

Hello and welcome to the "Free in My Faith" podcast.

[JAY HARVEY, Director of Prison Ministry for NickV Ministries]

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[FREE IN MY FAITH PODCAST Hosted by Jay Harvey]

[NICKV Ministries]

[Our guest today: KOJAK FULLER]

Jay: Hey, welcome, everybody! Jay Harvey, Director of Prison Ministry for Life Without Limbs, and this is the "Free in My Faith" podcast. Glad you tuned in. Glad you're listening. You can always listen at www.lifewithoutlimbs.org, and this is Episode 3. I am very excited today to have with me Kojak Fuller, and there are so many ways we could go with this conversation, but what I really want to do, since I know Kojak a little bit, is just kind of dive in and just chop it up a little bit with some basics at first, then tell the listeners about a ministry that you're involved in starting and getting up and running here in the near future.

But I won't try to fake it—I have known you a long time, respect, admiration, inspiration, but we're also kind of brothers because we both came to the Lord around the same time in different circumstances. I was delivered from alcohol and just a bad way of living. You were kind of a famous person in town because of basketball and everything else, but you ran into some trouble as well. Just a synopsis of your story so that the people know, however much you want to tell of it, but go ahead.

Kojak: Yeah, that'll work. Listen, it's awesome to be here. I appreciate this, man. I always love being in your presence anyway, man. Thank God for you. So, when it comes to my story, here it is: a young man coming from Anderson, Indiana, playing basketball. I grew up in a family that was very athletic.

We played every sport, and being competitive was one of the—hey, listen, "Either you're going to be competitive, or it's almost like you go into exile. You can't even be in this family," you know? So, man, I grew up with older cousins, uncles that played basketball. I played every sport, but basketball became the sport that, I was like, "Hey, listen, I am getting pretty good at this right here, so let me try this all the way," and I just fell in love with it.

What a lot of people do not know is that I fell in love with it to the point where it became a defense mechanism. So, I tried to really become good at it so people wouldn't know some of the other stuff that I was going through as a young man.

And so, here it is, man. I rose to a level of fame when it came to basketball here in Anderson and then around the state. A lot of individuals didn't know I was playing good basketball, but I had my first child at 15. I had my second child at 16. By the time I graduated high school, I had three kids and had no clue what fatherhood was, but I was playing good basketball.

Jay: Did you know at the time--it is so fascinating--it was a defense mechanism, or did you discover that later?

Kojak: No, I discovered that later because, you know, I thought basketball was who I was.

Jay: Your identity.

Kojak: Yeah, because that's how I was talking to people, meeting people. People were giving me things that I didn't know, so I was like, "Hey, man, this is who I am."

Jay: This is so crazy! People do not know, and because you and I understand the draw of basketball in Indiana, especially in Central Indiana. Then you played at a place called The Wigwam, which was famous and had a 10,000 seating capacity. It was like a small college atmosphere or a big college atmosphere, really. You had boosters at 14 or 15, like some people do in college at major colleges, giving you things that nobody knew about.

Kojak: Absolutely.

Jay: Wow! So, then what? You keep playing?

Kojak: I kept playing, and I used it more and more as a defense mechanism. I was fortunate enough to go to college playing basketball. However, I didn't know what was going on inside of me was going to come out at some point. I tried to hide it as long as I could, but it took over, and what I was doing outwardly, socially, interrupted what I was doing on the basketball court. When I went to college, I played for a year, got into some trouble, ran, and went to another college down South. Eventually, I had to come and face the music.

Jay: So, facing the music meant a period of incarceration?

Kojak: Yes.

Jay: Ok, that's unfortunate, but what happened there for you?

Kojak: Oh, man! The greatest thing that ever happened to me in my life was where I met the Master!

Jay: Amen! Wow. Man, what...

I am thinking of things, and I am thinking of... you and I think alike in certain environments where not everybody thinks alike. Sometimes people need something to cut through the clutter to get to the actual what happened. It wasn't because of other things that happened. This is a divine moment that everybody has an opportunity for, but nobody ever said how it would come and when. And so, I like to get rid of all the, "Well, of course, when you're in a desperate spot, you're going to cry out," but see, we've got to keep pushing through the weeds here.

That makes no difference. I have counseled people for years and pastored, and people who feel guilty about asking God to forgive them when they're on their deathbed with cancer. Listen, if we're going to give God to be the Author of our life, then He's got to have some editorial control. He's got to say, "I think I want to do it this way." That is why we should never label and we should never set aside somebody who meets God under circumstances of incarceration. We need to figure out how to celebrate what God has now chosen to do and begin a work in you because He had this in mind a long time ago.

Kojak: Absolutely.

Jay: Okay, so having said all that, when you come to that knowledge of God, and your faith is growing, and then you are released, I have always wondered, "Was your faith stronger inside or outside, or are those two different things?"

Kojak: Well, it is different serving God in two different places. Serving Him incarcerated, I was at a level where I had to trust Him on a certain level for certain things. Upon my release, now I have to trust Him in a different way. What I mean by that is this: I was a father in prison. I was able to see my kids—I wouldn't say often, but here

and there, I would be able to see them, so I had to father them through pen and paper. Now, being out here, I have to see them. Now I have to deal with the conversations of, "Daddy, I struggled during this period of time when you were not there, and it wounded me in an area to where I struggle with other relationships." Now I have to face that. God had taught me something when I was in prison. He had taught me because I thought that I was preparing for coming out here. You know what I am saying?

I am preparing, man, God preparing me for the streets to get out there, and the Spirit of God just lovingly rebuked me and was like, "No, no, no. I am not preparing you for that because that is going to be there. I am preparing you for when you have to face it." I am preparing you to learn how to trust Me when you have to face it because it's not a matter of if I am going to face it.

You're going to have to, and you're going to have to know Me in a way to where you learn how to walk on top of that.

Jay: Isn't that the most powerful understanding, the most powerful intimate detail, I think, that applies to everybody? God is always trying to get us, to woo us in, not to just bow and obey and cower, but to get to know Him at a level where we can trust Him because...

Kojak: Oh, absolutely! Come on now.

Jay: So, and I love what you said about when you're incarcerated, and I've done Prison Ministry, and I am not speaking for anybody but myself, but I do know that I have seen God-fearing men and women that they just have to display their faith differently when they're incarcerated because there are different things you have to do to survive in that environment, just like there are things you have to do here to survive, as well, but they're totally different.

Kojak: Totally different.

Jay: Right. But God is still the same.

Kojak: Still the same God. Right.

Jay: But what society tries to do is separate those two things, and they would be much happier and grow much quicker if they knew that it was the same.

Kojak: That's where the opinion comes in. I mean that's jailhouse religion. It's like, "Man, you have no idea because when I was in prison, I had to learn how to trust God on a level where I had no experience." I had no experience in prison, so I couldn't lean on my own understanding because I had none. So now I have to trust God in a way where I'm holding on to You, and it has nothing to do with what I see.

Jay: Peter had no experience walking on water, so he said, "Okay, this is what I have to do." Wow. So, one more question about that. Then I want to talk about your ministry. What is...being on the inside and being a spiritual leader to other men, I know that you were. I know that you were trusting God and making plans. Your life was changing rapidly for the good, but for the good of the kingdom. It wasn't just about getting out of trouble; it was about getting right with God so that your whole world opens up. When church volunteers or people come in, what's the one thing that you would want to say to them that you wish they would understand better before coming in?

Now we never criticize anybody for going in and doing prison ministry. To physically and mentally choose to go through and get patted down and go into a prison to minister to people, see

people, and love people is a wonderful thing. But sometimes they miss opportunities. What's one thing in your experience because this will help people who are listening to this to maybe think things through before the next time they go in?

Kojak: You know what, Pastor Jay, I think that...see the playing field is not level because when individuals go into the prison, they go in with the mindset of, "Man, y'all need help, so I am coming to help you." It's like, "Wait a minute now, I am already here, but the help already showed up. That is why I am sitting in this service because I have already been helped." If they can go in with the mindset that we're on the same playing field, and these are brothers and sisters in Christ, then now I am in a position to go in to receive. "God, what you got for me?" When you go in with that mindset and you don't go in thinking, "I have to give them something," because the thing about it is, there is some stunted growth.

Jay: When I train churches or volunteers, they love to quote the verse that says, "When I was in prison, you visited me." But I remind them that Jesus didn't say anything about talking. He just said, "You visited me." There's no specificity about having to talk. Now they will, but you said it. I think this is the biggest key is If you can walk out and know that God has taught you something—the volunteer—God has taught you something about yourself through one of His other children because you're equal, then we're to take that back out.

Kojak: But it has nothing to do with location.

Jay: Oh, it has nothing to do with location. I love helping people get to that point. But one of the main reasons I asked you to be on the podcast was because a couple of days ago, I learned that you're taking this new ministry to a different level, and I want to give you a platform to do that. So tell us about Money Ministries.

Kojak: Oh man!

Jay: I am excited for you, man.

Kojak: Listen, man. I am super excited as well, man. One thing I understood was that there was a time when God had "new" in my spirit, and I was like, "Man, new." When we get new clothes or new shoes, we posture differently. Matter of fact, we want to show people, "Hey, look, I got a new watch." We want to show newness off. When that was in my spirit, the next thing you know, I lost my brother. He was three years younger than me, and he died in prison.

The very thing I made it out of, he didn't. And so, I didn't understand that part of "new." And He was like, "Yeah, you're going into a new season, but you're going to experience loss. You're going to experience a new season without what you're used to having."

But I didn't know what God was preparing me for. So, here it is: Money Ministries. As you see this logo, this is my grandson right here. My grandson was my male companionship because I have girls here in my hometown.

So, he's the first grandson, so he was like that male companionship. But MONEY stands for "Moving Obstacles Now for Every Youth." And so, here it is, me and my grandson would play Nerf basketball in my house. When he would score, I'd say, "Money!" When I would score, he'd be like, "Money!"

And unbeknownst to me, on May 12th, my grandson wasn't going to be here anymore. He had a bad heart, and he had open-heart surgery before he was one. And he had countless--about 30 or 40 surgeries even after that. They would go through his groin, so this was a routine surgery. My son called me and told me, "Dad, he's in surgery." I said, "Okay, fine." My wife and I just got back from Puerto Rico.

Jay: How many years ago was this, Kojak?

Kojak: Seven. 2007.

Jay: Ok, seven years.

Kojak: Yep, yep, yep. Seven years. So here it is. We got a call. My son called me and said, "Dad, they put him on life support." The air was sucked out of me. I'm like, "Man, what?" So we get there on my way to Andy Riley, and they said he passed, man. I was so wounded.

Jay: Yeah, yeah. This God that has delivered you, and saved you, and protected you, and released you now is creating things that are good and positive. You have so much to give back. Then you hearken back to this: it's new, but there's loss. That was your first experience maybe with, "Man, God, what is going on?"

Kojak: Completely lost and angry. Listen, I was so upset with God because I knew God was going to heal my grandson. By the time he was ten, he would need a new heart. I was believing God. This is still Jehovah Rapha, right? Sure, and that didn't happen. I was so wounded that my family looked to me as that individual who would say, "Hey, listen, man, everything is going to be all right. God is still who He said He is." I didn't have that for them. I couldn't even muster up a, "Thank you, Jesus." I was so wounded and so angry with God, I didn't tell a lot of people because I didn't want people to "Scripture me to death."

Jay: Oh my goodness, yeah, come on. I didn't want to hear any Scriptures, man. Not at this time. I don't want no Scriptures. Listen, man, that was the best thing that happened to me. The reason why I say that is because that is when the Spirit of God was able to speak to me. "They that

worship me must worship me in spirit and truth." I thought that, you know, I was angry with Him. And as people, we try to protect God and be like Him as if He can't handle how we feel. You know what I am saying, and so here it is, man. I was so wounded. And as I was going through, there was a brother, man, staying good loved this brother, man, and he invited me to a prayer group with a lot of other businessmen that were believers.

And I was like, "Man, I really don't want to come." He was like, "Please, man, just come." So I came. And the next thing you know, they were talking about different businesses and prayer for those businesses, and they got around to me. And I was like, "Listen, brothers, I can't pray for y'all because I can't even pray for myself." At that moment, they put everything down, and they put me in the middle of the floor, laying hands on me, and prayed for me. On my way home, God dropped in my spirit, "Money Ministries." I was like, "What?" I'm like, "What in the world? Money Ministries?" He even gave me the acronym: "Moving Obstacles Now for Every Youth." That is how old my grandson was when he passed away.

Jay: My gosh.

Kojak: And the reason why I say that, is this, Pastor Jay, is if you never saw the 6-inch incision on my grandson's chest or I never told you about his condition, you would never know that he was sick. Why? Because he didn't look like his condition. That is when God was ministering to me. "Listen, The reason why my grandson never looked like what he had been through was because the people around him—his family—we never magnified the condition. We magnified who he was." And so, here it is! God is saying, "This is what I want you to do for the young people. I want you to create an environment that magnifies who they are so they can outlive their condition."

Jay: That's right. Oh, that's so good! This is not new. The ministry itself is new, and it's yours. You've been doing this kind of work, though, in some form or fashion for a long time since you got out of prison. But now you feel the call--and I think God does this, Kojak. I think after a while, He refines our ministry. He takes things from a level down to a little bit more refined level. And then there comes a point where only you can do some of the things that He's calling you to do. It's this process that we go through. So, what is your goal maybe just for the next few months or first year of Money Ministries as far as getting the word out or telling people where they can go to find out more?

Kojak: Absolutely. You can go--just got the website up. Me and my son and did it. It's still in the beginning stages, so, you know, we're trying to build onto it, but it's moneyministries.com.

Jay: Dot com. Real simple, I like it.

Kojak: So, the next few months, what I am going to be trying to do is put together a package, not only for outside of school, but I want to go into the schools and build the relationships with

the kids at the schools to where after school we can continue it. But also, we become a help and support for the school system to where now the teacher doesn't have to deal with behavior and they can teach. Why? because we're dealing with, you know, educational improvement. We're going to help them educationally. We are dealing with also social and emotional learning. We deal with, you know, managing emotions. These are just things that, taking a kid right where they are.

Jay: And that is what I like about the acronym, and so one thing that I think is different and good about what you said is the removing of the obstacles. It's one thing to go in, and be with, and mentor and provide encouragement, and those are all great things. But the Step 2 is you can have all that and still go home with obstacles that nobody knows about, and then you create a defense mechanism. You've got to remove the obstacles, right? And if somebody would have done that for you maybe, and given you an outlet to get some of those things removed, maybe it would have looked differently. But that's, to me, the exciting part of someone who is obviously is equipped and called. It's not just to be with your neighbor; it's to bear their burden, and so that's what I hear.

Kojak: That's exactly because--one thing, and specifically--us as people we do this, but specifically I am going to talk about youth. Youth, what they do is, whatever the obstacle is. It could be mom strung out on drugs or dad is incarcerated. So that obstacle right in front of them—every relationship—everything outside of that obstacle—is filtered through the obstacle. So now, people don't understand what's going on with this kid is because all the kid can see is this obstacle. So Money Ministries, what we do is--let's come—let's remove the obstacle so you can see a bigger perspective of yourself and your life.

Jay: That is so good. So often, we can't necessarily change some of those things, but you just said it—it's about allowing them a space to see without that filter. They don't know how to do that. Man, I am excited. Well, listen, I am going to have to have you back at some point, and we'll see how things are going, but I really appreciate you coming. You're my brother. I'll be sure and tell everybody I know about Money Ministries.

Kojak: Make sure you tell everybody you know because, man, listen, we've got some exciting things coming up, and we need support.

Jay: Good, I am so happy. Thanks for joining me today.

Kojak: Thank you, brother. Love you, man.

Jay: So, for Life Without Limbs Ministry, this is podcast Episode 3, Money Ministries and Kojak Fuller. Thanks for tuning in, and we'll see you in a couple of weeks. We're out. Thanks, Kojak, appreciate it.

From Legend to Lockup
<https://youtu.be/Ks1gwjpcay>

25:26

Kojak: My pleasure.

Jay: That is powerful, powerful.

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