

Hands Together through Reconciliation 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 (NIV)



A Glimpse through the Fence

17Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Allen's Story

Allen sits on his bunk reading a CMA (Christian Motor Cycle Association) magazine. He remembers when he had a bike of his own. He begins to doze off, dreaming of riding through the mountains and looking at the foliage. There are so many leaves; red, orange, yellow, and some that are a blending of colors. Allen wakes with a start when someone bumps his bed. He awakens back to the reality that he shares a room with one hundred and twenty five other guys. Allen is incarcerated.

Allen hasn't always been in prison. In fact, he was once a successful teacher, devoted husband, and loving father. Now he spends most of his days reading, working as an office clerk, or writing letters to his family. He is told when to go to bed, when to get up, and has no choice as to when or what he will get for the three meals he is served. Allen's story is not that different from that of other offenders when asked how he ended up in prison. Yet his story is drastically different when you ask him what he has learned from this experience or when asked about his relationship with God. Allen's is a story of reconciliation.

Allen was not born into a terrible family, nor was he abused as a child. Actually, Allen grew up in a typical American town with a typical American family. He prides himself on his mother's values, values for which he now has a greater respect. Allen graduated college and immediately began teaching and coaching. He had a love for the game of football that he passed on to his students. He eventually married, and soon they were expecting their first of two children, both girls. They would eventually be "daddy's girls", or so he thought. Everyone was excited when he got the opportunity to try out for an arena football league. He was offered a contract and chose to give up coaching to move from the sidelines to the fifty yard line. Things seemed to be going great, and the money allowed him to buy the girls, his wife included, things a teacher's salary could not afford. Everything changed in the blink of an eye. One direct hit to the left side of his knee brought his world crashing down around him. Allen was left angry, hurt, and lashing out at those around him as months of rehab, mounting medical bills, and mountains of pain continued. He had never been much for God, and when his wife informed him that the church was praying for him, he wanted nothing to do with this God his wife served. Pain killers became his escape until one day they had no effect. He began taking twice the dosage and then triple. Then he experimented with other drugs, eventually purchasing Methamphetamines. He

was one day on top of the world, and the next day he was spiraling into a black pit. His relationship with his wife became distant, and out of fear for the children she sought a separation. He was still trying to figure out how things had gone so wrong when he decided that he could buy back his family's love. Having no money and in a rash of clouded judgment, he decided that a coworker who was wealthy would not need one of her credit cards. It was only a matter of days before his conscience led him to confide in a friend; who convinced him to turn himself in to the authorities. He was sentenced to five years in prison and every day is a different struggle, a struggle, that after a few months of Bible studies led by prison volunteers, he looks upon as a lesson he was supposed to learn. He wishes he was not in prison; he wishes his wife would visit him, and he wishes he could see the girls instead of their pictures his mother brings.

He has been up for modification twice now, and the judgment is that he must remain behind the fence instead of on the outside on parole. When asked about not getting parole, he just exclaims, "It hurts, but there must be something God thinks I need to learn and I can only learn that lesson inside the fence." Allen struggles daily with the issue of reconciliation. He reconciled a lost relationship with a God he had known as a child but turned his back on as an adult. He wants to reconcile with his family, but the wounds run deep for both his wife and his daughters. He hopes one day they will be able to seek counseling together and he will at least get to visit his daughters. He cries as he is reminded of the hurt he caused his wife and wonders if there is a chance for them. He proclaims, "I have given it to God, and I will do whatever I must, even if I am told to let her go." His hardest decision is that he wants to write the woman he stole from and express his sincerest apologize, but he is not sure if he should write. He doesn't want his letter to sound false, leaving his victim thinking he is trying this to have a better shot at parole. So he prays to God and lays his burdens at the foot of the cross. He knows God's timing is not his own so he tries to make the best of it. He has almost read the entire Bible, which is one thing that he is thankful for and explains he might not have taken the time had he not been in prison. He finds as much joy and thanksgiving in his situation as he can and sees all events as God's plan for his life. He tells others about God and God's plans to prosper and not harm him but is quick to tell them that his trying to be the god in his own life is what got him locked up.

Allen settles down on his bunk and picks up his Bible. As he drifts off, he imagines the day when he is reconciled with the world and is on the outside looking through the fence.

Discussion Questions

- What is the "ministry of reconciliation"?
- How would you describe your relationship with God? (Close, friendly, distant, strained, nonexistent)
- Who in your life do you need to reconcile with? (Friends, parents, spouse, child, co-worker, neighbor)
- How will you go about trying to reconcile with this person or persons?
- Why is reconciliation important?
- As ambassadors of Christ, for what are we being called?

Conclusion

Allen's story is not unique. You may know someone like Allen, or you may have been an Allen yourself. We all are simply one bad choice away from possibly looking through the fence. Prison Chaplains and volunteers bring programs inside, allowing the offenders to meet God

where they are. Many people either knew God but chose to turn away, or they are just discovering God. We also find ourselves in that same place. Some of us knew God as children but were not faithful followers, or we are just discovering the mystery today. Whatever place you find yourself seeking God, know that reconciliation is the reason Christ was a sin offering on the cross. Christ gave up life so that we would know and be reunited with God because with our sin, the relationship would not be complete. You might think that you have too much sin in your life for God to ever want a relationship with you, but Allen would be the first to tell you; God takes all kinds! The door is open; God is waiting; come on in and chat awhile. Thank God for reconciliation.

Prayer

Dear God, your love and mercy never ceases to amaze me. I turn away from you, and you appear around each corner. I try to run away, and you chase after me. I hide, and you seek me out. I don't want to be found. I don't want you to see my sin, yet there you are with your arms outstretched, welcoming me home. Why do you love me so? You gave up your child to let me know that I am also your child. Christ gave his life for me, and now I want to give my life to Him. I am ready. I don't promise that I won't mess up, but I will promise to try and follow your will as best I can. Help me, Lord! I am yours if you will have me. I am humbled by your spirit. Fill me, use me, I want to be your new creation. Amen.

Melissa Reid Goodloe, her husband Tim and their faithful dog Trinity reside in Evansville, Indiana. Melissa is a graduate of Memphis Theological Seminary and is currently serving as a Prison Chaplain and an active member of the Morningside CP Church. Melissa's husband Tim is a truck driver, who team drives with his brother, and also currently seeking ordination through the Program of Alternate Studies. Melissa hopes that one day she and Tim will be able to pursue ministry together, since they share different gifts that complement each other's ministries. The whole family enjoys camping and visiting family and friends.