

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

Faith

*Faith is knowing in your heart
what you can't see with your eyes.
Faith is the substance of things hoped for,
believed in, and brought to God in
prayer.
Faith is deep. Faith is strong. Faith is real.
Faith is getting out of bed when you want
to pull
the covers over your head.
Faith is a nudge, a whisper, a shout from
the soul.
Faith is sustenance for a moment,
for a day, for as long as it takes.
Faith is the answer no matter the
question,
problem, or situation.
Faith is what it is...
Faith is everything.*

*So the thought for today is...where is your
faith? Luke 8:25*

Be Blessed!

STORIES OF EX-CONS WHO TURNED THEIR LIVES AROUND

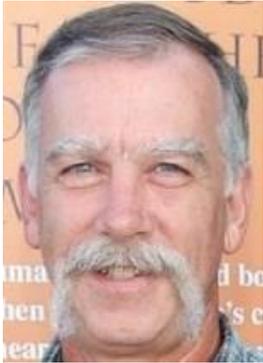
Each month we will try to share with you a case of an individual who has been released from prison and went on to make a positive impact on society.

THE FOUNDER OF THE FRENCH NATIONAL POLICE

It may surprise some to know that, at one time, the predecessor to the modern French National Police was founded and headed by an ex-convict. Growing up in Napoleon-era France, Eugene-Francois Vidocq lived a very colorful life that saw him charged and jailed for a variety of crimes, such as theft and assuming false identities. After a while, Vidocq offered his assistance to the police and worked as a spy in the criminal underworld. He became so effective in apprehending criminals and solving complex cases that authorities soon created the Surete Brigade, which was later expanded nationwide by Napoleon and renamed Surete Nationale, to assist him.

Under Vidocq's leadership, the police reduced crime rates significantly. During his stint, Vidocq employed surprisingly modern methods of investigation and even maintained a forensics laboratory, something few precincts did at the time. Although Vidocq would ultimately resign and clash with the police again—largely because he had formed his own private detective agency—such were his legendary exploits that he later became the basis for popular fictional detectives such as Edgar Allan Poe's *Dupin* and Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes*.

WHAT GOD WANTS (AND WHAT HE HAS GIVEN) – PART 1 BY DAN DOTY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE CITY UNION MISSION, KANSAS CITY MISSOURI



Disclaimer! My story isn't "better" than anyone else's but it's one that I hope (and pray) demonstrates the importance of "seeking God" rather than waiting for a personal tap on the shoulder from Him (He's done more than that already – read on).

Many people go through life believing that God has simply left us here on earth to enjoy life, do the best we can, and hopefully when we take our last breath, our good deeds will outweigh our bad ones and we'll get our free passes into heaven; and that we can do all this without any further involvement with Him other than a token appearance in a house of worship now and then, or having a copy or two of the Bible somewhere in our home – maybe not read but there nonetheless. That WAS me.

Multitudes sincerely believe that "when God wants to hear from me He'll let me know and until that time I'll mind my business and He can mind His." It may not be said in so many words but it's how many live. Too many expect a "lightning bolt" experience thinking that's what God will do if He really wants their attention.

But those who have said or felt this are forgetting that God has already spoken to us and given us a wonderful "instruction manual" for living our lives. As our loving creator He alone knows what's best for us and what the only way is of finding the lasting peace and happiness we all desire.

Many also mistakenly believe that EVERYONE will ultimately make it to heaven because they hope God will simply overlook the fact that friends and loved ones (and you & me) have lived our lives giving God very little of what He wants. What does He want?? He simply desires that we accept the amazing Gift He has given us – His Son – and that we have an ongoing relationship with Him that our lives center around.

God definitely desires that we enjoy life on this beautiful planet . . . but His design (as clearly revealed in the Bible) was that we would enjoy life in the context of obedience to His written communication – what some call God's love letter to His creation - the Bible (some also think incorrectly that it's God's angry list of "do's & don'ts").

Some believe that we can go around Jesus – aren't there other "roads" to God & heaven? From God's perspective (His Word), no, there is no other way AT ALL to get to heaven. See these two verses: John 14:6, Acts 4:12.

And of course there is the belief by many that there is no God at all so we are free to live life as we choose – doing good or bad (whatever that is). Atheism has no place for God or heaven or sin. But what if they are wrong??

The evidence for God's existence is overwhelming despite what atheists believe. I love the quote from Abraham Lincoln on the subject: "I can see how it might be possible for a man to look down upon the

WHAT GOD WANTS (AND WHAT HE HAS GIVEN) – PART 2

earth and be an atheist, but I cannot conceive how he could look up into the heavens and say there is no God."

The evidence for the truthfulness and reliability of the Bible is also overwhelming. I'm happy to share more about that anytime I'm asked.

Since God has chosen to speak to His creation through His Word, we should listen (reading daily) to Him very carefully.

My personal story of life before coming to faith in Jesus Christ is very similar to what I've written above . . . and probably very much like many who may be reading this.

When "confronted" with questions about having a personal relationship with Jesus I initially "ran" from the conversation. I wasn't interested in what someone else thought. I figured that if God really wanted my attention that He would make that clear in some other way than by having someone just come up to talk to me. I actually prayed many times "God, if you're real, show me." I'm sure He did many times but not in the miraculous way I wanted.

My closest and lifelong friend became a Christian in 1971 and began sharing with me that a personal relationship with Jesus Christ would give my life meaning. There was no question about the changes I saw in his life. He was a brand new person - what the Bible says happens when a person sees their need for a personal relationship with the Creator and Savior. He saw clearly the direction I was going and knew he would lose a friend for life if something didn't change in me.

I felt I needed to at least listen to him. I bombarded him with questions about God's existence, the truthfulness & reliability of the Bible, the perceived contradictions I had "heard" existed in the Bible, etc. He faithfully found answers to my questions. He knew very little himself but would go to more knowledgeable Christians. Eventually I found myself just trying to find more & more questions to ask just as a way to delay a personal decision that I thought would be the end of a fun-filled life.

But I finally came to the strong conclusion that what the Bible said was true; that my sin was separating me from a relationship with God and that I desperately needed to have my sins forgiven. And that's what Jesus Christ came to accomplish. He was perfect but chose to take the sins of the world on Himself so that every person who turned to Him could be forgiven and be assured of an eternal home in heaven.

I became a Christian in the fall of 1972 at age 18 - a "few" years ago now. Everything about me changed – not who I was – but my attitude, my world view, my purpose in life – and my eternal destiny! I now wanted to obey & serve God wherever He chose to put me and in whatever He had me do.

Now, years later, I have had an extremely fulfilling life that I've tried to center around a loving Savior.

JAIL BROKEN

BY TIMOTHY SHOCKLEY – OWNER OF “DREAM MUSCLE COFFEE”



*All that I've been through, I still believe that God has a dream for me.
– Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.*

Life is a beast and we cannot thrive in life without being first connected to the Author of Life. I believe we've all been dealt different hands in life. It's how we respond to the circumstances of life that define our destiny. My story isn't anything special, I dealt with issues just like a lot of people—pride, lust, greed and the traditional vices that detour people from destiny. My saving grace was being raised with good parents who taught my brother, sister and I the value of being an effective citizen in society. Regardless of how I was raised, I still made choices that didn't favor a promising destiny. I have a very addictive personality. I am overly competitive and I hate to lose. I hate to see those I care for without the basic necessities of life. I was so ambitious and determined to succeed by any means necessary, even if it meant I was to steal and commit crimes just to take care of my family.

Even though I was raised with great parents, we struggled financially. Often times we would be without lights, water, gas and sometimes we would get evicted. It was a struggle, not only to struggle but to live in a community that was saturated in poverty. It was tough. It messes with your mindset, your ambition and what you would foresee in your future.

Sports were my gateway out of the hood. I played football and basketball. I really excelled at football and ended up going to college to play. College was a culture shock in itself, growing up in an urban community to now being intertwined with white people. It was different and I learned a lot. Sometimes you don't know how bad your mindset is until you are around people who are different than you. It can either send you backwards or propel you forwards.

Enough became enough. I got tired of my situation and felt like God was absent. I became vulnerable to my life situations. I started stealing items out of a department store to hustle on the street. I wasn't just stealing candy bars. I had built a decent operation; anything from jewelry, to gift cards, to shoes. You name it. Those actions led to several felony counts, with a possible prison sentence of 8 years. It was tough. I was locked up with little hope that anything positive would come out of it. I was ready for the long haul, but while in jail I opened up a Bible and asked God for forgiveness. I told God that if He would open the gates I would never turn from Him again. The awesome thing about God is that He's forgiving and He's gracious and He gives second chances. God loves regardless and He has an awesome plan for anyone who still has life.

To conclude: I believed in God. I showed up to my court dates, payed all my fines, showed up early to my probation officer and I beat my criminal case without conviction. If it can happen for me, it can happen for you.

Keep hope alive. Stay positive when it is hard. What seems impossible to you is possible with God. Stay Inspired!

“FROM THE YARD” EACH MONTH WE WILL BRING YOU CONTENT FROM ONE OF YOUR BROTHERS INSIDE

DON'T FAKE THE FUNK (MARK 14:3-9) – BY BRIAN LIONBERG

What aspect about your life represents you? Is it a lifestyle? Is it an affiliation, belief, relationship or some vice? When you enter a room what do you want people to instantly believe about you?

In the above scripture reading we find Jesus in the house of Simon the Leper, and while sitting at the table “a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on his head” (v.3)

Upon further research this oil of spikenard was a perfume imported from India. It was partly made of plants that grew in the highest altitudes of the Himalaya mountains. Scripture says this amount in the flask or jar, was worth close to a laborer's wage for an entire year. The jar itself made of translucent stone held some value as it was used to make jewelry and trinkets.

It was a custom of the day to honor guests in your home by anointing the head and an act of devotion to the feet. My question is, why the entire jar? Why not just a few drops? Why the criticism? And what does this mean for you and I?

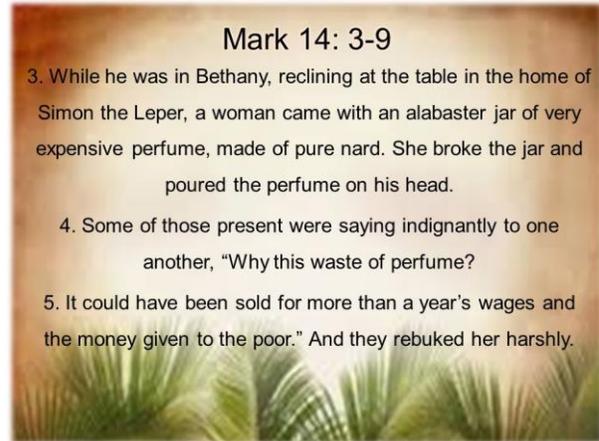
This woman whom John mentions is Mary, clearly recognizes who Jesus is and what He came to do. It was this recognition that represented her true devotion to Jesus along with the understanding that honoring Jesus comes at a high cost. This high cost goes way beyond the monetary means, it's about a heart change.

When Jesus confronted the Rich Young Ruler that a life of devotion to Him was more than following a set of rules and then asked him to sell all he had, give the proceeds to the poor, he walked away sorrowful. He walked away in this manner because his wealth had a grip on him. His wealth was a representative of everything he was in every way (Mark 10:17-22).

In the same way this jar of perfume was a representation of her status in the community, her persona, appearance, appeal, and femininity. The amount went beyond an extravagant pleasure; it leads us to believe she didn't intend to change this part about her for a long time. As a Christian, I struggle with wanting God to do something in my life while doing the same old thing.

So think about this ... it wasn't about the perfume per se. It was about her image of pleasing, performing and perfecting to the world around her. I say it's about a heart change because it's a standoff of forfeiting your reputation and surrendering your will to God. Whatever we are willing to walk away from or surrender to God, anything we thought we had to have to keep up “appearances” because you love God more, that's called a sacrifice of praise. Whatever gets in the way of representing ourselves rather than God, and you surrender its grip on you, then you position yourself to experience greater blessings from Him.

What “jar” are you willing to sacrifice to honor God? What is the Kingdom of God worth to you? Embark on the journey that represents a life devoted to Jesus. Don't fake the funk!





Just for Laughs



The Combination

The temporary Sunday School teacher was struggling to open a combination lock on the supply cabinet. She had been told the combination but couldn't quite remember it.

Finally, she went to the pastor's study and asked for help. The pastor came into the room and began to turn the dial. After the first two numbers, he paused and stared blankly for a moment.

Finally, he looked serenely heavenward and his lips moved silently. Then he looked back at the lock, and quickly turned to the final number, and opened the lock. The teacher was amazed. "I'm in awe at your faith, pastor," she said. "It's really nothing," he answered. "The number is on a piece of tape on the ceiling."

Going Down

As the storm raged, the captain realized his ship was sinking fast. He called out, "Anyone here know how to pray?" One man stepped forward. "Aye, Captain, I know how to pray."

"Good" said the captain, "you pray while the rest of us put on our life jackets - we're one short."

In All Things Give Thanks

A 4-year-old boy was asked to return thanks before Christmas dinner. The family members bowed their heads in expectation. He began his prayer, thanking God for all his friends, naming them one by one. Then he thanked God for Mommy, Daddy, Brother, Sister, Grandma, Grandpa, and all his aunts and uncles. Then he began to thank God for the food. He gave thanks for the turkey, the dressing, the fruit salad, the cranberry sauce, the pies, the cakes, even the Cool Whip.

Then he paused, and everyone waited--and waited. After a long silence, the young fellow looked up at his mother and asked, "If I thank God for the broccoli, won't he know that I'm lying?"

So Far, So Good

So far today, God, I've done all right. I haven't gossiped, haven't lost my temper, haven't been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish, or over-indulgent. I'm really glad about that.

But in a few minutes, God, I'm going to get out of bed and from then on, I'm probably going to need a lot more help.

Thank you.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Daniel & the Lions Word Search

D O M L F B V T E E R H T J Z
E E V R R A R T B S Z F C M D
H J V A A I U L D E S O L C B
S R V E C H A L R S H T U O M
I E E K I M D E T C E T O R P
N A E S E L V S Q S N O I L W
U D N L C I E J E A L O U S A
P O E G L U D B P R A Y E D L
I S J E E A E O O D A R I U S
S I D Q S L I D S T O N E V E

ANGEL
BELIEVED
BLAMELESS
BRAVE
CLOSED
DARIUS
DELIVER
FAULTS
HARM
JEALOUS
LAW



LIONS
MOUTHS
PRAYED
PROTECTED
PUNISHED
RESCUED
SAD
STONE
THREE
TRICKED

Closing Words

LONNIE JOHNSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GROWTH MINISTRIES, INC.

New Priorities

1999 was the tipping point of my life. It seemed like my life was a hot mess and everything had been turned upside down. I was in a bank about to cash my check that day and hit the streets to do only God knows what. A security guard approached me while I was in line and invited me to his church. I was so tired of how things were going I said “whatever”. The Pastor gave a sermon and talked about how we should seek God with all our heart. He said that connecting with Him was more important than anything. He said that we should pray and put God before **everything**.

I had always believed in God and prayed from time to time. But only to sink back into the same cycle of bad decisions and bad lifestyle. A couple of weeks later I was there again, at the worse point of my life. I dropped to my knees at home that day and told God that all I wanted was a relationship with Him. I said that I didn't care if I ever had a great job, a nice car, a wife or even my own place to stay. I said that all I wanted was to be connected to Him and live in peace with Him. From that day forward things began to change little by little. All those things I said I didn't care if I had, started to fall into my lap in big ways. But it was not the “things” that amazed me, it was the peace of mind I achieved. It was also the way God started using me to reach, serve and be there for others. I was a man that could not manage his own life and God had me reaching out and touching the lives of hundreds of people over the following years and it is still going strong today. It all started with me changing my priorities and putting God first and foremost in my life.

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

WE HAVE MOVED