

Christmas at Lexington 2017

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Okay, forgive my blathering as a Mother. My oldest son has been many years at Lexington Prison in Oklahoma among large, potentially dangerous populations without an altercation or a scratch. Now he is being studied by the Warden and Deputy Warden to try to understand his particular success with the incarcerated. They are delving way back into the history of his record. On paper they will find over 15 Christmas programs, many gospel programs, team sports, rodeos, food drives. But it is only ink. The truth is in his reputation. The inmates say that without "Coach" incarceration would be "hell."

What does he do? He respects their humanity; he never goes back on his word; he defines boundaries and never crosses them himself. He shows love, mercy, but not the snowflake kind which would be a death sentence. If they are cold, he brings them a blanket. If they are discouraged, he brings them hope as only the spiritual gift of exhortation can. As big Squally told me once: "Your son, your son, I had been in here 20 years without shoes. Look at me." Indeed, he was as big as the black man in *The Green Mile*. "My feet were so big, shoes did not fit. But what coach did, is he went out and had pair made for me."

And stories like that abound. Stories of a Samson strength. One time during a rodeo, one of the inmates started to slip off the bull. Coach, high above the chute reached down and with one arm brought him straight up and out danger. Another prisoner told me, "that happened twice, but Coach won't brag on himself." Once, two men who were about to sink shanks in each other were pulled apart and thrown half way across the gym. The rest of the population fell back in amazement.

Drugs, guilt, and condemnation consume them but he gives them words of encouragement. Guys who can't get off meth, he tells them, "tomorrow you will do it." And they do. Those who fear they will never make parole he puts in a good word and if the Lord says, "Coach, this one gets out" * he passes it on. Revival often sweeps the place. They get "atta boys" an encouraging word, a different pillow, anything that will help them do time. One dying man asked for a Pizza, and Coach brought one into him against the rules. Bibles are passed out and used. And the new Warden is amazed and wants to turn Coach's methods into policy, but they are hard to figure out. It is Christ's charisma and mercy and prayer and encouragement that go a long way in a dark place.

Post Script: Written by Eric's Mom after the Christmas of 2017. Eric, with the help of Nick Harris' Ariel Chapel and with the generosity of OKC businesses, raised \$64,000 for

the prisoners' wives, children and for all the workers at Lexington Prison. Long before the actual event, Eric would comb OKC businesses to ask for donations. To those who donated, he would return in person to thank them.

One business notable for its generosity is was Panera Bread who practically furnished all the pies for the Christmas bash. But there were many more whose names I don't know.

Post Script. Sometimes God would give Eric foreknowledge of a prisoner's release, when I wrote this story, I didn't know that Jimmy Scott, a former prisoner, had just received 'a word' from Eric.