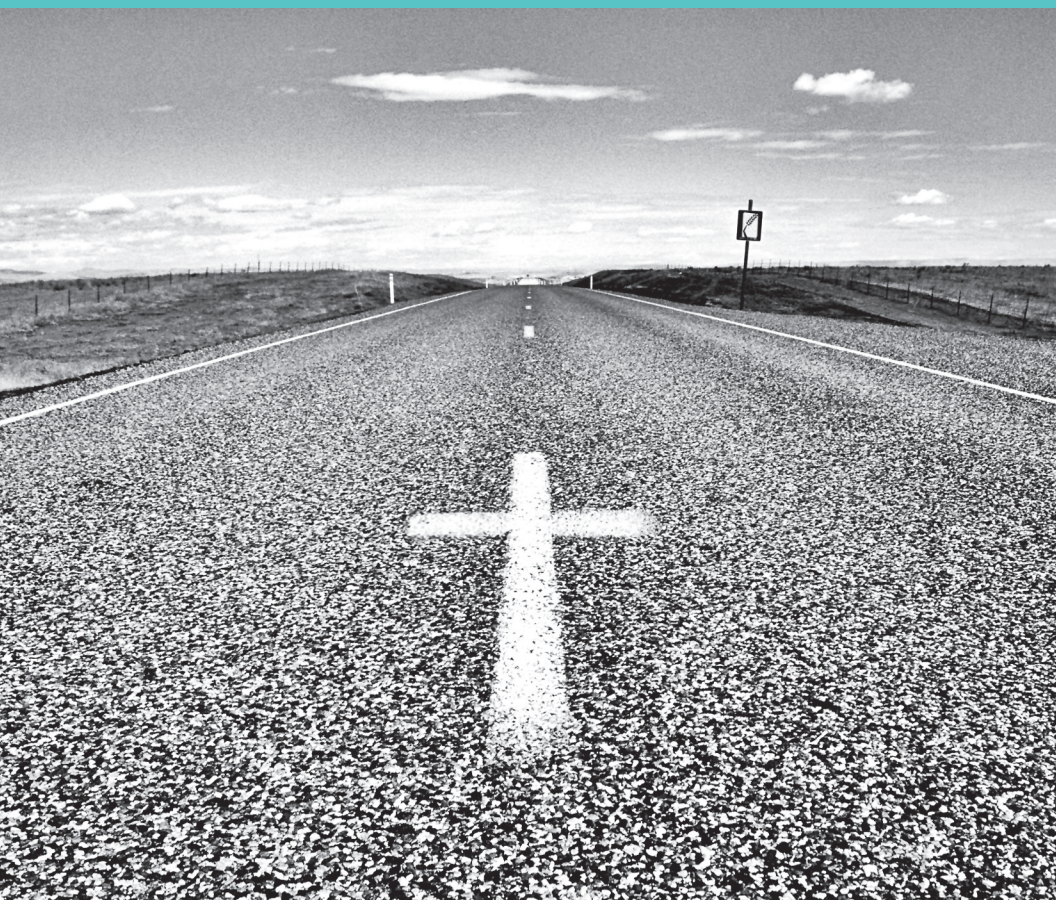


SHORTIMER

PREPARING FOR RELEASE



PRISON
FELLOWSHIP



*Trust in the LORD with all your heart
and lean not on your own understanding;
in all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make your paths straight.*
– Proverbs 3:5-6

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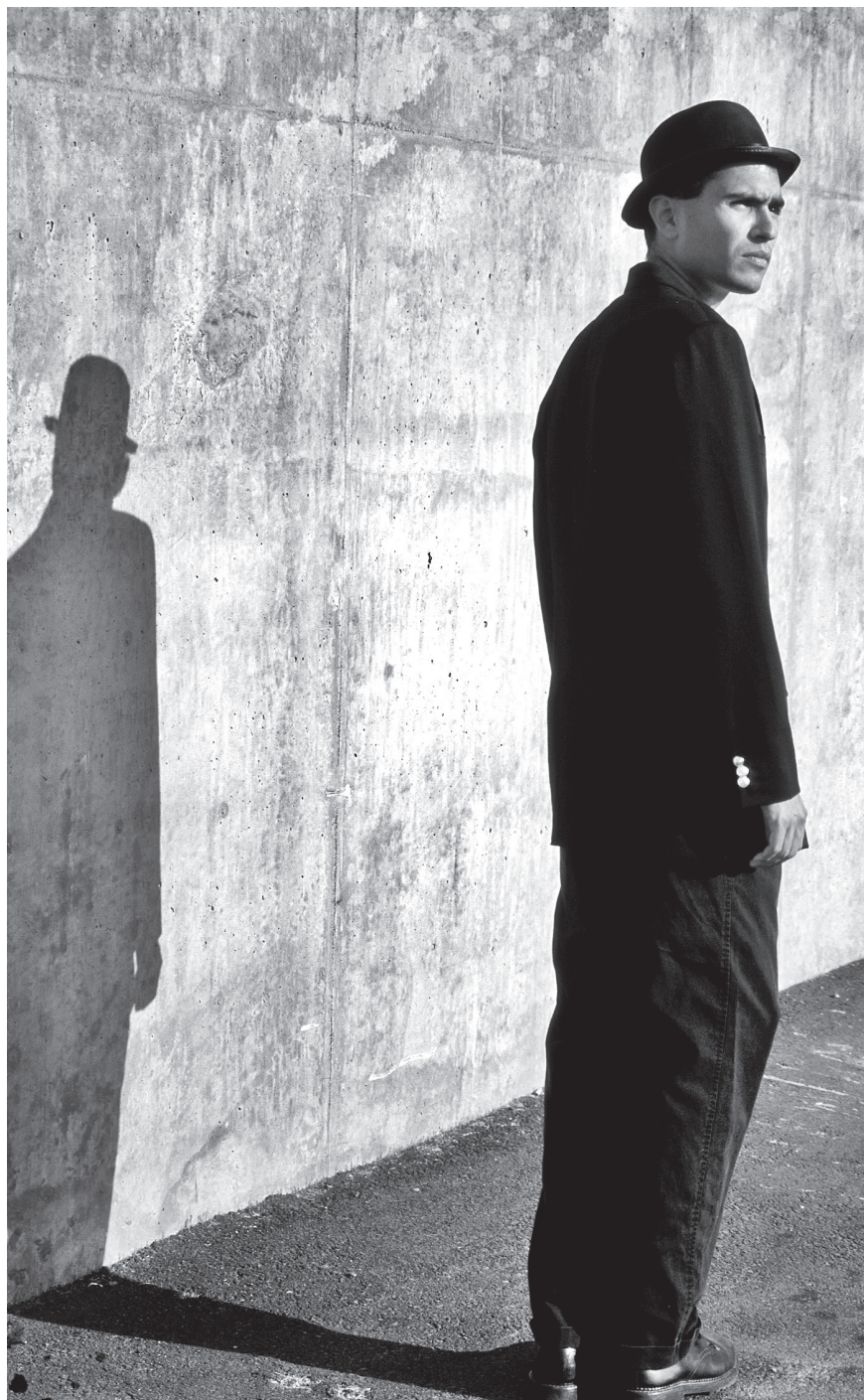
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I. INTRODUCTION

You just got the word. The parole board has agreed and you are out in 30 days. Whether you have been down for 6 months or 60 years, you are no doubt feeling a flood of emotions—relief, excitement—followed by anxiety, fear, and a lot of what ifs. You will likely fantasize about just how good life will be on the outside. Then you will start to worry. *What if I can't find work? What if I can't find a place to live? What if I mess up again and I have to come back?*

You won't be alone. It may be a very special day for you, but an average of 2,500 prisoners in America are released on any given weekday. Most people think that it would be great if former prisoners left prison to become responsible, tax-paying citizens. But you are not likely to hear a lot of positive, "can do" encouragement from fellow prisoners, officers, family members, and friends. The only thing you share in common with the other 2,499 people released on your day is that the odds seem to be stacked against you—all of you. But they are actually not as bad as they used to be. In the 1990s the rearrests rate **within three years of release** from prison was a crushing **67 percent**. A growing number of **reentry programs** is currently helping to bring that number down, but that still means for every four released prisoners who survive and make it on the outside, **six will stay tangled up with the justice system**. How you prepare for your own release will largely determine into which group you fall.

Prison Fellowship staff members have gathered and/or written the material in this booklet to help you make your release a permanent reality. We will introduce you to useful resources and good advice from those who have made it on the outside. The agencies listed in this booklet may be able to provide even more resource lists to aid you in your transition. Also, please realize that some of the information in this booklet may be out of date as national organizations change, move, close, or adjust their services. The information contained here is not a guarantee of success, but we offer it with the hope it will give you some ideas and places to start. You can do this, by God's grace, and we want to help. ■



II. SOUL SUCCESS

Shortimer is not the first nor the most complete book ever produced on preparing for release. Yet, we do like to offer up front one critical piece of information that we believe is central to success.

We could begin by telling you all about how to get an education, how to get a job, how to find housing and a car. A lot of folks assume poverty, bad family background, and lack of opportunity cause a person to get into crime because they have no choices. And if we just fix those things with a new job, degree, or car, all will be well. But when we consider that many people in prison had plenty of money, houses, cars, loving families, and work before their crimes, we must realize those things are not the root cause of crime.

The answer, whether one is poor or rich, is the same. Crime is a moral problem and requires a moral solution. There are thousands of poor and rich people who never commit crimes, so we know it's not about economic status. Why do people break the law? Jealousy. Envy. Greed. Hate. Lust. Selfishness. Pride. Think about it. The following story of Bryan Kelly shows this principle in action.

A Sorry Deal

The years and months that led up to the busted drug deal had been one series of poor choices after another. Raised by a hardworking teen mom (Dad walked out of the picture before he took his first steps), Bryan grew up in a community largely made up of “working class alcoholics” in small town Kansas. After dropping out of college in Texas, Bryan was “living to party, partying to live.” That led to drugs, and ultimately to a murder he never planned on committing.

Sitting in prison staring at a life sentence at the age of 26, “everything I knew was over,” Bryan said.

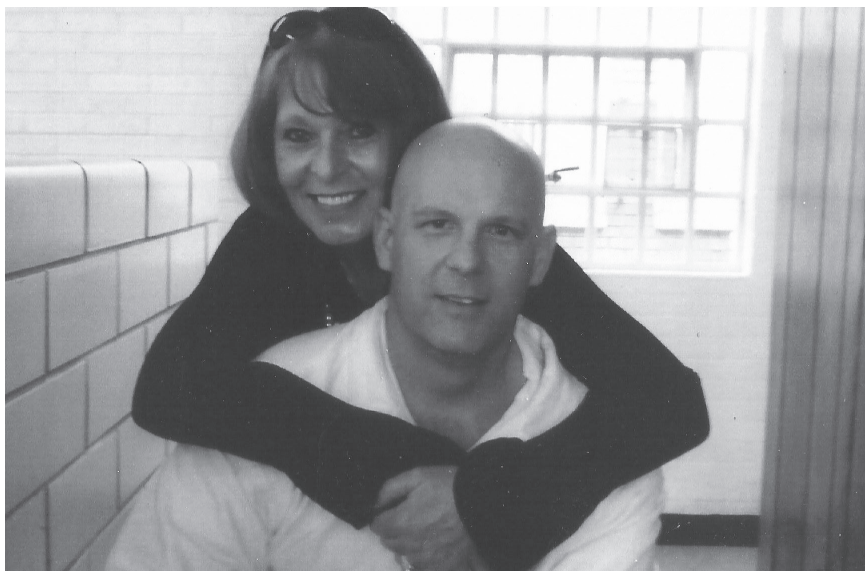
But then a fellow prisoner invited him to attend a weekend-long event sponsored by a prison ministry. During the three days, he was fed home-cooked meals and experienced a bit of Christian warmth.

“They didn’t try to cram the Bible down our throats. They just loved on us.”

At one point in the weekend, he began to feel an urge to confess his crime—something he hadn’t yet done, even in court. Through full tears, he unloaded to a caring volunteer who told him that the person he really needed to confess to was God.

“I can’t do that,” Bryan told the man. “I don’t really deserve it.”

“I didn’t realize I would meet someone who is smarter than God,” the



volunteer responded. “You’re not going to have any peace until you hand this over to Him.”

“So I handed the broken pieces to God,” Bryan says. “I told Him, ‘I’m sorry for the deal I’m giving You.’”

From there, Bryan began living—really living.

He went to addiction recovery classes. He earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology. He became a college tutor and a peer educator. He got involved with a business program for prisoners called Prison Entrepreneurship Program (PEP). And he grew in his faith.

Over the next 20 years, God began to transform a confused and shattered young man into a rock for others.

In 2012, Bryan was transferred to the Torres Unit outside of San Antonio. There, he enrolled in a faith-based dorm run by Prison Fellowship. For the first time in his life, he had the opportunity to live with a group of other believers.

“I’d never been on a dorm where there were so many people collectively working on their spiritual walk. What a great atmosphere there was! I knew that everybody there was striving toward a better walk with Christ.”

While there, he made a point of mentoring and discipling younger (or spiritually younger) prisoners in the path of Jesus. In many ways, Bryan saw his time at Torres as a chance to give back what he’d received over the years from older, wiser prisoners and godly volunteers.

Around this time, Bryan was up for parole (to serve the rest of his life

sentence on probation). Strangely, he convinced the parole board to let him serve one more year in prison, so he could finish the program he had started with PEP.

And then on July 1, 2014, at the age of 48, Bryan finally walked out of prison.

Masterpiece

Despite the fact that he was immediately hired by PEP to serve as a transitional coordinator for other guys coming out of prison and that he had a halfway house where he could rest his head, reentry wasn't exactly a walk in the park.

"I had never sent an email, never Googled anything, never used a cell phone, never owned a debit card," he admits. "A lot of things were brand new."

Meanwhile, he was also promoted to executive relations manager at PEP, a role that has enabled him to purchase a car and begin saving for a house. But despite this, he struggled with discouragement when he learned that an application he had submitted to pursue his master's was rejected because of his record.

Still, he has hope, and relationships to invest in. First, to his mother Barb, who "stuck by me the whole time I was in prison," writing him letters almost daily for 22 years. As a gift to her and in celebration of his 50th birthday, Bryan recently treated her to a Caribbean cruise.

Looking back over the past half century, Bryan only sees grace.

"My whole life since I've been out has been the Lord restoring what the locusts have eaten. It's amazing how he's restored those broken pieces ... He has taken my broken pieces and made it into a masterpiece."

The Gospel Story

What is so powerful about a relationship with Jesus Christ that could change a drug addict and a murderer like Bryan?" Jesus is a familiar name in our culture, but His true identity is often masked by rumor, hearsay, and stereotypes. Who is He really? His story goes hand in hand with what Christians call the Gospel or "good news." The Bible tells us it started when Adam and Eve decided they didn't have to listen to God anymore. God had said there was only one tree in the entire Garden of Eden from which they should not eat. But Adam and Eve had a better idea. They'd do it their own way, and so they ate.

The entire human race has reaped the consequences of that choice: "One man disobeyed God and all people became sinners" (Romans 5:19).

Sin threw the perfectly created world into a terrible mess. Sin separated God's creation from Himself, the Creator. Sin's ugly results are described in

terms that a worker can understand—earning a payment. It is a negative payment—a punishment: “The wages of sin is death ...” (Romans 6:23).

That means spiritual, eternal death—separated from God.

But sin and death don’t have the final word. God became a man—Jesus Christ. And Jesus, who lived a sinless life, took on the payment or punishment for your sin. “He himself bore our sins in his body on a tree” (1 Peter 2:24). You may feel worthless because of your failure, ashamed of what you’ve done to your family. But God thinks you’re worth the life of His Son dying on the cross.

And Jesus didn’t just die for your sins. He rose from the dead. And that is great news! Because He lives, so will all who invite Him to become their Lord and Savior—saving you from your sins, and lovingly leading your life.

Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection opens a way for us to restore a relationship to God that was broken by sin. It means that even though we will die a natural death (our physical bodies), we will be able to spend eternity—starting now, right where you stand—with an awesome, loving God.

God offers you this gift of eternal life and forgiveness of sins, but you have to accept the gift. That’s what Bryan did after realizing he was a sinner in need of a Savior. How can you accept the gift? Just talk to God. Pray. If you don’t know what to say, use the words below. The words are not magical; you have to say them from your heart.

Jesus, I’ve sinned against You, and I’ve hurt many people. I believe You died on the cross for my sins and rose from the dead. I believe You paid my death penalty. Please forgive my sins. Come live in my heart and make me a new creation. I don’t understand all there is to knowing You, but I pray that You will show me how to have a relationship with You like Bryan has. Thank You for saving me. I ask this in Your name, Amen.

If you sincerely asked Jesus to forgive you and live in your life, you now have God’s Spirit living within you. You are God’s child, and He wants to grow you up into a mature believer. He has an adventure for you to live. To help you understand more about this decision you’ve made, we would like to send you a short Bible study and more information. To receive this free material, write to: **Prison Fellowship, 44180 Riverside Parkway, Lansdowne, VA 20176.**

Shortimer focuses mostly on external necessities: shelter, finances, and employment. All Christian soon-to-be former prisoners should also plan for their spiritual growth as well. If you make the effort now to read the Bible and pray every day, your efforts in planning for a permanent move beyond prison will improve greatly. ■

What is Prison Fellowship?

Men and women behind bars sometimes feel like they are on the outside of society looking in. But God doesn't see them that way. He sees their value and potential.

In the Bible, Jesus identifies himself with prisoners, telling His followers, "I was in prison, and you came to visit me ... I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me (Matthew 25:35-36, 40).

In response to God's call to come alongside people behind bars, Prison Fellowship was founded in 1976 by Charles Colson, a former aide to President Nixon who served a seven-month sentence for a Watergate-related crime. Today, the Christian nonprofit is the nation's largest ministry to prisoners, former prisoners, and their families, and a leading advocate for criminal justice reform.

Prison Fellowship brings restoration to those affected by crime and incarceration in all 50 states by providing tools and opportunities for life transformation, supporting prisoners' families and returning citizens, and advocating for a criminal justice system that reflects the God-given dignity and potential of each life. Through an awakening to new hope and life purpose, people once caught in the cycle of crime are mobilized to serve and renew their communities.

III. WHAT CAN I DO BEFORE I WALK?

A lot, really. But it will depend on when you start. If you thought you'd never get out only to have an officer say in 30 days you're hitting the streets, you're going to feel a little panic. Don't wait. Tackle the most important things first (a place to live, someone to meet you, drug treatment, a current ID) and work your way down (write a resume, plan your celebration). The sooner you start, the more you can prepare, eliminate the panic, and impress those around you that you're serious about never coming back.

Take Advantage of Pre-Release Programs in Your Facility (*Excerpted from Connections 2009, New York Public Library*). Many pre-release units in prisons have specially trained staff to help you plan your reentry into society. Most pre-release units maintain updated listings of government and community agencies that can help you in finding a job, locating a drug program, or addressing any of a multitude of needs. You might also encourage your pre-release center to invite in, as some already do, representatives from community agencies or private companies that do a large amount of hiring, to give presentations.

Gather All the Documents You Will Need (*Portions excerpted from Connections 2009*). In order to apply for jobs and be eligible for most private or government programs, it is mandatory that you have certain types of documentation. If you begin to collect what you need now, a lot of valuable time and much frustration will be saved. At the very least, be sure to have a Social Security card (a number alone is usually not sufficient) and proof of identification (a birth certificate, baptismal papers, driver's license or nondriver's photo ID, for example). Each agency has its own requirements as to documentation, but the following are commonly required, or may help in increasing your chances of eligibility:

- Military discharge papers
- Alien registration card (for non-U.S. citizens)
- Prison discharge papers (given to you upon release)
- Proof of education (college transcripts or GED certificate, for example)
- Working papers (required for persons under 18 years old)
- Proof of functional disability
- Certificate of relief from disabilities
- Certificate of good conduct

Of course, not all these documents can be easily obtained, if at all, while you



are in prison. But collect what you can, and remember that, in some cases, a family member or friend on the outside may be of help.

It is becoming more common for departments of correction to issue some form of identification. If such a service is not available, you can get help obtaining a copy of your Social Security card by contacting the **U.S. Social Security Administration** office online at www.ssa.gov or calling (800) 772-1213 from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on weekdays. You can also write the following address and request information or forms: Social Security Administration Office of Public Inquiries, 1100 West High Rise, 6401 Security Blvd., Baltimore, MD 21235.

To get a photo ID, contact your local Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). This ID might be a driver's license or just an official ID card. The DMV handles both. Call your nearest DMV office to get details on taking a driver's test to get a new driver's license. In some states, you can renew your license by mail if it has not expired. You can look up the DMV under the "state government" listings in a telephone book or do a search on the Internet.

To get a certified copy of your birth certificate, write to the Bureau of Vital Statistics in the state where you were born. Ask them to send you the form(s) needed to receive a certified copy of your birth certificate (marked with their official seal). There is usually a small fee. ■



Pre-Release Success Checklist

The following checklist contains things to do and things to obtain prior to release. Failing to complete most of these steps before release or immediately after release can increase your chances of returning to prison either on technical violations or for new crimes.

- ☐ Get a Social Security card and other forms of ID (certified copy of birth certificate, photo ID).
- ☐ Complete any in-prison reentry programs available.
- ☐ Clear outstanding warrants, charges, and detainers.
- ☐ Clear aliases.
- ☐ Seal any and all parts of criminal history that future employers don't need to see.
- ☐ Complete drug treatment program or find a program in your community immediately after release.
- ☐ Form a job search plan (write a resume, network with friends and family).
- ☐ Secure short-term housing.
- ☐ Make a celebration plan for release date.
- ☐ Get directions and a ride to a local church on the first Sunday of your freedom.

IV. WHO'S PICKING YOU UP?

Making a positive transition to freedom on your first day is very important—and the first place where things can go wrong. The very first thing that will happen on your release is that you will have to leave the prison somehow. For many, a family member or friend will be there waiting for you to drive you home. That's the best way to go.

But for others, this will be a pivotal trial, because you've been transferred far from home, or have been down so long you don't know anyone who could pick you up. No DOC will leave you sitting on the curb. They'll help you with a taxi or bus ticket to wherever you're supposed to go. Your first priority is to find someone who can talk to you that day. There are many agencies and nonprofits listed throughout this booklet that may be able to help out. What happens all too easily is that a lonely former prisoner, having no transportation and no one to celebrate with, figures the world doesn't give a rip. So why not go straight back to what feels good—a drug habit. There goes the gate money and any real hope of making a comeback. A way to avoid that, especially on your first day, is to be with someone. (Not another lonely addict, please.) Try contacting a church well in advance to ask if someone can help you on your first day. ■



V. SHORT-TERM HOUSING

Making a successful transition to civilian life requires having a reliable place to live. If you're completing your parole in a **halfway house**, there will come a day when you must get a place of your own so the next person can move in. If you're exiting to an **in-house drug rehab program**, you could have 30 to 60 days of housing until you complete the program. If you're on **house-arrest** or an electronic monitoring program, you could already be living at home. Once you're discharged, the deputy or P.O. will remove the bracelet and pack up the phone device, and your life will switch to normal—except the phone will no longer ring in the middle of the night.



For those without a halfway house, drug rehab room, or family home to move into, the **Salvation Army** is a good place to start. Cooperative arrangements exist between the Salvation Army and prison, probation, and parole officers in a program of prison rehabilitation and crime prevention. Some services include pre-release job-training programs, employment opportunities, material aid, and spiritual guidance. Salvation Army rehabilitation centers and Harbor Light centers have been designated as halfway houses for former prisoners to participate in work-release programs.

National phone: (703) 684-5500
www.salvationarmyusa.org

You can find other up-to-date housing options by going to a public library and looking up the **U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development** (www.hud.gov/homeless/index.cfm) on the Internet to find local homeless shelters and other options in your area. If you don't know how to work the computer yet, ask a librarian for help.

Another helpful organization for women in reentry is the **Woman's Prison Association** which offers assistance with emergency food and shelter. Their phone number in New York is (646) 292-7748 and their address is 110 Second Ave., New York, NY 10003. You can also find them on the Internet at www.wpaonline.org. ■

VI. COUNSELING/RESOURCES FOR DRUG AND OTHER ADDICTIONS

Statistics show that close to 80 percent of prisoners have had problems with illegal drugs and that, for most, supporting that habit got them in trouble—using, stealing, dealing, forging, fighting, robbing, even killing. And we all know that many prisoners continue to take drugs in prison. For others, prison has been a detox tank; for the first time in months or years, your body has been clean and you want to keep it that way. But you feel weak. Freedom isn't going to help if you don't seek treatment. We've listed many addiction treatment centers to assist you in beating your habit. Thousands have been treated successfully, and there's no reason you can't be one of them. Write or call before your release day so you have a plan and resources to enter and complete treatment.

♦ **Alcoholics Anonymous** is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength, and hope with one another that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from alcoholism. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for AA membership. It is self-supporting through contributions. AA is not allied with any sect, denomination, political party, organization, or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Its primary purpose is to help alcoholics achieve and maintain sobriety. Contact them at: AA World Services, Inc., P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163, (212) 870-3400, www.aa.org.

♦ **Al-Anon/Alateen** is a worldwide organization that offers a program of help and mutual support for families and friends of someone with a drinking problem. Al-Anon Family Group meetings welcome anyone who believes his or her life has been affected by the drinking habits of someone in either the past or the present. Alateen meetings are similar, but designed for teens. The Al-Anon and Alateen programs consist primarily of independently operated meetings of people who gather to share their experience, strength, and hope with one another, and to learn how to apply the principles of Al-Anon to their own recovery from the effects of someone else's drinking. For more specific information, contact them at: Al-Anon/Alateen Family Group, World Service Office, 1600 Corporate Landing Pkwy., Virginia Beach, VA 23454-5617, (757) 563-1600, www.al-anon.alateen.org.

♦ **Celebrate Recovery** is a biblical and balanced program that helps those struggling with all kinds of hurts, habits, and hang-ups by showing them the loving power of Jesus Christ through the recovery process. It is a 12-step group based on the actual words of Christ. Over 25 years ago, Saddleback Church launched Celebrate Recovery with only 43 people. Today Celebrate Recovery is offered through 29,000 churches worldwide. To find a group near you, go to **www.celebraterecovery.com** and enter your location on their CR Group search page.

♦ **Debtors Anonymous** is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength, and hope with one another that they may solve their common problem and help others to recover from compulsive borrowing. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop incurring unsecured debt. There are no dues or fees for DA membership. DA is not allied with any sect, denomination, political organization, or institution; does not wish to engage in any controversy; neither endorses nor opposes any causes. Its primary purpose is to help compulsive debtors stop incurring unsecured debt one day at a time. Contact them at: Debtors Anonymous General Service Office, P.O. Box 920888, Needham, MA 02492, (800) 421-2383, **www.debtorsanonymous.org**.

♦ **Eating Disorders Anonymous** is a fellowship of individuals who share their experience, strength and hope with each other that they may solve their common problems and help others recover from eating disorders. In EDA, recovery means living without obsessing on food, weight, and body image. The only requirement for membership in this 12-step group is a desire to recover from an eating disorder. Contact them at: EDA, Inc., P.O. Box 55876, Phoenix, AZ 85078 or find them online at **www.eatingdisordersanonymous.org**.

♦ **Emotions Anonymous** is a 12-step organization similar to Alcoholics Anonymous. This fellowship is composed of people who come together in weekly meetings for the purpose of working toward recovery from emotional difficulties. EA members are from many walks of life and are of diverse ages, economic status, social, and educational backgrounds. The only requirement for membership is a desire to become well emotionally. Contact them at: Emotions Anonymous, P.O. Box 4245, St. Paul, MN 55104, (651) 647-9712, **www.emotionsanonymous.org**.

♦ **Gamblers Anonymous** is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience, strength, and hope with one another that they may solve their

common problem and help others to recover from a gambling problem. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop gambling. There are no dues or fees for Gamblers Anonymous membership. Its primary purpose is to help compulsive gamblers stop gambling. Contact them at: Gamblers Anonymous, P.O. Box 17173, Los Angeles CA 90017, (626) 960-3500, www.gamblersanonymous.org.

♦ **Narcotics Anonymous**

is an international, community-based association of recovering drug addicts with more than 31,000 weekly meetings in over 100 countries worldwide.

Membership is open to all drug addicts, regardless of the particular drug or combination of drugs used. When adapting AA's First Step, the word "addiction" was substituted for "alcohol," thus removing

drug-specific language and reflecting the "disease concept" of addiction. There are no social, religious, economic, racial, ethnic, national, gender, or class-status membership restrictions. There are no dues or fees for membership. Contact them at: P.O. Box 9999, Van Nuys, CA 91409, (818) 773-9999, www.na.org.



♦ **Overcomers Outreach** is a nonprofit ministry dealing with all compulsive behaviors through Christ-centered 12-step support groups. Overcomers is intended to be a supplement to—not a replacement for—the traditional 12- step groups. Contact them at: 12828 Acheson Drive, Whittier, CA 90601, (800) 310-3001, www.overcomersoutreach.org.

♦ **The Salvation Army Adult Rehabilitation Centers** operate on, and are grounded in, Christian values. The Salvation Army operates over 100 across the country. They provide shelter, food, clothing, medical and psychiatric assistance, work, vocational training, fellowship, and spiritual guidance. Contact the center in the area where you will be released. Local chapters of

the Salvation Army can be found in the phone book or by contacting the national headquarters: The Salvation Army, P.O. Box 269, Alexandria, VA 22313, (703) 684-5500, www.salvationarmyusa.org.

♦ **Sexaholics Anonymous** is a recovery program based on the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous. It received permission from AA in 1979 to



use its Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop lusting and become sexually sober. There are no dues or fees for SA membership. SA also has a Correctional Facilities Committee (SACFC) that takes the 12-step program into prisons. Contact them at: Sexaholics Anonymous, P.O. Box 3565 Brentwood, Nashville, TN 37024, (866) 424-8777, www.sa.org.

♦ **The Spirit of Freedom Ministries** is a nonprofit Christian organization dedicated to helping prisoners and families end their alcohol or drug-related problems. The ministry offers a variety of helpful materials, including a comprehensive Bible-based program designed to instruct the chemically dependent and bring them out of the bondage of addiction. The program, called The Christian Intervention Program for the Chemically Dependent, is available in many prisons throughout the United States and in parts of Canada. Contact them at: The Spirit of Freedom Ministries, P.O. Box 6648, Metairie, LA 70009-6648, (800) 535-6011, www.sofm.org.

♦ **Teen Challenge** is a national organization that provides residential and nonresidential treatment for drug and alcohol addiction in both adults and adolescents. Information regarding this tough but excellent program and a directory of locations are available from: Teen Challenge USA, 5250 North Towne Centre Drive, Ozark, MO 65721, (417) 581-2181, www.teenchallengeusa.com. ■

VII. FINANCIAL PLANNING

The following articles on financial issues were originally published in *Inside Journal*® (Prison Fellowship's newspaper for prisoners). The insight and advice they offer is still useful for rebuilding your personal financial foundation.

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Digging Out of Debt

by Doug Hagedorn

Do you have massive debt? Haven't saved much money for your release? Join the club! The average American household carries more than \$10,000 in debt! Whether you are a prisoner or free citizen, people are not doing well when it comes to managing their money. We save less, give less, have more debt, and file more bankruptcies than any previous generation. You may cringe at the thought of dealing with financial problems when you get out, but that does not change the fact that the problems will still be there. If you don't prepare now to deal with them, you may end up taking shortcuts that will cause your post-release life to crumble.

How Deep Is the Hole?

Digging out of debt begins with understanding your current debt situation. You may have had debts paid off or forgiven that you don't even know about. You may have other debts where interest is still accumulating. Answer the following questions carefully because each one will help give you a piece of information that will help you structure how you will get out of debt.

- To whom do you owe money? (credit cards, vehicles, child support)
- How much do you owe them?
- What are your minimum monthly payments for each?
- How much credit card interest are you paying on a monthly/yearly basis?
- How much interest are you paying on other debt?
- What is the interest rate on each of your debts?
- How much are you paying monthly toward debt that you could use for other things?

Next, make a debt "hit list." Once you have listed all of your creditors, the amount owed to each, and the current minimum monthly payment, you can



plan to pay off each debt one at a time. Start with the smallest and move to the next largest debt. As you pay off one debt and apply the extra monthly amount you now have available toward the next debt, you create a snowball effect. For example, say you have four debts: a credit card debt of \$400 at 19 percent, a department store card of \$800 at 16 percent, back alimony of \$1,500 at 8 percent, and a car debt of \$2,000 at 8 percent. Start by wiping out the credit card debt. It's the smallest; it will go quickly. Meanwhile, you would make the minimum monthly payments on the other debts. Let's say you were able to pay \$50 a month toward the credit card. In about 10 months, you're done (don't forget the interest piling up will make it last longer than you think). Now take that \$50, combine it with your minimum payment and start on the department store card. Finally, take on the alimony and car debt. It will take a few years, but this is one of the most effective ways to dig out.

Avoid the Quick Fix

While it's important to get back into the pace of freedom, you will want to avoid the blizzard of advertising that promises quick fixes to your money problems. Get-rich seminars and get-out-of-debt-quick scams sound too good to be true—and usually are. If you're going to get out of your financial hole, you will have to stop digging, and unfortunately, there are many temptations to keep digging.

Giving in to ad slogans such as “no payments for six months,” “no interest for one year,” “low monthly payments,” and “sale ends tomorrow,” are likely to make matters worse, not better. They invite you to buy stuff with money you don’t have and without any guarantees that you will have the money when the payments (with interest) kick in. Even fixed low-interest rate credit cards are dangerous because your low “fixed rate” gets jacked up if you miss a payment. Fees are charged for payments even one day late. Legal pay-day loan shops trap needy people by offering quick cash for writing post-dated checks. This unfortunate loan-sharking can hit you with interest rates of more than 500 percent! Avoid rent-to-own stores as you will pay three to four times the retail price for the convenience of “low-monthly payments.” Wait until you can pay cash.

No single debt-reduction action will lead to overnight financial freedom. The reality for most people is that it took years to get into debt, and it will take years and discipline to dig out. Paying a debt-consolidation service or filing for bankruptcy may not be the best answers either. They can cost you more money and damage your credit rating. Repairing and maintaining your credit rating is important if you ever plan to buy a home or other similar- sized purchase.

New Habits

New disciplines will be required if you’re going to make your debt disappear. Here are some simple methods of controlling the impulse to go deeper in debt.

Give yourself a 60-day waiting period for any purchase above \$25. Ask yourself some simple questions before giving in to buying something you really can’t afford: Do I really need this or is it a want? Do I need it now? Have I shopped around for the best price? Can I get it used? Can I wait until it goes on sale? Can I really afford it? What will I give up if I buy this? How does it impact my long-term goals? Should I pray about it first?

An impulse buy that takes 10 minutes can impact your bank and credit card health for years to come. For example, a \$2,000 credit card purchase at 19.8 percent interest typically requires a \$20 minimum monthly payment. At that payment rate, it will take 31 years to pay the \$2,000 off, plus you will have paid \$8,300 in interest!

If we are in debt, we really don’t even own what we have. Make a commitment to incur no new debt. Beware, credit card offers will begin flowing to your mailbox sooner than you think. Consider keeping only one credit card for emergencies, and you had better define what an emergency is! It’s not a quick trip to the tropics to catch some rays. Using cash and debit cards as much as possible will keep you well aware of how much you have or don’t have.

Contact your creditors and begin the negotiation process for paying off your debt. Most creditors desire to work with you if they know that the alternative is default or bankruptcy—especially if you explain why you are not making payments. If they know that you desire to work out a modified payment plan, they are often willing to deal. They might want you to make regular payments for some months before they are ready to commit to a settlement such as freezing interest, reducing interest rates, or canceling past penalties and fees—all definitely worth working toward.

Most people can dig themselves out of debt after they get their foundational issues of life straight and set up a budget. However, if you try these things and find you aren't disciplined enough or can't work out a repayment plan with your creditors, consider contacting a credit counseling service. Beware of some credit repair and counseling services that charge hundreds or even thousands of dollars in up-front fees that do nothing to improve your credit report. The trend with many debt consolidation companies is that they hold your payments until they finish negotiating with creditors, which takes months. Meanwhile, your credit rating gets ruined while creditors send threatening notices to you. Some companies are trustworthy and helpful. Before using one, check it out with your local consumer protection office and the Better Business Bureau.

The Best Help Around

Remember that you are not in this battle alone. Even if the mountain of debt seems beyond hope, do not minimize the role of faith in your journey. It is vital to your success. God has not left you or given up on you. He provides wisdom to those who ask. Continue to educate yourself about financial matters. There is a lot to learn.

And remember to pray. You will have to make some changes, and not all of them will be easy. But God will provide grace, strength, and fellowship. If you fall or err, dust yourself off and continue. Remember this is a marathon, not a sprint. ■

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Footnote: Doug Hagedorn is author of "Ease the Squeeze—Develop a Life Plan, a Giving Plan, and a Financial Plan," and teaches financial seminars in churches.

Developing a Spending Plan for Life

by Doug Hagedorn

Most people when asked whether they want to be financially free, answer a big Yes! Who wouldn't want to be out of debt, have money to chase their dreams, and be able to give whenever a need comes up? The problem is that most people don't know how to get there.

The first step to financial freedom is establishing your moral foundation in relationship to God. Most people don't get into dire money problems because they're dumb, but because of greed, dishonesty, or addictions, all of which are heart problems. In "Digging Out of Debt," I discussed the importance of making a debt reduction plan. You can't see your dreams come true or even pay your monthly bills if you have a mountain of debt crushing you.

Now it's time to talk about the financial concept that will help you with both debt reduction and achieving your dreams—it's called a spending plan. It addresses all your priorities (giving, debt, entertainment, education, family). It ties them all together. Many people know it better as a budget, but that word scares people because it sounds depressing and has the feel of a financial straitjacket. Many have tried a budget at one time in their lives, but dropped it after they overspent in an area, had an unplanned expense, or made a financial mistake. A budget is really nothing more than a plan for spending your money. We have to spend money. Why not have a plan? If you get lost while driving, do you throw away the map, or get yourself back on the right road? A budget is your financial map that will save you time and heartache. It does not guarantee that an unforeseen financial accident will not hit your car. But it does provide direction and guidance to get you through it.

Income Versus the Spending Plan

The million-dollar question has to be: How do I get spending habits to match my income? Many people want to focus first on making more money—a decent goal, but not always possible in the short run and not usually the answer anyway. Money doesn't buy happiness. More "stuff" may make you happy for a short while, but when the bill collectors call or you can't afford what you really need down the road, reality will set in. Costs for insurance, education, vehicles, and medical care continue to rise, making it a challenge to keep up with the basics like rent, food, and clothes—all the more reason to have a spending plan.

Most folks do not believe that they can cut any more of their expenses. I watched a reporter on the evening news interview a couple being forced to remove mounds of trash from the side of their house by some neighbors. The



husband said that he could not afford to pay for the trash removal. I noticed in the background a satellite dish, a late-model car, and some other items of value in their yard. He had money for those things; why not money to get rid of the rubbish? We basically spend what we want to spend. Obviously, some exceptions exist, but everyone has some areas where he or she can cut.

Unfortunately, most people don't take time to look at their spending patterns enough to know if they have an income or expense problem. Many folks try to ignore the whole thing until it reaches a crisis, which is always expensive. Step on the financial scale. It is time to look at both income and spending.

90-Day Paper Trail

Upon the day of your release, start a paper trail. Keep a written record or ask for a receipt of everything you spend money on—\$.99 for coffee, \$23 for a shirt, \$41 for the phone bill, everything. The most important thing that you can do to begin developing a realistic spending plan is to write down

Cost Cutters to Crush Those Budget Busters

Almost everyone sooner or later overspends his or her spending plan (aka budget). Don't worry and don't quit! There are lots of creative ways to play catch-up and avoid starting a debt-crushing trend of always spending more than you make.

You'll need to cut expenses in other areas for the next paycheck. Delay a purchase or maybe find some odd jobs temporarily to get you back on track. If you cannot make ends meet and you are



spending more than you make, it's time to get creative and humble. Use coupons. Read the sale ads in the newspaper. Wait for sales to buy things. Cook meals yourself. Rent a movie instead of going to the theater. Find free things to do (museums, parks, church activities). Pack your lunch. Select a higher insurance deductible (which lowers your monthly payments).

Buy things off-season

(winter clothes in summer, Christmas gifts in June). Quit costly habits (smoking, drinking, gambling, playing the lottery). Use the public library rather than buying new books. Drink water not sodas. Try generic store brands. Sell your car rather than trading it in. Get rid of phone add-ons (call waiting, caller ID). Cancel cable television service.

Your first spending plan will not be perfect. Don't give up. Don't be afraid to get help if you need it.

absolutely everything you spend for 90 days. Most people are truly shocked at where their money goes.

One couple that I counseled assured me that they definitely had no “fat” to cut, and the husband believed that he needed to get another job immediately. I asked them to postpone his decision and follow the 90-day budget tracking process. They did and found that they were spending double what they had thought on eating out, their hobbies, and recreational activities. They also had some expensive monthly bills—like cable television—that they could cut temporarily while getting out of debt.

Budget busters usually reflect our areas of weakness—our little escapes from reality like eating too much, buying lottery tickets, or alcohol. However, they can also be found in an unexpected car repair or replacing a dead dishwasher. To bring a little discipline to bear, try putting a cash allowance for each area in an envelope—like \$40 per month for eating out. When the “allowance” is all gone—it’s gone! When it comes to emergency repair or replacement, set aside \$25 to \$30 a month and don’t touch it. After nine months, you will create a nice cushion to handle a toilet breakdown or a flat tire.

You may not want or be able to track all of your spending each day. Just throw the receipts in a shoebox and add them up at the end of the week or month. After 90 days of tracking your expenses, go to work on a detailed spending plan. Total what you spent in each category. Divide each total by the number of days that you have been tracking the expenses. Multiply that answer by 30 to determine a monthly average. For example, you spend \$90 on fast food over a 90-day period. That is \$30 per month. Your income allows only \$15 per month, so that is your new target. Total up your categories to find your monthly expenses. Subtract these expenses from your total income for the month. Are you over or under? Whatever the case, that’s your first crack at a spending plan.

But is it worth all the time and hard work? Try it and see.

A spending plan will help you to think before you spend—and to spend less money than you make. It will help you learn which areas of your life are in need of greater discipline. So far, that sounds like no fun. But if you follow through, you will also begin to taste some real financial freedom—money that could go toward guitar lessons, college education, a family vacation, some new music, or giving to someone in need. Remember that how you spend money directly reflects the priorities of your heart. Tend to your heart first, then live it out through your spending plan. ■

Repairing Your Credit History

by Anthony Gonzales

Did you leave a trail of paper behind when you stepped inside? Overdrawn bank account? Credit-card debts? Car loan? While you've been absent from the free world, all those bad reports were entered into a computer at the local credit bureau. And from there, the information was sent to your national permanent record.

Once you are released from prison, a bad credit report could prevent you from getting a good job, buying a car, or even renting an apartment. More and more employers are checking applicants' credit histories. If you want to start clean and stay out, you might want to begin to repair your damaged credit rating while you are still inside.

First, get a free copy of your credit report from: **Annual Credit Report Request Service**, P.O. Box 105283, Atlanta, GA 30348-5283, or visit their website, **www.annualcreditreport.com**.

When it arrives, examine the report carefully. Are there mistakes in it? You can challenge the mistakes by explaining the error in writing to the credit reporting agency. Valid debts can often be postponed or cleared by writing to the creditor with a sincere explanation of your circumstances. Many creditors will accept very small regular payments and respect you for your efforts. You will be surprised at how helpful creditors are when you write them and offer to work something out. Ducking the problems won't help.

Who Can Help?

Your debt-credit problems may seem like too much to handle alone. There are several agencies that may be able to provide you with assistance, usually for free.

Myvesta Foundation: Myvesta is a nonprofit group that assists consumers across the country and around the world via the Web. The site provides useful information, free publications, and a forum where you can ask questions and get answers from professional counselors. Special programs also are available to help consumers get out of debt. Their website is **getoutofdebt.org**.

National Foundation for Consumer Credit: The NFCC is a group of nonprofit credit counseling organizations that help consumers understand credit reports, contact creditors, manage debt, and set up budgets. The NFCC member network consists of community-based office locations in all 50 states. Telephone: (800) 388-2227 Website: **www.nfcc.org**.



Many of the nonprofit organizations affiliated with the NFCC now go by the name of **Clearpoint Credit Counseling Service**. You may contact CCCS online at www.cccsatl.org.

You may want to contact the closest CCCS office near your prison. Each office has an education department and will consider sending someone out to give a group presentation, or they can provide individual counseling by phone. To find your nearest CCCS office call (800) 251-2227. ■

VIII. HOW TO FIND A CHURCH

by John Leonardson

Release for shortimers raises many questions about jobs, housing, and finances. But perhaps the most important tie that will bind all these concerns into success is belonging to a church.

For the in-prison Christian, the church inside has probably been a great source of encouragement, Bible study, and refuge. You have lived shoulder-to-shoulder with brothers or sisters in Christ sharing the trials of prison survival. You have a deep connection because of these prison experiences. For others, church will be a brand-new experience because you only recently received Christ, didn't have a chapel program, or never found fellow believers on your block. Whatever your current status, release means leaving all that behind. What's waiting for you on the outside?

Regardless of your prison experience, you'll likely be isolated, at first, from the kind of friends you need. For those coming from an active chapel program, free-world church tends to be less intense—you're not living within walking distance of chapel or with any fellow believers, nor will there be a service or Bible study every day of the week. In fact, no outside church will meet all your expectations, because all churches are imperfect and are attended by imperfect people.

The potential rests with the eventual encouragement, accountability, and growth in the faith God will use to satisfy your desires for Him and for a fulfilling life that glorifies Him. In a good local church you'll find pastoral guidance and leadership. It's a safe place to raise a family and make new friends. Many prisoners haven't developed good habits for leisure time—the main trouble spot for the newly released. So a good church home can become a place to develop healthy spiritual, recreational, and relational habits with fellow believers in Christ.

For all Christians, even recently paroled ones, belonging to a church is not merely an option—it's a must.

Plan to Search

Let's take this in steps. Decide, while still inside, that you will join a church and not look for excuses. Once you decide, the other steps come easier. Begin to plan what kind of church home will be right for you. Ask your chaplain and volunteers you respect about their churches to discover where you might belong. Did you participate in Prison Fellowship's Angel Tree®—a program



where churches provide gifts and the Gospel to the children of prisoners at Christmas? If so, find out what church helped your kids while you were imprisoned and start there.

Perhaps you prefer a formal church with hymns, choir, organ music, and liturgical order. You may like a traditional denomination or an independent Bible church. You might favor “contemporary worship” with bands and raised hands. All of these traits fall under the category of style, and many people get sidetracked by forms of worship. But style is far less important than substance.

What are the essentials of a good church? New Testament churches must believe in and teach the Word of God, have honorable leadership, practice love among the members, challenge members to grow in the Lord, energetically share the Gospel with the unsaved, and assist the needy. Avoid churches that have adopted worldly “feel-good” messages like “health and

wealth,” or that play games by redefining sin. What doesn’t matter is name recognition of the pastor, the size of the church, the denomination, how people dress, or the look of the church building.

Working the Plan

Act on your search plan the first Sunday of your release. Praying for guidance is the most important step. If you already know which church you’ll join, that’s fine; otherwise visit several churches you think meet the definition of a healthy church. Don’t be shy to ask for a ride if transportation is a problem. Meet with the pastor to discuss the church and share your background and concerns. The pastor can be the door to many other connections and resources, including job leads, counseling, and guidance on support groups. Not everyone needs to know your prison past up front, but share your prison experience with the pastor.

Next, start attending regularly where God is leading you. Your objective is to join a church within a reasonable time period, for example, within six months. Failing to do this leads to what I call “spiritual hitchhiking.” When you hitch a ride, you don’t take responsibility, pay for gas, or care about other passengers. By joining a church, you support your fellow Christians with your tithes and talents and prove you’re not ashamed to say you belong with the Lord and His people. Standing with a local church fights against “Lone Ranger Christianity” by placing yourself under the discipline and protection of other Christians. “Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27, NIV). We turn from being self-centered to following Jesus, the true Head of the Church.

How to Blend In

After making a habit of attending one church for a few months, you may ask yourself: How am I going to get established here and not be someone who just passes through? There are two considerations to keep in mind as to how well and how long it will take to make those inroads to service and fellowship. First, have the people and the pastor had any preparation in receiving former prisoners with their unique backgrounds and needs? Most churches do not, so plan in advance to take the chip off your shoulder. Have some patience with them as they, in turn, are learning to trust you. It’s natural for this to take some time.

Second, find someone of your same sex to mentor you. Again, try asking the pastor for help to find this person. When I got out of prison 25 years ago, I had problems with authority and wanted things my way. My mentor helped me work through these attitudes and explained to other people what I was facing. He made me deal with situations as they arose. One man, for example,

did not want me playing with his girls. I was hurt at first, but now, years later, he and his girls (now all married) are friends of mine. A mentor should be on your side, but not afraid to confront you.

Over the years I have had many roles in the church and learned a lot about myself and God. After 25 years, I'm a member of the same church. Today, I serve as an elder, teacher, and mentor to other men—pretty good for a convicted drug dealer! You can be sure the Lord will use your talents and gifts, too, if you give it enough time. Tackle your relationship issues, realizing we're all sinners saved by grace. Seek counsel from your pastor and mentor, and volunteer to serve. By working in the church, you'll gain spiritual maturity and grow in your gifts.

Your membership in a local church prepares that church for the next former prisoner who wants to join. Your decision to take part in the life of a congregation has a direct effect on future returning prisoners. Make joining a church as big a priority as finding work, beating an addiction, or managing your money. ■

Developing Church Support

Finding a church while still in prison isn't easy. But once you are released, get yourself some neat, clean clothes and begin visiting nearby churches on Sunday mornings. It may take a while, but people will eventually notice you and start wanting to know more about you.

It still happens once in a while that a former prisoner is asked not to come back because “we don't want your kind.” Leave politely, but keep trying elsewhere. God knows where that church stands and will guide you to a better one if you are persistent.

Once associated with a church, don't ask for help without showing your willingness to give back. You might offer your free time to help clean the church or cut lawns for people in the congregation who are elderly or sick.

Just be sincere, do what your heart leads you to do, and you will build real friends and supporters willing to help you put your past behind you and move into a crime-free future.

IX. ADJUSTING EXPECTATIONS

(Adapted from materials prepared by Citizens United for the Rehabilitation of Errants)

Going home? Worried about the ways that prison has changed you? Worried about adjusting to family life again and even to the unusual freedom of the outside? Here's a little food for thought as you make the transition.

You have been allowed to make very few decisions since entering the prison system. The demeaning environment may have damaged your self-esteem and confidence—overcrowding, noise, no privacy, physical danger have all left their mark. And while all these factors have been changing you, the people you know and love have also changed while you've been down. A clash of attitudes and changed personalities is probably waiting to happen. You'll need to keep a few things in mind to minimize the size of the clash and adjust to all the changes.

You may experience times of depression with resulting low energy. Don't confuse this with laziness. Allow yourself time to recover from the experiences of incarceration. You may have a hard time making decisions, even small ones like what to have for breakfast. It's normal, but you'll figure it out soon enough. The plans and promises you developed for yourself prior to release will not happen immediately. All around you, life will seem to



Keep Busy

Now that's the same advice we give to someone heading for prison who wants to make it through a sentence and come back home. What gives?

"Idle hands are the devil's workshop" may sound trite, but it is true. Any time you are busy, you are avoiding temptation to return to your old habits. Study, learn, work out, go to church. Fill your days and evenings with positive activities, and you will find yourself "too busy to get into trouble." That is where we want this booklet to take you: "Too busy to be bad."



move very fast while your big plans seem to stand still. Temporary depression and indecision may interfere. You may experience flashbacks triggered by common events at unexpected times. You may prefer at the beginning of your freedom to avoid crowded, noisy situations such as malls and theaters.

Your interests may have changed completely. You may crave some food items and want to avoid others. You may have dental or medical problems that went untreated in prison. You may have difficulty being intimate with your spouse at first. Many former prisoners feel that everyone labels them as "felons," as if the word were stamped on their foreheads, causing them to feel ashamed and awkward in social settings.

Family and friends on the outside have suffered along with you in different, but important ways. Don't minimize that or get into a comparing argument. In your absence your family may have been forced to become more independent and self-sufficient. To many returning former prisoners, that feels and looks like they aren't needed or respected. Give yourself and your family time to adjust, and don't demand to assume a lot of responsibility or decision-making that perhaps was your domain before incarceration. Talk things through and find areas to compromise. Your family's newfound independence does not disappear simply because you come home—it was developed to survive just as you developed new survival instincts to get through prison. ■

X. MAKING DECISIONS

by Becky Beane

When Pat Nolan got out of prison, some friends took him to lunch at a local deli. What was meant to be a simple, pleasant outing detoured into an excruciating debacle for Pat. As he recounts:

The waiter came over to take our orders. Everyone else told him what they wanted, but I kept poring over the menu. My eyes raced over the columns of choices. I knew that I was supposed to order, but the number of options overwhelmed me.

My friends sat in embarrassed silence. I was paralyzed. The waiter looked at me impatiently. I began to panic. How ridiculous that I wasn't able to do such a simple thing as order lunch. Finally, in desperation I ordered the next item my eyes landed on—a turkey sandwich. I didn't even want it, but at least it put an end to this embarrassing incident.

For two years I hadn't been allowed to make any choices about what I ate. Now I was having a hard time adjusting to the simple options most people face every day. If I had this much difficulty after only a couple of years in prison, think how hard it is for those inmates who haven't made any choices for 5, 10, or 15 years. When faced with a baffling array of options, is it any surprise that so many newly released prisoners make some bad choices and end up back in prison?

Before prison, Pat had served as a California assemblyman for 15 years. He had made countless significant decisions affecting legislation and people all across his state. But now he was taken down by a list of sandwich options.

Many other former prisoners have echoed Pat's distress over making even simple decisions when they first get out. Is it just the initial "culture shock" of being back in freedom, or is there more going on? And does the problem require intervention?

Overwhelmed with Choices

After having so many of his actions dictated to him in prison—when to eat, what to eat, when to sleep, etc.—Pat felt overwhelmed by so many options on the deli menu, what might be called "choice overload."

Research shows that for people in general, not just prisoners, the initial attractiveness of "freedom of choice" causes internal conflict as the number

of choices rises. In their 2000 study, “When Choice Is Demotivating,” researchers Sheena Iyengar and Mark Lepper performed experiments to compare the effects of having to choose from an extensive array of options versus a limited set of options.

They discovered that extensive choices “undermine choosers’ subsequent satisfaction and motivation.” When given many choices (compared with a more limited number) people experience more frustration with the choice-making process and more regret about the choices they make.

The researchers state, “How can there be so much dissatisfaction in the face of so much opportunity? Perhaps it is not that people are made unhappy by the decision they make in the face of abundant options, but that they are instead unsure—that they are burdened by the responsibility of distinguishing good from bad decisions . . . one might expect people to be even more debilitated in contexts in which people feel more highly accountable for the choices.”

This high-accountability pressure may especially effect newly released prisoners, who often sense people are scrutinizing them, expecting them to fail again.

When Pat went to the deli, his friends had probably been there before—they were familiar with the options, and they probably already had in mind some sandwich preferences. Had they gone to an untried restaurant where all of them confronted extensive unfamiliar options—say, for example, food of a particular ethnic group—all of the friends might have struggled with choice overload. In that context, Pat would not have felt so out of place.

Accustomed to a Regulated Life

In “Is There Life After Imprisonment?” British researchers note that prison causes “massive disruptions” in people’s “normal lives.” When someone sentenced to a long incarceration arrives at prison, “he has to come to terms with the fact that he is starting a new life . . . a prison life—and somehow he must learn to live it.”

Conversely, being released from prison also causes massive disruptions in what by now has become the new “normal” for the prisoner.

In describing his own decision-making battle after two years in prison, Pat notes that those with longer sentences face an even tougher struggle. These are the ones most prone to become “habituated” to the prison environment. At the extreme, they become “institutionalized”—at which stage a prisoner views prison as “home,” has no desire to be in the outside world, and has lost all ability to make independent decisions.

But long before prisoners get to that stage of institutionalization, they can become dependent on the regimented prison routine, where daily choices

of what to wear, what to eat, where to go, and how to do an assigned job are determined by someone else. Prisoners still have some choice in their lifestyle, of course: Will they take a nap or watch TV in the day room this afternoon? But those choices are highly limited (the choice to watch TV may not include the choice of which show to watch, for example).

Habituation can have benefits in prison, but limitations on the outside. Having one way to do things means that if you stay within that restricted framework, you won't get into trouble with corrections officers. Such limits may feel frustrating at times, but they also feel safe. In the outside world, where there might be hundreds of brands to choose from or scores of ways to complete a particular project, those safeguards are suddenly stripped away. There is no one "right" choice; there may be many right choices among the wrong choices. But the habituated prisoner has lost much of the ability, and much of the initiative, to evaluate and discern the varying quality of options.

So while the thought of freedom may excite them, the unsettling reality of freedom often sends former prisoners searching for something familiar. Not prison, necessarily (though some released prisoners do deliberately commit crimes so they will be sent back behind bars). But they may return to pre-prison friends and hang-outs, where at least they understand and can fulfill the expectations.

In Control or Out of Control?

How prisoners adapt to the massive disruptions in their lives, both inside and outside prison, depends a lot on their "locus of control"—a term referring to a person's perceived control over events in his or her life. As researchers Lorraine Reitzel and Beverly Harju define: "Put simply, if people feel that they have control over the events that happen to them, they have an internal locus of control. Those who have an external locus feel as though they have little control over what happens and that luck or fate governs most of the events in their lives."

In their study of how locus of control influences prisoners' adjustment to prison—particularly their level of depression—Reitzel and Harju found that those with a strong internal locus of control were least depressed. Depressive symptoms were most common among those with a strong external locus of control. These "high externals" tended to have a sense of helplessness in their evaluation of the prison setting, and were less adaptive in dealing with the stress of the environment. They endorsed such statements as "no matter how hard I try, the system won't give an inch" or "most of what happens to me in jail is out of my hands."

"Internals," on the other hand, were able to find advantages even to being in prison (such as the educational or treatment programs offered) and

recognized that the choices they made could affect their environment. (For example, their actions influenced how much respect correctional officers gave them). High internals demonstrated better problem-solving skills. They were also more likely to seek out services when in need.

Locus of control also influences former prisoners' ability to adapt to their return to the community. Newly released prisoners face significant challenges and struggles on the outside: Finding employment, housing, and a mode of transportation usually rank at the top of their list. Many prisoners encounter numerous rejections when they disclose their criminal record. High externals, who see themselves as powerless pawns, could become depressed, give up, or default to poor choices. High internals would tend to be more resilient, better able to cope with setbacks and consider new options, and stronger at problem-solving.

High Anxiety

Feeling overwhelmed by so many choices on the menu, Pat felt a bit of "panic" and perhaps even shame. He berated his indecisiveness as "ridiculous," which led to a feeling of desperation to make a decision, any decision. Pat's high level of anxiety and self-flagellation pressured him into making a careless choice.

In a 2008 study, "Emotional and Personality-Related Aspects of Career Decision-Making Difficulties," researchers focused on three common clusters of difficulties: pessimistic views, anxiety, and self-concept and identity. Both pessimism and anxiety were directly related to indecisiveness. The lower one's self-esteem or sense of self-worth, and the less stable one's sense of personal identity, the greater the difficulty in making decisions.

These emotional factors become even more exaggerated in prisoners with mental health problems, such as depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. The 2004 study "Damaged Goods: Exploring Predictors of Distress in Prison Inmates" notes that nearly 20 percent of U.S. prisoners have spent at least one night in a mental-health treatment facility or report a mental illness.

Prisoners who have been victimized in prison—by assault, rape, theft, vandalism—show increased symptoms of distress and depression. "Damaged Goods" reports that "exposure to trauma" negatively affects a prisoner's capacity for making good decisions. Victims of "inmate bullying" demonstrate poor thinking skills.

What Do They Think of Me?

The decisions we make are affected not only by our own emotions, but also by the emotions we perceive in others. As he struggled to make a sandwich choice, Pat perceived that his friends were embarrassed and that the waiter

was impatient with him. His interpretations may or may not have been correct. It did not matter. His belief that they were embarrassed and impatient increased his own embarrassment and impatience with himself. And because he could not persist through the pain of those feelings, he then rushed into a poor choice.

Research validates that other people's perceived anxiety or excitement may influence our own emotions and evaluations during decision making. One recent study is "Affecting Others: Social Appraisal and Emotion Contagion in Everyday Decision Making," by Oxford University researchers Brian Parkinson and Gwenda Simmons. They state that transfer of emotions "based on social appraisal occurs because someone else's perceived affect [emotion] carries information that alters our appraisal of the emotional meaning of what is happening." Emotional contagion refers to "catch[ing] another person's affect automatically and without necessarily registering its personal significance."

Again, let's look at Pat's deli dilemma. Pat perceived the waiter's impatience but did not take time to "register" its significance. What difference did it make if the waiter was impatient? It was his responsibility to serve the deli customers and bring them what they want. His impatience (if Pat's perception was correct) might reflect a weakness in the waiter, but certainly not in Pat.

However, in the anxiety of the moment, we may not take the time for such evaluation. Among newly released prisoners, already typically fearful about the odds for failure, the added anxiety of looking like a loser in front of others can push them into making premature—and unsatisfactory—choices.

Sometimes the consequences aren't so bad. Pat's anxious selection of a turkey sandwich didn't give him much enjoyment, but it certainly wasn't harmful. On the other hand, suppose a former prisoner believes his wife is frustrated that he isn't pulling his financial weight in the family. He may take a job working in a bar just to ease that feeling of frustration and anxiety—without carefully evaluating the temptations that could ensnare him at that work site.

Mental Energy Drain

Research shows that "people tire of the endless demands for choice and the stress of decision making." In their article, "Making Choices Impairs Subsequent Self-Control," Kathleen Vohs and colleagues describe several studies they conducted to gauge the effects of decision making on subsequent "self-regulation." This refers to a person's ability to override one powerful response with another response that helps him or her "attain goals and conform to standards."

They found that "self-regulation, active initiative, and effortful choosing

draw on the same psychological resources. Making decisions depletes that resource, thereby weakening the subsequent capacity for self-control and active initiative ... It has also led to greater passivity.” Depleted by the effort of making a choice—weakened even more by the fear of appearing foolish in the eyes of his friends—Pat gave up and passively “selected” the next item he saw on the menu, an unwanted turkey sandwich.

What this means for prisoners is that the initial transition to the outside world, where they are suddenly hit by countless unfamiliar choices, can make them extremely vulnerable to making poor choices and engaging in negative behaviors—simply because they lose the mental strength for persistence and self-control. If former prisoner Jack exerts so much energy just trying to choose which meal to order or which toothpaste brand to buy, what energy will he have left to pursue job leads or, once he finds a job, to get up and get to work on time? It’s far less demanding to go back to his old buddies, who can help Jack renew his old “job” of dealing drugs on his own time schedule!

Dysfunctional Thinking Patterns

Back in the 1970s, psychiatrist Samuel Yochelson and clinical psychologist Stanton Samenow completed a landmark 16-year study on the criminal personality. Based on extensive interviews with prisoners, they delineated 52 “thinking errors” that underlie offenders’ maladaptive behavior. Among these 52 errors: compartmentalized thinking, manipulativeness, impulsiveness, and refusal to be dependent on others.

In 2007, drawing upon Yochelson’s and Samenow’s work—in addition to subsequent studies—researchers Jon Mandracchia and colleagues came up with a more concise three-factor model of dysfunctional thinking patterns that are prevalent in offenders. The three factors relate to control, cognitive immaturity, and egocentrism.

As they explain in “Inmate Thinking Patterns: An Empirical Study,” control covers thinking patterns that reflect “a desire or power in all aspects of life.” Immature cognitive tactics include “using generalizations and labels for others and the environment, believing that one knows what another is thinking, rejecting responsibility ... and relying on emotions for judgment even when contrary evidence exists.” Egocentrism refers to thinking patterns focusing intently on the self—such as “avoiding acting responsibly because of a belief in one’s own incompetence” and “being self-righteous, closed-minded, and secretive.”

Pat wasn’t a career criminal; he went to prison once after being caught up in an FBI sting. Misjudgment may have led to his incarceration, but he lacked what could be termed a “criminal mind.” Repeat prisoners, however—those caught in a cycle of criminal activity—demonstrate persistent dysfunctional

thinking patterns.

What is especially problematic, as researchers have consistently discovered, is that such offenders are usually unaware of the erroneous nature of their thinking. And unless these thinking patterns are exposed and modified, released prisoners will continue to make poor decisions that can re-ignite criminal behaviors.

What Can Help?

Pat Nolan regained his decision-making skills, as family and friends patiently supported him through his early angst-ridden adjustments. He later served as a vice-president with Prison Fellowship, advocating for criminal justice reforms.

Here are some ways to help ease former prisoners' struggles with decision making. If you are the one getting out soon, show this list to a few friends or mentors, so they can understand what you're going through and help you through these struggles.

- Lessen the number of choices. Before going to a restaurant, for example, ask the former prisoner what kind of food he or she prefers. If the answer is "a good steak" or "Italian," choose a place that suits the preference.
- Give time to choose. Order an appetizer everyone can share while the former prisoner studies the menu. Patiently encourage the former prisoner to try on as many pairs of pants as he wants on a shopping excursion. Plan accordingly so you're not in a rush.
- Encourage proper self-care—nutrition, exercise, rest—to build up internal "self-regulation" resources. Remember, making decisions depletes mental energy.
- Help the former prisoner find appropriate professional resources. This might include mental-health counseling to help with issues of anxiety or depression, or career counseling to help determine suitable employment options and enhance decision-making skills.
- For significant choices (employment opportunities, housing options), help the former prisoner think through pros and cons of the various options. Don't make the choice for the former prisoner, but ask questions that will help him or her make a responsible choice. "What are the benefits of that job? What might be some limitations? Without a car, what are some ways you could get to your job?" Suggest options he or she may not have considered.
- Provide training (best if begun while people are still in prison) in decision-making skills to help prisoners understand their thinking patterns, identify erroneous ways of thinking, and learn more effective

ways of thinking. Some people may also require professional counseling; cognitive behavioral therapists specialize in helping people modify unhealthy thinking patterns, which in turn will change their actions.

- Provide a support structure for the former prisoner—a mentor, a church family, an accountability group, etc. Former prisoners need people to believe in them and to help give them guidance and a base of security in the midst of so many challenges and adjustments. A study called “Keepin’ My Mind Right” found that “the manner in which religious inmates accomplished the task of staying on track and coping with confinement was primarily social”—such as connecting with “positive others” who shared their religious values. The importance of positive, supportive relationships certainly carries over into reintegration into the community.
- Encourage their relationship with God—the One who gives wisdom, who loves them unconditionally, who forgives when they go astray, who picks them up when they stumble and sets them back on the right path, who calms their fears with His perfect love, and who transforms them through the renewing of their minds. ■

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XI. EMPLOYMENT

Every former prisoner has a variety of needs as he or she enters the free world again. Topping the list because they are of immediate concern are the physical needs: a place to live, clothes, transportation, food, and of course work. Work often determines the quality of the other physical needs because money buys the necessities of life. It's likely you'll depend on the kindness and charity of others for one or more of your physical needs for a short time until you find work and receive that first paycheck. The information in this section is designed to answer frequently asked questions about employment and steer you in the right direction as you carry out your job search.

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Frequently Asked Questions: Why Work?

(from "The Job Search," by Stephan Likosky)

The first question an former prisoner needs to ask him or herself upon release is, "Am I ready to work?" The answer is not as simple as it might appear. If it were posed, instead, as "Do I need to make money?" or "Do I need a job?" a simple "yes" would quickly suffice. But, being ready to work raises issues other than just a willingness to earn money. In order to succeed in the "outside" world, many of us need to do a lot of critical thinking about ourselves, and how hard we are willing to work at staying out of prison, a place to which, according to statistics, no small number of us often return.

So, let us begin with the most obvious question of all, and that is, "Why work?" On the negative side, work means sacrifice. It requires waking up early every day, and getting to work on time. It means, for many of us, beginning at a weekly salary, the amount of which we could probably earn illegally in one fifth the time selling drugs on the corner. Work also means having to muster up or develop enough self-discipline to keep our tempers under control, follow orders that may make little sense to us, and concentrate carefully on a single job assignment for long stretches of time.

Now let's look at the arguments on the positive side. The first, and for many the most pressing, answer to the question, "Why work?" is: "It will keep me out of jail." Now, I'm sure no one needs to be told, at least while

incarcerated, that jail isn't a very nice place to be. What happens, however, for some of us, is that once out in the streets, we choose to forget our jail experience, and before we know it, we're back to the same old patterns of destructive behavior. "I'm going to be the exception this time," we reason, "the person who won't get caught." Those who think this way choose to ignore the hundreds of thousands of [current prisoners] who thought the same thing. When committing an illegal act, who plans on getting caught and going to jail? So, when we need that extra shot of incentive, it's good to think back to our prison experience, the regimented life behind the walls, the lack of contact with family and friends, the relentless tensions and boredom to which we've been forcibly subjected, and to remember that a job, at the very least, will help keep us functioning on the outside—where we can proceed to get our lives together. For most of us, getting and maintaining that first job after release will be an accomplishment of which we can be proud.

Another reason why work is important is it allows us to reclaim responsibility for our lives. In prison, we had little or no control over most decisions which affected us—what programs to enroll in, for example, what kinds of food to eat at mealtime, or how and when we might enjoy our privacy. We were forced to become dependent on others for fulfilling even the most basic of human needs.

Once out in the streets, however, we have freedom to decide how we would like to conduct our lives. We have within us the power to make innumerable choices: where to work, with whom to live, which television station to watch, what to eat for dinner, etc. Of course, some of our choices may be limited by such factors as our financial situation, the skills we have, or the opportunities that knock at our door. Still, with determination and some good planning, we can utilize our work experience to broaden our options and, as time goes on, create new possibilities for ourselves. In this way, holding a job not only proves to us and to others that after being dependent for so long on others, we're capable of directing our own lives, but it also promises to reward us with growing financial returns, which can translate into the support needed for raising a family, new opportunities to return to school, and much more we might define as desirable. Lastly, work enables us to enrich our lives. It exposes us to a variety of new people and experiences. It teaches us skills that can prove beneficial in our career development later on, and it can give us a sense of pride and accomplishment in knowing at the end of a day, we've done our job, and done it well.

Once we've decided we're committed to finding work, it is helpful to examine some of the negative attitudes that we may have about ourselves. Such

attitudes, otherwise, will surely frustrate our efforts, and no job counselor, no matter how adept, or job hunting guide, however well written, would then serve much use. The negative attitudes most commonly heard are:

I have a felony on my record; no one will hire me.

I have no skills.

I don't want any dead-end or low-paying job.

“I have a felony on my record; no one will hire me.”

This argument can be dismissed as being simply untrue. In fact, it only serves to keep us in a cycle of self-defeat, and to justify a decision to do nothing at all to better ourselves. Remember that many people with criminal records, or drug histories for that matter, are now gainfully employed at all levels of society. The key to their success is their having developed a better sense of their own self-worth. The past is gone. Let's not forget that we've done our time and paid our debt to society. We now have as much right to work as any other person. It's true that finding work is not easy, and discrimination does exist. However, there are laws to protect us, as former prisoners (or ex-addicts), from being discriminated against. Also, with a little preparation, we can learn techniques to avoid job discrimination or, if confronted with it, successfully combat it.

“I have no skills.”

This second statement is, like the first, categorically untrue. There is no such thing as a person with no skills. We have all acquired skills, even if they are not job related. A typical homemaker, for example, in caring for her family, is likely to have had experience in family budgeting, child care, and cooking, all skills which can be of use to her in obtaining a paying job. Many individuals, similarly, have developed skills in caring for cars, helping to raise children, or maybe painting and plastering an apartment. The trick here is to examine our past experiences, preferably with the aid of a job counselor, to determine just what skills we do possess and to what types of jobs they can be most applicable. We will then be much more able to persuade potential employers how we can be of value to them.

“I don't want any dead-end or low-paying job.”

We can certainly sympathize with the person who doesn't want to work at a low-paying or dead-end job. Yet, the reality is, many of us have to start our careers at entry-level positions, or at least take such jobs for a period of time. It is important to be aware of a couple of things in this regard. First, many employers insist that new workers begin at the bottom and work their way



up. This enables the employer to better judge the work qualities of a person before granting him or her more responsibilities. Second, dead-end jobs, or low-paying jobs, do serve some purpose: they help us pay our bills, afford us some work experience, and may provide us with some important contacts for further employment. If we must take a low-level position, let's try always to have some long-range goals set for ourselves. Our job can then be seen as only a small step in our overall plans and need not be viewed as permanent. Above all, avoid the attitude, "I'll never take such a low-paying job." For the vast majority of us, there are no easy ways of getting rich fast; if there were, you wouldn't be reading this at the moment, and I wouldn't be here writing it!

For a lot of us, surviving in the "outside" world can be very scary—especially if we've been behind bars for much of our lives. We may find ourselves having to adjust to a whole new style in the way we interrelate with others. If we are willing to be ourselves, however, and to deal with others sincerely, we have overcome the biggest challenge. Remember, always, that there is never any reason to be defensive about who we are, or apologetic. We made mistakes, as have others, and we have paid for them. Our task now is to retake control over our lives, remembering that the decision as to whether or not we return to prison will rest, ultimately, with us as individuals, not with our parole officers, our friends and families, or outside society. Finding a job, and holding on to it, will be the first important step for most of us in readjusting. ■

Can an Employer Consider an Applicant's Criminal Record?

(This and the next three questions were prepared by Debbie Mukamal for the Department of Labor.)

Employers may consider an applicant's conviction record and, in some cases, a person's arrest record. Generally, employers are permitted to ask job applicants if they have ever been convicted of an offense, and employers may legally consider an applicant's conviction(s) in making hiring decisions. If an applicant fails to disclose such information or misrepresents the information, and the employer discovers the deception, the individual can be legally fired.

Some states, such as New York, have passed legislation forbidding most employers from considering arrest information when making an employment decision and from inquiring whether an applicant has ever been arrested. You should check with your state's attorney general to see if there are any limits on what an employer can ask and consider about a person's criminal background.

Q. What occupations may exclude people with criminal records?

A. Although it is generally illegal for an employer to impose a blanket ban against hiring former prisoners, some employers are forbidden from hiring people with prior convictions for certain jobs and are mandated to perform background checks before hiring anyone. The types of jobs with these legal prohibitions tend to be in the fields of childcare, education, security, nursing and home health care, where "vulnerable" populations are involved. These restrictions are established by state law, so you should contact your state's attorney general to determine the occupations and types of convictions that are affected by occupational prohibitions.

Q. How do employers learn about a person's criminal record?

A. The easiest way for employers to find out whether an applicant has a conviction history is to ask about it on a job application or during an interview. Although many employers are not required to conduct a background check on job applicants, many do perform checks and have easy access to applicants' criminal histories through consumer reporting agencies and other investigative services. Under the federal Fair Credit Reporting Act, consumer agencies cannot report criminal record information that is more than seven years old, unless the job has a salary of \$75,000 or more. If the employer decides not to hire an applicant because of the information found



on the consumer report, he or she must give the individual the opportunity to see the report and check it for errors. Your state may have a law that further limits the type of consumer information that can be included in the report. It is wise to check with a lawyer or consumer agency in your state about the allowable uses of consumer reports.

Q. Are there any state laws that protect people with prior convictions from employment discrimination?

A. Several states have laws that limit how and under what circumstances an employer may consider an applicant's criminal record. These laws make it illegal for an employer to discriminate against someone with a record unless the conviction record is related to the duties of the job. Factors that are generally considered include the time that has elapsed since the offense, the person's age at the time of the crime, the seriousness of the offense, the person's efforts toward rehabilitation, and the employer's interest in protecting the property and welfare of the workplace or the general public. For instance, if a job applicant who had a prior conviction for drug possession applied for a position as a food service worker, the employer probably should not be permitted to deny him employment based solely on his criminal record. To determine whether your state provides any protection from employment discrimination, you should contact your state's attorney general.

Some states have tried to decrease the stigma, as well as some of the legal barriers, associated with criminal histories by allowing people

to seal or expunge their criminal records or by offering "certificates of rehabilitation" or "certificates of good conduct" to those who have satisfied certain conditions since their release. Depending on your state's law, certain criminal information may be sealed, expunged, or otherwise dismissed, thus restricting who has access to the information. In addition, certificates of rehabilitation can be helpful, if not crucial, to securing employment with public agencies and removing bars to obtaining licenses. It may be useful to note that Welfare-to-Work, Workforce Investment Act, and, in certain situations, TANF funds can be used to cover the costs of sealing or expunging records or of obtaining certificates of rehabilitation. To find out if and how your state permits people with prior convictions to seal or expunge their criminal records or obtain certificates of rehabilitation, contact your state's repository of criminal records. (See Appendix A: State Repositories of Criminal Records.)

Q. Are there federal laws that protect people with conviction histories from employment discrimination?

A. Federal, state, and local welfare programs consider the process of moving individuals from welfare to work as a partnership in which employers are important allies. One of the fundamental purposes of welfare reform is to help needy parents achieve self-sufficiency through employment. For the efforts to be successful, job placements must meet the business needs of employer partners. However, in carrying out these efforts, some cases of unlawful discrimination may occur.

Even if your state does not have a specific anti-discrimination law, federal law, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (which is enforced by the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC]) would govern your employment activities. Title VII prohibits private employers and state and local governments from discriminating in employment decisions on the basis of race, color, gender, national origin, or religion. The EEOC has determined that policies that exclude individuals from employment on the basis of their arrest and conviction records may violate Title VII because such policies disproportionately exclude minorities, in light of statistics showing they are arrested and convicted at a rate significantly in excess of their representation in the population.

According to the EEOC, exclusion on the basis of conviction records violates Title VII unless there is a business necessity for the employment decision. To establish this, the employer must show that it considered three factors in making the exclusionary employment decision: (1) the **nature** and gravity of the offense(s); (2) the **time** that has passed since the conviction and/or completion of the sentence; and (3) the **nature** of the job held or

desired. Thus, business necessity can be established where the applicant has a fairly recent conviction for particularly egregious conduct that is related to the job in question.

Employers also cannot use arrest records to exclude persons from employment unless there is a business justification. If it can be demonstrated that the applicant actually engaged in the conduct for which he or she was arrested and that the conduct is job-related and relatively recent, the exclusion would be justified. As specified in the EEOC guidance, “[t]he employer is required to allow the person a meaningful opportunity to explain the circumstances of the arrest(s) and to make a reasonable effort to determine whether the explanation is credible before eliminating him/her from employment opportunities.” People with prior convictions who may consider a legal challenge as one of their options need to know that these types of claims are often time-consuming, expensive, and difficult. Such cases are decided on an individual basis, and legal representation may be hard to find. However, there are some nonprofit legal service organizations that are willing to help assess potential employment discrimination cases.

Q. Can I use the Internet to find a job?

A. A growing number of websites feature thousands of job listings across the country, and some will post your resume. There are other websites dedicated to collecting job listings for specific career tracks, for example, accounting or media jobs. Many companies also list job openings on their own websites. The Internet is an essential job search tool today. If you do not have a computer, most public libraries will have one you can use. These are a few places to start: www.careeronestop.org, www.jobsthathirefelons.org, www.monster.com, www.careerbuilder.com, www.simplyhired.com, www.job-hunt.org, www.indeed.com, and www.linkup.com.

Q. What is federal bonding and how can I get it?

A. A fidelity bond is a special kind of insurance policy that protects an employer against any business losses due to employee theft of money or property. Many employers require their employees to be bondable. But insurance companies can consider former prisoners too risky to insure under fidelity bonds. This means that people with felony convictions are often not bondable and thereby denied employment. To deal with that problem, the U.S. Department of Labor created the Federal Bonding Program. The program issues a special fidelity bond to insure former prisoners. Travelers Property and Casualty backs this bond. It is issued free for one year. If the person bonded proves to be an honest employee during that year, Travelers will sell the bond in future years at a regular commercial rate.

To be eligible for this Federal Bonding Program, you need only to be qualified to perform the duties of the job opening, and to be offered full-time work (defined as at least 30 hours per week). The bonding can be in effect on the first day of work. You can apply for the Federal Bonding Program by contacting any local office of your state's employment service (1-877-US2Jobs). Also ask for the name and phone number of the state bonding coordinator. Take the coordinator's name and number to the employment office when you go. They may not know about the Federal Bonding Program. Tell them you can be bonded.

This federal bonding won't cost you or your employer anything—so mention it as a plus to an employer who may consider hiring you. For more information write to: Federal Bonding Program, 9210 Corporate Boulevard, Suite 250, Rockville MD 20850, (800) 233-2258, www.bonds4jobs.com.

Q. What is the Work Opportunity Tax Credit program?

A. The Work Opportunity Tax Credit program (WOTC) provides tax credits to employers who hire from a group of people who typically have a hard time getting jobs. Employers who hire economically disadvantaged former prisoners qualify for this program. They must be hired no more than one year after release from prison or the date of conviction for a felony.

An employer can receive a tax break of up to \$2,400 for hiring a former prisoner and providing employment for at least one year. There is no tax credit if the job doesn't last at least 120 work hours. Jobs obtained through WOTC often become permanent and lead to promotions and better jobs. All this means an employer might be more willing to hire a former prisoner to get a tax break for the company. Apply for this program through your local office of the State Employment Service. Ask to have your WOTC eligibility completed. Also ask for a job opening referral. You may not get one right away, but always ask.

Be sure to tell a possible employer about the WOTC, because the employer must apply for the tax credit on or before the date you begin work. ■

Writing a Resume

By Stephan Likosky from The Job Search

What is a resume? A resume, or fact sheet, is a written summary of your work experience, education, and special interests. It organizes the relevant facts about you and shows the prospective employer what you have done and are able to do.

Why a Resume?

- More and more employers are now requiring that you have a resume when applying for a job.
- A resume is a written presentation of you to the employer, and as such, can help you gain entry to a personal interview.
- A resume serves as a visual reminder for the employer, after the interview, of who you are and what you discussed.
- A resume, even if you were never to show it to anyone, helps you organize your thinking about yourself and what you have to offer.

Need Help Writing a Resume?

Because a well-written resume is so important in job hunting, it is often a good idea to get some expert help or advice in writing one. Try visiting your public library's job information center, for example, or an employment counseling service, where you will find materials on how to write a resume, plus sample resumes, from which you can choose a model that is appropriate for you. Also, specially trained staff will be able to look over what you have written and help you strengthen those parts of your resume that need improvement.

A resume should be neat in appearance and should always be typed. Three of the many websites offering good advice on how to prepare resumes and cover letters are: www.resumegenius.com, www.myp perfect resume.com, and www.how-to-write-a-resume.org.

There are many job hunters who have little formal education or job-related experience. Perhaps they've spent many years in foster homes or prisons, perhaps they've worked illegally, or maybe they've had a number of jobs, but, due to a personal or drug-related problem, were never able to hold a job very long. They will need to evaluate their life experiences carefully in terms of the skills they have invariably picked up, and will need to learn techniques on how to present themselves in the most positive light to employers. There are some resume-writing books and job counselors available to help. ■

Get Ready to Work: How to Find a Job Even with "Former Prisoner" on Your Resume

by Jeff Peck

When Folsom correction officials released Tim Kepler after a seven-month prison term for drug offenses, he didn't have many choices. Both parents were dead. He had no job and no home. He desperately wanted to clean up his life, but instead found his way to his brother's girlfriend's apartment. Within 24 hours he'd spent his gate money on drugs and was flying high—but bitterly disappointed with his life.

The problem of finding work after prison plagues the most optimistic parolee. Where do you find work? How do you find it? A job is central to success in life after prison, but for many like Tim, seemingly impossible to find. No quick fix exists to this dilemma, but there is hope for those who want it.

Where to Look for Jobs

For many, the hardest part of looking for a job is getting started. Here are some practical ideas. It may seem obvious, but go back to where you worked before and ask if they can rehire you. If your offense was unrelated to work (and there are no employees there to trip you up by feeding possible addictions), your employer may consider hiring you back. It's a place where people know you.

Perhaps you never held a steady job in your life. A lot of guys slung bags and worked the "alternate" economy. In that case, start looking for companies that hire former prisoners. That will be a better use of time, rather than randomly applying anywhere and taking a lot of rejection.

How do you look for these companies? Everybody knows a person who got out and started working. Ask them. Ask your parole officer. P.O.s often have a list of employers who use day labor (moving, construction). That can get you started working. Often those jobs can go permanent for those who are hard workers and show up on time. Another place to look for minimum-wage work is temporary agencies. There can be slots for certain kinds of work where your record isn't an issue. Again, many temporary jobs turn into permanent positions for faithful service. Many former prisoners have been picked up by contractors looking for day labor who later hired them for more regular work.

The service sector is still a good place to look because it doesn't require

technical skills. Sure bussing tables or parking cars is less zippy than a professional position, but you've got to start somewhere if you don't have any training in areas like finance, carpentry, or welding, for example.

In addition to going back to a former employer and locating companies that hire former prisoners, a third place to look is with your friends and family.

You can take advantage of these leads even before you get out of prison. Prisons are overcrowded, and many parole boards are looking for good candidates to kick loose to make room. Good candidates for parole are those who show they have a job waiting. How do you pull that off?

If you have a trustworthy relationship with your wife, girlfriend, or best friend, respectfully ask that person to give you a recommendation where he or she works and secure you the promise of a job. Believe it or not, one aftercare expert estimates that 30 percent of former prisoners find work this way. But be careful not to abuse the trust of your friend or the employer. If you don't make parole, follow up by apologizing to the employer so he knows not to wait for you. This gesture takes the heat off your friend who went to bat to get you the job, and it demonstrates to the employer that you have a sense of responsibility.

And don't be like other former prisoners, quick to quit a job after a day or a week, leaving both the employer and the friend feeling used. If that happens, or if you fail to follow up after a parole rejection, that employer may be less likely to entertain giving any other former prisoner a chance.

Networking for Life

The key to any job search in today's world is to keep making contacts. People hire people they know or who are recommended by someone they know. Submitting a resume blind rarely attracts an employer's eye.

Lew Acosta, a former prisoner from New York, found that his bail bondsman was willing to sponsor Lew's first radio show. Later he worked for several temp agencies. Each one picked him up based on the personal recommendations of people Lew knew. Networking is really just keeping in touch with people and asking them to think of you as you look for work. For many, it will mean breaking a tough old habit—isolation. Isolation doesn't require as much work as getting up some energy to meet new people and make new friends.

The Gold Standard

Former prisoner Al Lawrence has worked in reentry for 18 years helping guys coming out to rebuild their lives on the outside. He noted several tough problems former prisoners face when looking for work, but also made the



startling personal observation that “I have never seen a guy not get a job who bought into a relationship with a church.”

Many churches post job boards to help members, and pastors have a wide network of people they know in the community who can offer jobs, but it goes much deeper than that. As Al explained from his observations, every former prisoner who really got involved in the life of a church received help finding not only work, but also housing and help with the transition from prison to the free world.

He observed that “anyone approaching it alone is like the fellow who represents himself in court. Lawyers say that man has a fool for a client. You’ve been living on prison time where fantasy prevails. You got to learn a new pace, and converting is hard to do by yourself.”

For earnest job-seekers, a church can make all the difference getting you through those first 30 days. For Tim Kepler, it was a church he attended a week after getting high that stepped into his life. Today, after more than 10 years, he can look back on a successful painting business, 10 years of marriage, and a blossoming music career.

Working a real job comes with some annoying responsibilities: You have to pay taxes, get up early, fight traffic, work long hours, and deal with difficult people. It’s just part of the price of freedom. But jobs also pay your bills, buy your food and clothes, build self-confidence, and can lead to promotions and raises. For those who stick it out, using freedom to work yields rewards that far exceed the comforts of a prison cell.

Top 10 Interview Tips

The job interview is a big moment for anyone regardless of background. We all get nervous and hope we can impress the employer that we're the one they want. You're on an emotional roller coaster wondering what kind of impression you'll make. Here are some tips to help you make the best impression possible.

- 1 Be on time.** Give yourself plenty of extra time to get there so you can relax and catch your breath. Remember, you may have a bad bus connection, be delayed by bad weather, or get lost.
- 2 Bring your references and all necessary papers.** Even if you've already given the company the names and numbers of your references, bring them anyway. If the employer has misplaced your file, you don't want the interviewer wasting time hunting for your info. Give it to them again if asked. Also, bring your ID, and proof of legal work status (if needed).
- 3 Go into the interview alone.** If someone drives you, ask the person to wait in the car or at a nearby coffee shop. If the company has a reception area, the person might wait there. Don't take children or teens with you to an interview. Find someone to watch them.
- 4 Look the interviewer in the eye.** Show interest and confidence. Eye contact is telling. Staring at the floor or out the window says nothing good. Listen to questions and answer them as best you can. Stick to the subject.
- 5 Don't make excuses.** If you talk about past failures, talk about lessons learned. Take responsibility and switch to talking about your strengths.
- 6 Watch your body language.** Don't fold your arms in front of you like a wall separating you from the interviewer. Most of the time leave your hands in your lap. Don't slouch in a chair or lean back. Sit up straight or lean slightly forward. Don't chew gum, smoke, tap your shoe, or fidget. This is why we said be on time. Give yourself time to relax before you go in.
- 7 Don't ever interrupt when the interviewer is talking to you.** Enough said.
- 8 Be positive!** Don't complain about the prison system, about a former boss, the weather, or a bad rap.
- 9 Ask about the next step.** Before getting up to leave, ask what is the next step. Then, smile and shake hands firmly while making eye contact.
- 10 Write a thank-you letter.** This will set you apart from almost any other candidate. This rarely used interview technique is very effective at getting you noticed and remembered. It tells the interviewer you're interested and enjoyed talking with him or her. As you leave, be sure to pick up their business card with the mailing address on it. ■

XII. YOUR FRIENDLY P.O.

Few prisoners serve absolutely full term today. Most will be released into the custody of a Parole Officer who will closely monitor your time on parole. There is something crucial to remember about parole: Time on parole is the same as time in prison. Parole is a step down to a less restrictive environment to help you begin your transition from incarceration.

You will be allowed to live outside of prison in a halfway house or another approved location—some place where you can be found at expected hours and where you promise to follow the rules. (Remember, the word parole comes from the French and means “to give a promise.”) You are promising to be good, so the system cuts you a little slack. Break your promise or any one of the rules established by your P.O., and you will find yourself in violation of your parole or promise and subject to completing the remainder of your sentence back inside.

When we are placed alone somewhere, there is always a temptation to test the boundaries—how far can we push and get away with it? Not far. You will find your P.O. has already heard every lame excuse in the world for violating the terms of parole.

Here are some of the obvious requirements of your parole:

- **You must always be available.** Your P.O. must be able to reach you easily by phone, at work, or at home. They like to do random drug and alcohol testing at the strangest hours!
- **You must pass those tests, each and every time.** Fail once and back you go. To be on the safe side, avoid over-the-counter drugs, unnecessary medications, and foods or beverages that may contain alcohol or poppy seeds.
- **You need a place to live.** It might be a nice home of your own, a flophouse apartment, a halfway house, or a shelter. But you must have a fixed address.
- **You are expected to find a job.** You will likely have to pay rent and buy food. Getting around between the home and job usually means a car or bus fare.
- **You are expected to associate only with law-abiding people,** not your old buddies who got you into trouble in the first place.
- **You will not own or have available to you any form of a firearm.**



Those are the absolute requirements. Here is an additional list of some kinds of optional good behavior that parole officers like to see:

- **Ask someone to help “keep watch” over you.** This can be a spouse, pastor, or good friend. But you need someone who is as interested in keeping you from returning to prison as you are. It’s called “accountability.” Just like an AA buddy, if you start thinking about doing something that can easily get you violated, call for back-up: someone who will talk you out of it. A good spouse or friend will be tougher on you than any P.O.—learn to call that person when you are tempted.
- **Be sure you understand every single one of your parole restrictions.** If you aren’t clear, ask your P.O. to spell them out carefully while you take notes. Some P.O.s will limit your ability to travel. It’s a truly rotten feeling to suddenly realize you are 200 miles out of bounds because you forgot to ask for permission to travel.
- **Have your documents in order before leaving prison if you can.** If not, then do it the moment you are free. Items you will need right up front include your Social Security card, a driver’s license, a birth

certificate (to get a new driver's license), and your Honorable Discharge if you had military service.

- **Have any documentation showing education level** (high school diploma, GED) or certificates of special skill training, such as welding or truck driving. Nothing says that the first job after release is what you will be doing the rest of your life. Just do something that is legal and brings in reasonable cash. Be ready to seize the first opportunity to move upward by demonstrating learned skills, good work habits, and job experience. Look at it this way: The more trouble-free days you put between your release date and today, the less chance you will be going back to prison. They say it takes 21 days for a new pattern of behavior to become a habit. Go for 21 on the positive items and then some.
- **Get a calendar. Mark off each day without any problem as a Victory Day.** Build it up: one month, six months, a year. A positive record causes both your P.O. and a potential super employer to look upon you more favorably.
- **Network.** Make new friends and avoid the old ones who got you into trouble in the first place. Go to church. Let's say that one again: GO TO CHURCH! You will not only build a spiritual relationship with God, but also gain a value system designed to keep you out of trouble. Finally, you will find friendly people who might be able to help you out with transportation, a place to live, some used furniture, and perhaps even a job.

If you feel a need to celebrate freedom with a party and alcohol, save it for your release from parole date, not your release from prison date. Note once more—days spent on parole count as prison days; if you want to spend those days actually inside the prison, the state will oblige you. You won't be completely "home free" until you have that piece of paper in your hand with the magic word "Discharged" on it. ■



XIII. OVERCOMING THOSE PESKY TRIGGERS

How to Recognize and Resist Urges That Lead to Reincarceration

by John Leonardson

A trigger is anything that moves a person toward relapse. Triggers can range from the obvious, like smelling marijuana or walking into a bar, to more subtle cues, like hearing a particular song on the radio or driving in certain parts of town. Triggers range from powerful almost irresistible influences to faint cues that pass easily. Learning what moves us in the wrong direction is vital to gaining control over destructive desires.

Warning signs usually precede relapse long before the actual event. Become familiar with your patterns of behavior and thought. By taking a daily inventory, you can take the necessary action and seek help before the problem gets out of hand. For example, if your problem is illegitimate sex, you must avoid R-rated movies (and provocative TV) with nudity, or places where the wrong kind of partner is likely to be found. Instead, substitute healthy entertainment and church social activities.

Negative emotions (e.g., anger and frustration), social pressures, boredom, exhaustion, high-risk friends, and newfound freedom are all triggers that make you vulnerable. Many former prisoners want to celebrate after release, and they should, but many rush right back to “feeling good” after a long dry spell without drugs and alcohol. Watch for thinking errors like believing you can make it on your own or resist your triggers without help. You’ll need a sponsor, mentor, or mature friend to hold you accountable, to help you recognize your triggers and avoid them.

Track your triggers by honestly reflecting on your past behaviors and the cravings that come with them. Which events, circumstances, or mental conditions have led to your addictive actions? What inaccurate thoughts do you believe? Are you ready to change? Nobody is willing to change until the pain of staying the same is greater than the pain of changing, even though the initial pain of change may seem worse.

Ways to Resist

Some triggers can't be totally avoided, such as mental images, common sights, or other circumstances beyond your control. You must develop a strategy to counter everyday events that lead you astray. When I quit drugs

I no longer drove alone to certain parts of town. I stopped reading certain magazines. When I drifted into dreaming of pleasant mental images of getting high, I countered those thoughts by admitting to myself that drugs almost ruined me. I ruthlessly examined my drug life and its almost total destruction of everything that I really cared about. It's important to avert your eyes, change your steps, and control your thought life.

As mentioned above, conquering the triggers that can set you up for a return trip to prison isn't a Lone Ranger effort. Pulling yourself up by your bootstraps sounds tough and in keeping with the great American tradition of rugged individualism. But it just isn't so.

My life is an example. For many years, I did drugs every day. But I have been totally free now for over 25 consecutive years. During the first years, temptations and triggers loomed everywhere, but with time, healing, and the patience of my mentor, these things gradually faded away. How did I do it? It was a daily effort with a lot of hard work. I heeded my own advice, but ultimately it came down to a power source outside myself. Faith in Jesus, His forgiveness of my sins, and His promise to keep me from falling were the keys to sticking to the plan and avoiding my triggers. Through daily prayer and studying the Bible, I tapped into His strength, not my own.

Jesus laid His life down for you, too. Real power to change comes from God as He transforms our hearts and desires. Your battles will be rewarded as the old habits gradually die out and triggers lose their influence. Join me and adopt my saying about triggers: "This is no longer an option for me." ■

The Reverend John Leonardson is the founder of MentorCare Ministries.



XIV. ARE YOU A VETERAN?

A 2015 Justice Department study estimated that in 2011-12 over 181,000 prisoners in America were veterans of service in the United States military. More than 75 percent of these incarcerated veterans held an honorable discharge.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has created a range of programs aimed at helping released vets find housing, a job and other resources to make a successful transition into the community. But you must have the honorable discharge to qualify. If you don't, you should begin the process of trying to upgrade your discharge to honorable status via a Department of Defense Form 293, so you can participate fully in the benefits.

The VA programs for honorably discharged vets vary widely across the country, depending on the resources and staff available at any given Veterans Center, which is the local outreach of the VA. Call or have someone call for you **(800) 827-1000** to find out where the nearest Vet Center is to your city of release.

We don't get many big, special days in life. What's worse than having a day when you come home from prison? Having two homecomings, or three, or however many times you choose to recycle yourself through the criminal justice system. So try to get it right the first time. Nobody really wants you to fail. It just seems that way. Your future, if you have one, is in your own hands; even a P.O. will tell you that. ■



XV. PARTING ADVICE

Well, it is a lot of information to digest, but we hope that this booklet has provided you with some good ideas and places to start as you begin your new journey back to freedomville. We have just a few more tips before we finish.

First, and above all, you will need to trust in God to carry you through the many lonely, frustrating, scary challenges you will face. We wrote about this more fully in the “Soul Success” chapter, but it’s worth repeating above every other piece of advice. The certainty of your struggle is not cause to live in fear. It is, however, a very good reason to live daily on your knees, asking God to open the doors, meet the needs, and deliver you from evil. As it says in the Bible, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33, NIV). And most often God answers those prayers using His people in churches. Do not shrug this off as merely optional.

Next, be warned, there are a lot of pre-release scams waiting for you—don’t buy into them. Usually the victim is told that for a modest fee (\$25-50), they will send you a full package of materials guaranteed to get you big government loans and other goodies. After money is paid, often nothing is delivered, or if it is, the documents are full of errors. Be suspicious.

This may not seem like a big deal right now, but get and stay healthy. Prison is not a place brimming with good health. You are in an environment rich with opportunities for the spread of tuberculosis, hepatitis, and AIDS. The health care and medication that you received while locked up was most likely less stellar than the Mayo Clinic.

But once you are out and have a job with health benefits, you should take advantage of it immediately with full doctor, dentist, and eye examinations. The longer you have been down, the more things might be wrong with your body that you don’t know about. Early examination can lead to early diagnosis and successful treatment of diseases that were feared and sometimes fatal back in the days when you first went in.

Learn to recognize and eat nourishing food—a Coke and burrito diet definitely won’t keep you going very long. And try to find the time and the means to get regular exercise. You may have pumped iron or walked long distances around the prison yard while locked up; if so, you need to retain the tone and cardiovascular health you built up. Walk around your neighborhood before or after work. Jog, if you can. Get a couple of barbells and do light lifting. It all helps fight off depression and costly medical expenses that will be

tough to pay with or without medical benefits. Whatever your age, prepare your body as if you will live for another 50 years. Maybe you will.

It really is our sincere hope that you will make it—and that this booklet will help to increase the number of prison survivors by at least another 20 percent! Now get going, and be sure to write us a letter about your success when you get a chance. ■



APPENDICES

State Repositories of Criminal Records • State Departments of Labor • State Attorneys General • Other Government and Nonprofit Agencies • Essential Services • Recommended Further Reading

Checking the listed websites is the best way to verify that the information provided in the appendices is up to date. This information is constantly changing. If you do not have easy access to the Internet upon your release, your public library is a great way to get connected. (It may require a library card membership, but there should be no charge for this.)

APPENDIX A

State Repositories of Criminal Records

Alabama

Alabama Law Enforcement
Agency Records and
Identification Dept.
P.O. Box 1511
Montgomery, AL 36102-1511
(334) 353-4340
www.alea.gov

Alaska

Department of Public Safety
Criminal Records
& Identification Bureau
5700 E Tudor Road
Anchorage, AK 99507
(907) 269-5767
www.dps.state.ak.us

Arizona

Criminal History Records
P.O. Box 6638
Phoenix, AZ 85005
(602) 223-2222
www.azdps.gov

Arkansas

State Police, Identification Bureau
1 State Police Plaza Drive
Little Rock, AR 72209
(501) 618-8500
[https://www.ark.org/criminal/
index.php](https://www.ark.org/criminal/index.php)

California

California Department of
Justice Record Review Unit
P.O. Box 903417
Sacramento, CA 94203-4170
(916) 227-3835
<http://oag.ca.gov>

Colorado

Bureau of Investigation
690 Kipling Street
Denver, CO 80215
(303) 239-4208
[www.cbirecordscheck.com/
index.asp](http://www.cbirecordscheck.com/index.asp)

Connecticut

CT State Police
Bureau of Identification
1111 Country Club Road
Middletown, CT 06457
(860) 685-8480
www.ct.gov/despp

Delaware

Delaware State Police
Bureau of Identification
P.O. Box 430
Dover, DE 19903
(302) 739-5884
<http://dsp.delaware.gov>

Florida

Florida Department of
Law Enforcement
P.O. Box 1489
Tallahassee, FL 32302
(850) 410-8109
www.fdle.state.fl.us/cms

Georgia

Georgia Crime Information Center
CCH/Identification Services
P.O. Box 370808
Decatur, GA 30037-0808
(404) 244-2639
www.gbi.georgia.gov

Hawaii

Criminal Justice Data Center
465 S King Street, Room 102
Honolulu, HI 96813
(808) 587-3279
www.ecrim.hawaii.gov

Idaho

Idaho State Police
Criminal Identification Service
700 South Stratford Drive
Meridian, Idaho 83642
(208) 884-7130
www.isp.idaho.gov/BCI

Illinois

Illinois State Police
Bureau of Identification
260 North Chicago Street
Joliet, IL 60431-1060
(815) 740-5160
[www.isp.state.il.us/crimhistory/
chri.cfm](http://www.isp.state.il.us/crimhistory/chri.cfm)

Indiana

Indiana State Police
Criminal History Limited Check
P.O. Box 6188
Indianapolis, IN 46206-6188
(317) 233-5424
www.in.gov/ai/appfiles/isp-lch

Iowa

Iowa Dept of Public Safety
Public Information Office
215 East 7th Street
Des Moines, IA 50319
(515) 725-6189 or 6093
www.dps.state.ia.us

Kansas

Central Repository
KBI Criminal History Records
1620 SW Tyler
Topeka, Kansas 66612-1837
(785) 296-2454
www.kansas.gov

Kentucky

Kentucky State Police
Criminal Records Section
1250 Louisville Road
Frankfort, KY 40601
(502) 227-8713
www.kentuckystatepolice.org

Louisiana

Bureau of Criminal Identification
& Information
P.O. Box 66614, #A-6
Baton Rouge, LA 70896-6614
(225) 925-6095
www.lsp.org

Maine

State Bureau of Identification
State House Station #42
Augusta, ME 04333-0042
(207) 624-7240
www5.informe.org/online/pcr

Maryland

CJIS – Central Repository
P.O. Box 32708
Pikesville, MD 21282-2708
(888) 795-0011
www.dpscs.state.md.us

Massachusetts

Criminal Assistance and
Research Unit
200 Arlington Street
Suite 2200
Chelsea, MA 02150
(617) 660-4640
www.mass.gov/chsb

Michigan

Michigan Dept. of State Police
Criminal Justice Information
Freedom of Information Unit
P.O. Box 30634
Lansing, MI 48909
(517) 322-5509
<https://apps.michigan.gov/ichat>

Minnesota

Bureau of Criminal Apprehension
Criminal Justice Information
Systems - CHA
1430 Maryland Avenue East
St Paul, MN 55106
(651) 793-2400
<https://dps.state.mn.gov>

Mississippi

Bureau of Investigation
Criminal Information Center
3891 Highway 468 West
Pearl, MS 39208
(601) 987-1212
www.dps.state.ms.us

Missouri

Criminal Justice Information
Services Division
1510 East Elm Street
Jefferson City, MO 65102
(573) 526-6312
www.mshp.dps.missouri.gov

Montana

Montana Criminal Records
P.O. Box 201403
Helena, MT 59620-1403
(406) 444-3625
<https://dojmt.gov/enforcement>

Nevada

Department of Public Safety
General Services Division
Fingerprint Support Unit
333 West Nye Lane, Suite 100
Carson City, NV 89706
(775) 684-6262
www.nvrepository.state.nv.us

Nebraska

Nebraska State Patrol, Attn: CID
3800 NW 12th Street, Suite A
Lincoln, NE 68521
(402) 479-4971
www.ne.gov/apps-nsp-limitedcriminal

New Hampshire

New Hampshire Dept. of Safety
Division of State Police Central
Repository for Criminal Records
33 Hazen Drive
Concord, NH 03305
(603) 223-3867
www.nh.gov

New Jersey

Division of State Police, CIU
P.O. Box 7068
West Trenton, NJ 08628-0068
(609) 882-2000 ext. 2918
www.njsp.org

New Mexico

Department of Public Safety
P.O. Box 1628
Santa Fe, NM 87504-1628
(505) 827-9181
www.dps.state.nm.us

New York

Records Review Unit
NYS Div. Criminal Justice Service
Alfred E. Smith Building
80 South Swan Street
Albany, New York 12210
(518) 457-8413
www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/ojjs/recordreview.htm

North Carolina

North Carolina State Bureau
of Investigations
3320 Garner Road
Raleigh, NC 27610
(919) 662-4500
www.ncdps.gov

North Dakota

Bureau of Criminal Investigation
Criminal Records Section
4205 State Street
Bismarck, ND 58502-1054
(701) 328-5500
www.ag.nd.gov

Ohio

Bureau of Criminal Identification
and Investigation
P.O. Box 365
London, OH 43140
(740) 845-2000
www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov

Oklahoma

State Bureau of Investigation
Criminal History Record
Information Request
6600 North Harvey Place
Oklahoma City, OK 73116
(405) 848-6724
www.ok.gov/osbi

Oregon

Oregon State Police
CJIS Division, Unit 11
P.O. Box 4395
Portland, OR 97208-4395
(503) 378-3070 ext. 230
www.oregon.gov

Pennsylvania

State Police Central Repository
1800 Elmerton Ave
Harrisburg, PA 17110-9758
(888) 783-7972
www.psp.pa.gov

Rhode Island

Bureau of Criminal
Identification/Investigation
150 South Main Street
Providence, RI 02903
(401) 274-4400
www.riag.ri.gov/BCI

South Carolina

South Carolina Law
Enforcement Division
P.O. Box 21398
Columbia, SC 29210
(803) 896-1443
www.sled.state.sc.us

South Dakota

Office of the Attorney General
Division of Criminal Investigations
500 East Capitol
Pierre, SD 57501
(605) 773-3331
<http://dci.sd.gov>

Tennessee

Bureau of Investigation
TORIS Unit
901 R S Gass Blvd
Nashville, TN 37216
(615) 744-4057
www.tn.gov/tbi

Texas

Texas Department of Public Safety
Crime Records Service
CJIS Field Representatives
P.O. Box 4143
Austin, TX 78765
(512) 424-2478
www.dps.texas.gov

Utah

Bureau of Criminal Identification
3888 West 5400 South
Taylorsville, UT 84129
(801) 965-4445
www.bci.utah.gov

Vermont

Vermont Criminal
Information Center
103 South Main Street
Waterbury, VT 05671
(802) 241-5237
<http://vermont.gov/portal>

Virginia

Department of State Police
P.O. Box 85076
Richmond, VA 23261-5076
(804) 674-2131
www.vsp.state.va.us

Washington

Identification and Criminal History
Washington State Patrol
P.O. Box 42633
Olympia, WA 98504-2633
(360) 534-2000
www.wsp.wa.gov

Washington, DC

Metropolitan Police Department
Arrest & Criminal History Section
ATTN: Police Clearances
300 Indiana Avenue NW
Room 3055
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 727-4245
www.mpdc.dc.gov

West Virginia

West Virginia State Police
CIB, Records Section
725 Jefferson Road
South Charleston, WV 25309
(304) 746-2170
www.wvstatepolice.com

Wisconsin

Department of Justice
Crime Information Bureau
P.O. Box 2688
Madison, WI 53701-2688
(608) 266-7314
www.doj.state.wi.us

Wyoming

Division of Criminal Investigation
316 West 22nd Street
Cheyenne, WY 82002
(307) 777-7181
<http://wyomingdci.wyo.gov>

APPENDIX B

State Departments of Labor

Alabama

Alabama Dept. of Labor
649 Monroe Street
Montgomery, AL 36131
(334) 242-8620
www.labor.alabama.gov

Alaska

Dept. of Labor and Workforce
Development
P.O. Box 11149
Juneau, AK 99811-1149
(907) 465-2700
www.labor.state.ak.us

Arizona

Industrial Commission
800 West Washington Street
Phoenix, AZ 85001-7070
(602) 542-4411
www.ica.state.az.us

Arkansas

Department of Labor
10421 West Markham Street
Little Rock, AR 72205
(501) 682-4500
www.labor.ar.gov

California

Dept. of Industrial Relations
1515 Clay Street
Oakland, CA 94612
(510) 286-3800
www.dir.ca.gov

Colorado

Department of Labor and
Employment
633 17th Street, Suite 201
Denver, CO 80202-3660
(303) 318-8000
www.colorado.gov

Connecticut

Department of Labor
200 Folly Brook Boulevard
Wethersfield, CT 06109-1114
(860) 263-6000
www.ctdol.state.ct.us

Delaware

Department of Labor
4425 N Market Street, 4th Floor
Wilmington, DE 19802
(302) 761-8200
www.delawareworks.com

District of Columbia

Dept. of Employment Services
4058 Minnesota Ave NE
Washington, DC 20019
(202) 724-7000
www.does.dc.gov

Florida

Dept. of Economic Opportunity
107 East Madison St, Suite 100
Tallahassee, FL 32399-4120
(800) 342-3450
www.floridajobs.org

Georgia

Department of Labor
Sussex Place - Room 600
148 Andrew Young International
Blvd NE
Atlanta, GA 30303
(404) 232-7300
www.dol.georgia.gov

Guam

Department of Labor
Government of Guam
P.O. Box 9970
Tamuning, GU 96931-9970
(671) 475-7044/36
www.dol.guam.gov

Hawaii

Department of Labor
830 Punchbowl Street, Room 321
Honolulu, HI 96813
(800) 586-8844
www.labor.hawaii.gov

Idaho

Department of Labor
317 West Main Street
Boise, ID 83735-0001
(208) 332-3570
www.labor.idaho.gov

Illinois

Department of Labor
160 N LaSalle Street, 13th Floor
Suite C-1300
Chicago, IL 60601
(312) 793-2800
www.illinois.gov/idol

Indiana

Department of Labor
Indiana Government Center South
402 West Washington Street
Room W195
Indianapolis, IN 46204
(317) 232-2655
www.in.gov/dol

Iowa

Iowa Labor Services Division
1000 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50319-0209
(515) 281-5387
www.iowaworkforcedevelopment.gov

Kansas

Department of Labor
401 SW Topeka Boulevard
Topeka, KS 66603-3182
(785) 296-5000
www.dol.ks.gov

Kentucky

Labor Cabinet
1047 US Hwy 127 South, Suite 4
Frankfort, KY 40601-4381
(502) 564-3534
www.labor.ky.gov

Louisiana

Workforce Commission
P.O. Box 94094
Baton Rouge, LA 70804
(225) 342-3111
www/idol.state.la.us

Maine

Department of Labor
P.O. Box 259
Augusta, ME 04332
(207) 623-7900
www.state.me.us/labor

Maryland

Department of Labor
Licensing & Regulation
500 N Calvert Street, Suite 401
Baltimore, MD 21202
(410) 230-6020 ext. 1393
www.dllr.state.md.us

Massachusetts

Executive Office of Labor &
Work Force Development
1 Ashburton Place, Room 2112
Boston, MA 02108
(617) 626-7122
www.mass.gov/portal/employment

Michigan

Department of Licensing and
Regulatory Affairs
611 West Ottawa
Lansing, MI 48909
(517) 373-1820
www.michigan.gov/wda

Minnesota

Dept. of Labor and Industry
443 Lafayette Road North
St. Paul, MN 55155
(651) 284-5005
www.doli.state.mn.us

Mississippi

Dept. of Employment Security
P.O. Box 1699
Jackson, MS 39215-1699
(601) 321-6000
www.mdes.ms.gov

Missouri

Labor & Industrial Relations
P.O. Box 504
Jefferson City, MO 65102-0504
(573) 751-4091
www.labor.mo.gov

Montana

Dept. of Labor and Industry
P.O. Box 1728
Helena, MT 59624-1728
(406) 444-2840
www.dli.mt.gov

Nebraska

Department of Labor
550 South 16th Street
Box 94600
Lincoln, NE 68508-4600
(402) 471-9000
www.dol.nebraska.gov

Nevada

Dept. of Business & Industry
555 E Washington Ave, Ste 4100
Las Vegas, NV 89101-1050
(702) 486-2650
www.labor.nv.gov

New Hampshire

Department of Labor
State Office Park South
95 Pleasant Street
Concord, NH 03301
(603) 271-3176
www.nh.gov/labor

New Jersey

Department of Labor &
Workforce Development
P.O. Box 110
Trenton, NJ 08625-0110
(609) 659-9045
<http://lwd.state.nj.us/labor>

New Mexico

Dept. of Workforce Solutions
P.O. Box 1928
Albuquerque, NM 87102-1928
(505) 841-8405
www.dws.state.mn.us

New York

Department of Labor
State Office Building 12
W.A. Harriman Campus
Albany, NY 12240
(518) 457-9000
www.labor.ny.gov/home

North Carolina

Department of Labor
1101 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-1101
(919) 807-2796
www.nclabor.com

North Dakota

Department of Labor
State Capitol Building
600 East Boulevard, Dept 406
Bismarck, ND 58505-0340
(701) 328-2660
www.nd.gov/labor

Ohio

Office of Workforce Development
OH Dept. of Job & Family Services
P.O. Box 182428
Columbus, OH 43215
(614) 752-9494
www.lmi.state.oh.us

Oklahoma

Department of Labor
3017 N Stiles Avenue, Suite 100
Oklahoma City, OK 73105-5212
(405) 521-6100
www.ok.gov/odol

Oregon

Bureau of Labor and Industries
800 NE Oregon Street, #1045
Portland, OR 97232
(971) 673-0761
www.oregon.gov/BOLI

Pennsylvania

Department of Labor and Industry
45 North 4th Street
Allentown, PA 18102
(610) 821-6441
www.dli.pa.gov

Puerto Rico

Dept. of Labor & Human Resources
Edificio Prudencio Rivera Martinez
505 Munoz Rivera Avenue
GPO Box 3088
Hato Rey, PR 00918
(787) 754-5353
www.trabajo.pr.gov

Rhode Island

Department of Labor & Training
Center General Complex
1511 Pontiac Avenue
Cranston, RI 02920
(401) 462-8000
www.dlt.ri.gov

South Carolina

Department of Labor,
Licensing, & Regulations
P.O. Box 11329
Columbia, SC 29211-1329
(803) 896-4300
www.llr.state.sc.us

South Dakota

Dept. of Labor & Regulation
700 Governors Drive
Pierre, SD 57501-2291
(605) 773-3101
www.dlr.sd.gov

Tennessee

Dept. of Labor & Workforce
Development
220 French Landing Drive
Nashville, TN 37243
(844)-224-5818
www.tn.gov/main/section/employment

Texas

Texas Workforce Commission
101 East 15th Street, Rm. 665
Austin, TX 78778
(512) 463-2222
www.twc.state.tx.us

Utah

Labor Commission
P.O. Box 146600
Salt Lake City, UT 84114-6600
(801) 530-6800
www.laborcommission.utah.gov

Vermont

Department of Labor
P.O. Box 488
Montpelier, VT 05601-0488
(802) 828-4000
www.labor.vermont.gov

Virgin Islands

Department of Labor: St. Croix
4401 Sion Farm STE1
Christiansted, VI 00820-4245
(340) 773-1994
www.vidol.gov

Virginia

Dept. of Labor and Industry
Main Street Centre
600 East Main Street, Suite 207
Richmond, VA 23219
(804) 371-2327
www.doli.virginia.gov

Washington

Dept. of Labor & Industries
P.O. Box 44000
Olympia, WA 98504-4001
(360) 902-5800
www.lni.wa.gov

West Virginia

WV Division of Labor
749-B, Building 6
Capitol Complex
Charleston, WV 25305
(304) 558-7890
www.wvlabor.com

Wisconsin

Dept. of Workforce Development
P.O. Box 7946
Madison, WI 53707-7946
(608) 266-3131
www.dwd.wisconsin.gov

Wyoming

Dept. of Workforce Service
1510 East Pershing Blvd
Cheyenne, WY 82002
(307) 777-8728
www.wyomingworkforce.org

APPENDIX C

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(573) 751-3321

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215 North Sanders
Helena, MT 59620-1401
(406) 444-2026

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P.O. Box 98920
Lincoln, NE 68509-8920
(402) 471-2682

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Carson City, NV 89701
(775) 684-1100

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State House Annex
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Concord, NH 03301
(603) 271-3658

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Richard J. Hughes Justice
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Trenton, NJ 08625
(609) 292-8740

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Santa Fe, NM 87504-1508
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(701) 328-2210

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Columbus, OH 43266-0410
(614) 466-4320

Oklahoma

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313 NE 21st Street
Oklahoma City, OK 73105
(405) 521-3921

Oregon

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Justice Building
1162 Court Street NE
Salem, OR 97301
(503) 378-6002

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Wisconsin Department of Justice
State Capitol, Room 114 East
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Madison, WI 53707-7857
(608) 266-1221

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2320 Capital Avenue
Cheyenne, WY 82002
(307) 777-7841

APPENDIX D

Other Government Agencies & Nonprofit Organizations

Administration for Children and Families (ACF)

(202) 401-9200
www.acf.hhs.gov

America's Workforce Network

Toll-Free Helpline
(877) US-2JOBS

America's Service Locator

www.servicelocator.org

Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (C SAT)

(240) 276-1660
www.samhsa.gov

Employment & Training Administration

(866) 4-USA-DOL
www.doleta.gov

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

(800) 669-4000
www.eeoc.gov

Federal Bonding Program

(800) 233-2258
www.bonds4jobs.com

Federal Bureau of Prisons

(202) 307-3198
www.bop.gov

Legal Action Center

(212) 243-1313
www.lac.org

Office of Child Support Enforcement (CSE)

(202) 401-9373
www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/css

Regional Work Opportunity Tax Credit Coordinators

(202) 693-3949 (D.C.)
[www.doleta.gov/business/
incentives/opntax/
Regional_Contacts.cfm](http://www.doleta.gov/business/incentives/opntax/Regional_Contacts.cfm)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

(877) 696-6775
www.hhs.gov

U.S. Department of Labor

1 (866) 4-USA-DOL
www.dol.gov

U.S. Department of Transportation

(202) 366-4000
www.dot.gov

Welfare-to-Work Division

(202) 693-3910
www.cdss.ca.gov

Work Opportunity & Welfare-to-Work Tax Credits

(202) 693-2786
[www.workforcesecurity.doleta.
gov/unemploy](http://www.workforcesecurity.doleta.gov/unemploy)

Workforce Investment Act

(202) 693-3045
www.dot.gov

APPENDIX E

Essential Services

NEWLY-RELEASED PRISONERS

will need life-support services at their destination city. The following list will help get you started. Most of the contact information is for national offices. However, the referenced websites provide links to local organizations. If you are unfamiliar with the social-service agencies in the community, contact a church or family-services organization with a ministry to the poor. They usually know who the key resources are for those in need.

Catholic Charities USA:

Local Catholic Charities agencies work in many ways to help families and individuals find and keep decent housing. Local community problems are addressed through more than 4,000 parishes across the country. Many local agencies help people affected by HIV/AIDS. National Office: (703) 549-1390
www.catholiccharitiesusa.org

Goodwill Industries:

Goodwill Industries provides people with the tools they need to succeed at working. This is one of the world's largest nonprofit providers of employment and training services for people who have a history of welfare dependency, illiteracy, incarceration, and homelessness. To find a local Goodwill, call: 800-GOODWILL or go to www.goodwill.org.

Salvation Army:

Cooperative arrangements exist between the Salvation Army and prison, probation, and parole officers in a program of prison rehabilitation and crime prevention. Services include pre-release job-training, employment opportunities, material aid, and spiritual guidance. Salvation Army rehabilitation centers and Harbor Light centers have been designated as halfway houses for former prisoners in work-release programs. National phone: (703) 684-5500
www.salvationarmyusa.org

Social Security Administration (SSA):

A former prisoner will need a Social Security card/number to work, but may not have this information on hand. There may be an SSA office in your community. Some former prisoners may be eligible for retirement or disability payments, depending on their age and health. This information can be obtained from the SSA.

For more information, check the blue government pages in your phone book for a local SSA office. Or visit their website (www.ssa.gov) to find the closest SSA to you.

National phone: (800) 772-1213

U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration (ETA):

The ETA offers adult training programs to teach job skills and provide job placement services for economically disadvantaged adults. Their Welfare to Work program offers training and jobs to help people get off welfare and maintain solid work habits. There are programs to help low-income women with criminal records achieve self-sufficiency. Apprenticeships, a combination of on-the-job training and related classroom instruction, help workers learn the practical and theoretical aspects of highly-skilled occupations. Check their website (www.doleta.gov) to find the local ETA office in your state.

United Way:

United Way's foundation is built on the effectiveness of local organizations working together to assist people in need. Through an extensive network of volunteers and community-service agencies, United Way organizations help to meet the health and human care needs of millions of people every day. National phone: (703) 836-7112 www.unitedway.org

YMCA:

The Y's community-developed efforts include alternative schools, gang intervention, family literacy programs, tutoring, substance abuse prevention, job training, employment services, and permanent and transitional housing. National phone: (800) 872-9622 www.ymca.net

YWCA:

The YWCA's community

programs include services for women in recovery, housing, child care, health, and fitness. National phone: (202) 467-0801 www.ywca.org

APPENDIX F

Recommended Further Reading

The Ex-Offender's Quick Job Hunting Guide, 2nd Edition

Written by Ron Krannich, Ph.D., this is a self-study workbook that outlines 10 steps to job search success. As you complete each exercise, you will develop a master plan for getting a job. For information on ordering, go to www.impactpublications.com.

Jails to Jobs: Seven Steps to Becoming Employed

Written by Mark Drevno, this book is a step-by-step guide to reentering the job market after incarceration. You'll learn how to accelerate your search using the Internet and social media, as well as your own circle of contacts and job search networking groups. Includes tips on dealing with your criminal record. For information, go to www.jailstojobs.org.

Illegal to Legal: Business Success for (ex) Criminals

Written by R.L. Pelshaw, this book shows former prisoners who once supported themselves through crime how the same skills can be used to start legal businesses. The secret is applying lessons learned from the past to pro-social endeavors today. Includes real-life success stories and snapshots of over 165 business concepts with estimated start-up costs. To order, go to www.illegaltolegal.org.

The Leap

Written by Robert Dickie,

president of Crown Financial Ministries, this book looks at new ways to prepare yourself to enter today's workforce. If a long-term career seems unlikely for you, Dickie explains how to "rebrand" yourself and create multiple income streams through part-time gigs, contract work, and freelance jobs. Order online through www.crown.org.

Blueprint for Your Family's Finances: Practical Planning for Your Peace of Mind

This book contains easy-to-follow worksheets and step-by-step instructions for short- and long-term financial planning, including instructions on household budgeting, insurance, and wills. Published by Crown Financial Ministries, www.crown.org.

Turn Setbacks Into Greenbacks: 7 Steps to Go From Financial Disaster to Financial Freedom

Written by Dr. Willie Jolley, this book is packed with life-changing principles for persevering in times of decline, financial setbacks, downturns, and challenges. Order through www.amazon.com or www.christianbook.com.

Everyday Finances for the Everyday Family

This helpful book by Mike Yorkey takes the mystery out of stretching your hard-earned dollars. This is an easy-to-read resource that will help your family budget, spend, and save money wisely. Order through www.christianbook.com.

Say Yes to No Debt

DeForest B. Soaries, Jr. shares 12 steps to financial freedom. Learn how to go from debt, delinquency, and deficit to deposits, deeds, and dividends. Order this book through www.christianbook.com.



*So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.
– Isaiah: 41:10*

*Small is the gate and narrow the road that
leads to life, and only a few find it.*
– Matthew 7:14



44180 Riverside Parkway • Lansdowne, VA 20176
1.800.206.9764
prisonfellowship.org