

August 2, 2020

A Life-Changing Encounter

Luke 19:1-10

Sonny Valeriano was 20 years old when he was arrested for selling marijuana. Shelesia Parham was incarcerated at 23 for forging her mother's name on bank withdrawal slips. Twenty years ago, James Herson, while struggling with addiction, burglarized a home. These three, along with 15 other individuals, committed crimes and then worked hard to turn their lives around. Sonny is now a massage therapist with a number of degrees. Shelesia owns multiple newspapers and hosted a weekly gospel hour on local radio. James works with the Milwaukee Rescue Mission, the organization he credits with helping him beat addiction.¹

Earlier this summer, the governor of Wisconsin granted pardons to each of these individuals (18 in all), saying they earned the pardon "by serving their sentence and making positive contributions to society."² Each of the people pardoned saw where a life of crime and addiction would lead them, and they changed course, helping others, giving what they have earned to charity, and devoting their time to righting the wrongs they committed in their past. Like Zacchaeus, they saw the error of their ways and chose change.

"Zacchaeus's story shows us that when we meet Christ, something wonderful and life-changing takes place in our lives and blesses others around us,"³ writes the student book author. God's love is redemptive, and God's forgiveness is transformative. Through Christ, we all have the chance to let go of our past and forge a new path. We have the opportunity to become better people, to serve others, "for the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

While a pardon does not expunge crimes, it restores many rights of convicted persons, such as the right to vote, the right to serve on a jury, and the ability to hold certain professional licenses. A pardon is a second chance, a kind of forgiveness. May God show us mercy as we seek pardons, and may God be with us as we offer forgiveness to others.

1. How do you feel about granting pardons to individuals who have turned their lives around and work to make positive contributions to society?
2. What things in your life need to be pardoned? Will you let God give you that pardon?
3. Who in your life deserves pardon or forgiveness from you?

Rachel Mullen is the Features and Acquisitions Editor for *Christian Living in the Mature Years Magazine*.

¹From nbc15.com/2020/07/16/gov-evers-pardons-18-people-most-do-far/.

²From nbc15.com/2020/07/16/gov-evers-pardons-18-people-most-do-far/.

³From *Adult Bible Studies*, Summer 2020, by Robert Gardner (Cokesbury, 2020); page 91.