

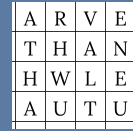
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A Different Kind of Freedom

by Maria Ignas

When Tina was 11, her single mother entered an unhealthy marriage to a man who created a lot of turmoil in their Dallas home.

Despite her difficult childhood—and several unhealthy friendships—Tina did well in high school and even briefly attended a four-year college. She shifted gears to instead pursue her cosmetology license, but after working as a stylist for a few years, she felt inspired to study fashion and moved to New York. There, she formed healthier habits.

Soon, Tina wanted to return to her roots. She decided she would be wiser this time about choosing more supportive friendships, so she moved back to Dallas.



Photo by Shana Thompson

Tina had a dark and troubled childhood, which continued into a dark period as a young adult. After years of unstable environments and toxic relationships, Tina was involved in a domestic dispute that led to her incarceration. But prison was the place she finally found freedom.

Although she planned to avoid old patterns, she found herself spending time with the same

unhealthy friends from her youth.

“I hadn’t changed enough to create those healthy boundaries,” she says.

Tina began making unwise dating decisions. She reunited with her high school love, a man who was not right for her. During their on-again, off-again relationship, she had a son with him.

They broke up, and Tina began a relationship with another man—and another cycle of breaking up and getting back together. They had a daughter and even got married, but the relationship was toxic.

“It seemed to me I ran into this generational curse,” Tina says.

After she and her husband separated, he sometimes showed up, uninvited, to her home. Feeling unsafe,

she would phone the police. During one of these unwelcome visits, they got in a fight, and Tina fatally shot him. She was sentenced to 20 years for involuntary manslaughter. Her children were 6 and 9 years old.

Spiritual chains

Tina grew miserable her first year of incarceration. As she lay in her cell, she thought about the graduations, marriages, and grandchildren she would miss. She felt so depressed she tried to take her own life. Tina promised God that if He would give her His peace, she would serve Him as long as she lived.

“I felt His whole presence in that moment,” she says.

Continued on page 2

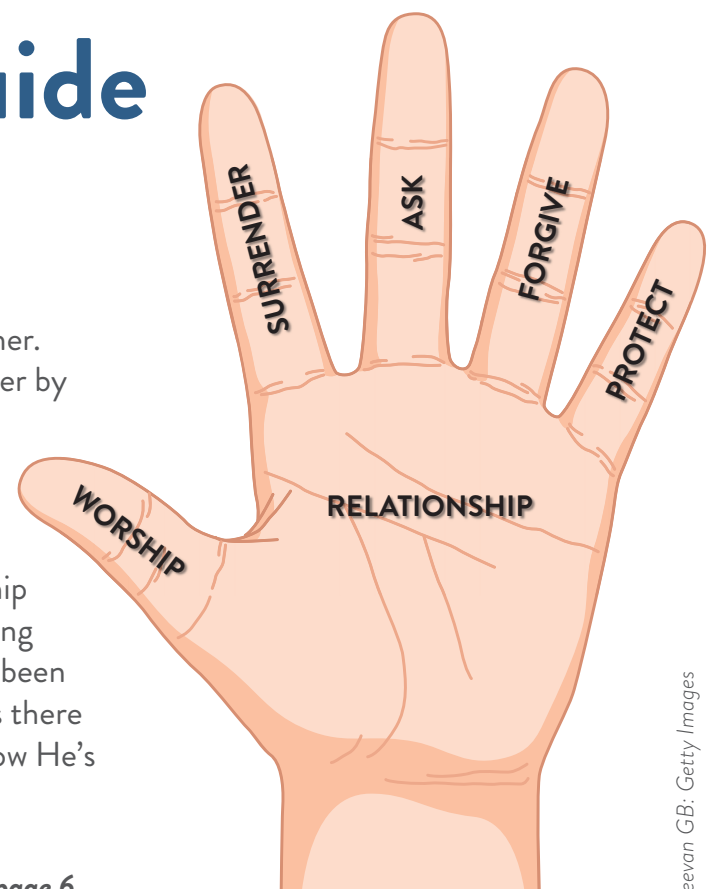
How To Pray: A Handy Guide

by D.P. Bender

Have you ever wondered how to talk to God? If you’ve ever wished there was a simple step-by-step guide on how to pray, you’re not alone. Even Jesus’ disciples once asked Him to “teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). Jesus answered them in Luke 11:2 with a “model prayer,” known today as the Lord’s Prayer. And actually, that same model prayer can also be found in Matthew 6:9–13. Jesus shared with His followers this sample prayer—which is like a list of talking points—that you can use when you pray. Use your hand to remember each talking point the next time you are wondering what to say to God.

“Our Father in Heaven”: RELATIONSHIP. [palm]

Your palm holds all your fingers together. In the same way, prayer is held together by your relationship with God. Faith is how you begin a relationship with God. When you trust that God sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross for your sins, a Father-child relationship is formed. Begin your prayers by putting a name to your relationship. Has God been your Father, Savior, King, or Guide? Is there a different word that best describes how He’s related to you recently?



Jeevan GB: Getty Images

Continued on page 6

Letters to the Editor

Rebecca in Indiana

If it isn't too much trouble, could you please send a Bible to me? And maybe past editions of Inside Journal?

Dear Rebecca:

For your free copy of the large-print NLT Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible and accompanying workbook, both available in English or in Spanish, see the ad on this page. If you never received

copies or need additional copies of recent editions of Inside Journal, you can ask your chaplain to visit prisonfellowship.org/storehouse to order more copies for free.

Jean in Nevada

I am trying different avenues to look for a sponsor to help me with my education. I have an associate degree in theology and want to finish my bachelor's. I

would love financial help. I would also love to honor the chaplain in Alabama for loving all people the same; a very good man—you can see the love of God in him.

Dear Jean:

The articles on page 4 have tips on furthering your education while incarcerated. As for the chaplain in Alabama, he might be a good candidate for the Outstanding



Ekely: Getty Images

Chaplain Award. That's a special way to honor chaplains who go above and beyond the call of duty. To learn more or to nominate him for this

award, please see the sidebar on page 8.

**Sincerely,
The Editorial Staff ■**

NEED A BIBLE?

**Get a free Inside Journal
Life Recovery Bible!**

NOW WITH A WORKBOOK!

WRITE TO:

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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.*



A Different Kind of Freedom *Continued from page 1*

The next month, Tina signed up for Prison Fellowship® Angel Tree, which gives incarcerated parents the chance to send their children a Christmas gift and message. When church volunteers arrived at Tina's mother's house to deliver presents and messages from Tina, the children were overwhelmed with joy.

Soon, Tina was up for parole. At the hearing, however, she was given one more year. She cried out to God, begging Him for help. She felt Him reply that though she was serving time in prison, her true chains were spiritual.

"He's like, 'No, you [were] incarcerated to shame, to regret, bitterness, unforgiveness,'" she says.

As Tina learned more about God, she felt inspired by Inside Journal stories about women like her who found healing in Jesus while in prison—and by characters in the Bible who experienced God's love and mercy, like Joseph, Peter, and Paul.

"Paul murdered some people that God loved, and Paul was called for greater purpose," she says. "So your background ain't going

to hold you back [from God's purpose]."

Freedom and ministry

Tina's faith grew stronger. A letter and phone call from her godmother, a mentor and minister, helped Tina understand that serving God was the path she wanted to take, too.

Tina's godmother urged her to forgive others and herself. She told her that once Tina left prison, she would be ready to step into whichever ministry God had planned for her. Tina's godmother passed away the next summer, but her legacy survives in Tina's heart and ministry.

Tina was released in November of 2013. As she reentered society, she worked on strengthening her relationship with her children.

"I had a chance to be a part of [my daughter's] 8th grade prom," she said. "I'm a seamstress, so I've always dreamed of doing her dresses and things like that."

Tina also never forgot the pull toward ministry she felt in prison. For the past 12 years, she's used her gifts as a seamstress, writer, and artist to serve vulnerable people in her community.

Prison Fellowship remains important in Tina's life. She kept a

stack of old copies of Inside Journal. And this past year, she and her church volunteered with Angel Tree® Christmas.

"[It's] the greatest joy to have been a recipient and now to be co-director [of Angel Tree at my] church," she says.

Tina thought she'd always serve in ministry as a single mother, but God had other plans. A year after her release, she got married. She's been with her husband for 11 years now. To Tina, her love story is miraculous.

"That's just God's glory," she says. "I couldn't have made it up in my wildest dreams."

God has completely changed Tina from the inside out, even in the smallest ways. For example, her daughter has noticed a calmness in Tina's driving. While she used to yell and throw items at other drivers, now she drives with complete peace.

"I was really a dark, dark, dark person," says Tina. "And today, I'm just as light as a feather."

If Tina could go back and talk to her younger self, she would tell her about the light and hope God offers.

"Hold on, because there is a morning coming," she says. "It's promised to you. So just hold on." ■

Filling Up on Soda and Still Feeling Thirsty

by L. Haviland

Have you ever been extremely thirsty?

Imagine exercising on the yard on the hottest day of the year until you are exhausted and dripping with sweat. Which would sound more satisfying: a glass of ice-cold water or a cup of hot coffee?

Water, of course! Your body craves water due to your physical need to replenish lost fluids.

Sometimes, however, we crave things that are not good for us. We fill up on things like unhealthy soda or other sugary beverages instead of healthy water. We end up reaching for something that might satisfy our thirst in the short term, but the satisfaction is temporary. Soon, we're thirsty again.

Living water

A story in the Bible tells of when Jesus had been walking a long while at the hottest time of the day. Tired and thirsty, He sat to rest at a well filled with cool water. He was in a town called Samaria, and a Samaritan woman came to the well to draw out water. Jesus asked her for a drink.

Other women in the village typically went to the well early in the day before the sun got too

hot. This woman went in the peak afternoon sun to avoid seeing anyone. She had a troubled past and knew she would most likely get looks from others.

She wasn't expecting to find a man sitting alone at the well—let alone a man of Jewish heritage who would talk to her as a Samaritan. In those days, men didn't socialize with women from different backgrounds. But Jesus wasn't just any regular man.

The woman gave Him water. He then told her, "If you only knew the gift God has for you and who you are speaking to, you would ask Me, and I would give you living water" (John 4:10). By "living water," the woman thought Jesus meant fresh water.

He cleared up her confusion, saying that anyone who drinks this earthly well water "will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life" (John 4:13-14).

The Samaritan woman liked the idea of water that didn't require her to go far from her home. She knew her shame but didn't know that Jesus was aware of it as well.



Olezzo: Getty Images

After telling Jesus she did not have a husband, He replied, "You're right! You don't have a husband—for you have had five husbands, and you aren't even married to the man you're living with now. You certainly spoke the truth!" (John 4:17-18).

No need for walls

It is important to note that it was Jesus who went to the woman. He found her. He knew about her life in detail: the things she wanted to hide, the things that caused her shame, the things about her that bothered others.

Not only did Jesus reveal what she would have never told Him herself; He also told her who He was to her: her Savior and Messiah. In just a few moments, Jesus brought down the walls the woman had

been hiding behind for so many years.

The woman at that well had issues with relationships and many failed marriages. She was an outcast. But Jesus didn't shame her. His interaction with her left her with no doubt that He fully knew and loved her. He saw past her flaws and wanted to offer her the same eternal life available to anyone else.

She ran back to her village to tell everyone, "Come and see a man who told me everything I ever did! Could He possibly be the Messiah?" (John 4:29).

Just like the woman at the well, we sometimes walk into our own version of the hottest sun, just to avoid facing others and facing our struggles.

We keep reaching for that "bad habit" item, instead of reaching for

God's healing. Our vices might temporarily distract or numb us from our pain. That's so much easier than admitting we need help and bringing our weaknesses to Jesus. But then we wonder why we're thirsty the next day!

Like the woman at the well, Jesus already knows what you're doing and what you've done. And He approaches you as He did her, with love, to gently tell you that you can choose to live differently. He came to die on a cross to save you and forgive you.

Psalms 107:9 says, "For He satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things."

He offers a solution to your thirst: God's living water. Because as good as that substitute feels in the short term, it will never fully satisfy. ■

ARE YOU CRAVING THE WRONG THINGS?

Have you ever found yourself reaching for candy instead of something more nutritious? Maybe your short-term comfort isn't candy but caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, or some other unhealthy vice. Sometimes, the emptiness and cravings stem from guilt, shame, or anger. To avoid facing hard things, we try to numb or "stuff" our feelings.

We hope these comfort items will make us feel better, but these temporary fixes are just that—temporary. Eventually, the troubles and the emptiness return. Worldly comforts will never fully heal us. Only God can truly restore us and bring us lasting change.

Psalms 34:8 says, "Taste and see that the Lord is good." The love of Christ is sweeter than any candy and more satisfying than any momentary pleasure. While on earth, Jesus experienced troubles and temptations, but He sought God's love instead of vices.

Whenever you are tempted to use earthly comforts to fill your hunger and emptiness, try seeking God instead. Not sure where to even begin? Start with this simple prayer:

"Jesus, You have made me for more than this habit. Please guide me in Your ways. I confess my sins and ask Your forgiveness. Show me how to live for You. 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 "CRAVINGS," 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: Getting Enrolled in College

Submitted by Bruce in Michigan

EDITOR’S NOTE: Pursuing higher education while behind bars has been shown to reduce recidivism, or the likelihood of prisoners returning to prison after release. It also increases a person’s employment opportunities after release, helps give them a sense of purpose, keeps them busy and distracted from unhealthy activities, and improves self-confidence and analytical skills.

When I was 16 years old, I came to prison with several life-without-parole sentences.* After 16 years of incarceration when I was bored with the entire prison culture, I opened an issue of Inside Journal, and I read an article [that] gave tips and resources to get readers started in college studies, and I thought about how it would feel to acquire a college education despite my poor background, long prison sentence, and empty prison account. And then I smiled because I felt rays of inspiration shining on me for the first time in many years.

Over the next 16 years, I earned three college degrees, including a master’s degree from California State University, while publishing 12 books on education and rehabilitation.

I invite you to consider whether college in prison might change your life too.

Tips for Enrolling in College:

1. Consider asking your prison staff or even the local school administrators of your nearby high school whether any prison college programs are currently being offered in your correctional system; if there are, apply. You may even have an opportunity to earn a free college degree (such as through Federal Pell Grants).
2. In addition to Pell Grants, one possible way to help pay for college is to seek sponsors. Note: You should never ask someone other than friends and family to send you money. Asking strangers for money is prohibited in most prisons. However, sharing your journey of personal transformation and education with loved ones is allowed. Therefore, write to people, tell them what you are doing, and take courses whenever someone offers to sponsor you.
3. If no prison college programs are available to you, you might consider requesting course catalogs from the Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC): 1101 17th Street NW, Suite 808, Washington, DC 20036 or visit deac.org. DEAC does not directly offer programs for prisons. However, DEAC accredits institutions that provide distance education, and some of those institutions offer programs that are specifically designed for or adapted to incarcerated individuals.
4. Prepare for college life by reading and writing every day. Check out educational books in the prison library. Start figuring out which time of the day you have the most focus and energy for studying. Good study habits and daily routines will be key to a successful college experience.
5. When you are not enrolled in college courses, contribute as much as possible to your inside community. Attend programs, create study groups, join authorized prison organizations, use the library, tutor GED students, submit articles for publication, serve on committees, and invest heavily in the people around you. By doing these things, you will lead a rich life that impresses and inspires others.

I completely immersed myself in my faith, service to others, and education. I had absolutely no way of knowing that a change in the law would one day overturn my life sentences. My judge gave me a chance—rather than another long sentence—partly because of my documented commitment to education and reform. Maybe you will get a chance, too. Work hard now, so when your day comes, you will be ready. ■

*NOTE: Many of these programs are reserved for people with a release date; those with longer/life sentences may have a harder time accessing these programs. This article is one person’s experience; individual experiences may vary.

COLLEGE TUITION FEES: THREE WAYS TO SAVE

1. Request credit for knowledge gained in past courses. Testing service providers such as CLEP (College-Level Examination Program) and DSST (DANTES Subject Standardized Tests) offer equivalency tests—or ways to test out of a subject if you already know all the material—but each college or university sets its own policy as to what it will accept. Before you rush out and pay precious bucks for these tests, ask your school of choice the following: a) What exam services will you accept and in what subjects? b) What scores are needed to earn equivalent credit? c) If I am accepted, would such credits allow me to skip one or more introductory courses? d) Are there any additional requirements before credit is granted?

End-of-course exams are similar to CLEP and DSST exams, except that credits are earned for specific colleges. The exams are nearly the same as those used in regular college courses, but they are much cheaper and less time-consuming.

2. Buy or borrow used books. When possible, purchase used textbooks or look for similar books on your library shelves. Consider donating any new books and study guides to your library for others who will come after you.

Many colleges offer end-of-course exams even if they do not clearly state it in their catalogs. If it’s not clear, write to them to ask what, if any, they do offer.

3. Request credit for knowledge gained in life experience. Prior learning, also called “experiential learning” or “life-work experience,” can save you time and money in your quest to earn a college degree. Many schools offer Prior Learning Assessment (PLA).

You can earn this PLA credit by preparing a record that summarizes and documents your knowledge. There are six major categories that may give you college-equivalent credit:

1. Work: Skills and activities performed on the job, including military service, homemaking, maintenance, budgeting, cooking, and nutrition.
2. Volunteer work: Church activities, political campaigns, service organizations such as Jaycees and Toastmasters.
3. Non-credit learning in formal settings: Business training courses, clinics, conferences, lectures, and workshops.
4. Travel: Tours, business trips, significant vacations, and living abroad.
5. Recreational activities and hobbies: Acting/community theater productions, arts and crafts, aviation training, landscaping, and musical skills.
6. Independent reading-viewing-listening: More intense self-directed study.

To receive credit for these experiences, you must construct a Prior Learning Portfolio (PLP), which is a document explaining your request for college-equivalent credits and listing reasons you may qualify.

PLPs have four parts: 1) a request for specific course credits; 2) a resume identifying your education, professional, and other relevant activities; 3) a narrative description explaining that you have “college-equivalent” knowledge and skills; and 4) documentation to support your claims of accomplishment.

Many colleges and universities offer PLP credit evaluations. The number of credits possible range from a few to more than 100. The evaluation fee—the cost for having a school look into your PLP request—varies among colleges. On average the cost to investigate your submission is \$30 to \$60 per credit hour. That may sound like a lot of money, but it’s far cheaper than signing up to take the course from scratch.

This was an excerpt from the article *Piecing Together a College Education* by Jon Marc Taylor, author of *Prisoners’ Guerrilla Handbook to Correspondence Programs in the U.S. and Canada*.

Focusing Outward: Serving Behind Bars

by L. Haviland

Although you may be incarcerated because of a bad decision or mistake you made, you can still do something useful with your time. You can serve others. Depending on what a facility allows and offers, service activities could include writing letters to someone needing encouragement or even learning to crochet blankets for the homeless. And serving doesn't just help others in need—it could actually help you, too. Here's how:

GAINED PURPOSE

Being in prison can leave you questioning your purpose. Helping others can give you a sense of accomplishment and meaning. It can remind you that you have something worthwhile to give. It feels good to wake up knowing someone needs you and to go to bed knowing

you made a difference to somebody.

BRIGHTER OUTLOOK

Studies have shown that when we serve others, our brain's reward system is activated, releasing chemicals like dopamine and oxytocin, resulting in a boost in mood. In addition, when we help others, we feel better about ourselves, and our self-confidence increases. It can lead to a shift in outlook: Although you can't change the past and what brought you to this place, doing good today can help you feel hopeful about the future.

FEELINGS OF CONNECTION

Helping others can also help you feel more connected. When you reach out to someone else in a posture of support, it can give you a sense of belonging. This is an

enormous plus if you're currently feeling lonely or isolated. It's also a great way to make new friends and learn about people of different backgrounds.

REDUCING STRESS

The idea of helping others when we are feeling overwhelmed may seem even more overwhelming. But serving others actually helps decrease stress and soothe worries. In this environment, it's all too easy to sit and think too much—about your past mistakes, your current problems, and the what-ifs of the future. But getting out of your own head and focusing on others is a healthy distraction from your thoughts. Bringing a smile to a friend just feels good! And studies show that reducing stress may even benefit your health by lowering blood pressure and improving sleep.

GIVING IN ACTION

One recent example of serving took place in North Dakota State Penitentiary (NDSP). Prison Fellowship Academy participants and graduates teamed up with dozens of residents and NDSP staff members, along with the United Way organization, to fill backpacks with food for local teens and public school children in the Bismarck, North Dakota, area. For more than three hours, the team sorted and filled a total of 1,598 backpacks with food. The food was delivered to more than 30 public schools in the Bismarck area, ensuring these children had food over a four-day weekend. This was one service project of many that takes place in various prisons. One participant in a similar project puts it this way: "To lead by example is [powerful].



LanaStock: Getty Images

It impacted my spirit in ways I did not expect it to. Lifted me up, strengthened the want to give more."

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

You can begin making a positive mark on the lives of those around you now. Whether it's by serving with a formal organization—like Knitting Behind Bars or Prisoners Literature Project—or by simply offering encouragement, tutoring a friend, or helping in the chapel, you can make your time matter.

Your life, talents, and gifts are significant and can lift others up. It just takes that first step. ■

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.

FINDING STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS

Submitted by Sarah in Louisiana

For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength. —PHILIPPIANS 4:13

This Scripture brings me hope. Growing up, I was angry in every sense of the word. I endured staggering amounts of abuse, my family was broken apart, and I was drowning in depression. I started running away and trying drugs and alcohol, and at age 17, I ended up pregnant. Dealing with single motherhood was very stressful, and along with that, mental illness also hindered me from keeping a job. Things got really tough and seemingly continued to escalate until I ended up in jail. This is where a spiritual counselor helped me give my heart to Jesus.

Yes, progress takes time. But I felt an inner difference instantly. I came to the realization that God never left me even when I felt empty inside. With the belief in God, you can win any battle against whatever demons you are fighting. The battle may be greater than you—but not greater than God! I was blessed with an undeserved salvation. I am free. I found my strength. Are you ready to find yours?

Lord, please continue to bless me with Your peace and grant me Your strength to keep pushing through every day. In Jesus' name, 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.

ACTIVITY: Autumn Word Search

Answers on page 8.

Hello Autumn

word search

Words may be horizontal, vertical and diagonal.

C	I	I	T	U	R	K	E	Y	H	S	T	G	E	R
H	A	R	V	E	S	T	L	R	A	I	N	K	L	T
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I	H	W	L	E	A	V	E	S	D	B	R	G	W	J
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APPLES	FALL	FOOTBALL	NOVEMBER
SWEATER	LEAVES	CORN	PUMPKIN
RAIN	AUTUMN	BOOTS	RAKE
THANKSGIVING	HARVEST	TURKEY	SUNFLOWER

Natalia Gramakova: Getty Images

READER RECIPES

Chicken Tamale

Submitted by Doris in Florida

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 bag corn chips
- 4 tablespoons pickle juice or hot water
- 1/2 pouch chicken breast
- 1 tablespoon cream cheese
- 2 tablespoons cheddar cheese sauce
- 1 1/2 tablespoons diced pickles
- 1/2 chicken seasoning packet
- 1 packet mayonnaise

DIRECTIONS:

While still in the bag, smash corn chips into small pieces. Dump into bowl. Add pickle juice and/or hot water and mush together until chips are coated. Set aside. In another bowl, combine chicken breast, cream cheese, cheddar cheese sauce, diced pickles, and seasoning. Add this chicken mix to one side of the corn chips and then fold over like a tamale. Drizzle with mayonnaise and/or cheddar cheese sauce to taste. Enjoy! ■



Peter Carruthers: Getty Images

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

How To Pray

Continued from page 1

“May Your name be kept holy”:
WORSHIP. [thumb]
To keep a name “holy” means to always treat it as sacred and special. Your thumb can remind you to give God a “thumbs up.” Tell God what you love about Him. What makes Him special? What has He provided that you are thankful for?

“May Your Kingdom come soon. May Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven”:
SURRENDER. [index finger]
Your index finger can remind you that God is first: He’s number one. Jesus taught His followers to put God’s plans ahead of their own. Is there something you are holding back from God? Talk with Him about your dreams, plans, and ideas. But also tell God you trust Him above it all.

“Give us today the food we need”:
ASK. [middle finger]
Your middle finger is your longest, so it can remind you to bring to God the long list of needs that you might have. God already knows what you need, but He also wants you to bring your cares to Him. So, tell Him what you need and trust He knows what’s best for you. But remember, just like it’s rude to raise only your middle finger at someone, it’s also rude to only ever talk to God when you need something.

“And forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us”: **FORGIVE. [ring finger]**
The ring finger symbolizes love and commitment. And as anyone who has been in a long-term relationship can tell you, love requires a lot of forgiveness. You have to both give forgiveness and receive it. Tell God what you need to repent; He’s always faithful to forgive. Also, discuss with Him the people in your life that you need to forgive. He’ll help you with those relationships, too.

“And don’t let us yield to temptation but rescue us from the evil one”: **PROTECT. [pinky finger]**
The pinky finger is your smallest finger and can remind you of your need for protection. Everyone needs help when temptations and difficulties come. Whatever you are worried about or need help with, let Him know about it. He’s sure to be there when you need Him.

God wants to hear from you. With this handy prayer guide, you can pray with confidence. Talk with Him about your relationship, worship Him, surrender your plans to Him, ask Him for what you need, give and receive forgiveness, and ask for His protection. It’s how Jesus taught His followers to pray, and it’s still the list of topics He would like to hear from you about. ■

OBJECT LESSON: Walking Through the Door

by Maria Ignas

WHAT IS AN OBJECT LESSON? Object lessons are teaching methods that involve the use of practical items to illustrate an abstract topic in a relatable way.

OBJECT: Door

LESSON: God offers us freedom from our past.

“But forget all that—it is nothing compared to what I am going to do. For I am about to do something new. See, I have already begun! Do you not see it? I will make a pathway through the wilderness. I will create rivers in the dry wasteland.” —*Isaiah 43:18–19*

In this verse, God is telling His people to let go of their past. He’s saying that no matter what they’ve done, they are still His people, and He still has wonderful plans for their present and their future.

The same is true for you. No matter your past, God has a purpose for your future.

Moving forward from your past doesn’t mean literally forgetting it or pretending it didn’t happen. It means learning from it and refusing to let it take over your mind. What would it look like to move forward from past mistakes in your life?

To illustrate what it can mean to leave your past behind, consider this: Whether you’re on work duty or at a class, what happens when your shift or class time has ended? How about when breakfast at the chow hall is over? What happens when your time in any room is finished?

You find the door and leave. That’s a door’s purpose: to allow you to exit one place and enter another. A door gives you passage into the next room.

Throughout your day, when you leave one room and enter another, do you normally stop at the door, turn around, and spend an hour staring back into the room you just left? Do you stand at the doorway, overthinking

your exit or refusing to leave? Chances are, you simply walk through the door, moving forward into the next room or hallway.

Think of that forward motion as a metaphor for the growth and changes you’re making during your time behind bars.

To learn from and move on from your mistakes, you do need to think about your past. You may feel regret or sadness when you reflect on what’s happened. Maybe you get angry at yourself or others. Maybe you repeatedly play out conversations or events in your mind. Or maybe your thoughts are so loud that you can’t focus on what’s in front of you.

Although it’s important to revisit your history in order to learn from it, the key is not to stay there. Learn from your mistakes and then move on. Obsessing over your past can feel like never leaving your cell. You look at the same scenery again and again each day.

Once you’ve examined your past and learned from it, apply what you learned to the next chapter (or next “room” you enter). Allow God to open that door so you can follow His path forward.

Right before those Isaiah verses above, God mentions darkness and destruction and death. Then He says to “forget all that” and



Peshkova: Getty Images

focus on what He is going to do—to make a pathway, one of renewal and growth.

Focusing on His future instead of your past can be very freeing! It would mean not having sleepless nights full of guilt. You would be able to enjoy the people and activities in front of you. You could work on forming healthier relationships and making better choices. And you could look forward to what each day has in store.

Imagine your own door that leads out of your past and into your future. Maybe it’s a golden gate, a bright white sliding door, or a small wooden door with a glass window. When you find yourself stuck in the room of your past, picture God opening the door for you. Imagine His voice telling you to leave the past behind and focus on His power in your life. Know that what has happened in your past is nothing compared to what God is going to do.

Are you ready to walk through that door into the good things God has planned for you? ■

RECOVERY CORNER

by Lexi Aggen

In many addiction recovery programs, one of the key steps to recovery is taking a personal inventory of your actions and behaviors. It’s important to write out a list of the ways fear or anger has controlled your actions. But what if you have never really thought about this before? Coming up with a list might involve journaling exercises, discussing ideas with a trusted friend, praying, or thinking it over while going for a walk.

This self-inventory will require deep introspection—which may feel uncomfortable. Give yourself grace as you process your struggles and weaknesses and allow different emotions to surface. When they do, acknowledge them—don’t try to ignore or dismiss your feelings. But once you acknowledge them, accept them and move on. Don’t wallow in any guilt or “what-ifs.”

During your self-evaluation, look closely at your past behaviors, attitudes, actions, and relationships. There are several different areas in your life that may require reflection. Some sample questions to ask yourself are:

- Where do I still feel anger toward others?
- What are some of my fears?
- How have I hurt others?
- What situations have caused me to feel anger/shame?
- Is there anyone I struggle to forgive?
- How has my addiction impacted me?
- Where does my addiction still affect me in my day-to-day?

It’s also important to reflect on your actions that led to your current situation. Write down your “triggers,” or what prompted you to act out. List mistakes you’ve made that you’ve blamed others for. Describe times you’ve avoided taking personal responsibility. Remember this is not a time to beat yourself up but to take an honest look at your life.

Taking a personal inventory can be difficult—but it can also help you better understand yourself and your behaviors, which in turn can help you make necessary changes and progress toward healing. ■

NEWS + NOTES

by D.P. Bender

Faith and Education Make a Difference

An upcoming book by a professor at Imperial Valley College, Jim Shinn, reveals two keys to success for those leaving prison. His book, “Being Better Behind Bars,” shares what he learned from 130 surveys of people who have left prison. Shinn told the Imperial Valley Press, “There’s a correlation between education and the lowering of recidivism and ... also between lack of recidivism and incarcerated people who get involved in their faith.” For decades, Prison Fellowship has also researched the role faith and education have in improving outcomes for those in prison. In a study released by the Texas Department of Criminal Justice in 2023, Prison Fellowship

Academy®—a yearlong, biblically based program—reduced recidivism in Texas by 53.8% compared with a similar group. But while preventing people from coming back to prison is important, Prison Fellowship’s programs are designed with more in mind such as participants becoming positive, contributing citizens. Programs like the Academy aim to help men and women strive for and reach their greatest potential, not just avoid rearrest and incarceration.

Women Gain Technology Skills and Confidence

After serving time for drug and gun charges, Tanesha struggled to rebuild her life. She told KSHB News, “There were times when they said no if you went to get a job because of your background or what they saw on paper.” But the

University of Kansas’s Center for Digital Inclusion made a difference in her life. The program offers technology education for incarcerated women. Not only does the training help women gain essential skills they’ll need when they get out, the program also helps to build their confidence. More than 1,000 women have completed the program since 2019, and it is offered in four correctional facilities in the Kansas City area. Tanesha is now on the outside serving in the program, helping women who were once like her. “I’m here to empower them,” she told KSHB, “and just let them be the best versions of themselves.”

Pickleball Bounces Into Prisons

At MacDougall-Walker Correctional Institution in Connecticut, incarcerated

individuals like Caesar are learning how to play pickleball (similar to tennis), and they’re also finding hope and a sense of dignity. Caesar told Connecticut Public Radio about the value of pickleball coaches coming to give their time: “You see one person show a little empathy, and that little empathy went a very long way, and I’m grateful for that every day.” Through the Pickleball for Incarcerated Communities League (PICL), coach Sarah Gersten and others see many benefits of the sport. “One of the biggest benefits I see to the PICL program,” Gersten said, “is reducing that sense of loneliness and isolation.” The program, active in at least half of the state’s correctional facilities, is showing positive results. Eulalia Garcia, who is the programs and treatment director for the Connecticut Department of Correction, said, “It’s something that they value, that they look forward to, that brings them happiness and motivates them to be better.” ■

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

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 next round of recipients:

David Balzer (PA); Joseph Blay (IA); Jeffrey Deakins (IN); David Jagemann (MO); Richard Johnson (IN); Robert Ortiz (NM); Windel Potts (GA); Joe Prainito (IA); Steve Walsh (FL); Dian Welch (IL)

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.



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