

I want to tell you all about a man named Jeff Grant.

In the 1990's, Jeff was a lawyer in Westchester County, New York.

He specialized in real estate law and he represented a company that owned hundreds of buildings.

He was loved and powerful.

Everyone thought Jeff was their friend.

If Jeff was low on cases, he'd take a walk and come back with 10 new ones.

He was a big fish in a small pond.

Jeff also had a grandiose lifestyle, had the biggest house and most expensive BMW in town.

He and his family would take lavish shopping trips while on luxurious vacations, and they spared no expense.

Jeff was also a drug addict, mostly addicted to opioids.

He became hooked after he ruptured his Achilles tendon in 1992.

After March 2000, Jeff's law firm was in pieces because he had bet a lot of money on startups, which he lost after the dot-com bubble burst that same year.

Then 9/11 happened, and remember, he lived in Westchester County, New York.

Because Jeff was desperate for money, he decided to fill out paperwork claiming that his firm had suffered economic hardship after 9/11, even though they were way out in the suburbs and nowhere near the Twin Towers.

Jeff embellished the application a little bit, but he needed this disaster relief loan, so he justified it to himself.

Needless to say, the government caught up with his false claim and his excessive drug use.

On July 28, 2002, Jeff resigned his law license, conceding his unethical borrowing.

(Soon after, the state ordered his disbarment.)

Soon after that, he called a physician friend who once again wrote out a forty-tablet prescription for Demerol.

Jeff picked it up at the pharmacy — this time with a sense of doom.

“My life was over,” he says. “I knew I was going to try to kill myself.”

That night, after his family went to bed, he sat down in his easy chair, turned on the TV, and downed the vial of pills.

Then he sank away into oblivion.

Jeff came to, woozily, in the morning.

During the night he had slid out of his chair and now he was lying crumpled on the floor.

He vomited.

He crawled to the kitchen to look for more pills to end the job, but no luck: His recent string of failures now included the failure to commit suicide.

In the blur of days that followed, Jeff knew, as those who hit bottom sometimes do, that he would never take another opioid painkiller.

He arranged admission to Silver Hill Hospital in New Canaan to begin his long, slow, climb back to health and vitality.

But by this time, his family relationships were so strained that his wife left him, and so he was effectively homeless for two years.

He slept on friends' couches while going to recovery meetings, usually about 4 a day.

Even though Jeff was on the road to recovery and even though he was no longer practicing law and he'd lost his license and even though he repaid the loan, Jeff was still convicted of his crimes.

He spent a year and a half in prison because of that false disaster relief loan.

He reported to Allenwood Correctional Institute on Easter Sunday, 2006.

Fast forward a few years, today, Jeff and his new wife, Lynn, run the Progressive Prison Project, based in Greenwich, CT.

Their ministry helps white-collar and other nonviolent offenders deal with prison issues.

Jeff and Lynn also founded its sister ministry, the Innocent Spouse & Children Project, which helps the families of the accused and convicted navigate their harsh new realities.

At the same time, he's now also the executive director of Family ReEntry, an organization founded by Elizabeth and Prescott Bush.

The agency helps ex-cons return productively to their cities and towns.

It offers, among other things, intervention; mentorship; skills training; and mental health, substance abuse and domestic abuse counseling.

I know Jeff's story because I first met him in 2009, shortly after he was released from prison.

We met at Union Theological Seminary, where we were classmates.

After he was released from prison, Jeff felt the call to go to seminary.

We graduated together, and he pursued the path of ministering to former convicts.

Today, Jeff and his family are thriving and making an incredible impact on the lives of thousands of formerly incarcerated people and their families.

Jeff thought his life was over, which is why he tried to kill himself.

But after a long, painful road of recovering from addiction, recovering from losing his family and serving a prison sentence, Jeff is now thriving.

He is doing all that he can to create a new life with this second chance that he has been given.

I tell you this story because Easter is about new life from what we once thought was dead.

We have eggs as one of our symbols for Easter because they represent new life waiting to be born.

Whether it's a bird egg or turtle egg or fish eggs, or even human eggs!

Let's not forget that all of us come from an egg that was fertilized and developed until it was ready to be born.

You know what else represents new life?

Beans!

That's why we have jellybeans at Easter.

A bean is a seed, and seeds, planted in the ground, grow into plants - all kinds of plants.

Food plants like strawberries, and celery.

Seeds grow up to be vines and bushes, and they even grow into trees.

So seeds are a symbol of new life, as represented by jellybeans.

And you know what else represents new life? Rabbits!

That's why rabbits are also a symbol for Easter!

We can't forget the Easter bunny!

And why do rabbits or bunnies represent new life?

Because they are prolific!

Rabbits are known for producing LOTS of babies.

And here's a science lesson for today.

Rabbits are lagomorphs.

A lagomorph is an animal that becomes mature sexually at an early age and can give birth to several litters of babies a year.

And the litters are often large.

Lagomorphs breed early and often and have lots of babies.

Female rabbits also have the capacity for superfetation.

Another science lesson.

Superfetation means that a female, while still pregnant with one litter of babies can become pregnant again with a second litter before the first is born.

Now that's fertility!

And those of you who are here who have had children are probably saying thanks be to God that that can't happen to humans!

So, with eggs, beans and bunnies, we do really well with the symbolism on this Easter holiday.

We are all about new life, second chances, beginning again.

That is, after all, what Jesus' resurrection was all about.

The authorities, the powerful ones, they thought they could kill Jesus and his message and his followers would disperse and abandon him.

But we know that's not what happened.

Jesus' death gave his teachings new meaning, new power, and new life.

His death actually taught us that nothing can kill the message of unconditional love.

And so we celebrate his resurrection today, celebrating life after death, second chances, beginning again when we thought all was lost.

I am sure we have all been on the mountaintop, at the beginning of our second chance, when all is well and we are flying high.

Maybe you're feeling great because you stuck to your Lenten practice this year and you came to church each week, and your job and your relationships are doing well, you are just acing life right now.

But we've all been at the bottom of the mountain as well, maybe you're at the place where profound failure has struck and you can't see a way out, you're not even sure new life or a second chance is in the cards for you.

Maybe you haven't been to church in ages, you gave up on your Lenten practice right after Ash Wednesday, your job isn't going well, relationships are strained, you and God aren't on speaking terms.

We've all been there too.

Wherever you are, I hope that you don't feel boastful or shameful, proud or guilty.

Because we have all succeeded and we have all failed, and the good news of this morning is that we are offered second and third and fourth chances everyday of our lives.

Each morning we wake up is a new day, a chance to do things differently.



Each interaction we have is a new opportunity to manifest God's love in this world.

Each decision we make is a chance to turn over a new leaf, start newer, healthier, kinder, more faithful habits.

My friends, wherever you are in the journey, whether your life is like Jeff's or maybe a little less dramatic, may you know that God's love is not conditional.

Your worth is not measured by how few mistakes you make, how many problems you avoid, or how perfect you are.

Nothing you do, no matter how unconscionable or unethical can sever you from God's love.

Through God, we are all offered opportunities for new life.

A chance to begin again.

Next time you experience a massive failure, may you remember this sacred truth, that just as Jesus experienced new life after death, so do each of us.

Happy Easter!

Source: Information about Jeff's journey can be found on the website [www.prisonist.org](http://www.prisonist.org) and the article is entitled, "The Redemption of Jeff Grant – By Timothy Dumas, Greenwich Magazine – March 2018."