

THE ADVANTAGE OF READING

JACKIE SPENCER, PRINCIPLE, GRANDVIEW MIDDLE SCHOOL, (GUEST WRITER)

READ! There is a saying, “*The man who won’t read, has no advantage over the man who can’t read.*” As a child, I didn’t understand the value of the written word. Reading came relatively easy for me, but my exposure to books was limited to a big coffee table bible and a set of red encyclopedias. Both had a peculiar smell filled with words and pictures that made no sense to me, so I rarely read anything except books from the school library when an occasional book report was required. Growing up in poverty, my focus was on being accepted and fitting in with my peers and they, too, rarely read. It was only after receiving a Pell grant to attend college that I developed a love for reading. My professor required a minimum of 20 children’s literature books for the semester so my free time was spent with books and thus my love affair with reading began. I truly believe that God’s hand over my life and the power of the written word has given me advantages I would have otherwise not had.

While raising my three sons, I came across a book by Daniel Whyte III, *Letters to Young Black Men*. In his book, Whyte gives a list of benefits of reading that I pray you consider:

- Through regular reading, you can become an “educated person” without following a rigid course of study.
- Regular reading forces you to increase your vocabulary.
- Through regular reading you can become a more interesting person to talk with.
- Through regular reading, you are able to go places, mentally, that you may not be in a position to go physically.
- Regular reading will help you become a better writer, speller and speaker.
- Regular reading helps you to become a thinker.
- Regular reading puts you head and shoulders above the crowd. As they say, “Readers are leaders.”

The most important book you will ever read is the bible. Take time daily to read from this book for it will change your life for the better. The bible contains both fiction (God inspired principals) and nonfiction to make its message clear and impactful. I suggest you start with Proverbs, the book of wisdom. It contains 31 chapters, so make a goal to read one chapter a day. In his book, *Letters to Young Black Men*, Whyte also suggests “areas of books to explore to get you started in a fulfilling life of reading:

- Read a good grammar book through a couple of times. This will help you immensely in so many areas.
- Read a pocket dictionary through, over a good space of time, of course. (A page a day is a good pace.)
- Read a good short history of the world. This will help give you a broader perspective on what is happening today.
- Read a good history of Africa. This will help you to understand where you came from.
- Read a couple of good Black American History books. This will help you to understand who you are.
- Read the classics written by both black and white authors. These books will strengthen your vocabulary as well as put you in the category of the “educated people” in this society.
- Read the great Christian classics. These will help encourage your faith.
- Read a good weekly news magazine and a good daily newspaper. This will help you keep abreast of what is happening now.”

I also encourage you to read self-help books that motivate you to reach your God-given potential. If you are in need of good books to read, please reply to Growth Ministries and we will be happy to get some books in your hands. Here’s to you having an advantage.

“FROM THE YARD” (Each month we will bring you content from one of your brothers inside)

BY ERNEST D. BROWN, JR. – LANSING CORRECTIONAL FACILITY

MY PAST

This has always been my biggest downfall because I let the things I did define me and shape me into who I thought I should be. Reading the book “Putting Your Past in Its Place” by Stephen Viars, has lead me straight to the source of whom I should have sought to determine who I was, which is my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Philippians 3:12-14 gives me encouragement to not look at my past failures, or the good things I've done, but to continue to look towards the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Jeremiah 29:11, another verse that helps me understand that in spite of the mess that I've caused in my life, God has a purpose to turn my mess into a message.

Jeremiah 29:11

For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

An “Oaks of Righteousness” class I took while in Lansing Correctional Facility helped me face my past and the ties it had on my soul, and to break the bondage of inappropriate relationships. This freed me up to talk about my lawlessness which landed me in prison, 5 times, along with my addiction to sex, money and drugs.

I would encourage each one who takes the time to read this, to look towards God, and His Word, to understand and find out who you are, because you will be overjoyed with the person He shows you that you are becoming.

I would also encourage you to read Psalms 38 and Psalms 51 when you feel as if you are all alone and no one cares. David shows you that you are not.

Sincerely

Ernest D. Brown Jr.

Just for laughs...

A Priest, A Minister, A Rabbi and A Bear

A priest, a minister, and a rabbi want to see who's best at his job. So each one goes into the woods, finds a bear, and attempts to convert it. Later, they all get together.

The priest begins: "When I found the bear, I read to him from the catechism and sprinkled him with holy water. Next week is his first Communion."

"I found a bear by the stream," says the minister, "and preached God's holy Word. The bear was so mesmerized that he let me baptize him."

They both look down at the rabbi, who is lying on a gurney in a body cast. "Looking back," he says, "maybe I shouldn't have started with the circumcision."

"WORDS TO GROW BY"

LINDA LEWIS, GMI DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

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!
And Remember,
Faith is seeing light with your heart
when all your eyes see is darkness.

Psalms 34:17-18 When *the righteous* cry [for help], the LORD hears
And rescues them from all their distress *and* troubles.
The LORD is near to the heartbroken
And He saves those who are crushed in spirit (contrite in heart, truly sorry for
their sin).

CLOSING WORDS

LONNIE JOHNSON, GMI EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Do you want to be free?

If the Warden ordered all gates, doors and bars opened to the facility and that everyone was free, most inmates would wander out, thinking they were free but not sure what they were free to do. I would guess most would migrate toward the things they liked to do like find their favorite restaurant, get some nice clothes, have a good time and whatever else made them *feel good*. But if we step back and examine our lives, some of the things that make us feel good do not give a state of freedom but instead a state of bondage.

Being free is being liberated from things, people, places and situations that keep us from being who God designed us to be. Being free means there is nothing holding us from reaching our full potential no matter where we are. It means we strive to be who God says we **can be** and not trying to achieve the limited character others say we **should be**.

I was once bound by many earthly things such as night life, a job I didn't like and people that didn't have my best interest at heart. I just didn't feel like I was being who I was meant to be. I felt like a prisoner in my own body. One day I threw up my hands and said, "God, I am done...I am turning it all over to you. I don't care if I ever have anything else in life, all I care is that I have you to lead me." That was the most sincere, life changing, prayer I have ever uttered. It changed my life because it was from the heart. God honored it and my life has never been the same. God has freed me from the chains of life and has given me true liberty.

So, if you are incarcerated, and may never see the outside of your compound, there is still an ultimate freedom that no one can take away from you. That freedom can be found walking in your true purpose with God. Write me if you want to know more.

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 you wish to be connected to Him and have ever lasting life, 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.

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