

THE GROWTH JOURNAL

ISSUE 2, VOLUME 4 – DECEMBER 2019

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another. Proverbs 27:17

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Women Empowering Women *"Shout out to all the Ladies in TCF"*

You can rise up from anything.
You can completely recreate yourself.
Nothing is permanent. You're not stuck.
You have choices. You can think new thoughts.
You can learn something new.
You can create new habits.
All that matters is that you decide TODAY and NEVER look back.
There is no force equal to a WOMAN determined to rise.
And remember that real Queens fix each other's Crowns.



"Words to Grow By"

LINDA LEWIS, GMI DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

May the new year bring you an abundance of amazing moments and joyful experiences.

May you be brave enough to take on and overcome challenges.

May your positive actions and acts of kindness inspire others.

May you love with all your heart and find peace in even the most turbulent of times.

May the love you give always find its way back to you multiplied.

And may you forever be filled with the hope & strength necessary to make your dreams a reality.



Solomon BY PASTOR MIKE HERNANDEZ, CHURCH OF THE HARVEST

Happy New Year! As we start 2020, we will continue to take our journey through the Bible, examining many different men and study what we can learn from these men. We ended 2019 with a four-part series on David. We will start 2020 by studying his son, Solomon.

Then David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in to her and lay with her. So she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon. Now the Lord loved Solomon. – 2 Samuel 12:24

Solomon was the son of David and Bathsheba and he was loved by the Lord. He was not King David's eldest son, but Solomon was still chosen by David to become the next king of Israel (1 Kings 28-35). This was a heavy responsibility so when God appeared to him in a dream asking Solomon what He could give him, Solomon asked for wisdom. God responded to his request by telling Solomon that He would not only give Solomon wisdom like nobody before or after him, but would also give him an abundance of riches and honor (1 Kings 3:3-13).

So if you walk in my ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days. – 1 Kings 3:14

What a promise Solomon received from the Lord. His reign started with wisdom and he had great favor with the people (1 Kings 3:16-28). The Lord also gave him great wealth and Solomon was chosen to build the Temple. Upon completing the temple, Solomon experienced the glory of God when the Ark of the Covenant (the ark held the Ten Commandments and other items and represented the Presence of God) was brought into the Temple.

And it came to pass, when the priests came out of the holy place that the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord. – 1 Kings 8:12-13

Solomon's wealth was in such abundance that even his drinking vessels were made from pure gold (1 Kings 10:21). Solomon's reputation went throughout the earth and foreign dignitaries would visit him to hear his wisdom and see his wealth. They would bring gifts to present to King Solomon. Israel was thriving and King Solomon was powerful, wealthy and famous.

Sometimes when you have it all, you forget to do what got you there. For Solomon, what got him to this position was his obedience to the Lord. He showed humility when he asked for wisdom to govern God's people. He was thankful when he encountered God's glory at the temple dedication. His early life showed a true dependence upon the Lord.

However, Solomon had one major issue...he loved women. This was also King David's (his father) issue. It is important to note that our sin patterns can be passed down to our children. This is not always the case, but I have seen it happen multiple times. One such example was Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 20:1-18 & Genesis 26:1-16). Abraham lied to Abimelech and then Isaac repeated the same lie with the same man.

But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites—from the nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, “You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.” Solomon clung to these in love. And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David. – 1 Kings 11:1-4

King Solomon loved women. He went far and wide searching for women (or the women came from far and wide to visit him) and he kept adding women into his life. He had 700 wives and 300 concubines. This is pretty excessive and may even be considered an addiction. And this addiction costed him.

How does the wisest man in the world not understand that he will encounter consequences if he disobeys the Lord? Sometimes when things are going well, we believe we are invincible. We believe that we will not have consequences to our sin.

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. – Galatians 6:7

I believe Solomon was deceived. He was so wise, so rich and so powerful, that he didn't believe anything could stop him. However, he lost his focus on God. He lost his dependence upon God. He stopped obeying the Lord and started marrying foreign women.

I'm sure when he married his first foreign wife, it was for political gain, or maybe it was young love, or maybe he thought he could help them by introducing them to his God. But sometimes one act of disobedience will take you to two, which will take you to more. I have heard this saying about sin and it has always stuck with me:

Sin will take you further than you want to go
Keep you longer than you want to stay
Cost you more than you want to pay

How does the wisest man in the world not understand this? I believe it was because of what is called a “slow fade”. A slow fade is when we slowly drift away from God. It isn't an immediate rush into sin, but perhaps a compromise here and a compromise there. One example could be how a little white lie, leads to another to cover up, which leads to another to cover up. At some point it's more work remembering all the lies than to simply tell the truth.

Solomon was a man who experienced the best life God had to offer. However, when he started disobeying God and filled his life with many foreign women, they ultimately turned his heart away from God. Unlike his father, David, Solomon never repented of his sin so his heart ultimately didn't stay loyal to God. And the take away for us is that if the wisest man in the world, who was blessed by God and experienced God's presence in a dramatic way can fall away from the Lord, then any of us can fall away from the Lord. Thus, we need to always keep God's commandments to prevent that from happening.

Hearing from God (Pt. 1) BY BEVERLY BROWN, GMI VOLUNTEER WRITER

Have you ever heard someone say, "God told me thus and thus?" Are you left wondering how they heard from God? Did they hear an audible voice or what?

For the next few months I will be talking about how we hear from the Lord. There are many ways the Lord can speak to us.

I will start with the most common way--His word, the Bible.

It is so important for us to be in the Word. We learn what God says about many things. Through it, we learn what is pleasing or displeasing to Him.

We learn how we can have peace and live a victorious life. We learn the truth.

When you read the Bible, don't read it with an ulterior motive or with your own agenda. When you read it, be open to what the Lord would say and His truth.

Maybe it has been hard for you to understand the Bible. I suggest you start reading with the New Testament. Even though you might not be able to understand all of it, accept and apply the parts you do understand. The more you read and pray, the more will be revealed to you.

The Bible is living. This means you constantly learn new things every time you read it. I have been a serious student of the Bible for several decades. And it seems almost every time I read it, something new jumps out at me.

When you read some of the verses, you might not feel they apply to you. Put it in the back of your mind and keep it there. Sometimes the lesson will apply to you later in life.

If you do come across things you do not understand, pray and ask the Lord to give you understanding. Sometimes the understanding doesn't come right away. It might come much later. You might be thinking and praying about a certain situation and the Lord might bring that certain scripture to your mind.

It is not only important for you to read and know the Word, but it is important that you apply it.

It is also important that you accept it as truth and as the word of God. Here is an example.

My mother was a giver in every sense of the word, including tithing.

My father died when Mama was in her early 50's. She struggled financially and ended up moving in with us for a few years.

When she moved out on her own, money was still tight.

I know what the Bible says about giving and tithing. Regarding tithing, the Lord says He will open the windows of heaven and pour out such a blessing there will not be room enough to receive it. Regarding giving, He says to give and it shall be given to you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over.

One day I was talking to the Lord about Mama. "I know Mama is a tither and a giver, Lord. Where are the blessings Your word promises?"

I know that blessings are not always monetary. He can bless in other ways.

My mother remarried when she was in her 70's. That is when she received her blessings. When she passed she was even able to leave a little inheritance for us kids.

The Lord speaks to you from His word, the Bible. It tells you His do's and don'ts. It tells you what Jesus did for you. It gives you His promises. The Bible is His truth.

For example, in today's world when there seems to be so many ways to salvation, Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

I have never heard an audible voice from the Lord, but He has spoken to me many times through His word.

Next month, we will discuss more ways the Lord speaks to you. **©2019 Bev Brown—All Rights Reserved.**

From The Yard! Below are some *Inspirational Articles* from your Brothers and Sisters Still Behind the Walls

The Perfect Gift by Brian L.

El Dorado

Recently one evening I was watching a movie "Miracle on 34th Street". There was a part when a mom brought her daughter to a store in town to see Santa. Santa began to speak to the little girl but her mom quickly interrupted by saying, "you don't have to talk to her, she just wants to see you, and she's deaf".

In that moment Santa begins to communicate slowly and softly in sign language with her, each having a warm smile on their faces. Eventually Santa asks the question, *what do you want for Christmas?*" Most of us have been asked this same question. Maybe you have sat on Santa's lap telling him all you wanted for Christmas. Maybe you left a written list with cookies and milk on Christmas Eve. As a youngster I would flip through a Sears catalog making a long list of toys I wanted. I remember my mom saying "that's a long list, have you been a good boy this year?"

The song, Santa Claus is Comin' to Town, has a well-known verse that says," He's making a list and checking it twice, he's gonna find out who's naughty or nice, so be good for goodness sake". For goodness sake...I always wondered, was I nice enough? Was I good enough?

Not many of us would want to have someone investigate our lives and decide if we deserve a gift or not. I would be quite nervous. If you're honest with yourself your list would be cut short. But unlike the fictional Kris Kringle, God is completely different. He knows everything about us and still offers us with the most precious gift He has; His Son, Jesus. And *His Name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6)*

The prophet Isaiah also prophesies "**Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14)**

So there it is. These Prophesies have come to fruition. Jesus is Immanuel meaning...God with us. He is the source of abundant life. It is not about whether or not we are good or bad, deserving or meritorious. It is because of God's great love that we can have the gift of Jesus, the gift of eternal life (Romans 8:7-8)

"Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift (2 Corinthians 9:15)



From The Yard! Cont.

Are you ready to be searched? By Cameron J. Hutchinson

Psalms 139:23-24



In the environment we (the incarcerated) live in, we are well acquainted with the pat-downs. This is a fine method used to search a man's person. To see if there is any unlawful object on one's person, anything that can cause harm, or even spread harm. Because in this environment there's a need to know on a deeper level than what's seen, hence, the pat down system is in place. And in many cases there's a preparation on a personal level to prepare for the pat downs whether seeking to hide things or not. It is even true if one is clean, he prepares for it by being ready to hand over whatever is asked of him to be inspected.

Likewise, this is the method used even in scripture. Psalms 139:23-24 (NIV) "Search me Lord and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting".

You see when it comes to the inspection, searching of the man, with God's method, is more than a hands on frisking. It's a true searching for what's not on your person but rather what's **in your person**. God is searching for what's in your heart. Like the things one cares for, and loves more than God himself and is not forthcoming about it; this also includes unconfessed sins, and hidden things from God (not really possible to hide things from God) but from others. God can find these things out and honestly He already knows. In the natural method and the divine method both come with exposure for all or someone to see, to hear, or to know. So it would be wise and well for one to just give up the mess rather than store it and be found out in time...**Are you ready to be searched?**

From The Yard! Cont.

By Nicolas M.

Lansing

Matthew 10:34-36

34 Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.

35 For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. 36 And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.

When we begin our path of righteous living there is a chance that those closest to us will challenge us or make it difficult for us to stay on our path. If we allow the opinions of others to waiver with our purpose, we diminish our own souls. We must never forget that those of us who seek to live by higher principles must be prepared to be challenged, ridiculed, and even attacked. Especially by those that are closest to us, who may not grasp the value of these principles. Matthew 10:37-38, he that loveth father and mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he that taketh not up his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.

Often those who lower their standards to be accepted or to achieve material things resent those of us that refuse to compromise our ideas and who seek to better ourselves. We often find that those individuals are our family and friends, which causes a great deal of stress and discomfort. Take a moment and read Matthew 19: 27-30 and reflect on Jesus's response to Peter who said "Behold we have forsaken all and followed thee, what shall we have therefore". Does this not reassure us that we must never live our lives with reaction to those individuals who have traded that which is temporary for that which is permanent? So we must hold on to what is right.

We must recognize that we are walking in the footsteps of the disciples. This recognition then should ensure that all efforts have meaning in the fulfillment of our purpose. We must remain humble and stick to our morals despite the temporary conflicts. Remain steadfast. For even though we may be ridiculed we are being examples for Christ and we must remain about our Father's business.

From The Yard! Cont.

Hope by Charles J.

Lansing

There are quite a few men locked away in this cage called PRISON and for the most part all they have is hope and the love of family or so they think. And I say this because if you love someone you'll do whatever it takes to let him or her know that, especially those whom are your family. No matter how old you get to be, you will always

need the Moral Support of your family, doubly for those of us in prison.

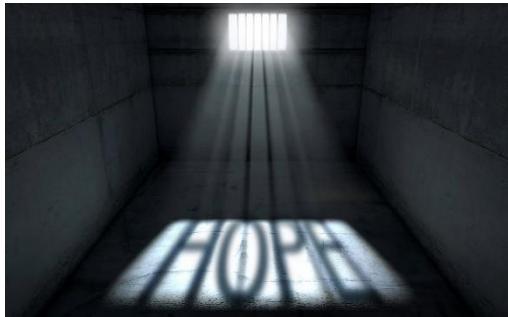
You can take a lot from a man and he will survive but when you take HOPE from him, you take everything his has left to live for! Having our families out there on our side gives us a lot to continue to want to live for; however, when we feel they've abandoned us, what do we really have left? I have witnessed, on too many occasions, men ending their lives because they have nothing else to live for because they feel abandoned by their loved ones. I have had to go retrieve bodies of those who've taken their lives because they either have no one out there, they can't do the time, or they just don't have HOPE.

HOPE is a powerful feeling. Let's look at it this way, when kids are getting bullied they live with the HOPE that some adult will come to their aid to make their tormentor stop, but sometime nothing is done. Some even tell an adult about it and yet nothing still gets done, so in the end one of two things comes from that and neither one is good. Either that kid takes his own life or that kid takes the life of his/her tormentors, because they want others to FEEL THE PAIN THEY WERE FEELING!

But you say that's no reason to take their life or the life of others. Well if you haven't walked in their shoes you have no right to say that nor judge them for their actions. You may have played an indirect part in their actions. You say, I didn't make them do it, true but you may not have done anything to help them or enough to let them know that you cared either! Do you think I am being harsh? Well I'm not, I am just being honest and I want you to know that you can play a major part in the outcome of how people turn out in life.

Nothing I say is said lightly or in jest. For I do know what I am talking about because I have been in both places. There's been two occasions where I've tried to take my life and in each, someone just happened to come at the time I was there and convinced me that not all hope was lost.

I was molested at a very young age. Growing up I was bullied, and because of that I became a very angry young man and that anger led me to being in prison currently. I am one of those people whose family has given up on him mainly because they don't nor want to know why I was doing the things that led up to me being incarcerated.



Hope (Cont.) by Charles J

Not enough is said about what we, in prisons, go through while in the warehouses and its time that someone speaks out about this. Yes, some of us deserve to be here but when it's all said and done we're still HUMAN BEINGS and no one can take that away from us.

You can try to ignore this if you want to but you have to think about this; one day, a lot of us are coming home to live next to you, and if these people don't get some of us the help we need, then who suffers when we're released?

If a person has no HOPE be it man or woman, then what do they have to live for? Do you really understand just how bad some of these guys are HURTING? What's being done to us and said about us is a form of BULLYING. Look, a lot of us were broken when we came in here and there are those of us that are trying to repair ourselves and help others to do the same thing. We need help in doing that from people like you and society at large.

We need you all to make the "powers to be" do the right thing in getting us the help we need to better ourselves and to make them give us the HOPE that we so need!

Those of you whom are in prison reading this, you need to make sure that you're paying close ATTENTION to those you say you have love for, because that can be the difference between life and death for them. We say we care but we often miss the signs of someone screaming for help or the signs that thy have given up because they no longer have HOPE.

Many times, it's in what they are talking about. They're avoiding people by isolating themselves. If they are usually happy-go-lucky but now they seem like they have a lot on their mind or more importantly they may have just lost someone that they are really close to, these are just a few signs that someone has lost HOPE and on the path to taking their own life.

I am no expert but I do know that a little HOPE goes a long way. I have survived for thirty-seven years on a little hope and for those of you who feel that there's no HOPE for you, please go find someone to talk to. Even if you feel there is no one who cares, I am telling you you're wrong. Someone cares. Believe me I know because I lost my mother five years ago the 12th of December and I feel like my world is no longer, even now, because she was my world and without her, I at times, feel like there's no HOPE for me.

So, don't think I am just talking, not all HOPE is lost. Just know and believe that. I close here saying someone LOVES you.

LOVE TO ONE AND ALL!

Happy New Year!



AULD LANG SYNE

BABY

BALL

BALLOONS

CALENDAR

CELEBRATION

CHAMPAGNE

CLOCK

CONFETTI

COUNTDOWN

DANCING

DECEMBER

EVE

FATHER TIME

FIRECRACKER

FIRST

FLUTE

GAMES

GOWN

HAPPY

HAT

HOURGLASS

INVITATION

JANUARY

KISS

MIDNIGHT

MUSIC

NOISE MAKER

PARTY

RESOLUTION

SPARKLER

STREAMER

TIMES SQUARE

TOAST

TRADITION

TUXEDO

VOW

YEAR

Closing Words LONNIE JOHNSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GROWTH MINISTRIES INC

Don't be a Hater in 2020!

Who do you hate and why?

Most of us are familiar with the story of Cain and Abel. Cain killed his brother because he was angry that God accepted Abel's offering and not his. This anger started with jealousy and obviously escalated to a raging hatred which then led to murder.

I ask again, who do you hate? What stage is your hatred at? Is it at the "I don't care for him much..." stage? Or maybe it is only at the "I dislike her..." stage.

Cain's misfortune actually started as a result of him slacking on his offering to the Lord. **See Genesis 4:1-9.** So he had no reason to be upset with Abel. He could only be mad at himself for not doing what was right. Think about why you actually "dislike" someone or why you "don't care for them much". What part in the situation did you play? Are you really mad at them, or are you mad at yourself?

If you read the passage I gave you above, you will see that Cain had more than one opportunity to stop things before they escalated out of control. Unchecked hatred can take us places that we will regret. Life is too short to focus your energy on hating someone for either something you could have avoided or something they did that you cannot control. Seek God to help clear your heart of any animosity you may have. Ask God to help you mend your relationships. Don't let your ill feelings toward someone rob you of your peace. You should hate nothing but sin. Hate puts us in a position to be controlled by sin. This is a warning God gave Cain in verse 6 chapter 4. **"...sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."**

Most of the time the reasons we hate are rooted in mess manufactured by the enemy. God created us to be in relationship with one another and Satan does not want that.

What will control how you feel about others? The love of God or the lies of Satan?



Write Us



We would love to hear from you. If you have a testimony, a prayer request or a question about your walk with the Lord, send us a letter. We would love to pray or rejoice with you.

Maybe you are a writer and you have a spiritual word of encouragement for the readers of our newsletter. We would love to review your article to see if we can use it in our newsletter. We also like to share poems from you more artistic sisters and brothers.

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 this prayer:

"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 Ministries, Inc., Attn: Executive Secretary, P.O. Box 4375, Olathe, KS 66063