

Inside Journal

for Men



YOUR SOURCE OF INSPIRATION AND INFORMATION

VOLUME 35, NO. 2

SPRING 2026

IN THIS ISSUE:



Patience,
p.3



Poetry,
p.4



Word
Search,
p.7

A Yellow Bus, a Paintbrush, and a New Leaf

by S.L. Ray

Woody grew up in Pennsylvania with his two older siblings. His mother and stepfather were both functioning alcoholics who worked a lot, often leaving the kids unsupervised. As a bored, lonely, insecure preteen, Woody started hanging around with friends who used drugs and alcohol to escape.

"I got into drugs at an early age because it was what everyone was doing," Woody says. "I didn't want to be left out."

His mom regularly attended Catholic Mass, but Woody never joined her. In Woody's neighborhood, there was a bus that picked up kids and shuttled them to church. One weekend, on a whim, Woody asked his mom if he could go.

"She was like, 'Absolutely!'" Woody recalls. "So I got on the big yellow bus, and they

Photo by Prison Fellowship



If someone had told Woody that the very artwork he created in prison would one day help pay for his wedding, he wouldn't have believed it. But his unbelievable story goes beyond all he could ask or imagine.

took us to church."

Despite having a great day, Woody only went to church that one time and placed God on the back burner for many years.

"I won't necessarily say I forgot about God,

but I didn't put Him first," Woody says. "I look back at it now, and even though I may have forsaken Him, He was always there watching me and guiding me through."

During Woody's teens and early 20s, his drug

use increased, and so did his criminal activity. He was eventually arrested and sentenced to more than 20 years for second-degree murder and grand theft auto.

Transformation from tragedy

After entering prison, Woody wanted to reconnect with the God he had first learned about years earlier, but he hesitated. Then his mother became seriously ill, and Woody realized that she might pass away before he even had a chance to make her proud.

"That was my turning point," Woody says. "[During a phone call], I promised my mom on her deathbed that I would become the man that she always envisioned me to be."

Shortly after his mom passed away, Woody heard great things about the Prison Fellowship®

Academy—an intensive, yearlong program in which people in prison can experience the love of Jesus. He decided to take a leap of faith and join the Academy.

"It really opened my eyes up to who I am as a person and what role that I should play when serving God," Woody says. "Prison Fellowship taught [me to] be a better person through and through—and more importantly, it got me closer to God."

In addition to helping Woody discover how to serve God, the Academy also opened his eyes to his passion for art. As a kid, Woody enjoyed drawing, but he had never touched a paintbrush before going to prison. While incarcerated, he discovered he had a natural talent for painting.

The Academy offered a unique art activity in

Continued on page 2

How To Find Your Footing as a Newbie

by Prison Fellowship

New to prison or newly transferred to a different facility? During your first few months, you will stick out. Learning the ropes can be tough when you don't know who to trust. Here are three tips to help you adjust to your new surroundings.

1. LISTEN TO PEERS—WITH CAUTION.

Fellow prisoners may offer to help or tell you what to do. They might show you where to line up for chow, counts, fresh clothes and linens, the chapel, visiting room, and the commissary. After a while, you may notice a person or small

group—often from your own living area—looking out for you and providing helpful information. Oftentimes, advice from peers is well-intended, as there's a bond shared by the incarcerated community. But some people have hidden motives or lack integrity. Until you get to know people better, take advice with a grain of salt, and



DrAfter123: Getty Images

Continued on page 8

Letters to the Editor

Terrell in Tennessee

I'm writing to request, if possible, a study Bible, so that I can continue to understand and learn more of the Scriptures, along with a catalog of all that you provide.

Dear Terrell:

To learn more about Jesus and His Word, ask your chaplain to visit prisonfellowship.org/resources/chaplains to see all the free resources Prison Fellowship has to offer. For a free Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible and workbook, see the ad on this page.

Dunyosha in West Virginia

I was wondering how to obtain a copy of the "Inside Journal for men" newspaper subscription. Also, can I get an application for Angel Tree Christmas as my son is 15 years old this year and I would love a chance to send him a gift for the holidays?

Dear Dunyosha:

Your chaplain or religious coordinator should be able to let you know if Inside Journal or Angel Tree are available at your facility. They can also visit prisonfellowship.org/storehouse to learn more about these and other free resources.

Michael in Colorado

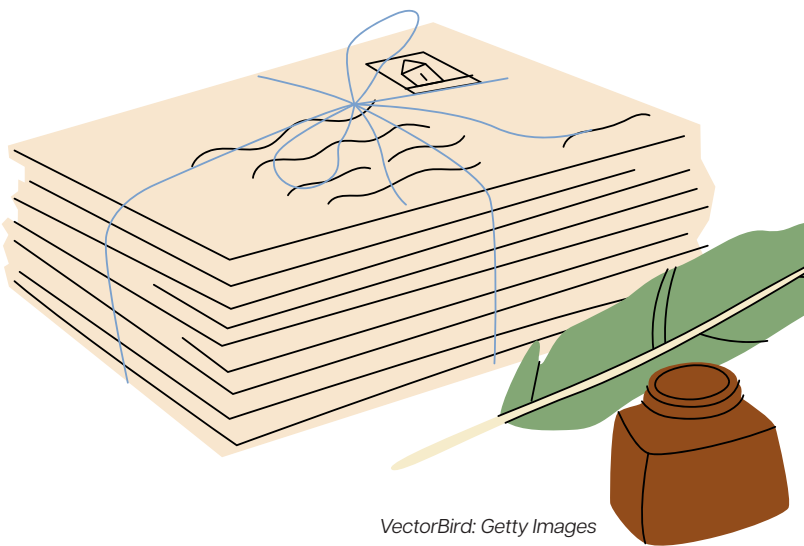
I am writing this letter to respectfully request if you would please add my name and address to your mailing list for a subscription to Inside Journal. Thank you!

Christon in Connecticut

I would like to subscribe me and my fiancé up for the Inside Journal magazine. Thanks so much and God bless!

Jeffrey in Missouri

I like reading your newspaper all the time and they got good stuff in there. I would like to have those newspapers mailed to me.



VectorBird: Getty Images

Dear Michael, Christon, and Jeffrey:

Thanks so much for your interest in Inside Journal. Individual subscriptions for this newspaper are not available, but chaplains may receive bulk orders for free upon request. Ask them to visit prisonfellowship.org/storehouse for new subscriptions or additional copies of past editions (while supplies last).

Sincerely,
The Editorial Staff ■

Need a Bible?

Get a free Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible!

NOW WITH A WORKBOOK!

WRITE TO:

Tyndale House Publishers
Attn: Inside Journal Bible
351 Executive Drive
Carol Stream, IL 60188

Include this information to make sure your Bible or Workbook gets delivered:

- ✓ Your complete name and prison ID number
- ✓ Your facility name
- ✓ Your facility address for prisoner parcel delivery
- ✓ Whether you want English or Spanish*

*Bibles and Workbooks are available in English or Spanish. You can order a Bible and Workbook together, or separately. Limit one order per person.

The image shows two items: a blue cover for 'THE LIFE RECOVERY BIBLE LARGE PRINT' and a blue cover for 'THE LIFE RECOVERY WORKBOOK'. Both covers feature the 'INSIDE JOURNAL' logo. A large white circle with the word 'FREE' is overlaid on the bottom left of the items.

A Yellow Bus, a Paintbrush, and a New Leaf

Continued from page 1

which participants would paint for guests. During his sentence, Woody became the leader of that program.

“Giving away a painting to someone and seeing their eyes when they get the painting,” Woody says, “was so wonderful and beautiful.”

Woody ended up creating many pieces, some of which he gifted to others, and some of which served an even greater purpose after his release.

“The prison art that I had brought home, I sold every single piece of it, and I funded my own wedding of over \$6,000,” explains Woody—adding that the officiant was one of the mentors who visited the prison, Pastor Jack Rose. “He was a very influential person and still is to this day in my life,” Woody says.

Answered prayers

When Woody was released in December 2022, he found it tough to rejoin the community and find work after more than two decades behind bars.

“It was a culture shock when I got out,” he reflects.

He also admits having to work hard at restoring relationships. “I’ve burned a lot of bridges in my life,” he says, “meaningful relationships that I was the problem in.”

Woody has made great progress in repairing damaged relationships. And he is now happily married to Maria, a wonderful Christian woman he met after his release.

“Don’t worry about what you did yesterday. Focus on what’s in front of you today.”

“[In prison], I just prayed every day that when I do get home, that God would bring me a wife,” Woody shares, “and He did.”

Maria and her three children have become Woody’s world—and Woody, who had no children of his own, is especially grateful to take on the role of father to the three kids.

The family lives in Virginia, where Maria and Woody enjoy volunteering through their church’s ministries.

Woody also mentors young men who have violent behavior charges. A fellow Prison Fellowship Academy graduate serves as co-mentor with him. In addition, Woody has created a proposal to start a jail ministry. He knows his personal story makes him relatable, and he knows God can transform lives behind bars.

Woody’s main employment is working as a maintenance staff person at a campground run by fellow Christians who believe anyone can change—and he agrees.

“Don’t worry about what you did yesterday,” Woody says. “Focus on what’s in front of you today. ... If I can change, I know anybody can.” ■

Learning To Grow in Patience

by L. Haviland

There are many familiar phrases about patience, such as this humorous one: “Lord, grant me patience, but grant it *now!*”

If you’ve ever tried planting a seed, hoping for a beautiful plant, you might know the frustration of watering it faithfully, whispering to it for weeks and weeks, and still seeing no progress. If that seed showed no sign of life after you spent time caring for it, you may have been tempted to give up or throw it in the trash.

This is a striking metaphor for one of life’s realities: Whether in a plant or a person’s heart, waiting is part of living. Thankfully, God can use those waiting periods to deepen our roots and prepare us for growth.

But growth takes time. It requires a patience most of us feel uncomfortable with. It requires periods of waiting—and sometimes long periods of painful waiting. People like instant results.

Waiting in discomfort is not fun. Most people are naturally impatient. But personal healing, recovery, and growth don’t happen as quickly as cooking ramen in the microwave. Real, lasting patience happens

through steady effort when everything in you wants to quit.

In our times of waiting, God meets us where we are to produce something strong—and even eternal—within us.

The real definition of patience

The Bible talks about patience as a long and steady waiting. Galatians 5:22–23 tells us that the fruit of the Spirit is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!”

The original word “patience” wasn’t referring to the ability to hang in there while you’re waiting for your microwave to beep after 30 seconds. The Greek word used in this verse means “long-suffering,” in a loose translation.

When difficulties happen—such as being denied parole, losing a loved one on the outside, or missing your children’s milestones—it’s a natural response to focus only on the pain of the moment. But God challenges us in Scripture to wait in our “long-suffering.” And not just to wait on our own terms, but to wait *with Him* and lean *into Him*.

In his book *Suffering*, pastor and author

Paul David Tripp talks about Jesus’ desire to sit with us through our hardships. Tripp says, “In your suffering, with so many things to worry about, you don’t have to waste your spiritual and emotional energy on the fear that you will be forsaken by the One who has the power to do for you what no one else can. ... He is with you, He is for you, and He will never leave.”

Although it may seem at times that your prayers are not heard, an important part of patience is waiting with intention and bringing God into your struggle. Speak with Him as you would to a friend, whether out loud or in a journal. Why? Because He knows what you’re going through; He’s been there.

Our role model in suffering

Hebrews 4:15 tells us about God’s empathy for our sufferings: “This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for He faced all of the same testing we do, yet He did not sin.”

Being open with God about the hardships you face, putting it all out for Him to carry for you, builds patience. Knowing God is not only near but also earnestly involved in



Goldfinch4ever: Getty Images

your life enables you to wait through difficulty with greater grace and hope.

You don’t need to white-knuckle it through the burden you face, insisting to yourself and those around you that you’ll push through this on your own. You never have to suffer alone, because God is faithful to walk with you through your suffering. He won’t turn His back on You.

Galatians 6:9 tells us, “At just the right time, we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don’t give up.” Even when the results are not immediate—when you’re tired, discouraged, or not seeing the change you have been crying out to God about—don’t quit hanging in there. God’s timing is perfect, and His

blessings are worth the wait.

Much like that seed mentioned earlier, God can transform your situations into plentiful harvests once enough time has passed to allow growth.

It’s impossible to practice the kind of patience that pleases God on your own. You can’t get good at the “long-suffering” patience mentioned in the fruit of the Spirit without God’s help. When you commit to stay the course toward transformation, it will be uncomfortable. But God will use your willing heart to help you develop the kind of patience that stands firm no matter what difficulty comes your way. ■

FRUSTRATED BY LONG-LASTING STORMS IN YOUR LIFE?

Have you been praying for a change, a breakthrough, or a fresh start—but it feels like God isn’t answering quickly enough? Waiting through hardship can feel frustrating and impossible. Look at the life of Joseph in the Bible. It was during a season of uncertainty and waiting that the real work and wonder in his life took place. Genesis 37:12–28 explains how Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery out of jealousy. Eventually, he was also sent to prison. Joseph could have given up. Yet in Joseph’s years of waiting, God helped him to develop a long-suffering patience—staying faithful, working diligently, and trusting in His timing. In Joseph’s season of hardship, God was actually preparing him for the great things He had in store down the road. If you are going through a season of difficulty or long-suffering, surrender your struggles to God. He can give you the patience, strength, and hope that will carry you through.

Not sure where to begin? Start with this simple prayer:

“Dear Jesus, I surrender my life to You. I confess my sins and ask Your forgiveness. You know my struggles and my discouragement. Please help me to trust You are at work in my life even when it seems as though nothing is changing. Please help me to grow in my waiting. Amen.”

To learn more about Jesus or to sign up for a free correspondence Bible study through one of our trusted partner organizations, write to us at “PATIENCE,” c/o Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790. For a free Bible or accompanying study guide/workbook, see our ad on page 2.

FROM THE INSIDE OUT:

Poetry From Our Readers



ArtistGNDphotography: Getty Images

See Me (A Message From God)

Submitted by Rob in Minnesota

I am He that walked alone.
I am He that brings new life.
I am He that is eternal. Do you see Me?
See Me in the starry nights.
See Me in the blowing breeze.
I am with you, please see Me.
See Me in newborn faces.
See Me in loved ones' eyes.
See Me wave within the oceans.
I am here. Will you see Me?
I am the flowers of your garden.
I am the wings for all that fly.
I am Savior, I am healer, I am You, that is Me.
I am Beginning, and I am End.
Have you tried to see Me yet?

The Knock

Submitted by Jeremy in Michigan

I heard a knock at my front door
Imagine my surprise
While looking through the windowpane
Tomorrow stood before my eyes

I wondered, should I change my clothes
Change my hair, set some goals
Call someone tomorrow knows
Or should I keep the front door closed?

Tomorrow knocked again politely
Urging me, ever so slightly
He didn't seem harmful at all, despite me
Fearing to let him in

So what? There stands tomorrow knocking
And time is going fast
Do I open up the door
Or continue living ...
... in the past?

The Big Bad Wolf

Submitted by Anna in Arkansas

I was in the darkest place that my life has ever seen,
Somewhere at either end, with nothing in between.
I was scared and felt alone.
But all these girls here are teaching me to be strong.
I couldn't cry to my family
Or even my boyfriend.
But even the big bad wolf
Falls apart every now and again.
But all the things I had thought to know
Have become my everyday devotion
And are teaching me to grow.
This is all that it had to take
I've truly learned from every mistake
If you gonna do wrong
You must learn to be strong
Repeated mistakes won't last you long
You'll be back in prison feeling alone.
I'm perfectly imperfect like a beautiful butterfly
So watch me unfold my imperfect wings
and soar the sky
But even the strongest wolf in the litter
Can break apart and fall bitter
If you ever hear a wolf howl in the night,
You are hearing the sound of its lonesome cries
But things are just as they should
Even in the breakdown of the big bad wolf. ■



Scholarship

OPPORTUNITY

Being released soon? The Charles W. Colson Scholarship provides former prisoners with a Wheaton College education.

Eligibility Requirements

Be a Christian
Be a U.S. citizen
Have a felony record (felonies must NOT include a sexual offense, arson, or repeat violent offenses)

Award

Undergraduate Degree:
Up to full tuition, room & board

Graduate Degree:
Tuition for a Master of Arts

Questions? Call 630.752.5727 or email cmi@wheaton.edu.

To get more tips and tools for a successful release, ask your chaplain (or other prison staff if you don't have a chaplain) to visit prisonfellowship.org/reentry.

Wheaton College is an explicitly Christian and academically rigorous college in Illinois that offers more than 40 undergraduate degrees and 18 graduate degrees. Visit wheaton.edu for more information.

The Outstanding Chaplain Award

Recipients

We asked readers to nominate their favorite chaplain for the Prison Fellowship® Outstanding Chaplain Award. Based on your nomination submissions, here is our latest round of recipients:

Lawrence Akins (NJ), Julie Bell (IA), Nikki Henry (FL), Douglas Huff (VA), Sean Page (OR), James Remer (OK), Mark Testroet (ND), Jay Vincent (IN), Chaplain Williams (AR)

The Outstanding Chaplain Award (OCA) honors dedicated chaplains who faithfully and lovingly serve those behind bars. This ongoing award is given monthly. Mail your nomination to OCA, c/o Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790. Or email your nomination to chaplainresources@pfm.org. Be sure to include the name of the chaplain you want to honor, the name of their facility (including city and state), your name, and your personal story or paragraph about why this person should be recognized as outstanding.

Justice Ambassadors Use Their Experience To Take Action

by S.C. Anthony

Everybody has a story, but how is it best told? That is a question Prison Fellowship Justice Ambassadors learn to answer in their efforts to turn their past challenges into present inspiration.

Justice Ambassadors are volunteers who advocate for cultural change and legislative reforms that promote fair punishment, positive corrections culture, and second chances. Justice Ambassadors from around the nation use Prison Fellowship’s message of hope and inspiration and combine it with their personal stories. They develop relationships with lawmakers, raise awareness in their communities, and advocate for changes to laws.

While volunteering for the program, Justice Ambassadors go through training to learn how to tell their story effectively. Some were previously incarcerated and speak about their time in prison. Others draw from injustices they’ve experienced or challenges they’ve overcome at different times in their lives.

Advocacy in action

One of the most exciting parts of a Justice Ambassador’s advocacy

happens during a Day of Action. Justice Ambassadors, faith leaders, and Prison Fellowship employees meet with elected officials and their staff members to talk about why they should support a bill or take action on a cause.

Prison Fellowship hosted a Day of Action in Washington, D.C., in 2025 that began early in the morning with breakfast and training. Prison Fellowship staff—who served as team captains—advocates, and other volunteers then met with lawmakers in their U.S. House and Senate office buildings. In those meetings, Justice Ambassadors discussed important topics, including why members of Congress should designate April as Second Chance Month®.

The event wrapped up with a photo outside the U.S. Capitol featuring all the day’s participants. The efforts of the Justice Ambassadors paid off, as they were able to bring attention to Second Chance Month and other topics.

Seeking second chances

Prison Fellowship began marking April as Second Chance Month in 2017 to raise awareness of the thousands of barriers faced by men and women with a criminal record. Second Chance Month is now

recognized by elected officials nationwide.

Another recent Day of Action held in D.C. focused on the Safer Supervision Act. The bill would modernize policies for the thousands of people on federal supervised release. Among other things, courts would be required to review whether supervised release is appropriate at sentencing and make sure terms are fit to individual circumstances.

Days of action in state capitals focus on changing state laws. In Michigan, Justice Ambassadors recently talked with lawmakers and their staff about the importance of creating clearer laws when people with a criminal record apply for a job that requires a license. That event focused on Michigan-specific laws and featured Justice Ambassadors who lived nearby.

Prison Fellowship believes formerly incarcerated men and women have a unique opportunity to share their stories for justice reform. If you are being released soon, consider applying to be a Justice Ambassador. If you are not being released soon, your family members can consider becoming advocates. Visit prisonfellowship.org/action to learn more. ■

JUSTICE AMBASSADORS IN A NUTSHELL



Justice Ambassadors are volunteers who advocate alongside Prison Fellowship to create cultural change. They also work to convince elected officials to pass state and federal laws. They advocate in many ways, such as meeting with lawmakers, using social media to raise awareness of a particular issue, and hosting events in their communities.

Drawing from their real-life experiences, Justice Ambassadors raise their voices to advance policies that help restore lives. They have been successful in inspiring members of Congress to pass laws on prison oversight and changes to the criminal justice system. In Oklahoma, the governor recently signed a bill that will reduce the fees assessed in criminal cases. In Ohio, people coming out of prison will have help acquiring a personal ID, among other critical documents.

No matter what they’re advocating, Justice Ambassadors always bring it back to their Christian values. Micah 6:8 reminds us to “do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.” Justice Ambassadors seek to live that out each time they use their voices to advocate for others.

WHERE HOPE UNFOLDS

The Crossroads mentorship program offers more than a dozen Bible study courses, each with up to twelve lessons. Courses are designed to help you learn about God and how to follow Him.

To join the Crossroads mentorship program, please fill out the attached enrollment form. Before returning the form, please check if your facility accepts physical mail from Crossroads.

HOW IT WORKS

1. Crossroads sends you a Bible study lesson.
2. You complete the lesson and mail it back.
3. Crossroads mails you the next lesson and forwards your completed lesson to a volunteer mentor.
4. As you begin your next lesson, the mentor will review your completed lesson and return it with an encouraging letter.



When you have completed this form, please return it to Crossroads and we will send you your first Bible study lesson.

Name: _____

ID #: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Gender: _____
MM DD YYYY

Earliest Release Date: _____ Referred by: PF
MM DD YYYY

Complete Mailing Address: _____

Prefiero el curso en español: ☐

Institution _____ Housing _____

Street or PO Box _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

STUDENT COMMITMENT

I will finish each lesson in a timely manner and will, with the help of my mentor, complete each course I start. I agree that Crossroads may use my submissions (including my picture, testimony, writings, and artwork) for promotional purposes or to further its mission. Crossroads will credit my work using only my first name, unless I give permission to use my full name.

Student Signature _____ Date _____

Crossroads offers its courses free of charge.



CROSSROADS

PRISON MINISTRIES

P.O. BOX 900, GRAND RAPIDS, MI 49509-9944

OBJECT LESSON: Threads Woven for a Purpose

by M. Ignas

WHAT IS AN OBJECT LESSON? An object lesson is a teaching method that uses a practical item to make an abstract topic easier to understand.

OBJECT: Shirt

LESSON: A single moment may not feel like it has much purpose, but a bunch of moments woven together by God can make an impact far beyond what you could have imagined.



Coral222/Getty Images

Prison runs on routine. Week after week, you do the same things without much contact with the outside world. So it's not surprising if you've ever sat on your bed questioning your purpose, wondering what the point of your life is or what good could come of it. But is that despair the end of your story?

One way to answer this question is to imagine a piece of fabric, such as your prison uniform. Sure, your uniform is not the coziest or most stylish clothing in the world. But it does do the job it was created for, which is to clothe you. That didn't happen by accident. To make the clothing you're wearing, the fabric had to be designed, woven from

fibers, cut, and pieced together according to a pattern.

Ideally, life is like that. When we live out the purpose God made us for, the events we experience are like tiny threads that come together to create something useful. But maybe your life doesn't seem carefully woven. Maybe, instead, it feels like a thousand strings tossed together with no rhyme or reason. Trying to understand the meaning of one isolated situation in your life can be as difficult as clothing yourself with a single thread.

But take heart: You don't have to figure things out for yourself.

Hope and goodness woven together

There is a promise from God, and it's available to you whether you're serving a few months or a life sentence. It can be found in Romans 8:28, which says, "And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them."

This verse applies to those who have accepted Jesus as their Savior. If you love Him with all your heart, He promises to take the thousands of threads that make up your life and weave them into something purposeful and beautiful. He vows to make

something of everything you experience.

When you experience tragedy, heartbreak, or disappointment, this can be hard to believe. You can understand how certain parts of your life worked out for the best, but what about your worst days? Your biggest mistakes? Your time in prison now? Some things just can't be used for good, can they?

God knows and cares

The truth is that God knows what to do even with these painful, confusing parts of your life. He was there with you when you experienced the kind of childhood you did.

When you dated a certain person. He knows exactly how long your time in prison will last and what your future holds. None of that scares Him or throws Him off.

We are the ones who don't know how to make sense of all these loose threads. Thankfully, God does. He can use everything for your benefit and His glory. He hasn't forgotten about you, and He will never leave you to try and stitch your threads together on your own.

When you put your faith in Christ, the Master Weaver creates something not just useful but beautiful out of your life. So be encouraged! ■

RECOVERY CORNER

Recovery: A Journey, Not a Destination

Many people mistakenly believe that addiction results from a lack of willpower or moral principles. In reality, addiction is a complex disease that alters the brain, making it hard to quit even for those who want to stop. However, research has uncovered effective treatments that can help people recover and lead fulfilling lives.

Drug addiction is a chronic disease where people compulsively seek and use drugs despite harmful consequences. Repeated drug use changes the brain, making it hard to resist intense cravings. These changes can persist, which is why addiction is considered a "relapsing" disease—people may return to drug use even

after long periods of sobriety. Relapse is common—but doesn't mean treatment failed. Like other chronic illnesses, addiction treatment must be ongoing and adapted to fit the person's needs.

How drugs affect the brain

Drugs target the brain's reward system, flooding it with dopamine and creating feelings of pleasure. Normally, this system motivates healthy behaviors like eating or spending time with loved ones, but drugs hijack this system, reinforcing unhealthy behaviors.

Over time, the brain adapts by reducing its response to dopamine, leading to tolerance—

needing more of the drug to achieve the same high. This often diminishes the ability to enjoy other activities as well.

Drug use also disrupts areas of the brain involved in learning, judgment, decision-making, stress management, memory, and behavior.

Why do some people become addicted while others don't?

Addiction risk varies based on three key factors:

- **Biology:** Genetics account for about half of a person's risk. Other factors like gender, ethnicity, and mental health also play a role.

- **Environment:** Family, friends, economic conditions, and life experiences—such as peer pressure, abuse, or early exposure to drugs—can influence addiction risk.
- **Development:** Drug use during key stages of life, especially adolescence, increases the risk of addiction. Teen brains are still developing in areas that control decision-making and self-control, making them more likely to engage in risky behaviors like drug use.

Addiction can be effectively managed, [but] treatment must be tailored to the individual's needs and updated as those needs change. The process of recovery

is personal and occurs via many pathways. It may include clinical treatment, medications, faith-based approaches, peer support, family support, self-care, and other avenues.

Recovery is a journey, not a destination. Taking the first step toward recovery from a substance use disorder can be difficult. But remember, it's a sign of strength. If you or someone you know needs help, there are people who care. You're not alone. Help is available.

Treatment and recovery are journeys worth celebrating. Celebrate every milestone, no matter how small. You've got this! ■

This material is used courtesy of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: <https://www.samhsa.gov>. Inclusion of SAMHSA content does not constitute or imply endorsement or recommendation by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, or the U.S. Government.

DAILY DEVOTIONAL TEAR-OUT

Tear out this daily devotional and start each morning and/or end each night saying it and praying over it. You’ll be amazed how a healthy spiritual habit like this can bring encouragement and focus to each day.

No More Wandering: It’s Time To Go North

Submitted by Benjamin in Florida

Then at last the LORD said to me, “You have been wandering around in this hill country long enough; turn to the north.” –Deuteronomy 2:2–3

This Scripture was just a line tucked deep in the Old Testament, but the night I read it, it hit like thunder in my soul. I had been wandering in my own personal wilderness for far too long. I was stuck on repeat, fixing my eyes on what the world promised instead of what God promised.

But that verse, that command, made me see something had to change. God was telling His people it was time to move toward the land He had prepared for them. And in the early hours of a silent morning, I knew He was saying the same to me.

“North” means letting go of the shame, releasing the regrets. It means choosing purpose over pity, humility over pride, and faith over fear. I’m no longer looking back at what was lost. I’m walking toward what God still has in store.

Prayer:

Lord, You lead, and I will follow. I’ve been here long enough. I’m turning north. Amen. ■

WRITERS WANTED!

One of our readers wrote the devotional above. If you’d like to write a devotional for Prison Fellowship, please list a Bible verse, followed by a personal short story (two to four paragraphs) that ties into that verse, and end with a prayer or meditation on that verse or topic. Please add the line: “I give Prison Fellowship permission to publish my works.” Send it to “DEVOS,” c/o Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146. Note: No previously published works allowed. Submissions must be your own, original work (no AI and no copying from other sources). Devotionals may be edited for content. Only your first name/initials and state will be used. Not all submissions will be chosen.

ACTIVITY: Mystery Word Search

Find the countries listed to the right (vertical, horizontal, diagonal). Then enter the unused letters in order to spell out a mysterious four-word phrase. Answers on page 8.

MYSTERIOUS PHRASE: _ _ _ _ _

- ALGIERS
ABU DHABI
AMSTERDAM
ANKARA
BANGKOK
BELGRADE
BERLIN
BOGOTA'
BRUSSELS
BUCHAREST
BUDAPEST
BUENOS AIRES
- CANBERRA
CARACAS
DAKAR
DETROIT
DUBAI
HELSINKI
KIEV
KIGALI
LIMA
LISBON
LONDON
LOS ANGELES
- LUSAKA
LYON
MADRID
MALE
MANILA
MOGADISHU
NAIROBI
NEW YORK
OSLO
OTTAWA
PARIS
PRAGUE
- RABAT
RIO DE JANEIRO
ROME
SAN SALVADOR
SOFIA
SYDNEY
TALLINN
TOKYO
TORONTO
VICTORIA
WASHINGTON



milena moiola: Getty Images

READER
RECIPIES

bhofack2: Getty Images

Chicken Pad Thai

Submitted by B. Silva in Texas

- INGREDIENTS:**

 - 1 packet chicken ramen with seasoning (ideally chicken picante)
 - 1/2 tablespoon peanut butter
 - 1/2 ounce crushed peanuts or cashews
 - Hot water
- DIRECTIONS:**

Place uncooked ramen, seasoning packet, and peanut butter into a bowl. Add hot water (enough to fill bowl about halfway). Cover and let stand for 5 minutes. Mix well. Add crushed nuts on top.

*Not all ingredients will be available at all facilities. Be sure to comply with your facility’s rules and regulations whenever cooking.

News + Notes

by S.C. Anthony

States Compete in Hot Dog Challenge

The states of Kansas and Missouri have a longstanding rivalry. Last August, the states found a new way to compete against each other—through a hot dog cuisine challenge.

The challenge, called the Top Dog contest, was the first cross-state cooking competition for the IN2WORK program, which partners with Aramark and the Kansas and Missouri departments of corrections to provide culinary training to people in prison and internships to returning citizens. Participants in the Top Dog contest set out to make a hot dog, side dish, and summer beverage.

The team from Missouri created a grilled hot dog quesadilla with

black bean and corn salsa, a side dish featuring a garlic aioli macaroni salad, and a refreshing drink made with orange and lime juice.

The team from Kansas served a grilled hot dog on a brioche bun; a macaroni salad with peppers, cheese, and olives; and a strawberry-lime lemonade with pineapple garnish.

Judges, including a chef from the Kansas City Chiefs football team, scored the dishes on everything from taste and presentation to food safety.

In the end, the Kansans won, but all participants benefited.

“This competition was more than just a culinary challenge—it was a celebration of growth, teamwork, and opportunity,” the Aramark district manager said on their website.

Titans Host Angel Tree Sports Camp

The game of football often brings people from different backgrounds together, and a Prison Fellowship Angel Tree sports camp in Tennessee last summer was no different.

The NFL’s Tennessee Titans hosted the camp at the team’s practice facility in Nashville. Children of incarcerated parents were invited to join the day’s activities. The camp began with a gift—a new pair of shoes for each child. Footballs then flew across the field and kids participated in drills with Titans players and coaches throughout the camp.

Titans Special Teams Coordinator John Fassel is no stranger to Angel Tree sports camps. He’s been part of multiple camps throughout his career, and he knows

what life lessons kids can learn from football.

“One of the great things about football is it teaches you perseverance and toughness and teamwork,” Fassel says.

Across the country, Angel Tree hosts sports camps where children with an incarcerated parent gain skills in various sports and learn about God’s love. Through lessons, drills, and fun competition, kids who might not otherwise have a chance to attend a day camp are treated like champions.

Fundraiser a Success

Prison Fellowship Angel Tree received a \$5,000 donation from participants in Prison Fellowship Grow at the Muskegon Correctional Facility (MCF) in Michigan. Prison Fellowship Grow is a yearlong, in-prison program aimed at those

ready to consider their lives through the lens of the Gospel message. Through partnership with local churches, Grow enables participants and volunteers to encounter Jesus together.

These Grow participants at MCF rallied to raise money for Angel Tree. Considering how low prison wages can be, this fundraiser was a huge accomplishment—and an inspiration to the incarcerated community, MCF staff, and Prison Fellowship staff, including the Angel Tree team.

Angel Tree equips churches to strengthen relationships between incarcerated parents and their children and support the families of prisoners year-round by delivering Christmas gifts on behalf of incarcerated parents, sending kids to summer camp, facilitating one-day sports and STEM camps, and more. ■

How To Find Your Footing as a Newbie

Continued from page 1

don’t follow advice that will get you in trouble with staff, peers, or parole boards.

2. MAKE POSITIVE FRIENDS.

Finding friends is key. But choosing healthy friendships with people who bring out the best in you is most important. Seek traits like honor and humility. Meet people at gatherings where attendees are focused on turning their lives around, such as the chapel, recovery programs, or leadership trainings—or those participating in yearlong intensive programs, such as the Prison Fellowship Academy and Grow. Find people with common interests and build relationships with others wanting true rehabilitation. In

prison, just like outside, relationships take time and energy. But a strong circle of friends will be priceless when you go through tough times together.

3. AVOID DEBTS AND FAVORS.

Be careful about owing anybody anything. Debts (in or out of prison) are future trouble. They can harm your reputation and safety, and they often come at a hefty price. Avoid asking for favors from casual friends and especially from people you don’t know yet. And don’t volunteer information about your personal life until you know you can trust someone. As they told you when they read you the Miranda rights, it may be used against you. In general, don’t borrow

or lend money, and don’t swap items.

Adjusting to prison will have its challenges, but if you’re willing to try, you can use your sentence to create positive changes in your

life. Listen more than you talk. Accept more than you complain. Learn more than you lecture. Some days will be harder than others, but keep the faith and find your groove. ■

Mystery Word Search: Answer Key

SOLUTION: PEACE IN THE WORLD

N	M	O	G	A	D	I	S	H	U	T	I	O	R	T	E	D	R
B	O	L	U	S	A	K	A	T	S	E	P	A	D	U	B	I	B
U	\$	S	O	Y	K	O	T	E	A	N	G	K	O	K	O	B	E
C	A	M	A	N	I	L	A	O	A	A	P	E	A	D	T	U	L
H	C	N	B	N	C	E	A	G	I	R	I	N	E	L	A	E	G
A	A	N	U	I	G	Y	M	O	F	A	T	J	L	O	B	N	R
R	R	I	D	L	D	E	I	T	O	K	A	V	Y	N	A	O	A
E	A	L	H	A	U	N	L	A	\$	N	\$	I	O	D	R	\$	D
S	C	L	A	G	B	D	T	E	E	A	R	C	N	O	O	A	E
T	H	A	B	I	A	Y	O	Z	S	P	E	T	O	N	D	I	M
I	E	T	I	K	I	\$	R	P	E	A	I	O	T	C	A	R	A
B	A	W	A	T	T	O	R	M	R	G	R	G	A	V	E	D	
O	B	E	R	L	I	N	N	A	O	I	L	I	N	N	L	\$	R
R	D	I	R	D	A	M	T	G	R	\$	A	A	I	B	A	W	E
I	L	I	S	B	O	N	O	U	M	A	L	E	H	E	S	O	T
A	N	E	W	Y	O	R	K	E	V	E	I	K	\$	R	N	R	\$
N	O	S	L	O	S	L	E	S	S	U	R	B	A	R	A	L	M
H	E	L	S	I	N	K	I	D	A	K	A	R	W	A	\$	D	A



© 2026 by Prison Fellowship

INSIDE JOURNAL®

is published four times a year by Prison Fellowship, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790.

prisonfellowship.org
877.478.0100

Editorial Manager:
D.P. Bender

Editor in Chief:
S.L. Ray

Writers:
S.C. Anthony,
L. Haviland,
M. Ignas,
S.L. Ray

Designer:
E. Hays

A member of
the Evangelical
Council for Financial
Accountability and the
American Correctional
Association.

Inside Journal® is a
registered trademark
of Prison Fellowship®.