

# A GUIDE TO Prison

# [Survival]



**“Prison was the best thing that ever happened to me.”**

Does that sound a little far-fetched ... even laughable? And yet, we've lost count of how many prisoners and ex-prisoners have told us that. While prison first seemed about as rock-bottom as they could get, the experience ended up being a real turning point in their lives—leading to a new way of thinking and a new purpose in life.

Such a turn-about involves making some new choices and creating some new habits while inside. This Prison Survival Guide offers suggestions in:

- How to eat right and stay fit
- How to feed your mind
- How to help your marriage stay together
- How to parent your kids from behind bars
- How to connect with the right kind of people inside
- How to deal with anger and depression
- How to guard against common prison diseases
- How to tap into your spiritual side

Prison Fellowship:

44180 Riverside Parkway, Lansdowne, VA 20176  
(703) 478-0100, [www.prisonfellowship.org](http://www.prisonfellowship.org)

**A Guide to Surviving and Thriving Behind Bars**

 **PRISON  
FELLOWSHIP**  
*Changing Lives, Minds, and  
Communities through Jesus Christ*

# Introduction to this resource

Most prisoners survive prison. We want to help you do more than that. In one of the most unlikely places, we believe you can **thrive!**

This Prison Survival Guide is a collaborative effort. While the key author is former Prison Fellowship staff member and ex-prisoner Ron Humphrey, he has been assisted by fellow staffers Jeff Peck, Becky Beane, and Zoe Sandvig. In addition, several current and former prisoners and their family members have contributed valuable insights from their firsthand experiences of incarceration. We extend our thanks to Jeff Andrews, Norm Askew, James French, Ritchie “The Zig” Hall, Larry Keen, Jackie Kubinski, Carolyn LeCroy, Peg Ruggiero, Chris Russell, Otis Smith, Donna Varnam, Steve Varnam, Thomas Walker, Roy Yamamoto, and Marty Yost.

We also want to recognize another former prisoner, Charles W. Colson. Three decades ago, as special counsel to President Nixon, Colson got caught up in the Watergate scandal. It pushed him to take a hard look at his life ... which led him to find forgiveness in Christ. And then it pushed him into prison. But after he got out, Colson founded Prison Fellowship in 1976. The Gospel had radically transformed his own life. And he wanted all prisoners to have that same opportunity.

Today Prison Fellowship—a ministry of PFM—is one of the largest prison ministries in the world. Our desire, simply, is to help you—and millions of other prisoners like you—turn your life around. We offer you this Prison Survival Guide as one small way to help.

Prison Fellowship volunteers are active in many U.S. federal and state prisons. Check with your prison chaplain or program director to find out if PF is active in yours. For more information you may also write to:

Prison Fellowship  
44180 Riverside Parkway  
Lansdowne, VA 20176

Please read on to learn more about how to make the most of your time in prison—and come out a better person.



# [Surviving] Prison for Life



## CHAPTER 1

### IT NOW BEGINS

"I hereby sentence you to ..."

The judge rattles off some numbers, but your mind is numb and your knees are shaking. You are going to prison, and you are scared. Your attorney will explain to you later what the numbers mean.

You are going to be living in a concrete and steel jungle, by a new set of rules and values from the ones you probably grew up under. A "tough guy" attitude won't help you here—prisons are full of some of the toughest and meanest people in the world.

You will have to gain new instincts for danger and living by your wits. And you must do it quickly.

Most people survive a prison sentence. They return to the outside world, some sooner, some later. But once back outside, they must continue to live by new values or join the more than 50 percent of released prisoners who end up back inside.

With that disheartening statistic in mind, we want to take the definition of *prison survival* to the next level, as they say in sports. So our new definition of prison survival means not just getting through prison with body and soul intact, but staying out of prison for the rest of your life.

Real survival for me really began on my release date from federal prison 17 years ago. It meant finding a place to live, a job, and a car to get to that job. It meant learning all over how to file a tax return, balance a checkbook, and follow a strict budget. It meant learning how to be an at-home husband and father again, without trampling on the shoes and the feelings of my wife, who had become more self-sufficient during the nine years I was down.

You will be dealing with prison survival for the *rest of your life*. It's a little like Alcoholics Anonymous:

"Hi, I'm Ron,  
and I'm a prison survivor!"

And no, it's not easy. But it can be done. Prison Fellowship has published many stories of former prisoners who are making it on the outside. They include Norm Askew, Jeff Andrews, Thomas Walker, Stacy Cavender, Otis Smith, James French, Michael Llamas, Chris Russell, Roy Yamamoto, Jackie Kubinski, and me—Ron Humphrey. These names might mean nothing to you. I list them just to show that you are not alone in your experience. Others have gone before you. And from the vantage point of now doing well on the outside, most of them look back on their prison experience and see it as a real turning point in their lives.

Freedom is definitely preferable to going back to prison. I have a new home, my wife of 30-plus years, children, grandchildren, a fantastic job that I love, and decent health. And I can go fishing whenever I feel like it. These are truly the best years of my life. Miss them by getting sent back to prison? *Not a chance.*

In the following pages of this booklet, we are going to dig into this new idea of prison survival. This guide was written with input from many other ex-prisoners, Prison Fellowship writers and editors, and experts in various fields (such as mental health or education). We will talk about nutrition and exercise, not just for your prison time, but for when you get home as well. The latest studies say more than 60 percent of Americans are overweight. And nothing shortens life expectancy more than the problems that come with carrying extra weight.

We will also talk about preserving the mind as well as the body. Educational programs, recreation, and good friendship will not only get you through prison, but carry you into the outside world as well. Now in my early seventies, I am still taking college classes in how to be a better

writer and photographer. And I still play with Rubik's Cube and other puzzles, just to keep dust from collecting in the brain cells.

Finally, we will look at positive and negative ways to become a prison survivor. We will be talking mainly attitude here, the reasons lifelong prison survival should be your goal. And we will consider how God fits into all this.

Just a few cautions about what this guide does *not* cover: It cannot address every specific type of circumstance that might come up in prison. Instead, we touch on some of the most typical circumstances and share some broad principles on how to face them. We could write books on parenting and relationships, but this isn't the place (though we'll provide some good recommendations for further reading). Also, the guide does not address prisoners' legal issues or give any legal advice. All cases are unique, and legal issues vary from state to state. So you should contact your lawyer with any questions or concerns you may have.

While 95 percent of today's prisoners in America will one day be released, we realize that some of you will never leave prison. For you, we hope you can find in this Prison Survival Guide a few gems of wisdom that will help you not only endure your situation, but *thrive* in it.

For the rest of you, we look forward with you to that day when the prison gate swings open for you and the guard shouts, "Don't come back!" By then, we hope you will be prepared to grant him that request!

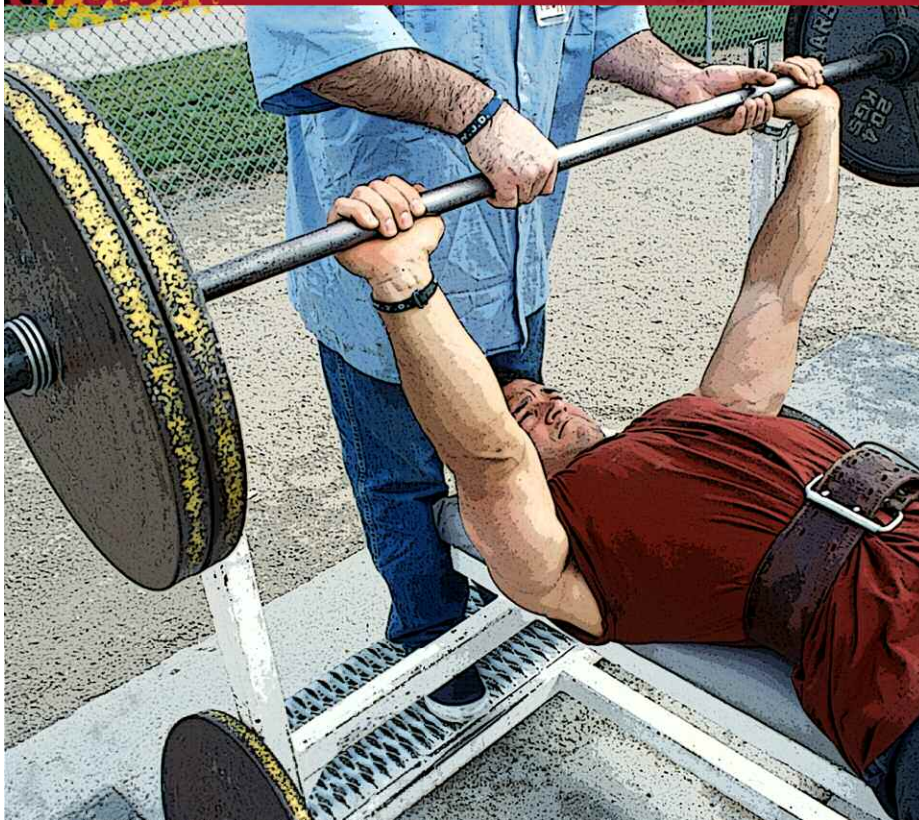
Ron Humphrey  
Former Senior Writer  
Prison Fellowship

**"Hi, I'm Ron, and I'm  
a prison survivor!"**





# Eat, Exercise, & [Endure]



## CHAPTER 2

### BEATING THE ODDS

Surviving prison must be easy: More than 700,000 prisoners will walk out the front gates of U.S. prisons this year, their sentences completed.

But wait: Many studies show that more than half of these “survivors” will march right back into jail or prison within two or three years of their release, having caught a new beef.

Apparently, we can survive prison but not freedom.

What’s going on here? Why are the odds stacked against us, and what can we do to put them in our favor?

Remember, we are extending the definition of *prison survival* to mean not just getting through the in-prison bit, but to then build a successful life on the outside that will keep you there. We should all want to be a “former prisoner” for the rest of our lives.

This is going to be a total approach. Not everything—eating, for example—will ever be the same in prison as on the outside, but we can talk about learning discipline and values during your imprisonment that you carry over and use in the real world.

### WHERE’S THE (REAL) BEEF?

Let’s start with food, which in prison is never five-star. Remember, the average taxpayer is buying your dinner tonight and every night you are behind bars. Remember, too, that many of them may be working long hours to put spaghetti, beans, rice, or mashed potatoes on the table for their own family, so they are not going to favor steak and lobster for you. With the state footing the food bill, you will be fed as economically as possible. You are going to see a lot of starchy carbohydrates and greasy fat and less protein. Carbs and fats cost less.

You can survive on prison food. You just need to learn to supplement and control your intake of foods that both dietitians and doctors agree can harm your body over time. That usually means replacing some chow hall visits with home-cooking from the commissary or canteen and your locker. You have probably already noticed that the all-time best-selling prepared food products in prison commissaries are ramen noodles and canned tuna. The noodles are dry; just add hot water. The tuna lid has a pull-tab so you don’t need a contraband can opener. There are many different ways to fix the tuna: on crackers, in a salad, or as a sandwich. And best of all, tuna—packed in water, not oil—is one of the healthiest foods you will find on either side of prison walls.

And ramen noodle packages are popular wherever hot water or a microwave is available to cook them. If the accompanying spice package doesn't go into the soup, it is used to spice up other food items. At the end of this chapter, we've included some recipes you can try in prison. And yes, we've taste-tested them all!

Many food-savvy inmates check the posted prison menu in advance each week and decide which meals they want to replace. Ideally, you will have enough canteen credit to buy the items needed to replace the skipped prison meals. And if you just can't get enough to eat between the mess hall and the commissary, then you are a candidate for a job in the kitchen.

Finally, many commissaries today sell multiple vitamin products. Consider using these daily, not just in prison, but on the outside as well. We seldom get all the needed nutrients through regular eating, no matter how careful we are. Drink water; you can find that in prison. Our bodies are largely water, and we need to replace fluids that are lost and to flush our systems. Keep drinking it when released; it's just a good life habit.

Where eating on the inside has similarities with the outside is at the waistline. More than 60 percent of Americans in and out of prison today are considered above the weight that is healthy for them. Extra weight leads to all kinds of health problems down the road, from diabetes to heart attack or stroke. You tire easily, your joints hurt, and you are spending money constantly buying larger clothing.

I speak from experience; after prison, I gained an average of three pounds a year. Doesn't seem like much one year at a time, but it adds up. I can see why so many others fail in dieting. It is much easier to never put on the extra pounds in the first place than to try to take them off later.

Each time I see my doctor, he anticipates my question about the effectiveness of the latest fad diet. "Diet and exercise," he chides me. We skip the details; he has been over them many times before with me. He wants me to watch how much I eat and what I eat for the greatest nutritional value with the lowest calorie count. One trick that works for me is to drink a glass or two of water just before eating. You feel full sooner, plus you can always use the water.

My doctor also wants me to follow a varied exercise program regularly to maintain heart and circulation, improve joint flexibility, and burn extra calories. He never suggests special diets that have caught the public's eye; just eat the right amounts of the right foods.

The American Cancer Society recently changed its guidelines, saying that a third of the 500,000 cancer deaths a year now result from poor diet and no physical activity. It states that eating a nutritious diet, staying active, and limiting alcohol are the top activities Americans should do to fight cancer.

### THE TRACK AND THE PILE

Prisoners spend much time just lying around. Do that in prison long enough and you will develop a bad habit that will carry over to your life after prison. The human body needs exercise, nearly everyone agrees. "Use it or lose it," some say. Our bodies are strongest and healthiest when we force them, through exercise, to work harder than at rest.

There are three different types of useful exercise, and examples of each can be done in prison as well as on the outside. **Stretching** exercises pull the muscles, extend your various bending points for mobility and flexibility, lower the risk of muscle strain, and help with balance.

**Resistance** exercise involves lifting, pulling, or pushing against something to build muscle strength. Here's where the weight pile comes in, if you are at a prison that still has one. But simpler resistance activities, such as calisthenics, push-ups, sit-ups, bicycling, and even stair climbing, offer muscle-building opportunities. I was able to find stationary bikes at my prison; I now have one at home to go with my treadmill and weight bench.

The third type of exercise is **aerobic**, or endurance training activities. These get your heart and lungs pumping while exercising other muscles. An ideal aerobic exercise will raise your maximum heart rate 50 percent or more above your normal heart rate and stay raised for at least 20 minutes. Walking and jogging are aerobic exercises you can do in prison; that's what the walking track is for. At home, I mix treadmill (high impact putting stress on muscles and joints) with lap swimming, which offers the lowest impact of all and combines aerobic with resistance activity.

At the federal prison where I did my time, another inmate started a walking club. Names were posted in the gym, and at the end of each day we marked how many miles we had walked or jogged that day around the prison track. Some inmates topped 1,000 miles in a year! The discipline I gained through regular walking and jogging around the prison yard carried over to my civilian time, and I feel rotten if I fail to get some aerobic exercise on a given day.

Eating properly and getting regular exercise are two important ways to not only make it through a prison sentence but to also build a pattern of good habits to follow on the outside.



## Microwave Peanut Butter Balls

### Ingredients

- ¼ cup honey
- ½ cup peanut butter
- 1 cup dry milk (or non-dairy creamer)
- ½ cup banana nut granola cereal  
(for variety, replace the cereal with ½ cup or one envelope of instant uncooked oatmeal, your favorite dry cereal, or 1 cup of crunched sandwich cookies)

### Directions

1. Place the honey, peanut butter, and cereal into a microwave-safe bowl.
2. Cook in a microwave on high power for about 1½ minutes. (Microwave power settings vary. You may need an extra ½ minute.)
3. Remove from microwave when peanut butter is soft. Stir until well blended.
4. Mix in dry milk a little at a time (if you are going with the variation, mix those ingredients in now). Mix with a spoon until the mixture will not stick to the back of your spoon or it becomes like Play-Doh.
5. Form the dough with your hands (or spoon) into ¾-inch round balls, or pat onto a flat microwave bowl lid.
6. Set aside for several hours in a cool place or on ice until hardened.

Servings:  
about 10 balls or 12 two-inch squares

## Zesty Tuna Wraps

### Ingredients

- 1 6-oz can tuna, drained
- 1 tbsp salsa
- 1 small dill pickle, diced
- ½ tsp honey
- ½ tsp low-fat mayo
- 1 flour tortilla
- ½-oz Velveeta cheese

### Directions

1. Combine tuna, salsa, pickle, honey, mayo in bowl, stirring until well blended.
2. On clean work surface, place 1 tortilla (the wrap) on two paper towels.
3. Spread cheese along one edge of wrap. Place tuna filling on top of cheese.
4. Roll wrap starting at the edge with the filling. Roll half turn, fold insides inward and finish rolling. This will close the ends. Tortillas can crack, but if warmed a few seconds in the microwave, they will be more “rollable.”
5. Microwave wrap on paper towels for one minute (or eat cold).

Note: If your commissary doesn't sell tortillas, you can try substituting bread or spread filling on crackers.

## Tex-Mex Beef Fiesta

### Ingredients

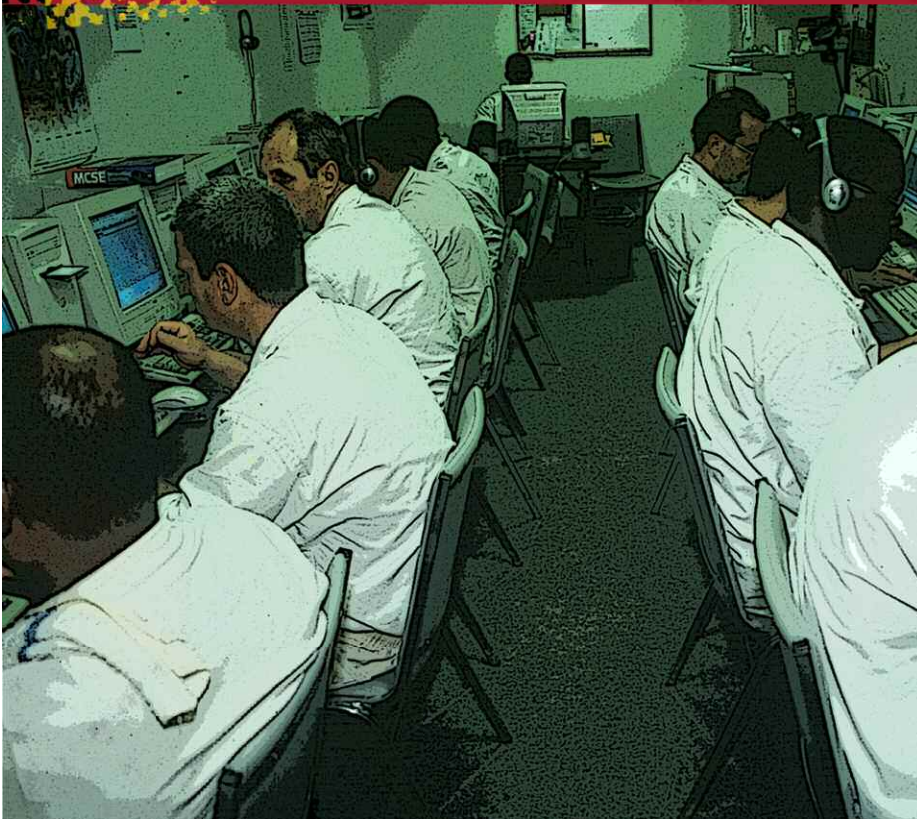
- 1 5-oz can low-fat hot & spicy (or regular beef summer sausage)
- 1 15-oz can chili with beans (or dried chili mix)
- 4-oz salsa
- 1 large hot dill pickle, diced
- 8-oz Velveeta cheese, cubed (or cheese spread)
- 2 packages Ramen Dry Noodle soup, chili or beef flavor
- 3-oz black olives, diced (optional)
- 3 tbsp honey
- 2 small jalapeño peppers, diced
- ¼ cup bell peppers, chopped (fresh or dehydrated)
- ¼ cup onions, chopped (fresh, dehydrated, or powdered)
- 2 tbsp low-fat sour cream chip dip (optional)

### Directions

1. Prepare soup according to package directions. Set aside.
2. Dice summer sausage, bell peppers, and onions and put in microwave-safe bowl. If using any dehydrated ingredients, add water according to package directions. Microwave about 3 minutes, stirring once after 90 seconds. Set aside.
3. In third microwave-safe bowl combine chili, diced pickle, honey, jalapeño peppers, and cubed cheese. Microwave 2 minutes, stir, cook 2 more minutes.
4. Combine the chili and summer sausage mixtures in one bowl, mixing well.
5. Drain Ramen noodles and pour chili mixture over the top. Divide into two bowls and spread salsa evenly over each serving.
6. Garnish with low-fat sour cream chip dip and olives.

Try replacing some chow hall visits with “home cooked” meals created from ingredients available in most prison commissaries. We’ve taste-tested all of these!

# Don't Lose Your [Mind]



## CHAPTER 3

### GET OFF THE COUCH

Five o'clock whistle. Quitting time at the prison factory (if you have a job). But what's the plan for the rest of the evening? Five hours in the dayroom watching someone else's choice of television fare? On the outside we call that "couch potato."

I read a report that says the average American spends four hours a day watching television. Above average watches more. Good grief, what are they watching? None of my ball games or NASCAR races last that long. Could it be dull sitcoms, inane reality shows, or crime shows? (Crime shows? Shouldn't we have some principles?)

Are there any alternatives to the Great Tube? Can you go back to your cell/dorm/cube and read a good book? Attend a class over at the Education Department? Hang out in the lonely and quiet library?

### BRAINSTORM OR BRAIN DRAIN?

Your brain works like a muscle; the more you use it, the better it gets. But leave it in "neutral" awhile and it will gather dust and rust that won't come out with WD-40.

Different correctional facilities provide varied opportunities to exercise your brain. Sometimes, fellow prisoners can be your best teachers. During my nine years in a federal facility, one inmate taught me to juggle using tennis balls bought from the rec department. Another showed me card tricks; playing cards were abundantly available. A third had me solving Rubik's Cube in just over two minutes.

Then an ingenious prison education director recruited an inmate/private pilot to teach classes in flying. We even got FAA-approved materials, and our instructor, Tom (I hope you got your wings back, buddy), kept us busy for 18 months learning the mysteries of weather as it applied to flying, basic ground school, and instrument flight.

At the end of the course, I passed a proctored FAA exam and received a certificate authorizing me to move immediately on to flight training. While the certificate expired long before my sentence did, just attending the class two evenings a week and doing the homework Tom assigned made those 18 months pass a lot faster than the others. At that prison, I could have also taken training leading to a long-haul truck driver CDL license. Truck drivers are in demand these days.

Remember our definition of *prison survival*? You must not merely finish your prison term, but also stay free in the world for the rest of your life. Otherwise, snuff your torch; no "Survivor" badge for you.

A 2005 Bureau of Justice Statistics study shows a direct link between the number of years of education you have and your ability to get a job and stay out of prison once released. It should be no surprise that the more skills or education you have, the greater the chance that an employer will hire you.

Yes, Congress abolished Pell grants for prisoners in 1994, but many local colleges have found ways to bring study programs into prison, and prisoners have found ways to pay for them.



We have letters from inmates who completed high school in prison. Some went on to complete bachelor and postgraduate degrees before their release. No, it's not easy, but it's not easy to continue your education on the outside either.

#### FINDING INNER STRENGTH

Many prisoners will not have the prodding and encouragement of family and friends to better themselves through study or training classes. It will have to come from a deep-set determination to rejoin the community, get a job, own a home, and raise a family.

Politicians and corrections officials are catching on. They are running out of bed space; they want *yours*. If you are released and you stay out, that bed is now available for someone else. And the overall cost of corrections dips a bit. Didn't know you were that important?

So decision makers are encouraging and bringing back educational opportunities for prisoners. I don't know if we will see the Pell grants return, but educating prisoners has a higher profile today than in past years.

Once you are out of prison and find a job paying more than 11 cents an hour, you can start bankrolling your future by taking night or weekend classes.

Most community colleges now offer some form of adult education at reasonable prices. I regularly take classes at the University of Georgia over the Internet. I read and do the assignments, I learn, I pass the tests, I get certificates of successful completion, and I have yet to visit the campus itself. And I'm not afraid to tell people I am age 71, having left prison at 54. Not bragging; I just like to be an "old-fogey" inspiration for others. It's the old,

*"If I can do it, so can you."*

#### JUST DOING MY JOB

Some years back, after prison, a magazine interviewed me about the value of working while serving a prison stretch. Prison work comes in different flavors, and I had done some computer work in the prison factory, packed inmate orders in the commissary, and umpired softball games. I just kept busy, and I told the magazine that I would have gone crazy without something to do.

With overtime, I could sometimes send home \$400 a month to my wife and kids, and that paid their rent. I felt I wasn't neglecting them even though I was away from them.

Jeff, a successful computer execu-

tive today, told me, "I never had a spare minute in prison. You need to make a life for you, both in prison and when you get out. I was almost as busy in prison as now. I would create projects for me. Some of it was just 'busywork,' but that is important, too."

In my favorite prison movie, *Shawshank Redemption*, Andy Dufresne, the lead character, says, "Get busy living, or get busy dying." I guess that's what drove me on while in prison; I wanted to live. (Some of you are not there yet. Keep reading, because we have some serious truth to change those who think dying is the way out.) When they cut that home monitoring device off my wrist on February 22, 1990, I just decided to stay busy. A week later, I was working for Prison Fellowship, and I have been on the run ever since.

So make your choice. Sit like a robot before a TV or enlighten your mind with some work, study, or a good book. Doesn't matter if you are in or out of prison; it's about keeping your mind as healthy as your body.

For correctional educational opportunities, see Appendix A.

#### Jon Marc Taylor is the undisputed expert on education behind bars.

Make that "Dr. Jon Marc Taylor, AA, BS, MA, Ph.D.," and note that he earned all of those college degrees while in prison. At the moment, Jon is among a handful of prisoners we know who have earned a doctorate in prison.

Jon has been in prison since he was 19—more than 25 years. But instead of wasting away, Jon decided to use his "sabbatical" for educational purposes, and he began attending any classes he could while sending away for correspondence courses. Based on his studies and research, he has written articles for more than 100 publications and has won the I. F. Stone Student Journalism Award and the Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award. A *New York Times* op-ed piece by Taylor was read into the Congressional Record. He is the author of *Prisoners' Guerrilla Handbook to Correspondence Programs in the United States and Canada*. (This is available at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) and other online outlets. If possible, ask a family member or your prison chaplain to see about getting you a copy.)

## Getting Ahead Behind Bars

**"The struggle to educate yourself behind walls and razor wire will be the greatest challenge most of us will ever have to endure. It takes dedication. It takes sacrifice." —Jon Marc Taylor**



# Preserving Your [Marriage]



## CHAPTER 4

### SAVE THE FAMILY

Going to prison is a severe strain on family ties. If you are married when you enter prison, the odds are stacked against you. Studies show that 85 percent of marriages collapse when one spouse goes to prison, even for a short stay. What can you and your family members do to preserve these ties throughout your prison time and after your release?

Before we get too far, you might have burned a few family relationships on your way to incarceration. You're responsible for some damage. Before any relationship can go forward, you'll need to call, write, or in a visit confess, acknowledge, apologize, and seek forgiveness. We recommend reading *The Art of Forgiving* by Lewis Smeades, *What's So Amazing About Grace* by Phillip Yancy, and *Harsh Grief, Gentle Hope* by Mary White.

Gerard, a Pennsylvania prisoner, says, "I made a conscious choice to keep up good contacts with family and friends, an effort to keep up as much normalcy in my life as possible. I humbled myself, let people know my situation, and have had wonderful contact through phone and mail and visits. I have also written the most, and perhaps the best, letters of my life. I believe a good letter is even better than a phone call; and it is an art form well worth cultivating. It lets me keep in touch with positive people to deepen ties and to feel much like a part of the world, even while locked up and cut off physically from so much."

Steve and Donna Varnam share their thoughts on how they kept their marriage intact while Steve was in prison. Their comments are given from the perspective of the husband being the one in prison—since more than 90 percent of prisoners are male. But imprisoned wives can learn from these, too.

### Husbands

- Get over your self-pity and accept responsibility for the actions that put you in prison. Only then can you get a fresh start on life and your marriage.
- Learn to communicate with your wife honestly. Your conviction has damaged her trust and confidence in you. Rebuilding your wife's trust will take time, and is essential to saving the relationship.
- Be sensitive to what your wife is going through. She is forced to assume many new responsibilities by herself. She, too, feels alone. Listen to her needs first.
- Encourage your wife with letters, telephone calls, and visits. Don't tear her down.
- Protect her feelings. Don't be afraid to say something nice to her. Disagree when necessary, then forgive and forget. Look for solutions where no one loses.



- Overlook the little things that irritate you. Keep talking. Silence becomes a barrier.
- Children should unite you, not divide you. Don't let them play one off against the other. Don't take the child's side against your wife even when the child is right. Don't let the shared responsibility to the children interfere with your responsibility and loyalty to their mother.
- Tell your wife you're sorry and ask for her forgiveness. It will mean so much to your wife to hear these words.
- Don't abandon your role as husband or father. Make it easy for your wife to tell you about what is happening at home. Discuss family decisions with her.
- Trust your wife. Do not let others plant suspicion in your mind. Do not let the disappointing experiences of other prisoners make you doubt your wife's faithfulness and commitment to you.

#### Phone Calling Tips

- When calling home collect, call different members of the family rather than always calling the same person.

- Time your calls. Agree that you'll say goodbye when time's up. This is all about costs. Until serious phone reform takes root, the bills that come with calls can sink a family budget. In many cases you'll need to keep it brief and use letters to finish up or go deeper into areas of concern.
- Plan your calls by making a list of items you want to talk about. This will help you get through the important items first before time runs out.
- When asking for books, food, money or clothes from family members, ask different people rather than the same person every time. This spreads the cost load around.
- Consider doing the same Bible study together and discussing what you learned by phone or in letters. It's a great way to grow together spiritually.

#### MAKE THE MOST OF VISITS

Visits from your family can be a wonderful time of joy and renewal. Or it can end up a wasted opportunity if you and your spouse don't connect. Worse, it can fall into angry battle if you use the time simply to vent your frustrations. How can you make the most of your time?

#### Count Your Blessings

Many spouses make a huge sacrifice to visit their loved ones in prison. They probably have to juggle a lot of activities to carve out this time for you. They may have to drive or ride in a bus several hours to get to the prison—which costs money. It costs even more if they have to pay for a motel room when the round trip is too much to cover in one day. And after a long trip—likely disrupted with many stops if young kids are along—spouses have to put up with the hassles of security clearance, long waits, impatient and condescending treatment by some correctional staff, and embarrassing pat downs. But it's worth it to them to see you. So please don't take your spouse's visit for granted. Let her know how much you appreciate that she made sacrifices to visit you.

#### Understand Inner Turmoil

Certainly your life isn't easy on the inside. But keep in mind that your family's lives aren't any picnic either. Try to understand the pressures they endure to survive on the outside without you—including the stigma of having a family member in prison. You won't be able to help change other people's reactions to them. You might not be able to help relieve your family's financial burdens. But you can find ways to praise, encourage, and appreciate your spouse for all she is doing for you and the family.

Having been stripped of most of the control of your life, it's easy

to want to reach out to your family and fix or control things. It doesn't work, and you may find yourself running into an emotional brick wall. Statements like, "I called last night but you weren't there; where were you? Who were you with?" communicate distrust and jealousy, which will just drive your loved ones away.

#### Encourage Your Spouse to Open Up

Ann Edenfield, author of *Family Arrested: How to Survive the Incarceration of Loved Ones*, suggests some questions you might ask:

- Are you feeling negative pressure because of my incarceration? From whom?
- How can I help you with home life and the children/family members?
- What fears and concerns do you have?
- Whom can you turn to on the outside for help?
- Have you found a counselor or mentor for yourself and the children?
- Are there issues you want to discuss openly with me?

# [Parenting] From Prison



## CHAPTER 5

### ANOTHER GROUP OF VICTIMS

If you're like most prisoners, you left behind some innocent victims. That's bad enough and deserves some soul searching. But for prisoner parents, there's another group of victims. I'm talking about your children.

Children of prisoners—more than two million of them across the U.S.—often pay a terrible price when a parent goes to prison. First of all, they've just lost a mom or a dad. And that mom or dad has been locked away because of a crime committed. Can you imagine the emotions these children are suffering? Fear. Insecurity. Abandonment. Guilt. Shame. Loneliness. Anger. Grief.

Sometimes, sad to say, the children may be relieved when a parent goes to prison. At least in prison Dad can no longer hurt the family ... or hurt himself.

But in most cases children still love their imprisoned parents deeply and miss them terribly. So if you have children, please don't let your own loneliness, anger, guilt, or pain keep you from doing everything you can to build a strong relationship with them, even while separated by prison. Even if you don't think you've been a very good parent in the past, you can now use this time to make a fresh start in parenting. A caution: Do not ignore restraining orders if you have one. You'll have to wait on events outside your control before you can move forward.

Otherwise, here are some tips that might help:

- **Take the initiative to stay in touch.**

Your children might not be able to visit you very often—perhaps even not at all. But you can still write to them (keep reading below for ideas on what to write about). Keep writing even if they don't write back. And as much as possible, try to talk with your kids whenever you are able to call home.

- **Find out what your children like and make a connection.**

What are their favorite subjects in school? What do they like to do in their spare time? One incarcerated dad had a son who was interested in science and biology. So the dad wrote to a health organization and asked for free materials on those subjects—one set to be sent to him in prison, the other set to be mailed to his son. Both learned a lot and shared with each other what they were learning. And don't you think it meant a great deal to the boy, seeing how his dad took an interest in the things that interested *him*?



Here's another example: Many children are learning a new language in school. Why not learn it along with them? You could even write simple letters to each other in the new language.

Do you need a way to *find out* what your children like? See the "Dad's Totally Fun Test" in Appendix B at the back of this Prison Survival Guide (easily adaptable for Moms, too!). Many prisoners have used this with great results—the kids seem to love it, too!

- **Become a long-distance coach ... or fan.**

Does one of your kids like basketball, football, or some other sport? Does another want to be the next great figure skater? Is one child on the cheerleading team or in the school dance club? Learn all you can about the sports or other physical activities that mean the most to your children. What skills does someone need to play a particular sport or do a particular kind of cheer? What are the rules of the game? Who are the role models your children look up to? When you stay on top of what is going on in your child's sport or activity, then you can share more in letters, in phone calls, and during visits. And you can cheer on their efforts in a more meaningful way.

- **Assure your children that they are not responsible for your absence.**

Children often think they are somehow to blame for a parent's imprisonment. They may wonder: Did I do something wrong? Did Daddy go away because he doesn't love me anymore? Did Mommy start using drugs because I was bad? Reassure your kids—again and again if necessary—that you are in prison because of what *you* did, not because of anything they did. They are not to blame.

- **Tell your children you love and accept them, no matter what.**

Think about how you talk with your kids, either in person, on the phone, or in letters. Do you spend more time criticizing them or complimenting them? Putting them down in some way or lifting them up? When children think that a parent is primarily down on them, they may start to feel unwanted or inadequate—and then they may look for other ways, not all of them healthy, to feel loved and accepted. Let them know, again and again, how much you love and value them.

One way you can show your love is through Angel Tree®, a ministry of Prison Fellowship, which is available in many prisons across the U.S. Through Angel Tree, you can sign up for your children to receive Christmas gifts *from you*. These gifts are actually purchased and delivered by local churches, but are given in *your* name. You can even include a personal message to your children. For more information on this wonderful program, see page 14.

- **Be willing to take risks for your children.**

The biggest risk may be admitting to your kids that you have made some bad choices and asking forgiveness for the ways you have hurt them. This may not be easy, but by taking this step, you will begin to rebuild strong bonds with your children. Also, be willing to risk receiving their anger or other strong emotions. Accept that their feelings are normal, and don't make them feel guilty or ashamed for having them. Be open to letting them talk through their feelings and concerns with you. This helps them see that you are a safe person for them, someone they can trust to be there for them.

- **Respect your children's caregiver.**

Your children may be living with their other parent, grandparents, another relative or friend, or a foster parent. It's hard when you can't be there day to day to have regular input on your children's upbringing. And you may not always agree with what the caregiver is doing. Even so, be careful to speak about and treat the caregiver respectfully in front of your children. Your kids are probably already going through a lot of turmoil; hearing you insult or criticize the person taking care of them will only add to their stress and confusion.

- **Help your kids to be kids.**

If you lived with your children before you went to prison, it's likely that your absence has caused a substantial change at home. Many children of prisoners have to take on more adult responsibilities—such as helping care for younger brothers and sisters, or doing more work around the house. When they come to visit you, take time to relax and play with them. Don't just leave them to entertain themselves while you visit with your spouse or other adults who brought them.

Also, don't put your kids into the role of confidante for your problems and frustrations. This can make them feel responsible for your well-being and feelings—which isn't their job.

- **Seek help to become a better parent.**

Even in prison, you may find specific programs and other resources to help you become a better parent. Perhaps your facility offers the National Fatherhood Initiative's Inside-Out Dad program, or Great Dads seminars. Prison Fellowship conducts a *Parenting from the Inside* seminar for mothers in prison. Check with your chaplain or prison administration staff to find out what's available.

- **Pray for your children.**

Do this every day, several times a day—during count, as you're standing in the chow line, while folding laundry. Dry, mundane times in prison can become meaningful as you keep your children in your thoughts and lift them up to the God who created them and loves them dearly!

#### A GREAT RESOURCE

Much of the information above is adapted from National Fatherhood Initiative's "Staying Involved with Your Children While Incarcerated" brochure and is used by permission. Visit [www.fatherhood.org](http://www.fatherhood.org) for more resources that promote father involvement. Or contact:

**The National Fatherhood Initiative**  
101 Lake Forest Blvd  
Suite 360  
Gaithersburg, MD 20877  
1-800-790-DADS



## Angel Tree: A Way to Say "I Love You"

Every year, hundreds of thousands of prisoners sign up to have their children receive Christmas gifts through Angel Tree, a ministry of Prison Fellowship. Angel Tree staff and volunteers process all of these applications and assign them to local churches that participate in this program. These churches contact the caregivers of your children to ask for gift ideas. Then, members of the church congregations purchase the gifts, wrap them, add any personal notes you want to include to your children, and deliver the gifts either through home visits or church-hosted Christmas parties. The gifts are presented to the children as being from Dad or Mom.

The primary way to get involved with Angel Tree Christmas is through your chaplain. Most prisons have a chaplain and volunteers to make this happen. Sign-up usually takes place in **August**—to give plenty of time to process the applications. So be sure to keep your ears open or ask your chaplain if Angel Tree is available.

If your facility does not offer a way to sign up for Angel Tree Christmas and you would like your children to receive a gift this Christmas in your name, please send your name, DOC#, and mailing address to: **Angel Tree Christmas, 44180 Riverside Parkway, Lansdowne, VA 20147.**

Angel Tree will then send you a Participation Form to fill out. *Aplicacion disponible en Espanol.*

There are a few restrictions: We can honor requests only if you are the parent or legal guardian, the child is 17 years old or younger, and there is no restraining order preventing your contact with the child or caregiver.



# Cracking the [Code]



## CHAPTER 6

### RELATIONSHIPS AND THE CODE

Surviving prison has a lot to do with the company you keep—the kind of relationships you have. And that brings us to the presence of the prison “code” that outlines the rules for behavior.

The “code” isn’t written down but is passed down to inmates year after year. It includes some common sense that can help guide you safely through a bid. But many of its rules continue the cycles of hostility, distrust, and selfish behavior that don’t make prison life easier and do not prepare you for life outside.

The language may vary among prisons, but the code typically goes something like this: Don’t show weakness. Don’t trust anyone. Don’t lose control. Mind your own business (or “do your own time”). There might be “subsets” of these rules, like don’t rat on other inmates. And there might be other rules that relate to the prisoner hierarchy or the prison economy (such as trading goods).

### PRISON DIVERSITY

One of the first problems with the code is that it does not account for the variety of prisons and jails in which conditions differ. Do you think there might be some big differences between Supermax and trusty camp, between federal and state, among prisons run more by inmates, others poorly run by staff, and still others that are models of the correctional system? The fear and danger are real in some places, and less so in others. So what can we say that will help you get through life in any of these prisons?

### DON'T GO IT ALONE

It is hard to do time alone in prison, so despite the “don’t trust anyone” warning, a few trusted friends will be helpful. You can celebrate together a favorable parole ruling, or console when someone loses a family member or gets the dreaded “Dear John” letter. You don’t need to know why your friends are in prison, and if they show little interest in what got you there, that’s a good sign.

Build or join a small circle of like-minded prisoners who share your interests, especially in getting through a sentence with the fewest problems. Bad company corrupts good character (go ahead, chuckle). Think there isn’t any good character in prison? Think again. It’s there. You need to find it.

That said, where do you start?

### THE FIRST WEEKS

During your first few weeks, you will stick out as the new guy. Some fellow prisoners might offer to help or tell you what to do. Much of this advice is well intended and will keep you out of trouble with both staff and inmates. They might tell you when to talk and when to shut up. They will show you where to line up for chow, counts, fresh clothes and linens, the chapel, visiting room, and the commissary. After a while, you will note one inmate or a small group of inmates—often from your own living unit—looking out for you and providing good information.

One key place to look for some character is the chapel programs. At least 21 states manage faith-based pods or units like the InnerChange Freedom Initiative®, launched by Prison Fellowship, and others. There is a world of difference on these units, and it's worth finding out if you can access them. Chapel programs vary in quality like anything else in life. But check it out: See if wise counsel and possible friendships are at your institution.

If you can't land a bunk at a faith-based unit, you'll probably be in GP, general population. You may think you have little in common with other inmates, but this will change as close sleeping quarters overcome matters of race, age, and social status. Those in the next cell or cubicle can become the guys or gals you hang out with from day to day. In time, the relationships you build will reap rewards as you support each other through tough times. Everyone needs friends. How you choose them makes a world of difference.

Try not to lean heavily on just one friend. That person may suddenly be sent to the hole, transferred, or released. A small circle of friends will be more stable for all of you.

Be careful about owing anybody anything. Debts (in or out of prison) are future trouble. They don't add much to your respect either. The bill may come due at an awkward or unexpected time. Avoid asking for favors from people you don't know. Everything has its price.

Avoid volunteering information about your personal life until you've

built trust with someone. As they told you when they read you the Miranda rights it "may be used against you."

Listen more than you talk. Don't whine or complain. Everyone is suffering. It's part of life. Learn, endure, and you can make a good transition to prison life.

### DO YOUR OWN TIME

Do your own time. How? Be slow to speak. Show a quiet confidence. If someone confronts you, carefully think through your answer before responding. Don't swear or shout. Yelling, bragging, and challenging are not ways to keep a low profile. This is not advice to live a loner lifestyle. Isolated, disconnected people don't have friends and resources when trouble comes calling. This is true in Freedomville just as it is inside.

Slowly build ties with others interested in true rehabilitation. There is a problem here: Plenty of folks—inside or outside—can't or won't do their own time. They always want to get into other people's business.

The code suggests that "fish" prove themselves (by show of force) or face slavery among the predators. But is that *always* true? As many officers and inmates will agree, fighting *early* as a strategy to avoid it later can lead to fighting *often*. Why? Take a look at gangs. One good takedown deserves another. Some people will not tolerate a challenge and instead come back at you until someone gives in. Hardheadedness and "nothing to lose" attitudes are in rich supply among prison society.

It is impossible to advise anyone in a general article like this about the wisdom of "stand your ground" without knowing the circumstances of your particular situation. We can say the shrewdest advice is to live at peace, as far as it depends on you.

The code is silent on another related event: the random, powder keg violence common to prisons because of an innocent or careless comment. What would anyone do when confronted with a sudden assault? Maybe there's a staff member or friend nearby, maybe there's an escape route, maybe you're backed into a corner and outnumbered. How you handle yourself is a judgment call none of us can make until we are in the moment. And it has little to do with the company you keep. You could be doing your own time just fine, while someone else isn't. In the end, we don't think the code is worth much at all. There is a better guide to life, which you can read about in chapter 11.

### WATCH WHAT YOU SAY

Respect is often the trip-wire of problems between inmates. It is the cash currency of relationships and keeping the peace. Disrespect wounds the pride. Wounded prides can be terribly unpredictable.

Be careful not to insult or disrespect ("dis") a fellow prisoner. Don't enter another inmate's house (cell) or sit on his or her bunk without permission. Don't comment on family photos or make remarks about the woman you saw him with on visiting day.

Prisoners have a variation of the Golden Rule to get through difficult sentences: "Conduct yourself in such a manner that you treat no single prisoner better than another." The book of James in the Bible urges readers to not show favoritism. This is a formula that will help you make friends and influence people.

### FROM THE INSIDE OUT

This guide is designed to help you survive prison and release, too. But you won't be carrying your friends from prison over to your freedom days. In the nearly 20 years since my [Ron's] release, I have met just one person I knew back then at FCI Danbury.

Yet many of the principles of friendship on the outside are the same. Look for people who share your values and your interests. Your friends will come from your family, neighborhood, work, and church. Shared events, such as bowling, fishing, Bible study, or watching a football game, bring you together to enjoy the company. Your outside friends will be different, but the skills you learned inside to select friends will continue to serve you well.

We are social creatures. We were created to need fellow humans to do life together. If you find and walk with the wise, you'll not only survive the fears and trials of prison life, you'll do better outside, too.



# Managing Your [Anger]



## CHAPTER 7

### BREEDING GROUND FOR ANGER

Anger comes quickly and easily in prison. You're angry with your lawyer for not working faster on your appeal. You're angry with your wife or friends because your canteen money didn't arrive. You're angry with the guy who joined a friend in the chow line by cutting in front of you. You're angry the guy in front of you bought the last of your favorite candy at the canteen. And then you get flopped by the parole board and really get angry.

The prison environment breeds anger. There are more frustrations than solutions, and the anger builds. Your anger builds until the pressure release valve blows, and then the trouble begins. When our anger flares up, we often act in ways that are irrational and destructive.

In prison, angry reactions will get you in trouble with the officers—robbing you of privileges and getting you stuck in segregation. It can put you on the outs with other inmates and in real danger. Inmate stabbings and beatings happen over minor circumstances, some of them not even real—just *perceived* offenses. Severe anger can also tear up your insides—mentally and physically—causing headaches, digestion troubles, insomnia, high blood pressure, skin rashes, depression, heart attack, and stroke. Do you want that?

Anger may also be your steady reaction to what prison stands for: personal failure. The hardships of prison can crack your sense of “cool.” You're stripped of your freedom, you have little control over your life, your

family ties are strained, and you've lost respect. You may think that hostility gives you greater control, but it only proves your *loss* of control—your feeling of powerlessness, your wounded pride. It's a far greater display of inner control when you're able to remain cool and unflinching under stress. But how can you get there?

Anger often follows distress—a feeling of hurt or anxiety. The meaning we attach to that feeling—our interpretation—is what leads to the anger. When we feel distressed, our thinking tends to become self-centered—it's all about *me*. Irrational thoughts can spring up automatically, shaped by feelings and events of the past. We're not going to go into *how* these automatic thoughts come about. But we will look at some of the most common types of irrational thinking that distort the way we interpret events and feed our anger. And we'll briefly look at ways to *restructure* our thinking.

### IRRATIONAL THINKING

Here are some common forms of irrational thinking that can spark our anger and get us into trouble.

#### • Running with assumptions

An assumption is something that might be true ... or might not. There might be many reasons that something happened, but we hit on one reason and act as if it is *true* before we fully check it out. We often make *assumptions* about a person's motivations for doing something—you might call this

mind reading. We're "sure" a person intentionally bumped us, when the real reason may be that he just wasn't paying attention.

- **Claiming personal rights.**

We turn wishes (I want to be respected) into rights (I have a *right* to be respected!). And then we jump to fight to protect our "rights." A grocery store shopper who barks at the woman in front of him may believe he had a *right* to get through the check-out line without waiting. She violated his right, so she "deserved" to be punished.

- **Imposing rules.**

This might also be called the "tyranny of the shoulds." We place rigid rules on other people—often without their knowledge. "He should have listened to me." "She should be home when I call her." If they break the rule, they must pay.

- **Overgeneralizing.**

This type of thinking is reflected in words, like *never* or *always* or other terms of exaggeration. "You NEVER listen to me!" "He ALWAYS picks on me." "I have to do ALL the work around here!" Naturally, the more a person overgeneralizes, the more upset he becomes. As one doctor explains, "It is obviously far more painful for a person to be 'always' mistreated than mistreated on a single occasion."

- **Thinking only in blacks/whites.**

This is extremist thinking. Something—or someone—is all good or all bad; all right or all wrong. No in-betweens, no shades of gray. This black-and-white thinking spills over into relationships and interactions: I am right, you are wrong. I am the victim, you are the offender. Once we get an image of a person as "bad," we will screen out anything that contradicts that image. "So he gave \$1,000 to charity. He did it just to get his name in the paper." There is room only for competition, win-lose; no room for cooperation or compromise, win-win. If you offend my rigid sense of justice, I must dole out the punishment.

- **Demonizing people.**

We project onto people the image of Enemy, which threatens our safety or interests. Often such images are projected onto whole classes of people—blacks, whites, women, guards ... prisoners. Perhaps *you* have felt demonized by many in the outside world. Aren't all prisoners animals that need to be caged?

First we *homogenize* a group: We strip them of their identities as unique individuals and lump them all together. Then we *dehumanize* them: We see them as something that we don't need to care about. Finally we *demonize* them: They embody Evil—which must be punished or destroyed.

## CHANGING THE WAY WE THINK

If thinking can get us into anger, changing our way of thinking can help get us out of it. Consider these suggestions:

- **Wait before you act.**

Take time to evaluate your thinking. Walk away if you have to. Count to 10. Take deep breaths.

- **Apply the rules of evidence.**

Look at all the evidence, pros and cons, related to your situation. Especially note evidence that might *contradict* your generalizations (always, never) about someone. This will give you a more realistic picture.

- **Consider other explanations.**

There may be many reasons for a person's behavior. Suppose a woman's husband is late for dinner. She assumes this is a sign that he doesn't care about her. But suppose she considers other explanations: Perhaps he was in an accident. Perhaps another person had a flat tire and he stopped to help. Depending on what she thinks, she might feel afraid, sad, or even proud. The point is, there could be many explanations, so get more information before reacting.

- **Change your rules and rights.**

Start thinking in terms of desires rather than demands. "I *wish* my wife would be more sensitive" instead of "she *should* be more sensitive."

- **Focus on problem solving.**

Consider the other person's perspective rather than just your own. It gets us away from focusing on who's right and who's wrong, who wins and who loses. The husband and wife might decide that if one person is going to be late, he or she should call the other—so that feelings don't run wild.

- **Don't make other people responsible for your feelings of worth and security.**

This is between you and God—*He* values you. As you grow more secure in your relationship with God, you won't make other people responsible for your feelings. Your worth is not based on whether someone else treats you with respect. Therefore, your worth is not *reduced* if someone treats you with disrespect. So is there really any need to punish or retaliate?

- **Be willing to forgive.**

Forgiveness pours cool water on wounds and begins healing.

Anger is like the crime that put you there. A bad decision made in haste led to your arrest, conviction, and confinement. A split second of angry action in prison can lead to unexpectedly bad results. Count to 10. Take a deep breath. Step back. Walk away. Later, you will be glad you did.



# Assaulted by [Depression]



## CHAPTER 8

### IN THE COMPANY OF MILLIONS

Depression can cover a multitude of conditions—everything from a long string of the “blahs” to actual mental illness. Nearly everyone experiences depression at some point in his or her life. Most get over it, on their own or with help. Nearly 20 million Americans suffer from severe, major depression, and the rate for prisoners is nearly three times that for outsiders.

But many depressed people don’t get the treatment they need to help them. “It’s stigma,” says PBS TV host Dr. Jay Fawver. “Society views depression as a weakness, so many who need help don’t seek it.”

Many people on the outside don’t get treatment because their insurance doesn’t cover the cost. The few mental hospitals still around are packed; the overflow ends ... guess where? In prisons. And prison is a terrible place to display weakness.

You might ignore or downplay the problem because you just think you are going through a difficult time in your life that will pass. And maybe it will. But if it doesn’t, then you likely have real depression because “down in the dumps” or gloominess will eventually pass, but depression seldom does on its own.

### WHY AM I DEPRESSED?

Dr. Robert Powitzky, chief mental health officer for Oklahoma’s department of corrections, divides most cases of depression into two groups—situational and neurological.

Situational depression is triggered by trauma or a change in life circumstances, such as the death of a loved one, divorce, illness, a legal problem, or imprisonment. The risk of situational depression in prison is especially high because of overcrowding, the threat of violence, sexual predators, shattered parole expectations, and boredom. “Situational depression is part of the grieving process,” said Powitzky. “In prison you have a huge loss of who you are and where you’re going in life.”

At other times, depression has a physical source—neurological—unrelated to life situations. Medically classified as a chemical imbalance, this depression results from low levels of neurotransmitters—substances that send nerve signals in the brain. Without the correct balance of these chemicals, such as norepinephrine, serotonin, and dopamine, the brain cannot correctly regulate these signals.

Sometimes it results from genetics. If you have a family history of depression or substance abuse, you are more likely to suffer from depression yourself.

In certain cases, physical illness can trigger symptoms of depression. Doctors stress the importance of getting a thorough physical exam before assuming you’re depressed. It is crucial to remove other causes for feeling down before taking medication for depression, although it may be difficult once you are already in prison.

Cocaine and marijuana can mimic depression. And withdrawal, especially from drugs like heroin or morphine, results in restlessness, cravings, anxiety, sleep problems, and mood swings. Overuse of certain prescription drugs, including Valium, for example, can create symptoms of depression.

### **I'M IN PRISON AND DEPRESSED. NOW WHAT?**

Medication may be available to you, even in prison. But you will have to get to a medical or mental health doctor who can make the right diagnosis and prescribe the medication you need.

In prison you might have access to a professional counselor or psychiatrist who can help you to deal with depressive thoughts satisfactorily. Depression is one of the most under-treated medical illness found in prisons. While depression often shows itself by a lack of pleasure rather than a presence of pain, it is still difficult to endure for those who suffer. Here are some things you can do to help ease the suffering.

- **Examine the cause.**

Were you feeling depressed before you entered prison? Or is prison itself what triggered the depression? Becoming aware of what affects your mood can help you control it.

- **Get counseling, if possible.**

If there is no one at the prison to counsel you, talk with a friend—someone you trust—to help you see your situation realistically and rebuild your hope for the future. Sometimes just knowing you are not alone in your suffering can help ease the pain.

- **Exercise.**

Walk or run as far as you can. Lift weights to stress your body instead of your mind. As you exercise, your body will release hormones that help relieve stress and fight depression.

- **Cut out illegal drugs, alcohol.**

They make depression worse mentally, physically, spiritually.

- **Try to eat well.**

Eat the vegetables and salads. Limit caffeine and sugar, and cut down on the junk foods you get from the canteen.

- **Some doctors recommend**

Vitamin E for depression. Include it in the daily multiple vitamin you take.

- **Get outdoors.**

Sunlight helps overcome depression, but don't overdo it to the point of sunburn or skin cancer.

- **Adjust your activities.**

Focus on activities that make you feel better.

- **Avoid being a loner.**

Have a few trusted friends to share your time with. Choose friends who are positive, encouraging, and uplifting. They will build up your spirits instead of pushing you deeper into depression with negative talk and negative thoughts.

- **Do something for others.**

By helping someone else who is down, you will lift yourself.

- **Try to do something creative.**

Try your hand at writing, painting, or drawing, for example.

- **Get out of the sack.**

Just going to work at a prison job you hate can help you beat depression. Use free time for study; prepare for your release date no matter how far-off it is.

- **Read your Bible.**

Take a look at some of the psalms. You may be surprised to discover that many of them were written when the writer was depressed—very honestly pouring out feelings of hopelessness and confusion. But the psalms, and other parts of the Bible, are also full of hope and encouragement. Let God speak His words of comfort and care to you.

## **How Do I Know If I'm Depressed?**

Depression can be confusing since the symptoms can be different, even completely opposite, in different people. Some depressed people can't sleep; others sleep too much. One symptom alone does not mean depression, but several of the following might mean you are headed in the direction.

### **Symptoms**

- Significant weight loss or gain
- Chronic insomnia or excessive tiredness
- Outbursts of anger, feelings of resentment
- Increased anxiety, fears
- Difficulty concentrating
- Restlessness
- Loss of pleasure in activities that once gave you pleasure
- Lost interest in hobbies
- Lack of sex drive
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, and unattractiveness
- Slow body movements and speech
- Dizziness
- Suicidal thoughts



# Hanging on to [Life]



## CHAPTER 9

### A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

Suicide. It's an ugly word. And a depressing thought. Checking out on your own terms and schedule. Hardly anyone who has ever spent a night behind bars hasn't considered it. If you haven't thought of it yourself, you likely know someone who has.

So this chapter has two sections.

The first is for those of you who may have thoughts of ending your life as a way of ending your pain. The second is for those who wonder how to help another who might be suicidal.

### THE ONLY WAY OUT?

What brings a human being to such a stage in life that killing himself seems the only solution?

We consider suicide because we believe it is a simple answer to a complex and distressing situation. End our life and we finally find relief from the crushing, crippling pain and shame inside. End our life and we also end—so we think—the suffering, shame, and indignities we put our families and loved ones through. But do we? Or does their pain only worsen when they get the phone call—We regret to inform you ... ?

A woman whose husband committed suicide says, “Ten years after my husband killed himself, I still remember certain moments from his last days that make me ache for another chance. Like many suicide survivors, I struggle with feelings of guilt. I also have a growing understanding for what people can do to prevent

suicide—warning signs we should know and steps we can take to help someone through a suicidal crisis. I learned too late, largely because the stigma surrounding suicide prevents us from talking about it.”

### WHAT YOU'LL MISS

Suicide is the ultimate form of giving up. Many times I have watched a sporting event on TV and switched away when my favorite team was struggling by halftime. Later, I would learn they had rallied with a dramatic comeback to win. And I had missed it because I gave up when they didn't.

I wanted to give up when I was in prison. But I realized I would hurt my family more by killing myself than by hanging on. So I hung on. And here's what I got for it:

- 6,300 (and counting) beautiful sunsets that I otherwise would have missed.
- Birthdays and Christmases with children and grandchildren.
- Camping trips and travel.
- Great eating. Why are my clothes too tight?
- Fishing, fishing, and fishing. Some got away; some didn't.
- The chance to love God and love others with my extra days.

Life is good. Don't hang up yet.

**THINKING ABOUT SUICIDE?****READ THIS FIRST**

If you are feeling suicidal now, please stop and read this. I am not a therapist or other mental health professional—only someone who knows what it is like to be in pain.

I don't know who you are, but I assume you are reading this because you are troubled and thinking about ending your life. I would prefer to be there with you, but since that is not possible, we will have to make do with this.

I have known many people who wanted to kill themselves, so I have some small idea of what you might be feeling. I have five simple, practical items to share with you. I won't argue with you about whether you should kill yourself, but I assume that if you are thinking about it, you feel truly bad.

Consider this: "Suicide is not chosen; it happens when pain exceeds the resources for coping with pain."

That's it. You are not a bad person, crazy, or weak because you feel suicidal. It doesn't even mean that you really *want* to die—it means only that you have more pain than you can bear. There are many kinds of pain that may lead to suicide. Whether the pain is bearable differs from one person to the next. The point at which the pain becomes unbearable depends on what kinds of coping resources you have. When pain exceeds pain-coping resources, suicidal feelings result. Suicide is not a defect of character; it is simply an imbalance of pain versus coping resources. Find a way to reduce your pain, or find a way to increase your coping resources.

**FIVE THINGS TO THINK ABOUT**

*(Adapted from a statement prepared by the University of Notre Dame as a resource for its students.)*

**1: You'll Make It**

You need to understand that people *do* get through this. Statistically, there is a strong chance that you are going to live.

**2: Wait 24**

Give yourself some distance. Say, "I will wait 24 hours before I do anything." Or a week. Just because you feel like killing yourself doesn't mean you have to actually do it this minute. Put some distance between your suicidal feelings and suicidal action.

**3: Live for Relief**

People often turn to suicide because they are seeking relief from pain. Remember that relief is a feeling and you have to be *alive* to feel it. If you take your own life, you will not feel the relief you so desperately seek.

**4: Tell Someone**

Some people may react badly to your suicidal feelings and increase your pain instead of helping you, by saying or doing thoughtless things. But there are people who can be with you during this desperate time. And they will not judge you or argue with you. Nor will they try to talk you out of how badly you feel. Find one of them. Use your 24 hours, or your week, and tell someone what's going on with you. It is all right to ask for help.

**5: Find Coping Resources**

Suicidal feelings are traumatic. After they subside, you need to continue caring for yourself. But don't give yourself the extra burden of trying to deal with this alone. Just talking about how you got to where you are releases much of the pressure, maybe enough to regain your balance. Continue creating coping resources until they outnumber your sources of pain.

Maybe this material gives you some small relief, but remember that the best coping tool is another human. Find someone who will listen, and tell him or her how you are feeling and how you got there.

Finally, but most importantly, talk to Jesus. This isn't cheap "God talk." He knows your pain, and He wants to help. So please read the box in this chapter called "Holding On."

**HOW YOU MAY HELP SAVE A LIFE**

Even if suicide never crosses your mind, you can be sure that if you stay in prison a while, someone you know will consider the idea of killing himself—and perhaps even act on those thoughts.

Public Law 106-297 requires U.S. jails and prisons to report regularly to the Department of Justice on deaths in custody. The Bureau of Justice Statistics collects and publishes the data. Their latest analysis, "Suicide and Homicide in Prisons and Jails," was published in August, 2005 and contains data from 1980 through 2003. Their findings point to the high risk of prison suicide:

- Prisoners have a suicide rate 10 times higher than the non-prison American population.
- Death-row prisoners have a suicide rate six times that for other prisoners. Each year, nearly as many death-row prisoners end their lives by suicide as are executed.
- The nation's 3,300 jails have a suicide rate three times that of state or federal prisons. Half of all jail suicides occur during the first week of custody.
- White inmates have a suicide rate three times that of Hispanics; six times that of African-American prisoners.
- Suicide rates increase with the age of the prisoner.
- More than 80 percent of all prison suicides happen in the inmate's cell. Nearly all the rest take place in secure lockup or segregation.
- Women prisoners attempt suicide more often than men but don't complete the act. The actual death-by-suicide rate for men is much higher than for women.
- Hanging by the bed sheet is the most common form of prisoner suicide—an extremely agonizing and slow form of death.



**BE AWARE OF WARNING SIGNS**

Suicide crisis clinics note several verbal and nonverbal warning signs that may let you know that your cellmate or friend is crying for help.

Many of these warning signs are signs of depression. Depression does not necessarily mean that a person is considering suicide, but depressed people often think of suicide.

**Nonverbal warning signs:**

- Giving away personal or prized possessions.
- Sleeping too much or too little.
- Lack of interest in personal appearance.
- Lack of interest in friends.
- Lack of interest in activities that were formerly of interest.
- Boredom, restlessness, and loss of concentration.

**Verbal warning signs:**

- “No one cares about me.”
- “Life isn’t worthwhile.”
- “People are better off without me.”
- “Everything seems to be going wrong.”
- “I don’t need this any more.”

Please know that if a friend in prison does commit suicide, you are not responsible! No matter what steps you took to try to prevent it, no matter what “signs” you might have missed, the final choice—which is ultimately outside your control—always lies with the person.

**DO**

- Get involved. Be available. Show interest and support. Ask if he or she is thinking about suicide.
- Be direct. Talk openly and freely about suicide. Contrary to what many people think, talking about suicide does *not* increase the risk that a person will commit

suicide. Rather, talking about it can help ease the pain that underlies the suicidal thoughts.

- Be willing to listen. Allow the person to express his or her feelings. Accept the feelings.
- Offer empathy, not just sympathy. Seek to understand what he or she is feeling and thinking.
- Offer hope that alternatives are available.
- Take action! Seek support!

**DON'T**

- Be judgmental or debate whether suicide is right or wrong, or if one’s feelings are good or bad.
- Dare the person to do it.
- Make decisions for the person.
- Tell the person to act differently.
- Act shocked (creates distance).
- Be sworn to secrecy.

**“I just don’t want to live anymore.”**

Where do we find hope when all hope seems extinguished—swallowed up in the heavy, dark, suffocating hole of depression and sorrow?

Even “coming to Christ” does not promise an automatic reprieve from such suffering. Sadly, Christians are just as likely to kill themselves as nonbelievers when there seems to be no other way out of unbearable pain.

But if Jesus does not promise to protect us from suffering and sorrow, what, then, does He promise? To be there with us. And to carry us through.

Even before Jesus came to earth, the prophet Isaiah told us He would be “a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering” (Isaiah 53:3). Jesus’ torture and brutal crucifixion show the extent of what Isaiah foretold: “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities” (53:5).

But it was not just horrible physical suffering that Jesus endured. Hanging on the Cross, in a way that none of us can even hope to imagine, Jesus was completely cut off from His beloved Father. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken

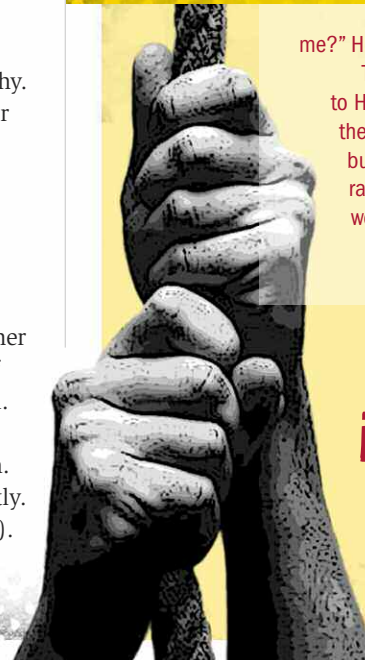
me?” He cried. He knows the anguish of distress and isolation.

That is why, in our own despair and emptiness, we can come to Him. He understands. He is with us. And He will not leave us there. The Father did not leave Jesus in the tomb after His death, but raised Him up to a new and glorious life. So too will He raise us from the tomb of our hopelessness and sorrow if we hold on and trust Him.

**“I am still confident  
of this: I will see  
the goodness of the Lord  
in the land of the living.”**

**Wait for the Lord; Be strong  
and take heart and wait for the Lord.”  
Psalm 27:13-14**

# Holding On



# Guarding Your [Health]



## CHAPTER 10

### HEPATITIS C—THE SILENT KILLER

If you're not very careful while in prison, by the time you leave, you might be taking along some hitchhikers: the virus bugs that make up Hepatitis C (HCV). Nobody knows just how many of America's 2.3 million jail and prison inmates have Hep C, the most dangerous and deadly of the alphabet soup that makes up Hepatitis (A, B, C, a little D, E, a discredited F, and G). But according to a January 2006 newsletter of the National HCV Prison Coalition ([www.hcvinprison.org](http://www.hcvinprison.org)), it is estimated that between 15 and 30 percent of all America's prisoners may be infected (and as high as 42 percent in some states), compared with only 2 percent of the general population. That's why we're talking about it.

The most dangerous aspect of Hepatitis C is that more than half of the infected prisoners don't know they have it, giving it nicknames like "the silent killer" or "the silent epidemic." Hepatitis C can lie dormant as long as 20 to 30 years before symptoms start showing. Symptoms include joint aches, loss of appetite, dark urine, fever, yellowing of the eyes and skin (jaundice), stomach pain, and vomiting. But once Hepatitis C settles in and becomes chronic, many of these warning signs go away.

All hepatitis is inflammation of the liver. Liver testing will reveal hepatitis infection and usually identify the strain. Long-term Hepatitis C not only leads to liver cancer but can also cause cirrhosis, or scarring of the liver, as normal liver cells are replaced by connective tissue.

Twenty percent of people who get Hepatitis C will clear it out of their body naturally, probably without even knowing they had it. But, without treatment, 25 percent of patients diagnosed with Hepatitis C will suffer liver failure or liver cancer. In 2006, liver cancer was the only one of the major cancers that saw an increase in the death rate. Nearly 10 percent of those with chronic Hepatitis C will die of it or its complications. There is no cure, although early treatment can contain it.

### How Hepatitis C Is Spread

Hepatitis C is a blood-borne infection. According to the *Hepatitis C Information Packet* distributed by the national HCV Prison Coalition, it is most commonly spread by:

- Sharing personal care items such as razors, toothbrushes, fingernail files or clippers, and pierced earrings.
- Sharing drug paraphernalia.
- Using shared, unsterilized tattoo equipment, including the ink.
- Having unprotected sex.
- Having received a blood transfusion or organ transplant before July 1992.



**Hepatitis C is NOT spread by:**

- Sneezing or coughing.
- Kissing or hugging. Although Hepatitis C has been found in saliva, it is not transmitted that way. It is transmitted only by having blood-to-blood contact.
- Casual contact (handshakes).
- Eating prepared food. Even if someone who has Hepatitis C cuts himself and drips blood into the food, it is unlikely that anyone eating the food will get infected. The enzymes in the digestive track will destroy or deactivate the virus.
- Sharing eating utensils or eating the same food. Hepatitis C is transmitted by contaminated blood entering your bloodstream, not your stomach.

Do yourself a favor and kill two birds with one stone: Stay on good terms with DOC rules and cut down on your risk of contracting Hepatitis C by completely avoiding drugs, tattoos, and body piercings. If you think your past behaviors have already put you at high risk for having contracted the disease, you may be able to get tested by your prison's medical staff. The Bureau of Justice Statistics reported in 2004 that 80 percent of state prisons tested inmates for Hepatitis C, although many only routinely targeted "high risk" groups.

Even if prisons test for disease, they may not offer treatment. The National HCV Prison Coalition points out that,

**"many prison officials believe the costs associated with treatment could bankrupt the prison healthcare budget."**

A year's worth of antiviral drugs could cost \$10,000 or more for one prisoner. And many prison officials assume that many drug users will simply reinfect themselves if treated. Nevertheless, the cost for treating prisoners for Hepatitis C could be a bargain compared to future medical bills for untreated cases.

**So, What Can I Do?**

Remember that most Hepatitis C comes from dirty drug needles or syringes, getting tattoos, sex that involves mixing blood, and drinking too much alcohol. It's not just about avoiding some horrible disease; there are many benefits to clean living. Read the chapter 11 find out why.

Everyone released from prison should seek a thorough medical evaluation. Sure, you might be short on funds, but if you can land a job with health benefits, get the physical and specifically ask to be tested for Hepatitis C.

**DON'T GET CAUGHT WITH HIV/AIDS**

Although HCV is four times more common in prisons than HIV/AIDS, the latter still infects many in the criminal justice system. As of 2001, approximately 24,000 inmates in the United States were HIV-positive, and the HIV/AIDS rate in prison is six times higher than that of the general population.

The disease slowly destroys the immune system by killing or damaging immune cells. The major symptoms are drastic weight loss, a dry cough, a recurring fever, profound fatigue, swollen lymph glands, long-lasting diarrhea, white spots on tongue or mouth, and pneumonia.

Like hepatitis, HIV/AIDS most commonly spreads through unprotected sex, infected needles, contact with infected blood, and from a mother to her child during pregnancy. Approximately 25 percent of all women who are HIV-positive will pass the disease on to their children. While it's theoretically possible to contract HIV/AIDS from a dirty tattoo needle, to date no such cases have been documented in the United States. While 20 drugs exist to treat HIV/AIDS, fewer than half of inmates with HIV/AIDS receive treatment.

**TB STILL MAKING THE ROUNDS**

Another common prison disease—tuberculosis—causes two million deaths worldwide each year. The prison population most likely accounts for 25 percent of those with the disease.

Defined as a disease caused by bacteria that usually attacks the lungs, tuberculosis spreads from one person to another through the air. A simple cough or sneeze from an infected inmate can spread the disease to his cell mate.

TB symptoms include weight loss, fever, night sweats, chest pain, coughing up blood, and a cough that lasts for more than two weeks. Many people never contract the actual disease, but carry a latent variation. Only 10 percent of those with latent TB eventually develop the symptoms. Treatment for TB involves taking a series of drugs for more than six months.

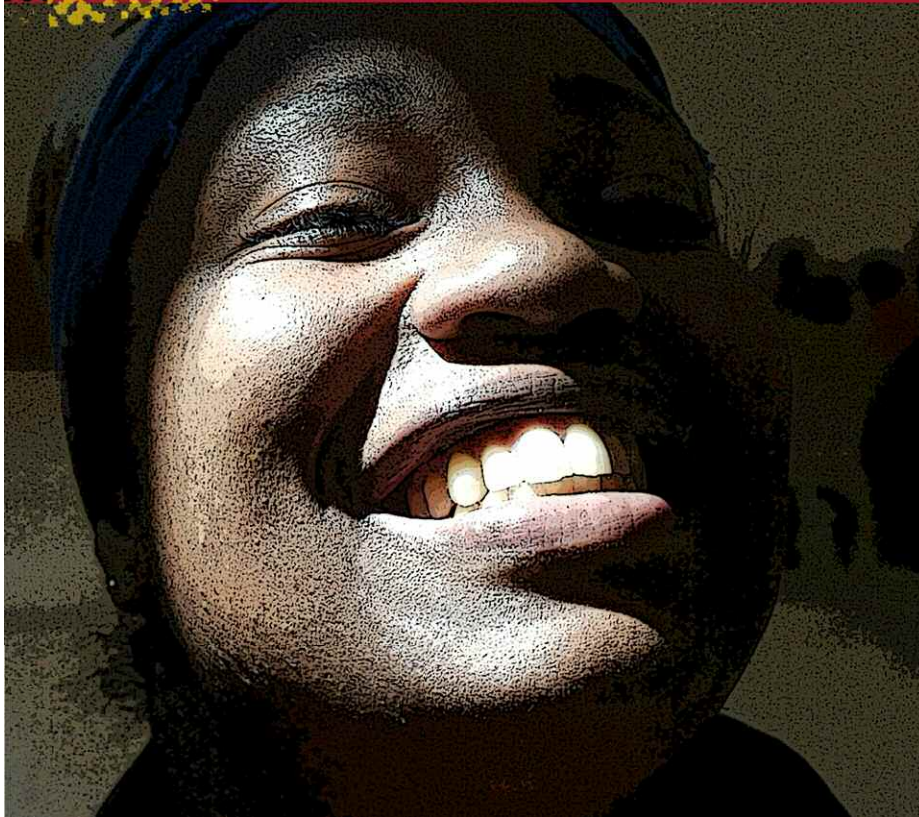
Several factors increase a person's chance of contracting the disease from latent TB: intravenous drug use, poor nutrition, and physical and emotional stress. An HIV/AIDS-positive person is also at great risk of contracting the disease. In fact, TB is the leading cause of death for those with HIV/AIDS.

While certain situations cannot be avoided, such as catching a cough from someone with TB, many precautions can prevent the spread of these diseases. Choices to stay clean from drugs, abstain from sex in prison, or forego getting a tattoo could make the difference between life and death.

**Statistics taken from**

Center for Disease Control, [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)  
WebMD, [www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)

# [Released] For Good



## CHAPTER 11

### THE ONE CALLED JESUS

He was innocent but taken away in shackles. He received no probation, pardon, or DNA exoneration. He was executed in the manner of the day: a torturous, agonizingly slow death, hanging on a cross between two thieves. He had said, “I’ll be back,” and meant it. From the dead, He arose three days later.

Jesus knows about doing time. You think you know about suffering? He’s been there, done that. And if you need help doing your hard time, He’s available. In fact, He would like to transform your entire life. No one was imprisoned for “aggravated kindness” or “self-control in the third degree.” Following Jesus is the best way through and away from prison and to an entirely new life.

There’s an old joke about “I found Jesus.” The punch line is, “I didn’t know He was lost.” Well, the joke ends there. When you go to prison, Jesus sees an opportunity to get your attention, to set you aside for a while to consider your ways.

More than one former prisoner has told me, “There was a purpose in me going to prison,” or “I would already be dead if it weren’t for my time in prison.” What they are saying is that through a new beginning in Christ, they have changed their values, changed their life patterns, and learned to live a full and meaningful life.

On the other hand, neither God nor the parole board is fooled by someone who claims to have found Jesus in prison only in the hope of a favorable parole decision.

The remainder of this chapter isn’t going to make much sense unless you have first done business with God. We cannot fix any of the brokenness of life before we get to the root cause—sinful hearts. If the heart is bad, well, it’s not hard to see why bad behavior keeps happening. We all need a heart transplant. Jesus does that, forgiving all your sins—past, present, future. He will change the way you think, serve, lead and live. See the sidebar for more on this crucial life decision.

### HELLO, GOD? IT’S ME.

Attention Christians: After accepting Jesus as your Lord and Savior comes the growth part we call discipleship. Yes, there are the “chapel hangers,” guys who spend all their free time at the chapel, but who swiftly return to prison on a new beef once released. So how can you be a genuine believer in an environment so loaded with phonies and immature Christians?

We can live a genuine Christian life behind prison walls, and it begins with getting to know God in a personal and honest way. No relationship can develop well between two individuals until there is solid communication.

As raunchy and despicable as our crimes and sins may be, if we have turned to Christ for forgiveness and salvation, we are now purified through Him. Anybody, anywhere, anytime, can connect with God because of Jesus’ death and resurrection—the event that validates everything the Bible says. In prison, we



have plenty of personal time, a lack of obligations, and the strict solitude of prison life. This provides a setting in which we can develop a practical, personal communication with God.

### GETTING TO KNOW GOD

Start with your Bible. If you don't have one, have someone send you one or visit the chaplain. Prisons provide chaplains and chapel services that can help open your eyes to what the Bible means and what God can do in your life. But no matter where you are—in the library, the rec yard, your cell—you can open the Bible and privately discover some of God's truth for your life. And you don't have to be in the chapel to pray.

Some of the strongest Christians in prison seldom visit the chapel except on Sunday morning. They read their Bibles, pray, and gently minister to others elsewhere within the prison. They are honest in their relationship with God and willing to share with others. And when they go home, they don't come back. Instead, they continue the new path that God has set before them, resisting old temptations with His strength and grace.

Find a small-group Bible study in your prison. A key skill for survival in or out of prison is finding a community of like-minded folks, especially ones who share a Christian faith and worldview. Hollywood loves to glorify the tough loner who doesn't need anyone. But for those of us living real life, we must have friends. The Bible puts

it this way: "If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!" (Ecclesiastes 4:10). So get active in prison church programs and read your Bible regularly, seeking to apply its words to your own life and relationships.

Several volunteer-based Christian organizations go into prisons to help inmates learn about God and grow in their faith. These include Prison Fellowship (the publisher of this Prison Survival Guide), Billy Graham's Institute for Prison Ministries, Good News Jail & Prison Ministry, Kairos Ministries, and many others. In addition, volunteers from local churches may visit regularly to lead worship services and Bible studies. Ask your chaplain or program director what is available.

### DON'T GET STUCK IN ONE SPOT

Be discerning about the programs you attend. Sometimes you'll meet well-intentioned volunteers from the outside who think all prisoners are nonbelievers, mired in sin. Consequently, their programs may repeatedly focus on coming to Christ for salvation. Yet many of us have already taken that first step of accepting Christ as Savior, and we need now to nurture our faith and develop positive Christian virtues inside the madhouse of the prison. Confused, we may answer every altar call, accepting Christ as our Savior over and over. Instead of growing as a Christian, we may be spinning our wheels.

We are prisoners and we are Christians, and we gradually learn

what it means to be both. If your volunteers are coming at you with the same material, ask them or ask through your chaplain if it would be possible to bring in a study series that will take you beyond the basics of "getting saved" into a growing understanding of your new identity in Christ and how His teachings impact *every* area of your life—from family relationships to employment issues, from breaking free of addictions to handling money wisely. If you don't have many Christian programs inside your prison, you can get some great Bible studies and correspondence courses through the mail. One excellent resource is Crossroad Bible Institute (specifically created to help prisoners grow in their faith) at P.O. Box 900, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49509-0900.

Most prisoners have a release date, a day when we will walk through the prison gate to freedom. But don't just focus longingly on your future freedom. What is important is learning—through prayer, Bible study, and friendship with other Christian prisoners or an outside mentor—to be a genuine Christian *now*, within a prison environment. And when released? It's like the Frank Sinatra song, "If I can make it here, I can make it anywhere."

### LIVING WITH GOD IN PRISON

Prison is another form of school—that is, a chance to learn something. If we learn how to live with God while in prison, there's a good chance we can do it in Freedomville, where we will enjoy great churches, pastors, and mentors.

And Jesus Christ wants to be your centerpiece in learning a new lifestyle based on respect for others—those who believe and those who don't. Jesus brought with Him a new idea to live by—*love*. To paraphrase His Great Commandment from Matthew 22:36-40: "Love the Lord with everything you've got, and love others as well as you love yourself." In another passage of the Bible—John 15:12—Jesus gives an even greater standard for loving others: "Love each other as *I* have loved *you*" (emphasis added). That's a sacrificial, serving kind of love.

It doesn't matter whether you are in prison or outside; walls and wire cannot keep God out of your life—only you can do that. But as you trust Him and follow His lead, you will find yourself becoming truly transformed. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17). And as you join with other Christians in supportive relationships, you will find that you can not only survive your prison experience, but also thrive in it!

## Responding to God's

# "I Love You"

You can pray something like this:

God, I'm a sinner and I am sorry for my sins. Please forgive all I have done. Thank You for loving me so much that You sent Jesus to die on the cross for me. I ask Jesus to come into my heart and cleanse it. I want to start over—a new person—with Jesus as my Lord and Guide. Thank You for hearing me and showing me mercy. Amen.

If you have sincerely confessed your sin and asked for the gift of Christ's salvation, God's Spirit has now entered your life and will be your constant companion. He promised to "never leave you nor abandon you" even if you lose heart along the way. During your most difficult times, He will be working in you, strengthening and encouraging you. When you get out, He will go with you. Trust Him; follow Him closely. It is a tough world, both inside and out, and you will need all the help you can get.

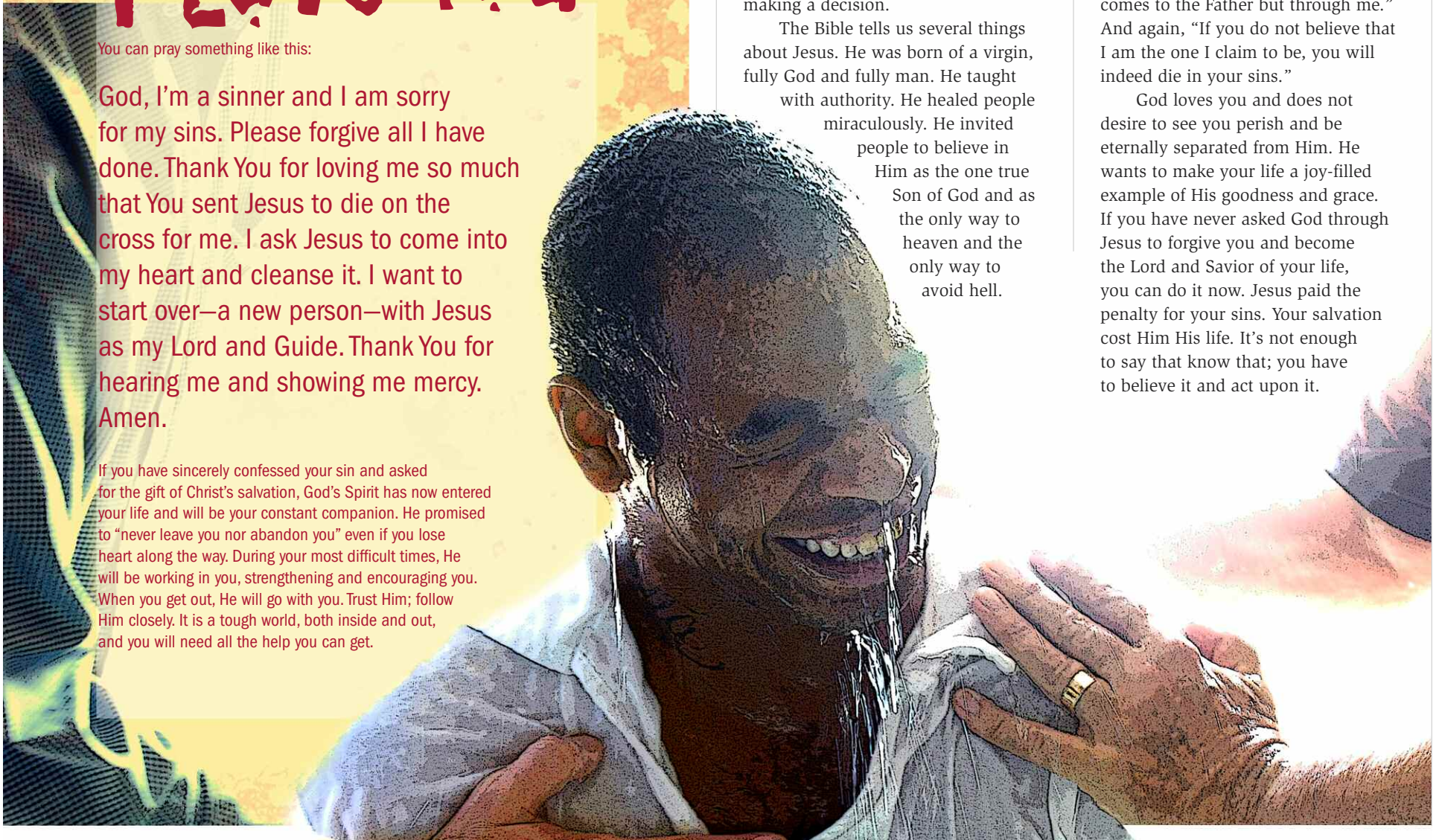
### DECISION TIME?

A lot of folks have an opinion about Jesus. For many their opinion is based on some preacher they saw on TV, or people who claimed to be "born again." But the most important decision in your life centers on getting the facts straight about Jesus and then making a decision.

The Bible tells us several things about Jesus. He was born of a virgin, fully God and fully man. He taught with authority. He healed people miraculously. He invited people to believe in Him as the one true Son of God and as the only way to heaven and the only way to avoid hell.

A scholar asked Jesus what it meant to be "born again." Jesus explained famously, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life." To others he said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me." And again, "If you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins."

God loves you and does not desire to see you perish and be eternally separated from Him. He wants to make your life a joy-filled example of His goodness and grace. If you have never asked God through Jesus to forgive you and become the Lord and Savior of your life, you can do it now. Jesus paid the penalty for your sins. Your salvation cost Him His life. It's not enough to say that know that; you have to believe it and act upon it.





# State Correctional Educational Opportunities

For information on correctional educational opportunities in your specific state, refer to the information below. This was provided by the website of the Office of Correctional Education, U.S. Department of Education, and is up to date as of September 2007.

## **Alabama**

**Correctional Education Division**  
**J.F. Ingram State Technical College**  
 P.O. Box 220350  
 Deatsville, AL 36022-0350  
 Phone: (334) 285-5177

## **Alaska**

**Department of Corrections,  
 Inmate Programs**  
 Suite 601  
 550 West Seventh Avenue  
 Anchorage, AK 99501  
 Phone: (907) 269-7434

## **Arizona**

**Correctional Education Division**  
 Mail Code 860  
 3701 West Cambridge Avenue  
 Phoenix, AZ 85009  
 Phone: (602) 272-7600 ext.256

## **Arkansas**

**Correctional Education Division**  
 Corrections School System  
 8000 Correction Circle  
 Pine Bluff, AR 71603  
 Phone: (870) 267-6725

## **California**

**Correctional Education Division**  
 Office of Correctional Education  
 P.O. Box 942883  
 Sacramento, CA 94283-0001  
 Phone: (916) 445-8035

## **Colorado**

**Correctional Education Division**  
 Colorado Department of Corrections  
 2862 South Circle Drive  
 Colorado Springs, CO 80906-4195  
 Phone: (719) 226-4416

## **Connecticut**

**Correctional Education Division**  
 State Department of Correction  
 Unified School District #1  
 24 Wolcott Hill Road  
 Wethersfield, CT 06109-1152  
 Phone: (860) 692-7536

## **Delaware**

**Correctional Education Division**  
 Department of Corrections  
 Bureau of Prisons  
 245 McKee Road  
 Dover, DE 19904  
 Phone: (302) 739-5601

## **Florida**

**Bureau of Institutional Programs**  
 Education Program  
 2601 Blair Stone Road  
 Tallahassee, FL 32399-2500  
 Phone: (850) 410-4412

## **Georgia**

No state information given. Contact:  
**Office of Correctional Education**  
 U.S. Department of Education  
 400 Maryland Ave. SW  
 MES 4527  
 Washington, DC 20202-7242

## **Hawaii**

**Correctional Education Division**  
 Department of Public Safety, Room 405  
 919 Ala Moana Boulevard  
 Honolulu, HI 96814  
 Phone: (808) 587-1279

## **Idaho**

**Correctional Education Division**  
 Suite 110  
 1299 North Orchard Street  
 Boise, ID 83706  
 Phone: (208) 658-2000

## **Illinois**

**Office of Adult Education  
 and Vocational Education**  
 1301 Concordia Court  
 Springfield, IL 62794  
 Phone: (217) 522-2666 ext.3601  
 Fax: (217) 522-9518

## **Indiana**

**Correctional Education Division**  
 State Department of Correction  
 E329 Indiana Government Center South  
 302 West Washington Street  
 Indianapolis, IN 46204  
 Phone: (317) 233-3111

## **Iowa**

**Correctional Education Division**  
 State Department of Corrections  
 Suite 4  
 510 East 12th Street  
 Des Moines, IA 50319  
 Phone: (515) 725-5728

## **Kansas**

**Correctional Education Division**  
 Department of Corrections  
 Landon State Office Building, 4th Floor  
 900 SW Jackson Street  
 Topeka, KS 66612-1284  
 Phone: (785) 296-3317

## **Kentucky**

**Correctional Education Division**  
 Department of Corrections  
 Health Services Building  
 275 East Main Street  
 P.O. Box 2400  
 Frankfort, KY 40602-2400  
 Phone: (502) 564-4795 ext.229

**Louisiana*****Correctional Education Division***

Technical College System  
P.O. Drawer EM  
Oakdale, LA 71463  
Phone: (318) 335-3944 ext.111

**Maine*****Adult Correctional Education***

State Department of Corrections  
State House Station #111  
Augusta, ME 04333-0111  
Phone: (207) 287-4342

**Maryland*****Correctional Education Program***

State Department of Education  
200 West Baltimore Street  
Baltimore, MD 21201  
Phone: (410) 767-0500

**Massachusetts*****Correctional Education Division***

State Department of Correction  
Hodder House  
P.O. Box 71  
Two Merchant Road  
Framingham, MA 01704  
Phone: (508) 935-0901

**Michigan*****Correctional Education Division***

Department of Corrections  
Prisoner Education Programs  
P.O. Box 30003  
Lansing, MI 48909  
Phone: (517) 241-7308

**Minnesota*****Correctional Education Division***

State Department of Corrections  
Facility Services Division - Education  
1450 Energy Park Drive  
Suite 200  
St. Paul, MN 55108-5210  
Phone: (651) 361-7244

**Mississippi*****Department of Corrections***

723 North President Street  
Jackson, MS 39202  
Phone: (601) 359-5600

**Missouri*****Correctional Education Division***

Division of Offender Rehabilitation  
P.O. Box 236  
Jefferson City, MO 65102  
Phone: (573) 526-6533

**Montana*****Correctional Education Division***

State Department of Corrections  
1539 11th Avenue  
P.O. Box 201301  
Helena, MT 59620-1301  
Phone: (406) 444-3930

**Nebraska*****Correctional Education Division***

Department of Corrections  
P.O. Box 94661  
Lincoln, NE 68509  
Phone: (402) 479-5723

**Nevada*****Nevada Department of Corrections***

P.O. Box 7011  
Carson City, NV 89702  
Phone: (775) 887-3237

**New Hampshire*****Correctional Education Division***

State Department of Corrections  
Special School District  
P.O. Box 14  
Concord, NH 03302-0014  
Phone: (603) 271-7357

**New Jersey*****Office of Educational Services***

State Department of Corrections  
P.O. Box 863  
Trenton, NJ 08625-0863  
Phone: (609) 292-8054

**New Mexico*****New Mexico Adult******Correctional Education***

State Corrections Department  
4101 Pan American Freeway, NE  
Albuquerque, NM 87107  
Phone: (505) 841-4289

**New York*****Correctional Education Division***

State Department of Correctional Services  
Harriman State Campus, Building 2  
1220 Washington Avenue  
Albany, NY 12226-2050  
Phone: (518) 457-8142

**North Carolina*****Correctional Education Division***

Department of Corrections,  
Division of Prisons  
4264 MSC  
831 West Morgan Street  
Raleigh, NC 27669-4264  
Phone: (919) 838-3642

**North Dakota*****Correctional Education Division***

State Penitentiary  
P.O. Box 5521  
3100 Railroad Avenue  
Bismarck, ND 58506-5521  
Phone: (701) 328-6100



**Ohio*****Correctional Education Division***

Ohio Central School System  
1050 Freeway Drive North  
Columbus, OH 43229  
Phone: (614) 752-0311

**Oklahoma*****Correctional Education Division***

State Department of Corrections  
Suite 200  
2901 North Classen  
Oklahoma City, OK 73106  
Phone: (405) 962-6109

**Oregon*****Correctional Education Division***

State Department of Corrections  
Workforce Development Division  
1793 13th Street, SE  
Salem, OR 97302  
Phone: (503) 934-1007

**Pennsylvania*****Bureau of Correction Education***

Department of Corrections  
Suite 103  
75 Utley Drive  
Camp Hill, PA 17011  
Phone: (717) 731-7823

**Rhode Island*****Correctional Education Division***

Rhode Island Department of Corrections  
Educational Services, Bernadette Building  
15 Fleming Road  
Cranston, RI 02920  
Phone: (401) 462-2507

**South Carolina*****Correctional Education Division***

State Department of Corrections  
Palmetto Unified School District #1  
4444 Broad River Road  
P.O. Box 21787  
Columbia, SC 29221-1787  
Phone: (803) 896-1568

**South Dakota*****Correctional Education Division***

State Department of Corrections  
Suite 4  
4101 South Westport Avenue  
Sioux Falls, SD 57104  
Phone: (605) 773-3478

**Tennessee*****Correctional Education Division***

State Department of Corrections  
Rachel Jackson Building, 4th Floor  
320 Sixth Avenue, North  
Nashville, TN 37243-0465  
Phone: (615) 741-1000 ext.8176

**Texas*****Correctional Education Division***

State Department of Criminal Justice  
Windham School District, Instl Division  
P.O. Box 40  
Huntsville, TX 77342-0040  
Phone: (936) 291-5300

**Utah*****Correctional Education Division***

State Office of Education  
250 East 500 South  
P.O. Box 144200  
Salt Lake City, UT 84114-4200  
Phone: (801) 538-7989

**Vermont*****Correctional Education Division***

Community High School of Vermont  
103 South Main Street  
Waterbury, VT 05671-1001  
Phone: (802) 241-2273

**Virginia*****Virginia Department of  
Correctional Education***

James Monroe Building, 7th Floor  
101 North 14th Street  
Richmond, VA 23219-3678  
Phone: (804) 225-3314

**Washington*****Correctional Education Division***

State Department of Corrections  
Educational Services Unit  
7345 Linderson Way, MS-41129  
Tumwater, WA 98501  
Phone: (360) 725-8211

**West Virginia*****Office of Institutional  
Education Programs***

State Department of Education  
Building 6, Room 728  
1900 Kanawha Boulevard East  
Charleston, WV 25305-0330  
Phone: (304) 957-9833

**Wisconsin*****Correctional Education Division***

State Department of Corrections  
P.O. Box 7925  
3099 East Washington Avenue  
Madison, WI 53707-7925  
Phone: (608) 240-5000

**Wyoming*****Correctional Education Division***

Department Of Corrections  
700 West 21st Street  
Cheyenne, WY 82002  
Phone: (307) 777-6104

# Dad's (and Mom's) Totally Fun Test

Could you use some help in knowing how to connect and communicate with your children while you're in prison?

At right is a sampling of questions from Dwight Twilley's *Questions from Dad* (the book is regrettably out of print) to help you think creatively about how to reach into your children's hearts and show them you care. The approach centers around a "Dad's Test"—only this test is fun! It includes funny, entertaining questions as well as a few serious ones that help you learn more about your kids and their interests.

You can use these questions and/or invent some of your own. You can make up a different test for each child, geared to his or her age. At holidays you can make up a test with a holiday theme.

Most kids love to draw. So you might draw an empty box and ask your child to draw something—such as the family pet or an alien from Mars.

If you can afford it, include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. That will boost your chance of getting a reply!

**01.** What's your favorite TV show?

\_\_\_\_\_

**02.** What's your pet's favorite TV show?

\_\_\_\_\_

**03.** You should never eat anything bigger than your own head.

- A) True
- B) False

**04.** What does your room look like?

- A) Neat and clean
- B) Not too bad
- C) Disaster area
- D) Bio-hazard area

**05.** Do you like school?

- A) Yes
- B) No
- C) A little
- D) A lot

**06.** Which is best?

- A) Hamburger
- B) Hot dog

**07.** What do you want to be when you grow up?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**08.** Would you like to ride an elephant?

- A) Yes
- B) No
- C) I'd be scared

**09.** What is the scariest thing you can think of?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**10.** Who is your best friend?

\_\_\_\_\_

**11.** What level can you get to in Mario III (or insert whatever game your child might play)?

\_\_\_\_\_

**12.** Name all the video games you have.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**13.** Do you still like dolls (action figures)?

- A) Yes
- B) No

(Questions like this help you keep pace with your child's changing interests as he or she grows older)

**14.** Write your name the best you can.

\_\_\_\_\_

**15.** Now write it the worst you can.

\_\_\_\_\_

**16.** Are you glad this test is almost over?

- A) Yes
- B) No

**17.** Do you want dad to send more tests?

- A) Yes
- B) No

**18.** Your dad thinks you are

- A) OK
- B) kinda likes you
- C) loves you
- D) love love loves you
- E) love love love love love love loves you

## APPENDIX B