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What Words of Encouragement Would You Give to Men in Prison Who Love the Lord?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Question about what words of encouragement Greg and Amy would give to men in prison who love the Lord.

* I go into prison as an outreach of my church. What words of encouragement would you give "my men" in prison who love the Lord?

Transcript

Welcome listener. Welcome, Greg. I'm Amy Hall, and I'm here for Stand to Reason's hashtag SDR-esque podcast.

Now, Greg, we are almost to Christmas. It's just in a couple of days. So today we're going to talk about encouraging people.

Alrighty. Sometimes our shows could be a little depressing, depending on the topic, or what we're going to talk about. What we're dealing with.

So, we're going to answer a question today from John, and here's what he says. I'm a frequent listener. I go into a prison as an outreach of my church.

What words of encouragement would you give to my men in prison that love the Lord? It's interesting that I was just talking recently with my brother about growing old. And I told him, I didn't start really worrying about it until I turned 70, and he has just turned 70. I know there was a didn't start having a real palpable psychological impact on me until I turned 70.

Now I'm, you know, pushing 75 here, or 74 and a half. And I'm more aware of it. And the awareness that I have is that I have a limited time left, which is true about everybody, but now you can kind of, the end of the tunnel is not a light.

It's just the end. So, you're aware of that. Now that has an impact in the way.

I think people look at their lives, and if people are looking at their lives as these four score and down, as you get closer to the end of the four score in 10, what is that? Anyway, what's the score 20? I think so. Like 90, four score in 10. Okay.

But in other words, you have a limited amount of will eventuate to provide a satisfying life. And as you get older in life, you realize those plans are not all have an all eventuated, or maybe things have gone in a completely different direction, like for men in prison. And now what? Okay.

Now you have just this segment of life that's left, and it doesn't look good. Um, whether you're in prison or not, you are still limited with the time you have left, you don't have enough time to do all the things on your bucket list that you thought of when you're in their twenties, and your health is failing, you keep getting things fixed just to try, try to keep up as it were. And you know that ultimately it's a losing battle.

Okay. Now what? And this is where I think that I don't have just four score in 10. If you think of it like yours is doing meaningful work and labor, hopefully, and you're saving up for when you can quit work and relax and enjoy the fruit of your labors.

All right. There's a sense in which I look at my life now much like that, but retirement happens when I die. And what I'm doing now is storing up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroy, nor thieves break in and steal.

Whatever the circumstances of my life right now, and there are many, many things, Amy, that are, the way my life is, that is not at all the way I expected my life to be, because in these particular areas, I expected something better, not complain about my job or anything like that, and standard reasons, a great wonderful thing. But just like everybody else, you know, our lives are like a diary in which we mean to write one story, and we write another. Or as John Lennon put it, life is what happens when you're making other plans.

Not well about quoting him, but that's a good our plans are not realized, and our lives take us in a different direction, and we realize our time is running out. If you're a Christian, your time is not running out. Your time is running out to lay up treasures in heaven, but your time isn't running out.

Because when Jesus returns, or we go to be with him, when our time is over, this is the beginning of our, if you will, retirement. In the best sense of the word. Now we're moving into a whole new area, where all of the challenges and the aches and pains and unsatisfied desires and disappointments are gone.

It's over with. Now we are starting a life, as I put it in story of reality, better than the best we could ever imagine. C.S. Lewis put it this way.

I wish I thought this one up. So great. The door that we've been knocking on, all of our lives will finally open.

All that yearning that we've experienced, all of our lives that that yearning that has not been completely satisfied will one day be satisfied. And so the advice I would give to people in prison, maybe for the rest of their life, who are followers of Jesus, who are brothers or sisters in Christ is the same advice that I instruct myself with in a, in a, in towards the end of my life with a lot of disappointment, to keep my sights fixed properly where they belong. And this isn't just a pick me up, now I can feel better.

This is a reality. The fact is that this world's not my home. I'm just passing through like that song goes.

In fact, I was singing it this morning as I was driving here because I'm reminding myself. And so that, what that does to me, and this is what I told my brother in my conversation with him, I am focused in on, on doing the things here in the remainder of my life that is going to, is going to make a difference in the life to come. Uh, I don't really care about crowns and rewards.

It doesn't resonate with me. But Paul does say that physical exercise profits a little, but godliness is a means of great gain. For it holds a promise not just for this life, but also for the life to come.

And so that's kind of echoes the same concept of Jesus saying, you know, store for yourself, treasures in heaven, et cetera. So if I do these things now, uh, serve, whether it's serving in a sense, officially in some capacity to stand a reason in the formal ministry, or whether I'm living out my Christian life in the lives of other people, my daughters, my wife, my neighbors, other people I come in contact to, I'm living virtuously and trying to attend to godliness and the growth in godliness. This is going to be good for me now in the remaining years I have left, but it's going to be great in the future because there's a payoff.

And so it's, it's, it's like, I think of it like my 401k. I don't know how else to put it, but I think that captures it. There is going to be a return for my efforts here.

It doesn't end in five, 10, 15, probably 20 years in my case, but it doesn't end there. Um, that's the beginning of something is going to be influenced by what I do with the remaining time I have here. So I want to be productive to that end.

Doesn't mean I won't slow down spend more time in my shop on my boat fishing or whatever, but I never want to not be investing. I hear people say, Oh, I can't wait when I, when I retire, you know, and sit back, watch football games, travel, play pickleball. Well, okay, you've earned that rest, but don't just let it be, um, now your, your period of life where you're just simply self-indulging because that's not going to get you anything in the future in long term.

You want to continue to pursue godliness in this life because it bears benefit for you here and also for the life to come. That's in first Timothy somewhere. So that's what I would recommend.

I would recommend to them the same thing I could end myself to, even though our circumstance are somewhat different, everybody faces significant disappointment at this stage

in their life. I know some people say, well, I have no regrets. I think that's nonsense.

I have so many regrets. And I, uh, I think most people do as well. I think that's helpful, Greg.

That's a great, um, first half of this answer because it does apply to everyone. Um, I, I have some things that are specific for them, although of course I think these also apply to other situations too, but, um, the first thing I would say is that because of the gospel in God's sovereignty, they can have rest from regret. And the reason why I say that is because we cannot ruin God's plan.

Even when we sin, God is working through that sin. Um, that doesn't mean our sin was good, but what it means is that we cannot mess up God's plan. And I can say this because we can look at the cross.

What were they doing? They were fighting against God and in fighting against God, they accomplished God's plan. The same thing happens with Joseph's brothers. They're, they're, they're sinning.

They're fighting to sell Joseph into slavery because they hate him. And God is working out a plan through their sin. So it's, you, you cannot ruin God's plan.

We can rest from that. And because of that, because we've been forgiven, because of the gospel, we can rest from regret. We can know that God is working not in spite of our sin, but even through our sin.

And he's working to do something and others and others and write there. You just can't ruin it. Um, so not only can you not ruin it, but you are, you were inadvertently furthering God's plan, even though that wasn't your attention.

So you can rest in that. You can rest in knowing that God has used everything in your life. And he will continue to use it for various purposes, not because it was good, but just because God is always working.

Now, if Jesus conquered sin through those who committed the worst sin of all time, then surely your lesser sins can also be used by God for some purpose, not in themselves, but in his overall plan in some way, even if we can't see it. So again, if, if even the death of Jesus was doing something good, then yours much smaller sins can also be doing something ultimately that will further God's plan. Yeah.

Um, so that's the first thing I would say. The second thing I would say is that God's two biggest goals for us can be pursued in prison just as they could be pursued everywhere else. So they will not be missing out on God's two greatest things.

I mean, they will miss out on, on other things that they can't do, but the biggest thing, God's biggest goals for us are two things. And the first one is he cares about who we become. And

you touched on this, Greg, about increasing in godliness.

That is his whole goal. He, he, he, he's working all things together for good to conform us to the image of Christ. That's what he's working towards.

And guess what? You can do that anywhere. You'll notice as you're reading the New Testament, there's not a lot in there about changing your situation. There's a whole lot about changing yourself or about allowing the Holy Spirit to change you and responding in a way that honors God.

That can be done anywhere. God can do that everywhere. He cares more about that than he cares about our actual situation.

I think a Paul's comment about presenting everyone complete in Christ. And some people think, well, the reason I'm left here is so I could get more people saved than more people go to heaven. I actually think that's misguided because that isn't the way it's described in the New Testament.

It's more what you're describing here. And that is, as Paul put it, to present every man completing Christ. So that, so that's one of God's two biggest concerns.

Now, the other one is he does care about bringing people to Christ. I think that's the other, the other big part of his plan is to gather his people. And guess what? You can also do that in prison.

You can also call others to repent. You can also share the gospel with others. You can also disciple others.

So you can, you can increase your godliness, get to know God, have him, the Holy Spirit, shape you. And you can be a missionary in jail. Those two things you can still do just as you can do anywhere else.

And then finally, you can give your life to others no matter where you are. You can respond as Jesus there was somebody who shared the gospel with David Wood when he was in prison. And if I remember right, the person who shared the gospel with him actually had turned himself in because he'd become a Christian.

So he ended up in jail and he brought David Wood to Christ. And David Wood is an apologist. He's a YouTuber.

He's a lot of followers. Yeah, he's making a huge difference. So look, there was someone.

He was going to let Nabeel Kureshi to Christ. Yes. Right.

And how many did Nabeel lead to Christ? So in prison, he probably thought he was throwing his life away. But God was using him to bring people to himself still in prison. So there is

significance.

There is rest. There is grace. There is purpose.

You're not just sitting there wasting your time. Every purpose God has for us can still be carried out there in prison. And I think if you think if you kind of adjust the way you're thinking about things instead of thinking that you have your life is just put on hold, your life is still continuing.

You can you can read stories about other Christians who are in prison. Richard Wormbrand or people in concentration camps, Christians have been in prisons for since the beginning. Paul was in prison.

Paul's prison epistles, for example. Exactly. Paul was very fruitful in prison.

So if you can just help them to feel like there's still significance and meaning and purpose and we have all sorts of examples of that. Well, our friend Christopher Ewan also became a believer in prison. That's right.

So yeah, so maybe that's another thing you could do is share those stories. Christopher Ewan's book out of a far country. I'm trying to think you could read Corey Timboom's book and she was in a concentration camp.

Richard Wormbrand was in prison, tortured for Christ. Yeah, tortured for Christ, hiding place for Corey. I'm just now reading a new book about Corey called The Watchmaker's Daughter.

So I'm just a few, you know, chapter two into it. I don't know if it's as good as the hiding place, but but you're right. Reading these things that stories about accounts about people who were in prison and still did incredible things for God.

How about the prophets in the Old Testament like Jeremiah? He was in prison. He was in a pit. I think that's right.

Joseph was in prison. Look what he did in prison. There's so many people in the Bible who were in prison.

Their lives did not end. They actually played incredibly important vital parts in God's redemptive story. And so I think those are all things I think will be really valuable for them to hear.

And I think we're going to just do that one question, Greg, because well, I just, you know, I wanted to end before Christmas on an encouraging note for everyone. But thank you. Thank you, John, for sending that question.

And also thank you for doing the work you're doing in prison. That's it's so valuable. And you never know.

I mean, just looking at the story of David Wood in Bill Corrashian, you just never know the

ripples that this will have to the world. Even in this, it looks like you're in this one small place. God does great things through the smallest people who love him and they want to glorify him.

Actually, as Lewis put it, there are no little people. I think that would be safer. Well, no ordinary people at the end of the same concept, but there you go.

The glory, you know, the weight of glory. Yeah, at the end it talks about that. Oh, yeah, you're right.

Yeah. Well, no little people, no ordinary people, depending on who you quote. Well, that's because the Holy Spirit is not ordinary and the Holy Spirit works through us.

So if we are looking to glorify God, then we will find ways to glorify God. All right. If you have a question we'd love to hear from you, just go to X and you can leave your question.

And if you just use the hashtag SCRask, it's all one word, then we will see your question. Or you can go to our website, our website's at str.org. And all you do there is just look for our hashtag SCRask podcast page. And you'll find a link right at the top left.

And you can submit your question there. So just send it. Make sure it's short one, two sentences.

And that's it. And we hope that you all have a very Merry Christmas. Thank you for listening.

Happy Christmas to you, Amy. Happy Christmas, Greg. All right.

Thank you so much for listening. We've enjoyed having you this year. We have one more this year, but I just wanted to thank you now.

All right. Thanks so much. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for a stand to reason.