

Toolkit

HELPING YOU CARE FOR YOUR GOD-GIVEN GIFTS | ISSUE 3, 2023

THE HEALING NATURE OF FORESTS

Spending time in the forest – or a quiet place with many trees – can help **lower stress levels and blood pressure, and boost your immune system**, reports NPR... Decades of research shows “forest bathing,” the act of surrounding yourself with nature, **reduces the stress hormones cortisol and adrenaline, and can help with depression**... If you are new to forest bathing, start by finding a location where you’re surrounded by trees; set aside two to six hours in the woods; try to reduce your heart rate; and try to make use of all your senses and practice breathing techniques.



AI IS HELPING TRANSLATE THE BIBLE

The Bible is the most translated book in the world, and two researchers from the University of Southern California Information Sciences Institute want to reach even more readers... They recently launched the Greek Room, an **artificial intelligence-powered technology to aid translating the Bible** into some of the rarest languages in the world, according to Religion News Service... With this tool the researchers hope to work on languages that don’t have a written system, grammar codes or dictionaries... They also hope to involve **local churches and native language communities**, so they have agency in the translation process.

COMMUNAL MEALS ARE ESSENTIAL TO OUR WELL-BEING

There is wisdom in breaking bread with others... A study published in the journal Adaptive Human Behavior and Psychology found that people who eat socially are more likely to **feel better about themselves and have a wider social network that can provide social and emotional support**...



It also found that eating with someone in the evening makes one feel closer to them than eating at midday... So don’t pass up on the opportunity to connect next time you get invited to a dinner party!



LOOK FOR NEW DIGITAL TOOLKIT IN 2024

For years we have sought to provide you with interesting highlights on current topics of faith, finances and health through this Toolkit newsletter. Next year and moving forward we will continue to do so, but in a **digital-only format**. This move will allow us to expedite the process in distributing Toolkit and cut down on the use of almost four million pieces of paper a year.

To sign up to receive Toolkit in 2024, go to everence.com/toolkit or scan the QR code and select the “subscribe” button. If you are an advocate or pastor, you do not need to sign up.



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A SOAP THAT CAN TREAT SKIN CANCER

A high school student is "America's Top Young Scientist" after inventing a **soap that treats skin cancer**... The Washington Post reports that Heman Bekele, from Virginia, was 13 when he entered the 3M Young Scientist Challenge with a pitch for a soap that **could cost less than \$10 a bar**... Upon becoming a finalist, Bekele was paired with a mentor to develop and test a physical prototype... After months of trial and error, the teen developed a formula that helps revive dendritic cells **capable of fighting cancer cells**... Bekele hopes to seek approval from the Food and Drug Administration for his product and start a nonprofit to create and distribute the soap.



HOUSES ARE GETTING SMALLER

With house prices nearing record highs, homebuilders and buyers are looking at smaller single-family homes. Since 2018, the average unit size for new housing **started to decrease 10% nationally to 2,420 square feet**, reports the Wall Street Journal... Most builders are following the same method of removing dining rooms and bathtubs while increasing the size of multiuse rooms like kitchens... While these smaller houses might not be ideal for larger families, **they are popular among entry-level buyers and empty nesters**... This movement is also changing the furniture market, with designs suited for smaller spaces.

EATING PLANTS CUTS ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE

Eating your fruits and vegetables **has a much lower impact on the environment** compared to meat-based diets, including greenhouse gas emissions, land use, water use and alteration of the biodiversity, reports Nature Journal... The study analyzed real diets of **more than 55,000 people in the UK and used data from 38,000 farms in 119 countries** to get a wide sample of the impact of foods produced in different places and with different methods... The study found **vegan diets resulted in 75% less emissions and a reduction of water use by 54%**... Researchers concluded cutting down on meat and dairy can help make a big difference to the environment in the long run.



EVERENCE LAUNCHES ENHANCED PROGRAM FOR CHURCHES

Recently, Everence® has been working on an extensive overhaul of our primary church stewardship program, known as the Advocate program... In 2024 it will have a new name: **Everence Stewardship Partners**... With the name change come major enhancements to the program, like expanded participation **to include pastors and other stewardship leaders**... Participating **congregations could be eligible for up to \$3,000 a year in Sharing Funds**... Everence has been building strong relationships with churches for over 30 years through the church stewardship program, and today more than 1,100 churches participate... Go to everence.com/partners to learn how a stewardship advocate can contribute to your congregation.

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