

Encouraging Words

...Let us encourage one another... Hebrews 10:25

Encouraging Words 2024 Volume 4 Issue 3

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FROM PASTOR CHUCK

It is a joy to partner with you in this ministry of encouragement! You men and women always submit some great articles, but a couple of the articles in this issue are really compelling and touching. I trust that Jesus will speak to you readers through these as well.

For our next issue, you can certainly submit any article or testimony that you wish, but I want to encourage you to share some stories of thanksgiving. For example, tell us how God has blessed you; what Jesus has done through you; something you're thankful He taught you; how He carried you through a rough time, answered a prayer, or simply amazed you. It has been said that if we spent more time thanking God for what we do have, that we would spend a whole lot less time complaining about the things we don't have. I believe this to be true.

Also, ladies, don't forget that you are invited to submit items as well! Please get these to us by October 1. (See "Be a Contributor" on the last page).

TRUE SALVATION – Brother Jay

There are many people who identify as Christian who look and act no differently from the world. They profess Christ with their mouth, but in their actions, they deny Him. Perhaps one of the reasons for this is because the "modern-day gospel" places the primary emphasis for salvation on "believing in Christ" (justification), and places little or no emphasis on actually becoming like Christ (sanctification). To teach that we can be saved by justification without sanctification is to teach an incomplete gospel. The famous pastor, Charles H. Spurgeon, said, "Justification without sanctification, would not be salvation at all. It would be like calling a leper clean and then leaving him to die of his disease. It would forgive the rebellion and allow the rebel to remain an enemy to his king."

Thankfully, Jesus did not come to save us in part. He does not declare us to be righteous and then leave us to be ruled by our sinful nature. He does not begin something without bringing it

to completion (Philippians 1:6). Christ did not come solely to set us free from the penalty of sin. He also came to set us free from the power of sin. He came to eradicate the sinful nature and to replace it with the righteous nature of God.

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The true Gospel is one of power, and it leads to a radically transformed life. But, in order for this radical transformation to be realized, God has to change the inner man in its entirety. He must change the heart along with its affections and desires. He must remove the stubborn, rebellious heart and replace it with a submissive, obedient one. Scripture refers to this as "circumcision of the heart" (Deuteronomy 30:6, Colossians 2:11). It is only after this has taken place that one is truly capable of fulfilling the command to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" – which according to Jesus is the first and greatest commandment (Matthew 22:37, Deuteronomy 6:5).

THEY SAID IT (Actually, They Wrote It)

— Brother Nathan

“I put the Know Why You Believe book you sent me to good use! A friend of mine, Travis, who I’ve been talking to about my faith for the last six years, texted me two typed pages of questions about Christianity! Thank you God! I wrote Travis a 56-page letter answering all of his questions, giving him my testimony and sharing what God is continually doing in my life. I just sent it off and look forward to him reading it and getting a response from him. He is one of the people I have kept writing over my entire incarceration. Seeds are coming up!!

God is so good to me, and I thank Him every day for putting me in prison!! If he hadn’t, I probably would never have come back to Him. The old Nathan is dead. Now, I am a new creature in Christ! My faith is never wavering, it only grows stronger and deeper every single day! Stay in the Word every day – that’s the only way it works!”

— Brother Greg

“I’m working with a brother who is young in the faith and trying to help him learn what it means to trust in Jesus. I’m teaching him to learn to set his mind on things that are above not on things that are of this earth.”

— Brother Roger

“Things here are a little better. The test I’ve been through has taught me how to better respond next time. I’m still learning and growing. Pray it never stops... Tell the brothers to stay in God’s word. Tell them James 4:8 is the only way we are going to grow...”

— Brother Tony

“God got me started doing a Bible study with two guys... Please keep them in your prayers. One was hard into Buddhism, but Christ helped him see the truth through His Word, and he has accepted Christ as his Savior. Both are enjoying the Bible studies.”

— Brother Jay

Brother Jay was asked by one of the “outside” worship groups to preach for one of the chapel services at his facility. This was Jay’s first ever sermon, and he prepared well. Jay said that he preached for 45 minutes and “It went great!”

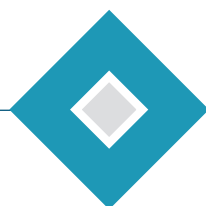
DEAD END

Brother Troy

Let’s say you’re driving to get somewhere - would you find taking a dead-end road helpful? Of course not! Unless that is your goal, even turning down that street would be a waste of time and gas!

We could – and should – take that same mindset with the sin of our lives. Scripture encourages us to seek wisdom in order to refrain from becoming like ... “those losers who make a game of evil and throw parties to celebrate perversity. Traveling that goes nowhere, wandering in a maze of detours and dead ends” (Proverbs 2:14-15 – the Message Bible). No doubt, I’m aware of this translation’s liberal take on the Word, but man! Didn’t those verses hit home for me!

Centuries later, Paul drops a rhetorical bombshell in asking, “What fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of these things is death” (Romans 6:21 ESV). Bro... Sis... our past lives of sin only lead to a dead end, so why even turn down that road? I was blessed with an awesome quote from my pen pal, by the late Naomi Judd: “A dead end is a good place to turn around.” These words ring true! Praise God for the “three-point turn” we can take up out of there – Ha! But let’s do even better. Once we find ourselves tempted to go down a dark, winding, dead end road, let’s not even take the turn.



RESTORATION PROJECTS

BROTHER TIM J.

After being sentenced to life, I wished to just fade away. I saw my life as a waste. God saw the beginnings of a restoration project. And he sees the same restoration in each of you. In fact God already looks at you and sees the finished project, the after picture.

Home makeover shows fascinate me. Remodeling experts enter a home or room set on transforming the space from a disaster area into an enchanting space. Broken fixtures get replaced by ones that gleam. Mismatched colors become complementary brilliance. **The before and after pictures show the fullness of the transformation.** Each of you is a restoration project. God, the ultimate remodeler, is working in you. He is replacing, repairing, and repainting. Like every remodel, this project takes time. But one day you will look at the before and after pictures, and you will be amazed.

Maybe you think I do not know anything about where you find yourself today, how you feel, or how bad the disaster is. I do not know exactly, but I do know how I felt 20 years ago when sentenced to prison for life, really meaning until death. I felt my life was over, felt my life was a complete waste. I thought I had destroyed my life beyond any restoration. But **God specializes in transforming the worst disasters into visions of beauty.** In Joel 2:25, God promises to restore all that

the swarming plague of locusts had eaten. If the people would repent, He would turn the devastation into abundance. And God promises the same in our lives.

When we place ourselves in His hands, God restores us and fills our lives with purpose. Even in the barren land of prison, He works in and through us to transform us into who we were created to be and uses us for His calling. Life becomes full, full of purpose as we serve others. I am still in prison 20 years later, but God has used me to serve my prison community and He has filled my life with an orchard of fruit trees. Four years were spent working as a dog trainer, training 15 rescued shelter dogs and mentoring novice trainers. Two dogs went to veterans with PTSD and one to a boy with autism.

Now my job is Field Minister and Graduate Assistant for a college. My duties include teaching, writing, training tutors, counseling in coping with problem emotions, and teaching "Thinking for a Change." My writing has won awards and been published, including in two legal journals. I co-

wrote a bill to reinstate parole for lifers and a second part to extend opportunities for earlier release to others. After being sentenced to life, I wished to just fade away. I saw my life as a waste. God saw the beginnings of a restoration project. And he sees the same restoration in each of you. In fact God already looks at you and sees the finished project, the after picture.

On those sleepless nights, when your past mistakes tell you it's too late, when shame tells you to give up, when you feel it does not matter what you do anymore, remind yourself you are one of God's great restoration projects. **Trust God; trust in His goodness and His greatness.** Piece by piece, He will make your life a work of beauty. He will fill your life with purpose. You will be amazed. And your restoration will inspire others to place themselves into the hands of the ultimate remodeler, the ultimate restorer. Refuse to listen to the lies of your feelings. You are beautiful. Your life matters to God and to all whom you will touch along the way. You are God's restoration project.

"Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

Luke 10:19-20

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Jeremiah 29:11

For We Walk by Faith and Not by Sight

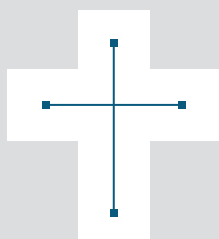
- Brother Thomas

Last year, I did not get selected to attend Kairos because I was late turning in the application, due to just getting out of segregation. So, this year came around, and I made it my duty to turn in the application the same day they were dispersed. So, the day arrived when the list of Kairos participants was posted. I checked for my name numerous times and did not see it. I totally lost it. Everywhere I went, I vented about not being on the list and I even stopped going to church for a week.

One day while I was cleaning the tunnel, I saw one of the chaplains on her way home and vented to her for approximately 10 minutes. She listened intently and calmly, and said, "Keep the faith, there is a possibility you can still attend." So, I prayed that very same night, and the Holy Spirit said, "If it's meant to be you will go." So, a couple of days later, I caught another chaplain in the hallway on her way home. I told her about my situation, and she told me she did not remember seeing my name on the list but would double check and get back with me. So, I continued to pray. Then, when I least expected it, I got a letter congratulating me for being accepted into Kairos 53.

So, near the end of Kairos, the participants were invited to get up and share our experience at Kairos with everyone. Even though I did not intend to get up, the Holy Spirit started bugging me to get up and share my testimony - like I bugged everybody to get there. The next thing you know, the Holy Spirit got me out of my seat - in front of everybody - and I shared my testimony. Towards the end, the chaplain got up and told the audience about my story and how she did not believe I was going to make it due to how far down the list I was. By God's grace I was the last participant selected.

If it is God's will, His will will be done!



Answered Prayer

- Brother George

I don't come from a religious family. While my mom and siblings would identify as Christians, it is more they believe God is real - not that they believe IN Him, trust Him or know Him personally. A few weeks ago, I sensed God moving my heart to pray for my family, that God would reveal Himself to them in a way that each might understand and accept.

Well, I spoke with my mom yesterday. She said, "I finally believe in God!" She was very excited. I asked what changed her. She said she was at Walgreens two weeks ago, gathering her monthly medical related supplies (she gets \$70 per month on a debit card from her insurance company). When she got to the register with her stuff, the card wouldn't work. The cashier said she had to contact her insurance company to straighten it out. Although she was frustrated and disappointed, she was resigned and polite, "OK... but you'll have to put all this stuff back on the shelves, because I can't afford it now."

Suddenly, the guy behind her in line, a Christian (I don't know how she knew that) said, "I'll pay for it." My mom refused, saying thank you, but she'd get it in a few days. But the man insisted, and they got into a little argument about it (she is proud and cynical) until finally, the man shoved his credit card to the cashier and said, "I want to bless you! I'm paying for it!"

My mom said, suddenly, she felt/sensed the love of God in her heart for the first time and was so overwhelmed/touched, she started sobbing. She told the people in line, the cashier and the man, "I have been in America 40 years now," (she's a Korean immigrant) and this is the first time a perfect stranger has been so kind and generous to me." She has experienced a lot of racism, abuse, etc.

She said that earlier that day it had occurred to her to go to church, but she'd rejected the idea. Now, in her car, sobbing so hard she couldn't drive, she cried out to God, "After all these years, NOW you show me you are real! OK, I believe! Do you want me to go to church, huh? Okay, I'll go to church!" And she did.

She said she doesn't know why God reached out to her now, but she is convinced God has a plan for her and wants her to do something, some service/ministry. She was so excited, and it made me realize that while some people can believe simply by hearing the Gospel, some people need a personal encounter with Christ - a Damascus Road moment - but once they do, they truly believe and trust the Lord. Amen!

Behind *Enemy Lines*

Last night, our Christian brother, a fellow child of God, was murdered by an agent of the enemy. Smooth (Dustin) was taken home to be with the Lord, after being stabbed in the neck during an argument. His killer casually walked around the block with cookies and coffee preparing to be locked up while Smooth bled out by the CEO's desk. I heard him let out a laugh before he got to his cell. All of this was on camera so he knew he didn't have long before they came for him.

This tragedy is a stark reminder of the battle we fight, and especially where we fight it. We're behind enemy lines, in the devil's playground, full of his unwitting disciples. We are soldiers in a war for the souls of men, so we must stay prepared, as Paul tells us, by putting on the full armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18).

Stand ready, stand strong, united with others in our faith, for we never know how much time we have left on this earth. Let us live our lives as if each day may be our last. I know that when I finally stand before God, I hope to hear "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Smooth was a Christian brother with an undeniable passion for the Lord. Though, like all of us, he had his struggles with sin. He fell into the trap of drug

use, and as result would often have debts to pay off. He was also quick to argue and run his mouth. Let us try to live according to James' exhortation to "be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger" (James 1:19). Paul also says in Romans 12:18, "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."

Smooth was set to be released in only 6-9 months and had talked about doing some kind of reentry ministry. "Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes." (James 4:14). Though our time on earth is short, "the love of the Lord remains forever with those who fear Him" (Psalm 103:17). We are to use the time we have wisely.

"So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:12)

"But where is wisdom to be found? And where is the place of understanding?... Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding" (Job 28:12, 28).

Smooth had been a gang member since his early teen years and had committed many crimes and acts of violence. But that all changed when he finally

found the Lord a few years back. He left that life behind him, a life he had known for decades, only with the help of the Holy Spirit. He went all in for Jesus. He listened to Christian rap and hip-hop, and dedicated his right arm to Christian tattoos (Christ with the crown of thorns, the lion's face for the lion of Judah, Bible verses, etc.). God can change the heart of the worst of us. But after that change of heart, we must not falter. We must stay strong in the faith, growing knowledge, and live our life for Christ. "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Sanctification is that lifelong process of becoming more Christlike through the help of the Holy Spirit. We have our part to play in this process. As Jesus said in John 17:17, "Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth." The first, and easiest, thing we must do is wield "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:18b). Stay in the Word every day. Study it by yourself and with others. Live by it.

At a time like this, it's hard to follow the whole "love your enemy" thing. Well, it's hard, no matter the time. But, in that spirit, I say, we pray, not only for Smooth's family

(especially his children) and loved ones, but also for his killer and others like him. I pray that God grants Smooth's killer a conscience, so he can look back at his actions and see the damage and the true cost to himself and others. That will be the first step toward repentance for him.

I don't read Our Daily Bread every day, but I looked at today's entry, "God's Agents of Peace," just now and am reminded of my opening line. Yes, there are agents of the enemy in our midst - perhaps even greatly outnumbering us - but we are His agents of peace in this war-torn world. We are called to shine as lights in this dark world (Philippians 2:15). As that entry says, "some people love violence and division. Don't lose heart. They will not win. God is looking for courageous believers to share His light and peace with our desperate world."

That's a good, and very timely, reminder that even in the aftermath of a senseless tragedy, God is ultimately in control, and we are called to show the love of God to everyone, at all times in all circumstances. For we know that no matter what the world throws at us, we win in the end.

— Brother Eric

Many of you know that **PRISON ALLIANCE** offers free Correspondence Bible Study lessons to anyone who is seeking to grow in their faith. Every completed lesson is sent to a volunteer who provides encouraging feedback to the student.

But, did you know that Prison Alliance/Christian Library International also has a variety of other Bible studies available for you through your Edovo App? The list includes: "Taming the Tongue," "Persevering in Hard times," "10 Misconceptions about Christianity," "Forgiveness" and more so check 'em out!

You can enroll

in their Correspondence Bible Study lessons through your chaplain or by writing:

PRISON ALLIANCE
PO BOX 97095
Raleigh, NC, 27624.



BE A CONTRIBUTOR

This newsletter is written by and for incarcerated Brothers & Sisters. If you have an encouraging story, a teaching, a charge, a poem or drawing that you think would encourage others, send it to us!

Do your best to limit your articles to 3-4 paragraphs or less. All articles will be subject to light editing for grammar, sentence structure & clarity. We will identify you by your first name, and maybe last initial, unless you tell us not to use it.

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