

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another

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Wow! How Time Flies

Cyndi Johnson

Executive Secretary, Growth Ministries, Inc.

This month as we celebrate the one-year anniversary of *The Growth Journal*, I could not be more proud. I remember when Growth Ministries was just a vision that God had given to our Executive Director, Lonnie Johnson. At the time he shared this vision with me, we knew that we wanted this ministry's main focus to be about helping the incarcerated develop spiritually and prepare them for re-entry into their communities. At the same time, we wanted a way to stay connected with those we serve, even when we cannot be there in person, and so "The Growth Journal" was born. Our response to the newsletter has been overwhelmingly positive as we have encouraged many to write us to share their testimonies, prayer requests, creative writing and words of wisdom to fellow inmates. Your appreciation for the messages you receive each month from *The Growth Journal* is just the right fuel we need to keep the fire burning. We look forward to another year of bringing you great articles and encouraging words that we hope will educate you and be a blessing to you each month.

I would like to say **thank you** to everyone who made a contribution to such an awesome newsletter and to all of our readers, "Keep Growing" in Christ!

Is Salvation Really Free?

Pastor Christopher Campbell

Northland Reformed Church

**“For by grace you have been saved through faith,
and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,
not of works, lest anyone should boast.”**

Ephesians 2:8-9

There is a saying “there is no such thing as a free lunch.” In other words, there is always a catch, always a string tied to every promise, and every gift is given with the expectation that somewhere down the line it will have to be repaid, maybe even with interest!

What about salvation? Is it really a gift of God? Don't we have to do something to earn it? To keep it? In chapter 2 of his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul addresses these questions. Paul explains that salvation which comes from God is the result of the undeserved and unearned love of God, freely given by grace to believers, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and received by faith in His finished work. Notice three key truths that Paul reveals in Ephesians 2:1-10. First, in verses 1 through 3, Paul explains that even if we wanted to, we could not earn salvation, because we are dead in our sins and trespasses. Then, in verses 4 through 7, he demonstrates that God's love, not our loveliness, is the source of this great salvation. Finally, in verses 8 through 10, he concludes that salvation is a gracious act of God, received by faith, not by works.

Salvation Is Undeserved and Unearned

Paul lists three reasons why we cannot earn our salvation. First, we cannot earn it because we are born “dead in trespasses and sins” (v. 1). Suppose a person went to a graveyard with a suitcase full of money, set it down, and announced to all those in the graves that they could have the money. All they needed to do was walk up and take the suitcase. How many of these corpses would one expect to take the offer? None, they are dead! In the same way, the salvation of God is not something that we can, in our own power, obtain. God, by his Holy Spirit, must perform a regenerating work in our heart before we can even see the Kingdom of God (see Jesus' teaching to Nicodemus in John chapter 3). Second, we cannot earn it because our own works disqualify us. We willingly submit to the devil and “walk according to the course of this world according to the prince of the power of the air” (v. 2). Third, we are continually “fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind” (v. 3) in rebellion against God.

Therefore, even if we wanted to earn salvation, we cannot, because even our best works in this life are imperfect and defiled with sin. In fact, we have earned and thus deserve the opposite, eternal death, for “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). But, Paul writes, this is not the end of the story.

Is Salvation Really Free? - *Cont'd*

Salvation Is Based on God's Love, Not Our Loveliness

Paul begins verse 4 with the word "But" to demonstrate the contrast between what we have earned and deserve with what God has done for us.

Despite all that the Ephesian believers were previously—dead in sin, walking in lock-step with the devil, and fulfilling the wicked desires of the flesh—God, in his great mercy, knowing this about them, still loved them enough to save them. Ephesians 1:4 states that believers were chosen "in Him before the foundation of the world." In other words, God, before He created the world, placed His love upon those who He planned to save. Thus, if a person is a Christian, the reality is that God set His love upon him or her from the beginning. There was never a time that God did not love His people!

This love of God is expressed in Jesus Christ, for "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Continuing in Ephesians 2:5-7, Paul tells us how God has demonstrated His love for us in Christ Jesus. First, He "made us alive together with Christ" (v. 5). This speaks of God's regenerating work in us, implanting new life and causing us to be born again. Second, He "raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (v. 6). That is, God has not only fully paid for our sins through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, but He accepts us as holy in His sight because of the holiness of Jesus' perfect life. We have everything we need, in Christ, for salvation and even now possess eternal life. But why has God done this? Paul informs us that He did so in order that "in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (v. 7). God has redeemed a people for Himself, for His own glory, that His kindness might be displayed through us.

Therefore, we must understand that, in salvation, it is God alone who gets all the glory. He is the one who loved us, even when we were dead in our sins, rebellious against Him, and hated the things of God. He is the one who has worked faith in our hearts and He is the one who will bring us to glory. This is the kindness and mercy of God, and what a great kindness and abounding mercy it is!

Salvation Is Given by Grace and Received Through Faith

If this is true, that we cannot earn nor deserve salvation and that God, in His mercy, has given us all that we need for salvation, how does salvation come to us? Summarizing his teaching so far, Paul stresses the fact that it is God's grace to us, received by faith, which brings us into fellowship with Christ and all his saving benefits. And both grace and faith are the gift of God. We cannot even believe in Jesus without God giving us the ability to do so! Therefore, if a person has faith in Christ, he must not boast about his faith, because it is also the gift of God.

Ultimately, God gives us everything we need for salvation. God paid the debt our sins deserve by sending His Son to die upon the cross. God credits us with the perfect life Jesus lived and now sees us as righteous in His sight. Truly "there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Romans 8:1). What a great comfort this is, knowing that although our conscious might daily accuse us of sin, we have an advocate in heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ, who proclaims, "Not guilty!"

Romans 6:23

*"For the wages of sin is death,
but the gift of God is eternal life
through Jesus Christ our Lord"*

Words from the Warden

Warden Sam Cline

Lansing Correctional Facility

My name is Sam Cline; I am the current warden of the Lansing Correctional Facility. I have been a warden in the Kansas prison system since 2003, having initially begun in this work as a Corrections Officer in 1982.

Maintaining security and control of the men incarcerated here at Lansing is the primary task of my position, but along with this important mission, I also believe we have a critical expectation to help incarcerated individuals improve their lives. I, personally, hold that it is my job to routinely uplift as many men as possible with courtesy, cheerfulness and encouragement. This behavior on my part is (hopefully) a model of how other staff might best approach interactions with offenders.

For several months, I have been able to team up with Lonnie Johnson of Growth Ministries, and men associated with this ministry, to walk together while I make routine rounds inside the Lansing Correctional Facility. Together we have encountered men on the 'street' and others in their cells. We have talked with men at their work locations, and others incidentally, as they engage in normal activities inside the Max Unit. On each of these occasions, I have enjoyed the camaraderie of this small group of "Ambassadors" and the time we spent to bring something different and surprising into our prison environment. In every case, I have seen only positives that I am glad to have been a part of.

Many of the men incarcerated here suffer, they have regrets that they will never escape. Without diminishing the structure or discipline of the prison, we can still be encouraging and endeavor to lead such men to Hope. Many of our men struggle with addiction, anger, mental illness, sexual perversion or simply weak character and it takes a special individual to encounter all of them without judgment. I am grateful that Growth Ministries has become a part of our corrections community.

Shout-Outs

Growth Ministries would like to recognize many of the individuals within the prison system that have helped us to be successful over the past 12 months:

Byron Alexander, John Hutchinson, Bill Shipman, Brett Peterson, Sam Cline, Peggy Howard, Renda Craft, Marcy Konkader, Sharina Preston, Kiley Young, Don Almond and Matt Thomas

We would also like to recognize our inmate ambassadors within the compounds:

Garnett Tolen, Darryl Lewis, Nicholas "Sweetz" Martin, Robert Haberlein, Earnest Brown and Joshua Walker

Thanks to these ambassadors for spreading the word about GMI and passing out newsletters.

Bible Wordsearch

The Sealed Scroll 2

Wordsearch 182

Rev.5:8-14

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- AMEN
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- GLORY
- GOD
- HEARD
- HEAVEN
- HONOR
- KINGDOM
- LAMB
- LIVING
- NATION
- PEOPLE
- POWER
- PRAISE
- PRIESTS
- REIGN
- SANG
- SCROLL
- SEALS
- SERVE
- SLAIN
- THRONE
- TIMES
- TRIBE
- VOICE
- WEALTH
- WISDOM
- WORTHY
- THOUSAND
- PURCHASED
- CREATURES
- LANGUAGE
- STRENGTH
- WORSHIPED
- SINGING

After you find all the hidden words the left over letters spell out a Bible verse reading from the top left to the bottom right

Psalm 64

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“From the Yard” (Each month we will bring you content from one of your brothers inside)

<p>When I Was A Child By Nicholas Martin aka Sweetz <i>Lansing Correctional Facility</i></p> <p>"When I was a child, I talked like a child. I thought like a child. I had the understanding of a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me." 1st Cor. 13:11</p> <p>CHILDREN are wonderful, beautiful, and amazing, but childhood is not supposed to last for an eternity. While each child is, in my humble opinion, born as the answer to one of the problems of the world, at some point a child has to grow up. Patience is the first sign that a child is maturing. When a child is able to truly recognize that he or she is not the center of the universe, they are beginning to put away childish things.</p> <p>The process of maturation begins, I believe, when we are able to use the Scripture as a mirror to see ourselves clearly. When we begin to understand how everything other than the obedience to God is vanity, that is when we begin to grow up. Have you ever watched your child outgrow the "THAT'S MINE" attitude??? Did you notice how the child no longer has so many fights or fits of frustration over things? This is true with us as believers.</p> <p>Maturity means not only seeing ourselves in the right light but also others. WE are able to recognize the value, and wonder, in everyone and everything. Have you ever seen a child's face aglow with wonder of something simple such as a firefly or nice shiny gadget? WE should hold onto our capacity to be awed, and not become bitter and cynical. WE LIVE IN A UNIVERSE WHICH BEARS WITNESS TO THE GREATNESS OF THE GOD WHO CREATED US. Maturity means that we are starting to understand, not just our place in the universe, but also the duty that we owe to GOD and also our brothers and sisters.</p>	<p>A New Day By Brian Lionberg <i>El Dorado Correctional Facility</i></p> <p>Approaching a new day</p> <p>“This is the day that the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it” Psalm 118:24</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I refuse to be shackled by yesterday's failures (1 Peter 5:7, Romans 8:1, 2 Corinthians 12:9) 2. What I don't know I will no longer allow to intimidate me. I will instead view it as an opportunity. (2 Timothy 1:7, Philippians 4:13, 2 Corinthians 5:7) 3. I will not allow others to define my mood, my methods, my image or mission. (Galatians 2:20, Romans 12:1-2, Proverbs 3:5-6) 4. I will pursue a mission greater than myself by making at least one person happy that he or she saw me. (Ephesians 5:1-2, Philippians 2:1-4) 5. I will not tolerate self-pity, gossip or negativism from myself or from others. (Proverbs 12:18-19, 15:1-2, 25:11, Ephesians 4:29)
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Thanks to these gentlemen that have contributed to our “From the Yard” section over the past year:

Garnett Tolen, Darryl Lewis, Nicholas Martin, Brian Lionberg, Earnest Brown, Curtis Wooten, Ormond Wimberly and Steven Clark

Just for laughs...

A Picture of God

A kindergarten teacher was walking around observing her classroom of children while they were drawing pictures. As she got to one girl who was working diligently, she asked what the drawing was.

The girl replied, "I'm drawing God."

The teacher paused and said, "But no one knows what God looks like."

Without looking up from her drawing, the girl replied, "They will in a minute."

WHEN THEY DO AN ALTAR CALL



AND YOU TRY TO ACT LIKE YOU DON'T NEED TO GO

“WORDS TO GROW BY”

LINDA LEWIS, GMI DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

The Tale of Two Wolves

An old Cherokee told his grandson,
 “My son, there is a battle between two wolves inside us all.
 One is **Evil**. It is anger, jealousy, greed, resentment, inferiority, lies & ego.
 The other is **Good**. It is joy, peace, love, hope, humility, kindness, empathy & truth.”
 The boy thought about it and asked, “Grandfather, which wolf wins?”
 The old man quietly replied,
 “The one you feed.”

My Friends, the question to you is...which one do you feed?

As you contemplate this story, be reminded that **Love** conquers all.

1 Corinthians 13

We, at GMI, love YOU and **God loves you MORE!**
 Be Blessed!

Closing Words

LONNIE JOHNSON, GMI EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Doubt vs. Faith

As you fight “*the fight of faith*” each day, the battle will take place in your mind. You must decide whether you will believe the Word of God, or the lies of Satan. The devil will plant doubt and unbelief in our mind to keep us from believing God for about what really belongs to us. He will use people close to us, people that we look up to, or people in positions of authority, who will tell us certain things are impossible. But the Word says, **“Nothing is impossible with God” Luke 1:37**. Satan will even use science and doctors to create doubt in our mind. The Word tells us that we have the power to heal, **“And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.” Matthew 10:1**. However, if someone in the medical field tells us that we have to live with diabetes and take medication, we dismiss that Word and allow the doubt to take over. When God speaks, we should be willing to put that Word above even the law of nature like Peter did when he stepped out and walked on water when Jesus told him he could.

Our problem isn't that we don't have faith. It is that we have too much doubt. We have enough faith (Romans 12:3). We actually have everything we need (2 Peter 1:3), It is our “unbelief” that keeps us from overcoming our challenges. This is even illustrated with the story of the father who wanted Jesus to heal his son. He asked Jesus to help with his “unbelief” (or doubt), not his faith. Stop believing your doubt and replace it with the Word of God.

My final word is simply a huge **“THANKS”** to many of the Growth Ministries Volunteers who have preached, written articles, walked the yard with me and the Warden, donated their money and time and made sacrifices behind the scenes in support of this cause: **Cyndi Johnson, Linda Lewis, Randy Spearman, Sonya Spearman, Terrance Saunders, Darrell Harden, Ryan Stemmons, Chastity Stemmons, Jack Williams, Paul Spencer, Jackie Spencer, Dr. Anthony Moore, Christopher Campbell, Michael Rose, Lisa Henry, Glenn North, Leigh Lynch, Tari Cannon, Bishop Eric Morrison and Kingdom Word, Keith Mitchell, Gene Purtle, Kathy Steen, Joyce Lee, Curtis Gilyard, and all those that prayed.**

What must I do to be saved?

If you have never accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior, or if you have turned away from Him living a life of unrighteousness, and wish to be connected to Him then take a moment and say the prayer below:

“Lord, I confess that I am a sinner and ask for your forgiveness. I believe that your son Jesus died on the cross for my sins and was resurrected with all power. I invite Jesus to be the Lord of my life and your Holy Spirit to come into my heart to guide me for the rest of my days. Amen.”

Romans 10:9 says that *if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.*

If this is you, please write Growth Ministries and we will gladly help you start your new life in Christ.

Growth Miniistries, Inc., P.O. Box 9045, Kansas City, KS 66112