John Rush is one of those men that the majority of people need to look up to physically. God also endowed Rush with a big heart and passion for aftercare. Using his combined past experience with Justice x Mercy and Freedom Gate Ministries, Rush is now the executive director of New Person Ministries (NPM). With 3 houses and 20 beds, NPM houses ex-offenders who need a place to stay. Before they are accepted, these men go through an application process complete with recommendations from chaplains. If the ex-offender has been serious about his faith in the prison setting, agrees to abide by NPM guidelines, and has $100 a week (this money can also come from a family member or other supporter) for room and board, they are generally accepted to live in one of the three NPM homes.

There are many transitional housing and shelter options out there for men and women leaving prison. The interesting thing about the ex-offenders living at NPM is that they are often not welcome at other shelters or housing options. Many people question why some shelters (especially Christian ones) refuse to take certain ex-offenders. Rush has the same question although his 40 plus years of working in and with the prison system offers some answers. The common denominator is that most of the people NPM accepts are sex offenders and the average shelter or transitional housing facility has a fear of these people and a fear of making waves with their supporters, according to Rush.

The sex offender label can come from varying circumstances. Rush explained, “A sex offender can be someone urinating behind a bar in Lebanon or vicious person in California that kidnaps [and violates] a 6 year old girl and then panics because she's a witness to what he looks like.”

The fear of sex offenders is a bit like a fad, Rush explained to me. In the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, no one feared the sex offenders. It was the drug dealers who were the “devils” and the “evil ones”, but now those same people are regarded as having a disease and are no longer feared. Stranger danger stories we hear from the news media keep the fear alive in many adults. “Children are probably in much greater danger from other crimes than being violated by a sex offender,” Rush reasoned.

Even though John Rush and the center manager, Steve Olivo, feel like most sex offenders get a bad rap, they still do not come down easy on sex offender’s actions. “It's a sin that's not pretty” the two men explained to me. “We believe firmly in treatment. They need to understand the hurt that they caused.” Part of the treatment at NPM includes that the actions of the sex offenders never happen again. They need to show genuine repentance, willingness to grow in Christ and knowledge of God, and the principles of God. They are not permitted to joke about it, not relive it, or “enjoy testifying about how tough of an idiot they are.” Rush shared how he is sensitive and protective of any victim he comes in contact with.

Rush and Olivo unapologetically cast some blame on the church for the way sex offenders are being treated. “The world is somewhat calloused toward certain sinner groups even if they're repentant and remorseful and living a new life, walking a new walk. Some people aren't capable of forgiving and forgetting and letting healing take place…” So what is the church to do? First, according to Rush, the church leaders should start listening to both sides of the story. “I find most Christian leaders listening to the Christian counselors who are treating victims and not being balanced to see what's happening on the other side of the fence.” NPM would love to visit your church and speak with an adult Sunday School class regarding this particular group of ex-offenders and share with the people how to treat them so as to extend the grace of Christ in their lives. Olivo reminded me that “all have sinned…” (Romans 3:23). Regardless of what that sin is, Christ wants to heal the sinner and usually chooses to involve the Church in that process.

If you are interested in hearing more about New Person Ministries and how they are changing lives for both offenders and victims, visit their website at www.newpersonministries.org.
Imperfect People, but a Perfect God

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Romans 8:22 (NIV)

We live in an imperfect world. Observe society today to see the chaos the fall of man has caused: death, violence, and infidelity. We look up to other mortals as heroes. Then when they fail, often our hopes fall with them, because our hopes are more often put in an imperfect man than a perfect God. It was Shakespeare’s fictional magical Puck, in A Midsummer Night’s Dream that said, “What fools these mortals be.” How true indeed. It seems whenever man is involved, fallibility follows.

The Fall Spins Off an Imperfect Man

As pointing to Romans 8:22 it reflects on the fall in the garden with Adam and Eve. Most Bible scholars believe that the whole creation was affected by this fall including the heavens. It is believed the animal kingdom was at peace and probably even vegetarian in nature, which they will again revert back to when Jesus returns in the Millennium (Isaiah 11:6). In my “Dinosaurs & Dragon” presentation I do, I theorize that possibly this fall also brought the violent nature we see in the fossil collections of the dinosaur kingdom with the T-Rex and other carnivore creatures. The point I am trying to bring out is everything was affected by the fall.

Imperfect Bible Heroes

Recently I opened a letter from an inmate requesting a copy of my spiritual warfare book Soldiers of the Cross. He wrote, “I need this book because I am really messed up and I need all the help I can get.” I thought, Thank you for being honest, because in truth we all are really messed up and we only get by through the Grace of God. In fact God uses imperfect people; take the Bible for example. David was an example of one that had these horrible failures; he had an adulterous affair with the wife of Uriah, one of his soldiers, then schemed a military setup to have Uriah the Hittite killed in battle. Yet even in his short comings God proclaimed that David was a man after His own heart. Follow the pattern and imperfections of other Bible heroes-Abraham, Moses, Solomon-and how they were still able to contribute to the Bible. The disciples were certainly not the cream of the crop in the perceived talent pool at the time, but Jesus knew what He was doing in forming a team that would ignite the Gospel to the world. In fact I must say it has been imperfect people that have encouraged and helped me the most in ministry. Men with imperfections, helping an individual like me who has so many flaws. This is why I am drawn to and love ministering to prisoners. There is nothing hidden in their past and when a man is broken then he can reach others for Christ.

A Perfect God Reconciles an Imperfect Man

Christ uttered on the Cross, “It is finished”. The Greek for this phrase is “Teleo”. It means it is complete, accomplished, perfect, paid in full, and nothing can be added. Through this perfect sacrifice on the Cross an imperfect man becomes perfect in the site of God. This is the miracle of Calvary.

Face it - we have all failed many times. When Babe Ruth played baseball, he was a five time strikeout leader. In fact, Babe stuck out 1,330 times in his career or 16% of his career at bat. Oh, by the way, he did sometimes make contact. In fact, he hit 714 home runs (without steroids) and is in the hall of fame. So the next time you fail, remember you are only one swing away from knocking it out of the park for God.

~Del Burkholder
Ready and Waiting

The doctor said our baby was due to come on March 8, but my body had been getting ready for a while and my motherly intuition told me the baby would come before the projected date. However, I didn’t know exactly when. So, I tried to make sure things were ready about a month in advance...hospital packing lists made and placed where my husband could find them, overnight arrangements made for our almost 2 year old daughter, the nursery cleaned, baby clothing washed and put away, and so on. As the beginning of March drew closer, I would sometimes think to myself, maybe I’ll have our baby in my arms next week at this time and sometimes maybe I’ll have our baby in my arms tomorrow at this time! We were all excited to welcome a new baby and I keyed myself up for this big event for a while.

As we turned the calendar page from February to March, I began to wonder if the baby would ever come! We waited and crossed the days off of the calendar. We waited and talked about what the baby would look like. We waited and wondered if the ultrasound technician knew what she was talking about when she said it would be a boy. We waited and waited, not knowing when the day would come for us to meet our baby.

Having a baby is a pretty big deal and most people don’t know the exact day they will meet their baby. Jesus returning to earth is a much bigger deal and there is only One who knows when that will happen – the Father. In Matthew chapter 24, Jesus talks about the angels and even the Son not knowing when Jesus will return to the earth. If waiting and not knowing when something will happen drives you a little crazy, you are not alone. It’s hard to know how to plan for something if you don’t know when it’s going to happen. Maybe that’s why we are told in Matthew 24: 44, “For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will.” We are warned to be ready at any time because we don’t know when Jesus will return. In hindsight, I should have been more in tune to the arrival of our baby. I didn’t think my labor pains were real (for a variety of reasons) and because of that we almost didn’t make it to the hospital on time. I simply didn’t think the Baby was going to come that day. That’s how it is with Jesus’ return - the time we least expect it is the time He may return. That’s why He admonishes us in the next chapter to “be on alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour” (Matthew 25:13). Since no one knows when the day is that Jesus will return, make preparations today so you are ready when He comes to take us to Heaven with Him.

“Emily Bucher

Setting the Course continued from page 2

reality of what would happen to Him there, and not the fear of facing the biggest challenge in His earthly life. He set His face to go there cause He knew He was not going alone, and it was His desire to do the will of His Father.

The second time I saw Jesus set His jaw as it were was after spending an agonizing night in the garden praying to His Father, asking Him if it would be possible, let this “cup” pass from Him. Three times He asked, three times there was no other way offered nor was there any other way possible. At the end of the prayer as the soldiers came to arrest Him, He once again was resigned to go through what the next agonizing hours held for Him. As He finished praying in Luke 14:42 He said, "Arise, let us go.”

As He was before Pilate He showed complete trust and control as He told Pilate, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.” He was very content to let His Heavenly Father have His way for His life.

That sacrifice He made that day is the very thing that empowers us today as Christians. His Resurrection power is our source of strength in times of winter days, when no grass is growing, when no trees are budding, and no flower are blooming. It’s in this time we know the power to go on is not absent. Just as in the tree and the grass, the life is in the roots and in due time they will produce what they were made to produce. As for you and me, the sacrifice and suffering He made was not turned and looked at the steel door and high fences, but rather have chosen to turn and look to Jesus as their source of strength and meaning to life. They have done as Jesus had done many times, as He "set His face or heart" in a specific direction and went the course that was set before Him.

I have been so encouraged as I have observed my brothers who are incarcerated. They say they will have their freedom taken from them while they are incarcerated. Men who can face each day with renewed courage, men who can face some of the most difficult circumstances, men who can come along side of a struggling brother and encourage him in his walk with God, men who can help carry others through a difficult situation and save them from harm, men whose prayers reach far beyond the steel fences and razor wire that surround them, touching lives and bringing healing and hope to others. These are not people who have lost their freedom, but rather men who have found freedom in the Lord Jesus Christ, in spite of being incarcerated.

I have been encouraged many times as I go into prisons to participate in a church service or Bible study by men who truly love the Lord and who have not turned and looked at the steel door and high fences, but rather have chosen to turn and look to Jesus as their source of strength and meaning to life. They have done as Jesus had done many times, as He "set His face or heart" in a specific direction and went the course that was set before Him.

May we too find the strength to "set our hearts" toward trusting God, knowing our future is in His hands. As someone said, "If He brought it to you, He will bring you through it.”

May I encourage you today with the words of Jesus in John 8: 31-32, “If you abide in my Word, you are My disciples, and you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.” PTL.
If you are interested in having Del perform for your church or organization, please contact him at delspeak@dejazzd.com or call 717.435.2438. All revenue earned from The Lighter Side of Del ventriloquist events directly benefits Streams of Life work in prisons.