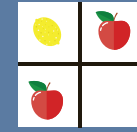


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How the Prison Yard Became a Training Ground

by D.P. Bender

Michael still has the baptism certificate marking August 11, 1996, as the day he publicly declared his faith in Jesus when he was 38. Following his baptism, he regularly attended church in the small Mississippi town where he lived. But Michael's faith was surface level, and his actions and attitude during church didn't match his actions and attitude everywhere else.

Since he was a teenager, Michael struggled with a drug addiction—and some unhealthy behaviors that went along with that. He knew this wasn't how he should be living, but recovery wasn't an easy option, and he continued



Photo by S. Thompson

As a teen, Michael struggled with addiction and unhealthy behaviors, which led to 20 years in prison. After his release, he returned to prison—as a minister serving others.

in his addiction lifestyle for several years.

Michael's aunt, who loved God and taught

Michael about Jesus, made sure he understood these behaviors were going to bring him troubles.

"When you're [living like] that, you're going to get the spanking of your life. And that's what I got," Michael says, referring to the discipline he would soon be receiving for his actions.

Michael was eventually arrested on a drug-related charge and sentenced to 30 years in prison.

Thankfully, Michael's aunt helped him see that God had a plan for his incarceration.

"She came to visit me," Michael says. "And she told me that she had a word from God for me. She said, 'I don't know how long you're going to be in jail, but whatever God has planned for you, these are your training fields.'"

He decided then and there to take his aunt's words seriously.

Seeing the bigger picture

Michael began reading his Bible for the first time ever. He read it all day, every day. He also signed up for classes and began going to chapel. For most of his time in prison, he even worked for the chaplain.

"When the judge sentenced me, I had a very expensive lifestyle and a very expensive drug habit," Michael says.

But during his time in prison, he was determined to quit chasing money and be ready for whatever God had for him.

Michael's faith brought him through many hardships in prison, including the death of his parents.

"I wasn't able to go to their funerals," he says.

Continued on page 2

7 Ways To Start a Journal—and Keep It Going

by L. Haviland

Journaling—writing out your thoughts and feelings—is a great way to tap into your creativity, work through difficult experiences, and reflect on who you are and who you want to be.

To begin, all you need is a pen or pencil and paper—any notebook or scratch paper will do. Then start writing! Don't worry about grammar and neatness—just write.

That sounds easy enough. But many people

start a journal and then stop soon after.

So how can you keep it up? The key is to write regularly, even if it is just a few minutes a day and even if you don't feel like it.

Here are some types of journaling you can try:

1. Create a Scripture memorization journal.

Memorize your favorite Bible verses by writing them out over and over. Start with one Scripture a week, writing it

out three to five times each day and speaking it as you write it. By the end of the week, you will probably be able to write it from memory. And by the end of a year, you will have a treasure of Scriptures at your fingertips to encourage you, bring you comfort, and strengthen your faith.

2. Write out your fears and frustrations.

Use your journal to write your



Constantine.pappas/Getty Images

thoughts on one situation that is bothering you each day. Putting it all down on paper may help you process your thoughts and look at things from another perspective. At the end of each day's

entry, consider adding one thing you are grateful for—maybe a beautiful sunrise, a refreshing glass of water, a good friend—to help balance the anxieties of life.

Continued on page 8

Letters to the Editor

G.B. in Nevada

Can you please send me an application for Angel Tree? The chaplain here doesn't seem to know what I'm talking about.

Kevin in Georgia

Last year I was able to obtain a pocket-sized calendar. Is there any way I can get a new one?

Dear G.B. and Kevin:

Applications and pocket calendars are typically shipped in bulk to facilities that participate in Angel Tree. If your facility does not yet participate, ask your chaplain (or other prison staff if you have no chaplain) to email insidejournal@pfm.org or call 800.55.ANGEL (26435) to learn more. The 2024–2025 pocket calendars are out of stock, but 2025–2026 editions will be shipping soon. If you can't get your facility to participate in Angel Tree, your child's parent or parent figure can visit the Family Portal, found at prisonfellowship.org/family, and request an application be mailed directly to you.

Anthony in Indiana

Recently, I was given [a copy of Inside Journal] and was inspired by what I read. I asked the chaplain here how to receive these newspapers, and he did not know. Can you help me?

Dear Anthony:

Your chaplain can visit prisonfellowship.org/storehouse to order past editions or email insidejournal@pfm.org to ask to be placed on the mailing list for future editions.

Matthew in Oklahoma

I'm soon to be released from prison, and the big wide world is waiting. The thought of it is scary and intimidating, causing me no small amount of anxiety. I'm a recovering drug addict, proudly sober for almost four years. Thankfully, our Lord Jesus Christ gives us strength to thwart temptation. ... I'm in desperate need of assistance, and if the good Lord willing, a mentor.



Ekely/Getty Images

Dear Matthew:

You've got a great attitude! Your chaplain can visit prisonfellowship.org/storehouse for a list of our free resources, including financial planning brochures and addiction recovery materials. You may also want to find a faith-based addiction recovery program such as Celebrate Recovery (celebraterecovery.com) in your area after your release. When you approach your release date, visit prisonfellowship.org/resources and scroll down to the section called "Preparing for Reentry" for resume tips, a national reentry directory, and more. You can also visit 211.org (or simply call 211) to find a community resource specialist in your area.

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.



Training Ground Continued from page 1

"And that was hard, and I struggled to find closure."

Being separated from his 5-year-old daughter was also difficult. Prison Fellowship® Angel Tree helped bridge the gap between them.

What touched Michael most about Angel Tree was how "the church takes no responsibility for the gifts; the church is just a mediator," he explains. "The gifts are actually coming from the parents as far as the child knows."

Michael signed up his daughter every year he was in prison. And as an Angel Tree child, she also was able to attend a Christian summer camp for free, which he says was an awesome experience for her.

"She went horseback riding, canoeing," he says. "It was about 50 kids, and all those kids' parents was also incarcerated. It means something different being able to talk with someone who's going through the same thing as you."

The student becomes the teacher

Michael became a

leader while in prison. The men around him learned to trust him. And as he continued to study the Word and serve with his chaplain, his ability to understand and even teach the Bible grew and grew.

With the support of his wife Triniere, after 20 years on the inside, Michael was released in 2019. He immediately went back to his hometown church. Within months, his pastor noted how gifted Michael was at teaching.

"I went to a Bible seminar," Michael says. "They gave me a Bible verse one night, and they wanted me to expound on it. I did, and immediately after, my pastor, Steve, asked me to preach on Sunday."

The pastor introduced him to the church saying, "I want 'Minister Michael' to come sit in this pulpit where he righteously belongs."

Hearing the word "minister" before his name helped Michael find purpose in all those years in prison. He knew God had a plan. His aunt had told him that prison would be a training ground for

him. But now the results of that training could be seen by many.

Michael is still preaching at his church and is now an officially licensed and ordained minister. He also helped his church start an Angel Tree ministry that serves families in his community. His church has delivered gifts and has hosted parties where Angel Tree families can come and fellowship.

Michael has also returned to prison to preach the Good News of Jesus at Prison Fellowship Hope Events.

"I also always share my story when I go to prison," Michael says.

Michael is eager to grow this part of his ministry and to spend even more time preaching inside prison. He knows that a prison sentence can be a chance for people to really make a change.

"Sometimes, God has to put you in a place where He closes the world off in order to get your undivided attention. Sometimes the trials you go through brings you to a point where God wants you to be." ■

When in Doubt, Cry Out

by E.G. Andrews

My nephew Ollie loves playing in the basement. There’s plenty of space for racing toy cars and building Legos.

One day, when Ollie was 5, we were playing hide-and-seek. I suggested we turn off the lights to make it easier to hide. Since there are no big windows on that level of the house, the basement playroom feels extra dark when the lights go out. Before Ollie could protest my suggestion, I hit the light switch. Ollie started to scream.

“No, wait, it’s too dark and scary! Turn the lights back on,” my nephew cried, wrapping his arms around my legs in fear. “Don’t leave me!”

Of course, I knew the truth: We were in no danger. I wouldn’t leave him alone in the dark. But to a 5-year-old child feeling small and weak, the dark can seem big and scary. I felt the same way when I was 5.

With the lights on, Ollie and I played a few more rounds of hide-and-seek. Then we headed upstairs for a snack. Munching on veggie straws, we talked about Ollie’s fear of the dark. He shared his fears and his desire to be brave like me one day. I told him he would be. But I also knew it might not happen overnight. He could take as much time as he needed, and I would be there to help.

Overcoming fear and doubt

Imagine if after that game of hide-and-seek, I had teased my nephew or given him a nickname like “Scaredy-Cat Ollie.” That wouldn’t have been helpful—and it wouldn’t have told the whole story.

Thomas, one of Jesus’ 12 disciples, has been nicknamed “Doubting Thomas.” In the Gospel of John in the Bible, when Jesus appears to the disciples after the resurrection, Thomas isn’t there. Later, the disciples tell Thomas they had seen the risen Lord.

In John 20:25, Thomas replies, “I won’t believe it unless I see the nail wounds in His hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in His side.”

Later, Jesus appears to Thomas and the other disciples. He greets them in peace, telling Thomas, “Put your finger here, and look at My hands. Put your hand into the wound in My side. Don’t be faithless any longer. Believe!”

“My Lord and my God!” Thomas says.

Jesus replies, “You believe because you have seen Me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing Me” (John 20:26–29).

A ‘hide-and-seek’ faith

In his book *Faith & Doubt*, author John Ortberg writes, “The main problem with doubt, when doubt gets toxic, is not what it does to us. It is what it keeps us from doing.” Doubt

is common, and even healthy—as long as it doesn’t stop us from pursuing the truth.

Thomas had doubts. Haven’t you? Doubts about yourself, about others, about God—these are all a real part of being flawed and limited humans in a world of unknowns. Sometimes, it’s difficult to be sure about what we can’t see or understand.

In our faith journey, there’s a difference between dishonest doubts and genuine questions. Thomas didn’t pretend he had all the answers. He didn’t run away. He brought his questions to Jesus with an honest, seeking heart. The Lord didn’t blame Thomas for being unsure but met him with compassion. Jesus sought out Thomas, though Thomas was questioning and afraid and “left out”—the only disciple who didn’t believe at first sight. That personal encounter changed everything.

The once-doubting disciple boldly declared aloud who Jesus is: Lord and God. Thomas’ faith grew stronger. He would spend the rest of his life sharing the Good News of Jesus with others. Just as Jesus sought out Thomas, Jesus comes to us—lonely and full of doubt as we are—and calls us by name. He welcomes us in and invites us to be a part of His Kingdom, where everyone has a place to belong. Just like I gave Ollie understanding and help, Jesus doesn’t condemn us for struggling



pictus photography/Getty Images

but embraces us with compassion.

Hold on to the Lord’s promise in Jeremiah 29:13–14a: “If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me. I will be found by you.” God wants you to find Him. He can handle your questions, and He wants you to bring them to Him.

So if you are wrestling with doubt, keep going. Ask questions. Pray continually. Know that dealing with doubt is part of building a solid faith—a faith that believes even when you can’t see. Even when you feel unsure in the dark, Jesus will be there to meet you on the journey. ■

ARE YOU PATIENT WITH YOUR DOUBTS?

Jesus wants us to have a one-on-one relationship with Him that’s unique to us, rather than just blindly following our parents’ or friends’ faith. This personalized faith takes some digging—learning, reflecting, and even doubting.

And this digging takes time.

When Jesus rose from the dead, Thomas just couldn’t wrap his mind around it. His entire faith was shaken—everything important that he believed in was in question, and he desperately needed some sort of proof to help him through his doubts. Jesus loved Thomas and knew how scared he felt. Yet John 20:26 says it took eight whole days before Jesus came to reassure Thomas.

Seeking God’s truth requires patience. Some answers might take eight days. Some might take eight years—or longer. Don’t feel rushed or impatient. Take the time to really lean into Him—by reading the Bible and being honest and open with Him.

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

“Dear Jesus: I long for a personal, honest, and genuine relationship with You. Help me through any questions or doubts along my faith journey. I confess my sins and ask Your forgiveness. Amen.”

To learn more about Jesus’ love for us, write to “Doubts,” c/o Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790.

ACTIVITY: Summer Sudoku

This “Image Sudoku” of summery fruits is great for people who don’t love numbers. You can even draw your own version and send it to a loved one to try. See answers on page 7.

1.

2.

Irina Kuznetsova/Getty Images

Angel Tree Provides Year-Round Connection

by L.C. Aggen

Prison Fellowship Angel Tree was founded in 1982. Originally, the program focused on helping incarcerated parents provide their children with a gift and message during Christmas. But over the years, Prison Fellowship has found new ways to help connect parents to their children. Below are some of the incredible opportunities your child is eligible for when you sign him or her up for Angel Tree®.



ANGEL TREE CHRISTMAS:

Staying true to its origins, Angel Tree Christmas creates a way for incarcerated parents to give a gift and message of love to their children during Christmas. Today, hundreds of thousands of children receive a gift and message through Angel Tree. Yet it's so much more than a gift. Children are connected to local church volunteers, who purchase and deliver the gift on behalf of the parent. Sometimes these volunteers deliver gifts directly to the child's house—even dressing up in festive outfits. Other times, churches throw parties for the children and their family members—complete with games, food, and a message of hope. Angel Tree Christmas often leads to deeper connections, with churches coming alongside these children all year long.



RECENT PHOTOS OF ANGEL TREE MOMENTS



ANGEL TREE CAMPING:

In 2002, Angel Tree camping launched. This aspect of Angel Tree allows children with a parent in prison to attend camp on a scholarship. This means camp costs little to nothing for the family. Angel Tree camping gives children a chance to experience new opportunities like zip lines, hiking, horseback riding, and more. It also allows children the opportunity to step



into leadership roles through ongoing programs at camps. This was the case for Kerri. Thanks to Angel Tree, she first attended camp when she was 5 years old. That first summer she didn't smile much, but over the years, the continued care from the camp staff helped Kerri open up. After she became too old to be a camp participant, she was able to return as a camp counselor. She now helps other children like her and teaches them about the Gospel.

ANGEL TREE SPORTS CAMPS:

In 2005, Prison Fellowship hosted its first Angel Tree sports camp. Today, children in select cities attend a local one-day sports camp to learn athletic skills, gain confidence, and receive mentorship. Church volunteers lead the day, building relationships with both children and parents or guardians that could lead to long-term support.

ANGEL TREE STEM CAMPS:

Recently, Angel Tree started hosting Angel Tree STEM camps, where children in select cities can learn skills in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. At these one-day camps, children participate in fun activities that expose them to careers they may not have considered prior to attending.

SIGN UP TODAY!

Are you a parent or parental figure*? Is your child involved in Angel Tree yet? You can play a vital role in their life—even from behind bars. Angel Tree is a great first step to deepening your relationship with your child. You can change your child's life today—ask your chaplain for an application to Angel Tree. See page 5 for more details. ■

**Angel Tree serves both parents and parental figures. A parental figure is a loved one who takes responsibility for a child and provides emotional support, guidance, and love. This can include parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, stepparents, and anyone who fills the role of a parent in a child's life.*



How Angel Tree Camps Care for Kids

by L.C. Aggen

Angel Tree summer camps can be a place of healing. “I think I would probably have been going down really wrong paths if I didn’t have camp,” says Trystan, an Angel Tree camper. “I honestly don’t know what my life would be like without camp.”

While away at summer camp, kids have the chance to make new friends, get guidance from counselors, and enjoy the great outdoors. In 2002, Prison Fellowship started Angel Tree camping, through which children with a parent in prison can receive scholarships to attend camp at little to no cost.

Having a parent in prison is difficult. For many children, attending camp can bring healing. According to the

American Camping Association, children who attend camp have increased confidence, stronger faith, and improved relationships with family members.

Camp allows children to try new activities, like archery, ropes courses, canoeing, and more. Kids can also meet other children with a parent in prison, helping them feel less isolated. Counselors serve as mentors and positive role models. Above all, camp provides a space for children to hear the Gospel.

Because camp provides a safe place to be vulnerable, children may express negative behaviors while at camp. In 2021, Angel Tree camping partnered with Psalm68Five Ministries to offer Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) training to help camps serve

Angel Tree children better. TBRI is a method of trauma-

“I honestly don’t know what my life would be like without camp.”

informed care that focuses on working with children who have difficult life experiences, such as having a parent behind bars. Equipping Angel Tree camp counselors with TBRI training allows them to better meet the needs of these children.

TBRI training helps camp staff identify the need behind a child’s behavior. Sometimes

an outburst happens because a child is dehydrated or has low blood sugar and just needs a drink or a snack. Other times, a child is upset but isn’t ready to talk about it, so the counselor takes the child for a walk or practices breathing exercises to help the child calm down enough to talk about the situation.

Trauma-informed care isn’t about behavior modification; it’s about understanding why a child is acting out and teaching that child how to regulate their emotions.

As other Prison Fellowship programs work to help incarcerated parents receive a second chance after their release, Angel Tree camping helps give many children a “first chance” to encounter Jesus and find healing at summer camp. ■



OPEN DOORS FOR YOUR CHILD THROUGH ANGEL TREE!

Through Prison Fellowship Angel Tree, your child may be eligible to receive a gift at Christmas, connect with a church, attend summer camp (at little to no cost), participate in sports camps (in select cities), and more. Plus, your child’s parent/guardian will get access to practical resources like our Family Portal and *The Hope Connection*.

Call 800.55.ANGEL (26435) to learn more.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS:

1. You must be the parent, stepparent, or mother/father figure.
2. There must not be a court order restricting your contact with the child(ren) or their parent/guardian.
3. Your child(ren) must live in the United States.
4. Your child(ren) must be 18 years old or younger.
5. The form must be filled out completely and legibly and then signed.

ASK YOUR CHAPLAIN OR PROGRAM COORDINATOR FOR AN APPLICATION TODAY!

Contact your child(ren)’s parent/guardian to gather the most current information for your application. **Forms must be postmarked by Oct. 1.** Ask your chaplain about your facility’s deadline for completed forms.

IMPORTANT: *If your information is incomplete or inaccurate or if your child(ren)’s parent/guardian cannot be reached or refuses to participate, we may not be able to deliver gifts to your child(ren).*

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 first round of recipients:

Bruce Evans (AR), Oscar Grant (VA), Dana Everage (NV), Darrell Hunley (VA), Alan Leigh (HI), Leon McClimans (IL), Sylvia Moseley (OH), Lois Wendlandt (WI), Willie Whiting (AL), C. Yang (NY).

The Outstanding Chaplain Award 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.

OBJECT LESSON: Empty but Full of Potential

by C.L. Bopape

WHAT IS AN OBJECT LESSON? Object lessons are teaching tools that use everyday items to illustrate an abstract topic in a simple way.

OBJECT: A bowl

LESSON: When you feel you have nothing to offer, God sees your potential. You are valuable to Him.



Charlietocks/Getty Images

Your perspective matters.

It’s like the old “glass half full” versus “glass half empty” debate: When you see a container that’s empty, do you look at it with anticipation and imagine good things that could fill it up? Or do you have feelings of disappointment because all you can think about is what’s missing?

What if you’re feeling empty inside? Do you focus on the void, or do you get excited by the idea of a fresh start?

This object lesson explains how prison can be the place where you grow, expect blessings, and realize the value of a healthy community. You don’t have to embrace a mindset that equates emptiness with failure and dread. Your address doesn’t dictate your worth!

Pick up a bowl and look at it closely. Think about how you would describe it to someone else. Is it reusable or disposable? Does it look fine, or is it damaged? What similarities do you share with the bowl you’re holding?

There’s often something comforting about having a full bowl, especially when you’re hungry or when the contents look appetizing. In prison, you might fill a bowl with cereal, ramen noodles, or even a special meal made with items from the commissary. But what about times when your bowl is empty?

When you choose the right perspective, you won’t see your empty bowl in a negative way. You’ll look at it with anticipation, knowing that it’s ready to receive something good.

Similar to an empty bowl, your life may not feel full or fulfilling

during your time behind bars. Instead of viewing this season with anticipation, you may believe you are too tattered or disposable for God to use you. On the other hand, you may look fine on the outside but on the inside, something is lacking. You might reflect on your past and think you have nothing to offer anyone. Perhaps it’s time to shift your way of thinking. Have you ever thought of looking at your confinement as a blessing? With the right perspective, you can use this season of your life to become the best version of yourself.

In John 10:10, Jesus says, “The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.” If you long for this rich and

satisfying life, but the heaviness of your guilt, shame, or pride seems to get in the way, here’s good news: God can turn your season of lack into a season of abundance. Unlike a throwaway bowl, you are valuable, and God sees your potential. No matter what you’ve done in your past, God still has a purpose for your future.

Use your time behind bars to engage in activities that challenge you to grow. Associate with people who will build you up—people who are living the way you want to live. Find ways to connect with God and others by taking classes, participating in exercise groups, or keeping a daily gratitude journal (see page 1).

And most important, when you nurture your relationship with the Lord—through activities like prayer, Scripture memorization, and reading God’s Word—you can expect a boost in your faith, greater peace, and wisdom for tackling life’s challenges. It’s as if you’re filling an empty bowl with life-giving food.

So the next time you see a bowl, think of ways to “fill up” any area of your life that feels empty. And remember you have potential. God can turn any emptiness into an opportunity. ■

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/storehouse to order the free Inside Journal Reentry specialty edition.

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.



READER RECIPES



golfphoto/Getty Images

Jeremy’s Holistic Soup Bomb

Submitted by Jeremy in Michigan

INGREDIENTS:

- 1/2 “brick” of ramen noodles
- 1/2 ramen noodle seasoning packet (hot Mexican or chicken flavors recommended)
- 1 Tablespoon Italian seasoning
- 1 Tablespoon garlic powder
- Generous amount of salt and pepper

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

DIRECTIONS:

Place all ingredients in a plastic cup or soup cup. Fill with 1 2/3 cups hot water and let stand for 15 minutes. Stir and eat!

(EDITOR’S NOTE: Jeremy says this soup helps him when he has a cold, and he suggests eating this three times a day when sick. Inside Journal cannot verify if this recipe helps with illness, but research has shown that spices such as garlic and chili pepper can help relieve cold symptoms.) ■

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.

Look Within To See God’s Love

Submitted by David in Louisiana

“Above this surface was something that looked like a throne made of blue lapis lazuli. And on this throne high above was a figure whose appearance resembled a man. From what appeared to be his waist up, he looked like gleaming amber, flickering like a fire. And from his waist down, he looked like a burning flame, shining with splendor. All around him was a glowing halo, like a rainbow shining in the clouds on a rainy day. This is what the glory of the Lord looked like to me. When I saw it, I fell face down on the ground, and I heard someone’s voice speaking to me.” —EZEKIEL 1:26-28

In God’s eyes, we are all one people—yet He cares uniquely for each of us. The Lord Jesus Christ was a native of Israel. His skin color was likely olive and His accent likely specific to His region. Jesus was unconcerned about the appearance or language of the people to whom He ministered. He was only concerned about the inward person. We, too, can be like Christ in being concerned only for who someone is on the inside—the character of a person instead of the cultural differences. God’s love is for all of humanity. We were each created in the image and likeness of the Creator, and we should respect this aspect of one another. There is no one else exactly like you in a world full of billions of people. And God truly loves each one of us.

PRAYER:

Father, we know that we will one day stand shoulder-to-shoulder with all of humankind—people from all backgrounds united as Your children—in Your presence, washed clean by the precious blood of our blessed Savior Jesus Christ. In the meantime, please send us kindness to spread throughout the landscape here on earth. Amen. ■

WRITERS WANTED!

The above devotional was written by one of our readers. If you’d like to write a devotional for Prison Fellowship, please list a Bible verse, followed by a personal short story (2–4 paragraphs) that ties in to that verse, and end with a prayer or meditation on that verse or topic. Please add the line “I give Prison Fellowship my 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 may be edited for content. Only your first name/state will be used. Not all submissions will be chosen.

RECOVERY CORNER

Just Visitors

by J.R. Breault

No one likes to experience sadness, anger, or loneliness. Even “smaller” feelings like boredom or irritation can be hard to handle.

When negative feelings come along, it’s easy to want quick relief. Some people seek comfort and distraction in eating junk food or watching TV. These activities seem relatively harmless—if done in moderation. But some sources of temporary relief, like drugs and alcohol, can have devastating, life-changing effects.

Let’s go back to the negative feelings that often spark a craving for escape. What if we could slow down and think about them differently?

Often, unpleasant emotions make us feel anxious because we assume they are inescapable—that they are here to stay. We can’t see a light at the end of the tunnel of our depression or despair.



Serenethos/Getty Images

But the thing is, all feelings are visitors. They aren’t permanent guests. Sometimes they come for a few minutes. Sometimes they come for a few days or even longer. But no feeling stays forever.

When you experience a negative feeling, instead of looking for ways to kick it out, consider just sitting with it. Take the time to think about what the underlying emotion might be showing you. Get curious about your feelings instead of fearing them or wanting them to be over. Try journaling or talking to a trusted person about them. Do you really need to escape? Or can you patiently wait for the feelings to leave?

Any feeling is likely to be replaced by a different one relatively soon. If you slow down long enough to remember this, you have a much better chance of making a different choice—and breaking free of habits that aren’t serving you long term. ■

Summer Sudoku ANSWER KEY

1.

🍎	🍌	🍊	🍋
🍊	🍋	🍎	🍌
🍋	🍎	🍌	🍊
🍌	🍊	🍋	🍎

2.

🍎	🍋	🍊	🍌
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Activity found on page 3.

NEWS + NOTES

by L. Haviland

Work Release Crew Makes Daring Rescue

Incarcerated men who were part of a supervised work crew became unlikely rescuers while pulling a truck driver from his fiery vehicle this past January.

Four men from the Daviess County Detention Center—Brian Boehman, Chalan Cox, Nicholas Edge, and Joshua Powell—had been repairing potholes on the highway when a semitruck spun out of control, almost striking them and their supervising deputy Christopher Isbill. Although the vehicle crashed and burst into flames, all five men dashed to the truck to help pull the driver, Bryan Marcum, to safety. Using scrap metal, the men broke the truck’s window to gain access to Marcum.

The prisoners were praised for their

bravery at a ceremony in the detention center. Kentucky Today quoted Daviess County staff member Art Maglinger as saying, “These individuals placed themselves in harm’s way to save a life. Their courage and quick action were remarkable, especially given the immediate danger from the fire and leaking fuel.”

Maglinger added that he had submitted requests for extraordinary meritorious good time for the prisoners to reward their exceptional and selfless heroism.

Incarcerated Firefighters Battle Wildfires

Hundreds of incarcerated individuals were sent out as additional crew to assist in firefighting efforts as wildfires recently raged across Los Angeles County earlier this year, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) told NPR.

The firefighter group, Conservation (Fire) Camps Program, trains participants to respond to various emergencies. While these men and women mainly assist in battling fires, they are also trained to help during floods “and other natural or manmade disasters,” according to the CDCR website. The program operates 35 fire camps throughout California, and prisoners volunteer to participate; they are not assigned as part of their sentence.

Thanks to this program, which has been in effect for more than 100 years, prisoners and professional crews have worked together to contain California wildfires, which have grown in frequency. Participants in the program—almost 1,800 prisoners—are also called upon to serve outside firefighting crews with meals, laundry services, landscaping, and more. And program participants

are even eligible to apply for employment with CAL FIRE after their release.

When discussing the severity of the January 2025 wildfires, Joseph McKinney, a program participant incarcerated in a medium-security prison, told the LA Times, “We’re not used to seeing damage on this scale. ... This has been really devastating to see because there’s been so much loss here.”

Kids Declare Camp a Slam Dunk

Earlier this year, more than 150 children with incarcerated parents participated in a free sports camp in Mesa, Arizona. The March 8 event aimed to provide children ages 7–17 with a fun and supportive environment to learn new skills and build confidence.

Hosted by Prison Fellowship, the one-day basketball camp was led by experienced coaches and volunteers, including former Phoenix Suns player Brandon Johnson, who served six months in

prison following a 2012 sports betting scandal.

“God just placed me in the right position.”

Johnson told AZ Family, “It’s just full circle for me. I was incarcerated. I had a parent that was incarcerated. For me, I had the ability to play in the NBA, but the trajectory of my life took a turn. When I got out, I started mentoring and speaking. God just placed me in the right position; brought my life full circle to Prison Fellowship.”

The event taught participants not only about the fundamentals of basketball and the importance of teamwork, discipline, and perseverance, but also about the love of our heavenly Father. ■

7 Ways

Continued from page 1

3. Try a stream-of-consciousness diary.

For this kind of writing, simply write any and every thought as it comes to mind, even if these thoughts are silly or boring. For example, “I had oatmeal for breakfast. My right toe hurts. I love cats.” Stream-of-consciousness writing might be a funny stress reliever or might bring to light issues you didn’t even realize were on your mind.

4. Keep a prayer journal.

Write as though you were writing a letter to God. He really is there for you and wants to hear from you—the real you, whether happy or sad. Share your

anger and your fears. Cry out to Him. No matter what you have to say or how you say it, He can take it, so just be honest in your writings. You can also use this journal to pray for others. If you see prayers get answered, record that as well. When you look back through your journal, you will find evidence of God’s faithfulness.

5. Write letters to your younger self.

If you are feeling guilt, shame, or anger about things you did or that happened to you in the past, write to your younger self. Use words of patience, kindness, forgiveness, and understanding. Write like you would to a child who is still

learning and needs grace. Whatever your younger self needed at that time in your life, reflect on that.

6. Write letters to your future self.

Just as writing to your younger self can provide a healthier perspective on the past, writing to your future self can allow you to feel hope and expectation for the you that is in the works. Write to the version of yourself that you hope to be in the future. Cheer yourself on every time you reach a goal you have set for yourself.

7. Keep a gratitude journal.

Every day, write down three things: something you are grateful

for, something you are proud of, and something you are looking forward to. Morning journaling can focus on hopes for the day ahead, and nighttime journaling can focus on anything positive that happened that day, even if it’s small. A gratitude journal is a way to boost your mood and change your frame of mind.

Journaling can teach you more about yourself, show you something good in your day, help bring healing and encouragement, and allow you to work through difficult emotions. No matter what type of consistent writing you decide to try, go easy on yourself and don’t give up. ■



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prisonfellowship.org
877.478.0100

Editorial Manager:
D.P. Bender

Editor in Chief:
S.L. Ray

Writers:
L.C. Aggen,
E.G. Andrews,
D.P. Bender,
C.L. Bopape,
J.R. Breault,
L. Haviland

Designer:
A. Raquel

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