

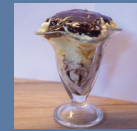
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Melisha's Journey From Fugitive to Advocate

by Lexi Aggen

Like many children growing up in rural Georgia, Melisha's life revolved around church. Though she could recite Bible verses, she was unaffected by the words.

"I didn't really have a relationship with God other than when I needed Him," she says.

When Melisha was 10 years old, her parents divorced, and her father moved out of the home. Melisha believed he had left because she was unlovable. As a result, she started buying gifts for other children to impress them and to feel more loved—but she had no money, so she would steal from her mom's purse to pay for these gifts.

After her parents' divorce, Melisha bounced around between different relatives' homes and various schools. At each school, she would have to navigate new relationships.

Photo courtesy of Melisha



Whether it was from her childhood insecurities or from law enforcement, Melisha was always trying to escape. But when she finally stopped running, she found peace in the stillness.

The year after she graduated high school, Melisha became pregnant by a man who didn't want to be part of the child's life. She struggled to make ends meet while living on her own as a single mother. She didn't want her family to know she was struggling, so she forged a check. When she didn't get caught,

she wrote more bad checks. Eventually, her criminal activities were discovered, and she was sent to jail.

Over the next few years, Melisha was in and out of jail. With each release, she returned to her church, but it still had no real impact on her heart. She also returned to criminal activities,

which did impact her life. Eventually, a warrant was placed on her that would result in a longer sentence than any she had experienced. She fled, hoping to avoid prison time, but the shame and frustration mounted.

"I hated the life that I lived," she says. "I hated the fact that God wouldn't change me."

Melisha planned to fake her death and leave the country. She hoped her family would finally have peace and that she could start over. But while on the run in another state, she called her pastor. She knew he wouldn't encourage her actions, but she contacted him anyway.

Her pastor encouraged her to turn herself in. He even offered to go with her to the police station.

Finding a new way

Melisha stopped running and was sentenced to 12 years in prison. Once incarcerated, she continued to attend religious services but remained unchanged. It wasn't until she was sent to segregated housing (ad seg) that Melisha would begin to understand who God was, and who she was through Him.

While in ad seg, Melisha had a vision

Continued on page 2

5 Ways To Keep Up With Technology

by Stacia Ray

When looking back on the technology of a century ago, we think of the inventions of the early 1900s like the airplane or the telephone. But how long did it take for those inventions to shift society?

The Wright brothers first flew their plane in

1903, but it wasn't until the 1930s that air travel began to really take off. Similarly, the telephone, invented by Alexander Graham Bell in 1876, didn't become widely used until the early 1900s.

Compare that to today's smartphones. Recent technologies are taking a few years, not a few decades, to spread.

This fast pace is

both a blessing and a burden. On one hand, advancing technology has the potential to lead to scientific breakthroughs, cures for disease, and solutions to poverty. On the other hand, it can leave people feeling disconnected or even fearful of the future. For example, artificial intelligence (AI) could improve healthcare,

Thithawat: Getty Images



education, agriculture, and other fields. But it also could take away jobs

as automation replaces human labor.

Continued on page 7

Letters to the Editor

Tasha in California

My story is probably like most. I am addicted to fentanyl. ... I'm seeking answers, prayers, just someone to talk to. I've been trying to get closer to God lately. ... I've never really been big on church or God, but my heart tells me to keep searching and to keep reaching out. I'm [also] looking for resources to help me get closer with my kids who are in foster care. I want to make a change and want to make a difference for my kids. Please help me.

Dear Tasha:

It's so great that you want to grow closer to God and to your kids. If you haven't already, you may want to see if there are any faith-based addiction recovery programs such as Celebrate Recovery offered in your facility. Consistent religious commitment (actively participating in faith-based activities) has been shown to be beneficial in 16 of 18 studies on alcoholism recovery and 12 of 12 studies on drug addiction recovery. Keep seeking God through prayer and surrender, and never give up hope!

Desiree in California

I am writing to learn more about Jesus' love for me. I ask God to grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

Holly in Tennessee

I love doing Bible studies, reading the Word. If you send studies, books, devotionals, or addresses [for places to write to, asking to receive more studies], I would love to hear from you. Thank you!



Ekely: Getty Images

Dear Desiree and Holly:

It sounds like you're both on a great path. To learn more about Jesus and His Word, have your chaplain visit prisonfellowship.org/storehouse to see all the free resources Prison

Fellowship has to offer. For a free Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible and workbook, see the ad below. And see the Crossroads Bible study ad on page 7.

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.



Advocate

Continued from page 1

of Jesus on the cross, bearing every sin she had ever committed. It was as if all the love she had been trying to earn throughout her life was on display for her, freely given.

"[After that] I began to just read the Bible," she says. "I surrendered my life to God. I told God, 'Do not release me until I'm ready.'"

God would hold her to that request.

Melisha felt a deep change in herself. Her desires shifted; she wanted to see God more in her life and the lives of those around her. She found an Inside Journal Life Recovery Bible and spent her time in the Word. Melisha received special privileges as a chaplain aid and spent the rest of her time in ad seg ministering to the other women there.

Melisha also signed up for Angel Tree®, which helps incarcerated

moms and dads deliver a Christmas gift and personal message to their children. Melisha had always struggled to provide for her son, but now she could give him a gift!

Using her voice for others

In 2019, Melisha received a release date that would allow her to be home for her mother's 70th birthday—but a week before her date, her release was taken off the table. Melisha felt a rush of emotions—anger, sadness, and confusion. Then she remembered her prayer to God—to not be released until she was ready. Peace washed over her. Two days later, her release date was restored.

In 2020, Melisha returned home. She found work in a warehouse, and within two years, she received four promotions.

"One of the things I had to do is humble myself," Melisha says, explaining that she wasn't the reason behind her job success. "God is the one that did the promotion. God is the one that did the elevation in my life."

Melisha stayed connected to Prison Fellowship® after her release, and in 2024 she became a Justice

Ambassador. Justice Ambassadors are a nationwide network of Christians who advocate for a restorative approach to criminal justice that recognizes the value and potential of every person.

Melisha's passion to help those who are incarcerated inspired her to start a podcast called *Jesus Is the Key to Reentry*. On the podcast, Melisha shares testimonies of other formerly incarcerated individuals and discusses how churches can be more involved in prison ministry.

Melisha now works as a forensic peer mentor, helping formerly incarcerated women successfully reintegrate into society. She remains active in Angel Tree—though now serving as a volunteer.

"Angel Tree helped my baby," she says, "so I want to help somebody else's babies."

Looking back over her life, Melisha now understands that God was teaching her what a real relationship looks like—that it's not one-sided, but an equal pursuit. She knows she is set free, no matter what her circumstances are, because Christ has set her free. ■



Photo courtesy of Melisha

Real Heroes Don't Have Superpowers

by D.P. Bender

Most heroes don't wear capes. They can't fly or become invisible. Their only superpower is their ability to put the needs of others ahead of their own. This was certainly the case for Bob Van Dillen who recently rescued a woman on live television.

Van Dillen was working as a reporter in Atlanta when Hurricane Helene came through. He and a film crew had gone to a street where a creek had overrun its banks. During the live local news broadcast, as Van Dillen stood on higher ground, he described for viewers the huge amount of water that had flooded the street shown behind him. He warned about the danger it posed to drivers.

As Van Dillen was giving his news report, a woman could be heard screaming in the background. The woman had driven her car into the flooded street, not realizing how deep the water was. Her car got stuck—and she was trapped inside. She yelled for help as the rising water began coming in through her window. She feared for her life.

Van Dillen assured viewers that he had already called 911 and that emergency workers were on the way.

"We got you," he finally yelled back to the woman, interrupting his own on-air report. "[We called] 911; they're coming."

But he also knew that rescuers were likely

overwhelmed with many other calls that were coming in during this fierce storm. The woman continued to cry out for help. Van Dillen feared the worst. He then apologized to viewers, emptied his pockets, and waded into the flooding water, all while cameras continued to roll.

By the time Van Dillen made it to the woman's car, the water was up to his chest. He pulled the woman out of the car and carried her on his back to safety. A short time later, the woman's husband arrived at the scene. He hugged Van Dillen and sincerely thanked him for rescuing his wife.

People called Van Dillen a hero. He didn't wake up that morning planning on being a hero. He got out of bed just planning on going to work. But it was the choice to place another person's needs above his own that made him a hero.

Someone ready to rescue you

Back in the days when Jesus walked the Earth, there were no television reporters. But there were a lot of sheep. Like the woman in this story, sheep sometimes get themselves into trouble and need someone to come rescue them.

Shepherds are in charge of making sure their sheep have grass to eat, water to drink, and a safe place to sleep at night. But they are also in charge of rescuing them from any danger they get themselves into. One of the biggest dangers for a sheep is to be separated from the flock. Many



Bulat Silvia: Getty Images

other animals like wolves, lions, and bears might try to eat a sheep that gets separated from the flock. A good shepherd will leave his flock and go find his lost sheep.

Jesus was the ultimate hero who saved His lost sheep: His people.

In John 10:11, Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep."

This is great news since each one of us can sometimes find ourselves feeling lost and alone and in need of rescuing. The world can be a dangerous place for us. But thankfully, we have a Good Shepherd in Jesus. He is our hero. When you feel lost or alone, you can call out to Jesus, and He will rescue you. You just have to trust Him.

Be an everyday hero

Jesus also calls us to be heroes. He says "follow Me" more than a dozen times in the Bible. He asks each of us to follow Him. That means we are supposed to do the sorts of things He does. He is a Good Shepherd who thinks of us and our needs even when we don't deserve His rescuing. He wants

us to be like this toward other people too.

Philippians 2:5 says, "You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had."

Think about this the next time you find someone feeling lost and alone. They might need some words of encouragement. They might need a friend. They might need

someone who is willing to think about others' needs above their own.

Many of the people around you are probably lonely. They may feel lost. Being a hero to people like this doesn't require you to put on a cape. You can be a hero by just being kind and thoughtful to someone today. ■

ARE YOU UP FOR A CHALLENGE?

To be a hero, you need to be on the lookout for people who need support or rescue.

Hebrews 13:16 says, "And don't forget to do good and to share with those in need. These are the sacrifices that please God."

This selfless behavior doesn't always come naturally, especially if you've been in a state of self-protection and feel defensive around others. This act of serving others and being someone's "hero" will be a challenge for some. Be willing to surrender your selfish ways and ask God to give you the strength to look out for others.

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

"Dear Jesus, please help me to be a hero to others. Show me opportunities to help someone in need. I surrender my life to You, confess my sins, and ask Your forgiveness. Help me to lean into You each day. 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 "HEROES," 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.

THE POWER OF EDUCATION

Prisoners who participate in educational and/or vocational training while incarcerated have a 43% lower recidivism (getting rearrested after release) rate and increase their odds of finding employment by 13%.

SOURCE: "Higher Education Programs in Prison: What We Know Now and What We Should Focus on Going Forward," RAND Corporation, 2019; and "Does Providing Inmates with Education Improve Post-release Outcomes?" RAND Corporation 2018.

Times Are Changing in the Justice System

by S.C. Anthony

The world is changing in so many areas—including the prison system. Two such examples of changes are prison population and access to education.

At its peak just over a decade ago, the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) had almost 220,000 prisoners in its custody.

That number has since fallen to 158,000.

States across the nation have also seen their prison populations drop.

What factors explain the decline? One reason is the FIRST STEP Act signed by President Trump in 2018. Mandatory minimum sentences, especially for crimes involving drugs, were reduced. Those serving longer sentences for crack cocaine possession were able to ask a court to reduce their sentence.

Reducing the number of men and women who are rearrested after release was another major goal of the law. Programs were put in place to ensure people's success on the outside. They allowed prisoners to earn credit for completing programs to decrease rearrest rates. Completing these programs gave them the opportunity to be put on home confinement.

The First Step Act was just over a year old when the world experienced arguably the biggest disruption of the last century: the coronavirus pandemic.

Workers were sent home with little notice and had to figure out what could be done remotely. Day care providers and schools shut their doors.

The criminal justice system was also affected by the rapidly evolving pandemic.

Decisions often had to be made on short notice. As the virus spread through

facilities, officials in many areas moved to reduce the number of persons in their custody, and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act allowed some prisoners to serve time in their homes or be released early. The BOP was responsible for 177,000 people in September 2019. That number fell to just over 155,000 a year later.

States large and small saw declines in their prison populations. California's dropped by 18%, Florida's fell by more than 15%, and Texas' by 14%.

Although changes have been happening for various reasons, the pandemic impacted the prison systems more than almost anything else in history.

At federal prisons across the country, 44% of prisoners are in for drug offenses. Drug courts have stepped into the gap as they aim to keep people out of prison. There were nearly 1,700 such courts across the U.S. before the pandemic, and after the pandemic, there were 4,000. Even though they are meant as an alternative to incarceration, participants are subject to strict requirements. Those include frequent and random drug tests, court appearances, and a long-term commitment to participate in intensive treatment. Drug courts have been shown to reduce the number of people rearrested, but those who fail to live up to the standards can still be sent to prison.

Education is often called "the great equalizer," and that holds true in prisons across the country (see gray sidebar, p.3). Many states offer educational opportunities in their facilities, and those options have expanded over the years. Incarcerated men and women can earn their GED, a college



Ekely: Getty Images

degree, or even a vocational certificate for jobs that are in high demand.

More unique ways for prisoners to educate themselves have been developed over recent years. In Washington state, women are given the opportunity to sharpen their driving skills before being released thanks to a car-driving simulator. Individuals in South Carolina are giving retired racehorses nurturing and rehabilitation. In Missouri, tattoo artists are practicing their craft through a tattoo apprenticeship program.

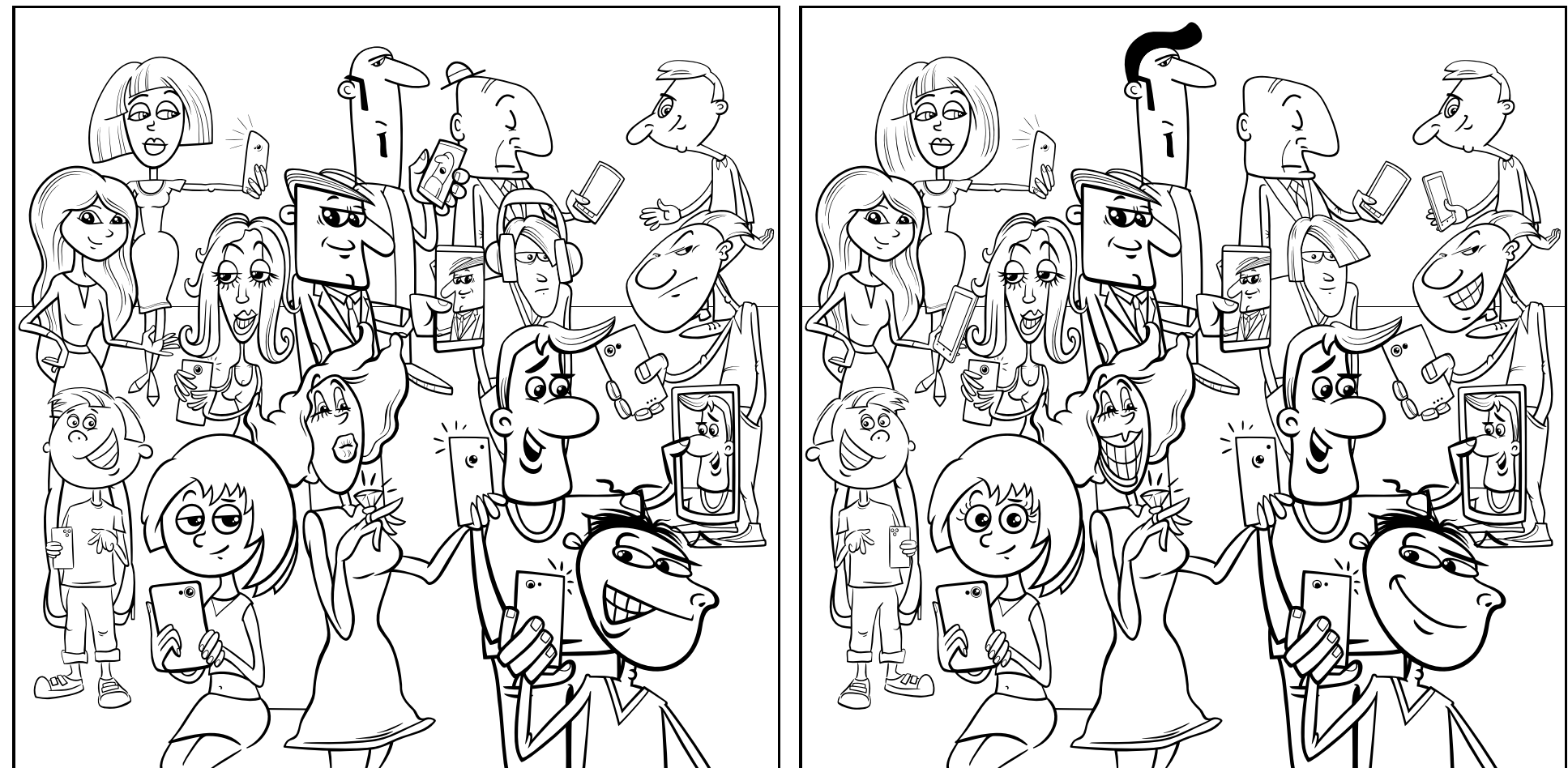
Research has consistently shown that education behind bars leads to a lower likelihood that someone will commit another crime and end up back in prison.

Every year brings some element of change to the criminal justice system. Members of Congress gather in Washington, D.C., to create and change the nation's laws while state lawmakers do the same across the country. The effects of their decisions may not be fully seen for years; changes in criminal justice, unlike changes in technology, are gradual.

One thing is for sure: The times are changing. ■

Find the Differences: Tech Edition

Find the 12 differences, and then color it or send it to your child to color for you. Answers on page 8.



A Vision To Reflect the Times

by Lexi Aggen

In 1976, Charles “Chuck” Colson founded Prison Fellowship, Inside Journal’s parent organization. Chuck was an advisor to President Nixon. He was arrested for his involvement in Watergate, a government scandal, and spent seven months in Maxwell Prison in Alabama, where he developed a passion to serve those behind bars.

At first, Prison Fellowship’s ministry efforts were small—mainly just Colson doing what one man could do on his own. He traveled to different prisons to preach and encourage the incarcerated. Soon, he helped start a program for men and women to attend a leadership training in Washington, D.C. This laid the groundwork for the Prison Fellowship Academy® and Prison Fellowship Grow™ (both currently available at select facilities). The Academy is a yearlong journey through biblically based material led by compassionate coaches. Grow is a program aimed at those ready to consider their lives through the lens of the Gospel message.

Today, Prison Fellowship is a nationwide ministry with hundreds of staff members, thousands of volunteers, and offerings both inside and outside prison. As the justice system and the needs of those in prison have changed, so too has Prison Fellowship.

A new leadership

One such change took place in January of 2024 when Heather Rice-Minus became president and CEO of Prison Fellowship. She is Prison Fellowship’s first female president and CEO.

“[Prison Fellowship’s] board of directors

is excited to have unanimously selected Heather Rice-Minus as the next leader of Prison Fellowship,” says Carl Dill, former chairman. “Heather is uniquely positioned to move the ministry into its next era of transforming lives and redeeming broken systems, both behind bars and in the community. She brings a profound heart for those in prison, as well as their families.”

Heather has over 10 years of experience at Prison Fellowship. Her first role involved working with the advocacy team to promote fair sentencing laws and provide second chances for those with a criminal record. Most recently, she served in an executive vice president role.

“I am deeply humbled to be entrusted to lead Prison Fellowship into its next season of ministry, effecting restorative culture change for individuals, families, and communities impacted by incarceration,” says Heather.

Heather’s career has allowed her to gain valuable experience in partnering with churches, strengthening relationships between children and their incarcerated parents, and interacting with financial donors.

To prepare for her new role, Heather read Chuck’s original writings about his hope for Prison Fellowship. As a result of this and of seeking God together, Heather and the board of directors decided to revise the mission and vision of Prison Fellowship.

Revitalizing the vision

The new mission and vision were released in June of 2024. Prison Fellowship’s new mission is to encounter Jesus with those impacted by incarceration. Prison chapels across the nation

are filled with passionate and active members of the global Church. The new mission expresses the ministry’s desire to partner with believers in prison to fully experience Jesus.

The new vision is that Prison Fellowship envisions a revival of the Church inside and outside prison that brings justice, mercy, and hope to our culture. This reflects Prison Fellowship’s belief that encountering Jesus together has the power to spark a renewal of believers on both sides of the prison wall—and that as the Church is revived, the whole culture will benefit.

“I’m excited to lead Prison Fellowship into the next era, seeking deeper impact and a wider footprint nationwide,” says Heather.

Heather is looking forward to giving local churches the tools to serve behind bars, expanding support for children with incarcerated parents, and improving prison

culture. She also wants to increase involvement of younger generations of Christians.

Prison Fellowship Angel Tree is another Prison Fellowship program that has changed over the years. When Angel Tree started in 1984, it was mainly about delivering gifts to children on behalf of their incarcerated parents. In the early 2000s, Angel Tree expanded to include Angel Tree camping and Angel Tree sports camps. Heather’s leadership will continue to support these children and their families—and now, Angel Tree kids have the opportunity to participate in STEM (science, technology, engineering, math) camps as well!

Prison Fellowship’s goal has always been—and will continue to be—supporting people impacted by incarceration. As times change, Prison Fellowship is dedicated to keeping Jesus at the center of all we do. ■

SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITY

Being released soon? 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

Shana’s Mudslide Submitted by Shana in Virginia

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 pint ice cream (vanilla or other flavor)
- 1 Hostess double chocolate muffin (or similar)
- Individual caramel candies (number of your choice)
- 1 chocolate pudding cup
- 1 sleeve Oreo cookies (or similar)

DIRECTIONS:

First, remove all wrappers from caramels and set caramels aside. Get two bowls. In one bowl, break the muffin into crumbs. While still inside their original packaging, crush the Oreos; then open package and pour cookie crumbs into muffin crumbs and stir. In a second bowl, place the ice cream on the bottom, and pour the crumbs mixture on top. Then add layer of pudding on top of the layer of crumbs. Place unwrapped caramels into now-empty first bowl and microwave them until they’re melted (about 10 seconds at a time so they don’t burn). Pour the melted caramel onto the pudding layer and enjoy! Be sure to eat immediately—before ice cream melts and caramels harden.

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



Butterfly2023: Getty Images

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.

Patience in the Waiting

Submitted by Shara in Florida

“Better to be patient than powerful; better to have self-control than to conquer a city.” —Proverbs 16:32

God declares a patient person more highly esteemed than a warrior. This may not sound right to our earthly ears because our minds often hold a different order of value and importance than our Father does. Yet, Scripture tells us that patience and self-control are better than a warrior or a fighter taking over a city. Scripture also tells us, “People with understanding control their anger; a hot temper shows great foolishness” (Proverbs 14:29).

How often have you heard someone say, “Don’t pray for patience—you won’t like what God will put you through to learn it!” We laugh it off, but we need to pray for the most valuable asset: patience!

Think about it: Since we have to wait for whatever length of time—because waiting for something at some point in life is inevitable—why get all worked up? Why lose control? Why get tired of waiting and give up? Our heavenly Father teaches us to be patient. Relax. Stay calm. Hold onto self-control. I encourage you to keep your patience in the waiting.

Father, teach me to relax and keep my cool in my moments of waiting. Please show me how to keep the faith as I wait on Your timing. Amen.

Correction: In the Winter 2025 Edition, we incorrectly stated that the “Keep Seeking, Keep Knocking” devotional was submitted by Bridget in Arkansas. Bridget is actually in Alaska. We apologize for the error.

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.

FROM THE INSIDE OUT: Poetry From Our Readers

TEARS IN A BOTTLE
Submitted by V. Dodson in Texas

The Lord said
Every tear I shed
Is saved in a bottle.
They are a collection of all my memories,
Of all the things, good and bad, in my life
That Jesus has seen happen for me.

I cried when I was happy, like the day my son was born.
I cried when I was very sad—when beaten down and torn.
I cried when I was mistreated and used
And especially when I was hurt and abused.

I cried when I got saved and knew that Jesus died for me.
I cried, to be so blessed, that Jesus could use such a sinner as me.
I cried when I was reconciled to family—after all the times I lied.
I cried when my mother got saved—right before she died.

I cried when my son graduated from school,
And I cried when he made muscle and tried to be so cool.
I cried when he got married—and gave up being wild.
And I cried at the birth of each grandchild.

You told me, Lord Jesus, that every tear I cried
Was being saved in a bottle, from my birth until I died.
And those tears in that bottle would be like crystal memories
Of all my joys and all my pains—and all my testimonies.

My tears in the bottle, for all the good times and bad
Will be a sweet aroma to Jesus for all the moments I’ve had.
And when I see Jesus in His glory, face to face once I’m there
We will pour out all those tears, and those memories we will share.

GOD IN ME
Submitted by C. Jacks in Georgia

Where do we look to find ourself?
Not in a mirror or on a shelf.
We have to dig deep within our heart
Even if it’s been torn all apart.
God has made each of us for a reason.
All of our trials and tribulations last only for a season.
We define ourselves by what we’ve been through
When in fact that’s the time that we grew.
It’s hard to say, but my loss is for my gain.
Yes it hurts, but God also feels my pain.
So when I close my eyes at night,
I know that God is helping me win this fight.
In the end, am I what God wants me to be?
Do people see God in me?
If this answer is no to this,
I may wind up in the great abyss.
So who am I? I don’t know.
But I hope that God in me starts to show. ■

RECOVERY CORNER

ADDICTION is giving up
EVERYTHING for ONE THING.

RECOVERY is giving up
ONE THING for EVERYTHING.

—Author unknown

It can be hard to keep up with the latest gadgets—especially while behind bars. But there are things you can do to help you stay current with technology once you are released—or sooner, for those who are allowed supervised access to computers or tablets.

The challenges you’re facing during your time away from technology might make you feel disconnected, but they also are likely developing your problem-solving abilities. Set goals for yourself—whether it’s completing a specific course, learning a particular software program, or simply becoming more comfortable using certain devices—and celebrate your progress along the way.

Here are some tips to help:

1. Find online learning platforms.

If you’re allowed supervised internet while incarcerated, or if you’re being released soon, search online for programs that allow you to learn at your own pace. Many offer flexible schedules and interactive content. Here are a few examples:

- **Coursera, edX, and Udemy:** These platforms offer courses on everything from basic computer literacy to advanced software development and data science.
- **YouTube:** Search YouTube for step-by-step guides on using specific technologies (like learning to use Microsoft Excel or setting up social media accounts).
- **Khan Academy:** This program teaches

fundamental subjects like math, computer science, and basic digital knowledge.

2. Utilize community resources.

After your release, check to see if there are free or low-cost tech workshops in your region. These are typically offered by libraries, community colleges, or nonprofits. Some organizations, like Per Scholas or Year Up United, provide free training to individuals who face barriers to employment or education, including those who have been incarcerated or served in the military.

3. Seek out mentorship and peer support.

Learning technology can sometimes feel isolating, especially if you’re transitioning back into society after a long absence. Getting support from a family member, church friend, neighbor, or community member can help ease this process.

4. Learn through practice and application.

One of the best ways to truly understand technology is to use it. Many companies, like Adobe or Microsoft, offer free trials of their software or have free alternatives. Some nonprofits even specifically help those with a criminal record: The Last Mile (thelastmile.org) is one organization that offers coding and business training for currently or recently incarcerated individuals.

5. Go deeper.

As you gain confidence, consider

joining online communities or forums where you can ask questions, exchange ideas, and find support from others who are learning technology. These online groups can provide you with the opportunity to interact with like-minded individuals and find answers to questions that might arise as you continue learning. Connection websites like **Meetup.com** host local in-person groups that are often focused on learning specific skills, including coding, graphic design, or digital marketing. Participating in a group learning environment can boost your confidence and provide hands-on learning opportunities.

Whether you’re getting out next week or not anytime soon, there’s no need to feel left behind in the rapidly changing world of technology. With a little help, it’s possible to learn new tech skills and reenter the digital world with confidence. Just start small and don’t give up.

Some of the questions you may want to ask a librarian or support person:

- How to navigate the internet.
- How to log onto and browse social media.
- How to use Google or DuckDuckGo.
- How to use an operating system (Windows or MacOS).
- How to register for an email account and send emails.
- How to use Microsoft Word (to write letters or articles) or Excel (to create spreadsheets or balance budgets).

DISCLAIMER: Be sure to follow all your facility’s rules and regulations and/or any conditions of your parole. ■

TECH: THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE FUTURE

The society we live in is worlds apart from the one our grandparents knew, and it’s only going to keep changing.

Here are just a few of the benefits of modern technology:

- AI is helping people in every field from writing to medical.
- “Smart home” items like Alexa are making lives easier.
- Drones and other devices are assisting in everything from missing persons recovery to delivery services.

Here are a few downsides of modern technology:

- Scams and identity fraud are becoming more advanced.
- Students are using AI to cheat.
- Technology is blurring the lines between what’s real and fake, messing with our general sense of trust and making it harder to tell when false information is spreading.

We can’t possibly predict how tech will affect future prison sentences, but we’ve already seen an increase in the use of tablets, and mail rooms are scanning letters instead of distributing original mail. Some experts speculate that AI and tech may even lead to new treatment methods for addiction, safer communications with the outside world, and advancements in such things as house arrests and transitional housing. No one can predict all the ways tech will change things, but the future will be interesting!

WHERE HOPE UNFOLDS

The Crossroads mentorship program offers more than a dozen Bible study courses, each with up to fourteen 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: _____

Earliest Release Date: _____

Referred by: PF _____

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

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NEWS + NOTES

by D.P. Bender

Facility Hosts First In-Prison Film Festival

The world’s first in-prison film festival took place this past October at San Quentin Rehabilitation Center in California. Organizers told Variety that the goal of the festival was to help those impacted by incarceration to be “seen, heard, and felt.” The lineup of films included a short documentary called “Four Letters,” which featured Charles Anderson, a former prisoner. Anderson learned computer coding while incarcerated and is now a software engineer. The film originally premiered in April when it was shown in prisons across California as part of Second Chance Month®.

Prison Fellowship started Second Chance Month in 2017 as a nationwide campaign to unlock second chances for the tens of millions of Americans with a criminal record who have paid their debt to society. Since then, multiple U.S. presidents, governors in more than 25 states, and hundreds of churches and organizations have recognized April as Second Chance Month.

Restorative Living Conditions Make Prison Safer

In South Carolina, a special housing unit called the Community Opportunity Restoration Enhancement (CORE) is proving that a more restorative approach to prison can lead to fewer violent incidents.

Officials at the prison combine mentoring, one-on-one meetings, and more open living conditions to create this unique prison environment. Older men with lengthy sentences serve as mentors to groups of young men.

The program focuses on young adults, ages 18–25, since this age group has the highest re-offending rates. The walls are covered with artwork created by the men in the unit. The men are also given greater-than-normal freedom to decorate their own cells. The program values self-expression and open communication as key parts of the restoration process. People are also allowed up to 15 hours outside their cells every day. The men dress in

polo shirts and khaki pants, and each personal room has a window with natural sunlight.

Behavior issues still occur, but violence has gone down in this unit and in a similar unit at another facility. Madalyn Wasilczuk, a law professor at the University of South Carolina who studied the two units, told the Associated Press, “It’s not a surprise to me that treating people more humanely and better would reduce violence.” Similar units have been tested in Connecticut, Massachusetts, Colorado, and North Dakota.

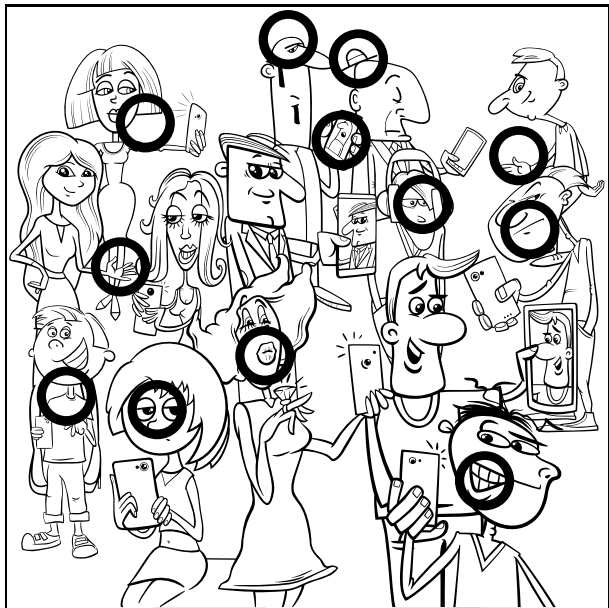
Public Attends Five-Course Meal in Prison

Grafton Correctional Institution in Ohio hosted nearly 60 members of the public for a five-course meal on prison grounds. In the middle of two gardens, tables were

set with white linen cloth, fresh flowers, and food prepared by the men of the prison. The opening course was a beet salad with goat cheese and vegetables that were grown at the prison. Next up was roasted salmon, lamb, and a corn cake dessert with a blueberry compote.

The men who made the meal were part of the prison’s EDWINS Leadership and Restaurant Institute, which offers a six-month culinary course in 652 prisons and jails around the country. Chef Brandon Chrostowski, who helped start the program, told the Associated Press that he began his institute with the belief that “every human being, regardless of their past, has the right to a fair and equal future.” ■

Find the Differences: Answer Key



THE OUTSTANDING CHAPLAIN AWARD

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:

Sterling Averett (GA), Christopher Blair (IN), Jodie Coats (MI), Tammy Edkin (PA), David Gonzales (NM), Samuel Latta (SC), Jean Marie (PA), Isaac Mineses (NM), Wanda Morrisette (PA), David Webb (KY), Doug Worsham (IN)

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.

GEN ALPHA SLANG

Times change, and so do the words we use! The generation of kids born between 2010 and 2024 are sometimes called “Generation Alpha.” And just like you had your own slang when you were a kid, so do today’s kids. Here are some of the terms popular with Gen Alpha kids.

- **“Sigma”**: A lone wolf-type of person; someone who’s the top of the pack.
- **“Flex”**: To show off or boast about something, often material items or achievements. “She’s always flexing her new phone.”

- **“Rizz”**: Short for charisma; can be used as noun or verb. For example: “That guy tried to rizz that girl, but she was more into his friend who has all the rizz.”
- **“Bet”**: Excited agreement. For example: “You want to hang out later?” “Bet.”
- **“No cap”**: No lie; “I’m being truthful.”
- **“Slay”**: Be great. “You slayed in that presentation.”
- **“Sus”**: Short for suspicious, popularized by the game Among Us. Gen Alpha uses it to call out something that seems fishy or untrustworthy.

- **“Yeet”**: A term that originally started as an exclamation of excitement or approval but now also means to throw something with force or abandon. “I yeeted my pencil across the room.”
- **“Drip”**: Refers to someone’s fashion or sense of style. Often associated with wearing the latest or most popular items. “That outfit’s got mad drip.”

How many of these did you know? If you have kids around this age, have you ever heard them use these terms? Try these on a young teenager and see what kind of reaction you get!



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