

The Growth Journal Magazine

2021

HAPPY NEW YEAR!

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2020 Made Us Stronger

By Lonnie Johnson

If asked, one would probably say 2020 was the worst year in a loooonnnng time. Covid, Racial Tension, Protests, Riots, Election Craziess. And did I say COVID?

I would challenge you to see 2020 a little differently. I see it as a year that made us stronger. We prayed harder than we've ever prayed; Our faith in God grew like never before; We learned how to become more resourceful; We became better parents out of necessity; And we were forced to remember we are not in control. These are a few things that made us stronger as Christians by humbling us and turning us toward God for strength.

With that said, we should be grateful for all that 2020 taught us. Jesus's brother said it like this (James 1:2-4 NIV), "² Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

Every now and then, God will heat us up and melt us down like gold to get rid of the impurities and bring us to a refined state.

Inside This Issue

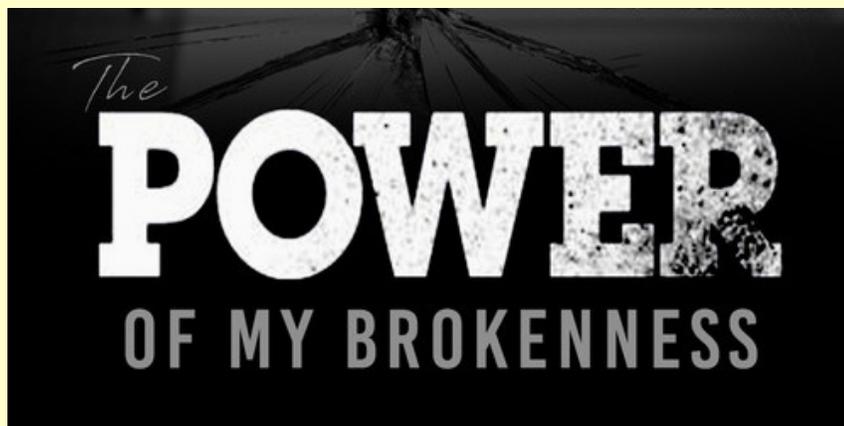
2020 Made Us Stronger	1
The Purpose of Pain	2 - 3
Success God's Way	4 - 5
12 Disciples - Peter	6
Women Empowering Women	7
Words to Grow By	7
Word Search	8
Just for Laughs	9
Closing Words	10
What must I Do to Be Saved	11
Write Us	11
Special Gift	12

WHEN THE WORLD
says, "give up."
HOPE WHISPERS,
"try it one more time."

The Growth Journal

The Purpose of Pain

By Pastor Royce Walker



Years ago, during a meaningless flag football game, I dove for a flag only to end up missing the flag and landing awkwardly on the upper left side of my back. It hurt immediately and it hurt often. Being a former Texas football player, I couldn't simply bow out though, and so I pressed on. Over the next few days I could hardly function, and simple tasks like tying my shoes or buttoning my pants were extremely painful. So, I put it in a sling and went about my business slowly nursing it back to functionality.

About a year and a half later I started vigorous weight training again and almost immediately I started to improve in every area of weight training. One thing that I noticed although was about 6 months in and I had a severe pain in my left upper front shoulder area. I could function and move, but man it hurt! A few months in and I began to notice that my collarbone structure on my left side was very different than on my right side. I decided to have a chiropractor friend x-ray it and see what was going on. As I feared the x-ray showed that, all those years ago I didn't just sprain my shoulder, but rather, I broke my collarbone and now it had settled in an un-natural placement. Now the issue with this is that if I wanted to continue to get stronger with weightlifting I one of 2 options: 1 - work through the pain and potentially hurt myself further, or 2 – medically assisted, re-break my collarbone and have it set back the way it should be and allow it to re heal.

One thing I know about humans is that we are all broken. The measure in which we are willing to recognize and confront that brokenness, is the measure in which we are willing to allow the healing process to begin and ultimately transformation to start. I grew up in non-ideal circumstances. I lived in a very dysfunctional home, after living in a battered woman's shelter for 3 years, after a year of being in the trailer park with my mother and my aunt. After the women's shelter, when I was 4 we got moved into a halfway house so my mother could get on her feet. After several months my mom met a guy and we moved in. All of this played into the beginnings of my brokenness. I was broken by my birth father's decision to choose alcohol and cocaine over his son. I was broken over the family councilors advice to me at 4 years old, after my father was convicted of breaking the restraining order my mother had on him, to run away and find the nearest trustworthy adult if I saw my father in public. I was broken by the verbal and emotional abuse from the rage of my stepfather. The constant drug abuse in my home. The 19 year old man that died of a heroin overdose outside my bedroom when I was 8 years old, and the list goes on and on.

The thing about brokenness, or trauma, is that when you're in the middle of it you often times don't know it's traumatizing, at least I didn't. I didn't know that it wasn't normal to come home to drugs literally everywhere in your house. Or that it wasn't normal to get into fist fights with your siblings for turning on the lights when they're high on pills. I didn't know it wasn't normal for every Saturday to be filled with rage and angst as parents warred and threw objects at one another. I didn't know it wasn't normal, because in my world that was the only thing that was normal. Little did I know that I would grow up desperately seeking a different normal but having no idea how to access it. I was broken, but I didn't know how to be anything else.

Trauma is tricky and we really do not like to face it. This is so much the case that our brains physiology will actually develop mechanisms in order to avoid the pain of remembering traumatic events. This is typically known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (or PTSD). And so often we are encouraged by the normality of the world around us to avoid and numb the pain that comes along when we try to move forward in our lives. So often we turn to cheap, yet effective temporary solutions, like drugs alcohol and the objectification of others, to numb the pain that's coming from our avoidance of actually going back to the breaking point. But this is exactly where we have to go, we have to revisit the moments that broke us and confront them. For me my shoulder was a reminder of that process.

I once had a mentor tell me "Royce, you simply expect transformation because you've experienced it." I didn't know exactly how spot on that was in that moment, but those words carry with me to this day. I hadn't just experienced a physical transformation, but a transformation of my being, my identity. When I was 21 my world was tipped upside down and I found myself reaching out, in the most painful place of my life, to a God I didn't know. In a moment of pain and brokenness I simply said "God, I'm done! And I don't know who you are or if you exist but if you do show up because I'm done with my life." That may have been the most authentic thing I've ever prayed. And the funny thing is, I didn't put specifications on who God was. If a Mormon would have showed up at my house the next day, I would be wearing a little black tie knocking on people's doors, if Muslims would have surrounded my life I would have devoted my life to the teachings of Islam, if no one would have shown up I wouldn't be writing this to you today, but Jesus showed up and he showed up big! Over the last 13 years I've dedicated every day, as best I can to that prayer. Every day I wake up and remind myself of the commitment that I made that day. That God showed up and He showed up through Jesus, and now my life isn't mine, it's His.

Over those years I've had to confront my brokenness. The moments of pain that I didn't want to go back to, to recognize my brokenness and allow God to take all those broken pieces and make something completely new. If I'm honest it's taught me that trauma is the beginning of transformation. That those moments of brokenness and pain, when kept to myself, are nothing more than realities that I am destined to recreate, either the exact same way, or in some other roundabout way. But when I take my trauma and I place it in God's hands he doesn't just put me back together, but rather He transforms my pain and gives me a purpose. He takes my trauma and transforms it into my testimony.

In a short summary here is what I've learned so far about the purpose of pain:

- Often times the things we've suffered don't show up until we are trying to get stronger.
- Nothing happens if nothing happens. Change isn't convenient, but it's a whole lot easier than continuing to live in pain.
- Forgiving yourself is more important than others forgiving you. God's mercy is endless, but peoples aren't. Keep your eyes on Him and control what you can control.
- The beginning of brokenness is the beginning of transformation. Often times we don't have human examples in our lives of those who have courageously identified their faults, shortcomings and mistakes. I'm sorry isn't something we should say as often as we should, and that's usually because we didn't hear it as often as we should have. Be the brave one and be willing to see your faults and stop blaming everyone else. Say you're sorry to those that need to hear it, and then move into the process of forgiving yourself.
- Think about how well its going with you being the owner of your life. Maybe one of the greatest blessings we can receive is the realization that we make terrible lords. Maybe the best thing you can remind yourself of each day is: "God I'm done, my life is yours." And you're not going to do everything right all the time, but as a pastor for the past 4 years, as a kid who was given up on, as a person who should not be alive, and as a life who has been transformed let me let you in on the truth: No matter what you've done and no matter what you believe, Jesus's willingness to take your and mine's place means this: you're worth it and you're not done.

The Growth Journal SUCCESS



An interview
with Christi

Growth Ministries had the honor of asking some questions of Christi Craddock-Harris, who spent 43 months in the Topeka Correctional Facility for women in Kansas.

GMI: How soon did you start planning for your release?

Christi: I started planning my release from the beginning.

GMI: Tell us some of the things you had in your release plan?

Christi: I had a mind set to stay focused; get ID, job, bank account, car and do what was expected of me from Parole and Registration. I only wanted to be somewhere I felt safe and that I could continue to do God's work through prison ministry.

GMI: How did God factor into those plans?

Christi: That's the funny part...every single step of my plan, I gave God all the credit. I put all my trust in Him and that He would work it all out and He sure did. When one door closed, another one opened.

GMI: Did you face any obstacles in prison as you were preparing to get out? If so, what were they?

Christi: I think I stressed myself out more because I had no ID or any of my important documents

GMI: What were some key goals you set for yourself as you planned to get out?

Christi: Well, besides eating real food (baked potato, steak, salad, fruit...ah pure bliss) and getting real clothes...I wanted to start working as soon as possible. I also wanted to give back to those who helped me along the way. I was thankful to know I already had a church to attend, Church of the Harvest in Olathe, who already knew about me. They were very welcoming,

GMI: Can you briefly tell us what your first day was like post incarceration?

Christi: My oldest two children and my ex-husband picked me up and we immediately went to register in the county I was moving to, then I checked in with my parole officer. I was blessed that my family already had a cell phone ready for me so I could give all the information that was needed. Then we were able to do some shopping before arriving at my new residence. The shopping experience was a bit overwhelming for me as I was not used to so many choices. It was also exciting to get to share that moment with my family. I think it's definitely a good suggestion to have someone close with you for that first time experience. I was welcomed at my new residence by Mrs. Lorrie Trout, director of GROW. She gave me time to get settled in, with my family's help, and made arrangements to sit down and get to know each other later. I felt so blessed walking into the new house; just looking at all the beauty inside and all my needs were provided. It was a bit emotional for me just looking around and feeling at peace. I always heard "Be still and know that I am God" when I had any doubts...but when I walked into that house...all my doubts were gone. God is so good.

GMI: What kind of support system did you have waiting on you?

Christi: Well, since I was starting all over in a new area in Lenexa, KS, I had my kids and ex-husband there for the first few days. Ms. Lorrie took me under her wing after that. I also had an old friend, Pastor Matt Thomas, with Freedom Initiative Church, a volunteer at TCF that lived in the area, who was waiting for my call. He helped connect me with his support team to find a job. I was blessed with so much love from friends back home in Wichita as well. So between Matt and Lorrie, they connected me with an amazing group of people who I can call anytime and they keep me on my toes. Very loving community. I lost my mom when I was in prison but I definitely felt like Lorrie has taken a strong lead in my life with my mom's approval. She has been my rock when I needed guidance and emotional support.

GMI: Did everything go exactly as you planned or did you encounter any challenges upon release?

Christi: Everything went pretty smoothly for the most part, with the exception of getting my ID. I got the run around so many times at the DMV. I had to order my marriage license because the one I had said copy on it, or because my birth certificate said a different name, and then they needed my divorce paperwork. So, of course, I had to send off for some of that. Luckily, my ex-husband was a huge help and ordered a new marriage license. It was just a bunch of little things, but after several attempts, I finally got an ID. It was an exhausting experience but I was thankful that I had Mrs. Lorrie by my side to pray with me and keep my nerves calm.

GMI: What was the hardest thing you had to deal with on the outside?

Christi: Getting on social media ended up being a bad situation for me. I was using it for ministry purposes however, I noticed people would reach out to me that I didn't need to be talking to and I didn't reach out to anyone I wasn't supposed to thank God. At the time, I thought I was ok to be on FB but I found out later I wasn't, because I was supposed to have permission, which led me to spending 3 days in jail. Finding a job was a bit stressful because by having a felony on your record, you always think to yourself that no place is going to hire you. I did apply online at several companies and through job placement recruiters, and that's where I started stressing out again. I didn't have a license or car so all the jobs that showed an interest in hiring me, I didn't know how I was going to get to them. I had never been on a public bus before and never used an Uber, so my anxiety was getting to me. Ms. Lorrie was a tremendous help until I got comfortable. But I did reach out to my support group when I was feeling overwhelmed or called my parole officer for advice. I was blessed to find out that I do have good support out here and not be afraid to use them instead of panic mode.

GMI: Are you doing anything to give back to society?

Christi: I love giving back with my time and compassion to others. Fortunately, being a part of GROW, I get the opportunity to minister to other women in our houses. We have a women's group that meets weekly. I also assist Ms. Lorrie with doing house visits to make sure all is going well with the residents and provide transportation to them if needed. I am a leader at the Freedom Initiative Church in Lenexa. We reach out to others in the community just to share God's love.

GMI: What keeps you focused and on track?

Christi: Just the thought that what I have could easily be taken away. I will never take my freedom for granted ever again.

GMI: What is one piece of advice you would like to give those who are close to being discharged?

Christi: Have a plan and stick with it, get all your priorities in order before your release. Check with your counselor to make sure you have everything you need to get your ID or driver's license, have your friends or family assist with getting important documents so you are prepared. Don't stress right away, give yourself time to check out your surroundings and pray before you start each day, find a good support group, stay off social media unless necessary but don't connect with anyone from your past that could potentially steer you down the wrong path again. Find a church and attend faithfully. When you feel overwhelmed, stop what you are doing and pray about it...ask God to give you direction and peace...He will lead you where you need to go. Trust Him!!!



The 12 Disciples of Jesus Christ- Peter *By Minister Alywin Mitchell*

John 15:16-17 NKJV

16 You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. 17 These things I command you, that you love one another.

The 12 disciples, also referred to as the 12 apostles or simply “the Twelve,” were Jesus Christ’s 12 closest followers. Each of them were major leaders in the movement which became Christianity and helped spread the gospel throughout the world.

Four passages in the Bible give us the names of the apostles: Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:13-19, Luke 6 12-19, and Acts 1:13. The names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew (Nathanael); Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus (James the Less), and Thaddaeus (Judas, son of James); Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him. (Matthew 10:2-4) These men became the founding leaders of the New Testament church, but they had their weaknesses and flaws. One of the most interesting things about the disciples is not one of the chosen apostles was a scholar or rabbi. They had no exceptional skills. They were average men, just like you and me.

Jesus had a lot of followers. At times, thousands of people gathered to hear him teach and see him do miracles. The 12 apostles were some of his closest disciples. But three members of the Twelve were closer than anyone else: Peter, James, and John. These three alone were given the privilege of experiencing the transfiguration, along with a few other extraordinary revelations of Jesus.

The first disciple or apostle we shall look at is Peter

18 And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 19 Then He said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” 20 They immediately left their nets and followed Him. Matthew 4:18-22 NKJV

Also known as Simon, Simon Peter, or Cephas (Rock), Peter was a gregarious, natural leader, and the obvious spokesman for the twelve. Without question, Peter was the disciple most people can identify with. One minute by faith he was walking on water, and the next minute he was sinking in doubt. Impulsive (Matt14:28) and emotional, All four Gospels state that during Jesus' Last Supper with his disciples, Jesus prophesied that Peter would deny knowledge of him, stating that Peter would deny him 3 times before the rooster crowed the next morning. After the third denial, 60 Peter replied, “Man, I don’t know what you’re talking about!” Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. 61 The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.” 62 And he went outside and wept bitterly. Luke 22:60-62 NKJV

Peter’s name is mentioned far more in the New Testament than any other of the disciples. He was the older of the two brothers and the only married disciple. (Luke 4:38) His wife was known to travel with him when he was on mission. (1 Cor. 9:5) His assignment was to bring the Gospel to the circumcised. (Gal. 2:7)

After the resurrection, Peter became a bold evangelist and missionary, and one of the greatest leaders of the early church. Passionate until the end, historians record that when Peter was sentenced to death by crucifixion, he requested that his head be turned toward the ground because he did not feel worthy to die in the same manner as his Savior. He died a martyr’s death in Rome during the reign of Nero. Some speculate around the same time as Paul was being beheaded.

The key lesson we are to learn from the life of Peter is God can forgive sins and strengthen the faith of those who love Him.

Women Empowering Women

It's a Brand New Day!

Stepping onto a brand-new path is difficult.
But not more difficult than remaining in a situation,
Which is not nurturing to the whole woman.
Sometimes you just know it's time to start something new,
So trust the magic of New Beginnings.
NEVER allow waiting to become a habit.
Live your dreams and take risks.
Life is happening now!
When you know Who you know and that He is Large and In
Charge,
That He loves you with Steadfast and Unconditional Love,
What are you waiting for?
It's a Brand New Day! *Jeremiah 29:11*

Happy Brand New Day!

COMMUNICATIONS

Words to Grow By

New Beginnings

There is ALWAYS hope when God gives you a new beginning.
When God gives you a new beginning,
Don't repeat the old mistakes.
God tells us in *Revelation 21:15*,
"Behold, I make all things new."
We must be thankful for closed doors.
They often guide us to the new ones...the right ones.
The pain that you've been feeling
Can't compare to the JOY that's coming. *Romans 8:18*

Happy New Beginnings!



GMI New Year's Word Search

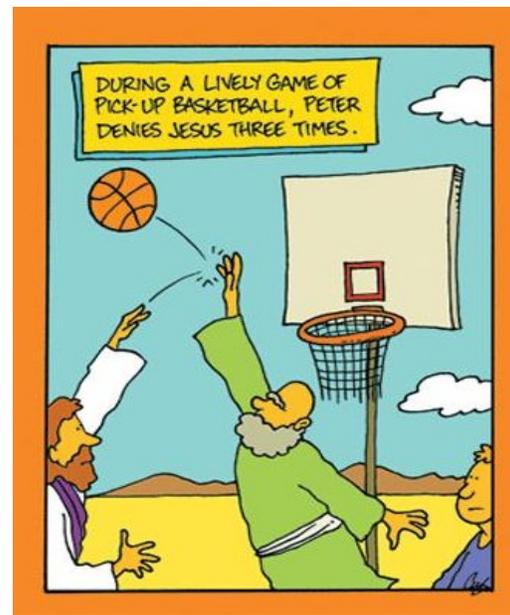
S B B S V N Z M Q Y F Y L V P L Y C J R
R B P M F W W I V A R E Y A U R V O T V
J E W T T A U N C D E A W F A J S N O L
R T H G I N D I M I S R Y U R Z S F V A
C E C T W M T S S L H O N E N E A E X C
L A N L A C E T L O J A S E B F L T Y P
Q K L E O F S R G H J O W Z W C G T G X
M J L E W C O I B A L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

ANNUAL
BABY
BALL
BALLOONS
SQUARE
TIME
TIMES
CALENDAR
CLOCK
DROP
FATHER
FRESH

GATHERING
GROWTH
MINISTRIES
HEALTHY
HOLIDAY
HORNS
CONFETTI
COUNTDOWN
HOURLASS
JANUARY
JOYFUL
MEMORIES

MIDNIGHT
NEW
YEAR
PARTIES
RENEWED
RESOLUTION
RESTART
SONGS
TRADITION
WISHFUL

Two guys are walking through a game park & they come across a lion that has not eaten for days. The lion starts chasing the two men. They run as fast as they can and the one guy starts getting tired and decides to say a prayer, "Please turn this lion into a Christian, Lord." He looks to see if the lion is still chasing and he sees the lion on its knees. Happy to see his prayer answered, he turns around and heads towards the lion. As he comes closer to the lion, he hears it saying a prayer: "Thank you Lord for the food I am about to receive."



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Thanks to Shirley Ostrander 01-15-2004
HOW COME THE WAITRESS GETS 15% AND GOD ONLY GETS 10%?



A priest buys a lawn mower at a yard sale. Back home, he pulls on the starter rope a few times with no results. He storms back to the yard sale and tells the previous owner, "I can't get the mower to start!" "That's because you have to curse to get it started," says the man. "I'm a man of the cloth. I don't even remember how to curse." "You keep pulling on that rope, and it'll come back to you."



Did you get what you wanted for Christmas?

One of the famous traditions of Christmas is gift giving and receiving. Tons of money is spent. Several gifts are wrapped and put under the tree. Kids wait in anticipation to see what “Santa” has brought them. And if the truth be told, adults are just big kids and look forward to gifts as well. Even though they may claim they don’t care about them anymore.

Then the moment of unveiling comes and we rip off the paper only to find something that we don’t want. We say thank you but we really don’t mean it. We are disappointed with our house slippers, necktie, candles or the current best-selling book. Sometimes we do get a cool gift and we are very excited to discover one of our favorite things or some cold cash. It’s always a crap shoot as to what will be inside that festive paper or bag.

I would like to help you get off that emotional roller coaster and focus your attention on the one gift that really matters. That is Christ. That gift was given to us by our Heavenly Father over 2,000 years ago. It is what Christmas is all about. It is the gift that keeps on giving. With Jesus you know exactly what you are getting every time. With this gift there is never any disappointment. He meets all of our expectations, needs and much more.

Jesus is the perfect gift for many reasons. Here are just a few...

- He gets you. He knows **you**. He knows what you are going through. When He stepped down from His throne to be on earth, He took on every human struggle and temptation. There is nothing we experience that He does not understand and can help us through.
- He has more than you need. He said it himself, “I am come that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly.”
- He covers our shortcomings with plenty of grace. Because He sits at the right hand of the Father advocating on our behalf 24/7, we are constantly forgiven of our sins.
- He empowers us to do things we couldn’t normally do. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.
- No matter what happens, no matter how bad it gets, He will never leave us or forsake us. Man may give up on us based on how we perform or how we don’t perform, but Christ will see us through whatever we are going through.

So when you think about those gifts that you didn’t like or didn’t get, just remember “You got Jesus!”. No gift can outshine that one. Nothing is more valuable; Nothing can bring you more happiness; Nothing can make you more successful. That’s a great thought to start the New Year with.

Bless you!



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: _____

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