

# The Growth Journal Magazine

NOVEMBER 2020  
VOLUME 5, ISSUE 1

Growth Ministries Inc., P.O. Box 4375, Olathe, KS 66063  
[www.growthministriesinc.org](http://www.growthministriesinc.org) 913-730-0977

## A New Look

By Lonnie Johnson

This edition of the Growth Journal marks the start of our 5<sup>th</sup> year of publishing this news magazine. We are honored to be able to provide stories, lessons, sermons, jokes, puzzles, encouragement, and news that can be a blessing and help you pass time productively.

We look forward to continuing our services to you. Please share your copy of this magazine with someone when you are finished reading it. Encourage someone to write us so they may be on our mailing list to get their very own copy.

We hope you enjoy the new look. We thought we would change it up since we are starting this new chapter.

Thanks to everyone for all your letters, cards, and emails over the past 4 years. You have motivated us to want to do more each year.

We hope you will continue to be encouraged and press forward, like Paul, towards your calling.

***Philippians 3:14 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.***

## Inside This Issue

- A New Look 1
- Zechariah 2 - 3
- Road to Recovery Art 4 - 5
- From the Yard 6
- Women Empowering Women 7
- Words to Grow By 7
- Word Search 8
- Just for Laughs 9
- Closing Words 10
- What must I Do to Be Saved 11
- Write Us 11
- Special Gift 12

## Gratitude

turns what we have into  
enough, and more.  
It turns denial into  
acceptance, chaos into  
order, confusion into  
clarity... it makes sense of  
our past, brings peace for  
today, and creates a vision  
for tomorrow.

# WHAT DOES A GODLY MAN LOOK LIKE?

## Zechariah

BY PASTOR MIKE HERNANDEZ

Have you ever wanted something but no matter how hard you tried, you could never obtain it? Even when you do all the right things, you still come up empty. Sometimes it feels as if life isn't fair or maybe you feel like God is mad at you or not listening to your prayers. This month, we are going to look at the life of a priest named Zechariah, who may have felt the same way.

*And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. – Luke 1:6-7*

Zechariah and Elizabeth were both righteous and walked before God blamelessly. You would think that if anybody deserved to get pregnant, it was this couple. However, Elizabeth was barren. Back in those times, having children was a big deal! A family with children was considered blessed. Not having children was almost shameful. Not having children meant something was wrong with you or some even viewed it as God was angry at you. Yet this was the life that was laid before Zechariah and Elizabeth.

Zechariah was a priest. One of the great honors of a priest was to burn incense in the temple. Most scholars believe this great honor only happened once in a lifetime for a priest. Zechariah was chosen by lot to enter the temple and burn incense.

I wonder what thoughts would have entered into Zechariah's mind when he found out he was chosen to offer incense. Was he bitter towards God because he did not have any children? Was he sad for his wife as she bore the shame of being barren? Or maybe he saw this as an opportunity to be alone with God in the temple and he can ask for a child.

So Zechariah goes to the temple and offers incense. The duties of the priest when they offer incense is to pray for the people. As Zechariah was praying an angel appeared and he was greatly afraid.

But the Angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. – Luke 1:13.

This is an amazing moment! The angel told Zechariah that his prayer was heard and that he would have a son. This means that while Zechariah was praying for the people, he snuck a prayer in for himself – that he would have a child. I love this moment because it shows that God cares for our deepest desires and that even though we may feel forgotten, He hasn't forgotten us! Instead of being angry at Zechariah for praying for himself, God actually answers his request.

I want to encourage you to keep praying for those things that are important to you. Having a child was so important to Zechariah that he was willing to risk the greatest honor of a priest to make his request. I believe God loves that kind of boldness in prayer! I believe God loves it when we make bold requests, especially when we ask for the desires of our heart. If we are walking righteously, then we can be confident that the desires in our heart are from God.

The angel communicates that Zechariah's son is going to prepare the people for the coming of the Lord (Luke 1:13-17).

*And Zechariah said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years." – Luke 1:18*

I don't know about you, but if an angel was talking to me, I don't know that I would question him, especially if he called me out for praying for my own requests when I was supposed to be praying for the people. Yet that is exactly what Zechariah did. This reminds me of Gideon, who also questioned an angel (Judges 6). It makes me realize that God uses people who may not always use their brain (or common sense as these are angels) so it gives me hope that God can use me as well. I have made some stupid decisions in my life for sure!

*And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." – Luke 1:19-20.*

The result of Zechariah questioning Gabriel was that he was unable to speak. Some believe that he was punished for questioning the angel. Some believe that Zechariah's words were so powerful that God took away his ability to speak so he couldn't speak doubt into the pregnancy. I believe it was just a sign from God to Zechariah that he was going to have a son. If Zechariah ever doubted his encounter with the angel, all he had to do was try to speak and realize that what the angel said was true.

*After these days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she kept herself hidden, saying "Thus the Lord has done for me in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people." – Luke 1:24*

In the sixth month, the same angel, Gabriel visited a young virgin woman named Mary, but that is the story of a different hero!

*Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. – Luke 1:57*

The custom back in those days was to name the firstborn male child after their father. As family and friends rejoiced in the birth, they were planning on calling the child Zechariah. Elizabeth told them his name was to be John. So the family and friends look at Zechariah, who still couldn't speak, and asked him what the name was to be.

*And he asked for a writing tablet and wrote, "His name is John." And they all wondered. And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God. – Luke 1:63-64.*

Can you imagine not speaking for nine months? I don't know that I could do it for I love to talk. For nine months, Zechariah's communication consisted of signs, body language and writing tablets. However, instead of being frustrated by not being able to speak, he was thankful because he had a son. Did you notice the first thing Zechariah did when he could speak? He blessed God!

Zechariah then prophecies and its recorded in Luke 1:67-79. Zechariah understood the role his son would play in bringing salvation to God's people. Zechariah blessed the Lord for His mercy. Zechariah was not bitter that he went 9 months without speaking

The life of Zechariah is an example of a life well lived. He was bold in his request for the impossible! He asked for a child when his wife was barren. What is barren in your life? Perhaps God will answer your prayer when you ask for life in what is barren. However, be prepared, God may answer your request in a unique way (like taking away your voice as a sign). Like Zechariah, if we keep our eyes on God, we can receive the impossible!

# ROAD TO RECOVERY



An interview with a recently released ex-offender



Growth Ministries sat down and talked with Robert Washington who was recently released from Lansing Correctional Facility after serving 13 years behind bars. This is what Robert shared:

**GMI:** What happened during your incarceration that made you decide to turn things around?

**Robert:** Once I was incarcerated, I knew I needed to do something different. I saw many people go to prison, get released and return. The change I needed was to begin with my education and applying what I learned.

**GMI:** Tell us some of the things you did to start a plan for reentry?

**Robert:** I read books like the “7 Habits of Highly Successful People” and “Winning with People”. I thought the two most important things to learn about were how to build relationships and how to manage money. I needed to learn what I wanted to be in life and how to create a plan to get there.

**GMI:** Did God play a role in reforming your life? If so, how?

**Robert:** I have to acknowledge God in everything. Yes, God is a part of this change. He sat me down and I began to listen. The more I listened, the more I saw my passion in life.

**GMI:** What are some of the challenges you encountered in prison as you were trying to get your life in order?

**Robert:** My biggest challenge was dealing with people. Once I knew where my life was going it was difficult to find likeminded people to talk to. I always had people in my life.

**GMI:** What are some of the major accomplishments you achieved before you were released?

**Robert:** Taking self-help classes like Effective Communication that was offered by Arts in Prison and completing the welding program. Writing a novel was a personal accomplishment because it is an innate ability I didn't cultivate before incarceration.

**GMI:** Tell us about some of the key things you put in place for release such as employment, housing and education?

**Robert:** To find a job I met with the job specialist 3 months before my release. Then the month before my release I placed more than 40 applications through Indeed. While I was in BIBR I studied the curriculum for Financial Peace. I took an Anger Management course. I have a great mentor that sent me several books that I read during my last year. I received books on character, communication, developing relationships, business and help with developing my ability as a writer. When it came to housing, I was given opportunities through Mentoring for Success and BIBR, which led me to Firm Foundations.

I have a plan to go to college and I will be enrolling in JCCC before the end of the month for the spring semester. I created a budget along with realistic financial goals based on what I thought I would be earning. I was very fortunate to have interviews ready upon my release with companies like Amazon, Goedecke and FedEx. I also created a leisure plan because I needed to know what I was going to do in my spare time. My mentor, Mentoring for Success and BIBR have been amazing in helping adjust to living outside of prison.

**GMI:** Many people get released but don't have a plan. What do you think is the difference between you and them?

**Robert:** I didn't want to waste time once I got out. I wanted to know what I was going to do and how I was going to apply the things I learned while I was incarcerated. I faced fears of uncertainty two months before I was released. I would constantly think about everything that could possibly go wrong and how I could avoid the things like making bad decisions and setting boundaries. So far, I have stayed focused. I don't know where I would be if I hadn't taken the time to plan my release.

Other people that don't have a plan are spending too much time wondering what they are going to do after they are released. This can lead to bad reactive behaviors and actions. This will bring a person back to the same thinking they had before they were incarcerated. Write your goals down. Put your plans somewhere you can see them when you wake up. That way your mind can focus on getting them done. I can't express enough how important this is. Please take my advice and plan your life.

**GMI:** Tell us about your support system.

**Robert:** I have been extremely blessed by my support system. First my mentor, Lonnie Johnson, has helped me tremendously. He used his network to help me find clothing and introduce me to people in the community that are willing to help those who have been incarcerated. He is always encouraging and giving me advice. We have been in contact every day of the two weeks I've been released. It is going great. I wasn't sure at first how the mentoring was going to turn out.

Mentoring 4 Success has people that want to see you succeed working for them. They have been very helpful with recommendations, help with housing, and positive reinforcement. I've met very good people through Mentoring for Success.

The KDOC job specialist. If it wasn't for her I wouldn't have been able to place applications and have interviews scheduled upon my release. Her recommendations for jobs have provided me with leads to employment that are turning out to be jobs.

My mom and sister have been a blessing my entire life. They never left my side and I appreciate that. If you have a rough relationship with your family, I encourage you to take steps to rebuild that relationship.

I have remained in contact with several people from BIBR. The community is more supportive than I imagined.

My PO is part of my network. If not for her I wouldn't have been able to obtain my ID so soon. I would've had to wait months.

**GMI:** What did you enjoy the most during the first week of reentry?

**Robert:** Seeing other guys that were in with me that are now out was helpful. When readjusting to society it's good to know you are not alone. It's good to know if they can get established so can I.

Waking up on a mattress was good.

Spending time with my family. My sister calls me when she's bored. This is something that couldn't happen while I was incarcerated. The first week I spent a lot of time with my mother and sister. I had so many people reach out to me to just say "Hi" and encourage me to make positive decisions.

Sitting down and eating a homemade meal makes me appreciate my freedom even more.

**GMI:** Is everything going exactly as you planned?

**Robert:** So far everything is going well. It's not going as fast as I would like with work but I have time to settle in and appreciate freedom. I still remain optimistic about what I can accomplish. I am still planning a podcast that I want to start. Everything I planned is still on track. The challenges I thought I would face turned out to be my imagination over thinking.

**GMI:** How are people treating you?

**Robert:** Better than I expected. I haven't met any difficult people. Everyone is positive and full of smiles.

**GMI:** What is one piece of advice you would like to give someone about to be discharged?

**Robert:** I highly recommend planning your future, setting goals, and following through with action. Find a mentor. I encourage anyone incarcerated to begin planning your release the moment you are incarcerated. Surround yourself with positive people who are headed in the direction you want to go. Build a network of these people. Forget the fear, the doubt and whatever else may cause you to worry. What I thought could go wrong has not happened. I was stressing myself for no reason. Always do the next right thing. Remember that no one out here is against you succeeding except for the person you see in the mirror. That person should be your greatest asset if you choose to develop that person.

Read. Read. Read!!! Books on building relationships, personal finance and building your character will take you far. I recently started reading a book on trust that my mentor gave me when I released.



## From the Yard *Inspirational writing from within the walls*

### **Where is God – My Testimony – Kora L., Topeka Correctional Facility**

I had been a mother to my beautiful girls and a wife to my husband since I was 18 years old. We started out rough with drinking and getting high. It didn't take long for us to get clean and we stayed that way for 9 years. We decided it wouldn't hurt to get high on Meth once in a while. After all, cocaine was our drug of choice, so why would it get out of control? Wrong! So Wrong!

Within one year we were separated, I was selling drugs and sleeping with other people. We passed our children back and forth and then the impossible happens. Never say, "That won't happen to me" ...because it can. I had said it a thousand times until it happened to me. Three innocent people were killed in a home and I am now doing 165 years for three 1st degree murders.

At first, I questioned, "Where is God...Why would He let something like this happen?". After all, if God is real then why wouldn't He save them?

I started going to church services as much as possible and spending time in my Bible and understanding God more, and before I knew it, I found myself relying on Him more. I'm not saying it was easy, because during my journey, so much has gone wrong and so many times I have questioned "Where is He? "

When I was first charged in my case, I didn't know God but I knew to get through everything I was going through, I'd better get to know Him. I spent two years in the County jail fighting my case and when I got convicted all I heard from other inmates was "Where is your God now?" I'd simply respond, "He is here and He will get me through this" and when I got sentenced, I heard the same stuff and still believed He is here. I'm nearing 4 years of being incarcerated and I could have never done this time without God in my life and I believe He will get me through anything that comes my way.

---

### **Five Powerful Ways to Demonstrate Humility – Nicholas Martin, Lansing Correctional Facility**

- 1) Doing a job that others may consider beneath them shows the world that you are a person of the people. This demonstrates you are willing to do what it takes at the expense of personal sacrifice for the larger cause. The CEO who inspires workers by picking up trash from the floor does the same to other workers.
- 2) Do not be a know-it-all and when you are wrong admit it. When you admit you are wrong, others realize that they are not a bunch of Lemmings following you off a cliff. Owning up to errors shows responsibility as well as humility, a key trait that inspires loyalty.
- 3) When you do not know the answer to something do not give one. Simply say, "I don't know." You will be amazed at how much attention gets paid when you do have the answer to a question.
- 4) Treat everyone with respect!!! ESPECIALLY, those whom you don't WANT or NEED ANYTHING FROM. When you treat someone with respect, you show them greatness. When you do the same for someone when you don't have to, it shows your greatness.
- 5) SHARE THE CREDIT!!! Whoever you acknowledge for your work be sure to mention each and every one who contributed to your success-even in a small way. True success in life never happens in a vacuum. If you delve in the personal history of the world's most successful people, you will discover that no one makes it to the top without many helping hands and doors being opened by others along the way.

These are words to live by. I know I have not always lived up to these standards, but a bonus powerful way of demonstrating humility is realizing that even old dogs can learn new tricks. Humility comes not from thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less.

*Girls compete.  
Women empower.*

**Women Empowering Women**

No matter where you are in life,  
Inspire and empower the women around you.  
Wisdom and wealth are sweeter shared.



LINDA LEWIS, GMI DIRECTOR OF

COMMUNICATIONS

*Words to Grow By*

**Trouble Don't Last Always**

Our world is going through some real turbulent times right now but Rejoice because **trouble don't last always.**

Yes, stuff happens, but hallelujah anyhow...**trouble don't last always.**  
Don't give up, don't give in, don't become discouraged, **TRUST IN THE LORD!**

We must **always** hold onto His unchanging Hand and **never forget** that no matter what it looks like, no matter what it sounds like, no matter what it feels like, **God still reigns and He's large and in charge.** God didn't promise us that this life would be easy but He did promise us **He would never leave us nor forsake us. Hebrew 13.5**

So remember my brothers and sisters, when you feel as though you're at the end of your rope, tie a knot at the end of it and continue holding on...**trouble don't last always!**

# Thanksgiving word search

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

## word list

Harvest  
Indians  
Pilgrims  
Thanksgiving  
Pumpkin pie  
November  
Turkey  
Family  
Corn  
Bounty

Ceremony  
Worship  
Tradition  
Holiday  
Gobble  
Yams  
Feast  
Colony  
Sail  
Harvest



**I have a  
mustard seed  
and I'm not  
afraid to use it!**

**"IN THE BEGINNING..."**

by chris sushynski



"I understand, but the order says 'one golden calf'..."

**REVEREND FUN** WWW.REVERENDFUN.COM



WE WERE TOLD YOU WERE TAKING IN CREATURES THAT CAME TO YOU IN PEARS



**AFTER EDEN**

by Dan Lietha



Adjusting from paradise to life in a cursed world, Adam & Eve would often update each other with new discoveries.

There was a preacher who fell in the ocean and he couldn't swim. When a boat came by, the captain yelled, "Do you need help, sir?" The preacher calmly said "No, God will save me." A little later, another boat came by and a fisherman asked, "Hey, do you need help?" The preacher replied again, "No God will save me." Eventually the preacher drowned & went to heaven. The preacher asked God, "Why didn't you save me?" God replied, "Fool, I sent you two boats!"

## Who Do You Think You Are?



Has anyone ever asked you that? Usually the person who asks that has taken offense with something you have said or done. *Who do you think you are talking to me like that? Who do you think you are barging in my office? Who do you think you are taking the big piece of chicken?* Well, you get my drift. That question says that someone thinks **you think** you are something you are not.

The bible says, **“As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” Proverbs 23:7.** There’s a lot to this scripture. One thing we can focus on is that Solomon said “as a man thinketh in his **heart...**” We often project one personality in public for everyone to see, but deep down inside we might feel another way about ourselves. What do you think about yourself down in your heart? Do you think you are all that and a bag o’ chips? Yep, I’m from that era. Do you think you should be treated better than others? Do you feel you deserve special privileges because of your family or background? Do you think because you’re good looking you should be allowed to cut to the front of the line?

I can hear God in my imagination often asking himself, “Who do they think they are?” He can ask that with sure frustration because He created us. He designed us for a purpose and to function a certain way. Our purpose is to live holy, in relationship with Him, loving each other and building each other up. But that purpose often gets thwarted at an early age in our lives. Family, community, school, Hollywood, social media, and the world have all taken their turn shaping our thoughts about what we should be. The external forces of life have convinced us to think differently of ourselves than what God wants us to think. Even after we get saved, we look at ourselves through the eyes of condemnation when we make a mistake or compare ourselves to others, thus denying ourselves of walking in the fullness, authority and love that God wants us live in.

Who do you think you are? Well, I’ll tell you who I think I am. I am a child of the one and only living God who has all power. I am part of a royal priesthood and a holy nation. I am the head and not the tail. I am above and not beneath. I am the lender and not the borrower. I am more than a conqueror. I am a light in dark places. I am a new creation in Christ Jesus. I am all that and so much more. Why do I think that? Because God told me that is who I am. I chose to believe His Promises and His Word instead of what the world tells me I am or what they say I should be.

No matter how much of the world’s thinking you have adopted, you can turn this thing around right now. Romans 12:2 says, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...” It’s simple, change the way you think about yourself. Dump all that noise and poison that the world has put in your mind. Start thinking of yourself the way God thinks of you. I promise your life will be a lot more successful.

Another thing you should do as you dump all of that noise from the world, you can replace it with positive things. Another simple instruction from the Word of God is in Philippians 4:8, “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

Now, Again, **“Who Do You Think You Are?”**

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 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**



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.

We also ask that you be mindful of what you send to us as there are some things that are prohibited for print:

Inappropriate Verbiage/Profanity

Sexually Explicit Verbiage/Images

Political opinions

Opinions regarding social/systemic injustices

Demearing or Offensive Views

Legal Information/Advice

## Would you like a seven-day meditation plan on who the bible says you are?

IF SO, PLEASE FILL OUT THIS FORM, MAIL IT TO US AT THE ADDRESS BELOW, AND WE WILL GLADLY SEND YOU AN EMPOWERING SEVEN-DAY MEDITATION PLAN THAT WILL CHANGE THE WAY YOU SEE YOURSELF.

Name/Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Facility: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

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