Former Viking, Jackson, to share message for men

Spencer Dream Center to host freewill offering men's breakfast Saturday

By Randy M. Cauthron

Joe Jackson, who played along such pro football greats as Fran Tarkenton, Joe Namath and the Minnesota Viking's vaunted "Purple People Eaters," will be featured at a men's freewill offering breakfast at the Spencer Dream Center at 9 a.m. Saturday. The event is hosted by DaySpring Assembly of God Church in Spencer.

(Radio submitted)

Raised in a Christian family in Cincinnati, Ohio, former Minnesota Viking Joe Jackson was baptized at 12 as a member of Second Trinity Baptist Church, but it wasn't until later in life that he committed his life to Christ. Today, rather than lining up with "Purple People Eaters" -- Carl Eller, Alan Page and Jim Marshall -- he leads Joe Jackson Ministries and is the pro director of Athletes International Ministries. He also serves a church evangelist at Phoenix First Assembly of God Church.

Jackson will lead a men's breakfast beginning at 9 a.m. Saturday at the Spencer Dream Center. The breakfast -- which will include pancakes, sausage, bacon, hash browns and scrambled eggs for a freewill donation -- is open to all men in Spencer and the surrounding communities.

Jackson's message to the men ... "will depend on where God's leading me."

"I'll be sharing my story, my journey, not just to the NFL but since then. I'll talk about how men can fulfill their God-given destiny," Jackson said.

As a youth, Jackson struggled with low self-confidence and self-esteem despite his 6-foot, 176-pound frame in the sixth grade. Towering over his classmates made him feel different, odd and clumsy. His desire to find acceptance from his peers sent him down a bad path placing the threat of detention centers and reform schools in front of any hopes of a National Football League.

"You want to be thought of as a person of value and special. When you measure yourself against your peers, that's your first problem. I should have determined that regardless of what I thought I looked like, I was of value. I had a particular set of skills that were of value," Jackson recalled.

"I made some poor choices," he continued. "Just like a lot of kids today, I wanted to be accepted. Sometimes you think you have to do things to acquire that and try to promote yourself. It's great to be loved by your family members, and they did that, but it was really important for me at that time to be loved by my peers. I figured with
my folks, that's what they're paid to do. But I wanted that love from my peers. It was my family who really stood by me though."

Feeling the impact that his behavior and decisions were having on his family, he turned to God.

"It just seemed to come upon me in a sense. It came upon me as a senior and as a freshman in college. A lot of my friends made some poor choices and wound up dead, or they dropped out of school or were in prison," Jackson said.

During his freshman year at New Mexico State University he cultivated that relationship through organizations such as Campus Crusade for Christ, The Navigators and The Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

Jackson credited a friend with introducing him to a more Godly path. He was introduced to the four spiritual laws from the Campus Crusade for Christ.

"He told me God loved me and had a great plan for my life. That's really when things changed. My life was turned around, not overnight, but it was headed in the right direction. That was a catalyst for who I am and what I am today."

As he grew spiritually, he continued to develop as a football player as well, being named a Preseason College All-American and All-Rocky Mountain Conference before being drafted by the New York Jets. His college and career accomplishments earned him election into the New Mexico State University Hall of Fame.

As a rookie in the NFL, Jackson finished second in quarterback sacks among first-year players and earned an All-Rookie Team spot in Sports magazine. His career allowed him the opportunity to play with the Vikings "Purple People Eaters" -- Carl Eller, Alan Page and Jim Marshall. He also played alongside NFL greats Fran Tarkenton, Joe Namath and John Riggins.

During his visit to the Spencer Dream Center dining room Saturday for the breakfast with area men, he said that while he's waiting on a little divine counsel regarding the exact message he will share, the direction and tone will be simple.

"I think we all need to follow the Lord's lead in our lives," Jackson said. "My message is for men to see themselves as victors. A lot of guys are beaten on and beaten down. Their self-esteem is low. They think they don't measure up to he world's standards. We will take about the 10 steps of a great man, the 10 steps of a champion. They all have value and it's not value based on someone else's values. That's the story I want to live them with."