

"Striving to be the Church of Jesus Christ where Every Member is a Minister"

**Olean First Baptist
Church**



Sharing the faith, hope and redeeming love of Jesus Christ with all people.



GOLD CITY IN CONCERT HERE SUNDAY, JULY 5!!!!

One of the Top 10 Southern Gospel vocal groups in the entire world has agreed to come here on Sunday, July 5 to provide a concert at 3 pm! No tickets will be sold, so seating is open and available on a first-come, first-served basis. Doors will open at 2:00. We need volunteers to serve as ushers, greeters and parking lot attendants. Call the church office if you are willing to help.

One of the few groups to achieve consistent success across three decades, Gold City has set the standard for class and professionalism, all the while maintaining a genuine burden to reach the lost, minister to those who are hurting, and encourage the church. Gold City has been abundantly blessed with Godly, sincere men who, with the combination of their powerful vocals and unparalleled dedication has earned legions of devoted fans across the U.S and Canada, as well as overseas.

With their unique style and versatility, Gold City has produced over 49 hit songs and more than 40 recordings, as well as earned numerous awards and nominations. But for this group of men, it isn't the awards and accolades that drive them. It is the desire that God has placed in their hearts to make a difference for the Kingdom Of God. They will be the first to tell you that there is nothing more rewarding than knowing God can use them to touch people's lives.

AT FIRST BAPTIST JULY/AUGUST 2015

DAN MCDOWELL
Senior Pastor

SUE NEELY VANBRUNT
Minister of Music

PENNY SOROKES
Church Secretary

BONNIE KETTLE
Financial Secretary

MILLARD COOK
Asst. Pastor Senior/Adult Ministries

BRUCE LAVERTY
Director of Family Ministries

ROBERT FAULDS
Organist

MICKI ELLIS
Audio-Visual Specialist

JERRY NUTT
Custodian

For over 30 years Gold City has consistently delivered a concert and a message that ministers to each person individually in a way that is genuinely and sincerely felt by all, and they are committed to continue doing so for as long as God makes a way. As they continue to add hit songs to the list, and as the bus continues to roll week after week, it's not about the who, when or where, it's about the why: to minister to those in need, through the greatest music on earth, and following His lead, every step of the way.

Gold City is:

- Tim Riley – bass
- Daniel Riley - baritone
- Chip Pullen - lead
- Robert Fulton - tenor
- Bryan Elliot - piano

You won't want to miss this *amazing* opportunity at FBC. Come and bring your friends and family!!

MUSIC SUNDAY AND CHICKEN BARBEQUE SUNDAY, JULY 19



David DeGroff (a multi-talented musician who grew up in our church family) will be here to offer a "Sermon in Song" during our morning worship and also provide a mini-concert in the sanctuary from 11:00 – 11:30. The chicken bbq will begin at 11:30 and include a half-chicken, baked beans, coleslaw, a roll, and beverage for \$7 pre-sale; \$9 at the door. Desserts will be available for \$1 or less each. BBQ Tickets are available in the church office. The funds raised at this event will benefit the Women's Ministry at FBC as well as offer support for ladies attending the Women of Faith Conference who need assistance for the added travel expense this year.

Summer Outreach Opportunity

Wednesday Night Outreach @ Alder Court.

Every Wednesday night starting July 8 thru August 26 -- 5:00PM – 6:30PM hotdogs, drink, games, ministry to the families at the Alder Court apartments on Alder St. Pastor Bruce and Carole are seeking volunteers to help provide supervision and transportation to these events!



Church Yard Sale

If you have donations for the sale, you can drop them off at the church during office hours from July 12 – July 26. You may donate household items, toys, bikes, etc. but please make sure they are in good condition. NO CLOTHING PLEASE.



Church Picnic

SUNDAY, AUGUST 16 @ 11 AM in the War Vets Park Pavilion!

Join us after church for an intergenerational Sunday School lesson led by Pastor Dan, followed by a picnic, games and swimming at the City pool. Meat, beverage and table service will be provided. Bring a dish to pass under the following guidelines:

If your name begins with:

A-H: Desserts

I-R: Salads

S-Z: Side Dishes

JULY'S CAMPFIRE/VESPERS WILL BE AT ROCK CITY PARK ON SUNDAY, JULY 12.

Bring a snack to pass! Mike Hooten will lead singing and Pastor Dan will bring a devotional message. We are still seeking a local location for vespers on August 9. Let us know if you have an idea or are willing to host!



In 2015 the Memorial Committee was privileged to dedicate the following gifts to the Glory of God and the Service of His Kingdom.

BOARD OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION
32" LED HD TV, Tilting Wall Mount for TV,
HDM1 Cable, Samsung BD-HM51 Blue-ray Player
for the Nursery

In memory of Mary Freda Griffith
Given by Family and Friends
and a Designated Gift to Christian Education

CAMPERSHIPS

In memory of Richard and Mabel Lyons

CHURCH AT LARGE

20 ft. x 30 ft. Canopy Tent
In memory of Richard DeGroff and Marie Williams
Given by Family and Friends

DIACONATE

Two Artificial Palms
In memory of Margaret Warren
(Rededication of 2013 Memorial)

FELLOWSHIP COMMITTEE

Microwave, Two Long Handled Utensils and
Two Floor Mats for the Kitchen
Given as an Anonymous Gift to the Memorial Fund for
Kitchen

MUSIC COMMITTEE

A Small Set of Kids Bells
(to supplement the existing set enabling us
to include more children)
Given as a Designated Memorial for Choir/Music
and
A Set of Southern Gospel Choir Books
In memory of Helen Duncan
Given by Donna DeLong

OFFICE

Answering Machine
In memory of Diane Brenton
Given by Friends

RADIO ROOM

New Projection System Computer
In memory of Helen Babcock, Anne Garey,
Theresa Geise, JoAnn Mazza, Ruth Osgood,
Evelyn Ottewell, Maxine Porcello,
Margaret Robinson, Clarence Spiller,
Frances Sprague, and Barbara Brookins
Given by Family and Friends



FROM THE PASTOR'S HEART...

Back in the 1970's as I was coming of age my mom would often tune in to the Old Time

Gospel Hour with Jerry Falwell on Sunday mornings before we left for our local church. The (now late) Rev. Falwell was in the process of launching a hybrid political/religious movement known as "The Moral Majority".

His belief at that time was that most Americans (at least at that point in our history) agreed on what was moral. The hot button issue then was abortion but profanity and sexual content on television and the role of women in society were also issues that The Moral Majority tried to influence. A lot of water has passed under the bridge since then. By the late 80's the Moral Majority folded its tents at least in part in the recognition that even Christians were not in agreement on key moral issues.

If you were in church on June 14 you heard me share my heartfelt concern and opposing position on Tony Campolo's recent change of opinion on homosexuality, gay marriage and how the church should approach those issues.

During that message I maintained that for Christians the issue needs to focus on biblical guidelines and that we need to come to grip with the fact that we are a counter-cultural movement. We should stop expecting the majority to be in agreement with us and recognize that our goal is not to be "on the right side of history" as it is written by secular record keepers. Our focus should be on doing our best to be on the right side of eternity; finding and obeying the perfect will of God as revealed to us in His inspired word.

As I write this (in mid-June) several major Supreme Court decisions have yet to be announced. One could largely undermine the "Affordable Care Act" (aka Obamacare), another will decide whether the constitution guarantees the right to same-sex marriage, and another will determine whether religious signage should have the same freedom of expression as political signs. The latter is not nearly as prominent as the first 2 I mentioned, but it is indicative of the counter-cultural place that Christians currently occupy in our nation.

In all probability by the time you read this those edicts will have been announced. Whatever those

decisions might pronounce in regard to the law of the land, there can be little doubt that the moral climate of our country (not to mention the world) is changing. We can't control that. Given God's choice to give us free will when He created us, I'm not sure that God can control it short of the Second Coming of Christ. So what can we do?

We can influence those around us. But first we need to be clear about what we believe, why we believe it and how God has used His people while our country was being formed. 2016 is another presidential election year and there is little doubt that the dialogue will be hot and heavy. It behooves us to revisit our heritage and remember the role that faith has played in making this nation great for almost 240 years.

On July 5 and 12 I will bring a 2-part series of messages during Sunday worship under the theme "A Blessed Nation". Exploring the meaning of the 33rd Psalm and other scriptures I will talk about the influence that God and His Word had on the founding of the United States.

If the response warrants it, I would also like to view a series of video presentations during the Sunday School hour on "Unearthing America's Foundations" and "The Faith of Our Founding Fathers" (part of the American Heritage Series produced by David Barton). I will plan to do that in the new library (across from the men's room in the education/fellowship hall wing of the church).

Keep in mind that ***July 5 is also the start of our new FM broadcast on EAGLE 99.1 and the date of the Gold City concert at 3:00.*** So July will start with a bang for us! On July 12 we will sponsor worship at the Pines at 2:30 and offer vespers around the campfire at Rock City Park at 6 and July 19 features the concert by Dave DeGroff and the chicken barbecue being sponsored by our women's ministry.

In August we will focus on our vision for ministry, the Biblical basis for and spirit of missions and what it takes to build a healthy church family. Those are important discussions to have as we head toward Rally Day and the annual stewardship campaign in September.

It seems like we wait all year for these summer months. Let's make the most of them as the body of Christ while we seek to share the faith, hope and redeeming love of Jesus Christ with all people!

~Pastor Dan



TURNING BITTERNESS INTO SWEETNESS

“And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, “What shall we drink?” (Exodus 15:23-24)

The message of these verses is that the Lord, in His wonderful goodness, is able to take the bitter experiences of life and fill them with heavenly sweetness. We should learn from these experiences which happen to God's ancient people at Marah.

I. The Proving We Must Anticipate

We may as well accept the fact that the Marah-experiences of bitterness come to us all. God can embitter that to us from which we promise ourselves the most satisfaction, and does so in the wilderness of this world, that our wants and disappointment in the creature may drive us to the Creator, in whose favor alone true comfort is to be had.

Wandering in the wilderness and seeing water just ahead, what a joy. The greatest joys and hopes are soon turned into the greatest griefs and fears with those that live by sense only, and not by faith.

Jesus warned his disciples, and us by them, that “In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) The Christian life is not a bed of roses. Every true Christian is tested and tried by the Lord for a wise and beneficial purpose. So that we may grow thereby. Learn this lesson carefully then: we must expect and experience God's testing. Though we are compelled by God's providence to pass through difficulty and temptation, we are not doomed to dwell there. If we are faithful, it is but in passing that we shall be endangered. If we use the remedy of obedience to God's word to-day, tomorrow we shall be beside the twelve ever springing fountains, and under the shade of the palm trees of Elim.

II. The Peril We Must Avoid

When the Israelites came to Marah and found the waters were bitter they reacted in a most unfortunate way, for they “murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?”

It is unbelief which makes us murmur, complain and fret. Why do we do it? Because we look at our circumstances instead of looking at God. We look at all the problems, we look at our trouble and we look at ourselves, and then become filled with fear, doubt and

self-pity.

Hannah had an experience of bitterness. She longed to have a child, and in her bitterness of soul “she prayed unto the Lord” (I Sam. 1:10) That is the secret of victory.

Then there was Hezekiah. He received a horrible letter from an enemy, so what did he do? When he received the letter, he “went up unto the house of the Lord, and spread it before the Lord” (Isa. 37:14).

When Moses prayed, the Lord showed him the remedy: “he cried unto the Lord; and the Lord showed him a tree.” Moses lived in a close intimate relation with God. So when the bitterness came he could bring them to Lord knowing that God held all the answers for his life.

We must carry all of our bitter experiences to the foot of the cross and leave them there. But we must be in a right relationship daily so that we by instinct run to prayer rather than to murmuring. So whatever heart ache you are facing today let Jesus bring the peace and joy he has for you by your faith trust and obedience to Him.

~Pastor Millard



JULY/AUGUST

BOARD MEETINGS

Board meetings for the month of July and August are as follows: **Tuesday, July 14, and August 11:**

7 PM – Trustees

Tuesday, August 4

Advisory Council

August 11:

5:30 p.m. – Board of Christian Education @ Rosel's

The Diaconate and Board of Christian Missions will meet on an “as needed” basis during the summer months.



All retirees are invited to lunch on at noon on **August 10** (stay tuned for the location). Pastor Dan will offer devotional thoughts and an opportunity for food and good fellowship. Transportation to this event is available for any who need it. There is no charge but donations will be gratefully accepted.

Sign up on the bulletin insert or call the church office by Thursday, August 2, if you would like to attend.....Come and bring a friend!!

The Family of God



We extend our Love and Sympathy to Mike and Corinne Hooten and their family on the loss of Corinne's father, Lee Weiss, on May 28; and to Rev.

Mac Shotwell and his daughter Paula on the passing of LaVerne on June 5. Mac and LaVerne served the Lord at Olean First Baptist from 1971-1983; and to Marilyn Piepho on the loss of her husband, John, on June 17.

DIRECTORY CHANGES

Marilyn Voorhees 2936 Five Mile Rd. Allegany, NY 14706 727-219-0317	Valerie Nolan 116 Keeney St. Apt 1E Evanston, IL 60202
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CONGRATULATIONS!!!

To *Grace Thurston* on the birth of her great-grandson, Liam Ullio Thurston on May 29. Liam is the grandson of Kevin and Edwina Thurston; son of Lisa Thurston and Daniel Ullio.

To *Cheyenne Peck* for being chosen for the 2015/2016 Select Choir at Olean High School!!

To *Ashley Putt* on receiving the Youth Citizenship Award from the Cattaraugus County Youth Bureau. Ashley will graduate from Olean High School on June 27 and plans to attend St. Bonaventure in the fall.

WHITE CROSS MINISTRY

Our White Cross requests show the great need at Cameron Community Ministries. The White Cross Giving Tree will be on display in the lobby during the month of September. As we give, they can minister in Jesus' name. Cameron Community ministers to men, women, and children. They have afterschool programs with tutoring for those who need help in schoolwork; a clothing store to "sell" clothes at a reasonable price so clothes are not "charity"; they teach men and women working skills so they can support their families; plus many other services. A list of needs is posted on the bulletin board outside the church office. We will also be making 200 roller bandages 3" x 10 yds. for our hospitals in the Congo. The cash request for international ministries is \$300.00. We can note where we want this to go.

Thank you for your help for our mission stations!
Rita Wymer, White Cross Chair

STEWARDSHIP REPORT: JAN - MAY, 2015

Contribution statements for the quarter ended June 30 will be distributed by late July. If you do not receive your statement please contact the church office or speak with Bonnie Kettle. In total, \$55,219.62 (95% of the \$58,303.96 pledged) was received in the months of January - May! That remarkable level of commitment to pledge fulfillment, and the prudent stewardship of our staff, boards, and committees, has helped to significantly narrow the budgeted deficit that was projected in January.

Congratulations and a heartfelt "Thank you" to all those who have maintained their giving at or above 100% of their pledge! Your continued faithfulness will be fundamental to our ability to provide the ministries we have planned for the remainder of 2015.

David Torrey, Trustees Finance Committee



THANK YOU'S

On behalf of the FBC Senior Choir, we would like to say "Thank You" to Sue Neely VanBrunt and Robert Faulds. They spend many special and countless hours of their time on our music. Their patience and perseverance has made the choir what it is today. You are appreciated and loved by each one of us so again, we say "Thank You."

~Victoria Lovell

"Thanks to the generosity of those who gave on the two Blanket Sundays, we were able to send \$275.00 to Church World Service for their use in providing blankets for those involved in disasters and emergency situations around the world. Your donations helped to BLANKET THE WORLD WITH LOVE!"

"Thank you for all the empty prescription bottles that have been dropped off at church in the red bucket in the Mission Center. We will continue to collect these through the end of this year. We will accept any color, and any kind of cap closure, locking or non-locking. Please remember to remove all labels before donating. Just a note, to say that we cannot accept empty vitamin containers as they are too large and cannot be used."
-Board of Christian Mission"



In June, a Musician Appreciation Picnic was hosted by the Music Committee & Choir officers to thank the many musicians in our congregation for their

continued dedication. Forty singers, bell ringers, instrumentalists, audio-visual techs and guests gathered for an evening of food, fellowship and singing. I would like to add my personal **THANKS** to all who minister through music! You are a blessing in so many ways!

We have gathered some of your ‘favorite songs’ to be used for our congregational singing in summer worship. During those summer months, the Sr. Choir, Kids Choir, the In One A’Chord Handbell Choir and the Junior Bells will take a brief hiatus. So, special music during worship will be shared by members and friends of our church, including: *the Chorduroy Barbershop Quartet; David, Casey & Katie DeGroff; Lori Funden; Karen & Cara Goodwin; the Hooten Family; Michael Schultz; FBC Handbell Ensembles; and our Praise Team - 3:16.* ‘Sing’cerely, Sue Neely VanBrunt

FBC LADIES MINISTRY NEWS

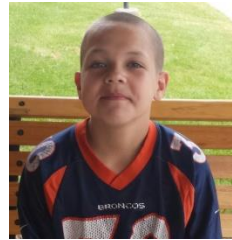
On Friday, August 21, a group of 37 women will depart from First Baptist to attend the Women of Faith 2015 Loved Conference – The Farewell Tour.



The ladies will be traveling by Covered Wagon bus and staying at the Hyatt Place hotel in King of Prussia, PA. The conference, featuring speakers from the 20 years of Women of Faith, begins at 7 PM on Friday evening, continues at 9 AM Saturday morning, and concludes at 5 PM. The group will be returning to Olean following the conference.

While this is the final conference for Women of Faith, the FBC Women’s Ministry Leadership Team is looking for other opportunities to attend similar events. In the meantime, here are a few of the

activities we have planned right here at FBC: As mentioned on page 1 of this newsletter, we are hosting a Music Sunday and Chicken BBQ on July 19 to benefit the Women’s Ministry and assist with the travel expenses for the WOF Conference; a Ladies Tea Party on October 3. We’ll be rolling bandages for the White Cross and making Christmas cards for our shut-in members; and our Third Annual Ladies’ Christmas Party on Saturday, December 5. All women (ages 18 and up) are welcome and encouraged to attend these opportunities to grow in your walk with the Lord and in your relationship with your sisters in Christ at FBC. Be sure to mark your calendars and plan to attend each of these events!



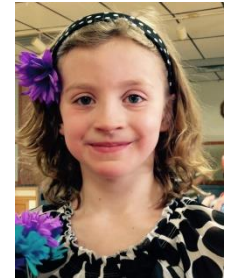
Our Young Musician of the Month for June is Jacob Peck.

Jacob, a 5th grader at Olean Intermediate Middle School, plays the tuba, sings in the Kids Choir and plays Kids

Bells at church. He said that he likes to play the tuba because he likes the low tones....and because it's the largest instrument. He recently broke his hand, so we will have to enjoy a tuba selection later in the year! He is the son of Francis and Becky Peck. We are happy that he shares his talents here at First Baptist!

Our Young Musician of the Month for July will

be **Katrina DeGroff**. Katie, a 3rd grader at Eastview Elementary, sings in the Kids Choir, plays Junior Bells and is an audio-visual team assistant -



checking microphones each Sunday. She said that she likes music because she likes the different sounds and that it makes her feel happy and like dancing! We will be able to hear Katie sing with her mom, Casey DeGroff, and grandfather, David DeGroff, during a worship concert on July 19th. We thank her for sharing her musical talents with us!





RECOGNITION FOR VETS HIGH PRIORITY FOR OFBC MEMBER

By Deb Wuethrich
One of First Baptist's many
veterans is Milburn (Mel)

Cunningham, a man who knows the value of liberty and patriotism. He winters in Zephyrhills, Florida, but returns each spring and summer to visit family and friends.

Mel became a Baptist at the tender age of six in Washington, Indiana, after hearing a Christmas message of hope in church. He won an essay contest for newspaper delivery boys and used his one-dollar grand prize to purchase white pants and a white shirt from JC Penny for baptism. The clerk even threw in a pair of socks.

Before World War II, Mel joined the National Guard, and later when the draft age was lowered to 20, he decided to enlist in the U.S. Army. "Because of my Guard experience, I went in as a PFC instead of basic private and they eliminated my basic training," Mel said. He was sent to Mississippi to work in an optics division. "I didn't know anything about optics," he confesses. But soon, he was in Aberdeen, Maryland, to work on optics for anti-aircraft guns.

He later enrolled in an Army Specialized Training Program and got to choose from three institutions — one of them being St. Bonaventure University. "I'd already been enrolled at the University of West Virginia, and I still wanted a small college," he said. At SBU, Mel and three roommates, all Baptists, asked their captain for permission to go to the First Baptist Church in Olean. With only countryside between the campus and the city they hitchhiked. "A model A Ford coupe, driven by a woman, stopped," Mel recalls. The driver was a retired Navy nurse headed to the same church. "There was only one seat so we piled in on each other's laps," he said.

Back then, the men and woman, boys and girls, sat on separate sides of the church. Mel still smiles when he remembers noticing a girl wearing heels and stockings in one of the classes. "She had the most beautiful legs I'd ever seen," he said.

Mrs. Clarence Anderson was president of the women's group and had instructed them to invite soldiers who came for church to Sunday dinner. The Silloway family invited Mel and another fellow and when they went to the car, the door opened. "There were those beautiful legs," Mel said. That's how he met Dolores Silloway, and on the ride back to campus he asked to see her again. She said she'd meet him July 4 after the parade, wearing red. He found her in a red jacket at the top of the stadium. "And the rest is history," he said. Mel was in Olean 9 months, then sent to Colorado and later, shipped to France. He and Dolores were engaged before he left, however. "She waited for me two years," he said.

Aboard the George Washington, Mel landed in Normandy about six weeks after D-Day. He was a member of the 104th Division, 414 Regiment; Company A, First Squad, the Timber Wolf Division. From St. Lo, France, he rode a 40 and 8 train to Belgium. General George Patton had been called in to fight the Germans and resulted in the Battle of the Bulge. Mel's division fought across to Holland, across the Roer River, south of Germany, with orders to drive Germans back so engineers could build a bridge. "They didn't want to go," Mel said. "They used special guns called 88's and one hit behind me so I was hit with shrapnel in the back, butt and legs."

There is a lot Mel doesn't remember after that. It was called "shell shock" in those days, but he suffered from what was later known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. He recalls only snatches of his hospital stays. He does recall one incident during a German counter-attack. Most of his squad had been wiped out. He and two others took refuge in a house, which the enemy then proceeded to burn. The trio found a bomb shelter and stayed in there a couple of days in total darkness.

"When we went out it was pitch black and there were no stars, no moon," Mel said. "Suddenly there was a glimmer of movement at a distance and a figure appeared, pointing with the right hand and finger extended. That's the direction we went, and it returned us to the American line. The other way would have meant certain capture. It was just a few seconds, but I am sure it was the Hand of God."

Mel didn't remember the incident for over 60 years, until a pastor mentioned a dark figure emerging from a forest. "I don't remember his message, only my realization that it was the Spirit of God telling us how to get back to our own troops and safety," Mel said. He has long believed in divine intervention and the guardianship of angels, and testifies to other remarkable stories.

Mel holds 19 medals for his service, including a Purple Heart, and at 93 still works tirelessly to see that other veterans receive honors. He and Dolores were married for 58 years. He worked at Dresser Industries for many years, and they later owned rock City Park, where he pursued an interest in gemology, even researching and studying gems of the Bible.

After Dolores passed in 2003, Mel was helping her widowed cousin Zella with yard work here in Olean. When it was time to return to Florida, they wed and returned together. "She only gave me one restriction: I'd have to learn to square dance," he said. "I did and we had fun. We had ten good years together."

A couple days before Memorial Day, Mel visited veterans at Eden Heights to invite them to ride in the parade with him. He personally ordered a sign from Staples for the car. He also plans to take part in a veteran's dedication in Florida yet this summer.

"I just enjoy getting involved in things like that," he said.



‘PAPER ANGELS’ WEAVES HOPEFUL, REDEMPTIVE STORY

If you’ve never read a Billy Coffey book, *Paper Angels* would be a good place to start. Some libraries put the books under Gentle Reads or Inspirational.

Main character Andy Sommerville long ago accepted the presence of a guardian angel in his life, first encountering him in his childhood. He calls the angel “The Old Man.” There was one time, however, when Andy really needed The Old Man and he didn’t show up.

In *Paper Angels* (2011 Faith Words, Hachette Book Group), the author weaves a hopeful, redemptive story as he tells the tale of Andy’s lonely life that, upon reflection, is rich with hope and simplicity.

As Andy lies in a burn ward of a hospital in his small town of Mattingly, Virginia, he drifts in and out of consciousness, reflecting on a fiery accident in the convenience store/service station that he owns. He also has long conversations, deep in the night, with a woman named Elizabeth who seems to have nowhere to go and spends time in a nearby chair, snipping folded paper with her scissors and letting Andy talk about his experiences.

Part of this process includes talking about the significance of various items in a special box that Andy has kept through the years. As Elizabeth asks about each item, Andy finds some easy to talk about, while others are more painful. Through their conversations, the author blends storyteller magic with hope that resides in the human spirit, even in the face of tragedy.

I loved this book, which seemed lyrical at times and uses colorful metaphors to describe truth. There were so many lessons in its pages with thoughts that were almost profound. At one point, the main characters consider that life is not so much one beautiful lesson after another as it is a succession of hard places that must be endured. “What beauty and ease we searched for in this world would be found not in open fields or along peaceful shores, but in the crags and crevices of the mountains we climbed,” notes one passage.

At one point, Elizabeth asks Andy, “What do we take out of this world?” and he says, “Nothing.” She

responds: “No, you’re wrong. We take one thing with us — the narrative of our lives. You’re not flesh and bone as much as you are a story, a first chapter and a last and everything in between. In the end, Andy, your story is all you have. And that’s why it needs to be told.”

Andy once wrote a letter to an individual he encountered only briefly, but it was someone he knew was hurting. In the letter, Andy wrote, “The hurt that comes from losing someone we love can be unbearable. But the hurt that comes from closing ourselves off from the world is much worse. I know you’re hurting right now. But pain isn’t necessarily a bad thing.”

In a discussion on suffering, the book notes, “We could all sing and we all should, but it was only the wounded who could sing truly. Only the maimed and the hurt and the broken. Because the best voices were those who had learned to praise God, and thank Him, too, in the midst of suffering.”

Andy also learns that life is full of give and take, and even accepting others, a lesson that came from his attempt to hold open a door for a woman who then screamed at him for doing so.

“You need to help,” Andy was told of the experience. “The sort of love you’re supposed to have for others is love that’s a verb, not a noun. It’s a love that *does* something rather than *is* something.” He’s told sometimes love isn’t just caring for others, it can also be allowing yourself to be cared for as well.

Over several pages near the end of the book, the author provides imagery of a blacksmith working with the anvil, and refers to a biblical concept when he asks the blacksmith, “What are you making?” and the craftsman says, “All things new.” Andy then says, “I understood then. Perhaps not everything, but everything that mattered. My life had not been a collection of ordinary occurrences, but holy ones. I had lived not mere moments, I had lived defining ones... And I knew this — our pasts, no matter how mangled, could be forced anew upon the anvil.”

I haven’t told all; there were a lot more thought-provoking moments in the book, weaved into a compelling tale of a man’s struggle with his existence and the meaning of life as he examines what happened to him through a horrific accident. Every life has its sorrows and joys. *Paper Angels* tends to help readers understand these times a little better.

— Reviewed by Deb Wuethrich



"I Can't Forgive Myself"

By Suzie Eller

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all

unrighteousness." [1 John 1:9](#) (NIV)

The workshop had ended. Most of the moms had left the room while she fidgeted with her bag. I could see she wanted to flee, but willpower and a great desire for freedom kept her feet rooted to the floor.

We sat down and she blurted out: "I've been told for years that when I forgive myself I'll be free. But I can't do it. I've tried."

I reached for her hands. "I've searched in Scripture. It's not there."

She looked up in surprise. "What do you mean?"

Forgiving ourselves. It's not there.

There are a multitude of scriptures that show us how to offer forgiveness to others, as well as how to receive it. But none that asks us to remove the burdens from our own hearts.

Thankfully 1 John 1:9 offers a promise. When we hold up our sin before God, He is faithful and just to forgive *all* our sins.

Faithful to us? Yes, to us. But also faithful to who He is, and His plan for our forgiveness through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross as He bore our sin.

But it doesn't end there. You see, when we are forgiven, our sin is reframed. Yes it still happened. But God removes it from us as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). We are seen as covered in mercy, spared from the punishment that was ours to take.

My new friend had been trying for years to do a job that wasn't hers. By trying and failing, she saw herself as shameful. That shame affected every aspect of her life: her relationships, her role as mom, and her faith as she tried to please God through service or acts, all the while seeing herself as "less than."

I asked her if she was willing to allow Christ to do what she had been unable to do for nearly a decade. Rather than forgive herself, would she accept the gift of forgiveness Christ so willingly offers?

Later that week I received an email from her. She shared that when she walked through the front door that night, her husband said, "Something's different about you."

It's been nearly three months since this young mom stopped trying to forgive herself, and scooped up the generous gift of God's grace instead. She is still surprised by the transformation. But more so, her family believes she found a miracle.

One that had been waiting for her all along.

Perhaps you carry shame. You've been trying to forgive yourself, but realize you can't undo the past. You've said you're sorry. You have changed. But the guilt or burden remains.

Hand that shame to your Savior today, and allow Him to hurl it as far as the east is from the west.

It's not your burden to carry any longer.

Dear Jesus, You paid a heavy price for my sin, and yet I am still carrying it as if it is mine to absolve. I have said I am sorry. I am changing. But this burden isn't mine to carry. Today I joyfully receive Your gift of mercy and grace, and see myself as washed clean because of You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Encouragement for Today Devotions

Proverbs 31
Ministry