



# TAMEONTA

*God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (1 Corinthians 1:28-29 ESV)*



## The Parable of the Persistent Widow

*Interpreting & Understanding the Parables with Jeremy Loyd (ex-prisoner)*

*And he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor respected man. And there was a widow in that city who kept coming to him and saying, 'Give me justice against my adversary.' For a while he refused, but afterward he said to himself, 'Though I neither fear God nor respect man, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will give her justice, so that she will not beat me down by her continual coming.' And the Lord said, "Hear what the unrighteous judge says. And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay*

*long over them? I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" (Luke 18:1-8 ESV)*

**H**ello again brothers and sisters. We have a wonderful section of Scripture to examine together; let us get started with this powerful teaching from none other than Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. This parable is consistent with the classic "lesser to greater" argument. As the ESV Study Bible explains this dichotomy, if the lesser (the Judge) answering the widow's petition is a fact, how much more will the greater (God) answer our requests? We really need to be careful and not go off into the ditch with this piece of Scripture, however. I need to be very clear here. God is not a magic genie who is there at our beck and call to do our bidding as we see fit. He is our heavenly Father, the Creator of all we see and will ever know; He is infinite in His wisdom, He is

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sovereign over all things, and He loves us more than we could ever be loved by anyone. Yes, Jesus is telling us to bring our requests to Him. Yes, Jesus is telling us that the Father is waiting for us to petition Him and to never lose hope. The important thing we must remember is that God is infinite in His all-knowing wisdom. We can only see the day as it unfolds for us, and this means that we are really at a disadvantage when it comes to knowing what is truly best for us. God sees all things, He is the Alpha and the Omega; that is to say, He knows how it all ends. He is already there. He is here, He is at all places at all times. He is omnipresent. Let us look at some Scriptures to help us develop a vantage point from which we can see how God operates within our lives: “For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!” (Matthew 7:8–10 ESV).

WOW!!! Another powerhouse from Jesus Christ. Man, He really had a way of just bringing it like none other, didn't He? It actually does my heart good to read that. What He is saying to us is that God knows what is best for us. He knows that we have situations, petitions, scenarios of endless possibilities running through our finite minds. He made us, He knows exactly what makes us tick, and He definitely knows what we need right when we need it. A pastor that has worked with me in the past when I was doing time once told me, “God may seem slow to us sometimes when we pray; however,

***“When the time was right God granted me my petition. Yes, it was painful waiting for God to move in my situation, but when it all had come to pass I was better off waiting for God’s answer to my prayer, and not what I wanted.”***

He is never late.” I used to cringe when I heard that because I really wanted God to do my will; I was not concerned with what His will was at the time. Once I watched my life move forward, I saw that if God had done my will at that moment it would have been a disaster. When the time was right God granted me my petition. Yes, it was painful waiting for God to move in my situation, but when it all had come to pass I was better off waiting for God’s answer to my prayer rather than what I wanted. As I write this for us all, I am dealing with

another situation that seems dire to me right now. But I know that God knows best and will always work all things out for the best. Yes, it is uncomfortable and sometimes even downright scary to think to yourself, “What will happen here? How will this all work out? I just do not see the way, Lord.”

Let us consider a brief, powerful Scripture. In Romans 8:28 Paul stated, “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (ESV). A great friend of mine, and one of the dearest brothers I have had the privilege of studying under, Chaplain Dan Matsche, emphasized “all things”

to me. I used to really pull my hair out with that one. I thought, “Is my getting set back another year by the parole board included in the ‘all things’ category?” It really does say “all things,” does it not? I know, brothers and sisters, that can be a difficult pill to try to swallow when you’re in the trenches and it seems like there is no light at the end of the tunnel. But Paul wrote that Scripture and it was inspired by the Holy Spirit. It is at this point we have to make our stand. We have to trust that God is powerful enough to not only protect His word, but to deliver on what it says. His word has not been compromised. It is exactly what He wants it to be, and it is trustworthy and true.

God is the source of all life—period, end of story. He has huge hands and He never drops things. We fail over and over again, but God just handles things outright in exactly the manner in which they need to be handled. I know, believe me, that things get really dark down here in this fallen world and it seems hopeless at times. We need to hold fast to our spiritual truths. We need to really get on our faces and ask God to bring us peace in these troubled times. We need to ask God for comfort while we wait. God loves us more than we could ever fully know in this lifetime, and He lives in us Christians through the Holy Spirit. We are vessels prepared beforehand for honorable use. We were empty vessels before we knew Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. But the moment that we felt that strong conviction from the Holy Spirit and we trusted in Jesus Christ, we became vessels of the Living God. Amen and amen!! Now, knowing that, we ask the “Comforter” to bring us comfort.

I almost hate to speak this next piece to you, but I have to say that in the turmoil and the pain is when I grow the most. It is in these times of shaping and waiting that I actually learn to lean more and more on God and His perfect plan. Oh, brothers and sisters, it feels like a fire purging me from the inside out, burning all the impurities out of my life. It feels like I am a sword being pounded on the divine anvil of God. Fire, hammer, more fire, more hammer, until I am formed into the product that the Lord Almighty desires. Yes, I know you all can relate to this analogy. I wish I could take credit for this; however, it has been passed down to me in one form or another for years and years. The point is that we are going to struggle, we are going to stumble, and yes, we will fall. But Jesus has huge arms and He will carry us when we just cannot take another step. Thank you, Lord Jesus Christ. Thank you.

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In his commentary on Luke, Darrell L. Bock observes, “The answer to the dilemma of prayer is that it is not intended to do something for God, but for us. It is one of the mechanisms of relationship that God gives to His children to be in touch with him. God may not need prayer, but we do” (Bock 1994, 291–92). So how do we put this all together? It starts with trust. I know most, if not all, of us may have some type of a trust issue that is

rooted heavily in past experience. Many of us have experienced what clinical psychologists call A.C.E.'s. These are Adverse Childhood Experiences. We have seen horrible things. Horrible things have been done to us. When we experience these events we oftentimes become leery of anyone or anything we see that could potentially hurt us or even let us down again. Here we go, brothers and sisters. We can trust God; He is a loving Father. One of my favorite verses in the Bible is this: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6 ESV). Another great Scripture is, "Cast your burden on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved" (Psalms 55:22 ESV). I know what you are thinking: Well, I am definitely not righteous; how will that apply to me? You are correct in your thinking. Let me elaborate: as a person dwelling in the flesh you are not righteous. But the Holy Spirit living in you is. How does that translate? You are made righteous by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. So yes, "he will never permit the righteous to be moved."

In the book of Job, Job told God: "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted" (Job 42:2 ESV). God can do all things? Yes, it is true and we can count on it. Let us take a look at some other Scriptures to give us the proper lens to see how mighty God really is. Jeremiah said, "Ah, Lord God! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you" (Jeremiah 32:17 ESV). And just a little further again in Jeremiah it says, "Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?" (Jeremiah 32:27 ESV). The answer is obviously no. Nothing is ever too hard for God, and nothing ever will be. These Scriptures are some of the spiritual truths we need to study and meditate on. We need to ask the Lord to write these on our hearts. In one of my favorite books of the

***"Yes, we may struggle, but if we are rooted in God's word, which consequently will keep us connected to God, we will be able to not only live on, but we will also be able to produce fruit in times of trial and hardship."***

Bible, the Psalms, it says "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you" (Psalms 119:11 ESV). Yes, memorize these Scriptures, pray on them, and watch these life-giving words take root in your life.

When the storm comes—and I promise you it will—this broken world is sure to offer up some extremely trying and difficult situations to us all; this is just an unfortunate fact of life. There will be times of drought and struggle. I also have a prescription for that.

Jeremiah wrote, "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit" (Jeremiah 17:7-8 ESV; cf. Psalm 1; John 15:1-8) That, brothers and sisters, is a gorgeous picture of how God provides life even in the midst of a hard season. Yes, we may struggle, but if we are rooted in God's word, which will keep us

connected to God, we will be able to not only live on but we will also be able to produce fruit in times of trial and hardship. Now let us look at yet another Scripture that is sure to help provide stability for us. In Philippians Paul wrote, “Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:5–7 ESV). It really says “in everything.” That is one of the key pieces, if you will, that I have personally had to just cling to and watch as it all comes to fruition. And yes, I have seen so many things that looked hopeless for me turn into some of the greatest growing points, not only for my faith in God but for my life as well. I know, I know—easy to preach, hard to live; especially when you are down in it, and it looks dark and hopeless. Let the Living God provide that hope for you. Never give up, never surrender, never think it is the end. This world is broken, but we are only sojourners, not permanent residents of this earth. We have a heavenly home waiting for us.

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Are you a person who has not yet been able to trust in Christ and His finished work on the cross? Are you on the fence, so to speak? Are you wondering, “Could this really be real, this Living God, this Christ who died on the cross for mankind?” I can promise you, it is all real, it is all true; every jot and tittle are life-giving. He really can not only change your life for the better, but He can bring you so much more than I could ever contain in any writing or document. Trust God and watch Him move on your behalf, watch Him bless you. Let us look at yet another great scholar who just has a way of saying what really needs to be said. In his book *Glory Veiled & Unveiled*, Gerald M. Bilkes writes:

The point of the parable is clear. Though the judge was unjust, the widow received her request because of her persistence. And would the believer, who comes not only to a perfectly just judge (see Genesis 18:25) but also a gracious heavenly Father, find persistent prayer to be fruitless? The answer is clear: of course not. Gospel access is sure by virtue of God’s character. It’s true—the Lord can delay for His own wise reasons. But isn’t it often our own delays and doubts that keep us from praying? By revealing the Lord as so infinitely better than an unjust judge, Christ gives this parable to foster gospel access for the discouraged believer. (Bilkes 2012, 146)

God wants us to ask Him, He wants us to faithfully lay our requests at the foot of His heavenly throne. The Apostle John said, “And this is the confidence that we have toward

him, that if we ask anything according to his will He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him” (1 John 5:14-15 ESV). Another great Scripture says, “Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and whatever we ask we receive from him, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him” (1 John 3:21-22 ESV). Now as we look at that wonderful passage, we see how obedience to God actually results in blessings for us. This does not mean that we are going to get an exchange for our works. We need to remember that our Lord is a giver of grace. It is by grace alone that we were saved, and it is by God’s loving grace that we receive any blessings. There is a blessing for obedience. I will give you an example. I used to struggle terribly with a lifelong addiction to substances. I asked God to please deliver me from this. I stayed obedient to God by not using substances anymore. God gave me the strength to stay clean in times of turmoil and also in times of complete peace. The result of the obedient behavior was God giving me strength and a new life with no more substance abuse issues. You see, brothers and sisters, God was right there with me every step of the way. He is still with me at this very moment and He loves me, all of me—even the parts of me that no one likes, not even myself. He feels the exact same way about you. What He has done for me, He will do for you as well. If your prayer is consistent with His will, then He will surely answer it.

***“The Spirit actually intercedes for us when we just do not know what we should be praying for. He has also given us His word in which He has revealed His will to us in many places.”***

You may ask, “How do we know the will of God?” This is a great question, and there is no easy answer. The answer is multi-faceted and something we need to examine with Scripture. I could never completely give an answer to this question, as God’s will is so complex that I do not think that our finite minds could absolutely know just what is the will of God. However, we do have some answers in Scripture that we can examine

and rely on to be true. As I mentioned above, God has given us the Holy Spirit. In Romans 8:26-27 Paul says, “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” (ESV). We are monotheistic in our belief. That is to say, God is one—and He is. However, He is three in one. The Holy Trinity is Father, Spirit and Son. The reference above to the Spirit is actually the Spirit of God. He knows the perfect will of the Father because he is part of the Holy Trinity (1 Corinthians 2:6-16). He is probably the strongest and most valuable “Helper” that we have going for us when it comes to discerning the perfect will of God. The Spirit actually intercedes for us when we just do not know what we should be praying for. He has also given us His word in which He has revealed His will to us in many places, and I urge you all to help answer this question by searching the Scriptures and coming up with the answers—as much as can be answered. God wants our complete trust and surrender in life. The will of God is for us to love His Son, and for us to love one another. We can see

for sure that those two acts of love encompass so much more than what is written. There are so many ways for us to love one another, and I challenge us all to do just that. Please pray for me, as I certainly pray for you all; that is one of the greatest forms of love we can truly demonstrate. I personally challenge you all, brothers and sisters, to get creative in showing love—not only to one another, but to the world as well.

Jesus sums up this parable with a rhetorical question that seems strange in its connotation but is clearly posed to elicit a prayerful response, not only from the disciples but from all who would read these refreshing words of life. In verse eight He says, “I tell you, he will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Luke 18:8 ESV) The answer is obviously yes. Jesus asks this question to prompt constant watchfulness, as well as prayers directed towards His return. We should always look forward to the day that Jesus returns and makes all wrong things right. “Come Lord Jesus, come!” should be our biggest request (1 Corinthians 16:22; 2 Timothy 4:8; Revelation 22:20). But let us not discount the amazing power of God to deliver on limitless blessings within the confines of this world, down to the most minute details of our lives. God is a loving Father, and He is waiting for us to commune with Him through prayer. He loves to hear from His children. Let us not grow weary in seasons of drought or waiting, but let us draw ever nearer to the throne of the Living God and bring our hopes, dreams, desires and requests to Him. Please pray for one another, both inside the prison walls and out. God is not bound by barbed wire; He is everywhere. May the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ guard your hearts and minds, brothers and sisters. Amen and amen!!

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- Bilkes, Gerald M. 2012. *Glory Veiled and Unveiled: A Heart-Searching Look at Christ's Parables*. Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books.
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## More Than a Fallback

By Marcus Checots

*The following testimony was received by The Cell Church in response to our offer of study Bibles in exchange for prisoners' stories of the work of Christ in their lives. It represents the author's own work, with minor editing to protect his privacy.*

**M**y name is Marcus Checots. I am 30 years old. I am currently incarcerated at Crowley County Correctional Facility. I see parole in

February and am praying God allows me to go home to my family. My parents have been married for 37 years, I also have an older and younger sister. Since my incarceration, they have been great support for me. I am excited to be back with them and build on my relationships. I am ready to go to church as a family.

To begin, I started getting to know about God at 7-8 years old. My grandma would take my older sister and me to church. At the time I didn't really understand what I

was going to church for. I went to the youth part, which at the time was all about having fun, playing music and food. Church was a blast. I didn't have a relationship with God, I just went because my grandma wanted us to go. She definitely had all the right intentions. I wish I would have been more aware of it at the time.

I kept going to church for a few years, but I never grasped the real meaning of it. I started getting older and stopped going. I was more focused on school. During Thanksgiving, my grandma would say "The Lord's Prayer" before eating. I believed there was a God and believed in Him. Still, I never developed a relationship with Him.

As I finished up middle school and began




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high school, I started getting into trouble with the law. I was drinking and smoking weed with my friends. I started going down the wrong road. Drugs, bad grades, I stopped caring. I was disappointing my family and felt like I was letting everyone down. This kept going on for my whole four years of high school. Surprisingly, I was able to graduate. After graduating, I dated a girl for two years and got into more hard drugs. Finally, I moved back home and was getting sober, working a

full-time job. I was getting my life back. After moving back home, my mom told me she had been praying. She had prayed and prayed, asking God to bring me home. After two weeks I came home. Amen.

For the next five years, I worked the same job. Things were going fairly well and I was spending a lot of time with family. One day, my mom gave me a ride to work. On her way home, she was hit by a drunk driver going 55 mph. My sister kept calling me, but I was working and unable to answer. I finally snuck into the breakroom and checked my phone. I got a lot of texts saying my mom had gotten into an accident. I freaked out. I asked my boss if I could leave and she said, "Of course!" I sprinted past my mom's totaled car, all of the way home. My mom was sitting at the kitchen table with my father and sister. I was wondering how she wasn't in the hospital. I asked, "Are you alright, mom?" She replied, "I'm okay." I said, "How are you okay?" My mother replied, "God was with me." As soon as she said this, I hugged her and cried. All she had was a few bruises from the seatbelt. That moment changed my family's life forever. A few weeks prior I had gotten into trouble with the law, but was fighting and hoping to have the charges dropped.

A few days after the accident, my mom and I went to the Christian bookstore. We bought Bibles for everyone in my family. I went home and looked through my Bible, and then we all read some scripture together. I went to my room



and began thinking. On February 2, 2012 at 2:03 a.m., I gave my life to Jesus Christ. I dropped to my knees and was bawling in tears. It was the best feeling ever! I never experienced the feeling until that night. I was so excited to tell my mom. Once I did, she told me we were going to church together Sunday. Going to church gave me the chills. I wept a lot. I believe that experience was beneficial to me.

Once I found God, I wanted to learn and understand more. Since 2012, I have developed a much stronger relationship with Jesus. I began memorizing verses and looking deeper into the Bible for answers. Each time I started doing good, I stopped searching the Scriptures. I felt like I had all of the answers. Then, I'd get into trouble and fall back on God. I've grown to realize that God isn't a fallback in my life, He is much more than that. He is my Father and directs my paths in faithfulness and love.




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I know I have made wrong choices but I also know God is continuing to teach and chastise me. In my current situation, He has taught me to focus on my faith and trust in Him. He has kept His word on keeping me safe, and not giving me more than I can handle. I'm going to live up to my part, to never place my powerful God on the back burner again. Thank you guys for giving me a chance to tell you my story, God bless!

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## MINISTRY UPDATES

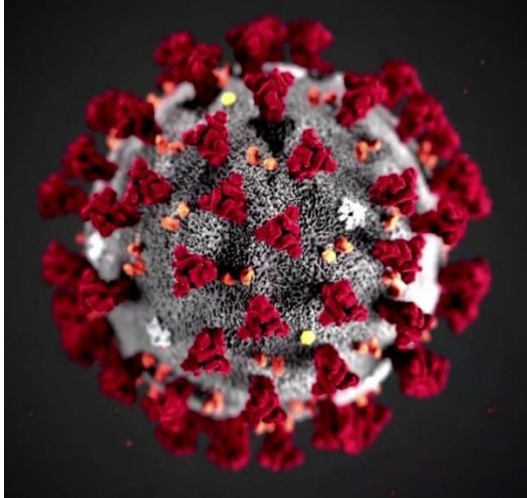
*By Mark Walker*

### New Partnership with Fellowship Denver Church

Fellowship Denver, my home church, recently partnered with The Cell Church to provide financial support for our ministry. As part of Fellowship Denver's recent "First to the Lord" initiative, the church moved to expand its impact on the community through strategic ministry partnerships. We are deeply grateful to God and to the elders of Fellowship Denver for considering The Cell Church worthy of



financial support as a ministry partner. Please join us in thanking the Lord for this new relationship, and asking Him to give the leadership of The Cell Church clear direction for the future as we seek to grow the ministry utilizing the additional resources He has provided through the generosity of Fellowship Denver! It is our prayer that more such partnerships will develop in the future.



## Coping with Coronavirus

We at The Cell Church know that the Coronavirus pandemic has had a major impact on your daily life in prison. We have heard from a number of brothers in facilities where there have been significant outbreaks and extended lockdowns. Please know that you are all in our prayers during this unusual season, and we are continually asking the Lord to keep you and your families safe and healthy, and to provide unique opportunities for ministry as volunteer programs remain suspended. Those of you who have

written to us during this time have inspired us with your faith in the Lord and your willingness to step up and be the church in your facilities when there are no religious programs available. If we can support your ministry in any way please let us know!

Of course, the virus has had an impact on The Cell Church out here as well. We are conducting our Saturday services online. Some of our members have caught the virus, and by God's grace have recovered fully. Additionally, our TUMI classes have been suspended. We recently received funding to expand TUMI to more facilities, and when the pandemic began we were preparing to start one new class and to schedule meetings with volunteer coordinators at additional prisons. That is all now on hold. Please join us, as you feel led, in praying that the Lord will open doors in His perfect timing for The Cell Church to grow—especially by offering the opportunity for biblical education and ministry training to more men and women on the inside. Thank Him for His ongoing provision through our generous donors during this challenging season, enabling us to serve you as you seek to grow in your faith and minister to those around you in His name!

*“I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him! Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.” (Luke 12:4-7 ESV)*

## Praying & Planning

The Cell Church has been abundantly blessed by God this year with increased financial resources and additional volunteers who are excited about getting involved with prison ministry in new ways. Over the past several years the Lord has also expanded our ministry vision from the original seed of an idea that He gave us when we started The Cell Church. It is therefore time for our ministry leadership to pause and seek God's direction as to how we might best expand and develop in order to become more effective and impactful in serving you while being faithful with the people and resources the Lord has committed to our stewardship.

Therefore, our leadership is currently in the process of praying about these matters, and we are planning a short retreat later this summer to seek God's direction and plan for The Cell Church in the next six months, the next year, and the next five years. During the retreat we will be revisiting our mission and vision statements to incorporate the new dimensions that the Lord has added to our ministry. Lord willing, we will also be working to clarify our organizational structure, set goals and objectives in every ministry area, assign responsibilities according to the spiritual gifts God has given each of us, and develop a budget for new endeavors as the Lord leads.

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*“Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.” (Psalm 127:1 ESV)*

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As we prepare for this essential season of listening to God's guidance for the ministry's future, we are thankful for your prayers. We want to ensure that we are following the Lord's leading and direction rather than our own ideas and agendas. He has surprised us before with the direction He has taken The Cell Church, and it has always proven to be better than anything we could ask or think and has made for His glory and the good of His people who are or have been in prison. We are deeply grateful to all of you who have faithfully encouraged and supported us over the years! Seeing the Lord's work in and through your lives and ministries motivates us to serve you as effectively and holistically as we possibly can. We are excited to see how the Lord will use The Cell Church in the coming years to equip and support a mission force of current and former prisoners for expansion of God's kingdom and the glory of Christ in the prisons and in the world!

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