



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

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Words to Grow By

LINDA LEWIS, GMI DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

Never Give Up!

Our greatest weakness lies in giving up.
The most certain way to succeed is
always,

To TRY just one more time.

Good things come to those who
Believe,
Better things come to those who are
Patient,
And the Best things come to those
who...

Don't Give Up!

**You were given this life because you
are strong enough to live it.
So before you give up,
Think about why you held on so long.**

Galatians 6:9 Let us not become
weary in doing good, for at the proper
time we will reap a harvest
If we don't give up.

**OUR DECISIONS
DON'T JUST AFFECT
US, THEY AFFECT
OUR FAMILY, OUR
CHILDREN, AND
OUR FRIENDS.**

**IF YOU DON'T DO
THE RIGHT THING
FOR YOURSELF, AT
LEAST DO IT FOR
YOUR CHILDREN,
DO IT FOR YOUR
FAMILY.**

- Joel Osteen



The Heart of a Father BY PASTOR MIKE HERNANDEZ, CHURCH OF THE HARVEST

This month I am going to take a break from talking about heroes in the Bible and instead talk about heroes in today's world. Believe it or not, I could be talking about you. I want to share about modern day heroes who make a difference in the lives of those around them. If you haven't figured it out yet, I am talking about Dads.

One of the greatest problems our world faces today is what I call Fatherlessness. According to the 2017 U.S. Census Bureau, 19.7 million children, more than 1 in 4, live without a father in the home. This may have affected you. You may have grown up without a father, or you may be a father who is absent from the home. Please know, I am not passing judgment on anybody, my hope is to help you see the importance of one of man's greatest missions – to be a dad!

Fathers protect, provide, encourage, and guide.

Protect – A father's job is to protect the family. When there is a noise in the night, a father checks it out. When a child is scared of the monsters under the bed, the father looks into it. When a guy comes to take a daughter out, the father meets him first. The father's job is to make sure everyone in the family is safe and secure.

Provide – The father's role is to make sure that there is food on the table and a place to live. The father is to make sure that his children have what they need to not just survive but thrive.

Encourage – A father should be the child's biggest cheerleader. A father tells his child that they are amazing, that they are smart, that they can change the world. A father tells their daughters that they are beautiful and their sons that they have a purpose. A father should build up, not tear down.

Guide – A father should be the leader of their home. They determine the direction the family should be heading. They should speak wisdom into their children's lives. They should be a trusted voice in their children's lives.

Maybe you had a father that did these things growing up. Maybe you didn't. We can't change the past. We can only focus on going forward. How can we be better fathers?

“and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” – Matthew 3:17

These are the words of God the Father to His Son Jesus after He was baptized. Notice that up to this point, Jesus hadn't started His Ministry, Jesus hadn't performed any miracles, Jesus hadn't taught any great messages. The Father was pleased with Jesus before He did anything. God, the Father was pleased with Jesus for who He was, not for what He did. In other words, Jesus didn't have to earn His Father's favor, Jesus had it because He was a Son.

That is how we must treat our children. Our children should not have to earn our praise. We give praise because they are our children! We should be pleased with them not because of how they act, we are pleased because they are our kids. God established identity into Jesus when He told the world, “this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased”. We need to establish identity into our children as well.

So how do we establish identity into our children? We do what God the Father did to His Son Jesus – we communicate that they are our children and we communicate our pleasure in them.

The Heart of a Father ... Cont

I know if you are reading this, you are probably not with your children. I want to encourage you that it's not too late to have relationship with them. The best you may be able to do is write letters to them. Please do so. They may never respond, but I believe that if they read them, they will be impacted by your words.

Every year for my children's birthdays (I have four children) I write them a Birthday Letter from Dad. In this letter, I give my thoughts on the past year and encourage them for the next year. I give them a Bible verse for the year. Even though I have never heard a thank you from any one of my children (and I have written over 30 letters) I believe these letters are a treasure to them (I know I can be fooling myself with that thought). Please write to your children.

Another role that a father gets to play is teacher.

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. – Deuteronomy 6:6-7

A father is supposed to teach God's commandments to his children. But in order to teach God's commandments, a father needs to know what those commandments are. They learn this by studying the Bible. The best teachers are those that model the behavior taught so a father should not just teach his children God's commandments but also show his children how to obey God's commandments by obeying them himself. It is a father's job to teach his children about God.

One more job a father has is to pray for his children. Every day cover your children in prayer. Pray over them by name. Pray God's blessings and goodness upon them. Pray for their protection. Pray for their provision. And pray that God will establish a relationship between you and your children. I believe God loves to answer these prayers.

"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction." - Malachi 4:5

God wants to restore the relationship between father and child. So even if you have a fractured relationship with your children, God wants to restore it. And if you have a fractured relationship with your father, God wants to restore that as well.

Some of you reading this may not have had a father. Regardless of the reason, you may feel an empty hole in your heart. My prayer for you is that you will allow God the Father to fill that hole. Some of you may need to forgive your father for abandoning you, abusing you, ignoring you, etc. If that is the case, please take the time to forgive them. If you need help, please reach out to Growth Ministries and we can provide resources for you.

I believe the greatest heroes living today are fathers. A father impacts not just the next generation, but future generations that follow. We are all impacted by fathers – whether we had one or we didn't. Let's be the best fathers we can be and leave a legacy for our children to follow. Let's be modern day heroes!

Use What You have BY MINISTER CHASTITY STEMMONS



Sometimes the best thing to do is to create with what you have left.

Have you ever heard of the statement..." USE WHAT YOU HAVE TO THE BEST OF YOUR ABILITY?"

Even if you haven't, I know you've experienced it before in some area of your life. Perhaps your situation caused you to lose a lot but I want to remind you that you didn't lose your mind or abilities. You may have even lost a job or career, saw an important friendship end, and experienced a family member you thought would always be there for you become a no show in your most difficult times.

Life is full of ups and downs and can leave you making decisions that result in unfavorable consequences. It's easy to look at what you lost, but I want to encourage to look for what you have left and move on. There is something beautiful that God wants to do with what you have left in you, if you allow him to do it.

I know you can relate to the widow woman in the Bible whose husband died and she was left with debt to pay. Her husband was dead and he was the one who provided for her household. This woman was faced with her two sons being threatened to be taken away from her and enslaved by the debtor to repay what was owed.

2 Kings 4:1-2 The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the LORD. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves."

Elisha replied to her, "How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?" "Your servant has nothing there at all," she said, "except a small jar of olive oil."

Elisha asked one simple question, "What do you have in your house?" Her first response was to say she had nothing at all. Lack of resources was not the widow woman's problem rather the ability to see what she had left was. Then she looked around and suddenly recognized she did have something to work with, a small jar of oil.

In desperate circumstances it's easy to see what you don't have but I challenge you like Elisha challenged her to see what you have left and get creative.

2 Kings 4:3 Elisha said, "Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don't ask for just a few. **4** Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side." **5** She left him and shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring. **6** When all the jars were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another one." But he replied, "There is not a jar left." Then the oil stopped flowing. **7** She went and told the man of God, and he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left."

This week I dare you to make a list of what you have left (be specific) and lift that list up to the Lord and ask the Holy Spirit to give you creative ideas on how to use it for His glory.

Blessings, Chastity



My Testimony BY CURTIS WOOTEN A.K.A. KING

Curtis is a young man that we at Growth Ministries are very proud of. Curtis was released from the Kansas Department of Corrections in February of 2018 and has been on the straight and narrow path ever since. He has overcome many obstacles and proven that there is a life after jail. We are pleased to feature his testimony in this edition of the Growth Journal.

Allow me to begin with a small prayer: Heavenly Father, please allow this message to empower or enlighten someone. In Jesus' mighty name, Amen!

This is a short testimony of my reality of prison and after prison. 2003, 2010 and 2016 are the years that I went through El Dorado RDU. There's a saying there, "You'll either become a better person or a better criminal." My first two times through prison was entertained by 40 Laws of Power. Stories from convicts that assumed they were ahead of the game. I had selfish ambition and was trying to step my manipulation concepts up a few levels. I was ignoring the fast, destructive, and stressful lifestyle that came with quick gains and big losses.

Proverbs 16:18-19 (NIV)

**18 Pride goes before destruction,
a haughty spirit before a fall.**

**19 Better to be lowly in spirit along with the oppressed
than to share plunder with the proud.**

My last trip to prison in 2016 was an eye spirit opener. The things I ignored the first two times started to gain my attention. I had memories of working in the kitchen and taking trays of food to the infirmary. I remember seeing prisoners looking like they were on life support and wanting to pull their own plug. I suddenly noticed how selfish I was for asking family and friends for money. I ignored that they had responsibilities such as their bills, food and clothing while I overlooked the lack of responsibility that I showed while in prison. The state provides everything for an inmate, even a job detail to support whatever one may want or need from commissary. And please excuse my example of a life sentence if you or someone you know is doing life. Be encouraged by the lift that one that is still living, contains the power to impact another. For life is what we make it.

I assumed that upon my release from prison that life would be rewarding. Especially since I built a stronger relationship with God. The reality of things is; jobs will be difficult, loved ones will be lost, heartbreak still exists, and bills still need to be paid. And not to mention that supervision has to be intact.

To be free is a mindset. Enjoying life without taking the chances that lead to prison eliminates extra stress. Finding things positive things to occupy your time like a hobby or volunteering could add tremendous value to your days. Having a support group or a mentor that you can reach out to can also make difficult times bearable.

My advice is simple, be thankful because we all know someone that is not here today, just as well as we know someone that is grateful that we are here. Be humble because pride is foolish. Be hungry because you might starve waiting for someone else. Be content because wanting something that you are not willing to work for is a setup for failure. And pray!

Philippians 4:13 (NIV) 13 I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

From the Yard

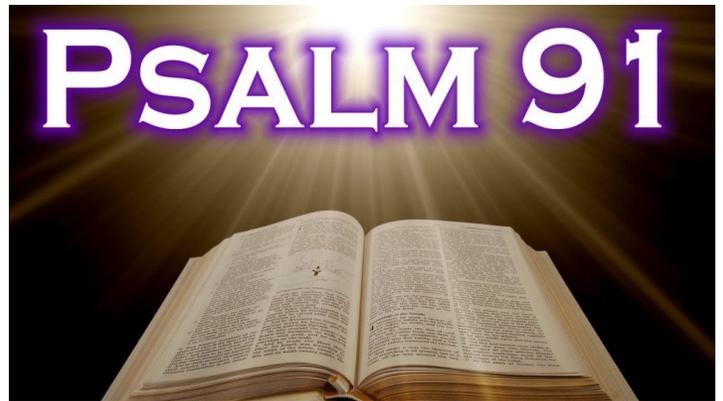
Welcome to another edition of "From the Yard" where we have two brothers on the inside that want to share some words of encouragement and a poem. *(We know a couple of you are waiting to see your articles published. Bear with us as we work them in. If we are unable to share them, we will write and let you know.)*

Words of Encouragement By Tony B., EDCF

Hello to all my Brothers and Sisters in Christ! My hope is that we are all healthy, mindful, and prayerful during these trying times.

Covid-19 is a threat from the enemy. Yet, I am here to remind you all that the powerful promises of Psalms 91 remain a steadfast encouragement to us.

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty... Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night... nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday... A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked... neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling... He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble.



Wow! Now how encouraging is that? Rather than spread fear and anxiety during these trying times, let's be that ever-present freedom! My mother did several years away from us and she made it through with the help of the Lord! So can you women! I have faith in your persevering spirit.

From the Yard Cont.

Loyalty? / Redefined! By Cameron J., HCF

- Loyalty - Trapped in a lifestyle that was never meant to exist, but now is a choice one can choose. Red clothing verses the blues. Either will force one to watch and partake in attacks leaving men and woman as a memory of fallen soldiers.
- Loyalty - An engrained concert to a harmful but delayed okay way that asks one to aid his homey because of...
- Loyalty - But what about moms and pops, sis, brother, the ones who sacrificed their dreams. The ones who gave you years of protection when you could not protect yourself. What about...
- Loyalty - To the ones who changed your diapers, which fed you and went hungry themselves for you...days and nights.
- Loyalty - Has it been illustrated properly? No it has not been. But still some will choose to remain loyal to a group of persons that only accept you if you ride to die. What?!! What is the meaning of your death but rather your life my friends? Rather one should not ride and just live, live to be loyal to life and to those who wanted you to stay home. Not to those who took you from that very haven that said, could be anything. Yet never mind you were chosen to be the source of their heartache, or graying hair, and the reason for their weariness and sleepless nights.
- Loyalty - Calls for one to be for one and nothing more
- Loyalty - Says ride with us or die with them. Sad to say most have and maintains...
- Loyalty - To a color, a name which convicts on its own merits. Whether that is you, I know not. But by that choosing, you have left family and dare one lie and declare...
- Loyalty - To both shame on you for that because your truth is reality.
- Loyalty - To family either will get you back or keep you with
- Loyalty - Time will tell and your loyalty will show it...

Funny Page

By the way, I must warn you, some are very corny!

WEDDING WHITE

A little girl finally got to attend a wedding for the first time. While in the church, the girl asked her mother: "Why is the bride dressed in white?" The mother replied to the girl: "because white is the color of happiness and it's the happiest day of her life today."

After a little bit, the girl looks up at her mother and says: "But, then why is the groom wearing black?"

SOLOMON'S TEMPLE

Where was Solomon's temple located? – On the side of his head. Duh!

ADAM & EVE

After having children, Adam and Eve started getting a lot of questions from their kids about why they no longer lived in Eden. Adam has a simple answer for this: "Your mother ate us out of house and home."

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

During a Sunday school lesson, a child learned about how God created human beings. The child became especially focused when the teacher explained how Eve was created from Adam's ribs. Later in the week, the boy's mother saw him lying down on the floor, so she asked him what was wrong. His reply was priceless: "Mom, I have a pain in my side—I think I'm getting a wife."

BOAZ & RUTH

What kind of man was Boaz before he married Ruth? Answer: He was **Ruthless**.

THE KINDERGARTENER

A Kindergarten teacher was observing her classroom as the children drew pictures. The teacher would occasionally walk around and see each child's artwork. As she approached one little girl who was working especially hard, she asked what the drawing was.

The little girl told her: "I'm drawing God!"

"But sweetie," the teacher replied, "no one actually knows what God looks like."

Automatically, the little girl continued drawing and said: "well, they certainly will in a minute!"



Fourth of July Word Scramble



Unscramble the words, then use the highlighted letters to write out the scrambled secret message.



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Answers to the Word Scramble are on page 11

Closing Words BY LONNIE JOHNSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GROWTH MINISTRIES INC



Which Side Are You On?

Some people say that COVID-19 is not as bad as the media portrays it. Some say it's not real at all. Then some say it is a very serious threat to our lives. We have a group of people protesting and saying, "Black Lives Matter", then across the street there is another group shouting "All Lives Matter!" Whenever there is a dispute, I have often heard that "There are always two sides to every story..." And we know in politics the nation is so divided that it is hard to get anyone to agree on anything. There always seems like there is a side to take.

How do we know what side to take on issues? Who is right and who is wrong? Often there are very well spoken individuals who can make a strong case for either side of an argument. I have even heard people say it does not matter if you are innocent or guilty in a court of law, but how good your lawyer is. As Christians we find ourselves trying to navigate the tense landscapes of divisiveness and stand on the right side.

I believe the answer to this is simple. If we want to stand on the side that is right, then we first have to take a stance of **righteousness**. Yep, righteousness. Righteousness does not always have a place with the obvious sides that are at conflict. Earlier I mentioned there are two sides to every story. Well I've also heard there are three sides to every story, each party's side, and the truth. 😊 Righteousness doesn't always take an obvious side but it always lines up with the heart of God.

Sometimes we feel like we have to take a worldly side because we want to fit in somewhere, or we don't want to offend a certain group, or don't want to be at odds with friends or family. But God says in 1 Peter 3:14 (ESV) **"But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled."** God is telling us not to worry about what others think or do, your blessings come from standing for what is right.

So how do we know how to do what is right? How do we know how to line up with God and not take sides based on what man says? The answer to this is simple also, read your bible. The Word of God has all the answers to any problem, debate, or decision we need to make. All we need to do is read our bible on a regular basis to know where God stands on all issues. And when trouble arises, we pick up our bible and search for answers. God's promise is that He will give us what we need. Matthew 7:7 **Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.**

Now we know what side to be on and we know how to get on the right side. I will leave you with this final thought. **Not being** on the side of righteousness is a sin. Yep, taking any other side but the side that God says we should take is a sin. Siding with grandma, the republicans, blacks, youth, men or any other classification of people that present a idea that is contrary to God's version of "right" is a sin. I didn't come up with that idea. James did by divine inspiration of the Lord. James 4:17 **So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.**

Answers to Word Scramble

 **Fourth of July Word Scramble** 

Unscramble the words, then use the highlighted letters to write out the scrambled secret message.

ASTSET	S T A T E S
ENDDEEPPNICN	I N D E P E N D E N C E
DEARAP	P A R A D E
LUEB	B L U E
TENIUD	U N I T E D
TWEHI	W H I T E
AEQTIULY	E Q U A L I T Y
ERIRFKWOS	F I R E W O R K S
ARLANCDITEO	D E C L A R A T I O N
FDREOME	F R E E D O M
DER	R E D
ILBEYTR	L I B E R T Y

A L L M E N A R E
C R E A T E D E Q U A L

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've never accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior, or if you've turned away from Him for a life of unrighteousness, 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