

# FORUM

## Freedom from a different slavery

**Nigel Alston**

Motivational Moments

"Every great moment has a halfway moment, that split second when we are given the opportunity to do something different."

—A Halfway House Bulletin Board Message

"My name is ... and I WAS a drug dealer," the young man said as he leaned into the microphone to speak at Union Baptist Church during the morning worship service. The congregation erupted with praise as it heard those five words — "I WAS a drug dealer." He was one of more than 30 or so graduates of the drug dealers conference that attended the concluding service.

God had delivered in unimaginable ways, and the evidence was talking about how the former drug dealer had been changed. It was a high time inside the walls of the church and I am sure inside the minds and hearts of the young men and women who attended the conference. I believe more people than the drug dealers were changed too.

The Corner to Corner or C2C, Drug Dealers Conference was held at Union Baptist Church over a three-day period, ending with a graduation cere-

mony during the morning worship service for those who chose to attend. Over a hundred men and women were given the chance to make a choice in the direction of the rest of their lives. Many of them had to be there: It was mandatory for those who



Rev. Sir Walter Mack Jr.

were currently in drug rehabilitation programs. However, many of them came back each day and brought others with them. A level of trust had been established, and change was taking place.

The force behind this one-of-a-kind conference is the pastor and teacher of the church, the Rev. Dr. Sir Walter Mack Jr. The conference was designed, according to him, to reach out to the dealer to help create a self-

awareness resulting in a profound positive impact in the community. By all accounts, that first step was achieved.

As Mack shared with the congregation, during the ceremony, one attendee indicated on his evaluation form that if it were not for this conference, THIS weekend, he would probably be dead! What a testimony to the power of reaching out to an often untouchable and unreachable segment of our society.

There was doubt on both sides about the conference, and perceptions changed over three days, both ways. Two former police officers, for example, members of the church, saw another side of the problem they had observed over too many years. It was a human side. One shared with me a conversation one drug dealer had with a friend on his cell phone from the parking lot of the church.

"Where are you," the friend wanted to know.

"I'm at Union Baptist Church," the drug dealer told the friend. "It's not what I thought it was going to be."

In other words, it was not a sting; it was not bait and switch. It was for the purpose designed: to help make a difference. He was impressed and moved by that and had to tell somebody.

And so were others who committed to moving forward from this point on.

"I will look forward and not back," said one attendee.

"I will change my thought process and attitude," said another.

"I will join a church," said the young man who spoke to the congregation on Sunday morning, in a Saturday afternoon session. He and four others came forward to turn their lives over to God. Several others were saved in more ways than one too.

It was quite a sight to see the celebration and graduation ceremony as the committee that planned the conference lined the aisle leading to the pulpit area, making way for the men and women, white and black, old and young, to come forward. It was as if the Red Sea were parting, this time for another group of God's children to be saved from a different form of slavery. They had been possessed by their possessions, fast money, fast living, jail and drugs. They were trying to escape and had been provided a way, through the church.

That great moment on Sunday had its halfway moment sometime during the three preceding days, when a choice was made by participants in a split second — to do something different. It will not be easy transforming from an old life to a new one, though, as they pursue a different path from this point on. However, a step has been taken in the right direction, and everyone involved is different and sees with new eyes. That's something to be thankful for.

*Nigel Alston is a radio talk-show host, columnist and motivational speaker. Visit his Web site at [www.motivationalmoments.com](http://www.motivationalmoments.com).*

## Battling breast cancer at 30

**Julie White**

Guest Columnist

Since Elizabeth Edwards was diagnosed with breast cancer, I have found myself doing more thinking about being the parent of young children while fighting this battle. At first, I wanted to write her a letter, to tell her that the treatment is not as bad as you envision when it begins. But yesterday when I heard a part of her interview on the "Today Show," it struck me that she is not afraid of the treatment. She is afraid for her children. She is afraid that she may not live.

Maybe I am not as strong as Elizabeth. Maybe it was a coping mechanism. Maybe I did not have these same thoughts until now because I am younger or because I have never experienced the loss of a child as she has. I am not sure why it has taken me so long to come to this place, but I am here now. There is a possibility that I might not win this cancer war. There is a possibility that after all my treatments it might not be gone, or it might come back.

Another young woman fighting breast cancer told me recently that she heard it is harder to be a breast cancer survivor than to fight the war. The doctors told her that while you are going through treatment you are doing everything you can to battle the disease. You are an active participant in your care on a daily basis. You work



Elizabeth Edwards found out she had breast cancer around the time her husband lost his bid to be vice president.

with your doctors to get the chemo that ravages your body. You show up daily for radiation and you check yourself into the hospital so they can cut the disease out of you. You sacrifice your dignity, femininity, sexuality, energy all in the name of beating the disease.

But when you finish your treatment they send you home and say, "See you in three months." And you go home and hold your breath. In three months, if you get a clean bill of health, they say, "See you in three months," and you keep doing this for a lifetime. You can get regular checkups and take care of your body, but I

was already doing that, and that does not prevent cancer.

I have always loved carrying the heavy load. I have taken great pride in moving so far from home and building a life completely on my own with Mark. I beamed the day I received my master's degree, having put myself through school, and landed a great job on my own merit. I have climbed the ladder in my career while taking great care of my family. I love being referred to as strong and being depended on by all around me.

Maybe that is why I was determined to be Wonder Woman when facing this dis-

ease. I remember telling a friend the story of my first day in the chemo treatment room, fighting back tears and facing that room head-on, saying to myself, "I will be damned if anyone in that room is any stronger than me." I put on my game face, allotted one year of my life to fighting this battle and carried on as if nothing had changed. I have worked full time, carried twins and fought cancer. No one is tougher than me.

But now I am tired. The newness of the fight is gone. I am at the end of the pregnancy. I can no longer sleep at night. I am constantly uncomfortable. I cannot keep up the full-time work schedule. I am about halfway through my treatment, and I feel no reason to celebrate as I thought I would. When I heard Elizabeth admit that there is a possibility she will not beat this, it struck me. It is finally staring me in the face. I can be the toughest young woman to ever fight this disease, and I may not live.

That leaves me with nothing to write Elizabeth, no insight to share; no words of wisdom come to mind. She is already tough. She already knows how to carry the weight of the world on her shoulders. I am five months down the road she has just begun and no more thoughtful or reflective — just another mother of young children who plans to cherish the time I have today to spend with my family.

*Julie White is a 30-year-old mother of 2-year-old Benjamin and is expecting twins on Dec. 30. She is the communications director for the state treasurer's office.*

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