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

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STORIES OF EX-CONS WHO TURNED IT AROUND

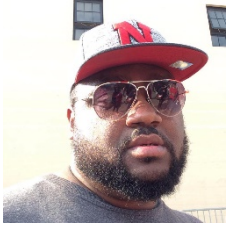
Frank William Abagnale

Beginning as a teen, Frank William Abagnale wrote a total of \$2.5 million in fraudulent checks. He also was successful in posing as a college professor, attorney, physician and pilot. His exploits led to a charge where he served five years in a French prison. He was released from confinement under the condition that he would work for the U.S. Government and advise them on fraud-related cases.

Abagnale now mans a fraud consulting company that is designed to assist corporations, law enforcement agencies and financial institutions on security and fraud. The story of Abagnale's life was profiled in the movie "Catch Me If You Can," which starred Tom Hanks and Leonardo DiCaprio and was directed by Steven Spielberg.

Christmas Trivia

- Christmas was declared a federal holiday in the United States on June 26, 1870.
- The first eggnog made in the United States was consumed in Captain John Smith's 1607 Jamestown settlement.
- Though Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ, there is no mention of December 25 in the Bible. Most historians believe he was actually born in the spring.
- The origin of Christmas trees goes all the way back to ancient Egyptians and Romans, who marked the winter solstice with evergreens as a reminder of spring.
- "Jingle Bells" started as a Thanksgiving song. James Lord Pierpont wrote a song called "One Horse Open Sleigh" and performed it at his church's Thanksgiving concert. Then in 1857, the song was re-published under the title it has today, and eventually became one of the most popular Christmas songs.
- The number of wise men who visited Jesus is unknown. Though the Christmas carol "We Three Kings" leads you to think otherwise, the Bible actually makes no mention of the number of wise men who visited Jesus. The "Magi from the East" did, however, bring him three gifts: gold, and frankincense and myrrh.
- The word Christmas originates from the words Christ's Mass. In old English (first recorded in 1038) it was referred to as Cristesmaesse, which literally means 'Christian Mass'.
- The word Noel entered the English language in the late 1300s. It originated from the Latin word 'natalis' which means 'day of birth'.
- In order for Santa to visit all the homes on Christmas Eve he would have to visit 822 homes each second.
- The Christmas wreath is symbolic of Jesus. The red berries symbolize his blood and the holly represents the crown of thorns.
- Christmas is one of the most profitable times of year for many businesses.



Hope By Minister Micheal Rose Sr.

The holiday season invokes a bevy of emotions for many of us. For some it takes us back to a simpler time in our lives when we would anxiously await, with expectation, that what we put on our list to Santa would be waiting for us on Christmas morning under the Christmas tree. Those were the days! The days before we had to concern ourselves with the everyday realities of adulthood such as work, bills, child rearing, and all the other nuances of being a responsible adult.

Christmas time was, is and always will be all about hope. Although in many societies, the true meaning of this time of year has been masked by the pageantry of lights, decorations, holiday shopping and the smell of pumpkin spice everywhere; at its core it still is a story of what was to be the hope to a dying world.

Hope is a funny thing. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines hope as a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen. When we have hope for whatever that 'certain thing to happen' it pumps a little extra energy into our veins; gives us a little pep in our step if you will. It can be a great motivator and enable us to move forward especially during the trials of life. I think we all have experienced the amazing feeling of having hope in something. Unfortunately, as we get older we also have experienced the pain of unmet expectations and in return after a repeated series of occurrences, we lose our ability to hope to some degree or altogether.

The solution to managing the disappointment that potentially comes with having hope is not to avoid hope altogether, but lies in what we put our hope in. In John 16:33, Jesus declares that in this world you WILL have troubles (tribulation, trials, distress and frustration). It does not matter if you are a Christian or agnostic; I think we all can see the truth in that statement. Frustration only lies where expectations go unmet. When our expectations do not line up with reality, we find ways to cope that in many ways are not the most productive means. So instead of changing our aim, change our target.

I've been through some hopeless times in my life. Candidly speaking, this time last year was probably the absolute hopeless I've ever felt; 20-year marriage was ending, away from my children and granddaughter, on the verge of losing just about everything I had gained materially. Truthfully, hope was a four-letter word to me. My world was rocked in a way I never thought imaginable. Anger, bitter, confused, I had to change my focus (aim). All those things I was in the process of losing were allowed to define me internally. I prided myself in being a great husband, father and provider. And when those things were being stripped away, I didn't realize who or what I was. As the saying goes, when you hit rock bottom is where you will find The Rock, and his name is not Dwayne Johnson.

Going back to John 16:33, after Jesus declared that there will be trouble in this world, He makes a hope-replenishing statement. He says, BE OF GOOD CHEER (take courage; be confident, certain, undaunted). Why, Jesus? "For I have overcome the world. (I have deprived it of power to harm you and have conquered it for you.) Essentially, change your target. You see, we often times put our hope in things that have the power to provide us some degree of satisfaction on this earth; our jobs, our families, the number of commas in our bank accounts. The sad reality is at any moment, the status of those things can drastically change. If, and/or when they change, where could that potentially leave us? Hopeless if we are not careful.

Change what we hope in (the target). Many of us place hope in an outcome, and when that outcome does not meet our expectations, we are left with frustration. One key to avoiding this is not putting your hope in an outcome, but One who already knows the outcome and who has your best interest in mind with whatever the outcome may be. What a friend we have in Jesus! He already told us we're going to have problems. Why not place our hope in He who has already figured them out? Never lose hope. Hope should always be our aim, but the where we place our hope (the target) makes all the difference in the world.

“WORDS TO GROW BY”, BY LINDA LEWIS, GMI DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

Christmas Wishes

When you are Lonely,
We wish you **LOVE**.
When you are Down,
We wish you **JOY**.
When you are Troubled,
We wish you **PEACE**.
When things look Empty,
We wish you **HOPE**.
May you be surrounded by
HAPPINESS, PEACE, LOVE, HOPE & JOY ALWAYS!
AMEN



We, at Growth Ministries, wish you and your family a very Merry Christmas and a Wonderful and Blessed New Year!

And never forget that **JESUS** is the reason for the SEASON!

Isaiah 9:6

A poem of Inspiration “We'll Get Through This”

Lord, our troubles
Are so great,
We don't know what to do;
The price for our
Iniquity
Is finally coming due.

The world is crumbling
All about;
No safe place can be found.
Right is wrong,
Wrong is right;
The change is quite profound.

Lord, we need
Your guiding light
To lead us out of here;



We'll focus on
Your Word, and prayer,
To take away our fear.

Temptations of
This dying world
We'll rule out and let go;
Give our burdens
All to you,
Shed all worldly woe.

That's how we'll
Get through this, Lord,
Fixed on heaven above,
Assured of your
protection, help,
And everlasting love.

By Joanna Fuchs

“FROM THE YARD” THIS MONTH WE HAVE TWO ARTICLES FROM BROTHERS ON THE INSIDE TO INSPIRE YOU

TRUE FREE WILL by Gregory G., Lansing Correctional Facility

I have often wondered why God put the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the Garden (Paradise) of Eden. I have contemplated this for literally years, and just now, I believe the Lord gave me the revelation. So, I would like to share it with you, TRUE FREE WILL.

God, blessed be His name, created man in His image and after His likeness and with this, man truly was created in the image of God (supreme) with dominion over all the earth, in His likeness (exercising free will in the earth). God who is supreme and exercises His free will upon all things in the universe, breathed into the nostrils of man (His) breath of life and man became a living soul.

So, in essence, as God is...we are. In Him we live and move and have our being. We are his offspring (Acts 17:28). So as God has free will, man must have free will to satisfy being made in the image and after the likeness of God. This term (free will) is another name for the word (choice). What is choice? By definition it is an option or selection.

Choice, meaning option and/or selection, what was the selection man was given to actually be in the image and likeness of God in order to prove that man was in fact made in the image and likeness of God? The selection or choice that exercised man's free will came in the form of "obedience and disobedience". Hence God's command to not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil which was also a choice with the second part of the command (FOR IN THE DAY THAT THOU EAT OF IT THOU SHALT SURLY DIE) being the choice.

That is the reason why the tree was in the garden. God truly made man in his image and after his likeness which meant God gave man all of his attributes and also gave man dominion to freely exercise all of his attributes and choice was the first one.

This is why the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was in the paradise of God.

ARE YOU A FAN OR FOLLOWER? by Brian L., Lansing Correctional Facility

Anyone who wants to follow me must put aside his own desires and conveniences and carry his cross with him every day and keep close to me! Luke 9:23 Living Bible

When the Kansas City Chiefs are playing on a Sunday afternoon you can hear when something significant happens during the game. The noise of cheers and jeers reverberate throughout the prison compound.

Prison is a place where football is the most anticipated, celebrated sport. Within any of our Kansas facilities there are fantasy leagues, comparing teams and players, trash talking, wagering on parlay tickets, thus these all build momentum leading up to game day. The level of this fervency usually separates who is just a fan and who is a true-blue follower of a team.

Throughout Jesus' ministry His encounters with people were often aimed at the true character of a follower. One such encounter was with a young religious leader recorded in Luke 18.

The young leader was inquiring about being on God's team. Jesus points out Commandments five through nine. The young man responds by saying, "Oh yeah, I've been true to those since I was a kid." (v.21) paraphrase.

So, Jesus replies, "You still lack one thing. Sell all you have and give the money to the poor... come and follow me." (v.22).

ARE YOU A FAN OR FOLLOWER? CON'T by Brian L., Lansing Correctional Facility

Continuing with football analogy, the world teaches us that the best seat in the house is on the 50-yard line, sitting in a lavish press box. It's from that viewpoint many Jews during Jesus' time believed wealth was a sign of God's blessing. No wonder the young leader was saddened by Jesus' statement. (v.23).

When I have conversations with men who have come back to prison multiple times I like to reflect on this biblical discourse. I suggest that like the young leader nothing much has been required of themselves. They live out the same old belief systems. So, you say and do all the right things in here but when you get out, you eventually revert back to what you're used to doing, which is usually a life of crime and victimization.

They tend to accept what I heard a preacher say once, "the world's gospel is try a little harder, do a little better." This is a do it yourself motto. There is no power in subscribing to this idea. Consequently, fans such as the young leader give up when their team struggles.

The young religious leader was at a crossroad. Jesus presented him with a heart check moment. But just like a fan the young leader gave in to the pressures of life, struggling all over again-he walked away sad.

We all have aspects about our lives that we struggle with but it's those things that act as a barrier to our relationship with Jesus that creates the difficulties. What Jesus was saying to the young leader was that-you may be passionate about the law, but you are missing the entire point of loving people and doing the right things in life with your time, talent, and treasure. To be a follower of Jesus is to be a living sacrifice. (See Romans 12:1-2).

Referring to Nicodemus in his book, "Not a Fan" by Kyle Idleman says in effect, ... there is no way to follow Jesus without Him interfering with your life. Following Jesus will cost you something. Following Jesus always costs something. For Nicodemus it would cost him a powerful position, the respect of co-workers, source of income and livelihood, friendships, and some family relationships.

Recidivism rates show that those incarcerated make up some of the best fans. Why? Because they're not willing to give God what is necessary. Just like the young leader they may look the part, talk the talk, but don't walk the walk.

Perhaps if you are reading this you have seen such fans on display with their favorite Sunday team jersey (sitting in the pew), cheering (singing) louder than the person next to them. They are able to quote player statistics (scripture), but never actually get on the field (Kingdom work). No blood, sweat, or tears for a fan.

The comfort zone for the young religious leader was his reliance on wealth. There was this level of selfishness that permeated his outlook on life. It's true that life is about relationships and choices. Having this understanding leads to having accountability-how so? Self-sufficiency was a barrier for the young leader. But God says our sufficiency is in Christ Jesus. Jesus is a perspective changer. He wants us to value what He values-getting out of our comfort zone of doing it our own way, for ourselves only, and into the end zone with/for Jesus.

This means having an empathetic nature in our choices and with our relationships. We must be faithful following His game plan of priorities. Who did He spend time with? How? Where did He go? When? How did He utilize His talents?

Fans compromise, while followers commit. Which are you? What prevents you from being a difference maker to those that surround you? Do you have a Chief's tattoo on your arm for impression sake or do you have a permanent place for Jesus in your heart?

ARE YOU A FAN OR FOLLOWER? CON'T by Brian L., Lansing Correctional Facility

Changing the Game from Compromise to Commitment

1. When you were young how did peer pressure affect your choices?
2. What attitudes are key to you following Jesus?
3. Following Jesus always costs something. What is it for you?
4. What does it mean for you to allow Jesus to interfere with your life?
5. What values and principles have you compromised in coming to prison? What beliefs need to change?

A Little Christmas Humor

1. What kind of music do elves listen to? Wrap.
2. What is a snowman's favorite breakfast? Ice Crispies.
3. Who says 'Oh Oh Oh'? Santa walking backwards!
4. What do zombies eat with their Christmas dinner? Grave-y.
5. Who delivers presents to baby sharks at Christmas? Santa Jaws!
6. What's the best Christmas Present? A broken drum - you can't beat it.
7. Which of Santa's reindeer has bad manners? Rude-olph!
8. Why did Santa put a clock in his sleigh? He wanted to see time fly!
9. What is a skunk's favorite Christmas song? Jingle smells!
10. What is Santa's dog's name? Santa Paws!
11. What never eats at Christmas dinner? The turkey – it's stuffed.



GMI WORD SEARCH BY LONNIE JOHNSON

CHRISTMAS THEME AND MORE

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

STAR
MYRRH
MISTLETOE
SNOWMAN
TREE
CHRISTMAS
HENRY
MASS
JESUS
BELLS
SPENCER
MAX UNIT

SAUNDERS
KINGS
GOLD
MANGER
JINGLE
FRANKINCENSE
MERRY
PRAYER
ICE
JOHNSON
EGGNOG
NAUGHTY

NICE
TINSLE
ELF
CANDY
CANE
FAITH
WORSHIP
SLED
JOY
ANGEL
FROST
GOD

Closing Words LONNIE JOHNSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GROWTH MINISTRIES INC

Do you really love me?

God is **love**. For God so **loved** the world He gave his only begotten son. **Love** is patient. **Love** is kind. When we get saved we hear the word love a lot in the Christian community. We've learned there are many types of love such as **eros** love which is sexual or passionate love, and **storge** love which is love between a parent and child.

What does it really mean to have **agape** love though? This is also known as "unconditional love". This is a love that God expects us to have for everyone. It is the kind of love which requires us to tolerate all people despite their age, race, color, culture or even sexual orientation. It is the kind of love where you want everyone to have the best life that God has planned for them, even if they don't want it for themselves. Even if a person does not like you, you still have an unconditional love for them. I mean, unconditional means just that, unconditional. This type of love is deeper than the eros love in that it has nothing to do with physical attraction or a desire for a person. It is broader than storge love. You can't feel **agape** love only for your child.

John 15:13 (KJV) says "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." That's a tall order. Are you willing to lay your life down for me? Jesus did. Is this where you draw the line at being "Christ like"? There are some people that aren't willing to lay down their lives for a family member, certainly not a friend.

If we really love God and trust Him, we have to believe that when we lay our life down for another person, when we demonstrate this type of unconditional love for our fellowman, God will cover us from any real harm or danger. Chances are you won't ever have to give your life for me, but you may have to forgive me if I hurt you. You may have to give me time to change just like someone gave you time to change. You may have to be tolerant with me as I work through my issues. You may have to protect me from gossip when others try to bring me down. Know this, **I LOVE YOU**.

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.

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