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Growth Ministries Inc.

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



LOVE

BARS

From the forthcoming book... A Poetic Collage!
Different Fabrics, Slices, and Parts of Life Intricately Fit Together Piece By Piece
Through Poetry ©
By Anthony J. Butler

Stars shine in darkness
 Bars... Can't lock away your love... Your heart might get hit with thoughts of hopelessness
 Man... God will help you win and cope with this
 I hope you know he's interceding for you just receive don't resist
 Fathers... I'm speaking facts... No cap... No lack... No acts you ever did will hold you back from being a dynamic dad to your kids
 Pray and thank God for interceding on your behalf... You are a whole dad and even if your mind, your will and your emotions are SOUL bad
 Keep seeking
 Keep knocking
 Keep praying
 Keep asking
 Keep basking in his glory
 Your story has many turns and twists
 The plight of your life... The plot thickens
 You in the fight of your life... ball up your fists and swing and kick and tackle and wrestle for your kids and grandkids and more
 God is not done with you he has great things in store
 Stars shine in darkness
 Bars...Can't lock away your love



Offender

When was the last time you took a long look at your ID? Have you noticed the word offender? Depending on what state you are incarcerated in, some other derivative word, such as inmate, is the largest sized word on it. And ... It's in all caps.

The Greek meaning for the word offender is sinner. Yes, I am a sinner, and so are you. But if you are incarcerated there are connotations attached to it, such as criminal, crook, or con. I am being polite with these formative words because I have been called much worse by others and will always be believed as such. Whether it's offender, inmate or some other related word, there are segments of society, and within "the system", that tend to stigmatize you with a past decision or past life.

The information on your ID does indeed serve a purpose. It may indicate block location, dietary and medical needs. Over the years I have had updated photos that began as a teenager whose original pic was one of a sobering moment of being admitted into prison. Throughout my 40 years I have seen a blonde, baby-faced kid turn into a silver haired man with wrinkles and crinkles around the eyes and face. Attached to my name is a #number that will always be mine. No one else, ever, will be identified by it but me. When it's keyed into a database it tells a story of a life gone awry and one that adds to columns of statistics.

I have to be honest ... In the beginning, when I clipped my ID to my person, it was like a mini billboard representing the worst moment of my life. I felt in a sense measured, shame, stripped of humanity and reduced to this #number. However, coupled with this, is having remorse and a full measure of pursuing responsibility, accountability, and redemption for my actions. As for the stigmas, they were out of my control. What I have learned is to detach from the outside noise by those who attach limits and labels. But, even more important are the echoes of internal noise.

Author and pastor, John Pavolovitz writes in his devotional book, *Rise*, " ... I don't think I've ever heard the devil's voice before; but if I have, it bears a really strong resemblance to my own. It's the taunting voice always hovering in the periphery in my head, waiting for me to make a mistake so it can pounce on the failure and fear ... It's the ridiculing voice that often tells me that I'm not good enough, that I'm not doing enough, that I don't have enough ... It's the dismissive voice that presses into the tender places of my identity and tries to make me question my worth and work."

You can choose to listen to these voices of condemnation that echo you are no good as you are, or listen to the One who knows the real you, the One who loves you just as you are, right where you are. The bible says, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1) The enemy will whisper "society is right about you". The internal voice will remind you of the worst version of yourself. But when you choose to believe who Jesus is, and what He offers as Lord and Savior, He will set you free from all condemnation. There will never be a sin He won't forgive, a wall He can't crumble, a habit He won't cut off, or a broken heart and spirit He can't heal.

Offender cont.

There has been given to us a divine decree on our behalf that is based on the finished work of Jesus on the cross which He promises to complete a good work in us. (Philippians 1:6) He will turn some really dirty water into sweet wine and put it into a new wineskin. Jesus is able to make that miracle a reality in your life.

I heard a preacher say once, "the facts are not final". What may look on record doesn't have the final say. There is also a divine legal decision on our behalf. The apostle Paul writes, "When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." (Colossians 2:13-14). Paul is saying your record is completely clean. There's no trace of fingerprints either. Your name is written in the book of life. Your ID # isn't listed in it. There is nothing, nor anything anyone can say, to keep you from your spot in heaven.

Satan is the #1 identity thief in the world. No one has been more crafty manipulating identities. Once you put your trust in Jesus He becomes your sin remover, name changer, and identity maker. Consider Paul who used to be Saul. He went out gathering intel on God's people in order to hunt them down to exterminate and snuff out The Way. You won't find a worse sinner and a man more feared than he. But God chose Saul to be Paul so that anyone coming after him might be encouraged how God gives new life. Paul testifies in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."

So, don't live up to the aliases, personas, and identities clipped to your chest. Yes, you gotta wear it, but the bible says, "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come."(2 Corinthians 5:17). Use your life as a testament liken to Paul, who used his former life for the present, as a testament to what God will do.

Praises to Him

Brian, GMI contributor

Things I Don't Do Anymore

In 2021 my husband unexpectedly passed away. Seven of our nine children are grown, but two are still at home. His death left me as a single mother to finish raising a pre-teen son and teenage daughter.



Things I don't do anymore since my husband left:

I don't wake up to a hug and a smile, to a little mood booster to get me going.

I don't tell my adolescent son to "go ask your dad", when he needs help shaving or picking out deodorant and all the things young men need.

I don't imagine my daughter walking down the aisle on her daddy's arm when she is ready to marry the love of her life.

I don't sit in the passenger seat of my car.

I don't wait while someone else fills up my gas tank, and asks if I want a drink or anything....feeling like a queen being honored and cared for by another.

I don't talk through my challenges, verbally processing with another person who is just as interested in our life as I am.

I don't hold hands, lean on a shoulder, steal a quick wink and grin, or just feel his presence near. Knowing he has my back, knowing he is paying attention to our family, feeling secure because he is on duty.

I don't go to the grocery store peacefully and confidently, knowing his paycheck will cover all the bills.

I don't fight either. No one is there to challenge me, to call me out, to stretch me, and encourage me to do better.

I no longer take a break from life, trusting my man has everything covered.

I no longer pour my overflowing love, trust, and devotion into another sacred being. Feeling the incredible reward of knowing his respectful and open-hearted reception of all I have to give.

Co-creating a family and a life together has been a privilege. I no longer take for granted the special relationship we created.

Even when my husband traveled and was gone for days at a time, I could feel his devotion to me and our family. I could pick up my phone and text or call. I prayed for him, and I could feel deep in my soul how earnestly he prayed for me.

His life filled my life in so many ways. His absence leaves a void it is difficult to describe.

More than all he DID, it was who he WAS in our home that mattered so deeply.

His manly energy, his values, his determination and grit, his wisdom from experience....all of HIM added more to each of us than we knew. (And we knew quite a bit!)

A husband and father are irreplaceable.

As long as there is breath, there is an opportunity to be irreplaceable to family and loved ones.

Words to Grow By (Linda Lewis)

A Father's Day Prayer

Thinking of you on Father's Day,
And offering a prayer
That God
Will keep you always,
In the shelter of HIS care.
May HE guide you in your daily work,
Bless everything you do
And grant you all those special joys
That mean the most to you.

May you ALWAYS remember;
HE forgives your sins—every one.
HE heals your diseases—every one.
HE redeems you from hell—saves your life!
HE crowns you with love and mercy—a paradise crown.
HE wraps you in goodness—beauty eternal.
HE renews your youth—you're always young in HIS presence.

May the Lord bless you
And protect you.
May the Lord smile on you
And be gracious to you.
May the Lord show you HIS FAVOR
And give You HIS PEACE. *Numbers 6:24-26*

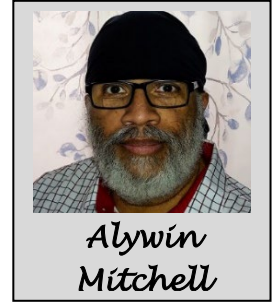
Happy Father's Day!

Women Empowering Women (Linda Lewis)

I Wish...
More women realized that **helping** another woman win,
cheering her on,
praying for her,
or **sharing** a resource with her,
does **NOT** take away from the blessings coming to them.
In fact, the more You give, the more You receive.
Empowering women doesn't come from selfishness
but rather from selflessness. *2 Corinthians 9:6-8*
Who can YOU help today?

While You Can't Change Your Past, You Can Change Your Future

I was raised with a brother and sister in the fifties and sixties by a single black mother. I learned very early on the "fear of the Lord" and the "fear of Momma!" My father died of Black Lung (Pneumoconiosis), Also known as miner's lung. It's caused by breathing in coal dust. But I was fortunate. I had an aunt, uncle, and grandparents within yelling distance, LOL, and worked on the family farm to help in "rearing" me. My mom always said that you: "raise" animals and you "rear" children, right?



My mother and grandparents also had a "YOU WILL GO TO CHURCH MINDSET." In our family, if you were too sick or lazy or didn't want to go to church, that precluded you from doing pretty much anything else that week except work or go to school. No going to the movies, dances, parties, or even playing outside when we were younger.

So, not having an earthly father or having children of my own, I have to say again...It would be the very height of arrogance and the extreme depth of stupidity for me to say that I understand, feel, or think that I know what those incarcerated are going through being a husband, a father, or a grandfather. However, the good news is that we are all God's children.

Believing that you, and everyone you know, is a child of God can be a source of peace and inner strength. Accepting this truth and letting it direct your life will make you find peace and become an example of good for others.

During your time of incarceration, you may be tempted to assume that you can't be a good parent or husband. You must resist this thinking. Brother Lonnie says that you should find ways to support your family and children whenever possible. Also, you can always pray for your family.

This Father's Day, you are not forgotten. Our God knows you. He loves you. His Son, Jesus Christ, is our Redeemer. He atoned for all our sins, for each and every one of us. Because of that, Jesus understands our lives perfectly, and we can be completely forgiven of our sins.

You must know and believe that you are forgiven! Once you have trusted Jesus Christ, God's Word says: *"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,"* Ephesians 1:7

While You Can't Change Your Past, You Can Change Your Future cont.

It must be difficult to know whom to trust, but you can always trust your Heavenly Father. The Bible teaches us that God knows you perfectly. He loves you and cannot lie. If trusting God—is difficult for you, pray about it.

It is also important to become someone who can be trusted. It may not be appropriate for you to have contact with those you have harmed. But you can nevertheless bear in mind the past events from their point of view, establish sympathy and empathy for them, and pray for them. You can choose to be a trustworthy person, but it can be a long road and take some time.

You must grow in your relationship with Jesus Christ. Once you have trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior, spending time in the Word of God, the Bible, and in prayer every day is crucial. Your aim must be to develop an intimate, passionate, personal relationship with Jesus Christ. As children of God, we have access to Him at all times. As a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you have the privilege to share your intimate thoughts, desires, and fears with God. Prayer is simply talking to your heavenly Father.

While you can't change your past, you can change your future.

"Faith is taking the first step even when you can't see the whole staircase."

— Martin Luther King Jr.

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:1-2

The Love of Your Father

Have you ever wondered what it would be like if your Father only praised you? If he only lifted you up in every situation? If he told you that you are always right no matter what you did? At first thought many people might think “that would be amazing, I wish I had a father like that!” But when you start to think about it would that really make you feel loved? Would that behavior bring you joy? No, I believe that children raised that way are as much at risk for feeling unloved as the person whose father was mean or abusive. Just stay with me and I promise I’ll explain what the Holy Spirit is wanting you to hear. As human beings we must have a measure of discipline in order for us to feel loved. We must have our fathers, our protectors, set boundaries for us so that we can develop into a mature adult. It’s not just for personal growth but for us to literally “feel” loved. We have to receive both sides. Love, compassion, understanding and the opposite which is correction and boundaries. Without that balance we tend to either feel ignored or despised. Aren’t humans complicated! Well not really. We are made in the image of God. Adam was never filled with anything other than joy, peace, love and comfort until he sinned against his Father. That is when everything changed perspective for Adam. He then had to choose blessing or cursing, life or death. Just as we have the same choice.



Every father, no matter how messed up, I believe wants to be a good father at some level even if they can’t show up. Every father, at some level, wants the love of their children even when they don’t say it or act like it. Sometimes the struggle of fatherhood can be an outright struggle and sometimes an internal struggle. But remember that struggle is spiritual not of flesh and blood. That is why so many fathers will say I wish I had done things differently to their child or children as their end of life draws near. But it takes two people to reconcile conflict, disappointment, or betrayal. God had to forgive Adam and Adam had to repent. God, your ultimate Father, who will NEVER BETRAY OR FORSAKE YOU, even gave His only Son to die on the cross for all our sins so that we can be with Him again in Heaven. You simply have to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior with all your heart and it is promised to you. If only this life could be that simple with our fathers here on earth. But humans lie. God does not.

Just stop and think for a minute. Ask God, your true Father, to show you how to have compassion for others through His eyes. What I’m saying is stop trying to fix relationships by yourself. Ask your Holy Father for His help and then step away and let Him work. Every time you want to take back control stop yourself and give it back again. This may take 10 times or 10,000 times. But I can promise you through experience that my Papa, Father God, provides the solution and the desired outcome because love is in accordance to His word. It says in the bible “If you ask Me anything in My name (the name of Jesus), I WILL do it.” (John 14:14) The key is that it must be accordance with your heavenly Father’s will. What is His will? It is His written word. It also states that we do not receive because we do not ask. That is called pride. We let our pride get in the way of asking for our Father to supernaturally correct the situation.

The Love of Your Father cont.

The power of the Holy Spirit wants you to feel the reality of God's love, forgiveness on both sides for your earthly Father and everlasting peace in your family. God loves family. He created Adam and Eve to be His forever family. Look at how much we disappoint Him but He NEVER stops loving us. He NEVER holds a grudge. He simply asks that we repent and sin no more. That doesn't mean we won't ever sin again but it does mean we will continually strive to do that which pleases our Father in Heaven.

I don't know about you but if my father were still alive, I would apologize for so many things. He would probably say, in some instances...lol, "honey, I forgave you a long time ago or I don't even remember that." But he died suddenly and I didn't get that opportunity. I encourage all of you to give your anger, frustration, hopes, fears and disappointments to God, your everlasting Father, who can change all things for good. Who can change hearts and minds. If we could simply take that step it would be one less thing Satan has to use against us in our daily lives. If you think for a minute that the spirit of offense doesn't affect EVERY aspect of your walk with God your Father, you are wrong. It blocks your healing, it blocks your deliverance, it blocks your relationship not just with God but with EVERYONE! Pride comes before the fall. The spirit of offense is one of the main spirits that came upon Lucifer the angel. Look what happened to him.

I'm not saying any of this will be easy but I am saying that God is for us so who can be against us! I am saying that every step forward, no matter how small, is what we can do to receive the ultimate blessings of our Father in Heaven. He wants nothing more than for us to prosper in all things. You must fight like Heaven to defeat hell. So, what do you have to lose by either becoming the father you want to be, forgiving the father who let you down or loving the father that made you feel invisible. We have ALL been hurt but we can ALL be saved by our Father's grace!

Have a Little Faith

Alvin is working in his store when he hears a booming voice from above that says. "Alvin sell your business!" Alvin ignores the voice, but the voice goes on for days saying..."Alvin sell your business for \$3 million". After a long week hearing this voice day and night, Alvin relents and sells his store.

*Nicholas M.,
Lansing*

"Alvin go to Las Vegas!" The voice urges Alvin.

"Why?" Alvin asks.

"Just take the \$3 million dollars and go to Vegas!" The voice keeps on urging Alvin while ignoring his questions.

Alvin obeys and goes to Vegas and visits a casino...

"Alvin go to the blackjack table and put it all on one hand!"

The voice instructs Alvin.

Alvin hesitates but gives in. Alvin has an 18 in front of him.

The dealer shows a six.

"Alvin take a card...", urges the voice.

"But the dealer has ah..."

"Hit me!" Alvin tells the dealer.

The dealer hits him, and Alvin gets an ace. He breathes easy.

"Take another card..."", The voice urges Alvin.

"But I got 19!" exclaims Alvin.

Alvin sighs, **"Hit me!"**

The dealer gives Alvin an ace. Now, Alvin has 20.

"Take another card...", The voice instructs Alvin.

"I have 20!" Alvin yells.

"Take another card..." The voice commands in a booming voice.

"Hit me!" Alvin squeaks nervously.

He gets another ace! 21

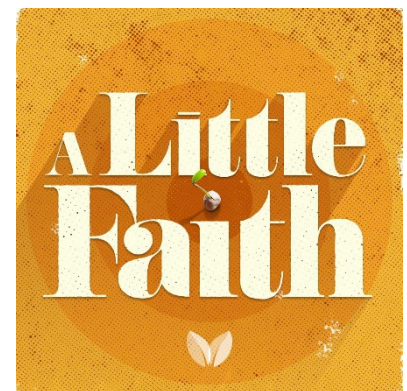
The booming voice says **"Unfreakin' believable!"**

As you listened to this joke about Alvin, some probably considered Alvin's willingness to listen to this booming voice as walking by faith and not sight. Some thought that Alvin was being foolish. I humbly submit that whatever your perspective, you are right. The entire concept of faith is rooted in the concept that we know it when we see it. What may be an act of faith to me may be an act of foolishness to you. I have met people who are offended by the suggestion that having a little faith is foolish in and of itself. I am here to make a case for having a little faith.

We live in the 'Information Age'. We take it for granted that we have unlimited access to knowledge. Everyone seems to have access to all sorts of information about the world. I would never argue that ignorance is bliss, but I wish to point out that our knowledge may be great, but it is also limited. Often, ignorance defines our true wisdom. In other words, what we know we do not know. No matter how great our knowledge, no one can disagree while our knowledge has its limits ... our faith is limitless.

What if told you that even when you think you are losing in life, you are actually winning? That everything that happens is really a victory. I know this may challenge your present paradigm, but it is true, nonetheless. In the scripture, faith is defined as the substance of things hope for, the evidence of things unseen. We do not have to know how something works for it to be true. I have no idea how my television works, but I know that it does. This is the truth. Every circumstance in our life provides us with an opportunity either to get better or to get worse, but it is our choice. It is a matter of perspective. The substance of creation is unseen, but the evidence of its reality is very visible. I know this seems like a very complicated thing, but it is both straightforward and simple.

Our thoughts create our reality. Life is full of adversities. If we believe there is meaning in suffering then we are right. If we don't believe that then it is also true. Alvin chose to believe that this mysterious voice was giving him these instructions for a reason. He acted in faith. His faith rewarded him. I know it may seem overly simplified to frame it this way. Yet, the truth is whom can provide compelling evidence to prove the opposite? Faith is rewarded as well as its own rewards. Of course, knowledge is power, and we should have as much knowledge as we can get. I am not making a case for ignorance. Faith is a much deeper wellspring than knowledge because its limit is our willingness to believe ...



In My Father's Eyes

Whenever I visit family and even friends, one of the most significant statements that's always made to me is, "you look just like your father". As a kid it didn't mean much but as I grew older, I get what people were saying to me.

*Tracy Allen
Growth
Ministries
Volunteer*

As is often the case, we as children mirror the image of our earthly parent, whether mother or father. I, of course, being the youngest child among three, I do look exactly like my father. Eyebrows, eyes, nose and without question, like many have mentioned to me, I have the same smile that he had when he was younger, middle aged and yes, even in his last days here on Earth. As I look at the pictures, I smile when I see myself and others see my father in me. Even as people have told me that my personality resembles to his greatly - warm, kind, cool and friendly, and yes, a person that loves to help people regardless of the task at hand, is something that I enjoy most when they mention and remember my father. It makes me feel even greater when they say that I have a lot of his characteristics, obviously his looks, and to a great degree, his mannerisms.

See, I spent a lot of time around my earthly Dad, Maurice. Some of it was because he wanted to spend time with me, but also, even through a difficult time when my mother became ill and eventually passed, my Dad was always there for his three kids - attending my basketball games in high school, going to Kansas City Chiefs games, alone with my Dad, as a teenager, being in attendance and whispering words of "I'm proud of you, kiddo" when I won awards during my journalism career, and the warm hug and embrace he gave me on countless cases throughout my life.

Yep, my Dad let me know he was always by my side.

I had more opportunities to look at my dad. I was able to watch how he did things and handled life, even when life sucked and took his wife of 34 years away from him and his family. I saw the strength emotionally in my father. I saw my father stand in the gap for his children when they did not have their mother anymore. I saw my father stand in the gap for his younger brother and younger sister, when his own parents died, leaving a younger brother and sister, and then of course my dad and his older brother.

In My Father's Eyes Cont.

One thing I learned about my Dad is that he never forsook his family. Neither did he forsake his wife. My Dad understood his responsibility as a father and a husband and a brother. Yes, my Dad, Maurice, replicated what his own father, my grandfather, Russell, did. My granddad grew up in segregation. My Dad and mother did too. I'm a child that was born in the 1960s. I watched the meaning of what fatherhood is all about even though the height of the Civil Rights movement was in FULL force. Everything I can remember, loyalty, resilience, love, overcoming adversity when life throws a log at you. These are what I remember as a little girl growing up in the inner city. And most of all replicating what my grandpa Russell did when his own wife passed; stand in the gap for his family.

Our heavenly Father, Abba, does the same for us. Abba stands in the gap for us when others decide to walk away or turn their back on us. Abba shows kindness, loyalty, resilience when we fail to do the right thing. Abba's a Father to emulate, just like Maurice, my earthly Dad. Someone that has shown me His love. Someone that believes in me. Someone who more than desires to spend time with me - if I let Him.

You ask, 'why should I want to emulate Abba'?
Because of these very things:

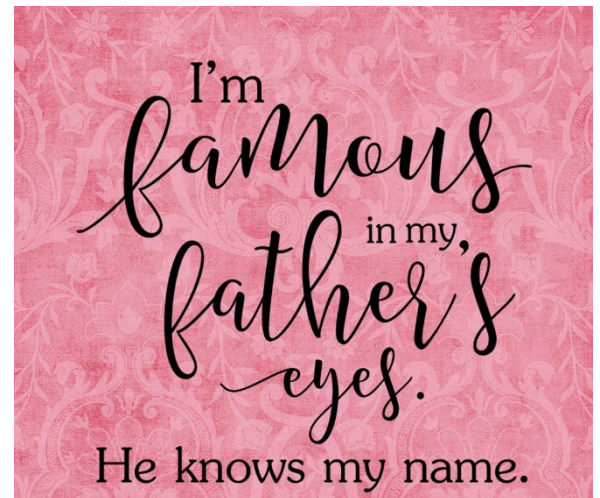
*He's always present - Genesis 28:15, Genesis 31:8, Hebrews 13:5-6

*He's kind - Ephesians 2:7, Psalms 36:7, Titus 3:4-6, Psalms 117:2

*He's in love with you.

* He believes in you so much; He wants you to be just like Him.

You are made in the image of Abba. You are famous in your Father's eyes. Believe it, embrace it, claim it.



A Letter from Your Daughter

This essay was written by a student at Mighty Writers, an education nonprofit that offers free writing classes to over 2,500 inner-city Philadelphia students a year.

Hi Dad,

This is Saviyah. I wanted to say thank you for my birthday card that you sent me. I absolutely love it and I will cherish it forever. I know I haven't written you in a long time, but I've been thinking about you a lot lately. I've been going to this writing camp on Thursdays and the topic I chose to write about is how to cope with a parent being incarcerated. I really have a lot of feelings about you being locked up; most of them are sad feelings. I'm going to tell you, because you're my dad, and I want us to have a strong bond, because you're my dad.

A feeling that I feel very often is jealousy: I get jealous of my little sister Heaven because she has her dad and I don't. She comes home with all this new stuff and a bunch of different stories about how much fun she had at her dad's house. Sometimes she calls her dad and he comes to get her and takes her fun places. Now, don't get me wrong, my mom does take me a lot of places and spends time with us a lot so that I won't feel this jealousy, but no matter how much she buys me and takes me out, I will never feel complete, because I don't have my dad there with me.

Dad, I really wish that you would stay out of jail and never go back. You may not know I think about you every day because my big sister talks about the talks she had with you on the phone. She also posts photos of you on her page and in one of the pictures you're with a dog—can you tell me about that when you write me back?

When you get out of jail, I want the two of us to go out and spend time together. I would like to spend a summer with you so I can get to know you. I feel like I'm not around you as much as my sisters and brothers, and I also feel left out because I'm not Muslim like the rest of my siblings are.

And Dad, I feel like I need you even more because my grandma recently passed away and wasn't able to celebrate my 13th birthday with me. And I didn't have you either. Sometimes, Dad, when I'm riding home on the bus from school, if I see a guy with a beard, wearing a nice outfit and nice shoes, I look at him and think, "I wish my dad was here." That may sound weird, but I actually do that, and I just realize, man, my dad really is in jail.

Dad, I am sorry I haven't come to see you but it's because I have mixed feelings about coming to a jail to see my father. I really don't even know how long you've been in jail. It is kind of depressing having to schedule a time to come see you. I just want to see you when you're out.

I hoped you enjoyed receiving this letter from me as much as I enjoyed writing it. Love youuuuu, Daddy!!!!!!!

Sincerely,

Saviyah



Just For Laughs!

I asked my dad to help me with a math problem. He said: "Don't worry; this is a piece of cake." I said: "No, it's a math problem."

Being a great father is like shaving. No matter how good you shaved today, you have to do it again tomorrow.

"Dad, are bugs good to eat?" asked the boy.

"Let's not talk about such things at the dinner table, son," his father replied.

After dinner, the father inquired, "Now, son, what did you want to ask me?"

"Oh, nothing," the boy said. "There was a bug in your soup, but now it's gone."

A small boy was at the zoo with his father. They were looking at the tigers, and his father was telling him how ferocious they were.

"Daddy, if the tigers got out and ate you up..."

"Yes, son?" the father asked, ready to console him.

"...Which bus would I take home?"

- Where do cows get their clothes? From cattle-logs.
- I used to be afraid of hurdles. But I got over it.
- Why didn't the sun go to college? It already had a million degrees.
- Why can't you borrow money from elves? They're always a little short.
- How do trains eat? They choo-choo.
- Why don't leopards play hide-and-go-seek? They're always spotted.

Closing Words – What’s in Your House?

Matthew 12:43-46 ⁴³ “When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. ⁴⁴ Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. ⁴⁵ Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation.”



This is an obscure scripture when put into context with the rest of the chapter.

Earlier in the chapter Jesus cast out the demon of a man who was possessed. The Pharisees insinuated that the only way Jesus could have done that was by the power of Satan (Beelzebul/Beelzebub). Jesus hit them with a flurry of parables to set them straight. Then Jesus goes on to entertain some more of their shenanigans after they asked him another question. Jesus then jumps to this random narrative of what happens to a spirit when it gets cast out.

So how does this apply to us? Let’s reflect back on when we gave up the “impure” things in our life. For many of us this was (or still is) an ongoing thing. One by one the unclean spirits who influenced us to do bad things were evicted. Our scripture above suggests that they wandered through arid (dry, lifeless) places. Not liking this new living environment, the spirit said, “I am coming back to my old house” (our bodies). Now, this is where you lean in and take notes. The Word says he found the house “**unoccupied, swept clean and put in order**”. I will deal with the unoccupied part last. Many times, when people come to Christ, they just want a clean slate. They are only looking to rid themselves of the problems and consequences that sin has laid on them. And they are only looking to keep from going to hell. So, we are happy with *just* going to church. We figure as long as I am not living like I used to, I’m good. All that old mess has been **swept clean** and my new life is now **in order**.

That kind of thinking brings us to a place where we eventually stumble and fall. A clean slate is not enough. We have to replace the old furniture in our house with new stuff. Otherwise, we just have an abandoned building. We need to be filling our minds with God’s Word by reading and meditating on it. We need to constantly be in prayer so that we are constantly connecting with God. We need to be serving others so that our time is occupied with righteous activities. We need to be doing the things that please God, and that is more than just going to church. If we don’t, then those old thoughts start creeping back into our mind. This scripture also says that when the demon spirit came back, he brought seven more demons that were worse than he was. Before you know it, you are in worse shape than you were in the beginning. You will be asking yourself, “What happened?”. Well, I’m telling you what happened. If you don’t replace the old stuff with new stuff, you will go back to what you are familiar with. We will start doing the things we used to do. The things the rest of the world still do. The word tells us “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...” Romans 12:2

Don’t just clean house, replace all the old stuff with new stuff. Good, holy, and pleasing to God kind of stuff.

What’s in your house? Do you still have the old stuff? Did you clean it out and leave it empty? Or have you moved the good stuff in yet? If your house is still empty, you better believe that your demon is on his way back to move in with 7 more friends worse than him.



Habakkuk 2:2 ESV

And the LORD answered me: "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it."

Write Us – We want to hear from you. We enjoy hearing from you. Here are some things you can write about.

- **Tell us about our magazine**

We want to know what you like about our magazine. What are some of the articles you want to see more of? Are there any specific types of stories that inspire you?

- **Send us something to publish**

Do you write poetry? Do you have a powerful testimony? Do you have a particular scripture that you want to share why it inspires you? Maybe you are an artist and want to share a drawing. Send it to us and let us check it out. If approved, we will publish it for others to see. Please refrain from any inappropriate material. We are a Christian organization and will not publish anything that is unsuitable for our readers.

- **Send us your prayer requests or issues you are dealing with**

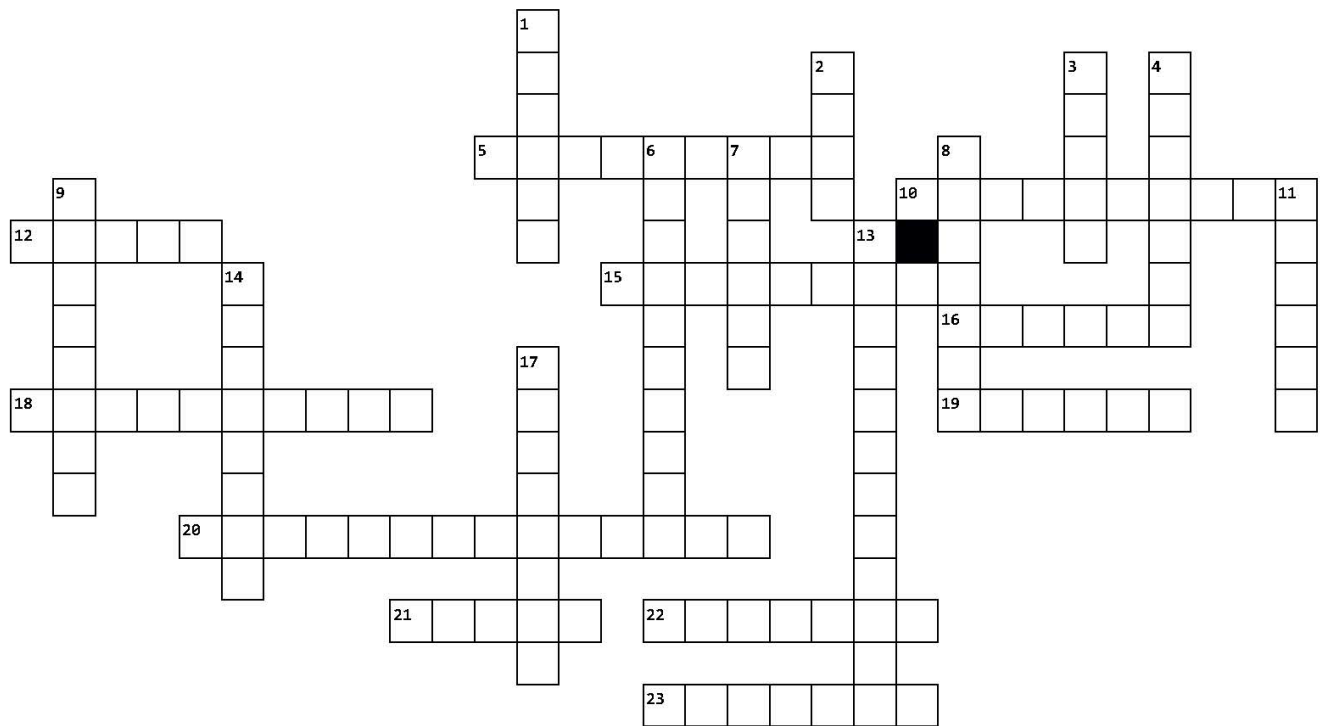
Are you going through something right now. Write us so we can pray with you. We will respond to your letter with a prayer, scripture and guidance on your issue. We all need someone to touch and agree with us when we are faced with life's challenges.


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Changing the World One Life at a Time

Bible Crossword



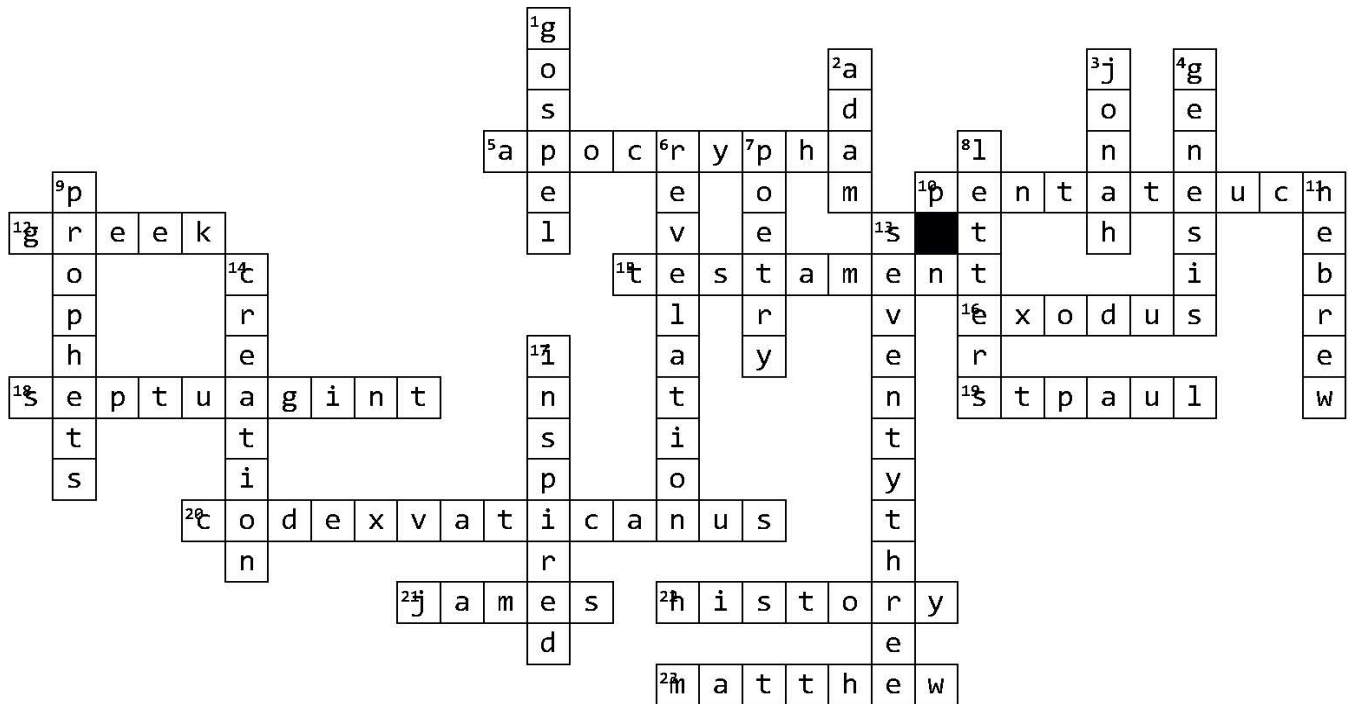
Across

5. The word for the books left out of the Bible.
10. The word for the first 5 books of the Bible.
12. The language the NT is written in.
15. Meaning "law" there are two of these that make-up the Bible.
16. The book that contains the 10 commandments.
18. The oldest Greek Bible
19. The author of the most books of the Bible.
20. The oldest Bible in the world.
21. The English king that made the most famous English Bible.
22. The writings that contain the stories of the Jews.
23. The first book of the New Testament.

Down

1. Four of these tell the life of Christ.
2. The first man on Earth.
3. Book in the Bible about a man swallowed by a whale.
4. The first book of the Bible
6. The final book of the Bible.
7. The book of Psalms is this style of writing.
8. Writings of the Apostles to early-Church figures.
9. People who speak to God.
11. The language the OT is written in.
13. The number of books in the Bible.
14. The first story in the Bible.
17. Meaning "breathed in" Catholics believe that this is how the writers of the Bible received the Holy Spirit.

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6 Digit Numbers

Find and circle all of the 6 Digit Numbers that are hidden in the grid.
The numbers may be hidden in any direction.

1	6	2	2	6	1	2	5	6	2	2	1	7
6	6	5	4	7	6	6	5	8	2	8	7	8
3	6	5	0	7	4	5	6	4	0	9	2	4
4	2	1	3	2	8	4	3	7	4	4	5	2
9	7	4	3	8	4	3	8	9	3	6	0	6
6	3	7	9	7	1	4	2	1	2	8	6	0
9	5	9	9	4	9	6	4	9	1	1	2	1
6	7	1	4	5	1	4	4	5	8	8	9	3
3	5	4	2	7	9	1	9	5	1	4	1	6
8	2	4	5	6	7	1	4	7	7	3	6	8
3	5	7	9	2	5	9	0	8	4	6	9	0
1	9	7	2	7	2	5	2	3	6	4	6	2
9	4	9	7	6	7	3	1	2	3	5	1	9

106248	494114	564237
154259	496963	605271
162261	496974	653921
225479	532137	662735
236462	546183	751951
479158	563824	908469
489238		