

food for thought >>>

*In the New Testament, love is  
more of a verb than a noun. It  
has more to do with acting than  
with feeling.  
~ R.C. Sproul*



Volume Six Issue Two  
December 2021



*Proverbs 27:17 As Iron Sharpens Iron, So One Person Sharpens Another*

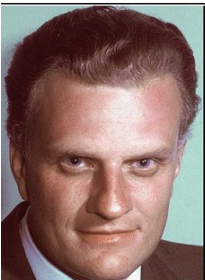
# The Growth Journal

*Special Christmas Edition*



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The very purpose of Christ's coming into the world was that He might offer up His life as a sacrifice for the sins of men. He came to die. This is the heart of Christmas.

— Billy Graham —

## Merry Christmas!



Merry Christmas, Feliz Navidad, Noel, and Yuletide Greetings are some of the ways we acknowledge this time of the year. We also celebrate with festive lights, tall trees, decorations and gift giving. I love all of that. Christmas is a great time of the year.

But what makes Christmas so special to me is that it marks the day that God set into motion the final part of His plan for humanity. It is when the Lord of lords, The King of kings, and the precious spotless Lamb would enter the world. He would enter with one goal. That goal would be to make the ultimate sacrifice for mankind which would atone for all our sins. An atonement that would bring us into perfect relationship with God and grant us eternal life. No more trying to satisfy the law, no more killing animals for atonement, no more having a man go behind a curtain making intercession for us once a year. Christmas reminds me that God loves us so much that he sent His only begotten son to earth to die for our sins.

Sorry to get all deep on ya, but Christmas is just that deep for me. What does Christmas mean to you? *Lonnie Johnson*

# *James the Less*

*by Alywin Mitchell*



For the past 11 months we have been examining the life of the 12 disciples of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We started with Peter, then James the son of Zebedee, John, James's brother, Andrew, Judas Iscariot the betrayer of Jesus, Philip, Bartholomew, Thaddaeus, Matthew also known as Levi, Thomas also known by the misnomer "doubting Thomas", Simon the Zealot, and now, last but certainly not least James, son of Alphaeus or James "the less".

James, son of Alphaeus, was one of Jesus' twelve apostles and one of three people named James mentioned in the New Testament. Other than being listed as a disciple, very, very little is known about James the son of Alphaeus. He is singled out from the other Jameses in the Bible by his father's name. In Bible times, men were often identified by their fathers and grandfathers. James son of Alphaeus, is also called "James the Less". The word less should be understood to mean "little" or "younger," not short or small or insignificant.

Mark 2:14 has an interesting fact that some connect with James son of Alphaeus. When Jesus calls Matthew (Levi) to follow Him, Levi is described as "the son of Alphaeus." Some Bible scholars think this means that Matthew and James were brothers. But this is doubtful, because Scripture in other places clearly identifies two sets of brothers who followed Jesus: Peter and Andrew, and James and John. No such connection was ever made between Matthew and James.

Tradition implies that it was James "the Less" who may have taken the gospel to Persia (modern Iran) and was martyred there. But other than that possibility, James the son of Alphaeus is the perfect example of humble, unknown service.

The basic lack of information about James the son of Alphaeus is a message in and of itself. This man James son of Alphaeus, James "the Less" was just as much an apostle as were Peter, James the son Zebedee and John. He will sit on a throne in Jesus' earthly kingdom with as much authority and honor as the other disciples and his name will be engraved in the foundation of the walls of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:14). James will not be considered "less" in eternity because he was faithful, committed, and true to his calling while on earth!

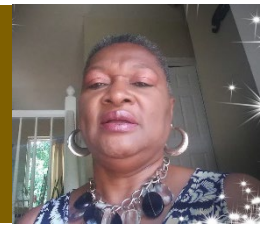
Tradition says that James, son of Alphaeus, evangelized in Persia which is modern-day Iran and was martyred there. According to Flavius Josephus, the Jewish historian, James the son of Alphaeus, was stoned to death in 62 A.D. But according to Hegesippus the Nazarene, who was a Christian writer of the early Church, James son of Alphaeus, was cast from the pinnacle of the Temple in 66 A.D., and when the fall did not kill him, he was clubbed to death.

The man, James the son of Alphaeus, should be a great encouragement to those called to live a life in obscurity. Our calling is just as sure, just as God-honoring, God-exalting, and God- glorifying, but few of us will be known by anyone other than those personal relationships which we form as we serve the Lord. Some will work their entire lives, some in remote places in the world with little or no recognition on this earth to show for it. But Our Lord God perceives, discerns and sees all. James the son of Alphaeus reminds us that Jesus understood what character meant when He chose the 12. He chose men with faithfulness, endurance, obedience, passion, courage, boldness and sacrifice. Our only responsibility is obedience to our Lord, not the outcome of our obedience. Some apostles wrote great and wonderful portions of the Bible and some had major parts and responsibilities in the gospels, but it appears that James the son of Alphaeus was quietly and humbly faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ. For that, he will be equally honored with all the other disciples for all eternity.

*"Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." 1 Corinthians 15:58*

# Tis the Season to be Jolly

by Dr. Lorrie Trout



The Holiday Season is quickly embarking upon us. It's a time of the year that is difficult to embrace for many reasons; whether it be because of the loss of a loved one; either by death, divorce, separation, or loss of children into foster care, and lastly incarceration. This is a time and season that should be filled with lots of laughter, bells of holly and family joy and happiness. We start with Thanksgiving in which many just bypass after Halloween and jump directly into Christmas mode, but how can we not give thanks unto the Lord for all that He has don? Even in the things we deem as the worst, we still should give thanks. "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." *1st Thessalonians 5:18*.

You may be asking, "What do I have to be thankful for? I'm locked away in this jail cell with nowhere to go, no family to see, not enjoying all the family meals etc." Yes, this may be true, but you have breath in your body. You could be dead or have no activity with your limbs. Even if you don't have activity with your limbs, you have limbs, you are alive. Despite how dark, doom and gloom, your situation may appear, just know that God has not forgotten you. Just know that in all of our wrong choices we make, we still have to deal with the consequences. It could be that if it had not been for God intervening in your life, when you committed your act of injustice, you would maybe be dead in the streets, no roof over your head, no food to eat, no heat, no water and no bed to sleep in. In everything there is a silver lining. It may not be what you think it should be...but be grateful!



Christmas is soon upon us and I know you will miss your family. Know that you are not alone. Society has taken Christ out of Christmas. It's not about the gifts and all the commercialization man has done to make it all about what I am getting for Christmas; or the money that is spent on gifts for family and friends. I am in no way diminishing the fact that you will miss your family and this truly can be a lonely time, but remember that Christmas is about the Birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. "For unto us a Child is born, Unto a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." *Isaiah 9:6* It's all about Jesus, the birth of Mary's Baby, who grew and gave His life for your and my sins. We have to take our eyes off us, making Christmas about us, but turn our eyes unto Jesus.

Make the best of having Jesus, the head of your life. He's your family. He's the one who will never turn His back on you. He will give you peace and love everlasting. If you can have a phone call with family, what a blessing. But if not, make the best of the time, with those around, by sharing a positive word of encouragement to them and speak life to yourself. I am saying to you, "that it's going to be alright." Use this time to get in touch with where you are in Christ; work on you and when you are reunited with your family, they will see Christ in you. They will see Christ shine in your life and you can be the Star that draws them to the Light. You are not alone and you are never alone. He said in His Word, "*I will never leave you nor forsake you*". Know that you are loved and that there is a brighter day ahead.

# When God is Silent

by Pastor Mike Hernandez



Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! I pray that you will be able to enjoy this holiday season where we celebrate Jesus' birth! Jesus coming to earth as a man, being born of a virgin is perhaps the greatest miracle ever!

This month I want to discuss a topic that we probably have all encountered. Have you ever felt that God was silent? Perhaps you felt that God has forgotten you? Have you ever thought that God gave you a promise that hasn't come true yet. What is actually happening when God is silent?

This is probably how the Israelites were feeling at the time of Jesus' birth. The last book of the Old Testament is Malachi and it was written around 430 BC. For the next 400 years, the Israelites were waiting for their Messiah, but God was silent. To them, it probably felt like they were forgotten. They were under the iron fist of Rome and God hadn't spoken through a prophet for 400 years. To them, God wasn't doing anything.

How many times in our lives do we feel like that? We feel forgotten. We feel like God is silent. We feel like God isn't moving. We feel like God isn't doing anything?

How do you think Abraham felt when he received a promise at 75 and God didn't fulfill that promise for 25 years? Do you think Abraham ever felt forgotten? Or how about Joseph (from the Old Testament)? Do you think he ever felt that way? He was given dreams from God, then sold as a slave then thrown into prison for being righteous. Do you think he felt forgotten? What about David? How do you think he felt after being anointed king, then running for his life, hiding in caves and living like a vagabond? Did he feel forgotten?

We have so many examples of people feeling forgotten. But here is the truth – God's timing is perfect and He is always working behind the scenes; we just can't see it.

So what happened in the world during the silent years? Remember, Malachi was written in 430 BC. In 331 BC, Alexander the Great goes on his world domination campaign. As Greece grows, so does the Greek language. Greek becomes the language of commerce and for the first time, a common language is established in the middle eastern area. Sometime around 132 BC the Old Testament was translated into Greek – it's called the Septuagint. Now the Old Testament can be read by more than those that only spoke Hebrew. Greek also had philosophers (Socrates, Aristotle, Plato) that brought in a new way of thinking – asking questions.



# *When God is Silent Cont*

In 63 BC, Rome conquers Greece and they rule till 135 AD. Rome keeps Greek as the common language, but they introduce something very important – roads. Rome ruled with an iron fist and suppressed uprisings and crime. Thus, they were able to establish roads for trade & commerce.

And so the world Jesus was born into has a common language, the Old Testament translated into this language, a philosophy of questioning and roads to travel upon. Even though we call these the 400 silent years, God was working. The world was ready for the gospel.

We may think God isn't working but God is always working. Think about Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus. He, and his wife, Mary, stay in Bethlehem after the birth of Jesus. Based on the fact that Herod killed all the babies 2 years old and under (Matthew 2:16), we can deduce that Joseph & Mary were in Bethlehem for up to two years after Jesus' birth. God knew that Herod was going to try to kill Jesus, so he told Joseph to flee to Egypt.

How would a carpenter have enough money to take his family to Egypt? Again, God was working behind the scenes. Unbeknownst to Joseph, God showed a star to some Magi (wise men) in the east and these Magi were looking for a star that would signify the King of the Jews. When they saw the star, they went on a several hundred mile journey with the purpose of worshipping the new born king. When the Magi arrived, they found baby Jesus and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh (Matthew 2:1-11). Now, Joseph had money to take his family to Egypt.

Even when we believe God is silent, God is still working behind the scenes. Just like Joseph couldn't see God working on his behalf, perhaps you can't see it either. Maybe you are praying for provision for your family...God is working behind the scenes. Maybe you are praying for positive relationships, God is working on your behalf. Maybe you are praying for a Bible...if that is the case, write this ministry and they will get you a Bible right away.

Even if you believe God is silent, I promise you, He is still working on your behalf! I remember hearing a preacher once say that a teacher doesn't give answers in the middle of a test. Perhaps God is being silent because you are being tested. However, after the test, you will either hear from God or see Him move in your life.

I hope during this Christmas season you are filled with hope and peace. I pray that you are able to rejoice in the birth of Jesus, the greatest event in the history of the world. I hope that you will be encouraged to recognize that God may be silent, but He is working on your behalf. Remember, you are not forgotten! God is working for you behind the scenes, even if you can't see it!



# Holiday Battle

by Curtis Wooten



Curtis was released from the Kansas Department of Corrections in 2018. Since then he has been building a new life led by God, which he enjoys with his new wife. Curtis has kept in close contact with Growth Ministries since release and has made a number of contributions of service to our organization. Curtis is a prime example of how easy it is to turn your life around.

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*Ephesians 6:12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*

*Galations 5:19-23 <sup>19</sup> The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; <sup>20</sup> idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup> and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

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Yes! It is difficult spending your holiday season away from family. I know, because I've been in some of the same facilities, during these same seasons. Although, some might find that is easy for me to say this because I'm not in those facilities anymore, that is totally wrong. Why? Because often times some of those inmates that you have had family ties with or a personal connection to, you want to keep in touch with and when the opportunity comes, and these seasons arrive again, even if you are on the other side of the fence, you still feel some kind of way. Like the term, "you're not the only one locked up because your family is doing the time with you." In other words, they need strength and uplifting too.

I've once said, or even twice said, in these newsletters, that the book doesn't end once you get released, only that chapter did. Other chapters will flow as found in the two scriptures I referenced in the beginning. Hopefully, they will be present and staring into the strength of your soul.

Let me get personal with you about my current Holiday Battle. June 19, 2021, Our Pastor, Lonnie Johnson, of Growth Ministies, married my wife and I. August 5, 2021, three days before my oldest daughter's birthday, I got shot in the neck, inches away from being a fatal head shot. And because of my braids, tattoos, and criminal background, the officers at the hospital gave me the impression that I got what I deserved. And as these scriptures wrestled with my soul, I decided "the flight over the fight". Now I'm rebuilding my life, from scratch, many, many miles away from my family as I work on myself spiritually, mentally, physically, and financially, and placing my faith in God that He will continue to prevail.

During our worst battles, "vengeance is mine, saith The Lord." Roman's 12:19, Nahum 1:2, Isaiah 34:8

*Curtis W.*

# Just Hold On

by Na'im Al-Amin

I was in Lansing Correctional Facility when I wrote the business plan to SWAGG INC. More on SWAGG INC. later.

Just know that my business plan for SWAGG INC. saved my life.

Losing a family member to incarceration is like a death in the family. From over 30 years of impact, I can tell you that re-entry is like returning from the dead.



The system spit me out of prison for the last time in 2018. Homeless. Moneyless. Geographically displaced.

On parole, with all the strings attached but with no home plan to help sever them.

My parole officer kept slippin' up; A/E after A/E or administrative error. I didn't know where to go. I was in survival mode--a familiar disposition. Foster care. Gang life. Prison. I thought I could survive anything.

But there I was on parole. No home plan. Sleeping in a car. It was the only time I ever thought about ending my life.

I gripped onto my plan for SWAGG INC.

Held onto it for dear life. The sentences scrawled across the pages lifted off the paper and grasped me back. They didn't let me go. My vision pulled me back from the edge.

Now, SWAGG is alive.

At SWAGG INC--Serve Witness And Give Guidance, Inspiration Never Ceases--we believe once you get out of prison, you should stay out.

We created a new business model to provide a solution to the re-entry/recidivism process.

It's all about *Pre-Entry Planning* here at SWAGG INC. That's all we do. It's who we are.

Les Miles said "It's winners and losers in the world, but it's also people who have not been taught to win; they haven't been taught, mentored and developed."

Through our HOPES program--Healing Ownership Planning Employment Sustainability--we work with clients 1 year prior to release and 1-3 years in the community to help our clients successfully discharge probation and parole.

We develop Returning Citizens through education, employment etiquette, and entrepreneurship.

We've created a suite of services to help our clients and their loved ones. All of these services are things I wish I had.

We work hard to elevate the statuses of people impacted by mass incarceration and those in a position to do something to interrupt the system.

I always believed that SWAGG would become real someday.


What do you have to hold onto? What will you make real someday? Reader, whether you're behind bars or beyond bars, hold onto that thing with care.

Next month, I'll be sending you a *Pre-Entry Plan* that you can fill out for yourself. Until then, **just hold on!**



## Joy to the World

1. Joy to the world, the Lord is come!  
Let earth receive her King;  
Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room,  
And Heav'n and nature sing,  
And Heav'n and nature sing,  
And Heav'n, and Heav'n, and nature sing.



2. Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!  
Let men their songs employ;  
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains  
Repeat the sounding joy,  
Repeat the sounding joy,  
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.

3. No more let sins and sorrows grow,  
Nor thorns infest the ground;  
He comes to make His blessings flow  
Far as the curse is found,  
Far as the curse is found,  
Far as, far as, the curse is found.

4. He rules the world with truth and grace,  
And makes the nations prove  
The glories of His righteousness,  
And wonders of His love,  
And wonders of His love  
And wonders, wonders, of His love.

Words: Isaac Watts, 1719.

Music: 'Antioch'

from "Messiah" George F. Handel, 1741.





## *from the yard>>> A few words from a couple of brothers still on the inside.*

A bird with one wing is how my great grandmother described my favourite aunt. A bird with one wing is earthbound. A person focused on material happiness is earthly for the same reason.

How much knowledge we have can burden us. This is why the wisest amongst us teach us the house of knowledge is the house of mourning. No matter how much we know there is a limit. Our day can be boundless. We don't know how to move a mountain, but with faith the size of a mustard seed we can. Faith without works is dead, that is how we know faith works. We have so many examples of real live faith in action. That is empirical knowledge for all you rationalists.

Abraham's faith was so great that the scripture says, God counted it as righteousness. Abraham is also called the Friend of God due to his faith. Without faith, we are a wounded bird. We are unable to fly. Have you ever seen a fly with one wing, it makes all the effort only to move in circles. A man lacking the proper faith is the same way. We move from folly to folly. Our knowledge is just sufficient to make us realize, without faith, we are unable to overcome the gravity of what is, to what can be. If you want to fly, truly walk by faith and not by sight. Read about Noah, Moses or my personal favorite Elijah; this will increase your knowledge that the Lord rewards great faith...

*By Nicholas M., Lansing Correctional Facility*

Men spend their lives in anticipations, in determining to be vastly happy, at some period, when they have time. But the present time has one advantage over every other – it is our own. Past opportunities are gone, future have not come. We may lay in a stock of pleasures, as we would lay in a stock of wine; but if we defer the tasting of them too long, we shall find that both are soured by age.

*By Adam M., Lansing Correctional Facility*

## *Let Go and Let God by Deborah Jackson*

Are you still burdened about a past sin that God has already freed you from? Well my friends you are not alone, however to fully please God we must forgive our selves and include those we have hurt in the past. God is a God who forgives no matter the size of the sin or who was involved.

*Micah 7:19* God will again have compassion on us, And will subdue our iniquities. God will cast all our sins into the depth of the sea.

God leads by example; as He forgives, we are to forgive ourselves and others. I've noticed the closer we are to someone the quicker they are to remind us of our past; but know that God is the final judge of us all. Once we have accepted Christ as our Lord and Savior we become righteous in His(God's) sight. His grace and mercy covers us which confirms that we are free from sin and death. Now is the time to allow God to show His Joy, His Peace, His Forgiveness, His Goodness and His Redeeming love to you. We can start by telling ourselves "I've been redeemed and washed in the blood of Jesus Christ who has changed my whole life". Give God a chance to show you His Redeeming Love by forgiving yourself and learn to love yourself as God Loves you.

*Colossians 1:15-17* He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

# *the Eyes of a Child*

by Robin Lynes



I grew up in a lower, middle-class family. Hand-me-down clothes or items, purchased from garage sales, were common. My parents had a tight budget and lived within their means. I didn't have the trendy or designer, material things, some of the other kids had in my school, but I never went without.

Christmas was a big deal as a child. Months prior to Christmas, I would snoop in my parent's closet and all around the house trying to uncover what I was getting, sometimes even playing with it for a few moments before carefully putting it back, as not to be discovered. Christmas morning, I would get up at the crack of dawn, often 2 or 3 a.m., to see what "Santa" put under the tree for me. The rule was, you could play with what "Santa" brought, but you were not allowed to open any presents until everyone was awake and ready to open. I couldn't wait to unwrap all the presents. My sister and I would tape the heck out of presents for each other to make it harder to open, sometimes even using multiple boxes to disguise what the gift was. As we grow up, the magic of Christmas and the wonders of life seem to dissolve. I pray you can reflect on past Christmas celebrations and remember the good memories. Even if your celebrations were not picture-perfect, find something good to hold onto and reflect on.

My sister and I still have a good relationship and speak every weekday morning. We frequently talk about "God moments" that we have experienced since our last conversation. It is amazing how many times we share experiences that we deem "God moments". If you think about it, I am sure you can find some moments you may deem to be "ironic" or "karma", but I challenge you to start sharing the experiences with others and let them know when you have had a "God moment". You will be surprised how much it happens when you focus on it.

As adults, we forget what it was like to discover new things and enjoy everything around us. We maneuver through the days and nights carrying whatever weight of sin and baggage we have from the past. All around us, miracles happen, and change is occurring. No matter how little the change is, each day is an opportunity for transformation if you trust in God and give him the glory. Let him carry the weight and bags for you.

*Matthew 19:14* – Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

Try not to let the current situation hinder your attitude. Look for the miracles of each day like a child looks at, and chases after, a butterfly in the springtime, carefree and full of wonder. Beauty can be found in your surroundings if you look for it. Beauty may be found in words, colors, music, and even solitude. This is a season of celebration and gratitude. Embrace the day God has given you. Keep reminding yourself you are a child of God that will someday enter His kingdom in heaven.

*Isaiah 49: 15-16* – "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands, your walls are ever before me."

## *the Eyes of a Child Cont*

God loves you and is with you, holding your right hand. Give Him the glory and celebrate His birth. He paid the ultimate price and sacrificed Himself for our sins. This act of sacrifice created a bond and relationship between us and God. In modern-day culture, think about those who use their body to memorialize their loved ones as tattoos. God has tattooed you on His body to signify extreme love and care for you.

*Matthew 5:9* – “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

During the holiday season, try to find positive in your surroundings and those around you. It is not your job to condemn anyone, only to accept people the way they are. Strive to be a peacemaker for God and bless those around you. The power to hold your tongue, in times when you really want to insert your thoughts, can be a blessing. As a child, I heard the saying, “If you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all!” As I mature in my walk with God, He also gives me the wisdom to know when to speak and when to remain silent. Sometimes the silence says more than words ever could. Peace be with you this holiday season.

### **Write Away...Write Now!**

**Anthony J. Butler: Founder | CEO of The VIP Movement | Multigenerational Speaker | Author | Consultant |**

I enjoy facilitating creative writing workshops. To watch the writers express themselves through poetry, raps, songs, short stories, skits, speeches, acting, and more, is a blessing! Writing evokes a variety of emotions. Emotions are our body’s first response to a life experience. Some major emotions are **fear, happiness, sadness, anger, surprise, and disgust**. What emotions have you experienced recently? Use those emotions to fuel your writing. Try one or all of the following writing prompts:

- Make a list of what angers you, saddens you, motivates you, gives you joy, hope, faith, encouragement, etc. This list can be used to help you with your creative writing!
- Write a “hook” that makes someone want to read your writing! “This Christmas I decided to give myself the gift of...” and/or “Many people don’t know what it is like to ...”
- The inmate surprised everyone with their...
- I will never forget the time that I...
- Use imagery (Sight-Sound-Smell-Taste-Touch) to vividly describe one of your....**Best Days, Worst Days, and/or An Average Day.**
- Make a list of topics that others can act out without a script. For example, a drive thru scene gone wild, a parent teacher conference that will be remembered forever, a last second shot, a coach, educator, pastor, etc. giving a moving speech!

**To all the readers of this article, be encouraged and know that we, at Growth Ministries, are praying for you and look forward to reading some of your creative writing! Write Away!**

# A Growth Ministries Christmas!

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

Carolers

Rudolph

Lights

Gifts

Infant

Stockings

December

Messiah

Virgin

Snow

Sleigh

Salvation

Goodwill

Wisemen

Santa

Tomb

Tree

Christmas

Nativity

Manger

Jesus

Star

Noel

What time is it ? People ask it numerous times throughout the calendar year and hear others say the same question each year as well.

In a rhetorical fashion, we say it right before taking the field or court with our teammates, and the answer is, "Game Time". We know that it's time to compete, we have opposition to defeat, we dressed up in our uniforms and it's time to either "get down" or "bow down". We are where we planned, practiced and prepared to be. We know what time it is. We are where our feet are...In the Moment.

The corporate world, ad agencies, box stores like Home Depot, Lowe's, Walmart, Target, Hobby Lobby, etc. have already had Christmas merchandise up on display for weeks ! They know what time it is ! It's time to get back in the Black and out of the Red financially speaking, more importantly for them...it's time to receive a profit.

Millions, if not billions, of people know that the time is coming for the Christmas Holiday a Royal Celebration. The question is, who will truly be In the Moment as well as prepared to, Receive a Profit ?

Does it take an elite athlete to know how to be in the moment or a business person to know how to receive a profit, it doesn't. I encourage all readers to prepare a room for both and expand upon it as you grow within the relationship with Jesus Christ our Lord. He's our reason to plan and prepare for December 25th, a day for a Royal Celebration. In *1 Peter 2:9*, we are declared as a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

For all the pregame speeches, halftime speeches, business conferences that play inspirational music behind their motivational speaker...nothing beats a word from the Lord declaring, WE are Chosen, WE are Royal, WE are His !

Brothers, it brings me no joy to know that you are incarcerated at this time; my prayer and my hope for you is one of physical; peace of mind, spiritual peace in your soul, and joy for the upcoming opportunity to celebrate Jesus Christ the one whose birth we celebrate in all the upcoming weeks.

God Bless and Be Safe

#ROYAL4LIFE. bcuz of Him.



What does it mean to love? To be loved? Love is not something easily defined. Common definitions don't do it justice. Love can mean different things to different people. The way I feel loved may not resonate with my neighbor, but the way I give love may relate to my family. Love is not as simple as it might appear.

I struggle with the meaning of love because I am re-evaluating how I feel loved and how I show love. I have discovered that many of my actions are a result of my wanting to feel loved. Some of the ways I have tried to feel loved are by eating food, buying material things, and accomplishing tasks.

Each is a temporary fix to an underlying problem. I don't want to seek love in earthly things. I want to accept God's love for me so I don't need earthly things. God loves me, but knowledge is not enough. I need to accept that love, to be changed. It seems so simple on the surface. I have the desire to be loved, as I'm sure everyone does, but I can't receive it. If you also struggle with this, let's explore that roadblock together.

Love is a verb. (Merriam-Webster): [Love Definition & Meaning](#)

- to hold dear
- to feel a lover's passion, devotion, or tenderness for
- to like or desire actively; take pleasure in
- to [thrive](#) in

Some examples of love as a verb include; I love burritos! I love you! I love shopping!

We only have one word for love, so we use it in all sorts of situations that don't call for it. Would we drop everything and drive eight hours for burritos? Probably not. (Those better be some GOOD burritos!)

That's the first problem; we only have one word to describe different sentiments and we use it to express every and any feeling. We use love to describe food, state our favorite activity, express how we feel towards our family, etc. As a result, we toss around the word love like it's a penny - it isn't worth much, and we have plenty to give out. Love as a verb is misused, abused, and overused.

What are the different loves? In C.S. Lewis's book, *The Four Loves*, he breaks down love into four different categories: storge, philia, eros, and agape. Storge is the love of a mother and child, old friends, and comfortable situations. Philia is the love of companionship, kinship, and friendship. Eros is the love of a romantic relationship and marriage. Agape is the love that God has for his children, unconditional and unfailing. [Four Types of Love - Official Site | CSLewis.com](#)

Unfortunately, he doesn't have a category for the love of burritos, but we can forgive him for that!

The affectionate, storge love I have for my family is different from the eros, romantic love I have for my husband, which is different from the philia, friendship love I have for my neighbor. All three are practice loves for charity, agape love shown to us by Jesus Christ.

Lewis didn't make a category for burritos, because love is relational. All categories of love are for describing relationships. That doesn't include food, because we don't have a relationship with burritos. Love doesn't pertain to objects or activities. The Merriam-Webster dictionary's definition of love is incorrect. We shouldn't use it to describe burritos or shopping.

## What is Love Cont

The second problem is we treat the verb love as a state of being, but it is also an action. For example, my actions towards my husband are different from those towards my family. I express eros love differently than philia love. I love both parties but show it in different ways.

I love my husband by sharing or pooling our resources. We live in the same house and have a joint bank account, but we also combine our gifts to further God's kingdom. Our day-to-day life reflects our values. We go to church and take time to attend a Bible study together. Because we love each other, we build each other up and help each other grow in faith.

I love my parents, but my actions towards them are different. I don't have a shared bank account with them. We don't go to the same church, Bible study, or live in the same house, but I still love my parents. I love my parents by keeping them updated on my life (at minimum). We speak weekly, at least. My husband and I make a point of spending time with them because we love them. If they needed me, I would drop everything and drive eight hours to help my parents.

Actions speak louder than words. If you truly love someone, it will be expressed in your actions.

The third problem with love today is we ignore the teaching and rebuking part of love. Love is pointing out sin. How often do we hide the truth from someone because we don't want to hurt their feelings? How often do we lie to someone to save them from pain or small inconveniences? That is NOT love.

The Bible is full of examples of Jesus and his disciples speaking the truth, no matter how convicting it was. *Luke 9:55* says, "But Jesus turned and rebuked them." Paul corrects Peter in the letter to the Galatians. *Galatians 2:14* says, "When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, 'You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?'"

God considers the Biblical correct of his followers to be love. *Proverbs 27:5* says, "Better is open rebuke than hidden love." Love is pointing out sin; love is confronting evil; love is helping someone out of their sin.

My pastor recently said, "Jesus' love never compromises His truth." The love of God will never contradict His holiness. He loves us by not allowing us to continue living in sin, but to get us out of that sin, He has to challenge us.

*James 1:2-4* says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

Love is reserved for relationships. It is an action. Love includes telling the truth and confronting sin.

*1 John 4:10* says, "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

My father died when he was only 56 years old. My mother was 53. She rarely had a job outside of the home and was lost when he was gone.

Money was very tight for Mama. As a result, she lived with us for three years until she was old enough to collect Daddy's Social Security. She felt like she was a burden on us because she could not contribute financially.

Often she would say, "I don't know why the Lord doesn't just take me, too. I just don't know why I'm still here."

Even though she couldn't contribute financially, she helped in many other ways.

Later Mama was able to move into a town home. During the time she lived there, she babysat several of her grandchildren. She was firm and yet did little things to make their time with her fun and memorable.

She took them for rides around the lake or to the store to get a treat. She joked, sang and taught them life lessons.

Mama picked my sister's son along with his friends up from school. They would beg her to take them by McDonald's. She would teasingly respond with, "Do you kids think I've taken you in to raise?" Then take them by McDonald's with the understanding they could have a hamburger or French fries, but not both.

They loved her.

When she passed, all her grandchildren – and children - felt a huge loss.

Mama had absolutely no idea of the impact she made with not only those grandchildren, but others whose lives she touched along the way.

Recently my grandson gave me a little book in which he wrote things he loved about me. Things like my smile, my kindness, my compassion and my humor. I was astounded! And very humbled. I had absolutely no idea he felt that way.

Your life has impact, also. Even though you may feel you are not in a position to make a difference, you do. Each thoughtful deed touches someone's life. Things you didn't think twice about doing or saying touched at least one person.

The biggest impact you can make is when you pray for someone. That can be life changing. You may think that is not much to do, but it is. You are reaching the spiritual realm.

Please do not feel your life is in vain and has no value. You do have value!

You may feel like you have no purpose in life, but you do. Sometimes it takes a while to realize what that is.

Can I tell you that it is the little things that matter most? The personal touches are the things people will remember most about you.

I know the holidays are very difficult for many of you. You may feel your life is meaningless and wish you could go back and change things. You might have many regrets. Your life is not over.

Even though you cannot go back and change things, you can decide to let your life have some meaning, regardless of where you are. Little things you say or do have a huge impact, especially to those you love.

Someone around you needs what you can offer. Your life has meaning and impact – even though you may be unaware of it. Don't ever feel that it doesn't.

Each day is a gift. Realize that you are making a difference today.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I want to write about this upcoming season and start setting goals. I know how hard these times are. I know how these times feel, when you are away from family and all the porters are hogging a tv channel and there's "Christmas this" and "Christmas that."

You're upset, and it usually spikes into violence on the yard or in your cell block.

This is the enemy testing you!

This is the easiest job of Satan.

Don't let Satan win. We are going to put together a game plan on where we are focusing our future as the priority because what you do once you walk out is going to be so important in your walk. The most important thing is your first day/night. I realized that when I kept falling back, it was because of two things. Number one, I had no relationship with Christ. Number two, I got overwhelmed with how much I needed to do to establish a new walk with my life. The first day I was out was always my hardest day. I had a mind that was running about a million things but had no destination. This last time I found myself sitting on my Dad's couch and was looking at social media of so called "friends" messaging me about "stay up bro, lmk when you get out.". This time I closed my eyes and I prayed. I prayed for wisdom and the strength to do right. I then found myself in a deep state and God gave me words, "Listen, one minute at a time, one day at a time, write a list of what you can do now." I wrote out a list and it was simple, P.O. meeting, job, oxford house. Within two weeks, I had those three taken care of. After that, I focused on one thing and asked God for guidance. Now that I was on my own and finally bought a car, I knew that I needed as much time as possible away from everything worldly. This part is so important, so so important. I literally went to work, worked as late as possible, then went to bible studies, bible doctrine classes, A.A. meetings, N.A. meetings, etc. I immersed myself in activities where I didn't let my mind become an idle mind. See, your key to success brothers and sisters is to focus on building a foundation. God has to be that foundation. Nothing, I mean nothing, of this world can be a part of this. Not your family, not your kids, not your work. Even if those aforementioned things are important to you, like mine are, they cannot be your foundation. The reason being is that your foundation is what will hold your house during storms in your life. People and things can be removed from you, but God cannot. God is the beginning and the end. When you build your foundation with God, then it will not crumble. In order to do that though, you have to put time in studying scripture, praying, working, and isolating yourself from all things worldly until you get that confidence that God will put into you and you will hear Him say "You're ready and I am with you". After this, all things become small that once were big burdens. Once you take baby steps, you end up taking big leaps without even noticing it. So do this; write a list of things that you will have to do in order to achieve Parole/Probation and focus on what resources you can look for to help you take care of this. Communicate with your Case Worker and your P.O. on what things are going to be hard for you and ask for help. Pray and read scripture daily and as many times as possible and start building your foundation now. If you want to mail me your list, and I can help with resources, I will gladly do that. I believe in you, I love you, I am praying for your protection from any evil and praying for your success. I love you all and I promise, if you do this, once you get out you will never spend another Christmas locked up. God bless you all!

*Romans 12:2*

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

*Proverbs 16:3*

Commit to the Lord whatever you do,  
and he will establish your plans.

*Proverbs 16:9*

In their hearts humans plan their course,  
but the Lord establishes their steps.

# Just for Laughs

Q: What do snowmen eat for breakfast?

A: Frosted Flakes or Ice Crispies.



1. WHAT DO YOU CALL A PERSON WHO IS AFRAID OF SANTA CLAUS?  
CLAUSTROPHOBIC

2. HOW DO SNOWMEN TRAVEL AROUND?  
BY ICICLE

3. WHY DOES SANTA CLAUS HAVE THREE GARDENS?  
SO HE CAN HO-HO-HO

4. WHY WAS SANTA'S LITTLE HELPER SAD?  
BECAUSE HE HAD LOW ELF ESTEEM

5. WHAT DO YOU HAVE IN DECEMBER THAT YOU DO NOT HAVE IN ANY OTHER MONTH?  
THE LETTER "D"

6. WHO DELIVERS CATS CHRISTMAS PRESENTS?  
SANTA PAWS

7. WHAT DO SNOWMEN LIKE TO DO ON THE WEEKEND?  
CHILL OUT

8. WHY DID THE GINGERBREAD MAN GO TO THE DOCTORS?  
HE WAS FEELING CRUMMY



My wife took our three-year-old to church for the first time. Getting impatient while waiting for the preaching to start, he turned to her and asked, "What time does Jesus get here?"

Did you hear that Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer never went to school? That's right—he was elf taught.

One friend asked another "What's a good holiday tip?" The other answered, "Never catch snowflakes with your tongue until all the birds have gone south for the winter."



*"Try rolling on the ground! Roll around on the ground!"*





# closing words...

## Get Your Mind Out of the Gutter!

*Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.. Philippians 4:8 NKJV*



Lonnie Johnson  
GMI Executive Director



### **Disclaimer: This is not a Christmas message.**

There was a time in my life that I am not at all proud of. It was a time when I made a lot of stupid mistakes and bad decisions that cost me and the people close to me a lot of heartache. One time in particular, I was living with my mom (God rest her soul), she was the recipient of the sorrow of my craziness. I remember her coming into my room and sitting on the edge of my bed where I was lying and saying to me, “**You are gutter trash to me**”. Coming from my mom, who was one of the kindest, most caring and tolerant people that walked the face of the earth, that was a very strong statement. It resonated heavily with me. Since then, anyone I encountered acting despicable, caniving, ornery or trifling I thought about the “gutter trash” comment. It was my reminder of how you should **not** be acting.

Most people don’t go straight to this wicked “gutter” state. It happens over time. Making it to “Gutter Trash” status often starts with the way we think or the things we allow our mind to focus on. We allow ourselves to graduate over time thinking and meditating on things that are contrary to the will of God. Then one day, our minds are so corrupted and unclean, its like they are in a gutter. That is when we are ripe for the enemy to drag us into all kinds of ungodly situations.

As usual, God in His ultimate wisdom, has a Word that can get us back to where we need to be. *Philippians 4:8* gives us a list of things we can focus our attention on. You could spend a good deal of time unpacking each one. I will touch slightly on a couple of them.

The first thing it says we should meditate on or think about are things that are **true**. This makes me think about the Word of God. That is the purest source of “Truth” that I know. If we meditate on the scriptures and let them guide us through life, it is almost impossible to fail.

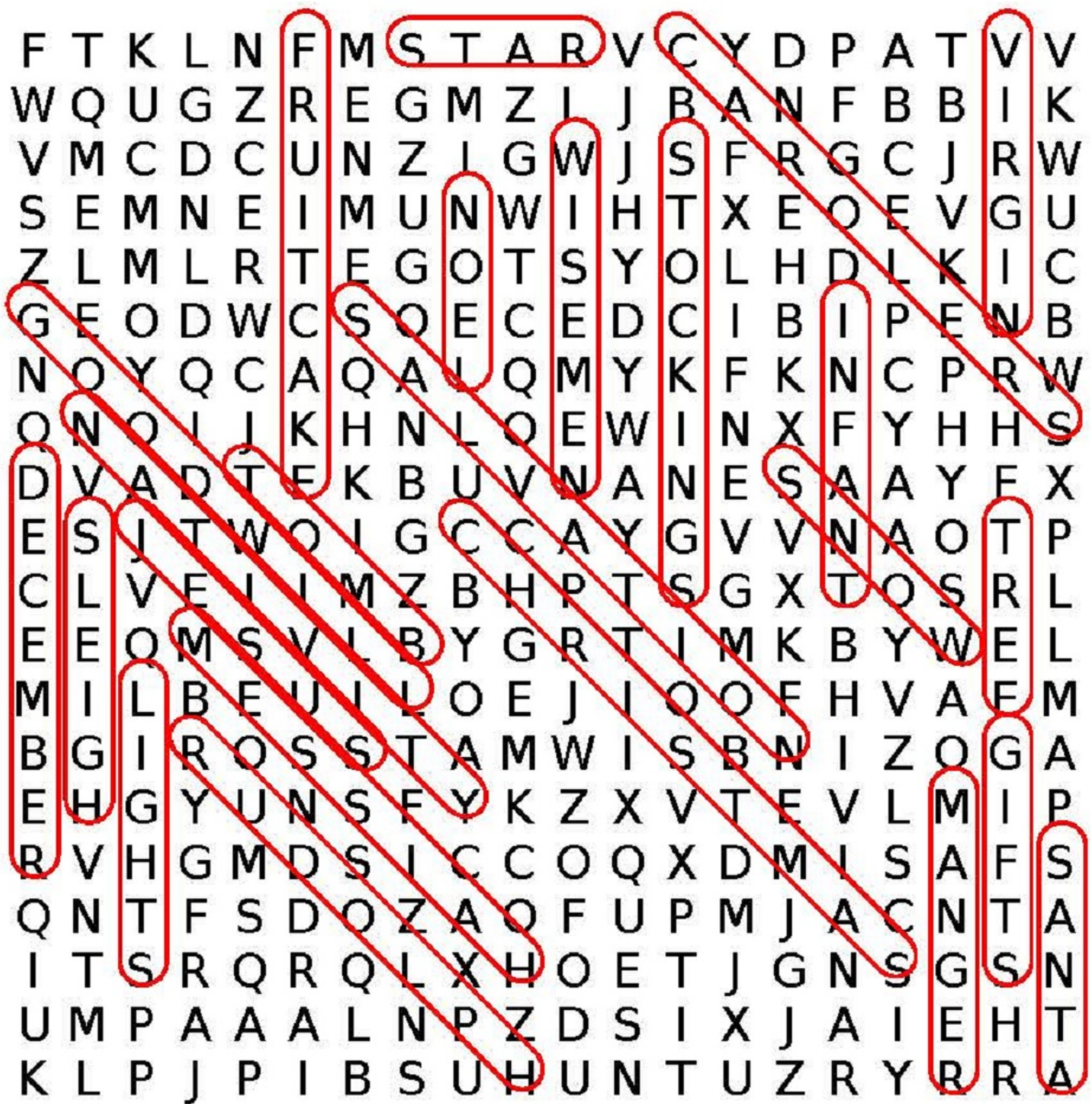
It also says to meditate on things that are **noble**. Being noble is about possessing fine personal qualities or high moral standards. It is about being elevated above ungodliness. Not allowing your mind to be stuck pondering on the lower things of life.

I encourage you to write down *Philippians 4:8*, tape it to your wall and mediate on it every morning for a few days. When you feel your mind wandering to things you know are ungodly, replace those thoughts with something on your list of good things to think about. Focus on each word and try to understand what each of those things are. Renew and transform your mind (*Romans 12:2*) by focusing on *Philippians 4:8* so that your mind does not slip into the gutter.

Even though this was not a Christmas message, I still wish you a very **Merry Christmas** and a Happy New Year!



# Word Search Answers



Growth Ministries Inc.

P.O. Box 4375  
Olathe, KS 66063  
[www.growthministriesinc.org](http://www.growthministriesinc.org)  
[info@growthministriesinc.org](mailto:info@growthministriesinc.org)

*Changing the World One Life at a Time*