



PRISON  
FELLOWSHIP

FOR WOMEN

# INSIDE JOURNAL®

YOUR SOURCE OF INSPIRATION AND INFORMATION

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# The Transformation of Tracey Sims

by Emily Andrews

**T**racey Sims was leading a seemingly happy life. The 34-year-old mother of four had just gotten married to the man she loved, and her future looked bright. But she was hiding a dark secret. Ten days after her honeymoon, she was arrested for participating in the defrauding of another company through her employer. She was staring down a 40-year prison sentence.

Though she would end up serving only six years in all, it was still a long journey she would never forget.

After leaving her children, ages 9 to 15, in her mother's care, she felt hollow just thinking about all the birthdays and family holidays she would miss. Her mind raced with doubts and fears. If her brand-new husband decided to leave her, could she blame him? If her children resented her forever, would she ever forgive herself?

### Whatever it takes

The slamming of the prison gates at the Carole Young Unit in Texas was a terrifying



Tracey, a happy mom and newlywed in her 30s, seemed to have her life in order ... until a dark secret came to light that changed everything.

sound, but Tracey determined that the prison experience wouldn't break her. For her own sake and the sake of the family she left behind, she would make the best of her time in the system.

Early on, Tracey realized something that would determine the course of her prison sentence—and her life.

"You have to be the one to rehabilitate yourself," says Tracey. "You can't depend on the prison system to do that."

While the choice to change was up to her, Tracey believed that only God could intervene and give her back her life. And she knew she couldn't get through her sentence alone—she needed help. So Tracey

looked for community. She started simple, with a choir and some classes. Then she heard the Prison Fellowship Academy® was coming to her facility, and she knew it was her chance to grow.

The Academy, an intensive life-transformation program, challenged Tracey to dig deeper into the roots of her

bad choices. She and her classmates held each other responsible for their actions and supported each other's spiritual growth. In the Academy, she didn't just find a positive community. She found people who pointed her to Jesus Christ—the only one who could save her and transform her heart.

As her faith in Christ continued to grow, she couldn't get enough of the Academy. Her mentor, Sheila Klein, said Tracey only missed class when she had knee surgery. By the next week, Tracey was hobbling back to class on crutches.

With the faithful guidance of program staff and volunteers, and the support of her new Christian sisterhood, Tracey transformed. She was part of the first graduating class of the Academy at the Carole Young Unit. After graduation, she decided to move forward, never backward. That summer, Tracey trained to be one of the first peer facilitators of that Academy.

"If we needed someone to

*Continued on page 2*

Photo by Chad Prince

## Start the New Year Strong—With ConBody's Cell Workout

by Emily Andrews

**T**here's a street corner in lower Manhattan where Coss Marte, then a teenager, launched his career selling drugs—before the law and some serious health issues caught up with him. By 23, he was in prison. He was out of shape, and if something didn't change, he would likely die of a heart attack before his seven-year sentence was up.

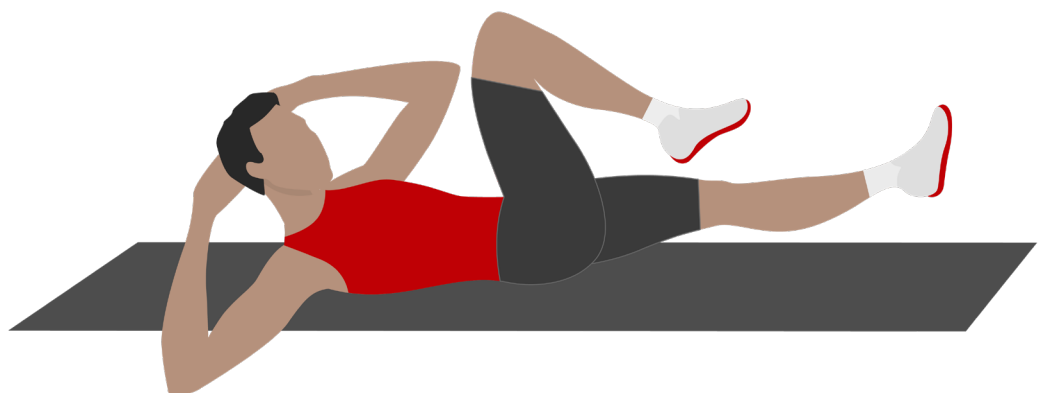
"That was a real wake-up call," says Marte. He remembers running laps around the prison yard and exercising in his 9-by-6 cell, with nothing but the walls and floor for equipment. He lost 70 pounds in six months.

Before his release, he helped at least 20 fellow prisoners lose more than 1,000 pounds total.

After being released from prison, Marte launched ConBody, a prison-style workout program led entirely by formerly incarcerated people. The first studio opened in 2015 on the same corner where Marte used to sell drugs. Today, ConBody also offers a variety of online workout videos with several different trainers. Marte hopes incarcerated men and women can participate in prisons where computer tablets are available.

Meanwhile, here are a few Marte-approved core exercises that you can accomplish right in your cell (just make sure to drink plenty of water!).

### EXERCISE 1



#### Bicycle Crunch:

Lie on your back and bring your knees up to form a 90-degree angle. Keep your hands by your temples, crunch up, and twist across the body while kicking your legs in a bicycle motion. (For example, if you crunch up and to the right, you should draw your right knee in.)

Source: ConBody

*Continued on page 2*



# Caution: God at Work

by Annie Goebel

When I asked Jesus to come into my life, I instantly received forgiveness for what I had done wrong. But I didn't instantly reach my full potential and become the woman God created me to be. Although the seeds of my faith had been planted, I still needed to nurture them so I could grow. In God's Word, the Bible, I found the "fertilizer" I desperately needed to feed the seeds of change in my heart. Changing from our old ways and leaving our old desires behind might not seem easy. The good news is that God will take the lead, if you let Him. I like the way the Message version of the Bible explains it in Proverbs 3:5-6: "Trust God from the bottom of your heart; don't try to figure out everything on your own. Listen for God's voice in everything you do, everywhere you go; he's the one who will keep you on track." We hear God's voice when we pray, study His Word, and meditate on it.

Even though I have been a "Jesus girl" for 30 years, I still have a long way to go. God's not done with me. He is still growing me, teaching me how to make His desires my desires. What about you? Where are you on your journey to becoming the woman God created you to be? Is your heart open to what He has to say? No matter where you



Photo by Taralyn Quigley

are in your walk with Jesus, He can mold and transform you into the masterpiece He sees you as.

This edition of Inside Journal is all about changing—more specifically, using this new year to redefine yourself as God's child, and letting go of the old you so that your thoughts and attitude can be transformed (page 4). Your body can be renewed (page 1), and you can use the calendar (page 3) to mark the day you decided to renew yourself in

Christ, to grow in Him where you are planted, like the mural created by the women of Shakopee prison (page 4).

Walking with Jesus doesn't mean all your problems suddenly disappear, but if you plant yourself in God's truth and let Him grow the seeds of change in your heart, you will experience the most amazing transformation!

Annie Goebel is the director of programs and special events at Prison Fellowship. ■

## Subscription Info

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## Tracey Transformed

Continued from page 1

encourage another member, we called on Tracey," says Bill Loyd, Prison Fellowship field director for southeast Texas.

### The gift of freedom—and family

Over time, the people Tracey met through Prison Fellowship became like family. She is also thankful that her own family never left her behind. Her husband, Darreyl, chose to stay through that difficult season of marriage.

He brought their children for prison visits regularly. Thinking back on those days, "It brings me to tears," says Tracey. "God is faithful!" Just before Christmas 2011, the parole board voted to release Tracey within 30 days. She felt like Jesus had chosen His own birthday to give her the sweetest gift—the gift of freedom. After Tracey walked free, she maintained her monthly parole requirements and landed a job with a title company. She earned a promotion while pursuing a

degree in marketing. Today Tracey serves with Prison Fellowship as a volunteer to help others walk the difficult road to restoration. She still makes the drive back to Carole Young to help run Angel Tree® Christmas parties and volunteer with Celebrate Recovery, a biblically based recovery program. Her husband and adult children have gone in with her to volunteer, too. Tracey considers it a great privilege to minister to women whose stories are similar to hers—women she could have shared a prison dorm with not so long ago.

"I am forever grateful, honored, and humbled to be able to serve them," Tracey says, fighting back tears, "because I know what those volunteers meant to me and my family." With her eyes fixed on Jesus, Tracey stays on course, knowing His grace is stronger than any past mistake or future temptation. Her greatest joy is helping others to follow the same path—leaving the past behind to take hold of a hope-filled future. ■

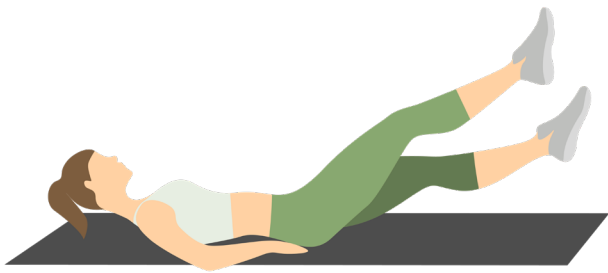


Photo by Chad Prince

## ConBody Workout

Continued from page 1

### EXERCISE 2

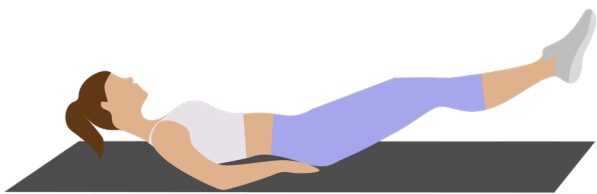


#### Flutter Kick:

Lie on your back with your arms by your sides and the palms of your hands down. Extend your legs completely out, with knees slightly bent. Lift your heels about six inches off the floor. Make small, rapid, up-and-down scissor-like motions with your legs.

Source: ConBody

### EXERCISE 3

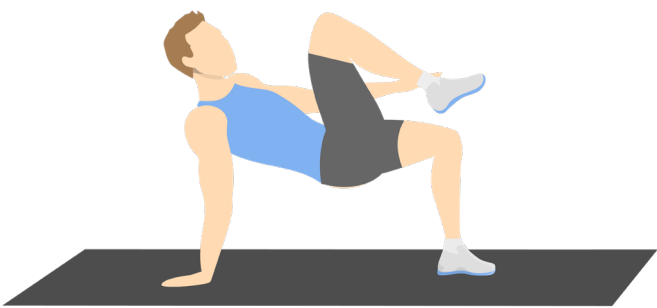


#### Hello Dolly/Scissor Kick:

Lie back and keep your legs together. Extend your legs out and point your toes toward the ceiling. Slide your hands, palms down, under your tailbone. Keep your head back and your chin tucked. Using your core strength, lift your feet six inches off the floor. Separate your legs horizontally as far as you can, and begin a horizontal scissor kick, back and forth.

Source: ConBody

### EXERCISE 4



#### Crab Toe Touch:

Sit on the floor with knees bent and feet together. Place your hands behind you. Lift your hips off the floor, kick your right leg up, and touch your right foot with your left hand. Then place your right foot on the floor, kick your left leg up, and touch your left foot with your right hand. Keep alternating legs quickly, keeping your core engaged and your neck relaxed.

Source: ConBody

As much as Marte loves helping people build a better body, he's even more excited about building better futures. On the outside, many of his clients have never met someone who has been in prison. But, Marte says, "As soon as they meet us, it changes their whole perspective." As communities welcome returning prisoners, Marte is doing his part to bridge the gap between the community and the formerly incarcerated,

and to spread awareness of the need for second chances. He encourages those behind bars to do what they can to stay motivated and grow stronger—working out, taking classes, getting counseling, and learning a skill. "You're going to come out struggling," says Marte. "It's going to be difficult, and you're going to be judged. But work hard. Build your character. You're going to survive, and that's real success." ■

“Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning.” – Lamentations 3:23 (NLT)

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HOLIDAYS						
January 1 – New Year’s Day						
January 21 – Martin Luther King Day						
February 14 – Valentine’s Day						
February 18 – Presidents Day						
April 21 – Easter						
May 12 – Mother’s Day						
May 27 – Memorial Day						
June – Ask your chaplain for an Angel Tree prisoner participation form.						

June 16 – Father’s Day						
July 4 – Independence Day						
August – Don’t forget to submit your Angel Tree prisoner participation form!						
September 2 – Labor Day						
November 11 – Veterans Day						
November 28 – Thanksgiving Day						
December 25 – Christmas Day						

MY IMPORTANT DATES						
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# Could You Forgive Your Worst Enemy?

by Stan Guthrie

During World War II, when Jewish people were being rounded up throughout Nazi-occupied Europe, Corrie ten Boom, her father Casper, and her sister Betsie were imprisoned for hiding Jews in their home. Casper and Betsie both died in detention, but Corrie eventually was released due to a clerical error. After the war was over, Corrie started visiting churches to share about how Jesus helped her through her imprisonment. In her book *The Hiding Place*, she told about an encounter at one church that stunned her. She had finished speaking, and as the church was emptying, a German man came up to her and thrust out his hand. She recognized him; during the war, he had been a cruel Nazi officer. “How grateful I am for your message, *Fraulein*,” he said. “To think that, as you say, He has washed my sins away!”

Painful memories came racing back. Corrie could not bring herself to raise her arm to shake the man’s hand. She was too angry. Bitter thoughts of vengeance filled her mind. Corrie had shared the message of Christ’s forgiveness to many people in war-torn Europe, so shouldn’t she practice what she preached? She prayed silently, asking Jesus to forgive her and to help her forgive the man. Then she tried to smile and raise her hand, but again, her right arm hung lifelessly at her side. So, she said another silent and honest prayer: *Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Give Your forgiveness.* Suddenly, her arm began moving. “As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened,” Corrie remembered. “From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand, a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.” Corrie knew that because God had forgiven her, she

needed to forgive others—even people who had hurt her and her loved ones. But she also realized that forgiving this man would be impossible without God’s help. So, she prayed to Him and received the power to forgive.

### A powerful balance

God can do the same for us if we ask. He can free us from our pain and anger and begin replacing our old, unforgiving ways with a new purpose in Him. God’s forgiveness doesn’t cancel earthly accountability, however. Being restored through Jesus doesn’t mean our past never happened. The courts will still give out punishments for crimes we committed, and our actions can still have consequences on our marriages, parent-child relationships, long-term health, and other areas of our life. But thankfully, God promises to walk with us even through those consequences, and to strengthen us by His grace. We all struggle with bad attitudes, thoughts, and habits, yet God is near each of us. He wants us to give our struggles to Him. He will replace our old, unhealthy things with good things, including the power to change. To be free from your old ways, the Bible says in Colossians and Ephesians that you are to “put on the new self” as a child of God. The Apostle Paul, who was in prison for sharing his Christian faith, says in

## ARE YOU FUELED BY ANGER?

Do you control your anger, or does it control you? Psalm 37:8 says, “Stop being angry! Turn from your rage! Do not lose your temper—it only leads to harm.” Colossians 3:13 adds, “Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.”

If you want to let go of your resentment, start with this simple prayer:

*“Lord, you are a God of forgiveness. If You can forgive sinners who don’t deserve mercy, surely You can bring me strength to let go of my anger and forgive my enemies. Please soften my heart and release any pain or anger. Amen.”*

To discover how God can free you from your anger, sign up for a free correspondence Bible study through a partner organization by writing to “No More Anger,” c/o Inside Journal, P.O. Box 1790, Ashburn, VA 20146-1790. To request a large-print Inside Journal® Life Recovery Bible in English or Spanish, write to\*: Tyndale House Publishers, Attn: Inside Journal Bible, 351 Executive Drive, Carol Stream, IL 60188 with your name, prison ID number, institution name, and address. \*PA readers: do not mail your request; ask your chaplain directly.

Ephesians 4:1, “I, a prisoner for serving the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of your calling” (NLT).

The Bible says this worthy life is humble, gentle, and patient about the faults of other people. “Throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life,” Paul says in Ephesians 4, “which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.” As Christians, by the power of God’s Spirit living inside us, we are to let go of the bad things from our old life and let Jesus Christ renew our attitudes. That’s what Corrie

ten Boom did, and what you can do, too.

### Time for a fresh start

With the New Year right around the corner, this is a great time to make a fresh start with God. You can be reinvented from the inside out—not by your own efforts to improve, but by His power. When you are reborn and renewed in Jesus, the old, beat-up, and bruised you is gone. God makes you new. So, if you just can’t seem to break a bad habit or let go of grudges, don’t try to reinvent yourself. Remember Corrie ten Boom, stop trying to use your power, and ask God to give you His power to change and to “put on the new self” every day. ■



ramzihachicho/Getty Images

Is it harder to forgive others, or to ask for forgiveness yourself? Whether you relate to Corrie or to the German officer, it’s important to release your anger, forgive others, and ask to be forgiven.

# Unique Mural Project Brightens Prison

by Stacia Ray

In Minnesota Correctional Facility – Shakopee (Minnesota’s only women’s prison), a recent art project has graced the walls with beauty and inspiration. Martha Ackerman—the wife of Prison Fellowship’s president and CEO James Ackerman—and artist Stephanie Segel had been offering classes to incarcerated women through a restorative art program they named Create: New Beginnings. Their in-prison workshops on topics such as shame, self-doubt, empathy, and forgiveness have been well-received. Martha, Stephanie, and Pamela Page, program manager of Shakopee’s Prison Fellowship Academy®—a holistic life-transformation program for prisoners—discussed the idea of creating a mural the incarcerated ladies

could help paint. With the warden’s approval, they came up with the design, which uses flowers to symbolize five positive peer values. All who submitted a request to participate were approved. To include these women in a hands-on capacity, “I came up with a ‘paint-by-numbers’

kind of thing,” says Stephanie. “We stenciled in the outline and mixed all the colors and labeled them, and then guided the ladies which colors would go where.” Sixteen women came in groups of four to paint, working in harmony alongside volunteers and staff. All of

them felt inspired and proud. The mural project, the first of its kind in Shakopee, is filled with symbolism. The flowers are shown inside three-dimensional shadowboxes, symbolizing the idea of finding beauty even when it’s behind glass or in a sealed enclosure. Prisoners and staff remarked how emotional the mural made them, some through tears. Everyone involved agreed that the painting process was very calming. This project was a collaboration between Prison Fellowship staff and volunteers, incarcerated women, and the prison’s administration, who all worked together to create the mural, which is titled “Bloom Where You Are Planted.”

The results of this three-day painting project are breathtaking. “Not only is it bright and meaningful,” says Martha, “but even the ‘bloom where you are planted’ theme

translates anywhere, with positive values and beliefs, and symbolism with grace and purpose.” And those 16 prisoners who held the paintbrushes get to rest in the knowledge that they created a legacy that will grace the halls long after they leave. ■



Photo by Shakopee Correctional Facility

The large, beautiful mural graces the hallway outside the cafeteria, inspiring women as they wait in line for meals.



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