand craft chocolate," Nick said.

It's not just Topekans that delight in Hazel Hill chocolates.

"In 2019, three of our handcrafted chocolate bars won bronze in the International Chocolate Awards Americas

competition," Nick said. "In 2020 our sea salt caramel won the gold medal in the Chocolate Alliance competition."

Whatever your preference – hand-made chocolate truffles, home-style fudge, crispy-creamy caramel apples or something else – at Hazel Hill they fashion delightful treats for every palate.

Need a gift basket, gift box, or just a few delicious chocolates to go? They'll take care of all the packing and shipping, too!

When you need a break

For your coffee emergency, go Downtown to Juli's Coffee and Bistro – a locally owned, woman owned, Veteran owned and operated coffee shop offering legit house coffee and all manner of espresso drinks.

Juli's features "Made in the USA" coffee grown and roasted in Hawaii, with aloha flavors like toasted coconut, chocolate and vanilla macadamia nut. Buy a bag to take home!

Having relocated from 8th Street last year, the new space has easier access – no more stairs. Local favorites are still available, like the Turkey Lurkey and house made Cranberry Almond Chicken Salad for lunch. Fresh salads, wraps and tasty paninis make it perfect



for casual dining. Daily house made specials keep it fresh and exciting.

Check out the menus online at www.juliscoffeeandbistro.com and order online, pay online and then pick up, or use Eatstreet delivery.

New menu items include made from scratch pies! Using recipes handed down for 5 generations, locally sourced small batch and uniquely tasty. Come in for a slice, or order ahead for the holidays: Apple, cherry, pumpkin, pecan, oatmeal, coconut cream, and more!

A little bit of Heaven

Working side-by-side at Cashmere Popcorn, Bill and Angie Anderson's goal is to create a high-quality product in every hand-crafted batch of popcorn, and provide it to you with unmatched customer service.

Faith and family is the driving force





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behind this amazing company. In fact, their family motto has always been, and will always be, "Thanks Be To God!"

They produce, package and market all the popcorn. With about twenty flavors to choose from, you'll find a little bit of heaven in every bag. Hours are Tuesday-Friday 10-6 and Saturday 10-4.

Cashmere Popcorn would like to wish everyone a Blessed Christmas Season, and thanks for supporting local.

Diamonds are Forever

With the Christmas season in full swing, you'll find many specials and gift ideas at David's Jewelers, 623 S. Kansas -



a family business that has served Topeka for four generations, with over 50 years in business.

Diamond rings, pendants and earrings usually top the list but they also offer vivid colored gemstones in unique settings, watches, clocks, statues and fine crystal.

"Gifts can start at \$20.00 and go from there," said Mitzi from behind the counter at David's. "We will be glad to help you find that special gift for that special someone."

Leather and more

Doug Mingus, owner and designer at Mingus Leather Studio, believes the world needs more beauty and joy: More gifts given and used; More smiles, kindness, and real service; More people doing what they love and sharing it.

His business was born to pursue all these when life presented an unexpected change. He created a place where beautiful handcrafted items, that are designed for life, are celebrated and shared. Immediately when walking into this shop you will be greeted with the intoxicating smell of leather and a warm kind welcome from Doug.

It all starts with full grain leather items made in his studio, or from other artisans he has partnered with. Belts, bags,

journal covers, catch-all and game trays, wallets, keychains, pouches, purses, and more.

Mingus didn't stop at leather. He partners with George's Pen Creations and has jewelry from Kamama Designs, candle makers like Beauty from Ashes, and other artists. Mingus Leather Studio is a place to find



unique, useful and beautiful items that bring a smile, and build businesses and families. There is something for everyone on your gift list here and you may even need to splurge on something for yourself.

Doug also does repairs on all kinds of leather items.

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Holiday Memories & Events

Check Out These Upcoming Holiday Events & Activities

While you're making your way around the downtown area, check out all of the new things to look at on both sides of the street. There are lots of new features! And watch for these downtown events and opportunities during the holiday season:

FIRST FRIDAY ART MARKET – Downtown and NOTO arts district. Arts, antiques, fine crafts, flea market items, snacks & beverages, entertainment and more.

LINDSEY STIRLING Snow Waltz Tour – Dec. 1, 7pm, TPAC.

MAYOR'S CHRISTMAS TREE LIGHTING– Dec. 2, 5:30pm, Downtown in Evergy Plaza.

MIRACLE ON KANSAS AVENUE PARADE– Dec. 2,

6-8pm, Downtown Lighted parade at 5th & Kansas. Santa will be there! topekapartnership.com/gtp-events

MIRACLE ON KANSAS AVENUE AFTER PARTY – Dec. 2, 8pm, Downtown in Evergy Plaza. Live music by Chance Encounter. Reindeer will be on hand!

RED STOCKING BREAKFAST - Dec. 9, 7:30-10:30am, The Pennant, 915 S. Kansas Ave. Get tickets in advance at www.kcls.org or at the door. Children 10 & under eat free. Benefits KCSL's child abuse prevention programs and services.



NUTCRACKER BALLET – Dec. 8, 7:30pm; Dec. 9, 1:30pm & 7:30pm; Dec. 10, 1:30pm at TPAC. Ballet Midwest's holiday staple. Tickets at TPAC box office, and Barbara's Conservatory of Dance. www.ballet-midwest.net



THE NUTCRACKER BY KANSAS BALLET

ACADEMY– Dec. 16 at 7pm & 17 at 1pm, TPAC. Tickets available at the TPAC box office or Ticketmaster.com. For info: 785-234-2787

THE KREADY HOLIDAY SPECTACULAR – Dec. 23, 1:30 & 7pm, TPAC. Bringing back the Topeka native and Broadway star, Jeff Kready, who will perform with his wife, Broadway star Nikki Renée Daniels

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The Beauty of Adult Adoption

Fourteen years ago, one day before Thanksgiving Day, I became Bill Dillon's daughter with the banging of a gavel. As my dad smiled and gave his eighteen-year-old daughter a side hug, a courtroom teeming with strangers clapped and cheered.

Back when I was six going on seven, my biological father left the pastorate along with his wife and two young daughters in Kansas to become a flight attendant in San Francisco. From that moment on, God acted as a father to the fatherless for several years. Although there were many difficulties along the way, my mom, sister, and I had many good times of laughter and comradery. We girls took on the world together and served God in various ministries. Yet when I was thirteen going on fourteen, God sent us a wonderful man to complete our family. He sent my dad—Bill Dillon.

After Bill Dillon married my mom, we had to learn how to integrate him into our family. Even our cat struggled to adjust to having a man in the house. Gradually, however, Bill Dillon became an integral part of our existence. He introduced us to Star Wars. He established game nights in which I learned I absolutely detest Phase 10. He always opened the car door for my mom. And we all knew that if we were up at a certain time each morning, Bill Dillon would be sitting on the couch with a cup of coffee reading his Bible.

When the first Father's Day approached, I got up the gumption to ask to call him Dad. He was thrilled, although it took some time for me to get used to speaking the new name. As the years passed, he taught me to drive, and he showed me that a man can choose to sacrificially commit to his family. By the time I was eighteen, I was ready to make it official—to legally become Carmen Dillon, daughter of Bill Dillon.

Missouri is one of thirty-nine states that allow adult adoptions.[1] Although requirements vary from state to state, Missouri's adult adoptions occur by the consent of the adopted and the adoptee. Thus, no permission had to be obtained from my biological father. We simply hired a lawyer to file the paperwork and represent us in court.

Although going to court the day before Thanksgiving shortened our time with extended family, I can't blame the

judge for wanting to make a positive ruling right before the holiday. My dad and I each took the stand and acknowledged that the adoption process meant the law would view Bill Dillon as my dad "as if I were born to him."

The judge wanted to be sure I understood that, according to Missouri law, my adoption would terminate any inheritance rights relating to my biological father. But my adoption had nothing to do with monetary inheritance. It had to do with becoming Carmen Dillon and forging a legal relationship with my dad.

And, by law, today I can say that I was born to Bill Dillon. If I showed you my new birth certificate that I had to acquire from my birth state of Texas, you would find Bill Dillon's name and address from the time of my birth. My social security card and driver's license declare that my surname matches my

father's. And, as a teacher, I am very grateful to be identified each day as "Miss Dillon" by my middle school students.

Sometimes I reflect on the beauty of living out this biblical illustration of salvation. In some places, the Bible speaks of being "born again" (John 3:3). In other places, it speaks of being adopted into God's family (Galatians 4:4-7). Yet I've come to realize that these illustrations are interconnected. When I was adopted by Bill Dillon, I was legally born into his family. In the same way, I was born into God's family upon my spiritual adoption. When I testified with my mouth to accept Bill Dillon as my dad and when he testified

that he claimed me as his own, we finally—legally—became family. What a glorious picture of the Gospel! Just as I became Bill Dillon's daughter by the banging of a gavel, I became a child of God by the banging of a nail.

[1]. Tim McDuffey, "Adult Adoption: A State-by-State Guide," Legal Hearsay, August 20, 2023, <https://legalehearsay.com/adult-adoption-a-state-by-state-guide/#states-that>

-By Carmen Dillon



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Kids find Christ through the expanding ministry of YFC

“We pursue kids where they are, instead of expecting them to come to us,” says the CEO of Youth for Christ, Jacob Bland. “Together, through trusted relationships, we point them to Jesus, who gives life to their story.”

Even in a seemingly hostile environment, or perhaps because of it, Youth For Christ recently announced a 20% average increase across all outcomes and 7,855 kids who came to know Christ. The encouraging data was included in the organization’s ministry report for 2022-2023. It included numerous milestones.

According to YFC President and CEO Jacob Bland, “This means that, across our 1,200 ministry sites in the USA, more kids are sharing their name with a YFC leader, engaging in Christ-centered relationships, making a decision to follow Christ and plugging into discipleship.”

For more than seven decades, YFC has served as a pioneer in missional youth outreach, helping 11–19-year-olds uncover God’s story of hope in their story through authentic relationships, shared experiences, outdoor adventure, mentoring, small groups and more.

Bland said, “Every day we strive to engage young people who feel isolated and overlooked, whether they’re struggling with anxiety, locked up in juvenile detention, deaf or hard of hearing, feeling unsafe at home or just learning that a parent has been deployed.

The Covid pandemic was disastrous on the minds of young people. The organization had responded with special outreach dealing with loneliness and many found comfort and resolution. Now, students are pointing other students toward Christ.

Bland noted, “We also saw 25% more kids relationally sharing their faith with their peers — this year compared to last. They are living out YFC’s ‘3Story way of life’ and it’s this rising metric of young leaders that has our full attention. Frankly, Generation Z seems to be much more open to discussions about faith among their peers than the generations that immediately preceded



them. It’s clear that this is a strategic opportunity God is creating for ministries like YFC and our Kingdom partners.”

YFC’s 3Story concept is an integral part of the organization’s strategy, forming a holistic approach to ministry that incorporates three key narratives.

Bland shared, “3Story is how we live in relationships with God and others. The three circles represent God’s story, my story and the stories of young people. When the circles overlap, it means friendship is growing, trust is building, transformation is happening.”

The report also noted that compared to last year:

Seven percent more teens made a first-time decision for Christ.

Thirty-eight percent more students engaged with local churches this year.

Twenty-one percent more kids began sharing their faith with their friends.

“Because of God’s faithfulness, 2,907 kids became multipliers of the hope of Christ!” Bland enthused.

Yet even as YFC looks back on a phenomenal year of ministry, Bland notes the numbers only matter because they tell a story.

Bland said, “In YFC, we aren’t celebrating numbers or scope or scale. We celebrate how Christ is moving. These are more than numbers — every number has a name, and every name has a story. The harvest is ripe among this generation and Jesus is still calling us to pray earnestly and trust Him as Lord of the harvest, the solution for every soul, every story.”

Youth For Christ has been a leader in missional youth outreach for more than seven decades and is dedicated to

uncovering God’s story of hope in the next generation that desperately needs it. YFC reaches young people everywhere, working together with the local church and other like-minded partners to raise up lifelong followers of Jesus who lead by their godliness in lifestyle, devotion to the Word of God and prayer, passion for sharing the love of Christ, and commitment to social involvement.

YFC chapters impact thousands of communities across the nation, seeking out and serving youth from all walks of life. Young people are silently struggling through a wide variety of challenging issues — and through the YFC ministry God empowers them and they see the living power of a loving God. YFC trains its leaders in a proven, relational ministry model called 3Story®, which encourages staff and volunteers to be good news while also sharing the stories of the Good News of Jesus. It involves building relationships through the ups and downs of everyday life to lead people to Christ.

YFC has been a pillar of missional ministry since 1944, when Dr. Billy Graham served as YFC’s first full-time staff member. Since then, Youth For Christ has continued to be both a rural and urban ministry on mission, and it is always about the message of Jesus. Youth For Christ operates in over 100 nations and has over 130 chapters that impact communities across America through over 1,200 local ministry sites.

Visit the Youth For Christ media page here. Learn more about Youth For Christ at its website, www.yfc.net, Facebook and Instagram pages, Twitter feed @yfcusa or on Vimeo.



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VOICE

MANAGING EDITOR



Lee Hartman
LHartman3@cox.net

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS

Nick Hartman, Dwight Widaman

ADVERTISING CONSULTANTS

Lee Hartman
785-640-6399
Voice@cox.net

NEWS & FEATURES

Carolyn Cogswell, Rob Mooney,
Alan Goforth, Clint Decker,
Michael Foust, Dwight Widaman,
Lee Hartman

LAYOUT & DESIGN

Joe Boothe, Lee Hartman, Dwight Widaman

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CONTACT INFO

Offices: 2611 SW 17th St. (by appt.)
Correspondence & Payments:
P.O. Box 5724, Topeka, KS 66605
Phone/Fax: 785-235-3340
Voice@cox.net
MetroVoiceNews.com
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I'm an Israeli Arab. I'm embarrassed and Hamas is to blame

What is it like to be an Israeli Arab right now? In a word, horrible.

I've spent the majority of my life in Israel's north, a beacon of coexistence where Jews and Arabs have lived side by side in harmony. Yet today, for the first time in my life, I understand why Jews are afraid of us.

Like all Israelis, I was glued to the news on the morning of Oct. 7, when Hamas terrorists infiltrated the country and indiscriminately murdered and kidnapped men, women, children, the elderly, Jews, Arabs, and foreign nationals. The staggering numbers are now permanently etched in our minds: over 1,400 murdered and 240 taken hostage. Like all Israelis, I was devastated.

When I saw an elderly woman being abducted and taken into Gaza, I felt that it could have been my own mother, who is now 95. When I read reports of young children being slaughtered, I thought of the son of my best friend. He used to play as a baby with his small, delicate fingers slipping through my hair. Now grown, he's serves on reserve duty in the IDF, and I lose sleep every night wondering if he's safe. And when I saw pictures of the Arabs and Bedouins who were killed, I saw myself.

Against this backdrop, the paranoia, tension and fear that Jews feel when they encounter Arabs is understandable. As a researcher who studies how the human brain works, I can tell you that when the brain experiences grave stress, it's natural to generalize your surroundings as a coping mechanism. The suspicious looks that I was accustomed to receiving when traveling in and out of Ben Gurion Airport are now being directed at Israeli Arabs across the country.

I'm embarrassed. And Hamas is to blame.

The other question I'm frequently asked is, "Do you condemn Hamas?" Asking Israeli Arabs this



question misses a fundamental aspect of just how much we're intertwined with Israeli life. Does it make sense to ask an Israeli Jew if they condemn Hamas? Of course not.

This is why the world needs to understand that Israeli Arabs reject Hamas and its ideology just as much as Jews do.

Another question I'm asked is, "Don't you feel bad for the Gazans and what is happening to them?" Certainly, I do. Every day, I think about the many Gazan children crying out for their mothers, just as I can't stop picturing the Jewish children in Hamas captivity. For those captive Israeli and Palestinian children crying similarly out of fear, I ask: Who is feeding them? Who hugs them when they cry? Who is telling them everything will be okay? And in this instance, Hamas is also to blame for cynically weaponizing their fear to further an agenda of terror.

Showing empathy for one side in a conflict does not negate the capacity to have empathy for the other. Rather, it shows that you're human. Arabs do not need to choose a side in this conflict.

For the sake of humanity, I implore the Arab community to move forward and to cleverly and respon-

sibly understand the Jewish narrative, as we have been asking them to understand ours for 75 years. For the first time, as an Arab minority, we are requested to stand with empathy and understand the majority's narrative.

At University of Haifa, we're preparing to do just that. While the beginning of the school year has been delayed due to the war, the University's administration is brainstorming ways to turn down the temperature on campus so that our students are reintegrated into a peaceful environment.

In the city of Haifa, there are mixed neighborhoods and mixed apartment buildings. At the University, Jews and Arabs learn and grow together. This is the paradigm that Israel must replicate in order to move on from the tragedy of Oct. 7.

I'm not upset when I see the posters in Hebrew around campus stating, "Together We Will Win," because I know that Arabs are included in that fight.

Together we can use our voice to speak against rising levels of discrimination we're seeing.

I was also asked recently if I ever see myself leaving Israel to a place with a much larger Arab population, like France. My answer is

clear: I'm not going anywhere. Israel is my home.

For Jews and Arabs alike, this country is special. When each of us sees an olive tree, we're in awe of this majestic force, of nature's ability to grow out of the arid desert soil.

If Jews and Arabs are adamant about not going anywhere, it's up to both communities to determine what's next in a healthy and productive way.

On Oct. 7, Hamas did far more than kill 1,400 people. It also set back any hope we had for peace, gearing us all up for another generation of nothing but violence. But for every tragedy, there is a silver lining. A recent survey by the Israel Democracy Institute (IDI) indicated that 70 percent of Arabs in Israel identify with the State of Israel. IDI reports the highest percentage of respondents who feel part of the state since they began asking this question in 2003. This demonstrates that the Arab community in Israel aspires to further integrate into society and distance itself from bad faith actors like Hamas.

Israeli Arabs and Jews are like salt and pepper: They both belong on the table, and once they're sprinkled into a dish, it's almost impossible to distinguish between them. We must embrace and cherish our shared destiny by working with each other, engaging in meaningful dialogue, and understanding that when it comes to coexistence and shared life, there's nothing to fear.

—by Mouna Maroun | Prof. Mouna Maroun is the Vice President and Dean of Research at University of Haifa and the former Head of the Sagol Department of Neurobiology at the school. She is a first-generation university graduate, the first woman from her hometown of Isfiya to earn a PhD and the first Arab woman in Israel to hold a senior faculty position in the natural sciences.

'America First'? Or 'America Only'?

By Dennis Prager

I am a strong advocate of America First. Indeed, I believe the citizens of every country should put their country first.

The case for doing so is not difficult to make. Just as people should put their family's well-being first, they should put their country's well-being first. Just as we would regard parents who put the well-being of others' families before — or even on par with — the well-being of their own family as defective parents, we should regard people who place other countries' well-being before that of their own country as defective citizens.

Similarly, with rare exceptions (such as in a time of war or when saving another person's life in an extreme situation), people should first take care of themselves.

In this regard, I am guided by two Jewish teachings.

One is the basic and well-known principle, stated 2,000 years ago by Hillel, one of the most important thinkers in Jewish history: "If I am not for me, who will be for me?" To paraphrase Hillel: "If Americans are not for America, who will be?"

The other Jewish teaching is the Talmudic principle that when deciding to which poor people one should first give charity, "The poor of your own city come first."

The idea of America First accords with both reason and religious morality.

However, some prominent conservatives, whom I know and respect, seem to equate "America First" with "America Only."

And that is neither logical, nor moral, nor American.

It is not logical because the word "first" implies a "second" and more. In baseball, "first base" implies a "second base," etc. If first base were the only base, it would not be known as "first base." If you said that your first choice among airlines was, let us say, Delta Air Lines, no one would assume that Delta was your only choice. By definition, therefore, "America First" does not mean "America Only." So, those who believe that Americans should be concerned only with America are being disingenuous when they say, "America First." They should say what they mean: "America Only."

But "America Only" violates one of the most basic principles of morality —

that we should not only take care of ourselves, our family and our country. Indeed, the second part of Hillel's famous aphorism makes this clear. His rule begins, "If I am not for myself, who will be?" But that is not his entire rule. His first question is immediately followed by this one: "But if I am only for myself, what am I?"

On the important conservative website, American Greatness (my own column appears there), an America First advocate wrote a column last week titled, "The America First Response to the Israel-Hamas War."

He opens his column with these words:

"Not my circus, not my monkeys. The America First position on the Israel-Hamas mess is clear: stay far, far away."

He then writes:

"Before anyone in any position of power begins to think about even commenting on foreign conflicts, they should solve the crises roiling our civic life at home."

This is another example of the amorality inherent to "America Only."

To take the subject of his article, the current Hamas-Israel war, if the writer



really means what he says — that no American in a position of power should "even comment" on that war, that is as pure an example of an amoral position as one can imagine. Israel was attacked by a terrorist movement that has announced for years that it seeks not to merely defeat Israel but to annihilate the country. Its members tortured, burned and otherwise murdered entire families, raped women, kidnapped grandmothers and babies to hold them hostage, and murdered more Jews than on any one day since the Holocaust — yet no American official should "even comment" on this?

He then writes:

"The answer to who Americans should support in the war between Hamas and the Israelis is simple: America."

Presumably this author would have written in 1940-41: "The answer to who Americans should support in the war between Nazi Germany and Great Britain is simple: America."

If this is what he and other spokesmen for America First believe, these people should tell the truth and rename their movement "America Only."

Which brings me to the third problem with this version of America First. It is not only illogical and amoral; it is un-American.

■ Please see AMERICA FIRST on next page

Hate: The Seeds of Racism



CLINT DECKER

President and Evangelist with Great Awakenings, Inc.

Speaking Truth

In 1994 there began one of the most horrific national genocides in the African nation of Rwanda. In a period of 100 days, nearly 1,000,000 people were murdered, mostly members of the Tutsi tribal population, by the opposing Hutu tribe. My wife and I watched the move, *Hotel Rwanda*, which portrayed the story of the slaughter. It was heart-wrenching. The killers and victims were both Africans, both Rwandans, but some belonged to one tribe, and some of another. Africans would call this tribalism, toward Jews it would be antisemitism and in America, it would be racism.

From Africa to America and around the world, during the history

of mankind, racism has been responsible for the senseless killings of millions, upon millions of people. It has risen where tyrants have asserted their power based on race or ethnicity, then used it to divide and conquer, by oppressing or enacting revenge upon their enemies, who were racially or ethnically different from them.

In the beginning it was not this way. Where did this evil come from?

The God of heaven and earth, who fashioned mankind together said, "God created man in his own image... male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:27) Notice how God makes a distinction regarding the two sexes, but makes no mention of race or ethnicity. Yes, they were created with a specific skin color, but God saw no value in highlighting it because He looked beyond that. Furthermore, after God finished creating, He called everything "good." Therefore, the color He created our first parents, Adam and Eve, He took pleasure in.

But the moment our first parents rebelled against their Creator, everything changed. They instantly became separated from God and all His good-

ness, and became filled with a moral darkness. This depravity forever changed mankind.

Soon this new evil revealed itself with history's first murder. Cain and Abel were brothers with the same parents, Adam and Eve. Despite that, there was a difference between them. A religious one. The way Abel worshipped the Lord God, was acceptable to Him, but the way Cain worshipped the Lord, was rejected by Him. Due to this difference, Cain looked down upon Abel and his heart became bitter and angry. At the same time, God said to Cain, "...sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it." (Genesis 4:7) He rejected God's Words and eventually, this anger turned into hate where he struck down his own brother in cold blood.

What was the cause of this horrible incident? Hate-filled differences. This is the seed that gives birth to racism. Differences do not divide us. Blacks and whites can live side by side. Jews and Muslims can co-exist. Christians and atheists can work together. The differences are not the problem, hate is. When a person begins to see the



differences as a liability, and it leads them to become jealous, angry and oppressive — that is when the evil of division takes root.

The gospel of Jesus Christ takes direct aim at this, when Jesus stated, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew. 22:37-39) A fully devoted love for God and our fellow man, can destroy racism from the face of the earth. How? Because divine love poured into the heart of man, celebrates racial differences and sees the beautiful creation of God in it. However, racism seeks only the love of self, and to dismantle and destroy.

Jesus came to our divided human

population, filled with so many differences, to change our hearts. He died and rose again to wash us of hate, and fill us with a holy and perfect love toward one another.

A prayer for you — *Lord God, examine our hearts to see if any of our differences with others have sprouted into hate for them. Let us no longer be held captive by anger for others. Instead, fill our hearts with love for you and our neighbors. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

—Clint Decker is President of Great Awakenings and Speaking Truth is a nationally syndicated column. Please share your comment with Clint at cdecker@greatawakenings.org and follow his blog at clintdecker.blogspot.com.

RJ Thesman: Helping Caregivers Through the Holiday Season

When a disastrous fire thrust RJ Thesman's father into trauma-induced dementia, she and her family began to learn firsthand about what's involved in caregiving. While RJ's mother, a nurse, was sure she could take care of her beloved husband, the family saw the stress this caused during the ten years of dementia care leading to his death.

When RJ's mother was diagnosed a few years later with Alzheimer's and an inoperable brain tumor, her children wondered if part of it was brought on by stress. As RJ and her siblings walked the journey with their mother, RJ, the researcher of the family, began to delve into the facts and studies.

Her findings in the world of dementia and Alzheimer's eventually led RJ to write the Reverend G books, a fiction series about a pastor who learned she was developing Alzheimer's. But RJ also kept notes and developed a book designed to help people, like her family, who are struggling with caregiving at one of the most joyous, stressful time of the years: Holiday Tips for Caregivers.

We asked her to tell us more about her journey and her passion to help others through her book.

What are some of the most common caregiving situations people face?

Many situations involve caregiving. Bedside care is when patients can no longer function for themselves, so this involves moving them, changing soiled linens, feeding them, giving meds, treating bedsores, and being there 24/7. One of my friends has MS, so her husband is responsible for multiple transfers throughout each day—from bed to wheelchair to toilet to bed. The Hoyer lift has been a wonderful tool. Giving care can also involve helping a diabetic with nutritional needs or driving a chemo patient to and from appointments. Each of these situations involve some type of stress and a rethinking of how life needs to operate. Basically, caregiving involves laying aside our own agendas to support, encourage, and care for another person.

Tell us a little bit about your caregiving journey.

rjI was the long-distance caregiver. My siblings, brother and sister, lived in the same town as my parents. I was 250 miles away and working several jobs as a single mom. I could only get away three to four times a year. So I researched new medicines and new techniques. I tried to encourage my siblings. And when I was able to travel, I was the one who saw the changes that had occurred. So I could report those and confirm them with my siblings as they met with doctors. But my story also included massive guilt because of my distance. And my siblings understandably carried some judgment and resentment, which they expressed from time to time. It changed the loving dynamics of our family.

You entered the caregiving world when your dad, and then your mom, was diagnosed with dementia and Alzheimer's. How did that lead to the creation of this book?

Although I knew of many people who were giving care, the actual situation had never invaded our family. When it did, it was a learning process for all of us, and I wanted to share what we learned with others who might be struggling. With 60 million caregivers in the US—just of those dealing with loved ones with Alzheimer's—the need was enormous. Most of the written materials had a medical or therapy-based tone, so I wanted to write from a more personal viewpoint. I wanted to create a book that could be read while the caregiver was sitting at the bedside of his or her loved one. That meant it had to be short. Easy to understand. Helpful. Those were my goals.

What do you hope the reader of this book walks away with?

Some practical tools to help with each day, and the ability to finally take a break and get away for a little while. To know they are not alone and not be afraid to ask for help.

How are holidays different for caregivers than other times of the year?

Everyone experiences some type of stress during the holidays, but it is magnified for caregivers. How can they prepare the usual Thanksgiving meal when they have to give care during every hour? Their mental state is often compromised from the stress, so they cannot even think about what to buy and how to prepare the food.

We saw this happen with my mom as she could not find her pots and pans, could no longer safely cook, and could not even fix her favorite recipes. Taking care of Dad took everything she had. Add to that the guilt of not being able to prepare the usual meal or to travel to see that precious grandbaby because your husband needs personal care, like disposable underwear changed, every hour. The circumstances of the caregiving situation multiply during the holidays.

You say that self-care is an important part of caregiving. Tell us a little bit about that.

I have seen the importance of self-care in my own family and read multiple articles about self-care. In fact, sometimes caregivers die before the one they care for because of the stress and the lack of self-care. Or the caregiver begins to experience more and more severe health issues from the stress of caregiving. One of my friends developed shingles. My sister developed skeletal issues until she was almost bowed over from the burden.

Caregivers sometimes change in personality because of the multitude of emotions they block. When caregivers begin to take some time for themselves, then they begin to realize the value of self-care. They return to caregiving with a refreshed spirit and feel like they can breathe again.

We cannot take care of others unless we take care of ourselves. We have to have a break of some kind or the stress will break us. This is even a biblical principle, "Love others AS you love yourself."

As for the argument — offered by every America Only advocate — that America must first deal with its own problems before helping any other people on Earth, this simply means that America will never help any other people on Earth. There never was and never will be a time when America is free of do-



How does a person get beyond the guilt of taking time for himself or herself?

Therapy helps, and journaling was helpful for me. Having our own support groups who confirm the importance of self-care can be so lifegiving. But I think there will always be some sort of guilt, wishing we could do more, or wanting life to be different. It is easy to lapse back into regret, so having an accountability partner to talk to can relieve some of this "false" guilt and self-condemnation.

What is the most important thing caregivers need to know during the holiday?

This too shall pass. The situation may seem interminable, but at some point, it will end. Then the holidays can be a bit more normal. And we can think of holidays in the past and how beautiful they were. Focus on the gratuities of the moment rather than the pain of what is happening. I also believe, and included it in the book, that caregivers should try to get away during the holidays—if even for a few hours to browse through some of the holiday trappings in the different stores. Enjoy the beauty and the meaning of the season instead of focusing on the horror of each day. Try to celebrate—if even briefly.

How can others in the body of Christ help caregivers especially during this time of year?

Some churches have caregiving

support groups. These can be beneficial, depending on the situation.

The Grief Share groups are also helpful, because caregiving involves ongoing grief. Some people are afraid to offer help because of what they fear they might see or experience. But if we were in need of care, we would want others to care.

Offer to come sit with the patient for even an hour so the caregiver can get some fresh air. Don't just ask the caregivers what they need. They may be too stressed to know what they need. Just figure it out and do it.

You don't have to wait until the funeral to bring over a casserole and some cheerful flowers. And just coming to the house to talk to the caregiver can make a huge difference. It's called the ministry of presence. Just be there, but don't bring any platitudes or condemning Bible verses. Let the caregiver share, cry, scream, express anger, or whatever he or she feels. Be the presence of Christ for those moments.

RJ's book is available at [HERE](https://rjthesman.net/). To learn more about her ministry, see <https://rjthesman.net/>

—Jeanette Gardner Littleton is an editor and author who also works with Heart of American Christian Writers Network, helping authors tell their stories. Learn more at www.HACWN.org.

AMERICA FIRST

continued from page 2

America has never been just a country. Nor is America an ethnic group or race. America is an idea: the greatest nation-making idea in world history.

America was set up to be a "bright shining light," and has always seen itself — correctly, I believe — as exceptional. The America Firsters who believe in America Only do not see America as a moral force for good in the world. It should not "even comment" on good and evil outside of its borders.

mestic problems.

The argument that we should concern ourselves with our borders, not those of Israel (or, presumably, Taiwan) is a non-sequitur. That we have made America into a country with open borders has nothing to do with Israel or any other country. It has to do with the left's

desire to undo America (and Western Civilization in general). And it is not an America First argument; it is an America Only argument.

If conservatism succeeds in changing "America First" into "America Only," you can say goodbye to American exceptionalism, and to freedom on this planet.



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NOTO Celebration of Lights continues on Saturdays through Dec. 16 from 11am-8pm. Featuring FREE horse-

drawn wagon rides through the District, grand opening and lighting ceremony of the NOTO Celebration Tree at 6pm, live music and holiday shopping. Shop local by visiting all our NOTO District stores and the NOTO Holiday Market from 11 to 5 each Saturday. The NOTO Winter Celebrations season is proudly presented by Donaldson's Jewelers.

HOLIDAY CRAFT SHOW – Dec. 2, 9-3, Great Overland Station. Shop home-



made, local good. Children will love the free Exploration Station where they can create their own crafts, play and watch holiday movies with staff while parents shop. Hot coca and cookies! Free adm.

FAMILY-FRIENDLY FRIDAY FLICKS - Dec. 1, 8, 15 and 22, 6pm light meal followed by movie at Kansas Avenue United Methodist Church, 1029 N. Kansas Ave. Freewill donations accepted.

SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS – Dec. 9, 10-3, Topeka Church of the Brethren, 3201 NW Rochester Rd. Guest Speaker Dana Hart – Remembering the Birth of Christ and celebrating the symbols of our Lord. Crafts 10:30-3, meal 12-12:30pm. A benefit for Topeka North Outreach. 555-864-1992 or charla.kingery@gmail.com

GARY'S BERRIES – SANTA'S ACRES – Nov. 24 through December, at 5991 17th Street, Grantville, KS 66429, off of Highway 24. Christmas characters such as Santa and the Grinch, nearly one million lights, plenty of food items (like fudge, donuts, kettle corn and more), shopping and more. Meet Santa. garys-farmfest.com or call (785) 246-0800.

Visit the NOTO Calendar of Events at explorenoto.org for more information.

FIRST FRIDAY ART WALK & MARKET is the first Friday of every month. The North Topeka Arts District has become an attraction to Art Lovers and History Buffs alike with beautiful scenes of art and history. Entertainment can also be found on First Fridays, at various venues during the artwalk up and down N. Kansas Avenue, as well as streetside vendors. The restaurants, locally owned shops, art galleries antiques and studios have become a favorite art walk destination. Art Walk Hours are 10 am to 9 pm.

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the events calendar

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THE BERRYTON PICKERS – First Sat. of ea. month, 7-9pm, Berryton Baptist Church. Bring your snacks!

GRAND OTTAWA OPRY – 2nd & 4th Saturday, 5:30PM-pre-show, 6PM showtime, Ottawa Memorial Auditorium, 301 S Hickory, Ottawa. Tickets are \$15 and only at the door. Ph. 785-241-6762, email grandootpry@gmail.com. GrandOttawaOpry.com

PICKIN' ON THE PRAIRIE BLUEGRASS JAM, every Sunday 1-3:00, Potwin Drug Store, Old Prairie Town, 785-215-6997 for info. Milkshake for the month of August is GIMME'S MORE

NASHVILLE NIGHTS – Nov. 9, 7pm, TPAC. 3 top songwriters – Lee Thomas Miller, Wendell Mobley and Barry Dean have multiple Grammy, CMA and ACM nominations and a combined 19 #1 hit singles.

TOPEKA JAZZ: BRIAN BAGGETT TRIO – Nov 26, 3pm, TPAC. Tickets: TopekaJazz.com

LINDSEY STIRLING Snow Waltz Tour – Dec. 1, 7pm, TPAC.

THE KREADY HOLIDAY SPECTACULAR – Dec. 23, 1:30 & 7pm, TPAC. Bringing back Topeka native and Broadway star, Jeff Kready, with his wife, Broadway star Nikki Renée Daniels

SPECIAL CHURCH EVENTS

HARVESTER'S PROGRAM FOR SENIOR CITIZENS -

every second Sat., takes place at Christian Lord Ministries, 2421 SE California. Call 266-4979.

HOPE HOUSE FREE COMMUNITY CLOTHING BANK – Wed. 6-8pm and Sat. 12-3pm, Oakland Church of the Nazarene. 939 NE Oakland

HARVESTER FREE MOBILE FOOD DISTRIBUTION – 2nd Saturday each month, 1:30-3pm, Oakland Church of the Nazarene: 939 NE Oakland

FREE WEEKLY COMMUNITY PANCAKE BREAKFAST – Sundays 8:10 to 10:30am, at Oakland Church of the Nazarene: 939 NE Oakland, followed by church services at 10:45am with Pastor Jeanette Cook.

FIRST SATURDAY BREAKFAST BUFFET – 7:30 AM – 10:00 AM, Shawnee Heights UMC, 6020 SE 44th

INSIDE OUT FELLOWSHIP CHURCH – Every Sunday 12pm service; Every Tuesday 7:30pm service. Location: 2409 NE Division St. For info: 785-380-7031 or io@insideoutinc.net or www.insideoutinc.net

KIDS for JESUS! – Wednesday's 6:30 – 8pm, Lakeview Church of the Nazarene, 2835 SE Croco Rd. Bring your friends, family, neighbors, enemies! For info: 785-266-3247, FB: Topeka Lakeview Nazarene, Email: LakeNaz@aol.com

MID-WEEK PRAYER & BIBLE STUDY - Wednesday's, 7-8pm, Lakeview Nazarene, 2835 SE Croco Rd. You are invited! Contact info: (785)266-3247, FB: Topeka Lakeview Nazarene

LOL "LADIES OF LAKEVIEW" – Lakeview Church of the Nazarene, 2835 SE Croco Rd. Monthly Women's Ministry Events! (Cooking, Crafts, Outreach, Bible Study, Fellowship!) Call the church office for info: (785) 266-3247, Facebook: Topeka Lakeview Nazarene Email: LakeNaz@aol.com

SENIOR ADULT EXERCISE CLASS - Tuesday's @ 10am, Lakeview Church of the Nazarene, 2835 SE Croco Rd. Church: 785-266-3247. Facebook: Topeka Lakeview Nazarene. Email: LakeNaz@aol.com

BIBLE STUDY: Discerning the Voice of God by Priscilla Shirer - Monday's, starting Oct. 2, 6-8pm. This study is for men & women. Lakeview Church of the Nazarene, 2835 SE Croco Rd. Be sure to bring your study guide with you! Church: 785-266-3247. Facebook: Topeka Lakeview Nazarene.: LakeNaz@aol.com

ROOTED CHRISTIAN HOMESCHOOL CO-OP; Colossians 2:6-7. Monday's 12-4pm. Cooking class for 4th graders & older at noon. Call the Church Office for more information. Lakeview Church of the Nazarene, 2835 SE Croco Rd. Church: (785) 266-3247. Facebook: Topeka Lakeview Nazarene. LakeNaz@aol.com

NATIVITIES AND NOELS -- Dec. 1 and 2, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Dec. 3, 1 to 7 p.m., Topeka Stake Center of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2401 S.W. Kingsrow Rd. Over 800 nativities from around the world, ongoing live Christmas music, refreshments, nativity craft for children. "Christmas Around the World" music program at 7 p.m. on Saturday includes congregational singing and Christ-centered Christmas music from many different countries shared by many different local churches. Free. For info: call 785-554-8068 or go to <https://www.facebook.com/nativitiesandnoels>

FAMILY-FRIENDLY FRIDAY FLICKS – Dec. 1, 8, 15 and 22, 6pm light meal followed by movie at Kansas Avenue United Methodist Church, 1029 N. Kansas Ave. Freewill donations accepted.

FESTIVAL OF THE NATIVITIES – Dec. 2, 9-12, Faith Lutheran Church, 1716 SW Gage. Take a tour of a variety of different nativities sets, along with live music, children's activities, and light refreshments!

SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS – Dec. 9, 10-3, Topeka Church of the Brethren, 3201 NW Rochester Rd. Guest Speaker Dana Hart – Remembering the Birth of Christ and celebrating the symbols of our Lord. Crafts 10:30-3, meal 12-12:30pm. A benefit for Topeka North Outreach. 555-864-1992 or charla.kingery@gmail.com

DRIVE THROUGH LIVING NATIVITY – Dec. 10, 5-7pm, First Lutheran Church, Huntoon & Fairlawn. Free.

FREE CHRISTMAS MOVIE NIGHT - A CHRISTMAS STORY – Dec. 15, 6:30-8pm. Oakland Church of the Nazarene 939 NE Oakland Ave. Popcorn and snacks

BREAKFAST IN BETHLEHEM – Dec. 16, 9-11am, Christ Lutheran Church, 3509 SW Burlingame. Join us for breakfast, and then travel through our interactive stations for fun activities focused on the story of Christmas. Free of charge!

BLUE CHRISTMAS SERVICE – Dec. 17, 6pm, First Presbyterian, 817 SW Harrison. A service of remembrance and hope.

CHRISTMAS EVE CANDLELIGHT SERVICE – Dec. 24, 8am, 9am & 10am, First Southern Baptist Church, 19th & Gage.

CHRISTMAS SERVICES – Dec. 24 at 9:30am and also 4 & 6pm, and Dec. 25 at 9:30am, 8am, 9am & 10am, First Southern Baptist Church, 19th & Gage.

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE – Dec. 24, 1pm, Oakland United Methodist Church, 801 N.E. Chester Ave.

CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICE – Dec. 24, 3pm, Kansas Avenue United Methodist Church, 1029 N. Kansas Ave.

NEW YEAR'S EVE WATCH NIGHT SERVICE – Dec. 31,

4pm, Kansas Avenue United Methodist Church Fellowship Hall, 1029 N. Kansas Ave.

FAMILY-FRIENDLY EVENTS

SENIORS NUTRITIONAL LUNCH – Weekdays, except holidays, at noon at Auburn Civic Center, 1020 N. Washington Street. Minimal cost per person. Reservations/cancellations required 24 hours in advance by calling Meals on Wheels of Jefferson & Shawnee Co. at 295-3980. Each meal includes 1% milk & sugar-free items for diabetics. 215- 0064.

MEDICARE MONDAYS – First Mon. ea. month, 1-3pm. Topeka/Sh. Co. Public Library, 1515 SW 10th. Jayhawk Area Agency on Aging offers Senior health insurance counseling. For info: 580-4545 or nhonl@tscpl.org

COUNTRY AND BALLROOM DANCING - Thursdays 6-9pm. Croco Hall. Info: Edwina 379-9538, 478-4760.

FIRST FRIDAY ART MARKET – Downtown and NOTO arts district. Arts, antiques, fine crafts, flea market items, snacks, beverages, entertainment and more.

TOPEKA ACAPELLA UNLIMITED AUDITIONS –Topeka Acappella Unlimited is looking for female singers who would like to sing four-part acappella harmonies. Topeka Acappella Unlimited is a Chapter of Sweet Adelines, International. Call Cindy Patton at 785-640-7403 for info

HARVESTERS MOBILE FOOD PANTRY, 1st & 3rd Sat, 2-3pm, Shawnee Heights UMC parking lot.

FREE MOBILE FOOD DISTRIBUTION – 4th Tue. thru Nov., 9am, 1231 NW Eugene St. Randel Ministries, Inc., in partnership with Harvesters and Family of God Church will have its monthly food distribution. No ID or proof of income required, first come first served. Distributing fresh produce and other items to families in need. 785-234-1111 www.RandelMinistries.com

TOPEKA PUBLIC LIBRARY PLAY BUS – 9:30am-noon,

Visit Historic Lecompton and see the **LARGEST Christmas Trees and Ornaments DISPLAY** in the Midwest!

Open Nov. 1 to Jan. 1 • Mon. - Sat.: 10am to 4pm • Sun.: 1 - 5pm

Over 170 trees decorated in antique, Victorian, vintage and theme décor – including turn-of-the-century and WW I-era decorations, a barb-wire tree, feather trees, and many more unique decorations!



While there, tour

- Constitution Hall
- Territorial Capital Museum
- National Landmarks

HISTORIC LECOMPTON

Civil War Birth Place

Where Slavery Began to Die

Kansas & National Historic Landmarks

Lecompton Turnpike Exit • 10 miles East of Topeka on U.S. 40 & 24

www.LecomptonKansas.com

C5Alive Developing and Uniting Christian Leadership

- Business • Non-profits • Churches

Membership open to all Christian businesses, non-profits, churches & individuals!
Luncheons & Tradeshows & other events open to the general public!

C5Alive POWER Luncheons are held 2nd Thur. each mo.

Dec. 14, 11:30-1: "Christmas" Luncheon

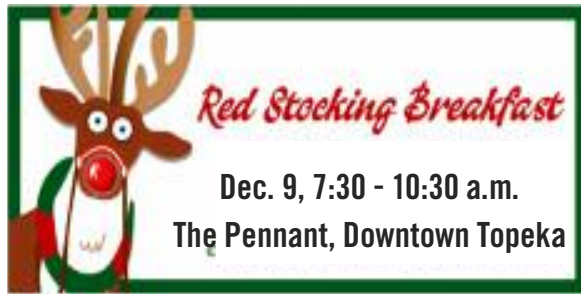
Join us for Christmas Fun at Fairlawn Plaza Mall!

Open to the public. RSVP to info@C5Alive.org

Save the Dates!

- Jan. 12: POWER Luncheon, 11:30-1
- Feb. 8: POWER Luncheon, 11:30-1
- Mar. 14: POWER Luncheon, 11:30-1
- Mar. 30: EASTERFEST at Great Overland Station!

For info: www.C5Alive.org or [Facebook.com/C5Alive](https://www.facebook.com/C5Alive)



Lakeview Nazarene Church, 2835 Croco. Every Tuesday, enjoy story time, play opportunities, books for check-out & take & make art. 785-266-3247.

OPEN INDOOR COURT PICKLEBALL – Sundays at 4pm, Berryton United Methodist Church (7010 SE Berryton Rd. All ages and abilities welcome.

SENIORS PITCH CLUB – Every Tuesday 1 pm at Garfield Community Center. First visit free then a dollar per visit for coffee and replacement cards .

BREAD BASKET FARMERS MARKET – Saturday's, 7:30am-1pm, inside West Ridge Mall .

CYCLING EVENTS – Various cycle rides are offered by Kansas Cyclist. www.kansascyclist.com/

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES – Outdoor events and activities. www.getoutdoorskansans.org/calenda

SATURDAY NIGHT CRUISES – 5pm: 1st Sat. – Spangles, 29th & Topeka Blvd.; 2nd Sat. – Fairlawn Plaza; 3rd Sat. – The Dugout, 17th & Fairlawn; 4th Sat. – The Pad; 5th Sat. – The Dugout.

170 CHRISTMAS TREES & ORNAMENT DISPLAY – Nov. 1-Jan. 1, 10am-4pm Mon-Sat., & 1-5pm Sun. at Territorial Capital Museum, 640 E. Woodson, LeCompton. Over 170 Christmas Trees decorated in antique, Victorian, vintage and theme décor – including turn of the century and WW II era decorations, a barb-wire tree and feather trees. Also tour Constitution Hall, a National Landmark 785-887-6148. lecomptonkansans.com

KNIGHTS OF LIGHTS – Nov. 24 - Dec. 31, 5:30-10pm, Fridays, Saturdays & Sundays, KC RenFest grounds, Bonner Springs. Stroll through a Renaissance wonderland with lights, shopping, food, entertainment and fun. Visits with Santa, Mrs Claus and Barbie the Christmas Elf will captivate you and the sights, scents and sounds of the festivities will enchant you. <https://www.etix.com/ticket/p/59351124/knights-of-lights-2023-bonner-springs-kansas-city-renaissance-festival>

FESTIVAL OF TREES – Nov. 21- Dec. 2, 10am-6pm, Fairlawn Plaza Mall. Wonderfully decorated trees and a silent auction.

TARC's WINTER WONDERLAND – Nov. 22-Dec. 31, 6-9pm Mon-Wed; 6-10pm Thu-Sun. Lake Shawnee, 3435 SE East Edge Rd. View dazzling holiday light displays, featuring one million lights, while winding through a 2-mile scenic drive. Advanced Tickets are available: TARC, 2701 SW Randolph. 785.506-8720. Winterwonderlandtopeka.com

LEARNERS SESSION – every Saturday morning 11-1, Sk8away, 815 SW Fairlawn. Free skate lessons by certified instructors. \$8 per person but an adult skates for free with paid child! sk8away.net, 785-272-0303, manager@sk8away.net

GARY'S BERRIES – SANTA'S ACRES – Nov. 24 through December, at 5991 17th Street, Grantville, KS 66429, off of Highway 24. Christmas characters such as Santa and the Grinch, nearly one million lights, plenty of food items (like fudge, donuts, kettle corn and more), shopping and more. Meet Santa. garysfarmfest.com or call (785) 246-0800.

HOLIDAY CRAFT SHOW – Dec. 2, 9-3, Great Overland Station. Shop homemade, local goods. Children will love the free Exploration Station where they can create their own crafts, play and watch holiday movies with staff while parents shop. Hot coca and cookies! Free adm.

LAWRENCE OLD-FASHIONED CHRISTMAS PARADE – Dec. 2, 11am, Downtown Lawrence. Authentic horse-drawn carriages parading down Massachusetts Street is the perfect way to kick off the holiday sea-

son. Cozy up with hot cocoa and blankets. Feel the true holiday spirit while watching dozens of beautiful horses and wagons adorned in garland and bells.

MIRACLE ON KANSAS AVENUE PARADE – Dec. 2, 6-8pm, Downtown Topeka. Lighted parade at 5th &

Kansas; including the “official arrival of Santa.” Reindeer will be on hand as Chance Encounter plays afterward at Every Plaza. www.topekpartnership.com/gtp-events

CHRISTMAS LIGHT SHOW – Dec. 8, 9, & 10, at 6, 7, 8, & 9pm, Topeka Bible Church, 1101 SW Mulvane St. Dazzling light displays synchronized to live performances of Christmas music by artists you can see through the windows of the building. A huge LED screen lets you get “up close” to the live performances as you enjoy the show from the comfort of your car. Music is played over your car's stereo. Price: Free. 30 minutes long. 785-234-5545

NUTCRACKER BALLET – Dec. 8, 7:30pm; Dec. 9, 1:30pm & 7:30pm; Dec. 10, 1:30pm at TPAC. Ballet Midwest's holiday staple. Tickets at TPAC box office, and Barbara's Conservatory of Dance. www.ballet-midwest.net

RED STOCKING BREAKFAST – Dec. 9, 7:30-10:30am, The Pennant, 915 S. Kansas Ave. Get tickets in advance at www.kcls.org or at the door. Children 10 & under eat free. Benefits KCSSL's child abuse prevention programs and services.

SENT PICTURES WITH SANTA & RESOURCES FAIR – Dec. 9, 9-11am, 455 SE Golf Park Blvd. Healthcare services, shopping for gifts, wrapping and more.

C5Alive “CHRISTMAS” LUNCHEON – Dec. 14, 11:30-1, at Fairlawn Plaza Mall. Featuring Christmas fun and games. Cost: \$10 for C5 members & first-time guests who RSVP, \$12 at the door

• \$15 for non-members & repeat guests.

• Please RSVP to info@C5Alive.org, so we know how much food is needed!

Open to the public – Put POWER in your life with great food, great speakers and great company! Invite a friend to join you!

SAVE THE DATE: C5 POWER Luncheon, Jan. 11, 11:30-1.

GLORIA!; Dec. 15, 7pm; White Concert Hall, Washburn University. Shawnee Choral Society presents their annual winter concert, free for all ages.

facebook.com/ShawneeChoralSocietyTopeka

THE NUTCRACKER BY KANSAS BALLET ACADEMY– Dec. 16 at 7pm & 17 at 1pm, TPAC. Tickets available at the TPAC box office or Ticketmaster.com. For info: 785-234-2787

OLD PRAIRIE TOWN CHRISTMAS – Dec. 16, 10am-2pm, 199 NW Filmore. Old Prairie Town will be filled activities: make magic reindeer feed, help an elf on the railroad hand cart, write a letter to Santa at the depot, take pictures with Santa in the Mansion, enjoy music and dance in the Everest Church, make an ornament to take home and hear a story in the school house. Families can enjoy shopping for nostalgic gifts or treats in the Mulvane General Store and Potwin Drug Store as well. Warm beverages can be purchased from El Cafecito. \$5 per person

WING FLING –Dec 16, 2pm, Stormont Vail Events Ctr. Live music by Undercover, sporting events in the big screen, and party games like cornhole, ladder toss, etc. stormontvaileventscenter.com

THE KREADY HOLIDAY SPECTACULAR – Dec. 23, 1:30 & 7pm, TPAC. Bringing back Topeka native and Broadway star, Jeff Kready, with his wife, Broadway star Nikki Renée Daniels

MEETINGS & CLASSES

CRAFTY, SKILLED OR CREATIVE VOLUNTEERS NEEDED to develop outdoor lighted displays at Ward Meade Park events. Contact Elsie, 785-256-2920, leave a message.

CONCERNED WOMEN FOR AMERICA MEETING - Join other concerned people to pray and unite in action for Shawnee Co. and our Nation. For info about monthly meetings: 785-260-5659 or ks.cwfa.org.

THE HEAT – FREE fitness classes for the community. Located at Florence Crittenton Services Center for Integrative Health, 5423 SW 7th St. www.fl-ocritkansans.org Sun. 4-5 pm Yoga; Mon. 12-12:45pm Cardio Remix; Mon. 5:30-6:15pm STRONG™; Tue. 12:15-1:15pm Restorative Yoga; Tue. 5:30-6:15pm Zumba@; Wed. 5:30-6:15pm Cardio Sculpt; Thu. 12:15-1:00pm Pilates+ CIRCL Mobility™; Thu. 5:30-6:15pm Zumba@; Fri. 12-12:45pm POUND

DEAF WORSHIP SERVICE – 3rd Sun., 3pm, Faith

Lutheran Church, 17th & Gage. Also, every Sun. 9:30am service is interpreted.

TAI CHI FOR HEALTH – Mon. 10-11 at Lowman United Methodist Church and Thu. 9:30-10:30 at Topeka Zoo. No training needed, just watch & follow. Contact Madon Daily at 505-424-8989 or madondaily@gmail.com. To Join from Home via Zoom, contact Madon for the Zoom link.

PICKLEBALL – Mon. & Wed, 1-3pm, First Baptist Church, 3033 SW MacVicar Ave. Park on West Side, where the gym is located. Contact Dave Mathias, davemathias@sbcglobal.net, or Betsy Thompson, betsythompson@gmail.com.

SHEPHERD'S CENTER BOOK CLUB - 1st & 3rd Mon. 2-4pm at Westminster Presbyterian Church, 1275 SW Boswell Ave. Contact Pat Kirkman at patyk696@yahoo.com.

SMS - STRENGTH, MOBILITY, STABILITY EXERCISE



Topeka Public Library. Bring a project to work on as we share our needleworking skills and ideas. All are welcome to drop in.

CHRISTIAN HOMESCHOOL CO-OP - Monday's, 1-4pm, Lakeview Nazarene, 2835 SE Croco Rd. Contact info: (785)266-3247, FB: Topeka Lakeview Nazarene

SENIOR ADULT EXERCISE CLASS - Tuesday's 10am, Lakeview Nazarene, 2835 SE Croco Rd. All exercises will be done from a chair, will help you get up out of a chair, & climb stairs safely! Contact info: (785)266-3247, FB: Topeka Lakeview Nazarene

TOPEKA LINCOLN CLUB - 1st Tue. of month, 7pm, Topeka Public Library. Discussing our greatest President, Abraham Lincoln, and his times. The public is welcome. For info, contact Kirk Nystrom 235-6977.

SUNRISE OPTIMIST CLUB - Every Tue., 6:30am, Sunrise Optimist Complex, 720 NW 50th St. 246-1291.

NARVE (Nat'l Assn of Railroad Veteran Employee) - 2nd Tuesday each month at Grace Episcopal Church, 701 SW 8th Ave - 9:30AM. Enter on NW corner.

MENNINGER BIBLE CLASSES - Tuesdays 11am-12:30. Amerus Room, YWCA, 225 West 12th. A new study group for Year One of Flo Menninger's course on Four Years through the Bible. Read and discuss Genesis through First Kings. Nominal charge for ma-

terials. For info call the YWCA at 233-1750 or Clara Gamache at 785-408-5433. (The Bible study is also taught on Sat. mornings on 101.5 FM radio.)

FRATERNAL ORDER OF EAGLES Aerie 4319: 1st & 3rd Tue. 7pm; Auxiliary: 1st & 4th Tue. 6pm, 2941 SE Fremont Street. An international non-profit organization uniting fraternally in the spirit of liberty, truth, justice, and equality, to make human life more desirable by lessening its ills and promoting peace, prosperity, gladness and hope. www.foe.com 785-266-7307

DUPLICATE BRIDGE - Tuesdays and Thursdays at 12:30PM at The Woman's Club of Topeka, 5221 SW West Dr. Bill Gates and Warren Buffett play duplicate bridge! It is great for your brain health. For additional information email janescola@hotmail.com.

O.W.L.S. (Older Wise Loving Saints) - meets the second Tuesday of the month. Location varies and can be found at www.faithfamilylife.com

HAND AND FOOT CANASTA - 2nd & 4th Tue., 2-4pm, St. David's Episcopal Church, 3916 SW 17th St. Must arrive before 2pm and stay for entire game. Email Caroline at hlbopper1@gmail.com or call 228-2447.

MEXICAN TRAIN DOMINOES - 1st & 3rd Tue., 2-4pm, St. David's Episcopal Church, 3916 SW 17th St. Do not come before 1:45pm. Email Ottie Reed, reed7111@gmail.com, or Mary Adkins, marycat-

keeper@gmail.com

MAP GROUP (MEMOIRS, ANCESTRY, PHOTOS) - VIA ZOOM - 4th Wed. 10-11:30am. Contact Rich McReynolds at rim4017@gmail.com. A Zoom link will be sent to you.

FAMILY HISTORY WRITING GROUP - 2nd Wed. 10-11:30am, Lowman United Methodist Church, room 12. Do you have great family stories to tell and want to pass them down to the next generation but don't know where to start? shepherdstopeka@yahoo.com

S.W.A.G. (Spiritual Warriors Anointed by God) youth group - Wed at 7:00 p.m. 3710 NW Topeka Blvd.

AWANA - Every Wed., 6-8pm, First Southern Baptist Church, 1912 SW Gage Blvd. Bible based program for children & youth ages 3-HS. For info: 272-0443.

AWANA - Every Wed., 6:30pm, Bethel Baptist Church, 4011 N. Kansas Ave. Bible based program for children & youth ages 3-HS. For info: 286-0467.

AWANA - Every Wed., 6:30-8pm, Auburn Christian Church. Bible based program for children & youth ages 3-HS. For info: 256-2515.

VIP LUNCHEON FOR SENIORS - Every Wed., 10:45 Bible Study and meal at Noon, Topeka Church of the Brethren, 3201 NW Rochester Rd. (1 mile north of Dillon's North). FREE lunch with Christian fellowship, devotions & entertainment provided by Topeka North Outreach. Free will donations accepted. For info: 785-224-8803 or vip@topekanorthoutreach.org.

STUDENT IMPACT - Every Wed., 6-8pm, First Southern Baptist, 1912 SW Gage Blvd. Youth games, teaching, worship, small groups. For info: 272-0443.

CHRISTIAN CHALLENGE - Every Thurs. 7-9pm, First Southern Baptist, 1912 SW Gage Blvd. Worship for college students.

TOPEKA TWILIGHT LIONS BRANCH CLUB - 3rd Thursdays at 7pm at Lakeview Church of the Nazarene, 2835 SE Croco. Social gathering, guests welcome. Topekalions.org

TOPEKA COSMOPOLITAN CLUB: The Club that fights Diabetes -- Meetings: first three Thursdays of every month, 12 noon, at the Topeka Country Club.

INTENTIONAL MOM - 1st & 3rd Thurs., 9-11:30am, Topeka Bible Church Auditorium, 1135 SW College. For all moms, helping to be intentional! 234-5545.

OPERATION BACKPACK - 1st Thurs., 6pm, Indian Creek Elementary School, 4303 NE Indian Creek Rd. Volunteers gather to assemble Weekend Snack Sacks for low-income students. No assembly in August. Sponsored by Topeka North Out-

reach. For info: 286-1370.

LINE DANCING - 2nd & 4th Thu. 1:30-3:30 at First Baptist Church, 3033 SW MacVicar Ave. Contact Karen Botkin at 785-945-6785 or Jim Baer at 785-256-2432 or jimbaer73@gmail.com to register.

BRIDGE GROUP - 1st & 3rd Thu. 1-3:30pm, at Our Savior Lutheran Church, 2021 SW 29th St. To play, arrangements must be made by Mon. 5pm with Joan Arterburn at 408-5174.

TOPEKA GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY - 4th Thurs., 7pm, Topeka Shawnee County Public Library, 1515 SW 10th St. No program in Nov. or Dec. Promotes & stimulates the education, knowledge & interest of the membership & the public in family history, genealogical records & research. 233-5762 or tgstopeka.org.

KINGDOM ADVISORS TOPEKA AREA STUDY GROUP - 3rd Thu., 11:30am-1pm via Zoom. Christian financial professionals: financial planners, accountants, attorney's & insurance agents invited. For info: kingdomadvisors.org or Jim Hanna, james.c.hanna@ampf.com or 785.357.6278 x19.

TOPEKA (Downtown) OPTIMIST CLUB - Every Fri., noon. Serving the youth of Topeka. Anyone welcome. For info: 272-1099 or fostern60@yahoo.com.

A GOOD YARN CLUB - 2nd & 4th Sat., 9-11am, Wanamaker Rd Baptist Church, 2700 SW Wanamaker. Doing Good for Others: Knitting & Crocheting for Local Charities, free yarn, needles, hooks & patterns. All are welcome. Info: Anne, 785-272-9249 or kittens812@sbcglobal.net

BIBLE QUIZZING - 1st Sat. Learn God's Word & have fun with area Christian youth age 9-19. YFC/YEA style quizzing & rules. 913-593-6427 or biblequizzing.org.

MONTHLY SCORE MEETING - 1st Sat., 8-9:30am, Washburn Tech, 5724 SW Huntoon (enter east doors facing Huntoon). No RSVP or fee is required. Small business owners are invited to a Breakfast Roundtable discussion with members of SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives). Info: 234-3049.

TOPEKA GREAT LIGHT AGLOW - For meeting info contact Vickie Lynch at greatlighttopeka@gmail.com.

SUPPORT GROUPS

HOPE AND HEALING ACADEMY harnesses the power of horses to transform the human spirit. They are expanding services to address the needs and experiences of first responders and members of the armed

forces. For info, call 785-224-4232 or go to www.hopeandhealingacademy.com.

OVERCOMER'S OUTREACH ANONYMOUS RECOVERY SUPPORT GROUP - Mondays 6:30-7:30pm, at Be Filled Of South Topeka, 200 Airport Rd, Bldg. 818 Suite 1. Led by Pastor Bill Ritchey. 785-817-2802

BINDING UP THE BROKEN HEARTED - Sessions offered for women who suffer from the after-effects of abortion. All the women who lead these sessions have had an abortion and have received healing from God's Word. For info, contact local Healing Hearts representative Shelly Brush, First Southern Baptist Church at shelly.b@healinghearts.org. All communication is confidential and secure.

MIDLAND CARE GRIEF SUPPORT GROUPS: Building A, 200 SW Frazier Circle, Every Mon., 4-5pm: 12 Week Adult Group for Recent Loss 1st and 3rd Thu., 10:30am & 5:30pm - Ongoing Adult Group 1st and 3rd Thu., 5:30pm: Ongoing Young Adult Group (4-18 years of age) For All Groups: Call for start dates and info packet. Group and individual grief support available upon request. Info: 785-232-2044 ext.341

CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUPS - Jayhawk Area Agency on Aging provides an opportunity for caregivers to get together and share their ideas and feelings. 2nd Monday, 3:30pm, Topeka public library, Anton Rm. 3rd Friday, 12 noon, Jayhawk Area Agency on Aging, 2910 SW Topeka

ABORTION RECOVERY SUPPORT - Providing services for women & men who suffer from Post-Abortion Syndrome. Kay Lyn at KLCarlson20@cox.net.


AL-ANON is a support group for families and friends of alcoholics. For information on meetings in the Topeka area email ais-topeka@kansas-al-anon.org or 785-215-1045. All correspondence confidential

PURSUIT FOR SEXUAL PURITY - Men struggling with pornography & sexual addiction. This bible study/ accountability group uses the Pure Desire book by Ted Roberts. For info: 249-9509. All inquiries confidential.

ALZHEIMER'S SUPPORT GROUPS - Monthly support group meetings for caregivers of individuals with Alzheimer's disease or a related dementia. All of our programs have moved from in-person to virtual.

Caregiver support group via Skype 9:30am every other Wednesday. Email Hayley Young at hdyoung@alz.org or call 785.379.3067 for the meeting link and other info.

Caregiver Support Group via Google Hangouts, 4:30pm every other Wednesday. Email Hayley Young



Knights of LIGHTS

NOV 24 - DEC 31, 2023

Fridays and Saturdays: 5:30 - 10:00pm
Sundays: 5:30 - 9:00pm
PLUS Thursday, Dec 21st: 5:30 - 9:00pm

- Meet Barbie the Christmas Elf
- Lighted Maze, Castle, and Pirate Ship
- Visit with Santa and Mrs. Claus
- Half a Million Lights
- Giant Rocking Horse
- Free Hot Cocoa for Kids
- Free Gift Bag for Adults and Children
- Free Gift Bag for Dogs

Make a reservation for a private igloo dinner

FOR MORE INFO: KCRENTREST.COM

Lecompton has Midwest's largest Christmas trees and ornaments display

Experience the holiday magic of Christmas when visiting Historic Lecompton. Visitors can see an indoor display of over 170 trees decorated in antique, Victorian, vintage and theme decor - including turn of the century and WW II era decorations. Among the many trees is a barb-wire tree, a feather tree, a Victorian Costume tree and many more unique decorations.

At the same time, visitors can also tour Constitution Hall, a National Landmark. Lecompton is known as the "Birthplace of the Civil War, Where Slavery Began to Die." Lecompton was



The Christmas display will be offered from November 1 to January 1. The display and museum is open 10 am to 4 pm Wednesday through Saturday and 1 to 5 pm Sunday.

Many interesting historical sites in the area can be seen on a walking tour, starting from the Territorial Capital. There are also unique shops and eateries in this quaint little town.

For more information on the display and the museum, go to lecomptonkansas.com.

recently named one of the "Best Small Towns in Kansas" by Kansas Magazine readers.

at hdyoung@alz.org or call 785.379.3067 for the meeting link and other info.

BIKERS AGAINST CHILD ABUSE — NE Kansas Chapter (B.A.C.A.) 3rd Sun., 4 pm American Legion, 3800 SE Michigan. Open to the public. For info: 817-5801.

COMPASSIONATE FRIENDS/BEREAVED PARENTS GROUP — 4th Mon. in Formation classroom at Most Pure Heart of Mary, 17th & Stone. Discussion starts 7pm; fellowship & refreshments 8:30. 785-272-4895

CAREGIVERS GROUP — Caring Hearts of Hope meet 2nd and 4th Tuesdays from 5:30-6:30pm at Highland Heights Christian Church. This group will root its encouragement in God's word and prayer as well as conversation and sharing and is open to all those who care for others with illnesses such as Alzheimers, dementia, cancer or other debilitating illnesses or injuries. For dates and info, go to "Weekly Class List" at www.highlandheightsccc.com or call 785-379-5642.

EMOTIONS ANONYMOUS: a 12-step program for those suffering with emotional instability such as depression, anxiety, grief, etc. Meets every Tues. at Grace Episcopal Cathedral, Noon-1pm. For info: Sharon 785-633-7764

FIBROMYALGIA & CHRONIC FATIGUE SYNDROME SUPPORT GROUP — 2nd Tue., 7-9pm. First Congregational Church, 17th and Collins. For info: Randy at 785-969-4038 or TopekaCFS@outlook.com.

GRANDPARENT/RELATIVE CAREGIVER SUPPORT GROUP — 3rd Tue., 6:30-8pm, 2nd floor meeting room, St. Francis Hosp, 1700 SW 7th. For info: Sharla, 286-2329; Jennie (English/Spanish) 231-0763.

GRIEF SUPPORT — Sponsored by Heartland Hospice for those dealing with death or major loss: 1st Mon., 5:30-7:30pm, individual appointments; other times are available. Call Terry at (785)230-6730. 3rd Thurs., 11am, Lunch After Loss, Paisano's Ristorante, Fleming Place, SW 10th & Gage Blvd., . For reservations or info: 785-271-6500.

HEALING AFTER LOSS TO SUICIDE (HeALS) Topeka support group meets the 1st Tuesday of each month via Zoom. The 3rd Tuesday meeting is in-person at 1st Congregational Church, 17th and Collins. Both meetings are 6:30-8. Topeka.heals@gmail.com. 785-380-9309

PRISON OUTREACH MINISTRY — Every Tue., 7-9pm, Topeka Women's Prison, 815 Rice Rd. Reaching out to those who can't come in, finding freedom behind bars, inspiring inmates to seek salvation during a dif-

ficult time. Providing support & guidance through the Holy Spirit to offer strength. Director: Don Garner, 286-0489 or faithfamilylifeministries@gmail.com.

GAMBLERS ANONYMOUS — Every Wed, 7pm, St. Francis Hospital, meeting room #8.

MOMS-IN-TOUCH PRAYER GROUP — Every Wed., 2:30-3:30pm, Library at Cair Paravel-Latin School. Experience God's power through prayer as we lift our students, teachers, staff, administrators & board up to the Lord. For info: 357-0369.

DIVORCECARE PROGRAMS — (For updates check www.divorcecare.org) locations and times:

WED. — 6:30pm, Topeka Bible Church, 1101 SW Mulvane. Cost: \$15. Child care provided. For info: 379-0505 or www.divorcecare.org.

WED. — 6:45 — 8:45pm, Walnut View Christian Church, 3634 SE 37th St. (just East of 37th & Croco). Cost: \$10 registration (scholarships available). The video seminar series featuring some of the nation's foremost experts on divorce and recovery topics, combined with support group discussion of the materials. Complimentary child care children up to the fifth grade. Info: 266-7550 or walnutviewcc@att.net.

WED. — 6:30pm, Northland Christian Church, 3102 NW Topeka Blvd. No Cost. 286-1204, www.northland.cc

PROSTATE CANCER SUPPORT GROUP — First Thursday, 3pm, St Francis Hospital, Room 300 on 2nd floor. For info: Jim 785 806 3266

CELEBRATE RECOVERY — Every Fri., 6pm, 1912 Gage Blvd. A Christ-centered program, based on 8 principles found in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Applying these Biblical principles, become free from addictive & dysfunctional behaviors. crtpekaaks.org.

NICOTINE ANONYMOUS — Every Fri., 6:30pm, Town & Country Church Renaissance Room, 4925 SW 29th St., use west door cross red foot bridge. A fellowship of men & women helping each other to live free of nicotine. No fees. 402-321-486; Laboomaha@att.net

TOPEKA NAR-ANON FAMILY GROUP — For families & friends who are affected by someone else's narcotic addiction. Every Sat., noon-1:15 pm, rm. A, 1st Baptist Church, 3033 SW MacVicar, enter on S. side, door A. www.naranonmidwest.org

COVENANT KEEPERS — 3rd Sat. Group for people who want to see their marriage saved when their spouse wants out. 816-453-0884 or 816-966-0927

Former Muslim, then atheist, finds Christ

Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a former Muslim-turned sharp critic of Islam and then vocal atheist, has gone through a new conversion — revealing that she's now a Christian.

"I still have a great deal to learn about Christianity," she wrote in an essay published on Monday at the British website Unherd. "I discover a little more at church each Sunday. But I have recognized, in my own long journey through a wilderness of fear and self-doubt, that there is a better way to manage the challenges of existence than either Islam or unbelief had to offer."

Hirsi Ali, 54, did not say which Christian denomination she was now a member of and did not reveal which church she attends.

Hirsi Ali has been a critic of Islam — the religion she was raised in — which led to death threats. She became the victim of female genital mutilation as a child in Somalia. After surviving a civil war and an arranged marriage, Hirsi received political asylum in the Netherlands.

She later served as a member of Parliament in her adopted country from 2003 to 2006, where she publicly renounced her Muslim faith. In 2004, Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh collaborated with Hirsi Ali on a short film called "Submission," detailing the abuse and mistreatment of Muslim women.

As a result, both received death threats. Van Gogh was murdered in November 2004 by Mohammed Bouyeri, a Dutch-Moroccan Islamist who had objected to the film. Three years later, Hirsi Ali helped establish the AHA Foundation, which works to protect women's rights in the West from those suffering religious oppression.

Hirsi Ali's journey from Muslim to atheist to Christian reflects the current cultural and political moment.

"To understand why I became an atheist 20 years ago, you first need to understand the kind of Muslim I had been," she wrote. "I was a teenager when the Muslim Brotherhood penetrated my community in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1985. I don't think I had even understood religious practice before the coming of the Brotherhood. I had endured the rituals of ablations, prayers and fasting as tedious and pointless. The preachers of the Muslim Brotherhood changed this. They articulated a direction: the straight path. A purpose: to work towards admission into Allah's paradise after death. A method: The Prophet's instruction manual of do's and don'ts — the halal and the haram. As a detailed supplement to the



Quran, the hadeeth spelled out how to put into practice the difference between right and wrong, good and evil, God and the devil."

The essay comes as the war between Israel and Hamas has entered a fifth week following the Oct. 7 attack. Pro-Palestinian protests, some of which have been violent, have popped up across the West. At the same time, cases of antisemitism have also seen large increases in the United States and other parts of the world.

Hirsi Ali, who works for the Hoover Institution at Stanford University and the American Enterprise Institute, recalled that "the most striking quality of the Muslim Brotherhood was their ability to transform me and my fellow teenagers from passive believers into activists, almost overnight."

"We didn't just say things or pray for things: we did things," she said, adding that a "special hatred" was reserved for Jews.

Hirsi Ali noted, "You can see why, to someone who had been through such a religious schooling, atheism seemed so appealing. ... I also found an entirely new circle of friends, as different from the preachers of the Muslim Brotherhood as one could imagine. The more time I spent with them — people such as Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins — the more confident I felt that I had made the right choice. For the atheists were clever. They were also a great deal of fun."

Why convert to Christianity now? Hirsi Ali, who has hinted at this conversion in recent public appearances, said the rise of militant Islam, China, Russia and wokeism were all factors.

"Part of the answer is global," she noted. "Western civilization is under threat from three different but related forces: The resurgence of great-power authoritarianism and expansionism in the forms of the Chinese Communist Party and Vladimir Putin's Russia; the rise of global Islamism, which threatens to mobilize a vast population against the West; and the viral spread of woke ideology, which is eating into the moral fiber of the next generation."

Hirsi Ali said that the differences between Islam and Judeo-Christian tradition are simple.

"Unlike Islam, Christianity outgrew its dogmatic stage," she wrote. "It became increasingly clear that Christ's teaching implied not only a circumscribed role for religion as something separate from politics. It also implied compassion for the sinner and humility for the believer."

Hirsi Ali said the freedom Western nations enjoy compared to majority-Muslim ones is another reason for her conversion. She said the "God-hole" left by the church's diminished influence in Western life and culture has caused a void.

"Atheism failed to answer a simple question: What is the meaning and purpose of life?" she said, adding that "the void left by the retreat of the church ... has merely been filled by a jumble of irrational quasi-religious dogma."

From ReligionUnplugged. Published with permission.

—Clemente Lisi is the executive editor at Religion Unplugged. He is the author of "The FIFA World Cup: A History of the Planet's Biggest Sporting Event" and previously served as deputy head of news at the New York Daily News and a long-time reporter at The New York Post. Follow him on Twitter @ClementeLisi.



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Four things I've learned about being adopted



Malinda Just, right, with her family (l to r) Megan, dad Steve, mom LaReta and Monica.

“What do I have to be thankful for? My own dad didn’t want me.”

Thanksgiving was creeping closer, and I had just unleashed that question to a group of high school freshmen I thought to be my friends.

If I recall correctly, it was the first time I voiced that inner turmoil. My biological father had walked out of my life when I was a year old, eventually signing away all his parental rights to me. For whatever reason, high school was the time I really started thinking on his abandonment.

It’s not that I didn’t have a “good” life. I did. My mom had not left me. When she remarried, she took me with her, always caring for and loving me. My stepdad—who has never been anything but Dad—adopted me when my biological father signed me away. I’ve always known I was lucky.

But for me, those heavy questions needed to be asked, then answered, before I would be able to see my adoption for the gift it is. High school, however, wouldn’t be a time of healing. Instead it was a time of increasing darkness. Shortly after I allowed people to see that vulnerable piece of my heart, a few used that question against me and walked away from our friendship, first with heated notes and then with silence. On the outside, I fought it. I was indignant. On the inside, I figured I deserved it. Their actions reinforced the original abandonment trauma. After that fall-out, I pushed the agony back into the dark. I wouldn’t allow it to surface again in words until I began therapy at age 30.

But even from its dark cage, that question would have its way with me. It would label me: Unwanted. Unloved. Discardable. I would believe it. I would react to it. At 15, on top of my already tender state, my younger brother died unexpectedly. When that grief coupled with the caged darkness, I became a shell. Oh, I looked and acted fine on the outside. My eyes were the only giveaway that things weren’t OK, and few took time to notice—or at least it felt that way to me, unwanted, unloved, discardable. Inside, I wasted away, increasingly numbed out with pain, grief and despair.

But all the while, God knew. He saw. He cared. I have come to understand that every time I wept, alone, He wept with me in His nearness—He weeps with those who weep—and that understanding started to bring feeling

back to my numbed insides. By this time, I was a married adult with children, but that didn’t matter to the Lord. He wanted me, and I surrendered.

Since then, He has provided tremendous growth in my life. At times, I still struggle with depressive cycles. At times, I still feel unwanted, unloved and discardable. At times, I’m triggered by events and people in my present that reinforce the trauma of my past. And yet, God is faithful. He continues to reveal places of hurt and anguish and there’s still weeping. But there’s also rejoicing. I’ve even come to the place of being able to rejoice in my earthly adoption—looking at it beyond “being lucky.” In the process of learning to see my earthly adoption as a gift, I’ve learned a few things.

Adoption starts with trauma.

Perhaps this doesn’t seem like something to rejoice in. It’s actually not. But, it’s something that is important to grasp and accept when it comes to thinking about adoption. Adoptions start with trauma. I hesitate to use the sweeping word “all” here, and yet, I struggle to think of an adoption scenario that wouldn’t involve some element of trauma to at least the child involved. I think so often we can have a glorified view of adoption—and I don’t want to diminish its merit—but to bypass this root element of adoption is to lessen its messy beauty.

I have learned that when root-issues are overlooked—and this applies beyond adoption—there can’t be a solid foundation for anything to be built on top. Without a solid foundation, whatever was built will surely crumble. To be able to view adoption as beautiful, I

needed to become comfortable with understanding how much of my life and worldview was shaped by the trauma of abandonment. I have learned that, as with anything, if I’m not willing to be honest and tell the truth, even if it’s just between myself and the Lord, healing won’t come. Recognizing and accepting that there is a painful element to adoption has been freeing for me and I’m thankful for the lesson.

Adoption is a sacrifice.

For the child for instance, adoption is a sacrifice of trust. In some way, an adopted child’s trust has been broken. In my experience, healing from this is a lengthy, difficult process. As far as the adoptive family goes, it is a sacrifice to extend even a small willingness of trust to another parent after you’ve been hurt before. There’s always a risk of abandonment again, and an adoptive child has to decide between what can feel like sacrificial vulnerability or retreating toward self-preservation. Growing up, I think I did the latter more than the former. Relational vulnerability often still feels risky.

From what I can tell, it also takes sacrifice on the part of the adoptive parent(s) to have patience with the emotional scars of an adoptive child. Working toward establishing and building trust is time-consuming and emotionally draining. I have learned that it is important to actively pursue this. I also know it doesn’t always work the way an adoptive family wants. Sometimes the root pain wins out, and that is also a sacrifice. There’s nothing easy about adoption.

In my case, it has also been a sacrifice on the part of my husband. First as a child and then into adulthood, I have often reacted from a place of fear. I had lost trust in fathers—and honestly, males in general—and I’ve routinely been afraid that if I wasn’t pleasing enough, I would be left again. This theme has surfaced multiple times in my life, including in my marriage. In that way, marrying me, an adopted child, has been a sacrifice for my husband, as we have needed to come to terms, both individually and as a couple, with the basic brokenness—unwanted, unloved, discardable—I have felt my whole life.

Adoption is a gift.

Now that I’ve hit a couple difficulties of adoption, we can make a jump to the part so often focused on: adoption as a gift. This is true, but can be hard to see, at least for the child. It took me a long time to work through the trauma, heartache and sacrifice before I could even begin to see my adoption as more than “lucky.”

In the fall of 2017, God peeled off another layer of my adoptive story, helping me realize that my dad made a decision for me. As a general rule, parents don’t choose their biological children. But in adopting me, my dad did. I was old enough to have a personality. I was old enough to display a temperament. I was old enough for him to look at me and say, “no way.” But he didn’t. He picked me. He gave me his name. He claimed me. It took me over 30 years to fully understand and claim the enormity of my forever Dad’s decision to bring me into his home, his heart and his life. In ways only God, working all things together for our good, can do, he took the most precarious, painful pieces of my story and showed me how it reveals His glory. And in that, I have learned adoption is truly a gift.

My earthly adoption mirrors my heavenly adoption.

My earthly adoption speaks volumes of the love my God has for me. My earthly adoption is a picture of my heavenly adoption—that adoption where God said, you have a personality, a temperament, a wayward tendency, but you are mine. I give you my name. I claim you.

Like my earthly adoption, my spiritual adoption started off with trauma. Sin separated me from my heavenly

Father. Being separated from Him is painful, devoid of color. Like my earthly adoption, it has taken me time to learn I can trust my Father. Just like trusting others in my daily life has been a challenge, so it’s been with the Lord. I have placed misconceptions, lack of understanding, lies, in between me and Him. And yet, like the patient, adoptive father He is, He has gently guided me toward truth. With His pursuit, He has turned me time and again to His word where I have started to have a better grasp of the knowledge of the Holy. As I am sanctified, I expect Him to keep leading the way in this regard and I will gladly follow.

Just like my earthly adoption, my spiritual adoption is a gift. I didn’t earn it. It is pure grace upon grace (John 1:16). Often I catch myself trying to prove my worth—to muster up more trust than I have for instance—but my God reminds me that his grace is sufficient in my lack (2 Corinthians 12:9). At times I still struggle to understand God as Father, but He doesn’t push me away. He continues to press His gift into my hand.

“But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, ‘Abba, Father.’ Now you are no longer a slave but God’s own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.” (Galatians 4:4-7)

So, what do I have to be thankful for? My biological father chose to walk out of my life, yes. I felt like it defined me, yes. But I’ve learned that I’m more than that. I am an adopted heir. I am a child of God. What a glorious gift! One I continue to learn from and that I will always cherish, no matter how old I get.

—by Malinda Just | Special to Metro Voice

I was originally honored to write this for Rachael on her blog My Healing Hands-On Home (I have since lost touch with her and the original blog link is dead) in a series called “Things I’ve Learned From...” With her blessing, I re-published the piece on my blog in 2019, and am sharing it here with minor edits in honor of National Adoption Month (November 2023).

“Gotta Serve Somebody”: Bob Dylan’s spiritual journey continues

Bob Dylan rocked the music world in 1979 when he released the iconic album “Slow Train Coming.” The singer who was the voice of his generation was writing about overt Christian themes, many of them apocalyptic. Fans of Christian music were ecstatic. Dylan was one of them and would become a staple on the concert circuit and contemporary Christian radio stations.

Now, more than 40 years later, many are wondering what happened. Is Dylan still a Christian? Did he return to his Jewish roots? Or is his spirituality, like his music, still evolving? As Dylan himself might say, the answer is blowing in the wind.

“I think Bob Dylan, in addition to being a Nobel Prize-winning musician and poet, has sort of been a chameleon all of his career,” said Mark Davidson, senior director of archives and exhibitions at the Bob Dylan Center in Tulsa. “He has had an iconic status since the early 1960s, when he was writing songs such as ‘Blowin’ in the Wind,’ ‘Like a Rolling Stone’ and all of those early songs. He cemented his legacy early on as a poet’s poet and a musician’s musician. Since then, he has endured and changed and never stopped looking for new avenues for creativity and inspiration.”

Davidson, coauthor of the new book “Bob Dylan: Mixing up the Medicine,” recently discussed the singer’s spiritual journey with Metro Voice. Although Dylan’s conversion to Christianity may have seemed abrupt to many people, it was not out of character for him to periodically reinvent himself.

“There have been shifts like that throughout his career,” Davidson said. “Obviously, the motorcycle accident in 1966 was one, and 1978-79 was another big one. You can argue that during the early 1990s, leading up to ‘Time out of Mind,’ he was going through another of these transitions. The same thing happened in the 2010s when he was doing the ‘Great American Songbook’ albums. It sort of was leading creatively to this new place of ‘Rough and Rowdy Ways’ and ‘Shadow Kingdom.’ It’s not so out of the blue for him to have these moments where everything changes and it’s a new direc-



tion.”

At least in retrospect, his lyrics foreshadowed his conversion.

“I think some of his direction and instrumentation during the 1978 tour leads pretty naturally to what he ends up doing when he does this deep dive into the gospel music tradition,” Davidson said. “Some of the influences were bubbling under the surface early on, the things have always been there and came out in new ways decades down the road. I think gospel music was one of them.”

The pivotal point in Dylan’s journey to Christianity came when a woman threw a silver cross onto the stage during a concert near the end of a worldwide tour in 1978, when he and his band were physically and emotionally exhausted.

“It’s a difficult story to pin down,” Davidson said. “He was talking to the audience about feeling really bad and feeling like he needed something, and someone threw a cross on the stage. In the book, we also talk about during that 1978 tour, when he started exploring gospel directions in his music. He had been working on some of the songs that would end up on ‘Slow Train Coming.’ From what I have seen of that 1978 world tour, it was grueling. I think by the end of it, probably Dylan and his entire band were pretty wiped out. That was an impetus for that big shift.”

Dylan later recounted his experi-

ence in dramatic terms: “Jesus put his hand on me. It was a physical thing. I felt it. I felt it all over me. I felt my whole body tremble. The glory of the Lord knocked me down and picked me up.”

He would go on to record three albums with Christian themes: “Slow Train Coming” (1979), “Saved” (1980) and “Shot of Love” (1981). The lyrics are serious and reflect a deep biblical knowledge, of both the Old and New Testaments.

“I don’t think his foray into Christianity and studying the Bible was at all superficial,” Davidson said. “We know that he was writing down verses and took it very seriously. He really studied the Bible. One thing that can be said about Dylan is that when he gets an interest in something, he doesn’t go in halfway at all. That is true of traditional folk songs, Woody Guthrie and everything he was learning in the late 50s and early 60s. Everybody says he was like a sponge.”

Throughout his career, he has absorbed what was going on around him and turned it into often profound lyrics.

“The word ‘genius’ is bandied around a lot, but I think one of the things Dylan has been able to do throughout his career, and it’s part of the way his brain works, is take in a lot of things very quickly, commit them to memory, absorb them and put them back out in his own way,” Davidson said. “That is evidenced

through his Christian gospel period, early folk songs and country music.”

At the same time Dylan was trying to get grounded by attending Bible studies in Southern California, he also was being encouraged to go more public with his faith. Chuck Girard, founder of the seminal Christian rock band Love Song, whose story is told in the recent movie “Jesus Revolution,” crossed paths with him several times in the early 1980s.

“When everyone tried to jump on the bandwagon after the announcement of Dylan’s conversion, he remained true to character — and wisely so,” he said. “He successfully managed to stay aloof from those who would exploit him. He offered himself on his own terms and only did so when he felt led to lend his talents to some Christian endeavor.”

Dylan’s spiritual path following his gospel trilogy is a matter of much debate and speculation.

“You see more of the Old Testament biblical allusions cropping up immediately after the Christian trilogy in ‘Infidels,’” Davidson said. “In terms of where he is now or where he has been since the early 1980s, that’s difficult for me to answer. I know that he is a very private person and really doesn’t speak on topics such as that. I think he is no less immersed in all of his thinking about the world. I don’t see Dylan as ever having shut off that part of his brain — the curiosity, the deep thinking,

the self-reflection.”

“Rolling Stone” interviewed Dylan after the release of “Infidels.” “I don’t think I’ve ever been an agnostic,” he said. “I’ve always thought there’s a superior power, that this is not the real world and that there’s a world to come. That no soul has died, every soul is alive, either in holiness or in flames. And there’s probably a lot of middle ground.”

Dylan, now 82, performed two shows in Kansas City last month as part of his Rough and Rowdy Ways tour. Regardless of the spiritual content of his music at the moment, it is enough to appreciate him for his insights into the human condition and the times in which he lives. As with everyone else, faith is a journey, not a destination.

“What I know is that I’m not his judge,” Girard said. “My theology is such that I believe it to be a very difficult position to get un-born again. I know firsthand what it’s like to stumble and fall and be restored. It’s not over until it’s over, as they say. In my deepest heart of hearts, I believe that I’ll see Bob Dylan in heaven someday.”

For more information about the Bob Dylan Center, visit www.bobdylancenter.com. “Bob Dylan: Mixing up the Medicine” is available at most bookstores and online, including at Bob Dylan: Mixing up the Medicine: Davidson, Mark, Fishel, Parker: 9781734537796: Amazon.com: Books

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Army wants soldiers it kicked over the Covid shot to come back

The U.S. Army has done an about-face and is now asking unvaccinated former soldiers to rejoin after previously kicking them out for not getting the COVID-19 shot.

The decision comes as the Pentagon misses recruiting goals. In 2022 it fell short by 25%.

“Individuals who desire to apply to return to service should contact their local ... recruiter,” Brig. Gen. Hope Rampy wrote in a letter sent to former Army personnel.

Rampy also told former soldiers who refused the shot that they could have their military records expunged.

Unvaccinated risk?

Army Secretary Christine Wor-

muth said in 2022 when the first soldiers were discharged, “Unvaccinated soldiers present risk to the force and jeopardize readiness.” The Pentagon also suspended most soldiers who asked for exemptions from the mandate.

The Army has not explained why an unvaccinated soldier was a risk previously but is not now a risk.

Multiple military branches have struggled to attract new recruits in recent years.

In response, officials have implemented changes in recruitment strategy, including targeting college graduates and giving bonuses as high as \$50,000.

As of November, just 19 soldiers



have returned after thousands who were kicked out.

Bradley Miller, a former Army lieutenant colonel, was one of those removed. He was relieved of

his command in October 2021 and resigned shortly before hitting the 20-year mark, missing out on a pension, because he questioned the safety of the COVID-19 shots.

“I never trusted whether the vaccines would ever be safe or would ever do what they were supposed to do. And as a commander, I certainly never wanted to order my troops, who might also be hesitant, to take the vaccine either,” he told American Family News of his decision.

Members of Congress are responding to the Military’s decision.

“We’re all glad to see the Army is reversing its persecution of soldiers who refused to get the COVID vaccine, but that doesn’t take away the damage this caused to our troops,” Rep. Anna Paulina Luna (R-Fla.) wrote Twitter.

Christian banking institution, Crown Ministries partnering to provide stewardship education

AdelFi, a Christian banking institution in California, is teaming up with Crown Financial Ministries to provide biblical stewardship information.

The exclusive banking partnership with Crown enables AdelFi to offer customized courses on financial stewardship, budgeting and saving to its thousands of consumers, non-profits and business members across the nation. Plans are to develop more than 20 customized courses, all based on what the Bible teaches Christians about money.

The online education platform is in addition to the AdelFi Financial Stewardship Center, which already provides

AdelFi members free access to credit scores, financial calculators and articles on various topics such as credit and borrowing, home purchasing, getting out of debt, teaching kids about money and more.

“As a Christian financial institution, we want to provide our

members access to education and resources from a biblical perspective and in a fully digital way,” said Abel Pomar,



president and CEO of AdelFi. “As many of our members are younger and more digitally savvy, we are thankful that

Crown allowed us to customize their courses to match how our members prefer to learn.”

Recent research conducted by Lifeway Research and AdelFi found that young Christian consumers, compared to their non-Christian counterparts, considered taking on more debt (47 percent v. 37 percent). Also, the study found that while three-fourths of young adults seek to purchase from companies that share their values, less

than half of Christians spend their money with Christian-owned companies.

“It’s important for us to educate the broader Christian community about the lasting kingdom impact that money has, specifically how we spend and invest it,” Pomar said. “Christians should know how banks utilize and invest the resources God entrusts to them and how we as a Christian financial institution are fundamentally different.”

For more information about the AdelFi Financial Stewardship Center, visit www.AdelFiBanking.com/financial.stewardship-center.

Disney100: The Exhibition coming to Union Station next spring

Walt Disney grew up in Marceline, Mo., and honed his animation skills in Kansas City. Next spring, Disney 100: The Exhibition at Union Station will celebrate his life and work.

“Our leadership team has worked tirelessly over the last three years to ensure we were able to bring Walt and his story back to Kansas City, where his animation career began,” said George Guastello, president and CEO of Union Station. “We have a long-time partnership with Semmel Exhibitions, and when we heard the Walt Disney Company was creating an exhibition celebrating its 100th anniversary, we knew we had to bring it here to Kansas City, where the roots of Walt Disney run deep.”

Walt created his first commercial film and met Kansas City-born artist and

Disney legend Ub Iwerks during his time in Kansas City. Together, their innovative spirits, boundary-breaking technology and unparalleled storytelling would help set the creative standards for the company that would be founded by Walt and his brother, Roy O. Disney, in 1923.

In creating this exhibition, the Walt Disney Archives opened its vault of treasures to showcase hundreds of objects, including more than 250 artifacts and works of art, costumes and props, and incredible memorabilia. Kansas City is one of the first three cities to host the North American tour, along with Philadelphia and Chicago.



Within Disney100: The Exhibition, guests will encounter some of their favorite Disney stories as they journey through 10 imaginatively themed galleries showcasing “Crown Jewels” from some beloved films such as “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” (1937), the live-action “Cinderella” (2015), “Encanto”

(2021) and many more. The exhibition features more than 14 interactive installations and hundreds of items, including from some of the most recent members of the Disney family — Pixar, Star Wars and Marvel.

“Guests will step into Disney100: The Exhibition and experience 100 years of Disney history like never before,” said Becky Cline, director of the Walt Disney Archives. We are excited to bring the tour to Kansas City, a place that was instrumental in Walt’s life. It was here where he forged his storytelling skills and his creative passion. Everything Walt did began with storytelling. It is the essence of Disney magic.”

This exhibition is the largest and most

immersive projects the Walt Disney Archives has ever produced. Visitors will be taken on a visual journey where they can explore seldom-viewed works of art, including visual development art for “Sleeping Beauty” (1959), created by artist and Disney Legend Marc Davis. Also on display will be a special piece of production art from “Mary Poppins” (1964), which also can be seen in the opening titles of “Mary Poppins Returns” (2018), created by artist and Disney Legend Peter Ellenshaw

Tickets to Disney100: The Exhibition are now available, and station officials strongly encourage the public to reserve their adventure time ahead of the opening. For more information, visit www.unionstation.org.



7 Smart Home Solutions that Enhance Convenience and Security

Devices that allow you to stay connected to your home from virtually anywhere are all the rage. If you're looking to seamlessly integrate innovative solutions into your home for added convenience, security and peace of mind, you'll need smart tech with the right features.

The experts at Masonite, a global industry leader in interior and exterior doors and door systems, share these seven smart home solutions.

Garage Door

Leave behind that nagging feeling that you forgot to shut the garage door when you're a block away from home. Smart garage door openers that connect to an app on your phone mean you can always check on the status of your door to ensure it's closed when it should be. It provides the added benefit of keeping track of who's coming or going while allowing you to remotely open the door for friends, family, neighbors and others who may need access when you're away.

Front Door

Take your front door to the next level with a high-performance model incorporated with top tech like the Masonite M-Pwr Smart Door, the first residential front door to fully connect to your home's electrical system and wireless internet network. Homeowners can create a customized welcome-home experience with the door's motion-activated

LED welcome lights and a smart lock that recognizes your arrival and automatically unlocks. Whether at home or away, homeowners can use the door's smartphone app to program the lighting, confirm if the door is open or closed with a door state sensor or monitor the entryway with a built-in video doorbell.

Plus, the integrated connection to the home's power means there's no need to charge or replace device batteries, providing peace of mind that you're always connected and protected. Available at The Home Depot, homeowners can select from a range of designs, colors and glass styles all made with the Masonite Performance Door System. The system is designed to protect your home from the elements and provide superior weather resistance, energy efficiency and comfort with premium fiberglass construction, a rot-resistant frame and a 4-Point Performance Seal so there's no need to sacrifice style for performance.

Mirror

Hectic mornings may never completely be a thing of the past, but you can smooth out the start to your day with a smart mirror that displays important information like weather, news updates and your schedule. Many interactive displays allow you to check notifications and play music for a sleek, stylish addition to the bathroom that helps you stay



on track and on time.

Refrigerator

Smart refrigerators are often inherently newer models, meaning they're typically more energy efficient to save money on electric bills. With built-in features like cameras and sensors that aid in keeping track of grocery lists, they can help reduce food waste by reminding you to consume perishables before they spoil. Some models even include an interactive display that lets you watch recipe videos so you can test your skills with a virtual assistant.

Oven

Wi-Fi connectivity is the key feature of smart ovens, improving the cooking experience with increased control. By using an app on your smartphone, you can remotely preheat the oven and set timers. You can even cook like a pro with models that allow you to import recipes for automatic temperature control.

Dishwasher

Similar to smart appliances like refrigerators and ovens, smart dishwashers bring added convenience to your day along with improved function and efficiency. Connection to Wi-Fi and remote accessibility via smartphone app allow you to start wash cycles and check cycle status while away, receive notifications when detergent is low and more.

Washer and Dryer

If laundry feels like a chore, you can make it less of a hassle with smart washers and dryers that connect to your home Wi-Fi network. These smart appliances allow you to remotely start and stop washing and drying cycles from your smartphone and can send notifications when cycles are finished. Built-in diagnostics send alerts to your phone when there's a malfunction or it's time for required maintenance.

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entertainment

‘The Shift’ Breaks New Ground: A Sci-Fi Film with a Biblical Twist

The newest film from Angel Studios breaks new ground in the faith-based genre by giving fans a sci-fi, romantic plot with a biblical twist.

That film, *The Shift*, is released in theaters Dec. 1 and follows the story of a man named Kevin who meets a devil-like character known as the Benefactor and refuses his offer of wealth and fame. The Benefactor subsequently sends Kevin to a multiverse where there are multiple “Kevins,” forcing him to fight to get back to his wife and family.

The movie is a sci-fi retelling of the biblical book of Job.

Kevin, though tempted, maintains his belief in the God of the Bible.

It stars Kristoffer Polaha (Wonder Woman 1984, *Mystery 101*) as Kevin, Neal McDonough (*Captain America: The First Avenger*) as the Benefactor, Elizabeth Tabish (*The Chosen*) as Kevin’s wife, and Rose Reid (*Finding You*) as the character named Tina.

“We’re watching the journey of the one guy who denies the Benefactor,” Polaha told *Christian Headlines*.

The film spotlights hope, integrity, and faith amidst darkness and trials, Polaha added.

“Kevin wants to be in a relationship



with God,” he said.

Angel Studios has had a string of successes this year. Its summer blockbuster *Sound of Freedom* grossed \$184 million domestically. In October, Angel released a documentary, *After Death*, that opened in the Top 5. During Spring, the Angel film *His Only Son* opened at No. 3.

Brock Heasley, the film’s director and writer, said the film is not a typical faith movie but also not a typical sci-fi project.

“For a sci-fi film, you usually think of spaceships and lightsabers and all,” Heasley told *Christian Headlines*. “... But there’s a whole other way of approaching science fiction that’s a little bit more

grounded. And it’s a little more based on character and big ideas, and not big effects. And so, sure, we’ve got special effects. . . . But this is a very grounded story that is dealing with one man’s journey back to his wife.”

The movie, he said, is also grounded in hope.

“All of us are going to pass through things that are difficult and things that are not necessarily even our fault because all of us have things that happen in our lives for which we are not responsible,” he said. “There is light to be found even within the darkest of times.”

The *Shift* is rated PG-13 for violence and thematic elements.

Sight & Sound’s “I Heard the Bells” on DVD



Just in time for the Christmas season, Sight & Sound is releasing its first feature film, “I Heard the Bells,” on DVD. Many area residents are familiar with the company’s live theater in Branson.

Set in the 1860s, the film takes viewers on a journey through the experiences of author Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who leads an idyllic life until the day his world is shattered by tragedy. With a nation divided by Civil War and his family torn apart, Longfellow puts down his pen, silenced by grief. However, the sound of Christmas morning reignites the poet’s lost voice as he discovers resounding hope and a rekindled faith.

“While many recognize Longfellow as one of America’s most well-known poets, they often don’t realize how his words and faith in God had far-reaching impact,” director Josh Enck said. “The passion behind creating this film was not only to share the true story behind the Christmas carol but to deliver a story of hope to a hope-hungry world.”

As the first Sight & Sound film ever produced, “I Heard the Bells” exceeded expectations, garnering a 98 percent au-

dience score on Rotten Tomatoes. Initially debuting in December 2022 as a three-day theatrical event, the film’s run in movie theaters nationwide extended to two months as a result of high demand, resulting in \$5.6 million in box-office sales. A partnership among Pinnacle Peak Pictures, Universal Pictures Home Entertainment and Sight & Sound opens the door for the ministry to reach audiences in a whole new way.

“We’re honored to collaborate with Pinnacle Peak Pictures and Universal Pictures Home Entertainment this holiday season to bring this powerful story to life for new and existing audiences,” said Katie Miller, director of marketing and communications for Sight & Sound. “We’re passionate about sharing true stories of individuals who changed the world because Christ first changed them with as many people as possible. We can’t wait to share what’s next for Sight & Sound Films.”

More information about how to purchase “I Heard the Bells” is available at www.iheardthebellsmovie.com.

“Max Lucado’s Because of Bethlehem” coming to theaters

Although it is still early November, the calendar of family Christmas activities already is beginning to fill up. Bestselling author and pastor Max Lucado will share the Christmas story in “Max Lucado’s Because of Bethlehem,” which will be shown in theaters nationwide on December 5, 6, and 7.

The movie will feature Lucado’s own holiday memories and the lifechanging Christmas story alongside a variety of star-studded artist performances by CeCe Winans, Matthew West, Anne Wilson, Matt Maher and Evan Craft. Inspired by his bestselling book, “Because of Bethlehem: Love is Born, Hope is Here,” he shows how the Bethlehem story, with all its fumbles, awkwardness and longing, illustrates how God is with us in ways we could never imagine. “Christmas tells us that God knows what it is like to be a human,” Lucado said.



This event, recorded earlier this year in Nashville in front of a live audience, reminds everyone that the spirit of Christmas is much more than a pretty tree with presents piled underneath. The film, directed by Steve Gilreath, celebrates and reflects the true gift of the season.

“I love Christmas,” Lucado said. “It invites us to believe the wildest of promises: God became one of us so we could become one with him. Clear the table; clear the calendar. Call the kids and neighbors. Christmas is here. Christ is here.”

“We are thrilled to bring this Christ-centered Christmas production to theaters all across the country,” said David Pierce, chief media office of the Educational Media Foundation. “With every word spoken and voices raised in song, audiences will experience the absolute joy of the season in celebration of the world’s greatest gift.”

Given recent world events, people need the Christmas story more than ever.

“Because of Bethlehem, we are given the honor to interact with God, hear his thoughts and witness the magnificence of his glory in both the good and bad parts of life,” Lucado said. “Jesus brought the message to us in order that we would know truth and be truth in a dark world.”

Theater and ticket information are available at www.fathomevents.com/events/max-lucados-because-of-bethlehem/

Kready Holiday Spectacular Coming to TPAC

With 17 Broadway shows between them, Jeff Kready and Nikki Renée Daniels promise to thrill you with vocal stylings that are direct from New York City, but have hometown heart. The Topeka Performing Arts Center benefit show is an opportunity to celebrate the season at a holiday concert for the whole family.

Accompanying them will be their daughters Lena (10) and Louise (6), in a holiday concert for all ages. Accompanied by musicians from the Topeka Symphony Orchestra, Jeff and Nikki will sing a wide range of holiday favorites from the classic to the contemporary. Also on stage will be Maria Cuevas of the band, Maria the Mexican, and singers from El Shaddai Ministries Community Church of Topeka. Other musicians on the program include The Shawnee Choral Society under the direction of Nicolas Carr, along

with invited singers from Topeka area high schools, as well as the Kansas Youth Chorale. In addition, the concert will bring the debut performance of a new song entitled, *Topeka!* written by Tony Award nominated composer, Steven Lutvak.

Come witness a new Topeka tradition that will delight and inspire you this holiday season. The one-performance-only event will be on Saturday, December 23rd, at 10:00 AM in the Georgia Neese Grey auditorium at TPAC.

Tickets are on sale in person at the TPAC Box office or online at [Ticketmaster](http://Ticketmaster.com) via www.topekaperformingarts.org/events.

Jeff Kready is a Washburn Rural and Washburn University graduate as well as a former music teacher with Topeka Public Schools. He moved to New York to pursue an acting career and has been in several Broadway shows



For King & Country on the power of Christian music

While Christmas remains a Christian holiday and a powerful public statement of the faith, it has also transcended its religious roots to become a cultural phenomenon. Including its music.

And though some poke fun at radio stations playing Christmas music 24/7 after Halloween, for many it is the only opportunity during the year to hear the Gospel presented.

Songs like O Come, O Come Emmanuel and Hark the Herald Angels Sing are prime examples.

Like these songs, Christian music can offer a sneak peak of heaven, a member of For King & Country said before the recent Dove Awards.

“Someone could be going through a very, very typical thing in their lives, and you can play a song, and it can go for about three minutes and 30 seconds, and all of a sudden, something in that space transforms who they are,” the group’s Luke Smallbone says. “I think that gives you a little bit of a peek into what heaven must be like, because I don’t know anything else that can have that type of impact. No sermon, for the most part, transforms the condition of someone’s soul so quickly.”

Music also helps with spiritual development, he said.

“I think it’s very, very rare when you see someone with a great joy who is singing songs to God, that they are struggling or barely making it,” Smallbone said. “They usually have a joy that is innate, that is indescribable. And I think it’s a spiritual practice.”

During the annual awards show, Grammy-winning artist Jordin Sparks performed “Love Me Like I Am” alongside the Australian duo.

“What is special about this through-line with Christian music is that there’s always an underlying message of hope,” she said. “And there’s always an underly-

ing message of love. And there’s always an underlying message of ‘you can do this,’ and ‘we can get through this together.’ Some other genres are very exclusive, but Christian music is about people being in this together. It’s about loving you as you are and coming as you are.”

Moriah Peters Smallbone, wife of For King & Country singer Joel Smallbone, stressed that music serves as a bridge between cultures and people.

“We try to be a bridge, projects that bring cultures and people groups that seemingly have nothing in common together,” she said. “There’s this underlying thread, this consistent message. Unity is incredibly valuable in a time where people are increasingly divided.”

Where Christian music and faith connect is no more evident than at Christmas.

Polls have shown that non-Christians, including atheists, listen to Christmas music with many participating in the holiday.

As for the music, not many artists today are singing Christmas songs with the Gospel boldly proclaimed. You have to go back to the 60s and 70s for much of it.

The Gospel Project published an article listing the best Gospel-centered Christian music. One example was the Carpenter’s rendition of “Christ is Born.” Writes Tevin Wax, General Editor the Project, “There is a very understated majesty to this song. I really like the line that says, ‘Hear him crying in the manger,’ and then that is juxtaposed by the line ‘King of heaven, Son of God,’ which then leads to the worshipful response ‘Alleluia.’ And you really have the mystery of the incarnation there in a nutshell. You’ve got it described so beautifully with a crying baby in a manger and yet this is the King of heaven, this is God in the flesh, this is the Son of God.”

Liam Neeson, Jonathan Roumie partner on C.S. Lewis project

Action-movie star Liam Neeson is teaming up with the prayer app Hallow for a special Pray25 Advent prayer challenge. “Advent with C.S. Lewis,” a four-week-long prayer series, will feature the works of the famous Christian author.

Neeson voices Aslan, a character in the film adaptations of Lewis’ “The Chronicles of Narnia” books. He will lead the reflections alongside actor Jonathan Roumie and Sr. Miriam James Heidland, SOLT, starting on Monday, December 4. Roumie is best known for playing Jesus in the TV show “The Chosen.” Heidland is a popular Catholic speaker, podcaster and author.

Advent begins this year on Sunday, December 3, and the liturgical season leading up to Christmas is viewed as a time of preparation and penance ahead of the birth of Jesus.

“I’ve partnered together with Hallow for this project to help guide folks through some beautiful meditations,” said Neeson, adding that it was “an honor to journey through them with the community on the app.”

“Advent with C.S. Lewis” will draw from various passages from the writings of Lewis. It “seeks to help participants acknowledge the desires of their hearts and see how those desires point to far more and greater than what the world offers,” Hallow said.



“I’m incredibly excited to partner with Liam Neeson and Sr. Miriam James for Hallow’s Pray25 challenge this year,” Roumie said. “The content is fantastic and will really impact people and help them find peace during this hectic time of year.”

In addition to prayers and meditations led by Heidland, Neeson and Roumie, Pray25 participants also will have access to traditional Christmas hymns from Andrea Bocelli and Matt Maher, Hallow Original Advent Lo-Fi and more Advent and Christmas music, the company said.

Alex Jones, Hallow’s CEO and co-founder, said producing a prayer series inspired by C.S. Lewis has been a long-time goal.

“It’s always been a dream of ours to do a challenge with C.S. Lewis’ incredible

writings,” he said. “They changed my own life, and we’re honored to be able to pray through them this Advent. And I couldn’t think of a more phenomenal voice to lead us through the writings than Liam’s. He, Jonathan and Sr. Miriam do such a beautiful job bringing them to life.”

Jones hopes that those who join in on Pray25 will provide a focus on God during the “busy season filled with distractions.”

“We’re so excited to help people pray this Advent,” he said. “We believe that prayer is transformative, and we are blessed to have partners like Liam Neeson and Jonathan Roumie to help folks prepare their hearts for Jesus.”

The prayer app has been criticized for including Neeson because of his support for abortion.

Kirk Cameron shares message of love in new children’s book

At a time of rising hate, actor and author Kirk Cameron is sharing a message of love with young readers.

“The Fox, the Fair and the Invention Scare,” released this week by Brave Books, shows how giraffes and foxes end a long family feud

and heal their divided community with courtesy, compassion and kindness.

“Our world is at war, literally,” Cameron says. “And all along our children are watching, trying to make sense of things. If we can show them something different, if we can show them that we’re really all brothers, we can give them hope.”

The book tells the tale of young Stewart the Giraffe and Asher the Fox, who compete at the Hive Haven Invention Fair. Tensions flare when their families air age-old grievances. Stewart and Asher watch in horror as their inventions are destroyed in the chaos that ensues. They then join forces to win first prize at the fair and end



generations of animosity between the giraffes and foxes.

The new book was inspired by a true story of forgiveness, healing and love that the author witnessed years ago at a Restore America Rally in Washington, D.C. A couple said their son

was gunned down on an inner-city street but that they vowed to respond with faith and love. A young man then spoke, saying it was he who killed the couple’s son. The boy’s parents not only forgave the murderer but welcomed him into their family and gave him the love that had been missing in his life and that made him a killer.

“He said the love of God demonstrated by this couple had forever changed him and gave him new life and a new heart,” Cameron told Fox News. “They not only forgave him; they had something deep in their heart that allowed them to treat somebody who killed their child as if he

were their own son.”

His message of love and forgiveness in “The Fox, the Fair and the Invention Scare” comes straight from the teachings of Jesus.

“Earlier teachings told people to love your neighbor and hate your enemy,” he said, citing the book of Matthew. “Jesus taught us to not only love our neighbors but to extend kindness to our enemies. God sends the sun to shine on both the good and the evil and the rains to water the crops of both the righteous and unrighteous.”

With the release of this book, Cameron also has introduced a social media and outreach campaign that offers to meet with and find common ground with his legion of critics.

“I’m a Christian conservative, traditional-values guy,” he said. “There are people out there who appear to be my enemies. They probably see me as their enemy. But I think we can have respectful discussions about family values, morality, religion and the books we should be reading to our children.”

50+ Lifestyles

A Guide to Enjoying Life in the Best Years

Understanding and Reducing Stroke Risks

As the second leading cause of death worldwide, according to World Health Organization, stroke will affect 1 in 4 adults over the age of 25 globally. A condition where the blood supply to the brain is disrupted, a stroke results in oxygen starvation, brain damage and loss of function.

There are two main types of strokes: ischemic, which occur when a blood vessel carrying oxygen and nutrients to the brain is blocked by a clot, and hemorrhagic, which are less common but can be more serious, occur when

of stroke, to learn more.

Know the Signs and Symptoms

If you suspect yourself or a loved one is experiencing a stroke, acting F.A.S.T. is critical in getting timely treatment necessary to survive. If you recognize the signs and symptoms of a stroke – face weakness, arm weakness and speech slurring – it's time to call for help. Reducing the amount of time between the onset of stroke and treatment can make a difference in how well the brain, arms, legs, speech and

according to the World Stroke Organization, and many risk factors can be controlled before they cause a stroke. By managing conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity and atrial fibrillation (AFib); ceasing smoking; eating a healthy diet; getting regular exercise; and taking prescribed medications, you can decrease your risk.

Address Health Inequities

Communities of color are disproportionately affected by stroke risk factors and have poorer experiences when it comes to timeliness and access to stroke care, referral patterns, treatment utilization and outcomes, according to research published in the “Journal of Stroke and Cerebrovascular Diseases. In fact, the risk of having a first stroke is nearly twice as high for Black people, according to the CDC, and members of the Black community have the highest rate of death due to stroke. Additionally, according to the American Stroke Association, non-white stroke patients are less likely to arrive by EMS and experience longer emergency department waiting times compared to white patients.

Know Where to Go

For every minute a stroke occurs, 1.9 million brain cells are lost, and the longer a stroke goes untreated, the greater the chances are of experiencing



long-term disability and brain damage. That's why it's critical to seek immediate treatment at the nearest comprehensive (or Level 1) stroke center. These facilities offer a full spectrum of neuroendovascular care, which can help patients taken directly there survive without long-term disabilities.

Understand Treatment Options

Seeking immediate treatment for stroke means you have more treatment options available, such as being eligible to receive tissue plasminogen activator or mechanical thrombec-

tomy (MT) for ischemic stroke. MT, a minimally invasive blood clot retrieval procedure, helps improve the chances you'll survive an ischemic stroke and make a full recovery. Treatment options for hemorrhagic stroke include surgery to remove, repair or clip a ruptured aneurysm.

If you or a loved one experience signs of stroke, seek immediate emergency medical services. To learn more about stroke risks and treatment options, visit jnmedtech.com.

– Family Features

Know the Signs and Symptoms

Quickly identifying signs of a stroke and seeking immediate treatment can save lives or reduce long-term disability.*

When a stroke occurs, acting **F.A.S.T.** can help you or a loved one get timely treatment needed to survive.

F
Face
drooping

A
Arm
weakness

S
Speech
slurring

T
Time to call for
emergency help

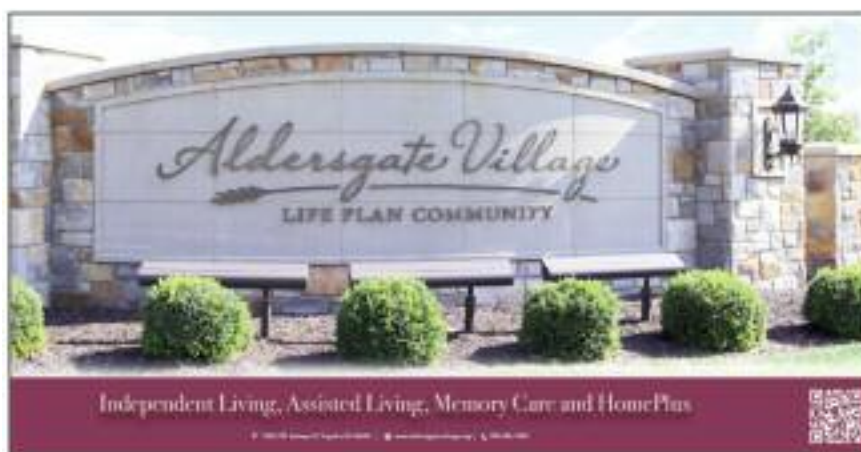
a weakened blood vessel ruptures and begins leaking blood. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 87% of strokes are ischemic.

Because a stroke can cause lasting disability and pain for those impacted and their loved ones, it's important to learn how to identify the signs and symptoms of stroke, how to reduce risk factors and where to go for timely treatment. Consider this information from the experts at Cerenovus, who are committed to changing the trajectory of stroke and offering a broad portfolio of devices used in the endovascular treatment

thinking are able to recover. The longer a stroke goes untreated, the greater the chances are of experiencing long-term disability, brain damage or death.

Reduce Stroke Risks

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The Importance of Mental Wellness for a Healthy Heart and Brain



Research shows anxiety, stress and depression can have a negative impact on physical health and may even increase the risk for heart disease and stroke.

In fact, the American Heart Association, the world's leading nonprofit organization focused on heart and brain health, identified a strong interconnection between the mind, heart and body in its scientific statement, "Psychological Health, Well-Being and the Mind-Heart-Body Connection."

"Research has clearly demonstrated negative psychological factors, personality traits and mental health disorders can negatively impact cardiovascular health," said volunteer chair of the statement writing committee Glenn N.

Levine, M.D., FAHA, master clinician and professor of medicine at Baylor College of Medicine and chief of the cardiology section at the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center. "The body's biological reaction to stress, anxiety and other types of poor mental health can manifest physically through an irregular heart rate or rhythm, increased blood pressure and inflammation throughout the body. Negative psychological health is also associated with health behaviors that are linked to an increased risk for heart disease and stroke, such as smoking, lower levels of physical activity, unhealthy diet, being overweight and not taking medications as prescribed."

Studies have found some people, in-

cluding people of color, may face a greater risk of poor health outcomes due to chronic stress, depression and anxiety linked to psychosocial stressors, particularly those related to social and economic inequality, discrimination, systemic racism and other societal factors. A study published in the "Journal of the American Heart Association" found U.S. adults who reported feeling highly discriminated against at work had an increased risk of developing high blood pressure compared to those who reported low discrimination at work.

"Mental health includes our emotional, psychological and social well-being," Levine said. "It affects how we think, feel and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others and make choices. Practicing mindfulness in all forms allows one to be more aware of and have more control over emotional responses to the experiences of daily life."

Consider these tips from Levine to improve your mind-heart-body connection:

- Practice meditation regularly. Even simple actions such as communing with nature or sitting quietly and focusing on your breath can have a positive impact.

- Get plenty of good, restful sleep. Set a regular bedtime, turn off or dim electronics as bedtime approaches and form a wakeup routine.

- Make connections and stay in touch. Reach out and connect regularly with family and friends, or engage in activities to meet new people.

- Practice mindful movement. There are many types of gentle mindful practices like yoga and Tai chi that can be done about anywhere with no special equipment to help ease your soul and muscles.

- Spend time with your furry friend. Companion animals are often beloved members of the family and research shows pets may help reduce physiological reactions to stress as well as support improved physical activity.

- Work it out. Regular physical activity – a recommended 150 minutes of moderate activity, 75 minutes of vigorous activity or a mix of both weekly – can help relieve tension, anxiety and depression, and give you an immediate exercise "high."

"Wellness is more than simply the absence of disease," Levine said. "It is an active process directed toward a health-

ier, happier and more fulfilling life. When we strive to reduce negative aspects of psychological health, we are promoting an overall positive and

healthy state of being."

Learn more about the importance of heart health at heart.org.

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C.J. Stroud's faith brought him from rough background to NFL stardom



Quarterback C.J. Stroud of the Houston Texans not only is running away with the NFL rookie of the year award but also is being mentioned as a potential most valuable player. Stroud, an outspoken Christian who hasn't been afraid to share the name of Jesus, talked after a recent game about how God has been with him through hurdles in life.

"For me, it's a lot of prayer," he said. "A lot of just knowing that God wouldn't put anything on me that I can't handle. I don't deserve his grace and his mercy, but he still gives it to me, and I love him for that. I think God made me like that."

Stroud's father, a former pastor, is serving a 38-year prison sentence in California after pleading guilty in 2015 to carjacking, kidnapping, robbery and misdemeanor sexual battery. At the time, Stroud was a middle school student. With the breadwinner of the family in jail, the family reportedly experienced financial struggles and housing insecurity.

Texans head coach DeMeco Ryans praised Stroud for his poise. "The thing about C.J. is it's the calm in the chaos," Ryans said. "He doesn't waver. He's confident that he's going to make plays, and the moment isn't too big for him."

After winning his first game in the NFL earlier this season, Stroud told the media that his purpose is to share the gospel and Jesus Christ. "I'll do that," he said. "I think that's what God wants/

Stroud expressed gratitude to his teammates and coaches, sharing how

"amazing" it is to have mutual trust reciprocated through actions. He also praised his and his teammates' families.

"Shout out to our families," he said. "We put in a lot of work, and our families do a great job of supporting us in that way. I love my family. I know the rest of my teammates can say the same. It's not just us. It's the city of Houston behind us, our families behind us, the guys' kids, their wives, my family, my parents. A lot of people are behind us in this thing, and I think we are proving a lot of people right who believe in us."

Vikings QB Kirk Cousins on season-ending Achilles injury

Minnesota Vikings quarterback Kirk Cousins tore his right Achilles tendon on October 29.

But that doesn't mean he's taking a break from living out his faith in Christ. In fact, the 35-year-old four-time Pro Bowler has used this personal and professional setback to glorify God in the midst of adversity.... Cousins revealed his thought process after the injury, "I'm excited to write the next



chapter and see what God wants to do with it, whatever it may be. I've just kind of been reminded again that my career, it's not my career. It's His career that I steward, and I've just gotta surrender myself and let Him lead where He wants to go.

And when that's a torn Achilles, I have to accept it just as much as if it's a win on 'Monday Night Football' "... I'm learning to play this sport holding my hands open and say, 'You

know God, whatever You want to do — if that means a torn Achilles — I've got to accept that," Cousins said, admitting that during his prayer times he's sometimes been tempted to question God's perfect plan. "... Ultimately I'll look back and say, 'God allowed that to happen, and I am where I am someday because of [the injury], not in spite of [it].'"

"The Bible makes it very clear that the best decision you will ever make, far beyond where to throw a football, is the decision of who will be the Master of your life. Will you allow Jesus Christ to become Lord of your life, and have control of your life? And will you serve Him?"

Marvin Harrison Jr. says faith is 'main ingredient' for success

Marvin Harrison Jr. has been practically unguardable since the start of last season. If No. 2 Ohio State reaches the national championship game, the star wideout may very well may break the Buckeyes' all-time records for receiving yards and receiving touchdowns.

After catching 11 passes as a true freshman, Harrison burst onto the scene in 2022 with a 1,263-yard, 14-touchdown season, and has been every bit as good in 2023. He is one of just three receivers in the nation with more than 1,000 yards (1,093) and more than 12 touchdowns (13).

With his seven catches for 149 yards



in Ohio State's 38-3 win over Michigan State on Nov. 11, Harrison became the first player in program history to record multiple 1,000-yard receiving seasons. He pointed to his faith in God as a driving force for him while reflecting on the accomplishment after the game.

"It's crazy," Harrison said in the postgame press conference. "All praise and glory to God. He's blessed me a lot with a lot of different gifts. Each and every day, I just try to honor those gifts, put in as much work as I can, and He's blessed me to be able to accomplish a feat like that."

Harrison plays with the shape of a cross in one of his thigh pads and regularly mentions his faith on social media, putting "AGTG" — which stands for "All glory to God" — at the end of some of his posts. Earlier this month, he captioned an Instagram post with 2 Chronicles 15:7. The verse says, "But as for you, be strong and do not give up, for your work will be rewarded."

In a recent interview, Harrison was asked what his special ingredient was. His answer revolved around Scripture and growing closer to the Lord.

"My Bible," he said. "I continue to pray, to pursue my faith as much as I can outside of football. And so that's one thing that I probably would say is a main ingredient for me."



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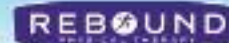
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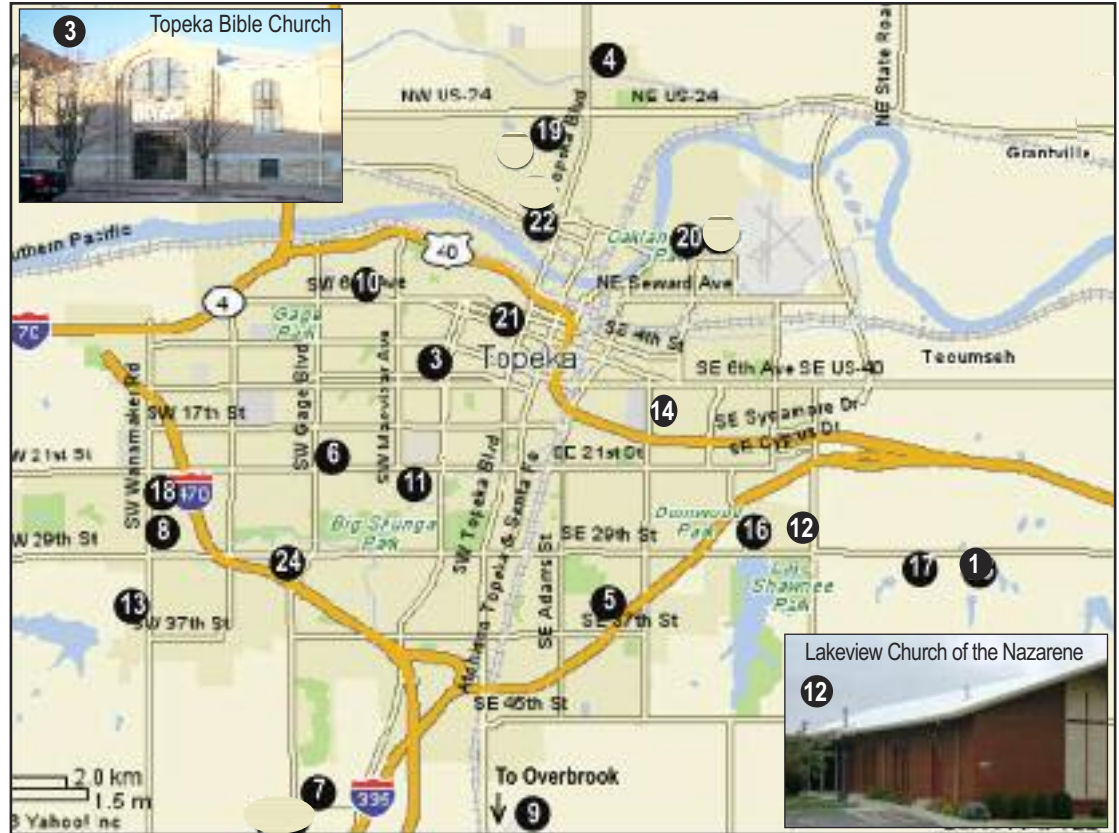
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www.highlandheightscc.com
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3. TOPEKA BIBLE CHURCH

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4. NORTHLAND CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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5. INDIANA AVENUE CHURCH OF CHRIST

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8. WANAMAKER ROAD BAPTIST CHURCH

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 Rob Self, Senior Pastor
 Facebook: Topeka Lakeview Nazarene
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 Sunday 10:45am:
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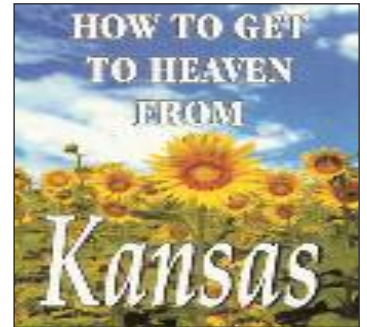
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1. Realize you are a sinner. Everyone starts the same place spiritually. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23). Sin's penalty keeps you out of Heaven and condemns you to Hell, separating you from God. Romans 6:23 says, "The wages of sin is death." Sin brings both physical & spiritual death. "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death." (Rev. 20:14).

2. Realize Jesus paid the penalty. Jesus Christ's death, burial, and resurrection provided a way for you to go to heaven and restore your relationship with God. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8). Since Jesus, God's Son, was the only One who could pay for our sin, He is the only Way to Heaven.

3. Repent of your sin and receive Jesus as your Savior. In order to go to Heaven from KANSAS, or anywhere else, you must accept Christ by calling on Him in prayer. He tells us in Romans 10:13, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Use the following prayer, or one similar to it, to receive Him now:

Dear Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner. I believe that you died and rose again for me. Please forgive me of my sin, become Lord of my life, and take me to heaven when I die. I am trusting you completely, and in nothing I can do. Thank you Jesus! Amen.



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Finding faith in “The Nutcracker,” a Christmas classic

The popularity of the ballet “The Nutcracker” skyrockets during Advent and the Christmas season because of its pageantry, dancing, and timeless classical music. But have you ever wondered what the story is really all about? If so, you’re not alone.

The story is much clearer, says the Reverend Matt Rawle, the lead pastor at Asbury United Methodist Church in Bossier City, Louisiana, if we use a “lens of faith” to look more closely at the characters and the action.

The story actually resonates with strong parallels to our faith and helps us prepare for Christmas, Rawle writes in his book on the subject.

We can see many parallels to our faith in what happens to the characters. Clara, the main character, is at that “in between” age and always waiting: waiting to grow older, waiting for someone, waiting to understand the world. She is loved dearly by her peculiar godfather who gives her a special gift – the Nutcracker. After the Nutcracker later comes to life, he battles the evil Mouse King, only to die in battle. However, the loving godfather resurrects the Nutcracker, who then takes Clara to his kingdom to the acclaim of many who have awaited his return.

Sound familiar?

“The Gift of the Nutcracker explores (many) Christian themes throughout the four chapters,” writes Rawle, “each focusing on a particular character from the story. In turn, each chapter applies the lessons learned from the story to help us better understand our walk as Christians and relationship with Christ.”

Like Clara, we Christians understand what it’s like to live in an “in between” time of life. We live in this world, raise families, enjoy traditions, and celebrate holidays and holy days. Yet Paul encourages us to not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds.” (Romans 12:2). Like Clara, we find that it is often in these periods of waiting that we see the most growth in our lives.

Or consider Drosselmeir, Clara’s peculiar godfather, who gives her the Nutcracker. He also produces a puppet show that foreshadows future events, though it doesn’t disclose everything that will hap-



pen. If we are watching the play for the first time, we may not know this. But if once we have seen the play in its entirety, we know what events lie ahead.

Similarly, the Scripture passages during Advent foretell the coming of the Messiah, God’s gift of his only begotten son. We know now that Jesus is the King of Kings, but people in the first century did not know the full story. “Scripture doesn’t tell us everything we want to

know,” writes Rawle, “but it does reveal everything that we need.”

The third section of the book looks at the Mouse King, the villain of the story. We’re not quite sure who he is or why he wants to battle the Nutcracker, but Clara fears him from the start.

Are there times when fear and suspicion are the dominant feelings in our day? Are we constantly fighting battles, both real and perceived ones, throughout the day? Clara finds comfort when the Nutcracker is by her side, but what about us? Do we truly feel peace and the hope for a new life by realizing that God will never abandon us?

The final section of the book deals with the Nutcracker, whom Rawle calls “the greatest gift.” When Clara receives the Nutcracker at the Christmas party, she doesn’t know what to think about the gift. It wasn’t something that she wanted, but she found out later that it was a gift that she needed.

In one sense, Jesus is the gift we wanted, but we are surprised to find that he is also the gift we need. Jesus calls us all to turn the other cheek, welcome our neighbor, feed and clothe the poor, even carry his cross. If we are to welcome the Christ child into our lives at Christmas, we must also embody his teachings and act more like Jesus during the rest of the year.

Rawle summarizes the connections between the story and our faith journey in this way: “Much like our journey as Christians, Clara’s story is one that begins with uncertainty, fear, and struggle, yet ends with comfort, hope, and joy. Both The Nutcracker and the Advent story unfold just as we know they will, but without the hope and anticipation that always accompany both the dance and the season.”

So the next time you attend a live performance of The Nutcracker, or watch it on TV, be sure to use a “lens of faith” and walk with Christ alongside Clara and the Nutcracker.

—Christopher Fenoglio is the managing editor of UMC.org and writes regularly about books, films, and popular culture. Contact him by email or at 615-312-3734.

47 Years of The Nutcracker: Ballet Midwest’s Annual Production

Symbolizing good luck and their ability to frighten away malevolent spirits, nutcrackers have long symbolized another thing for many people... the Christmas season. Based loosely on E.T.A. Hoffman’s fantasy story “The Nutcracker and the Mouse King,” the plot of the annual holiday ballet program depicts a girl whose new beloved Christmas gift of a wooden nutcracker that comes to life on Christmas Eve to battle against the evil Mouse King.

Make the Nutcracker ballet a part of your holiday must-dos and watch this unique story transform on the stage during the 47th annual Ballet Midwest Nutcracker, December 8-10, 2023 at the Topeka Performing Arts Center.

At the start of the show, the stage is set as a Victorian Christmas party with boys and girls running around with holiday glee. The merry crew are led into mischief by Fritz, who makes it his mission to torture his older sister, Clara, and the special gift from her mysterious godfather: a Nutcracker.

Falling asleep that very evening, Clara dreams of her darling Nutcracker, her very own night, battling evil against the



wicked Mouse King. Victorious, Clara and her Nutcracker (now a handsome prince) travel through snow-covered fields, to cascades of flowers and through the sugar plum-filled Kingdom of Sweets, where dancers take to the stage representing different countries (and their corresponding treats!) throughout the second part of the show.

Ballet Midwest Company and Junior Company dancers are primary players

on stage, but the cast includes both adults and children from the local community. Ages 3 to ageless make up the full cast of almost 200 dancers.

Ballet Midwest’s Nutcracker Ballet is a holiday staple and will be performed live at TPAC, Friday, December 8th at 7:30 pm, Saturday, December 9th at 1:30 pm and 7:30 pm and Sunday, December 10th at 1:30 pm.

Ticket prices are \$25 for adults, \$22

for seniors 55 and older, and \$16 for students 18 and younger. A family pack of two adult and two student tickets is \$60. Tickets can be purchased in person at the TPAC box office, from cast members, and at Barbara’s Conservatory of Dance.

For more information visit www.balletmidwest.net.

Fun Facts:

- All local talent! All the dancers involved are trained right here in North-

east Kansas. Many grow up performing in the Nutcracker every year with dreams of the day they perform the lead roles in the production.

- It’s the longest running Nutcracker in Northeast Kansas.

- Terrific lighting and theatrical effects to behold – smoking cannons, lighting flashes, growing sets, falling snow and more.

- Costumes are stunning! The level of detail with Victorian lace and sequins makes the dancers shine on stage.

- Christmas tree grows over 20 feet in front of your eyes.

- Acting plays a major role in the production – Shannon Reilly (Topeka Civic Theatre’s Artistic Director) consistently creates magic on stage as Clara’s godfather. Each cast member similarly strives to bring out the best in their role, whether scary or stunning, magical or mysterious.

- Incredible pas de deux (dance of two) to view: enjoy watching strong men lift ladies overhead, allowing them to gracefully hover in the air, spin with precision and glide through space.