

THE RED THREAD

WHAT ARE YOU RUNNING FROM?

THE GIFT OF SALVATION

Acknowledge to yourself and to God that you have sinned (Romans 3:23).

In sorrow for your sins, turn from them to God and ask His forgiveness (Isaiah 55:7).

By faith receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, believing that He died in your place on the cross (John 3:16).

BETWEEN TIMES

RESTORATION OF FAVOR BIBLE STUDY

Day 1—
2 Samuel 11:1-13

Day 2—
2 Samuel 11:14-27

Day 3—
2 Samuel 12:1-13

Day 4—
Psalm 51:1-5

Day 5—
Psalm 51:5-9

Day 6—
Psalm 51:10-13

Day 7—
Psalm 51:14-17

Day 8—
Psalm 51:18, 19

Day 9—
Psalm 32:1-7

Day 10—
Psalm 32:8-11

WHY & HOW

THE RED THREAD exists to be an encouragement to the men and women currently separated from family and friends in correctional institutions. It is published on 2nd and 4th Wednesdays by **Crimson House Ministries** at 1616 North Robberson, Springfield, Missouri, 65803. Please send all correspondence to that address. Subscription information is available online at: <http://readingroom.crimsonhouseministries.org/>

Each of us in prison has been running from something most of our life. We have been running so hard and so fast that we never saw the razor-wire trap until we were ensnared. Then, our desperate struggle to free ourselves only made matters worse. What are you running from?

My flight started with running from my father. A former communist, having defected to America, he was way too strict and way too brutal. He believed way too much in criticism and way too little in praise. Long before I began to run away from him, however, I ran to him. Forever did I chase the words, "I love you." If he would have uttered those simple but, oh, so significant words once—just once—I would have not turned from him. Most of you know what it means to run from a father.

Freedom. That's what I was running for. Absolute freedom. Obligation, responsibility, discipline—these things I abhorred with a passion above all passions. Anything that even whispered of authority—of rules, of regulations—I fled like the plague. Restriction struck a mighty discordant chord that disturbed the very marrow of my free spirit. Whenever I found myself in dire straits that precluded running, I fought with all of my might. Even tossed into a hopeless "escape-proof" cell at the Seminole County Jail, I refused to surrender. Busting out required me to bust another prisoner out of another "escape-proof" cell; that didn't stop me. Nothing could have stopped me...from running.

No matter how far I ran, though, it just wasn't far enough. It was as if I were trapped in a nightmare with an inescapable monster hot on my heels, breathing its fetid breath down the back of my neck. Studying psychology convinced me that that monster was me,

or, more accurately, what was in me: a huge, gaping void of emptiness, yearning to be filled with affection and attention—a legacy of my parents having abandoned me as an infant in communist Hungary in order to defect. What a wonderful cause of bitterness, believing that you had been traded for freedom like a sack of rice! I sincerely believed that it was myself that I couldn't get away from. Oh, it was true enough, I was empty, but that's not what I was running from.

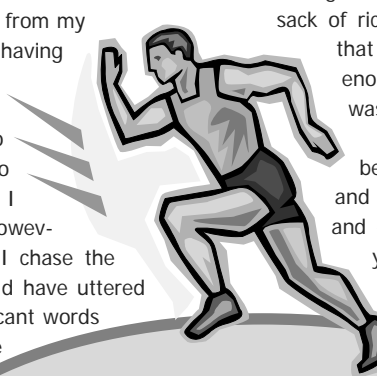
Emptiness, however, sure made it easy to become addicted to crime. Television shows and movies portrayed criminals as sophisticated and glamorous beings. Was it only me, or did you, too, wish to be Tony Montana in "Scarface?" Even as a pauper, did you not feel like a king merely because you were a criminal? Of course

you did! Crime promised to fill the void and delivered a false sense of fulfillment, all the while digging the hole deeper and deeper.

We literally fell for the oldest trick in the book! All along

we weren't running from our fathers, or from ourselves; we were running from God! Satan, the master of lies and deceit, played a wicked trick on us, making salvation appear like a monster and destruction like a savior. As a rat runs headlong to the cheese, so we ran headlong into his trap. It is so easy to swallow that wonderful pill of intellectualism that is modern day psychology and to blame our predicaments on our fathers and the past, and in so doing elude responsibility for our own bad choices. It is always easy to blame others, and to be bitter, and to hate. Satan makes it so, that we might never open our eyes and see the truth—see whom we are really running from and where we are really headed.

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"IT IS ALWAYS EASY TO BLAME OTHERS, AND TO BE BITTER, AND TO HATE. SATAN MAKES IT SO, THAT WE MIGHT NEVER OPEN OUR EYES AND SEE THE TRUTH—SEE WHOM WE ARE REALLY RUNNING FROM AND WHERE WE ARE REALLY HEADED."

PASTOR'S DEVOTION

This issue's focal point is confession, leading to a restoration of God's favor. A restoration of favor cannot be limited to the natural definition of the word: favor means, "friendly regard shown toward another especially by a superior." Instead, we must take the Scriptural context into account to fully apply the meaning to our spiritual life. By natural definition, David's desire for a restoration of God's favor could easily overlook his personal sin and his petition could have simply been his "God" anticipations (cf. Psalms 51:18 KJV). But David was a man after God's own heart, and he understood "favor" as being more than just 'friendly regard', he knew it as the Lord's personal presence. It is not just a "kind consideration" that defines favor, it is Immanuel (God with us) (cf. Luke 1:28.) It was the restoration of the Lord's personal presence that David longed for.

If we are not careful we can seek the Lord for His favor by the natural definition in desiring Him to do His good pleasure and protect us and those we love, all the while harboring an unconfessed and sometimes hidden sin that prohibits the true favor of His presence.

"What are sins? Sin, says the Westminster Shorter Catechism, is "any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God." This echoes 1 John 3:4, "sin is lawlessness." It has other aspects too. It is lawlessness in relation to God as lawgiver, rebellion in relation to God as rightful ruler, missing the mark in relation to God as our designer, guilt in relation to God as judge, and uncleanness in relation to God as the Holy One."¹

Sin initially keeps us from God presence, and thus His favor. The generation in which we live errs greatly in thinking that God could or would save out of love or generosity, and disregards completely the Bible's teaching that sin is a stench and abomination to God.

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LET'S HEAR FROM YOU...

We love hearing from you and so do our readers. Please send your articles, poems, praise reports, testimonies, etc..., to **The Red Thread, Crimson House Ministries, 1616 North Robberson, Springfield, MO, 65803.**



THE SAVIOR

I walked the road of earthly pleasure
Enjoying all of life's sinful treasures,
Filled with feelings of being lost, empty and alone.
I searched for ways to rid myself of sins I
could not atone.

It seemed I could not bear the load
Along life's rough and lonely road.
So many sorrows and so many sins,
With all my treasure I was still empty within.

And then one day the Savior I found,
He came upon me without a sound.
He filled my life with light and song
And He forgave me for my every wrong.

If Christ my Savior is anything,
Then to me He must be everything.

And now my hope is built on nothing less
Than the Savior's blood and righteousness.

—Paul David, inmate

(*What Are You Running From?* ...continued from page 1)



All along, God had been tapping us on the shoulder, trying to get our attention. "Hey, look! Look where you are headed!" But we were running too fast, our eyes filled with lies. Even caught in the trap that is prison, God had been tapping away. "Hey, look! Look where you are!" But we were fighting too hard to escape, our eyes still set on lies, our souls burning with pride, our hearts with lust. Even as we thrashed about and the cords of the trap (Proverbs 5:22) tightened, all our fevered minds could think about was: "Just one good lick and I'll be somebody!" Sound familiar? We couldn't even see the truth when the truth when the truth was wrapped around us, squeezing the life out of us, squeezing the life out of us, squeezing the life out of us, whipping us toward the brink of insanity!

My friend, God is still tap-tap-tapping away. Are you in a lonely confinement cell as you read this? "Look! Look where you are!" He is trying to make you see that you have run so far, yet have gotten nowhere. Do you truly wish to continue to run and to end up here?

A wise man once said that every man is created with a God-shaped vacuum in his heart. That gaping void of emptiness, the Lord Jesus Christ is prepared to fill now (Revelation 3:20.) You don't have to run anymore.

Stop, my friend! Rest! Listen! Do not run into the grave; I promise you, Hell is one trap that you will never escape!

I beg you, my friend, with every particle of Jesus in my heart, not to put it all off until tomorrow, for tomorrow is not promised. Behold, now is the time! (2 Corinthians 6:2)

—Zoltan Dobi, inmate
Milton, FL

Watch your thoughts, they become your words.
Watch your words, they become your actions.
Watch your actions, they become your habits.
Watch your habits, they become your character.
Watch your character, it becomes your destiny.
Your destiny is to be like Jesus.

—James Kist
Cressor, PA

DESTINY IN
JESUS

PASTOR'S DEVOTION

(continued from page 1)

Sin is not just a minor deviation, an error, a misguided step, or a genetic trait that has no healing. Sin is the gross aberration from God's original purpose for man. Sin is not something to live in; rather, it is something to be saved from. Hence Paul's words to the Romans that first identifies sin's universality, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (3:23); and then sin's remedy, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed" (Romans 10:9-11 KJV). Only by His grace can we make that initial confession that brings us out of sin's darkness and into the light of Christ's righteousness.

Yet, as born again believers we cannot neglect a continued prayer of repentance. Jesus speaks of this in Matthew 6 when he demonstrates asking the Father to forgive us of our trespasses. As we mature as believers there will be personal sins, which, once revealed to us by His Spirit, will need a repenting from. And while His grace co-

vers us from our initial repentance, through our unknown sin, and even after its revelation; that sin may hinder His gifts in us and thus, our joy in Him.

Look at David's words regarding the weight and presence of his sin: Wash me thoroughly; it is ever before me; make me hear joy and gladness; restore unto me the joy of salvation.

At least a year had passed from the time of David's sin with Bathsheba until Nathan's convicting words. David's sins had been before him for months; his joy and gladness were gone from planting to harvest and through the former and latter rains; and he recorded no Psalms during this time of darkness. Hidden sin will keep us from functioning in God's fullness. Yes, David was still king, and we may still keep our "life" position in Him, but the Lord has come to give, not just life, but abundant life. Sin keeps us from the abundant life.

Prayer Focus: I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah* (Psalm 32:5.) Let us seek the Lord as David did, confess our sins, and be healed.

¹ Packer, J.I, 1996



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