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

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EX-CONS WHO TURNED THEIR LIVES AROUND

Reginald Dwayne Betts

As a teen, Betts and a friend of his stumbled across a man sleeping in a car in the parking lot of Springfield Mall, Virginia. The pair of boys held the man at gunpoint and stole his car, keeping the man prisoner as they went on a ride.

It was a very costly ride, and in less than a day Betts was caught and charged with six felonies. He was later tried as an adult and served a sentence of nine years. Apparently the judge who handed down the sentence actually believed such a stunt would offer the young Betts a chance at redemption, getting him off the streets and into an environment where he could spend his time learning something.

Ironically, it sort of worked and Betts wrote "A Question of Freedom: A Memoir of Learning, Survival, and Coming of Age in Prison". Per the story, prison was essentially a place of "ritualized humiliation, not rehabilitation," but from it Betts was able to find his redemption via the book itself. Turned out he had a knack for writing, and now, along with being a popular published author, he's also a poetry teacher at the University of Maryland and a fellow at the Open Society Institute.



Each year many people pledge to be healthier as their New Year's resolution. Few succeed. Failure is usually the result of a lack of discipline. Growth Ministries challenges you to commit to a healthy spiritual life. Having a healthy spiritual life is similar to having a healthy physical life. You need to have a good **diet, exercise** and get adequate **rest**.

Diet: Watch what you consume. Are you watching more TV than the Word of God? What things are you allowing in your spirit? Pornography, hate messages, thoughts of greed. Unhealthy consumption leads to an unhealthy spirit.

Exercise: Are you a lazy Christian, or are you exercising godly things? Are you serving your kids well? Are you faithful and active in the things of God such as bible study, prayer life, discipleship?

Rest: Do you allow yourself some downtime to hear God or do you fill all your time with work, fun and other busyness? Do you slow down and surrender to God's spirit, so he can teach you the best ways to navigate life?

Take an assessment of your spiritual health and do what it takes to get fit!

Excerpts from a sermon by Pastor David Frech on 1/6/19 at Church of the Harvest as heard by Lonnie Johnson

Adam BY PASTOR MIKE HERNANDEZ, CHURCH OF THE HARVEST

Happy New Year to you! Over the next 12 months, I am going to focus on a man from the Bible and share thoughts about him. Some of these thoughts will be things he did well. Some of these thoughts will be things he did not do so well. I take encouragement that the Bible is filled with people who had flaws and wasn't perfect. I find myself in that category more often than I would like to admit.

We will start this journey with taking a look at the first man, Adam.

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." - Genesis 1:26-28

According to these verses, God created man for several reasons: to be a reflection of God (man was created in His image), to have dominion, to be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it. These purposes still exist today and are for every man (if any women are reading this, these verses apply to you to but for the context of this study, I am going to focus on communicating to men).

Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." - Genesis 2:15-17

Notice that God gave Adam complete freedom, with one exception - he was not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Pretty much everything else was acceptable. Adam lived in a perfect relationship with God and had just one rule to follow. Now it is interesting to note that God put the Tree of the Knowledge of Good & Evil right in the middle of the garden. He did not hide it where it would be difficult for Adam to obtain the fruit. Instead, God put the tree where Adam would be constantly around it. I believe this is because God wanted Adam to choose to obey Him every day. I believe this is still what God wants, for us to choose Him every day.

The command to not eat of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good & Evil was given to Adam. Eve was not yet created and we have no record that God gave this command to Eve. It was Adams's responsibility to pass the decree from God down to his family.

And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him". - Genesis 2:18

The word "helper" is the word "ezer" in the original Hebrew language and literally means "aid, help". The word does not denote that a woman is inferior to man, but instead is to be his helper, as man is in need of help. Men and women are co-equal in God's sight. In fact, the word "ezer" is used 21 times in the Old Testament and 16 times the word "ezer" is used to describe the Lord as our "helper".

I will lift up my eyes to the hills, from whence comes my help (ezer)? My help (ezer) comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. - Psalms 121:1-2

Adam cont. BY PASTOR MIKE HERNANDEZ, CHURCH OF THE HARVEST

When the serpent comes to tempt Eve, Adam was right there.

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'you shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden God has said, 'you shall not eat it, nor touch it, lest you die'. "Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."– Genesis 2:1-5

This is where Adam failed in his responsibilities. Adam should have stepped in and protected his wife. The command from God was given to him directly and the serpent just said the exact opposite of what God said. God said they would die if they ate the fruit, the serpent said they would be like God if they ate the fruit. Instead of Adam being proactive and telling the serpent to leave, he was passive and watched his wife get tricked by the serpent and then ultimately ate the fruit himself.

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. And they heard the sound of the Lord walking in the garden in the cool of the day; and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. – Genesis 3:7-8

The consequence of Adam's disobedience was sin entered the world. Adam and Eve realized they were naked and tried to cover themselves with fig leaves. And isn't that what we do when we have sin in our lives? We try to cover ourselves.

Then when God came looking for them, Adam and Eve hid. And isn't that what we do when God comes looking for us...we try to hide from Him?

And finally, when God confronted Adam about his sin, Adam made excuses.

And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?" Then the man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I ate." – Genesis 3:11-12

And isn't that what us men do when we are confronted with our sin, we cover ourselves, hide from God and take no responsibility for our actions.

Adam and Eve had consequences for their sin. They had to leave the garden and work for food. We always have consequences for our sin. But I take hope with what God does next for Adam and Eve.

Also, for Adam and his wife, the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them. – Genesis 3:21

In God's mercy and compassion, God covered Adam and Eve when they couldn't cover themselves. He does the same for us. He covers us when we can't cover ourselves. I am so thankful that He covers us! I know there are so many times when I don't deserve His covering, but He still covers; that I don't deserve His forgiveness, but He still forgives. You can receive His forgiveness too!

"WORDS TO GROW BY" BY LINDA LEWIS, GMI DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

Treasure

The Smiles, Good Times and Memories,

Leave behind

The Disappointments, Hard Times and Enemies,

Hold On To

Faith, Hope and Beliefs,

And may your

New Year be filled with

LOVE, JOY & PEACE! John 14:27

Wishing you and yours a Blessed & Prosperous New Year!

A poem of Inspiration

"Getting There"

You can't see the sun set on a cloudy day,

You can't enjoy a band that does not play.

You can't get warm when there's no heat,

Your stomach churns with
nothing to eat.

As winter arrives, there is
a chill in the air,

As does a need for warm
clothes to wear.

As those lush green hills
turn snow white,

Displaying a beautiful sight day and night.

When the water boils, turn down the heat,

When trouble comes, do not admit defeat.

When help is needed, know where to look,

Open the covers to read God's Holy Book.

Then seek peace that only
God can afford,

Worship with others in
faith of one accord.

Serving The One Who died
to set you free,

Saving your soul by giving
it eternal liberty.

Honor The One that put the world in place,

Who in His image created the human race.

Extinguish thoughts that trouble your mind,

Take Jesus by the hand, leave them behind.



By Robert Hedrick

RESOURCES FOR FELONS

Below are a few resources for felons to use once they are released:

Employers that hire felons:

- Applebee's
- Goodwill Stores
- Kohl's
- PetSmart
- Red Lobster
- Target
- Tyson Foods
- UPS
- Walmart

Housing:

Finding housing for felons in Kansas is no easy task and we want to assure you that we understand your struggle.

With that being said, below is a list of organizations and resources in Kansas that will help you in your pursuit of felon friendly housing.

Kansas Department of Corrections: Department of Corrections Re-entry Program for the state of Kansas.

Douglas County Sheriff's Office Reentry Program

Oxford House Kansas Re-Entry – The Oxford House Kansas Re-Entry Program allows individuals coming from Jails, Prisons, and other Institutions an opportunity to live in a safe, Alcohol and Drug-Free environment, so that they may re-establish their life.

A Little Humor

TWO LITTLE BOYS WERE BEST FRIENDS AT CHURCH, BUT THEY BOTH HAD A REPUTATION FOR GETTING INTO TROUBLE. ONE SUNDAY, ONE OF THE BOYS WAS HOME SICK, BUT THE OTHER BOY, NOT WANTING TO LET HIS FRIEND DOWN, WAS TWICE AS BAD AS NORMAL.

AS HE WAS RUNNING THROUGH THE SANCTUARY AFTER CHURCH, THE PASTOR GRABBED HIM AND ANGRILY SAID, "WHERE'S GOD?!"

THE LITTLE BOY WAS FRIGHTENED AND DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY.

THE PASTOR CONTINUED, "I WANT YOU TO GO HOME AND THINK ABOUT IT AND I DON'T WANT YOU TO COME BACK UNTIL YOU CAN TELL ME WHERE GOD IS."

THE BOY WENT HOME AND CALLED HIS SICK FRIEND ON THE TELEPHONE. "GUESS WHAT," HE SAID. "THEY'VE LOST GOD, AND THEY'RE TRYING TO BLAME THAT ONE ON US, TOO."

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."

AMINISTER WAS OPENING HIS MAIL ONE MORNING. DRAWING A SINGLE SHEET OF PAPER FROM AN ENVELOPE, HE FOUND WRITTEN ON IT ONLY ONE WORD: "FOOL."

THE NEXT SUNDAY HE ANNOUNCED, "I HAVE KNOWN MANY PEOPLE WHO HAVE WRITTEN LETTERS AND FORGOT TO SIGN THEIR NAMES. BUT THIS WEEK I RECEIVED A LETTER FROM SOMEONE WHO SIGNED HIS NAME AND HAD FORGOTTEN TO WRITE A LETTER."

AMAN AND HIS TEN-YEAR-OLD SON WERE ON A FISHING TRIP MILES FROM HOME. AT THE BOY'S INSISTENCE, THEY DECIDED TO ATTEND THE SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICE AT A SMALL RURAL CHURCH. THE FATHER FORGOT TO BRING ANY CASH, SO HE REACHED IN HIS POCKET AND GAVE HIS SON A DIME TO DROP IN THE OFFERING PLATE AS IT WAS PASSED.

AS THEY WALKED BACK TO THEIR CAR AFTER THE SERVICE, THE FATHER COMPLAINED. "THE SERVICE WAS TOO LONG," HE LAMENTED. "THE SERMON WAS BORING, AND THE SINGING WAS OFF KEY."

FINALLY THE BOY SAID, "DADDY, I THOUGHT IT WAS PRETTY GOOD FOR A DIME."

GMI WORD SEARCH BY LONNIE JOHNSON
 NEW BEGINNINGS (THINGS THAT WILL HELP TO START THE YEAR OUT RIGHT)

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

EXERCISE
 OBEDIENT
 BLESS
 DIET
 GOD
 LAUGH
 BE HUMBLE
 REST
 RESET
 FORGIVE

MEDITATE
 TITHE
 BLAMELESS
 TRUST
 PROTECT
 TEACH
 HOPE
 DECENCY
 FORGET
 LOVE

STUDY
 HONESTY
 LISTEN
 BE KIND
 PRAY
 LEAD
 SERVE
 FAITHFUL
 HONOR
 FIT

Closing Words LONNIE JOHNSON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, GROWTH MINISTRIES INC

I Hate Liars!

Don't you just hate a liar? I do. I hate when someone tells you they are going to do something and then don't do it. I mean, they never had any intention of doing it. They just wanted to get your hopes up to make themselves look good, get you to do something or leverage that lie for personal gain. Sometimes people may have good intent but do not have the means to deliver but still tell you they can.

What I don't hate are the "**Promises of God**". God's promises are the only sure thing that you can really depend on. Firstly, God has nothing to gain by lying to you. Nothing. Everything is His. "**The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it. The world and all its people belong to Him.**" (Psalm 24:1 NLT). So, what do you have that would add anything to Him? He does not need to impress anyone, and He has the resources to produce anything He says He will do. Even things that are supernatural.

I am so glad that our God promises me things that no other person can provide. I'm so glad that "**God is not a man, so He does not lie. He is not human, so He does not change his mind...**" (Numbers 23:19). Because of that I can walk with confidence that all my needs are met, no weapon shall prosper, I can do all things, I am more than a conqueror and so much more according to his promises. When I find a situation too difficult to handle I can find a promise in His Word that tells me that my Father has it handled.

So, I ask you, who do you trust more? God or yourself? God or your neighbor? God or those that have authority over you? If your answer is God, then stop worrying, stop stressing, stop trying to figure out everything on your own. If it is man, then try God. Hold Him to His Word. "**Taste and see that the Lord is good!**" (Psalm 34:8).

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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